

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

THE EFFECTS OF ATTACHMENT STYLE ON RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of Master of Science in Counseling,

Marriage and Family Therapy

by

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## DEDICATION

To all the star-crossed lovers, commitment-phobes, and insanely diffident people who have ever wondered why they love and how they love.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## ABSTRACT

### THE EFFECTS OF ATTACHMENT STYLE ON RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION

by

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Master of Science in Counseling

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One's attachment style carries over from infancy and childhood into adulthood and adult romantic relationships. A deep understanding of attachment theory and its implications toward relationship satisfaction is vitally important for marriage and family therapists to acquire when working with couples in dissolution. The present study investigated the three different attachment styles of *secure*, *anxious-ambivalent*, and *avoidant* and the propensity each style had toward an increase or decrease in relationship satisfaction. A sample of 271 participants between the ages of 18 and 64 completed the Adult Attachment Questionnaire (AAQ) and the Relationship Scales Questionnaire (RSQ) to examine attachment style, and the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) to determine relationship satisfaction. Results indicated that securely attached individuals were more inclined to experience higher relationship satisfaction and insecurely attached individuals were more inclined to experience lower relationship satisfaction.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Couples argue; it's inevitable. Bickering and bantering has been going on for centuries, yet some couples are able to withstand the emotional highs and lows of being involved in long-term monogamy. It is unfortunately all too common that the positives in committed relationships and marriages erode when disagreements are handled poorly (Noller, 1996). Successful coping is quite beneficial and a fundamental skill necessary to cushion the impact of stressors that couples inexorably endure (Landis, Peter-Wight, Martin, & Bodenmann, 2013). But just what is it that sets those couples apart from other couples whose relationships and marriages flounder?

A basic understanding of one's interpersonal tendencies seems to be the key to unlock what it takes to be efficacious in a relationship. The three attachment styles that this research will focus on are *secure*, *anxious-ambivalent*, and *avoidant*, and what they implicate in regards to relationship satisfaction. Interpersonal tendencies evolve from one's attachment style and often times one's interpersonal tendencies will carry over into their romantic relationship. Interpersonal tendencies also often lead to relationship problems, which then lead to conflict within a romantic relationship. Boisvert, Wright, Tremblay, and McDuff (2011) found that the most common relationship problems as identified by couples were communication issues, emotional affection or distance, and lack of physical affection or sex. All of these problems are the consequences of one's attachment style and result in patterns of behavior that have been repeated time and time again since infancy. Attachment style is a critical piece of information that marriage and family therapists need to get a firm grasp on in order to successfully restore intimacy, empathy, understanding, and connection in adult romantic relationships (Solomon, 2009).

### **Statement of the Problem**

It is important that adult attachment in romantic relationships continue to be explored. One's attachment style in an adult romantic relationship is undoubtedly connected to how satisfied one is with their relationship. Kobak and Sceery (1988) investigated the differences in affect regulation across the attachment styles and found that those who identified as secure had more constructive ways of dealing with negative feelings. These securely attached individuals were also seen as ego resilient, less anxious, and less hostile and reported high levels of social support and little conflict when compared to their insecurely attached counterparts. Other researchers have further explored affect regulation and how it directly links to how satisfied one could be within their romantic relationship (Simpson, 1990). Simpson (1990), in his study on dating couples, found that those who closely identified with the secure attachment style reported having more frequent positive emotions and less frequent negative emotions about their partner and their relationship than did those who identified with the anxious-ambivalent and avoidant attachment styles. Secure attachment in an adult relationship can be easily challenged if one's partner's primary attachment relationship is insecure (Simpson, 1990). With relationship satisfaction being so easily affected by one's attachment style, it is critical that marriage and family therapists explore and educate their clients on relationship or marital discord in order to employ effective treatment planning in couple's therapy (Marion, 2009).

### **Terminology**

*Secure attachment*: one of the attachment styles originally formulated by the works of Bowlby (1973, 1982) and Ainsworth (1978). As defined by Hazan and Shaver (1987), securely attached individuals find it relatively easy to get close to others; they are comfortable depending on others and having others depend on them; and they don't worry about being abandoned or about someone getting too close to them. Individuals who identify with this attachment style report warmer childhood relationships with both parents or caregivers and between their two parents or caregivers.

*Anxious-ambivalent attachment:* one of the attachment styles originally formulated by the works of Bowlby (1973, 1982) and Ainsworth (1978). As defined by Hazan and Shaver (1987), anxious-ambivalently attached individuals find that others are reluctant to get as close as they would like; they worry that their partner doesn't really love them or won't want to stay with them; and they have a strong desire to merge completely with another person and find that this sometimes scares people away.

*Avoidant attachment:* one of the attachment styles originally formulated by the works of Bowlby (1973, 1982) and Ainsworth (1978). As defined by Hazan and Shaver (1987), avoidantly attached individuals are somewhat uncomfortable being close to others; they find it difficult to trust them completely and difficult to allow themselves to depend on them; they are nervous when anyone gets too close to them; and their love partners often want them to be more intimate than they feel comfortable being.

*Interpersonal tendencies:* types of behavior that are elicited in adult romantic relationships. These types of behavior were learned from previous experiences and are ingrained in the individual as a part of their personality.

*Love style:* a specific typology of love that can be either primary or secondary (Lee, 1973, 1988). The three primary love styles are eros (romantic, passionate love), ludus (game-playing love), and storge (friendship love). The primary love styles can be combined to form the secondary love styles or compounds. These secondary love styles are: mania (possessive, dependent love; a fusion of eros and ludus); pragma (logical, "shopping-list" love; a fusion of ludus and storge); and agape (selfless, all-giving love; a fusion of storge and eros) (Feeney & Noller, 1996).

*Relationship satisfaction:* an overall measure of how satisfied or dissatisfied one is with their adult romantic relationship. Relationship satisfaction can be measured by means of physical and emotional interactions between couples in romantic relationships.

## **Purpose and Significance of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to increase therapists' awareness of attachment style and its importance for working with couples in psychotherapy. It is hypothesized that individuals in adult romantic relationships who identify with secure attachment will have higher relationship satisfaction in comparison to those who identify with the anxious-ambivalent or avoidant attachment styles. This study will be supplementary to the existing work on adult attachment in order to enhance the practice of marriage and family therapists that work with couples. In summary, this study will test the following research questions:

1. Will individuals who identify with the secure attachment style report higher relationship satisfaction?
2. Will individuals who identify with the anxious-ambivalent attachment style report lower relationship satisfaction?
3. Will individuals who identify with the avoidant attachment style report lower relationship satisfaction?

The empirical studies discussed in Chapter Two will further elaborate on adult attachment style and if securely attached adults tend to have higher relationship satisfaction than insecurely attached adults in relationships. Chapter Three will address the overall research design and how the data were collected. This chapter will involve a description of the sample, the instruments used, and all other procedures utilized during data collection. Chapter Four discusses what types of methods were used to test the hypotheses, whether the results supported the hypotheses, and what the major findings of this research are. Lastly, Chapter Five includes the results and the findings, identifies areas of future research, and what the implications of this study are for the field of marriage and family therapy.

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Over the course of the past few decades, a countless amount of research has been conducted on attachment style and relationship satisfaction. With the majority of the research reaching the conclusion of secure attachment as an indicator of greater relationship satisfaction, it should be noted that it is also important to consider the research on insecure attachment and its implications toward decreased relationship satisfaction. Given these findings, the following review of the literature will explore the history of attachment theory and how it came to be developed, attachment in adulthood, and the implications attachment style has on relationship satisfaction.

### **Attachment Theory**

The earliest work on attachment theory began in the 1950s by John Bowlby, a British psychiatrist. Bowlby viewed that attachment was based primarily on an infant's need for safety and security and was their genetic determination for motivation to avoid harm (Feldman, 2010). Bowlby (1969/1982) defined attachment as four distinct classes of behavior, all of which were controlled by an innate human behavioral system: *proximity maintenance*, *safe haven*, *separation distress*, and *secure base*. These four famous classifications were all products of Bowlby's experiences as a family clinician at the Tavistock Clinic in London and when he authored a report for the World Health Organization (WHO) on homeless children after World War II (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

According to Bowlby (1969/1982, 1973), attachment theory is based off the quality of interactions with significant others in times of need. When one's caregiver is allegedly available and receptive to proximity-seeking attempts, a sense of attachment security is established. Intimacy and nurturance become primary interaction goals between infant and caregiver when secure attachment is attained. The same is true in adult romantic relationships. Adults also yearn for a sense of safety, intimacy, and nurturance in their relationships. Partners in a relationship are

also perceived to be more trustworthy and reliable when attachment security is attained, which is similar to what happens between an infant and its caregiver. On the contrary, attachment insecurities and doubts about close relationships cultivate when one feels that their partner is emotionally unavailable, just as an infant feels unsafe and afraid when its mother fails to develop a sense of attachment security (Birnbaum, Reis, Mikulincer, Gillath, & Orpaz, 2006).

Later into his research on attachment, Bowlby began to collaborate with developmental psychologist, Mary Ainsworth. In 1978, Ainsworth identified three types of attachment, which she later became famous for and is what the backbone of this research is. These three attachment styles are widely known as *secure*, *anxious-ambivalent*, and *avoidant* (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). One's attachment style begins to develop in childhood during early social development. When looking at the attachment styles as identified by Ainsworth et al. (1978), if a securely attached infant becomes distressed, they use the parent or caregiver as a secure base. An anxiously-ambivalently attached infant has overt expressions of protest and anger toward the parent or caregiver when distressed. Lastly, an avoidant attachment style suggests that when an infant is distressed, they will avoid the caregiver and display signs of detachment (Simpson, 1990). Recent research has shown that one's attachment style carries over from infancy and childhood into adulthood and adult romantic relationships. With divorce rates in North America being so high (Brassard, Lussier, & Shaver, 2009), it is vitally important for marriage and family therapists working with couples in dissolution to understand attachment theory and its implications toward relationship satisfaction.

### **Adult Attachment**

Over the past few decades, hundreds of studies have investigated the topic of adult attachment (Mikulincer & Goodman, 2006). Hazan and Shaver (1987) were at the forefront of investigating adult attachment in romantic relationships. They were the first to conceptualize that romantic love was an attachment process. According to the literature written by Feeney and

Noller (2006), the notion that romantic love is an attachment process implies that adult attachment parallels attachment established during infancy. The relationships between lovers and spouses are quite similar to the relationships between infants and their caregivers. Therefore, it can most definitely be argued that the three major attachment styles as described in this research (*secure, anxious-ambivalent, and avoidant*) are manifested in adult romantic love.

Hazan and Shaver (1987) continued to elaborate upon their work with adult romantic love by examining the emotional and behavioral similarities between attachment in infancy and attachment in adulthood. As stated by Feeney and Noller (2006), Hazan and Shaver (1987) described the emotional and behavioral parallels as, "...frequent eye contact, smiling, and holding; the desire to share discoveries and reactions with the other; powerful empathy; and so on." (p. 24). In addition, there are also strong similarities between infant-caregiver attachment and romantic love attachment in regards to the dynamics within these relationships. For example, if the caregiver/partner is available and responsive, the individual feels secure. However, it is important to note that there are some differences between infant-caregiver attachment and attachment in adult romantic relationships. The most prominent difference between the two attachments is that romantic love is characterized by reciprocity in caregiving and sexuality only in adult attachment. On the contrary, infant-caregiver relationships are vastly asymmetrical in that the caregiver's role is to fulfill the needs of the infant; the infant does not need to respond to the needs of the caregiver.

Hazan and Shaver (1987) contrived three behavioral systems integrated into adult romantic love, which are attachment, caregiving, and sexuality. Of course, these systems may vary widely across the span of a romantic relationship, but all are critical in the formation of an individual's development. These systems play a key role in developing one's mental model of oneself and others they are romantically involved with (Feeney & Noller, 2006). In developing these three behavioral systems, the different styles of love were examined. The three primary

love styles are identified as eros (romantic, passionate love), ludus (game-playing love), and storge (friendship love). The three secondary love styles, which are combinations of the primary styles are mania (merging of eros and ludus), pragma (merging of ludus and storge), and agape (merging of storge and eros). When looking at the proposed love styles, it can be noted that secure attachment resembles the fusion between eros and agape, anxious-ambivalent attachment resembles mania, and avoidant attachment resembles ludus.

Hazan and Shaver (1987) found that adult individuals in romantic relationships who identified with a secure attachment style reported having warmer childhood relationships with their caregivers or parents. These individuals also saw themselves as having few-self doubts and believed that romantic love exists and does not dissipate over time. Individuals who identified with an avoidant attachment style saw their mothers as cold and rejecting. Avoidantly attached individuals were also more likely than individuals that identified with other attachment groups to question the enduring nature of romantic love and had experience of love marked by fear of intimacy. Individuals who identified with the anxious-ambivalent attachment style described themselves as having fathers who did not treat them fairly. They also described themselves as being easily misunderstood by others and that it was easy to fall in love but difficult to find real love.

During infancy when attachment style comes about, a set of strategies for organizing emotional experiences and dealing with negative feelings is formulated. These skills and strategies carry over into adulthood and into adult romantic relationships. Individual differences in affect regulation vary across the attachment styles. Secure individuals are able to handle negative feelings and emotions in a relatively constructive way, acknowledge their distress, and develop an awareness that they can turn to others for support. Avoidant individuals typically exhibit a limited acknowledgment of their negative feelings and often display anger and distress when such undesirable feelings arise. These individuals tend to develop highly self-reliant

coping strategies instead of turning to others for help. This particular coping skill was learned in order to help the individual reduce the amount of conflict experienced when dealing with a rejecting or insensitive caregiver. The anxious-ambivalent individual is likely to show a rather constant awareness of negative emotion. These individuals are hyper-focused on their negativity and often express heightened feelings of fear and anger. The hypervigilance of anxious-ambivalent individuals is a coping strategy developed during infancy as a way to maintain contact with unreliable caregivers (Feeney & Noller, 1996).

### **Attachment Style and Relationship Satisfaction**

It is no surprise that couples that have a secure attachment style are more satisfied with their relationships (Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994; Koski & Shaver, 1997). Securely attached individuals are more likely to provide intimacy and warmth toward their partners (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Perceived partner supportiveness is also an important aspect of a securely attached individual's caregiving style. Securely attached individuals are typically more responsive to their partner and more aware of their partner's needs. Additionally, securely attached individuals are also able to protect, comfort, and assist their partners during times of need (Strauss, Morry, & Kito, 2012). On the contrary, insecurely attached individuals have different communication patterns in comparison to their secure counterparts and exhibit more negative affectivity (Kachadourian, Fincham, & Davila, 2004). The following research discussed in the remainder of this literature review explains the differences in attachment style and characteristics of secure and insecure styles on relationship satisfaction.

### **Differences Between Secure and Insecure Attachment**

Research conducted by Madey and Rodgers (2009) focused on whether attachment style is a direct predictor of relationship satisfaction or if it is mediated by Sternberg's variables of consummate love such as intimacy, passion, and commitment. Two types of attachment patterns were investigated specifically: secure-insecure and close-independent. Attachment was measured

using the Relationship Scales Questionnaire (RSQ). Intimacy, passion, and commitment were measured using Sternberg's Triangular Love Scale. Relationship satisfaction was measured using a relationship satisfaction scale developed by Madey and Rodgers (2009). Preliminary analyses were conducted between gender, length of relationship, and marital status of the participant with attachment style, intimacy, passion, commitment, and relationship satisfaction. No significant correlations were found between gender and marital status. However, length of relationship did correlate with greater commitment. Hierarchical regression analyses showed that the association between secure attachment and relationship satisfaction is directly mediated by commitment and intimacy. In other words, "...secure-insecure attachment no longer predicted relationship satisfaction after controlling for intimacy and commitment..." (Madey & Rodgers, 2009, p. 81). However, when controlling for passion, secure attachment independently forecasted relationship satisfaction.

Other research is also indicative of securely attached individuals experiencing greater relationship satisfaction than anxious-ambivalent and avoidant individuals. Pistol, Clarke, and Tubbs (1995) elected to study the potential differences among the three attachment styles on relationship investment variables. According to the research done by Pistol et al. (1995) on attachment theory, securely attached adult individuals in relationships reported being comfortable with being close to their partner, dependent on their partner, and were able to give and receive care. Secure attachment was associated with intimacy, trust, and interdependence in the relationship. Anxious-ambivalently attached individuals reported being preoccupied with relationship security, intensely focused on their partner, and were hyper-vigilant to separation from their partner. Anxious-ambivalent attachment was associated with the emotional ups and downs of the relationship. Avoidantly attached individuals reported distancing themselves from their partner and from emotional stress due to fear of rejection or an overall dismissal of the

prominence of the relationship. Avoidant attachment was associated with low levels of self-disclosure and having casual sexual involvements.

Pistol et al. (1995) came up with three separate hypotheses regarding attachment styles and relationship investments. They first hypothesized that securely attached individuals will report higher levels of satisfaction, rewards, and commitment than anxious-ambivalent and avoidantly attached individuals. Second, they postulated that there would be differences between all three attachment styles on relationship costs (distress and emotional ups and downs) with securely attached individuals experiencing the least amount and anxious-ambivalently attached individuals experiencing the greatest amount. Lastly, they assumed that avoidantly attached individuals would report higher levels of relationship alternatives and would have the lowest amount of investments in the relationship when compared to secure and anxious-ambivalent individuals.

The results of this research revealed that securely attached individuals reported significantly higher levels of satisfaction, rewards, and commitment than did the anxious-ambivalent and avoidantly-attached individuals (Pistol et al., 1995). The avoidantly attached individuals reported significantly lower investments than the anxious-ambivalent and securely attached individuals. All three groups differed on costs where securely attached individuals reported the lowest amount and anxious-ambivalently attached individuals reported the highest. Individuals who were currently in a relationship reported higher levels of satisfaction, rewards, investments, and commitment than those whose relationship was in the past. Individuals who recounted a former relationship reported higher costs and alternatives than those currently involved in a romantic relationship.

### **Physical Affection and Relationship Satisfaction**

With the attachment theory, securely attached individuals are comforted with being close to their partners and their attachment style is associated with trust and intimacy. Pistole et al.

(1995) implied that the greater the intimacy, the greater expressions of physical affection. A study was conducted to determine if a correlation between physical affection and relationship satisfaction exists. The researchers originally hypothesized that there are seven types of physical affection that are necessary in order for the correlation to occur (Gulledge, Gulledge & Stahmann, 2003). These types of physical affection are backrubs, massages, caressing/stroking, cuddling/holding, holding hands, kissing on the lips, and kissing on the face. The results indicated that there is a correlation between physical affection and relationship satisfaction but only five of the seven physical affection factors that were tested correlated with relationship satisfaction. The five physical affection factors that correlated with relationship satisfaction were backrubs, massages, cuddling/holding, kissing on the lips, and kissing on the face. Gulledge et al. (2003), also found that men and women see the various factors of physical affection very differently so while the woman might not see a back rub as a display of affection, the man might be trying to display affection by offering the back rub. In general, individuals who display more physical affection with their partners will most likely contain more relationship satisfaction than individuals who do not display physical affection.

Much like the research conducted by Pistol et al. (1995), Keelan, Dion, and Dion (1998) proposed that securely individuals would self-disclose more to their partners than individuals who were insecure in the relationship. In addition, they claimed that the greater self-disclosure a secure individual practices, the greater the satisfaction in the relationship. The researchers examined self-disclosure as it correlates to attachment styles in two different ways. Questionnaires and behavioral assessments of self-disclosure were administered to look at the differences individuals exhibited when disclosing information with their partners in comparison to strangers. Attachment styles were indexed in a four-category system of *secure*, *fearful*, *preoccupied*, and *dismissing*. Keelan et al. (1998) concluded that individuals who were securely attached reported higher relationship satisfaction and showed higher intimate levels of initiated

self-disclosure intentional for a partner than a stranger of the opposite sex. This, in turn, made securely attached individuals more comfortable with their partners. It was also found that secure individuals disclosed more to their partners than those with a dismissing attachment style.

Kachadourian et al. (2004) examined the tendency that securely attached individuals have toward forgiving their partners and how this acts as a mediator for relationship satisfaction. Forgiveness plays an extremely important role in romantic relationships and relationship satisfaction. Those who have a positive model of themselves and others have a propensity to forgive their partners when they commit wrongdoings against them (McCullough, Rachal, Sandage, Worthington, Brown, & Hight, 1998). Kachadourian et al. (2004) aimed to assess the tendency to forgive in intimate relationships. The researchers employed two studies to examine the role of forgiveness. Study 1 explored the relations among the variables in a sample of couples in committed romantic relationships and Study 2 explored the relations among the same variables in married couples. Forgiveness was measured using the Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory (TRIM). The TRIM is an 11-item self-report measure to assess an individual's reactions to their partner's wrongdoings. Attachment security was measured using the Relationship Questionnaire (RQ). The RQ consisted of four short paragraphs that described four different attachment styles. Participants were asked to identify how closely each paragraph related to them on a Likert rating scale of 1 (*not at all like me*) to 7 (*very much like me*). Relationship satisfaction was measured using the Perceived Relationship Quality Components Inventory (PRQC). This assessment tool consisted of six different subscales: satisfaction, commitment, intimacy, trust, passion, and love. All of the items were added together to formulate an overall relationship satisfaction score. It was concluded that individuals in dating relationships that had a more positive sense of self also had a more positive model of their partner and, in turn, were more likely to forgive their partner's transgressions. Forgiveness of a partner's misconduct in a relationship ultimately leads to greater relationship satisfaction.

Other researchers have found evidence conducive of anxious and avoidant individuals experiencing greater relationship conflict and dissatisfaction. Brassard, Lussier, and Shaver (2009) suggested that adult attachment theory was particularly relevant to the study of couple conflict and relationship satisfaction. Brassard et al. (2009) assumed that perception of conflict is twofold: the actual level of relationship conflict experienced and the biased understanding of the conflict from each partner's own perspective. The researchers believed that biased perceptions of conflict by anxious and avoidant individuals could have been mediated by the associations between attachment insecurities and relationship dissatisfaction. This particular study was designed to test a conceptual model that specifies the link between attachment insecurities, biased perceptions of conflict, and relationship satisfaction on both partners of each participating couple. Brassard et al. (2009) hypothesized that individuals' and partners' views of conflict in the relationship would mediate the association between attachment insecurities and satisfaction. Anxiety and avoidance attachment insecurities were assessed with the Experiences in Close Relationships (ECR) inventory. Level of perceived conflict was assessed with an inventory developed by Brassard and Lussier (2007) that summarized a list of 24 different sources of conflict. Participants were asked to report the level of conflict they were experiencing with their partner in each category. Couple satisfaction was measured by a four-item version of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS). Results revealed correlations between anxiety and avoidance for both men and women. This indicated that both forms of insecurity were linked to a higher frequency of conflict and lower relationship satisfaction.

In addition to the literature on insecure attachment, DeWall, Lambert, Slotter, Pond, Deckman, Finkel, Luchies, and Fincham (2011) researched the tendencies toward infidelity and extramarital affairs in individuals with an anxious-ambivalent or avoidant attachment style. They elaborated on how avoidantly attached individuals had a propensity to cheat on their current relationship partner. Attachment style was measured using the Experiences in Close

Relationships Scale (ECR). Attitudes toward infidelity were measured using the Attitude Toward Relationship Infidelity (ATRI) scale, which was created for this study by the researchers themselves. Items on the ATRI included, “Cheating on my partner is morally wrong”; “If I could get away with it, I would cheat on my partner” [reverse scored]; “Being faithful to my romantic partner is important to me”; “Cheating on my romantic partner would not be a big deal” [reverse scored]. These questions along with many others were formulated to measure one’s view of infidelity within their relationship and were rated using a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). DeWall et al. (2011) predicted that avoidantly attached individuals would respond more favorably to the questions on the ATRI, indicating that their overall attitude toward cheating on the partner was positive. As expected, individuals who identified with the avoidant attachment style had more positive attitudes toward cheating on their current partner. The researchers also found that individuals with an avoidant attachment style were also more biased toward relationship alternatives, especially attractive relationship alternatives.

Further research on insecure attachment has shown that anxious-ambivalently attached individuals are more likely to perceive conflict with their partners (Brassard, Lussier, & Shaver, 2009). This ultimately decreases satisfaction with the relationship and hinders closeness and stability, eventually leading the level of commitment to the relationship to dissipate over time. Campbell, Simpson, Boldry, and Kashy (2005) found that anxious individuals tend to feel highly anxious about their romantic partners and relationships. Despite the fact that these insecure individuals often yearn for support from their partners, they are typically dissatisfied with the amount of support they receive (Rholes, Simpson, Campbell, & Grich, 2001). Campbell et al. (2005) explored the research on the anxious-ambivalent attachment style a bit further by conducting a two-part study to test how individuals in relationships perceived relationship-based conflict. These perceptions were also examined to see what their impact was on relationship

satisfaction, closeness, and future quality of the relationship. The two parts of this study included a diary to be completed by participants within two weeks and also be videotaped during the two weeks to discuss what they perceived to be the most major conflict that occurred during the diary study. Part 1 of the study revealed that the more anxiously attached an individual was, the more likely they were to perceive more conflict to transpire with their dating partner. Part 2 revealed that highly anxious individuals appeared more distressed and escalated when recalling the conflict they were asked to discuss.

In a longitudinal study done by Simpson (1990), individual-level analyses revealed that secure individuals were involved in relationships in which higher levels of trust, commitment and satisfaction were strongly evident. Individuals who displayed insecure styles—especially highly avoidant individuals—had relationships consisting of opposite features. Secure individuals had more frequent positive emotion and less negative emotion. Anxious and avoidant individuals experienced the opposite pattern. Emotional distress following relationship dissolution varied depending on the individual's attachment style; because of the positive aspects of their mental models, secure individuals were safeguarded from extreme distress following a break up. Avoidant individuals experienced some distress, and anxious individuals experienced the most distress following relationship dissolution. Specifically, Simpson (1990) also found that avoidant men experienced less extended and intense emotional distress following relationship dissolution. In the dyad-level analyses, it was revealed that the anxious pattern was associated with less interdependence and commitment reported by partners. The avoidant pattern was associated with less trust reported by partners. There was also a sex difference in that men with an anxious style did not correlate with their female partner's level of relationship satisfaction. Women with an anxious style were negatively correlated with their male partner's degree of relationship satisfaction.

Research on attachment and relationship satisfaction by Guerro, Farinelli, and McEwan (2009) further explained the impact a secure attachment style has on a relationship. In this study, 581 couples were given questionnaires regarding their relational satisfaction. Relationship satisfaction and attachment style were mediated by how one's partner reported communicating emotions. It was found that participants were less satisfied with their relationships when their partners expressed anger and appeared detached from the relationship. Participants that were the most satisfied with their relationship were coupled with a secure partner who used prosocial forms of emotional communication.

Similarly, dissatisfaction with one's relationship can carry over well into adulthood if attachment style is not explored and understood. Hollist and Miller (2005) explored relationship satisfaction and marital quality in married people between the ages of 40 and 50. Questionnaires assessing health, mental health, and marital satisfaction were administered to the 429 married couples that participated in the study. The Measure of Attachment Qualities (MAQ) was used to measure self-reported attachment. It was found that insecure attachment styles were strongly associated with marital quality and satisfaction. The researchers also found that secure attachment had less of an influence on relationship quality between married couples that had been married for 10 years or more. It was concluded that the relational security between these long-term couples developed a firm foundation within their marriage and were increasingly more resilient to life stressors.

### **Sexual Orientation and Attachment**

Attachment style is explored across all sexual orientations. In a study conducted by Zamora, Winterowd, Koch, and Roring (2013), attachment style was examined in gay men in adult romantic relationships. Similarly to what has been found in heterosexual adult romantic relationships, one's love style is significantly predictive of attachment style. Ridge and Feeney (1998) also found that comparative frequencies of attachment style are analogous in both

heterosexual and homosexual couples. In this study, 177 gay and lesbian individuals were assessed and reported similar responses to heterosexual individuals on attachment style.

However, the findings of this research also revealed that homosexual individuals, particularly gay men, had closer relationships to their mothers than did straight and lesbian women.

### **Synthesis of the Review of the Research**

There are many factors that are included in relationship satisfaction with attachment style being one of them. Even though one's attachment style is only one of many factors that attribute to relationship satisfaction, it is undoubtedly the one of most importance. Based on the work conducted by previous researchers, it can be concluded that one's attachment style impacts the degree to which how satisfied one is with their romantic relationship. Previous research supports the hypotheses for the present study, as the aim of this research is to examine the differences in relationship satisfaction across the three attachment styles (*secure, anxious-ambivalent, and avoidant*). As stated previously, this study hypothesizes that individuals who identify with a secure attachment style will report higher relationship satisfaction. Contrary to those who identify with a secure attachment style, this study also hypothesizes that insecurely attached individuals will report lower relationship satisfaction. Feeney and Noller (1996) have identified some profound research on attachment, which can be indisputably dubbed as noteworthy. They found that couples that closely identify with secure attachment are more likely to navigate through conflict resolution in a more constructive and positive manner. This in turn leads to greater relationship satisfaction over time in comparison to individuals in relationships who identify with an anxious-ambivalent or avoidant attachment style. The research conducted by Brassard, Lussier, and Shaver (2009) also found similar findings that are pertinent to the bulk of this research. Much like what was discovered by Feeney and Noller (1996), Brassard et al. (2009) found that communication patterns and perceived conflict between couples that report being securely attached lead to greater relationship satisfaction. It is also rather profound that

frequent self-disclosure between partners in relationships leads to more effective communication patterns and conflict resolution strategies (Keelan, Dion, & Dion, 1998). This is also a direct link to relationship satisfaction as the more self-disclosure there is in a relationship, the greater the communication, and the less perceived conflict there will be.

These key findings ultimately elucidate the reasons as to why this particular research is being conducted. Overall relationship satisfaction is what propels couples into a lifetime of long-term romantic bliss (Hollis & Miller, 2005). High relationship satisfaction is what maintains healthy adult romantic relationships. As noted prior, high relationship satisfaction is more likely to be the result of a secure attachment style. The methods, results, and discussion of the findings of this research will further be elaborated on in the chapters to follow.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Individuals in adult romantic relationships often seem to have misconstrued thoughts as to why their partner behaves the way they do. Understanding one's attachment style as well as their partner's attachment style will help couples to explore their similarities and differences in relating and connecting to one another. The present study investigates the three attachment styles of *secure*, *anxious-ambivalent*, and *avoidant* as postulated by Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall (1978). The purpose of this study is to see what impact one's self-reported attachment style has on their overall relationship satisfaction with their committed romantic relationship and what the differences are across the three styles. Based on previous literature, it is hypothesized that individuals who report higher rates of relationship satisfaction will report themselves to be securely attached and individuals who report lower rates of relationship satisfaction will report themselves to be anxious-ambivalent or avoidant. The current chapter will elucidate how this hypothesis was tested, beginning with the research design, and followed by the participant sample, instruments used, and the procedure employed.

### **Design**

Data were collected on the following constructs: (a) secure attachment, (b) anxious-ambivalent attachment, and (c) avoidant attachment. The study tested the following research questions: (a) Will respondents who identify with the secure attachment style report higher levels of relationship satisfaction? and (b) Will respondents who identify with the anxious-ambivalent or avoidant attachment styles report lower levels of relationship satisfaction? An examination of the relationship among these constructs and relationship satisfaction was conducted using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients. The independent variables were avoidant attachment (*Style A*), secure attachment (*Style B*), and anxious-ambivalent attachment (*Style C*). Through survey research using the Adult Attachment Questionnaire (AAQ), the Relationship Scales Questionnaire (RSQ), and the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS), participants were

asked what they reported their attachment style to be, how they connected to the items relating to each of the attachment styles, and how satisfied they were with their committed romantic relationship.

### **Participants**

The sample included participants who were currently in a committed romantic relationship or marriage. The ages of respondents ranged from 18 to 64 years of age. In addition to relationship status and age, gender and sexual orientation were also measured. The demographic characteristics illustrated that there were a total of 271 participants that volunteered to take part in this study.

### **Instruments**

The hypothesis of this study was that individuals who report higher rates of relationship satisfaction will report themselves to be securely attached and individuals who report lower rates of relationship satisfaction will report themselves to be anxious-ambivalent or avoidant. It was also posited that those who identify as securely attached would report higher rates of emotional intimacy and closeness, whereas the insecurely attached individuals (*anxious-ambivalent* or *avoidant*), would report higher rates of difficulty trusting and depending on their partner. The independent variables of this study were (a) *secure*, (b) *anxious-ambivalent*, and (c) *avoidant*. The scales used in this study were the Adult Attachment Questionnaire (AAQ) originally developed by Hazan and Shaver (1987/1990), the Relationship Scales Questionnaire (RSQ) originally developed by Griffin and Bartholomew (1994), and the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) originally developed by Hendrick (1988). The dependent variable in this study was relationship satisfaction as defined by the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS). Refer to Appendix B to view the complete data collection instruments.

The Adult Attachment Questionnaire (AAQ) used in this study provided a measure of experience in adult romantic relationships and was designed to measure the extent to which an

individual identified with any of the three attachment styles: *secure*, *anxious-ambivalent*, or *avoidant*. The measure of attachment type as purported by the AAQ provided respondents with three answer choices, of which they were to select the one that described their feelings best: (a) “I am somewhat uncomfortable being close to others; I find it difficult to trust them completely, difficult to allow myself to depend on them. I am nervous when anyone gets too close, and often, others want me to be more intimate than I feel comfortable being” (the *avoidant* type), (b) “I find it relatively easy to get close to others and am comfortable depending on them and having them depend on me. I don’t worry about being abandoned or about someone getting too close to me” (the *secure* type), and (c) “I find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like. I often worry that my partner doesn’t really love me or won’t want to stay with me. I want to get very close to my partner, and this sometimes scares people away” (the *anxious-ambivalent* type) (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Each respondent was to indicate which attachment type best described them based off a 7-point Likert scale, with a rating ranging from 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 7 (*agree strongly*).

The Relationship Scales Questionnaire (RSQ) was designed to provide a multi-item assessment of the four attachment styles that Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) had measured in a previous study where each style was assessed with only one item. The four subscales as formulated by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) have fairly low internal consistency reliabilities but regardless, they are extremely useful in measuring and assessing adult attachment styles. The subscales used in this study were those of Griffin and Bartholomew (1994) and were defined as *anxiety*, *closeness*, and *avoidance*. Anxiety was assessed based off the amount of apprehension one experiences in romantic relationships (e.g., “I often worry that romantic partners don’t really love me”). Closeness was assessed based off the capacity and willingness to maintain close and intimate relationships (e.g., “I find it easy to get emotionally close to others”). Avoidance was assessed based off one’s level of uneasiness and discomfort with close and

intimate relationships (e.g., “I prefer not to have other people depend on me”). Each respondent was to indicate how each item described them best on a 5-point Likert scale with a rating ranging from 1 (*not at all like me*) to 5 (*very much like me*).

The Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) was based on a 5-item Marital Assessment Questionnaire used in earlier research conducted by Hendrick (1981). This particular measure was designed to predict relationship satisfaction in adult romantic relationships and marriages. Respondents were to indicate how each item best described their relationship with their partner by selecting a rating from a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*low*) to 5 (*high*). The RAS consisted of 7 items total and included questions like, “How well does your partner meet your needs?” and “How much do you love your partner?” (Hendrick, 1988).

The aim of this research was not to cause any emotional distress or discomfort to participants when they reflected on their current adult romantic relationship; therefore, minimal risk was involved. However, it should be noted that it was almost impossible for the researcher to foresee any individual feelings of either comfort or discomfort amongst the participants. Participants were made aware that they could stop taking the survey at any time, as their participation in this study was completely voluntary. Each participant was also asked to provide some demographic information about his or herself including age, gender, relationship status, and sexual orientation. Sexual orientation was measured using Kinsey’s Heterosexual-Homosexual Rating Scale that was originally published in 1948. It measures sexuality on a scale from 1-7 with 1 being “*exclusively heterosexual with no homosexual*” and 7 being “*exclusively homosexual with no heterosexual*.” This measure of sexual orientation was selected because it continues to pose as one of the most compelling and common ways for individuals to self-identify with their sexual identity (Drucker, 2011). No further information on participants was collected and all data were collected anonymously. Participants were given copies of both the Adult Consent Form and Bill of Rights and signed them electronically. All electronic copies of

these forms were stored on the researcher's password protected home computer. No one other than the researcher and the researcher's advising committee had access to these records. All data was obliterated after the results were formally completed.

## **Procedure**

Once the researcher obtained authorization through the university to compose this study's survey, the researcher posted a status update on Facebook for the social networking community to view at their own discretion. The researcher stated in her post that she was a Marriage and Family Therapist graduate student conducting research to see what effects attachment style has on relationship satisfaction. The only requirements were that participants needed to currently be in a committed relationship, be at least 18 years of age, and have a basic understanding of the English language as the survey was not going to be written or translated into any other language. Participants were instructed to email the researcher in order to receive and electronically sign copies of the Adult Consent Form (see Appendix C) and Bill of Rights (see Appendix D). The researcher also made participants aware that the survey would take no more than 30-40 minutes to complete depending on their answers. Additionally, the researcher explained that the participants would be receiving a debriefing statement once they had completed the survey. The debriefing statement (see Appendix E) included more references on the literature as well as the contact information of the researcher should participants have any questions or concerns. After collecting the materials, the data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Based on previous research, this study aimed to predict how high or low one's relationship satisfaction was depending on which attachment style they identified with: (a) *secure*, (b) *anxious-ambivalent*, or (c) *avoidant*. This chapter will illustrate the results of this study, the significance of the findings, and whether or not the results supported the research hypotheses.

### **Research Hypotheses**

This study hypothesized that: (a) those who identify with a secure attachment style will have higher relationship satisfaction and (b) those who identify as anxious-ambivalent or avoidant will have lower relationship satisfaction. These hypotheses were tested using means and a correlation analysis of the three different attachment styles. The tables in this chapter show the demographic information of the study's participants, descriptive statistics for all study composites, and a correlation analysis of *secure*, *anxious-ambivalent*, *avoidant*, and *relationship satisfaction*.

Table 1

*Demographics for Study Participants*

<i>Demographic</i>	<i>(N = 271)</i>
GENDER	
Male	18.1%
Female	81.9%
AGE	
18 to 24	32.1%
25 to 34	36.2%
35 to 44	15.1%
45 to 54	12.9%
55 to 64	3.7%
RELATIONSHIP STATUS	
Single	6.6%
In a relationship	53.9%
Married	37.3%
Married and separated	1.1%
Divorced	1.1%

Table 1 shows the demographic statistics of gender, age, and relationship status for the participants that volunteered to be a part of this study. Of all the participants that took part in this study ( $N = 271$ ), the majority were female (81.9%) and either identified with the 18 to 24 age group (32.1%) or the 25 to 34 age group (36.2%). Participants mostly identified with being in a relationship (53.9%) or being married (37.3%).

Table 2

*What is your sexual orientation?*

<i>Response</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Exclusively heterosexual	229	84.5
Predominantly heterosexual, only incidentally homosexual	26	9.6
Predominantly heterosexual, but more than incidentally homosexual	5	1.8
Equally heterosexual and homosexual	3	1.1
Predominantly homosexual, but more than incidentally heterosexual	1	.4
Predominantly homosexual, only incidentally heterosexual	2	.7
Exclusively homosexual	5	1.8
Total	271	100.0

Table 2 shows which level of Kinsey's Heterosexual-Homosexual Rating Scale participants identified with. Responses ranged from 1 (*exclusively heterosexual*) to 7 (*exclusively homosexual*). Of the 271 participants in this study, 84.5% identified with being exclusively heterosexual; 9.6% identified with being predominantly heterosexual, and the remaining subjects had varying responses in terms of homosexuality (see Table 2). In summary, the majority of the participants in this study identified with being heterosexual in comparison to individuals that identified with any other sexual orientation as listed by Kinsey's rating scale.

Table 3

*Which best describes how you feel in romantic relationships?*

<i>Response</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Style A	67	24.7
Style B	183	67.5
Style C	21	7.7
Total	271	100.0

Table 3 shows the frequency of which attachment style participants identified with most. *Style A* represents the avoidant attachment style, *Style B* represents the secure attachment style, and *Style C* represents the anxious-ambivalent attachment style. This frequency table shows that 183 participants (67.5%) identified with the secure attachment style, 67 participants (24.7%) identified with the avoidant attachment style, and 21 participants (7.7%) identified with the anxious-ambivalent attachment style. Thus, the majority of participants in this study seemed to gravitate toward what was described as being securely attached.

Table 4

Please rate relationship *Style A* to indicate how well or poorly the description corresponds to your general relationship style.

<i>Response</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Disagree strongly	48	17.7
Disagree	83	30.6
Somewhat disagree	26	9.6
Neutral/mixed	21	7.7
Somewhat agree	49	18.1
Agree	32	11.8
Agree Strongly	12	4.4
Total	271	100.0

*Note:* Style A: I am somewhat uncomfortable being close to others; I find it difficult to trust them completely, difficult to allow myself to depend on them. I am nervous when anyone gets too close, and often, others want me to be more intimate than I feel comfortable being.

Table 4 shows the frequency in which participants identified with attachment *Style A* (*avoidant*). With few participants categorizing themselves as insecurely attached, only 12 participants (4.4%) agreed strongly with *Style A*, whereas 83 participants (30.6%) disagreed with categorizing themselves as avoidant. It can be concluded that many individuals did not identify with attachment *Style A*. However, there were some varying responses indicative of slight disagreement with the avoidant attachment style (see Table 4).

Table 5

*Please rate relationship Style B to indicate how well or poorly the description corresponds to your general relationship style.*

<i>Response</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Disagree strongly	4	1.5
Disagree	19	7.0
Somewhat disagree	22	8.1
Neutral/mixed	30	11.1
Somewhat agree	37	13.7
Agree	116	42.8
Agree Strongly	43	15.9
Total	271	100.0

*Note:* Style B: I find it relatively easy to get close to others and am comfortable depending on them and having them depend on me. I don't worry about being abandoned or about someone getting too close to me.

Table 5 shows the frequency in which participants identified with attachment *Style B* (*secure*). With 116 participants (42.8%) agreeing with identifying themselves with attachment *Style B*, and 4 participants (1.5%) disagreeing strongly with identifying themselves as securely attached individuals, it can be concluded that the majority of the participants in this study reported themselves to be securely attached.

Table 6

*Please rate relationship Style C to indicate how well or poorly the description corresponds to your general relationship style.*

<i>Response</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Disagree strongly	86	31.7
Disagree	89	32.8
Somewhat disagree	27	10.0
Neutral/mixed	25	9.2
Somewhat agree	30	11.1
Agree	11	4.1
Agree Strongly	3	1.1
Total	271	100.0

*Note:* Style C: I find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like. I often worry that my partner doesn't really love me or won't want to stay with me. I want to get very close to my partner, and this sometimes scares people away.

Table 6 shows the frequency in which participants identified with attachment *Style C* (*anxious-ambivalent*). With only 3 participants (1.1%) agreeing strongly with identifying themselves with attachment *Style C*, and the remaining participants predominantly disagreeing with how they felt attachment *Style C* best described them, it can be said that very few participants in this study identified with this attachment style.

Table 7

*Descriptive Statistics for Study Composites and Relationship Satisfaction*

<i>Composite</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Relationship	271	1.00	4.57	3.52	.52
Avoidant	271	1.00	4.80	3.16	.63
Anxious	271	1.00	5.00	2.49	.86
Secure	271	1.40	5.00	3.48	.68

Table 7 shows the descriptive statistics for the composite variables of *avoidant*, *anxious-ambivalent*, *secure*, and *relationship satisfaction*. The means ranged from 2.49 (SD = .86) to 3.52 (SD = .52). It seems that most individuals identified with having high relationship satisfaction as well as being securely attached.

Table 8

*Correlations Among Study Composites and Relationship Satisfaction*

		Relationship	Avoidant	Anxious	Secure
Relationship	<i>r</i>	1	-.051	-.289**	.265**
	<i>p</i>		.406	.000	.000
	<i>N</i>	271	271	271	271
Avoidant	<i>r</i>	-.051	1	.353**	-.251**
	<i>p</i>	.406		.000	.000
	<i>N</i>	271	271	271	271
Anxious	<i>r</i>	-.289**	.353**	1	-.632**
	<i>p</i>	.000	.000		.000
	<i>N</i>	271	271	271	271
Secure	<i>r</i>	.265**	-.251**	-.632**	1
	<i>p</i>	.000	.000	.000	
	<i>N</i>	271	271	271	271

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

Table 8 shows the values of the specified correlation tests for Pearson's *r*. A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between relationship satisfaction and attachment style (*avoidant*, *anxious-ambivalent*, or *secure*). The correlation coefficients were used to test the research questions of the study.

In order to test research question one, a correlation coefficient between *secure* and *relationship satisfaction* was used. As a reminder, research question one was: Will individuals who identify with the secure attachment style report high relationship satisfaction? The correlation between *relationship satisfaction* and *secure* was found to be negative, strong, and was statistically significant at the .05 level ( $r = .27, p < .001$ ). A correlation of .27 results in an  $r^2 = .07$ , which indicates that 7% of the variance in relationship satisfaction is explained by variance in secure attachment. This is a moderate effect, meaning secure attachment has a moderate practical significance in predicting relationship satisfaction.

In order to test research questions two and three, a series of correlation coefficients between *anxious-ambivalent* and *relationship satisfaction* and *avoidant* and *relationship*

*satisfaction* were implemented. Research question two was stated as such: Will individuals who identify with the anxious-ambivalent attachment style report low relationship satisfaction? Research question three was: Will individuals who identify with the avoidant attachment style report low relationship satisfaction? The correlation between *relationship satisfaction* and *anxious-ambivalent* was also found to be statistically significant at the .05 level ( $r = -.29, p < .001$ ). A correlation of  $-.29$  results in an  $r^2 = .08$ , which indicates that 8% of the variance in relationship satisfaction is explained by variance in anxious-ambivalent attachment. This is a moderate effect, meaning anxious-ambivalent attachment has a moderate practical significance in predicting relationship satisfaction. The correlation between *relationship satisfaction* and *avoidant* was statistically significant at the .05 level ( $r = -.05, p < .001$ ). A correlation of  $-.05$  results in an  $r^2 = .002$ , which indicates that 0.2% of the variance in relationship satisfaction is explained by variance in secure attachment. This is a very small effect, meaning avoidant attachment has little practical significance in predicting relationship satisfaction.

### **Synthesis of the Research**

The research findings of this study are indicative that securely attached individuals in relationships tend to report higher levels of relationship satisfaction. There was a significant correlation between having a high level of relationship satisfaction and identifying with being securely attached. Those who reported an anxious-ambivalent or avoidant attachment did not have the same marked significance in relationship satisfaction. The original research hypothesis was validated in that securely attached individuals reported higher levels of relationship satisfaction than the anxious-ambivalent and avoidantly attached individuals. An unexpected finding was that individuals that reported to be anxious-ambivalent did not have drastically low ratings of relationship satisfaction as predicted by the researcher. It can be concluded that individuals who are involved in either a committed romantic relationship or marriage will be more likely to report higher levels of relationship satisfaction if they identify with the secure

attachment style. Those that identify with the anxious-ambivalent or avoidant attachment styles will not report high levels of relationship satisfaction, but will not necessarily report significantly low relationship satisfaction either.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to examine attachment style and how it impacts relationship satisfaction. Previous research has elaborated on what differentiates each of the attachment styles experienced in adulthood while in a committed romantic relationship. Understanding one's attachment style is a crucial part in fostering a healthy adult romantic relationship (Kobak & Sceery, 1988). As stated by Pistol et al. (1995) secure attachment is associated with greater intimacy, trust, and interdependence in the relationship, which in turn, are telling traits of having high relationship satisfaction. On the contrary, individuals who identify with the anxious-ambivalent and avoidant attachment styles have low relationship satisfaction due to increased conflict, jealousy, and insecurity within the relationship.

This study aimed to contribute to the already large body of research on attachment style and its effect on relationship satisfaction. With an elaboration on attachment style during adult romantic relationships, the issue of individuals needing to comprehend their own attachment style, and the work of previous researchers was the current study able to formulate a solid hypothesis. As mentioned previously, the current study hypothesized that individuals who report being securely attached will have high relationship satisfaction in comparison to those who report being insecurely attached. Chapter Three explained the research design, the procedure that was used to implement data collection, and the instruments used. Chapter Four illustrated the major findings of this study and how they were supportive of the research hypotheses.

### **Discussion**

In light of the literature review, this study's hypotheses were supported by the results. As previously stated, research question one was: Will individuals who identify with the secure attachment style report high relationship satisfaction? There was a strong, negative correlation between *secure* and *relationship satisfaction*, which indicates that securely attached individuals have greater relationship satisfaction than its anxious-ambivalent and avoidant attached

counterparts. Research question two stated: Will individuals who identify with the anxious-ambivalent attachment style report low relationship satisfaction? As demonstrated in the results, there was not a strong correlation between *anxious-ambivalent* and *relationship satisfaction*.

Research questions three stated: Will individuals who identify with the avoidant attachment style report low relationship satisfaction? Similar to the findings of those who identified with the anxious-ambivalent attachment style, there was not a strong correlation between *avoidant* and *relationship satisfaction*. It is clear that the results suggest that securely attached individuals will report high relationship satisfaction and insecurely attached individuals (*anxious-ambivalent* and *avoidant*) will report low relationship satisfaction.

It is important to note that these results cannot be generalized to populations other than the one sampled in this study because of differences that may be present in other cultures and other age groups. This study's respondents were primarily young in age with over 60% of participants ranging in age from 18-34. This study also did not account for racial ethnicity, which could sway differences in attachment styles, as attachment may be different across other cultures.

### **Future Research and Implications for Marriage and Family Therapists**

In light of the results presented in this study, there are unquestionably some areas of research that need continued pursuit. More research on cultural differences in attachment style needs to be explored, as one's experience during infancy and childhood may look different across various cultures and in other countries. Further research should also be conducted on how one's partner perceives their attachment style in order to further elucidate the need for couples to attain a better understanding of their partner's attachment origins. A third potential study should research how life stressors and unexpected events mediate one's attachment style despite having a preexisting secure attachment style from infancy.

As stated, the proposed research could be immensely helpful in assisting marriage and family therapists with coming up with effective treatment planning in working with couples in

psychotherapy. Implementing psychoeducation on attachment style and the differences among the three identified in this research (*secure, anxious-ambivalent, and avoidant*) is one of the few therapeutic tasks that Bowlby (1988) discussed in his revision of working with insecurely attached individuals. Bowlby posited that therapists who employ each task with their clients would achieve positive therapeutic outcomes. These tasks include: providing clients with a safe haven and secure base from which they can begin to explore memories, emotions, maladaptive beliefs and behaviors; exploring and understanding how clients currently relate to other people based on goals, perceptions, expectations, and fears through encouragement and assistance from the therapist; examining the client's particular relationship with the therapist and begin working through transference and models of projection in order to achieve a corrective emotional experience; helping clients to reflect on how their working models of self and others are rooted in childhood experiences with primary attachment figures; helping clients to recognize that their working models of behavior may have once been adaptive but they are now no longer functional (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). It goes without saying that implementing these therapeutic tasks when working with couples poses as an effective treatment plan. It is critical to execute these tasks since couples often come into psychotherapy in distress and discord. Marriage and family therapists often must model appropriate behavior to their clients. If we, as clinicians, develop a better understanding of our own attachment style, its origins, and its implications toward our romantic relationships, then we can better promote psychoeducation in terms of attachment style within our therapeutic practices.

In summary, exploring and understanding attachment style is a critical clinical piece of information that psychotherapists need to employ when working with couples. Greater knowledge of one's attachment style and a thorough, in-depth exploration of working models of behavior will ultimately help couples in dissolution achieve a greater level of interpersonal understanding for one another. Through this process will individuals in adult romantic

relationships be able create more realistic working models of self and others. Individuals in relationships will also have an immediate opportunity to improve their reality-testing skills through working with their partner (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). The aim of this study was to build upon an already existing awareness of attachment style and a base for psychotherapists to build upon to be as successful as possible when working with couples. May these findings continue to accumulate atop the mushrooming literature and research on attachment and pose as a useful point of entry into the psychotherapeutic practice of couples counseling.

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## Appendix A

### Facebook Status Update to Recruit Participants

I am conducting research to see what effects attachment style has on relationship satisfaction. If you are currently in a committed relationship, are at least 18 years of age, and are able to read, write, and speak English fluently, then you are able to participate in the study. If you are interested and agree to participate, please send a message to my Facebook inbox or email me at [kelsey.m.larson@gmail.com](mailto:kelsey.m.larson@gmail.com) so that I may email you a link to the survey website. You will be completing four different surveys. The completion of all four surveys should take about 30-40 minutes of your time depending on your answers. After you complete the surveys, I will send you a debriefing statement that will elaborate on the purpose of the study, references that refer to the literature used for this research, and my contact information should you have any further questions or concerns. Thank you very much for your time.

## Appendix B

### Data Collection Materials

#### 1. Demographic Information

What is your age?

18 to 24      25 to 34      35 to 44      45 to 54      55 to 64      65 to 74  
75 or older

What is your gender?

Male      Female

What is your relationship status?

Single      In a relationship      Married      Married and separated  
Divorced

What is your sexual orientation?

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1 – Exclusively heterosexual with no homosexual
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2 – Predominantly heterosexual, only incidentally homosexual
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3 – Predominantly heterosexual, but more than incidentally homosexual
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4 – Equally heterosexual and homosexual
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5 – Predominantly homosexual, but more than incidentally heterosexual
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6 – Predominantly homosexual, only incidentally heterosexual
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7 – Exclusively homosexual

#### 2. Adult Attachment Questionnaire (AAQ)

These questions are concerned with your experiences in romantic love relationships. Take a moment to think about these experiences and answer the following questions with them in mind.

Read each of the three self-descriptions below (A, B, and C) and then place a checkmark next to the single alternative that best describes how you feel in romantic relationships or is nearest to the way you feel. (Note: The terms “close” and “intimate” refer to psychological or emotional closeness, not necessarily to sexual intimacy.)

\_\_\_\_\_ A. I am somewhat uncomfortable being close to others; I find it difficult to trust them completely, difficult to allow myself to depend on them. I am nervous when anyone gets too close, and often, others want me to be more intimate than I feel comfortable being.

\_\_\_\_\_ B. I find it relatively easy to get close to others and am comfortable depending on them and having them depend on me. I don't worry about being abandoned or about someone getting too close to me.

\_\_\_\_\_ C. I find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like. I often worry that my partner doesn't really love me or won't want to stay with me. I want to get very close to my partner, and this sometimes scares people away.

Now please rate each of the relationship styles above to indicate how well or poorly each description corresponds to your general relationship style.

**Style A**

Disagree strongly			Neutral/ mixed			Agree strongly
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**Style B**

Disagree strongly			Neutral/ mixed			Agree strongly
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**Style C**

Disagree strongly			Neutral/ mixed			Agree strongly
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**3. Relationship Scales Questionnaire (RSQ)**

Please read each of the following statements and rate the extent to which you believe each statement best describes your feelings about close relationships based off the scale below.

Not at all like me		Somewhat like me		Very much like me
1	2	3	4	5

\_\_\_\_\_ 1. I find it difficult to depend on other people.

\_\_\_\_\_ 2. It is very important to me to feel independent.

\_\_\_\_\_ 3. I find it easy to get emotionally close to others.

\_\_\_\_\_ 4. I want to merge completely with another person.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. I worry that I will be hurt if I allow myself to become too close to others.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. I am comfortable without close emotional relationships.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. I am not sure that I can always depend on others to be there when I need them.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. I want to be completely emotionally intimate with others.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. I worry about being alone.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. I am comfortable depending on other people.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. I often worry that romantic partners don't really love me.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. I find it difficult to trust others completely.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. I worry about others getting too close to me.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. I want emotionally close relationships.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. I am comfortable having other people depend on me.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 16. I worry that others don't value me as much as I value them.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 17. People are never there when you need them.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 18. My desire to merge completely sometimes scares people away.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 19. It is very important to me to feel self-sufficient.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 20. I am nervous when anyone gets too close to me.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 21. I often worry that romantic partners won't want to stay with me.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 22. I prefer not to have other people depend on me.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 23. I worry about being abandoned.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 24. I am somewhat uncomfortable being close to others.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 25. I find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 26. I prefer not to depend on others.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 27. I know that others will be there when I need them.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 28. I worry about having others not accept me.

\_\_\_\_\_ 29. Romantic partners often want me to be closer than I feel comfortable being.

\_\_\_\_\_ 30. I find it relatively easy to get close to others.

#### 4. Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS)

Please read each of the following statements and rate the extent to which you believe each statement best describes how satisfied you are in your relationship.

Low  
1

2

Medium  
3

4

High  
5

\_\_\_\_\_ 1. How well does your partner meet your needs?

\_\_\_\_\_ 2. In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?

\_\_\_\_\_ 3. How good is your relationship compared to most?

\_\_\_\_\_ 4. How often do you wish you hadn't gotten into this relationship?

\_\_\_\_\_ 5. To what extent has your relationship met your original expectations?

\_\_\_\_\_ 6. How much do you love your partner?

\_\_\_\_\_ 7. How many problems are there in your relationship?

## Appendix C

### Adult Consent Form

#### California State University, Northridge CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

##### *The Implications of Attachment and its Effects on Relationship Satisfaction*

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything that you do not understand before deciding if you want to participate. A researcher listed below will be available to answer your questions.

##### **Researcher:**

Kelsey Larson, MFT Trainee  
Educational Psychology and Counseling  
(818) 935-2135  
kelsey.m.larson@gmail.com

##### **Faculty Advisor:**

Jonah Schlackman, Ph.D.  
Educational Psychology and Counseling  
18111 Nordhoff St.  
Northridge, CA 91330-8265  
(818) 677-4771  
jonah.schlackman@csun.edu

#### **PURPOSE OF STUDY**

The purpose of this research study is to explore the implications of one's attachment style and how it effects relationship satisfaction.

#### **SUBJECTS**

##### ***Inclusion Requirements***

You are eligible to participate in this study if you are 18 years of age or older and are currently in a committed relationship. You must be able to read and write in English, however, English fluency is not a criterion. Basic understanding of English is required, but not English fluency.

##### ***Exclusion Requirements***

You are not eligible to participate in this study if you have never been in a committed relationship and/or you are unable to read and write in English.

##### ***Time Commitment***

This study will involve approximately 30-40 minutes of your time.

#### **PROCEDURES**

The following procedures will occur: You will complete some demographic information about yourself. You will then complete the Adult Attachment Questionnaire (AAQ) and the

Relationship Scales Questionnaire (RSQ). Both of these questionnaires measure your attachment tendencies toward your current partner. Lastly, you will complete the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS), which measures how satisfied you are in your relationship.

### **RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

This study may involve some emotional discomfort. At any point during the survey in which a respondent is unwilling to continue the questionnaire due to feeling emotional discomfort, they can stop.

### **BENEFITS**

#### ***Subject Benefits***

The possible benefits you may experience from the procedures described in this study include a better understanding of your attachment style and relationship satisfaction.

### **ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATION**

The only alternative to participation in this study is not to participate.

### **COMPENSATION, COSTS AND REIMBURSEMENT**

#### ***Compensation for Participation***

You will not be paid for your participation in this research study.

#### ***Costs***

There is no cost to you for participation in this study.

### **WITHDRAWAL OR TERMINATION FROM THE STUDY AND CONSEQUENCES**

You are free to withdraw from this study at any time.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

#### ***Subject Identifiable Data***

No identifiable information will be collected. All data collected from the questionnaires will be stored on a password protected laptop on an encrypted file.

#### ***Data Storage***

The data will be kept in an encrypted file that is password protected and will be destroyed one year after the end of the study. No identifiers will be kept in the file in terms of names, addresses, and phone numbers.

#### ***Data Access***

The researcher, Kelsey Larson, and faculty advisor, Jonah Schlackman named on the first page of this form will have access to your study records. Any information derived from this research project that personally identifies you will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without your separate consent, except as specifically required by law. Publications and/or presentations that result from this study will not include identifiable information about you.

#### ***Data Retention***

The researchers intend to keep the research data until analysis of the information is completed and then it will be destroyed on year after the end of the study.

### **IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS**

If you have any comments, concerns, or questions regarding the conduct of this research please contact the research team listed on the first page of this form.

If you have concerns or complaints about the research study, research team, or questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Research and Sponsored Projects, 18111 Nordhoff Street, California State University, Northridge, Northridge, CA 91330-8232, or phone (818) 677-2901.

#### **VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION STATEMENT**

By following the link to the questionnaires as posted on Facebook, you are agreeing to the terms of consent of this study. **Your participation in this study is voluntary.** You may refuse to answer any question or discontinue your involvement at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled. Your decision will not affect your relationship with California State University, Northridge.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/5QKS6FV>



## Appendix E

### Debriefing Statement

#### The Implications of Attachment and its Effects on Relationship Satisfaction

This study was designed to research the effects of attachment style and how that impacts one's overall satisfaction with their committed romantic relationship. Prior research suggests that one's attachment style is indicative of successful and unsuccessful relationships (Simpson, 1990). The research related to this study has also suggested that individuals who report themselves as having a secure attachment style are closer to their partners and are more satisfied with their romantic relationship rather than those individuals who reported an anxious-ambivalent or avoidant attachment style (Keelan, 1994). Secure attachment is associated with less anxiety, greater intimacy, trust, and willingness to discuss and resolve problems in a relationship. Insecure attachment in a relationship is associated with anxieties and worries about not being loved or abandoned and not being accepted by one's partner (Madey, 2009). How comfortable one is with being open to self-disclose to their partner has also been found to be more prevalent among securely attached individuals. In turn, comfort with self-disclosure has been associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction (Keelan, 1997).

I hypothesize that individuals who report higher rates of relationship satisfaction will report themselves to be securely attached and individuals who report lower rates of relationship satisfaction will report themselves to be anxious-ambivalent or avoidant. Furthermore, I posit that those who are securely attached will report higher rates of emotional intimacy and closeness, whereas the insecurely attached individuals (*anxious-ambivalent* or *avoidant*) will report higher rates of difficulty trusting and depending on their partner.

Thank you very much for participating in this study. We appreciate the time that you have spent completing these surveys. If you would like to view the results of this study or if you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact the principal investigator,

Kelsey Larson, at [kelsey.m.larson@gmail.com](mailto:kelsey.m.larson@gmail.com). You may also contact the faculty advisor, Jonah Schlackman, Ph.D., at [jonah.schlackman@csun.edu](mailto:jonah.schlackman@csun.edu). If you are interested in additional reading on this subject, I have included several references to the literature relevant to this study. Again, thank you for your time.