Lived Experience of Iranian Married Men and Women in Interacting with Each other in a Marital Relationship: A Qualitative Research based on Functional Analytic Psychotherapy Approach (FAP)

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A R T I C L E I N F O

ABSTRACT

The present research is designed with the aim of deep and comprehensive identification of textual and cultural factors related to couples' interaction, explanation of its meaning and concept, and the model of factors related to the quality of couples' interaction and functional analytical psychotherapy approach (FAP). The research community was all married men and women in Tehran who had been married for at least two years. Although men's and women's relationship has been analyzed in the research, the unit of analysis is individual: married men and women. By purposive sampling technique, 30 married couples were selected in Tehran. Semi-structured interviews with related participants continued until theoretical data saturation was achieved. Each interview text was placed in ATLAS Ti software for coding system, semantic production, and analyzable codes, and then the software performed analysis. According to the aforementioned model, results were categorized based on seven themes including identifying and expressing needs, experiencing and expressing excitement, conflict and incompatibility, mutual relationship, disclosure and close relationship with spouse, verbal and nonverbal relationship, and attitudes.

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Introduction

The intimate and romantic relationship is accompanied by inevitable pain which is hidden in the essence of intimacy. In fact, according to Irvin Yalom, humans are born, dead, hurt, and healed in relationships. (Yalom, 2015). One of the relationship forms is the interaction between couples. When the level of individual satisfaction from a relationship is suitable, the ground for human growth excellence and material and spiritual development will be provided. (Edatati & Redzuan, 2010). Researchers have found there is a relationship between happiness, physical health, and the quality of individual intimate relationships (Gambrel & Keeling, 2010). But all couples face problems in their relationships which can be severe or mild, long-time or short-time which originate from different factors. Some of these problems are solved easily, while others are not despite spending time and effort to solve them. (Khamseh, 2011). The unique background of couples and their life experience will result in the formation of behavioral collections and attitudes about the way of intimate relationship function. So, this behavioral collection can lead to strategies that destroy relationships and enforce additional pain for both parties of the relationship.

Human relationships are composed of different levels and angles which can be assessed from different points of view (Johnson & Whiffen, 2017). Functional analytical psychotherapy (FAP) is one of the third-wave therapies that focus on relationships and helps improve relationship problems (Garcia et al., 2006). Functional analytical psychotherapy (FAP) is a context-oriented-interventional approach that is designed suitably to target interpersonal relationships and to focus on the ways others have an impact on individuals' social interpersonal relationships in addition, it increases clients' ability to interact, love, and be loved (Kuczynski et al., 2020). Functional analysis is focused on explaining behavior and its circumstances and consequences. To describe precisely, functional analysis is defined as determining differential stimulus which advances the intended behavior (circumstance) and events that happen during this behavior (consequence) and have an impact on the occurrence probability of these events in the future and these effects can be recognized by the function (Callaghan & Darrow, 2015).

Approached-based therapies have been noticed in recent years which seek to increase our understanding of changing mechanisms of behavioral health interventions (Munoz-Martinez et al., 2022). A recent meta-analysis of mono-topic designs has shown that FAP is effective for a wide range of targeted behaviors (Singh & O'Brien, 2018). But, although mono-topic and mechanistic data are hopeful, clinical trials at a group level are still needed to assess FAP effectiveness (Kanter et al., 2017; Hayes et al., 2019; Hayes et al., 2021; Hafman & Hayes, 2019; Tolin et al., 2015; Holman et al., 2017).

Although FAP is a therapy based on behavior analysis principles it is considered inter-personal therapy and it is thought both reasons and therapy of psychological disorders are completely dependent on inter-personal relationships (Baruch et al., 2009). It seems that couple therapy replete with FAP can provide one analytical approach based on behavior to assess, conceptualize and treat the relationship crisis of couples which is based on topographic analysis of user behaviors and its function for clients and is completely contextual. The therapist must be sensitive about what is functional and non-functional for couples, instead of focusing on what should be done for them (Gurman et al., 2010). Individualist-oriented functional analytical psychotherapy is organized according to 5 main domains: skill in determining and expressing needs during relationships, sensitivity to response, receiving or providing feedback for others, problem in determining or expressing emotional and cognitive experiences, problems in close inter-relationship and disclosure, and problems in inter-relationship conflicts. Although FAP has existed for nearly 3 decades as a therapy, limited research is done to study its effectiveness and most studies of FAP effectiveness use single test data (Singh & O'Brien, 2018). Therefore, researchers of FAP believe that in the wide world of couples therapy and family therapy, it seems strange that couple therapy is replete with FAP has not been studied yet. (Lopez, 2003; Rabin et al., 1996; Gorman et al., 2010).

On the other hand, it seems that the social-cultural context can be considered one of the widest and most important contexts in couples' relationships (Cheraghi et al., 2017; Sadeghi et al., 2012). For the meaning of behavior for behaviorists is grounded in collocations of the present environment which support behavior and also historical collocations which shape behavior. We are the product of both our present and past environment.

Each clinical target behavior can be recognized by this method. The current environment includes the immediate environment (therapy room, therapeutic relationship), the client's current relationship, and stronger ethnic-cultural and political power which influence our behavior (Tsai et al. 2016). Kluckhohn states that: "*neither society nor individual can survive unless behavior has a certain minimum meaning according to ecological requirements*". (Kluckhoh,1956, 962). Culture is a source of behavioral rules, manners, ideas, and lifestyles which will possibly lead to positive consequences (admiration instead of scolding) in social and physical contexts (making a living instead of hunger) if adopted So, we can explain it from a behavioristic point of view. If you follow cultural rules, positive reinforcement will possibly occur. This is part of the socialization process. Culture responds to ecological requirements which are sourced from it (Keller & Lamm, 2005); therefore, behavior and lifestyle are exposed to reinforcement-based events which are imposed upon them by the environment. Behaviors and lifestyles which increase the possibility of survival will be reinforced or selected to be transferred to the next generation and therefore "t*hose which were useful in the pas*t" will be transferred to the next generations. (Triandis & Gelfand, 2012). Consequently, cultures have an adaptive function that possibly increases the physiological survival of the certain ecological environment sourced from it (Salzman, 2020).

If we agree with the recent assessment, it is supposed that couples' relationships follow some cultural components which if neglected can be one of the important factors in the effectiveness of couple therapies. According to this, the present research has studied its dependence on cultural-social context based on the concept of couple therapy replete with functional analytical psychotherapy. In fact, according to the increasing rate of couples' conflicts and divorce during recent years, deep and comprehensive recognition of contextual and cultural factors related to couples' interactions, the explanation of its meaning and concept, and the model of factors related to couples' interactions seem necessary. Therefore, studying couples' relationships will help to identify the structural framework which shapes couples' relationships and will have an impact on our understanding of close relationships, the way they are interrupted, and identifying effective interventions based on culture.

Consequently, in addition to the analysis of couples' experiences of relationships and deep phenomenological understanding of the way of Iranian men and women interact, this research has classified, represented, and explained related factors of couples' interaction based on a functional analytical psychotherapy approach. The study has been performed to have a deep understanding of the way of interaction between couples based on the functional analytical psychotherapy framework and to find a cultural conceptualization of functional analytical psychotherapy requirements and components in a couple of relationships, and to find the answer to the following question:

How is the Lived experience of Iranian married men and women interacting with each other in a marital relationship based on a functional analytical psychotherapy context?

Methods

The research method is based on a qualitative approach framework using thematic analysis and the research questions are "WH" questions. The main purpose of the researcher is to achieve meanings, priorities, attitudes, experiences, and ways of Iranian men and women's perception of relationships: a mental and closed-culture phenomenon that necessitates qualitative research due to the lack of knowledge in this area. Thematic analysis is a way of identifying, analyzing, and expressing models or themes of textual data. This method organizes data and explains it in detail. (Zabihzadeh et al., 2018). However, thematic analysis is beyond organizing and describing details and according to Braun and Clarke (2006) this kind of qualitative research can explain various aspects of the research topic. The theme is the most abstract part of the data, and its formation and selection are highly dependent on the research structure and questions (Clarke et al., 2015). Among the common methods of thematic analysis, the "latent thematic analysis" strategy was used in this research. According to this method, the main focus on the extraction of hidden meaning can interfere with what is beyond the conscious mind of interviewees or was not mentioned explicitly by interviewees. In other words, in latent thematic analysis, the hidden meanings are revealed based on the researcher's point of view (Clarke et al., 2015). Achieving such hidden meanings require hard interpretative effort

from the researcher for which the main part will be obtained by designing investigative questions during the interview. (Hayfield & Halliwell, 2014)

The study population was all married men and women in Tehran who had been married for at least 2 years. Thus, although men's and women's interactions were analyzed in this research, the unit of analysis is individual: married men and women. Therefore, by purposive sampling technique, 30 married people in Tehran (15 men, 15 women) participated as study samples by having research inclusion criteria. The most important criteria taken into account for the participants in the research were: 1) satisfaction and voluntary attendance to participate in research, 2) being married for at least two years 3) having no psychological disease background 4) having the educational level of at least diploma to understand interview questions and provide a suitable answer. The age average of the interviewees (women and men) was 31/53-35/26 and marriage was 8/6-6/3.

Among the female interviewees: five had diplomas, one had associate degrees, six had a bachelor's, two had master's and one had Ph.D., as well as seven, were housewives, and eight were employed. Among the male interviewees: three had diplomas, eleven had bachelor's, one had mastered with no PhDs and all were employed. Semi-structured interviews with related participants continued until data saturation was achieved. In other words, it continued until there was no extra information in the interview and increasing accuracy in the new responses. To facilitate interaction during the interview and increase the response accuracy of interviewees, all interviews of the men and women of the study were performed by same-sex interviewers. The interview protocol was question oriented (instead of item-oriented) consisting of specific verification questions.

The data collection tools of this study were semi-structured face-to-face interviews. Before each interview, the aim of the research was explained to each participant and then their consent to participate in research which relied on information confidentiality, permission to record voice, and use interview content for research objectives were obtained. Each interview ranged from 45-70 minutes, so the average time for all interviews was 60 minutes. In this study, the six-phase strategy of Brown and Clark (2006) was used to code and extract themes: familiarizing with the study's theoretical foundations and the

content of interviews, coding semantic units, searching themes, reviewing themes, denomination, and definition of themes and writing a report. Therefore, after recording each interview, their contents were first checked by the researcher with the recorded interview to approve the final implemented copy. In the next step, each interview text was placed in ATLAS Ti software for coding system, semantic production, and analyzable codes and the analysis was performed by the software.

Additionally, to be assured of data validity in this research, the researcher took steps to enhance data acceptability and reliability by spending time collecting data, frequently a review of data, and also considering the diversity of interviewees in factors such as age, education level, and years of marriage. Besides this, "reviewing members" is the most important technique of reliability in all kinds of qualitative studies (Cresswell, 2013). In this study, while the relationship with interviewees during data analysis was maintained, after analysis, study results in the format of a report were presented to 2 men and 2 women who were interviewed to affirm the accuracy of the final copy of the results report. Also, a copy of the interview contents and assigned code of semantic units were provided for three researchers who were familiar with the qualitative methods in order to exchange views about possible disagreements in coding to achieve consensus. Plus, the researcher tried to explain all details of the research process from sampling to collecting and data analysis extensively to eliminate any doubts and ambiguities.

Finding

According to the suggested framework by Clark et al. (2015), the final report of the study results was classified in form of "main themes" "*themes*" and "*sub-themes*" and then a "*thematic map*" (Clark et al., 2015) related to the study question was designed. According to Clark et al. (2015), the main themes of thematic analysis are organization and regulation of analysis. These themes reflect underlying beliefs hidden behind the series of themes. The underlying layer of main themes is composed of themes for which the function is to describe and report the meaning related to the central organizing concept. Finally, the lowest level of the suggested model is allocated to sub-themes, the themes which have a role in creating a specific aspect of one central organizing concept. Results of the present study are categorized according to

the related model based on seven main themes including identifying and expressing needs, experiencing and expressing excitement, conflict and incompatibility, mutual relationship, disclosure and close relationship with spouse, verbal and nonverbal relationship and attitudes, 27 themes such as identifying needs, realistic expectations and assertiveness, attention awareness, recognition of excitement, expressing excitement, avoiding accepting excitement, avoidance, scolding and anger, conflict resolution and problem-solving, awareness of influence, communication skills, defensiveness and self-awareness, listening skill, trustworthiness, attachment styles, and intimacy, attitude towards a spouse, attitude towards spouse's family, self-attitude, attitude towards marriage and body language, the hidden meaning of words and selecting them and sub-themes.

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Code System
∨  experience and express emotion
  >   acceptance
  >   attention awareness
  >   recognize emotions
  >   express emotions
  >   · inhibition of emotions
∨   recognize and express needs
  >   recognition
  >   · assertiveness
  >   realistic expectations
∨   · conflict and incompatibility
  >   problem solving
  >   · avoidance
  >   scolding and express anger
  >   conflict resolution
∨   mutual relationship
  >   self awareness
  >   awareness of effect
  >   communictional skill
  >   defensiveness
∨   disclosure and close relationship with spouse
  >   · intimacy
  >   · skill to listen
  >   trustworthiness
  >   · attachment style
∨  , verbal and nonverbal communication
  >   body language
  >   · word selection
  >   hidden meaning of word
∨   attitude
  >   . attitude toward marriage
  >   . attitude toward spouse family
  >   attitude toward spouse
  >   attitude toward self
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Chart1- A visual display of allocated code concentration in main themes and themes

1) Verbal and non-verbal communication: verbal and non-verbal communication is one of the main themes of the study consisting of three themes: the hidden meaning of the word, body language, and word selection. The hidden meaning of the word consists of two sub-themes which are using ironic words and indirect expression and correct usage of declarative sentences. Body language consists of four sub-themes including tone, intonation, moving hands and head, and eye contact. Word selection consists of three themes: vocabulary collection, using poems, and using narration and story.

Verbal communication is one of the most important communicative skills which play a main and effective role in interpersonal relationships. But another main conversational skill is body language and non-verbal communication. Body language reveals our feelings and attitudes before we say anything. We are judged by revealing our initial signs and indications and if these initial gestures are not friendly, it is hard to make a good and favorable conversation.

Hidden meaning behind the word: According to participants' opinions, hidden meanings of the word both provoke tension and turmoil or help solve conflicts better. Ironic conversations, indirect expressions, and correct usage of declarative sentences can make misunderstandings and can mislead verbal communication. "*She always talks about her friend's husband who betrayed her and insults men and expects me to say nothing and just listen, but I understand she beats me to frighten another...*" (A 38-year- old man)

Body language: recognizing body language is very important because 50% of messages' effectiveness results from body movements. Often the person accepts our body language more than our verbal messages: so, we should pay significant attention to body language (Mac key et al., 2013). According to participants' opinions, body language is one of the most important factors in a healthy or disturbed relationship. Factors such as tone, intonation, movement of head and hands, and eye contact. "*Respectability is very important to me. I tell him not to speak loudly but he shouts at our children. Neighbors have complained about us...*" (A 25-year-old woman). "*...When talking, he stares at me in such a way that I cannot keep talking...*" (A 25-year-old woman).

Word selection: vocabulary collection, using poems and narration, and story can add to the favorability of a relationship or if used radically and improperly, it can provoke tension and turmoil. "When I make a mistake, he immediately makes up a story and I don't like to listen to it" (a 45-year-old woman). "*I like my wife to talk to me, help me, even sometimes I like her to insult me, but not to be silent. I ask her why she does not say anything and she replies, "what can I possibly say*?" (A 41-year-old man).

2) Disclosure and close relationship with spouse: disclosure and close relationship with a spouse is one of the main themes of this study which consists of four themes: intimacy, attachment style, trustworthiness, and

listening skill. Intimacy consists of four sub-themes including secrecy, too much interference, disclosure of secrets, events, and emotional risk-taking. Listening skill consists of four sub-themes including the reluctance of hearing about oneself, overstatement, attention, listening well, and talking about oneself. Trustworthiness consists of two sub-themes of secrecy and problem in trusting someone. The attachment style consists of two sub-themes requesting a lot of support and fear of intimacy and attachment.

One's feelings about intimacy and close relationship in an inter-personal relationship and the way of self-disclosure or speaking about self-experiences in interacting with others will form answers which imply intimacy. In another word, interpersonal closeness indicates a relationship or intimacy with another person. A close interpersonal relationship consists of relationships that require expressing our feelings about others, being understood by another one, and understanding others and their needs (Tsai et al., 1398).

2-1. Intimacy: Intimacy is an interactive process in which real and intimate communication occurs accurately and developmentally between two people. From the research participants' point of view, factors such as secrecy, interference, disclosure of the secret, events, and emotional risk-taking are parts of intimacy. Secrecy means that another part of the relationship hides his/her deep feelings and beliefs. "*I like him to talk to me about his job and concerns, but he says nothing.*" (A 30-year-old woman). To create intimacy, while we need to have joint privacy and limit with each other, we also need to have little and safe privacy for ourselves. Communication with our friends and our family. It seems that much interference can even prevent individuals from creating intimacy at a normal level. "*She wants to know everything; my relations with co-workers in the office or, what the manager said and what we did. Sometimes, I like to say nothing to her because she makes me angry.*" (A 36-year-old man). According to participants, disclosure of secrets and events is considered part of intimacy. "I like him to talk to me, but instead he unburdens himself to his sister. Later, I hear something from his sister, and it bothers me a lot." (A 35-year-old woman). It seems there is an interconnected relationship between emotional risk-taking and intimacy. Those who don't take the risk to create intimacy because of rejection or emotional inhibition or fear of intimacy or any other reason will create a sense of insincerity on the other side of the relationship. "*I ask him why he does not become intimate with*

me or my family and he says, "oh, I'm not in the mood" or he says, "because of your impudence" (A 25-year-old woman).

2-2. Attachment style: attachment style is one theme of disclosure and close relationship with the spouse which manifested in participants' responses in the form of a request for a lot of support and fear of intimacy and attachment. Couples who request a lot of support or are not interested in intimacy lead the relationships towards dissatisfaction. "*She always wants to know where I am and what I am doing. I must call her and talk. She doesn't understand I am busy.*" (A 38-year-old man)

2-3. Trustworthiness: It seems that trust is one of the main pillars of the marital relationship and when it is damaged its repair would be difficult. Secrecy and the problem to trust both refer to individual and marriage backgrounds. "*After his message to his female co-worker and when I saw it, how would he expect me to trust him*?" (A 33-year-old woman). "*My father always told me not to trust females, especially when they are rich.*" (A 35-year-old man)

3-4. Listening skill: In marital privacy, the depth of intimacy between couples depends on their ability to listen precisely and effectively to a large degree. The desire to have listened about oneself, overstatement, paying attention, precise listening and the amount of talking about oneself can lead to continual conversation or can bother someone and interrupt a relationship." *When he wants to explain something, he drags the discussion until I become tired and don't like to listen to it.*" (A 38-year-old woman). "*I can't say anything about his behavior at all. He never accepts leaves the place.*" (A 33-year-old woman).

3) Experience and expressing feelings: Experience and expressing feelings are considered as parts of the main themes of this study which consist of five themes: attention awareness, acceptance, recognition of excitement, expressing excitement, and avoiding excitement. Attention awareness consists of four sub-themes of lack of knowledge about physical sensations when occurring, being overwhelmed with emotions, integration with sensations, and getting involved with negative self-talk during the manifestation of emotions. Acceptance consists of three sub-themes of inhibition and suppression of certain sensations, excessive focus on sensations, and inability to control

sensations. Recognition of emotions consists of three sub-themes of a problem with recognizing sensations, hiding emotions deliberately, and pretending fear and misfortune. Expressing emotions consists of three themes routine emotions and lack of intimacy in expressing them, and exaggerated expression in a way that annoys others. Inhibition of emotions consists of two sub-themes the problem with crying and the problem with expressing the sense of anxiety, fear, happiness, and sadness.

The term emotional experience refers to any type of experience or feeling, whether positive or negative. Feelings such as sadness, anxiety, loneliness, also love; pride, happiness, humor, etc. Feelings may occur at the moment of experiencing an event or interaction or may appear later when remembering an experience. (Baruch et al., 2009). According to Greenberg (2018). Emotions show people the nature of their communication links. Excitement informs people whether their relationships are developing or interrupted or need correction. "*As soon as something happens which is not in his favor, his mood changes immediately and he is not the same person and I fear him a lot in this situation, an angry and terrifying person.*" (A 34-year-old woman).

"*It is hard for me to talk about my feelings. Maybe I don't know how I feel.*" (A 30-year-old woman)

4) Recognition and expression of needs: Recognizing and expressing needs is one of the main themes of this research which consists of three themes: recognition, assertiveness, and realistic expectations. Recognition consists of two sub-themes: problem in recognizing needs and recognizing suitable time and place for expressing needs. Assertiveness consists of six sub-themes: expressing needs, fear of expressing, fear of being judged, sense of vulnerability when expressing needs, excessive indirect or clever expression, and fear of being rejected. Realistic expectations consist of four sub-themes excessive needs expression, putting someone under pressure, meeting needs immediately, and excessive independence.

Recognizing and expressing needs is very effective in couples' relations. People build relations through various needs and seek to meet their needs. Without accurate recognition and expression of needs, couples may feel failure or not being understood. This aspect consists of elements such as fear of expression, fear of being rejected, or problem in recognizing one's needs.

"*I don't behave with tact. I don't know when to tell him my desires*." (A 33-year-old woman)

"*I fear telling him I need something and he says no. So, I don't request him anything*."

5) Conflict and Incompatibility: Conflict and incompatibility are parts of the main themes studied in the research which consist of four themes: problem-solving, avoidance, scolding, anger, and conflict resolution. Problem-solving consists of four sub-themes: dodging the question, covering up, retaliation, and being stubborn. Avoidance consists of three sub-themes: avoiding conflict, unwillingness to talk, and apologies without any reason. Scolding and expressing anger consist of two sub-themes: creating unimportant conflict and unwillingness to forgive. Conflict resolution consists of two sub-themes: problem with tolerating conflict and conflict resolution skills.

Conflict and incompatibility mean difference of opinion or unfavorable interactions which occurs between couples.

"*He is very proud and doesn't apologize. I must always apologize, even if I'm not guilty*." (A 27-year-old woman)

"*He tells me I always blame him a lot...*" (A 32-year-old woman)

6) Mutual relationship. Mutual relationship is one of the studied main themes of this research which consists of four themes: self-awareness, communication skill, awareness of effect, and defensiveness. Self-awareness consists of three sub-themes: perfectionism, realistic expectations, and feeling of failure. Communication skill consists of four sub-themes: constructive criticism, the skill to express, appreciation, and admiration. Awareness of effect consists of five sub-themes: awareness of the impact on the spouse, contiguous conversation, excessive silence, incompatibility of body language and word content, and problem to follow what is said. Defensiveness consists of two sub-themes being open to criticism and flexibility.

This aspect includes the way couples have an impact on each other and their reaction to their feedback. Feedback refers to responses and reactions people show against their behavior or others' behavior. The thing which allows people to be aware of their function is the information received from others (Tsai et al., 2016).

"*He gabs so much that everyone gets bored. I always signal him but he doesn't understand*" (A 4-year-old woman)

"*I wish to goodness that she would appreciate me but she behaves in such a way as if it is my duty.*" (A 49-year-old man)

"*If I was not open to criticism, I would have left him a long time ago.*" (A 37-year-old woman)

7) Attitudes: Attitudes are one of the main themes of this research which consist of four themes: attitude towards marriage, attitude towards spouse's family, attitude towards a spouse, and attitude towards yourself. Attitude towards marriage consists of eight sub-themes: patriarchy, equality of men and women, power division, life considerable decision-making, consulting the spouse, freedom of action, right to choose, and marriage formalities. Attitude towards a spouse's family consists of five sub-themes: the place of living, frequency of visiting each other, the right to comment, the number of financial transactions, and the concept of privacy. Attitude toward a spouse consists of twelve sub-themes: selfishness, regularity, planning, personal hygiene, being kind, being merciful, taking care, attitude towards gender, the need to consult, commitment and loyalty, carelessness, and carefree. Attitude towards self consists of eight sub-themes: being valuable, being attractive, being wise, trustworthiness, being merciful, personal privacy, personal goals, worthiness, and dignity.

Attitudes are considered important and powerful aspects of couples' interaction and are defined as behaviors and the way couples assess marriage concepts and each other's families. It seems that the way of people's attitude directs their behaviors can have a significant impact on appearing problems.

"*I think I must make decisions about financial issues because she is not familiar with the market and doesn't know anything.*" (A 41-year-old man)

"*He tells me to bring everything I cook to his mother as well and we must go there all the weekend. It is not possible. I like to visit them once every two weeks.*" (A 25-year-old woman)

"*Our Gene is different. We can have two wives simultaneously. My uncles were like this.*" (A 45-year-old man)

Figure 1 shows a thematic map of the Lived Experience of Iranian married men and women in a marital relationship in the context of functional analytic

psychotherapy. The relationship between main themes, themes, and sub-themes are drawn in parallel forms.
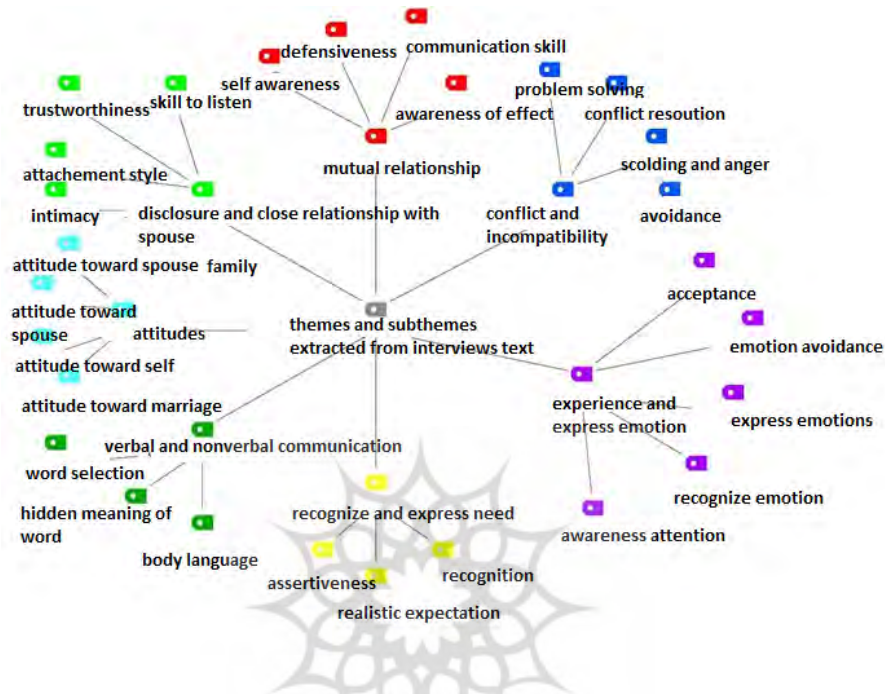
Figure 1. thematic map of the Lived Experience of Iranian married men and women in marital relationships in the context of functional analytic psychotherapy

Conclusion & Discussion

According to the results of the qualitative analysis of interviews, one of the aspects reviewed in this research is attitude. A lot of studies support the effect of attitude on behavior (Marvian & Karami, 2020). Attitudes have an impact on behavior by forming our perceptions about situations which in turn dictate our behavior. Attitudes are considered an assessment of every aspect of the social world. Attitudes are often ambivalent. It means that we are assessing objects and topics both positively and negatively which are often learned socially from others. This type of learning can occur during classical conditioning, instrumental conditioning, or observational learning (Baron et al., 2006)

One of the most important types of attitude which plays a significant role in couples' relationships is the traditional and modern attitude towards marriage and the opposite sex it seems these two types of attitudes have a dramatic impact on the way couples interact.

Verbal and nonverbal communication is another component of research that aligns with previous studies (Richmond & Mc.Crosi, 2003, Alexander et al., 2008, Florian, Hirschberger & Mikolincer, 2013; Jaberi et al., 2015; Rahmani et al., 2018). Non-verbal behaviors shape the main part of communication: Body movements, walking, sitting, way of speaking and tone of voice, eye contact, and the main communicational forms are the same in the world.

Couples' relationship is verbal and non-verbal (body language). No one can claim that she/he does not have a relationship with others, because even without talking, feelings and attitudes are transferable. Recognizing body language is very important because 50% of messages stem from body movements. In fact, the non-verbal relationship is the phonetic accuracy of speech which appear separate from verbal content. This part of language consists of tone, intonation, way of pronunciation, speed of speech, volume, and voice falling and rising. Implicit messages add another semantic level to sentences and often are different from verbal expressions. (McKay et al., 2013)

Another component is disclosure and a close relationship with the spouse. This element consists of excess and deficiency and suitable time to disclose. And also, intimacy and skills related to intimacy. A lot of studies study the relationship between intimacy and self-disclosure in relationships and its impact on couples' relations (Barzegar & Samani, 2016; Mansoori et al., 2013; Bichcusky, 2009). Self-disclosure consists of the process of disclosing thoughts, inner feelings, and previous experiences of oneself for another. Exchanging personal information is considered a main process to expand inter-relationship. Also, self-disclosure is a main part of interpersonal relationships and is necessary to be noticed so as to understand marital functions (Waring et al., 1998). In fact, intimacy is referred to as closeness and support that each member feels and expresses. A lot of studies showed that the ability to build an intimate relationship with others is one of the main factors in the mental health and mental welfare of adults. (Schumm et al.,

1981). Briefly, during the marriage, special behaviors appear among couples that alienate them from each other. Arguments, excessive criticism, and emotional rejection are such behaviors that eliminate couples' intimacy and lead to incorrect usage of communication patterns and a decrease in marital life quality (Barzegar & Samani, 2016). Markman et al. (1993) who probably are the most interested researchers of the self-disclosure area, believe it is considered as a very important feature of good psychological function and is a sign of personal and instrumental health to acquire a healthy personality.

Another element of this research is a mutual relationship. Kohlenberg et al. (2008) believes that mutual relationship during individual assessment consists of a wide range of problems related to the mutual relationship such as failure to consider or explain the individual impact on others, neglecting inter-personal consequences, failure to recognize others' needs, providing punitive feedback for others, misunderstanding gestures, long and boring discussions, or escaping and avoiding some important relationships.

In the research, the above-mentioned concepts were studied in couples' relationships. In fact, this element studies the effect of behavior or describing the effect of self-behavior on a spouse, providing feedback for the spouse or sensitivity towards feedback received from the spouse. A lot of studies checked the impact of various types of relationships and defensiveness in the relationship. For example, Laurenceau et al., (2005) mentioned the feature of an intimate relationship, the feeling of closeness and connection in by couple's relationship. As a result, when couples face relationship problems, it is possible that the whole relationship will be affected by negative feelings. Moreover, the present research is aligned with studies of Labate & McHenry (1993; Oliver & Margolin, 2008; Fowers, 2001; lorenso et al., 2005; Weeks & Fife, 2014).

Another studied component is conflict and incompatibility. Conflict is an as inseparable part of interpersonal relationships but what is important is recognizing conflicts and being aware of them. When people face obstacles while achieving their goals, they express conflict. Therefore, behavioral collections consist of three classes of behaviors:

Passive behaviors: Passive people have problems with conflict and try to reject it.

Aggressive behaviors: Aggressive people also have problems with conflict and try to solve it anyway.

Assertive behavior: Assertive people seek suitable ways to express and resolve their conflicts (Mirenayat, 2019). In fact, conflict in an intimate relationship is inevitable. The question is not whether a conflict exists among couples or not, but the main point is when conflict occurs, and how it will be managed (Weeks & Fife, 2014). In fact, those couples who manage their conflicts by using positive methods and less use of negative interactions will create a situation in which there is more chance to self-disclose and reach an agreement about problems (Johnson, 2003). The results of the study align with the results of Gottman, 2008; Gottman & Silver, 1999; Hollist et al., 2007).

The last element studied in this research is emotional experience and expression. This element considers the recognition of emotions in couples' relationships and the awareness of whether these emotions are expected and suitable or not. Hise et al. (2005) State that emotional experience avoidance is considered an obstacle to behavioral changes. In recent years, the main role of emotion in marital distress and couple therapy was accepted more than before (Gottman, 1994). Therefore, the study of emotion continues. (Plautchik, 2000; Tomkins, 1991; Lewis & Haviland-Jones, 2000). The main role of emotional regulation and emotional participation in marital distress or happiness (Johnson & Bradley, 1999) and the emotional nature of human attachments (Bowlby, 1988; Johnson, 2003) are highly explained (Johnson, 2012).

Affirming the role of culture is not an overstatement. From FAP's point of view, we all are the products of our environment and culture is the main factor of it. Therefore, FAP therapists must deeply consider the suitable culture or subculture of clients. A rewarding or punitive behavior depends on the culture and FAP therapists must be skilled in assessing cultural differences and what naturally reinforces them. FAP therapists must be sensitive to the fact that language is the main channel of culture and should adjust their language accordingly. (Tsai et al., 2016). In fact, similar behaviors can have different functions within different frameworks. Different behaviors can especially have similar functions as well. It is the responsibility of the therapist to recognize and understand these main functional classifications for couples. Therefore, assessing background and cultural differences can help build culture-based assessment tools and increase treatment efficiency because

accurate assessment is the main channel to correct and practical conceptualization and regularity.

We faced limitations to perform in the present research such as limited studies about enhanced couple therapy with functional analytical psychotherapy. Another limitation was the impossibility of a complete and comprehensive assessment of enhanced couple therapy with functional analytical psychotherapy theory from the Iranian native culture's point of view for Iran is a big country with various cultures in which comprehensive cultural assessment is not possible with one research.

In addition to limitations, according to results for the assessment and conceptualization of couples' problems, it is possible to prepare suitable tools which arise from Iranian culture. In fact, couple therapists can study the dissatisfactions and conflicts within couples widely and theoretically based on 7 areas and start their therapy according to enhanced couple therapy with functional analytical psychotherapy.

In future studies, we can perform related studies from therapists' points of view because performing such studies and comparing their results with this study's results can help to answer some existing conflicts among therapists and clients.

Ethical considerations:

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