OBSERVED ATTACHMENT AND SELF-REPORTED AFFECT

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter Page

I. INTRODUCTION 1

II. AFFECT AND ATTACHMENT LITERATURE 3

Attachment 3
Affect 9
Bridging Attachment and Affect 13
Current Research Limitations 16
Current Study 17

III. METHODOLOGY 18

Participants 18
Procedures 19
Measures 19
Analysis 22

IV. FINDINGS 23

Secure Orientation 23
Preoccupied Orientation 24
Dismissing Orientation 24

V. CONCLUSION 26

Discussion 26
Clinical Implications 29
Limitations and Future Research 31

REFERENCES 33

APPENDICES 46

LIST OF TABLES

Table Page

1....46
2....47
3....51
4....52
5....53
6....54
7....55
8....56
9....57
10....58
11....59
12....60
13....61
14....62
15....63
16....64
17....65
18....66
19....67
20....68
21....69
22....70
23....71
24....72
25....73
26....74
27....75
28....76
29....77
30....78
31....79
32....80
33....81
34....82

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure Page

1.....83

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Attachment research began with the work of John Bowlby in the 1950s. This initial research analyzed infants' relationships with their primary caregivers (van der Horst et al., 2008). Mary Ainsworth expanded Bowlby's work by identifying distinct attachment styles that infants displayed with their mothers: secure, avoidant, and ambivalent (Bretherton, 1992). Since this time, children's relationships with caregivers have been studied extensively and conceptualized to reflect an attachment relationship. Attachment relationships have been studied regarding childhood relationships with caregivers and adulthood relationships with romantic partners (Feeney, 1999). Attachment security during childhood predicts optimal neurodevelopment, affect regulation, and behavior regulation (Thompson, 2006). Infant attachment security is also related to high levels of self-esteem, self-confidence, and social competence in adolescence (Thompson, 2006). Secure adult attachment relationships have been linked to increased relationship satisfaction, increased levels of support, and an improved ability to manage stress among men and women (Feeney, 1999; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

Although researchers have studied multiple facets of attachment styles in childhood and adulthood, little emphasis has been placed on how attachment styles in adulthood impact various aspects of couple communication. Understanding the unique impact attachment styles have on men and women provides opportunities for further understanding and intervening in distressed couple relationships. Research has shown that attachment relationships help form the way that people view themselves and others (Miller, Perlman, & Brehm, 2007). However, less research

has identified specifically how attachment styles impact how men and women experience affect during conversations. Because affect has the potential to greatly influence couple communication and subsequent satisfaction, it is important to consider how attachment styles contribute to affective experiences (Feeney, 1999). This study expands on current knowledge of attachment and affect by investigating the ways that observed attachment orientations of men and women influence couples' affective experiences in communication.

CHAPTER II

ATTACHMENT AND AFFECT LITERATURE

Attachment

In order to improve couples' communication experiences, it is important to develop a deeper understanding of the in the roles attachment and affect play in couple relationships. Attachment refers to the security of the relationship between a person and a caregiver or romantic partner (Cassidy, 1999.) Attachment, specifically, has been explored in a variety of studies analyzing different dimensions of attachment. This review will focus primarily on the results of studies of attachment as it impacts relationships in adulthood.

Attachment Theory

Attachment is a theory of relationships built around people's drives toward safety and stability (Dinero, Conger, Shaver, Widaman, & Larsen-Rife, 2011). Bowlby began forming this theory due to his interest in the transmission of relationship patterns from parents to children (Bretherton, 1992). Bowlby hypothesized that understanding a child's relationship with his/her parents would improve understanding of that child (van der Horst et al., 2006). This led to his belief that intervening with parents would improve their children's functioning (Bretherton, 1992).

Beginning in infancy, people are inclined to be close to a caregiver who is able to provide a sense of security. Security refers to the degree that children know that their caregivers will respond sensitively to their needs. This proximity-seeking behavior leads to the development of what attachment scholars refer to as an "internal working model"; an ever-expanding collection

of understandings, expectations, and mental representations that people hold about themselves, others, and the world (Collins et al., 2004). A critical element in the development of this working model is the child's relationship with that caregiver, or attachment figure. Over time, across numerous caregiver-child interactions, the child develops a sense of security within the relationship that is then projected to other interpersonal relationships (Bartholomew, 1990; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Thus, the nature and quality of childhood attachment to caregivers contributes to the individual's expectations and abilities within adult intimate relationships (McCarthy & Maughan, 2010). These working models—the collection of expectations individuals have about relationships—continue to be updated and adjusted in adulthood, and subsequently guide how people experience their romantic relationships (Feeney, 1999). As a theory that conceptualizes an internal foundation for individuals, it is one that can be applied to men and women throughout their lives.

Attachment Styles

Hazan and Shaver (1987) identified three primary adult attachment styles: secure, avoidant, and anxious/ambivalent. In Western cultures, the most common attachment style is secure, encompassing approximately 56% of adults. An avoidant attachment style is found in approximately 23% of adults while an anxious/ambivalent attachment style is found in approximately 20% of adults (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Research suggests that women are more likely to be categorized as secure than men and men are more likely to have avoidant attachment styles across cultures (Mickelson, Kessler, & Shaver, 1997; Schmitt et al., 2003).

Bartholomew (1990) expanded these three attachment styles to create a model with four categories: secure, dismissing (avoidant), preoccupied (anxious/ambivalent), and fearful. These attachment styles are based upon a balance between an individual's model of self (how positively or negatively one's self is viewed) and a model of others (how positively or negatively others are viewed).

Secure attachment style. Securely attached individuals have a positive perception of self

and others (Bartholomew, 1990; Collins & Read, 1990). This positive model results in their ability to achieve intimacy in relationships while balancing a personal sense of autonomy. Secure individuals are more likely to have positive levels of self-esteem and are less likely to display serious relationship difficulties (Bartholomew, 1990). They have more self-confidence and view others as trustworthy, "dependable, altruistic, willing to stand up for their beliefs, and having control over the outcomes of their lives" (Collins & Read, 1990, p. 654).

Preoccupied attachment style. Adults with a preoccupied attachment style have a negative view of self, but a positive model of others (Bartholomew, 1990). Preoccupied/anxious individuals have low feelings of self-worth but have a strong desire to be close to intimate partners (Bartholomew, 1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Those with a preoccupied attachment style are more likely to doubt themselves and feel misunderstood by partners (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). They often hold beliefs that others are not trustworthy and have little control over their lives (Collins & Read, 1990). Despite feelings of insecurity in relationships, preoccupied adults generally display warmth in relationships (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991).

Dismissing attachment style. The dismissing attachment style (i.e. avoidant) is categorized by a positive perception of self, but a negative view of others (Bartholomew, 1990). Dismissing adults highly value independence and hold a belief that relationships are unreliable. Consequently, they avoid close relationships and apply themselves primarily to individual activities and success (Bartholomew, 1990). Dismissing individuals do not identify that they experience a negative emotional impact resulting from rejection, which contributes to a more positive sense of self-esteem (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991).

Fearful attachment style. Fearfully attached individuals have a negative perception of self and others. Fearful adults desire a close romantic relationship but fear that they will be rejected (Bartholomew, 1990). They are more likely to experience feelings of jealousy and extreme positive and negative emotions (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Those with a fearful attachment style have difficulty becoming close to others, partially due to their lack of security and difficulty

asserting themselves (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991).

Gender. Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) found that females were more likely than men to be classified as having a preoccupied attachment style. They also found that men were more likely to have dismissing attachment styles than females. This is consistent with Mickelson, Kessler, and Shaver's (1997) findings that individuals who are avoidantly attached are more likely to be men. Interestingly, they also found that secure individuals are more likely to be female but did not find that those who are preoccupied are more likely to be females.

Stability in Attachment Style from Childhood to Adulthood

With distinct categories of attachment styles in adulthood, researchers questioned whether attachment styles are consistent across the lifespan or whether they are able to change in adulthood. In most cases, attachment relationships are formed with a primary caregiver during childhood and maintained during adolescence (Dinero et al., 2011). Attachment styles formed during childhood impact how individuals form attachments with romantic partners in adulthood (Davila & Cobb, 2004; Dinero et al., 2011; Feeney, 1999; Fraley, 2002).

Fraley (2002) outlines two differing perspectives about the stability of attachment styles. The revisionist perspective proposes that attachment style is fairly flexible. This perspective states that attachment styles have the potential to change when people encounter experiences that challenge their existing attachment styles. The contradicting viewpoint is the prototype perspective, which supposes that childhood attachment figures provide the prototype for attachment figures in adulthood. Fraley's (2002) meta-analysis of attachment stability concludes that attachment styles present in childhood and adulthood in fact overlap to some degree.

Considering that attachment is relatively stable, different factors that can contribute to change in attachment styles should be considered, particularly when trying to design interventions/therapy with troubled couples. Consistent with the revisionist perspective, significant life circumstances have the potential to change an individual's attachment style (Davila & Cobb, 2004; Fraley, 2002). Circumstances such as death of a parent and the transition

to parenthood increase the likelihood that an adult's attachment style will change (Davila & Cobb, 2004; Fraley, 2002). It is also possible that changes in cognitions about relationships can impact changes in attachment style (Davila & Cobb, 2004). People who think more positively about relationships may have the ability to change their attachment styles. On the other hand, people with more cumulative vulnerabilities, such as having psychopathology or parental divorce, may develop an insecure attachment style over time even when they were previously securely attached (Davila & Cobb, 2004). Childhood attachment styles are challenged further by intimate relationships in adulthood (Dinero et al., 2011). As individuals grow closer to their romantic partners, their attachment styles are influenced more by that relationship than by their childhood attachment styles. Despite the findings that attachment style is relatively stable, these factors may contribute to the changes in attachment style that do occur.

Gender. Much of attachment research has not yet addressed potential differences between men and women regarding the stability of their attachment styles. Research that has explored this has not discovered gender differences in attachment stability over time (Ammaniti et al., 2000).

Attachment and Couple Satisfaction

Attachment styles not only impact individuals but those who are in close relationships with them. Indeed, research suggests that attachment styles impact the current and future quality of intimate relationships (Holland & Roisman, 2010; Simpson, 1990). Attachment influences relationship quality through different components of an intimate relationship, such as support, management of stress, and overall satisfaction.

Support. A major component of the quality of relationships is the level of support partners perceive from one another. Insecurely attached adults are more likely to describe their partners as less supportive than are securely attached adults (Martin, Paetzold, & Rholes, 2010). Secure men, particularly, provide more support to their spouses than insecure men (Mikulincer et al., 2010). Additionally, insecure adults are less likely to provide support to their partners

(Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Insecure adults experience increased anxiety around their partners, leading to fewer attempts to gain support from their partners (Martin et al., 2010). Consequently, insecurely attached couples provide and perceive low levels of support from their partners (Martin et al., 2010; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). More specifically, partners with anxious attachments perceive their partners as providing low levels of support while avoidant individuals believe their partners are too involved in their individual challenges (Martin et al., 2010).

Stress management. Attachment also influences how couples are able to cope with relationship stressors as they arise. Insecure adults have increased difficulty coping with stressors in their relationships (Feeney, 1999; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Those with avoidant attachment styles tend to distance themselves as a method of coping with stress, specifically through denial, attention diversion, and disengagement (Feeney, 1999; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Anxiously attached adults are more likely to focus primarily on their emotions to help them cope with stress. Securely attached adults, on the other hand, tend to problem-solve more and look to others for support in their attempts to cope with stress (Feeney, 1999; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

Communication and commitment. Secure attachment in romantic relationships contributes to a variety of additional positive characteristics. Secure couples have positive communication strategies and experience more harmonious interactions than insecure couples (Feeney, 1999; Holland & Roisman, 2010). Furthermore, secure adults describe their partners more positively in communication with others (Holland & Roisman, 2010). Secure couples are more interdependent and experience more feelings of trust than insecure couples (Simpson, 1990). They also have higher levels of commitment to the relationship that remains stable over time (Mikulincer et al., 2002; Simpson, 1990). Additionally, adults are likely to form relationships with partners who have similar attachment styles, suggesting that relationships perpetuate the attachment styles that partners had when they began the relationship (Simpson, 1990). These findings imply that securely attached individuals behave in relationships in ways

that result in greater relationship satisfaction.

Overall satisfaction. In addition to the effects on specific factors contributing to satisfaction, attachment style impacts couples' overall levels of relationship satisfaction. Satisfaction in couple relationships is most strongly determined by attachment security specific to the romantic relationship rather than by an overall attachment style (Mikuliner et al., 2002). Highest levels of relationship satisfaction are often found among securely attached men and women (Feeney, 1999; Mikulincer et al., 2002; Tucker & Anders, 1999). This finding reflects the direct link between attachment security and high levels of couple satisfaction (Timm & Keiley, 2011). Couples with anxious attachment styles have lower marital satisfaction than other insecurely or securely attached couples (Mikulincer et al., 2002; Tucker & Andrews, 1999). Couple satisfaction is influenced by the combination of individuals' attachment styles, their partners' attachment styles, and their combined couple attachment styles (secure, insecure, or mixed; Banse, 2004). Couples are most satisfied in their relationships when both partners are securely attached (Feeney, 1999). Furthermore, insecurely attached individuals report higher levels of satisfaction when their partners are securely attached compared to when both partners are insecurely attached (Feeney, 1999)

Gender. Gender differences have been found regarding attachment styles and different components of couple satisfaction. Men who are securely attached experienced significantly more harmony during interactions than insecure men, but this was not found for women (Mikulincer et al., 2002). Additionally, men and women who have anxious attachment styles are in relationships with lower levels of trust (Simpson, 1990). Anxiously attached women also experience lower levels of commitment in their romantic relationships while among men, those who are avoidantly attached have lower levels of trust and commitment in their relationships (Simpson, 1990).

Overall satisfaction in relationships can be further delineated based on the gender of partners. Anxiously and avoidantly attached men specifically have lower levels of relationship satisfaction (Simpson, 1990; Tucker & Andrews, 1999). Among women, anxiously attached

individuals have the lowest levels of couple satisfaction (Tucker & Andrews, 1999). This indicates that the presence of a secure attachment style in relationships contributes to increasing levels of couple satisfaction among men and women.

Affect

In addition to the role of attachment in couple satisfaction, couple's affective experiences also play a role in relationships. Emotional experience encompasses the internal reactions that people have to emotional stimuli (Guerrero et al., 1998). Affect is an important component of emotional experience but is more general than emotions. Affect fluctuates on a continuum and refers specifically to the "positive or negative valence of the emotional experience" (Guerrero et al., 1998, p. 5). Men and women's affective experiences have the ability to motivate them in positive or negative ways (Fuendeling, 1998). Thus, affect serves as a guide for the way that people interact with their romantic partners.

Affect in Couple Relationships

Although affect is experienced individually, it is also influenced by and experienced within the context of romantic relationships. Positive affect is generally reflective of positive emotions, such as happiness and joy (Gottman, 1994). Positive affect can be seen in couples by verbal and nonverbal displays of affection and interest in one's partner. Laughter and positive responsiveness are also characteristic of partners experiencing positive affect. Contrastingly, partners experiencing negative affect may feel "anger, sadness, fear, contempt, and disgust" (Gottman, 1994, p. 20). These emotions result in partners participating in more complaining and blaming of one another. They may also become more defensive, critical, or domineering. The presence of positive and negative affect in couples has the potential to greatly influence complex aspects of couple relationships.

Absorbing states and flexibility. When interacting with one another, male and female partners experience a variety of affective states. Partners may fluctuate from positivity (smiling and humor) to negativity (frowning and criticism) or become stuck in a positive or negative state.

Gottman (1994) describes partners' experiences of affective "stuckness" as absorbing states. Couples experience absorbing states when they become unable to exit a specific affective state. Couples can find themselves in either positive or negative absorbing states, and positive absorbing states are beneficial for couples. Not surprisingly, negative absorbing states are more commonly found among distressed couples (Gottman, 1994; Gottman, 1998). Distressed couples are more likely to respond negatively to partner's attempts to repair a disagreement, leading to more negative affect (Gottman, 1998). Distressed couples also participate in fewer affective transitions, limiting their ability to transition from negative to positive affect (Griffin, 2002). This contributes to the pattern that one partner's negative affect leads to another partner's negative affect, creating a cycle resulting in a negative absorbing state that is difficult to exit (Gottman, 1994; Gottman, 1998). Non-distressed couples, on the other hand, are more often able to respond positively to their partner's negative affect, thus interrupting the cycle and avoiding a negative absorbing state (Gottman, 1998). This contributes to non-distressed couples' flexibility in their affective experiences, which results in more positive affect overall (Griffin, 2003).

Once a distressed couple has entered into a negative absorbing state, they have only a 10% chance of exiting that state into more positive affect (Gottman, 1994). Non-distressed couples are better equipped to exit absorbing states by using "metacommunication, feeling probes that explore feelings, information exchange, social comparison, humor, distraction, gossip, finding areas of common ground, and appeals to basic philosophy and expectations in the marriage" (Gottman, 1998, p. 180). These skills increase couple's ability to maintain affective flexibility—preventing the problematic negative absorbing state—and achieving high couple satisfaction. It is likely that the link between affective states and levels of distress interact with one another circularly. That is, distressed couples may be more likely to experience absorbing states and couples experiencing absorbing states may be more likely to become more distressed.

Affect in couple conversations. As illustrated by the findings of absorbing states, the interaction of romantic partners impacts their affective experience. Individuals' moods are

impacted by the affect, positive or negative, that their partners display in conversations (Madhyastha, Hamaker, & Gottman, 2011). Because partners are significantly impacted by one another's affect, their individual methods of managing their emotions can impact the overall affective experience of the couple. Couples who are able to regulate their emotions express less negativity and respond to their partner's negativity more positively (Gottman, 1994). In addition, couples are more likely to experience positive affect when partners are more playful and when they share positive experiences with one another (Driver & Gottman, 2004; Hicks & Diamond, 2008). The presence of positive affect in conflict and daily conversations increases couple satisfaction and decreases likelihood of divorce (Gottman, 1994; Gottman & Levenson, 2000). Interestingly, Gottman and Levenson (2000) found that it is the absence of positive affect rather than the presence of negative affect that most significantly predicts divorce.

Gender. Research has identified some gender differences regarding couples' affect in their romantic relationships. During conversations, men who experience more negative affect contribute to negative beginnings to discussions (Gottman & Levenson, 2000). In addition, women who do not begin conversations negatively are often in relationships with men who become angry and complain less (Gottman & Levenson, 2000). Driver and Gottman (2004) found that men and women may contribute to positive affect in different ways. Positive affect increases most significantly for women when men display playfulness and respond enthusiastically. Men experience increases in positive affect primarily when women respond enthusiastically to them. Men and women both feel more positively when their partners respond enthusiastically, but women also experience more positive affect when their partners are playful with them. This suggests there may be multiple pathways to positive affect for women while there is one primary pathway for men.

Affect and Couple Satisfaction

Affect contributes to the satisfaction that couples experience in their relationships. Overall, couples with high levels of positive affect are more satisfied in their relationships

(Johnson et al., 2005; Mattson et al., 2011). Positive affect distinguishes between satisfied and unsatisfied couples (Mattson et al., 2011). Premarital couples who experience high levels of positive affect experience more satisfaction in the present and after their marriages. Couples with lower levels of positive affect experience less effective problem solving discussions, which contributes to lower levels of marital satisfaction (Mattson et al., 2011). Negative affect present during couple conversations is related to lower levels of relationship satisfaction, particularly when discussing sexual topics (Rehman et al., 2011).

Gender. Research suggests that women's relationship satisfaction may be more impacted by affect than men's satisfaction. The level of negative affect men experience significantly impacts the decreases in their wives' levels of satisfaction (Mattson et al., 2011.) Women particularly experience lower levels of relationship satisfaction when they experience negativity during couple discussions (Rehman et al., 2011). Women, therefore, experience less relationship satisfaction both when they and when their partners' experience negative affect during couple conversations.

Affect Measures

Current research has not widely used moment-to-moment self-reports of affective experiences, with some notable exceptions. Gottman and Levenson (1985) began using self-reports of affect from couple conversations. This study prompted couples to have three different conversations, after which the partners reviewed the videotapes. Partners were instructed to indicate their affect as they felt it during the discussions. While reviewing their conversations, partners rated their affect on a 180 degree dial (0 degrees = negative, 90 degrees = neutral, and 180 degrees = positive.) The affect reports were averaged for every 10-second period and further analyzed, finding that this measure is a valid measure of affect (Gottman & Levenson, 1985). Levenson, Carstensen, and Gottman (1994) followed the same procedure to determine affect during couple interactions.

Griffin (1993, 2008) has used similar measure of self-reported affect. Griffin's studies

both began with prompted couple conversations. After their discussions, partners were separated and watched the videotapes of their conversations. A computer depicted nine color-coded bars representing a range from extremely negative emotion to extremely positive emotion. Partners highlighted the emotion they were experiencing as they reviewed the videotapes to provide a continuous self-report of their affect (Griffin, 1993, 2008).

Gardner (2008) also used continuous self-reports of affect. After couple conversations, partners were separated and reviewed their videotapes. A computer screen depicted a vertical scale with nine points (1 = high negativity and 9 = high positivity). Participants used the mouse to rate their affect on that scale as often as it changed during the conversation (Gardner, 2008).

Bridging Attachment and Affect

With an understanding of the roles attachment and affect play independently in close relationships, it may be helpful to analyze how affect and attachment interact with one another in relationships. Childhood attachment styles impact the level of emotional adjustment individuals experience in adulthood (Fuendeling, 1998; Ross & Fuertes, 2010). Attachment formed during childhood creates the foundation for affect regulation in childhood and adulthood (Fuendeling, 1998). Men and women who are securely attached as children tend to maintain high levels of emotional adjustment as adults (Ross & Fuertes, 2010). This finding is amplified for children who are securely attached to both parents during childhood, as they experience the highest levels of emotional adjustment as adults (Ross & Fuertes, 2010).

Affective Characteristics of Attachment Styles

To fully understand the link between attachment styles and emotional experience, specific methods that lead to securely attached individual's emotion regulation should be addressed. Adults' internal working models impact the primary and secondary appraisals of their relationship experiences. Primary appraisals include how an individual immediately responds emotionally to a given relational situation. Secondary appraisals are the subsequent cognitive responses to situations that can impact the emotional reaction that was experienced first (Feeney,

1999). Internal working models provide a foundation for individual's emotional experiences from which they draw when interacting with their partners.

Attachment styles significantly impact how individuals regulate their emotions (Wei et al., 2005). Securely attached individuals have more positive methods of coping with their emotions than insecurely attached individuals (Simpson, 1990). Fuendeling's (1998) review found that secure adults manage their negative affect more often by effectively appraising the interaction prompting their negative affect. Perhaps an important component of secure adults' abilities to regulate emotion is their ability to seek support from others to help themselves understand and regulate their emotions. They are also more able to consider goals for their relationship during interactions with their partner, which allows them to effectively regulate their emotions.

Contrary to secure partner's ability to regulate their emotions, anxious/ambivalent adults exhibit more dysregulation of their emotions (Fuendeling, 1998). Anxious individuals use emotional reactivity as a method of regulating their emotions, although it contributes to future negative affect (Wei et al., 2005). Anxious partners give attention to their emotions but focus primarily on their negative emotions (Fuendeling, 1998). Their over-emphasis on emotions leads to difficulty directly accessing social support, which contributes to difficulty regulating their emotions.

While secure adults give appropriate attention to emotion and anxious adults give too much attention to emotion, avoidant adults do not give enough attention to their emotional experiences (Fuendeling, 1998). Avoidant individuals attempt to regulate their emotions by using emotional cutoffs with people around them (Wei et al., 2005). Although they experience high levels of anxiety, they give little attention to and often inhibit their emotions, both positive and negative (Fuendeling, 1998). Because of their inattention towards their emotions, they have more difficulty recalling emotional memories. When asked to recall memories during which they felt specific emotions, avoidant individuals are often unable to remember specific moments in their

pasts (Fuendeling, 1998).

Gender. Gender and attachment interact and impact the degrees of positive and negative affect couples experience. Men and women who are securely attached are more likely to be in relationships with partners who experience frequent positive emotions (Simpson, 1990). Men who are anxiously attached are in relationships with women who experience less frequent but more intense periods of positive affect. Women who are more anxiously attached are in relationships with men who experience less frequent and less intense positive emotions (Simpson, 1990). This suggests that it is both the individual and the partners' attachment styles that impact the affect that men and women experience in relationships.

These gender differences also impact how partners cope with negative emotions as they arise. When they feel distressed, anxiously attached women in particular do not feel comforted by their partners (Fuendeling, 1998). When feeling anxious, securely attached women are likely to seek support form their partners while avoidant women become less likely to seek support as their anxiety increases (Fuendeling, 1998). When women feel anxious, their secure male partners are also likely to offer them support while avoidant men are less likely to offer support. These gender findings illuminate a process between securely and avoidantly attached men and women. When securely attached women feel anxious, they seek out support from their parents and will receive support if their male partners are also securely attached. On the other hand, avoidant women will seek out support less from their partners and if their partners are also avoidant, will not receive much support. When both partners are securely attached, men and women behave in ways that increases the levels of support whereas when both partners are avoidant, they behave in ways that decrease how much support they receiver when distressed (Fuendeling, 1998).

Affect and Attachment in Relationships

The impact of individual attachment styles on affect inevitably continues to influence relationships with others. Securely attached adults experience more positive emotions when thinking about attachment figures from the present and from childhood (Mikulincer & Shaver,

2007). When interacting with others in close relationships, they also experience more positive affect in conversations (Hicks & Diamond, 2011; Impett, English, & John, 2010; Sadikaj, Moskowitz, & Zuroff, 2011).

During interactions with significant others, insecurely attached partners experience high rates of negative affect (Sadikaj et al., 2011). More specifically, partners with an anxious attachment feel a greater degree of negative affect when interacting with their intimate partners (Hicks & Diamond, 2011; Sadikaj et al., 2011). Avoidant partners may experience the most negative impact when interacting with their significant others. Although avoidant individuals do not encounter as much distress in conversations as anxiously attached partners, it is the result of dulled positive and negative emotions (Sadikaj et al., 2011). Despite their dulled affect, avoidant partners are unique in that they experience a spillover effect of negative affect (Hicks & Diamond, 2011). When participating in conflictual conversations with romantic partners, avoidant individual's negative feelings remain consistent the following day. So despite the fact that they do not experience the highest rates of negative affect, their negativity is the most pervasive (Hicks & Diamond, 2011).

The influence of attachment style on affect during interactions with others is most significant for interactions with a romantic partner (Sadikaj et al., 2011). Considering that attachment styles in adulthood are based primarily on relationships with an intimate partner, it is logical to conclude that this relationship is also where the greatest degree of affect is experienced. However, Impett et al. (2010) found that mothers without avoidant attachment (i.e. secure and preoccupied) styles to their romantic partners experienced more positive emotions towards their adult children. This indicates that mothers with avoidant attachment styles to their spouses also display negative emotions towards their adult children, regardless of the mother-child attachment styles. This finding suggests that adult romantic attachment styles not only predict affect with a romantic partner but also impact emotional experience in other significant relationships. With increased negativity in parent-child relationships as a function of spousal attachment styles, the

affect that attachment has extends beyond the specific attachment relationships (Impett et al., 2010).

Gender. Attachment styles within couples impact how men and women experience affect. Securely attached women's male partners experience frequent positive emotions, suggesting that attachment styles impact the individual and the relationship (Simpson, 1990). In addition, men who are anxiously attached tend to be in relationships with women who experience fewer positive emotions (Simpson, 1990). Anxious women are also more often in relationships with men who experience infrequent positive emotions (Simpson, 1990). Although anxious women experience the most negative affect, women who are high on avoidance experience the smallest increases in positive affect during positive interactions with their partners (Hicks & Diamond, 2008). Insecure attachment styles among women, therefore, contribute to fewer positive emotions overall and more difficulty increasing their positive affect with their partners.

Gender

Across the literature regarding attachment and affect, some significant gender differences have been identified. Females are more likely to have preoccupied attachment styles while men are more likely to have dismissing attachment styles (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Mickelson, Kessler, & Shaver, 1997). For men only, secure attachment styles are related to more harmony during conversations with their female partners (Mikulincer et al., 2002). Low levels of trust are found among anxious women and avoidant men (Simpson, 1990). Relationship satisfaction among men is lowest for those who are anxiously and avoidantly attached while among women, satisfaction is lowest for those who are anxiously attached (Simpson, 1990; Tucker & Andrews, 1999).

Men and women experience increases in positive affect when their partners respond enthusiastically to them but women also experience more positive affect when their male partners are playful (Driver & Gottman, 2004). Women's satisfaction is significantly impacted in relationships and decreases both when women and when their male partners' have negative affect

during couple conversations (Mattson et al., 2011; Rehman et al., 2011).

Securely attached men and women experience frequent positive emotions in their relationships (Simpson, 1990). Women who are in relationships with anxious men experience infrequent but intense positive affect. Conversely, men in relationships with anxious women experience infrequent and less intense positive affect (Simpson, 1990). Anxious women experience the most intense negative affect, although avoidant women have the most difficulty experiences increases in positive affect when in conversations with their partners (Hicks & Diamond, 2008; Simpson, 1990). When women experience distress, secure women seek support from their partners and secure men provide support to their distressed partners (Fuendeling, 1998). However, avoidant women do not seek support and avoidant men do not provide support when their female partners are distressed (Fuendeling, 1998).

Current Research Limitations

Although there is a body of research on couple attachment, affect, and gender, there are some limitations in the current research. Research indicates that the impact attachment styles have on couple affect differs somewhat depending on the gender of the partners. More understanding of the role that men and women's attachment behaviors have on their combined couple affect would contribute to existing research to further understand how gender influences attachment and affect in adult romantic relationships.

In addition, the majority of research measures attachment based on self-report questionnaires (Dinero et al., 2011; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Sadikaj, 2011; Simpson, 1990). Although these methods are reliable, they neglect to identify the presence of observed attachment behaviors in intimate relationships. Because attachment is both an internal and external process, it is important to also study the behavioral manifestations of attachment security in romantic relationships.

Additionally, the majority of research studying couple affect uses either observed affective behaviors, such as eye contact and smiling, (Gottman, 1998; Gottman & Levenson,

2000; Griffin, 2003; Madhyastha, et al., 2011) or self-report measures of overall daily affect (Hicks & Diamond, 2008). A limited amount of research has used continuous, moment-to-moment self-reports of affect experienced by partners during a conversation with their significant others. Additionally, the ways that gender interacts with attachment and affect has not been addressed using continuous self-reports of affect. Despite current knowledge about attachment and affect, a need exists to investigate the influence of attachment behaviors on self-reported affect in order to more fully understand how gender interacts with attachment and affect during couple interactions.

Current Study

The current study is exploratory and expands on existing knowledge about gender, self-reported attachment and affect by exploring the intensity of continuous affective experiences during couple conversations. It analyzes observed attachment behaviors to determine the degree of secure and insecure attachment behaviors in male and female partners. This will help determine the impact that attachment behaviors have on affective experiences during conversations with intimate partners (Wampler, Riggs, & Kimball, 2004). This study further investigates how male and female attachment styles impact affective flexibility and negativity during conversations with romantic partners.

Research Question

This study will seek to answer the question of whether male and female partners' attachment behaviors influence the couple's affect during interactions. In order to do this, I will use male and female partners' AABQ scores as predictors of couple affect patterns during couple conversations.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Participants were recruited using nonprobability convenience sampling procedures. Participants were recruited primarily through religious organizations and some were recruited through undergraduate classes at a university. Couples were given a $20 Walmart gift card for their participation. Twenty-three heterosexual married couples participated in the study but only 22 were included in the analysis due to disagreement between coders regarding the couples' attachment style. One couple was not included in demographic analysis due to missing data. The only participation criterion was that the couples needed to be married at least six months. The sample was comprised of 82.6% Caucasian (n = 38), 6.5% Mexican-American (n = 3), 4.3% African American (n = 2), and 2.2% Puerto Rican participants. (n = 1). The mean age of participants was 31.7 with a range from 22 to 57 (SD = 8.95.) The majority of participants (53.3%, n = 25) reported an income at or above $34,000 and others reported incomes of $22,000-25,999 (11.1%, n = 5) and $30,000-33,999 (8.9%, n = 4). Regarding religious orientations, participants were primarily Latter-day Saints (65.2%, n = 30) while other participants were Protestant (26.1%, n = 12), Hindu (4.3%, n = 2), Catholic (2.2%, n = 1), and non-denominational (2.2%, n = 1).

All participants were in their first marriage except for one male participant, who was in his second marriage. The length of participants' marriages ranged from 7 months to 30 years.

Thirteen percent (*n* = 3 couples) reported being married 7-11 months, 13% (*n* = 3) for 1-2 years, 21.7% (*n* = 5) for 3-5 years, 26.1% (*n* = 6) for 6-10 years, 13% (*n* = 3) for 11-20 years, and 13% (*n* = 3) for 21-30 years. Participating couples reported having no children (30.4%, *n* = 7), 1-2 children (47.8%, *n* = 11), 3-4 children (17.4%, *n* = 4), and 5 or more children (4.3%, *n* = 1).

Procedures

Participants arrived to a university and were lead to a laboratory, which included a waiting room. The couples were then told that they were participating in a study regarding emotional experience during difficult relationship discussions. Participants were given detailed instructions about the study procedures but were not told about the discussion prompts prior to the conversation. Participating couples were then split up for individual interviews. During the interview, participants were given the prompt: "Think about a time when your partner hurt, angered, or offended you—an incident that you still have feelings about." Participants then briefly described the incident to a researcher. After completing the individual interviews, couples were placed together in a room and asked to share with one another the incidents discussed during their individual interviews, which was the problem-solving (pre) conversation. After 10 minutes had elapsed, a knock at the door indicated that partners were to open up an envelope with the prompt: "Please share with your partner a time when you felt cared-for and supported by her/him, and discuss how you think such experiences affect your relationship." Couples continued this discussion, the (post) supportive conversation, for 7 minutes. Following the discussion, participants reviewed the videotape of their interactions. While watching the videotape, partners continuously rated their affective experiences during the videotaped discussion on a nine-point scale.

Measures

Attachment

Attachment in this study is identified at the individual (rather than the couple) level. Attachment styles were identified in individuals and determined based on the videotaped

interactions of couple discussions. One graduate student and one undergraduate student were trained to use the Adult Attachment Behavior Q-set-Revised (AABQ-R) (Wampler, Riggs, & Kimball, 2004). Coders were trained until their codes significantly correlated with one another at the .05 significance level. Coders were trained by the advisor of this study, who was trained by the creator of the AABQ. Coders met with the trainer and began practicing coding couple interactions (not from this study) individually with the coder. Supervised by the trainer, both coders then sorted couple interactions together. Once the coders appeared to be agreeing with one another while coding together, both coders separately sorted three couples. Independent coders' sorts were compared to determine how well they correlated with one another. Coders were found to correlate with one another at the .05 level, after which the coders began to sort the couple interactions from this study independently.

Videotaped couple interactions were viewed and each partner's attachment behavior were coded individually. Coders placed 80 descriptions of attachment behavior (verbal and nonverbal) on a 9-point scale from least like to most like. Descriptions included "supports partner's own efforts to address concerns and issues," "talks easily about own needs for caring, depending on others," and "appears disinterested in partner." See Table 2 for a full list of attachment behavior descriptions.

The AABQ-R correlates the coded behaviors with the prototypical secure style, preoccupied style, and dismissing style, resulting in three correlations for each partner. Correlations determined how much each participant correlates with each of the three attachment styles in a range from -1 to +1. Partners received three scores (one for each attachment style). See Table 3 for a breakdown of attachment correlations for this sample. The correlations individual partners receive indicate the attachment style(s) that they most closely resembled in their conversation. At this point, there has not been research published using the AABQ with the exception of the original article published.

Interrater reliability has been found using the AABQ-R with a mean correlation of .67 (Wampler, Riggs, & Kimball, 2004). Convergent validity was originally measured by comparing AABQ-R results with self-reported affect on the Adult Attachment Inventory. Validity was calculated using kappa, resulting in a kappa of .78 for males and .49 for females. For the current analysis, reliability was determined based on inter-coder agreement. Inter-coder reliability was calculated by having two coders each code two-thirds of the videotapes. Both coders independently coded one-third of the same couples to determine inter-coder reliability. Correlations were found between both coders to determine inter-rater agreement for the designated one-third of couples. One-third of the couples were coded together so that the couples would be equally dispersed between coders (i.e. one-third of couples by coder one, one-third of couples by coder two, and one-third of couples by both coders.) One couple's data was discarded due to disagreement between both coders. For the remaining couples, coders had a mean correlation of .54 (p = .001).

Affect

Affect data in this study is at the couple (rather than the individual) level. Both partners reported on their affective states during the interaction to create affect scores at the couple level. Participants rated their affective experiences while watching a videotape of their couple discussions. Partners were seated at a computer displaying nine boxes on a scale. The first four boxes were labeled "negative," the middle box was labeled "neutral," and the last four boxes were labeled "positive." Participants were instructed to indicate their affective experiences during the discussion on that scale. Participants provided continuous reports of their affect as often as it changed during the discussion.

Participant's ratings of their affect were transformed into numbers on a scale from 1 (*most negative*) to 5 (*most positive*). Affect data were analyzed using Gridware, a software program designed to generate state space grids for dynamical analyses of continuous data. State space grids (SSG), developed by Lewis, Lamey, and Douglas (1999) were used to illustrate

continuous affect that the partner's reported. SSGs are composed of a 5 by 5 grid to display how each partner experienced affect during the conversation. The partner's affect is then combined to see how negatively or positively the couple as a whole was during the conversation.

Affect scores were calculated separately for the pre (problem-solving) conversation and the post (supportive) conversation. Two negativity scores were calculated: negative duration and negative visits (see Table 1 and Figure 1). The negative region is indicated in Figure 1 as the L-shape, reflecting any time one or both partners reported feeling negatively. *Negative duration* was measured by how much time each couple spent in a negative affective state across the 17-minute conversation. *Negative visits* were calculated by how many visits the couples made to a negative region during their entire 17-minute conversation. This occurred when the couple moves from both partners feeling positively to one or both partners feeling negatively. In Figure 1, any time the couple entered into the yellow L-shape, it would be counted as a negative visit. This study also measured flexibility in three ways: *mean duration, dispersion, and transitions per minute*. *Mean duration* was calculated by the average length of time that a couple spends in one affective state, whether both partners were positive, both were negative, or one was positive while the other was negative. In Figure 1, the larger the circle, the more time the couple spent in that state and would be averaged to determine the mean amount of time a couple spent in each state. *Dispersion* was determined by the variety of emotional states the couple entered, specifically how many components of the 5 by 5 SSG the couple entered during their conversation. Affective *transitions per minute* were determined based on the number of times the partners changed how positively or negatively they were feeling at any one point on the five-point scale.

Validity has been found with this measure of self-reported affect (Schuldberg & Gottlieb, 2002). This computerized, continuous self-report of affect correlates with traditional paper and pencil measures of self-reported affect, specifically the Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS; Watson et al., 1988) year). This measure was positively correlated with self-reports of

positive affect (r = .32*)* and negatively correlated with self-reports of negative affect (r = -.30) (Schuldberg & Gottlieb, 2002).

Analysis

Standard multiple regression analyses were conducted to determine which independent variables (male or female secure, preoccupied, and dismissing attachment scores) were the predictors of the affect dependent variables (*negative duration* during pre and post conversations, *negative visits* during pre and post conversations, *mean duration* during pre and post conversations, *dispersion* during pre and post conversations, and *transitions per minute* during pre and post conversations). The first set of analyses regressed each affect variable from both the pre and post conversations onto male and female AABQ security scores. The second set of analyses regressed the same affect variables onto male and female AABQ preoccupation scores. The final set of analyses regressed the same affect variables onto male and female AABQ dismissing scores. For each set, there were 10 multiple regression analyses conducted (five affect variables measured during two conversations that were each regressed onto male and female AABQ scores). This was done for all three sets of analyses, resulting in a total of 30 multiple regression analyses conducted. See Table 3 for a summary of attachment correlations in this sample and Table 4 for sample descriptives.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Secure Orientation

For the first set of analyses, multiple regression was run to test if male or female AABQ security scores significantly predicted couple affect variables (negative duration, negative visits, mean duration, dispersion, and transitions per minute) during the problem-solving (pre) and supportive (post) conversations. Regression results indicated female attachment security significantly predicted some of the couple affect variables. Summaries of the secure regression model for males and females are presented in Tables 5 – 14. Female attachment security predicted lower couple mean duration (SE = 11.44, β = -.51; F = 4.44, p = .015) during the problem-solving discussion. This finding suggests that the presence of secure attachment qualities in females may serve as a buffer against a couple experiencing absorbing states during a potentially negative problem-solving conversation. Additionally, higher female security significantly predicted lower couple negative duration (SE = 61.60, β = -.52; F = 3.52, p = .017) during the supportive conversation. Couples that included a female high in security spent less time in negative emotions while in a supportive conversation, suggesting that couples including a secure female were able to successfully exit negativity when the topic of conversation transitioned into one that is more supportive. Both tests utilizing partners' secure AABQ scores indicated that female attachment security predicted less couple negativity and more flexibility during couple discussions.

Preoccupied Orientation

The second set of analyses included multiple regression analyses testing whether male and female AABQ preoccupation scores significantly predicted couple affect variables (negative duration, negative visits, mean duration, dispersion, and transitions per minute) during the

problem-solving (pre) and supportive (post) conversations. Regression results indicated that female preoccupation significantly predicted couples' affective negativity and flexibility. See Tables 15 – 24 for summaries of all regressions conducted for males and females in this set. Couples that included females who displayed higher rates of preoccupied behaviors experienced fewer negative visits (SE = 7.27, β = -.48; F = 5.89, p = .02) and fewer transitions per minute (SE = 5.64 β = -.51; F = 6.85, p = .01) overall during the problem-solving conversation. This finding suggests that couples with female partners who are high on preoccupation transitioned affective states at a lower rate when participating in problem-solving discussions. This is consistent with the additional finding that female preoccupation was associated with significantly higher couple mean durations during both the problem-solving (SE = 20.02, β = .51; F = 4.84, p = .01) and supportive conversations (SE = 56.66, β = .50; F = 3.08, p = .02), which contrasts with findings regarding female security. The data indicate that the more preoccupied behaviors that females exhibit, the more time they or their partners spend in one affective state and the fewer affective transitions they experience during couple conversations. These findings suggest that higher levels of preoccupied behaviors in females resulted in couples experiencing less affective flexibility during the problem-solving and supportive discussions.

Dismissing Orientation

The final set of analyses included multiple regression analyses testing whether male or female AABQ dismissing scores significantly predicted couple affect variables (negative duration, negative visits, mean duration, dispersion, and transitions per minute) during the problem-solving (pre) and supportive (post) conversations. Regression results indicate that female dismissiveness significantly predicted couple negativity and flexibility. See Tables 25 – 34 for descriptives of male and female results. The higher a female partner's dismissing score was, the higher the couple's negative duration during the supportive conversation (SE = 66.36, β = .54; F = 4.23, p = .01), which is the opposite from high security scores in females. Interestingly, female

dismissiveness did not contribute to significantly more negative duration for couples during the problem-solving conversation but only during the supportive conversation. However, female dismissiveness was related to higher couple mean durations during the problem-solving conversation (SE = 13.06, β = .48; F = 3.59, p = .03), also the opposite from female security scores but the same as female preoccupation scores. Findings on mean duration indicate that security in a female partner predicts lower couple mean duration while female insecurity predicts higher couple mean duration in problem-solving conversations. These findings show that dismissiveness in females contributes to couples spending more time in fewer affective states during both the problem-solving and supportive conversations, but during the supportive conversation this time was more significantly negative. This suggests that female dismissiveness predicts less couple flexibility during problem-solving conversations. Findings regarding female dismissiveness indicate that couples that include a female partner who has high levels of dismissiveness experienced significantly high levels of negativity and low levels of flexibility.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Because this study was exploratory, it was unclear what findings would result from the analysis. This study sought to answer the question of whether male or female partners' attachment behaviors influenced the couples' affective negativity and flexibility during couple conversations. In order to answer this question, the author analyzed male's and female's displayed attachment behaviors and the couples' affective experiences of negativity and flexibility. Interestingly, all analyses showed that female attachment behaviors significantly impacted a couple's affective experiences during conversations. No findings suggested that male's attachment scores significantly impact how couples experience affect while talking with their partners.

The findings that only female attachment behaviors were influential in predicting the couples' affective experiences in this sample can be understood by considering the role identified in research that women play in relationships. In Gottman and Notarius' (2000) decade review of marriage literature, they identified that couples tend to view the female partner as more influential in the initiation and execution of discussions about problems in the couple relationship. Furthermore, research identifies that couples including husbands who accept influence from their wives are less likely to divorce, although this is not true for females who accept influence from their husbands. Couples in which the husbands accept influence from their wives also tend to be more satisfied in their relationships. This review suggests that women play a unique role in the maintenance of relationships, which men and women both tend to recognize as important. With this knowledge, it is understandable that in the present study female scores were more significant. Particularly because this was a securely attached sample, therefore suggesting that this sample may have high relationship satisfaction, it is logical that they would more closely follow the

patterns that research has identified is present in satisfied couples, specifically the pattern of females having more influence in couple conversations. Additionally, the analysis was conducted in such a way that the male or female scores would be found as significant, but not both. Therefore, it is not that males are insignificant but rather that in this study, the female scores were more significant in predicting the couple's interactional experiences.

In this study, multiple regression analyses were conducted to determine whether male or female attachment orientations significantly predicted different dimensions of couple affective negativity and flexibility (negative duration, negative visits, mean duration, dispersion, and transitions per minute; see Table 1). Female security predicted significantly lower couple negative duration during the supportive conversation and higher dispersion during the problem-solving conversation, indicating that high levels of female security made it more likely that couples would experience less negativity and more flexibility even while participating in potentially conflictual conversations. Previous research has identified that securely attached couples are typically more satisfied in their relationships (Mikulincer et al., 2002; Timm & Keiley, 2011). Gottman (1998) reported that couples who are satisfied in their relationships are much less likely to become stuck in negative absorbing state, which may be due to the fact that secure individuals tend to have effective methods of emotion regulation. (Simpson, 1990). Similarly, Griffin (2003) found that nondistressed couples experience a greater degree of affective flexibility. Supposing that security in this sample is associated with increased satisfaction, the current findings that female security predicts less couple negative duration is consistent with previous research on affect. It is possible that couples including a secure female partner experience lower rates of absorbing states and are more easily able to exit negative emotional states as a function of their orientation towards secure attachment behaviors. Particularly in this sample, the majority of males and females were significantly securely attached. This suggests that even though the females' security scores were found to be significant, it is likely that the females in this study were in conversations with partners who were also

securely attached. This increases the likelihood that both partners had secure characteristics of effective emotion regulation and communication strategies, which worked together to improve how easily the couples exited negative states and contribute to more flexibility in their conversation overall

Although this sample was characterized by secure attachments, there were still interesting and significant findings from the correlations regarding preoccupied and dismissing attachment orientations. The analysis showed that females' preoccupation was related to couples making fewer negative visits during the problem-solving discussion. Although preoccupation contributed to a lower frequency of this particular negativity component, it may be due to preoccupied individual's tendency to become stuck in a negative affective state when in conversations with their partners. It is possible that couples including females high in preoccupation made fewer negative visits because they had more difficulty exiting negative states once they entered into them. Fuendeling (1998) also found that anxious women were not comforted by their partners when they were distressed. Therefore, when preoccupied/anxious women were distressed, their negative affect was not alleviated despite their partners' attempts. This may help explain why preoccupation levels among females predicted couples visiting negativity at a lower rate. Once they entered into negativity, they may have been unable to be comforted or consoled, contributing to fewer separate visits to negativity during the problem-solving conversation. Given that men are more likely to follow the lead of their wives, if females made negative visits it may be that men would simply match their partners' negativity rather than attempt to change their affect. This interpretation is consistent with the finding that female preoccupation was also related to couples making fewer transitions per minute during the same conversation. Although it may seem positive that they had fewer negative visits, it may be indicative of an unhelpful underlying process within preoccupied individuals that hinders their affective flexibility during difficult conversations. Considering the tendency for preoccupied individuals to strongly depend on and over-exert themselves emotionally towards romantic partners (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991;

Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007), they may become overwhelmed with negative emotions and have difficulty achieving affective flexibility. It is important to consider that this sample was predominantly securely attached, Therefore, although these findings highlight interesting correlations that may reflect processes that exist within couples with preoccupied partners, this study cannot generalize these findings to individuals who are predominantly preoccupied in their attachment style. Rather, these findings should be used as a foundation from which to explore attachment and affect among men and women in a more diverse sample.

Opposite from female security was the finding that female dismissiveness predicted significantly higher couple negative duration during the supportive conversation. This finding is interesting because the increase in negativity was found only during the supportive conversation, during which one would expect to experience a decrease in negativity. Hicks and Diamond (2008) found that women who were high in avoidance experienced the smallest increases in positive affect during conversations with their partners. Their finding suggests that in the present study, although there was a switch in conversation topics from one that is likely more negative to one that is likely more positive, the presence of dismissing behaviors in females contributed to a couple's inability to experience an increase in positivity. Considering again that men tend to accept influence from women, men in this study may not have challenged female's negative affect but rather followed their lead and remained with negative affect. Beyond simply experiencing few increases in positive affect, as in Hicks and Diamond's study, females in this study actually experienced significantly more negativity as the conversation progressed. Hicks and Diamond (2011) suggested that women high on avoidance experience a "spillover" of negative affect. It is possible that in the present study, women with more dismissing traits were in relationships that had more difficulty transitioning from negativity to positivity, even as the conversation topic changed. In fact, the analysis showed that for females dismissiveness predicted more couple negativity even after the more negative conversation (problem-solving) had passed.

However, the females in this study were not significantly dismissive, which limits the ability for these findings to be applied to all couples that include a dismissive female partner.

Across all three attachment styles (secure, preoccupied, and dismissing), female scores were significantly associated with mean duration. Higher levels of security among females was related to couples' lower mean durations while high levels of preoccupation and dismissiveness were related to higher levels of couple mean duration during problem-solving conversations. These findings suggest that female security predicted more couple affective flexibility with females' partners while the opposite was true for female attachment insecurity. Particularly considering the secure sample, it may be that females in this study who displayed secure characteristics, such as providing support, were having conversations with men who were also displaying supportive characteristics. This would increase couple's flexibility and decrease their combined negativity because their interactions were characterized by positive interactional processes. Additionally, female preoccupation predicted significantly higher mean duration among couples during the supportive conversation. The presence of preoccupation among females was related to couples having more difficulty achieving flexibility throughout the conversation. Anxiously attached (i.e. preoccupied) adults tend to become emotionally reactive as a means of emotional regulation (Wei et al., 2005). This emotional reactivity may contribute to the higher levels of mean duration during both conversations. If preoccupied females have difficulty regulating their emotions, they will spend more time in specific affective states because they are unable to regulate their emotions and experience more affective flexibility.

Overall, this study found that female security was associated with lower negativity (specifically negative duration) and higher flexibility (specifically lower mean duration). Similarly, female preoccupation and dismissiveness predicted lower flexibility (specifically higher mean duration) and dismissiveness predicted higher negativity (specifically higher negative duration).

Clinical Implications

This study examined the ways that attachment orientations manifest themselves during couple interactions. Particularly during couples therapy, managing couple interactions becomes a challenging but important task of the therapist. A primary way this study can be used in therapy is through enactments between partners in therapy. Enactments refer to a process over the course of therapy during which the therapist facilitates conversations between partners (Butler & Gardner, 2003). The beginning phases of enactments are characterized by the therapist primarily processing the emotional experiences of partners with them individually in the presence of their partners. The therapist at this point is active in session and partners speak directly to the therapist rather than to one another. As therapy progresses, the therapist becomes less active as the couple begins communicating more directly with one another. Near the end of therapy, clients are able to have conversations with one another with little direction from the therapist (Butler & Gardner, 2003). During enactments, particularly during the beginning stages, the therapist could expect to observe many of the attachment behaviors analyzed in this study. In order to change the processes that perpetuate negative affective experiences, it is best if the clinician can intervene directly during couple interactions that create and perpetuate negative emotional experiences.

During enactments, clinicians should be attuned to specific attachment behaviors that both partners display, specifically those listed in Table 2. For example, a clinician observing a female minimizing a painful event her partner shared will recognize this as a behavior consistent with dismissiveness. With the understanding that dismissive attachment behaviors and negative affect often interact with one another, the therapist should interrupt this process in session. In this example, when the therapist observes this behavior during an enactment, he/she should pause the female partner and facilitate a new interactional process. The therapist could prompt the male partner to share with the female partner what affect he was experience as he was dismissed by his partner. Additionally, the therapist could highlight to the female that the comment seemed to disregard the male or identify the negative affective climate it created and ask her to repeat

herself in a way that is more validating of her partner. By having the female rephrase her comment directly to her partner, some of the negative impact her words would have had can be decreased as they begin to develop a new way of interacting. Both methods would change the process that the couple typically follows in this situation and help the couple learn a new way of responding to one another. Therapists can use that process throughout therapy to identify insecure attachment behaviors and prompt clients to express their underlying attachment needs to one another in a direct way. This would begin to improve their flexibility in conversation and decrease their negativity, with coaching from the therapist throughout the process.

In addition to use during couple enactments, this study could also be used when exploring individual's past relationships in individual or couples therapy. During couples therapy, therapists can become observant of attachment behaviors displayed between partners that are consistent with security, preoccupation, and dismissiveness. When a therapist observes a partner becoming defensive, for instance, he/she can inquire as to where that pattern originated. Because attachment is a lifelong process, there will be previous expressions of attachment in every individual's life. Clients may then be able to identify moments from past relationships or their childhood when they felt the need to become defensive. The therapist can then explore with the client the emotional impact that these moments had on that individual through questioning and reflecting. Therapists should be familiar with the affect components in this study (negativity and flexibility) and use these as a guide to exploring past affect patterns as well. With the knowledge that negativity and a lack of flexibility are associated with insecure attachment styles, therapists should help clients identify if this is true for their past and specifically how their attachment styles and affect have interacted with one another. Facilitating this process in therapy would help partners understand how their past attachment patterns impacted their affect and relational patterns in the past as well as how that is manifested in their current relationships. Through understanding how partners' experienced affect and attachment in the past, their current relationship can be understood by both clients and the therapist.

Limitations and Future Research

A notable limitation to this study was the small usable sample size of 22 couples. Although some statistically significant findings were identified, additional analyses could have been conducted to further delineate the relation between gender, attachment, and affect had there been a larger sample.. For example, the affect variables could be regressed against all attachment correlations (secure, preoccupied, and dismissing for males and females). This analysis could further indicate what attachment orientations are most significant in affecting different components of couple affect during interactions. This sample was also limited to heterosexual married couples; therefore, it is difficult to generalize these findings to couples that do not fit into that category. Future research should expand on this study to address how attachment and affect are impacted in unmarried and homosexual couples.

Because this study was exploratory in examining the significance of gender on the association between attachment and affect, future research should explore whether gender impacts the role attachment behaviors play in couple conversations and subsequent affect with a larger and more diverse sample. The findings from this study indicate some interesting differences between men and women regarding how different attachment orientations impact their couple affect. However, due to the fact that this small sample was primarily securely attached, it would be interesting to repeat the methods in this study with another sample to see if the same findings hold true. Additionally, this study analyzed attachment at the individual level but affect at the couple level. Future research could analyze the impact of individual attachment behaviors on individual affect during couple conversations to further delineate the pathways through which individual attachment impacts couple affect. It is unclear in this study whether one partner's affect contributed more to affective negative flexibility or not. In order to further understand the process by which attachment behaviors impact affect during interactions, research should explore both the individual and couple processes of attachment and affect.

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APPENDICES

Table 1

Affect Variables

Variable	Measure	Definition
Negativity		
	Duration	Total amount of time spent in negativity
	Negative visits	Number of times couples enter into negative region
Flexibility		
	Mean duration	Average amount of time spent in one affective state
	Dispersion	Variety of emotional states experienced (number of SSG grids entered)
	Transitions per minute	Number of times couples change degree of positivity or negativity experiencing per minute

Table 2

Adult Attachment Behavior Q-Set Revised

Attachment Behavior Descriptions
1. Is aware of own moods and how they affect partner (is unaware of how own moods affect partner)
2. Devalues or minimizes events that cause painful feelings (is willing to discuss painful feelings and causes)
3. Responds at length and has to be interrupted or refocused (presents a credible picture with appropriate detail of relationship issues)
4. Is generally aware of partner's moods (is unaware or disinterested)
5. Generally maintains stoic or flat affect when interacting with partner (is emotionally engaged and expressive as appropriate)
6. Appears interested in needs of partner and encourages their expression (shows little or no interest in needs of partner)
7. Recognizes and attends to partner's signals of distress or concern (Is unaware or ignores partner's distress and concern)
8. Uses thinking to organize behavior, inhibit feelings, and to display false positive feelings (is able to use both emotions and thinking to engage issues)
9. Partner's distress or concern is interpreted correctly as evidenced by partner's response (shows little understanding of partner's concerns)
10. Is conflicted or confused about partner (provides a consistent account of relationship with partner)
11. Respects partner as individual even if partner's behavior is not consistent with own desires (is uninterested, threatened or distressed by partner differences)
12. Appears rigid, inflexible, or defensive about couple interactions (sees partner's concerns as issues for negotiation)
13. Responses to partner's communications are inappropriate, arbitrary, inconsistent or unpredictable (responds appropriately to partner)
14. Responds at appropriate level of intensity to partner (responds at inappropriately high or low intensity)
15. Is irritated or resentful of signals of distress or bids for attention by partner (maintains equilibrium and attention regarding partner's signals)
16. Presents self as actively seeking support (demonstrates passivity, self doubt, or withdrawal with partner)
17. Speaks in run-on entangled sentences about partner's faults (is balanced and coherent about partner's faults)
18. Has integrated experiences with partner into a well developed understanding (is confused or seems to lack understanding of partner)
19. Provides only minimal or superficial responses (talks easily and in depth at appropriate times)
20. Views self as worthwhile (denigrates or devalues self, appears to have low self-worth)
21. Generally blames partner for difficulties (has an appropriately balanced view of responsibility and acknowledges own role in difficulties)
22. Is direct and active in seeking help and cooperation from partner (makes little or no effort to seek help or cooperation from partner)
23. Does not provide comfort or support (reaches out to partner when partner is distressed)

24. Directs intrusive psychological analysis and jargon towards partner (analysis of partner is respectful and easy to follow)
25. Is credible and easy to believe (presents information that is hard to believe)
26. Appears to dislike interacting with partner (interacts easily and readily with partner)
27. Expects appropriate care from partner (appears to have low expectations of partner responsiveness in close relationships)
28. Attempts to use other as therapist, caretaker, or parent (Care sought from partner is appropriate for adult to adult relationship)
29. Signals are congruent with seriousness of issue causing distress (is distressed but intensity of signal does not match level of distress)
30. Is able to stay in the here and now (diverts attention from the present moment or issue)
31. Expresses anger appropriately and is clear, coherent, and believable about causes (Minimizes or denies anger towards partner)
32. Appears abstract and remote from actual experience, stereotyped (is able to discuss specific experience in the here and now)
33. Treats partner's concerns seriously and with respect (minimizes partner's concerns)
34. Complains that partner is "too much to handle"(expects partner to cooperate and contribute)
35. Expresses appropriate concerns about closeness and availability of partner (inhibits expressions of desire for partner, and fear or anger at unavailability)
36. Is appreciative of partner's strengths and tolerant of partner's shortcomings (is detached or unappreciative of partner)
37. Shows exaggerated concern and overprotectiveness towards partner (sees other as competent and able to function independently)
38. Shows appropriate recognition of partner's autonomy and role in relationship issues (appears withdrawn or disinterested in partner's role)
39. Tunes out or otherwise avoids focus on partner's feelings (acknowledges and relates to other's feelings)
40. Appears to have a strategy of cutting off anger or distress related affective displays (expresses upsets freely and appropriately to issues)
41. Is generally trusting in relationship with partner (approaches partner cautiously, tends to remain distant)
42. Scolds partner (discusses issues with partner without excessive anger or blame)
43. Describes self positively yet admits negative self-attributes (presents self in stereotyped or one dimensional terms)
44. Values intimacy (devalues influence or need for close relationships or family ties)
45. Displays dependence on partner by complaining, resistance, hostility, petulance (shows autonomy and responsibility for self with partner)
46. Shows ability for intimacy, warmth, and involvement with partner (is distant, cool, or disengaged from partner)
47. Shows a general absence of spontaneity, personal conversation, or ongoing emotional engagement (is engaged and expressive with partner)
48. Talks easily about own needs for caring, depending on others (ignores or fails to acknowledge needs for others)
49. Is preoccupied with own issues or problems (shows appropriate attention to both own issues and partner)
50. Information about self is relevant and of appropriate length and detail (shows lack of self-disclosure, reveals very little about self)
51. Seems awkward and ill at ease when interacting directly with partner (appears comfortable with partner interactions)

52. Appears overwhelmed, helpless, fearful, weak (is actively and appropriately engaged in addressing issues and concerns)
53. Discusses/expresses both positive and negative emotions (avoids emotion)
54. Expresses no desire or plays down the significance of improved availability and connection with partner (values and seeks improved availability and connection)
55. Presents self as capable of eliciting comfort and support from partner (appears not to expect comfort and support from partner)
56. Shows higher level of frustration or anger with partner than seems warranted by topic (is accepting and balanced toward partner)
57. Supports partner's own efforts to address concerns and issues (is critical and demanding of partner's efforts)
58. Has some negative feelings about partner but can set these aside (has difficulty putting aside negative feelings toward partner and working on issues)
59. Is caught up with analyzing partner shortcomings (experience has led to acceptance of self and partner)
60. Appears responsive to approval or positive affect from partner (is not comforted and remains distressed)
61. Presents self as independent and invulnerable (acknowledges vulnerability and need to rely on others)
62. Partner shortcomings are acknowledged without anger or blame (Subject appears highly reactive to partner shortcomings)
63. Subjects partner to constant barrage of stimulation (time spent speaking and listening are approximately balanced)
64. Is balanced regarding personal responsibility for self and others (appears over-responsible or over-functioning for partner)
65. Descriptions of couples problems are stereotyped (descriptions are personal and specific to couple)
66. Expressed level of concern matches seriousness of issues (seems excessively worried, frightened, reactive)
67. Subject reports negative experience that is not accompanied by feelings of hurt or distress (negative experiences are "felt" or openly acknowledged)
68. Subject is cooperative in dealing with partner's concerns and issues (appears resistant or entangled in own needs and concerns)
69. Is frequently overwhelmed with negative emotion, or otherwise has difficulty in regulating distress (is able to both express and regulate distress)
70. Acknowledges own contribution to relationship issues with partner (tends to depict self as helpless or child-like)
71. Belittles or derogates partner in an attempt to dismiss partner's importance (is respectful towards partner and willing to engage issues)
72. Accepts or is forgiving of partner's limitations (continues to blame partner for shortcomings)
73. Makes overly strong demands for love, attention, and/or support (requests for love, attention, and/or support are appropriate to circumstances)
74. Responses maintain focus on issues and problems (responses include sudden intrusions or subject shifts)
75. Appears sad or angry without being aware of these feelings (is aware of feeling sad or angry)
76. Does not ask or look to partner for caring, comfort, or concern (seeks support from partner when distressed)
77. Responds with appropriate detail to relationship issues (responds in excessive detail about relationship issues)

78. Appears to have a hostile or coercive affective display strategy towards partner (modulates affective display to provide effective communication with partner)
79. Presents an objective and easily understood account of issues (is confused, unobjective, mentally entangled)
80. Shows focus on faults of partner at expense of exploration or problem solving (is aware of own contributions to problems and willing to engage in exploration)

Table 3

Summary of Male and Female AABQ Attachment Correlations Significant at .01 Level

	Secure	Preoccupied	Dismissing
Males	21	0	0
Females	19	0	0

Notes: Numbers will not total 22 because individuals could be significantly correlated with none or more than one attachment style.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics For AABQ Correlations

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
AABQ Secure	.004	.795	.640	.211
AABQ Preoccupied	-.657	.045	-.429	.156
AABQ Dismissing	-.677	.183	-.479	.189

Table 5

Multiple Regression of Male and Female Security Predicting Pre Conversation Negative Duration

	B	SE	β
Male AABQ	-6.73	190.79	-.01
Female AABQ	204.88	139.12	.32

Notes: $R^2 = .10$; * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$

Table 6

Multiple Regression of Male and Female Security Predicting Post Conversation Negative Duration

	B	SE	β
Male AABQ	-40.35	84.48	-.09
Female AABQ	-161.69	61.60	-.52*

Notes: R^2 = .27; * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$

Table 7

Multiple Regression of Male and Female Security Predicting Pre Conversation Negative Visits

	B	SE	β
Male AABQ	-7.28	6.52	-.23
Female AABQ	7.49	4.75	.33

Notes: $R^2 = .17$; * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$

Table 8

Multiple Regression of Male and Female Security Predicting Post Conversation Negative Visits

	B	SE	β
Male AABQ	-.04	3.83	-.00
Female AABQ	-.30	2.80	-.03

Notes: $R^2 = .00$; * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$

Table 9

Multiple Regression of Male and Female Security Predicting Pre Conversation Mean Duration

	B	SE	β
Male AABQ	19.42	15.69	.24
Female AABQ	-30.52	11.44	-.51*

Notes: $R^2 = .32$; * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$

Table 10

Multiple Regression of Male and Female Security Predicting Post Conversation Mean Duration

	B	SE	β
Male AABQ	6.24	47.81	.03
Female AABQ	-50.21	34.86	-.32

Notes: $R^2 = .10$; * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$

Table 11

Multiple Regression of Male and Female Security Predicting Pre Conversation Dispersion

	B	SE	β
Male AABQ	-.09	.07	-.25
Female AABQ	.10	.05	.40

Notes: $R^2 = .23$; * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$

Table 12

Multiple Regression of Male and Female Security Predicting Post Conversation Dispersion

	B	SE	β
Male AABQ	-.19	.21	-.20
Female AABQ	-.08	.16	-.12

Notes: $R^2 = .05$; * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$

Table 13

Multiple Regression of Male and Female Security Predicting Pre Conversation Transitions Per Minute

	B	SE	β
Male AABQ	-5.33	5.03	-.21
Female AABQ	7.55	3.67	.42

Notes: $R^2 = .23$; * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$

Table 14

Multiple Regression of Male and Female Security Predicting Post Conversation Transitions Per Minute

	B	SE	β
Male AABQ	1.55	9.08	.04
Female AABQ	7.24	6.62	.24

Notes: $R^2 = .06$; * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$

Table 15

Multiple Regression of Male and Female Preoccupation Predicting Pre Conversation Negative Duration

	B	SE	β
Male AABQ	74.12	170.84	.10
Female AABQ	-311.23	248.29	-.27

Notes: R^2 = .09; * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$

Table 16

Multiple Regression of Male and Female Preoccupation Predicting Post Conversation Negative Duration

	B	SE	β
Male AABQ	23.82	84.46	.06
Female AABQ	157.55	122.74	.29

Notes: $R^2 = .08$; * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$

Table 17

Multiple Regression of Male and Female Preoccupation Predicting Pre Conversation Negative Visits

	B	SE	β
Male AABQ	9.24	4.50	.34
Female AABQ	-19.00	7.27	-.48*

Notes: $R^2 = .38$; * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$

Table 18

Multiple Regression of Male and Female Preoccupation Predicting Post Conversation Negative Visits

	B	SE	β
Male AABQ	-3.10	3.28	-.21
Female AABQ	-4.56	4.77	-.21

Notes: $R^2 = .08$; * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$

Table 19

Multiple Regression of Male and Female Preoccupation Predicting Pre Conversation Mean Duration

	B	SE	β
Male AABQ	-14.85	13.78	-.20
Female AABQ	54.96	20.02	.52*

Notes: R^2 = .34; * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$

Table 20

Multiple Regression of Male and Female Preoccupation Predicting Post Conversation Mean Duration

	B	SE	β
Male AABQ	7.89	38.99	.04
Female AABQ	140.52	56.66	.50*

Notes: $R^2 = .25$; * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$

Table 21

Multiple Regression of Male and Female Preoccupation Predicting Pre Conversation Dispersion

	B	SE	β
Male AABQ	.02	.07	.06
Female AABQ	-.19	.10	-.41

Notes: $R^2 = .18$; * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$

Table 22

Multiple Regression of Male and Female Preoccupation Predicting Post Conversation Dispersion

	B	SE	β
Male AABQ	-.07	.19	-.09
Female AABQ	-.08	.28	-.07

Notes: R^2 = .01; * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$

Table 23

Multiple Regression of Male and Female Preoccupation Predicting Pre Conversation Transitions Per Minute

	B	SE	β
Male AABQ	7.41	3.88	.34
Female AABQ	-16.25	5.64	-.51**

Notes: R^2 = .42; * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$

Table 24

Multiple Regression of Male and Female Preoccupation Predicting Post Conversation Transitions Per Minute

	B	SE	β
Male AABQ	-5.93	7.63	-.17
Female AABQ	-20.58	11.08	-.39

Notes: $R^2 = .16$; * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$

Table 25

Multiple Regression of Male and Female Dismissiveness Predicting Pre Conversation Negative Duration

	B	SE	β
Male AABQ	-40.92	230.56	-.04
Female AABQ	-172.97	156.99	-.25

Notes: R^2 = .07; * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$

Table 26

Multiple Regression of Male and Female Dismissiveness Predicting Post Conversation Negative Duration

	B	SE	β
Male AABQ	28.33	97.45	-.06
Female AABQ	186.15	66.36	.54*

Notes: R^2 = .03; * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$

Table 27

Multiple Regression of Male and Female Dismissiveness Predicting Pre Conversation Negative Visits

	B	SE	β
Male AABQ	8.86	7.96	.24
Female AABQ	-6.93	5.42	-.28

Notes: $R^2 = .12$; * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$

Table 28

Multiple Regression of Male and Female Dismissiveness Predicting Post Conversation Negative Visits

	B	SE	β
Male AABQ	2.55	4.49	.13
Female AABQ	.86	3.05	.07

Notes: R^2 = .02; * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$

Table 29

Multiple Regression of Male and Female Dismissiveness Predicting Pre Conversation Mean Duration

	B	SE	β
Male AABQ	-29.54	19.18	-.31
Female AABQ	31.59	13.06	.48*

Notes: $R^2 = .27$; * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$

Table 30

Multiple Regression of Male and Female Dismissiveness Predicting Post Conversation Mean Duration

	B	SE	β
Male AABQ	-31.90	58.53	-.12
Female AABQ	30.40	39.86	.17

Notes: R^2 = .04; * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$

Table 31

Multiple Regression of Male and Female Dismissiveness Predicting Pre Conversation Dispersion

	B	SE	β
Male AABQ	.14	.09	.34
Female AABQ	-.10	.06	-.37

Notes: $R^2 = .21$; * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$

Table 32

Multiple Regression of Male and Female Dismissiveness Predicting Post Conversation Dispersion

	B	SE	β
Male AABQ	.33	.24	.29
Female AABQ	.11	.16	.14

Notes: R^2 = .12; * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$

Table 33

Multiple Regression of Male and Female Dismissiveness Predicting Pre Conversation Transitions Per Minute

	B	SE	β
Male AABQ	7.29	6.21	.25
Female AABQ	-7.02	4.23	-.35

Notes: $R^2 = .16$; * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$

Table 34

Multiple Regression of Male and Female Dismissiveness Predicting Post Conversation Transitions Per Minute

	B	SE	β
Male AABQ	6.62	10.84	.14
Female AABQ	-6.00	7.38	-.19

Notes: R^2 = .05; * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$

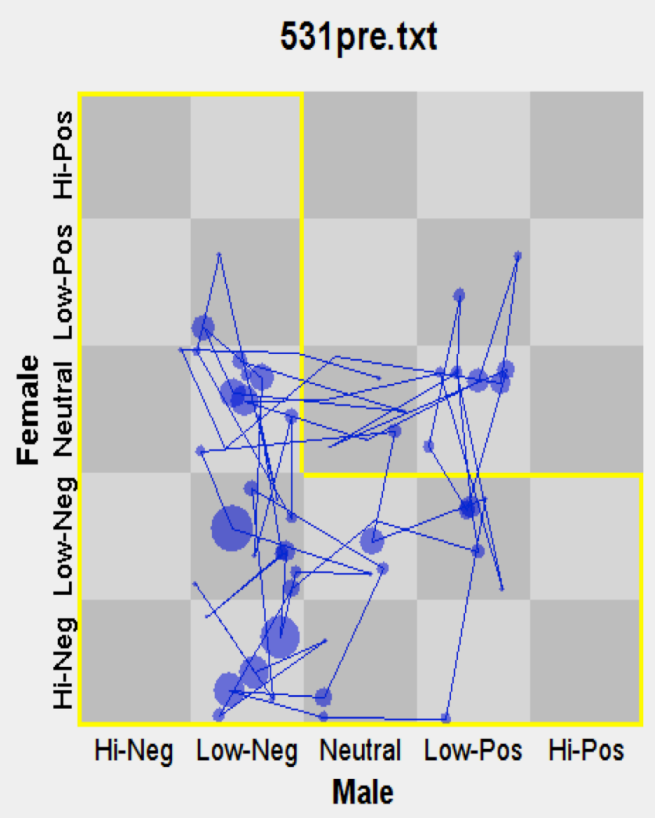

Figure 1. Example of State Space Grid (SSG) depicting the affective experience of one couple during a conversation. The yellow L-shape indicates negative couple affect and the size of the circles indicate how much time the couple spent in that affective state.

VITA

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Scope and Method of Study: This study explored the impact of males' and females' adult attachment styles on their affective flexibility and negativity during couple conversations. Couples were observed in order to analyze the degree of secure and insecure attachment behaviors displayed within individuals. This study sought to answer the question of question of whether male and female partners' attachment behaviors influence the couple's interactions. In order to do this, male and female partners' Adult Attachment Behavior Q-Set (AABQ) scores were used as predictors of couple affect patterns during couple conversations.

Findings and Conclusions: This study found that females' attachment scores were predictive of affective flexibility and negativity across all three attachment styles (secure, preoccupied, and dismissing.) Males' attachment orientations were not found to be significant for any attachment styles in this sample. In females, security was predictive of higher flexibility and lower negativity. Likewise, preoccupation in females predicted lower flexibility. Female dismissiveness was predictive of higher negativity and lower flexibility.

ADVISER'S APPROVAL: Brandt Gardner