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Influence of Attachment Styles on Romantic Relationships

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This investigation examined the impact of secure, anxious, and avoidant attachment styles on romantic relationships in a longitudinal study involving 144 dating couples. For both men and women, the secure attachment style was associated with greater relationship interdependence, commitment, trust, and satisfaction than were the anxious or avoidant attachment styles. The anxious and avoidant styles were associated with less frequent positive emotions and more frequent negative emotions in the relationship, whereas the reverse was true of the secure style. Six-month follow-up interviews revealed that, among those individuals who disbanded, avoidant men experienced significantly less post-dissolution emotional distress than did other people.

In recent years, a growing number of researchers have become interested in the processes by which people develop, maintain, and dissolve affectional bonds within close relationships (see Bretherton, 1985; Clark & Reis, 1988). Empirical research in this area was spawned by the pioneering theoretical work of John Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1980), who sought to determine how and why infants become emotionally attached to their primary caregivers and why they often experience emotional distress when physically separated from them.

Bowlby identified a clear sequence of three emotional reactions that typically occur following the separation of an infant from its primary caregiver: protest, despair, and detachment. Given the remarkably reliable nature of this sequence across a variety of different species, Bowlby developed a theory of attachment grounded in evolutionary principles. Specifically, he argued that an attachment system composed of specific behavioral and emotional propensities designed to keep infants in close physical proximity to their primary caregivers might have been selected during evolutionary history. By remaining in close contact with caregivers who could protect them from danger and predation, infants who possessed these attachment propensities would have been more likely to survive to reproductive age, reproduce, and subsequently pass these propensities on to future generations.

Empirical research examining tenets of Bowlby's theory has focused mainly on different styles or patterns of attachment in young children. Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall (1978) have identified three primary attachment styles: *anxious/ambivalent*

(characteristic of infants who intermix attachment behaviors with overt expressions of protest and anger toward the primary caregiver when distressed), *avoidant* (characteristic of infants who avoid the caregiver and exhibit signs of detachment when distressed), and *secure* (characteristic of infants who successfully use the caregiver as a secure base when distressed).

During social development, people presumably construct internal affective/cognitive models both of themselves and of typical patterns of interaction with significant others (e.g., Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1973; Main et al., 1985). These mental models are believed to organize the development of personality and to guide subsequent social behavior. People who possess a secure attachment style tend to develop mental models of themselves as being friendly, good-natured, and likable and of significant others as being generally well intentioned, reliable, and trustworthy. Those who display an anxious style tend to develop models of themselves as being misunderstood, unconfident, and underappreciated and of significant others as being typically unreliable and either unwilling or unable to commit themselves to permanent relationships. And those who have an avoidant style typically develop models of themselves as being suspicious, aloof, and skeptical and of significant others as being basically unreliable or overly eager to commit themselves to relationships. A growing body of empirical research has documented the existence of these mental models in adults (Collins & Read, 1990; Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

Recent research has begun to explore whether an individual's attachment history might influence his or her attachment style toward romantic partners during adulthood (e.g., Collins & Read, 1990; Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Kobak & Sceery, 1988; Main et al., 1985). On the basis of descriptions of the behavioral and emotional characteristics of avoidantly, securely, and anxiously attached children provided by Ainsworth et al. (1978), Hazan and Shaver (1987) developed a single-item, self-report measure of attachment style adapted to adult romantic relationships. Individuals are asked to indicate which one of the three attachment styles best characterizes their general orientation toward romantic involvements. Securely attached people indicate that they find it relatively easy

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to get close to others, are comfortable depending on others and having others depend on them, and don't worry about being abandoned or about someone becoming too emotionally close to them. Avoidantly attached people indicate that they are uncomfortable being close to others, find it difficult to completely trust and depend on others, and are nervous when anyone gets too close. Anxiously attached people indicate that they find others are reluctant to get as close as they would like, frequently worry that their romantic partners don't really love them or won't remain with them, and often want to become extremely close to their partners.

The study of individual differences in attachment styles is likely to contribute significantly to our understanding of why close relationships vary in both their quality and their interpersonal nature (Shaver, Hazan, & Bradshaw, 1988). On the basis of previous theory (e.g., Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1979, 1980) and research (e.g., Ainsworth et al., 1978; Hazan & Shaver, 1987) concerning attachment processes, several hypotheses can be generated about the nature and emotional quality of romantic relationships possessed by people who exhibit different attachment styles.

Hypotheses Concerning Nature of the Relationship

Considering the different types of mental models they harbor, people who exhibit secure, avoidant, and anxious attachment styles should be involved in different kinds of romantic relationships (Bowlby, 1973, 1980). People who exhibit a secure style should gravitate toward and develop stable, supportive relationships in which relatively high levels of trust, interdependence, commitment, and satisfaction are evident, whereas those who display an avoidant style should develop emotionally distant relationships defined by lower levels of trust, interdependence, commitment, and satisfaction. People who manifest an anxious style ought to exhibit considerable ambivalence toward their romantic partners. Even though they may yearn to develop stable, supportive relationships, their insecurity about the stability of relationships in general should preclude them from developing relationships characterized by high levels of trust, commitment, interdependence, and satisfaction.

Collins and Read (1990) recently provided preliminary evidence suggesting that certain attachment styles do covary with measures of trust, satisfaction, and quality of communication in established relationships. To date, however, no one has examined whether different attachment styles may precipitate different levels of interdependence and commitment, two of the most important global dimensions underlying relationship development and everyday functioning (Kelley, 1983).

Hypotheses Concerning Emotions Experienced Within the Relationship

According to attachment theory (Bowlby, 1973), people who possess secure, avoidant, and anxious attachment styles should develop relationships that systematically differ in their emotional tone. Several emotion theorists (e.g., Berscheid, 1983; Block, 1957; Davitz, 1969) suggest that two major dimensions underlie the experience of emotions: magnitude of affect (intense vs. mild) and hedonic sign of affect (positive vs. negative).

To the extent that they develop interdependent, committed, and trusting relationships, people who display a secure attachment style should be involved in emotionally pleasant relationships characterized by frequent occurrences of mild and intense positive emotion and by less frequent occurrences of mild and intense negative emotion (cf. Berscheid, 1983). In view of their tendency to eschew intimacy and commitment and to maintain guarded emotional distance from their romantic partners, people who exhibit an avoidant attachment style should experience the opposite pattern of emotions.¹ And given the uncertainty they harbor concerning the stability and dependability of their relationships, people who manifest an anxious style also should be involved in affectively unpleasant relationships.

Hypotheses Concerning Emotional Distress Following Relationship Dissolution

Ainsworth et al. (1978) revealed that securely, anxiously, and avoidantly attached children display different emotional reactions following separation from adult caregivers. Although all children tend to experience the same sequence of basic responses (protest, despair, and detachment), avoidant children typically express extreme levels of detachment (reflected in emotional and behavioral withdrawal) when separated from caregivers, whereas anxious children often exhibit extreme levels of protest and anger. Hence, according to attachment theory (Bowlby, 1973, 1979), adults who exhibit avoidant attachment styles toward romantic partners should experience less emotional distress following relationship dissolution, and those who manifest anxious styles should experience more intense distress.

This latter prediction, however, requires some qualification. Past research has shown that people involved in close, interdependent relationships typically experience stronger emotional distress following relationship termination (Simpson, 1987). Despite the fact that anxiously attached people yearn for extreme levels of commitment and emotional closeness, they may not necessarily experience pronounced distress following relationship dissolution if their relationships possess less desirable qualities. Moreover, even though securely attached people are likely to be involved in relationships characterized by more desirable attributes, the positive nature of their mental models should buffer them from excessive distress after dissolution (cf. Bretherton, 1985).

To test these hypotheses, 144 dating couples were studied longitudinally. During Phase 1, participants responded to a series of measures that served as indicators of the amount of trust, interdependence, commitment, and satisfaction that existed in their current relationship. They also reported how frequently each of 28 different emotions were experienced within

¹ Avoidant people might experience emotions less frequently in their relationships. Although the avoidant style is characterized by behavior indicative of interpersonal detachment, it also is characterized by the presence of and potential for frequent negative emotions (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Kobak & Sceery, 1988). Thus, despite the fact that avoidant people may appear to have emotionally quiescent relationships, they should be susceptible to experiencing frequent negative affect.

the relationship. Six months later, as part of Phase 2, couples were contacted by telephone to determine whether they were still dating and, if not, how much emotional distress each partner experienced following the breakup.

Method

Phase 1 Data Collection

Participants and Procedure

One hundred and forty-four dating couples (144 men and 144 women), at least one member of whom was enrolled in introductory psychology at Texas A&M University, participated in this investigation. The mean age of men and women was 19.4 and 18.7 years, respectively. Mean length of dating relationship was 13.5 months. Over 92% of the couples had dated for more than 1 month.

Couples reported to a large experimental room in groups of 5 to 15. The experimenter told participants they would be asked to complete an initial questionnaire survey that inquired about their dating relationship. She then passed out the survey in number-coded packets so that each dyad could be identified later for purposes of data analysis. The experimenter guaranteed that all responses would be confidential and that they would not be revealed to anyone, including dating partners. Couples then were physically separated to ensure that they could not communicate while completing the survey.

Measures

Attachment style measures. Attachment style was measured by having both members of each dyad rate 13 sentences contained within the Hazan and Shaver (1987) adult attachment measure on Likert-type scales. Even though Hazan and Shaver's attachment measure was developed according to descriptions of avoidantly, securely, and anxiously attached infants provided by Ainsworth et al. (1978), the measure possesses some unfortunate psychometric properties (see Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Hendrick & Hendrick, 1989). First, people classify themselves as belonging to one of three mutually exclusive attachment categories without indicating the extent to which the chosen category characterizes them. As a result, meaningful individual difference variability that exists within each category cannot be assessed. Second, this categorical classification method assesses an individual's standing on only one attachment style despite the fact that some adults may be best characterized as a blend of two or more styles. Third, this method of classification places severe limits on the types of statistical analyses that can be conducted. Fourth, this method does not allow one to determine the internal reliability of each style. Finally, measurement of individual differences in adults traditionally has focused on linear relations between multiple-item measures designed to assess specific, continuously distributed constructs (Jackson, 1971). Instances in which discrete classes underlie adult individual differences are rare.

Accordingly, the three Hazan and Shaver (1987) attachment vignettes were decomposed into 13 individual sentences, each of which was responded to on a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7). To control for acquiescence response biases, 3 sentences were worded in a negative direction. In addition, slight alterations in wording designed to reduce item-response difficulty were made for 2 sentences. Participants rated the following items according to how they typically felt toward romantic partners in general: (a) "I find it relatively easy to get close to others," (b) "I'm not very comfortable having to depend on other people," (c) "I'm comfortable

having others depend on me," (d) "I rarely worry about being abandoned by others," (e) "I don't like people getting too close to me," (f) "I'm somewhat uncomfortable being too close to others," (g) "I find it difficult to trust others completely," (h) "I'm nervous whenever anyone gets too close to me," (i) "Others often want me to be more intimate than I feel comfortable being," (j) "Others often are reluctant to get as close as I would like," (k) "I often worry that my partner(s) don't really love me," (l) "I rarely worry about my partner(s) leaving me," and (m) "I often want to merge completely with others, and this desire sometimes scares them away." Items a–e were taken from Hazan and Shaver's "secure" vignette description. Items f–j and j–m were taken from the "avoidant" and "anxious/ambivalent" vignettes, respectively.

Interdependence measures. Given that interdependence is a multidimensional construct (Berscheid, 1985), three conceptually related yet empirically distinct measures were used to assess it: Rubin's Love Scale (Rubin, 1970), the Dependency Scale (Fei & Berscheid, 1977), and the Self-Disclosure Scale (Miller, Berg, & Archer, 1983). For all three scales, Cronbach's alpha exceeded .85. Internal analyses revealed that all three measures were highly correlated (for both men and women, r s ranged from .53 to .87). Moreover, principal-axis factor analyses conducted separately on men and women indicated that all three measures loaded highly on the same factor (for both men and women, all factor loadings exceeded .64).

Commitment measures. Commitment tends to be reflected in both avowed intentions to remain in a relationship as well as in extrinsic and intrinsic investments made within it (Kelley, 1983). Two measures, therefore, were used to assess commitment: the Commitment Scale (Lund, 1985) and the Investment Scale (Rusbult, 1980). For each scale, Cronbach's alpha exceeded .83. Internal analyses indicated that these two measures were highly correlated (for men, $r = .82$; for women, $r = .78$).

Trust measures. Trust in a romantic partner tends to be a multidimensional construct consisting of at least three components: predictability, dependability, and faith (Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna, 1985). Insecurity also may play a critical role in the formation and development of trust in relationships (Berscheid & Fei, 1977). Accordingly, trust was assessed by two sets of measures: the Trust Scale (which consists of three subscales: predictability, dependability, and faith; Rempel et al., 1985) and the Insecurity Scale (Fei & Berscheid, 1977). For each of the trust subscales, Cronbach's alpha exceeded .70. For the Insecurity Scale, Cronbach's alpha was .83. Internal analyses revealed that all four measures correlated highly (for both men and women, r s ranged from .41 to .74). Furthermore, principal-axis factor analyses conducted separately on men and women indicated that all four measures loaded highly on the same factor (for both men and women, all factor loadings exceeded .60).

Satisfaction measure. Satisfaction was assessed by an 11-item, face-valid measure of satisfaction with the partner on 11 different dimensions (e.g., attractiveness, loyalty, kindness, similarity of values; Simpson, 1987). Cronbach's alpha was .82.

Frequency of Emotion Index. Participants indicated how often they experienced each of 28 different emotions within their current relationship. Each emotion was rated on 7-point Likert-type scales, ranging from *never* (1) to *very often* (7). The 28 emotions used were selected so that all four major quadrants presumed to underlie the experience of emotions—intense positive emotion, mild positive emotion, intense negative emotion, and mild negative emotion—were represented. Seven emotions tapped the intense positive quadrant: excited, elated, surprised, joyful, happy, delighted, and passionate. Seven tapped the mild positive quadrant: calm, needed, serene, satisfied, wanted/cared for, content, and optimistic. Seven assessed the intense negative quadrant: angry, fearful, jealous, irritated, hostile, distressed, and disgusted. And seven assessed the mild negative quadrant: rejected, sad, guilty, worried, disappointed, depressed, and lonely.

Phase 2 Data Collection

Participants and Procedure

Approximately 6 months later, several attempts were made to contact all participants by telephone. Both members of 132 dyads (91.67%) were successfully reached. Telephone interviewers first determined whether the couple was still dating. According to independent reports provided by both partners, 48 couples (36.36% of those contacted) no longer were dating. These people then responded to a telephone survey that assessed the extent of emotional distress they experienced following relationship dissolution.

Measures

Intensity and Duration of Emotional Distress Index. The intensity and duration of emotional distress was assessed by a six-item index (Simpson, 1987). Three items assessed the intensity of distress: (a) "Immediately after the breakup, how difficult was it for you to make an emotional adjustment," (b) "Immediately after the breakup occurred, to what extent did it disrupt your typical, everyday functioning and routine," and (c) "How upset were you immediately after the breakup?" Participants responded to these three items on 7-point scales, ranging from *not at all* (1) to *a great deal/extremely* (7). Three items assessed the duration of distress: (d) "How long did it take you to make an emotional adjustment following the breakup," (e) "How long were you upset after the breakup," and (f) "How long did the breakup disrupt your typical, everyday functioning and routine?" Participants responded to these three items on 8-point scales, ranging from *no time at all* (1) to *more than 2 months* (8). All six items were then aggregated to form a single, more reliable index (Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$). Higher scores indicated greater distress.

Additional items. Participants also answered two additional questions: "When (during the 6-month period) did you stop dating this person," and "Who initiated the breakup: you, both you and your partner, or your partner?"

Results

Phase 1

Construction of Attachment Indexes

To construct continuous measures of each attachment style, the items corresponding to each vignette were identified, keyed in the proper direction, and aggregated to form three continuous attachment indexes. The Secure Attachment Style Index was constructed by aggregating Items a through e (Cronbach's $\alpha = .51$). Higher scores reflected greater security. The Avoidant Attachment Style Index was developed by aggregating Items f through i (Cronbach's $\alpha = .79$). Higher scores indicated greater avoidance. The Anxious Attachment Style Index was created by aggregating Items j through m. Higher scores reflected greater anxiousness (Cronbach's $\alpha = .59$).²

Relations Among Attachment Indexes

All three indexes were then correlated both within and between men and women. As reported in Table 1, within each sex, scores on the Secure Attachment Style Index were somewhat negatively correlated with those on the Anxious Attachment Style Index, indicating that greater security was associated with slightly less anxiousness. Scores on the secure index were very

negatively correlated with those on the avoidant index, so that greater security was indicative of less avoidance. For men, there was no relation between scores on the avoidant and anxious indexes. For women, however, a slight positive relation emerged between these two styles, so that women who possessed an avoidant style tended to be somewhat more anxious.

At the level of the dyad, two statistically reliable effects emerged. Men who scored higher on the anxious attachment index were involved with female dating partners who scored somewhat lower on the secure index. Moreover, men who scored higher on the avoidant index were dating women who scored somewhat higher on the anxious index. Two marginally reliable effects also emerged: Women who scored higher on the secure index were dating men who scored lower on the avoidant index, and women who scored lower on the anxious index were dating men who scored higher on the secure index. By and large, the dyadic effects were relatively small in magnitude.

Attachment and Relationship Indexes: Individual-Level Analyses

Because the measures designed to assess interdependence, commitment, and trust correlated highly within each domain, composite indexes were constructed to provide more reliable estimates of the strength of association between each domain and the three attachment styles. Once all scales were keyed in the proper direction, each measure was transformed into a common metric (through z-score transformation) within the sexes. Measures designed to tap each domain were then aggregated to form more reliable, composite indexes of each dimension. As reported in Table 2, correlations between these composite indexes and the three attachment styles revealed that people who scored higher on the secure attachment index indicated that they were involved in relationships characterized by greater interdependence (reflected in greater love for, dependency on, and self-disclosure with the partner), greater commitment (evidenced by greater commitment to and investment in the relationship), greater trust (reflected in the greater predictability of, dependability of, and faith in the partner and in lower levels of insecurity in the relationship), and greater satisfaction. Conversely, people who scored higher on the avoidant index reported that they were involved in relationships defined by lesser amounts of interdependence, commitment, trust, and satisfaction.

Men who scored higher on the anxious index indicated that

² Factor analyses also were performed on all 13 attachment items. Within both men and women, two factors emerged. The first factor appeared to tap a *secure-avoidant* dimension. The second factor appeared to tap an *anxious-nonanxious* dimension. Given that the general pattern of findings did not differ depending on whether two or three attachment styles were examined (see footnote 3) and in view of strong theoretical reasons for attempting to identify three distinct attachment styles, results are reported for all three attachment indexes. Note, however, that the secure and anxious indexes were somewhat less reliable than was the avoidant one. Because scales that possess lower reliabilities yield more attenuated effects, all comparisons of effect sizes between the three attachment indexes must be made bearing their differential reliabilities in mind.

Table 1
*Pearson Product-Moment Correlations
for Three Attachment Styles*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. MSEC	—	-.32	-.66	.12	-.14	-.05
2. MANX		—	.11	-.17	.09	.13
3. MAVD			—	-.14	.18	.10
4. FSEC				—	-.30	-.65
5. FANX					—	.24
6. FAVD						—

Note. $n = 144$ women and $n = 144$ men. Data is presented for correlations within each sex and within the dyads. Critical value at $\alpha = .05$ is .17 (two-tailed). MSEC = secure attachment style: men; MANX = anxious attachment style: men; MAVD = avoidant attachment style: men; FSEC = secure attachment style: women; FANX = anxious attachment style: women; FAVD = avoidant attachment style: women.

they were involved in relationships characterized by less trust and less satisfaction. Effects for interdependence and commitment were marginally significant. Women who scored higher on the anxious index reported being involved in relationships defined by less commitment and less trust. Effects for interdependence and satisfaction, although in the anticipated direction, were not reliable. Zero-order correlations between the three attachment styles and the specific measures used to assess interdependence, commitment, and trust corroborate these findings.

To ensure that these results were not attributable to systematic differences in length of relationship, relationship length was partialled out of all correlations between the three styles and the four composite indexes. All significant effects reported

in Table 2 continued to be reliable once relationship length was controlled for.

Attachment and Relationship Indexes: Dyad-Level Analyses

An examination of dyadic effects (i.e., correlating each male's attachment style scores with his female partner's standing on each indicator of interdependence, commitment, trust, and satisfaction and vice versa) revealed several reliable within-dyad effects. As displayed in Table 3, men who scored higher on the secure index tended to be involved with female partners who were less insecure. Men who scored higher on the anxious index tended to be dating women who reported less interdependence and less commitment. And men who scored higher on the avoidant index tended to be dating women who reported less trust, greater insecurity, and less satisfaction.

As presented in Table 4, women who scored higher on the secure index were dating men who reported greater commitment to the relationship and less insecurity in the relationship. Women who scored higher on the anxious index were involved with men who reported less interdependence, less commitment, and less satisfaction. And women who scored higher on the avoidant index were dating men who reported less commitment, less trust, and greater insecurity.

Attachment and Frequency of Emotion: Individual-Level Analyses

To assess the emotional nature of the relationships of people who exhibited secure, anxious, and avoidant attachment styles, four composite subscales representing each of the four emotion

Table 2
*Pearson Product-Moment Correlations Between Attachment Styles and Indicators
of Interdependence, Commitment, Trust, and Satisfaction*

Variable	Attachment style					
	Men			Women		
	Secure	Anxious	Avoidant	Secure	Anxious	Avoidant
Interdependence measure						
Love	.22***	-.12	-.22***	.28****	-.07	-.28****
Dependency	.26***	-.14*	-.28****	.22***	-.05	-.30****
Self-Disclosure	.20**	-.15*	-.16*	.19**	-.21**	-.17**
Composite index	.26***	-.15*	-.25***	.27***	-.11	-.29****
Commitment measure						
Commitment	.15*	-.15*	-.23***	.25***	-.21**	-.31****
Investment	.12	-.12	-.16*	.26***	-.23***	-.27***
Composite index	.15*	-.15*	-.19**	.27***	-.23***	-.30****
Trust measure						
Predictability	.38****	-.27****	-.22**	.28****	-.25***	-.19**
Dependability	.24***	-.27****	-.28****	.23***	-.27***	-.23***
Faith	.24***	-.25***	-.26***	.31****	-.36****	-.28****
Insecurity	-.37****	.48****	.25***	-.35****	.54****	.37****
Composite index	.38****	-.40****	-.31****	.37****	-.45****	-.34****
Satisfaction measure	.23***	-.23***	-.20**	.29****	-.09	-.27***

Note. $n = 144$ men and $n = 144$ women. All correlations are two-tailed.

* $p < .10$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$. **** $p < .001$.

Table 3
Pearson Product-Moment Correlations Between Men's Attachment Styles and Indicators of Interdependence, Commitment, Trust, and Satisfaction Reported by Their Female Partner

Variable	Attachment style		
	Secure	Anxious	Avoidant
Interdependence measure			
Love	.07	-.20**	-.10
Dependency	.06	-.20**	-.08
Self-Disclosure	.07	-.09	-.06
Composite index	.07	-.20**	-.09
Commitment measure			
Commitment	.05	-.19**	-.13
Investment	-.03	-.17**	-.06
Composite index	.02	-.19**	-.10
Trust measure			
Predictability	.09	-.12	-.16*
Dependability	.09	-.01	-.13
Faith	.11	-.09	-.15*
Insecurity	-.20**	-.01	.34****
Composite index	.16*	-.07	-.25***
Satisfaction measure	.14*	-.03	-.23***

Note. $n = 144$. All correlations are two-tailed.

* $p < .10$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$. **** $p < .001$.

quadrants were constructed. The composite subscale reflecting the extent of intense positive emotion was constructed by aggregating the seven items designed to tap this quadrant. Composite subscales assessing the extent of emotion evident in the other three quadrants were constructed in a similar manner. All four subscales were reliable (all Cronbach's alphas $> .79$). The four subscales were then correlated with each attachment style index. Results are displayed in Table 5.

People who scored higher on the secure index reported experiencing reliably less intense negative emotion, less mild negative emotion, more intense positive emotion, and more mild positive emotion. The effect for intense negative emotion among women was marginally reliable. People who scored higher on the avoidant and anxious indexes reported experiencing reliably more intense negative emotion, more mild negative emotion, less intense positive emotion, and less mild positive emotion. When length of relationship was partialled out of the correlations between the three attachment indexes and the four emotion subscales, all significant effects reported in Table 5 remained reliable.

Attachment and Frequency of Emotion: Dyad-Level Analyses

An examination of dyadic effects (i.e., correlating each male's attachment style scores with his female partner's scores on each composite emotion subscale and vice versa) revealed several reliable within-dyad effects. As displayed in Table 6, men who scored higher on the secure index tended to be dating female partners who reported experiencing more frequent mild positive emotions in the relationship. Men scoring higher on the anxious index tended to be involved with women who experi-

Table 4
Pearson Product-Moment Correlations Between Women's Attachment Styles and Indicators of Interdependence, Commitment, Trust, and Satisfaction Reported by Their Male Partner

Variable	Attachment style		
	Secure	Anxious	Avoidant
Interdependence measure			
Love	.05	-.29****	-.14*
Dependency	.15*	-.35****	-.10
Self-Disclosure	.01	-.22***	-.03
Composite index	.07	-.32****	-.09
Commitment measure			
Commitment	.20**	-.32****	-.22***
Investment	.13	-.29****	-.16*
Composite index	.19**	-.32****	-.22***
Trust measure			
Predictability	.15*	-.19**	-.19**
Dependability	.04	-.14*	-.11
Faith	.00	-.16*	-.09
Insecurity	-.23***	.04	.23***
Composite index	.13	-.16*	-.19**
Satisfaction measure	.09	-.30****	-.11

Note. $n = 144$. All correlations are two tailed.

* $p < .10$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$. **** $p < .001$.

enced intense positive emotions less regularly. And those scoring higher on the avoidant index were involved with women who experienced mild positive emotions less often.

Table 7 reveals that women who scored higher on the secure index were dating men who reported more frequent intense positive emotion in the relationship. Those scoring higher on the anxious index were involved with men who experienced intense positive and mild positive emotions less frequently.³

³ The effects reported in Tables 2–7 could be attributable to the use of three continuous attachment measures, rather than a single categorical one, in which people place themselves into one of three mutually exclusive attachment categories. To examine this possibility, a parallel set of analyses were conducted. Specifically, all three continuous measures of attachment were standardized (through z-score transformations) within each sex. Each individual then was placed into a single attachment category on the basis of their highest standardized score on the three continuous attachment indexes. A series of one-way analyses of variance (treating attachment category as the independent variable and the four composite measures of relationship quality and the four composite subscales of emotion as the dependent measures) was conducted within each sex. The pattern of findings and magnitude of effects closely corresponded to those reported for the three continuous measures. Scheffé tests (Kirk, 1982) conducted on each dependent measure confirmed the reliability of these findings. These effects, therefore, are not specific to the use of three continuous measures of attachment. Given the factor analytic results reported in footnote 2, a set of two-dimensional analyses paralleling the three-dimensional ones also were conducted. In particular, each of the 13 attachment items that loaded highly on the first factor (the 5 secure and 4 avoidant ones) were keyed in the same direction and were aggregated to form the first dimension (reflecting level of security/lack of avoidance). Following this, each of the 13 attachment items that loaded highly on the second factor (the 4 anxious items) were aggregated to form the second

Table 5
Pearson Product-Moment Correlations Between Attachment Styles and Emotions

Emotion	Attachment style					
	Men			Women		
	Secure	Anxious	Avoidant	Secure	Anxious	Avoidant
Intense Positive Composite subscale	.31****	-.21**	-.32****	.46****	-.21**	-.32****
Mild Positive Composite subscale	.31****	-.31****	-.22***	.44****	-.44****	-.41****
Intense Negative Composite subscale	-.19**	.30****	.20**	-.15*	.26***	.23***
Mild Negative Composite subscale	-.33****	.37****	.28****	-.22***	.39****	.28****

Note. $n = 144$ women and $n = 144$ men. All correlations are two-tailed.

* $p < .10$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$. **** $p < .001$.

Phase 2

Emotional Distress Following Dissolution

To determine the relations between the three attachment styles and the extent of emotional distress experienced after relationship dissolution, each style was correlated with scores on the Intensity and Duration of Emotional Distress Index. Men who scored higher on the avoidant index experienced significantly less emotional distress following dissolution, $r(46) = -.33$, $p < .02$. Neither the secure nor the anxious style was reliably correlated with the index of emotional distress both $rs(46) < .06$, *ns*. No reliable effects emerged for women, all $rs(46) < .14$, *ns*. Internal analyses correcting for attenuation that was due to unreliability of the measures revealed that none of these null results were attributable to the unreliability of either the emotional distress or attachment indexes. A test for independent correlations (Cohen & Cohen, 1983) revealed that the correlation between emotional distress and the avoidant style was reliably larger for men ($r = -.33$) than for women ($r = .08$), $z = 2.01$, $p < .05$.

Highly avoidant men might experience less emotional distress because they tend to be involved in short-term dating relationships characterized by lower amounts of interdependence, commitment, trust, and satisfaction. Yet when the effects of the length of their relationship and their scores on the composite indexes of interdependence, commitment, trust, and satisfaction were simultaneously partialled out, a reliable relation still existed between the avoidant and emotional distress indexes, $r(46) = -.34$, $p < .03$.

People's scores on the Intensity and Duration of Emotional Distress Index were not reliably associated with either when they stopped dating the partner during the 6-month period, for both sexes, $t(46) < 1$, *ns*, or who initiated the breakup, for both sexes, $F(1, 44) < 2.5$, *ns*. Furthermore, men and women did not differ in the amount of emotional distress experienced follow-

ing dissolution, $M_s = 24.77$ and 25.02 , respectively), $t(94) < 1$, *ns*.

Discussion

On the basis of derivations of attachment theory, three hypotheses concerning the relations between adult attachment styles and phenomena occurring within romantic relationships were examined. Individual-level analyses revealed that secure, anxious, and avoidant attachment styles tend to be associated with romantic relationships that differ in their qualitative nature. People who exhibit a secure attachment style tend to be involved in relationships characterized by higher levels of interdependence, trust, commitment, and satisfaction. Those who exhibit insecure styles—particularly highly avoidant people—tend to have relationships defined by the opposite set of features. Moreover, the three attachment styles are strongly associated with different patterns of emotional experience within relationships. People who manifest a secure style have relationships characterized by more frequent occurrences of positive emotion and less frequent occurrences of negative emotion, whereas those who display anxious and avoidant styles experience the opposite pattern. Among men, the avoidant style reliably predicts the strength of emotional distress experienced after relationship dissolution. Specifically, highly avoidant men tend to experience less prolonged and intense emotional distress following relationship termination.

Table 6
Pearson Product-Moment Correlations Between Men's Attachment Styles and Emotions Reported by Their Female Partner

Emotion	Attachment style		
	Secure	Anxious	Avoidant
Intense Positive Composite subscale	.14*	-.25****	-.10
Mild Positive Composite subscale	.22****	-.12	-.23***
Intense Negative Composite subscale	-.09	-.02	.05
Mild Negative Composite subscale	-.12	.00	.08

Note. $n = 144$. All correlations are two-tailed.

* $p < .10$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$. **** $p < .001$.

dimension (reflecting level of anxiousness). Analyses revealed that the pattern and magnitude of effects for the two-dimensional analyses were highly similar to those found using the three continuous attachment measures across all dependent measures. Hence, these effects are not specific to the use of three versus two attachment dimensions.

Table 7
*Pearson Product-Moment Correlations Between
 Women's Attachment Styles and Emotions
 Reported by Their Male Partner*

Emotion	Attachment style		
	Secure	Anxious	Avoidant
Intense Positive Composite subscale	.19**	-.35****	-.15*
Mild Positive Composite subscale	.10	-.26***	-.12
Intense Negative Composite subscale	-.08	.16*	.11
Mild Negative Composite subscale	-.08	.10	.15*

Note. $n = 144$. All correlations are two-tailed.

* $p < .10$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$. **** $p < .001$.

Dyadic effects were less robust than were individual-level ones. Although these findings may reflect the fact that within-individual measures shared common method variance that was not shared by the within-dyad measures, they probably indicate that an individual's attachment style has less impact on the partner's perceptions of the relationship than it has on his or her own perceptions. This pattern of results is not surprising given that the quality and emotional tenor of relationships should be more strongly and directly influenced by one's own attachment style rather than the style adopted by one's partner.

How does this investigation contribute to our understanding of attachment phenomena within adult romantic relationships? The relationship quality findings clarify and extend those of Collins and Read (1990), who found similar associations between the three attachment styles and measures of trust and satisfaction. The interdependence and commitment results extend our knowledge concerning what other critical indicators of relationship functioning reliably covary with the three styles. The frequency of emotion findings transport the study of adult romantic attachment into a new domain, one more closely linked to recent conceptualizations of attachment as a system governing affect regulation in relationships (Sroufe & Waters, 1977). Finally, the emotional distress results address one of the most fundamental predictions stemming from attachment theory.

One salient issue in the adult attachment literature concerns whether individual differences in attachment style are traitlike in nature or whether they reflect unique person-situation interactions. Attachment researchers have discussed the three styles interchangeably, sometimes using them to describe features of people and other times using them to characterize features of relationships (cf. Hazan & Shaver, 1987). If the three styles primarily stem from unique person-situation interactions, however, one would expect certain styles to correlate highly with one another within couples. Over time, for example, highly avoidant people ought to elicit anxious propensities from their romantic partner and vice versa. Within-dyad correlations did reveal that women who were anxious were dating more avoidant men, and men who were anxious were involved with less secure women. These effects, however, were small in magnitude. More important, they did not increase significantly in size with relationship length. Considered together, these findings suggest that individual differences in attachment style,

although not impervious to change (see Main et al., 1985), are not highly contingent on the specific style displayed by current romantic partners.

Attachment Styles and Relationship Quality

People who possessed avoidant and anxious attachment styles reported being involved in a relationship characterized by less interdependence, trust, commitment, and satisfaction. Closer examination of these effects, however, revealed an interesting trend. Highly avoidant people reported their relationship was somewhat less interdependent and committed than did highly anxious people, whereas highly anxious people reported their relationship contained somewhat less trust. This pattern of results corroborates previous research (e.g., Collins & Read, 1990; Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987), which has shown that avoidant people tend to be preeminently concerned about avoiding excessive intimacy and commitment in relationships and that anxious people tend to be extremely preoccupied with issues surrounding their partner's predictability, dependability, and trustworthiness.

Interestingly, within-dyad results revealed an opposite pattern of effects. The anxious style was associated with somewhat less partner-reported interdependence and commitment, whereas the avoidant style was associated with less partner-reported trust. Given the correlational nature of this investigation, the precise origins of these effects cannot be determined. Highly anxious people, for instance, may have partners who report less interdependence and commitment for several different reasons, including that their anxious behavior reduces their partner's level of interdependence/commitment, their partner's lack of interdependence/commitment has made them anxious, or they habitually become involved with partners who are less able or willing to develop close, committed involvements. Nonetheless, the specific causal pathways may be different for anxious and avoidant people. By eschewing closeness and commitment, highly avoidant people may produce heightened distrust in their romantic partner. Conversely, by displaying a general lack of trust, highly anxious people may generate decreased closeness and commitment from their partner.

Within-dyad results also revealed one reliable sex difference. Men's standing on the anxious style did not covary with their female partner's level of satisfaction with the relationship, whereas women's standing on the anxious style was negatively correlated with their male partner's degree of satisfaction. This finding replicates the work of Collins and Read (1990), who revealed that the extent of anxious attachment displayed by women assumes a greater role in affecting global satisfaction within relationships. This finding also is in accord with research indicating that female possessiveness tends to be negatively associated with male satisfaction, but male possessiveness does not tend to be associated with female satisfaction (Davis & Oathout, 1987). Future research must determine whether the behavior of anxious women elicits lower satisfaction in their male partner, whether their partner's lower satisfaction generates their anxious behavior, or whether additional variables account for these relations.

Attachment Styles and Emotionality

The frequency of emotion effects reported in Phase 1 were fairly large, particularly given the modest reliability of the measures. Some investigators (e.g., Sroufe & Waters, 1977) have suggested that attachment theory should be viewed more globally as a theory of affect regulation. According to this perspective, different styles of attachment may reflect different patterns of *ego resilience*, or the ability to effectively regulate and mitigate negative affect when it arises in established relationships (see Block & Block, 1980).

Given their mental models of others as being predominantly well-intentioned, reliable, and trustworthy (Collins & Read, 1990; Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987), securely attached people should be predisposed to cope more effectively with negative affect in relationships than should their insecurely attached counterparts. They also should be more adept at translating negative affect into positive affect (Bowlby, 1973), perhaps through selective or biased attributional processes that allow them to habitually perceive and interpret stressful events in a positive, relationship-enhancing manner (Harvey, Wells, & Alvarez, 1978). Recent research suggests that secure people do tend to have more affectively positive and well-adjusted relationships, in relation to avoidant and anxious ones (Kobak & Sceery, 1988). Secure people are described by their peers as being more ego resilient, less anxious, and less hostile. Avoidant people, on the other hand, are described as less ego resilient and more hostile, and anxious people tend to be characterized as less ego resilient and more anxious. Furthermore, within romantic relationships, the secure style tends to be associated with more adaptive styles of love (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1989; Levy & Davis, 1988) as well as greater self-esteem, greater self-confidence, and less anxiety (Feeney & Noller, 1990).

Within-dyad correlations revealed that the three attachment styles tended to covary more strongly with how frequently partners experienced positive rather than negative emotions in the relationship. Among both men and women, for instance, higher scores on the anxious style were reliably associated with less frequent, intense positive emotion as reported by the partner. Although not definitive, these findings seem to suggest that the absence of positive emotion, and not necessarily the presence of negative emotion, may serve as one principle source of discontent underlying the relationships of anxiously attached people. Future research must examine how positive and negative emotions differentially affect the quality of ongoing relationships.

Attachment Styles and Postdissolution Emotional Distress

Highly avoidant men reported experiencing significantly less postdissolution distress. Such an effect, however, was not witnessed for women. One explanation for this disparate pattern of results stems from research on sex differences in emotion during interpersonal conflict. Men tend to be more conflict avoidant and to typically suppress strong emotions, whereas women tend to be more conflict confronting and to openly vent strong emotions (Gottman & Levenson, 1988; Kelley et al., 1978; Peplau, 1983). Given the tendency of avoidant people to

defensively inhibit negative emotional experiences (George, Kaplan, & Main, 1985; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Main et al., 1985) coupled with the tendency of men to typically suppress strong affect, highly avoidant men should experience less postdissolution distress. For avoidant women, however, the inclination to suppress negative emotional events (George et al., 1985; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Main et al., 1985) should be at odds with the propensity on the part of women to express strong affect. This scenario may account for the lack of relation between the avoidant attachment style and the extent of postdissolution distress within women.⁴

For men, the avoidant attachment style continued to reliably predict the degree of emotional distress even when measures of relationship length and quality were controlled for. Thus, the lack of emotional distress experienced by avoidant men appears to stem from their attachment style per se, rather than from the less desirable qualities of their romantic involvements. This finding is noteworthy because it provides additional evidence that the nature of an individual's attachment style is not merely a function of the quality of their most recent romantic relationship.

Caveats

Several caveats must be considered when interpreting these findings. First, these results may be limited to recently formed dating relationships. Second, although sound theoretical reasons exist for hypothesizing that attachment styles may directly affect the quality and emotional tenor of relationships, these correlational data do not permit causal inferences. Third, despite the fact that compelling psychometric reasons exist for treating attachment styles as continuous dimensions and despite the fact that virtually identical findings emerged regardless of whether attachment styles were treated as discrete or continuous measures, we do not propose that the concept and use of discrete attachment categories be abandoned. Finally, attachment styles have been conceptualized and discussed as possessing relatively stable, traitlike qualities. Nevertheless, the attachment style an individual exhibits in a given relationship may be contingent on their own relationship history in conjunction with the style possessed by their current romantic partner. Although this argument is a plausible one, this investigation revealed that partners' scores on the three attachment indexes were predominantly orthogonal. Moreover, even though people can experience changes in attachment style over time and across generations within families (Main et al., 1985), they often appear to adopt the same style in different relationships

⁴ On the face of it, the avoidant style appears to parallel the tendency of men to suppress emotions, whereas the anxious style appears to parallel the proclivity of women to more openly express them. If this argument is viable, one might suggest that anxious women ought to experience reliably more postdissolution distress than other people. However, at least three different factors are likely to systematically influence the amount of distress experienced: attachment style, gender, and the quality of the former relationship. Because anxious women tend to be involved in relationships characterized by less desirable qualities, one should not necessarily expect them to be overly distraught following relationship dissolution.

(Hindy & Schwartz, 1984). Future research must track people longitudinally to unequivocally establish whether attachment styles remain stable across several relationships.

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