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Section 01

**Self-Reported Attachment Styles as Relates to Romantic Partner Preference, Relational Maintenance Behaviors, and Overall Relational Satisfaction**

**Introduction**

Finding a romantic partner and establishing a committed, close, and intimate relationship with them could be one of the most important, yet simultaneously difficult, developmental tasks of early adulthood. In addition, acquisition of a romantic partner and the maintenance of that relationship is a very important predictor of emotional well being and overall life satisfaction (Collins, Cooper, Albino, and Allard, 2002, p. 966).

Media portrayals of love sometimes make it seem as though love is easily attained and maintained, however, real world consensus of collegiate romantic relationships tends to contradict this laid back, laissez faire perception of love and acquisition of a romantic partner. Why is it so difficult to find a successful, committed, romantic relationship during early adulthood, and throughout life for that matter? What are the predictors of a relationship’s success? What is the key, if any, to successful pairing of romantic dyads?

The purpose of this study will be to understand the relationship between self-reported attachment styles as they relate, and possibly predict, romantic partner preference, use/disuse of relational maintenance behaviors, and overall relational satisfaction for undergraduate males and females aged 18-22 at Longwood University.

This prospectus will address the theoretical grounding required for such a study on attachment styles and their effects on romantic partner preference, relational maintenance, and overall relational satisfaction. Furthermore, it will extensively review literature pertinent to understanding the communication phenomenon being addressed, and finally it will propose a methodology for conducting this study.

**Importance of Studying Attachment and Romantic Relationships**

As mentioned, finding a romantic partner and maintaining a committed, close, and intimate relationship with that partner can be one of the most difficult developmental tasks of early adulthood. Also mentioned was that the success or failure of accomplishing this romantic acquisition can have significant consequences later in life. Therefore, gaining insight as researchers into the different factors and processes that affect this partner choice and the use/disuse of maintenance behaviors is of great interest and value.

Over the past 60 years, many researchers have studied the criteria by which individuals choose their romantic partners. Some of these criteria include physical attractiveness, similarity in interests and values, proxemics, and reciprocation (Holmes & Johnson, 2009, p. 834). Ever since Hazan and Shaver extended Bowlby’s work to encompass romantic relationships, attachment styles have become a criterion of interest for researchers conducting studies in this field of interest.

Specifically, this study will analyze through analysis of variables the effect that different attachment styles have on three dependent variables: romantic partner preference, use/disuse of relational maintenance behaviors, and overall relational satisfaction. More importantly, this study will focus solely on collegiate males and females aged 18-22, an important missing cohort in the current research on attachment styles and romantic relationships.

**Theoretical Grounding**

Bowlby’s Attachment theory provides the theoretical framework from which we can begin to understand the answers to some of the questions that arise from examining the impact attachment styles have on partner preference, maintenance behaviors, and relational satisfaction. Although Bowlby was primarily focused on understanding the nature of the infant-caregiver relationship, he believed that attachment characterized human experience from “the cradle to the grave” (Fraley, 2004). It was not until the mid-1980's, however, that researchers began to take seriously the possibility that attachment processes may play out in adulthood. Hazan and Shaver (1987) were two of the first researchers to explore Bowlby's ideas in the context of romantic relationships” (Fraley, 2004).

Bowlby believed that parents and primary caregivers communicate with infants through attachment styles: These are “patterns of care giving that teach us who we and others are and how to approach relationships” (Wood, 2007, p. 50). Bowlby believed that we learn our attachment styles in our earliest relationships with care givers, typically the infant’s mother. This attachment is particularly important as it forms the expectations for later relationships and can maintain throughout the duration of the infant’s lifespan (Wood, 2007, p. 50-52).

A key concept of Bowlby’s theory focuses on internal working models. As Holmes (2009) describes, “The developing child builds up a set of models of the self and others, based on repeated patterns of interactive experience. These basic assumptions, representations of interactions that have been generalized, role relationship models, and self-other schemata, form relatively fixed representational models which the child uses to predict and relate to the world” (p. 78).

Originally Bowlby posited two attachments; secure and insecure. Since his original work much research has been done in the area of attachment, and there are now four universally agreed upon attachment styles. According to Wood, they include secure (positive view of self/positive view of others), dismissive/avoidant (positive view of self/negative view of others), anxious/ambivalent (negative view of self/positive view of others), and finally fearful/disorganized (negative view of self/negative view of others) (2010, p. 51).

All attachment styles have implications in the context of romantic relationships, particularly romantic partner preference, maintenance behaviors, and overall relational satisfaction.

In reference to how an individual’s attachment style may affect his/her romantic partner preference, Holmes and Johnson (2009) have identified three hypotheses: They are attachment similarity hypothesis, attachment complimentarity hypothesis, and attachment-security hypothesis (p. 836). In order of reference, this means that an individual chooses a romantic partner with a similar attachment style (ex: anxious ambivalent chooses anxious ambivalent), complimentary attachment style (ex: avoidant/dismissive chooses anxious ambivalent), or someone who has a secure attachment style (ex: anxious ambivalent chooses secure).

**Review of Literature**

**Attachment Style as a Predictor of Romantic Partner Preference**

Many scholars have studied the role that attachment plays in romantic partner preference. This is an important aspect of this communication phenomenon to study, as research in this area provides insight into the verification of either the similarity, complimentarity, or security-attachment hypotheses regarding partner preference and its relation to attachment style.

Collins, Cooper, Albino, and Allard (2002) conducted a longitudinal study aimed at, among other things, predicting whether attachment relates to romantic partner preference. The results found that as predicted insecure attachment is a risk factor for detrimental relationships in the future. More importantly, avoidants, the only attachment category with a strong statistical correlation, were involved with similar partners who had less secure attachments, seemingly supporting the similarity-attraction hypothesis. “These findings are consistent with the idea that insecure attachment may have indirect effects on relationship outcomes by leading individuals to select partners who, because of their own personality vulnerabilities, are less able to provide a secure base of love and support” (p. 1003).

**Attachment Style as a Predictor of Relationship Maintenance Behaviors**

In addition to studying attachment style’s affect on romantic partner preference, many other scholars have focused their research on understanding how attachment affects the relationship maintenance behaviors of a romantic dyad.

Yum and Li (2007) found in a study examining attachment styles and maintenance strategies across cultures that regardless of culture, those with secure attachments report greater use of self-perceived and partner received relationship maintenance strategies than other non-secure respondents (p. 82). Furthermore, secures were found to be more engaged in pro-social maintenance behaviors than other non-secure respondents (p. 83).

Tran and Simpson (2009) found, in a study of the roles of attachment and commitment on pro-relationship behaviors, that individuals involved with anxious partners reported higher frequencies of destructive relational behaviors (p. 699). They found that emotional reactions primarily determined the connection between anxiety and accommodative behaviors on the part of the respondent, therefore, the higher the level of commitment, the more positive emotions reported, thus pro-relational behaviors exhibited in the romantic dyad (p. 699).

Collins, Cooper, Albino, and Allard (2002) in their study of attachment style differences in relationship functioning and partner choice found that both partners involved in avoidant, romantic dyads engaged in fewer positive relationship maintenance behaviors, reporting less effective problem solving ability and greater romantic conflict (p. 982).

Dainton and Stafford (2000), in a study aimed at predicting the factors that contribute to a romantic dyad’s use or disuse of Stafford and Canary’s maintenance strategies, found that satisfaction and commitment were moderate predictors of the use of particular maintenance strategies however; the romantic partner’s use of the same maintenance strategy was the strongest predictor of relationship maintenance strategy choice (p. 177). This suggests reciprocity as the primary reason for selecting what maintenance strategies to use in a romantic dyad.

Other predictors of relational maintenance behaviors are equity and uncertainty. Dainton (2003) found that inequity and uncertainty were negatively related to overall use of Stafford and Canary’s seven maintenance strategies. Although both are strong predictors, uncertainty was found to be the stronger predictor of relational maintenance behaviors (Dainton, 2003, p. 176).

Sometimes hurtful messages are used in dyadic interactions as a detrimental maintenance strategy. Dailey and Le Poire (2003) in a study of the relationship between hurtful messages (HM’s) and partner attachment found that there is not a finite relationship between the two, as internal working models of the self can still affect the interpretation of HM’s as well as change and modify the original partner’s attachment (Dailey & Le Poire, 2003, p. 17).

Interestingly enough, the more secure an individual, the fewer HM’s they would receive, however, the hurt they reported from participating in conflict or receiving a hurtful message were much higher than other preoccupied and dismissive respondents. On the other hand, preoccupieds and dismissive-avoidants reported higher frequency of hurtful messages in dyadic interaction than secures, however correlation between this cohort and degree of hurt was negative. Dismissive avoidants seem to be least affected by HM’s as they may have developed necessary strategies of distancing themselves from harm or emotional hurt (Dailey & Le Poire, 2003, p. 17).

**Attachment Style as a Predictor of Relational Satisfaction**

Finally, many communication scholars have utilized relational satisfaction as a dependent variable in their studies on attachment styles. In fact, Collins, Cooper, Albino, and Allard (2002) found in their study of attachment style differences in relationship functioning and partner choice that avoidants were involved in less satisfying relationships than more secure attachment styles (p. 987).

In Dainton’s (2003) study of equity and uncertainty in relational maintenance the researcher found that both affect relational satisfaction. The results found that although both equity and uncertainty were moderate predictors of relationship satisfaction, uncertainty is the stronger predictor of the two (p. 176).

Yum and Li (2007) in their cross-cultural study of attachment styles, maintenance strategies, and relational quality found that overall secures report much higher degrees of overall relationship quality than their non-secure counterparts (p.83).

Overall, the findings of all of these studies suggest that although many factors influence and predict relational satisfaction, having a secure attachment is certainly preferred over a non-secure attachment when it comes to self-reported relational satisfaction and quality.

To briefly conclude the research addressed, there seems to be evidence supporting the similarity-attraction hypothesis, when referencing romantic partner preference. Furthermore, there seems to be a continuum on which the more secure attachment styles tend to enact more positive relational maintenance behaviors in their romantic dyads, while more insecure attachments tend to enact detrimental relational maintenance behaviors. Furthermore, a similar continuum can be seen in relation to secure attachment being correlated with higher reported ratings of relational satisfaction, while insecure attachment tends to be correlated with lower reported ratings of relational satisfaction and higher ratings of relational conflict. This study will aim to support the hypotheses derived from the review of literature, however in the cohort of collegiate undergraduates aged 18-22, as no research has been done in this area. Rather, research on attachment style and romantic relationships has typically utilized adults in long-term, committed, romantic dyads as study participants.

**Methodology**

I will be using a quantitative methodology as this approach will best generalize how individuals use understanding of their own attachment style to choose and interact with their romantic partners. I want to be able to predict particular outcomes, and the relationships between different variables such as attachment style and romantic partner preference, use/disuse of relational maintenance behaviors, and relational satisfaction. I will be able to accomplish this most effectively through surveys and analysis of variables (ANOVA) as I will be able to identify the different participants’ attachment styles using Hazan and Shaver’s categorical measure; a survey instrument. Furthermore, I will be able to ascertain what relational maintenance behaviors the participants enact, whether or not they are currently in a romantic relationship, their overall relational satisfaction, and other relevant information that would not be adequately recorded using other methods of observation. It is because of these reasons that a quantitative methodology will best serve my purposes in this study of self-reported attachment styles.

H1: *Individuals will choose hypothetical romantic partners that have the same attachment styles as the original partner.*

This hypothesis will provide information regarding the support, or lack thereof, of the similarity attraction hypothesis for undergraduate males and females aged 18-22.

H2: *Those individuals with secure attachment styles will report higher use of overall relational maintenance behaviors than those individuals with insecure attachment styles.*

This hypothesis will provide information regarding whether or not undergraduate males and females aged 18-22 with secure attachment styles report more frequent use of relational maintenance behaviors.

H3: *Those individuals with an anxious attachment style will report higher frequencies of destructional relational maintenance behaviors.*

This hypothesis will provide information regarding whether undergraduate males and females aged 18-22 with anxious attachment style report higher frequencies of destructive relational maintenance behaviors.

H4: *Those individuals with an avoidant attachment style will report fewer positive relational maintenance behaviors.*

This hypothesis will provide information regarding whether undergraduate males and females aged 18-22 with an avoidant attachment style report fewer positive relational maintenance behaviors.

H5: *Those individuals with secure attachment styles will report higher ratings of relational satisfaction and quality than those individuals with insecure attachment styles.*

This hypothesis will provide information regarding whether undergraduate males and females aged 18-22 with secure attachment styles report higher ratings of overall relational satisfaction: that is how happy they are in their relationship.

**Sampling**

For this study I intend to research undergraduate males and females aged 18-22 who either have a romantic partner, or have had a romantic partner in the past year. The sampling methods I will be possible using for this study include convenience sampling, volunteer sampling, and possibly snowball sampling. These forms of nonprobability sampling will be the most efficient means for conducting my survey analysis.

**Procedure**

In this study I will be using surveys to gather data. According to Keyton (2010) a survey is a system for collecting information in which questions or stimuli statements are offered to participants who then respond to this information so that researchers can collect data that can be used to describe, explain, compare, and analyze different behaviors, attitudes, or communication phenomenon. The main reason behind choosing surveys as my means of data collection is that surveys produce comparable information across numerous people so the data from the nonprobability sampling techniques can be generalized to the overall population from which respondents were originally selected: undergraduate males and females aged 18-22 (Keyton, 2010, p. 161).

The surveys will focus on identification of four independent variables (all four attachment styles) as they relate and possibly predict the three dependent variables of this study: romantic partner preference, use/disuse of relational maintenance behaviors, and overall relational satisfaction. I will be using an ANOVA, analysis of variables, test to determine which independent variables are most statistically correlated with the three dependent variables.

This method is the best approach to finding out whether or not my directional hypotheses are correct or incorrect. The use of Hazan and Shaver’s categorical measure for self-reported attachment style will accurately identify participants attachment orientations, while follow up relational maintenance behavior and satisfaction survey questions will reveal any validity to the hypotheses specifically for the cohort of undergraduate males and females aged 18-22.

**Conclusion**

To conclude, over the past 60 years much research has been done on the criteria by which individuals choose their romantic partners, however investigation into the roles attachment plays in this process have been excluded until recently. This study will be aimed at understanding through analysis of variables the effect that different attachment styles have on three dependent variables: romantic partner preference, relational maintenance behaviors, and overall relational satisfaction.

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**Appendix A**

Survey Question 1:

If given the opportunity to choose a partner with any attachment style, I would choose a partner with (a) a similar attachment style, (b) a complimentary attachment style, or a (c) secure attachment style.

This question will be pivotal in understanding the relationship between attachment styles and romantic partner preference, specifically providing support for either the similarity, complimentarity, or secure attachment hypotheses for undergraduate males and females aged 18-22.

Survey Question 2:

Identify and select one of the following excerpts that best describes how you think, feel, and behave in romantic relationships:

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.

This question is extremely important as it is Hazan and Shaver’s categorical measure for self-reported attachment style, and I will be using this measure to identify participants attachment styles before investigating how they relate to the dependent variables for undergraduate males and females 18-22.