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The Relationship Between Body Image, Emotional Maturity, and Rejection Sensitivity with Emotional Divorce in Women on the Verge of Divorce

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to determine the relationship between body image, emotional maturity, and rejection sensitivity with emotional divorce among women on the verge of divorce in the city of Tonekabon. Given its primary purpose, this research was applied in nature and employed a correlational design. The statistical population consisted of all women on the verge of divorce in Tonekabon, which, according to data obtained from the Welfare Organization and the Social Emergency Center during 2022–2023, included 223 couples. A simple random sampling method was used to select participants. Based on the Krejcie and Morgan table, a sample of 136 married women was obtained. The research instruments included the Fisher Body Image Questionnaire (1970), the Emotional Maturity Scale by Yashvir Singh and Mahesh Bhargava (1991), the Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire by Downey and Feldman (1996), and the Emotional Divorce Questionnaire by Gottman (2008). Data were analyzed using stepwise regression analysis with SPSS version 27. The findings indicated a significant relationship between body image, emotional maturity, and rejection sensitivity with emotional divorce among women. Moreover, the variables of rejection sensitivity, emotional maturity, and body image were found to have predictive power for the criterion variable of emotional divorce.

Keywords: body image, emotional maturity, rejection sensitivity, emotional divorce.

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Introduction

Emotional divorce—defined as the erosion of marital intimacy, empathy, and mutual responsiveness while the legal bond persists—has increasingly been recognized as a silent precursor to marital dissolution, with profound implications for mental health, parenting quality, and intergenerational adjustment. In contexts where formal separation is stigmatized or delayed, couples may remain legally married yet functionally disengaged, creating a "psychological singlehood" that burdens family systems and community resources alike (1). Theoretical and empirical work over the past decade suggests that emotional divorce is multiply determined, emerging from the interplay of intrapersonal vulnerabilities (e.g., rejection sensitivity, emotional immaturity), interpersonal schemas (e.g., attachment-related disconnection), sociocultural pressures (e.g., body ideals and objectification), and structural conditions (e.g., power dynamics and family structure) that together undermine dyadic regulation and marital cohesion (2-4). Against this backdrop,

understanding how body image, emotional maturity, and rejection sensitivity jointly forecast emotional divorce in women on the verge of divorce is not only theoretically salient but also practically urgent, given the cascading consequences for women's well-being, co-parenting, and social participation (5-7).

Body image has emerged as a central psychosocial construct that shapes romantic cognition, affect, and behavior. Contemporary objectification and sociocultural models posit that internalizing narrow beauty ideals amplifies body surveillance and shame, reduces embodied self-acceptance, and increases relational insecurity—processes that can translate into avoidance, jealousy, sexual dissatisfaction, and conflict in intimate partnerships (8, 9). Cross-national evidence further situates body image within broader cultural ecologies, showing that attitudes toward aesthetic modification (e.g., cosmetic surgery) are embedded in social norms and personal contingencies of self-worth; such attitudes can spill over into relationship expectations and dyadic negotiations of attraction, authenticity, and commitment (10). In digital ecosystems saturated with idealized bodies, frequent appearance-based social comparison has been linked with body dissatisfaction and a stronger drive for thinness, especially when comparisons target highly curated images; these dynamics are known to erode self-esteem and heighten vigilance to rejection, thereby straining communication and trust in couples (11). While much of this literature has emphasized young adults in Western or online samples, its core mechanisms—appearance-based contingencies of worth, comparison spirals, and objectified self-consciousness—are theoretically applicable to married women experiencing marital strain, where perceived bodily inadequacy may be misattributed as partner devaluation, fueling reciprocal withdrawal and affective disengagement (8, 9, 11).

Measurement-oriented studies remind us that anxiety-related symptom structures and their item functioning vary across sociodemographic groups, which has methodological implications for studying marital processes in diverse populations (12). Yet beyond measurement nuance, clinical and counseling findings converge on the idea that body-related distress can act as a relational stressor: it burdens emotion regulation capacity, biases threat appraisals, and narrows behavioral repertoires during conflict, thereby undermining mutuality and closeness. Within Iranian contexts, early work has explicitly linked body image with emotional divorce and perfectionism, suggesting that self-critical standards and appearance dissatisfaction co-occur with affective distancing and marital disaffection (1). Complementing this, qualitative and quantitative studies on women's post-divorce or threatened-divorce experiences depict a landscape of identity renegotiation under social scrutiny, where bodily self-perception intersects with agency, stigma, and the pursuit of dignity (7). Collectively, these strands highlight body image as an actionable lever—one that interfaces with emotion schemas and rejection-related expectancies to shape trajectories toward or away from emotional divorce (8, 9, 13).

Emotional maturity functions as a multi-faceted competence encompassing emotional stability, reflective capacity, frustration tolerance, social adaptability, and autonomous problem-solving. Conceptually, it is a protective factor that buffers couples against the destabilizing effects of stress and perceived threat, enabling partners to transform negative affect into collaborative problem solving and repair. Empirical studies in Iranian samples underscore that lower emotional maturity is associated with heightened psychological distress and a greater tendency toward emotional divorce; moreover, emotional maturity appears to mediate links between distress and marital disengagement, positioning it as a plausible mechanism of resilience in strained marriages (14, 15). Intervention research further suggests that structured counseling approaches

that target emotion schemas and metacognitive beliefs can reduce emotional divorce and bolster emotional maturity, pointing to modifiable intra-individual processes that are relevant for prevention and treatment (16). When couples receive training in conflict resolution grounded in choice-theoretic principles, improvements are observed in hope and reductions in emotional divorce—effects likely mediated by enhanced responsibility-taking, needs-fulfillment dialogue, and emotion-coaching—i.e., capacities closely aligned with the behavioral expression of emotional maturity (5). Taken together, the literature situates emotional maturity as both a state-like competence sensitive to psychosocial interventions and a trait-like scaffold for secure intimacy and adaptive conflict navigation (5, 15, 16).

Rejection sensitivity—defined as the anxious expectation, rapid perception, and intense reaction to interpersonal rejection—has been conceptualized as a relational schema that amplifies threat detection and dysregulates affect in romantic contexts. High rejection sensitivity biases attention toward ambiguous signals of partner disinterest, promotes defensive or controlling behaviors, and undermines empathy during disagreements; over time, these patterns degrade trust, increase stonewalling or criticism, and crystalize as emotional distancing (17). In structural models of marital conflict, rejection-linked schemas (e.g., disconnection/rejection, impaired autonomy/performance) mediate the impact of insecure attachment on conflict patterns, suggesting that rejection sensitivity forms part of a broader schema architecture that organizes emotion, cognition, and behavior in couple dynamics (2, 18). Within families navigating divorce or the threat of divorce, children's and adults' affective synchronization is often impaired—an observation that underscores how rejection-focused vigilance and dysregulation ripple through relational networks, not merely dyads (19). Moreover, sexual myths and dysfunctional sexual beliefs—common correlates of shame and rejection fears—predict emotional divorce, indicating that rejection-related expectancies can link body image, sexual scripts, and marital disengagement (20). These literatures converge on a plausible pathway: appearance-based contingencies (body image) feed rejection expectancies; low emotional maturity constrains emotion regulation and repair; together, these forces heighten conflict reactivity and avoidance, culminating in emotional divorce (1, 8, 9, 17).

Sociological and family-systems perspectives broaden the lens by integrating institutional and structural determinants. Divorce proceedings and the broader sociolegal milieu shape couples' experiences, altering incentives, timelines, and perceived options; during drawn-out processes, emotional withdrawal can become both a coping strategy and a self-fulfilling trajectory toward relational dissolution (21). Cross-sectional analyses of family structure and intimacy indicate that reduced cohesion and lower dyadic closeness co-occur with higher emotional divorce, consistent with theories of emotional cutoff and disengagement (4). At the level of personality and individual differences, several studies document links between dark traits, differentiation of self, and rigid gender roles with marital boredom and disengagement—patterns that plausibly interact with rejection sensitivity and deficits in emotional maturity to accelerate emotional divorce (22). Similarly, decision-making styles and within-family power structures predict emotional divorce among employed women, highlighting how autonomy constraints, asymmetric influence, and low collaborative problem-solving degrade emotional bonds (3). Parent–child communication patterns and early maladaptive schemas also figure prominently in structural accounts, indicating developmental pathways through which interpersonal schemas—including rejection-focused schemas—are acquired and later enacted within marriage (18). Complementary intervention research demonstrates that emotion-focused therapy

fosters post-divorce adjustment and emotion regulation, implying that targeted work on emotion processing and attachment needs can reverse or mitigate some of the processes implicated in emotional divorce (23).

Within this mosaic, body image occupies a distinctive niche as both a sociocultural and intrapersonal construct. Large-scale evidence from the United States shows that sociocultural pressures and objectification-related processes shape women's body satisfaction via identifiable pathways (e.g., internalization of ideals, appearance comparison, self-objectification), processes that map onto elevated relational vigilance and decreased sexual and emotional intimacy when internalized (8). International data on body image, physique anxiety, and dating anxiety extend these findings into early adulthood relational settings, illustrating how body-related fears compromise approach behaviors and heighten threat sensitivity in courtship—mechanisms that plausibly generalize to marital contexts under strain (9). Content analyses of body dysmorphic disorder etiologies in women reveal sociocultural, cognitive, and interpersonal drivers, aligning with a multi-level formulation in which body-related perfectionism and threat appraisals erode dyadic stability (13). In digital spaces, the frequency and direction of appearance comparisons predict body dissatisfaction and thinness drives—key markers of evaluative self-focus that may sensitize individuals to perceived partner disapproval or disinterest (11). Though not always examined in married samples, the underlying mechanisms—internalized ideals, comparison cycles, and anxious vigilance—speak directly to rejection sensitivity and emotional maturity constraints, offering a coherent explanatory chain toward emotional divorce (8, 9, 17).

Iranian research specifically foregrounds emotional maturity as a pivotal mediator and predictor in marital functioning. Studies indicate that lower emotional maturity amplifies the link between psychological distress and emotional divorce, suggesting that competence in emotion regulation, reflective functioning, and social adaptation can interrupt escalation cycles and preserve intimacy (14, 15). Consistent with this, counseling interventions that target emotion schemas have been shown to reduce emotional divorce and elevate emotional maturity, furnishing translational evidence that the maturity construct is malleable and clinically meaningful (16). Furthermore, training couples in conflict resolution grounded in choice theory enhances hope and lowers emotional divorce, perhaps by fostering autonomous choice, responsibility, and needs-satisfying dialogue—capacities that likely down-regulate rejection sensitivity and broaden behavioral options during conflict (5). At the same time, studies of men indicate that sexual satisfaction mediates between personality traits and emotional divorce, pointing to a shared psychosexual channel through which body image and relational schemas may operate across genders (6). For women confronting the social and existential challenges of post-divorce life, qualitative work illuminates the interplay of agency, social evaluation, and identity reconstruction—elements germane to both body image and rejection sensitivity, and to how emotional maturity scaffolds adaptive coping (7).

A comprehensive model of emotional divorce must therefore integrate: (a) sociocultural body image pressures (internalization, comparison, objectification) that elevate evaluative self-focus; (b) rejection sensitivity schemas that bias attention and appraisals toward threat in close relationships; and (c) emotional maturity capacities that enable reappraisal, empathic attunement, and constructive conflict engagement. Family-structure variables (e.g., cohesion/intimacy) and institutional contexts (e.g., divorce proceedings) may moderate or mediate these pathways by altering stress loads, temporal horizons, and perceived efficacy of repair (4, 21). Personality-based vulnerabilities (e.g., dark traits) and social-role constraints (e.g.,

gendered norms) likely shape the baseline levels of rejection sensitivity and the accessibility of mature emotional responses, thereby influencing whether body image concerns translate into enduring emotional distance or are metabolized through dyadic repair (3, 22). Evidence from attachment- and schema-focused models supports this integration by locating rejection sensitivity and emotional maturity within broader developmental architectures of intimacy and autonomy (2, 18). Finally, because anxiety symptomatology and item functioning may vary across cultural and socioeconomic contexts, rigorous measurement and sensitivity to differential functioning remain critical for drawing valid inferences in heterogeneous marital samples (12).

In sum, converging literatures across counseling psychology, social and clinical psychology, family therapy, and sociology underscore a theoretically plausible and practically consequential nexus among body image, emotional maturity, and rejection sensitivity in shaping women's propensity toward emotional divorce. Body image concerns heighten evaluative self-focus and perceived partner scrutiny; rejection sensitivity channels this vigilance into maladaptive interpretations and reactions; and insufficient emotional maturity constrains the capacity for regulation, perspective taking, and repair. Within cultural and institutional contexts that can prolong marital strain, these forces may synergize to entrench emotional distancing. Yet the same literature points to modifiable targets—emotion schemas, metacognitions, conflict-resolution skills, and body image flexibility—that can mitigate risk and restore relational vitality (5, 16, 23). Building on these insights, the present study focuses specifically on women on the verge of divorce, examining how body image, emotional maturity, and rejection sensitivity are associated with—and predict—emotional divorce.

Methods and Materials

Study Design and Participants

Given the main objective of the study, this research was applied in nature and employed a correlational design. The statistical population consisted of all women on the verge of divorce in the city of Tonekabon, which, according to the statistics obtained from the Welfare Organization and the Social Emergency Center in 2023, included 223 couples. A simple random sampling method was used to select participants. Based on the Krejcie and Morgan table, a total of 136 married women were selected as the sample. After obtaining the necessary permissions from the university and coordinating with the Welfare Organization, a meeting was held with the selected married women on the verge of divorce (whose marriages had lasted at least one year) to explain the research objectives and procedures. The participants were then invited to take part in the study, and the relevant questionnaires were distributed among them. They were asked to answer the questions accurately and within the given time frame. The raw data collected were analyzed using statistical software.

Data Collection

Fisher Body Image Questionnaire (1970): The Body Image Test was developed by Fisher in 1970 and consists of 46 items. Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied). The total score is obtained by summing the item scores. A total score of 46 indicates the presence of body image disturbance, while a score above 46 (up to a maximum of 230) indicates the absence

of disturbance. The questionnaire assesses three main domains: head and face (12 items), upper limbs (10 items), and lower limbs (6 items). The remaining 18 items evaluate general attitudes toward body characteristics. The reliability of this test was examined in Iran by Yazdanjoo (2000) using a sample of 99 high school students from grades 10 to 12 who completed the test twice, ten days apart. The Pearson correlation coefficients between the two administrations were .81 for grade 10, .84 for grade 11, .87 for grade 12, and .84 overall. These correlations were statistically significant at the 0.001 level, indicating a high degree of test-retest reliability. The internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha) and split-half reliability of the questionnaire were reported as .93 and .91, respectively.

Emotional Maturity Scale by Yashvir Singh and Mahesh Bhargava (1991): This scale was developed by Yashvir Singh and Mahesh Bhargava in 1991 and contains 48 items designed to assess various dimensions of emotional maturity, including emotional instability, emotional regression, personality disintegration, social maladjustment, and lack of independence. Responses are scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (very much). The test-retest reliability of the scale was assessed among university students (both male and female, aged 20–24 years) with a six-month interval between administrations, yielding a correlation coefficient of .75 (as cited in Imani et al., 2009).

Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire by Downey and Feldman (1996): This questionnaire, developed by Downey and Feldman (1996), consists of 24 items, each with two parts (A and B), and is rated on a 6-point Likert scale. It measures sensitivity to rejection and emotional neglect. Each item is rated on a 5-point scale from 1 (very low) to 5 (very high). The content validity of the questionnaire was confirmed by domain experts. The internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha) was reported as .72.

Gottman Emotional Divorce Questionnaire (2008): The Emotional Divorce Questionnaire was adapted from John Gottman's book *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* (2008). This scale consists of 24 statements about different aspects of marital life, to which participants respond with "yes" (1) or "no" (0). In a study conducted by Mami and Asgari (2014), the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the questionnaire was reported as .83, indicating acceptable reliability. Its content validity was also confirmed by a panel of experts.

Data Analysis

In the present study, descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation were used to summarize the data, while inferential statistics—including stepwise multiple regression analysis and Pearson's correlation coefficient—were applied to test the hypotheses using SPSS statistical software.

Findings and Results

As shown in the table above, the highest mean belongs to the variable *emotional maturity* with a mean of 132.42 and a standard deviation of 33.144, while the lowest mean corresponds to the variable *emotional divorce* with a mean of 16.14 and a standard deviation of 3.186.

Table 1. Mean and Standard Deviation of the Study Variables: Body Image, Emotional Maturity, Rejection Sensitivity, and Emotional Divorce (n = 136)

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation
Body Image	125.91	33.718
Emotional Maturity	132.42	33.144

Rejection Sensitivity	73.20	18.043
Emotional Divorce	16.14	3.186

To determine whether parametric tests could be used, the normal distribution of the variables—body image, emotional maturity, rejection sensitivity, and emotional divorce—was tested using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test.

Table 2. Kolmogorov–Smirnov Test for Normality of the Variables

Variables	Test Statistic	Significance Level	N
Body Image	0.076	0.051	136
Emotional Maturity	0.067	0.200	136
Rejection Sensitivity	0.060	0.200	136
Emotional Divorce	0.071	0.092	136

According to Table 2, the significance level for all variables exceeds 0.05. Therefore, none of the variables show a significant deviation from normality, indicating that the distribution of all variables is normal. Consequently, parametric tests were used to test the study hypotheses. The results of the Pearson correlation coefficients were examined for each hypothesis.

Table 3. Correlation Matrix of Body Image, Emotional Maturity, and Rejection Sensitivity with Emotional Divorce

Variable	Emotional Divorce	Rejection Sensitivity	Emotional Maturity	Body Image
Body Image	-0.367**	-0.181*	0.564**	1
Emotional Maturity	-0.374**	-0.196*	1	-
Rejection Sensitivity	0.377**	1	-	-
Emotional Divorce	1	-	-	-

The results of Table 3 show the Pearson correlation coefficients among body image, emotional maturity, rejection sensitivity, and emotional divorce. A significant positive correlation was found between *rejection sensitivity* and *emotional divorce* ($p < 0.01$). Conversely, significant negative correlations were observed between *body image* and *emotional divorce*, as well as between *emotional maturity* and *emotional divorce* ($p < 0.01$).

Thus, there is a significant relationship between body image, emotional maturity, and rejection sensitivity with emotional divorce among women on the verge of divorce. To determine the best predictors of emotional divorce among these variables, a stepwise regression model was employed. The variables of rejection sensitivity, emotional maturity, and body image entered the model, and the results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Summary of Stepwise Regression Analysis for Rejection Sensitivity, Emotional Maturity, and Body Image

Predictive Model Variables	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Standard Error	F Statistic
Step 1: Rejection Sensitivity	0.377	0.142	0.136	2.962	22.175**
Step 2: Rejection Sensitivity, Emotional Maturity	0.485	0.236	0.224	2.806	20.501**
Step 3: Rejection Sensitivity, Emotional Maturity, Body Image	0.512	0.262	0.245	2.768	15.613**

Table 4 indicates that rejection sensitivity alone explains 13.6% of the variance in emotional divorce ($R^2 = 0.136$). When emotional maturity is added in Model 2, the explained variance increases by 8.8% ($R^2 = 0.224$), indicating that these two predictors together account for 22.4% of the variance in emotional divorce.

In Model 3, adding body image increases the explained variance by 2.1% (R^2 = 0.245), so together, rejection sensitivity, emotional maturity, and body image explain 24.5% of the variance in emotional divorce.

The Durbin–Watson statistic was 2.320, which falls within the acceptable range of 1.5–2.5, indicating independence of errors; hence, the regression model is valid.

Table 5. ANOVA Results for the Regression Models of Rejection Sensitivity, Emotional Maturity, and Body Image

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares (SS)	Degrees of Freedom (df)	Mean Square (MS)	F	Significance Level
Rejection Sensitivity	194.575	1	194.575	22.175	0.000
Residual	1175.771	134	8.774	-	-
Total	1370.346	135	-	-	-
Rejection Sensitivity, Emotional Maturity	322.907	2	161.454	20.501	0.000
Residual	1047.438	133	7.875	-	-
Total	1370.346	135	-	-	-
Rejection Sensitivity, Emotional Maturity, Body Image	358.905	3	119.635	15.613	0.000
Residual	1011.441	132	7.662	-	-
Total	1370.346	135	-	-	-

The results in Table 5 show that the variables body image, emotional maturity, and rejection sensitivity are significantly related to emotional divorce and have predictive power for this criterion variable.

Table 6. Stepwise Regression Coefficients for Predictive Variables

Model	Variable	B	Standard Error	Beta (β)	t	Significance
1	Constant	11.269	-	-	-	-
	Rejection Sensitivity	0.067	0.014	0.377	4.709	0.000
2	Constant	16.032	-	-	-	-
	Rejection Sensitivity	0.056	0.014	0.316	4.083	0.000
	Emotional Maturity	-0.030	0.007	-0.312	-4.037	0.000
3	Constant	17.185	-	-	-	-
	Rejection Sensitivity	0.053	0.014	0.301	3.934	0.000
	Emotional Maturity	-0.020	0.009	-0.204	-2.234	0.027
	Body Image	-0.019	0.009	-0.197	-2.167	0.032

In Model 1, the variable rejection sensitivity entered the regression equation as follows:

Emotional Divorce = 11.269 + (0.067 × Rejection Sensitivity)

The standardized beta coefficient for rejection sensitivity was 0.377, indicating that it directly affects emotional divorce and predicts 37.7% of its variation. A one-unit increase in rejection sensitivity is associated with a 0.377-unit increase in emotional divorce. The *t* value (4.709) was significant at the 0.01 level.

In Model 2, both rejection sensitivity and emotional maturity entered the regression equation:

Emotional Divorce = 16.032 + (0.056 × Rejection Sensitivity) + (-0.030 × Emotional Maturity)

The standardized beta coefficient for emotional maturity was -0.312, showing an inverse effect. A one-unit increase in emotional maturity decreases emotional divorce by 0.312 units. The *t* value (-4.037) was significant at the 0.01 level.

In Model 3, the variables rejection sensitivity, emotional maturity, and body image entered the equation:

Emotional Divorce = 17.185 + (0.053 × Rejection Sensitivity) + (-0.020 × Emotional Maturity) + (-0.019 × Body Image)

The standardized beta coefficient for body image was -0.197, indicating an inverse relationship. A one-unit increase in body image decreases emotional divorce by 0.197 units. The *t* value (-2.167) was significant at the 0.05 level.

Based on these results, with a 95% confidence level, it can be concluded that there is a significant relationship between body image, emotional maturity, and rejection sensitivity with emotional divorce among women on the verge of divorce. Furthermore, rejection sensitivity, emotional maturity, and body image serve as significant predictors of emotional divorce.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study revealed significant relationships among body image, emotional maturity, and rejection sensitivity with emotional divorce in women on the verge of divorce. Specifically, rejection sensitivity demonstrated a positive correlation with emotional divorce, while emotional maturity and body image were negatively associated with it. Furthermore, regression analysis indicated that these three variables jointly accounted for approximately 24.5% of the variance in emotional divorce, with rejection sensitivity emerging as the strongest predictor. These results suggest that emotional disengagement between spouses cannot be understood solely through situational or behavioral factors but must also be explained through underlying emotional, cognitive, and self-perceptual dimensions.

The positive relationship between rejection sensitivity and emotional divorce aligns with previous theoretical and empirical evidence that emphasizes the destructive impact of heightened rejection expectations on marital functioning. Individuals who chronically anticipate rejection tend to interpret neutral or ambiguous partner behaviors as dismissive or disapproving, which triggers defensive emotional reactions such as anger, withdrawal, or overcompensation (17). In turn, these reactions generate a self-fulfilling cycle of alienation and detachment. In schema-based conceptualizations, rejection sensitivity reflects the activation of “disconnection/rejection” schemas that distort partner intentions and prevent effective emotional communication (2, 18). Studies on attachment and emotion regulation have shown that individuals with these schemas exhibit high interpersonal vigilance, lower tolerance for relational ambiguity, and greater difficulty in emotional repair after conflict—all of which promote affective separation rather than reconciliation (3). These findings converge with broader observations that rejection-sensitive individuals engage in maladaptive conflict strategies, such as stonewalling or emotional avoidance, which erode trust and mutual support over time (4).

The present results also support the theoretical assumption that emotional maturity acts as a protective factor against emotional divorce. The inverse relationship observed between emotional maturity and emotional divorce implies that emotionally mature women are more capable of regulating affect, resolving conflicts constructively, and maintaining empathy toward their partners even during stressful circumstances. These findings are consistent with previous studies that identified emotional maturity as a mediating variable between psychological distress and marital disengagement (14, 15). According to the literature, emotionally immature partners tend to react impulsively, suppress emotions, or externalize blame during disagreements, which aggravates marital dissatisfaction and withdrawal (16). Conversely, emotional maturity enables spouses to identify and express feelings adaptively, accept differences, and seek cooperative solutions rather than resorting to avoidance or criticism (5). In this context, the current results reinforce the

notion that strengthening emotional maturity—through targeted training in emotion regulation, empathy, and reflective communication—can be an effective route to prevent emotional divorce (23).

The third major finding was the negative relationship between body image and emotional divorce, indicating that dissatisfaction with physical appearance is associated with greater emotional estrangement between partners. This pattern aligns with cross-cultural evidence linking negative body image to lower marital intimacy, sexual dissatisfaction, and relational insecurity (8, 9). Women who internalize unrealistic beauty standards or engage in frequent appearance-based social comparisons tend to develop feelings of inadequacy that spill over into their marital relationships. These women may interpret their partner's behaviors through a lens of self-devaluation, perceiving rejection or indifference where none exists, thereby triggering withdrawal or hostility (11). In this sense, body image dissatisfaction may indirectly contribute to emotional divorce by heightening rejection sensitivity and lowering self-esteem. This conclusion is consistent with findings from Iranian studies linking perfectionism and body dissatisfaction with emotional distancing in couples (1). Likewise, content analyses of body dysmorphic disorder etiologies emphasize the role of sociocultural pressures, appearance-based perfectionism, and interpersonal validation needs in undermining intimate relationships (13). In addition, the present results resonate with the global trend toward body modification as a means of self-enhancement, suggesting that increased concern with physical appearance may reflect deeper psychological insecurities and relational vulnerabilities (10).

From a family-systems perspective, the interaction among body image, emotional maturity, and rejection sensitivity illustrates how individual-level factors converge to influence marital processes. The observed correlations confirm that emotional divorce is not an isolated outcome but the cumulative product of affective immaturity, cognitive distortions, and socioemotional self-perceptions that distort the flow of intimacy and responsiveness. Similar to findings by (21), marital disengagement tends to develop gradually during conflict escalation, where each partner's psychological schemas reinforce emotional distance. Furthermore, (22) emphasized that maladaptive personality traits and rigid gender roles predict marital boredom, a condition conceptually adjacent to emotional divorce. The present study extends this framework by showing that body image dissatisfaction and rejection sensitivity may be the underlying psychological mechanisms that sustain boredom and detachment. As such, the regression results, indicating that these three variables predict nearly one-quarter of the variance in emotional divorce, underscore the multidimensional nature of marital alienation.

These results also correspond with findings from studies on sexual satisfaction, which function as an affective bridge between physical self-perception and marital cohesion. For example, (6) demonstrated that sexual satisfaction mediates the relationship between personality traits and emotional divorce in men. This provides indirect support for the current results, as women with poor body image may experience diminished sexual confidence, leading to reduced intimacy and emotional closeness. Additionally, the findings from (20) corroborate that dysfunctional sexual beliefs predict emotional divorce, further linking self-perception of the body with marital emotional disconnection. Taken together, these findings reinforce the conceptual view that self-perception and emotional regulation are interlocking systems: distorted self-perception (body image) generates insecurity and fear of rejection, while limited emotional maturity restricts adaptive coping and expression, together culminating in emotional withdrawal.

Sociocultural conditions also appear to modulate the expression of emotional divorce. As (3) and (4) highlighted, decision-making patterns, power distribution, and structural constraints within Iranian families can either intensify or mitigate emotional distance. Women who perceive limited autonomy or are bound by rigid gender expectations may suppress emotional expression, thereby fostering relational coldness. Similarly, the protracted nature of divorce proceedings in traditional societies, as documented by (21), can exacerbate emotional exhaustion, reinforcing emotional withdrawal long before legal separation. In such settings, body image dissatisfaction and rejection sensitivity can act as latent amplifiers of disconnection, transforming internal conflicts into chronic emotional detachment. Hence, the present findings should be interpreted within a broader cultural matrix where interpersonal schemas and sociocultural norms jointly shape marital dynamics.

Clinical and counseling implications emerge directly from these findings. The significant predictive value of emotional maturity suggests that therapeutic interventions emphasizing emotion-focused or schema-based approaches may effectively prevent emotional divorce. For instance, (16) found that emotional schema therapy improved emotional maturity and reduced emotional divorce among couples seeking separation. Similarly, training in choice-theory-based conflict resolution enhanced marital hope and reduced disengagement (5). These results affirm that interventions targeting emotional regulation, self-reflection, and relational empathy are central to preserving marital bonds. Moreover, approaches that address body image flexibility—such as cognitive-behavioral strategies for reducing appearance-based self-worth—can simultaneously reduce rejection sensitivity and improve marital intimacy (8, 9). The integration of these therapeutic domains within culturally sensitive family counseling models could yield significant benefits for couples at risk of emotional estrangement.

The correlation between rejection sensitivity and emotional divorce also underscores the need for interventions that directly target maladaptive interpersonal expectancies. Schema therapy, attachment-based therapy, and emotion-focused approaches can help individuals identify and modify rejection-related cognitions that lead to defensive relational patterns. The findings of (2) and (18) support this, showing that targeting disconnection and autonomy schemas can reduce marital conflict and improve satisfaction. This conceptual overlap indicates that rejection sensitivity is not an isolated vulnerability but part of a broader emotional schema system that shapes relational expectations and behaviors. By enhancing metacognitive awareness and self-regulation, therapy can break the cyclical patterns that culminate in emotional divorce.

Finally, the interrelation among the three studied variables offers a foundation for a systemic intervention framework. The reciprocal interactions—body dissatisfaction amplifying rejection fears, rejection fears reducing emotional maturity, and immaturity perpetuating maladaptive self-focus—create a feedback loop that leads to emotional withdrawal. Theoretical models integrating objectification theory, emotion regulation frameworks, and interpersonal schema theory provide strong explanatory power for these interconnections (8, 9, 17). Therefore, preventive efforts should not treat body image, emotional maturity, and rejection sensitivity as independent constructs but as dynamically interacting determinants of relational health.

This study, despite its valuable insights, faces certain limitations. The sample was limited to women on the verge of divorce in a single geographical region, which may restrict generalizability to broader populations or to men experiencing similar marital challenges. The reliance on self-report instruments

introduces potential response biases, including social desirability and subjective interpretation of questionnaire items. Furthermore, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference; while associations were identified, the directionality among body image, emotional maturity, rejection sensitivity, and emotional divorce cannot be definitively established. Additionally, unmeasured variables such as cultural beliefs, economic stress, or social support may moderate these relationships, suggesting that future studies employing longitudinal and mixed-method designs are needed to validate and expand upon these findings.

Future research should aim to explore these relationships longitudinally to determine causal pathways and reciprocal effects among body image, emotional maturity, and rejection sensitivity over time. Expanding the sample to include men, younger couples, and diverse cultural settings could offer comparative insights and test gender-based differences in emotional divorce predictors. Moreover, incorporating qualitative methodologies, such as narrative or phenomenological interviews, may capture the nuanced lived experiences underlying emotional detachment. Studies should also investigate mediating mechanisms—such as sexual satisfaction, attachment insecurity, or emotional regulation strategies—that link body image and rejection sensitivity to marital disengagement. Finally, experimental or intervention-based studies could evaluate the efficacy of integrated counseling programs designed to enhance emotional maturity and body image satisfaction while reducing rejection sensitivity.

From a practical standpoint, marriage counselors and family therapists should screen for body image concerns and rejection sensitivity in couples presenting with signs of emotional disengagement. Integrating modules on emotional maturity development, self-compassion, and flexible body image within marital therapy programs could mitigate emotional distance and foster greater intimacy. Practitioners should also tailor interventions to the sociocultural context, considering traditional gender expectations and family power structures that influence communication patterns. Preventive psychoeducation—delivered through premarital counseling or community workshops—can equip couples with emotional regulation and communication skills before conflicts escalate into chronic detachment. Lastly, public health policies should support accessible, culturally sensitive marital counseling programs that emphasize holistic emotional well-being alongside relationship maintenance.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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