



RELATIONSHIPS – NEAR AND FAR

Proceedings of the
Australian Psychological Society's
Psychology of Relationships Interest Group
6th Annual Conference

Australian Catholic University
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AND

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Welcome from the Chair of the Conference Committee

On behalf of the National Committee and the Conference Organising Committee of the APS Psychology of Relationships Interest group, I welcome you to this the 6th Annual Conference of the Psychology of Relationships Interest Group.

The Annual Conference is one of the main activities of the Interest group. The Conference has proven to be an interesting and exciting occasion. We have had some wonderful expert Keynote speakers and some challenging and interesting presentations of research and practice in the field of relationships. We, in the Interest Group are a “broad church” in that we do not constrain what the referent is for “relationships”. The Conference provides an excellent opportunity to meet with colleagues who share similar interests and provides an ideal venue for students accompanied by their supervisor to present some of their work in a climate that, while not threatening, can be quite challenging.

Our aim for this year’s conference was to continue to provide a forum for the dissemination of current research, case studies, and theoretical papers focusing on relationships but with an emphasis on Relationships Near and Far. The distance may be geographical or psychological. As individuals and as members of identifiable groups we are involved in a multiplicity of relationships. While many of the relationships in which we participate are extremely positive and bring us our greatest joys, some are not as successful and bring us our tears and our sorrows. The media continually puts before us the interactions and outcomes of relationships between various individuals but especially the outcomes of relationships gone wrong between groups in our society as well as between nations. Hence, our Conference theme for this year.

As you will no doubt agree when you read the Proceedings, we have been successful in selecting, through a refereed process, a diversity of papers for presentation. The papers to be presented at the Conference include four international authors – one from Poland, one from the UK, one from Canada and one from the USA. This is in addition to the usual coverage from throughout Australia. We have had submissions from practitioners as well as academics, from students as well as some of our own experts in relationships.

The individual presentations along with our two Keynote addresses attest to the theme. This year we are honoured to have Julie Fitness from Macquarie University, and Garth Fletcher from Canterbury University in Christchurch, NZ. Each day of the Conference will include a featured Keynote address.

Finally, let me thank you, the participants, for your attendance at our 6th Annual conference. It is your participation and attendance that enables the Interest Group to meet some of the needs of its members as well as provide an excellent opportunity for those with an interest in the development of our own research, practice, and personal relationships as well.

Regards

Barry J Fallon PhD FAPS
Chair, Conference Organising Committee

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The papers contained in these proceedings have been subject to a blind peer-review process.

Relationship Satisfaction in Young Adulthood: The Role of Attachment, Intimacy and Coping Strategies

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Abstract

Relationship difficulties experienced during the early periods of adulthood have been found to have a significant impact on mental health. Nevertheless, little research to date has systematically examined the underlying factors contributing to these difficulties. Three factors that have been shown to directly influence young adults' relationship satisfaction include attachment, the psychosocial development of intimacy and the coping strategies utilized during periods of relationship stress. However, no previous work has considered the ways young adults deal with the stress of forming new relationships and how this mediates attachment and development of intimacy on relationship satisfaction. The present study aimed to investigate how coping strategies mediate young adults' attachment and development of intimacy on relationship satisfaction. One hundred and six participants (20 males, 86 females) between the age of 18 and 27 involved in a romantic relationship lasting between six and 18 months completed an online survey. Findings revealed a structural model whereby attachment was found to have a direct and indirect effect on the readiness for intimacy, coping and relationship satisfaction. In line with expectations young adult's psychosocial development of intimacy and coping functioned as intervening variables in explaining the link between attachment and relationship satisfaction.

Romantic relationship difficulties experienced during the early periods of adulthood (18-25 years) have been found to have a significant impact on mental health (Williams, Connolly & Segal, 2001). Specifically, relationship difficulties have been associated with loneliness, high instances of anxiety and depression (Overbeek, Vollebergh, Engels & Meeus, 2003; Williams, Connolly & Segal, 2001) and are also reported as the most common reason for contemplating suicide and seeking counselling in this age group (Barber, Blackman, Talbot & Saebel, 2004).

In contrast, the successful formation of intimate and satisfying romantic relationships in young adulthood has been associated with healthy psychosocial development (Erikson, 1968, Marcia, Waterman, Matteson, Archer & Orlofsky, 1993), overall wellbeing, life satisfaction (Gottman, 1998) and the success of future relationships (Collins, Cooper, Albino & Allard, 2002). Nevertheless, little research has examined why some young adults are prone to relationship difficulties and loneliness whereas others successfully enter into and maintain intimate and satisfying relationships during this transitory and stressful life phase.

Research suggests that an individual's attachment orientations or one's cognitive, affective and behavioural representations of relationships influence one's ability to successfully form satisfying relationships (Bartholomew, 1990; Collins et al, 2002; Collins & Read, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1994). Equally, literature shows that young adults differ in their readiness to become intimate with romantic partners and are more likely to experience satisfying relationships if they have the developmental capacity to form intimate bonds (Levitz-Jones & Orlofsky, 1985). An additional factor thought to contribute to the formation of satisfying relationships is the coping behaviours one displays in times of stress (Collins et al, 2002; Marchand, 2004), a seemingly important factor given the stressors associated with the novel process of forming new relationships in young adulthood (Neider & Seiffge-Krenke, 2001). No research to date however has examined how these factors together impact on young adults' early relationship experiences.

Attachment and Relationship Satisfaction

Individual differences in cognitive and affective representations of relationships have been found to play a central role in shaping the quality of adult romantic relationships (Bartholomew, 1990; Collins, et al, 2002; Collins & Read, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1994). These representations are formed through parent-infant interactions and are thought to extend into romantic relationships in young adulthood (Stackert & Bursick, 2003).

According to attachment theory, Bowlby (1977) contends that parent-infant interactions are internalised such that an individual develops two complementary mental working models that evaluate whether, 1) the self is

worthy of care and support, and 2) whether others are regarded as trustworthy and available for comfort and support. Several studies into adult attachment and romantic relationships have conceptualised these internal models as orthogonal continuous dimensions termed anxiety (model of self) and avoidance (model of other) (Bartholomew, 1990; Brennan, Clark and Shaver, 1998). These internal models become core features of personality and form the basis of attachment styles or stable patterns of relational cognitions and behaviours (Bowlby, 1988).

Research into attachment representations and relationship satisfaction has predominantly focused on marital relationships and found clear, robust associations between individual differences in attachment and the quality of intimate relationships (Marchand, 2004; Feeney, 2002; Feeney, 1999). Overall, individuals with high anxious attachment are said to desire extreme closeness due to fears of abandonment and rejection based on their negative self concept (Pearce & Halford, 2005). Such individuals may experience relationships characterised by dependence, jealousy and love addiction (Mikulincer, 1998). In contrast, individuals with high attachment avoidance seek to avoid closeness and generally mistrust partners based on their negative view of others. Avoidant individuals may experience relationships characterised by a lack of closeness or even 'compulsive self reliance' (Bartholomew, 1990). Those with both high attachment anxiety and avoidance have demonstrated a desperate need to be loved and validated coupled with social anxiety and discomfort with relying on others (Guerrero, 1996). Individuals characterised as securely attached (i.e. low anxiety and avoidance) have shown they are comfortable with closeness and confidently depend on others (Pearce & Halford, 2005). Secure attachment has been associated with intimate love relationships defined by higher levels of trust, satisfaction, commitment and lower levels of conflict and jealousy (Feeney, 1999). These findings suggest that secure individuals with low attachment anxiety and avoidance seem to have more positive relationship experiences where individuals with insecure styles possessing either high attachment anxiety and/or avoidance seem prone to lower levels of satisfaction and greater relationship difficulties (Hazan & Shaver, 1994, Feeney & Noller, 1990).

Studies on attachment and young adult romantic relationships have found similar themes to those of marital studies regarding attachment and relationship satisfaction however the results are less consistent (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Collins & Read, 1990; Furman, Simon, Shaffer & Bouchee, 2002, Simpson, 1990). Inconsistencies in young adult research suggest that even though attachment orientations may largely drive predictable patterns of perceptual, affective and behavioural experiences within marital relationships, there may be additional underlying factors accounting for relationship satisfaction in the phase of young adult romantic relationship development (Simpson, 1990). The mediating or intervening effects of such factors have at times been argued to explain some of these inconsistencies in the young adult population. Therefore, an aim of this study was to investigate whether normative developmental processes unique to young adulthood such as the readiness for intimacy, the cornerstone of young adult development, could be an important intermediate factor accounting for the link between relationship satisfaction and attachment.

The Role of Psychosocial Intimacy and Relationship Satisfaction

According to Hazan and Shaver (1989) romantic relationships can be formed on the basis of the attachment need for security with or without true intimacy. However, relationships characterised as intimate are associated with higher levels of satisfaction compared to relationships lacking intimacy (Gaia, 2002).

From a psychosocial developmental perspective, Erikson (1968) noted that following the stage of identity formation in late adolescence, young adulthood is a crucial period within which individuals must successfully learn how to become intimate with others. Therefore the development of intimacy is regarded as a key developmental task in which young adults engage. Successful negotiation of this task is thought to result in the young adults' abilities to openly trust and share one's feelings with another (Marcia, 1993; Rosenthal, 1981), while unsuccessful resolution tends to result in experiencing difficulty becoming intimate, and rather engaging in relationships that are superficial or require no commitment (Levitz-Jones & Orlofsky, 1985).

To date, literature addressing the links between attachment intimacy with relation to relationship satisfaction has predominantly posited intimacy as a component of attachment (Guerrero, 1996; Bartholomew, 1990). Guerrero (1996) for example subsumes a high capacity for intimacy to be equal with low attachment avoidance. However, it seems that a developmental readiness for intimacy as described by Erikson (1968) (a largely intraindividual rather than interpersonal process) may result as a consequence of secure attachment (e.g., Allen & Land, 1999; Cassidy, 1999; Sroufe, 2002). Reis and Patrick (1996) point out that the drive for closeness motivated by a readiness for intimacy is born from the desire for growth promoting relationships which in essence are secure attachment bonds.

The Mediating Effects of Coping Strategies and Intimacy on Attachment and Relationship Satisfaction

While both attachment and intimacy have both been considered important factors in determining relationship satisfaction, the affect, cognitions and behaviours one displays in times of stress have also been found to have significant bearing on relationship satisfaction (Creasey & Hesson-McInnis, 2001; Marchand, 2004). Similarly, the development of intimacy and attachment have been shown to drive coping responses in stressful situations (Howard & Medway, 2004; Kemp & Niemeyer, 1999; Levitz-Jones & Orlofsky, 1985). Nevertheless, the literature to date has not systematically examined how intimacy and attachment patterns influence the ways young adults' cope with the stress of forming new relationships and how this subsequently influences relationship satisfaction.

The stressors associated with forming young adult relationships such as balancing new roles and expectations and the uncertainty of the relationship lasting amidst a multitude of transitional changes are well documented (Anashensal & Gore, 1991; Collins & Read, 1990; Collins & Sroufe, 1999; Erikson, 1968; Havighust, 1972; Neider & Seiffge-Krenke, 2001). Surprisingly, literature on young adult relationships has largely ignored affective and cognitive coping and predominantly focused on the impact of behavioural responses (i.e. aggression, withdrawal) to relationship conflict (Creasey & Hesson-McInnis, 2001). Feeney (2002) however suggests that the ways an individual copes with the normative stressors associated with relationships are bound to influence how one experiences romantic relationships.

Coping refers to the thoughts and acts people use to respond to the demands of stressful transactions or to regulate distress (Folkman, Lazarus, Pimley and Novacek, 1987). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) outline two types of coping. The first is problem-focused coping whereby an individual engages in strategies that constructively alter the source of stress. The second is emotion-focused coping which aims to reduce or manage emotional distress without necessarily engaging in constructive solutions.

Both attachment (Mikulincer & Florian, 1998) and one's capacity for intimacy (Levitz-Jones & Orlofsky, 1985) are thought to play a role in determining behavioural and affective responses to stress. In particular, the coping literature to date has demonstrated that secure attachment is considered an 'inner resource' in times of stress that facilitates problem-focused coping strategies such as positively appraising situations, constructively working to problem solve, engaging in open and honest communication and seeking support if they feel they have exhausted their personal resources (Creasey & Hesson-McInnis, 2001; Davis, Shaver & Vernon, 2003; Howard & Medway, 2004; Kobak and Sceery, 1988; Mikulincer et al 2003; Mikulincer & Florian, 1998). These behaviours have also been shown to elicit positive responses from partners and reinforce positive relational experiences promoting relationship satisfaction in young adult relationships (Collins & Read, 1990; Simpson, 1990). Insecure attachment (highly anxious or avoidant) on the other hand has been considered a 'risk factor' in times of stress with outcomes leading to the use of emotion-focused coping (Kemp & Neimeyer, 1999; Mikulincer & Florian, 1998). Overall behaviours typifying emotion-focused coping have shown to mediate the relationship between insecure attachment and marital relationship satisfaction via the reinforcement of negative internal working models (Collins et al, 2002; Marchand, 2004). It is however important that insecurely attached individuals have been shown to use different types of emotion-focused coping strategies on the basis of whether their insecurity is based on attachment avoidance or anxiety. For instance emerging research suggests that highly avoidant individuals engage in coping tactics associated with downward emotional regulation (i.e., deactivation strategies) such as distancing and denial, while anxiously attached people utilise upward emotional regulation (i.e., hyperactivation strategies) such as wishful thinking and self-blame (Mikulincer & Shaver, in press; Schmidt et al., 2002).

However, little research has examined the mediating influence of both a developmental readiness for intimacy and these various coping strategies on young adult relationship satisfaction during the novel process of relationship formation when attachment vulnerabilities may be activated.

Aims and Hypotheses

The present study aimed to investigate whether readiness for intimacy and coping could act as important intermediate factors in accounting for the link between relationship satisfaction and attachment. In so doing, the study aimed to assess the direct and indirect effects of attachment and intimacy on coping and relationship satisfaction. These links amongst the variables are illustrated in Figure 1. Specifically it was hypothesised that attachment anxiety and avoidance would be negatively related to intimacy and relationship satisfaction, while intimacy would be positively associated with relationship satisfaction as shown in Figure 1. It was also hypothesised that attachment anxiety would be positively related to hyperactivating emotion-focused coping and negatively related to deactivating emotion focused coping, while both dimensions would be positively related to problem-focused coping (see Figure 1). Lastly, intimacy was hypothesised to be positively related to relationship satisfaction and problem focused coping while negatively related to chronic hyperactivating and deactivating emotion-focused strategies (see Figure 1).

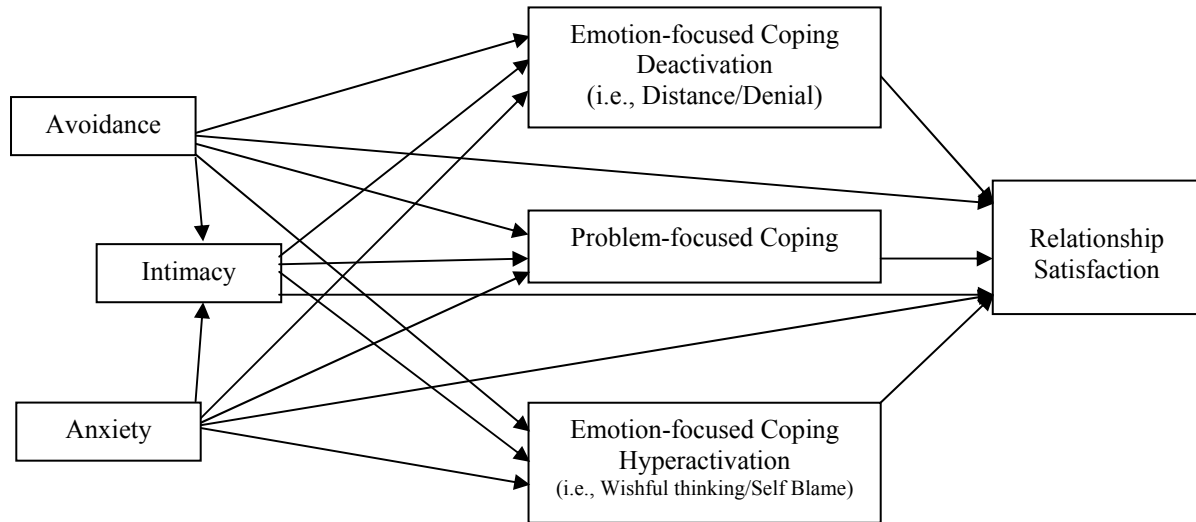


Figure 1. Hypothesised mediation model of intimacy and coping behaviours on relationship satisfaction.

Method

Participants

One hundred and twenty young adults (20 males, 100 females) aged between 18 and 27 years ($M = 20.96$ years, $SD = 2.39$) and currently in a relationship ($M = 9.62$ months, $SD = 4.6$) participated in the study. Participants were recruited from universities, church groups and through personal networks (snowballing) around metropolitan Melbourne.

Materials

Participants completed an on-line questionnaire comprising background questions (i.e., age, sex, education, occupation and relationship history) followed by four self-report questionnaires (described below).

Attachment orientation was measured by the Experiences in Close Relationships Questionnaire (ECR) by Brennan, Clark and Shaver (1998). The ECR contains 36 items with 18 assessing the attachment dimension of anxiety while a further 18 items are used to measure an individual's attachment avoidance. The two subscales have been found to have high internal consistencies with alphas of .91 (anxiety) and .94 (avoidance) and a correlation of $r = .11$ suggesting factor independence (Brennan, et al., 1998). Each item is rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree).

The development of intimacy was measured using the intimacy subscale of Erikson's Psychosocial Stage Inventory (EPSI) by Rosenthal, Gurney and Moore (1981). The intimacy subscale consists of 12 items of which half are worded to reflect successful development of romantic intimacy in relationships while the other half reflects unsuccessful development of intimacy in relationships. These items are reverse coded for scoring consistency. The respondent ranks each item on a five point scale ranging from 5 (almost always true) to 1 (hardly ever true). This subscale has been found to have an adequate alpha reliability coefficient of .73 (Rosenthal, et al. 1981).

The Ways of Coping Survey (Revised) (WOCS) by Folkman and Lazarus (1985) was used to measure the coping strategies participants used in response to the stress associated with forming a new relationship. The WOCS is a 66-item questionnaire containing statements regarding a wide range of thoughts and acts that people use to deal with the demands of specific stressful encounters. Participants rate each item on a 4-point scale ranging from 0 (does not apply and/or not used) to 3 (used a great deal). In this study, participants were asked to consider their current relationship-related stressors when responding to the items. Items are grouped together to form 8 subscales with one problem focused coping scale (planful problem-solving) and 7 emotion-focused coping scales (wishful thinking, detachment, seeking social support, focussing on the positive, self blame, tension reduction, keep to self). When tested with college students, the subscales have been found to have adequate internal consistencies up to .88 (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985).

Relationship satisfaction was assessed using Simpson's (1987) Relationship Index. This 11-item measure previously used with college students ($\alpha = .85$) contains 11 statements regarding different aspects of their partner (eg. Loyalty, attractiveness, finances, kindness, emotional support, similarity of interests, intimacy, social

standing, trustworthiness, attitudes, personality). Respondents were asked to indicate how satisfied they are with each aspect of their partner on a scale of 1 to 7 (1=very unsatisfactory; 7=Very satisfactory).

Procedure

Participants were recruited from three sources—university colleges, church groups and through the personal networks of the research group (snowballing). Participating heads of student colleges at the University of Melbourne, Deakin University and church youth groups organised to distribute an introductory letter to members of their organisations either by mail or email. Similarly, letters were distributed to personal contacts by email, mail or face to face contact. This letter of invitation provided a brief outline of the study, the inclusion criteria and the URL for the on-line survey. The online questionnaire took approximately 40 minutes to complete.

Results

All cases were screened for missing values, univariate and multivariate normality, outliers, homoscedasticity and multicollinearity. Seven cases had more than 40% missing data, while seven univariate outliers were detected. Therefore, a total of 14 cases were deleted from the original sample leaving 106 valid cases. Assumptions of univariate and multivariate normality were met and correlational analyses did not reveal multicollinearity. The bivariate correlations, means and standard deviations for all variables included in the path analysis are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, Scale Reliabilities and Bivariate correlations among the variables

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Avoidant attachment	-	-.03	-.77**	-.08	-.10	-.29**
2. Anxious attachment		-	-.15	-.04	.33**	-.23*
3. Intimacy			-	.08	.03	.26**
4. Problem coping				-	.45**	.04
5. Emotion coping					-	-.07
6. Relationship satisfaction						-
Scale Ranges	1-7	1-7	20-60	18-38	42-93	48-77
Mean	2.67	3.64	46.34	27.91	66.71	66.20
Standard Deviation	1.14	.95	8.69	4.40	10.33	7.49
Scale Reliabilities (α)	.92	.89	.89	.69	.82	.79

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Path analysis was used to investigate the effects of intervening variables of intimacy and coping (problem-focused and emotional) on the relationship between attachment and relationship satisfaction. The path analysis was computed using AMOS 5.0 computer software (Arbuckle, 2003) and estimated using Maximum Likelihood Chi-Square Estimation (X^2_{ML}). In line with Hu and Bentler's (1999) combinatorial approach to model assessment, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and the Standardised Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) model fit indices were selected to evaluate model fit.

The initial path analytic model was examined for goodness of fit and post-hoc respecifications conducted through the examination of Modification Indices (MIs) and path coefficients. Non-significant path coefficients were removed from the model in line with well established model trimming procedures (e.g., Byrne, 2001; Kline, 1998).

The final respecified model for the young adults provided a good fit to the sample data resulting in a non-significant chi-square statistic $X^2(7) = 10.43$, $p > .05$ and a CFI = .98 and SRMR = .05 well in line with the recommendations of Hu and Bentler (1999) for a model of small N . The respecified model and standardized regression coefficients for the adult children sample are presented in Figure 2.

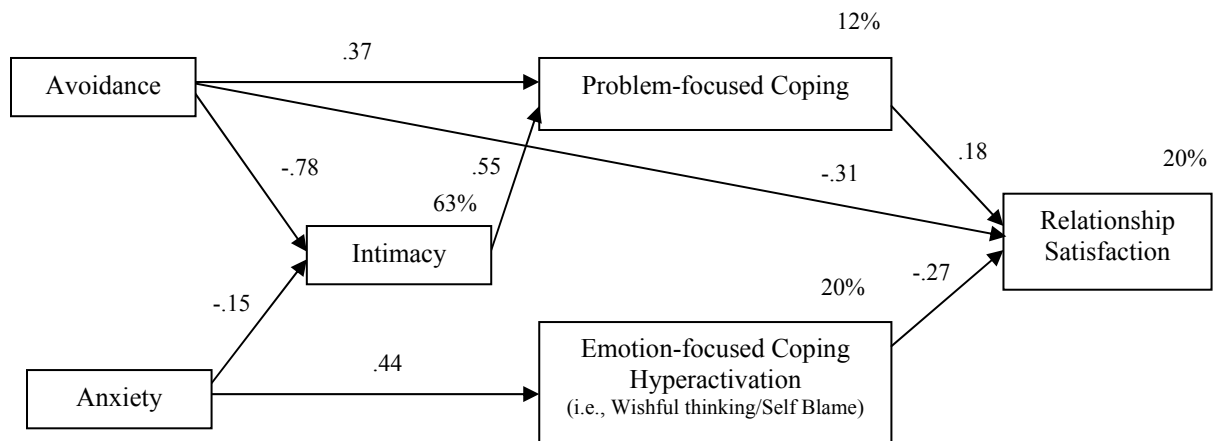


Figure 2. Mediation model of intimacy and coping behaviours on relationship satisfaction.

Sixty-three percent of the variance in young adults' readiness for intimacy was explained by attachment avoidance ($\beta = -.78$) and anxiety ($\beta = -.15$). Furthermore, attachment avoidance ($\beta = .37$) and intimacy ($\beta = .55$) contributed 12% of the variance in problem-focused coping. In contrast, anxiety was found to be the only significant contributor to hyperactivating emotion-focused coping ($\beta = .44$) explaining 20% of the variance. Lastly, attachment avoidance ($\beta = -.31$), problem-focused ($\beta = .18$) and hyperactivating emotion-focused coping ($\beta = -.27$) we found to contribute 21% of the variance in young adults' relationship satisfaction. Interestingly, attachment anxiety and intimacy were not found to have direct relationships to relationship satisfaction. Rather attachment anxiety had a negative indirect effect ($\beta = -.14$) on relationship satisfaction through hyperactivating emotion-focused coping. On the other hand, readiness for intimacy had a positive indirect relationship ($\beta = .10$) on relationship satisfaction through problem-focused coping.

Discussion

The present study examined whether association between attachment representations and relationship satisfaction was partly explained by the intervening variables of intimacy development and coping. The hypotheses that intimacy and coping strategies would impact on this association were partially supported by the present study. This study found that attachment avoidance had a direct relationship with satisfaction, but also had an indirect effect through readiness for intimacy and problem focused coping. Attachment anxiety on the other hand had a solely indirect effect on relationship satisfaction through hyperactivating emotion-focused coping. Lastly, intimacy was found to have an indirect effect on relationship satisfaction through problem-focused coping. Generally speaking, the results suggest that secure attachment is important in fostering the readiness for intimacy and that the effect of intimacy on relationship satisfaction is associated with the use of problem-focused coping. This supports the findings of past research where it has been argued that secure attachment facilitates the engagement in open and honest communication which is likely to assist in the enactment of problem-based solutions to both relationship and non-relationship related distress and the promotion of positive relationship experiences (e.g. Creasey & Hesson-McInnis, 2001; Davis, Shaver & Vernon, 2003; Mikulincer et al., 2003; Simpson, 1990).

Interestingly, attachment avoidance was found to have two contrasting influences on relationship satisfaction. Specifically, the direct relationship between attachment avoidance and relationship satisfaction confirmed previous studies that have identified a negative association between attachment anxiety and relationship satisfaction (e.g. Bartholomew, 1990; Collins, et al., 2002; Collins & Read, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1994). In contrast however, individuals high on attachment avoidance who engaged in more problem-focused coping reported higher relationship satisfaction. While the intervening effect of problem-focused coping on the association between attachment and relationship satisfaction is very plausible, it seems inconsistent with the literature that attachment avoidance would be related to the use of problem-focused coping. Nevertheless, it could be argued that avoidant individuals are just as likely to engage in problem-focused coping, but only of the type that lead to immediate "quick fix" resolutions (e.g. self-reliance) to relationship difficulties thereby limiting emotional investment (e.g., Collins, et al., 2002). This is clearly an area of further research that is necessary to unpack the diverse problem-focused coping strategies selected by avoidant individuals. In contrast to past

research, deactivation emotion-focused coping strategies played no role in modulating attachment or intimacy on relationship satisfaction.

The finding that anxious attachment was related to hyperactivating emotion-focused coping and in turn related to lower relationship satisfaction is consistent with past research findings suggesting the maladaptive properties emotion-focused coping in the context of romantic relationships (e.g., Collins et al., 2002; Marchand, 2004). In particular, our findings supports Feeney et al's (1994) observation that it is the anxiety dimension of attachment that is a key variable driving the use of behaviours typifying hyperactivating emotion-focused coping strategies in times of stress. This implies that people who possess high attachment anxiety are more likely to feel inadequate or lack the personal resources to alter their situation, leading them to over rely on others to help alleviate their distress, or in fact, merely intensify their distress through lack of seeking an effective resolution to the problem. Furthermore, the findings of the present study supports previous research which has found that relationship difficulties associated with the need for validation, clinginess (examples of hyperactivation-emotion focused coping strategies) arising from anxious attachment to be detrimental to ones ability to form and sustain satisfying relationships (Bartholomew, 1990; Collins & Read, 1990; Collins et al., Feeney, 1999; Guerrero, 1996; Mikulincer, 1998).

The findings of the present study contribute to our understanding of some of the factors that underlie difficulties in forming new relationships in young adulthood. Specifically, some insight was gained from utilising anxious and avoidant attachment dimensions rather than discrete attachment styles. In particular anxious attachment appears to be a key variable related to the use of ineffective coping strategies in response to the stressors associated with forming new relationships. Anxious attachment also seems to interfere with a young adults' capacity to form satisfying relationships. In contrast avoidant attachment did not appear to influence coping strategies or relationship satisfaction in this study.

Overall, these important findings suggest that for professionals working with young adults, the assessment of attachment anxiety could help to identify potential cognitive, affective and behavioural processes which may interfere with their ability to form satisfying relationships. Additionally, young adults presenting with attachment anxiety could benefit from learning effective coping strategies to help them navigate new relationships, promote personal wellbeing and engage in satisfying relationships.

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The Relationship between Personality, Anger, and Communication Style

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Abstract

This research is an investigation of the relationship between personality, anger and communication style. One hundred and three females with a mean age of 36.73 (SD = 13.43) and 59 males with a mean age of 39.59 (SD = 13.22) participated in the study. Previous research into communication, personality, and anger suggests that people of different personality types and different types and levels of anger should vary in their style of communication. Respondents' scores on extraversion, neuroticism, and psychoticism were clustered to form two groups comprising those with an elevated extraversion score versus those with an elevated neuroticism score (there was no difference on psychoticism). Similarly, the scores of the state, trait, anger expression (in and out), and anger control (in and out) scales were clustered into two groups. An angry group and a controlling group were defined from the data. Consistent multivariate effects were found between the personality and anger clusters and sex of respondent on communication style factors, but few of the anticipated univariate effects were found. Analyses showed that the differences between groups on the basis of personality and anger were less discriminating than the differences that were found between males and females.

Acts of communication reflect many factors, including the particular context and the personalities involved (Hartley, 1999). Anger, an emotion that sometimes influences our communication behaviour (Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield, 1994), is linked to personality. To date, little research has investigated the association between personality, anger, and communication style. The aim of the current study is to investigate the association of five communication styles with typologies of personality and anger are investigated. To do so a cluster analysis procedure will be used to identify groups of respondents representing dominant typologies of personality and anger. Combinations of personality and anger clusters with sex of respondent will be analysed to test the expected association between personality, anger, and communication style.

Personality

Personality can be defined as a relatively stable and enduring organization of an individual's temperament, character, and intellect, which determines how they will interact with their environment (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1987). The Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQ) is a well established measure of personality; the current version measuring three dimensions: extraversion-introversion, neuroticism (emotionality or stability-instability), and psychoticism (tough-mindedness). According to Eysenck and Eysenck (1964), someone scoring high on psychoticism is generally solitary, unsympathetic, insensitive, and hostile or aggressive. A typical high scorer on neuroticism is anxious, worrying, moody, and often depressed. The typical extravert is sociable, lively, and outgoing, while a high scorer can be quick-tempered and aggressive. It is expected that cluster analysis will reveal that there are three groups of respondents with high scores on one and low scores on the other two personality factors. Therefore, a high psychoticism, neuroticism, and extraversion group of respondents are expected to emerge from the data.

Anger

Spielberger, Jacobs, Russell, and Crane (1983) posit that anger can be viewed as both an emotional state that varies in intensity (State Anger) and as a relatively stable personality trait (Trait Anger). Hence, the construct of anger refers to an emotional state where feelings typically fluctuate anywhere between minor annoyance to uncontrolled rage (Spielberger, et al., 1983). The State-Trait Anger Inventory (STAXI-2) is the most widely used and validated of anger measures (Spielberger, 1999). The scale measures state and trait anger. State anger fluctuates over time as a function of external variables such as frustration or threats to self. In contrast, trait anger refers to an individual's predisposition to respond to a wide variety of situations with frustration or annoyance, which result in high levels of state anger. Individuals with high trait anger scores typically have higher state

anger scores than those individuals with low trait anger (Spielberger, 1999). As well as state and trait anger, the factors of anger expression-out (how often angry feelings are expressed in verbally or physically aggressive behaviour), anger expression-in (how often angry feelings are experienced but not expressed or, suppressed), anger control-out (how often a person controls the outward expression of angry feelings), and anger control-in (how often a person attempts to control angry feelings by calming down or cooling off) are also measured by the STAXI-2 (Spielberger, 1999). It is expected that cluster analysis of the six anger related variables will result in the emergence two clusters of respondents, on high anger-low control group, and a second group of low anger-high control.

Personality and Anger

Research findings consistently demonstrate a positive relationship between neuroticism and anger levels (Friedman, Tucker, and Reise, 1995; Martin, Wan, David, Wegner, 1999; Schill, Thomsen, & Wang, 1987). For example, a study employing the Big Five model of personality and the anger expression scales (Marshall et al., 1994) reported an association between neuroticism and anger expression-in, but not between neuroticism and anger expression-out. In a later study employing the same measures an association between neuroticism and both anger expression-in and anger expression-out was found. Spielberger's trait anger scale and the Buss-Durkee Hostility Inventory were administered alongside the MMPI to a sample of American college students (Friedman et al., 1995)s. As predicted, results indicated a moderately strong relationship between neuroticism and anger.

Past research has demonstrated an association between neuroticism and various forms of anger ranging from expression of anger-in (Martin, et al., 1999) and expression of both anger-in and anger-out (Friedman, et al., 1995) to trait anger (Schill, Thomsen, & Wang, 1987). With a sample of college students ranging from 18 to 32 years of age measuring the association between the Big Five and anger expression in and out, Martin et al., (1999) concluded that anger expression-in was associated with neuroticism. On the basis of these findings an association between neuroticism and anger would be expected.

Individuals who score high on the dimension of psychoticism tend to be hostile, aggressive, reckless suggesting that high levels of trait anger may be observed in these individuals. Accordingly, previous research supports this. Schill et al. (1987) examined the relationship between Eysenck's psychoticism dimension and level of anger and aggressive acting out. The results demonstrated a moderately strong correlation between the psychoticism scale, anger and aggressive acting out. However, this relationship was significant for males only. Several studies have shown males score higher on Eysenck's psychoticism dimension than females (e.g., del Barrio, Moreno-Rosset, Lopez-Martinez & Olmedo, 1997; Forrest, Lewis, & Shevlin, 2000). Lynn and Martin (1997) conducted a study spanning 37 nations into the gender differences of Eysenck's Personality dimensions and found males obtained higher mean scores than females on the psychoticism scale in 34 of the 37 sampled countries. Similarly, Martin and Kirkcaldy (1998) found that males scored higher on the psychoticism dimension than females. Previous literature suggests that psychoticism is positively related to anger and negatively related to self-esteem (e.g., Mayorana, di Nuovo, & Fogliani-Messina, 1985; Pilsbury, 1983; Schill et al., 1987). However research in this area is limited and in many instances has involved a clinical or criminal population. Further research is needed to ascertain whether these findings are applicable to a normal population. On the basis of the previous research into the definition of personality it is expected that respondents will cluster into three independent groups corresponding with the elevated scores on the three personality types of extraversion, neuroticism, and psychoticism. In this research, it is expected that a cluster of respondents high in psychoticism will be found and they will be associated with high levels of trait anger.

Few studies have examined the relationship between psychoticism and trait anger. Individuals who score high on the dimension of psychoticism tend to be hostile, aggressive, reckless suggesting that high levels of trait anger may be observed in these individuals. Schill et al. (1987) conducted a study into trait anger correlates of Eysenck's personality dimensions using a normal population. The results of this study indicated a moderately strong significant correlation between psychoticism and trait anger, for males. However, there was no significant relationship between these variables for females. Research has indicated that males typically score higher than females on the dimension of psychoticism (del Barrio, et al., 1997; Forrest, Lewis, & Shevlin, 2000; Martin & Kirkcaldy, 1998).

The typical extravert is described as being possessed of both an aggressive nature and an inability to keep their temper under control (Eysenck and Eysenck, 1998). Several studies examining the relationship between extraversion and anger have offered support for this description, indicating an association between extraversion as measured by the NEO-PI (a measure of neuroticism, extraversion, and openness) and anger (Friedman, Tucker, & Reise, 1995; Marshall et al., 1994). Sippelle et al. (1977) evaluated the role of personality in the response to stress, and found that individuals classed as extraverts on the EPI experienced significantly more anger than introverts. However, a later study by Schill et al. (1987) found no significant relationship between Spielberger's Trait Anger Scale and extraversion as measured by the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory.

Communication Style

Communication serves as a means of pursuing and servicing relationships or, alternately, serves to satisfy a conscious or unconscious drive, with maintaining relationships being secondary to meeting that aim. Often, such a drive is based on fulfilling a need (Bowles, 2005). Needs motivate people to act because they involve a real or perceived scarcity that typically prompts interaction or communication to correct the imbalance created by the unfulfilled need. In response, others may communicate active support, comply, or hinder attempts to satisfy the need. Conflict arises when an individual perceives that someone has frustrated, or is about to frustrate, some concern or need of his or her own (Valentine, 1995). Thus, needs may give rise to conflict in the communication process associated with the individual's personality and pattern of anger and its expression.

Models concerning conflict styles can be used to describe how individuals communicate to satisfy needs (Bowles, 2002). One such model, the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory – II (ROCI-II; Rahim, 1983), is based on Blake and Mouton (1964) two dimensions of managerial styles - concern for production and concern for people. Rahim's (1983) developed a five-factor description of how individuals handle interpersonal conflict on two dimensions: (a) concern for self, and (b) concern for others. The degree of concern for self refers to how much individuals will seek to satisfy their own concerns, whereas the degree of concern for others explains how much individuals will seek to satisfy the concerns of others. As shown in Figure 1, a combination of the two dimensions results in five specific styles of conflict handling: (a) dominating, (b) integrating, (c) obliging, (d) avoiding, and (e) compromising.

Rahim, Magner, and Shapiro (2000) describe the five conflict styles as follows. Dominating involves going all out to win one's own objective, often ignoring the needs and expectations of others. Integrating involves active collaboration between all parties to reach a mutually satisfying solution through both confrontation and problem solving. Obliging is associated with playing down differences and emphasising commonalities to satisfy other's concerns. This includes an element of self-sacrifice in that one's own concerns are neglected at the expense of other's concerns. Avoiding involves postponing issues until a better time, or simply withdrawing from threatening situations altogether, refusing to acknowledge that there is a conflict needing to be dealt with. Thus, by avoiding, neither one's own nor other's concerns are satisfied. Finally, compromising involves give-and-take or sharing, whereby both parties sacrifice something to make a mutually acceptable decision.

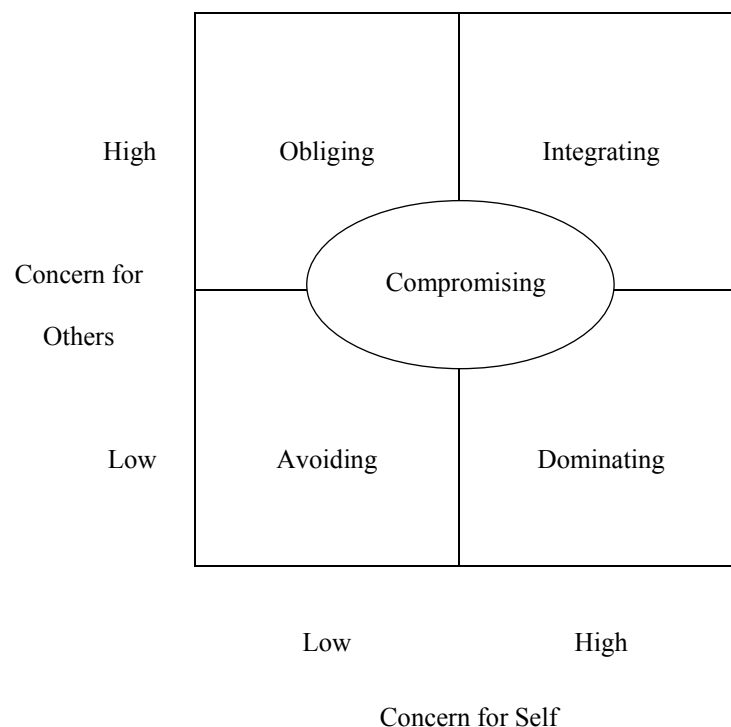


Figure 1. The five styles of handling interpersonal conflict in relation to concern for self and concern for others (Rahim, 1983).

Sex effects associated with the ROCI-II have been previously reported wherein males, under stress to seek redress from their partner's extramarital relationship, were more avoiding and compromising. Women showed more emotions, which could be construed as dominating in this context (Schapp, Buunck, & Kerkstra, 1988). Other research regarding sex and conflict style has yielded inconsistent findings. Some studies indicate that women are more cooperative than men (Rahim, 1983), while others have not found these effects (Bedell & Sistruck, 1973; Rubin & Brown, 1975).

While there is some research linking personality and anger, there is no known research linking personality, anger, and communication style. The aim of the current study is to investigate the relationship between personality, anger, and communication by clustering the three factors of personality (psychoticism, extraversion, and neuroticism) and anger variable scores (Everitt & Landau, 2001). It is anticipated that clustering respondents on the basis of their personality scores will produce three groups: one high on psychoticism only, one high on extraversion only, and one high on neuroticism only. Similarly, it is expected that two groups will emerge from clustering the six anger scales: a high anger-low control group, and a second group of low anger-high control. Combining these two sets of clusters will potentially create five groups on which the communication style factors can be compared as dependent variables. It is expected that the high psychoticism cluster will be associated with high dominating scores; the high neuroticism cluster will be associated with elevated avoidance; and, the extraversion cluster will be associated with higher obliging and integrating scores. The anger cluster will be higher scoring on dominating and the control cluster will be higher scoring on compromising and integrating. It is also expected that the interaction of the high anger separately with high psychoticism and high neuroticism clusters will result in elevated dominating scores. The interaction involving the extraverted cluster and the control cluster will be associated with elevated scores on compromising. As previous research involving sex is equivocal, it will be included in the analyses but no outcome is hypothesized.

Method

Participants

The study involved 162 adult participants residing in Australia. Ages ranged from 18 to 76 years ($M = 37.77$; $SD = 13.39$). There were 103 females (64%) and 59 males (36%). The majority of participants reported working in a professional capacity (40.1%), followed by a combination of clerical, sales, and service workers (19.7%), and students (6.8%). The remainder listed their work category as home duties (1.9%), retired (4.3%), unemployed (0.6%), or in various other categories (10.6%) including labourers, trades-people, and the self-employed. There were also 26 missing entries (16%). Most were either married or in a relationship (64.2%), the remainder (35.8%) being single, divorced, or widowed.

Materials

Participants completed questionnaires comprising self-report measures of conflict style, anger, and aspects of personality. Conflict style was measured using the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory – II (Rahim, 1983). This 35-item inventory comprises five scales, each representing one of the five conflict styles which are defined on two basic dimensions: concern for self and others (Figure 1). The ROCI-II uses a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, higher scores reflecting greater use of the particular conflict style. Only the 28 items found to have factor loadings $\geq .40$ in Rahim's (1983) original study were used in the current analysis. Items were worded to elicit responses relating to communication with others in general. Rahim (1983) reported satisfactory reliability for each of the five scales with coefficient alphas ranging from .72 to .77. For the current study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient ranged from .62 to .88.

Personality characteristics were measured using the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire – Revised Short Scale (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1998). This 48-item inventory comprises four sub-scales of 12 items each: Psychoticism, Extraversion, Neuroticism, and a Lie scale. Each of the 48 items requires a "yes" or "no" response from participants dependent on how they perceive themselves in terms of the item. Respondents receive a possible score of 0-12 on each subscale, the higher the score the greater the presence of associated traits. Eysenck and Eysenck (1998) report reasonable scale reliabilities for the EPQ-R Short Scale with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from .61 to .88. For the current study, alpha coefficients ranged from .58 to .84.

The State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory - 2 (Spielberger, 1999) was used to measure participants' experience, expression, and control of anger. The STAXI-2 is a 57-item questionnaire measure comprising six scales: state anger, trait anger, anger expression-out, anger expression-in, anger control-out, and anger control-in. Spielberger, (1999) reported reliability coefficients ranging from .73 to .94 for these scales. For the current study, alpha coefficients were between .70 to .91.

Results

Prior to reporting the MANOVAs, correlations and results of the cluster analyses are reported. Correlations of the factors involved in the comparisons (Table 1) showed that there were consistently weak correlations overall. The highest correlations were found for the trait and state anger factors indicating that clustering of these variables was not inappropriate.

Table 1
Correlations of Variables in the Analyses

	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Psychoticism	.09	-.08	.04	.08	.18*	.17*	.09	-.05	-.20*	-.23**	.16*	-.12	-.15
2. Extraversion		-.10	.12	-.00	-.07	-.23**	-.01	.04	.11	-.23**	.14	-.02	-.01
3. Neuroticism			.21**	.47**	.31**	.46**	-.30**	-.29**	.04	.34**	-.12	.24**	.18*
4. State Anger				.26**	.21**	.27**	-.12	-.14	-.08	.15	-.06	.20*	.03
5. Trait Anger					.60**	.42**	-.50**	-.36**	-.05	.01	.16*	-.00	.03
6. Anger exp'n-out						.32**	-.51**	-.29**	-.06	-.16*	.23**	-.06	-.00
7. Anger exp'n-in							-.07	-.15	-.15	.32**	.05	.17*	.11
8. Anger control-out								.58**	-.01	.04	-.08	.02	.04
9. Anger control-in									.17*	-.02	-.04	-.11	.01
10. Integrating										.03	-.07	.17*	.28**
11. Avoiding											-.28**	.50**	.27**
12. Dominating												-.09	-.03
13. Obliging													.36**
14. Compromising													

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level 2-tailed; ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level 2-tailed; N = 162

A *k*-means cluster procedure was applied to the three factor scores of psychoticism, extraversion, and neuroticism with centers derived from the data. Inspection of the dendogram and the agglomeration schedule revealed that the best profile was provided by a two factor solution. Figure 2 presents the means of the variables for each cluster. Psychoticism did not contribute to the distinction in the clusters ($F(1,160) = 1.43, p = .233, \eta^2 = .09$). Neuroticism was significantly different between the clusters ($F(1,160) = 9.40, p = .003, \eta^2 = .06$). The greatest contributing factor to the differentiation between the clusters was extraversion ($F(1,160) = 478.70, p = .001, \eta^2 = .75$). The profile of the cluster was defined as a high neuroticism cluster ($n = 72$) and a high extraversion cluster ($n = 90$).

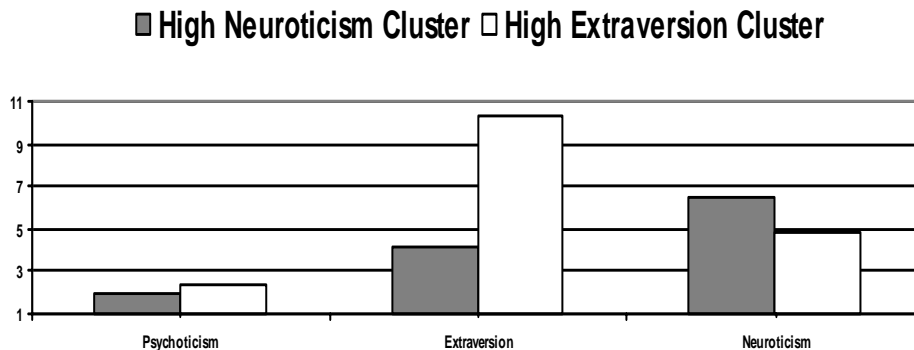


Figure 2. The profile of respondents' scores for two clusters based on personality scores.

A second *k*-means cluster procedure was applied to the six factor scores of state anger, trait anger, anger expression (in and out), and anger control (in and out). Inspection of the dendrogram and the agglomeration schedule revealed that the best profile was again provided by a two factor solution. Figure 3 represents the means of the variables for each cluster. Significant differences were found for state anger ($F(1,160) = 10.67, p = .001, \eta^2 = .06$), trait anger ($F(1,160) = 115.17, p = .001, \eta^2 = .41$), anger-expression out ($F(1,160) = 89.29, p = .001, \eta^2 = .36$), anger-expression in ($F(1,160) = 33.66, p = .001, \eta^2 = .17$), anger control-out ($F(1,160) = 1.43, p = .233, \eta^2 = .09$), and anger control-in ($F(1,160) = 76.05, p = .001, \eta^2 = .32$). Cluster one ($n = 76$), characterized by high anger, was contributed to consistently significantly and mainly by trait and expression of anger factors. Cluster two ($n = 86$), labelled control, was comprised of respondents high on the two control factors and low on trait anger and expression.

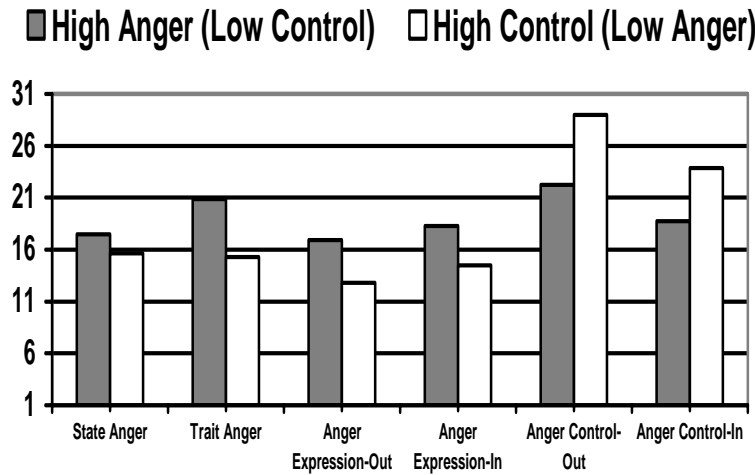


Figure 3. The profile of respondents' scores for two clusters based on anger scores.

To test for the interaction between personality, anger, and sex of respondents, three MANOVAs were completed involving pairwise comparison of the IVs with the five communication factors as the DVs. The first MANOVA was completed with personality and anger clusters as IVs. Using Pillai's trace criterion, a significant multivariate effect was found for personality cluster ($F(5,154) = 2.75, p = .02, \eta^2 = .08$) and for the cluster of anger ($F(5,154) = 2.36, p = .04, \eta^2 = .07$). No significant interaction effects were found. Univariate tests using a Bonferroni adjusted alpha level revealed a significant effect for personality (Table 2), indicating that the high neuroticism group were significantly more avoiding ($F(1,158) = 8.65, p = .004, \eta^2 = .05$; see Table 1) and less dominating ($F(1,158) = 4.41, p = .037, \eta^2 = .03$). Only one univariate effect involving the anger cluster on dominating was revealed ($F(1,158) = .574, p = .018, \eta^2 = .04$).

To test for the relationship between the sex of respondents and the clusters of anger, a second MANOVA was completed. Using Pillai's trace criterion, a significant multivariate effect was found for the sex of respondent ($F(5,154) = 3.51, p = .005, \eta^2 = .10$). There was no multivariate effect involving the cluster of anger and no interaction. Univariate tests with a Bonferroni adjustment indicated a significant effects for the sex of respondent, with females scoring higher on the communication factors of integrating ($F(1,158) = 4.55, p = .034, \eta^2 = .03$); avoiding ($F(1,158) = 7.59, p = .007, \eta^2 = .05$); obliging ($F(1,158) = 5.99, p = .016, \eta^2 = .04$); and compromising ($F(1,158) = 5.75, p = .018, \eta^2 = .04$). Males scored significantly higher on dominating ($F(1,158) = 6.73, p = .01, \eta^2 = .04$). There was one univariate effect for anger on the communication factor of dominating ($F(1,158) = 5.06, p = .026, \eta^2 = .03$), as previously reported. There was no interaction involving sex and anger factors.

To test the relationship between sex and the personality clusters, a third MANOVA was completed. An analysis of the difference using Pillai's trace criterion indicated a significant multivariate difference for sex ($F(5, 154) = 3.21, p = .009, \eta^2 = .09$). There was also a multivariate effect involving personality ($F(5, 154) = 3.21, p = .009, \eta^2 = .09$). The univariate analyses, with Bonferroni adjustment, showed that the previously reported sex effects were present for all factors except integrating. The between-subjects analyses showed that females were more avoiding ($F(1, 158) = 6.86, p = .010, \eta^2 = .04$); obliging ($F(1, 158) = 6.46, p = .012, \eta^2 = .04$); and, compromising ($F(1, 158) = 6.18, p = .014, \eta^2 = .04$). Consistent with the previous analyses, males were higher

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics of Communication Factors by Sex, Cluster of Personality, and Cluster of Anger Variables

	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Sex	Females			Males		
Integrating*	103	4.02	.30	59	3.92	.32
Avoiding*	103	3.41	.77	59	3.08	.73
Dominating*	103	2.87	.67	59	3.12	.55
Obliging*	103	3.58	.48	59	3.38	.47
Compromising*	103	3.84	.38	59	3.68	.43
Personality	High Neuroticism			High Extraversion		
Integrating	72	3.95	.27	90	4.01	.34
Avoiding*	72	3.49	.72	90	3.13	.78
Dominating*	72	2.85	.57	90	3.05	.68
Obliging	72	3.53	.50	90	3.50	.47
Compromising	72	3.80	.41	90	3.77	.41
Anger	High Anger			High Control		
Integrating	76	3.95	.344	86	4.00	.28
Avoiding	76	3.30	.813	86	3.28	.74
Dominating*	76	3.07	.666	86	2.80	.60
Obliging	76	3.59	.487	86	3.44	.47
Compromising	76	3.79	.404	86	3.77	.41

Note. * indicates a significant effect.

scoring on dominating ($F(1, 158) = 5.58, p = .019, \eta^2 = .03$). Analyses showed that the only personality factor with a significant effect, was the high neuroticism group which was higher on avoiding ($F(1, 158) = 10.56, p = .001, \eta^2 = .06$), as found in a preceding analysis.

Discussion

This research has shown that two meaningful pairs of clusters emerged from the data, with one cluster conforming to the expected dimensions. The analysis of five communication factors in relation to pair-wise interactions of IVs (personality/anger; sex/anger; sex and personality) showed that there were relatively few effects based on interactions. There were main effects mainly involving sex, fewer effects were found for personality, and fewer involving anger. These effects will be discussed in turn.

Meaningful clusters did emerge from the data partially in line with the expectations. The findings from the current research showed that the personality factors did not form clusters as expected (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1998). Instead of three clusters representing each personality factor, two emerged that were labelled high extraversion (/low neuroticism) and high neuroticism (/low extraversion). Psychoticism did not separate sufficiently to warrant a contribution to the IV. As a convenience sample was used there is unlikely to be many highly psychotic individuals in the sample. Importantly, the profile provided in Figure 2 shows that there is little variability in the psychoticism score in comparison with that of extraversion and neuroticism. This made the anticipated analyses impossible (Schill et al., 1987).

By contrast, the six factors associated with anger and its expression did separate into two definable groups as expected (Everitt & Landau, 2001). The high anger (/low control) and high control (/low anger) cluster profile was contributed to least by state anger. The trait anger and expression scales contributed most to the anger cluster, and the anger control-in and anger control-out factors contributed most to the control factor. This configuration of anger factors into IVs provides a meaningful conceptualization of the factors.

Importantly, the expected interaction that would have highlighted the effect of the high anger/neuroticism (Martin et al., 1995; 1999) and high anger/extraversion (Friedman, et al., 1995) on communication factors of dominance (high) and high anger/extraversion on communication factors of compromising (low) was not found. No interactions were found involving any of the combinations of the IVs.

None of the expected main effects linking psychoticism to dominating (Mayorana, di Nuovo, & Fogliani-Messina, 1985; Pilsbury, 1983), and extraversion to obliging and integrating (Martin et al., 1999) were found. By contrast, the extraversion group were more dominating in line with Eysenck & Eysenck (1998), and the neuroticism group were more avoiding in line with Martin et al., (1999). Unfortunately, the effect sizes found indicate that the relationship between the IVs and DVs was small (Cohen, 1992).

Despite the previous equivocal findings linking sex effects with the ROCI factors (Bedell & Sistruck, 1973; Rubin & Brown, 1975; Schapp, Buunck, & Kerkstra, 1988), the results showed that there were consistent sex effects. Women were more cooperative than men in that they were significantly more compromising, obliging, avoiding and integrating, in line with previous research (Rahim, 1983). Males were more dominating. However, while these effects were significant the effect size was small (Cohen, 1992).

The absence of the expected effect for the interaction and the main effect on communication for anger and personality factors was difficult to explain. It is possible that there is, at best, only a small association between anger, personality, and communication. If so, this research may be representative of the real situation. The procedure of clustering the respondents' scores on anger and personality was expected to accentuate the differentiation of respondents and consequently the communication scores associated with the clusters. That this procedure did not have this effect is problematic. A possible explanation of the absence of effect may be that the communication factors are context-bound and immediacy mediated. That is, that there is a necessary stimulus that triggers the personality or angry response bringing about specific types and magnitudes of communication.

Future research could focus on defining the stimulus for the angry responses. It is also proposed that men are generally more comfortable with the expressions and experience of anger, however, the findings of related research are inconsistent (Milovchevich et al., 2001). In their own study, Milovchevich and his colleagues found that measures of gender role identification, rather than sex, had a strong relationship with anger experience, expression, and control, at both the trait and state level. Milovchevich et al. stress the need for research concerning anger and sex to focus more on cultural rules and scripts governing anger expression rather than on the experience and expression of anger in general. They conclude that individual's experience, control, and expression of anger may be largely learned behaviour. These issues may be considered in future research.

In conclusion, in this research an analysis of the relationship between groups of respondents classified in reference to levels of anger and personality, and the sex of respondent, as IVs, showed only weak differences on communication styles. Findings for the expected effects associated with anger and personality were also inconsistent, whereas the effect for sex was stronger than expected. Future research into the effects of situational and context factors that may accentuate the expression of the individual respondent's anger and personality response is suggested.

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Intimacy and Attachment in Adolescent Relationships

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Abstract

From an attachment theory framework this study investigated the relationship of working models of self and other to the experience of intimacy conceptualised as a multidimensional phenomena. It was hypothesised that more self disclosure and increased intimacy goals would be associated with a positive model of other and that a positive model of self would be associated with greater levels of receiving disclosure and perceiving a partner to be responsive. Using a cross sectional sample of upper high school students (N=265) the results provided support for the view that the model of other primarily influences intimacy goals and self disclosure. Partial support was found for the effect of the model of self on eliciting disclosure from others and perceptions of partner responsiveness. The results are discussed in the context of multidimensional models of intimacy and adolescent psychosocial development.

Intimacy is argued to be an important influence on relationship quality, and its presence in relationships gives a sense of 'belonging' to the individuals involved (Sprecher & Hendrick, 2004). When intimacy occurs with another person it produces positive affect states, such as happiness, feelings of closeness and being validated and cared for (Reis & Shaver, 1988). Conversely, a lack of intimacy in relationships can lead to feelings of depression, low relationship satisfaction, and loneliness (Sprecher & Hendrick, 2004). Despite the evidence that intimacy is associated with many benefits, people differ in the extent to which they desire intimacy in their relationships (Bartholomew, 1990). Attachment theory has recently been proposed as a theoretical framework to explain individual differences in experiencing intimacy (Prager, 2000). Bowlby (1980) proposed that the early care given to an infant is internalised to produce cognitive representations of the self and others, and these 'working models' continue to influence the interpretation of behaviour in interpersonal relationships across the lifespan. Weis (1982) argued that important changes occur in adolescent relationships with regard to both intimacy and attachment; and that peer relationships become of increasing importance.

Both adolescents and adults believe closeness, sharing and revealing private information are the most important aspects of intimacy (Monsour, 1992). According to Reis and Shaver's (1988) 'transactional' model, intimacy is a process where one person 'discloses' information, and the listener responds in a way which produces feelings of validation and support. At each point in this process both partner's goals, expectations and beliefs regarding interpersonal behaviour influence how each interaction is perceived and interpreted. Researchers (e.g., Grabill & Kerns, 2000; Sprecher & Hendrick, 2004) have now adopted the model proposed by Reis and Shaver (1988) by using multiple measures of intimacy to capture the different processes involved.

A central concept of attachment theory is that working models influence the perceptions one holds of the behaviour of others in interpersonal experiences. The model proposed by Reis and Shaver (1988) allows the specific stages of the intimacy process, where working models of other and self can influence an individual's motivation for intimacy and the interpretation of a partner's behaviour, to be identified. Attachment working models of other and self are proposed to have differential effects on aspects of intimacy such as self-disclosure, receiving disclosure, intimacy as an interpersonal goal, and perceptions of partner responsiveness.

For an exchange to be perceived as intimate one person must disclose revealing personal information about the self to the listener. The discloser is likely to be influenced by their working model of other in that individuals who believe that others are dependable and trustworthy are more likely to disclose important self relevant information. On the other hand, individuals with a negative view of others will be likely to disclose less to reduce the risk of rejection. Individuals who expect others to respond to their feelings in a supportive, as opposed to unsupportive, manner are likely to disclose, secure in the belief that they will be understood. Intimate relationships also involve reciprocal disclosure of personal information. Empirical studies have confirmed a greater tendency of secure individuals, who have a positive model of self and other and greater care giver capacities, to receive disclosure from others (Grabill & Kerns, 2000) than attachment styles with a negative model of self. Mikulincer and colleagues (2001) found global measures of attachment dimensions were associated with differential subsequent feelings of empathy and personal distress in reactions to other's problem situations. In particular, the model of self was positively related to empathic feelings.

Sanderson et al. (2005) have investigated the effect of intimacy 'goals' on behaviour. Individuals who have high intimacy goals, focus on intimacy and engage in patterns of behaviour that are conducive to creating

intimacy in their relationships, rather than the pursuit of other goals such as self-exploration or independence. Expectations about the reliability and trustworthiness of others as conceptualised by attachment working model of other may provide an explanation for individual differences in intimacy goals. Individuals with an expectation that others will be available and responsive, characteristics of secure attachment, are more likely to value and desire intimacy in their relationships.

Ultimately the perception of intimacy depends on feeling understood, validated and cared for (Reis & Shaver, 1988). Cognitive models relating to expectations in relationships are thought to affect the interpretation of interpersonal behaviour by guiding selection and attention of information that confirms 'self' beliefs (Collins & Read, 1994). Individuals are more likely to attend to a relationship partner's behaviour that is congruent with their own view of self. In a study investigating perceptions of intimacy according to attachment style, Grabill and Kerns (2000) found that Secure and Dismissing individuals, attachment styles characterised by a high sense of self-worth, rated their partners as more responsive to their disclosure. This indicates that high self-worth may be a key influence on the perceptions of responsiveness and intimacy in relationships.

The Present Study

The aim of this study is to determine the extent to which four particular aspects of intimacy relate to attachment working models of self and other. Specifically, it is hypothesised that the expectations about the reliability of others (model of other) will influence the desire an individual has for intimacy in their friendship (intimacy goals) and the extent to which an individual reveals personal information (self-disclosure). Individuals who hold a positive model of other (secure and preoccupied styles) are predicted to report more intimacy goals and self-disclosure than individuals with a negative model of other (fearful and dismissing styles). Model of self is proposed to explain differences in perceptions of receiving disclosure from others and perceptions of the responsiveness of partners. Individuals with a positive view of self will attend to behaviour of a relationship partner that confirms their self belief that they are worthy. Therefore, they are more likely to perceive others as disclosing personal information (other disclosure) and perceive partners as responsive to their needs (partner responsiveness). Thus, individuals who have a positive model of self (secure and dismissing styles) are hypothesised to report receiving more disclosure from their friends and are more likely to perceive their friend as being responsive than individuals with a negative model of self (preoccupied and fearful styles).

Method

Participants

A cross-sectional sample of 284 Australian Capital Territory high school students aged 15 to 19 years ($M = 17.31$, $SD = 0.69$) initially participated with the majority of participants (83.6%) from an English speaking background. 19 cases were excluded due to missing data. The final sample consisted of 193 (73.3%) females and 72 (26.7%) males.

Procedure and Measures

Parental and individual consent was obtained for all participants before they took part in the research. Participants completed a questionnaire booklet in a classroom setting and were debriefed following completion of the study.

Attachment. Attachment style was assessed using the Relationship Questionnaire (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) which consists of four paragraphs each describing an attachment style. Participants rated the extent to which each attachment style describes them, from (1) *not at all like me* to (7) *very much like me*. Respondents were assigned to an attachment category based on their responses.

Intimacy Goals. The Intimacy Goals in Friendships Scale (Sanderson et al., 2005) was used to assess the extent participants desired and valued intimacy in their friendships. The scale consists of 14 items for which respondents are asked to rate their endorsement on a 5-point scale from (1) *strongly disagree* to (5) *strongly agree*. Scales were summed to provide an overall score with higher values indicating a greater desire for intimacy in their relationship. Sanderson et al., (2005) report an internal reliability of .88, which was slightly lower than for the current study ($\alpha = .92$).

Partner Responsiveness. A modified version of the Perceived Partner Responsiveness Scale (Reis, H., personal communication, May 10, 2005) was used to assess perceptions of partner responsiveness. The original 18 items were reduced to 10 items asking respondents how true each statement was regarding their friend's ability to make them feel understood, validated and cared for. Respondents rated each statement on a 5 point scale from (1) *not at all true* to (5) *completely true*. Scores on each of the items were summed to provide an overall score. Internal reliability for this study was high (Cronbach's $\alpha = .94$).

Other Disclosure. The Opener Scale (Miller et al., 1983) was used to assess the respondent's perceptions of their ability to elicit disclosure from others. Respondents were asked to rate each of the 10 items on a 5-point

scale from (5) *strongly disagree* to (1) *strongly agree*. The items were summed to provide an overall score with higher scores indicating greater perceptions of receiving disclosure from others. For the current study, internal reliability was high ($\alpha = .87$).

Self-Disclosure. The 10 item Self-Disclosure Index (Miller et al., 1983) was used to assess the extent to which participants disclosed information relating to their thoughts and emotions. A 5-point scale accompanied each statement ranging from (5) *strongly agree* to (1) *strongly disagree*. Items were summed to create an overall score with high scores indicating greater self-disclosure. Miller et al., (1983) reported high internal reliability for the scales calculated for same-sex-friend (Cronbach's $\alpha = .87$ for men, $.86$ for women), which were similar to the current study (Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$).

Results

The means and standard deviations for the intimacy measures by each of the attachment categories are presented in Table 1. A one-way MANOVA yielded a significant overall main effect of Attachment Style on Intimacy, Wilks's $\Lambda F(12, 683) = 7.343, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .101$. Follow up analysis revealed main effects for all four measures: Intimacy Goals $F(3,261) = 8.614, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .09$; Other Disclosure $F(3,261) = 9.683, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .10$; Self-Disclosure $F(3,261) = 8.988, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .094$; and Partner Responsiveness $F(3,261) = 10.750, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .11$.

Table 1
Means and Standard Deviations of Intimacy Measures by Attachment Style

	Secure (n = 137)	Fearful (n = 41)	Preoccupied (n = 63)	Dismissing (n = 24)
Intimacy Goals				
Mean (SD)	62.34 (6.34)	60.37 (6.07)	61.95 (5.99)	55.29 (8.63)
Other Disclosure				
Mean (SD)	42.55 (4.11)	41.29 (5.28)	39.49 (5.71)	37.83 (6.24)
Partner Respons.				
Mean (SD)	41.66 (5.93)	37.93 (6.26)	37.51 (7.17)	38.00 (7.91)
Self-Disclosure				
Mean (SD)	35.23 (7.27)	29.97 (6.76)	31.70 (7.79)	29.66 (6.61)

Planned contrasts were conducted to test the *a priori* predictions. Differences in means of Intimacy Goals between Attachment styles characterised by a positive model of other (Secure and Preoccupied) were compared with those with a negative model of other (Fearful and Dismissing). As predicted, the means of the attachment styles with a positive view of others ($M = 62.145$) were higher than those with a negative view of others ($M = 59.83$), $t(261) = 4.477, p < .001$. Tukey *post hoc* comparisons indicated the difference between the Dismissing and Fearful groups was significant, $t(263) = -5.07, p < .01$. The Dismissing group also differed significantly from the Secure, $t(263) = -7.05, p < .01$, and Preoccupied groups $t(263) = -6.66, p < .01$. However, the Fearful group did not differ significantly from the Secure and the Preoccupied groups.

Group differences in Self-disclosure according to model of other were also investigated using planned contrasts. The means of the groups with a positive model of other ($M = 33.46$) (Secure and Preoccupied groups) were compared to the means of the groups with a negative model of other ($M = 29.81$) (Fearful and Dismissing). As expected, the results revealed that attachment styles with a positive model of other scored significantly higher than those with a negative model of other, $t(261) = 3.35, p < .001$. Tukey *post hoc* contrasts were conducted to examine all possible differences in the levels of Self-Disclosure. Contrary to expectations, the results reveal the Secure group was significantly higher than the Preoccupied group, $t(261) = 3.52, p < .01$. The Secure group was also higher than the Fearful, $t(261) = 5.25, p < .001$, and Dismissing groups, $t(261) = 5.56, p < .01$. None of the insecure groups differed significantly from each other.

Planned contrasts were then conducted to investigate the effect of model of self on Other Disclosure. The means of groups characterised by a positive model of self (Secure and Dismissing group) ($M = 40.19$) were compared with the mean of Attachment styles with a negative model of self (Fearful and Preoccupied) ($M = 40.39$). It was hypothesised that groups with a positive model of self would report receiving greater levels of disclosure from others. However, the results revealed a non significant difference between the groups with a positive model of self and negative model of self. The pattern of means (Table 1) indicate the results are contrary to predictions. The Secure group was the highest ($M = 42.55$), the Fearful ($M = 41.29$) was the second highest,

followed by Preoccupied ($M = 39.49$) and then Dismissing ($M = 37.83$). Tukey *post hoc* tests revealed the Fearful group was not significantly different to the Secure group and the Preoccupied group. Significant differences were found between the Secure and Preoccupied groups, $t(263) = 3.05, p < .01$, and Secure and Dismissing groups, $t(263) = 4.71, p < .01$.

Planned contrasts were conducted to investigate the effect of model of self on Partner Responsiveness by comparing the means of Attachment styles with a positive model of self (Secure and Dismissing group) ($M = 39.83$) with the mean of Attachment styles with a negative model of self (Preoccupied and Fearful) ($M = 37.72$). As predicted, the mean of the groups with positive model of self was significantly higher than groups with a negative model of self, $t(261) = 2.695, p < .007$. *Post hoc* comparisons found that the mean of the Dismissing group was significantly lower than the Secure group, $t(263) = 3.66, p < .05$, but not significantly different to the Fearful and Preoccupied group. The Secure group was also significantly higher than the Fearful, $t(263) = 3.73, p < .01$, and the Preoccupied groups, $t(263) = 5.15, p < .05$. There were no significant differences between the Fearful, Preoccupied and Dismissing groups.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate the effect of attachment models of other and self on four major aspects of intimacy and the results provided support for the majority of the hypotheses. Those with a positive model of other were predicted to report greater desire for intimacy in their friendship and higher levels of personal disclosure than those with a negative model of other. As predicted, a positive model of other was associated with greater intimacy goals and higher levels of self-disclosure in friendship. The hypothesis that attachment working model of self influences perceptions of receiving disclosure from others, however, was not supported. Participants with a positive model of self did not differ significantly from those with a negative model of self on perceptions of receiving disclosure from others. However, the hypothesis that individuals with a positive model of self would report greater feelings of being understood, validated and cared for by their friends was supported.

Although the results of the *a priori* tests supported the majority of hypotheses, follow-up analysis revealed the pattern of means was not quite in line with predictions. Results of the *post hoc* comparison of intimacy goals showed that despite the means following the expected direction, the Fearful group was not significantly different to the Secure and Preoccupied group. A subtle difference in the conceptualisation of negative model of other may explain the Fearful group's higher level of intimacy goals in comparison to the Dismissing group. Bartholomew (1990) argues that the negative model of other held by Dismissing individuals is due to a denial of the importance of interpersonal relationships. This allows Dismissing individuals to maintain distance and preserve self-esteem. On the other hand, Fearful individuals have a desire for intimacy in their relationships but avoid intimacy to prevent the risk of being rejected. These slight differences in motivations, despite both attachment styles having a negative model of other, may contribute to the unexpected discrepancy in the level of intimacy goals observed between the two styles.

As predicted, individuals who believe friends will be responsive to their needs are more likely to self-disclose than individuals who do not believe their friends will be responsive. Although the *post hoc* comparisons revealed a significant difference between the Secure and Preoccupied groups, the pattern of means was in the expected direction. The results of the present study support previous research, which found that Secure and Preoccupied individuals reported the greatest levels of self-disclosure in their friendships (Grabill & Kerns, 2000). Interestingly, the attachment styles that reported the highest levels of self-disclosure were also the highest in desiring intimacy in their friendships. Individuals with high intimacy goals may use self-disclosure as a way of initiating intimacy in friendships.

The predicted influence of model of self on perceptions of receiving disclosure from others and partner responsiveness received partial support from the results of this study. Contrary to predictions, attachment styles with a positive model of self did not differ from those with a negative model of self on perceptions of receiving disclosure from others. Although Secure individuals reported the highest levels of receiving disclosure from others, Dismissing individuals, reported the lowest level of receiving disclosure. Contrary to expectations, the Fearful group reported the second highest level of receiving disclosure from others.

This result is surprising considering Bartholomew and Horowitz's description of a 'fearful' attachment style does not correspond to Miller and colleagues' (1983) description of 'Openers'. Openers are described as individuals with high self-esteem, who are low in anxiety, and like being around other people, while Fearful individuals are described as introverted, socially anxious and un-expressive (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). The elevated levels of receiving disclosure in the Fearful group may be explained by the latent desire for intimacy these individuals are suggested to have (Bartholomew, 1990). A fear of rejection prevents Fearful individuals from initiating the intimacy process, but receiving disclosure from others may be a way to satisfy their desire for intimacy and so they over estimate the level of disclosure they receive.

Finally, as expected, attachment styles with a positive model of self had higher perceptions of partner responsiveness than attachment styles with a negative view of self. Although the pattern of means was in the

expected direction, the *post hoc* comparisons revealed a significant difference between Secure and Dismissing groups, but no significant difference between the Dismissing, Preoccupied and Fearful groups. This finding was not consistent with the results of Grabill and Kerns (2000) who found Dismissing individuals reported greater perceptions of partner responsiveness than both the Fearful and Preoccupied groups. The proportion of Dismissing individuals in this sample, however, was lower than expected. This may have affected the ability of this study to detect a significant difference between the Dismissing, and the Fearful and Preoccupied groups in perceptions of the responsiveness of their friend.

Limitations and future research

Although the overall sample size was quite large in this study, the unequal numbers of participants in the attachment style categories may have obscured some significant differences between the groups. Future research may overcome these limitations by selectively sampling to increase the numbers of participants in each of the attachment styles. Additionally, the limited numbers of males precluded any appropriate analyses by sex. There is considerable debate in the intimacy field regarding sex differences in intimacy. For example, women have been found to disclose more than males and receive more disclosure from both males and females (Dolgin & Minowa, 1997). Conducting the analyses for males and females separately may have revealed important sex differences in intimacy.

Conclusions

This study investigated the influence of attachment working models on four related aspects of intimacy: intimacy goals, self-disclosure, other disclosure, and perceptions of partner responsiveness. Attachment styles characterised by a positive model of other were associated with high intimacy goals and greater self-disclosure in adolescents. Mixed support was found for the impact of positive model of self on levels of receiving disclosure from others and perceiving a partner as responsive. The findings show that intimacy in adolescence is influenced by attachment through the concept of working models an individual holds in relation to self and others. The results from the present study highlight the importance of conceptualising intimacy as a multidimensional construct when attempting to investigate how individuals differ in their experience of intimacy. Experiencing appropriate components of intimacy in adolescent friendships contributes to the skills necessary for reciprocal relationships in adulthood to be developed.

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The impact of dissociative identity (disorder) on intimate relationships

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Abstract

This paper offers a brief glimpse into the findings of a study undertaken to address some of the paucity of research in the area of close personal relationships and dissociative identity [DI]. Finding understanding and non-judgmental social interaction, with a partner seems to be crucial in allowing the individual with dissociative identity the respect and support they need to find their way in the world.

“Just the freedom to be I think that’s the really important thing...not trying to hide anymore and feeling respected” (Annie, participant with DI)

This paper reports on an area of research in the field of Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID) that has been rarely examined: the area of close and/or intimate relationships. While much research has been done into individuals’ experience of DID, its symptomatology and its treatment, little has been done on the issue of whether such individuals are able to sustain functional relationships and what the nature of those relationships might be.

For those less familiar with Dissociative Identity Disorder, it is characterised by the presence of two or more distinct identities, each with its own unique and enduring way of relating to the world and self; and at least two of these identities recurrently taking control of the person’s behaviour (APA, 2000).

Despite the fact that DID, previously known as Multiple Personality Disorder, has been included in the Diagnostic Statistical Manual (DSM) since 1980, it is an area where much controversy still abounds concerning its ‘validity’ as a legitimate disorder. One’s position in this debate shapes one’s beliefs about those with a diagnosis of DID and influences how one relates to such individuals. Positions range from believing it is faked by the individual (Selzer, 1995) or created iatrogenically by the therapist (Merksey, 1992), through believing it is real but disordered (Ross, 1997), to seeing it as just a different way of being and not inherently dysfunctional (Clayton, 2004).

The current authors’ position is that DID is real and can in many cases be functional in adulthood, hence not automatically requiring treatment. In line with this focus on functionality, within this paper the word ‘disorder’ will be dropped. Also the concept will hereafter be termed dissociative identity or simply DI.

Effect of the past

Dysfunctional relationships are, in most circumstances, at the heart of the aetiology of DI. Although trauma has historically been viewed as the causal factor in DI, Liotti (1992) and Lyons–Ruth and Jacobvitz, (1999) found that dissociative identity results more specifically from disruptions in childhood attachment arising out of trauma. As such it is now recognised that dissociative identity is most likely a result of trauma, abuse, severe neglect and/or attachment issues (Steele, 2003). Any alteration of early attachment dynamics (see Bowlby 1977 and Briere, 2002) is seen to have a lasting affect on the development of self and interpersonal relationships. Bowlby’s research suggested that early adult-child relations become the template for other relationships. Hazen and Shaver (1990) and Kirkpatrick and Davis (1994) propose that, unlike securely attached children who grow into adults who develop secure relationships, abused or neglected children are more likely to develop anxious or avoidant type relationships. On the basis of such research, it would seem that adults with dissociative identity may well reflect and experience such relationship styles.

Researchers from within the trauma field suggest that individuals who have suffered forms of abuse are more likely to experience sexual difficulties in relationships (Mennen & Pearlmuter, 1993), difficulties in forming and maintaining interpersonal relationships (Noll, Trickett, & Putnam, 2003), and have variations in their ability to experience a sense of trust and confidence in adult relationships (Cole & Putnam, 1992). This may also make secure attachments to partners more difficult. With the recognition that many individuals with DI have suffered multiple forms of abuse, it is possible, therefore, that this group may also identify the same difficulties.

Social context in the present

The relationship styles exhibited by individuals with DI, however, are not likely to be solely a product of their traumatic childhood. The influence of the society in which they live as adults is also likely to have a major impact on whether or not the development of relationships is possible and on the nature of the relationships that do develop. Individuals with dissociative identity live in a social world where they are largely marginalised. Given the nature of dissociative identity, many individuals report an extreme wariness of revealing their way of being to those they interact with, for fear of not being understood or of being stigmatised (Clayton, 2004; Jackson, 1994). The fear of rejection is such that many individuals with DI go to great lengths to pass as 'normal' (Brockington, Hall, Levings & Murphy, 1993). It might be expected that such issues of stigma and hiddenness would impact greatly on the development and nature of relationships for people with DI.

Impetus for study

A search of the academic and social literature to date found very few references to the nature of relationships of individuals with DI. The little research that is available is derived from inpatient participants, is based on quantitative data and on the whole presents a negative picture (Chu, 1998). More importantly, these literature reports do not include people "whose expertise derives from dealing on a daily basis" with DI (Nairn & Coverdale, 2005). Only two qualitative papers were found referring to relationships and DI. One by Jackson (1994) revealed that partners of those with DI felt isolated, that there was unpredictability to life, inability to plan for the future, and that they were wary of speaking out due to the controversy surrounding DI in clinical and societal circles. Clayton (2004) highlighted that further research was needed in respect to what is the two way impact on significant relationships of a person having DI and what the partners felt about the DI.

Aims of the current study

The current study is part of a larger study that explores societal and experiential perspectives on DI in Australia. The current study's aims were to a) redress the paucity of research into DI and relationships, b) ascertain whether, contrary to both the clinical and attachment literature, there are individuals with DI in functioning relationships and c) explore how both individuals and partners viewed the dissociative identity and the two way impact on their relationships.

Method

The current study employed a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis. This type of methodology is particularly appropriate when exploring the experiences of an under-researched group as it can give a depth and detail to the material that otherwise would be difficult to obtain with quantitative methods (Denov, 2004).

Participants

Participants were recruited through invitation letters sent to therapists around Australia. The data was obtained between the period 2003 - 2005, from face to face semi-structured interviews with individuals officially diagnosed with DI (ages ranging from twenty-four to sixty-nine) and partners of those with DI (ages ranging from twenty-seven to fifty-two). The length of time that individuals had been aware of their DI ranged from three months to twenty years. The majority of the individuals reported having suffered both familial and outside abuse.

This paper reports on data from four couples, three individuals, and two other partners. Actual names and identifying characteristics have been changed to ensure anonymity.

Louise and Michael (DI) have been married for 28 years. They currently live apart yet still spend a large amount of time together. They have one adult child. Deidre (DI), who has an 8 year old son, and Alan have been married for five years. They are parents to a baby boy. Alexi (DI), who has two children from a previous marriage, is in a committed cohabiting lesbian relationship with Bella, while Laurie and her partner (DI), who live apart from each other, have been in a relationship for three years.

Procedure

Participants were interviewed for approximately one hour at a place of their choosing. Some participants chose to be interviewed with their partner while others were interviewed either on their own, or with a support person. One couple was interviewed twice, once together and then each person separately. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and a copy sent to participants for ethical consent and approval.

Analysis

The interviews were explored by thematic then discourse analyses. This paper presents a brief glimpse into the study's findings. The extracts presented below are from one point in time and are open to as many different interpretations as there are readers. This paper offers only one of those interpretations.

Results

The following extracts offer reflections from participants about the problems and benefits experienced in their relationships.

Problems identified by those with DI

Individuals with DI revealed that many problematic relationships they had been involved had exacerbated the difficulties they experienced living with DI. Many difficulties had even inadvertently arisen in relationships that were in the main supportive.

One issue raised by some DI individuals was that partners and family members sometimes reinforced on a personal, and thereby more painful level, the general societal message that the individual was dysfunctional and disordered.

My husband was really quite willing to see me as mentally disordered. And ... being under that gaze, it was quite horrific actually (Anna).

The quote above illustrates the stressful nature not so much of the DI itself, but of being judged because of it. 'Under that gaze' implies a sense of being watched, of being under a microscope, and at the same time judged, akin to the panoptic gaze identified by Foucault, (1977). The term "mentally disordered" carries the assumptions that underlie the medical model of being deviant, and abnormal.

Even if friends and partners did not see them as mentally disordered, the way in which they reflected back to the individuals their 'non-normality' was difficult for some to deal with.

It's just too many questions and too much curiosity and I don't have all these answers because I don't even know (Jenni).

The issue of being a 'curiosity' or something of a novelty like that found historically in circuses, indicates a potential tendency for partners and friends to focus on the symptoms or behaviours of the person's way of being, rather than on the person in their own right.

Some difficulties for DI individuals arose in having to try to fit in with their partner's expectations, and possibly the underlying societal expectation of what is entailed in a 'normal' relationship.

I know that it puts pressure on her to be 'around' more rather than switching off or zoning out which she might have previously done to cope with things (Laurie, partner)

Some of the participants mentioned that coping strategies relied on more by DI individuals are discouraged in their relationships, resulting in more stress for the individual and hence for the relationship as a whole. For Laurie's partner, the pressure to 'be around' may carry the implicit message that the use of dissociation is not acceptable.

One difficult aspect of some relationships mentioned by a couple of the participants was the possibility of situations arising where they felt used by partners and felt a lack of control/ownership perhaps reinforcing or reminding of past experiences.

I could never say he was really abusive but he [ex-husband] did use me in many ways (Alexi).

Yes it turned out like I found, it's not a good thing when people know. Because then it's like you're a puppet or something for them (Jenni).

Issues were also raised by individuals of how the very nature of relationships sometimes reinforced some of the dissociative symptoms. This seemed to be most frequently the case during times of physical intimacy.

Numbing off the whole of my body...a very deliberate process...it was my saving thing (Alexi).

Perhaps the demands of relationships, in particular sexual demands, at times prompt further dissociation. This is not surprising given many of the individuals' abusive experiences in childhood, where dissociation was their only way of avoiding pain etc. "they leave their bodies and feel numb while they are abused" (Thomas, 2005, p22).

Positive aspects identified by those with DI

On the other hand, many of the DI individuals interviewed referred to the enormously positive benefits of being in a supportive and strong relationship. Some had sustained very long-term, solid partnerships, contrary to indications in some of the clinical literature.

As it went on the relationship got stronger and yeah. I mean he's my – I mean yes he's my husband but yes he's my best friend (Deidre).

Some explained how finding a supportive relationship was a major turning point for them in their ability to cope with life.

I know that being with Alan when he first came along it was like a revolution (Deidre).

The reference to 'revolution' indicates a major departure from previous experience, but also an impetus for change in the future.

Some referred to the way in which their supportive relationship enhanced their capacity to cope better.

So that's part of what I think Louise does... keep me together (Michael).

Michael reflected that Louise offered a sense of safety and security, so that he was able to feel more together, rather than scattered and lost.

A number of individuals interviewed mentioned the way in which their partner was able to help avoid some of the adverse symptoms of the DI that had previously caused problems in their daily life.

Bella knows a lot of the things that trigger me so she can anticipate sometimes for me in situations before where I'd find myself totally blown away (Alexi).

So I haven't self-harmed for about 3 years now and the desire to do so is not so strong when I'm upset (Alexi).

Some individuals referred to the importance of safety and the value of finding a partner with whom they finally felt safe and could trust.

I guess Louise was the first person I really felt safe with (Michael).

She [close friend] said to me 'you took years and years to trust me and I just really appreciate it' (Jenni).

Finally, a couple of interviewees referred to the simple relief, taken for granted by the average person, associated with being able to be normal and open at last with someone about their way of being, and to have that way of being accepted as valid.

Sometimes I feel really normal really, which is an amazing thing, just the freedom to be I think that's the really important thing (Alexi).

Because many individuals with DI need to pass and keep their DI hidden in everyday society, the opportunity to relate openly and honestly to a selected few is highly valued.

We live honestly and that's probably the first time that I've ever been able to be honest that I have lived honestly (Alexi).

Negative Impact of the DI on the non-DI partner

While many of the partner participants reported strong relationships and love for their partner they also reported times when their partner's way of being impacted negatively on them. For Alan, one of the hardest things was hearing and learning about his partner's abusive childhood and dealing emotionally with what this knowledge entailed.

The hardest part for me was getting to know quite a fair bit of what Denise went through (Alan).

It freaks me out sometimes because I can't relate to it you know (Alan).

One partner, Trina, referred to the way in which her partner's dissociative identity, which she viewed as an illness, left her feeling "totally unwound, helpless and out of control."

Some partners such as Laurie indicated that the DI made connecting emotionally with their partner more difficult.

It's harder to deal with the patches when she is not in an emotional space where we can connect. I get hurt by that a lot. I end up feeling that the relationship is not wanted or that she is sick of me ... I guess my self-esteem takes a bit of a battering in that situation. (Laurie).

There is, in the above, an indication that the traditional assumptions about emotional unavailability, i.e. that it signifies a problem in the relationship, cannot necessarily be made in Laurie's situation. There is a further indication that such differing ways of being can impact on self-esteem for the partner.

Some partners made mention of the grief they felt, for their partner, themselves and possibly for the future 'expectations' they may not be able to have.

I've had to learn not to plan too much...to try not to put too much emotional investment into them (Laurie).

One of the impacts of the diagnosis, and understanding is the enormous amount of grief because I've had to face look should I be expecting things – maybe I should stop expecting (Louise).

For Louise, the enormity of the DI diagnosis is obvious. There is a tangible loss, almost akin to that which may be felt by someone with a chronic life threatening illness.

This is further emphasised in Louise's responses regarding the issue of being a 'we' with a shared set of goals like a 'normal' couple.

I'm trying to understand this why is it so difficult for us to have a 'we', we have a 'we' in some senses but we don't have a 'we' in the way that I know of couples (Louise).

We all have this sense of moving towards something that we want, and because he doesn't have that, it makes it actually really hard to be a 'we' (Louise).

As well as issues of emotional connection and expectations, some partners revealed that issues of intimacy were still being resolved, irrespective of the number of years together.

There were many times where I'd try and be affectionate or the affection might have a sexual overtone and Michael'd like arrgh! reject me (Louise).

The part of my partner who is out most of the time hates the idea of sex so that can be pretty stressful. Often I'll find myself lying in bed waiting for another part to emerge so we can be intimate. The sexual intimacy stuff is definitely the hardest thing we have to sort out together though (Laurie).

Associated with this was the sense for some partners that they found themselves playing out roles in the relationship dynamic which did not always sit comfortably with them.

I sometimes feel I'm expected to be a parent when I want to be a woman (Louise)

Louise struggled with wanting to be seen by Michael as a woman and as a sexual being while knowing that as a 'parent' she offers a sense of safety and security for Michael: "Louise is like a secure base".

For some partners, extended family added to the difficulties felt within the relationship. Sometimes this occurred when relatives found it difficult to accept the reality of dissociative identity.

I have been blamed by his parents ... it saddens me. It has taken medical records for people to believe that this illness [DI] is real (Trina).

At other times contact with extended family appeared to cause difficulties because it reminded of previous abusive environments. One participant mentioned that contact with her partner's extended family caused him to behave in ways that were foreign to her.

A terrible strain on our relationships has been dealing with his family (Louise).

I find it hard to communicate with Michael when he is with his family. It's like he is in this 'role' and he is just not reachable and so it's hard to bring 'Michael' back ... I find that particularly thing scary (Louise).

The word 'scary' indicates a level of fear at seeing her partner in a situation where he was no longer the person she felt she knew. It is not clear from the quote what was 'scary': the fear that he might not return, or perhaps the implied insight into dissociative states he may have needed to enter in order to cope in an abusive past.

Positive Impact of the DI on the non-DI partner

The partners tended to make many positive comments about their partner, rather than about the impact of DI per se on themselves.

He's a very, very loving parent ... he was sole carer for a while ... that was brilliant for her [daughter] (Louise).

I love his mind (Louise).

As with the individuals with DI, however, the partners expressed a number of positive aspects of being in a relationship with someone with DI.

I've learnt enormously from him... I've got a much deeper understanding of myself, other people and the human psyche (Louise).

I am happy that, in a life so full of betrayal, and with the constant reality that people cannot be trusted ... my partner has been able to learn to trust me. That trust is very special to me and I treasure it (Laurie).

The couple in relationship

Only one person, a partner of someone with DI, mentioned fearing her relationship would break up due to the DI.

I fear this illness will break us up (Trina).

What was strongly emphasised across the majority of the interviews was the strength of the relationship due to each partner making concerted efforts to not take the other for granted.

You can never take anything for granted because what is one day is often different the next. It keeps life interesting and ensures you never take your partner or the relationship for granted. It also feels good to know that even though it feels a bit rocky sometimes it's the closest thing your partner may have had to stability, possibly ever. It feels nice to be part of that (Laurie).

There was further acknowledgement that both partners changed and grew as a result of the relationship.

It's been a learning curve for me and I've had to accept a lot so has my husband. It's not just affected me; it's affected everybody around me (Deidre, DI)

We've both grown and changed so much in this relationship I guess she would say the same of me that there has been growth and change but it's in the relationship and I don't think it's related to DI specifically I think it's related to people growing together (Bella, partner).

The above quotes remind us that relationships are dynamic, and that while the relationship can be a site in which difficulties resulting from the DI can be expressed and possibly intensified, it can also be a site of safety, from which growth can take place (Miller & Sutherland, 1999).

Discussion

Relationships are complex it's not like one person has a problem and the other person doesn't have anything at all (Louise)

This brief qualitative exploration demonstrates the complexity of a few of the issues that are involved in a relationship with someone who has DI. Some of these could apply to all intimate relationships not specifically those involving a DI. According to Herman, trauma affects an individual's basic capacities for "trust and intimacy" (1997, p. 132). The data reveal that individuals were able to form and maintain close intimate and apparently secure relationships, and as a result also learnt to trust others. These findings are in contrast to those reported in the dissociative identity clinical literature, and offer hope to others who may experience DI. For some of the individuals with DI, their current relationship gave them a place to be 'themselves', and to 'live honestly'. Partners helped them to feel safe within the relationship, something that many individuals with DI had not felt before. This safety though did not necessarily transfer to outside relationships: individuals still reported the need to keep 'hidden' or to be seen as 'normal' in everyday society. There was however confirmation of the sexual abuse literature which suggests that abuse survivors may experience difficulties with sexual intimacy in adulthood. Both individuals and partners reported difficulties with the sexual aspect of their relationships.

Although at first glance, there appear to be few positive impacts of the DI mentioned by the partners, this could be a reflection of the fact that such elements in a relationship tend to be taken for granted by a 'normal' person. In contrast, these elements are particularly noted by someone who has experienced a background of dysfunctional relationships.

Partners reported that living with a person who has DI also gave them greater insight into themselves, others and the human psyche. Alongside this insight however was for some of the partners a resultant overwhelming sense of grief: - grief for their partner's past, their present and the future that had been changed as a result of the abuse. This echoes finding of partners of female sexual abuse survivors (Bacon & Lein, 1996). Interestingly, the theme of loss receives scant coverage in the sexual abuse literature (Bourdon & Cook, 1993) and is not covered in the DI literature and thus could possibly be a focus of future research.

On a positive note the current study has revealed is that it is possible for individuals with DI to have successful and long term relationships. “Well I’m in the relationship with Alexi. We believe it’s very successful; it works for us “(Bella).

Conclusion

Although the data reported on in this paper is from a relatively small sample, and as such is not able to be generalised to the wider population of individuals with DI or their partners, it begins the task of addressing the gap in the empirical literature concerning the impact of DI on close intimate relationships. The findings reveal the complex experience of being in a relationship where one partner experiences DI. Although Figley (1995) noted that for partners, there is a cost to caring for those who have been traumatised; this study reflects that partners as well as individuals also feel a sense of growth within themselves and their relationship.

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The Impact of Chronic Illness on Relationships in Early Adulthood: A Comparison Study between Healthy and Arthritic Young Adults

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Abstract

While engaging in romantic relationships is regarded as a normative task during young adulthood, non-normative life events such as the emergence of chronic illness can mitigate against the successful negotiation of such tasks. Chronic illness brings with it a series of additional challenges and stressors to the realm of personal relationships that are thought to interrupt the development of normative interpersonal and intraindividual processes. However, few studies have examined how young adults faced with a chronic illness such as arthritis navigate romantic relationships and the consequences of illness and relationships on psychological adjustment. The aim of the study was to compare the relationship experiences of healthy young adults with those faced with arthritis. One hundred and nine young adults ($M = 23.01$ years, $SD = 2.43$) took part in the study. Of these participants 41 had been diagnosed with arthritis. A univariate MANOVA revealed arthritic young adults reported significantly more insecure attachment, lower levels of readiness for intimacy, and poorer relationship satisfaction compared to healthy young adults. Further correlational and regression analyses on the arthritic sample revealed psychological adjustment was related to arthritis severity, attachment and components of coping. Findings will be discussed in relation to attachment theory and coping processes.

The successful formation of close personal relationships is a major challenge in the psychosocial development of young adults (Newman & Newman, 2003). The formation of romantic relationships in early adulthood (i.e. 18-25 years), while a normative developmental task, is often a very stressful event, due to the limited experiences young adults have with significant and enduring romantic relationships (Montgomery, 2005). The ability of young adults to negotiate these tasks effectively is thought to be compromised by co-occurring non-normative life challenges such as dealing with a chronic illness (Seiffge-Krenke, 1998). This study focused on a particular chronic illness of increasing prevalence in young adulthood, arthritis (Arthritis Foundation of Australia, 2005).

Preliminary research suggests that arthritis (characterised by an inflammation of musculoskeletal system) can have negative effects on relationship processes. For instance, Druley, Stephens and Coyne (1997) argue that arthritic adults find it hard to go out and actively seek a relationship. Moreover, these authors point out that arthritic adults may even distance themselves from relationships for reasons such as minimising feelings of burden on others and reducing partner worries or concerns. It is therefore imperative to understand how relationship processes operate under such non-normative life events. Research on illness tends to be limited to how individuals cope with illnesses rather than how they cope with normative life and age-related developmental tasks (Endler, Kocovski & Macrodimitris, 2001; Mahat, 1997; Schmidt, Nachtigall, Wuethrich-Martone & Strauss, 2002). Unless research into normative developmental experiences (such as the formation of romantic relationships) includes the views and perceptions of young adults with chronic illness such as arthritis, research in the area will be incomplete and only perpetuates the exclusion and marginalisation reported by these young adults (Terzi, 2004). Therefore, while research has investigated how young adults experience and deal with the early stages of romantic relationships (e.g., Arriaga, 2001; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Simpson, 1990) little is known about how young adults with a chronic illness deal with the challenge of forming new, lasting and satisfying romantic relationships compared to healthy young adults - an aim of the present study.

Much has been learned about the propensity for adaptive relationship functioning using attachment theory as a framework for relationship processes (e.g., Collins & Read, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). However, attachment orientation, while important, only provides a partial explanation of the differences reported by young adults in experiencing romantic relationships (Cassidy, 2001). There is emerging evidence that demonstrates young adults' psychosocial development of intimacy provides a further foundation upon which young adults will experience satisfaction and adaptively cope with the stress of romantic relationships (Hassebrauck & Fehr, 2002). The research relating attachment and psychosocial development to relationship outcomes is briefly reviewed in the following sections.

Consequences of Secure and Insecure Attachment in Romantic Relationships

In recent years, attachment has been best conceptualised as comprising of two complementary orthogonal dimensions termed avoidance and anxiety (e.g., Brennan, Clark & Shaver, 1998; Fraley, Waller & Brennan, 2000). The dimensions are abstractions of what Bowlby (1969) termed "internal working models". The

avoidance dimension assesses the level to which an individual expects others to be available and supportive, and is therefore associated with the capacity to seek out or avoid closeness in relationships (Bartholomew, 1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). The anxiety dimension is related to the level of anxiety experienced by the individual due to uncertainty surrounding their opinions of being worthy for care and affection (Bartholomew, 1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994).

Numerous studies have demonstrated links between attachment processes and relationship outcomes. Many of these studies have focused on outcomes such as relationship satisfaction, psychological adjustment (i.e., levels of depression, generalised anxiety and stress), and coping strategies (e.g., Hazan & Shaver, 1994; Ognibene & Collins, 1998; Schmidt et al., 2002; Wei, Shaffer, Young & Zakalik, 2005). For instance, Vetere and Myers' (2002) exploration into coping has shown that successful coping strategies (i.e., effective use of problem-focused coping) within romantic relationships led to relationship being described as more satisfying. Furthermore, individuals characterised by low levels of attachment anxiety and avoidance consistently reported comfort with intimacy, greater relationship satisfaction and the use of adaptive problem-focused coping strategies in the resolution of couple disputes and relationship-related stress compared to individuals high on avoidance and/or anxiety (e.g., Mikulincer, & Florian, 1995; Mikulincer, Florian & Weller, 1993). Specifically, people high on attachment avoidance are found to engage in more distance or escape-avoidance strategies in coping with relationship distress and are regarded to have an under-developed capacity for intimacy (Ognibene & Collins, 1998). Alternatively, individuals high on attachment anxiety, have been thought to engage in more hyperactivating coping strategies (i.e., wishful thinking, chronic support seeking; Ognibene & Collins, 1998) in response to relationship stress often resulting in low relationship satisfaction and poor general psychological adjustment (e.g., Vogel & Wei, 2005). These people also yearn high levels of intimacy and closeness (Cassidy, 2001; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). It is important to make the distinction that studies examining the effects of attachment on coping have generally divided coping into problem-focused and emotion focused strategies. However, given that research has found systematic differences across emotional coping strategies used by individuals high on attachment avoidance or anxiety, it seems more appropriate to divide emotional coping into tactics associated with downward emotional regulation (i.e., deactivation strategies) and upward emotional regulation (i.e., hyperactivating strategies) (Schmidt et al., 2002). Therefore, the current study examined these two forms of emotional coping separately, in addition to problem-focused coping strategies, as these findings may also hold true for young adults in relationships experiencing chronic illness.

In terms of psychological adjustment, research suggests that people experiencing arthritis and related conditions report higher levels of depression (Doeglas et al., 2004; Fitzpatrick, 1991), learned helplessness and stress (Hommel, Wagner, Chaney & Mullins, 2001; Mahat, 1997) compared to healthy adults (Endler & Parker, 1994; McWilliams, Cox & Enns, 2003). However, it is argued that secure intimate attachment relationships along with adaptive coping processes are likely to modulate the adjustment outcomes for these individuals. Nevertheless, little research has attempted to investigate the role of interpersonal and coping factors in the lives of young adults with arthritis.

Consequences of Psychosocial Development of Intimacy in Romantic Relationships

According to Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, the development of intimacy is a key challenge for young adults (Montgomery, 2005). Intimacy is commonly defined as feelings of closeness, emotional sharing, and the experience of warmth within a relationship (Sternberg, 1986). It is important to consider young adults readiness for intimacy when investigating romantic relationships in the context of a chronic illness, as the ability to achieve an adaptive capacity for intimacy may be threatened by the added pressure of an enduring illness such as arthritis. For instance, fearing the burden that their arthritic condition places upon others, young adults may resist entering a significant intimate relationship. Consequently, these individuals may become overly self-reliant and incapable of developing a healthy sense of intimacy (Druley et al., 1997). Feldman, Gowen and Fisher (1998) argue that this inability to negotiate the developmental process of intimacy may also result in young adults with arthritis experiencing low levels of relationship satisfaction.

A review of the literature suggests that no study has systematically examined young adults' development of intimacy in the context of a chronic illness. Consequently, there is no knowledge regarding how young adults deal with the development of intimacy while managing a chronic illness. Furthermore, how attachment processes and coping along with intimacy relate to young adults relationship satisfaction and adjustment to arthritis remains an untouched line of inquiry.

Therefore, the first aim of the present study was to investigate differences between healthy and arthritic young adults' relationship experiences, with attention given to attachment, intimacy, coping behaviour and relationship satisfaction. The second aim was to investigate whether interpersonal factors (i.e., attachment and relationship satisfaction) made a significant contribution to arthritic young adults' psychological adjustment above intrapersonal factors (i.e., coping and intimacy) and arthritis severity.

Method

Participants

A total of 109 young adults (29 males, 80 females) aged 18 to 25 years ($M = 23.01$ years, $SD = 2.43$) participated in the study. At the time of the study, all participants were involved in a romantic relationship for 6 to 12 months ($M = 8.56$ months). The total sample was comprised of two groups – 41 young adults diagnosed with an arthritic condition (14 rheumatoid arthritis, 9 fibromyalgia, 9 juvenile arthritis, 3 psoriatic arthritis, 3 systemic lupus erythematosus, and 3 ‘other’ arthritic conditions), and 68 young adults serving as the healthy comparison group. Young adults with arthritis were recruited through the youth support groups of Arthritis Foundations across Australia. The comparison group of healthy young adults was recruited through undergraduate courses at a major Melbourne metropolitan university.

Materials

Arthritis Severity. Arthritic participants’ health status was assessed using the Multidimensional Health Assessment Questionnaire (MDHAQ; Pincus, Swearingen & Wolf, 1999). The MDHAQ consists of 28 items measuring one’s ability to engage in activities of daily living (ADLs), levels of pain, fatigue and personal beliefs associated with the illness. Participants are required to answer statements regarding ADLs across a four point scale ranging from (1) without any difficulty, to (4) unable to do. Participants are also required to answer questions about the levels of pain and fatigue associated with arthritis across semantic differential scales. Furthermore, nine questions regarding personal beliefs about the illness are rated along a 5 point likert scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. The measure has high internal consistency ($\alpha = .92$, present study).

Attachment. Participants’ attachment to a romantic partner was assessed using the Experiences in Close Relationships Scale (ECR; Brennan, Clark & Shaver, 1998). The ECR consists of 36 items measuring the two subscales constituting attachment related anxiety and avoidance. Each subscale consists of 18 statements upon which participants were instructed to rate how they typically felt towards their romantic partner along a 7-point likert scale ranging from (1) disagree strongly to (7) agree strongly. This scale shows excellent reliability, with a Cronbach’s alpha of .91 and .94 for anxiety and avoidance scales respectively (Brennan et al., 1998).

Psychosocial Development of Intimacy. Intimacy was assessed using the intimacy subscale of the Erikson Psychosocial Inventory Scale (EPSI; Rosenthal, Gurney & Moore, 1981). The intimacy subscale consists of 12 items rated on a 5-point likert scale ranging from 1 (hardly ever true) to 5 (almost always true). Reliability for the intimacy subscale was reported to be .81 (Markstrom & Kalmanir, 2001).

Relationship Satisfaction. To assess relationships satisfaction, Simpson’s Relationship Satisfaction Index (RSI; Simpson, 1987) was used. The inventory consists of 11 items which the participant rated their current relationship using a 7-point likert scale ranging from 1 (very unsatisfactory) to 7 (very satisfactory). Cronbach’s alpha was reported at .82 (Simpson, 1990).

Coping. The Ways of Coping Scale – Revised (WOCS-R; Folkman & Lazarus, 1985) was used to assess strategies used in coping with a romantic relationship. This instrument contains 66 items that measure coping strategies to manage stressful situations. This measure was split into two subscales, problem-focused coping with 14 items and emotional-focused coping with 28 items. The response format comprises of a 4-point likert scale ranging from 0 (does not apply and/or not used) to 3 (used a great deal). Internal consistencies of the coping subscales for the present study were: $\alpha = .84$ for deactivation emotion-focused, $\alpha = .73$ for hyperactivation emotion-focused and $\alpha = .90$ for the problem-focused coping.

Psychological Adjustment. Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale 21 (DASS-21; Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) is a 21-item measure of 3 subscales anxiety, depression and stress. Participants used a 4-point response scale ranging from 0 (did not apply to me at all) to 3 (applied to me very much, or most of the time). Cronbach’s alpha for the whole scale was reported at .93, while the subscales are anxiety .82, depression .88 and .90 for stress (Henry & Crawford, 2005).

Procedure

Willing participants were provided with an introductory letter and instructed to fill in an online questionnaire which took approximately 40 minutes to complete. Details regarding the accessibility of the online questionnaire were provided in the introductory letter. Two versions of the online questionnaire were constructed, one for each group of participants. Both versions of the questionnaire consisted measures assessing attachment, intimacy, coping and relationship satisfaction, however, the version administered to the arthritic group included two additional instruments measuring (1) the severity of arthritis and, (2) psychological adjustment.

Results

Results are presented in two parts. The first section reports on the examination of differences across healthy and arthritic young adults on a series of relationship variables (i.e., attachment, intimacy, coping and relationship satisfaction). The second section provides a preliminary investigation of the impact of arthritis, interpersonal and intrapersonal factors on psychological adjustment.

The data for both samples were examined for missing values, univariate and multivariate normality, outliers, homoscedasticity and multicollinearity. Missing values were replaced by series means and variables not violate tests of normality and correlational analyses did not reveal multicollinearity (see Table 1).

Comparisons amongst Healthy and Arthritic Young Adults

A univariate between-groups Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was conducted to examine the differences in healthy and arthritic young adults' attachment orientation, intimacy, coping strategies and satisfaction in romantic relationships. The MANOVA resulted in a significant Multivariate main effect for group (Pillai's Trace = $F(1,104) = 7.16, p < .01$). Univariate analyses revealed significant differences between healthy and arthritic young adults on attachment avoidance ($F(1,104) = 25.52, p < .01$) and anxiety ($F(1,104) = 13.71, p < .01$), intimacy ($F(1,104) = 8.29, p < .01$), and relationship satisfaction ($F(1,104) = 21.35, p < .01$). As shown in Table 1, arthritic young adults consistently reported higher levels of attachment avoidance and anxiety, and lower levels of intimacy and relationship satisfaction compared to healthy young adults.

The Impact of Arthritis, Attachment, Intimacy and Coping on Psychological Adjustment

In order to examine the differential effects of relationship related variables, coping and arthritis severity on psychological adjustment, a Hierarchical Linear Model (HLM) was conducted. It is often the case that three components constituting psychological adjustment – depression, anxiety and stress are analysed separately. However, given the high correlations between these components ($r \geq .70$) and to minimise Type I error through repeated HLM analyses, a total psychological adjustment score was computed by summing the three components together. Nevertheless, the inclusion of a large number of predictors in the model coupled with the low N warrants that the results presented below to interpreted with caution, and thus we further highlight that these results are preliminary.

The HLM saw arthritis severity entered in the initial step, followed by the three coping variables (problem-focused, detached avoidance (i.e., deactivating emotion-focused) and wishful thinking/self-blame (i.e., hyperactivating emotion-focused) in step two. Step three saw the inclusion of psychosocial intimacy and the final step included the addition of relationship satisfaction and attachment avoidance and anxiety. The inclusion of relationship satisfaction and attachment in the final stage of the model was to examine whether these relational variables accounted for additional variance in psychological adjustment above intrapersonal variables such as coping and intimacy and arthritis severity.

The analysis revealed that arthritis severity was a significant predictor at step 1 ($F(1,39) = 57.82, p < .01, \beta = .77$) and remained significant across all stages of the model (see Table 2). The addition of coping and intimacy across steps 2-3 did not add to the prediction of psychological adjustment. However the inclusion of relationship satisfaction and attachment in step 4 saw a significant improvement in the model $\Delta R^2 = .07$ (F change (3,32) = 2.98, $p = .05$) (see Table 2). Specifically, attachment anxiety ($\beta = .33$) was found to predict psychological adjustment with higher anxiety associated with poorer psychological adjustment.

Table 1
Intercorrelations among scales used and their means, standard deviations and reliabilities

Subscale		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Severity		-	.094	.541**	-.072	-.124	.697**	.789**	.612**	-.050	.193	-.067
2. Romantic avoidance			-	-.118	-.340*	-.595**	.036	.135	.108	-.289	-.190	-.084
3. Romantic anxiety				-	.015	.044	.612**	.634**	.494**	-.023	.308*	.105
4. Relationship satisfaction					-	.398**	-.005	-.196	-.191	.462**	-.025	-.082
5. Romantic partner intimacy						-	-.090	-.261	-.191	.525**	-.072	-.239
6. Stress							-	.786**	.773**	.122	.403**	.031
7. Depression								-	.699**	-.101	.359*	.113
8. Anxiety									-	.028	.195	.126
9. Problem focused coping										-	.157	.087
10. Detached avoidance coping											-	.656**
11. Wishful thinking coping												-
Healthy Young Adults	<i>Mean</i>	-	2.47	3.52	65.65	48.33	-	-	-	87.73	47.89	12.62
(n = 68)	<i>S.D.</i>	-	.88	.92	10.68	5.62	-	-	-	14.83	8.61	3.53
Arthritic Young Adults	<i>Mean</i>	71.22	3.46	4.28	54.30	44.09	14.78	14.47	11.35	83.59	49.19	13.41
(n = 41)	<i>S.D.</i>	20.78	1.14	1.15	14.25	9.03	4.76	5.51	4.28	14.69	11.31	3.49
	<i>α</i>	.92	.97	.94	.95	.86	.88	.91	.88	.90	.84	.73

* $p < .05$, two-tailed, ** $p < .01$, two-tailed.

Table 2
Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Psychological Adjustment among Arthritic Young Adults

<i>Model</i>	<i>Variable</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	R^2	ΔR^2
1.	Arthritis severity	.49	.06	.77**	.60***	.60***
2.	Arthritis severity	.47	.07	.73**	.64***	.04
	Problem focused coping	.01	.09	.01		
	Detached avoidance coping	.24	.16	.20		
	Wishful thinking coping	.05	.52	.01		
3.	Arthritis severity	.45	.07	.71**	.66***	.02
	Problem focused coping	.09	.11	.10		
	Detached avoidance coping	.26	.16	.22		
	Wishful thinking coping	-.17	.54	-.04		
	Intimacy	-.24	.18	-.16		
4.	Arthritis severity	.34	.07	.53**	.73***	.07*
	Problem focused coping	.17	.11	.19		
	Detached avoidance coping	.18	.15	.15		
	Wishful thinking coping	-.29	.51	-.07		
	Intimacy	-.31	.21	-.29		
	Romantic avoidance	.07	1.4	.01		
	Romantic anxiety	3.79	1.3	.33**		
	Relationship satisfaction	-.11	.10	-.11		

* $p \leq .05$, two-tailed, ** $p < .01$, two-tailed, *** $p < .001$ two-tailed,

Discussion

One of the purposes of this study was to examine how young adults with arthritis fair in achieving the normative task of developing satisfying romantic relationships. The second aim was to investigate the impact of romantic relationships and coping behaviours on adjustment to arthritis. While the data presented in this paper is preliminary, the findings do suggest that experiencing arthritis may disrupt the normative development of attachment and psychosocial-related processes.

Arthritic young adults consistently reported less relationship satisfaction and readiness for intimacy, and higher attachment anxiety and avoidance compared to healthy young adults. Interestingly, arthritic young adults were characterised by levels of attachment anxiety ($M = 4.28$) that were much higher to the typical levels of anxiety reported across studies in attachment using young adults ($M = 2.06 - 3.08$) (e.g., Fraley et al., 2000; Brennan et al., 1998). This however, is consistent with emerging research in the adult literature that suggests adults with chronic illness are likely to report poorer relationship functioning (Packham & Hall, 2002). Studies examining arthritic adults in later later-life have alluded to insecure attachments (particularly high levels of attachment anxiety) and the avoidance on intimacy as consequences of chronic health issues (Druley et al., 1997). Packham and Hall (2002) found that adults with arthritis have "a high occurrence of psychological problems concerning confidence and perceived attractiveness" (p.1443). Arthritis sufferers' image of themselves can be described as negative due their perceived inability to achieve their desired goals such as work and study (Doeglas, et al., 2004). This suggests that many young adults with arthritis may have a negative view of self (i.e., are highly anxious about relationships) and this is consistent with reports suggesting a majority of young adults with arthritis experience negative self-esteem. Therefore, these complexities brought on by a condition such as arthritis are likely to be contributing factors to the young adult's insecure attachment style and their sense of readiness to engage in mature intimate relationships.

Findings also support past research examining the link between chronic illness severity and psychological adjustment (Mahat, 1997; Neugebauer & Katz, 2004). In the present study, arthritis severity was found to be a robust predictor of psychological adjustment. While this was not surprising, the fact that coping, intimacy and

relationship satisfaction were not significant factors was unexpected. One reason for this unexpected finding could be that arthritis severity is one of the most significant factors determining young adults' psychological adjustment. While interpersonal and intraindividual factors may play a role, it could be that these factors do not considerably combat the negative mental health effects brought on by the illness. Mahat (1997) for instance found that hyperactivating and deactivating emotional-focused coping strategies were widely used by adults in navigating the challenges of arthritis. However, given that most of the young adults in the present study had a mean length of illness no greater than 5 months, it maybe that they are yet to formally develop a series of coping styles to combat the illness and their mental wellbeing. Most participants are likely to still be coming to terms with their diagnosis let alone having formalised coping responses.

Another reason for these findings could be a lack of power due to the low N:p ratio within the HLM analysis. It was clear that some of the standardised regression coefficients were of moderate magnitude and would likely result in significant contributions had the analysis obtained higher statistical power. Thus, the findings should be interpreted with some caution and it is timely to re-iterate additional research is required to either confirm or disconfirm the preliminary data presented in this study.

However, in line with expectations, attachment anxiety was found to be a significant predictor of psychological adjustment for young adults with arthritis, however, attachment avoidance was not. The significant contribution of anxiety is line with the work of Doeglas et al. (1994), Druley et al. (1997) and Packham and Hall (2004), all of whom regard relational representations that encompass positive and agentic views of the self as a fundamental determinant of mental wellbeing and in dealing with chronic illness.

The non-significant effect of attachment avoidance on psychological adjustment, while unexpected is not totally surprising. Though it can be argued that arthritic young adults may engage in attachment avoidance as a means of combating feelings of vulnerability or burden when involved in a relationship, empirical evidence is yet to emerge indicating avoidance has a negative effect on psychological adjustment. The present study and previous findings seem to consistently point to attachment anxiety as a risk factor in heightening general feelings of depression, stress and anxiety.

It is clear that more research is needed to examine how arthritis impacts on young adults' development and negotiation of normative tasks. However, more research is also required to understand how young adults adjust to arthritis and its associated mental health outcomes. Further research should explore why young adults differ in attachment anxiety and avoidance compared to healthy young adults. This is important because research into attachment clearly demonstrates that accumulated experiences with attachment figures impact on attachment development, but so too could chronic illness shape people's attachment orientations. In addition, further research needs to be undertaken to explore the role of developmental processes and coping strategies to more clearly understand how: (a) intraindividual factors interact with relational processes for young adults experiencing arthritis, and (b) whether non-normative life experiences such as chronic illness significantly interrupt young adults' normative developmental pathways.

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Are Conflict Resolution Styles Related to Conflict Dimensions and Conflict Outcome Satisfaction?

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Abstract

Participants' scores on the scales of the Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory (Conflict Engagement, Positive Problem Solving, Withdrawal and Compliance) were used as the inputs into a cluster analysis. The aim of the cluster analysis was to form groups of participants with different profiles on the Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory. The 473 participants formed four groups with different profiles. One group was low on Problem Solving and high on the other dimensions while a second group was high on Problem Solving and low on the other dimensions. A third group was high on Conflict Engagement while the final group was high on Withdrawal and Compliance and low on Conflict Engagement. Significant differences were found between the groups so formed on conflict dimensions (duration, proportion solved, and seriousness) and on outcome satisfaction. The findings that there were very few differences between the males and the females did not accord with previous results. The differences found between the present research and previous research may in part be accounted for by the multivariate approach taken in the present study that makes for a more complete picture of some aspects of conflict within relationships.

While the amount of time that couples spend in conflict may be relatively small, the management or resolution of conflicts in close interpersonal relationships continues to be a major focus of interest for researchers as there are important implications not only for the relationship but also for the well-being of the individuals (Klein & Milardo, 2000). Van den Broucke, Vandereycken, & Vertommen (1995) assert that there are few aspects in a marriage that influence a couple's sense of well-being more than their ability to manage mutual conflict. Satisfaction with feelings about the relationship and satisfaction with the outcome of the conflict are prime indicators of whether the conflicts in the marriage have been handled constructively (Crohan, 1992). The present study has as its focus satisfaction with the outcomes of conflict in relationships. The research investigates the relationship between conflict outcome satisfaction and the conflict resolution styles of the person involved in the conflict and between the various dimensions of the conflict itself and conflict outcome satisfaction.

A variety of measures of conflict resolution have been proposed and developed. They include self-report measures (e.g. Cramer, 2002) and observational measures (e.g. Noller, Feeney, Bonwell, & Callan, 1994). Not only are there differences in the methods of measuring conflict, within a particular method there are different conceptualisations of conflict. For example, the self-report measure developed by Cramer (2002) has scales for avoidance, negative handling, and non-resolution, as well as an overall conflict score. This is in contrast to the self-report measure developed by Hojjat (2000) who utilises a two dimensional structure of positive-negative and active-passive dimensions that results in four different styles – positive-active, positive-passive, negative-active, and negative-passive. Many of these measures have been developed without an overarching theoretical or conceptual framework and are often used in a manner which fails to take into account a clear articulation of the conceptual framework between the measure and other variables with which the measure of conflict is expected to be associated.

Kurdek (1994) developed two brief non-observational measures of conflict. The first was the Ineffective Arguing Inventory (IAI), a measure of how a couple handle conflict. The second measure was termed the Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory (CRSI) and was developed to assess each partner's style of handling conflict. Kurdek works very consistently within a broad based social exchange paradigm and thus his measures have a conceptual basis which is consistent.

Researchers have reported strong statistical relationships between conflict resolution and relationship satisfaction (e.g. Rand, Levinger, & Mellinger, 1981; Schneewind & Gerhard, 2002). Conflict resolution styles reflect interpersonal behaviours utilized to address disagreements that occur within relationships. Rubenstein & Feldman (1993) reported on research which they conducted which demonstrated decreased relationship satisfaction with increased use of avoidant and attacking conflict resolution styles. Cramer (2000) asserted that whether conflicts were satisfactorily resolved or not satisfactorily resolved did not alter the finding that a negative conflict resolution style was significantly associated with lower relationship satisfaction. Cramer makes a very clear distinction between satisfaction experienced within the totality of the relationship and satisfaction with the outcome of conflicts within the relationship. Cramer (2002) demonstrated that the direct relationship between conflict behaviours and satisfaction with the relationships was negligible. He concluded that satisfaction

with the outcome of conflicts within the relationship was a mediator between the conflict behaviours and satisfaction with the relationship.

The reporting of sex difference in the variables of interest in the present research has been inconsistent. For example, El-Sheikh Buckhalt and Reiter (2000) reported that females were more angry than males as a result of unresolved conflict and females were more happy than males during conflicts which ended with compromises. Cramer (2000) in his research on relationship satisfaction and conflict styles reported that there were no differences between the males and the females.

By using similarly conceptually based measures of conflict styles and ineffective arguing, the present research seeks to provide further information about the factors involved in conflict outcome satisfaction. The aim of the present study was to investigate the relationship between various dimensions of conflicts e.g., duration of the conflict, seriousness of the conflict, and the Kurdek (1994) measures of ineffective arguing, and conflict resolution styles, and their relationship of all of these to satisfaction with the outcome of the conflict. The conflict resolution styles inventory results in each participant having a score on each of the four styles. The present research further sought to investigate the possibility that there were several consistent patterns (or profiles) of scores among participants on the scales of the CRSI. If it possible to identify groups that differ in their profiles of the conflict resolution styles, then additional research questions will be addressed. If such groups can be identified and the groups differ on the demographic variables, the conflict dimension variables, the IAI, and satisfaction with the outcome of the conflicts, then the utility a multivariate approach to identifying groups of participants based on profiles on the conflict resolution styles will be demonstrated.

Method

Participants

There were 208 males, 263 females and 2 undisclosed participants who had been or were currently in a heterosexual relationship for at least six months. The mean age was 40.54 years ($SD = 12.06$). Married participants represented 76.4% of the sample, 6.1% were engaged, and 16.8% were in an exclusive dating relationship. The mean length of the participants' relationship with their partner was 17.21 years ($SD = 10.95$).

Measures

The variables were: basic demographics (age, sex, type and length of relationship), and questions about conflicts: seriousness (1 = *not at all serious* through 5 = *very serious*), duration (1 = *very brief*, 4 = *very long*), proportion of conflicts resolved (1 = *All* through 5 = *None*), and their level of satisfaction with the outcome of the conflicts (1 = *not at all satisfied* through 5 = *Very satisfied*), The Ineffective Arguing Inventory (Kurdek, 1994) is a single dimension scale and has eight items. An example item is "Our arguments are left hanging and unresolved". The response scale ranged from 1 = *strongly disagree* through 5 = *strongly agree*. In the present study the scale produced a Cronbach alpha of .72. The Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory (Kurdek, 1994) is a 16 item scale with a five point response scale where 1 = *never*, through 5 = *always*. The CRSI has four scales of four items each: Conflict Engagement (e.g., Launching personal attacks), Positive Problem Solving (e.g., Focusing on the problem at hand), Withdrawal (e.g., Remaining silent for long periods of time), and Compliance (e.g., Exploding and getting out of control). In the present study the Cronbach alphas for the four scales were .84, .82, .78, and .79 respectively.

Procedure

The research was conducted in accordance with the University's Human Research Ethics committee procedures. The data was gathered by students enrolled in an advanced Social Psychology class at an Australian University. They were instructed to invite friends, relatives and acquaintances who met the selection criteria to participate in the research. The basic selection criteria were that the participant was in a heterosexual relationship and had been in that relationship for at least five years. Participants were handed the questionnaire, asked to complete the questionnaire independently and then place it in a reply paid envelope for return to the researcher. Anonymity was assured to the participants as no personally identifying information was obtained.

Results

The basic descriptive statistics for all variables are presented in Table 1. The overall means from the descriptive statistics indicate that more problems were resolved than not resolved, that the conflicts are of medium seriousness, while not of short duration they were also not long lasting, and that there was general satisfaction with the outcomes of the conflict. With respect to the Conflict Resolution Styles, positive problem solving was used the most frequently while conflict engagement, withdrawal, and compliance were each used to the same extent.

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations for Conflict Dimensions, the Ineffective Arguing Inventory and the Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Confl Resolv	1.93	1.06								
2. Seriousness	1.82	.61	.38							
3. Duration	1.84	.66	.36	.62						
4. Outcome Satisf	3.12	.73	-.60	-.39	-.38					
5. IAI	24.03	3.68	.36	.27	.28	-.34				
6. Conflict Engag	9.29	3.59	.30	.33	.38	-.33	.33			
7. Pos Prob Solv	15.03	2.89	-.49	-.39	-.41	.54	-.33	-.49		
8. Withdrawal	9.35	3.32	.42	.35	.39	-.41	.36	.46	-.52	
9. Compliance	8.93	3.31	.24	.25	.21	-.28	.26	.08	-.30	.42

Note. The decimal is omitted from all correlations. With the exception of the correlation between Compliance and Conflict engagement, all correlations are statistically significant at $p < .001$.

The greater the proportion of conflicts resolved, the shorter the duration and the lower the seriousness then the greater was the satisfaction with the outcome of the conflicts. The IAI was positively correlated with conflict engagement, compliance and withdrawal but negatively correlated with positive problem solving.

Clusters were computed based on the four conflict resolution styles of the CRSI proposed by Kurdek (1994) using the K-means cluster analysis procedure. Using this analytic procedure four interpretable clusters were identified. Those in cluster 1 ($n = 60$) were high on both conflict engagement and withdrawal and also above the overall mean on compliance. They were the lowest on positive problem solving. This group will be referred to as the engaged/withdrawing/complying group. Those in cluster 2 ($n = 149$) were high on positive problem solving and low on the other three styles. This group will be referred to as the problem-solving group. Those in cluster 3 ($n = 122$) were above the overall mean on conflict engagement and at or below the mean on the other three styles. This group will be referred to as the engaged/problem-solving group. Finally, those in cluster 4 ($n = 114$) were above the mean on withdrawal and compliance and below the overall mean on conflict engagement and positive problem solving. This group will be referred to as the problem-solving/withdrawing/complying group. The means and standard deviations for each of the clusters are presented in Table 2 and a graphical representation of the clusters is presented in Figure 1.

Table 2
Means and standard deviations for the four scales of the CRSI for the four clusters

	Cluster							
	1		2		3		4	
	(n = 60)		(n = 149)		(n = 122)		(n = 114)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Conflict Engage	14.70	2.23	6.12	1.58	11.06	2.54	8.75	2.38
Pos Prob Solv	11.37	2.65	17.02	2.90	15.09	2.19	14.29	2.48
Withdrawal	13.80	2.62	6.47	1.88	8.86	2.21	11.32	2.13
Compliance	10.23	3.41	7.52	2.48	6.80	1.84	12.37	2.19

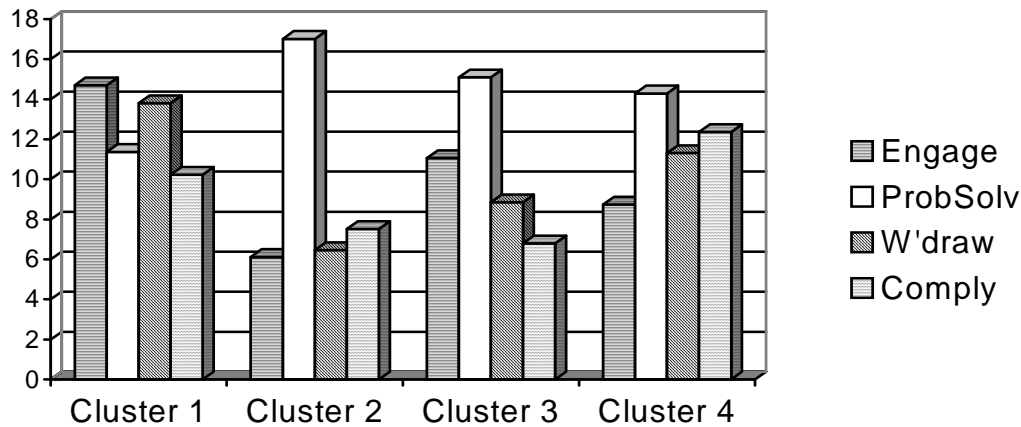


Figure 1 The means of the CRSI for the clusters.

To validate differences between the clusters a 2(sex) by 4 (cluster) MANOVA was computed. There was a significant difference between the four clusters at the multivariate level and at the univariate level for each of the CRSI scales. At the multivariate Pillais Trace was an $F = 80.693$, $df = 12, 1296$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .43$. For the univariate analyses the results were as follows: for conflict engagement Pillais Trace was an $F = 257.956$, $df = 3, 433$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .64$; for positive problem solving Pillais Trace was an $F = 97.146$, $df = 3, 433$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .40$; for withdrawal Pillais Trace was an $F = 202.05$, $df = 3, 433$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .58$; and for compliance Pillais Trace was an $F = 129.83$, $df = 3, 433$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .47$. There were no main effects for sex. There was a minimally significant interaction between sex and cluster at the multivariate level (Pillais Trace was an $F = 1.888$, $df = 12, 1296$, $p < .032$, $\eta^2 = .02$). At the univariate level there was a significant interaction only for positive problem solving (Pillais Trace was an $F = 19.778$, $df = 3, 433$, $p < .009$, $\eta^2 = .03$) in which the means for the males in cluster 1 and cluster 3 were lower than the mean for the females in these clusters while for clusters 2 and 3 the reverse held true.

A 2 (sex) by 4 (cluster) ANOVA on the IAI showed a significant main effect for cluster ($F = 32.568$, $df = 3, 420$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .19$). The lowest mean (22.32) on the Ineffective Arguing Inventory was for the Problem-Solving cluster and the highest mean (27.15) was for the Engaged/Complying/Withdrawing. *Post hoc* tests indicated that the mean for each cluster was significantly different from the mean for every other cluster (see Table 3). There were no significant main or interaction effects for sex.

Table 3

Means and standard deviations for Ineffective Arguing Inventory for each of the four clusters

Cluster	Mean	SD	n
Engaged/Complying/Withdrawing	27.15	2.48	55
Problem-Solving	22.32	3.68	143
Engaged/Problem-Solving	23.50	3.50	119
Problem-Solving/ Complying /Withdrawing	25.01	3.07	111
Total	23.96	3.69	428

Chi square analyses revealed a significant association between sex and cluster membership ($\chi^2 = 8.286$, $df = 3$, $p = .04$). Females were overrepresented in the Engaged/Problem-Solving cluster and underrepresented in the Problem-Solving/Complying/Withdrawing cluster. The reverse situation applied for the males. There was also a significant association between cluster and relationship type ($\chi^2 = 14.42$, $df = 6$, $p = .025$). Those in a dating relationship were overrepresented in Engaged/Problem-Solving cluster while those in a marriage relationship were underrepresented in this cluster.

A series of 2 by 4 ANOVAS were computed on the conflict dimensions of seriousness, duration, and proportion of conflicts resolved. There were no significant sex effects. For each of the conflict dimensions there was a significant main effect for cluster, with each of them being significant at the $p < .001$ level (see Table 4). For each of the conflict dimensions it was those in the Problem-Solving cluster who reported the lowest means

while it was those from Engaged/Complying/Withdrawing cluster who reported highest seriousness, longest duration, and lowest proportion of resolved conflicts.

Table 4
Means and standard deviations for each cluster on the conflict dimensions

Dependent Variable/Cluster	Mean	SD	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2
<i>Serious</i>			16.210	< .001	.11
Engaged/Complying/Withdrawing	2.09	.078			
Problem-Solving	1.54	.051			
Engaged/Problem-Solving	1.86	.055			
Problem-Solving/ Comply/Withdraw	1.97	.056			
<i>Duration</i>			23.016	< .001	.15
Engaged/Complying/Withdrawing	2.36	.084			
Problem-Solving	1.55	.056			
Engaged/Problem-Solving	1.91	.060			
Problem-Solving/ Comply/Withdraw	1.94	.061			
<i>Proportion Resolved</i>			38.911	< .001	.23
Engaged/Complying/Withdrawing	2.99	.127			
Problem-Solving	1.42	.084			
Engaged/Problem-Solving	1.76	.090			
Problem-Solving/ Comply/Withdraw	2.17	.092			

A 2 by 4 ANOVA on the outcome satisfaction variable showed there was no main effect for sex, but there was a significant main effect for cluster ($F = 35.794$, $df = 3, 426$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .20$). There was also a significant interaction between sex and cluster ($F = 3.985$, $df = 3, 426$, $p = .008$, $\eta^2 = .03$) (see Table 5). The females in the Engaged/Complying/Withdrawing cluster and the Engaged/Problem-Solving cluster reported higher outcome satisfaction than did the males in these clusters while in the Problem-Solving cluster and the Problem-Solving/Complying/Withdrawing cluster the situation was reversed with the males reporting higher outcome satisfaction than the females in these clusters.

Table 5
Means and standard deviations for outcome satisfaction for the four cluster for males and females

Cluster	Females		Males	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Engaged/Complying/Withdrawing	2.58	.720	2.46	.839
Problem-Solving	3.44	.614	3.51	.567
Engaged/Problem-Solving	3.23	.576	3.12	.594
Problem-Solving/ Complying/Withdrawing	2.70	.841	3.16	.580

Another way of examining the impact of the variables on outcome satisfaction is to use multiple regression with outcome satisfaction as the criterion variable. An hierarchical multiple regression was computed. In step 1 the conflict dimension variables of seriousness, duration, and proportion of conflicts resolved were used to predict outcome satisfaction. The multiple regression was significant $R^2 = .378$, $F = 95.481$, $df = 3, 471$, $p < .001$. All three conflict dimensions made a significant contribution to the prediction of outcome satisfaction. At the next step the individual difference variable of ineffective arguing was included. This resulted in a $\Delta R^2 = .011$, $F(\text{change}) = 8.229$, $df = 1, 470$, $p = .004$. The three conflict dimensions as well as the IAI contributed significantly to the prediction of outcome satisfaction. The third step included the conflict resolution styles

variables. This resulted in a $\Delta R^2 = .057$, $F(\text{change}) = 11.967$, $df = 4, 466$, $p < .001$. At this step in the regression analysis there were only two variables that were making an independent significant contribution to the prediction of outcome satisfaction. The variables were the conflict dimension of proportion of conflicts resolved ($\beta = -.252$, $t = 8.539$, $p < .001$) and the conflict resolution style variables of problem solving ($\beta = -.064$, $t = 5.593$, $p < .001$).

Discussion

The grouping of participants into clusters based on their profiles on the CRSI has provided a useful means of working with the multidimensional aspects of conflict resolution styles. It moves the field away from a focus on the somewhat simplistic investigation of the relationship between say, compliance and outcome satisfaction or other relationship variables. Defining clusters in terms of the four conflict resolution style scales is probably a more accurate reflection of the behaviour of individuals within couples where there is for each person a preferred, and probably somewhat automatic response style to conflict, but also the individuals utilise other styles and tactics in varying degrees. In the multiple regression at the final step it was only proportion of conflicts resolved and the problem solving conflict resolution style that were significant predictors of outcome satisfaction. The analysis of variance using cluster membership as the between groups variable indicated that it is not a simple and straightforward as that. In all three of the four clusters in the present research the problem solving conflict resolution style was the highest. Even so, when the score on that particular style was used in conjunction with the scores on the other three styles differences between the clusters emerged with respect to outcome satisfaction. It was that cluster in which the problem solving style was the stand alone highest with very low scores on the other styles that outcome satisfaction was the highest. The two other clusters in which the problem solving style was the highest also had one or more of the other styles being used to quite an extent. Those in these clusters were lower on outcome satisfaction. That cluster in which the problem solving style was not the highest of the four styles was the lowest in outcome satisfaction. Both the multiple regression approach and the clustering provides further validation for previous research which has reported that a problem solving approach to conflict yields more positive outcomes for a relationship (e.g. Cramer, 2002). In the present research it was those persons in the cluster highest on positive problem solving who not only reported the highest outcome satisfaction, but also reported their problems to be the least serious, of the shortest duration, and had the greatest proportion resolved. Conversely it was those individuals in the cluster in which the problem solving style was not the highest of the four styles who not only reported the lowest outcome satisfaction but also were the lowest on proportion resolved, and highest on seriousness and duration.

What was not evident in the present research was the differences between the sexes which is often reported in the literature (e.g. Hojjat, 2000). There were no main effects for sex in any of the analyses conducted. There was an association between sex and cluster membership, with females being overrepresented in the cluster which was high on conflict engagement but low on withdrawal and compliance and underrepresented in the cluster which was high on withdrawal and compliance. The other result involving sex was an interaction between cluster and sex for outcome satisfaction where the females in the engage/withdraw/comply cluster and the engage clusters reported higher outcome satisfaction than their male counterparts with the reverse happening for the problem solving and withdraw/comply cluster. These significant interaction involving sex need to be taken cautiously as the effect size was quite small.

The results of the present research are sufficiently encouraging to suggest further studies. A longitudinal design clustering couples, similar to the work of Ridley, Wilhelm and Surra (2001) and including variables such as satisfaction and the mental health of the partners, similar to the work of Marchand and Hock (2000), would help further elucidate our understanding of the importance of positive relationship experiences, their effect on health and well-being and the critical and at times damaging role which conflict can play. An additional approach would be to include emotional support in research (see Cramer, 2004) between partners when examining conflicts, conflict styles and their impact not only on outcome satisfaction but also on relationship satisfaction and mental health aspects such as depression.

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Adoptees' relationship experiences post-reunion: Exploring the effects of interactions with biological relatives

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Abstract

Recent changes in adoption legislation and practice have provided adoptees with greater opportunities to search for and be reunited with birth relatives. A thorough understanding of the relationship experiences an adoptee may encounter post-reunion is critical for counsellors seeking to provide support for adoptees during these search and reunion experiences. This paper examines the relationship benefits and difficulties associated with the broadening social network after a reunion. As part of a larger study, 57 adoptees were interviewed about their adoptive experiences and interpersonal relationships. Thematic analysis revealed several major themes associated with adoptees' reunions: (a) potential issues in adapting to a new family, (b) difficulties experienced when attempting to negotiate family roles and set boundaries between family members, (c) positive and negative interactions between adoptive and biological families, and (d) benefits and difficulties that can affect significant others (e.g., romantic partners, children). Open communication, compatible personalities, and supportive adoptive parents were factors promoting a beneficial environment for adoptive and biological families post-reunion. Conversely, strong loyalties to the adoptive family, secrecy or withholding information about the reunion, and different needs or expectations of family members created difficulties within the broader social network. Recommendations for adoption practice and counselling will be discussed.

From the early twentieth century through to the 1970s, the dominant type of adoption in many western countries involved infants who were born out-of-wedlock, and whose adoption was based on anonymity and secrecy (Brodzinsky, 2005; Hoksbergen & ter Laak, 2005; Ryburn, 1994). Recent changes in legislation regarding the disclosure of identifying information have enabled increasing numbers of adult adoptees to search for and subsequently be reunited with birth relatives. In this way, many adult adoptees face issues regarding the addition of new individuals into their social networks.

Theory and research into social networks and social support suggest that networks which contain a greater number of individuals are generally advantageous. By definition, such networks involve a greater number of potential helpers, who may offer various types of practical and emotional support in times of need (Hobfoll, 1996). Similarly, there are thought to be advantages associated with greater support density; that is, networks in which the different members are known to one another, and have personal relationships with one another. Based on these considerations, it might be expected that adoptees would generally benefit from the process of developing and maintaining relationships with birth relatives. Indeed, Affleck and Steed (2001) found that relationships between adoptees and their birthmothers tended to be rewarding if there was a good match between the expectations of the two parties.

However, Rook (1984) has highlighted a number of ways in which social interactions and support provision may have negative effects on the individual. For example, attempts to provide help may be ineffective or excessive, and social interactions are sometimes unwanted and/or aversive. When a particular relationship is a source of both conflict and social support, the element of conflict may offset the positive effects gained from the support (Rook, 1984). Further, given that personal relationships tend to require considerable investment of time and energy, expansion of the social network may place some strain on the individual's resources.

In addition, issues pertaining specifically to the adoption experience suggest possible difficulties linked to contacts with birth relatives. For example, Affleck and Steed (2001) found that adoptees who had more unrealistic expectations of their reunions were more likely to experience disappointment and difficulties in their relationships with their birthmothers. Moreover, issues regarding kinship, parental rights and parental responsibilities are highly emotional in nature (Verrier, 1993); hence, the process of incorporating birth relatives into adoptees' social networks may be emotionally fraught.

Thus far, research regarding reunions with birth relatives have generally focused on the type of relationships developed (Gladstone & Westhues, 1998), level of satisfaction with the actual reunion (Rosenzweig-Smith, 1988), expectations of the reunion process (Affleck & Steed, 2001), and issues faced by adoptive parents (Petta & Steed, 2005). Although Gladstone and Westhues (1998) discussed their findings in terms of the type of

relationship adoptees may have with their birth relatives post-reunion, the complex and inter-dependent relationships between adoptee, adoptive family, and biological family members were neglected. Clearly, more research is needed to address the potential benefits and difficulties experienced by adoptees as a result of their broadening social network post-reunion.

More research emphasis is needed on the expanding family network of adoptees post-reunion, and the factors that may make these experiences more or less difficult. The current paper broadens previous research by investigating the relationship experiences of adoptees post-reunion, in terms of their larger social network. The general aim of this research was to explore the factors that may facilitate beneficial relationships post-reunion, but also those that may underlie the difficulties associated with a larger family network. In order to address this aim, adult adoptees were interviewed regarding their reunion experiences. Thematic analysis was then used to identify factors relating to the main aim.

Method

Participants

As part of a larger study, 138 adults who were adopted in Australia before two years of age completed two questionnaires, six months apart. Participants were recruited through the media, Internet, distribution of pamphlets, and psychology pools from the University of Queensland and University of Southern Queensland. Within the questionnaires, participants provided information about their search and reunion experiences. From this larger sample, participants were invited to be interviewed, based on the following criteria: (a) they had not searched nor been reunited ($N = 16$), or (b) they had searched and been reunited with at least one birth relative ($N = 41$). From those adoptees who had been reunited, the first author sampled those who indicated positive, negative, or mixed experiences whilst searching, during, and/or after their reunion. This was done to ensure a broad range of adoption, search, and reunion experiences. Forty-three females and 14 males, aged between 18 years and 63 years ($M = 38.2$ years), participated in the interviews.

Data Collection

Questionnaire data of particular relevance to this paper assessed how supportive the participants felt their adoptive mother was towards the search, reasons for not disclosing information about the search to adoptive parents, and the type of relationship that had been developed with the birthmother. These data were examined to assess consistency with the interview-based findings.

Before conducting the interviews, researchers read the two questionnaires that each participant had completed to gain a better insight into any unique experiences that may have been reported. The first author interviewed all male participants, whilst two female research assistants interviewed the female participants. Interviews were semi-structured, lasted between one and two hours, and with the permission of the participants were recorded on audio-cassette. Interview questions focused on the participants' lives growing-up as an adoptee, friendships and romantic relationships throughout life, experiences with support groups, and general views on adoption. Participants who had searched and been reunited with biological relatives were also asked about their experiences whilst searching, during their reunion/s, and post reunion (e.g., negotiating roles, setting boundaries, and relationships between family members). The latter questions were of primary interest for the current paper. Each interview was transcribed verbatim.

Coding of the Interview Material

Thematic analysis similar to that described by Joffey and Yardley (2004) was used. The first and third authors independently reviewed the content of 25% of the transcribed interviews. Information relevant to adoption experiences and interpersonal relationships was extracted and sorted into positive, negative, and neutral experiences. From this information, general themes were developed separately by each coder and entered as either positive or negative experiences affecting personal relationships. After this independent thematic analysis, each coder discussed the identified themes. The themes to be used in the analysis were decided by consensus. An inductive analysis was conducted to identify specific sub-categories. The first author then extracted quotes from all the interviews into these categories and sub-categories, after which the third author also independently coded these quotes. The researchers met and discussed any disagreements regarding coding, and further modifications to the sub-categories were made in light of this discussion. Consensus was reached on all the identified dimensions, categories, and sub-categories. The first and second authors then completed an independent analysis on quotes that were relevant to the current research question, from the interviews with participants who had met one or more birth relatives. Ambiguous quotes were removed from the analysis.

Results and Discussion

Coding indicated two general dimensions of benefits and difficulties with the broader social network post-reunion. Within these two dimensions, four major categories were identified as benefits and three categories were identified as difficulties. Specifically, results revealed that participants perceived benefits from having a larger family network post-reunion in terms of (a) positive interactions between families, (b) availability of a greater support network (c) benefits for their romantic partner, and (d) benefits for their children. Conversely, participants perceived difficulties with a larger family network in terms of (a) issues adapting to a new family, (b) difficulties negotiating family roles, and (c) negative interactions between families. The general dimensions, categories, and sub-categories from the qualitative analysis are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Post-reunion Relationship Experiences of Adopted Persons (N = 41)

<i>Categories</i>	<i>Sub Categories</i>
a) Benefits of a Larger Family Network	
Positive Interactions Between Families (N = 12)	Open Communication / Correspondence Shared Activities Compatible Personalities Adoptive Mother's Support and Involvement Birthmother's Gratitude and Respect
Greater Support Network (N = 11)	Solving Issues / Problems Gaining A Family
Benefits for Romantic Partner (N = 6)	Better Understanding of Adoptee Greater Support Network
Benefits for Adoptee's Children (N = 9)	Enhanced Family Network Excitement on Behalf of Adoptee
b) Difficulties with a Large Family Network	
Issues Adapting to a New Family (N = 8)	Anxiety Associated with Meeting New People Additional Demands Personality / Psychological Issues - Biological Relatives
Difficulties Negotiating Family Roles (N = 15)	Secrecy / Sharing Information Loyalty to Adoptive Parents Differing Expectations of Closeness Difficulties Defining the Relationship
Negative Interactions Between Families (N = 14)	Social Comparisons Personality Differences Communication Difficulties Avoidance

Benefits of a Larger Family Network

Positive interactions between families. One of the dominant themes identified from the study was the ability of adoptive and biological families to establish positive relationships. This was especially the case when family members shared similar personalities and/or leisure interests. When adoptees felt comfortable openly discussing information about their adoption with both adoptive and biological family members, this had a positive effect not only on the adoptee, but also the relationships with family members. As one adoptee stated:

Since going through the search process and also being able to discuss my adoption with both my adoptive mother and birthmother, I am a more confident person. My relationship with my adoptive mother also improved and felt more comfortable.

Interactions between families were also positive when birthmothers displayed gratitude and respect towards the adoptive family for the upbringing that they had provided the adoptee. Sharing information about the circumstances of the adoption between families also allowed the adoptee to gain a better understanding as to why their biological mother had relinquished them. This strengthened the relationship between the adoptee and their adoptive mother, but also allowed the biological mother to display appreciation for the care and protection provided by the adoptive family. Finally, an important factor that promoted positive interactions between families was the support provided by the adoptive mother during both the search and reunion process. When reunion information was shared with the adoptive mother and she responded in a supportive manner, the relationship was enhanced:

She [adoptive mother] surprised all of us by being incredibly open and loving and supportive to the point where my mother and my biological mother have established a nice friendship. She came down and met the family and my adoptive mum made up a photo album for her... Such an overwhelming feeling of love and being loved, it's very beautiful.

Frequency data from the questionnaires were also analysed to explore adoptees' perceptions of support from their adoptive mother in regard to searching. Interestingly, more than half the participants (54.8%) perceived their adoptive mother as very supportive of their decision. However, smaller proportions indicated that their adoptive mother was slightly, moderately, or extremely opposed to the search.

Greater support network. When reunions with birth relatives occur, additional persons may be incorporated into the adoptees' social network. Greater social support and a sense of belonging can occur for an adoptee when they are embraced by their biological family. This may be particularly important when the adoptee is not close to their adoptive family or when the adoptive parents are deceased. Some adoptees feel as though they have gained a family or been "given a second go at a family." With a wider support network, adoptees have more people they can turn to during difficult times; the larger network of family members can assist when solving problems, seeking advice, or discussing personal issues (Hobfoll, 1996).

Benefits for significant others. The benefits of a larger family network apply not only to the adoptee, but can also extend to significant others (e.g., romantic partners and children). For example, romantic partners can gain a better insight into the adoptee's personal history. One adoptee mentioned that through their partner having this greater knowledge, their overall relationship was enhanced. Another indicated that their biological family enabled their partner to have a greater support network through "gaining a wealth of relationships, people, and information". When embraced by the biological family, the adoptee's children also gain more family members. This can assist in their social development when younger, but also enable them to appreciate their biological history when older. Further, relationships between adoptees and their own children can be enhanced when the children are happy about the reunion. This is particularly the case when the children see physical resemblances between the adoptee and biological relatives.

Difficulties with a Larger Family Network

Issues adapting to a new family. Despite the relationship benefits already mentioned, various difficulties were also reported. For example, some adoptees perceived that it was difficult to adapt to a new family. This especially occurred when anxiety was felt relating to biological relatives who have not shared any life experiences. Furthermore, when differences exist in terms of personalities, interests, or lifestyles, it may be extremely difficult to establish a positive relationship. One participant mentioned that their biological mother had many unresolved psychological issues:

My relationship with my birthmother was from the beginning very involved with lots of problematic stuff. There were things that she didn't want to cope with, because it was stuff that had happened in her life, lots of very big, deep issues. It made adapting to her family very hard.

The additional demands placed on adoptees when adapting to a new family was another issue mentioned by some participants. Specifically, the extra commitment, in terms of time and energy that are required to develop a new relationship may pose difficulties for adoptees and/or their partners, as one adoptee stated:

He's [romantic partner] still reserved about it [having an extra family] and the fact that it takes up half of your life because you've got another family. It's not like there's one on each side, you've got a third one. It does take a lot of time from your relationship and life.

Similar to the potential anxieties that an adoptee faces when meeting a new family, romantic partners may also have difficulties when meeting a second family. No longer do they face the task of meeting one set of parents; they also need to get along with an extra set of relatives.

Difficulties negotiating family roles. Another major issue that created difficulties for adoptees post-reunion concerned negotiating family roles. More specifically, during celebrations and special occasions, difficulties

arise when the search or reunion has been kept secret from the adoptive parent/s. Furthermore, special occasions are made uncomfortable when biological relatives cannot be invited, or cannot have their identity revealed:

I had a party at my home and I invited everybody I knew but I couldn't invite them [biological parents] because my parents were there. One time I invited a birth aunty and it was really weird because she was talking to my parents and they didn't know who she was.

Keeping a reunion a secret from the adoptive family poses many difficulties for an adoptee. Interestingly, results from the full sample indicated that more than half of the adoptees who searched for birth relatives had not informed one or both of their adoptive parents about this decision (53.7%). Reasons for this lack of disclosure were reviewed (Table 2). Almost half the participants reported that the main reason for keeping their search status a secret was their fear of hurting or being disloyal to their adoptive parent/s.

Table 2
*Reasons for Not Informing Adoptive Parent/s about Searching (entire sample)**

<i>Type of Relationship</i>	<i>Proportion of Participants</i>
Fear of Hurting Parent / Loyalty	<i>N</i> = 16 (42.1%)
Waiting for a Positive Outcome	<i>N</i> = 4 (10.5%)
Predicted a Negative Response	<i>N</i> = 10 (26.3%)
Difficulties Discussing Adoption	<i>N</i> = 5 (13.2%)
'Other'**	<i>N</i> = 3 (7.9%)

* Twelve participants indicated searching after parents were already deceased.

** Responses of "uncertain of reaction", "wait until parents are deceased", and "lack of empathy" were coded as 'other'.

Thus, a sense of loyalty to adoptive parents appears to be a main reason why adoptees do not disclose their search or reunion decisions to their adoptive family. Although this may cause difficulties at any time when an interaction takes place between families, it also poses a threat in terms of defining relationships with family members, as illustrated by the following quote:

It's not that I don't want to have a relationship with them [biological family]. I do want to continue to see my biological mother, but I don't want a replacement to my parents. My parents [adoptive] will always be mum and dad.

To assess the variety of roles established with birthmothers post-reunion, frequency data on the type of relationship were examined for the full sample (Table 3). Only 8% of adoptees indicated that they had developed a mother-child relationship with their birthmother. More than half reported having a family relationship (but not a mother-child relationship), or perceiving their birthmother as an acquaintance only.

Table 3
Perceptions of Relationships with Birthmothers (entire sample)

<i>Type of Relationship</i>	<i>Proportion of Participants</i>
Mother-Child Relationship	<i>N</i> = 6 (8.0%)
Family Relationship, but not mother-child	<i>N</i> = 22 (29.3%)
Friendship	<i>N</i> = 13 (17.3%)
Acquaintance	<i>N</i> = 18 (24.0%)
Stranger	<i>N</i> = 14 (18.7%)
'Other'*	<i>N</i> = 2 (2.7%)

* Responses of "cannot explain relationship" and "relationship not established" were coded as 'other'.

These varying roles lead to difficulties when birth relatives have greater expectations of closeness with the adoptee. Generally when the adoptee's loyalties lie towards their adoptive parents and the biological parent feels that they have a right to take on a parenting role, problems can arise (Verrier, 1993), as highlighted by one adoptee:

My biological mother is not my mother, at birth she gave up that right; she needs to accept that she's a family friend. My biological father didn't like the fact that he wasn't my father because he tried to take on that role and I said, "Mate, you gave up that right, rack off!"

Negative interactions between families. Finally, difficulties can arise with a broader social network when interactions between adoptive and biological families are negative. These negative interactions appear to reflect four factors. First, social comparisons between family members may lead to insecurities, as one adoptee discussed:

I think my adoptive dad felt a bit intimidated by the fact that my biological father is a psychiatrist and at that time dad was working as a house, a house parent in respite care. I just had this sense that dad was feeling a bit sort of you know, he felt inferior.

Second, negative interactions are more likely when personality differences exist (just as compatible personalities can create positive interactions). Third, communication difficulties can create problems between families. Some adoptees mentioned how adoptive and biological family members have relationship difficulties due to not understanding how to discuss adoption-related issues with each other. Fourth, some adoptees mentioned that difficulties with the larger family network occurred when members of the adoptive or biological family tend to avoid each other. Such avoidance created difficulties when integration of families should be appropriate, such as during a special occasion. For instance, even when information about the reunion has been disclosed, difficulties may still arise when adoptive or biological family members avoid each other:

My biological parents celebrated my son's birthday and I got a phone call [from adoptive parents] very abusive saying "How dare they be there, they had no right to be there, he's our grandson!" Until this year it was the last contact we had with them [adoptive parents].

Conclusion

There are many complex factors unique to adopted persons that may influence their relationship experiences post-reunion. As participants in this study reported both benefits and difficulties associated with a broader family network, it is important that practitioners can provide adoptees with sufficient information regarding both these aspects. Indeed, before having a reunion, adoptees could be assisted by obtaining information about all possible consequences of broadening the family network. One recommendation generated from this research concerns the importance of open communication between adoptees and their adoptive family in regards to searching and reunion experiences. Adoptive parents also need to be aware of the potential benefits for adoptees of their support and involvement during and after reunion/s. Furthermore, current findings suggest that reunion/s are capable of producing benefits not only for the adopted person, but also for significant others (e.g., romantic partners and children).

The current study supported Gladstone and Westhues' (1998) argument that although a larger social network grants the opportunity for a broader support base and exchange of resources, difficulties can arise when adoptees have to adapt to a new family or negotiate family roles. However, it also extends their work by highlighting the possibility of negative interactions between adoptive and biological families. Factors such as reunion secrecy and/or strong loyalties to adoptive parents can create difficulties when negotiating relationships between family members. This is particularly relevant when differing expectations of closeness exist between the adoptee and biological relatives. Counsellors thus need to be able to assist adoptees identify and negotiate such roles, relationships, and expectations. Future research and practice should continue to investigate reunion experiences with birth relatives and how roles and relationships are negotiated between families post-reunion. Such information should provide better insight for adoptees regarding potential benefits and difficulties they might experience in terms of relational adjustment post-reunion.

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Female sexual dysfunction: A theoretical consideration of the nature of the sexual response and aetiological factors

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Abstract

Recent literature has criticised linear models of sexual behaviour that fail to account for the interactive influences among women's sexual response phases. This paper presents a theoretical evaluation of Basson's (2001) revised model of the female sex response cycle, comprising overlapping phases of variable order. The complex motivational factors and distinct experience of subjective and physiological sexual arousal proposed in this revised model is also discussed. The extent to which psychological factors comprising historical, individual and relationship characteristics may be associated with female sexual dysfunction, is also evaluated.

Women's sexual response has been conceptualised as a linear progression through discrete phases of desire, arousal and orgasm. The current Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-IV-TR; American Psychiatric Association, 2000) classification system for Female Sexual Dysfunction (FSD) has maintained reliance upon this traditional linear model of sexual response. However, incongruity between this linear model and evidence of women's sexual function has been increasingly recognised. This paper therefore considers the progression from previous models of female sexual response to contemporary understandings of FSD. A modified version of a circular sex response cycle proposing overlapping phases of variable sequence is presented (Basson, 2001). Basson's model does not include a comprehensive consideration of aetiological factors related to FSD. Multiple factors derived from both biological and psychological origin may negatively influence normal sexual function and consequently contribute to the development and maintenance of FSD. The following sections therefore also evaluate the evidence to support the role of various aetiological factors that may be included in a revised model of FSD. In particular, this paper examines the evidence for the inclusion of historical, individual and interpersonal factors in this revised model.

Models of Female Sexual Response

From the early 20th century until the 1960s women's sexual response was conceptualised as the occurrence of a single event during which a progression from lust to excitement and, finally, orgasm was experienced. Masters and Johnson's (1966) initial description of a linear sexual response cycle involved 1) excitement; 2) plateau; 3) orgasm; and 4) resolution. Kaplan (1977) then argued for the necessity of incorporating desire as the primary component of the sexual response cycle and proposed three discrete phases of desire, excitement and orgasm.

The DSM-IV-TR (2000) also utilizes a linear tri-phasic model of FSD. The clinical utility of the DSM-IV-TR diagnostic categories for sexual dysfunction has been extensively criticised within the literature, as inconsistencies between this traditional linear model and evidence of women's sexual function was increasingly recognised. Consequently, a revised classification system of the major categories of sexual dysfunction was recently developed through the American Foundation for Urologic Disease [AFUD] (Basson, Althof et al., 2004). Underlying this revision is Basson's (2001) modified version of a circular sex response cycle that emphasises responsive and variable initial or spontaneous desire components (see Figure 1).

Multiple Reasons for Engaging in Sexual Activity

A critical focus of Basson's (2001) alternative model of sexual response is that women's reasons for engaging in sexual activity are portrayed as being diverse and extending beyond the presence of an initial sexual desire. Basson (2005) defined sexual desire as thinking or fantasising about sex and yearning for sex between sexual encounters. Research has revealed that women, particularly those in longer-term relationships, engage in sexual activity for various reasons other than to satisfy sexual desire or needs (Regan & Berscheid, 1996). For example, women may be motivated to engage in sex because they want to increase emotional intimacy with their partner, increase their own well-being and sense of feeling sexually desirable, or to reduce anxiety associated with engaging in sexual activity with their partner infrequently (Althof et al., 2005; Gayler, Conaglen, Hare & Conaglen, 1999; Hill & Preston, 1996; Klusmann, 2002; Lunde, Larson, Fog & Garde, 1991; Regan & Berscheid, 1996; Weijmar Schultz, van de Weil & Hahn, 1992). The diversity of women's reported reasons for engaging in sexual activity support the motivational component of Basson's (2001) revised sex response cycle.

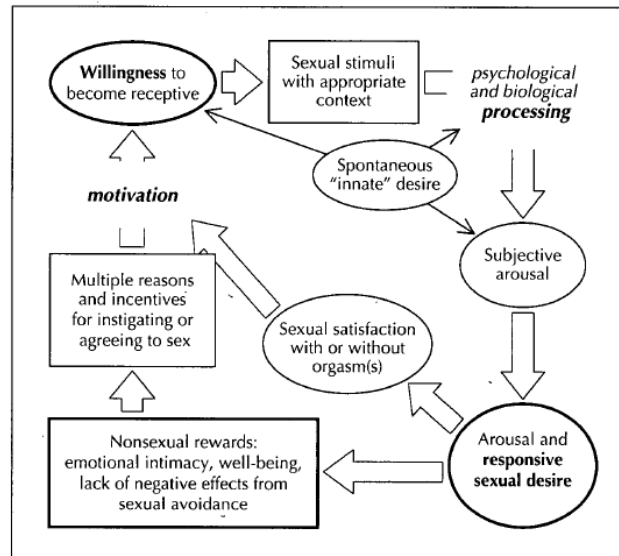


Figure 1. Women's circular sexual response cycle (Basson, 2001).

Women's Experience of Sexual Desire

Prior definitions of FSD assumed that women's sexual response always began with sexual desire and that an absence of this initial desire was indicative of a disorder (Basson, 2005). Current literature has brought into question previous depictions of women's sexual desire that focused on the linear occurrence of desire at the beginning of sexual experiences (e.g. DSM-IV-TR: American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Sexually functional women in longer-term committed relationships have reported that they are often unaware of spontaneous desire but they have engaged in sexual activity in order to fulfil intimacy needs with their partner. (Bancroft et al., 2003; Basson, 2001; Cawood & Bancroft, 1996; Garde & Lunde, 1980). In addition, epidemiological research has found that the frequency of women's experience of initial spontaneous desire is variable (Laumann, Paik, & Rosen, 1999). Underlying Basson's revised sexual response model is therefore the critical distinction that the absence of any, not just spontaneous, desire during sexual experience is necessary to constitute a disorder of sexual desire.

Overlapping Sex Response Phases of Variable Order

Basson (2005) contended that responsive sexual desire and arousal interact and are not discrete phases. This interaction is consistent with the substantial overlap reported between sexual desire and arousal domains on the FSFI among women in clinical and nonclinical samples (Rosen et al., 2000; Wiegel et al., 2005). However, Basson's presentation of women's sexual desire and motivation has been criticised as not explaining the mechanism of generation of sexual response (Both & Everaerd, 2002). Both and Everaerd further posited that Basson's representation of women's sexual motivations conflict with literature indicating that sexual desire is always responsive (not spontaneous) because it is driven by conditioned responses to sexual stimuli. Further research is therefore required in to clarify the relationship between women's experience of sexual desire and arousal. Examination of how women's sexual motivations may contribute to an experience of responsive desire is also required.

In addition, a review of clinical and empirical research has indicated that women may experience orgasm before maximum arousal; during peak arousal, and further orgasms may occur during the gradual resolution phase of sexual arousal (Basson, 2005). The substantial overlap reported between women's sexual arousal and orgasm disorders may reflect sexual problems in one domain interacting with other problematic sexual areas (Laumann et al., 1999; Rosen et al., 1993). However, the identification of any interaction between problematic arousal and orgasm phases was not possible with previous linear models of sexual response.

The Formulation of FSD in the Sex Response Cycle

Utilising Basson's (2001) revised model, sexual dysfunction is formulated through the identification of problematic sexual functioning in various phases of the response cycle. This cyclic formulation of FSD is in contrast to previous linear models which conceptualised dysfunction as the separate and discrete inhibition of sexual response in one of the three phases. The formulation of FSD through the circular sex response cycle has been proposed to facilitate the identification of interactions between problematic domains of women's sexual

functioning (Basson, Brotto, & Laan, 2005). Women's problematic areas of sexual functioning are proposed to occur subsequent to stressors (e.g. partner infidelity) that negatively impact on areas proposed to influence sexual response, such as emotional intimacy or body-image (Basson, 2005). The relevance of psychological characteristics (emotional intimacy and body-image) to a revised model of women's sexual dysfunction is examined in the following section of this paper.

Factors Contributing to Female Sexual Dysfunction

Multiple factors derived from both biological and psychological origin may negatively influence normal sexual function and consequently contribute to the development and maintenance of FSD. These aetiological factors comprise biological risk factors and psychological factors. Psychological factors include intergenerational, individual and interpersonal characteristics. Conceptualising psychological factors under these headings is useful, as McCabe (1991) distinguished characteristics which have had an influence on an individual for a long period of time (intergenerational), those which currently have an influence (individual) and those which are derived from the interpersonal interaction (interpersonal). These psychological factors may therefore be categorised as having predisposing (intergenerational characteristics) and precipitating/maintaining (individual and interpersonal characteristics) roles in the development of sexual dysfunction. The following sections evaluate the evidence to support the role of various aetiological factors that may be included in a revised model of FSD. The empirical research examining associations between FSD and biological factors will only be briefly considered, as the focus of this paper is on the role of psychological factors in the development of FSD.

Biological Factors Associated With Female Sexual Dysfunction

Sexual dysfunction is frequently attributed to biological factors comprising diverse organic components. Women may experience sexual dysfunction secondary to organic conditions such as cardiovascular disorders, endocrine abnormalities including the hypoestrogenic state of menopause, and substance or prescription medication use (Graziottin & Leiblum, 2005). As biological factors have been inconsistently associated with FSD, consideration of how a woman's psychological characteristics may contribute to sexual dysfunction is warranted (Laumann et al., 1999).

Psychological Factors Contributing to FSD

Current research suggests that psychological factors, comprising historical, individual and interpersonal characteristics, are strongly associated with sexual dysfunction in women (Basson, Leiblum et al., 2004).

Historical characteristics associated with FSD. Historical characteristics, such as values derived from an individual's family of origin that sex is naughty or disgusting, have been consistently associated with future sexual behaviour (Boszormeny-Nagy & Spark, 1973; McCabe, 1991). Numerous studies have reported associations between child sexual abuse and adult female sexual difficulties, particularly desire problems (Bagley & Ramsay, 1986; Briere & Runtz, 1987; Fleming, Mullen, Sibthorpe, & Bammer, 1999; Kinzl, Traweger, & Biebl, 1995; Sarwer & Durlak, 1996). However, the interpretation of evidence obtained through the retrospective recall of events must be treated with caution (McCabe & Cobain, 1998).

Individual psychological factors. While a majority of women in research studies have described depression as reducing sexual response, a minority have indicated that feeling depressed had little effect on their arousal and sometimes increased their sexual interest (Baldwin, 2001; Dobkin, Leiblum, Rosen, Menza, & Marin, 2006; Graham et al., 2004; Heiman, 2002; Hurlbert et al., 2005; Lykins et al., 2006). Although depression is consistently associated with sexual dysfunction, particularly hypoactive sexual desire disorder, the complex nature of this relationship warrants further investigation among women with FSD. Similarly, van Minnen and Kampman's (2000) review indicated that anxiety inhibits women's sexual function, although experimental research has consistently indicated that state-induced anxiety either facilitates sexual arousal or does not affect it (Palace & Gorzalka, 1990; Graham et al.; Laan, Everaerd, Van Aanhoud, & Rebel, 1993; Laan, Everaerd, & Evers, 1995; Lykins et al., 2006). Comparison of sexually dysfunctional and functional individuals has found that high levels of performance anxiety predicted all categories of women's sexual dysfunction (McCabe, 2005; McCabe & Cobain, 1998). These preliminary indications suggest an association between women's cognitive distractions and sexual dysfunction, although validation of these initial results with larger samples of women is clearly warranted.

Additionally, a single comparison of sexually dysfunctional women to a control group has suggested that dysfunctional women endorse significantly more dysfunctional beliefs, particularly regarding body image, than sexually functional adults (Nobre & Pinto-Gouveia, 2006). Further examination of the influence of body image on FSD is required (Ackard, Kearney-Cooke, & Peterson, 2000; Anderson & LeGrand, 1991; Bancroft, Loftus, & Long, 2003; Fookan, 1994). Data on the impact of lifestyle factors on women's sexual functioning is limited

and highlights the need for more comprehensive evaluations of the influence of variables including obesity, employment and stressors on FSD.

Interpersonal psychological factors. While longer relationship duration has been associated with FSD, further research clarifying the influence of this interpersonal variable and possible intervening factors, such as age and family status, is required (Davies, Katz & Jackson, 1999; Gruszecki, Forchuk, & Fisher, 2005; Klusmann, 2002). Emotional intimacy, including communication between partners, may be one of the primary relationship factors contributing to women's sexual functioning. The examination of differences in levels of effective communication and sexual self-disclosure among sexually functional and dysfunctional women has yielded inconsistent results (Byers & Demmons, 1999; Kelly, Strassberg & Turner, 2001; McCabe & Cobain, 1998). Clinical observations have consistently indicated a strong association between relationship conflict and sexual dysfunction. In particular, sexual dysfunction has been associated with the occurrence of higher levels of aggression and withdrawal and lower levels of assertion and negotiation within the couple's relationship (Heiman, LoPiccolo, & LoPiccolo, 1981; McCarthy, 1998, 1999; Metz & Dwyer, 1993; Metz & Epstein, 2002; Rosen & Leiblum, 1992).

Limited research has suggested that men and women's sexual function within a couple is interdependent (Bancroft et al., 2003; Cayan, Bozlu, Canpolat, & Akbay, 2004; Fisher, Rosen, Eardley, Sand, & Goldstein, 2005; Oberg & Fugl-Meyer, 2005; Rosen et al., 2004). Such research examining the interdependence of couple's sexual functioning has indicated that female partners of men with erectile dysfunction (ED) may experience significant self-reported declines in sexual desire, arousal, orgasm, satisfaction and frequency of sexual activity. However, interpretation of these results may be limited as these studies have employed women partners whose sexual problems were not consistently within a clinical range. Our understanding of those interpersonal factors contributing to the development and maintenance of FSD is therefore likely to be enhanced through consideration of how sexual dysfunction in the male partner may be associated with FSD.

New Directions

Research is needed to examine the utility and validity of models of female sexuality. Further research is needed to determine the validity of Basson's (2001) circular, contextual model which includes overlapping phases of variable temporal sequence and diverse motivational components. The current paucity of empirical data examining the role of aetiological factors most crucial for inclusion in this revised model is apparent. Examination of the importance of historical, individual and interpersonal factors to a revised circular model of female sexual response is therefore of current importance.

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Exploring Differences in Attachment, Intimacy and Coping Across the Formation and Dissolution of Romantic Relationships

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Abstract

Research into the romantic experiences of young adults has received great attention over the last decade, particularly from an attachment theory perspective. However, much less research has focused on examining how relationship related processes and experiences differ for young adults engaging in the developmental task of forming relationships compared to young adults having recently experienced a break-up. Moreover, fewer studies have investigated these differences across related developmental variables such as age and gender. Consequently, the first aim of the study was to examine differences in young adults' attachment, psychosocial development of intimacy and relationship coping strategies in dealing with the formation or dissolution of a relationship. The second aim was to explore for systematic differences across these two groups on the basis of gender and age. One hundred and ninety-four young adults aged between 18-30 years ($M = 20.93$, $SD = 2.24$; *Males* = 43, *Females* = 151) participated in the study. A 3 factorial between groups MANOVA (Relationship Status x Gender x Age) revealed a main effect for Group across attachment and intimacy, and a Gender x Age interaction for attachment and coping. Developmental implications of these findings are discussed.

The formation and dissolution of romantic relationships during early adulthood is regarded by many developmental theorists as a normative experience (e.g., Havinghurst, 1976). While normative, it is during early adulthood that young people first engage in intimate, long-term relationships (Levinson, 1986) and so must develop the ability to skillfully balance intrapersonal and interpersonal needs of their own and others (Larson, Wilson, Brown, Furstenberg & Verma, 2002). It is therefore not surprising that relationships are considered challenging by young adults, particularly during the transitional periods of relationship dissolution and the formation of new relationships.

While there is extensive research into the romantic experiences of young adults, with particular attention given to the factors that contribute to stressful and satisfying relationships, little research has focused on examining how relationship experiences differ for young adults forming relationships compared to young adults having recently experienced a break-up. In addition, fewer studies have investigated these differences across the developmental factors such as age and gender which are argued to influence relationship processes during young adulthood (Helgeson, 1994). Accordingly, it is important to understand the role of age and gender in the development of young adults' mental representations of relationships (specifically, attachment and readiness for intimacy) and coping abilities during contrasting relationship stressors associated with falling "in love" and during "breaking-up". A greater understanding of how individuals cope within relationships as well as how they cope and adjust to dissolution is vital to the promotion of positive development in the interpersonal functioning of young adults.

Consequently the first aim of the study was to examine differences in young adults' attachment, psychosocial development of intimacy and relationship coping strategies in dealing with the formation or dissolution of a relationship. The second aim was to explore for systematic differences across attachment, the development of intimacy and the coping strategies between these two distinct relationship transitions on the basis of gender and age.

The Role of Attachment Bonds in Romantic Relationships

It is widely reported in the literature on romantic relationships that attachment bonds have a significant role in the quality of relationships formed in adulthood and adults' abilities to deal with relationship dissolution (e.g., Feeney & Noller, 1990, Noller & Feeney, 2002; Simpson, 1990). Attachment theory proposes that humans have a tendency to form strong affectional bonds with others beginning at birth and continuing throughout the life-cycle. Attachment theory holds that people have an innate need to feel secure and near to others over the course of life and particularly during periods of stress and turmoil. Over time, cognitions about behavioural and emotional interactions and experiences are constructed. These cognitions relate to attachment internal working models and according to research can be derived on the basis of two complementary mental representations – avoidance (discomfort with closeness and dependency) and anxiety (about abandonment) (Brennan, Clark & Shaver, 1998). Avoidance relates to an individual's capacity to seek out or avoid close relationships due to beliefs about the availability and responsiveness of others. Attachment related anxiety refers to the level of anxiety individuals' feel with regards to their worthiness as a person to receive care and affection from others

(Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). Accordingly, avoidance and anxiety can be conceptualised as two orthogonal continuous dimensions, whereby high levels of avoidance and anxiety leads to a more insecure attachment style (Bartholomew, 1993)

Research into romantic attachment indicates that individuals with a more secure attachment endorse more positive expectations, functional beliefs and more rational attitudes regarding their relationship when compared to insecure individuals (Stachert & Bursik, 2003). In addition, research indicates that securely attached individuals' tend to use more adaptive coping strategies like problem-focused coping and support-seeking behaviour to regulate relationship distress. In contrast, individuals' characterised as more avoidant tend to use strategies that grossly attempt to deactivate stress such as denial and distance-avoidance coping strategies, whereas, individuals characterised by greater levels of attachment related anxiety are associated with more hyperactivating coping strategies (i.e., wishful thinking, self-blame) leading to greater levels of physical and emotional distress and more dysfunctional coping in relationships (Davis, Shaver & Vernon, 2003; Mikulincer, 1998).

In relation to the present study we would expect that individuals' who experienced the distress of a relationship break-up would be significantly more anxious and avoidant in their attachment behaviour in comparison to individuals involved in a relationship. We therefore also expect individuals who have recently experienced a breakup to engage in more deactivating and hyperactivating coping strategies as a means of dealing with this distress.

Psychosocial Development of Intimacy

For young adults the psychosocial developmental stage of intimacy is essential for the formation of healthy and stable relationships and vital to understanding how young adults respond to relationship development and dissolution (Marcia, 1993; Montgomery, 2005). Early adulthood is a time when different social interactions lead to the involvement of mature and intimate relationships. Like attachment, variation in psychosocial development can lead to individuals acquiring different capabilities in intimacy as well as assist with an individual's identity development. In turn this may affect their ability to cope with stress associated with romantic relationships. Erikson (1968) proposed a life-span developmental stage-model of personality consisting of eight phases. Each of the eight stages requires the individual to resolve a series of crises, whereby the resolution of these crises gives rise to normative personality development (Marcia, 1993). During each crisis individuals' have the potential to develop along one of two developmental trajectories – a non-normative or normative pathway. The psychosocial crisis of primacy for young adults relates to the development of intimacy whereby individuals may vary on the degree to which they choose to engage in intimate relationships or to isolate themselves from interpersonal associations. Research indicates that positive development towards the pathway of intimacy gives rise to learning to share oneself with another and to commit to close relationships with others. Negative development along the pathway of isolation results in an inability and refusal to commit to another completely (Marcia, 1993; Rosenthal, 1981). This in turn has been shown to lead to an avoidance of intimacy, whereby young adults choose not to engage in romantic relationships.

In arguing that attachment and psychosocial development form the basis on which young adults develop sustainable romantic relationships, it is important to examine whether differences in the formation or dissolution of relationships may in fact be related to these key interpersonal and intra-individual processes.

Age and Gender differences

Importantly the present study is concerned with the period during which individuals' are undergoing the transition into early adulthood (18 to 22 years old) as well as those already considered to be young adults (23 to 30 years old). Investigating systematic differences in psychosocial intimacy as a function of age is particularly important as developmental tasks can often extend from adolescence into emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000). The two age groups investigated in the present research are thus likely to give rise to distinct changes in attachment, intimacy and coping. It is also important to explore whether differences exist for these two age groups because in the younger group, the formation of serious relationships is likely to be a novel experience when compared to individuals' in the older age group who are more likely to have had greater experience in forming and dissolving relationships. The present research will seek to address whether this is likely to influence the way individuals' adjust to and cope with these relationship transitions.

Research indicates that over time young people gain relational competence when they engage in interpersonal relationships (e.g., Engels, Finkenauer, Dekovic & Meeus, 2001). Accordingly, cognitions about the self and about relationship partners are formed via the formation and dissolution of romantic relationships. In line with this, research indicates that with age there is an increase in the importance given to romantic relationships as a source of support and intimacy (Shylman & Scharf, 2000). Therefore, as individuals' age and acquire more experience with romantic relationships they are more likely to communicate attachment related needs and thus more likely to cope more effectively with relationship stress. Accordingly, young adults in comparison to those

transitioning to early adulthood are expected to have greater relationship experience and to therefore be more likely to learn and adjust to the stress associated with forming and dissolving relationships.

Gender differences are argued by gender-role socialization theorists to result from reinforcement of gendered norms. The idea that gender differences exist due to socialization has often been noted in the attachment literature (Bartholomew, 1994; Collins & Read, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1994). Research indicates that women when compared to men are better at expressing their emotions and can communicate their needs as well as discuss their problems more openly and more effectively (Trobst, Collins & Embree, 1994, cited in Xu & Burleson, 2001). According to the literature women seek social support more often than men and they maintain interpersonal relationships outside of their romantic relationship, more so than do men (e.g., Helgeson, 1994). Given this, gender differences are likely to be seen for attachment related behaviour and in the way that individuals' cope with relationship related stress in relationships and the way they cope following a relationship break-up. In the context of dating relationships these norms are also likely to influence factors involving intimacy (Cutrona, 1996), whereby women are more likely to demonstrate greater levels of psychosocial intimacy. A further example which is in support of sex differences stems from a study conducted by Helgeson (1994); the author investigated sex differences in college students who were adjusting to relationship dissolution and to the physical separation of their partner. Study findings indicated that women adjusted better than men and men reported greater distress (anxiety, depression and hostility) following a relationship break-up in comparison to women. Importantly, while gender differences appear to exist, study results are often mixed. For example in a study conducted by Simpson, (1987) no sex differences were found following a relationship break-up. Accordingly, the effects of gender on relationship related variables remains unclear.

Therefore, the following research questions were generated for the current study. (1) Would young adults differ in their attachment representations, readiness for intimacy and coping depending on whether they had recently formed or dissolved a romantic relationship? (2) Would differences across age and gender influence young adults' relationship experiences?

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 194, undergraduate students recruited across three major metropolitan universities in Melbourne. One hundred and fifty-one participants were women and 43 were men aged between 18 to 30 years ($M = 20.93$, $SD = 2.24$) who were either in a relationship for a period of six to 12 months ($n = 123$; $M = 9.76$ months, $SD = 1.12$) or who had experienced relationship dissolution within the last three months ($n = 71$; $M = 6.42$ months, $SD = .23$). Over 90% of participants were involved in a heterosexual relationship.

Materials

Relationship dissolution questionnaire. This questionnaire consisted of four sections – a personal details measure, followed by a self-report measure of attachment, a measure of the psychosocial development of intimacy and an assessment of the ways of coping with relationship dissolution. The personal details measure consisted of 19 items assessing a series of background variables such as age, gender, ethnic background, education level, occupation, work status, sexuality and a series of forced-choice and free text response items about the relationship break-up experience.

The Experience in Close Relationships (ECR) questionnaire (Brennan, Clark & Shaver, 1998) was used to assess attachment to the former romantic partner. The ECR consists of 36 items that characterize individuals along two subscales, anxiety (18 items) and avoidance (18 items). The reported internal consistency for these subscales was .91 and .94 for anxiety and avoidance respectively. Items were rated along a seven point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

The intimacy subscale of the Erikson Psychosocial Stage Inventory scale (EPSI) (Rosenthal, Gurney & Moore, 1981) were used to measure three level of romantic intimacy. This subscale consist of 12 items rated along a five-point scale ranging from 1 (hardly ever true) to 5 (almost always true). The alpha coefficient reported in a study by Iskovitz (2001) on a sample of 13 to 29 year olds for this subscale yielded an alpha coefficient of .84.

To measure the coping strategies of young adults having experienced relationship dissolution, the Ways of Coping Scale – (Revised) (WOC-R) (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985) was utilized. This instrument comprised of 66 items rated on a four-point scale ranging from 0 (not used) to 3 (used a great deal) representing problem-focused and different types of emotion-focused strategies of dealing with stressful life events. Given that the present study was interested in problem-focused coping and hyperactivating and deactivating forms of emotion-focused coping, these three strategies of coping were computed as separate subscales. All subscales resulted in very good internal consistency reliabilities ($\alpha = .95$, problem-focused coping; $\alpha = .92$, deactivation and $\alpha = .82$ hyperactivation emotion-focused coping).

Relationship Formation questionnaire. The relationship formation questionnaire comprised of five sections. As with the relationship dissolution questionnaire, attachment, psychosocial development of intimacy and ways of coping were assessed using the ECR, intimacy subscale of the EPSI and WOC-Revised. A personal details inventory was also included as part of the relationship questionnaire. It is important to note however that the personal details measure used in this questionnaire asked participants to provide details regarding general perceptions about their current partner rather than issues surrounding the relationship dissolution.

Relationship Satisfaction was assessed using the Satisfaction Index (Simpson, 1987). This instrument consists of 11 items covering emotional, financial and physical characteristics of an individual's current romantic partner. Participants were asked to rate their level of satisfaction along a five-point scale ranging from 1 (very unsatisfactory) to 5 (very satisfactory). This measure revealed is reported to have a high internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha of .85.

Procedure

Two versions of the questionnaire were administered – a relationship dissolution and a relationship formation questionnaire. One version was administered to individuals that had been involved in the dissolution of a romantic relationship in the last three months. The alternative version was administered to participants that were currently involved in a romantic relationship of six to 12 months duration. A further criterion of the study was that participants needed to be aged between 18 to 30 years of age. This age range was chosen in order to compare individuals transitioning into early adulthood (that is, 18 to 22 year olds) with those considered to be young adults (that is, 23 to 30 year olds). To maximize the rate of participant recruitment, the study was developed in two forms – a pen-and-paper self-report questionnaire and an on-line self-report questionnaire. The pen-and-paper questionnaires were distributed in lecture theaters to undergraduate years in the disciplines of psychology, engineering and business to reflect the wider student demographic at the two universities, SUT and Deakin. The approximate time to complete the questionnaire was 30 to 34 minutes.

Results

A three factorial between groups multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) 2 (Relationship Status) \times 2 (Gender) \times 2 (Age) was performed to investigate group differences for relationship status, gender and age across three dependent variables – Attachment, level of intimacy and ways of coping. A significant multivariate main effect for relationship status was found (*Pillai's Trace* = .10, $F(6,181) = 3.46$, $p < .01$, *partial* $\eta^2 = .10$). Univariate *F*-tests revealed that individuals in relationships significantly differed to individuals who had experienced a recent relationship breakup on their reported level of avoidance ($F(1,194) = 15.75$, $p < .001$, *partial* $\eta^2 = .08$) and on their levels of psychosocial intimacy ($F(1,194) = 15.05$, $p < .001$, *partial* $\eta^2 = .08$). The means presented in Table 1 indicate that young adults who had recently experienced the relationship dissolution reported greater attachment avoidance, but lower readiness for intimacy compared to young adults currently in relationships. While no significant differences were found between two groups across attachment anxiety or coping strategies it is interesting to note that young adult having recently experienced relationship dissolution also reported higher anxiety and less use of problem-focused coping compared with young adults engaged in a current relationship.

In addition, a significant gender \times age multivariate interaction was found (*Pillai's Trace* = .12, $F(6,181) = 4.12$, $p = .0001$, *partial* $\eta^2 = .12$). Univariate *F*-tests revealed gender by age interactions for attachment anxiety ($F(1,194) = 11.11$, $p = .001$, *partial* $\eta^2 = .06$) and hyperactivation emotion-focused coping (i.e., wishful thinking) ($F(1,194) = 8.23$, $p < .01$, *partial* $\eta^2 = .04$). Specifically, younger men and women showed no difference in attachment anxiety, however, older women displayed higher levels of attachment anxiety compared to younger women. In relation to the engagement of wishful thinking as a coping strategy, younger women used more wishful thinking than younger men. However the opposite trend for gender was found amongst the older group with women reporting less utilization of wishful thinking than men.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of Attachment, Level of Intimacy and Coping Strategies for Relationship Status, Gender and Age

<i>Relationship Status</i>	<i>DVs</i>	<i>Men</i>				<i>Women</i>				<i>Total</i>	
		Transition period to Young Adulthood (18-22 years)		Young Adulthood (23-30 years)		Transition period to Young Adulthood (18-22 years)		Young Adulthood (23-30 years)		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Relationship Formation	Avoidance	2.77	1.16	2.69	1.20	2.40	0.98	2.95	1.03	2.67	1.14
	Anxiety	3.25	0.93	3.74	0.93	3.63	0.95	2.71	0.75	3.57	0.96
	Intimacy	44.36	7.69	44.03	8.47	45.48	8.03	41.91	5.09	44.12	8.03
	Problem-focused coping	71.21	25.26	66.42	19.17	83.38	17.64	90.72	17.23	72.03	21.12
	Detached avoidance	34.86	16.29	40.14	13.66	45.57	11.05	46.55	8.99	41.04	13.50
	Wishful thinking	9.21	4.30	9.53	3.65	11.67	4.52	14.36	4.39	10.29	4.19
Relationship Dissolution	Avoidance	3.55	1.37	3.64	1.46	3.14	1.33	4.47	0.79	3.75	1.30
	Anxiety	4.12	0.88	3.65	1.08	4.39	1.23	2.63	1.84	3.81	1.17
	Intimacy	37.29	11.29	39.05	10.93	39.75	7.14	31.75	2.50	38.41	10.18
	Problem-focused coping	55.29	20.12	67.80	21.99	78.75	18.91	81.00	28.32	67.93	22.45
	Detached avoidance	28.29	10.31	42.00	15.53	50.17	16.55	47.50	13.30	40.99	16.06
	Wishful thinking	7.86	2.41	10.15	4.71	12.25	5.03	16.50	4.65	10.41	4.76

Note. *N* = 194

Discussion

In summary, the findings suggest that significant differences exist for individuals' forming and dissolving relationships both in their attachment and in their psychosocial development of intimacy. It appears that individuals' who experience a relationship breakup are more avoidant in their attachment related behaviour when compared to individuals' involved in early romantic relationships. The dissolution group tended to be more avoidant in their attachment due to greater discomfort with closeness and dependency. However, this finding could have one of three possible explanations. Firstly, the higher avoidance reported by the relationship dissolution group could be a consequence of relationship breakdown and thus a marker of romantic detachment. This in fact could be seen as an adaptive response to relationship dissolution, whereby the waning of attachment to a past partner promotes exploratory behaviour which can facilitate the seeking of a new attachment partner in the future. Secondly, in line with Davis et al. (2003) it is possible that the breakup lead this group to perceive relationship partners as unreliable in terms of availability and support. Thirdly, it may be that this group of individuals are more dispositionally avoidant. In this case, it is could be implied that increases in romantic intimacy may in fact heighten these individuals' discomfort with closeness and force them to withdraw from the relationships as a means of coping with the discomfort. High attachment avoidance is argued to lead to rigid and maladaptive patterns of relating to others particularly in the context of interpersonal relationships (Mikulincer & Florian, 2001). Furthermore,

Feeney and Noller (1992) found that individuals endorsing an avoidant attachment style were more likely to experience a relationship break-up, while individuals' with a secure attachment style tend to report greater relationship satisfaction and therefore are more likely to maintain relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1994).

With regards to psychosocial development of intimacy, lower levels as demonstrated by the relationship dissolution group is characteristic of a reduced confidence to seek out close relationships, and a greater inability to relate to others constructively (Orlofsky, 1993). Interpretively, an inability to relate constructively to others may mean that individuals' with low levels of intimacy also resort to less adaptive coping strategies like problem-focused coping (Ptacek, 1996). This trend while insignificant was in fact evident for individuals' in the relationship dissolution group.

A further aim of the study was to examine whether systematic differences existed relative to age and gender. The findings revealed a gender by age interaction for attachment anxiety and wishful thinking coping strategies. This is consistent with previous research which has identified gender differences in coping strategies among adolescents (e.g., Copeland & Hess, 1995; Frydenberg & Lewis, 1991; Shulman, 1993). For example, in terms of gender and coping, Frydenberg and Lewis (1993) found that females seek more social support, use more tension-reduction strategies and employ more wishful thinking strategies compared to males. The two way interaction is however somewhat more complicated. It indicated that for individuals aged between 18 to 22, males in comparison to females used significantly less wishful thinking coping strategies. When comparing young adults in the age range of 23 to 30, it appears that males however use significantly more wishful thinking compared to females. In addition, males in the older age group used more wishful thinking strategies than did males in the younger age group. This was also evident when comparing females in the two age groups. While these results are somewhat perplexing, wishful thinking includes anticipation and hope that an event or outcome will turn out positive. As individuals age and develop greater relationship experience they may form a more positive outlook on life. In the last decade or so there has been a social push towards positive psychology, individuals thus may resort to wishful thinking with age as a way to cope with relationship related stress.

The present study also confirmed age and gender differences for attachment anxiety. The results indicated that similar levels of anxiety were seen for males and females in the 18 to 22 year old group. However, in the 23 to 30 age group, males in comparison to females were significantly less anxious. This finding is consistent with gender stereotyping which suggests that females in comparison to males present are more anxiety, tend to be more preoccupied and hypervigilant about relationships in comparison to males (Davis et. al., 2003). Additionally, males in the slightly younger age group had greater attachment anxiety when compared to males in the older age group. Finally, younger females reported less attachment anxiety than older females. The mixed study findings suggest that gender and age are thus important factors in the interplay of relationships particularly relevant to the transitional stages of development.

A particular limitation of the current study is the generalisability of findings to the wider Australian demographic of young adults. The sample was predominantly undergraduate university students residing in Melbourne. In addition, the sample consisted mainly of participants with an Australian cultural background and thus it offers little in the form of cultural diversity. It is for this reason that we may only speculate that the findings may in fact hold true for other cohorts. Furthermore, the majority of study participants were female and while the study was able to confirm gender-related differences amongst participants, future studies should seek to obtain a more gender balanced sample.

Further to the aforementioned, the present study was unable to make causal inferences as to whether attachment avoidance stemmed from the experience of relationship dissolution, rather than contributing to the

dissolution. While certain trends in the study were observed to be indicative of group differences, these differences could not be affirmed as the results were insignificant. Importantly these insignificant results may be a function of low power as reported in the results section of this paper.

In conclusion, while previous research has investigated the effects of relationship dissolution on young adults (e.g., Feeney & Noller, 1992; Helgeson, 1994; Simpson, 1987) no study to date has investigated inter and intrapersonal differences between individuals' in relationships and individuals' postdissolution. The present study therefore extended research in the area of romantic relationships and bridges the gap between the development of early adulthood and young adulthood.

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Working at intimate relationships: Links between attachment, self-regulation, communication, and relationship satisfaction

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Abstract

It is a generally accepted tenet of attachment theory that attachment insecurity is linked to difficulties in emotional self-regulation. However, research to date has not examined the relationship between attachment insecurity and behavioural self-regulation in romantic relationships. Behavioural relationship self-regulation refers to the effort that couples put into their relationship in order to ensure that it is successful and satisfying. While this construct is behaviourally focused, it looks at general rather than specific behaviours, such as communication patterns. Given that attachment, communication patterns, and relationship satisfaction have been shown to be linked, the current study examined these variables in the context of behavioural relationship self-regulation. The sample consisted of 79 heterosexual couples from the general community who had been in their current relationship for a minimum of three months. Participants completed measures of attachment, behavioural relationship self-regulation, communication patterns, and relationship satisfaction. Regression analyses and bootstrapping showed that behavioural relationship self-regulation and communication patterns partially mediated the impact of attachment on relationship satisfaction; however, findings varied for males and females. The results of the current study will be discussed in regard to their implications for relationship satisfaction in intimate relationships.

Attachment theory has provided an important framework for research into relationship satisfaction (Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000). While attachment patterns have consistently been found to be linked to relationship satisfaction (e.g. Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Simpson, 1990), a range of interpersonal factors are increasingly being studied in the context of attachment. Attachment theory can therefore assist both researchers and clinicians by providing insight into how interpersonal factors are linked to satisfaction in intimate relationships.

Adult Romantic Attachment

The current consensus among attachment researchers is that self-report measures of adult romantic attachment are best conceptualised as measuring dimensions rather than categories of attachment (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998; Fraley & Waller, 1998; Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000). Two dimensions have commonly been found in the literature: attachment-related anxiety and attachment-related avoidance. Individuals low on both anxiety and avoidance are considered to be securely attached to their partner. In contrast, those high in anxiety tend to feel insecure about their intimate relationships, and worry about whether their partner is consistently available and loving. Individuals high in avoidance find it difficult to be intimate with partners, and can deny the importance of romantic attachments, or place a high value on self-reliance.

Attachment and Communication

Research has shown links between adult romantic attachment and patterns of communication. When asked to consider a time when they were deceived by their partner, Jang, Smith, and Levine (2002) found that anxious individuals avoided the issue during discussions with their partner, avoidant individuals communicated less with their partner overall, and secure individuals had more direct discussions about the issue. Similarly, avoidantly attached men and anxiously attached women have been found to have lower quality communication about relationship issues than more securely attached individuals (Simpson, Rholes, & Phillips, 1996). These findings suggest that insecure attachment may predict more negative communication patterns in couples during periods of conflict or relationship distress, and that anxious and avoidant individuals may differ in their styles of communication.

Communication patterns can also serve as a mediator between attachment and relationship satisfaction, although research in this area is limited. During marital conflict, Feeney (1994) found that more positive communication patterns, such as mutual expression and understanding, mediated the link between attachment security and relationship satisfaction. This study also showed that negative communication patterns, such as coercion and destructive processes, were stronger mediators in wives than husbands. As such, males and females may differ in their use of positive and negative communication patterns.

Self-Regulation in Intimate Relationships

Self-regulation involves regulation of thoughts, feelings, and behaviours with the aim of guiding individuals through activities and situations (Karoly, 1993). When this concept is applied to intimate relationships, it refers to the amount of work that individuals put into their relationships (Halford, Wilson, Lizzio, & Moore, 2002). As such, unlike emotional self-regulation, relationship self-regulation is concerned with the general behaviours that individuals exhibit in intimate relationships, as these behaviours have an observable impact on the relationship (Wilson, Charker, Lizzio, Halford, & Kimlin, 2005). There are four concepts involved in behavioural relationship self-regulation: appraisal of relationship functioning, which involves analysis of behaviours in the relationship; goal setting, which is the ability to set specific goals for change in one's own behaviour; implementation of change, where goals are put into place; and evaluation of change efforts, where individuals assess whether their changes in behaviour were effective. Behavioural relationship self-regulation has been found to be a strong predictor of relationship adjustment in a community sample of married couples (Wilson et al., 2005). However, given that relationship adjustment has been shown to differ from relationship satisfaction (Eddy, 1991), further research is needed into the links between behavioural relationship self-regulation and relationship satisfaction.

It is a generally accepted tenet of attachment theory that insecure attachment is linked to difficulties in both emotional regulation and the formation and maintenance of satisfying close relationships (e.g. Sroufe, Duggal, Weinfeld, & Carlson, 2000). However, while substantial research has been conducted into the links between attachment and relationship satisfaction, no research to date has looked at attachment and behavioural self-regulation in romantic relationships. Given the links between insecure attachment and lower emotional regulation in relationships, it is proposed that insecure attachment will be linked to lower levels of behavioural relationship self-regulation.

The aim of the present study was to examine the links between attachment, communication patterns, behavioural relationship self-regulation, and relationship satisfaction. It was hypothesised that higher attachment-related anxiety and avoidance would predict lower relationship satisfaction. It was further hypothesised that communication patterns, both positive and negative, and behavioural relationship self-regulation would mediate the links between attachment patterns and relationship satisfaction.

Method

Participants

The sample comprised 79 heterosexual couples who were dating, cohabiting, or married, and had been in their current relationship for a minimum of three months. Participants were aged between 18 and 78 years of age ($M = 32.16$ years, $SD = 12.99$ years). The length of the participants' current relationship ranged from 3 to 612 months ($M = 95.36$, $SD = 125.05$). More than one-third of participants (37.3%) were married, while 27.8% were cohabiting and 34.8% were dating. The majority of the sample (64.6%) did not have children. Almost two-thirds of participants (63.9%) had TAFE or university qualifications, while 18.4% were currently completing a TAFE or university qualification. The rest of the sample had either secondary school qualifications (12.7%) or had not completed high school (5.1%). Most participants were either in professional careers (39.3%) or were tertiary students (29.1%), while the remainder were tradespeople (10.8%), in clerical positions (6.3%), engaged in home duties (5.7%), or were in service or other professions (8.8%). Eighty-one percent of participants had been born in Australia, while 19% were born overseas.

Materials

Participants completed self-report questionnaires that included demographics and measures of attachment, behavioural relationship self-regulation, communication patterns, and relationship satisfaction.

Demographics. The demographics component of the questionnaire included questions relating to age, gender, type and duration of current romantic relationship, age at first romantic relationship, number of children, parental divorce, income, occupation, and level of education.

Adult romantic attachment. Attachment to the current romantic partner was studied using the Experiences in Close Relationships Questionnaire – Revised (ECR-R; Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000). The ECR-R is a 36-item scale that measures anxiety and avoidance in regard to attachment. The current study found that these subscales had high reliability, with Cronbach's alpha of .92 for anxiety, and .90 for avoidance.

Behavioural relationship self-regulation. Behavioural self-regulation in relationships was measured using a recently published measure, the Behavioral Self-Regulation for Effective Relationships Scale (BSERS; Wilson, Charker, Lizzio, Halford, & Kimlin, 2005). The BSERS is a 16-item self-report scale that measures behavioural relationship self-regulation for both self (BSERS-Self) and partner (BSERS-Partner). As such, participants completed the scale twice in regard to their perception of both their own self-regulation and their partner's self-regulation. Wilson et al. (2005) found that the BSERS consisted of two subscales, strategies and effort, with

moderate to high reliability for both the self-report and partner-report measures across two samples. Reliability alphas in the current study were also moderate to high: self-report strategies, $\alpha = .82$; self-report effort, $\alpha = .70$; partner-report strategies, $\alpha = .81$; partner-report effort, $\alpha = .70$.

Communication patterns. The Communication Patterns Questionnaire (Christensen, 1988; Christensen & Sullaway, 1984) was used to assess communication in couples. This measure has been found to comprise four factors with acceptable reliability: coercion, mutuality, post-conflict distress, and destructive process (Noller & White, 1990). The current study found reliability alphas of .84 for coercion, .83 for mutuality, .79 for post-conflict distress, and .85 for destructive process.

Relationship satisfaction. Relationship satisfaction was assessed using the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976). This is a 32-item measure of relationship adjustment, which may be used as a unidimensional or multidimensional scale. As relationship adjustment has been shown to differ from relationship satisfaction, the satisfaction subscale of the DAS was used to measure relationship satisfaction rather than the total DAS scale, which is a measure of adjustment (Eddy, 1991). One question that related only to married or cohabiting couples (“Do you ever regret that you married or lived together?”) was reworded to also be relevant to dating couples (“Do you ever regret that you entered into this relationship?”). Two items were dropped from the satisfaction subscale due to low reliability, meaning that the subscale used in the current study comprised eight items. This revised satisfaction subscale was found to have acceptable reliability ($\alpha = .81$).

Procedure

In order to gain a representative sample of couples from the general community, potential participants were informed of the study through flyers distributed through neighbourhood houses, community centres and agencies, community clubs, and Deakin University. Participants were required to be over the age of 18 and currently in a heterosexual relationship of at least three months’ duration. Both members of the couple were asked to participate in the study. Interested participants were provided with a questionnaire package, which contained information about the study and the questionnaire, and was returned individually to the researcher by reply-paid post. Questionnaires were anonymous, but were coded in order to match partner responses. The response rate for the study was 22.4%.

Results

Data from couples are interdependent, meaning that any statistical analysis that ignores this dependence violates the assumption of independence of observations (Kenny, 1995; Kenny & Cook, 1999). As members of the couples in the current study were distinguishable by gender, analyses were conducted separately on males and females to minimise the impact of dependent data.

Hierarchical regression analyses were conducted on these two groups to investigate the links between attachment, communication patterns, behavioural relationship self-regulation, and relationship satisfaction. Given that relationship satisfaction is proposed to decrease as the length of the relationship increases (Karney & Bradbury, 1997), length of relationship was controlled for in analyses by entering this variable at the first step of the analysis. Following the regression analyses, a test of mediation was used on the variables that had been found to be significant predictors. As it was hypothesised that there would be multiple mediators of the link between attachment and satisfaction, bootstrapping was used to test mediation, as this is a robust method of assessing mediation when there are multiple mediators (Preacher & Hayes, in review). Furthermore, bootstrapping is more appropriate for use with smaller samples than other tests of mediation (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). An SPSS macro that allowed for bootstrapping by estimating and comparing indirect effects in multiple mediator models was obtained from www.quantpsy.org.

Predictors and Mediators of Relationship Satisfaction in Females

Relationship length was controlled for by being entered at the first step, attachment-related anxiety and avoidance were entered at the second step, behavioural relationship self-regulation variables (Self Strategies, Partner Strategies, Self Effort, and Partner Effort) at the third step, and communication variables (Mutuality, Coercion, Post-Conflict Distress, and Destructive Process) at the fourth step. When anxiety and avoidance were entered, both were significant predictors of relationship satisfaction. With all variables entered, no self-regulation or communication variables reached significance; however, Partner Strategies ($p < .10$) and Coercion ($p < .08$) approached significance. As such, a more parsimonious model was developed using only these self-regulation and communication variables (see Table 1).

Table 1
Predicting Relationship Satisfaction from Attachment, Communication and Self-Regulation in Females (n = 79)

Model	Variable	Relationship Satisfaction		
		<i>r</i>	β	<i>sr</i> ²
1.	Length of relationship	-.31**	-.31**	-.31**
2.	Length of relationship	-.31**	-.36**	-.35**
	Anxiety	-.43**	-.28**	-.24**
	Avoidance	-.57**	-.44**	-.38**
3.	Length of relationship	-.31**	-.30**	-.28**
	Anxiety	-.43*	-.23*	-.19*
	Avoidance	-.57**	-.38**	-.32**
	Partner Strategies	.52*	.21*	.18*
4.	Length of relationship	-.31**	-.29**	-.27**
	Anxiety	-.43	-.13	-.10
	Avoidance	-.57**	-.42**	-.35**
	Partner Strategies	.52	.14	.11
	Coercion	-.44**	-.27**	-.24**

$R^2 = .57$; Adjusted $R^2 = .54$; for Step 4, $F(1, 73) = 9.86, p < .05$

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$

Bootstrapping was then used to test whether these variables mediated the link between attachment and satisfaction, while controlling for length of relationship (see Table 2). Examination of the specific indirect effects of Partner Strategies and Coercion showed that both variables mediated the link between attachment-related anxiety and relationship satisfaction. However, while Partner Strategies and Coercion, taken as a whole, mediated the link between attachment-related avoidance and relationship satisfaction in females, neither variable was a significant predictor on its own.

Table 2
Bootstrapped Point Estimates and Confidence Intervals for the Total and Specific Indirect Effects for Females (n = 79)

Indirect Effects	Point Estimate	Bootstrapping	
		Bias Corrected and Accelerated 95% CI	
		Lower	Upper
Anxiety			
Partner Strategies	-.39	-.85	-.12
Coercion	-.31	-.73	-.06
TOTAL	-.70	-1.27	-.34
Avoidance			
Partner Strategies	-.24	-.61	.01
Coercion	-.17	-.52	.08
TOTAL	-.40	-.91	-.07

Note. 5000 bootstrap samples.

Predictors and Mediators of Relationship Satisfaction in Males

A hierarchical regression analysis was conducted using the procedure described above. When entered at the second step of the regression analysis, attachment-related anxiety and avoidance were both significant predictors of relationship satisfaction. However, of the self-regulation and communication variables, only Coercion emerged as a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction. As such, the final regression model omitted the nonsignificant variables (see Table 3).

Table 3
Predicting Relationship Satisfaction from Attachment and Communication in Males (n = 79)

Model	Variable	Relationship Satisfaction		
		<i>r</i>	β	<i>sr</i> ²
1.	Length of relationship	-.13	-.13	-.13
2.	Length of relationship	-.13*	-.21*	-.20*
	Anxiety	-.57*	-.21*	-.16*
	Avoidance	-.70**	-.58**	-.43**
3.	Length of relationship	-.13*	-.16*	-.16*
	Anxiety	-.57	-.09	-.06
	Avoidance	-.70**	-.49**	-.35**
	Coercion	-.63**	-.33**	-.27**

$R^2 = .62$; Adjusted $R^2 = .60$; for Step 3, $F(1, 74) = 14.10, p < .05$

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$

Bootstrapping was then used on these variables to test mediation while controlling for length of relationship (see Table 4). Examination of specific indirect effects showed that Coercion mediated the link between both attachment-related anxiety and relationship satisfaction, and attachment-related avoidance and relationship satisfaction.

Table 4
Bootstrapped Point Estimates and Confidence Intervals for the Total and Specific Indirect Effects for Males (n = 79)

Indirect Effects	Bootstrapping		
	Point Estimate	Bias Corrected and Accelerated 95% CI	
		Lower	Upper
Anxiety			
Coercion	-.80	-1.36	-.41
TOTAL	-.80	-1.36	-.41
Avoidance			
Coercion	-.75	-1.30	-.36
TOTAL	-.75	-1.30	-.36

Note. 5000 bootstrap samples

Discussion

This study investigated the links between attachment, behavioural relationship self-regulation, communication patterns, and relationship satisfaction. Due to the relatively small sample size of the study, the results should be interpreted with caution. In accordance with expectations, attachment-related anxiety and avoidance predicted lower relationship satisfaction. The findings also partially supported the hypothesis that the link between attachment and satisfaction would be mediated by communication and behavioural relationship self-regulation. For females, Coercion (coercive communication) and Partner Strategies (a perception that one's partner used more relationship strategies) mediated the link between attachment-related anxiety and relationship satisfaction. However, no such relationship was found in regard to attachment-related avoidance. For males, one form of communication, Coercion, mediated the link between attachment and relationship satisfaction; however, behavioural relationship self-regulation was not a significant mediator.

These findings suggest that for males, being high in attachment-related anxiety and avoidance may increase the likelihood of using a coercive pattern of communication during conflict, which in turn may be linked to lower relationship satisfaction. However, for females, this may only occur for those high in attachment-related anxiety. This suggests that the impact of insecure attachment on communication patterns differs for males and females. It is possible that more avoidantly attached females communicate less with partners during periods of relationship distress, as has been found in previous research (Jang et al., 2002). Additional research into attachment and the nature of communication patterns in couples could explore this further.

An interesting finding was that a relatively new aspect of relationship research, behavioural relationship self-regulation, partially mediated the relationship between attachment-related anxiety and relationship satisfaction in females. This suggests that for females, the negative impact of attachment-related anxiety on relationship satisfaction may be lessened by the partner's use of relationship strategies. This has implications for therapeutic interventions with couples, as females who perceive their partners as putting more work into the relationship may have higher relationship satisfaction. Subsequently, females and males may need to be educated differently about their relationship and how it may be improved.

It should be noted that, while earlier research into communication and behavioural self-regulation has focused on married couples, the current study looked at dating, cohabiting, and married couples. This means that some differences in communication and behavioural relationship self-regulation within the current study are to be expected. Furthermore, as this sample comprised couples from the general community, it is possible that a clinical sample of couples would have differences in attachment, communication, and behavioural relationship self-regulation. This is a worthy area of study in future relationship research.

In summary, this study indicates that the link between attachment and relationship satisfaction is partially mediated by communication patterns and behavioural relationship self-regulation. Along with being an interesting and relevant predictor of relationship satisfaction, this study suggests that behavioural relationship self-regulation may become an important aspect of future attachment research. Attachment has previously been shown to be a strong predictor of relationship satisfaction, and its links to communication and behavioural self-regulation further its usefulness as an organisational framework for relationship research.

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Female Sexual Dysfunction: The Effectiveness of Psychological and Medical Treatments

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Abstract

Sexual dysfunction in women may occur in the desire, arousal or orgasm phases of the sexual response cycle. This paper examines the major treatment approaches to these dysfunctions and how they have changed over the last 30 years. Masters and Johnson (1970) provided the first integrated treatment program for female sexual dysfunction (FSD) with the major aspects incorporating sensate focus and communication exercises. Treatment was extended in the 1980s and 1990s to include other therapeutic techniques. Recent literature has seen a shift in the focus of treatment from predominately psychological techniques toward more use of medical approaches. This paper provides an analysis of treatment from a medical and psychological perspective. The effectiveness of various treatment approaches on female desire, arousal, orgasm and pain disorders are evaluated, and the factors believed to contribute to FSD are used to develop a recommended approach for treating these disorders.

Sexual dysfunctions are common disorders in the general population, and can cause significant disturbance and interference to a person's sexual functioning, which may then have negative implications in other areas of their life. At present, our understanding of the effectiveness of treatment for sexual dysfunction is limited. An extensive review of the literature found few published studies. Almost all previous data on psychological treatment approaches to FSD were generated in the mid 1980s when the focus on etiological predictors of FSD were predominately psychological. Treatment programs for sexual dysfunction have frequently lacked adequate research methodology, which makes it difficult to evaluate their effectiveness (McCabe, 2001). It is becoming increasingly clear that past treatments have used a narrow approach to understanding sexual dysfunction, which have not encompassed the broader psychological and relationship factors that many women describe as being pertinent to the development of their sexual dysfunction.

Masters and Johnson (1970) demonstrated the value of behavioural therapy in alleviating sexual symptoms and they were the first to develop an integrated treatment program for FSD. The major aspects of their treatment program incorporated sensate focus exercises (Masters & Johnson, 1970). The use of sensate focus stemmed from the belief of Masters and Johnson that performance anxiety was the main factor in the etiology of sexual dysfunction, and, that by reducing anxiety, the natural sexual function of the body would intervene and "push" toward successful, pleasurable sex (Masters & Johnson, 1970). The sensate focus exercises were aimed at reducing the anxiety associated with the need to perform sexually, and focusing on the pleasurable sensations that accompany body and genital stimulation. Sensate focus is often applied in the treatment of all sexual dysfunctions because of its ability to help the couple broaden their approach to sexuality whilst reducing the threatening focus of performance and the need to achieve orgasm.

One of the most impressive aspects of the Masters and Johnson (1970) approach to treatment was their reported 80 percent success rate following treatment among almost 800 persons with various types of sexual dysfunction. Additionally, of the successfully treated clients that could be found five years later (313 couples), only five percent reported recurrence of the dysfunction for which they sought treatment (Allgeier & Allgeier, 2000). The outcome of these impressive results was a set of specific sex-therapy techniques for the treatment of sexual dysfunction and a general enthusiasm among the therapeutic community about the promise of sex therapy to alleviate client's sexual problems (Wiederman, 1998). Masters and Johnson's approach was quickly embraced by a large proportion of health professionals and for many years therapists used modified versions of the Masters and Johnson method (Allgeier & Allgeier, 2000).

Over time however, outcome studies from clinical practice revealed overall improvement in only about two-thirds of those who participated in the therapeutic approach outlined by Masters and Johnson (1970). The results from controlled outcome studies have all been more modest than the proportions of successfully treated couples reported by Masters and Johnson (Hawton, 1991; LoPiccolo & Stock, 1986; Wiederman, 1998). Many reasons have been proposed for the differences in results such as: clients motivation, with many of Masters and Johnson's clients having to travel long distances to participate in treatment; the vagueness of research methodology at the time, which may have led Masters and Johnson to not be sufficiently rigorous in their judgement about what constituted a successful outcome (Allgeier & Allgeier, 2000); and a shift in the focus of the factors believed to be relevant in causing sexual dysfunction. The belief of Masters and Johnson (1970) that performance anxiety was the main cause and maintaining factor in the development of female sexual dysfunction is not enough to explain some of the tenacious and self-destructive behaviours that many clients experience

(Charlton, 1997). A more complex view of human nature and sexual conflict is evident with research indicating that factors other than performance anxiety (such as: communication and relationship issues, medical problems and past negative sexual experiences) may need addressing if treatment is to be successful (Clayton, 2003; Rosen, Taylor, Leiblum, & Bachmann 1993; Tiefer, Hall, & Tavis, 2002). Therefore, whilst the Masters and Johnson approach to treatment still guides much of what occurs during sex therapy, the expansion of etiological factors, and the realization that anxiety may not be the major causal factor in the development of sexual dysfunction, particularly, for women, has led to an expansion and modification of their method.

Barlow (1986) extended this line of research. He proposed that for particularly women with sexual disorders, performance anxiety was not always the direct cause and maintaining factor of their dysfunction, and a more complex treatment approach was necessary. He hypothesized that anxiety interacts with cognitions to influence sexual functioning and that combining both behavioural and cognitive techniques into an intervention package would produce the most promising results. The cognitive-behavioural approach suggests that the amelioration of sexual difficulties results from actively challenging and modifying the troublesome beliefs, attitudes, and expectations underlying the dysfunction in sexual behaviour (Allgeier & Allgeier, 2000; Barlow, 1986; Wiederman, 1998).

Cranston-Cuebas and Barlow (1990) designed a number of experiments to test the relationship between anxiety, cognitions and sexual dysfunction. Their results indicated that for some women, anxiety appears to facilitate, rather than inhibit sexual response (Cranston-Cuebas & Barlow, 1990). Specifically they found that anxiety from performance demand resulted in increased sexual arousal for functional women, whereas such anxiety was problematic for sexually dysfunctional women (Allgeier & Allgeier, 2000; Cranston-Cuebas & Barlow, 1990). Accordingly, it seems that it may not be performance anxiety per se that is responsible for initiating or maintaining sexual difficulties in most cases, but rather the effects of anxiety on sexual functioning appear to be mediated primarily by attentional and cognitive processes (Rosen & Leiblum, 1995; Wiederman, 1998).

Treatment programs for FSD reported in the literature have not employed sufficiently rigorous methodology to draw conclusions about the relative effectiveness of treatment approaches for these disorders. Despite the popularity of the behavioural approach of Masters and Johnson (1970) and the cognitive-behavioural approach of Barlow (1986), there exists substantial doubt about the reported high success rates obtained and a number of major shortcomings are evident.

Firstly, there have been limited controlled studies of treatment efficacy in sex therapy, and a lack of empirical support for the various treatment approaches that have been tried with these disorders (Heiman, 2002; McCabe, 2001; Trudel et al., 2001). Few studies have included placebo or waiting list control groups and long-term follow up is also lacking in the majority of studies (Hawton, Catalan, Martin & Fagg, 1986; McCabe, 2001; O'Donohue, Dopke & Swingen, 1997). These limitations make it difficult to determine what specific effects the treatment has had compared to controls, the ability to predict which women will or will not benefit from therapy, and, the determination of long-term treatment gains.

Secondly, in studies reported to date (e.g., Hawton, 1991; Hawton & Catalan, 1986; McCabe, 2001), a large majority of women who present for sex therapy fail to show improvements in their sexual functioning. This indicates that whilst treatment is beneficial for some it is not for the majority and therefore perhaps we are going about treating women's sexual problems the wrong way. In line with this suggestion, debate in recent years has surrounded the way in which FSD is conceptualized with individual and relationship factors considered etiologically important in the development and maintenance of women's sexual problems. Treatment programs have failed to consider the influence of these factors and the relationship between sexual disorders and other aspects of emotional and interpersonal functioning. These factors have been described by women as being pertinent to their sexual functioning.

Medically Based Approaches

Almost all of the previous data on psychological treatments were generated in the mid 1980s when the focus on etiological predictors of FSD were predominately psychological. Due mainly to the success of sildenafil for men, a shift toward a more medicalised approach to the treatment of FSD and an emphasis on dismissing or overlooking psychological treatments has recently occurred (Heiman, 2002; McCarthy, 2004; Segraves & Balon, 2005; Tiefer, 2002). As the focus on the biomedical treatment of sexual dysfunction has increased, there has been correspondingly less interest in the experiences of the individuals and couples involved in the development and maintenance of the problem (Kleinplatz, 2003). Additionally, the use of medical treatments for FSD have found mixed results and in the majority of cases have been largely unsuccessful (Heiman, 2002; Segraves & Balon, 2005).

Only one clinical trial was located that met efficacy criteria and supported the use of sildenafil for the treatment of female sexual arousal disorder among a sample of 51 young pre-menopausal women (Caruso, Intelisano, Lupo, & Agnello, 2001). However, a published abstract of a well-controlled clinical trial using 583 estrogenised women showed no difference in levels of sexual arousal between a drug and placebo group

(Basson, McInnes, Smith, Hodgson, Spain, & Koppiker, 2000). The medical model of FSD tends to emphasize quantity, performance and objective measures, (e.g., frequency of orgasm, adequate lubrication) over quality of sex and measures of subjective experience (e.g., pleasure, satisfaction, intimacy), which women describe as being particularly relevant in their motivation to engage in sexual activity (Kleinplatz, 2003; McCarthy, 2004). Undoubtedly, pharmacotherapy may play a role in the treatment of a limited number of sexual disorders (particularly for men), but, at this time, the use of medication in the treatment of FSD has demonstrated limited efficacy (Clayton, 2003).

Psychologically Based Treatment of FSD

Sexual Desire Disorders. Loss of sexual desire has been considered the most difficult to treat of all the sexual dysfunctions (McCabe, 2001). Although different approaches have been tried on a case-by-case basis (Leiblum & Rosen, 1988), there are almost no controlled studies documenting an efficacious approach for hypoactive sexual desire or sexual aversion disorder (Heiman, 2002). Recently, a wait-list controlled study testing a cognitive-behavioural treatment for hypoactive sexual desire disorder reported slight improvements in overall cognitive, behavioural and marital functioning in women (Trudel et al., 2001). Effects of the program on sexual functioning, however, were modest with some reporting slight improvements in their symptoms, but, at three month and one year follow-up, most reported a return to pre-treatment levels.

Hawton et al. (1986), reported on the long-term outcome of couples who entered sex therapy 1-6 years earlier for a variety of sexual dysfunctions. A modified Masters and Johnson (1970) behavioural approach to treatment was used which incorporated sensate focus, education and communication exercises. Successful follow-up was possible with 106 of the original 140 couples. The authors found that recurrence of sexual difficulties was common and that long-term follow-up was extremely poor for most couples with 75% reporting recurrence of the presenting sexual problem (Hawton et al., 1986). Treatment gains were sustained in the remaining 25% with these couples originally seeking help for the male partner's erectile dysfunction and the female partner's vaginismus (Hawton et al., 1986). However, as this study did not include a control or comparison group one must be cautious about attributing changes to therapy alone.

One of the most significant findings of this study had to do with the significant deterioration in the long-term outcome of couples who sought treatment for the female partner's impaired sexual desire (Hawton et al., 1986; Heiman, 2002). At the beginning of the original study 52 women sought treatment for impaired sexual desire. At the end of treatment only 32 women remained in this group with a large proportion (N=22) having the problem resolved, at follow-up this had dropped to just one woman reporting long-term gains (Hawton et al., 1986). This finding is in support of results obtained by De Amicis, Goldberg, LoPiccolo, Friedman and Davies (1985) and also the current literature which suggests that sexual desire disorders are the most difficult to treat (McCabe, 2001; Trudel et al., 2001). Hawton et al., (1986) concluded that individual and relationship issues must be included during sex therapy as these factors are likely to have precipitated and maintained women's lack of sexual desire, and therefore may well be the reason behind their poor long-term prognosis. Whilst this study failed to have a control group it can be considered an improvement on past sex therapy studies. Long-term follow-up data was available, a large number of couples were studied, extensive pre and post test data were available and standardized measures were used (Heiman, 2002).

To date, there are no specific techniques for treating hypoactive sexual desire disorder among women, which may help explain why treatment outcome has been so poor. As it appears that treatment is beneficial immediately following therapy, yet high relapse rates are evident, therapy which focuses on helping the couple resolve general relationship issues, and on them making a commitment to using the sensate focus program as a means of gradually re-establishing a satisfactory sexual relationship may be more successful (Hawton et al., 1986; Trudel et al., 2001). Additionally, as high comorbidity rates are evident with most sexual disorders it may be that arousal and orgasmic disorders underlie sexual desire disorder in many instances (Clayton, 2003; Wincze & Carey, 2001).

Sexual Arousal Disorder. Female sexual arousal disorder is rarely identified as separate from either sexual desire or orgasmic disorders. There are therefore no controlled studies using psychologically based treatment that has focused specifically on this disorder independent of orgasmic or desire disorders (Heiman, 2002; O'Donohue, et al., 1997; Rosen & Leiblum, 1995).

Orgasmic Disorder. Female orgasmic disorder is generally regarded as the most prevalent sexual dysfunction among women, and evidence suggests that treatment for the disorder may depend on whether the woman suffers from primary (the woman has never experienced manual or partner induced orgasm) or secondary (infrequent or situational) orgasmic problems (Rosen & Leiblum, 1995; Spector & Carey, 1990). According to a review by O'Donohue et al. (1997), there is evidence to support an efficacious treatment approach for primary orgasmic disorder but not for secondary orgasmic problems (Heiman, 2000; Morokoff & LoPiccolo, 1986). Secondary orgasmic problems are believed to be more highly associated with emotional or psychiatric disorders (Kaplan, 1979), and relationship conflicts (McCabe & Delaney, 1992), and may therefore respond better to therapy which focuses on these areas combined with sex therapy (LoPiccolo & Stock, 1986). If the problem is

one of primary orgasmic dysfunction, a program of directed masturbation is most effective (LoPiccolo & Lobitz, 1973; Morokoff & LoPiccolo, 1986), and this technique is the only treatment for any of the female sexual dysfunctions that meets efficacy criteria (Heiman, 2002; O'Donohue et al., 1997). The Masters and Johnson (1970) program of sensate focus is often used alongside this approach to develop education and communication among couples in sex therapy.

O'Donohue et al. (1977) found that when comparing 577 controlled studies which used between six to 14 treatment sessions, directed masturbation was more effective than systematic desensitization, and directed masturbation plus sensate focus was more effective than sensate focus alone in the treatment of women with orgasmic dysfunction (Heiman & Meston, 1997). However, like other sexual dysfunction categories, most studies had significant weaknesses, such as a failure to describe the study design and the representativeness and recruitment of participants and therapists. Many differed significantly in their treatment format and most failed to provide standardized treatment manuals, which may have influenced the impact of treatment. Additionally, very few studies provided follow-up data to determine if treatment benefits were maintained (O'Donohue et al., 1997). Furthermore, controversy exists concerning the diagnosis of female orgasmic disorder. It has been suggested that due to the high co-occurrence of arousal and orgasm disorders, arousal deficits may underlie the lack of orgasm among many women.

Genital Pain Disorders. A review by O'Donohue et al., (1997) of effective treatments for sexual dysfunction, failed to find any controlled outcome studies on the effectiveness of treatment for both vaginismus and dyspareunia. The prevalence of both of the genital pain disorders appears quite rare. Within a 5 year study, Masters and Johnson (1970) treated only 29 women with vaginismus compared to 342 women who were treated for orgasmic disorders. This low prevalence may provide an explanation as to why there are no controlled outcome studies of this condition (Rosen & Leiblum, 1995). There are two uncontrolled studies and a number of case studies for vaginismus which all used a gradual dilation procedure with relatively high success rates (Heiman, 2002). There are limited reports of treatment success with dyspareunia and no controlled studies (Heiman, 2002). Cognitive-behavioural treatment which focuses on individual and relationship factors may be useful for vaginismus, whereas due to the influence of organic factors dyspareunia sufferers may benefit from an integrated medical and psychological approach (Heiman, 2002; Rosen & Leiblum, 1995).

Future Directions for Treatment of FSD

It appears from a review of the current literature, that when taking into account methodological problems, there may not be efficacious treatment approaches for FSD (Heiman, 2002; O'Donohue et al., 1997; Trudel et al., 2001). Despite directed masturbation being found to be efficacious for some women in the treatment of primary orgasmic dysfunction, the studies have not been replicated, long-term follow-up data were not available and controversy exists concerning the solitary diagnosis of this disorder. Therefore, while the studies provide some support for the efficacy of directed masturbation, the final determination of its effectiveness cannot be made.

Large gaps in the treatment literature for FSD are evident and substantial advances need to be made. Whilst results suggest that certain types of sexual dysfunctions are likely to respond better to psychological therapy than others, treatment has been largely ineffective. Most studies suffer from serious methodological limitations and systematic investigation has failed to take into account the emotional, interpersonal and relationship aspects of sexual exchange that many women describe as being pertinent to the development of their dysfunction. Additionally, dysfunctions are thought to commonly co-occur with the majority of women presenting with multiple dysfunctions, yet studies to date tend to focus on the treatment of one specific dysfunction (Clayton, 2003; McCarthy, 2004; O'Donohue et al., 1997; Rosen & Leiblum, 1995; Sawrer & Durlak, 1997). Treatment needs to incorporate all the factors that appear to impact on FSD and focus on the interactive effects of intergenerational, individual and relationship factors as well as the co-occurrence of dysfunctions. Novel treatment approaches need to be developed that engage women in the process of therapy and address the individual, psychological and relationship factors that contribute to their sexual dysfunction.

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Global Love: Nomadic Youth and their negotiation of intimate relationships

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Abstract

For many young Australian, British and New Zealand citizens, a period spent working and travelling overseas has become something of a rite of passage. While this has policy implications, what are less often considered are individual experiences, such as possible repercussions for relationship formation/management and identity construction. This paper examines historical precedence for this globe trotting trend, and provides the theoretical framework that will set the scene for the initial empirical results to be presented at the conference. It is particularly interested in young individuals who, either while travelling or interacting with someone who was travelling, began an intimate relationship with a person with a different nationality to their own. This group was of particular interest due to the current trend of 'working abroad' for an extended period, and also due to the supposed centrality of decision making in their lives. The study considers whether love is a suitable sole criterion for the 'choice' of an intimate partner, or whether location, career, distance, and national identity play a significant role. The paper draws on the work of leading theorists to identify four themes that have relevance to the study of international relationships: globalisation; love and emotion; identity; and individualisation. The soundness of these to the study of relationships is identified and future implications considered.

This work examines a selection of the potential issues which may arise when individuals amalgamate the practicalities of their daily life with the heady emotion of love. Specifically, the paper is interested in issues that are particularly relevant to young people who are involved in international relationships, and how these may be characteristic of the contemporary world we live in.

During the last century, transport, communication and technologies have altered the ways in which we live our lives and understand our world. Over recent decades, travel has increased in accessibility to Western middle class, educated individuals, and becomes more popular each passing year. As a result, migration has also continued to rise. In the financial year of 2003-2004, Australia recorded the number of permanent additions to its population as being 148,884, which was an 18.3% increase from the previous year. Europe was the largest contributor to this population increase, with 23.1% of all migrants originating from there. The United Kingdom was the single largest birthplace group with 16.1% of immigrants being born British. Of the number of immigrants, 117,975 were permanent additions under the Migration (non-Humanitarian Program), and 42,187 of these came under the family stream. In comparison to the previous year (2002-2003), permanent additions to Australia's population under the Migration Program increased by 20.3% (Australian Immigration Update, 2003-2004).

Of the more than 900,000 permanent residents that are currently eligible to acquire Australian citizenship, more than half are from just two countries – New Zealand and the United Kingdom. About 75% of those born overseas and eligible to apply have acquired citizenship. In 2003-2004 over 3.8 million temporary entry visas were granted (Australian Immigration Update, 2003-2004).

In a reciprocal fashion, the majority of Australian-born immigrants are emigrating to New Zealand, the United Kingdom or the United States. In 2002-03, 53.8 per cent of Australian-born emigrants went to one of these three countries (Australian Emigration Facts, 2005). The UK's Office for National Statistics (ONS), released statistics for UK immigration in 2004 that revealed that net immigration to Britain rose by nearly 50% from the previous year. The data, released 18/04/2005, showed that the rise in UK immigration was also matched by the highest recorded departure of British nationals leaving for a new life overseas. Clearly, travel and immigration between these countries is popular, and always increasing.

Of particular interest to this paper is the trend for young people to spend a period abroad – to the extent that it seems to have become a 'rite of passage'. For young people, 'gap year' breaks (most commonly taken before or after university, where individuals travel and/or work for a period overseas) and 'working holiday maker' schemes (normally reciprocal agreements between countries allowing young people aged 18-30 to work for a period in another country) are becoming ever more popular. While figures on the number of individuals taking a 'gap year' are not readily available, we do know that between 1983-84 and 1999-2000, the number of Working Holiday visa arrivals in Australia increased by 17.2 per cent a year on average (Harding & Webster, 2002). In the year 2000, there were 79,237 Working Holiday Maker visa arrivals into Australia (Harding & Webster, 2002). In the financial year 2003/2004, this number increased to 93,760 (Changes to Australian Working Holiday Visas Take Effect 1 July, 2006).

With such significant numbers of people living or spending an extended period of time in another country, it is inevitable that many of them will form intimate relationships with individuals of a different nationality to their

own. These international relationships are fantastic examples of just how different the experiences of intimate relationships in the modern day can be. They also serve as an ideal participant group for the study of how individuals in the contemporary world manage their intimate relationships amongst other important aspects of their lives, as for them, their continuation or non-continuation of the relationship can be a very conscious decision.

Of course, in such relationships, individuals face many potential issues and challenges, particularly if visa restrictions do not allow an indefinite stay in one partners' country. While confronted with the same challenges as relationships whose partners share the same nationality, couples with different nationalities must also make significant life decisions when contemplating the relationships future. Location particularly, is often problematic, and career options may be altered or limited by a move to another country. That is to say nothing of distance from family, friends and cultural norms. Decision making for such couples is paramount to their relationships future (or non-future as the case may be).

Such relatively recent cultural trends lead to consideration of potential issues that may arise as a result. This paper considered the work of leading theorists to arrive at four themes that have particular relevance; globalisation; love and emotion; identity; and individualisation.

Globalisation

“Travel is not the seeing of sights, but the change that goes on deep and permanent in the ideas of living” – Unknown.

Theorists have devised ‘globalisation’ as a descriptor of the recent social changes observable in the world. Globalisation became an issue of great significance in the 1990’s when expressions such as international and worldwide became more common. As Beyer (1994, p.14) reflects, globalisation theories differ from other longer established worldwide perceptions because they must take as their principal component of analysis the unmitigated globe. Globalisation by its nature encompasses a plurality of meanings and associations. Above all, however, as Robertson (1992, p.8) affirms, it represents the shrinking of our world, the accessibility of global multiplicities in the form of a single world system. For Giddens (1991, p.4), current day society is in part characterised by the fact that “the influence of distant happenings on proximate events, and on intimacies of the self, becomes more and more commonplace”.

As evidenced above, global movements are becoming increasingly popular. It is also apparent that with the increasing popularity of this ‘nomadic’ lifestyle, more and more individuals will find themselves in the situation of interest to this project. There are many issues that are particularly relevant to transnational or global relationships. Most palpable is the magnitude of decision making skills in their lives, and this, alongside the ways in which they manage their intimate relationships are of particular interest to this project. It should also be noted that at an individual level, a person may experience issues directly related to their global love. These may include a feeling of homelessness, where the individual no longer feels truly at home in either country; identity loss; difficulty in settling in to a new culture; and/or loneliness due to separation from family and friends.

In an international pairing, there is always one partner who is displaced from their homeland. This may influence a higher dependence on their partner to fulfil areas of their life that may otherwise be distributed amongst friends and family members. Hartin (1992, p.28) suggests that generally, a modern partner is expected to be the ideal companion for every occasion; “a wise and understanding confidant, an all-coping parent, an exciting sex partner, a comfort in trouble, an advisor in difficulties, a resource in a crisis, and a loyal sympathiser and supporter”. Surely this is never more applicable than in the case of an international couple, one member of whom has been stripped of the immediacy of their previous support network. Living in another country also has implications for an individual’s identity and sense of self, and this is considered in the next section.

Identity

An individual who has moved to a new country in order to continue an intimate relationship with a partner may constantly feel they are negotiating between the here and the there, what they consider to be home and what they consider to be abroad, their native culture and adopted culture. This may continue throughout their life, and may even be transferred to any children that result from the international partnership, as they may also feel like a part of their identity exists in the realms of other places. It is possible that the feeling that one belongs is the most powerful locator of them all, and that in contemporary society one may live for many decades in one country without ever feeling like they truly ‘belong’. The saying ‘home is where the heart is’ is timeless, and well noted. However, the meaning of the word ‘home’ is one of those much used and little reflected on words that many take for granted. National identities may be threatened, altered, or even reinforced by a time spent travelling the world or working abroad. Such issues are particularly relevant to international relationships, as the possible discontent of one partner living in an adopted country (whether short term or long term) could potentially have an adverse impact on the relationship.

It has been suggested that social identity formation develops most significantly between the ages of 16 to 26 (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997). With the majority of working holiday visas being granted to individuals under the age of 26 – as much as 70% of visas go to people aged 22 to 26 years (Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, 2006) – it is apparent that many young people will today be developing their social identity at least partly in country that is not their own. In as such, individuals run the risk of having their sense of self becoming multi-faceted and sometimes distorted. The implications of this can be quite severe, and many theorists including Giddens (1991), Beck (1992), Castells (1997) and Bauman (2002) have outlined potential difficulties in understanding the “self” for individuals living in this new world. Hall (2000, p.17) argues that identities in this new world can no longer be viewed as singular, as they can be easily constructed “across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions...they are constantly in the process of change and transformation”. If this is so, it can be said that one’s personal and social identity, that which distinguishes them as an individual, is constructed by choice rather than traditional ascription, and further, is adaptable over the life course and between different social settings.

The implications of this for young individuals who are taking up temporary residence in another country are potentially problematic – if who they are is a choice, they have the option of presenting an alternative identity in their new country. Indeed, their journey and resulting experiences is bound to have a material impact on their understanding of their sense of self, let alone potentially present a conscious decision to alter their identity. In line with this possibility, Hall and du Gay (1996) propose that contemporary identities are simply numerous positions which the individual is obliged to take up, all the while ‘knowing’ that they are representations and that representations are always constructed.

Assuming that such observations are credible, what could they entail for intimate relationships? As DeAngelis (1990, p.271) suggests, the reflexive project of the self expounds the idea that true intimacy with another person cannot be attained until one has achieved a sense of self, and a peace with that self. Through reflexive analysis, an individual may hope to know their own needs and desires. However, as Descartes (1986, p.98) indicates, one may only ever hope to know the *body* of another, since one has no access to another person’s consciousness. This becomes potentially even more problematic when two individuals from different countries and backgrounds come together in an intimate relationship, as any mutual understanding and shared experiences are inherently limited. There is also the possibility that a partner may feel disadvantaged in terms of only knowing one aspect of their partners identity, and in not being able to identify with their partners different background.

For an individual living in a foreign country, the potential loneliness and feeling of estrangement could lead to their notion of self and individuality being increasingly important. Indeed, a new identity created through self reflexivity may be created to suit their new life, and thus the way in which they present themselves to the world becomes a very individual project. Further, in regards to relationships, the changes that an individual living in a new country may undergo may mean that they are a different person, or present a different identity, to the one their partner originally fell in love with. While these issues may bring some couples closer together, it may cause problems for others.

Individualisation

Beck (1992, p.88) views the devaluing of the traditional standings of class, stratification and gender inequality of industrial society as encouraging people to manufacture themselves as the central focus of planning and operations. With regard to relationships, this has clear consequences. What is of interest about contemporary relationships is that they are apparently increasingly responsible for negotiating their own life patterns and experiences, with less guidance from traditional social structures such as religion. Individual values are now often dictated by their own personal experiences, rather than by traditional ascription. Thus, there has been an increasing value placed on personal happiness and satisfaction.

In the contemporary world, individuals must necessarily make decisions that have impact on their own lives and influence their future course of action. These decisions require planning and rationalisation, deliberation and engagement. As such, individuals living in this period of reflexive modernisation must negotiate their sense of self with social norms and life events, such as travel, work and relationships. As Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002, p.48) purport, a normal life story becomes a (seemingly) elective life, a risk biography, in the sense that everything (or nearly everything) is a “matter for decision”. Reflection on whether the right decision was made can be never ending and often painful. In reflecting on the possible implications of this on an individual’s private world, specifically on their intimate relationships, it is clear that there are potential emotional costs. If one struggles to think for themselves, it is evident that having two people thinking for themselves yet also in association could be problematic. Thus, life planning is central to the project and involves striking a balance between opportunity and risk.

Milgram (1992, p.13) suggests that the decisive adaptation to an over encumbered social environment is to completely disregard the requirements, happiness and demands that individuals do not classify as relevant to the satisfaction of their own personal needs. In line with this, as suggested by Furedi (2002, p.114), people of the

modern Western world are far more likely to make decisions that gratify their own needs first and others second and with reflection on this, many individuals feel that their idea of what should and should not be able to be taken for granted in their relationship has become indistinct.

Today, a good relationship is not so defined simply because it lasts. Rather, it is one that necessarily coexists with self-respect, individuality and provides room for growth. What's more, the relationship is more easily cancellable if for whatever reason either partner feels they are not getting satisfaction from the association. Giddens (1991) suggests that modern day relationships are tending towards a "pure relationship" model, in which a relationship exists only for its own sake, and is constantly monitored and valued for its worth. Just as the reflexive project of the self focuses on the question "how shall I live?" the "pure relationship" centres on reflections of "is everything all right, how am I?" (Giddens, 1991, p. 91). Clearly, reflexivity and contingency within intimate relationships cannot help but alter the traditional model of what a relationship is. Jamieson (2004, p.38) purports that today, emphasis has shifted from the married domestic couple to a "range of forms of emotionally intense dyadic relationship between two equal adults".

If contemporary relationships are contingent as many theorists suggest is the current trend, then international relationships must deal with the added pressure of deciding whether their relationship is 'worth' the inherent problems and issues that came with it. In a sense, individuals must decide whether the relationship they are in is valued enough to then negotiate and manage such issues as visas, location decisions, career changes and separation from family and friends. The question of whether love *is* 'all you need' becomes starkly relevant. In a world of disposable consumerism, fighting through difficult times to make a relationship work may appear adverse to contemporary values. The next section looks briefly at how love has changed over time, and considers how it is situated in the modern day West.

Love and Emotion

Historically, love has been described and analysed by multiple disciplines, but it has been largely ignored by sociology. The sociology of love and emotion is lagging behind its more pragmatic contemporaries such as post-modernism, political, environmental, and economical theories. Dismissed as belonging to the realm of pop-psychology and women's literature, existing sociological theories of love and emotion have failed to make any lasting impact. In particular, the nature of 'transnational' love in contemporary society and how people marry it with life decisions is ill-researched.

Psychologist Dossie Easton (1998) suggests that in contemporary middle class urban cultures, people no longer have to marry for survival, now that they have the option of getting divorced without the fear of themselves or their children starving, or the fear of the stigma of being single. This indicates that we are having relationships for very different reasons than our ancestors, and one of these reasons appears to be emotional gratification. The changes in attitude towards marriage may possibly have come about partly as a result of the changing nature of gendered roles in intimate relationships, around the time of the 1940's, when, during the war, women went out to work in the factories in lieu of their men.

We have come a long way from Parsons and Bales (1955) vision that there were two separate roles in each intimate relationship, the 'instrumental' role (normally male) and the 'expressive' role (normally female). The instrumental role was seen to be mans' domain, earning a living and providing for the family, whereas the female, in the expressive role, was the nurturer, located in the home. When the feminist movement irrevocably altered the general acceptance of these roles, there was a follow on effect on the nature of intimate relationships. Once there was no steadfast 'role' to be fulfilled by either sex, the necessity of marriage for marriage's sake became less pronounced and love being a requirement for a relationship increased in importance.

Of course, it is not specifically marriage relationships that are of interest in this paper. Young people no longer necessarily expect to get married, nor are they expected to follow any particular life plan. Today, individuals are staying in education and the parental home longer, having numerous intimate relationships, trying several career paths rather than having just one, and (importantly for this study) travelling the world in greater numbers and for longer periods.

The nature of intimate relationships is thus very different to previous centuries. In Western society, people are often now having intimate relationships to satisfy emotional needs rather than societal or even physical needs. Thus, these relationships must meet certain expectations, lest their usefulness expire. Bauman (2003, p.12) refers to this phenomenon as "liquid love", where like other consumer goods, "partnership is for consumption on the spot... [f]irst and foremost it is eminently disposable". The suggestion here is that modern day intimate relationships are contingent, and that they are maintained only for as long as they satisfy the individuals involved. This is perhaps what encourages the trend for nomadic youth to form short but intense intimate relationships with others; as such relationships are often not intended to be 'forever', rather, they are enjoyed for the experiences they can provide. As outlined, a "pure relationship", according to Giddens (1991), is theoretically what young people in the Western world are all tending towards. Giddens (1991, p.91) suggests that a pure relationship is characterised by reflexivity, openness and communication. The implication is that, over

time, belief in 'enduring love' will become almost farcical, and instead individuals will strive to have emotionally satisfying encounters with others, with no necessary expectation that it will last 'forever'.

What of the implications for nomadic youth who find love while abroad? The issues surely become intensified and more poignant. Even if they do find themselves in a relationship that provides mutual satisfaction and good emotional communication, they must then weigh up whether the relationship is worth sacrificing their home country for (alternatively, whether they can provide the support for their partner should they be the ones to move to a new country), what career options are available to them, whether they need to get married within two years to ensure that visa restrictions do not separate them...the list is endless, as each relationship will carry with it its own issues and problems. Issues of identity and individualisation have been highlighted in this paper, however clearly many other experiences and reactions may be relevant.

Conclusion

Traditionally, love was most commonly discovered, consummated, and lived in a particular community, possibly within a particular country, but rarely experienced transnationally (excluding examples of war brides). In the last 100 years however, with the advent of cheaper travel, global communication, and many other changes, international relationships are becoming ever more common. For such individuals, it is not simply a matter of falling in love – encounters with the above issues (and many more besides) may have a significant impact on their intimate relationship.

Little empirical research has been carried out in the area, and as outlined above, there are many significant issues that relate to such relationships that should be addressed. This paper has outlined several of the issues that require empirical attention in future studies. While they may not all be unique to international relationships, they are particularly relevant to such pairings. The paper has outlined the conceptual issues that imply that there is research that needs to be carried out. Further understanding is needed as the trend for increasing numbers of transnational relationships looks set to continue. Such research will have implications for government policies, migration issues, multiculturalism, and relationship trends to name a few.

This paper addresses issues that, are thus far not given due consideration in the literatures regarding contemporary intimate relationships, love, identity, the self and reflexivity, in the broader context of globalisation.

Authors Note

This paper forms a theoretical base for the empirical research that I will carry out as part of my doctorate. Semi-structured interviews with young individuals who are involved in international relationships began August 2006, during my first year at the University of York. It is intended to conduct 30-50 interviews both in the UK and in Australia.

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Attachment and Intimacy as Predictors of Relationship Satisfaction: The Test of a Mediation Model of Romantic Relationships in Young Adults

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Abstract

Research into romantic relationships has identified a direct link between an individual's attachment and relationship satisfaction. However it is also argued that young adults' developmental readiness for intimacy contributes to relationship satisfaction. More recently, it has been proposed that the effect of young adults' attachment on relationship satisfaction may be indirectly effected by their psychosocial development of intimacy . Therefore, the aim of the study was to investigate the degree to which psychosocial readiness for intimacy mediates the association between attachment and level of satisfaction in the early stages of young adults' romantic relationships. One-hundred and six young adults between the ages of 18 and 27 years ($M = 20.96$, $SD = 3.29$) involved in the early stages of a romantic relationship participated in the study. The development of intimacy was found to effect the association between the attachment dimensions of avoidance and anxiety on relationship satisfaction. As hypothesised, low levels of avoidance were associated with higher levels of intimacy, and in turn, higher levels of relationship satisfaction. Further in line with expectations, lower levels of anxiety were associated with higher levels of intimacy, and in turn, higher levels of relationship satisfaction.

The formation of romantic relationships is generally regarded as one of the major developmental tasks during young adulthood (Erikson, 1959, 1968; Levitz-Jones & Orlofsky, 1985). The development of intimate and satisfying relationships is deemed important in early adulthood, as these romantic experiences are thought to set the foundations for close personal relationships over the lifespan (Bartholomew, 1990; Cassidy, 2001; Collins & Feeney, 2000). It has been suggested that experiencing positive and satisfying romantic relationships in the formative years of young adulthood has profound effects on mental and physical health, and well-being (Hazan & Shaver, 1994; Reis & Patrick, 1996; Simpson, 1987, 1990).

As a means of understanding these early romantic relationships, researchers have turned to a wide variety of social psychological and developmental perspectives. In particular, attachment theory and Erikson's (1968) epigenetic model of psychosocial development have been used as theoretical frameworks in investigating romantic relationships.

Attachment Theory and Psychosocial Development – Parallels and Distinctions

Based in part on early familial attachment relationships between child and caregiver (e.g., Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978), these early relationships are thought to influence social functioning in adulthood. Consequently attachment theory has been applied to the study of romantic relationships and has become one of the most widely used theories in the study of adult close personal relationships (e.g., Collins & Read, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

Attachment has conceptualised in the adult literature as a cognitive-behavioural system comprising two complementary mental representations (i.e. internal working models) concerned with the evaluation of relational avoidance and anxiety (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998; Campbell, Simpson, & Kashy, 2005; Feeney, Noller, & Callan, 1994; Fraley & Waller, 1998). Mental representations of relational avoidance are thought to arise as a result of a relationship history characterised by an attachment partner's constant rejection and suppression of emotions and needs (e.g., Hazan & Shaver, 1994). Therefore, individuals that are avoidant tend to harbour a discomfort with closeness and intimacy, regard relationships as secondary to other life tasks (e.g. work, sport), engage in the suppression of emotions, and lack the confidence to rely on others for the fulfilment of emotional and instrumental needs (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Brennan et al., 1998; Collins & Read, 1990; Feeney et al., 1994; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). Alternatively, mental representations of relational anxiety result from past relationship experiences characterised by the inept or inconsistent responsiveness of a partner in the fulfilment of attachment needs, rendering the individual unsure (i.e., anxious) regarding the reliability of their romantic partner. Consequently, individuals characterised by anxiety have an excessive need for approval, fear abandonment, and yearn for high levels of intimacy (Brennan et al., 1998; Campbell et al., 2005; Collins & Read, 1990; Simpson, 1987, 1990). Within this dimensional space, individuals scoring low on both attachment avoidance and anxiety are regarded as secure and engage in relationships often characterised by closeness, intimacy and trust, and high levels of relationship satisfaction (Brennan et al., 1998; Campbell et al., 2005; Collins & Read, 1990; Simpson, 1987, 1990).

Like attachment theory, Erikson's (1968) model of psychosocial development placed emphasis on the importance of developing adaptive mature relationships, with the readiness for intimacy stage regarded as a primary developmental phase in young adulthood (Erikson, 1959, 1963, 1968). Successful resolution of this phase (characterised by willingness to share oneself with another while maintaining autonomy) results in an individual developing a strong sense of self and the capacity to engage in emotional closeness and self-disclosure with a romantic partner (Hamachek, 1990; Orlofsky, 1978; Slater, 2003). It is therefore not surprising that research examining young adults' readiness for intimacy has been found to be associated with reports of greater relationship satisfaction than individuals whose progress towards achieving this task has been mitigated (Sanderson & Cantor, 1995, 1997; Sanderson & Evans, 2001).

It is clear that both theories make relevant and complementary predictions regarding the underlying processes that lead to the formation of satisfying relationships in early adulthood. However, the theories are distinctive in that attachment theory places importance on the influence of interpersonal relations (i.e., the need to turn to significant others for care, comfort and support during times of distress) while Erikson's psychosocial epigenetic view emphasises ego development and the antecedents and consequences of achieving a coherent sense of identity (Fonagy, 1999). On the basis of this distinction, researchers have generally resisted empirically demonstrating how links between developmentally focused intra-individual processes and interpersonal processes may provide a more comprehensive understanding of romantic relationships in young adulthood.

Nevertheless, researchers have continued to theorise and posit that the attachment representations young adults hold about relationships guide their expectations, feelings, emotion regulation (Bretherton & Munholland, 1999) and readiness for mature intimate relationships (Allen & Land, 1999; Cassidy, 1999; Doi & Thelen, 1993; Sroufe, 2002). It therefore seems plausible that the impact of attachment mental representations on young people's relationship satisfaction may be mediated, at least partially, by young adult's psychological readiness to engage in intimacy. Therefore, the aim of the study was to investigate whether the psychosocial development of intimacy would mediate the role of attachment on young adults' romantic relationship satisfaction. Firstly, it was hypothesised that the effect of attachment on relationship satisfaction would be mediated by intimacy. More specifically, it was argued that young adults characterised by low avoidance and/or low anxiety would report higher levels of intimacy, and in turn, higher levels of intimacy would result in greater relationship satisfaction. This hypothesised mediation model is illustrated in Figure 1.

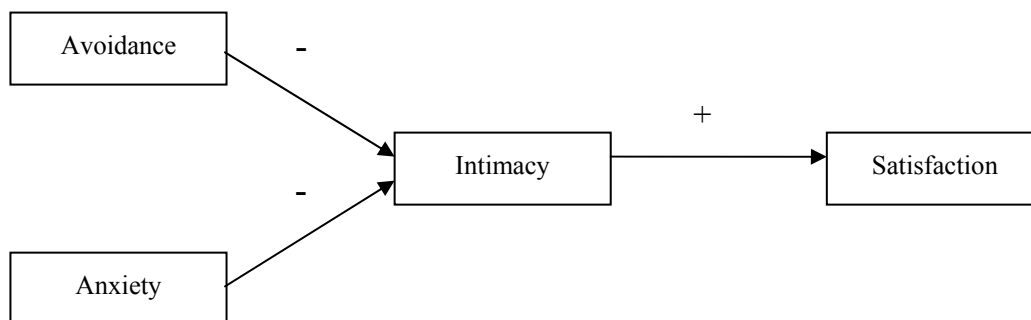


Figure 1. Hypothesised mediation model of young adult romantic relationships.

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited across two Melbourne universities, local church groups, and a major Melbourne metropolitan shopping centre. The inclusion criteria required participants to be between the ages of 18 and 27 years, and to currently be in a romantic relationship (of between 6 and 12 months in duration). The resulting sample consisted of 120 participants (80% female), aged between 18 and 27 years ($M = 20.96$, $SD = 2.39$) of an average romantic relationship length of 9.62 months. The majority of study participants (95.2%) were involved in heterosexual relationships.

Materials

The questionnaire comprised of four sections assessing demographic details, attachment, psychosocial development of intimacy and relationship satisfaction.

Demographic details. Information regarding participants' background (i.e., age, gender, ethnicity, education level, occupation, and sexual partner preference) was collected using a 20-item measure designed for the study.

Attachment. The Experiences in Close Relationships Scale (ECR) was utilised to measure adult romantic attachment (Brennan et al., 1998). The scale consisted of 36 items measured on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (I strongly disagree) to 7 (I strongly agree) with possible scores ranging from 36 to 252. The scale consisted of two subscales with 18 items measuring the attachment dimension of avoidance and 18 items measuring anxiety. Strong internal consistency for both subscales have been reported with values of $\alpha = .94$ for the avoidance subscale, and $\alpha = .91$ for the anxiety subscale (Brennan et al., 1998).

Psychosocial development of intimacy. Intimacy was measured using the intimacy subscale from the Erikson Psychosocial Stage Inventory (EPSI) (Rosenthal, Gurney, & Moore, 1981). The subscale consisted of 12 items; six items reflected successful resolution of the stage of intimacy and six items reflected unsuccessful resolution. Responses were rated along a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (hardly ever true) to 5 (almost always true). Scores are aggregated to form an overall score, which range from 12 to 60, with higher scores indicating higher levels of intimacy. The subscale has been reported as having adequate internal consistency ($\alpha = .73$; Rosenthal et al., 1981).

Relationship satisfaction. Participants' satisfaction with their current romantic partner was measured using the Relationship Satisfaction Index (SI) (Simpson, 1987). The index consist of 11 items, which measure 11 aspects of romantic relationships such as financial resources, physical attractiveness, emotional support, reliability/trustworthiness, attitude similarities, kindness and understanding, attractiveness and intimacy. These items are rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (very unsatisfactory) to 7 (very satisfactory). These 11 items are then aggregated to form an overall score ranging from 11 to 77, with higher scores representative of greater satisfaction with a romantic partner. Strong internal consistency for the index has been reported with $\alpha = .85$ (Simpson, 1987).

Procedure

Potential participants across the different recruitment sites were given a brief presentation outlining the aims and details of the study during either residential university college functions, local church group activity evenings or retail staff training days. Volunteering participants were provided with an introductory letter that further outlined the details of the study and the URL address for the online study. The online questionnaire took approximately 40 minutes to complete.

Results

Preliminary data screening and treatment

All cases were screened for missing values, univariate and multivariate normality, outliers, homoscedasticity and multicollinearity. Seven cases had more than 40% missing data, while 10 univariate outliers were detected. Therefore, 14 cases were deleted from the original sample leaving 106 valid cases. Assumptions of univariate and multivariate normality were met and correlational analyses did not reveal multicollinearity. The bivariate correlations, means and standard deviations for all variables included in the mediation analysis are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Bivariate Correlations and Scale Reliabilities for Measures: Means and Standard Deviations for Measured Variables

	<i>Avoidance</i>	<i>Anxiety</i>	<i>Intimacy</i>	<i>Satisfaction</i>
Avoidance	.93	.06	-.72**	-.38**
Anxiety		.89	-.29**	-.26**
Intimacy			.84	.33**
Satisfaction				.86
<i>M (SD)</i>	2.56 (1.02)	3.65 (0.96)	47.47 (7.29)	66.28 (7.37)

Note. $N = 106$. Cronbach's alpha is presented on the diagonal; Avoidance = Experiences in Close Relationships Avoidance scale; Anxiety = Experiences in Close Relationships Anxiety scale; Intimacy = Erikson Psychosocial Stage Inventory Intimacy scale; Satisfaction = Satisfaction Index.

** $p < .01$

Tests of mediation were conducted using Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM) (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Shrout & Bolger, 2002) and the Sobel test (Frazier, Barron & Tix, 2004; Preacher & Hayes, 2004) on significant IV-MV and MV-DV standardised regression coefficients. As can be seen in Table 2, Sobel tests on the

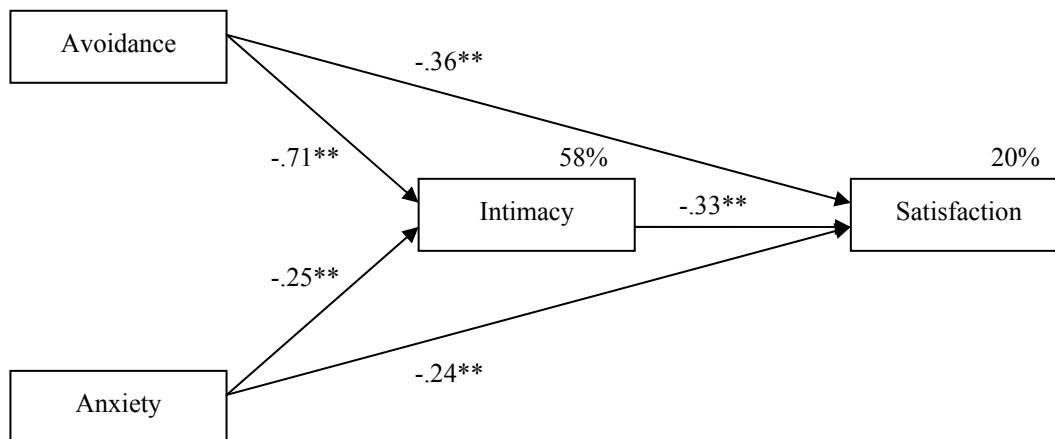
mediating effect of intimacy on attachment and relationship satisfaction resulted in partial mediation rather than full mediation (MacKinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West, & Sheets, 2002). Hence, while the inclusion of the mediator (i.e., psychosocial development of intimacy) resulted in a significant reduction in the direct effects of attachment avoidance and anxiety on relationship satisfaction (see Table 2, columns τ and τ') the direct effects of attachment remained significant. Attachment avoidance and anxiety were thus found to have a direct and indirect effect on relationship satisfaction. These findings are further illustrated in Figure 2 where the direct effects of attachment and intimacy account for 20% of the variance in relationship satisfaction. Furthermore, Figure 2 illustrates that attachment avoidance and anxiety were significantly negatively related to intimacy and accounted for 58.2% of the variance in young adults' readiness for intimate romantic relationships.

Table 2
Test of Mediation on Significant Standardised Regression Paths

IV	MV	DV	α	β	τ	τ'	Mediation Results		
							Sobel Test	95% LL CI	95% UL CI
Avoidance	Int	Sat	-.71	.33	-.36	-.32	-2.65**	-0.99	-0.75
Anxiety	Int	Sat	-.25	.33	-.24	-.20	-2.15*	-0.75	-0.49

Note. $N = 103$. Int = Erikson Psychosocial Stage Inventory Intimacy scale; Sat = Satisfaction Index; α = beta weight of IV to MV (MV regressed on to IV); β = beta weight from MV to DV controlling for IV, τ = IV to DV without MV, τ' = IV to DV with MV; Sobel Test = significance test of $\alpha \times \beta$; LL CI = lower limit 95% confidence interval; UL CI = upper limit 95% confidence interval

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$



Note: For clarity of interpretation error terms not indicated.

** $p < .01$

Figure 2. Mediation model of young adult romantic relationships.

Discussion

The aim of the study was to investigate whether the psychosocial development of intimacy would mediate the role of attachment on young adults' romantic relationship satisfaction. Specifically, it was expected that young adults characterised by low scores on attachment avoidance and anxiety would report high levels of intimacy, and in turn greater relationship satisfaction. While full mediation did not result, the hypothesis was partially supported with avoidance and anxiety having a direct and indirect effect on relationship satisfaction through the psychosocial development of intimacy. Furthermore, the hypothesis that lower reported levels of attachment avoidance and anxiety would be associated with higher levels of intimacy and greater relationship satisfaction was supported.

The finding of an indirect effect supports the argument that the developmental process of intimacy does play a role, along with attachment in yielding satisfying romantic relationships (Cassidy, 1999, 2001; Feeney, 1999; Sanderson & Evans, 2001; Scharf, Maysel, & Kivenson-Baron, 2004). Both processes are closely linked to essential human needs for comfort, care and support, and when developed adaptively result in people

experiencing romantic relationships in largely positive terms (Sanderson & Evans, 2001). This finding supports Cassidy's (2001) claim that attachment creates abilities required to resolve the intimacy stage, and consequently effects romantic relationship quality. In line with the strong relationship between attachment avoidance and intimacy reported in this study, Doi and Thelen (1993) found avoidance to be an important predictor in how young adults negotiate the developmental stage of intimacy. Furthermore, Doi and Thelen suggest that attachment avoidance may be equivalent to a 'fear of intimacy' (withdrawal and isolation), which also may explain the strong negative relationship between attachment avoidance and intimacy. On this basis it is important that future research investigate the relationship between attachment and intimacy development, with longitudinal studies necessary in order to identify if causation truly exists between the intra-individual and interpersonal processes.

Cassidy (2001) for instance argues that children develop an understanding of intimacy throughout their development suggesting that the task of intimacy may not be causally related to attachment, but develop in parallel to attachment processes throughout childhood and into young adulthood where children's learned abilities for closeness in relationships are then transferred from parents to peers (Hazan & Shaver, 1994). It may therefore also be necessary to explore the interaction between the processes of attachment and the psychosocial development of intimacy in future research.

It was found that less attachment-related avoidance and anxiety resulted in greater relationship satisfaction. This was consistent with the vast amount of research conducted in the area (Collins & Feeney, 2000; Collins & Read, 1990; Creasey & Hesson-McInnis, 2001; Feeney, 1999; Hazan & Shaver, 1994; Simpson, 1987, 1990). This suggests that positive attachment experiences result in cognitive representations that romantic relationships are beneficial and valuable. The resulting attachment behaviours (i.e. seeking intimacy, providing care and support) facilitate the formation of rewarding and satisfying romantic relationships that are characterised by closeness and trust. Therefore, the fulfilment of needs for comfort, care and support in romantic relationships results in evaluations of relationships as satisfying (Hazan & Shaver, 1994).

The observation that higher intimacy scores predict greater levels of relationship satisfaction was consistent with research conducted by Sanderson and Cantor (1995, 1997) and Sanderson and Evans (2001) on young adult dating couples. Successful negotiation of the intimacy stage renders individuals more mentally and emotionally ready to commit themselves to romantic relationships characterised by a higher degree of intimate behaviour, closeness, and mutual trust. In turn, people are more ready to seek intimacy and create opportunities to engage in open communication and interdependence. Partners' needs for comfort and support will be more readily fulfilled, resulting in satisfying and enduring romantic relationships (Sanderson & Cantor; Sanderson & Evans).

Lower scores on the avoidance and anxiety dimensions were shown to result in a greater developed readiness for intimacy, which is consistent with the claims of Scharf et al. (2004) and Simpson (1987, 1990). Therefore, young adults who have developed positive representations of romantic relationships through positive attachment experiences are more capable of closeness, trust, care and support.

Although this research provides evidence for the role of attachment and intimacy in predicting relationship satisfaction, a possible limitation to the generalisability of findings is the predominantly female representation in the sample (79.6%). Previous research has shown that the predictors of relationship satisfaction often differ as a function of gender. Typically, women's satisfaction is more influenced by patterns of relationship interaction than men's. For example, research has contended that women's satisfaction is positively associated with the amount of relationship talk in which their partner engages; however, this association is not observed in males (Sanderson & Evans, 2001). Therefore a more gender balance sample would facilitate the present mediation model in being explored for gender differences across relational and intra-individual processes associated with relationship satisfaction.

The present study provides an initial empirical demonstration of how the integration of the relational and intra-individual processes of attachment and readiness for intimacy are likely to yield a more detailed understanding of the negotiation and functioning of romantic relationships in young adulthood. It is hoped that future research will more clearly uncover the unique and shared contributions that these processes play in sustaining satisfying romantic relationships not only in young adulthood, but across the lifespan.

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Openness and Secrecy in Adoptive Families and Possible Effects on the Interpersonal Relationships of Adult Adoptees

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Abstract

The aim of the current study was to investigate the possible impact that secrecy within adoptive families can have on the interpersonal relationships of adult adoptees. As part of a larger study, 144 adoptees completed a variety of relationship measures and questionnaires tapping openness/secrecy and parental characteristics within the adoptive families. Those whose adoptive families were more open and honest tended to be closer to their adoptive parents and report that their parents had been more caring and less controlling. In contrast, those whose adoptive families were more secretive scored higher on measures of social and family loneliness, avoidant and anxious attachment, and risk in intimacy. Fifty-seven of the participants were interviewed further about their adoptive experiences and interpersonal relationships. Thematic analysis indicated that openness in adoptive families was helpful in providing adoptees with a model for their own interpersonal relationships and also in assisting adoptees with identity, search, and reunion issues. Conversely, secrecy in adoptive families often led to difficulties in relationships with the adoptive family and general identity and trust issues. Secrecy also seemed to impact negatively on search and reunion experiences. The implications of these findings for adoption practice and counselling will be discussed.

From approximately the 1920s through to the 1970s, adoption in Australia and most other western countries occurred in a closed system where adoption records were kept secret (Swain, 1992). The original birth certificate was replaced with an amended birth certificate containing the names of the adoptive parents (Brodzinsky, 2005) and adoption was seen as “exactly like building a family biologically” (Hartman, 1993, p. 87). The closed adoption system was challenged in the 70s and there were moves in many countries for adoption records to be opened and for various types of open adoption to be explored (Brodzinsky, 2005). In Australia, adoption legislation was amended in the early 1990s, allowing adoptees over the age of 18 and their birthmothers to have access to identifying information. However, some states also have legislation in place whereby either party can place a veto on the information being released. Thus, secrecy can still persist in spite of legislative changes.

Those who adopted a child in the closed adoption era may have little or no information they can pass on to their adopted child regarding his or her biological heritage. However, the way in which adoptive parents manage the topic of adoption (e.g., when to tell children they are adopted, what information to provide, how to handle questions that arise), may have an effect on the adoptee’s later adjustment. Indeed, Brodzinsky (2005) argues that it is not whether or not the adoption is closed or open that matters, but the extent to which adoptive parents are open with their children regardless of the information they have available. Wrobel, Kohler, Grotevant, and McRoy (2003) have recently proposed the Family Adoption Communication (FAC) Model, which outlines the different disclosure decisions that adoptive parents make at various stages of their child’s development. At any stage, parents can share all known information while actively seeking more, share all of the information they know but without actively seeking more, share some information but not all, or withhold whatever information they know. While this model is useful in describing the different decisions adoptive parents make regarding the information they reveal or withhold at different stages, it does not look more specifically at the actual impact that openness or secrecy can have on the adoptee.

Karpel (1980) argued that family secrets in general have consequences at various levels: (a) informational (e.g., distortion or deception); (b) emotional (e.g., anxiety, fear, or confusion); relational (e.g., the violation of trust); and (d) practical (e.g., the danger of disclosure). These consequences can also be applied to secrecy in adoption. While many researchers have looked at the effects of secrecy at the informational and emotional levels, few empirical studies have looked specifically at the effect of secrecy on interpersonal relationships. In keeping with Karpel’s analysis, Schooler and Norris (2002) note that secrecy can undermine trust and intimacy within the adoptive family. Verrier (1993) has also observed that relationship difficulties are the main reasons for an adoptee to seek counselling. While there could be many causes of such difficulties, it is unclear what impact secrecy within the adoptive family may have on interpersonal relationships outside of the family.

The aim of the current study was to examine the possible impact that secrecy within adoptive families can have on the interpersonal relationships of adult adoptees. It was predicted that greater secrecy in adoptive

families would be associated with poorer relationships between the adoptee and his or her adoptive parents (i.e., less closeness, less perceived parental care, higher perceived parental control, and greater family loneliness). We also explored the relationship between secrecy and numerous other interpersonal variables (i.e., loneliness; attachment style; risk in intimacy; and satisfaction, commitment, and trust in close relationships).

Method

Participants

Participants at Time 1 included 144 adult adoptees who were part of a larger study comparing adoptees and non-adoptees on various measures. All adoptees were born in Australia, had Anglo-Australian backgrounds, and were adopted by non-relatives within the first two years after birth. Ages ranged from 18 to 66, with a mean age of 39.21 years. Most of the participants were female (76.1%), were in a marital or de facto relationship (62%), and had completed some additional education after high school (79%). Participants completed a second questionnaire approximately six months later (Time 2). There was a very low attrition rate, with 138 adoptees (95.83%) participating at Time 2. Fifty-seven adoptees (43 females and 14 males) also took part in interviews at Time 3. Ages for the interview group ranged from 18 to 63, with a mean age of 38.23 years. Just over half were in a marital or de facto relationship (54.4%) and most had completed some education beyond high school (73.7%).

Measures

At Time 1, participants completed demographic questions and items relating to their adoption, search, and reunion experiences. Of particular relevance to the current study was an item measuring the adoptive family's attitude toward discussing the topic of adoption. Response options included: Open and honest discussion (my questions were answered and discussion was encouraged); on a 'need to know' basis (my questions were answered but discussion was not encouraged); taboo subject (discussion seemed to make family members uncomfortable and was discouraged); or "I was given lies and misinformation". As some participants checked both the "taboo" and "lies and misinformation" categories, these categories were combined into a secrecy category for the analyses. Thus, participants' responses were coded as 1 (*open and honest*), 2 (*need to know*), or 3 (*secrecy*). Participants also rated their current emotional closeness to each of their adoptive parents on a scale from 1 (*extremely distant*) to 6 (*extremely close*). A number of standardised measures were also completed, with the Attachment Style Questionnaire (ASQ; Feeney, Noller, & Hanrahan, 1994) and the Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI; Parker, Tupling, & Brown, 1979) being relevant for the current study. The ASQ consists of 40 items that are rated on a scale from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 6 (*totally agree*). The two-factor solution was used to derive measures of avoidant attachment (16 items) and anxious attachment (13 items). The PBI consists of 25 items tapping the extent to which parents exhibited caring or overprotective (controlling) attitudes and behaviours while the participant was growing up. Each of the adoptive parents was rated separately, thus yielding four subscores (i.e., mother care and overprotection and father care and overprotection).

At Time 2, participants again completed the ASQ and also responded to various measures of interpersonal relationships. Measures of relevance to the current study included the Risk in Intimacy Inventory (RII; Pilkington & Richardson, 1988); the social, family, and romantic loneliness subscales from the Social and Emotional Loneliness Scale for Adults (SELSA; DiTommaso & Spinner, 1993); the relationship satisfaction and commitment subscales from the Investment Model Scale (IMS; Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998); and the Trust in Close Relationships Scale – Short Version (TS) adapted by Boon and Holmes (1992).

Fifty-seven participants were interviewed at Time 3 regarding their adoption, search, and reunion experiences. Each participant was interviewed by a same-sex researcher who followed a semi-structured interview protocol. The interview was specifically designed to gain further information regarding participants' relationships with adoptive parents, friends, romantic partners, and birth relatives (for those who had had reunions). Of most interest to the current study was the interview material regarding the degree of openness or secrecy within the adoptive family and the possible impact of those communication patterns on the interpersonal relationships of adult adoptees.

Procedure

Adoptees were recruited from various sources, including advertisements, university newsletters, flyers left in doctors' and counsellors' waiting rooms, adoption support groups, psychology classes, and networks available to the researchers. Inclusion criteria were that they had to be Anglo-Australian and adopted by non-relatives within two years of their birth. At Time 1, participants were sent a package including a cover letter, consent form, questionnaire, and a reply-paid envelope. Participants were contacted again approximately six months later (Time 2) to complete the follow-up questionnaire. No incentives were offered for participation at Time 1, but participants received either movie vouchers or \$20 if they completed the follow-up questionnaire at Time 2.

Fifty-seven of the participants were also invited to take part in an interview (Time 3). These participants were chosen to reflect a wide variety of adoption, search, and reunion experiences (including both searchers and non-searchers).

Coding of Interview Transcripts

As part of the larger study, a thematic analysis similar to the one described by Joffey and Yardley (2004) was conducted in order to investigate the extent to which adoption experiences might impact on the interpersonal relationships of adult adoptees. The first and second authors first read 15 of the transcripts and independently noted themes that were relevant to this overall research question. Themes were organised under higher-order categories where relevant. The two coders then reached consensus on the coding labels to be used for the remainder of the analysis and a coding manual was developed. The second author extracted quotes from all transcripts that pertained to the main research question and coded all of these quotes using the established coding categories. The first author then independently coded a random selection of 50% of the quotes and the two coders discussed and resolved any discrepancies. As a result of these discussions, some category labels and definitions in the coding manual were modified. Consensus was reached on the final codes and categories. For the current paper, we will focus on the categories that related specifically to the possible impact that openness or secrecy within the adoptive family can have on the interpersonal relationships of adult adoptees.

Results

Quantitative Findings

For the current study, the ASQ was the only measure completed at both Time 1 and Time 2. Statistically significant Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients indicated that greater secrecy in adoptive families was associated with less emotional closeness to adoptive mother ($r = -.50$) and father ($r = -.46$), less perceived parental care from mother ($r = -.51$) and father ($r = -.48$), greater perceived overprotection or control from mother ($r = .38$) and father ($r = .34$), and greater family loneliness ($r = .27$). With regard to other interpersonal relationships, secrecy within adoptive families was significantly associated with greater social loneliness ($r = .31$), risk in intimacy ($r = .28$), avoidant attachment (r 's = .27 at Time 1 and Time 2), and anxious attachment ($r = .22$ at Time 1 and .21 at Time 2). Secrecy was not significantly correlated with romantic loneliness, trust in close relationships, relationship satisfaction, or relationship commitment. As age correlated significantly with secrecy ($r = .23$), partial correlations were also computed controlling for age. The same pattern of results was found, except that the correlation between openness and anxious attachment at Time 1 was no longer significant.

Qualitative Findings Regarding the Impact of Openness

Openness within adoptive families helped adoptees in their (a) resolution of adoption-related issues such as identity and belonging, (b) search and reunion experiences, and (c) relationships with others.

Resolution of adoption-related issues. Many participants appreciated the fact that their adoptive parents had told them about the adoption when they were quite young, and this often helped the adoptee's sense of identity and belonging. For example, some adoptees indicated that being told early in life meant that adoption was not an issue, they always felt that they belonged, and that there was no sense of confusion later. A 30-year-old male participant also noted how his adoptive parents' openness helped him to deal with adoption-related issues while growing up. Some of the other children at school had teased him for being adopted, and he was able to discuss it with his parents and together come up with a solution to deal with the teasing. As he noted, "I don't think adoption itself is more or less, better or worse than biological sort of things. I think the way it's explained and managed and described is what has impact on people".

Search and reunion experiences. While many adoptees noted that their adoptive parents had been very supportive throughout their search and reunion experiences, some also noted how their parents' openness had particularly impacted positively on their searches and reunions. For example, a 39-year-old female adoptee noted that the positive outcome of her reunion had a lot to do with the fact that she had never had anything about the adoption hidden from her. A 36-year-old male also noted that he never had any reservations about searching for his biological parents because everything about his adoption had always been out in the open. Another male participant had such an open relationship with his adoptive parents that he was happy for them to read letters that he had sent to, and received from, his birthmother.

Relationships with others. Some participants noted that their adoptive parents had been good role models of openness and that this enabled the adoptees to be open in their own relationships. For example, a 31-year-old male said that his romantic partners always knew that he was adopted: "We were always pretty open about talking about things. I suppose that's just the way that ... because I grew up that way. It certainly helped in a relationship to be able to sit down and say, 'Hey, I've got a problem with this, can we work things out?'".

Qualitative Findings Regarding the Impact of Secrecy

Conversely, secrecy and/or lies or misinformation within adoptive families seemed to impact negatively on the adoptee's (a) relationships with adoptive parents, (b) identity, search, and reunion experiences, and (c) relationships with other people.

Relationships with adoptive parents. A number of adoptees noted how their adoptive parents' unwillingness to openly discuss adoption impacted negatively on their relationship with them. Adoptees who found out later in life that they were adopted were especially likely to experience a loss of trust or sense of betrayal. For example, one woman said that the late disclosure of her adoptive status broke the trust with her adoptive parents. Another felt very cheated and that she had been lied to all her life. In some cases, participants mentioned actual lies they had been told by adoptive parents. For example, one woman found out she was adopted via an anonymous telegram, but her adoptive mother denied it. Both adoptive parents had numerous opportunities after that when they could have told her the truth, but they both died still holding onto their secret.

Identity, search, and reunion experiences. Adoptive parents' secrecy regarding adoption can also negatively affect an adoptee's exploration of identity issues and their search and reunion experiences. In keeping the adoption a secret, or making it a taboo topic, some adoptive parents made it difficult for their adopted children to find out more about their backgrounds. For example, when one adoptee was almost 40, her adoptive mother revealed that she had always known the birthmother's name, where she lived, and the circumstances of the adoption. She had gone to great lengths to keep this information secret, even to the point of using razor blades to cut the birthmother's name out of the adoption papers. Another woman suspected that her adoptive mother knew more than she was saying. However, every time the adoptee broaches the subject, her adoptive mother "cries and she gets all hysterical. So it's just a no go zone". Not only does secrecy affect whether or not adoptees find out certain facts about their own identities or backgrounds, but it can also affect the way in which search and reunion experiences progress. For example, some adoptees also engage in secrecy by not telling their adoptive parents of their search and/or reunion. While there are different reasons for such secrecy (e.g., not wanting to hurt the adoptive parents), some adoptees noted that they were secretive because of the secrecy of their adoptive parents. As one woman explained, "I didn't feel I could tell them ... because I, when I confronted them about, about being adopted, they were in complete denial ... I didn't tell them because, you know, it would just upset them ... But part of me also goes, 'well why should I talk to you about it, you know, because you know, you never spoke to me about it'".

Relationships with other people. Some participants noted that their adoptive parents told them not to talk about the adoption to others, thereby closing the adoptee off from other possible sources of support. Moreover, some adoptees noted that the lack of trust they felt towards their adoptive parents also affected trust in other areas. One participant noted that she finds it hard to believe what others say. Another woman noted that secrecy had affected trust in her romantic relationships: "... there's definitely a trust issue with it, like in my life I can see that very much. Like I've never gotten married, I've never sort of had a lot of key milestone markers that most people have had, and I don't mind that so much, but I just find that it's hard to trust people". However, secrecy within the adoptive family does not always translate into trust problems in other areas. One adoptee noted that the "the total cone of silence" surrounding her adoption had actually prompted her to be the opposite in her own relationships, perhaps even being too open at times.

Discussion

As predicted, greater secrecy in adoptive families was associated with poorer relationships with adoptive parents (i.e., less emotional closeness and perceived parental care, but greater perceived parental control and family loneliness). One reason for this is that secrecy on the part of adoptive parents breaks trust and intimacy (e.g., Schooler & Norris, 2002). This also seems to be borne out by our qualitative data. However, it is important to note that secrecy does not occur in isolation, but exists within a dynamic family system. In that regard, secrecy could be both a cause and a symptom of dysfunctional family relationships.

Our analyses regarding the possible impact of secrecy on other interpersonal relationships were exploratory. Results from our quantitative data indicated that greater secrecy by adoptive parents was related to greater social loneliness, risk in intimacy, and anxious and avoidant attachment. However, secrecy was not significantly related to any of the romantic variables (i.e., romantic loneliness or satisfaction, commitment, and trust in romantic relationships). At first it seems surprising that secrecy would be unrelated to trust. However, the items on the trust scale relate specifically to trust with a particular spouse or romantic partner, rather than trust in general. If adoptive parents are secretive regarding adoption-related issues, the violation of trust seems to relate more directly to the relationship between the adoptee and the adoptive parents. Still, our qualitative data reveal that at least for some adoptees, problems in trust did transfer to other relationships including romantic relationships. For others, the secrecy in their adoptive families actually prompted them to be more open in their interpersonal relationships. This underscores the importance of considering each adoptee's individual narrative in a counselling situation, as different issues will arise for different individuals.

The current study is limited by the correlational nature of the data, thus making statements of cause and effect rather speculative. We have also only focused on the adoptee's perspective. In future research, it would be useful to also assess the impact of secrecy from the perspective of the adoptive parents and birth relatives. In the current paper, we have only reported on secrecy within the adoptive family. In our ongoing research, however, we will also be looking at the impact of secrecy in other adoption relationships (e.g., secrecy within the birth family). Some themes emerging from our qualitative data also need further verification due to the small number of quotes in some categories.

Although adoption practice has already moved towards more open arrangements, practitioners still need to help individuals who came through the closed system. As noted earlier, however, the extent of openness and secrecy within adoptive families is possibly more important than whether or not the adoption itself was open or closed (Brodzinsky, 2005). Greater openness in exploring adoption-related issues appears to strengthen adoptive family relationships, whereas secrecy can undermine bonds between adoptive parents and their children. Counsellors also need to be sensitive to the emerging needs of adoptive parents. In some cases, adoptive parents have withheld information or even lied, perhaps as a way of keeping control, protecting themselves or their children, or hiding shame (Schooler & Norris, 2002). However, Schooler and Norris also note that "it was not unusual for agencies themselves to edit or even fabricate information that was told to the adoptive parents at the time of the adoption" (p. 5), so that they have also been betrayed. A word of caution is also needed in dealing with openness and secrecy in a therapeutic situation. It has so far been assumed that openness is always good and that secrecy is always bad. However, openness and secrecy may be thought of as a continuum that can change over time depending on the needs of each member of the adoptive family, including the developmental stage of the child (Brodzinsky, 2005; Wrobel et al., 2003). As more information is gained regarding the impact of openness and secrecy, practitioners will be in a better position to assist all members of the adoption triad.

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The Association between Parenting Characteristics and Adolescent Identity Development and Moral Development

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Abstract

The relationship between parental warmth, monitoring, inductive reasoning and support, and two key aspects of adolescent functioning; namely, identity development and moral development were investigated in the current study. Seventy-five secondary school students aged 13 to 15 years completed questionnaires concerning their parents' parenting behaviours, and their own identity and moral development. The results from multiple regression analyses showed that parental monitoring contributed significantly to adolescents' identity development. Parental warmth was found to be significantly associated with adolescents' moral development. Overall, the outcomes from the current study are congruent with previous research suggesting that parenting behaviour plays an important role in the healthy development of adolescents.

Although the significance of peer relationships grows during adolescence (Fallon & Bowles, 1997), the parent-child relationship maintains its importance at this time for the psychological development of the child (Steinberg, 2000). One important influence on the parent-child relationship, and in turn many aspects of adolescent development, is parenting behaviour. The current study will focus on the association between parenting behaviour and two important areas of adolescent development, namely identity and moral development.

Parenting and Identity Development

Previous research has shown that parents are central to adolescent identity development (Grotevant & Cooper, 1985). Identity refers to a person's stable, coherent, and integrated sense of self; that is, who one is and what one stands for as a member of society (Erikson, 1968). According to Erikson (1950), identity formation is a primary psychosocial task during adolescence and the relationship with parents affects adolescent progress in this area (Sartor & Youniss, 2002).

According to Sartor and Youniss (2002), the model of parenting proposed by Barber (1997) offers a strong theoretical foundation for understanding the relationship between parenting and adolescent identity development. Barber argues that one important element of socialisation contributing to healthy child development relates to parental regulation of behaviour. It is also referred to as demandingness, and is necessary in order for children to learn self-regulation (Barber, 1997). One aspect of parental behaviour that reflects this is parental monitoring which refers to supervision with reasoning, and encouraging children to be aware of the consequences of their actions. It also involves the establishment of clear rules and communication patterns (Barber, 1996). Recently, parental monitoring of adolescent's social and school activities has been demonstrated to be related to adolescent identity development (Sartor & Youniss, 2002). According to Sartor and Youniss, behavioural control (of which monitoring is a part) promotes the development of identity by encouraging self-reflection and independent thinking in the context of a positive, nurturing connection with parents.

Facilitation of psychological autonomy through responsiveness to adolescents' needs to separate themselves from parents is another component of Barber's model. During adolescence, the desire for autonomy and independence increases as individuals search for identity (Erikson, 1968). Thus, in healthy parent-adolescent relationships, parents provide structure yet remain flexible thereby providing adolescents with the opportunity to securely engage in identity exploration (Allen, Hauser, Bell, & O'Connor, 1994). Although adolescents choose to spend the majority of their time with peers (Fallon & Bowles, 1997), parental availability and support provide security as adolescents construct their identities (Sartor & Youniss, 2002). According to Sartor and Youniss, adolescents frequently seek out their mothers when they need emotional comfort or advice on personal matters. Indeed, research shows that adolescents with the highest identity achievement perceived their parents as emotionally supportive (Adams, Dyk, & Bennion, 1990). Hence, parents should stay involved without intruding, thereby offering support and enough flexibility for adolescents to choose and commit to ideological beliefs and personal goals.

Parenting and Moral Development

Parental behavior has also been associated with adolescent moral development. During adolescence, children construct a set of values that will help them function successfully as adult members of society. The development of these values begins during childhood and becomes a major developmental task of adolescence (Havighurst,

1951). Furthermore, as adolescents struggle with the identity crisis, they become concerned with personal and social moral codes (Erikson, 1963). The development of these moral views influences how they view society, politics, and religion.

Morality relates to the system of rules that regulates the social interactions and social relationships of individuals within societies and is based on concepts of welfare (harm), trust, justice (comparative treatment and distribution), and rights. Thus, morality is defined here as an individual's prescriptive understanding of how people ought to behave towards each other (Smetana, 1999). As children construct morality from various social experiences and different interaction partners, including parents, it has been proposed that the affective nature and cognitive aspects of parents' interactions play significant roles in facilitating children's moral development (Smetana, 1999).

Research shows that the affective components of family interactions, such as parental warmth, are related to the development of conscience and moral reasoning (Baumrind, 1980; Walker & Hennig, 1999). Establishing a warm, supportive and mutually positive basis for interaction may enhance the likelihood that children are motivated to listen to and respond to parental messages (Smetana, 1999). Indeed, Knafo and Schwartz' (2003) study revealed that perceived parental warmth and responsiveness contributed to adolescents' accuracy in perceiving parents' overall value system. Parental affective reactions, in conjunction with reasoning, may facilitate children's understanding and encoding of moral and social rules (Smetana, 1999). In addition, according to Berkowitz and Grych (1998), another effect of warm and responsive parenting is that it conveys to the child that they, and people in general, are deserving of respectful treatment, and therefore it is wrong to do something that is hurtful to another. Violation of this standard leads to guilt and shame, effects linked closely to conscience.

There is also an important cognitive component to parents' interactions with their children that may facilitate children's moral development. Employing induction; namely, explaining parental behaviour and its implications for the child and others, is linked to greater empathy, more highly developed conscience, higher levels of moral reasoning and altruism (Berkowitz & Grych, 1998). By explaining the reasons for rules and responding appropriately to moral violations, parents can facilitate moral development by stimulating children to think reflectively about their actions (Smetana, 1999). More specifically, to effectively facilitate moral development, explanations of moral rules and responses to moral violations need to highlight the consequences of the acts for other's rights and welfare (Smetana, 1999; Walker, Hennig, & Krettenauer, 2000). Employing induction directly addresses and connects the cognitive (moral reasoning) and affective (empathy) aspects of moral functioning, and helps children to internalise standards for moral behaviour (Berkowitz & Grych, 1998).

The aim of the current study was to investigate the relationship between parenting characteristics of warmth, monitoring, inductive reasoning and support, and two key aspects of adolescent functioning; namely, identity development and moral development. Much of the research on parenting has used categories (e.g., authoritative parenting); however, it is important to identify particular parenting behaviours which influence these two areas of adolescent development. Specifically, it was hypothesised that parental support and parental monitoring would be positively associated with adolescent identity development. Moreover, it was expected that parental warmth and parental inductive reasoning would be positively linked with adolescent moral development.

Method

Participants

A sample of convenience consisting of 75 adolescents (36 females and 39 males) from a Victorian secondary school in Melbourne participated in this study. The age of the participants ranged from 13 to 15 years, with a mean age of 13.47 years ($SD = .62$).

Materials

The Parenting Questionnaire. Sanson (1994) 25-item parenting questionnaire were used to assess three dimensions of parenting; namely, warmth ($\alpha = .75$) 7-items (e.g., "How well do you get along with your parent/s?"), monitoring ($\alpha = .62$) 6-items (e.g., "How often do your parent/s know where you are going when you go out with friends?") and inductive reasoning ($\alpha = .63$) 8-items (e.g., "My parent/s encourage me to think about different ways of handling a problem"). Items 1 to 4 were scored on a 5-point scale, and items 5 to 21 were scored on a 6-point scale, with items 4, 5, 9, 16, 18, 19 and 20 reversed scored.

Parental Support. The revised version of the Interpersonal Relationships Scale (Barber & Shagle, 1992) was used to assess maternal support (Sartor & Youniss, 2002). This 5-item subscale ($\alpha = .86$) asks students to rate how often they engage in various communicative, supportive, and conflictual behaviours with their mothers on a scale from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*daily*). The subscale includes items such as: my mother tries to cheer me up when I am upset; my mother tries to reach a compromise when we disagree.

Moral Development. The Schwartz Value Survey (SVS) (1992; Oishi, Schimmack, Diener, & Suh, 1998) was used to measure moral development. Three value types reflecting moral values were used in the present study: Universalism 8-items ($\alpha = .86$); namely, understanding, appreciation, tolerance and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature (e.g., 'social justice'); Benevolence 5-items ($\alpha = .70$); that is, preservation and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom one is in frequent personal contact (e.g., 'honest'); and Conformity 4-items ($\alpha = .77$) which refers to the restraint of actions, inclinations and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms (e.g., 'politeness'). Each item is rated on a 9-point scale in terms of its importance to the participant, with 1 representing (*opposite to my value*); 0 (*not important*); 3 (*important*); 6 (*very important*); and 7 (*of extreme importance*).

Universalism, benevolence and conformity value subscales demonstrated intercorrelations of approximately .70, and were combined in order to construct an overall moral development score.

Identity Development. The identity subscale of the Erikson Psychosocial Stage Inventory (EPSI; Rosenthal, Gurney, & Moore, 1981) was used to assess the degree to which the identity achievement versus identity confusion stage has been negotiated successfully. The 12 items in the scale reflect clarity and stability of identity as well as a sense of future direction. Items include: "I have a clear idea of what I want to be"; "I like myself and am proud of what I stand for." Each item is rated on a scale from 1 (*hardly ever true*) to 5 (*almost always true*). Items 1, 3, 7, 10, 11 and 12 are reverse scored.

Rosenthal et al. (1981) examined the test-retest reliability using pilot and test samples of participants 13 years of age and above, showing a correlation of .71 for the identity subscale. Moreover, the construct validity was also examined by correlating the subscale scores of the EPSI and the subscale scores of the Greenberger and Sorensen's PMS (1974), revealing a correlation of .56 for the identity subscale.

Procedure

All year 7 and 8 students were given envelopes containing information letters outlining the research with consent forms attached for parents and students to sign. Testing was conducted at a convenient time at school. Using questionnaires participants recorded their perception of parenting characteristics, identity development and moral development.

Results

Identity development

Pearson Product-Moment correlation coefficients were calculated between each of the predictors and the outcome variable, identity development. Moderate correlations were found between parental monitoring and identity development ($r = .30$, $p < .01$), and between parental support and identity development ($r = .20$, $p < .05$). These results indicate that higher levels of parental monitoring and parental support were associated with higher levels of identity development in adolescents.

To investigate the first hypothesis, a standard multiple regression analysis was performed whereby the contribution of parental monitoring and parental support to adolescent identity development was investigated. These results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Results of Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Identity Development from Parental Monitoring and Support

Variable	B	β	R^2	Adjusted R^2
Parental Monitoring	.239	.29*	.12	.09
Parental Support	.085	.12		

$N = 75$. * $p < .05$

Table 1 shows that 12% of the variation in identity development scores within the present sample was explained by a linear combination of parental support and parental monitoring. Additionally, the adjusted R^2 value indicated that 9% of the variation in identity development scores would be accounted for by the current regression model, if the study were to be repeated using an orthogonal sample. The overall relationship between the predictor variables of parental support and parental monitoring and the outcome variable, identity development was significant, $F(2, 71) = 4.69$, $p = .012$. However, parental monitoring was the only variable found to significantly contribute to the variation in identity development scores ($\beta = .29$, $p = .015$).

Moral Development

Pearson Product-Moment correlation coefficients showed a moderate positive relationship between parental warmth and moral development ($r = .40, p < .01$), and between inductive reasoning and moral development ($r = .33, p < .01$). These results show that higher levels of parental warmth and parental inductive reasoning were associated with higher levels of moral development in adolescents.

To investigate the second hypothesis, a standard multiple regression analysis was conducted to investigate the contribution of parental warmth and parental inductive reasoning to adolescent moral development. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Moral Development

Variable	<i>B</i>	β	R^2	Adjusted R^2
Parental Inductive Reasoning	.26	.12*	.17	.14
Parental Warmth	.50	.31*		

$N = 75$. * $p < .05$.

As shown in Table 2, 17% of the variation in moral development scores within the present sample was explained by a linear combination of parental warmth and parental inductive reasoning. Moreover, the adjusted R^2 value indicated that 14% of the variation in moral development scores would be accounted for by the current regression model, if the study were to be repeated using a sample from the general population. The overall relationship between predictor variables of parental warmth and parental inductive reasoning and the outcome variable, moral development was significant, $F(2, 74) = 7.12, p = .002$. Parental warmth was the only variable found to significantly contribute to the variation in moral development scores ($\beta = .31, p = .036$).

Discussion

Identity Development

The hypothesis that parental support and parental monitoring would be positively associated with adolescent identity development was partially supported. The results of the current study showed that parental monitoring was a significant contributor to adolescent identity development. This is consistent with the findings of Sartor and Youniss (2002). According to Barber (1996) parental monitoring is supervision with reasoning, setting clear rules, and encouraging children to be aware of the consequences of their actions. It may promote the development of identity by encouraging self-reflection and independent thinking in the context of a positive, nurturing connection with parents (Sartor and Youniss, 2002). These processes are essential in aiding the individual's search for a consolidated and purposeful sense of self (Erikson, 1950).

The finding that parental support was not a significant predictor of adolescent identity development is in contrast to the research of Sartor and Youniss (2002). It could be speculated that the effect of parental support on identity development may vary with age and stage of the identity formation process. The participants in the current study had a mean age 13.47 years and therefore were relatively early in the exploration of their own identities (Erikson, 1950). By contrast, the participants used in the studies by Sartor and Youniss (2002) used late adolescents (15-17 years) who may have been much further into the process (Erikson, 1950). The impact of parental support on identity formation may therefore be more influential when adolescents are at the consolidation stage compared to the initial exploration of their identities. This possibility clearly requires clarification in future research.

Overall, it can be concluded that parental monitoring is important in the explanation of the variance in adolescent's identity development. However, since only a relatively small proportion of the variance in adolescent identity was explained, future research should consider additional factors that may be important contributors to identity development, such as peer support and family functioning (Bosma & Gerrits, 1985; Meeus & Dekovic, 1995).

Moral Development

The prediction that parental warmth and parental inductive reasoning would contribute to adolescent moral development was partially supported. The results of the study showed that parental warmth was a significant contributor to adolescent moral development. These results are consistent with the research of Walker and Hennig (1999).

The finding that parental warmth significantly contributed to adolescent moral development supports Baumrind's (1980) argument that establishing a warm and mutually positive basis for interaction promotes the development of conscience and moral reasoning. A warm, supportive bond between parents and children may enhance the likelihood that children are motivated to listen to and respond to parental messages (Smetana, 1999) which in turn promotes a greater development of conscience and moral reasoning (Baumrind, 1980). This finding is also consistent with Berkowitz and Grych's (1998) argument which suggests that warm and responsive parenting is related to several core components of moral development. According to Berkowitz and Grych (1998), such parental behaviours communicate that a child is valuable and worthy of such treatment thereby promoting children's development of a positive self-concept. A broader message is that people in general are deserving of respectful treatment, and therefore it is wrong to do something that is hurtful to another.

The result that parental inductive reasoning was not a significant predictor of adolescent moral development is not consistent with the research of Walker, Hennig, and Krettenauer (2000). It could be speculated that the method of data collection used in the current study could have led to the inconsistency in the results. Specifically, the current study utilised a questionnaire to obtain information about the frequency of parental inductive reasoning behaviour and to assess adolescents' moral development. On the other hand, Walker et al.'s study utilised Kohlberg's Moral Judgment Interview, where participants responded to the hypothetical moral dilemmas and "dyadic discussion session", which involved discussing hypothetical and real life moral dilemmas. Further investigation of this issue is therefore clearly warranted.

Although, a significant proportion of the variance in moral development was explained by the combination of parental warmth and inductive reasoning, other factors should be investigated that would add to the strength of the theoretical model. These might include, for example, self-control and peer relationships (Kochanska, 1991; Walker et al., 2000).

There are certain methodological limitations that may have affected the results. In the current study, the participants were drawn from one secondary school and thus applying the findings to a general population must be done with some caution. In addition, the current study relied on measures based on youth self reports only. Future research could also consider using parents as information sources to better understand the influence of parenting characteristics on adolescents' development. Overall, the findings from the current study support the theory that parenting influences various areas of adolescent development (Baumrind, 1991). Most of the previous research in this area has utilised Baumrind's typology (e.g., authoritative parenting) to examine the links between parental styles and adolescent development. However, this precludes the ability to investigate whether particular characteristics of parenting contribute more to adolescent development than others (Paterson, 1999). The benefit of the present study is that it identified specific parental characteristics that influence adolescents' identity and moral development. One of the implications of the current findings is that they can inform those designing parenting training programs on specific ways of supporting positive adolescent identity and moral development. In particular, parental monitoring behaviour such as keeping track of whereabouts of the child should be emphasized in an effort to facilitate adolescent identity development. Likewise, encouraging parents to express positive affect towards their adolescents may help to promote moral development.

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Gender Differences in the Intergenerational Transmission of Relational Commitment

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Abstract

Using a conventional sample of 180 university students, this paper addresses the issue of intergenerational transmission of relational commitment. Conceptualization of commitment should consider besides the factors temporarily simultaneous with a current relationship, the experiences learned or witnessed in the family of origin or in other relational contexts. The present study focuses on the relationships between young adults' level of commitment and their perceptions of parental happiness and commitment. Results indicate that young adults' level of commitment and their ways of expressing commitment are positively associated with parents' level of happiness and behaviours, when controlling for parental relational status. However, the effects are differentiated for males and females.

Family researchers have long recognized the importance of family of origin in the intergenerational transmission of people's behaviours, cognitions, abilities, and attitudes related to adult romantic relationships. Learning principles (Bandura, 1977), cognitive schema (Kelley, 1972), and emotions (Bowen, 1978) have been considered as the underlying mechanisms of the intergenerational transmission of divorce (Amato, 1996; Amato & Booth, 1991; Bumpass, Martin, & Sweet, 1991; Wolfinger, 2000), marital conflict (Tallman, Gray, Kullberg, & Henderson, 1999; Story, Karney, Lawrence, & Bradbury, 2004), parental racial explicit and implicit attitudes (Sinclair, Dunn, & Lowery, 2005), cultural values (Phalet & Schonpflug, 2001), and marriage related feelings (Larson, Benson, Wilson, & Medora, 1998). Despite the abundance of intergenerational transmission literature, however, much less has been written on the intergenerational transmission of commitment (Weigel, Bennett, & Ballard-Reisch, 2003). The purpose of the present study is to explore the ways in which perceptions of the experiences in the family of origin are associated with how people think, feel, and act about their commitment within a close relationship.

Relational commitment

Interpersonal commitment represents a central concept in understanding relational stability, and has been extensively studied in the last thirty years. Although commitment relates to dyadic or group processes, it is generally viewed as the individual's subjective psychological state and defined as "the individual desire or intent to continue the relationship" (Berscheid & Reis, 1998, p. 240).

Most of the definitions and explanatory models of commitment (c.f., Johnson, 1991; Levinger, 1999; Rusbult, 1980) focused primarily on those commitment determinants that occur simultaneously with a present relationship. However, we would argue that people might have certain perspectives on commitment before they get involved in any relationship and the family of origin could play an important role in transmitting and shaping these perspectives. In line with this reasoning, Weigel et al. (2003) showed that commitment message themes recalled from families of origin explained 18% of the variance of people's perceptions about commitment. The present study goes a step farther and examines not only the relation between people's commitment and commitment messages received in the family of origin, but also the links between their commitment and perceived parental commitment and relational experiences.

Intergenerational transmission of relational skills and knowledge

People learn how to be human and social beings largely in the context of their relationships with parents and relatives (Fletcher & Fitness, 1993). Family of origin is one of the most important socialization contexts in which children acquire the basic social repertoire and interactional models necessary to develop the cognitive, behavioural, and emotional competence for any particular social settings (Tallman et al., 1999). One of these domains pertains to the initiation and maintenance of close relationships.

There are several ways in which children can learn from their parents and relatives about the resources and skills they need in relating to others: directly, by internalizing parents' ideas and conceptions about relationships or vicariously, by adopting the behaviours for which significant others have been rewarded and/or avoiding the behaviours for which significant others have been punished (Bandura, 1977). As family members are likely to serve as role models, children are likely to learn and repeat their parents' styles of interpersonal and marital behaviour, therefore leading to an intergenerational transmission of relationship perspectives that could be either healthy or unhealthy (Feng, Giarusso, Bengston, & Frye, 1999; Story et al., 2004). Amato (1996) showed for

example, that parental divorce increased the risk of children's divorce and explained this finding by the intergenerational transmission of problematic interpersonal behaviours (communication, commitment, infidelity). Furthermore, the same study indicated that children learn, internalize, and reproduce not only certain behaviours, but also communication styles, dispositional characteristics, and emotional vulnerabilities like jealousy, irritability, depression, anger, and anxiety (Amato, 1996). This was more likely to happen when the children lived in a conflictual family; the parents had rigid expectations, and exerted excessive control over their behaviours (Benson, Larson, Wilson, & Demo, 1993). Weigel et al. (2003) indicated that the ways people recollected commitment messages received in their families of origin were significantly associated with parental divorce and perceived marital happiness; participants who grew up in intact families were more likely to believe that marriage takes work and see marriage as enduring than participants whose parents were divorced. Generally, negative attitudes may lead people to expect or want little in relationships and thus, to behave in ways that will obstruct the development of a healthy and lasting relationship (Larson et al., 1998). However, gender seemed to be related to the way people experience parental divorce and attitudes toward divorce. Daughters appeared to be more affected by parental divorce than boys, mostly because they could identify better with the mother's post divorce struggles (Sanders, Halford, & Behrens, 1999).

Given that intergenerational transmission takes place in multiple relational areas (marital conflict, divorce, aggression), we would expect that commitment perspectives, behaviours, or feelings are likely to be transmitted in the family of origin in similar ways. Weigel et al. (2003) gave some evidence that indeed people learn certain messages from their parents and use them as a framework to evaluate their own relationships. However, this study did not look at the way commitment related behaviours are learned in the families of origin and then expressed in romantic relationships. Additionally, even though Weigel and colleagues (2003) investigated the possible influences of parental marital happiness on the type of commitment messages recollected, they overlooked similar effects on how people act and feel about commitment. Based on one of the main assumptions in cognitive therapy that people's emotional and behavioural expressions are not caused directly by the events, but by the way those are interpreted (Beck, 1976), we would argue that the ways in which people perceived and interpreted parental interactions might be more important in assessing their own behaviours than objective measures of what really happened in their families of origin. Our study tried to fill these gaps and answer the following research questions:

RQ1: Are the perceived parental level of happiness, commitment related behaviours and messages associated with young adults' level of commitment?

RQ2: Are the perceived parental level of happiness, commitment related behaviours and messages associated with young adults' commitment related behaviours?

Method

Participants

Participants were 180 undergraduate students from an American Western university, including 133 females (74%) and 47 men (26%). The mean age of the sample was 21.24 years old. Most of the participants identified themselves as Caucasian (70%); with 9% identifying themselves as Hispanic, 7% as African American, 7% as Asian (7%) and 7% as "other". In the sample, 53% reported their current situation as seriously dating a romantic partner, 9% were casually dating, 9% were married, 9% were cohabiting, 9% had not ever been involved in a close relationship, and 8% were engaged.

Procedure

Participants completed a questionnaire composed of several commitment-related scales already used and validated in previous research (c.f., Weigel & Ballard-Reisch, 2002). The questionnaire contained a number of demographic questions for the participants and current partner related to age, sex, religion, race, and the nature of the relationship – whether they were currently involved in a close relationship, the length of their relationship, and number of relationships. We also asked them to assess the level of happiness for both mother and father, regardless whether the parents lived together or not during participants' adolescence.

Commitment was assessed by the eight items commitment scale of Sternberg's (1988) triangular measure of love (Kurdek, 2000). Participants indicated for each item (e.g., "I am committed to maintaining my relationship with my partner", "Because of my commitment to my partner, I would not let other people come between us", "I have confidence in the stability of my relationship with my partner") how true this was in their case, with 1 = *not at all true* to 9 = *extremely true*. Summed scores were computed; higher scores indicating higher commitment levels, Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .92 for males and .95 for females.

We assessed participants' meanings associated with commitment by using the list of themes structured by Weigel et al. (2003). Examples of these messages or themes were: "Marriage is enduring", "Relationships take hard work", "Relationships are partnerships", "Relationships are not permanent", "One needs to approach

relationships with caution”, “Relationships must have love and happiness”, “Relationships are beset by lack of trust and fidelity”, “One must uphold obligations”, “Divorce is hard on families”, and “External pressures influence relationships”. Respondents were asked to rate 10 messages/themes about commitment as “very typical” (10) or “not at all typical” (1) of their current perceptions of commitment in close relationships. Later in the questionnaire participants were asked to rate these 10 items again in terms of how typical they were of the messages received from their families of origin. Cronbach’s alpha for the message scale for the parents was .588. In this study, we did not use the message scale for participants.

Also, participants were asked to evaluate first, for themselves and later for their parents (this time differentiating between the parental male and female figures) the frequencies of certain behaviours found by Weigel and Ballard-Reisch (2002) to be representative indicators of relational commitment. These indicators referred to specific behaviours like “Providing affection”, “Providing support”, “Maintaining integrity”, “Sharing companionship”, “Making effort to communicate”, “Showing respect”, “Creating relational future”, “Creating positive relationship atmosphere”, “Working together on relationship problems”, and “Expressing commitment”. Cronbach’s alpha coefficients for the behaviour scales were the following: for participants females .92, participants males .91, parental male figure .96, and for parental female figure .95.

Results

We used hierarchical multiple regressions to examine the associations between parental relational experiences as perceived by participants and their level of commitment and commitment behaviours. Since we expected different results for males and females, we ran all the analyses separately for the two gender categories.

Commitment level

Males’ level of commitment was significantly predicted by parental marital status and perceived parental happiness, $F(3, 731) = 4.11, p < .05$. These three variables explained 20% of the variance in men’s commitment level. More specifically, when parents were divorced, sons were less committed in their relationships. This result corresponds to previous research showing that immediate problems after a divorce were more common for boys (Davies & Windle, 2001; Rodgers & Rose, 2002). These problems might have been associated with pessimistic expectancies about the future success of the relationship and therefore, with a lower level of commitment (Larson et al., 1998).

At the same time, perceived level of father’s happiness significantly predicted son’s level of commitment; the happier the father was perceived, the more likely the son was committed (see Table 1). It seemed that the young male adults identified with their fathers as gender-role models and associated the father’s positive experiences with a more positive and optimist view on relationships. This is also consistent with previous research that showed fathers had more influence on son’s attitudes than mothers (Kapinus, 2004).

Moreover, we were interested in the relationship between the perceived ways parents expressed commitment and their ideas about commitment and the level of offspring’ commitment. No significant relationships were found; neither women’s nor men’s levels of commitment were associated with the commitment behaviours and messages witnessed from parents.

However, when we analysed the same relationship for specific items, we found that males’ level of commitment was significantly predicted by the following commitment themes: “One needs to approach relationships with caution”, and “Relationships are partnerships”; males being less committed if exposed to the first message (see Table 2).

Table 1
Estimates of Parental Relational Status and Levels of Parental Happiness on Level of Commitment, Unstandardized Coefficients

	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>
	<i>B</i>	<i>B</i>
Parents divorced	-13.47*	-1.21
Perceived level of mother’s happiness	-2.80	.68
Perceived level of father’s happiness	9.54**	2.47
R ² adjusted	.20	.01

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .001$

Table 2
Estimates of Commitment Messages on Level of Commitment, Unstandardized Coefficients

	<i>Men</i>
	<i>B</i>
One needs to approach relationships with caution	-1.91*
Relationships are partnerships	3.84*
R ² adjusted	.25

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .001$

Commitment behaviours

Research question two investigated the prediction power of perceived parental happiness, parental commitment behaviours, and commitment themes recollected from parents. Only women's behaviours were significantly predicted; none of the models were able to predict men's commitment behaviours.

First, we entered the parental relational status and the level of mother's happiness. In the next step, we added the level of father's happiness. The later model was not significant, therefore, we reported the first model ($F(2, 412) = 4.23, p < .05$) that explained 5% of the variance of females' commitment behaviours (see Table 3). The happier the mother, the more likely the daughter was to report showing commitment behaviours to her partner.

Table 3
Estimates of Parental Relational Status and Levels of Parental Happiness on Commitment Behaviours, Unstandardized Coefficients

	<i>Women</i>
	<i>B</i>
Parents divorced	- 3.00
Perceived level of mother's happiness	3.41**
R ² adjusted	.05

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .001$

The way parents expressed commitment seemed to link significantly with women's expressions of similar behaviours (i.e. providing affection, support, sharing companionship, making effort to communicate, creating relational future). Even though we entered into the regression model both the male and female parental figure's actions, they predicted only women's behaviours ($F(2, 314) = 3.25, p < .05$; $F(2, 314) = 3.25, p < .05$). The coefficients were very similar and indicated positive relationships between behaviours expressed by parents and females' commitment behaviours (see Table 4 and Table 5).

These findings indicated that daughters were more sensitive and paid more attention to what parents did in their relationship than sons, consistent with the gender-role stereotypes – women are more relational oriented and expected to care about relationships and have the skills for maintaining relationships, while men are expected to be independent and reluctant to commit) (Cross & Madson, 1997).

Table 4
Estimates of Parental Relational Status and Maternal Figure's Behaviours on Commitment Behaviours, Unstandardized Coefficients

	<i>Women</i>
	<i>B</i>
Female figure's behaviours	.15*
R ² adjusted	.03

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .001$

Table 5

Estimates of Parental Relational Status and Paternal Figure's Behaviours on Commitment Behaviours, Unstandardized Coefficients

	<i>Women</i>
	<i>B</i>
Male figure's behaviours	.15*
R ² adjusted	.04

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .001$

Certain messages daughters recollected from their parents appeared to be significant predictors of the ways they expressed commitment toward their partners ($F(9, 271) = 3.08, p < .05$). Women who recalled that "Relationships are beset by lack of trust and fidelity" were less likely to express commitment in their own relationships; while those who heard from their parents that "Relationships are not permanent" were working harder in their own relationships (see Table 6). Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler and Tipton (1985) indicated that people tended to believe their own relationships were much better than their parents' marriages. It is possible that our female participants had the same assumption and therefore, even when exposed to messages against relational stability, they were more likely to engage in commitment expressing behaviours.

Table 6

Estimates of Parental Relational Status and Commitment Messages on Commitment Behaviours, Unstandardized Coefficients

	<i>Women</i>
	<i>B</i>
Relationships are beset by lack of trust and fidelity	- 8.17*
Relationships are not permanent	.93*
R ² adjusted	.14

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .001$

Discussion

The present study suggests that there are significant associations between the familial experiences witnessed in adolescence and adulthood relational experiences. When people were asked to assess the level of involvement into a close relationship they considered parental well-being and commitment related opinions and behaviours. In this study, we differentiated between the reported level of commitment, reporting of behavioural expressions of commitment, and commitment message themes. We conceptualized them as different dimensions of the concept of commitment and expected that the models that predict them to be different. Additionally, we measured participants' perceptions of their parents that might have developed over a long period of time and were not necessarily the same as the actual behaviours and messages that the parents actually gave.

Our findings indicated that level and commitment and commitment related behaviours were predicted differently for men and women. Parental relational status, perceived marital happiness, and certain commitment messages significantly predicted men's level of commitment, but not their expressions of commitment; while for women, these variables significantly predicted their behavioural expressions, but not the degree in which they were committed. The relationships also varied based on the gender of the more influential parent. More precisely, young adult males were less likely to be committed when the parents were divorced, but more likely to commit when the father was perceived as happy. Previous research showed that divorce related problems were more common for sons (Davies & Windle, 2001; Rodgers & Rose, 2002) and these were mainly expressed at the behavioural level (Reid & Crisafulli, 1990). These might be explained by the greater hostility expressed during coparenting among distressed parents of sons (McHale, 1995), or by the socialization strategy that inhibit son's emotional responses to parental conflict and lead to more difficulties in affect regulation (Katz & Gottman, 1995). Therefore the model which includes parental relationship status may be a more powerful predictor for boys than girls in terms of level of commitment.

Women's expressions of commitment behaviours were significantly associated with mother's level of happiness and parents' commitment behaviour, while men's behaviours were not related to any of these

variables. These differences might be associated with the way men and women develop and maintain their self-construal through socialization and relational experiences: women are more relational oriented and men are more independent (Cross & Madson, 1997). Consequently, women (with an interdependent self-construal) attend closely to information concerning relationships, encode and organize this information in terms of relationship, and have a superior memory for this information (Cross & Madson, 1997). It is then expected that women would engage more in behaviours witnessed in the families of origin than men.

Moreover, an interdependent self-construal is related to intimacy and self-disclosure (Gore, Cross, & Morris, 2006). Indeed, Buhrmester (1996) showed that intimacy is a more conscious element in the lives of adolescent girls, than it is for boys, although it is not absent from boys' relationships. In particular, girls mention more self disclosure. They are also more likely to ruminate together about each other's problems, called co-rumination (Rose, 2002). If this is the case teens/especially females can expect to hear more about the problems of the relationship from their mother than from their father and be more sensitive to the mother's happiness. The co-rumination effect may help to explain that while there is some influence from fathers in the model.

The small predictive power of recalled commitment message themes from parents might be due to the fact that generally it is extremely difficult to distinguish exactly where, how, and from who certain relational messages were received. It is not clear which parent gave the strongest messages, and they may have prevailed over those of the quieter or more absent parent. Probably, the unequal presence or power of the two parents have influenced the strength of their messages. Since research suggests that it is mothers who communicate the most about concerns in their lives, the children may be getting a more troubled picture.

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Cracking the Code of Healthy Relationships: Parent Effectiveness Training (PET) as a Valuable Resource for Communities

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Abstract

Eminent researchers in Australia are calling for a re-think in the way we are raising our children. Stanley, Richardson and Prior (2005) suggest radical changes in the way we view the needs of children and young people in this country. Among revised economic priorities are valuing parenting and an emphasis on prevention rather than cure. Competent emotional training is fundamental in building strong relationships (Gottman, 1997) and producing families who are in control rather than controlling. Parent Effectiveness Training (PET) based on Gordon's (1970) Theory of Healthy Relationships, is a course originally aimed at prevention in dealing with family problems, and delivered here in various communities by intensively-trained authorised instructors. Improved listening skills, emotional self-regulation and non-antagonistic assertiveness on the part of PET parents have been shown to make significant improvement in family problem solving as well as reduce parental stress compared with controls (Wood, 2003; Wood & Davidson, 2003). Given an increased understanding of the value of these skills in emotional competence and conflict resolution, their dearth at home and in the wider community, this paper calls for a government re-assessment in ways of making either PET or behavioural programs a real choice for parents.

Serious questions are being raised about the way we bring up children in this country. Stanley (2001) believes society is failing children, with youngsters more troubled than ever before. New economic priorities are suggested by Stanley, Richardson and Prior (2005) including valuing parenting and an emphasis on prevention rather than cure.

Deficits in interpersonal skills occur in most social problems (McCord & Tremblay, 1992), including antisocial behaviour (Rutter, Giller & Hagell, 1998), depression (Spence, 2001), homelessness (Sykes, 1993), school drop-out and youth suicide (Mitchell, 2000). At the same time, emotional health and social competence have been found essential for the development of well functioning adults (Prior, Sanson, Smart & Oberklaid, 2000; Pryor & Woodward, 1998), and neurological investigations suggest that these attributes result from nurture and training and are not innate. Parents who establish a strong sense of family connectedness, and show warmth, love and caring protect their children from a wide spectrum of risks (Resnick, Bearman, Blum, Bauman, et al., 1997). Furthermore bringing up children to be cooperative, assertive, self-controlled and empathic trains their social competence, sets them up for self-efficacy and contributes to their resilience in adverse circumstances (Prior et al., 2000).

The ecological context of parenting has changed radically and many traditional parenting practices no longer seem effective (Garbarino & Bedard, 2001). Extended families once provided knowledge and support for parents, but now there is poor preparation for parenthood (Pugh & De'Ath, 1985). Anastasiow (1988) notes that disadvantaged parents often produce children who are even less educated or healthy. Alvy (1994) believes parent training is now a social necessity. The cost is less than the economic and social gains. Problem prevention through parent training can be cost-effective (Spence, 1996). However in valuing parenting we must be ready to help families appropriately by providing a choice of needs-based programs. We must be clear as to differing family needs, the scope of each program, and the evidence for their efficacy.

The major parenting programs available in Australia are Triple P (Sanders & Markie-Dadds, 1996), a behavioural approach advocating parental control, and Parent Effectiveness Training (PET, Gordon, 1976) a relationship approach, targeting emotional competence for both parent and child.

The aim of the present review is to examine the origins, theoretical background, implementation and effectiveness of each program and to identify differences which would enable a choice to be made to meet the needs of a given family.

Overview of Triple P

Origin and Theoretical Background

Triple P is disseminated through the Parenting and Family Resource Centre (PFSC), at the University of Queensland, which has developed a nationally coordinated system of training and accreditation for practitioners in five levels of family interventions, originally concentrated on remedial work, but now including community-based programs delivered by health professionals other than psychologists (Sanders & Markie-Dadds, 1996). Triple P derives from behavioural principles (Eysenck, 1960; Skinner, 1953) and learning theory (Bandura,

1969; Patterson, 1971), aiming to put parents in control, teaching compliance in a positive way, and targeting behaviours in present time. It works in clinical practice, and includes techniques for maintenance and generalisation, all supported by extensive research.

It now extends to older children through Teen PPP, teaching parents to manage problems and conflicts with supportive control and rewards for good behaviour. It includes acknowledgement of emotions, but suggests that parents separate emotion from problem solving. While Triple P advocates a positive atmosphere, the focus is necessarily on concrete behaviour change, and it is expected that emotional problems will be improved along with behaviour.

Validation Studies

Triple P has generated a vast body of research. The focus is mainly one of professional intervention in concrete behaviour problems, claiming to have the strongest empirical support of any intervention with children, and providing a body of methodologically sound evidence-based outcomes (Sanders, 1999). As an detailed example, three levels of the Triple P Positive Parenting Program (enhanced, standard or self-directed) were compared by Sanders, Markie-Dadds, Tully and Bor (2000). The families of 305 preschoolers at high risk of developing conduct problems were randomly assigned to a condition or a wait-list control. Following the program, those in the enhanced and standard programs showed lower levels of parent-reported disruptive behaviour, lower levels of dysfunctional parenting, greater parental competence and more consumer satisfaction than those in either of the other two conditions. The children in the enhanced level showed greater reliable improvement. At a 1-year follow-up, children in all three conditions showed similar levels of clinically reliable change in observed disruptive behaviour. Overall, parents' self-management in relation to the maintenance and generalisation of parenting skills once acquired has been continuously emphasised in the research (Sanders, 1984; Sanders, 1999; Sanders & Woolley, 2005). The strengths of the program are in its clinical applications and its clear explanations of traditional parenting.

Overview of PET

Origin and Theoretical Background

PET was developed by psychologist Thomas Gordon, following intensive research with Carl Rogers at the University of Chicago. After further experience as a clinician, Gordon decided to change to preventive methods, teaching parents interpersonal skills to strengthen family relationships thereby influencing positive behaviour change in their children. He developed his (1970) Theory of Healthy Relationships, based on listening skills (Rogers, 1951), parental assertiveness and self-disclosure (Jourard, 1971) and conflict resolution according to Dewey's (1938) educational theory of inquiry. He then constructed a course incorporating his own experience of group-centred leadership (Gordon, 1955).

PET first targets parents' emotional awareness and self-regulation, progressing to mutual respect and power sharing, with a shift from teaching compliance to encouraging emotional self-responsibility through intensive skills training. Gordon (1983) advocated this radical approach, suggesting that societal changes would cause an increase in family problems without a shift in parenting style to cope with them.

In Australia PET is available through the non-profit national provider, the Effectiveness Training Institute of Australia (ETIA), which incorporates state instructor associations. ETIA is responsible for training and accrediting all instructors, and supplying course materials, including the Australian PET Workbook (Wood, 1997). The program divides neatly into skill modules, has undergone rigorous evaluation for national accreditation with the Australian Training Council (ATC) and offers credit transfers for parents who qualify for them. ETIA is a Registered Training Organisation and PET is a competency-based training.

PET is intended for relationship enhancement in normal families with any age children, a population with needs as important as those requiring clinical help, and possibly with greater numbers (L'Abate, 1981; Levant, 1983). It teaches interpersonal life skills, which generalise to any situation, with well evaluated outcomes of parental skill acquisition and stress reduction, as well as training efficacy. It is suitable for both community and professional delivery in a readily available Australian vernacular format. Its relevance in the changed context of parenting can be appreciated in the light of recent studies of the importance of emotional competence for both parents and children (Damasio, 2000; Gottman, 1997; Le Doux, 1998; Salovey & Mayer, 1990), and reinforced by findings from longitudinal studies like the Australian Temperament Project (Prior et al., 2000) and the Arizona State University study of reciprocal empathy-related responses between parents and children (Zhou, Eisenberg, Losoya, Fabes et al., 2002).

Validation Studies

Numerous Australian studies of PET have produced evidence-based positive outcomes over a generation of parents taking the course (Schultz, 1985, Wood & Davidson, 1993, 2003). The study by Wood and Davidson (2003) provided evidence of the changes parents made following PET, and compared changes in parents' communication to their children with that of control parents who made little or no change. An extensive study of PET in Australia (Wood, 2003) investigated skills acquisition and stress reduction for parents, and the use of two different PET workbooks, with a three-group comparison design (70 standard US workbook, 81 Australian workbook and 81 controls with no PET). Both PET groups achieved substantially and significantly higher scores than controls on empathic listening, appropriate assertiveness and conflict resolution. Compared with controls the PET parents showed a significantly greater reduction in levels of parental stress about their family concerns. Males scored significantly higher in listening skills using the Australian workbook, although there were no statistically significant differences between the workbooks. Detailed qualitative reports indicated that parents had made satisfactory changes in family management procedures, improved relationships with children and increased levels of family harmony. These findings provide the first wide-ranging evaluation of PET implemented at a community level in the light of emerging awareness of emotional intelligence and the need for family development of interpersonal communication skills.

In the US, a meta-analysis (Cedar & Levant, 1990) produced support for the overall efficacy of PET. Cedar considered that this meta-analysis, which included 26 separate studies, represented the most comprehensive search for PET studies up to that time.

Conclusion

It must be remembered that Triple P and PET function in two totally different paradigms, with different objectives, methods and philosophies. Triple P research focuses on the "gold standard" (Robson, 2002) of randomised, controlled studies, often described with the implication that other methodologies are of little value. It is also true that the evaluation and quantification of separate behaviours presents fewer methodological problems than do outcomes in the area of complex emotional and relational interactions (Robson, 2002) where valid assessment is a complex and ethically demanding task, often calling for quasi-experimental designs, and qualitative methodologies, as does PET.

Triple P as a behavioural program receives generous government funding. This paper calls for similar recognition of PET as a useful, well-validated program which can deliver a set of emotionally competent skills to Australian parents and provide a legitimate choice.

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