

## Original Research

### Predicting Emotional Divorce Based On Communication Beliefs And Ambivalence In Expressing Emotion

Samira Akhavan Arjmand<sup>1\*</sup>

**\*Corresponding Author: Samira Akhavan Arjmand.** Master of General Psychology, Azad University, Shiraz, Iran. Email: [samira140033@yahoo.com](mailto:samira140033@yahoo.com). Orcid no: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5589-277X>.

#### Abstract

**Background:** The aim of this study was to predict emotional divorce based on communication beliefs and ambivalence in expressing emotion in women referring to psychological clinics in Isfahan in the spring and summer of 2018.

**Method:** For this purpose, 179 women were selected by purposive sampling method and completed the questionnaires of ambivalence in expressing emotion, communication beliefs and emotional divorce (2008). Simultaneous regression was used in statistical data analysis.

**Results:** Simultaneous multiple regression analysis showed that there is a significant relationship **between** the dimensions of communication beliefs and emotional divorce. There is also a significant positive relationship between the dimensions of ambivalence in expressing emotion and emotional divorce.

**Conclusion:** The dimensions of communication beliefs are able to predict emotional divorce; So that the belief in the destructiveness of opposition, the immutability of the spouse and the belief in the expectation of mind reading have the greatest role in predicting emotional divorce and the dimensions of ambivalence in expressing emotion can predict emotional divorce.

**Keywords:** Communication Beliefs, Ambivalence in Expressing Emotion, Emotional Divorce. Niloofar Pedaran<sup>1\*</sup>

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## Introduction

Marriage is considered a very important and valuable component in human life. Through marriage, man and woman are attracted to each other through a force of instincts, the rite of love, and affection, freely and completely committed to each other to create a productive unit as a family. However, over time, the initial love and affection fades and sometimes, unfortunately, disappears completely. It is in this state that the spouses continue to live completely alien to each other and only as housemates, without any feelings or affections towards each other. This type of separation is called "silent divorce" or "emotional divorce". In an emotional divorce, the parties do not have any love, affection and intimacy towards each other and do not get any pleasure from being close to each other. Despite this lack of love and affection, they have accepted living together and are not separated [1].

According to the statistics on the rate of emotional divorce, which is much higher than the rate of formal divorce, emotional divorce can be considered as one of the most important and effective factors in the disintegration of the structure of the most fundamental part of society, namely the family [2].

One of the important factors that play a significant role in the emotional divorce of spouses is communication beliefs. Unfavorable communication beliefs cause important issues in the relationship to remain unresolved and so these issues are often the source of repetitive conflicts. Many couples always have the same or similar arguments about a certain issue, without solving the problem. Persistent conflicts and the gradual reduction of emotional attachment and the reduction of long-term interests and interactions are considered as causes of frustration and marital burnout. Also, couples' burnout depends on their compatibility with their beliefs [3].

Another factor that has a significant impact on

a couple's emotional divorce is ambivalence in expressing emotion. Ambivalence in emotional expression involves various forms, including the desire to express but not being able to express it, expressing without a real desire to do it or expressing emotion and later regretting it. The structure of ambivalence in the expression of emotion and the coping style of the oppressor, or the defensive nature of the oppressor, may have many similar features due to the shared deterrence process. Therefore, if the spouses do not raise their needs or do not realize the needs of each other in relation to each other and do not reach a positive solution to meet their needs; They experience stress, failure, frustration, anger and eventually burnout [4].

Experts believe that the family is one of the first public and global institutional systems that is absolutely necessary to meet the vital and emotional needs of human beings and the survival of society [5]. Appropriate relationships in society are formed based on appropriate relationships in the family, and the more appropriate the relationships within the family, the more stable and strong the family and, consequently, the community [6]. No society can claim health without having healthy families and none of the social harms have arisen unaffected by the family [7]. One of the most important family harm is divorce, but official divorce statistics do not fully reflect the failure of spouses in married life, because next to that, a bigger statistic is dedicated to emotional divorces, that is, to the silent lives and empty families where a man and a woman live coldly together but do not seek a legal divorce. [8] In fact, some marriages that do not end in divorce turn into empty marriages that lack love, companionship, and friendship and spouses only go through family life and spend time.

Disagreements such as disparate tendencies of couples and deprivations due to the inability of marriage to meet the expectations of each of them, in such circumstances, if the two

parties are not able to separate according to the existing conditions, they will inevitably be forced to live their lives with emotional divorce with the most difficult conditions until the end of their lives [9]. Divorce can be examined from various religious, legal, cultural,... perspectives. But what has always been considered as divorce is the separation of the wife from the husband or the separation of the couple from the cohabitation and the termination of the marriage. And due to changes in the structure and relationships between couples, we are faced with a new division that divorce is divided into two types, formal and emotional (silent). In a formal divorce, a man and a woman are legally separated from each other by going to court and they have no obligation to each other, but emotional divorce occurs differently in the couple's life. Emotional divorce is the most important factor in the disintegration of the structure and the most fundamental part of society, namely the family.

Ambivalence in the expression of emotion may be used as an emotional trait that, along with global tendencies or the rules of cultural representation, affects the experience of emotion [10]. Some people express their emotions freely and seemingly without worrying about the consequences, but others are conservative in conveying their emotions. Studies have shown that ambivalence in expression is negatively correlated with expressionism [11, 10] and leads to inhibition and rumination in the expression of emotion [12]. Ambivalence in expressing emotion is the best sign of low expression and high conflict, the experience of conflict, in addition to the biological and psychological consequences, also has significant interpersonal consequences, although all of these consequences are interrelated [11].

Therefore, according to what has been said, the researcher seeks to answer the question of whether communication beliefs and ambivalence in expressing emotion can

predict emotional divorce?

### **Research hypotheses**

#### **General Hypothesis:**

Communication beliefs and ambivalence in expressing emotion can predict emotional divorce.

#### **Sub-hypotheses:**

- 1- Communication beliefs are able to predict emotional divorce.
- 2- Ambivalence in expressing emotion is able to predict emotional divorce.

### **Theoretical foundations of research**

#### **Emotional Divorce**

Emotional divorce or silent divorce is a kind of separation in which a couple, although living together under one roof, there is no love and affection between them, In this type of life, the only thing that binds the couple together is basically the same contract that they accepted at the beginning of life; A contract in which both parties usually feel love and affection at the time of signing the clauses, but after many years, now this sweet and warm relationship has turned into cold and silent [13].

#### **Communication beliefs**

Interpersonal communication is the basis of human identity and perfection and the basis of his connection with others. Effective communication flourishes and improves the quality of people's relationships. At the same time, ineffective communication hinders human prosperity and destroys relationships.

Byers (1999) [14] believes that cognitive theory is based on the view that the highest source of growth for individuals' progress is the ability to think logically and realistically and to have a correct attitude about themselves and the world around them. In other words, it is our way of thinking and perception that creates our emotional behavior. The first principle of epistemology is that the human condition is the result of his or her cognitions and thoughts. It is man's cognitive power that distinguishes him from other beings, and it is this cognitive ability that shapes man's particular behavior. [14]

One of the views that has recently received a lot of serious attention in relation to dysfunctional beliefs is the Albert Ellis School of Logical-Emotional-Behavioral Psychotherapy, which has a special place among other psychological schools. Based on the fundamental assumptions of this therapeutic method, our emotions arise from our beliefs, evaluations, interpretations, and reactions to our life situations [15].

### **Emotional expression and social functioning**

The functional-social importance of emotional expression is influenced by individual differences and situational factors. Expressing obvious emotion gives information to others and calls for answers from them, and shapes social relationships in a way that directly affects a person's health, satisfaction with interaction, and adaptation to traumatic events. By studying bereaved individuals, Bonano and Coltz (1997) [16] concluded that reducing negative emotion facilitates the supportive reactions of important individuals who are perceived as an important shield against loss, but the frequent and long-term expression of negative emotions, such as anger and sadness, leads to the alienation of important people [16].

### **Ambivalence in expressing emotion**

Ambivalence can be defined as rapidly changing or simultaneously intense and contrasting emotional feelings in an object. But ambivalence in emotional expression includes the following various forms: the desire to express but not being able to express it, the expression without a real desire to do it, and to express emotion and later regret it. The structure of ambivalence in emotional expression and the way in which the oppressor copes or the defensive state of the oppressor may have many similar features due to the common inhibition process [11]. Ambivalence in the expression of emotion may be used as an emotional trait that influences emotional decomposition along with global tendencies or

the rules of cultural representation [10].

### **Ambivalence in the expression of emotion and social functioning**

The ability to recognize the emotions of others as a component of social skills is essential for social interaction.

Ambivalent people have difficulty navigating the emotions of others because their conflicting feelings may cause them to distrust people expressing their obvious emotion or have a contradictory interpretation of it. Therefore, these people have little ability to understand the needs and emotional reactions of those around them [10]. Ambivalent people may be less likely to receive support provided by others. Perceived support, on the other hand, moderates the relationship between ambivalence and health. The inability to properly receive social support may make ambivalent people (especially men) less satisfied with their marriages.

### **Ambivalence in expressing emotion and physical health**

Ambivalence in expressing emotion takes time to affect physical health. Longitudinal studies in people with high levels of ambivalence in expressing emotion show that ambivalence inadvertently affects physical health over time [11].

King (1998) [10] found a weak correlation between ambivalence in emotion expression and physical illness. Based on this finding, King followed Dillon's view and stated that ambivalence is only due to its negative effect on social support that is related to health. Given that the activity of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis is an important modulator of stress-disease interaction, the effect of anger expression and defenses on hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) reactions to acute psychological stress was evaluated. They measured defensiveness using the Kennedy and Watson Social Degree Scale (MCSD, 1960) [27]. High scores on this scale reflect a tendency to underreport, deny or inhibit negative emotions and try to make

oneself look good to others. This personality trait is thought to affect the cardiovascular response and the risk of disease. In this study, 46 healthy male volunteers participated in public speaking and mental calculation. Samples were divided into high-expression and low-expression groups in anger and low defense mode. Serum cortisol and adrenocorticotrophic hormone (ACTH) were measured before and after each exercise. Their heart rate (HR) and blood pressure (BP) were also measured continuously at least two intervals before and after work.

### Research Background

Rousta (2017) [17] in a study entitled Predicting emotional divorce based on early maladaptive schemas and assertiveness in married women concluded that early maladaptive schemas have a significant relationship with emotional divorce, so that early maladaptive schemas are able to predict emotional divorce. Expression also has a significant relationship with emotional divorce, so that assertiveness is able to predict emotional divorce.

Kashkoli Eidipour (2017) [18] in a study entitled "Predictor of marital burnout based on communication beliefs and sexual satisfaction" concluded that communication beliefs can predict marital burnout in married women. Sexual satisfaction can also predict marital burnout in married women.

Asghari (2013) [9] in a study examined the relationship between ambivalence in expressing emotion and depression: the mediating role of interpersonal problems. The results of path analysis showed that only ambivalence in expressing positive emotions is associated with depression and the dimensions of openness, popularization and aggression are indicators of interpersonal problems mediating this relationship. The significance of the direct effect between ambivalence in expressing positive emotion and depression also indicates that difficulty in frankness and popularization and aggression

are relative mediators of the relationship between the two variables and there are other variables that play a mediating role in this regard. Based on this, it can be said that disruption in interpersonal relationships is one of the mechanisms that causes ambivalence in expressing positive emotions associated with depression.

Darandegan, Parsa, Ahmadi Amoli and Nasrollahi (2015) [19] in a study examined personality traits and ambivalence in expressing emotion in patients with gastrointestinal cancer compared with the non-patient group. Multivariate analysis of variance of 200 subjects showed that there was a significant difference between the patient and non-patient groups in terms of neuroticism, consensus and conscientiousness and ambivalence in expressing emotion, but there is no significant difference between these two groups in terms of extraversion and openness to experience.

### Research Methods

The statistical population of this study included all women who referred to psychological clinics in Isfahan (5 clinics), and according to the psychologists of the clinics, they had marital problems.

The statistical sample also included women referring to psychological clinics in Isfahan, and according to the number of dimensions and variables, 179 people were selected by available sampling method. Also in the present study, the reliability of the questionnaire was 0.81 through Cronbach's alpha. After determining the sample and conducting correspondence and obtaining the necessary permits to conduct research, the researcher has referred to a number of clinics in Isfahan and with the coordination and cooperation of the clinic officials, they conducted research questionnaires among the participants. At the beginning, the objectives of the research and how to complete the questionnaires were briefly explained to the

participants and they were asked to inform her if they had any ambiguities about the questionnaires. After completing the questionnaires in groups and collecting them, they were scored.

The data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed at two levels of descriptive and inferential statistics. At the level of descriptive statistics, statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation and at the level of inferential statistics, correlation coefficient and regression test were used simultaneously with SPSS software version 21.

**Results**

**Descriptive statistical analysis**

The findings of Table 1 show the mean and standard deviation of communication beliefs and its dimensions, emotional ambivalence with positive expression and merit, as well as emotional divorce of referring women. Table 2 shows the correlation matrix of the research variables, so that there is a significant positive relationship between the dimensions of communication beliefs with emotional divorce and also the dimensions of ambivalence in expressing emotion with emotional divorce.

**Inferential statistics**

**Hypothesis 1:** Communication beliefs are able to predict emotional divorce.

To determine which of the dysfunctional communication beliefs can predict the emotional divorce of the client women,

simultaneous regression analysis of emotional divorce based on communication beliefs was performed. For this purpose, communication beliefs were considered as a predictor variable and emotional divorce as a dependent variable (criterion), the results of which can be seen in the table below.

**Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of research variables**

Indicator Variables	Number	Average	The standard deviation
Destructiveness of opposition	179	89.18	97.4
Spouse immutability	179	48.19	31.3
Mental reading expectation	179	76.19	44.3
Sexual perfectionism	179	11.19	88.3
Gender differences	179	59.19	82.3
Communication beliefs	179	88.96	53.14
Ambivalence in expressing positive emotion	179	70.47	28.11
Ambivalence in expressing entitlement	179	19.33	38.7
Emotional Divorce	179	25.13	51.6

**Table 2: Correlation matrix of research variables**

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Destructiveness of opposition	1							
Spouse immutability	45**.0	1						
Mental reading expectation	22**.0	27**.0	1					
Sexual perfectionism	60**.0	51**.0	31**.0	1				
Gender differences	56**.0	43*.0	46**.0	51**.0	1			
Communication beliefs	81**.0	70**.0	57**.0	80**.0	76**.0	1		
Ambivalence in expressing positive emotion	40**.0	29**.0	28**.0	29**.0	31**.0	43**.0	1	
Ambivalence in expressing entitlement	25**.0	27**.0	20**.0	25**.0	30**.0	34**.0	34**.0	1

Emotional Divorce	57**.0	44**.0	31**.0	44**.0	42**.0	60**.0	52**.0	
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\*P<0.05; \*\*P<0.001

**Table 3: Simultaneous Regression Predicting Emotional Divorce Based on Communication Beliefs**

Variable	$\beta$	T	sig	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F	sig
Destructiveness of opposition	426.0	25.5	001.0	63.0	40.0	74.22	001.0
Spouse immutability	184.0	576.2	01.0				
Mental reading expectation	151.0	243.2	03.0				
Sexual perfectionism	04.0	484.0	629.0				
Gender differences	02.0	185.0	853.0				

As shown in Table 3, the value of F = 22.74 and the probability of the test (sig) is 0.001, in other words, a variety of communication beliefs are able to predict changes in the variance of women's emotional divorce. Its prediction rate based on the R-square is 40%, which means that all types of communication beliefs can predict 40% of the changes in the criterion variable (emotional divorce). The values of  $\beta$  and t also show that the belief in the destructiveness of opposition ( $\beta = 0.426$  and  $t = 5.25$  with  $p = 0.001$ , respectively), the immutability of the spouse ( $\beta = 0.184$  and  $t = 2.576$  with  $P = 0.01$ ) and belief in the expectation of mind reading ( $\beta = 0.151$  and  $t = 2.243$  with  $p = 0.03$ ) play the most important role in predicting the variable of emotional divorce in women referring to counseling clinics.

**Hypothesis 2:** Ambivalence in expressing

emotion is able to predict emotional divorce.

To determine which dimension of ambivalence in emotion expression can predict emotional divorce, simultaneous regression analysis of emotional divorce was performed based on the dimensions of ambivalence in emotion expression, for this purpose, the dimensions of ambivalence in expressing emotion as a predictor variable and emotional divorce as a dependent variable (criterion) were considered, the results of which can be seen below.

As shown in Table 4, the value of F = 63.93 and the probability of the test (sig) is 0.001, in other words, the dimensions of ambivalence in expressing emotion can predict emotional divorce and its value based on R squared is equal to 0.42.

**Table 4: Simultaneous regression of predicting emotional divorce based on the dimensions of ambivalence in expressing emotion**

Variable	$\beta$	T	sig	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F	sig
Ambivalence in expressing positive emotion	385.0	327.5	001.0	649.0	42.0	93.63	001.0

Ambivalence in expressing entitlement	408.0	701.6	001.0				
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This means that the dimensions of ambivalence in expressing emotion predict 42% of the changes in the criterion variable (emotional divorce). From  $\beta$  and t values, it is clear that first ambivalence in expressing entitlement ( $\beta = 0.408$  and  $t = 6.701$  with  $p = 0.001$ ) and then ambivalence in expressing positive emotion ( $\beta = 0.385$  and  $5.327$ ). = t ( $p = 0.001$ ) play the most important role in predicting the emotional divorce variable. In other words, the second hypothesis has been confirmed.

**Table 5: Simultaneous regression of predicting emotional divorce based on communication beliefs and ambivalence in expressing emotion**

Variable	B	T	sig	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F
Communication beliefs	394.0	695.7	0001.0	606.0	37.0	51.09
Ambivalence in expressing emotion	211.0	971.1	05.0			

As shown in Table 5, the value is  $F = 51.09$  and the probability of the test (sig) is 0.001. In other words, communication beliefs and ambivalence in expressing emotion can predict emotional divorce and its value based on R squared is equal to 0.37. This means that both variables simultaneously predict 37% of the changes in the criterion variable (emotional divorce). From the values of  $\beta$  and t, it is clear that communication beliefs ( $\beta = 0.394$  and  $t = 7.695$  with  $p = 0.001$ ) play the most important role in predicting the emotional divorce variable.

**Discussion**

In this study, two hypotheses were developed and according to the findings of the analysis, the following explanations are available to confirm them.

**Hypothesis 1:** Communication beliefs are able to predict emotional divorce.

Findings showed that there is a direct and significant relationship between different types of communication beliefs and emotional divorce. These findings indicate that with the increase of each type of communication beliefs, the rate of emotional divorce of women also increases. To determine the role of each of the communication beliefs on emotional divorce, the results of simultaneous regression showed that different types of communication beliefs are able to predict 40% of the changes in the emotional divorce variable. It was also found that the belief in the destructiveness of opposition, the immutability of the spouse and the belief in the expectation of mind reading of all types of communication beliefs directly and positively have the most role in predicting emotional divorce. Therefore, it can be acknowledged that in addition to all kinds of communication beliefs that have a simple positive and meaningful relationship with emotional divorce, the believes of destructiveness of opposition, the immutability of the spouse, and the belief in the expectation of mindfulness play the greatest role in increasing women's emotional divorce.

This finding in some ways is consistent with other studies, these researches include the researches of Bushman (1998) [20], Seruz et al. (1999), Metz and Kapach (1990) [21], Kashkoli Eidipour (2017)[18], Rothman, N. B. (2017)[23].

Cognitive perspectives attribute effective or inefficient communication between spouses to their different ways of thinking about their actions and behavior. Ellis believes that irrational attitudes and perceptions of individuals can play a significant role in creating a dysfunctional emotional relationship between spouses and their



dissatisfaction (from marital relationships). Irrational beliefs are the main cause of many social differences, especially marital relationships, such beliefs actually mean the existence of false and inconsistent thoughts about oneself and the world. According to Rothman (2017)[23], no event can inherently cause psychological disturbance in human beings because all stimuli and events have meaning and interpretation in the mind. Accordingly, incompatibilities and emotional problems are due to the way information is understood, interpreted and processed by stimuli and events that underlie negative thoughts and beliefs. One of the main areas of influence of irrational and dysfunctional thoughts is married life.

Asgari (2013)[9] consider dysfunctional communication beliefs as a set of beliefs, regardless of whether they are efficient and logical or not in bilateral relations, especially marital relations. Marital satisfaction is one of the effective factors in the stability and reliability of families and at the same time the mental health of spouses and children. In marital relationships, various factors cause spouses to be satisfied with each other. Imani (1391) considers the following as the most important factors for success in married life: emotional and intellectual development, similarity of interests and way of thinking, religious similarity, educational and class similarity, and similarity of sexual thinking, similarity of interests in life and speed of action in Jobs and finally the relationship with the couple's family. Since dysfunctional communication believes cause important issues of cohabitation to remain unresolved and become a source of recurring conflict between spouses, they can lead to emotional divorce, which in itself indicates the deterioration of the relationship between husband and wife. This type of divorce over time creates increasing tension between husband and wife, which usually leads to their separation from each other [22]. Because

emotional divorce is the result of the accumulation of frustrations and tensions and the constant problems of daily life that cause erosion in relationships. This situation occurs when spouses realize that despite their best efforts, their relationship does not and will not give meaning to life. In other words, emotional divorce results from a mismatch between facts and expectations, the extent of which depends on the extent of the spouses' communication beliefs.

**Hypothesis 2:** Ambiguity in expressing emotion is able to predict emotional divorce.

The results of research on this hypothesis showed that there is a positive and significant relationship between the dimensions of ambivalence in expressing emotion and emotional divorce. Simultaneous regression analysis also showed that the dimensions of ambivalence in expressing emotion are able to predict 42% of the changes in the criterion variable (emotional divorce). It was also found that first ambivalence in expressing entitlement and then ambivalence in expressing positive emotion have the most role in predicting the variable of emotional divorce.

This research is in line with previous studies, including the research of Ratman (2017) [23], Hazel and Mongreen (2004) [24], Dilion et al. (2014)[22], Darandegan et al. (2015)[19].

Ambivalence in expressing emotion is defined as a tendency to be skeptical about expressing emotion. It is believed that expressing or not expressing emotion by itself cannot be a problem, but what creates the problem is the conflict or ambivalence that one experiences in expressing emotion [22, 11, 10, 14].

The style of ambivalence in expressing emotion is defined as the tendency to express emotion but not being able to express it, expressing emotion without real desire or expressing and then regretting the expression [22]. Ambivalence in the expression of emotion may be used as an emotional trait that influences the experience of emotion along

with global tendencies or the rules of cultural representation [10]. Some people express their emotions freely and seemingly without worrying about the consequences, but others are conservative in conveying their emotions. Studies have shown that ambivalence in expression is negatively correlated with expression [10] and leads to inhibition and rumination in the expression of emotion.

Ambivalence in the expression of emotion, fear of intimacy, and defensiveness of the oppressor are associated with three characteristics of attitudes toward social support and its use and increasing use of avoidance coping strategies. These three types of conflict affect different components of emotional intelligence, and a decrease in social support can lead to an increase in symptoms of the disease. According to research on their own and others' schemas [23], emotionally conflicted individuals may not value themselves for receiving social support. Ambivalent people, on the other hand, may be less likely to pass on their confusion to others for fear of intimacy and they create problems for others to be able to deduce their needs. King (1998)[10] stated that women may feel a lot of conflict, especially in expressing intimacy because they typically face cultural expectations of affection on the one hand, and occasional demands for happiness and emotional indifference on the other. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to expect that people who have difficulty expressing and expressing their emotions correctly and have a state of conflict and ambivalence in expressing their emotions, in their relationship with the other party and the spouse, they cannot properly express their feelings and desires to the other party. And therefore, their needs and desires are not met and they somehow suffer from shortages, failures and helplessness, and it projects the same feeling on the other person or spouse and their relationship is disrupted and causes problems and causes distrust and disrespect

and lack of love for each other; Instead of supporting each other, spouses act in the direction of harassment, failure and self-esteem degradation of each other and each seeks to find a reason to prove the other's fault and shortcomings and to reject the other. These factors gradually lead to a decrease in marital satisfaction and emotional divorce.

### Conclusion

Because communication beliefs and ambivalence in expressing emotion are the main cause of many marital problems, in the present study, as predictor variables, it was found that different types of communication beliefs and ambivalence in expressing emotion can predict a large amount of marital burnout.

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