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Relationships that appear to contribute to the development of an earned- secure attachment

Abby E. Feinberg

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Abby Feinberg Relationships
that Appear to Contribute to
the Development of an
Earned- Secure Attachment

ABSTRACT

This study was undertaken to explore what relationships appear to contribute to the development of an earned- secure attachment with a specific focus on the type and quality of the relationship.

Well over 1,000 people received the study through social media requesting participation in a SurveyMonkey survey consisting of 3 screening questions, 14 demographic questions, 6 multiple choice questions, and 4 open ended questions. The screening and demographic questions allowed the 1,035 participants to be categorized by attachment style. The survey items assessed most important current relationship type and quality.

The findings of this research corroborated with previous studies that a non-family member is not more likely than a family member to be the relationship that enables the development of earned- secure attachment. My findings also support that participants identified with earned- secure attachment experienced significantly more loss, abuse, or trauma than continuous- secure participants, as well as reported significantly more that they experienced challenges and have since worked through them. Findings that were not significant are discussed in reference to the limitations of this study and further research is suggested.

RELATIONSHIPS CONTRIBUTE EARNED-SECURE ATTACHMENT

**RELATIONSHIPS THAT APPEAR TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE
DEVELOPMENT OF AN EARNED- SECURE ATTACHMENT**

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

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2015

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

John Bowlby (1979) offered that "attachment behavior is held to characterize human beings from the cradle to the grave" (p. 129). In his research, Bowlby offered differences in attachment development that lead to different life experiences. According to Bowlby's theory, central to the differences in life experiences are what he noted as secure and insecure attachment experiences. Secure attachment is described as a child who is able to separate from a caregiver, reach out when afraid, and rejoice when reconnected; in adulthood this person has trusting relationships and positive self-esteem. Insecure attachment was delineated into three categories: ambivalent, avoidant, and disorganized. Individuals with insecure ambivalent attachment are easily distressed, worried, and reluctant about their relationships. People with insecure avoidant attachment may be restrictive with their emotions and intimacy and not seek comfort from others. Insecure disorganized attachment stance may lead to later life confusion of roles and a combination of reluctant and restrictive behaviors. Bowlby believed that the secure and insecure attachment styles developed between infancy and adolescence would remain relatively inflexible for the rest of that person's life.

Recently, George, Kaplan, & Main, (1985) built on Bowlby's concepts of secure attachment by introducing the concepts of continuous-secure and earned-secure attachment styles. They argued that a person achieves an earned-secure attachment stance when that person moves from an insecure attachment stance via healing experiences to attain a calm and logical

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acceptance of his or her unstable childhood. These newer delineations challenge Bowlby's contention that attachment stances are inflexible.

Because of the emerging debate regarding the mechanisms of attachment, and its importance to a stable adult experience, a study is indicated. As the concepts of earned secure and continuous secure attachment styles are new to the field of attachment, to date, limited research has been conducted on how they operate. However, some of the more recent studies identify the need for further study on what contributes to the development of earned-security, and specifically, how personal relationships may contribute to the attainment of earned-security (Paley, Burchinal, Burchinal, & Payne, 1999; Levy, Blatt, & Shaver, 1998; Saunders, Jacobvitz, Zaccagnino, Beverung, & Hazen, 2011). Thus, the proposed study is designed to fill that gap.

Psychodynamic therapists focus on enabling a client to reach a more stable sense of being. From what we know, healthy attachment development is key to a stable sense of self (Bowlby 1979). The more information social workers have on the factors that enable a person to attain an earned-secure attachment stance, the better prepared clinicians can be to offer evidenced-based treatment. Whether the results exhibit specific ways therapy can support the transition, or specific types of relationships that therapists could encourage clients to engage in, this research will directly impact clinicians who use psychodynamic approaches or attachment theory, and their clients.

Social workers can use this information in at least two ways on a micro level: by supporting their clients to take on these qualities themselves, and by supporting their clients to recognize these qualities in others and select their relationships accordingly. Social workers can use this information on a macro level by starting and further supporting programs that enhance

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these qualities in people and the ability to recognize these qualities in others. Similar to learning other techniques to benefit their clients, social workers can learn to embody these qualities for their clients.

The research question is: “What relationships appear to contribute to developing an earned-secure attachment?”

A survey research design was used to study this question. A link to the SurveyMonkey allowed participants to take a version of Hazen and Shaver's (1987) three category attachment measure as a screening. Participants who were labeled secure then completed the demographic questions, including questions to categorize participants as earned-secure or continuous- secure. All identified secure participants then answered quantitative and qualitative questions regarding their relationships and how they believe one attains earned-security.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

My study on earned-security is based in attachment theory; therefore, this chapter reviews a brief history of attachment and its contributors. For a better understanding of the newly coined earned- security attachment style, it is positioned in tandem with a summary of the different attachment styles. This chapter presents recent studies in the attachment field that include as a study focus an examination of the delineation of secure attachment into continuous- and earned- secure attachment. This explanation will support the need for such a category in attachment theory, which is presented further in the chapter titled Discussion. Lastly, this chapter examines existing studies on earned- secure attachment, the results of which suggest areas for further research and exhibits the appropriateness of my study.

The History of Attachment

The clinical notion of "attachment" has played a role in most psychology research dating as far back as Freudian times. In his psychoanalytic research, Sigmund Freud reflected on what can be seen today as the rudimentary beginnings of the notion of attachment by examining interactions between people. Freud based his understanding of interactions in the concept of internal conflict (Hughes, 1989). B. F. Skinner's view of a "baby in a box" shifted our understanding of human interactions from internal conflict to only necessary for the purpose of meeting one's physical needs (i.e. food, warmth) (Skinner 1972). In response to B. F. Skinner's notion of attachment as solely physical need- based, Harry Harlow transferred our focus of

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attachment to caregiving and companionship. It remains an essential part of attachment history that Harlow exhibited the need for comfort, emotion, and socialization with his rhesus monkey experiments as it continues to support the current understanding of attachment (Harlow, Dodsworth, & Harlow, 1965). This transition in our understanding of attachment from internally focused to externally driven is crucial to the placement of this research in the current understanding of attachment.

Studying human interactions concurrently to Freud, Melanie Klein did not stray too far from Freud's views on the psyche; however, she began focusing on children, particularly the child's state of the psyche (Hughes, 1989). As her supervisee, John Bowlby furthered Klein's focus on children and introduced the world to the concept of attachment between a mother and her infant (Bowlby, 1958). John Bowlby was the first to view attachment as a regulatory process, relationship, or system. The main authors contributing to the evolution of our understanding of attachment from 1950 to the present include John Bowlby (1950's to 1980's), Mary Ainsworth (1970's to 1990's), and Cindy Hazen, Phillip Shaver, Nancy Kaplan, Mary Main, and Carol George (1980's to present). This chapter presents a brief overview of each contribution as it relates to my study.

John Bowlby is most known for pioneering attachment theory. Attachment researchers continue to build on his theory as they add to the ongoing development in our understanding of attachment. As mentioned above, from his focus on child development, he began studying the interactions, specifically the bonding, between mothers and their infants (1958). Bowlby (1973) saw attachment as an 'all or nothing' concept: according to his view, one is either attached, or is not attached.

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Confidence in the availability of attachment figures, or lack of it, is built up slowly during the years of immaturity-- infancy, childhood, and adolescence-- and that whatever expectations are developed during those years tend to persist relatively unchanged throughout the rest of life. (p. 202)

Due to the understood critical and limited time to solidify an infant's attachment style, which would remain with her the rest of her life, attachment became a central topic. Bowlby explored the impact of human attachment through infant experiences of separation, loss, sadness, and depression, and the insecure attachment styles that would result (1973; 1980). In the late 1980's, Bowlby explored what causes secure attachment and healthy human development. These developments set the basis for the components of attachment styles, upon which my study used as its foundation.

Mary Ainsworth joined Bowlby in his research on interactions between mothers and their infants. She furthered his work by developing an attachment measurement process that she termed the "Strange Situation procedure," which became a well-known instrument, even in the present, for measuring infant attachment. The concept underlying this measurement process was to study an infant's reactions while his mother left him and returned to him; at times a stranger was present as an additional factor. The infant's response upon the mother's return was more telling of the level of the infant's attachment style than the infant's reaction to the mother leaving. This resulted in a landmark discovery of three infant attachment patterns: secure, ambivalent, and resistant or anxious-avoidant (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). These attachment styles and how each is depicted are explained in the following section: Insecure Attachment Styles. Ainsworth's research expanded our understanding of attachment styles, paralleling my

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study's efforts in expanding beyond the current understanding of attachment styles by exploring earned- security.

To support or counter Bowlby's claims that attachment style is stable from infancy throughout one's lifespan, further research focused on adult attachment. As earned-security can only be attained after an individual has an insecure attachment style in infancy, the attention on adult attachment is important to my study. A more detailed explanation of the definition of earned-security follows in the sections: Delineation of Secure Attachment: Continuous- and Earned- Secure Attachment, and Existing Studies on Earned- Secure Attachment: Areas for Further Research. To research attachment in adults, Cindy Hazen and Phillip Shaver developed a self report measure of adult attachment. During this process they discovered a fourth attachment style known as anxious ambivalent, discussed in the following section: Insecure Attachment Styles (Hazen & Shaver 1987). By creating a self-report measure, they contributed a reflective component in measuring attachment; this notion of self reflection is important to my study on earned-security. Around the same time, Nancy Kaplan, Carol George, and Mary Main developed the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) -which will be further explained below- (1985; 1984/1996). Through this process, Kaplan and colleagues coined the term earned-secure; referring to individuals who accepted and moved beyond their negative childhood experiences as evidenced by appropriate affect and realistic recollection. This research countered Bowlby's claim, and is the basis of the present study.

Insecure Attachment Styles

As my study examines one particular attachment style- earned-security; I feel it is important to understand the other preceding and concurrent attachment styles. As mentioned above in the section titled The History of Attachment, attachment was originally perceived by

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Bowlby (1979) as an 'all or nothing' concept. As research developed our understanding of the experience of attachment, the 'all or nothing' concept introduced by Bowlby became known, respectively, as secure and insecure. While secure attachment simply resulted in healthy human development, and one either had it or did not, researchers focused on the different styles of insecure attachment. Insecure attachment was first delineated into two categories during the Strange Situation procedure, when Mary Ainsworth identified ambivalent and avoidant (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Kimberly Bartholomew (1990) evolved Ainsworth's avoidant insecure attachment style into the more specific categories now known as avoidant-dismissing and avoidant-fearful. Along with the aforementioned categories of insecure attachment, prior research added an additional insecure category of disorganized-disoriented (Crittenden, 1988; Main & Hesse, 1990; Main & Solomon, 1986). Each attachment style has a typical cause and presentation which is described below. This relates to my exploration of the cause of earned-secure attachment, as the presentation of earned-secure attachment already has saturated research described in the next two sections. This section describes the insecure attachment stances.

Ambivalent and avoidant insecure attachment. Mary Ainsworth (1978) is responsible for expanding our understanding of attachment with identifying what is known as the ambivalent and avoidant attachment styles. The ambivalent child would reach out to his mother for support; however, look away and act uninterested once receiving attention. Uncertain of the consistency of his mother's support, he feels his needs are met at random and he needs to exaggerate his behavior to receive attention. The avoidant child would not reach out to his mother upon her return and exhibited a blunted affect based on the feeling that his behavior has no impact on the

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system; he feels helpless, depressed, unworthy, and unacceptable (Ainsworth et al., 1978). The avoidant category was further delineated by Bartholomew (1990).

Fearful-avoidant and dismissing-avoidant attachment. Bartholomew's (1990) research delineates insecure-avoidant into fearful-avoidant and dismissing-avoidant. These delineated categories are specific for adults and correspond with the single avoidant style in children.

Avoidance may therefore stem from either a fear of intimacy or a lack of interest or motivation to become intimate with others... individuals who desire close attachments but avoid them out of fear, and individuals who claim to neither fear nor desire close attachments. (p. 149)

It was beneficial to explore the differences behind the similar presentation of avoidance and blunted affect in the two types of avoidant styles in order to recognize how to support each style type. Parallel to this benefit, the outcome of studying the earned-secure delineation and its difference from the continuous-secure delineation is to enhance the understanding of how to support individuals with earned- secure attachment and how to help other insecure individuals attain earned- secure attachment. My study seeks out methods to support individuals with other insecure attachment styles to attain earned-security.

Disorganized-disoriented attachment. Researchers immersed in the study of attachment developed the last insecure attachment stance, disorganized- disoriented (Crittenden, 1988; Main & Hesse, 1990; Main & Solomon, 1986). The causes of disorganized attachment include preoccupied, stressed, or disrupted caregiving. Examples include a scary caregiver, a parent with mental illness or depression, maltreatment, neglect, or abuse. When the attachment system is constantly activated with no resolve, the constant arousal and distress connections

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result in a reduction of physiological arousal and emotional stress. Individuals with disorganized-disoriented attachment stances would benefit greatly from attaining an earned-secure attachment stance through a supportive replacement relationship as discussed in the section Existing studies on Earned- Secure Attachment: Areas for Further Research.

As discussed above, much attention has been directed toward the different styles of insecure attachment; however, attention has recently been directed toward the delineation of secure attachment. This delineation, as described in the next section, helps portray the spectrum of attachment as a regulatory process, relationship, or system, rather than the originally perceived independent and unchanging categories. The more research contributing to the general understanding of the attachment schema, the more benefit individuals can receive.

Delineation of Secure Attachment: Continuous- and Earned- Secure Attachment

Although secure attachment had been recognized in one understanding or another since Freudian times, focus in studies had been centered on understanding the insecure attachment styles. An example to illustrate this point is Melanie Klein's (1935) statement:

The fact that a good relation to its mother and to the external world helps the baby to overcome its early paranoid anxieties throws a new light on the importance of its earliest experiences. From its inception analysis has always laid stress on the importance of the child's early experiences, but it seems to me that only since we know more about the nature and contents of its early anxieties, and the continuous interplay between its actual experiences and its phantasy-life, are we able fully to understand why the external factor is so important. (p. 170)

Klein acknowledges the benefits of what had presented as the now-recognized secure attachment; however, she changes her focus to the underlying anxieties rather than what has

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resulted in "good relation to its mother" (p. 170). Beginning in 1984 and continuing to the present study, few researchers have directed their focus toward studying and delineating secure attachment (Kaplan, et al., 1984; Bowlby, 1988; Pearson et al., 1994; Phelps et al., 1998; Paley et al., 1999; Roisman et al., 2002; Saunders et al, 2011; & Fraley, 2012). This section reviews the development of our understanding of secure attachment and the delineation of secure attachment into earned- and continuous-secure attachment stances.

Secure attachment. Mary Ainsworth's (1978) concept of 'strange situations,' described in the previous sections, added more understanding of secure attachment. Each attachment style has causes, characteristics, and a presentation specific to it. In her study, Ainsworth noted that the secure child would reconnect with his mother and continue playing, feeling as though his mother's support is constant and predictable (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Mary Main explained the readiness to establish new relationships is found in secure individuals (Main & Goldwyn, 1984) and she exhibited that secure attachment affords a child more attention toward cognitive capacities necessary for full development (Main, 1991). This is pertinent to my study as I sought to learn about the process by which an individual develops the characteristics and presentation of a securely attached individual.

Earned- secure attachment. After Ainsworth's research on childhood attachment, researchers directed their focus toward adult attachment. Nancy Kaplan, Carol George, and Mary Main developed the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) (1985; 1984/1996). Presently world renowned, this interview lasts 60 minutes with a certified interviewer and is followed by hours of coding. The interviewer considers affect, memory, and acceptance of one's childhood to determine current attachment style. After this study, Pearson and colleagues (1994) coined the terms earned-secure and continuous-secure attachment in their revision of the AAI; developing

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earned- security is the focus of the present study. Our understanding of earned-secure attachment, as developed by Kaplan and her colleagues, consists of overcoming insecure attachment through relationships; whereas continuous-secure attachment is the stable nature of a securely attached infant into adulthood. To further explain the distinction, Pearson and colleagues (1994) reported that earned-secure adults described their parents as neglecting them more, rejecting them more, and loving them less than that reported by continuous-secure adults. The earned-secure delineation is noted as 15% - 55% of the general adult population while the continuous- secure delineation is noted as 22% - 36% of the general adult population (Pearson et al., 1994; Paley et al., 1999; Phelps et al., 1998; Moller et al., 2002).

Main & Goldwyn (1984) and Crowell and colleagues (2002) elaborate that in safe and stable environments, people can express and reflect on their feelings and their negative pasts, in order to overcome their insecure attachment. Shaver, Hazen, and Bradshaw (1988) state "an insecure person becomes increasingly secure, probably by participating in relationships that disconfirm negative features of experience-based mental models and/or gaining insight into the workings of one's mental models..." (p. 85). Main & Goldwyn (1984) has also referred to the process of developing an earned- secure attachment stance as a corrective relationship. These descriptions of our understanding of earned-secure attachment are crucial to my study.

Since the development of earned- secure attachment, some researchers have disputed Bowlby's initial claims. John Bowlby (1958) declared the unwavering hierarchy of attachment resulting in no replacement for that of a mother's support. Although Bowlby (1969) was supportive of secondary attachments later in life: romantic partners appear to replace parental figures as primary attachment, he maintained his stance in 1973, as noted above, "that whatever expectations are developed during those years tend to persist relatively unchanged throughout the

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rest of life" (p. 202). Bartholomew (1990) supported this claim with the term "monotropism" or attachment to mother figure only. Multiple studies have explored the hierarchy of attachment and the ability of a secondary attachment figure to replace the missed attachment of an infant's mother (Main & Weston 1981; van IJzendoorn, Sagi, & Lambermon, 1992; Mitchell-Copeland, Denham, & DeMulder, 1997; Howes, Rodning, Galluzzo, & Myers, 1998; Daniel, 1998; Ammaniti, van Ijzendoorn, Speranza, & Tambelli, 2000; Crowell, Treboux, & Waters, 2002). Ainsworth (1989) wrote: "As potential attachment figures, these deserve research attention" (p. 711). Support of the importance of a secondary attachment figure is related to my study which sought to know which secondary attachment figures can enable an insecurely attached individual to develop an earned- secure attachment stance.

Additional research has been conducted to confirm the claim that earned-secure individuals are as secure as continuous- secure individuals and more secure than insecure individuals. The following section will describe the studies on earned-security in detail including the expressed need for my study to decipher what relationships assist the development of an earned-secure attachment.

Existing Studies on Earned- Secure Attachment: Areas for Further Research

Although earned- security is a relatively new concept in the history of attachment, there are important studies that have paved the way and stated the need for my study. Within earned-secure research there have become centralized topics of focus, including parenting, generational attachment, and correlation between specific relationships and earned-secure attachment. This section explains the findings, limitations, measures, and suggested further research from those studies.

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Parenting and generational attachment. Research has shown that individuals with an earned-secure attachment stance parent with the same ability as individuals with a continuous-secure attachment stance (Pearson, Cohn, Cowan, & Cowan, 1994; Levy, Blatt, & Shaver, 1998; Phelps, Belsky, Crnic, 1998) or are able to have secure children (Saunders, Jacobvitz, Zaccagnino, Beverung, & Hazen, 2011). This subsection explains each study and its relation to my research.

One of the first studies to exhibit parenting ability in earned-secure individuals was Pearson, Cohn, Cowan, and Cowan, (1994). They conducted a study, using Main and Goldwyn's (1988) terms earned-security and continuous-security, to relate attachment stance to depressive symptoms and parenting styles in 40 parents of preschool children. While their results for depressive symptoms reflected a difference between continuous-secure and earned-secure participants, there was no difference regarding parenting style of the two subgroups. There is earned-security research focused on the depressive symptoms or resiliency of the participants. My study considered resiliency by including questions regarding overcoming challenges in the survey items. Pearson's subjects participated in the AAI and a self-report measure of depressive symptoms. My study was unable to use the AAI based on restrictions and limitations that are discussed in the discussion chapter. It is important to compare results from studies like mine that use self-report measures, and studies like Pearson's that use the AAI. The researchers refined their definition of earned-secure with the exclusion of unresolved participants due to loss. Grief can affect clear recall and has a wide scope; it would interfere with the results of earned-secure. To assess for unresolved grief, my study included a question in the survey items about loss. The researchers claim theirs was the first study to look at a potential distinction within secure attachment connected to self perception and parenting style. A limitation was the sample was

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taken from a longitudinal study restricted to predominantly middle class, Caucasian parents, with an average age between low to mid 30's and from the same geographic location. The researchers might be biased in assuming they would find more earned-secure participants in this niche, rather than a broader, more diverse and generalizable sample. Due to sampling limitations in Pearson's study, my study targeted individuals of all ages and educational backgrounds via social media, which is discussed in detail in the methodology chapter. My study also expanded the focus from parenting style to general positive relationships.

Another study that focused on the parenting abilities of earned-secure individuals was Levy, Blatt, and Shaver (1998). They conducted a study that focused on the connection between attachment style and subjects' depictions of themselves in relation to their parents. While the results did not support the researchers' expectations regarding differences among insecure attachment styles, their understanding of fearful participants, a distinction of insecure avoidant, indirectly connected to the field of research on earned-secure attachment style. Levy's study included a multitude of self-report measures including Hazen and Shaver's (1987) three category attachment measure which is a Likert-type rating scale, and the Bartholomew attachment measures (Bartholomew and Horowitz, 1991). Levy's research is pertinent to my study as I replicated the use of Hazen and Shaver's (1987) three category attachment measure, using it as a screening for participation. A restriction in Levy's study is the use of only undergraduate students, limiting the age and educational scope of the population. The strengths of Levy's study were its large sample size, fairly even distribution of men and women, and the inclusion of people not currently in romantic relationships. The focus is not on parenting but rather personal factors. These are strengths that my study aimed to replicate for the sake of diversity and generalizeability. Although earned-secure attachment was not one of the categories in the self-

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report measures, Levy and colleagues (1998) closely connected "fearful avoidant individuals" to earned-secure adults in their ability to conceptualize their relationship with their parents (p. 416). The similarity between the two subcategories is the rational and articulate explanation of one's own negative childhood experiences, while maintaining current positive interactions. Levy's study suggests further research into factors that enable a person to be better able to understand his or her childhood relationships, or an earned- secure attachment stance.

Phelps, Belsky, and Crnic (1998) had parenting style central to their study in which they strove to refine the definition of earned-secure. They stated that individuals were only considered earned- secure if they could "exhibit effective caregiving under high stress" (p. 21). Through the qualifier of a stricter definition, this study helped to confirm earned-secure as a successful transformative process from insecure to secure attachment stance. These findings are vital to my study which is based on previously supported data of developing earned-security as a transformative process. My study solely focused on what appears to assist this transformative process. The sample in the longitudinal study was of mothers and their first- born sons. The researchers used the AAI in addition to two home visits to establish environmental stress level. While the interviewers were qualified to conduct the reliable AAI, the judgment of environmental stress levels as witnessed in the home may not have been as reliable. Additionally, the families were asked to act as they normally would, without attending to the in-home reviewer rating their activity. Their results supported previous research showing that earned-secure individuals parent and manage pressures of aversive conditions as well as secure, and better than insecure individuals. These findings support the importance of my study which aims to assist more insecure individuals to maneuver themselves through the transformative process in order to reap the benefits of earned-security supported in Phelps's study. The

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limitations include that subjects were only married mothers and mostly Caucasian. There may be bias in that an eligibility requirement was marriage and a first- born son. In addition, the original study was of "the terrible two's," which could have influenced which mother's decided to participate in the longitudinal study. However the study did include both working and middle class participants, with an age range of 20-41, and an educational range of 12-25 years. My study aimed to replicate the range of participants in education, age, and socioeconomic status; however, my study also aimed to include more diversity in gender, race, sexuality, and marital status.

A study that focused on the generational aspect of attachment was by Saunders, Jacobvitz, Zaccagnino, Beverung, & Hazen (2011). They controlled for depressive symptoms while exploring the specific relationships associated with earned-security. The notion of specific relationships associating with earned- security is central to my study. Saunders and colleagues (2011) administered the AAI and questionnaires about therapy and depressive symptoms to mothers expecting their first child. To replicate Saunders's study's focus on therapy as a specific relationship associated with earned-security, my study allowed participants to suggest therapy as a means to attain earned-security in the survey items. Later, when the babies were 12 to 15 months old, they used the Strange Situation procedure discussed in the previous sections. Saunders and colleagues (2011) used a stringent definition of earned-security from Hesse (2008) and Main and colleagues (2002) to strengthen their study. The study found that the alternative provider of emotional support to the individual with earned- secure attachment was no more likely to be a non-family member than a family member. Another conclusion was that earned-secure individuals spent more time in therapy than the other attachment categories. While these findings may be beneficial in that they support the accepted idea that therapy and relationships

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outside and inside the family are positive for individuals with an insecure attachment stance, they are not specific enough to state that someone with an insecure attachment stance should create more relationships: therapeutic, family, and others. To obtain more specific relationship qualities would further expand the field and help insecure individuals attain earned-security. It would also restrict the search to qualities in individuals who are more likely to be helpful rather than cause further harm; these were goals of my study. The results from the Strange Situation procedure support previous findings that earned-secure mothers are just as able to have securely attached infants as their secure counterparts. This study is another example of the use of participants from a longitudinal study, one that involved first-time mothers. This restriction excludes research on men and women who are not mothers. The sample also predominantly included Caucasians. However, it was able to attain a range of ages and socio-economic statuses, which my study aimed to replicate. The retrospective nature of the study is a limitation and the study suggests future studies to explore personal factors contributing as well as outside supports. Therefore, Saunders's study supports the necessity of my study.

Relationships and earned-secure attachment. A select few studies have targeted the topic of association between reparative relationships and earned-secure attachment stance (Grich, 2001; Saunders, Jacobvitz, Zaccagnino, Beverung, & Hazen, 2011). My study shared the focus of these studies in that it aimed to add to the understanding of which relationships assist with the development of an earned-secure attachment. The results of these studies suggest that a non-family member was not more likely than a family member to support the attainment of earned-security. My study examined more specifically what relationships appear to lead a person to attain an earned-secure attachment style. Both of these studies have sample limitations: Grich (2001) uses only college students in romantic relationships and Saunders and colleagues (2011)

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attained their sample from a longitudinal study that only included first-time mothers. My study targeted a diverse participation population via social media with the objective to broaden the sample pool.

Grich, (2001) studied 180 college students in romantic relationships using the AAI, the Adult Attachment Questionnaire (AAQ), and self-reported measures of adjustment and relationship satisfaction. Grich explored to which category, secure or insecure, an earned-secure individual more closely related. The findings were based on each person's level of resiliency. Resiliency was more pronounced for participants who experienced stressful life factors during childhood but currently maintain secure attachment, those labeled earned-secure, than their counterparts who had experienced negative parenting, those labeled insecure. This paralleled the triumph of earned-secure individuals compared to their continuous-secure counterparts. Grich used a self-assessment measure of attachment in addition to the AAI to obtain "both one's conscious attachment orientation... and the more unconscious attachment orientation" (p. 3). While Grich's study focused specifically on romantic relationships, it informed my study due to its inclusion of a self-report measure and the support that earned-secure individuals are declared so resilient. This study claimed to be the first to look at earned-security through a self-reported measure. Additionally, Grich claimed to be the first to look at environmental stressors as defining criteria for earned-secure attachment. One limitation was combining the continuous information obtained from the self-report with the categorical information obtained from the AAI. This study was also limited to heterosexual couples as the 180 individuals consisted of 90 heterosexual men and women. Having an equal number of men and women was helpful in determining that there were no significant gender differences; however, this result only occurred within the sample of heterosexual couples. In addition to the retrospective reporting limitations

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and limited range of age and education, the results could only be correlational rather than causal. This study offered a valuable perspective on resiliency within the earned-secure population. My study's intended benefit to the social work community is offering the specific process by which to obtain the recognized benefits to earned-security in studies such as Grich's (2001).

Limitations. One common limitation across studies on earned- security is the lack of diversity in participation. Most participants are Caucasian, married, women, who have at least one child, and are heterosexual (Paley et al., 1999; Pearson et al., 1994; Phelps et al., 1998; Saunders et al., 2011; Roisman, Padron, Sroufe, & Egeland, 2002; Roisman, Fortuna, & Holland, 2006) or undergraduate students (Levy et al., 1998; Grich, 2001; Cohen, 2005). My study aimed to be more accessible and reach a more diverse population.

Participant diversity. Roisman, Padron, Sroufe, and Egeland, (2002) reported data from a 23-year longitudinal study. The researchers distinguished retrospectively and prospectively defined-earned security. An individual was labeled retrospectively earned- secure based on coherently describing negative childhood experiences; a retrospectively continuous- secure individual coherently described positive childhood experiences. This distinction is pertinent to my study which identified earned-secure individuals retrospectively. Due to the length of the study, participants' infant attachment classifications were used to prospectively define earned-security years later. The study replicated Pearson and colleagues' (1994) study and supported the data that there was more reported internalized distress for retrospectively earned- rather than continuous- secure individuals. A limitation on this study was the sample size and only including mothers and their first born children.

Roisman, Fortuna, and Holland (2006) conducted a follow-up study after the retrospective and prospective study on earned- and continuous- security. They wanted to answer

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the question why earned-secure individuals reported negative childhoods. The researchers used the AAI to collect life narratives from 18-25 year olds and an experimental mood induction; which was unrelated to security. The results demonstrated that adults in a sadness condition were more likely to be considered earned-secure while happy individuals were more likely to be labeled continuous- secure. One view is that mood has an impact on the AAI results and therefore more valid and reliable measures need to be created. Another view is that earned-secure individuals that experience overcoming negative situations will be more resilient than their happy continuous-secure counterparts. However, happiness may also have a positive effect on resiliency; this could be a future topic to study. Roisman and colleagues' (2006) study was important in informing my study in that it stated that mood may play a factor in the measurement of earned- attachment.

Undergraduate student participants. Cohen (2005) conducted a study on undergraduate students labeled earned-secure and continuous- insecure. She explained continuous- insecure as insecurely attached since childhood. The researcher created a new measure of secondary attachment quality called the Questionnaire about Secondary Attachment Figures (Q-SAF). Among the findings were the data that grandparents were reported most frequently as earned-secure individuals' secondary attachment figure during childhood; this was twice the amount as reported for continuous- insecure individuals. Qualities of secondary attachment figures included warm and altruistic compared to the dismissing and mean relationships of the continuous- insecure individuals.

Longitudinal studies. Another restriction to diversity in participation population in multiple studies was from taking samples from longitudinal studies (Paley et al., 1999; Pearson

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et al., 1994; Phelps et al., 1998; Saunders et al., 2011; Roisman et al., 2002). This resulted in limitations on the sample based on the exclusion criteria of the initial study.

Research measures. A couple studies used self-report measures along with the predominant AAI (Pearson et al., 1994; Grich, 2001) and one study used self-report in place of the AAI (Levy et al., 1998). As the AAI requires a qualified interviewer as well as face to face time with each participant, it is beneficial to examine alternative ways to obtain more information in the field of earned-secure attachment; many segments of the generalized population do not have the means necessary to meet with a qualified interviewer for at least an hour. My study describes in detail the choice for self-report, as well as the limitations restricting my study from using the AAI, in the discussion chapter.

Suggested further research. There are multiple studies that have suggested the need for further research on the processes through which an individual develops earned-security (Paley et al., 1999; Levy et al., 1998; Saunders et al., 2011). These studies, described above, support the need and offer suggestions taken into consideration in the development of my study.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

Purpose and Design

The purpose of this research was to examine the specific relationships that appeared to contribute to individuals' development of earned-secure attachment. The exploratory descriptive study was designed to assess whether people perceived their relationships as enabling them to develop earned-secure attachment stances, and how they described those relationships. This study surveyed a sample of individuals through a mixed methods approach to answer the question: What relationships appear to contribute to developing an earned-secure attachment? There were also sub-questions that examined qualities or aspects these relationships have in common and what age does earned-secure attachment seem to appear? The feasibility of this study was based on creating an attachment self-report questionnaire that included earned-security. Using questions in the demographic section informed by Nancy Kaplan, Ph.D., the creator of the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI), to categorize participants made this reasonably feasible.

Sample

The target population consisted of individuals who were identified as secure through the screening and completed the survey items. A total of 478 individuals comprised the sample of eligible participants. Earned-Secure attachment is not a commonly known distinguishing factor so some of the demographic items helped to delineate between earned- and continuous- secure

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attachment (See Appendix G: Demographic Questions). The nonprobability convenience sampling screened people based on the exclusion criteria: people who identified as having a secure attachment stance, delineated into continuous- and earned- secure categories, and who were eligible for the study; this allowed for exploration within the phenomena that relationships contribute to a person developing earned- secure attachment. I hoped to get a large, diverse sample by including as many adults as possible in the screening. This descriptive approach was an attempt to be generalizable to the general population. As opposed to the previous studies including mainly White, heterosexual, married, parents, my target audience included all races, sexual orientations, relational and parental statuses, and genders. However, the participants were collected via convenience sampling, because it was not possible to randomly recruit people identified with earned-security; therefore, a diverse sample pool could not be guaranteed.

Protection of Privacy

The responses were documented and saved on SurveyMonkey. Recordings of identified continuous- and earned- secure participant responses were coded for subsequent analysis. Security mechanisms were initiated within Survey Monkey that eliminated all potential to access/identify individual respondent emails or identity. Thus, total anonymity was assured due to the nature of the data collection process. Due to the anonymity of the study, there was no opportunity for participants to submit questions within the study; however, I provided my direct email address and the Chair of the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee phone number for participants to ask questions separately from their responses to the study items. This information was included on the informed consent (See Appendix C: Informed Consent).

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Recruitment

Recruitment was largely based on convenience sampling. The inclusionary criteria included any adult, age 18 and older, who had access to a computer, could read and understand English, and was identified as having a secure attachment as evidenced by selecting "B" on the third question of the screening (See Appendix A: Screening Questions). The third question on the screening was an edited version of Hazen and Shaver's (1987) Original Attachment Three-Category Measure. Use of the survey was acceptable as it is not a copyright measure. Exclusion criteria were individuals identified as having an insecure attachment as evidenced by selecting "A" or "C" on the third question of the screening. Individuals who selected "No" to either of the first two questions regarding age and language, or selected "A" or "C" in the third question, were redirected to the Thank You Page (See Appendix B: Thank You) and were not eligible to participate in the study. If potential participants met all the screening criteria, they were directed to the Informed Consent page (See Appendix C: Informed Consent). The participant pool was contacted via social media and personal networking such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and email; all sites for which I am a member. I wrote posts and private messages on Facebook and LinkedIn (See Appendix D: Post and Private Message on Facebook and Appendix E: Post and Private Message on LinkedIn). People receiving the post also had it automatically broadcasted on their newsfeeds, which continuously transmitted news updates, for additional publicity. LinkedIn also emailed the updates to the connections so members could receive their posts without accessing the website. I emailed friends, family, coworkers, and groups in which I had involvement (See Appendix F: Email Recruitment). All posts, messages, and emails included a statement requesting recruitment assistance by further distributing the link.

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Data Collection

Participants received the study's SurveyMonkey link via Facebook, LinkedIn, or email directly from this researcher or from people forwarding the study to others. When participants clicked on the link, the welcome page, including the screening, opened in a web browser. If participants were eligible for the study, they were directed to the informed consent. If participants consented, they were directed to the demographics section of the survey (See Appendix G: Demographic Questions); followed by the survey items (See Appendix H: Survey Items). SurveyMonkey offers "Skip Logic to disqualify respondents who don't consent to your terms..." (SurveyMonkey Website). Participants who did not consent were redirected to the thank you webpage (See Appendix B: Thank You).

Survey questions: quantitative data. SurveyMonkey collected all the data and stored it on an immediate and continuous basis. I had access to the results and could allow access to others, specifically a research advisor and a statistical consultant, neither of who participated in this study. The distinguishing items among the demographic questions were produced in collaboration with Nancy Kaplan Ph.D., creator of the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI).

Survey questions: qualitative data. In addition to answering multiple choice questions about the types of relationships that helped them develop an earned- secure attachment stance, participants were provided with an "Other" option with space for comments. These quantitative questions included the opportunity for commentary, which was coded as qualitative. There were also qualitative questions such as "What qualities were well-known to you as a child in the relationship?" This mixed methods approach allowed the inclusion and explanation of the diverse relationships in individuals' lives. This exploratory study drew out what allows a person to shift from an insecure to earned-secure attachment stance (See Appendix H: Survey Items).

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Data Analysis

As there are only a few other studies that have specifically analyzed the relationships that contribute to developing an earned-secure attachment, this study expects to validate or challenge the previous findings (Grich, 2001; Saunders, Jacobvitz, Zaccagnino, Beverung, & Hazen, 2011). The data analysis was primarily based on a set of descriptive statistical analysis. The Smith School for Social Work statistical specialist assisted with this aspect of the study. As this was a descriptive study design, use of frequency analysis was used to show the central tendency that appeared to contribute to a person developing an earned-secure attachment stance. A pie chart added a visual understanding of the nominal categories of relationships addressed. A bar chart exhibited the ordinal differences between people's relationships with their caretakers in childhood, during their insecure attachment stance, and their current relationships. In addition, correlation analysis was applied to examine relationship associations amongst subgroups (based on demographic features) within the sample. Finally, t-tests and analysis of variance were run to determine differences between relationships across subgroups.

A total of about 478 individuals responded to the open ended questions; however, N varied between questions due to ability to skip questions. For the open ended questions, I utilized qualitative analysis methods to assess the responses. All responses were coded using words and phrases used by respondents across the questions. I looked for themes and patterns regarding which types of relationships and qualities of those relationships appeared to contribute to a person developing earned-security. Intratranscript analysis was an appropriate method for meaning making; it allowed me to determine the importance of each participant's expressed response. Direct quotes from responses to the open-ended questions were beneficial to the data analysis in that the qualitative responses helped add nuance to objective data from the survey.

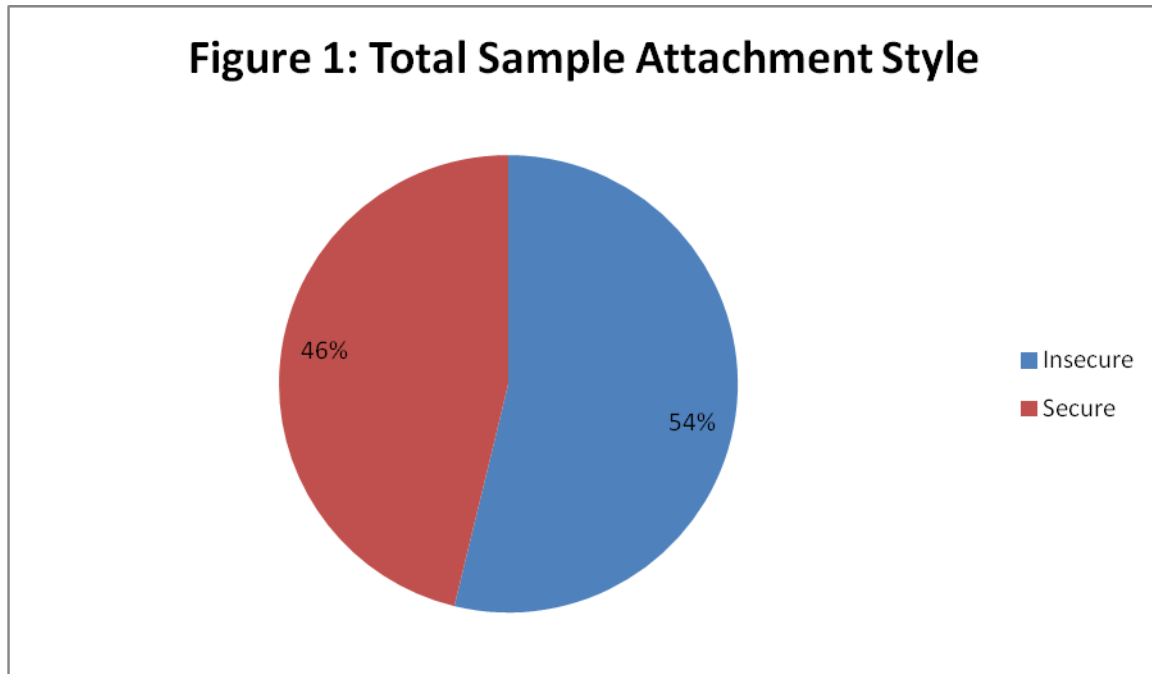
CHAPTER IV

Findings

My study was designed to answer the research question of "what relationships appear to contribute to developing an earned- secure attachment." Study results led to findings that identified relationships that appear to contribute to developing an earned-secure attachment. The study design utilized SurveyMonkey software to collect data. The survey included three parts: the initial screening, the demographic questions, and the survey items, including both quantitative and qualitative questions. In this chapter, the quantitative and qualitative findings are presented from the screening, demographics, and survey items. Tables and figures are included to assist in describing the results, accompanied by narrative summaries for each.

Screening Data

The screening consisted of three questions to gauge eligibility. Out of the 1,035 individuals who completed the screening, 557 individuals, or 54%, were screened out or removed for not having answered the main identifying question. Therefore, 478 individuals, or 46%, were identified as over 18 years old, able to read and understand English, and currently having a secure attachment style as defined by the Original Attachment Three-Category Measure (Hazan & Shaver 1987). (See Figure 1: Total Sample Attachment Style). The findings are reported on the 478 individuals identified as secure; however, there is variation in the number of participants (N) per question because some participants did not respond to every question.



Demographics Data

Total participant population. The demographics section included questions on gender, birth year, race/ethnicity, geographic location, relational status, parental status, level of education completed, and having experienced loss, abuse, or trauma. Of the 476 individuals who reported gender, 340 (71%) identified as Female, 132 (28%) identified as Male, and 4 (1%) identified as other. There were 60 different birth years reported by 473 individuals. The range of birth years was 1927 to 1996. The most frequent group of birth year was 1976 to 1996 and the mode of the respondents was 1989 with the median of 1987. There were 19 categories of race/ethnicity reported by 478 respondents with a 391 majority (82%) who identified as Caucasian/ white. For the remainder of the respondents, 23, or approximately 5%, identified as Caucasian/ Jewish; fifteen, or 3%, identified as mixed race/biracial; twelve, or 3%, identified as African American/ black; eleven, or 2%, identified as Asian; and 9 individuals, 2%, identified as Hispanic. Of the 477 individuals that responded to the question about geographic location, 361 participants (76%) identified their location as the northeast region of the country; forty- six participants (10%)

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identified West; forty participants (8%) noted they live in the south; a total of 27 participants (or 6%) identified the Midwest as where they live; and a mere 3 participants (<1% of the respondent pool) identified that they lived in a location of 'other.' (See Table 1: Demographic Information).

	Respondents	Percent
<u>Birth Year/Ages</u>		
1927 - 1950 (64-87)	26	5.50
1951 - 1975 (39-63)	66	13.95
1976 - 1996 (18-38)	381	80.55
<u>Gender</u>		
Female	340	71.4
Male	132	27.7
Other	4	0.8
<u>Geographic Location</u>		
Midwest	27	5.7
Northeast	361	75.7
Other	3	0.6
South	40	8.4
West	46	9.6
<u>Race/Ethnicity</u>		
African American/ Black	12	2.5
Asian	11	2.3
Caucasian - Jewish	23	4.8
Caucasian - White	391	81.8
Hispanic	9	1.9
Mixed Race/ Biracial	15	3.1
Other	13	2.72

Total population status and history. For relational status, the 477 respondents were categorized as single 217 times (46%), married 141 times (30%), other 101 times (21%), divorced or separated 13 times (3%), and widowed 5 times (1%). There were 473 participants to give a response to parental status. The majority, 356 (75%), reported "I have no children." Others reported they have children; 75 reported that their children currently live with them (16%)

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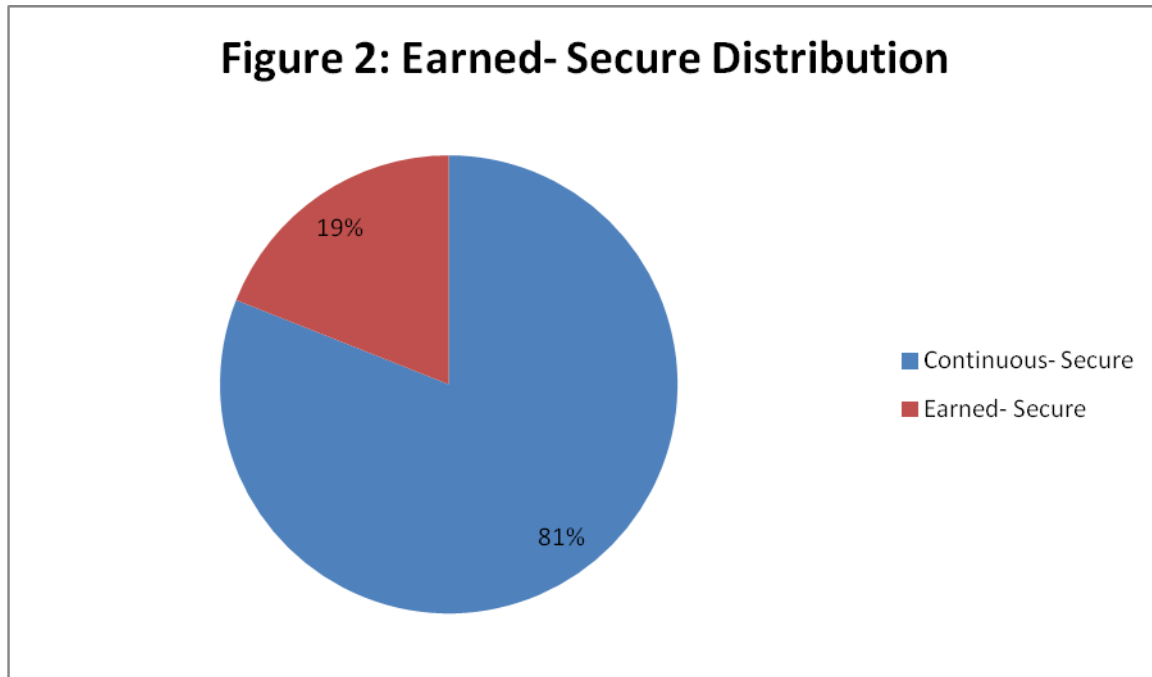
and 42 reported their children do not currently live with them (9%). For highest completed level of education, 477 respondents selected "College" 254 times (53%), "Graduate School" 171 times (36%), "High School" 41 times (9%), "Other" 10 times (2%), and "Middle School" 1 time (<1%). Lastly, 476 individuals responded to the question about loss, abuse, or trauma. The majority reported "No" with 313 responses (66%), and the remainder reported "Yes" with 163 responses (34%). (See Table 2: Total Population Status and History).

Table 2 Total Population Status and History ($N \approx 478$)		Respondents	Percent
<u>Highest Completed Level of Education</u>			
	College	254	53.2
	Graduate School	171	35.8
	High School	41	8.6
	Middle School	1	0.2
	Other	10	2.1
<u>Loss, Abuse, or Trauma</u>			
	No	313	65.8
	Yes	163	34.2
<u>Parental Status</u>			
	I have children currently living with me	75	15.9
	I have children who do not currently live with me	42	8.9
	I have no children	356	75.3
<u>Relational Status</u>			
	Divorced or Separated	13	2.7
	Married	141	29.6
	Other	101	21.2
	Single	217	45.5
	Widowed	5	1.0

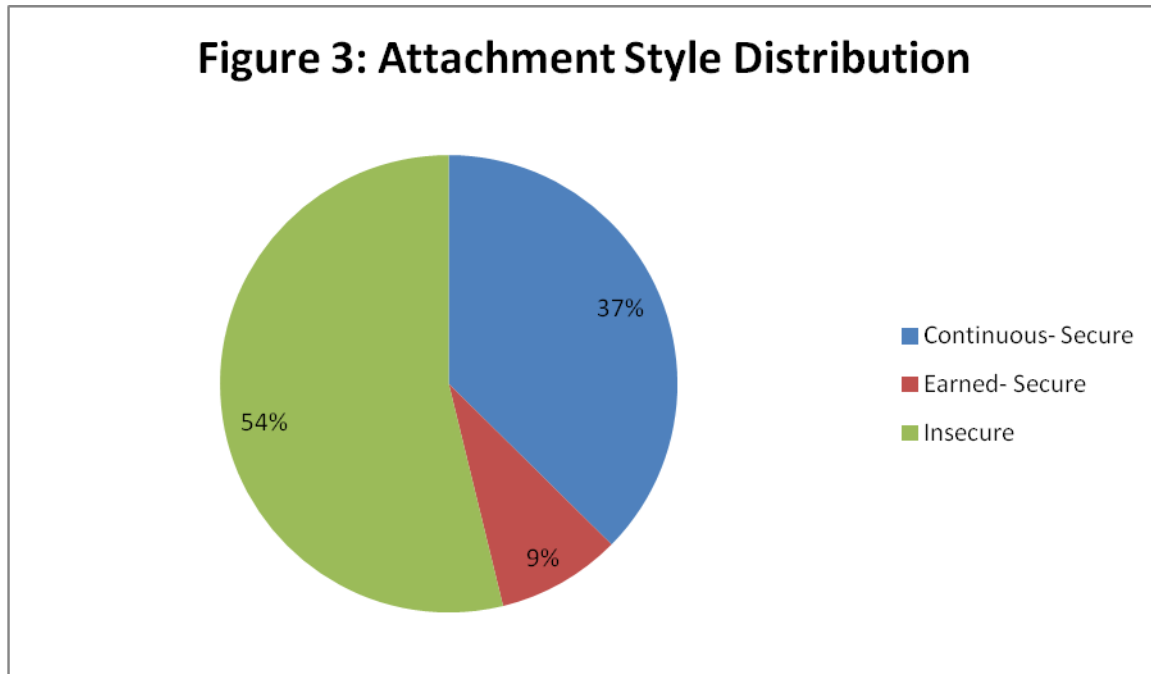
Earned- secure attachment distinction. In addition to the questions mentioned above, the demographic section also included questions that allowed the participants to be categorized into earned-secure attachment style and continuous-secure attachment style. Those who did not answer the key question to determining whether or not they were earned-secure were excluded

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from analysis. Of the 478 individuals identified as having a secure attachment style as defined by the screening, 91 participants were in the category earned-secure (19%), and 387 participants were in the category of continuous-secure (81%) (See Figure 2: Earned- Secure Distribution).



Therefore, the distribution of attachment style among the 1,035 individuals who completed the screening is as follows: 557 insecure (54%), 387 continuous- secure (37%), and 91 earned-secure (9%) (See Figure 3: Attachment Style Distribution).



The earned-secure delineation is supported by the question regarding participant current feelings toward childhood primary caregiver. Of the secure participants, 98% reported currently feeling neutral to loving toward their childhood primary caregiver. (See Table 3: Current Feeling toward Childhood Primary Caregiver.) This will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Table 3

Current Feeling toward Childhood Primary Caregiver ($N \approx 478$)	Respondents	Percent
Hateful or close to hateful	9	1.9
Neutral to loving	466	98.1

Comparison between categories. A comparison was made between individuals identified with an earned-secure attachment style and individuals identified with a continuous-secure attachment style to further inform the overarching question of what contributes to the development of an earned-secure attachment. There was no significant difference in the mean year of birth, by the two groups. The mean year of birth for earned-secure was 1980 and for continuous-secure was 1982. For race/ethnicity, there were too many categories documented to

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run a statistical test of difference. The frequencies are listed above and reported in Table 1.

There was no significant difference found between the categories of earned-secure and continuous secure for gender, geographic location, relational status, parental status, or level of education completed. Between earned-secure individuals and continuous-secure individuals, there was a significant difference found in reported experiences of loss, abuse, or trauma (Chi Square (df= 1, n= 476) = 21.235, p= .000); 56% of earned-secure reported yes compared to 29% of the continuous-secure group.

Survey Data

Comparison between categories. A comparison was made between individuals identified with an earned-secure attachment style and individuals identified with a continuous-secure attachment style to further inform the overarching question of what contributes to the development of an earned-secure attachment.

Reflection on childhood challenges. A chi square analysis was run to determine if there was a difference in participants' reflections of their childhood by whether they were earned- or continuous- secure. A significant difference was found (chi square (df= 1, N= 449 = 61.97, p= .000). A higher percent of earned-secure chose "I believe I had a lot of challenges... I have since worked through them" (68%) than those who were continuous-secure (29%). A higher percent of earned-secure also chose "I believe I had a lot of challenges... and have not worked through them" (8%) than the continuous-secure (2%). A lower percent of earned-secure chose "I believe I had very few challenges during my childhood" (24%) than continuous-secure (70%). (See Table 4: Reflection on Childhood Challenges).

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	Percent	Asymp. Sig.
"...I had a lot of challenges... I have since worked through them"		
Continuous- Secure	28.5	
Earned- Secure	67.9	
"...I had a lot of challenges... and have not worked through them"		
Continuous- Secure	1.9	
Earned- Secure	8.3	
"...I had very few challenges during my childhood"		
Continuous- Secure	69.6	
Earned- Secure	23.8	
		.000

Most important current relationship. For most important current relationship, there was a significant difference in the percent of participants who checked "Mother" (chi square, continuity corrected (1, *N*≈ 478) = 6.62, *p*= .007). There was also a significant difference in the percent of participants who checked "Father" (chi square, continuity corrected (1, *N*≈ 478) = 4.731, *p*= .020) (See Table 5: Comparison of Most Important Current Relationship).

	Percent	Asymp. Sig.
Father		
Continuous- Secure	18.8	
Earned- Secure	8.7	
		.020
Mother		
Continuous- Secure	35.3	
Earned- Secure	20.7	
		.007

No further statistical analysis was conducted because of variable restraints; however the frequencies are exhibited below. The Earned-Secure participants reported Partner (40%) with the highest frequency for current most important relationship (See Table 6: Most Important Current Relationship Reported by Earned-Secure).

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Table 6
Most Important Current Relationship
Reported by Earned-Secure (*N* ≈ 92)

	Respondents	Percent
Family		
Child	7	6.9
Extended Family Member	3	0.0
Father	8	7.9
Grandparent	0	0.0
Mother	19	18.8
Sibling	12	11.8
Total:	49	48.5
Non- Family		
Friend	11	10.8
Non- Family Caregiver	0	0.0
Partner	40	39.6
Therapist	1	0.0
Total:	52	51.5

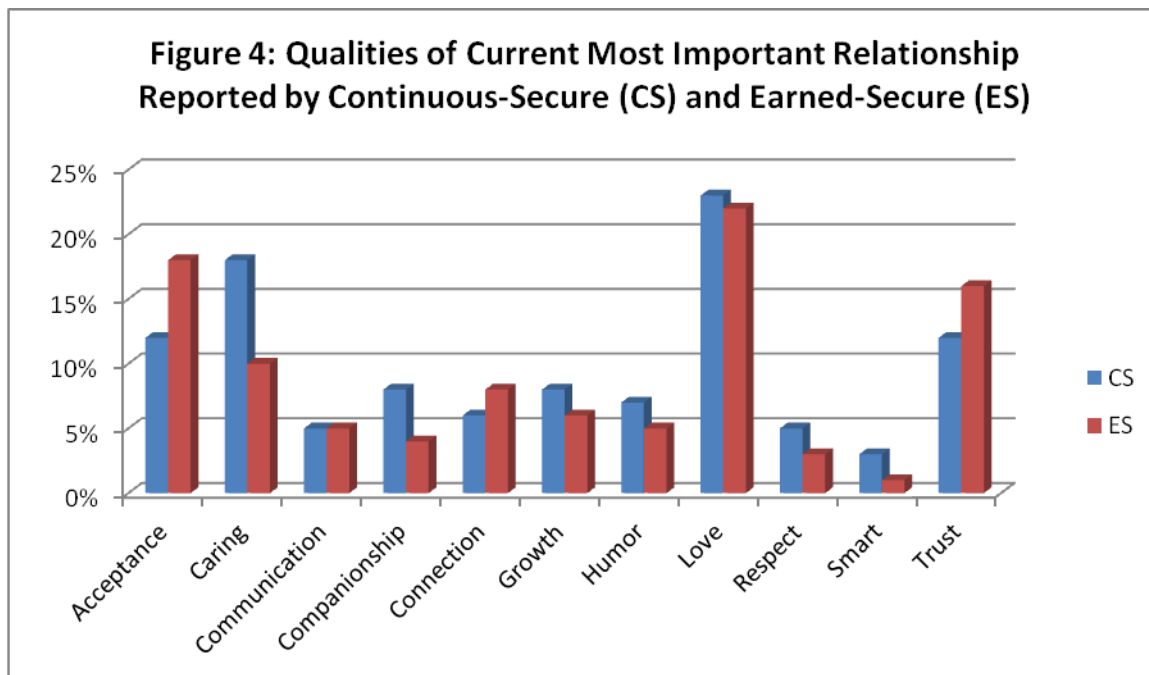
There were two other factors of interest: when the participant met the current most important relationship identified and advice variables. There was no significant difference found for when each participant met their current most important relationship, whether child, adolescent, or adult, between earned- secure and continuous- secure. There was also no significant difference found between earned-secure and continuous-secure on any of the advice variables. Advice variable frequencies as reported by Earned-Secure participants are displayed below (See Table 7: Earned-Secure Advice).

Table 7
Earned-Secure Advice (*N* ≈ 92)

	Responses	Percent
Get closer with a friend	41	15.1
Get closer with a grandparent	34	12.5
Get closer with a sibling, if one is available	40	14.7
Get closer with an adult at a religious affiliation	19	7.0
Get closer with an adult at school	25	9.2
Get closer with an adult in your extended family	39	14.3
Get more involved in your school and/or community	39	14.3
Go to therapy	34	12.5
Total:	271	100

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Qualitative findings. Of the qualitative questions among the survey items, the question regarding qualities of current most important relationship lent itself most strongly to the overarching thesis question. As expected the qualities include an array of factors. I found themes and combined like-qualities into categories; a breakdown of the categories and their percentages are separated by attachment and presented in the Appendix (See Appendix I: Category Breakdown for Qualities of Most Important Current Relationship). As presented below, the category of quality reported most frequently across both secure attachment styles was love; followed by acceptance, trust, and caring (See Figure 4: Qualities of Current Most Important Relationship Reported by Continuous-Secure (CS) and Earned-Secure (ES)). More of this will be considered in the following chapter.



The subsequent chapter presents a discussion of the findings identified in this chapter. I will discuss my study findings from the perspective of the literature presented in Chapter II, divergent points of view, and new insights that emerged through the course of my study.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

This final chapter presents a discussion of my study findings in relation to how I selected my subjects, in comparison with previous studies, and with a focus on the unique findings that emerged from my study. My study was designed to explore factors that influence the development of attachment styles. Specifically, I was interested in examining the factors that attributed to earned- secure attachment, a relatively newer attachment style reflected in the attachment literature. Research had delineated secure attachment into two categories: continuous- secure (secure from infancy to adulthood) and earned- secure (insecure in infancy; however, developed security through a reparative relationship). Previous research suggests that these two attachment styles have similar influences on the ability of adults to parent and maintain healthy relationships (Levy, Blatt, & Shaver 1998; Pearson, Cohn, Cowan, & Cowan, 1994; Phelps, Belsky, Crnic, 1998; Saunders, Jacobvitz, Zaccagnino, Beverung, & Hazen, 2011). Therefore, I was interested in learning which reparative relationship influenced an individual identified as having an insecure attachment style to develop an earned- secure attachment style; thereafter, presenting similarly to his continuous- secure counterpart. My hypothesis was that understanding the influencing factors would lead to a more informed clinical process when working with adults with insecure or earned- secure attachment styles, as well as the potential to assist clients in developing an earned- secure attachment from an insecure attachment. My findings about these influencing factors identified the presence of loss, abuse, or trauma

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significantly more in earned-secure than continuous-secure participants, and that earned-secure participants selected mother and father as "current most important relationship" significantly less than continuous-secure participants. Other findings were not significant and are discussed in comparison to previous findings and in relation to the limitations of my study.

Subjects

Pearson and colleagues (1994) reported that earned-secure adults described their parents as neglecting them more, rejecting them more, and loving them less than that reported by continuous-secure adults. This distinction formed the basis for subject categorization in my study and informed my demographic questions which categorized the participants into continuous- and earned-secure groups. To meet criteria for the earned-secure category, participants had to report neutral to negative on the Likert scale of experiencing rejection from their childhood primary caregiver. To further support the category criteria, there was an open-ended response box where participants were asked to explain their selected answer. Some of their explanations included: "Sometimes I felt as though my feelings were invalidated or dismissed out of annoyance- example 'if you're not hurt, you shouldn't be crying,'" "My father was very rejecting. His anger was huge and intimidating and he would blow up and yell at me at random times," "Mother always criticized me, even when I made great accomplishments." These quotes support the experience of rejection by each of these identified earned-secure participants. Main & Goldwyn (1984) and Crowell and colleagues (2002) elaborate that in safe and stable environments, people can express and reflect on their feelings and their negative pasts in order to overcome their insecure attachment. Even though the earned-secure individuals (19% of the total sample) reported a rejecting primary caregiver in their childhood, 98% of the total sample reported currently feeling neutral to loving toward their primary childhood caregiver. The

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earned- secure participants were able to feel neutral to loving toward a rejecting primary childhood caregiver and therefore overcome their insecure attachment. The consistency of my findings with previous literature confirmed that my screening and delineation process was true to the definition of earned- secure attachment.

In the literature, the earned-secure delineation is noted as 15% - 55% of the general adult population while the continuous- secure delineation is noted as 22% - 36% of the general adult population (Pearson et al., 1994; Paley et al., 1999; Phelps et al., 1998; Moller et al., 2002). My findings fell outside these ranges (earned-secure at 9% and continuous- secure at 37%) likely resulting from use of convenience sampling. I believe that the higher percentage of continuously- secure individuals reflects the makeup of the population that I can conveniently sample.

It is interesting to note that my study included more diversity than most of the previous studies as discussed in the literature review chapter; however, the sample population was still reflective of the convenient sampling that was available to me. There were no significant differences found among demographics between continuous- and earned- secure participants. It is possible that this finding supports that earned- secure attachment can be found randomly throughout different demographics; however, it is likely that with further repetition of this study and a more representative sample population there may be significant differences found.

Comparison with Previous Studies

In Grich's (2001) study, a person's level of resiliency in response to life stressors was more pronounced for participants who experienced stressful life factors during childhood but currently maintain secure attachment (those labeled earned-secure) than their counterparts who had experienced negative parenting (those labeled insecure). This resiliency parallels the

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triumph of earned-secure individuals who, by definition, have worked past their negative childhood experiences compared to their continuous-secure counterparts who have had secure attachments since infancy. My findings validated the previous study as earned-secure participants reported loss, abuse, or trauma significantly more than the continuous-secure participants. Many of the responses included divorce, death of a loved one, alcoholism, sexual abuse, physical abuse, and bullying. Additionally, earned-secure participants reported significantly more than continuous-secure participants of having a lot of challenges and having since worked through them. To further support this question, an open-ended question was included to give respondents an opportunity to use their own words express their experiences and how they made sense of and overcame their issues. "I have grown as my own person and I learned how to communicate with all people. I don't hold an[y] grudges from my childhood and try to teach my children the same," "I have processed my experiences with trauma both somatically and verbally... and have been in therapy... Also, I journal, am a social worker..." "I was physically and mentally abused by my step mother... I feel sorry for her and have forgiven her." These quotes exhibit the challenges participants faced throughout their childhoods and how they have since worked through those challenges.

Most important current relationship. As there have only been a few studies that have targeted the topic of relationship type or quality among earned-secure attachment (Grich, 2001; Saunders et al., 2011), I wanted to add to the growing field of earned-secure attachment in this area. The findings from Grich (2001) and Saunders and colleagues (2011) suggest that a non-family member was not more likely than a family member to support the attainment of earned-secure attachment. To determine the reparative relationship that enabled the development of earned-secure attachment, my study asked participants about their current most important relationship.

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My findings are consistent with the previous studies because my sample population selected non-family members about as frequently as family member options for most important current relationship. However, the specific breakdown includes continuous- secure participants reporting mother or father significantly more than earned- secure participants. Additionally, the relationship reported with the highest frequency by earned- secure participants was partner.

Earned- secure qualitative results: relationship qualities. As there are no previous studies on the qualities of the relationship that enable the development of earned- secure attachment, a new insight emerged through the course of this study. The open-ended questions allowed participants the opportunity to use their own words to express the qualities of their current most important relationship. I composed categories out of the many diverse reported qualities and the findings present the frequency of reported qualities within each category. Love was the most frequently reported category by both continuous- and earned- secure participants. I composed this category by arranging the responses "loving, affectionate, and unconditional." Earned- secure participants reported acceptance as the second most frequently reported category. This category included many qualities such as "understanding, patient, and non-judgmental." The third most frequently reported category by earned- secure participants was trust. The category was composed of many qualities including "committed, loyal, and dependable." The details of the categories I created, including the qualities reported by participants, are included in the Appendix (See Appendix I: Category Breakdown for Qualities of Most Important Current Relationship). Through these findings, I have identified that the factors of relationship quality are many and that more precise questions are indicated in this area.

Conclusion

Limitations and Bias

Limitations. As discussed in the literature review chapter, the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) is the current most reliable and valid measure for assessing earned-secure attachment. Although world renowned, this interview lasts 60 minutes with a certified interviewer and is followed by hours of coding. Those with the ability to complete this assessment are not representative of the national population. As I did not have the resources to use the AAI and I wanted to be as inclusive as possible, I chose a short questionnaire. While the screenings were meant to disqualify individuals with insecure attachments, it is possible that some individuals with insecure attachments received the study items through error or screening unreliability. It is possible that the reflective questions about an individual's past relationships may have provoked an unpleasant experience for an individual with an insecure attachment; the survey nature did not allow for a certified interviewer to appropriately respond to the emotional unrest that may have resulted. I did not have the resources to reach a large, generalizable sample through randomized sampling. Instead, the total participant population was recruited through convenience sampling. As discussed above, I believe this may have affected the attachment distribution. Therefore, further research may be conducted to repeat this study using the AAI and reaching a randomized large sample. Future studies should include all genders, ethnicities, races, sexual orientations, etc. to replicate this study with its intentions. The concern of overgeneralization is an ethical one; possible cultural or other minority status incompetency may occur by assuming the data relates to all individuals.

There were flaws within my survey. Several items included in my survey did not provide information that helped answer my research question. Though there was a wide range of cultural

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identities reported, the open-ended nature of the reporting made it too challenging to allow for group comparisons. A future study could focus on being inclusive while also being concrete enough to allow for statistical testing. The open-ended questions were not precise enough to direct respondents to give clear information. For example, I had to create categories from hundreds of reported qualities. I did not have any explanation behind the reported words and yet I had to subjectively make categories. It may be beneficial to have a multiple choice rather than open-ended question. Additionally, there were no significant findings for the question about advice, likely due to its presentation and vagueness. I also asked participants to note their date of birth rather than their age, making analysis more cumbersome. Future studies should present the questions more clearly and without the ability to select all that apply. Also, piloting the open ended questions is essential to determine precision of the questions asked. I did not conduct a pilot of these questions. Other limitations with my survey were that I could not ask for clarification or further details to responses and SurveyMonkey allowed participants to skip any question. This may have impacted the results. Utilizing a pilot prior to initiating the final survey may have helped identify survey item limitations.

Using a survey was a limitation. The study was meant to explore the qualities of individuals with whom relationships enable the development of earned-security. While this study was intended to inquire about the specific relationship that enabled the development of earned- secure attachment, instead I asked about the current most important relationship. It would have been too difficult within my limited means and resources to have explained the concept of earned- security and trust that the reporter understood the concept enough to answer about the specific relationship in question. As the survey needed to be at an eighth grade reading and comprehension level, and there was no ability for dialogue, the method of collecting data

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was challenging for the task at hand. Future research should collect data in a way that allows for the inquiry of the specific relationships that enable the development of earned- security, while also not having the need for a certified interview.

Bias. I had a bias due to originally believing I had an earned-secure attachment stance as a result of my relationships with my spouse and my therapist. There may have been an expectation of finding that individuals with an earned-secure attachment stance developed it through those same relationships. Through this research process, and learning more about attachment, I have come to question my initial belief and plan to do more self exploration. Another source of bias might be found in the age range that was mainly targeted. The most frequent group of birth year was 1976 to 1996 and the mode of the respondents was 1989 with the median of 1987; I was born in 1989. I tried to proactively address this bias by using social media sources geared toward older adults such as LinkedIn and email, in addition to social media aimed at younger adults such as Facebook.

Implications for Clinical Social Work Practice and Final Comments

My study's intended benefit to the social work community is to offer the specific process by which to obtain the recognized benefits of earned-security in studies such as Grich's (2001). The current study examines, more specifically, the relationships that enable a person to attain earned-security. Clinical social workers can use this information in at least two ways on a micro level: by supporting their clients to take on these qualities themselves and by supporting their clients to recognize these qualities in others and select their relationships accordingly; thereby enabling their insecure clients to develop an earned- secure attachment. Social workers can use this information on a macro level by starting and further supporting programs that enhance these qualities in people and the ability to recognize these qualities in others. Similar to learning other

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techniques to benefit their clients, social workers can learn to embody these qualities for their clients.

Though there has been relatively little study in this area, what there has been suggests that individuals with an earned-secure attachment stance parent with the same ability as individuals with a continuous-secure attachment stance (Levy et al., 1998; Pearson et al., 1994; Phelps et al., 1998). Saunders and colleagues (2011) found that earned-secure mothers were just as able to have securely-attached infants as their continuous-secure counterparts. Therefore, better parenting and more securely attached infants could be an additional outcome to studying earned-secure attachment. Each of these studies has suggested the need for further research on the processes through which an individual develops earned-security. Obtaining more specific relationship qualities may further expand the field and help insecure individuals develop earned-security.

Phelps and colleagues (1998) study included a qualifier of a stricter definition and helped to confirm earned-secure as a successful transformative process from insecure to secure attachment stance. This delineation helps portray the spectrum of attachment as a regulatory process, relationship, or system, rather than the originally perceived independent and unchanging categories. This difference in view of attachment will benefit social workers in their work with their clients. More research contributing to the general understanding of the attachment schema can result in more benefit for individuals who obtain services.

Each attachment style has causes, characteristics, and a presentation specific to it. The qualities of readiness to establish new relationships (Main & Goldwyn, 1984) and the ability to afford more attention toward other cognitive necessities (Main, 1991) are positive presentations of secure and earned-secure attachment. This study sought to learn about the process by which

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an individual develops the characteristics and presentation of a securely attached individual. The outcome of studying the earned-secure delineation and its difference from the continuous-secure delineation is to enhance the understanding of how to support individuals with earned- secure attachment.

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Appendix A

Screening Questions

1. Are you 18 or older?

Yes

No

2. Are you able to read and understand English?

Yes

No

3. Place a checkmark next to the single alternative self-description below (A, B, and C) that best describes how you feel in relationships or is the nearest to the way you feel. (Note: The terms "close" and "intimate" refer to psychological or emotional closeness, not necessarily to sexual intimacy.)

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

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

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

Appendix B

Thank You!

Thank you for your time and interest in this study. Unfortunately, your answers to one or more of the previous questions indicate you are not eligible to participate. Please share this survey with others by forwarding the survey link www.surveymonkey.com/s/smithmastersthesis. To exit, simply close the browser window.

Appendix C

Informed Consent

Dear Participant,

My name is Abby Feinberg. I am currently conducting research for my thesis which explores relationships with others and whether certain types of relationships can be more advantageous than others.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to answer any questions during the survey process. All data submitted through the survey will be anonymous so you cannot be connected to your answers. Additionally, you may exit the survey at any time and the information will not be saved. The data collected from this study will be used to complete my Master's in Social Work (MSW) Thesis. The results of the study may also be used in publications and presentations. For strictly informational context on attachment styles please visit <http://psychcentral.com/encyclopedia/2008/attachment-styles/>.

Should you choose to participate, I thank you in advance for your time and thoughtful responses. The survey includes 14 demographic questions, 6 multiple choice questions, and 4 open ended questions. The survey may take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete.

Although there is no financial benefit from participating in this study, this study offers participants an opportunity to reflect on their past and current relationships. It is my hope that you may grow relationally through reflection on past relationships.

If at any point you feel uncomfortable I ask that you withdraw from the survey, all of your answers will be eliminated before you hit complete. Should you have discomfort you may want to consider accessing a local mental health provider for follow up.

All research materials will be stored in a secure location for three years according to federal regulations. In the event that materials are needed beyond this period, they will be kept secured until no longer needed, and then destroyed. All electronically stored data will be password protected during the storage period.

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights or about any aspect of the study, you can contact me at AFeinberg@Smith.edu or the Chair of the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee at (413) 585-7974. If you choose to contact me or the school with questions or concerns, your participation will continue to be anonymous, since I will not be able to connect surveys with any calls or emails.

Thank you for your interest in this study.

Sincerely,

Abby Feinberg

Smith College School for Social Work '15

AFeinberg@Smith.edu

Appendix D

Post and Private Message on Facebook

Are you over 18?

If so, you could help me with my Master's Thesis!

It is a brief 5-10 minute survey exploring the ways we are connected to relationships in our lives and if certain types of relationships can be more advantageous than others. Please help me collect as many responses as possible by taking my survey and sending it to other people you know over 18.

www.surveymonkey.com/s/smithmastersthesis.

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Appendix E

Post and Private Message on LinkedIn

Hello,

I am conducting research on the ways we are connected to relationships in our lives for my Master's in Social Work and would appreciate your help! Please take 5-10 minutes to complete my short survey and pass it on to others you know who are over 18. Thank you for your time and consideration. www.surveymonkey.com/s/smithmastersthesis.

Abby Feinberg

Smith College School for Social Work '15

AFeinberg@Smith.edu

RELATIONSHIPS CONTRIBUTE EARNED-SECURE ATTACHMENT

Appendix F

Email Recruitment

Hello,

My name is Abby Feinberg and I am conducting research on the ways we are connected to relationships in our lives for my Social Work Master's Thesis. I would appreciate your help as I need as many participants as possible! Please take 5-10 minutes to complete my short survey and pass it along to others you know who are over 18.

www.surveymonkey.com/s/smithmastersthesis.

Thank you so much for your time and consideration,

Abby Feinberg
Smith College School for Social Work '15
AFeinberg@Smith.edu

Appendix G

Demographic Questions

1. What is your gender?

- Female
- Male
- Transgender
- Prefer not to answer
- Other:

2. In what year were you born? (Enter 4-digit birth year; for example, 1976)
(Comment box)

3. What would you identify as your race/ethnicity?
(Comment box)

4. Which answer best describes your United States geographic location?

- Northeast
- Midwest (previously known as North Central Region)
- South
- West
- Other: (Comment box)

5. Which answer best describes your relational status?

- Single
- Married
- Divorced or Separated
- Widowed
- Other: (Comment box)

6. Which answer best describes your parental status?

- I have no children.
- I have children who currently live with me.
- I have children who do not currently live with me.

7. What is your highest completed level of education?

- Middle School
- High School
- College
- Graduate School
- Other: (Comment box)

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Appendix H

Survey Items

1. What was the most important relationship to you as a child?

- Mother
- Father
- Grandparent
- Sibling
- Extended family member; please specify: (Comment box)
- Non-Family Caregiver; please specify: (Comment box)
- Friend
- Other: (Comment box)

2. Why was this relationship the most important to you as a child?

- Necessity
- Choice
- Both
- Other: (Comment box)

3. What is currently your most important relationship?

- Mother
- Father
- Grandparent
- Sibling
- Extended family member; please specify (Comment box)
- Non-Family Caregiver; please specify (Comment box)
- Friend
- Partner
- Child
- Therapist
- Other: (Comment box)

4. Is your current important relationship with the same person from your childhood?

- Yes
- No; please clarify (Comment box)

5. Which answer best describes your relationship with the person from Question 3.

I met the person in Question 3 when I was a...

- Child
- Adolescent
- Adult
- Other: (Comment box)

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6. How long have you had a relationship with the person from Question 3? (Enter an amount of time; for example, 10 years)

(Comment box)

7. What qualities were well-known to you as a child in the relationship from Question 1?

(Comment box)

8. What qualities come to mind now of the relationship from Question 1?

(Comment box)

9. What qualities come to mind now of the current relationship from Question 3?

(Comment box)

10. Which answer(s) best match(es) the advice you would give to a child with an unloving caregiver?

I would advise a child with an unloving caregiver to...

(Select all that apply).

- Get closer with an adult at a religious affiliation. (Examples: Church, Synagogue, Mosque...)
- Get closer with an adult at school.
- Get closer with a sibling, if one is available.
- Get closer with a friend.
- Get closer with a grandparent.
- Get closer with an adult in your extended family.
- Get more involved in your school and/or community. (Examples: Sports, Debate Team, Community Service...)
- Go to therapy.
- Other:

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Appendix I

Category Breakdown for Qualities of Most Important Current Relationship

Reported by Continuous-Secure Participants; 785 responses.

Love- Love/Affection/Unconditional: 181 (23%)

Caring- Generous/Caring/Giving/Nurturing/Compassion/Kind/Sweet/Warm/Selfless: 95 (12%)

Trust- Trust/Dependable/Consistent/Secure/Stable/Responsible/Constant/Commitment/
Dedication/ Devotion/Loyal/Faithful/Reliant/Steady: 93 (12%)

Acceptance- Accept/Support/ Empathy/Understanding/Patient/Tolerant/Calm/Always There/
Non-judgmental: 91 (12%)

Growth- Determined/Driven/Motivated/Adventurous/Resilient/Hard
worker/Challenge/Growth/Strength/Confidence/Courage/Proud/Independent/Tough/Open/Open-
minded/ Protection/Safety: 63 (8%)

Companionship- Friend/Companion/Partner/Teamwork/Equality/Reciprocity: 59 (8%)

Humor- Humor/Fun/Enthusiasm/Laughter/Joy/Enjoyment/Happy/Easy: 57 (7%)

Connection- Intimate/Deep/Close/Passion/Connected/Engaged/Attentive/Involved/Interest/
Attuned/Comfort/Responsive/Romantic/Family/Emotional: 47 (6%)

Communication- Honest/Guidance/Advice/Communication/Listening/Compromise: 40 (5%)

Respect- Respect/Admiration/Appreciation/Inspirational/Encouraging/Motivational/
Helpful/Mutual: 35 (5%)

Smart- Smart/Wisdom/Knowledge/Intelligent/Creative: 24 (3%)

Reported by Earned-Secure Participants; 193 responses.

(Underlined qualities were only found among Earned- Secure Responses)

Love- Love/Affection/Unconditional: 42 (22%)

Acceptance- Accept/Support/ Empathy/Understanding/Patient/Tolerant/Calm/Always there/
Non-judgmental: 35 (18%)

Trust- Trust/Dependable/Consistent/Secure/Stable/Commitment/Dedication/Loyal/
Faithful/Steadfast: 31 (16%)

Caring- Caring/Nurturing/Compassion/Kind/Warm/Selfless/Indulgent: 19 (10%)

Humor- Humor/Fun/Laughter/Happy/Sass: 16 (8%)

Connection- Passion/Connected/Comfort/Family/Emotional/Sensitive/Masculinity/Feeling
Seen/Seeing: 15 (8%)

Growth- Challenge/Growth/Open/Open-minded/Safety/ Unafraid/Resourcefulness/
Non-threatening/Empowered: 12 (6%)

Communication- Honest/Guidance/Communication/Compromise/Simplicity: 9 (5%)

Companionship- Friend/Companion/Partner: 7 (4%)

Respect- Respect/Mutual: 5 (3%)

Smart- Smart: 2 (1%)

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Appendix J

Approval Letter from the Human Subjects Review Committee



School for Social Work
Smith College
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063
T (413) 585-7950 F (413) 585-7994

November 11, 2014

Abby Feinberg

Dear Abby,

You did a very nice job on your revisions. Your project is now approved by the Human Subjects Review Committee.

Please note the following requirements:

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

Maintaining Data: You must retain all data and other 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.

Congratulations and our best wishes on your interesting study.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Marsha Kline Pruett'.

Marsha K. Pruett, PhD
Co-Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Elaine Kersten, Research Advisor