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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this exploratory/descriptive study was to explore the possible

relationship between attachment styles of individuals in romantic relationships during

older adolescents. The research question that guided this research is: Is there an

association between the individual attachment style of each partner in a romantic

relationship?

 A flexible methods approach of data collection, with a standardized data

collection instrument was used to procure the necessary data for this independent

research. The sample of this study was purposive and a snowball strategy was used in

finding participants. The sample consisted of 19 couples (38 individuals); the

inclusionary/exclusionary criteria for the sample being: 1) both partners of the coupled

relationship had to respond to be included in the study, 2) each participant had to be

between the ages of 18-23, and 3) the couple participating had to have been together for

at least three months.

The findings reveal that an overwhelming majority of participants in this study

can be classified as having a secure attachment style, and as a result, the majority of

couples appear to have the same attachment style as their partner.

The findings of this study indicate that further research on the topic of attachment

and couples is needed. Primarily only one attachment style was represented in this study,

which leaves much to be discovered through future research about the dynamics in and among couples with different and differing attachment styles.

  Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) can be useful in virtually every modality of social work practice, as every human has the need to attach, and we all experience life through our attachment styles and relationships. Only through understanding our insecure attachment tendencies may we begin to work to change them.

ATTACHMENT IN OLDER ADOLESCENT ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

A project based upon an independent investigation,
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master Social Worker.

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2007

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is based on the theory of attachment (Bowlby, 1969) and more specifically, how that theory can be applied to better our understanding of coupled relationships. The purpose of this study was to examine whether there is any association between the attachment styles of individuals in older-adolescent romantic relationships, and to that end, the research question was as follows: Is there any association between the individual attachment styles of partners in romantic relationships?

Attachment theory was developed based on the work of Mary Ainsworth (1989) and John Bowlby (1969). By studying the relationships between young children and their primary caregivers, Ainsworth (1989) and Bowlby (1969) were able to categorize those relationships by level and type of attachment. As a result of these early attachment experiences with caregivers, children were found to behave in predictable ways.

Bowlby (1969) and Ainsworth (1989) also found that the attachment styles identified in children are predictors of how they will develop. Based on early interactions with caregivers, children learn quickly what they may expect from relationships, and these expectations and understandings of the world stay with them and mold how they will then form relationships in the future. Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) is considered to be applicable to humans across cultures because the need to attach is seen as a biological rather than purely social function (Bowlby, 1969).

The rest of this document is organized as follows. To provide a context for the study that was carried, the next chapter reviews the literature on attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) and discusses the history of the development of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) in greater depth. Chapter II also discusses how attachment is experienced in human childhood and adulthood as well as in other species. Previous research on the topic of attachment (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991) and related studies are also described and discussed.

Chapter III outlines and explains the methodology used in this study. The design of this study was exploratory/descriptive, and I used a flexible-methods approach of data collection with two standardized data-collection instruments (Anastas, 1999). One was developed by Fraley, Waller and Brennan (2000) and is titled "Experiences in Close Relationships – Revised Questionnaire" (see Appendix C). The other is a Background Information Questionnaire (see Appendix B), which was created by me.

The non-random sample obtained for this study is purposive in nature, and I used a snowball strategy to help locate eligible participants (Anastas, 1999). The sample consisted of 19 couples with the criteria for inclusion as follows: 1) both partners of the coupled relationship had to participate, 2) both participants had to be between the ages of 18-23, and 3) the couple had to have been together for at least three months at the time of study.

The next chapter, Chapter IV, presents the findings of this study. As it indicates the overwhelming majority of participants in this study appear to have a secure attachment style, and as a result, the individuals in this sample at least seem to have similar attachment styles as that of their romantic partners.

Finally, Chapter V concludes this study. In this chapter the findings of this study are compared to the literature reviewed in Chapter II, including a comparison to findings of other studies on this topic. Implications for practice are presented, strengths and limits of the study are outlined, suggestions for future research are offered, and the chapter ends with concluding remarks.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following literature review addresses the topics of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969), attachment styles in adulthood as a result of childhood attachment, and discusses some examples of how a person's individual attachment style can impact their romantic relationships. The literature reviewed here gives background on the theory of attachment and offers some examples of studies already done on attachment styles, romantic relationships and divorce. This will help lay the groundwork for the independent research I have conducted.

It is important to note that attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) can be a useful tool in understanding how and why our relationships develop and function the way they do, and what we bring to our relationships in terms of expectations and behaviors. The classifications of people into different attachment styles can give us a better understanding of ourselves and our relationships, but we must be careful not to over-generalize. Throughout this thesis tendencies and characteristics of each attachment style will be outlined, but it is important to remember that attachment is a spectrum, and the degree to which people experience the tendencies of their classification can vary greatly. The classification of attachment style should not be used to draw specific conclusions about the past experiences of individual.

Attachment Theory as a System

Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) is based on the belief that the attachment behavioral system is biologically inherent in humans. Which means that, as humans, we are genetically programmed to seek attachment with other humans from the moment of birth. Attachment is seen as an instinctive behavior; the ability to develop the behavior system is in us, and is then shaped by the environment and the experiences we have (Bowlby, 1969). According to Bowlby (1969), instinctive behavior can be understood as behavior that a) follows a pattern, b) responds to a variety of stimuli with a variety of behaviors, c) provides sustainability to an individual or species, and d) has the propensity to develop even when circumstances are unfavorable or even non-existent.

The development of the attachment behavioral system in humans is seen as a product of natural selection, exemplified by the fact that this behavior is not specific to human relationships. Bonds of attachment among members of a species also serve functions of survival (Ainsworth, 1989). Attachment bonds serve as a means to protect offspring and ensure longevity for the species. In addition, the sociable system, which prompts us to share resources and work as a community can only be activated when our attachment behavior system is in a state of maintenance (Cassidy & Shaver, 1999). The nature of the attachment we experience ultimately develops into our individual attachment style (Ainsworth, 1989).

The attachment behavior system is activated when a child seeks proximity to their attachment figure (Cassidy and Shaver, 1999). Attachment behavior, or attachment-seeking behavior, can be understood as any behavior that brings a child closer to the goal

of proximity to the attachment figure (Bowlby, 1969).   Attachment behavior falls under two categories. The first category is active behavior, where the child seeks or maintains proximity to the attachment figure, such as by following, clinging or sucking. The second category is signaling behavior, which is intended to inspire the attachment figure to come closer to the child, such as crying or smiling (Bell & Ainsworth, 1972). Once the attachment figure is back within a comfortable proximity, the attachment system can then relax. The goal of a child with an activated attachment system is to get and keep the attachment figure within acceptable boundaries of proximity (Bell & Ainsworth, 1972).

The attachment behavior system can be more easily understood when seen through a control system perspective. This is because unlike other behavior systems, such as sneezing or blinking, the attachment behavior system can activate and then relax, while other behavior systems cannot disengage once set (Cassidy & Shaver, 1999). Control systems seek to keep things regulated within a comfortable range, and are always present, but can adapt to the environment and vary within individuals (Bowlby, 1969). Attachment behavior may also have idiosyncrasies based on culture, as the need for attachment is inherent, but the organization of the system is based on lived experiences of the individual (Bowlby, 1969). Attachment behaviors are flexible because children learn what behavior is most effective in certain situations and with certain people (Cassidy & Shaver, 1999).

Before the age of three, the attachment system is frequently activated (Bowlby, 1969). Certain conditions in the child (such as hunger, pain or fatigue), or in the environment (such as strange people or a perceived threat) can heighten the activation and intensity of the attachment behavior system (Cassidy & Shaver, 1999). After the age

of three, attachment behavior is less frequent, and also less urgent. By this age children

begin to anticipate their mothers' departures and are able to recognize signs of impending

separation. If a child has a secure attachment relationship with his mother, and is left in

the care of familiar people, the separation is not experienced as traumatic and is typically

not met with many attachment-seeking behaviors (Bowlby, 1969).

The attachment behavior system is goal directed. The goal is to get close or

remain in close proximity to the attachment figure. Attachment behavior is also goal

corrected, meaning that behavior can be changed to most effectively get the need met

(Bowlby, 1980). In normal development, the attachment behavior system goes through a

series of phases as children grow. Phase one: between birth and about eight weeks of

age, the child exhibits attachment-seeking behavior, but does not direct these behaviors to

a specific person. Phase two: between about two to six months of age, the child begins

to identify certain attachment figures and seek them out specifically. Phase three:

between the ages of about six months to two years of age, the child actively seeks

proximity to a specific attachment figure. Phase four: after age two, the child becomes

more flexible and seeks a partnership with the attachment figure, realizing that each have

their own goals to accomplish (Bowlby, 1969).

Children can and do direct attachment behavior to adults other than their primary

attachment figure, who may be able to offer comfort. However, this most often happens

when the primary attachment figure is not available, and the result is often not as

calming. Children may get comfort from others, but this does not replace the longing for

the primary attachment figure (Cassidy & Shaver, 1999).

Attachment figures also have the innate urge to remain close, and care-giving behavior can be understood as any behavior on the attachment figure's part to maintain proximity to the child (Bowlby, 1969). When the parent's attachment system is engaged, the child's can relax and the child is then free to explore. The attachment behavior system is closely related to other behavior systems, such as the exploratory behavior system, which urges us to be independent, and the fear behavior system, which recognizes danger and initiates a fight-or-flight response. All of these systems are necessary for survival and all work in tandem with each other (Cassidy &Shaver, 1999).

When attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) was first developed, mothers were nearly universally the primary caregivers of children. As a result, the primary caregiver is often referred to as the mother in much of the writing on attachment theory, and will commonly be referred to as such in this thesis. The attachment bond, or attachment relationship also commonly refer to the mother-infant dyad. This does not mean, however, that the mother needs to be a child's primary attachment figure; any adult can fill that role (Davies, 2004).

History of Attachment Theory

John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth (1991) are two of the pioneers of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) and worked independently and in collaboration to research their theories through observations of interactions between infants and their primary caregivers (primarily the infant/mother dyad). The research and theories developed by Bowlby and Ainsworth were markedly different than those of their contemporaries. Ainsworth and Bowlby began their exploration of attachment in the 1950's, when drive theory, endorsed by Freud and Klein, was widely accepted by analysts (Bowlby, 1969).

According to drive theory, attachment-seeking behaviors by infants to their mothers were seen only as a result of the drive of the infant to be fed. Attachment-seeking behaviors with the goal being attachment itself was not yet understood (Bowlby, 1969). Drive theory postulates that emotions and behaviors of children are a result of their unconscious drives, and emotional distress is brought on by conflict between these drives. Bowlby, however, thought that behaviors and emotions were generated through actual lived experiences (Bretherton, 1992).

Bowlby and Ainsworth were not only unique in their ideas, they were also unique in their research. The development of attachment theory was different from other analyses of the time because it was not studied solely retrospectively. The data gathered by Ainsworth and Bowlby on attachment were compiled through experiences as they were happening. Most other analysis of the time was based on testimonials of patients about their memories of past/childhood experiences (Bowlby, 1969).

A cornerstone of attachment theory is the understanding and recognition that babies and young children can experience loss and go through a grieving process similar to adults. Prior to the development of attachment theory it was generally thought that babies and young children were incapable of experiencing loss or grieving. In addition to attachment-seeking behavior, the effect of separation and loss are other key components to the understanding and development of attachment theory (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991).

During the first half of the twentieth century it was common practice for children to be left in the care of nurseries or orphanages for days to months at a time, due to family need. It was common, for instance, for a child to be placed in a nursery while

his/her mother was hospitalized for the birth of another child. It was in these settings that the need for attachment and effect of separation was first observed (Bowlby, 1969).

At the London Child Guidance Clinic, Bowlby was among the first to systematically record his observations of children separated from their parents (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). In observing young children in this residential setting, Bowlby was able to see predictable patterns of behavior emerge. Bowlby found that in 15-30 month old children, who had experienced sufficiently secure relationships with their mothers prior to being placed at the clinic, and for whom this was the first separation from their mother, reactions all followed a predictable pattern (Bowlby, 1969).

First the children exhibit a period of protest, where they will cry, scream and reject substitute caregivers. During this phase children will ask for, and actively look for their mothers. The protest phase is followed a few days later by the despair phase. During this phase children will withdraw, become inactive and cry intermittently (Bowlby, 1969). Like adults who experience a great loss, children too, go through a phase of being inconsolable. The return of the lost person is the only thing that may bring comfort (Bowlby, 1980). The children will, at times, allow the nurses to comfort them and even allow themselves to become attached to the nurses. The nurses, however, eventually leave the nursery, and the loss of the mother is experienced all over again. After a series of these losses the children will finally enter the detached phase, where they will no longer allow themselves to become attached to anyone (Bowlby, 1969).

If the child is returned home to a secure environment, with his mother, without too much time passing, he will be able to reattach with her. However, even if a child is able to reattach after such a separation, there will undoubtedly be some lingering feelings

from his experience. After such a separation, when he feels he is in danger of losing his mother again, he is likely to show signs of extreme separation anxiety, marked by excessive crying and clinging behavior. If the separation is too prolonged or traumatic, however, he may remain permanently detached. The words used to describe length of time here are vague because as people we all have different thresholds for attachment. We all need it, and all go through the same phases when we lose it, but we all react individually to our lived experiences. Some children may be able to tolerate longer periods of separation than others (Bowlby, 1969).

The intensity of the anxiety felt by children during necessary times of separation (ex. Mother being hospitalized), can be greatly decreased if the children are left in the care of someone familiar to them. At the Child Guidance Clinic Bowlby (1969) also found anxiety to be lowered when children were placed with siblings or had familiar transitional objects from home (Bowlby, 1969).

In his work with children and families Bowlby also observed that there was a connection between the style of parental interaction and child personality development. Through interviews with parents he also came to see the intergenerational effect of these methods of attachment. In other words, the parents' style of interacting with their children was affected by the interactions they had with their own parents (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991).

Ainsworth made similar observations of mothers and babies, of the Ganda tribe, in their homes in Uganda, seeing the relationship between the behavior of the mother and the behavior development of the child (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). Unlike most Western societies, the women and children of the Ganda tribe spent much of their time

together in a group. When their mothers would leave, children would be cared for by

adults familiar to them. This communal environment, however, did not stop babies from

clearly discriminating their primary attachment figures. Ainsworth observed attachment

behavior of the babies specifically when their mothers would leave or return. Ganda

babies did form attachment to other familiar adults, but the attachment bond was much

stronger and emerged much earlier with their own mothers (Bowlby, 1969).

Ainsworth also came to categorize children into distinct styles of attachment.

Ainsworth observed that securely attached children cried infrequently, and greeted their

mothers with positive enthusiasm after a separation. Insecurely attached children wanted

constant physical contact with their mothers, while simultaneously seeming ambivalent to

them. Non-attached children seemed not to distinguish their own mothers from other

adults, and generally did not exhibit attachment-seeking behaviors (Cassidy & Shaver,

1999). The styles of attachment seen by Ainsworth continue to be the basis for

classification of attachment styles today, and will be explained and expanded in greater

depth in the following section (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991).

Ainsworth's work in Uganda showed the universality of attachment theory. The

Uganda babies had multiple caregivers, while a study Ainsworth replicated in Boston

years later, had a typical Western single caregiver, and the attachment styles she observed

were parallel. Ainsworth found that the number of caregivers has no effect on

attachment. Rather, it is the nature and consistency of the attachment relationship

(Cassidy & Shaver, 1999).

In later work, Ainsworth developed the Stranger Situation experiment to observe

infant-caregiver interaction, and further understand the nature and behavior of attachment

relationships in differing attachment classifications. During the experiment, the infant-mother dyad enter the room, and a while later are joined by a stranger. The mother then leaves the child alone with the stranger. After a while, the mother returns and the stranger exits. After a few minutes, the mother leaves too, and the infant is alone in the room. The infant is then joined by the stranger, and eventually joined by the mother again. In the end the stranger leaves, and the infant-mother dyad are alone in the room (Cassidy & Shaver, 1999). It is important that infants participating in this study be at least eight months old because by that age most children have developed some sense of fear of strangers (Bowlby, 1969).

In this study, attachment classification was based on the infant's reaction to his mother when they were reunited. The child's behaviors were rated on proximity seeking behavior, contact seeking behavior, avoidance, and resistance to contact and interaction. The reaction of the baby was understood through the context of the behavior before the mother left, behavior upon introduction of the stranger and behavior of the mother (Cassidy & Shaver, 1999).

The behavior observed in the infants was complementary to the behavior observed by their mothers. Mothers of securely attached infants showed more contact and affectionate behaviors than did mothers of anxious-avoidant attached infants. Also, mothers of anxious-avoidant attached infants reported experiencing overwhelming feelings of irritation with their babies (Tracey & Ainsworth, 1981). The attachment relationship grows quickly, and the attachment style of children is directly correlated to the experiences they have with their primary caregivers.

Attachment in Childhood

Attachment styles first begin to develop in infancy and are the way that each

person begins to understand the stability of the world around him or her. The infant's

attachment to his/her primary caregiver is the first attachment the child has, and the

nature of that attachment helps the child learn what to expect in terms of getting his/her

needs met. The attachment style created in the infant/caregiver dyad also teaches the

infant how to react to certain situations. Attachment styles are broken into two groups:

secure and insecure.

Insecure attachment can manifest in three different presentations: preoccupied,

dismissing-avoidant, and fearful-avoidant (Davies, 2004). Attachment styles are

determined based on scales of anxious and avoidant feelings and behavior exhibited

toward the primary attachment figure. When reading literature on attachment styles, the

three categories of insecure attachment can be called different names, but for continuity,

they will be referred to by those listed above throughout this thesis.

Children who have experienced secure attachment have been assured that their

needs will be met because their caregivers respond promptly and appropriately to their

signals of distress. If secure children cry when hungry or frightened, they can be assured

that their caregiver will appropriately respond to them and nurture them. It is not so

much the amount of time that babies are held by their caregivers in these situations, but

the nature of the interactions. Secure babies respond positively to being picked up and

having close physical contact with their caregivers (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991).

As securely attached children grow older they are typically more well-adjusted,

partake in positive attention-seeking activities and have fewer behavioral problems than

insecurely attached children. Securely attached children come to expect that their needs will be met, and that they are worthy of such love and attention (Davies, 2004). Their attachment figures have balanced reliable support with encouragement for independence (Bowlby, 1973).

Children who experience dismissing-avoidant attachment can actually be ignored by their primary caregivers, or rejected when they seek comfort. These caregivers seem intolerant of the child's signals of distress and do not respond to them accordingly. These babies long for contact with their caregivers but are often separated from them for long periods of time or rejected when they seek emotional or physical contact (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991).

As a defensive response to this neglect, infants learn that they cannot count on their caregiver to nurture them when they are hungry or frightened, so over time they stop eliciting a response. Children with dismissing-avoidant attachment features still feel distress, but have learned that their cries for help will not be answered, so they do not bother to cry. These children remain externally calm in the face of distress as a way of protecting themselves (Davies, 2004). After a separation from their caregiver, securely attached children welcome back their caregivers by means of seeking physical contact and showing affection, while children with dismissing-avoidant attachment will often show little acknowledgement of their caregivers' return and respond apathetically toward them (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991).   As dismissing-avoidantly attached children grow up, they are likely to be seen as self-reliant, and may even push people away if they try to help or become close, because of their past experiences. These children feel that they do not deserve love or support, so they do not seek it.

Children who experience preoccupied attachment show a strong want and need for attachment, but because of inconsistencies in caregiver attention they are never sure if they will be able to get the attachment they seek. The caregivers respond inconsistently to attachment seeking behavior of their children, and as a result the children become more and more anxious around such behaviors (Davies, 2004). Preoccupied attached children often experience severe and prolonged separation anxiety as a result of the inconsistencies of their caregivers' availability. Separation anxiety is normal in infancy, but securely attached babies become increasingly able to tolerate separation as they develop object constancy (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991).

Preoccupied attached children often focus much of their attention on their caregiver's moods and behaviors to try to anticipate the level of attachment they may receive. This focused attention often means that other developmental milestones are being neglected because all of the infants' energies are going into trying to understand their relationships with their caregivers. As preoccupied attached children grow, they become increasingly anxious about separation and have fears of abandonment. As they enter school, they are typically timid and do not interact well with others (Davies, 2004).

Children who experience fearful-avoidant attachment do not have an organized way to respond to stressful situations. Fearful-avoidant attachment typically describes children who have been abused in some way by their caregivers. These children do not react in predictable ways to their caregivers, and often show conflicting emotions at the same time. This is because they have conflicting feelings about their caregivers. Children with fearful-avoidant attachment often have unresolved trauma, and therefore are disoriented and do not know how to respond to a caregiver who is both a source of

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comfort and a source of pain and fear. These children are always on the alert, and develop a heightened sense of fight or flight. As they grow older they tend to want to control situations. Children with fearful-avoidant attachment also do not know how to respond appropriately to situations of disappointment or stress, so they often resort to physical violence with other children at school when it is not warranted (Davies, 2004).

Two studies I researched for this literature review showed a strong correlation between attachment to parents and social development in children (Creasey & Hesson-McInnis, 2001; Engels, Finkenauer, Meeus & Dekovic, 2001). Creasey and Hesson-McInnis (2001) found that insecurely attached adolescents have more difficulty managing conflict, and have more negative affect than secure adolescents. Engles et al. (2001) found that among adolescents, attachment to parents is strongly related to social skills, school performance, competence in peer relationships and self-esteem.

Four studies, (Lopez, Melendez, & Rice, 2000; Love & Murdock, 2004; Riggs & Jacobvitz, 2002; Summers, Forehand, Armistead, & Tannenbaum, 1998), looked at the phenomenon of being a child of divorce as a possible indicator of attachment style, psychological well-being and the relationship of the parent-child bond. The two studies that looked for a possible connection between divorce and the relationship of the parent-child bond found that divorce has a negative effect on the parent-child bond (Lopez et al., 2000); (Love & Murdock, 2004), while Summers et al. (1998) found that it is the parent-child bond, and not the act of divorce, that is correlated with the psychological well-being of the child.

One study, (Lopez et. al., 2000), found that being a child of divorce does not have an effect on styles of attachment, but Summers et al. (1998) reported that coming

from a divorced family is related to the ability to securely attach to a romantic partner, and Riggs and Jocobvitz (2002) found that insecurely attached people are more likely to be from divorced families. Shemmings (2006) found that attachment styles are related to adult children's emotional availability toward their parents

Attachment in Adulthood

Attachment styles begin to develop the moment children come into the world, and they continue to develop throughout childhood and into adolescence. It is believed that without intervention, these attachment styles remain relatively constant from adolescence throughout adulthood (Bowlby, 1973).

As a person grows into adulthood, they still remain attached to their primary caregiver (Ainsworth, 1989), but this attachment becomes less important as adults replace it with an attachment to a romantic significant other (Davila & Bradbury, 2001). Overbeek, Vollebergh, Engles and Meeus (2003) found that the shift away from the parents and toward peer relationships and romantic relationships can emerge in adolescence, but does not fully replace the parent bond. Over time, however, as people grow older and move away from their family of origin, this attachment to a romantic significant other is then seen by the individual to be the most important attachment in their life, and they come to rely on that significant other for support in similar ways as they once did their primary caregiver (Treboux, Crowell, & Waters, 2004). However, the attachment between romantic/sexual partners is much more reciprocal and complementary than the caregiver-child bond. Partners tend to depend on each other to provide different levels of care-giving, security and support for each other at different times and under different circumstances (Ainsworth, 1989).

Adults bring the attachment styles developed in childhood and adolescents into their romantic relationships. Additionally, adult reactions to dysfunctional relationships with these adult attachment figures often mimic the response an infant would have to a dysfunctional relationship with a primary caregiver: distress, withdrawal, depression, etc. (Hazan, 1990). Securely attached individuals bring a sense of trust that their needs will be met into their romantic relationships, while insecurely attached individuals bring the same attachment needs experienced in childhood into their romantic relationships, as shown by the following studies.

Five studies looked at coupled relationships and the possible effects the attachment styles of each partner would have on the development, interaction and outcome of the romantic relationship. All of the studies on this topic were based on heterosexual couples, and all found a connection between individual attachment styles and functioning of the relationship (Creasey, 2002; Davilla & Bradbury, 2001; Paley, Cox, Burchinal, & Payne, 1999; Paley, et al. 2005; Treboux, Crowell, & Waters, 2004). Creasey (2002), Davila and Bradbury (2001), and Treboux et al. (2004), found that the attachment styles of both partners affects the functioning of the relationship, while Paley et al. (1999), and Paley et al. (2005) found that it is only the attachment style of the man that affects the functioning of the relationship.

Among the studies connecting both partners' attachment styles with the functioning of the relationship, it was reported that individual attachment styles were related to the behavior and affect expressed by each partner during relational conflict. In addition, insecurely attached people were found to have more difficulty dealing with conflict in the romantic relationship than securely attached people (Creasey, 2002). It

was also found that in relationships where both partners have secure attachment styles there is a strong correlation with high functioning in the relationship, while the highest levels of distress is exhibited by couples in which one partner has a secure attachment style and one has an insecure attachment style (Treboux et al. 2004). There was also found to be a strong correlation between the preoccupied/anxious insecure attachment style and couples that stay in unhappy marriages, as opposed to couples that reported being in happy marriages or had divorced (Davila & Bradbury, 2001).

Paley et al. (1999), and Paley et al. (2005) reported that the attachment style of the man in the relationship, but not the woman, affects the overall functioning of the relationship. It was found that in families where the father has an insecure attachment style, there is a correlation with negative escalation in marital conflict, while the attachment style of mother is indicative of family functioning (Paley et al., 2005). Also, attachment styles of husbands are correlated with the marital functioning (marital behavior and marital perception) of wives, while the attachment styles of wives appears to have no effect on the marital functioning of their husbands (Paley et al., 1999).

Two studies (Berman, 1988; Sbarra & Ferrer, 2006) examine how attachment bonds are created between romantic partners, and how styles of attachment come in to play when romantic relationships end. In a study of recently divorced women, it was found that participants experienced feelings of attachment toward their ex-husbands even after the marriage had ended. This indicates that attachment bonds can be formed in the context of adult romantic relationships, and therefore the loss of those attachment figures after the end of a relationship can create feelings of loss and distress (Berman, 1988). It was not found, however, that a person's individual attachment style was an indicator of

how well or poorly they would adjust to the ending of a relationship. Participants who were perceived as having a good adjustment to the end of a relationship correlated feelings of love with feelings of anger and sadness, in reference to their ex partners, while participants who were perceived as having a poor adjustment to the end of a relationship often did not mutually experience these emotions (Sbarra & Ferrer, 2006).

It is assumed that without intervention, attachment styles remain consistent from adolescence on. Intervention to modify an attachment style could take the form of therapy. Bowlby suggested that in this type of therapy, the therapist should work from the mind-frame that interpersonal difficulties experienced by the client are rooted in actual lived experiences, and that the attachments formed in early childhood and the expectations for current relationships are both expressions of individual attachment style (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). In addition, the experiences learned from the past may or may not be applicable to current relationships (Nichols & Schwartz, 2005). By understanding these patterns of interacting with others, the client is then in the position to begin to modify their behaviors. Therapists can serve as new attachment figures for clients, providing a safe base for clients to rework their current models of attachment. The internal representation of this attachment relationship can then remain internalized in the client, even after the therapeutic relationship has ended (Ainsworth, 1989).

A strength of attachment theory is that it is applicable to all humans, regardless of the culture they grew up in. Cultures do vary in they ways attachments are continued throughout life, but the basic need for attachment is part of human nature. Understanding people through the context of their attachment relationships is a holistic way of looking at a person and their symptoms, and creates an understanding of how to move forward once

the style of attachment has been established. It also identifies that themes of one's past need to be taken into consideration when understanding one's present.

A weakness of attachment theory is that it is given as a formula, indicating that people who have certain experiences will have predictable outcomes in life. Human beings are all individual and all have different levels of tolerance and resiliency. Taken too literally, the interpretations of this theory in applications to people's lives may be incorrect and potentially damaging.

Attachment in Non-Humans

As mentioned previously, humans are not the only species that are endowed with the attachment behavior system. Simultaneously to Bowlby's and Ainsworth's studies of attachment in humans, Harry Harlow was conducting attachment studies of his own with rhesus monkey (Harlow & Suomi, 1970)s. Harlow and his team created two surrogate mothers for infant monkeys born into captivity. The infant monkeys were each placed alone in a cage with two surrogate mothers, directly after birth. One surrogate was made of terry cloth, and the other of wire. It was observed that the infants spent much of their time cuddling and clinging to the cloth surrogates, showing distinct attachment behavior.

The wire surrogates remained virtually ignored, despite the fact that they were the only surrogates that provided the infants with food. When the loved cloth surrogates were removed from infants' cages, the infants withdrew and buried themselves in the corners of their cages, and only reemerged when their "mother" was returned. With one infant, the research team replaced the face of her terry cloth mother with one that was more life-like. Upon seeing her mother's new face, the infant responded with fear. She had become accustomed to her surrogate mother just as she was, and reacted as a human

infant might at the sight of a stranger (Harlow & Suomi, 1970). Harlow's observations of infant monkeys exhibiting attachment behaviors paints a scene nearly identical to observations made by Bowlby at the Child Guidance Clinic.

Critiques of Related Studies

Some biases found in the studies (which can also be seen as limitations) are that nine studies had samples that consisted of a disproportionate percentage of white participants, (Creasey, 2002; Davila & Bradbury, 2001; Love & Murdock, 2004; Paley et al., 1999; Paley et al., 2005; Riggs & Jacobvitz, 2002; Sbarra & Ferrer, 2006; Summers et al., 1998; Treboux et al., 2004). Four studies had samples that consisted of a disproportionate percentage of female participants (Berman, 1988; Love & Murdock, 2004; Sbarra & Ferrer, 2006; Summers et al., 1998). Four studies had samples drawn from the undergraduate college population (Creasey, 2002; Lopez et al., 2000; Love & Murdock, 2004; Sbarra & Ferrer, 2006). Five studies had samples of only heterosexual participants (Creasey, 2002; Davila & Bradbury, 2001; Paley et al., 1999; Paley et al., 2005; Treboux et al., 2004).

Some strengths of the studies were that four studies reported on underrepresented populations (Creasey, 2002; Lopez et al., 2000; Shemmings, 2006; Summers et al., 1998), and focused specifically on issues of race. Four studies had an equal number of male and female participants (Creasey, 2002; Paley et al., 1999; Paley et al., 2005; Riggs & Jacobvitz, 2002) and Summers et al. (1998) was a longitudinal study over six years that kept a 92% retention rate of participants.

Some limitations of the studies were that twelve studies had some aspect of participant self-reported data (Creasey, 2002; Creasey & Hesson-McInnis, 2001; Davila

& Bradbury, 2001; Lopez et al. 2000; Love & Murdock, 2004; Paley et al., 1999; Paley et al., 2005; Riggs & Jacobvitz, 2002; Sbarra & Ferrer, 2006; Shemmings, 2006; Summers et al., 1998; Treboux et al., 2004). Three studies were not generalizable (Lopez et al., 2000; Love & Murdock, 2004; Summers et al., 1998). Two studies gave no demographic information on race or gender of the participants (Berman, 1988; Shemmings, 2006).

In summary attachment theory can be used to understand many things about how we relate to each other and form relationships with others. For the most part, the studies I researched found connections between attachment styles and the way people relate to others and handle relationships with others. I was able to find only one study that looked at the individual attachment styles of each member of a partnered relationship, and as a result I see a gap in the research and a need for more information. The following section will describe the methodology of my study, based on my interest and perceived need for research in this area.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore the possible relationship between attachment styles of individuals in romantic relationships during young adulthood. The following section will cover the research method and design I used, the type of data I collected, the selection criteria for my sample, the data collection methods I used, and the data-analysis strategy I used.

Design

The design I used to develop and carry out the study is exploratory/descriptive. This design was exploratory because I sought to look more deeply into attachment styles, with a specific population, using a different lens than had been examined before. The study was also descriptive, because I sought to describe the relationship between individuals through their attachment styles. I used a flexible methods approach of data collection, with a standardized data collection instrument, which is outlined below (Anastas, 1999).

The Research Question

My research question was as follows:

Is there any association between the individual attachment styles of partners in older-adolescent romantic relationships?

Sample

Before seeking participants for my study, I submitted my research materials and surveys to the Smith College Human Subjects Review Committee. The purpose of this was to ensure that the material I would be presenting to participants would not harm them in any way, and would be in accordance with school policies. The approval letter of this process is attached as Appendix A.

Inclusion/exclusion critera for this study were as follows: (1) both partners of a coupled relationship had to respond to be included in the study, (2) each member of the potential sample pool (couple) had be between the ages of 18-23, and (3) the couple had to have been together for at least three months prior to responding to the survey. Participants were asked to indicate their gender on the Background Information survey (see Appendix B, attached). However, sexual orientation of respondents was not either an inclusionary or exclusionary factor. Neither were they asked about racial background, because attachment theory is thought to be universal (Bowlby & Ainsworth, 1991) regardless of race (theoretically speaking, at least).

Participants were asked to answer the surveys independently and discuss the questions or their responses with their partner only after the survey had been put in the mail. Findings were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Data Collection

The data-collecting instrument I used to determine individual attachment styles of participants is The Experience in Close Relationships – Revised Questionnaire (Fraley et al., 2000) (see Appendix C). This instrument asks a variety of questions designed to determine degree of attachment related avoidance and attachment related anxiety. These

responses are coded on a 1-7 Likert-type scale. Based on the responses given by each

individual, attachment style is determined. Once individual attachment styles were

determined, they were then compared to that of their partners for possible association.

Each participant was also asked to complete a short Background Information

Questionnaire (see Appendix B). The intention of this survey was used to see if any

other statistical relationships were present, as related to attachment style.

Participants

The sample recruited for this study is purposive, which is a non-random method

of selecting participants. A snowball strategy was used to locate the necessary number of

participants (Anastas, 1999). To each interested person I sent out a packet that included

four Informed Consents (see Appendix D): one for each partner to complete and one for

each partner to keep); two Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised Questionnaires

(Fraley et al., 2000), (see Appendix C); and two Background Information Surveys (see

Appendix B), as well as a self-addressed stamped envelope for return of the surveys. The

majority of the responses came from acquaintances of two college professors who agreed

to pass my survey on to their students. Of approximately 400 surveys sent out, 40 people

(20 couples) responded. However, one couple had to be excluded because one partner's

age was above 23 years old. In finality, 38 people participated in the study.

Data Analysis

The 38 completed surveys were coded, using the instructions developed by the

creators of the Experiences in Close Relationships - Revised Questionnaire (Fraley et al.,

2000), (see Appendix C). After developing a data sheet and code-book, the data were

then forwarded to a statistician at Smith College for further analysis using SPSS. The

findings that result from the quantitative data analysis are explained in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This chapter presents the relevant findings of the data that were gathered for this independent research, and that are discussed in the next chapter. The instruments used to gather the data needed were The Experiences in Close Relationships- Revised Questionnaire (Fraley et al., 2000), (see Appendix C) and the Background Information Questionnaire (see Appendix B). This chapter will start with characteristics of the sample; substantive findings of the research will then be discussed.

Sample and Characteristics

The following are frequency tables of the sample and their characteristics. The full sample was composed of 38 individuals, all of whom are reflected in every table for every variable. As can be seen below, there is a slightly higher number of females in the study than males. This is because one couple in the study is of a lesbian relationship. Note that no respondents identified themselves as transgendered or intersexed.

Table 1: *Sex*

Sex	Frequency	Percent
Male	18	47.4
Female	20	52.6
Total	38	100.0

It can be seen in the table below that respondents who reported being 23 years old were slightly more represented than respondents of other ages.

Table 2: *Age*

Age	Frequency	Percent
18	4	10.5
19	7	18.4
20	6	15.8
21	8	21.1
22	3	7.9
23	10	26.3
Total	38	100.0

As the table below shows most of the couples in this sample have been together for over one year, only three couples (six respondents) have been together between three and six months.

Table 3: *Length of Time Together*

Length of Time Together	Frequency	Percent
3 months	4	10.5
4-6 months	2	5.3
7 months-1 year	12	31.6
Over 1 year	20	52.6
Total	38	100.0

As seen below, half of all respondents reported being in one significant relationship before their current relationship, and only one respondent reported having had five or more significant relationships before the current relationship.

Table 4: *Number of Significant Relationships Before This One*

Number of Relationships	Frequency	Percent
1	19	50.0
2	8	21.1
3	8	21.1
4	2	5.3
5 or more	1	2.6
Total	38	100.0

In the table below it can be seen that the number of respondents from divorced homes is nearly half that of respondents whose parents did not divorce.

Table 5: *Are You a Child of Divorce?*

Are you a child of divorce?	Frequency	Percent
Yes	12	31.6
No	26	68.4
Total	38	100.0

As shown below, the majority of respondents reported feeling close to at least one parent while they were growing up.

Table 6: *Did You Feel Close to Either Parent Growing Up?*

Feel Close?	Frequency	Percent
Yes	28	73.7
No	10	26.3
Total	38	100.0

The following table shows which attachment categories respondents were classified as, based on their answers to the Experiences in Close Relationships – Revised Questionnaire (Fraley, Waller & Brennan, 2000), (see Appendix C). As can be seen, the overwhelming majority of participants fell into the Secure category, and no respondents were classified as Fearful Avoidant.

Table 7: *Attachment Style*

Attachment Style	Frequency	Percent
Secure	33	86.8
Preoccupied	4	10.5
Dismissing Avoidant	1	2.6
Total	38	100.0

The following two tables show a more in-depth view of respondents' anxiety and avoidant scores, based on their responses to The Experiences in Close Relationships – Revised Questionnaire (Fraley et al., 2000), (see Appendix C). In scoring, a lower number on each scale indicates a lower score. Therefore, a person who falls within 1-1.9 on the Anxiety scale reports feeling lower levels of anxiety around attachment than a person who falls in the 5-5.9 category.

Table 8: *Anxiety*

Anxiety Score	Frequency	Percent
1-1.9	18	47.4
2-2.9	11	28.9
3-3.9	5	13.2
4-4.9	2	5.3
5-5.9	2	5.3
Total	38	100.0

Table 9: *Avoidant*

Avoidant Score	Frequency	Percent
1-1.9	17	44.7
2-2.9	14	36.8
3-3.9	6	15.8
4-4.9	0	0.0
5-5.9	1	2.6
Total	38	100.0

Substantive Findings

My research question was as follows: Is there any association between the individual attachment styles of partners in older-adolescent romantic relationships?

As it was shown in Table 7, the vast majority of all participants in this study were classified as having secure attachment styles.   An overwhelming majority of couples consist of partnerships in which both partners appear to have secure attachment styles according to the instruments used in this study. Overall, 16 of the 19 couples (84.2%) in the study had the same attachment style as their partner. Of those, 15 couples consist of two securely attached individuals, and one couple consists of two individuals with preoccupied attachment styles. Only three couples consist of partners who have different attachment styles from each other: two have one secure and one preoccupied partner; one has a secure partner and a dismissing-avoidant partner.

A t-test was run to determine if there were differences in the mean scores of anxiety and avoidant scores between respondents who are children of divorce and those who are not children of divorce. A significant difference was found on the avoidant scale (t [13.575] = .437, p=.029, two-tailed). Children of divorce had a higher mean score on the avoidant scale (2.818) than others (1.921). This difference is significant.

Table 10: *t-test for Equality of Means*

Equal variances not assumed

Score	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Anxiety	.706	23.907	.487	.26949
Avoidance	2.437	13.575	.029	.85718

T-tests were also run to determine if there were significant differences in the mean scores of respondents on the anxiety and avoidant scales in reference to the following questions on the Background Information Questionnaire (see Appendix B):

1.   Growing up, did you have dinner with your parents most of the time?

2.   Growing up, did you have enough privacy?

3.   Growing up, was your house the type where friends and family frequently stopped by?

4.   Growing up, did you spend a lot of time with your extended family?

5.   How long have you been in your current relationship?

No significant differences were found on either the anxiety or avoidant scores between these two sub-samples.

The findings of my independent research show that the majority of respondents are classified as having secure attachment styles, and the majority of couples surveyed have the same attachment style as their partner. The findings also indicate that being a child of divorce was the only variable on my Background questionnaire (see Appendix B) that showed any significant difference between groups of people.

The following chapter discusses the meanings of these findings. It also compares the findings of this study to previous studies done on the topic, and suggests possible implications for practice based on the results.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

As stated before in this thesis, my research question was as follows: Is there any association between the individual attachment styles of partners in young-adult romantic relationships? The purpose of this study was to explore the possible relationship between attachment styles of individuals in young-adult romantic relationships. The next section will discuss how the findings of my research relates to the literature reviewed in Chapter II and compares to the findings of previous studies on this subject.

Related Research

Attachment Styles in Coupled Relationships

The vast majority of participants in my study were found to have secure attachment styles, and in 84.2% of the couples surveyed, both partners had the same attachment style. I was not able to find any previous studies that focused on the association between the individual attachment styles of each partner in coupled relationships. However, Treboux et al. (2004) reported findings on the functioning of coupled relationships based on the individual attachment styles of each partner. Treboux et al. (2004) found that in relationships where both partners have secure attachment styles there is a strong correlation with high functioning in the relationship, while the highest levels of distress are found in couples when one partner has a secure attachment style and one has an insecure attachment style.

Divorce in Relation to Attachment

The only variable in my study that was found to have a significant correlation to participants' scores on the anxiety and avoidant scales based on their responses to the Experience in Close Relationships – Revised Questionnaire (Fraley, et al., 2000, see Appendix A), was whether they are a child of divorce. Respondents whose parents are divorced had a higher mean score (X=2.818) on the avoidant scale than did respondents whose parents had not divorced (X=1.921). Using a t-test, this difference is significant; suggesting that children from divorced families may be more likely to experience avoidant attachment tendencies than their counterparts from families considered "intact."

Several studies discussed in the Literature Review of Chapter II also address the relationship between attachment styles of individuals who are children of divorce. For example, one study (Riggs & Jacovitz, 2002) found that insecurely attached people are more likely to come from divorced families, than from families considered "intact," while another (Summers et al., 1998) found that coming from a divorced family has a negative correlation with the ability to securely attach to a romantic partner. In contrast, another study (Lopez et al., 2000) found that divorce may have a negative effect on the parent-child bond but not necessarily affect attachment style.

Comparison of Findings

The purpose of the study I conducted is different from the purposes of other existing research on this topic, but it is clear that my study fills a gap even though the findings seem to both support and refute other research. I found that children of divorce had a higher mean score on the avoidant scale, which could be seen to support the findings of Riggs & Jacovitz (2002) and Summers et al. (1998). However, even though

children of divorce in this study scored more highly on the avoidant scale than participants from "intact" families, in the end, the vast majority of respondents seem to have secure attachment styles. Looking at the results from this perspective, my study could be seen to support the findings of Lopez et al. (2000), whose study seems to also indicate that having divorced parents is not an indicator of future attachment style. What is most clear is that further research in this area is needed. The next section presents some implications for practice.

Implications for Practice

Education

Based on my research, more classes with content on attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) in couples' therapy classes and in classes on loss and Divorce Could help to expand our knowledge base for practice with individuals, couples and even families.

Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) is not as widely accepted as a major theory of psychology as many other theories, such as drive theory (Berzoff, Flanagan & Hertz, 2002), structural theory (Berzoff et al. 2002), ego psychology (Berzoff et al. 2002) and self psychology (Berzoff et al. 2002). It is not, therefore, taught as frequently or in as great depth as are many other theories, leading to a very real gap in the level and type of research on attachment and implications for practice which, in turn, creates a commensurate educational gap.

Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) differs from the more widely taught theories mentioned above because it understands the human experience through actual lived experiences and interactions rather than through the internal workings of individuals. Therefore, it presents a much different understanding of individuals and relationships

than do many other theories and offers a perspective that is important and necessary to deepen our understanding of individual and group psychology. Broadening the knowledge base of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) by building research and thus putting more emphasis on its education would create more well-rounded professional development for clinicians and researchers.

Practice with Clients

To the extent that it emphasizes the nature of a relationship between people, attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) is particularly relevant in couples therapy. The research I conducted here suggests that couples may be more likely than not to be composed of individuals with similar attachment styles, results that could be very useful in helping people to interpret the problems they experience as couples.

As a theory of how and why people are attracted to each other, attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) gives an understanding of how individuals operate in the world and what they expect from their partners. The similarity of the wants, needs, and expectations of individuals in couples who have similar insecure attachment styles, therefore, could be a very real cause of problems. By understanding their attachment styles, however, clinicians who work with couples can help them begin to resolve their problems by offering them some insight and education about their attachment styles and how their styles either impede or enhance their relationship.

Cross-Cultural Application

Because this theory is applicable to every person in the world, more research on the topic would be useful, not only in this country but in others as well. Expanding the knowledge base of attachment theory and research could bring about needed social

change. For instance, by educating people about the importance of attachment at a young age, policies on orphanages and child labor in other countries could be changed to give more support and opportunities for attachment to children.

The following section discusses the strengths and weaknesses of this study.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Study

Weaknesses

Weaknesses of the study I conducted range from broad problems faced by many researchers and research designs to specific weaknesses I noticed while doing my project. Like many other studies, my study had the weakness of relying on self-reports of participants. Also, like many other studies on this topic, my population was aged 18-23 at the time of the study. Many previous studies on attachment found participants from an undergraduate population (which my study was not limited to), but the age range is the same. Also, the participants in my study were primarily heterosexual, which can be considered a bias. A specific weakness of my study is that on question #6 of the Background Questionnaire (see Appendix B), I asked participants how many significant relationships they had had before their current one, and I did not leave space for them to answer 0. This error on my part could have discouraged some participants from completing the survey.

Strengths

A major strength of this study is that it filled a gap in current research on the topic. I was not able to find any previous research that addresses this topic in the same manner as my study. Another strength of this study is that complete strangers with no incentive for their participation were obviously interested enough to complete and return

the surveys. I find this strength particularly important because the study requested that couples rather than simply individuals participate.

The method I used for distributing my survey was via word of mouth and then mailing survey packets. This method was slow and expensive, and did not produce the response I anticipated. Out of approximately 400 surveys I mailed out, only 38 were returned. Perhaps distributing the survey via the internet would have produced more results, and would have certainly been less expensive and time consuming. Because my approach to data collection was flexible methods, if I had to do it over again, I would have expanded the age range of participants. I do not know anyone in the age range of 18-23, and had I expanded the age range to include people 18-30, I may have been able to get more respondents.

The vast majority of people who participated in my study were found to have secure attachment styles using the instruments selected to test that variable. This raises the question of why that may be. Perhaps the content of the material discouraged people who did not feel secure from completing the survey or then returning it. Also, the necessity of both partners' participation could have been a barrier that discouraged participation.

Suggestions for Future Research

For future research on this topic it is important to note characteristics of previous participants – to then identify a trend, or to find ways to encourage participants with different experiences to participate in the future. For instance, the majority of the participants in my study seemed to be securely attached; it would be interesting and useful if future research were to focus on participants with insecure attachment styles.

Also, it is believed that attachment styles, though established early on, can change through different life experiences (Bowlby, 1973). Longitudinal studies, measuring the consistency of attachment styles of individuals, over the course of several years, could give insight into possible variables that could shift attachment tendencies. For instance, participation in therapy, the introduction of religion, or the experience of trauma could be variables significant enough to shift the attachment tendencies and styles of certian individuals.

Conclusion

As noted throughout this document, the research question that drove this thesis study was as follows: Is there any association between the individual attachment styles of partners in older-adolescent romantic relationships? The results of this research show that the majority of the sample scored in the "secure attachment" (Fraley et al., 2000) category. Furthermore, most of the couples are composed of individuals who have similar attachment styles. Much more research needs to be done to see if the results of this study are indicative of a pattern or just apply to this particular sample.

There is much more research to be done on the topic of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969), as it is applicable to virtually every aspect of the human experience. We are born with an innate need and urge to attach to people; which serves the important purpose of enhancing our survival and success as individuals and as a population. As a result of the type of attachment we experience through our developmental years, we all develop attachment styles. We develop understandings and expectations of the world, people, and relationships based on our lived experiences. We are each and every one of

us socialized through experiences of attachment, and each and every one of us then operates in the world through our understanding of attachment.

Because attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) is considered to be universally applicable to every person, it has a very important place in social work practice. In working with clients in virtually every modality, it often takes time for clients to truly open up and for practitioners to truly understand the motivation for a clients' feelings or behaviors. The use of an attachment questionnaire early in treatment, such as the Experiences in Close Relationships – Revised Questionnaire (Fraley et al. 2000, see Attachment C), would give both practitioners and clients unified understandings of where clients are "coming from" and indications of how to move forward in the work.

Through understanding the roots of individual attachment, people may better understand how they operate in the world and why. In work with couples and families this understanding has the potential to be even more significant, as it would show examples of how individual attachment styles are exhibited through actual lived experiences. Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) is an understanding of people through the relationships they experience and therefore has a very logical place in any social work practice that has a focus on relationships.

It is again important to remember that attachment is a spectrum, and the degree to which people experience the tendencies of their classification can vary greatly. The classification of attachment style should not be used to draw specific conclusions about the past experiences of individuals, but it is useful in understanding patterns of behavior and for helping individuals draw connections between their current style of relating and the attachments that may have led to it.

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Appendix A

Human Subjects Review Committee Approval Letter

January 10, 2007

Whitney Young
28-52 31st Street
Astoria, NY 11102

Dear Whitney,

Your revised materials have been reviewed and all is now in order. We did not receive a copy of your amended referral list, but assume you plan to expand it somewhat. Please send the revised list to Laurie Wyman.

Please note the following requirements:

Consent Forms: All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

Maintaining Data: You must retain signed consent documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

Renewal: You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

Completion: You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

We are glad to now give final approval to your study and wish you success. It is an interesting topic. Laurie will let me know when she received your amended referral list.

Sincerely,

Ann Hartman, D.S.W.
Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

Appendix B

Background Information Questionnaire

Please circle the one answer for each question that best describes you.

1. Gender: Male / Female   / Intersexed / Transgender

2. Age: 18   19   20   21   22   23

3. How long in current relationship?   3mo. /   4-6mo. /   7mo.-1yr. /   1yr   /   over 1 yr.

4. Is this the first time in a relationship with this partner? Yes   No

5. If no, how many times before? 1 2 3 4 5 5+

6. How many significant relationships have you had before this one? 1 2 3 4 5 5+

7. How would you define your sexual orientation? Gay / Straight / Bisexual

8. Are you currently in a relationship with someone of the same sex? Yes   No

9. Are you currently in a relationship with someone of the opposite sex? Yes   No

10. Are you currently in a relationship with someone who is transgender or intersexed? Yes   No

11. Are you a child of divorce? Yes   No

12. What is your placement in the sibling order? Oldest / Middle / Youngest

13. What is your level of education? Some high school / High School Graduate /
     Some College / College Graduate / Some Masters courses / Masters Graduate

14. Do you live in a rural or urban setting? Urban / Rural

15. Did you grow up in a rural or urban setting? Urban / Rural

16. When you were growing up, did either of your parents stay home full time? Yes   No

17. What type of school did you attend when you were growing up? Public / Private / Home School

18. Did you and your family practice a religion growing up? Yes   No

19. If so, do you still practice that religion? Yes   No   N/A

20. Do you practice a different religion than the one you grew up with? Yes   No

21. Growing up, did you have dinner with your parents most of the time? Yes   No

22. Growing up, did you have time to yourself? Yes   No

23. Growing up, did you have enough privacy? Yes   No

24. Growing up, was your house the type where friends and family frequently stopped by? Yes   No

25. Growing up, did you spend a lot of time with your nuclear family (parents and siblings)? Yes   No

26. Growing up, did you spend a lot of time with your extended family? Yes   No

27. Growing up, did you feel particularly close to either parent? Yes   No

28. Were you ever in foster care? Yes   No

Appendix C

The Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised Questionnaire
Fraley, Waller, and Brennan (2000)

The statements below concern how you feel in emotionally intimate relationships. We are interested in how you *generally* experience relationships, not just in what is happening in a current relationship. Respond to each statement by circling a number to indicate how much you <u>agree or disagree</u> with the statement.

1= strongly *disagree*, and 7= strongly *agree*

1. I'm afraid that I will lose my partner's love.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

2. I often worry that my partner will not want to stay with me.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

3. I often worry that my partner doesn't really love me.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

4. I worry that romantic partners won't care about me as much   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
as I care about them.

5. I often wish that my partner's feelings for me were as strong   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
as my feelings for him or her.

6. I worry a lot about my relationships.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

7. When my partner is out of sight, I worry that he or she might   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
become interested in someone else.

8. When I show my feelings for romantic partners, I'm afraid they 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
will not feel the same about me.

9. I rarely worry about my partner leaving me.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

10. My romantic partner makes me doubt myself.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

11. I do not often worry about being abandoned.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

12. I find that my partner(s) don't want to get as close as   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I would like.

13. Sometimes romantic partners change their feelings about me   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
for no apparent reason.

14. My desire to be very close sometimes scares people away.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

15. I'm afraid that once a romantic partner gets to know me, he or she won't like who I really am.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

16. It makes me mad that I don't get the affection and support I need from my partner.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

17. I worry that I won't measure up to other people.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

18. My partner only seems to notice me when I'm angry.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

19. I prefer not to show a partner how I feel deep down.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

20. I feel comfortable sharing my private thoughts and feelings with my partner.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

21. I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on romantic partners.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

22. I am very comfortable being close to romantic partners.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

23. I don't feel comfortable opening up to romantic partners.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

24. I prefer not to be too close to romantic partners.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

25. I get uncomfortable when a romantic partner wants to be very close.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

26. I find it relatively easy to get close to my partner.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

27. It's not difficult for me to get close to my partner.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

28. I usually discuss my problems and concerns with my partner.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

29. It helps to turn to my romantic partner in times of need.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

30. I tell my partner just about everything.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

31. I talk things over with my partner.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

32. I am nervous when partners get too close to me.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

33. I feel comfortable depending on romantic partners.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

34. I find it easy to depend on romantic partners.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

35. It's easy for me to be affectionate with my partner.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

36. My partner really understands me and my needs.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Appendix D

Informed Consent Letter

Dear Participant,

My name is Whitney Young and I am currently working on my master's degree in social work at Smith College. I am asking people to participate in a study of attachment styles and the degree to which they may reflect or differ from early attachments, primarily to care givers. The data collected as part of this study will be used in my MSW thesis, and in presentations of my thesis. It is possible that my findings will some day be published.

Attachment styles are the different ways each of us behaves and the different expectations we bring into our relationships with other people. We base these expectations on what we learned from our relationship with our parents (or primary caregivers) growing up. My goal in this study is to see if you and your partner have similar or differing attachment styles from one another.

As a participant in this research project, you will be asked to fill out two surveys, one on information about your life and your background (no identifiable information is asked for, and at no time do you reveal your name). The second survey asks questions related to your attachment style, and you will be asked to rank on a scale of 1-7 how well each statement describes you. Participants in this study must be between 18 and 23 years of age and must be in current relationship for at least 3 months. The survey will take each participant approximately 30-50 minutes to complete, after which they will be mailed back to me in the envelope provided.

Because it is always possible that thinking about your childhood may cause some distress, a referral resource list is included at the end of this Informed Consent should you wish to seek support following your participation in this research. On the other hand, thinking about your attachment style may also be informative and beneficial to you and your partner and help you gain greater insight into yourself and your relationship.

This research is important to the field of social work because understanding attachment in terms of partnered relationships can help couples therapists get a better understanding of how people interact with each other. Also, people between the ages of 18-23 often see college therapists for relationship issues, and this research can give those therapists a little more insight into some of the issues, particularly related to attachment, that affect people in this age range.

All personal information about you as a participant will be kept confidential by me, and all identifying information will be completely separated from the surveys that you send back to me. Other than myself, only my academic advisor the data analyst will see the questionnaires, and neither of them will have access to identifying information about you. Furthermore, when I write my thesis report the data will be presented as a whole and

reflect patterns rather than individual responses. Finally, I will keep all of the surveys locked in my possession for three years, as required by Federal guidelines, after which time I will destroy the information.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may withdraw up until the point when you return the completed survey to me. After that, since there will be no identifying information attached to the survey, it will be impossible for me to remove your data from the group. When you answer the questions in this survey you may refuse to answer any question.   If you wish to contact me with questions, comments, or concerns at any time you may e-mail me at wyoung@email.smith.edu.

If you would like more information about attachment theory, please visit www.answers.com and enter "attachment theory."

If you would like to find a social worker or therapist in your area or have questions regarding mental health services or referrals, please visit www.networktherapy.com, or www.mentalhealth.smhsa.gov, or call the National Association of Social Workers at 1-800-227-3590. You may also be eligible for counseling services through your school if you are currently enrolled in a college or university.

Please keep the extra copy of this form for your personal records.

YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE ABOVE INFORMATION AND THAT YOU HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, YOUR PARTICIPATION, AND YOUR RIGHTS AND THAT YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.

Participant signature _____ Date_____

Thank you very much!

Whitney Young _____ Date_____