

EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF DYADIC ADULT  
ATTACHMENT ON PHYSICAL, SEXUAL, AND  
RELATIONAL AGGRESSION WITHIN  
ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

By

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence is a pervasive national problem especially among couples seeking couples therapy. Some estimates suggest that half to two-thirds of couples seeking therapy report some level of aggression in the previous year (Holtzworth-Munroe et al., 1992; O'Leary, Vivian, & Malone, 1992). Despite this prevalence, however, many couples' therapists fail to properly identify domestic violence, assess appropriately for issues of severity (Schacht, Dimidjian, George, & Berns, 2009), and fully understand the complexity of its ethology.

Aggressive behaviors are common and harmful among individuals in romantic relationships. Because of the prevalence of domestic violence among committed partners, many studies (e.g., Archer, 2000; Eagly & Steffen, 1986) have examined the influence of physical aggression in multiple aspects of romantic relationships. However, due to a variety of methodological challenges, fewer studies have been devoted to examining the influence of relational aggression in romantic relationships.



Adult attachment style has demonstrated to be a predictive factor for adults engaging in aggressive behaviors toward their romantic partner. Attachment theory boasts a rich, although brief, history of research. What began as a philosophy targeting an explanation for the relational patterns of children (Bowlby, 1973) and their immediate family members has evolved into a diverse theory examining similar relational patterns among individuals throughout the lifespan.

The link between adult attachment style and physical and/or relational aggression has been examined among individual adults (e.g., Maysel, 1991). Some studies have targeted the influence of adult attachment styles and aggressive behaviors within romantic relationships (e.g., Holtzworth, Stuart, & Hutchison, 1997). However, previous research has not examined the impact of the “dyadic component” (the impact of one’s partner’s attachment style combined with one’s own attachment style) on the prevalence of physical and relational aggression.

Because contemporary marriage and family therapists provide therapy services to couples of all types, understanding the applicability of not only this “dyadic component” of adult attachment on relationship aggression but how these effects are manifested within various relationship types is essential. Furthermore, if dyadic adult attachment is indicated as a predictive factor in the presence and severity of physical, sexual, and relational aggression within relationships, therapists should consider incorporating measures of adult attachment into their standard assessment procedures for couples presenting for therapy. Before examining this dyadic component and its influence on physical and relational aggression within romantic relationships, the types of aggressive behaviors being investigated will be presented in the following review of the literature.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### **Physical and Relational Aggression**

Physical aggression refers to direct, physical contact intended to cause harm to another person. When occurring within the context of a home environment, physical aggression is commonly referred to as domestic violence. Physical aggression causes harm through damaging another's physical well-being (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Although previous studies differ in the specific behaviors being examined, there is little disagreement among researchers of what behaviors constitute physical aggression. Because physically aggressive behaviors are consistent among most humans, operationally defining which behaviors constitute physical aggression is typically not a difficult endeavor. For example, it is expected that most (if not all) people will consider one person slapping another to be an act of physical aggression. These behaviors are clearly homologous with behaviors found in other animals.

Unlike physical aggression, researchers have differed on their definitions of relational aggression. In general, relational aggression refers to forms of aggression intended to cause harm in non-physical ways including, but not limited to, psychological and emotional damage. Examples of relational aggression include, but are not limited to, gossiping, spreading rumors, and excluding others from the group or ignoring them (Archer & Coyne, 2005). Some researchers (e.g., Paquette & Underwood, 1999) consider relational aggression to be even more harmful than physical aggression. For example, a person may feel more damaged or harmed if another person vehemently slandered their character or personal values than if the person had caused damage through physical violence. However, it should be noted that the extent of the psychological and/or emotional damage an act of physical or relational aggression causes is largely dependent upon the emotional and/or physical resilience of the victim.

In addition to differences in operationally defining relational aggression, there is little consensus among researchers regarding which term (e.g., label) to utilize when referring to these non-physical forms of aggression. In addition to the term “relational aggression,” utilized by Crick and Grotpeter (1995), these forms of aggressive behavior have been labeled as “indirect aggression” (Lagerspetz, Björkqvist, & Peltonen, 1988) and “social aggression” (Cairns, Cairns, Neckerman, Ferguson, & Gariépy, 1989). For the purposes of this study, the term “relational aggression” was utilized.

Crick and Grotpeter (1995) postulate that data collection assessing physical aggression (e.g., an interaction involving one person striking another) is significantly less complex than assessing relational aggression (e.g., an interaction where one person excludes a peer from an activity). For example, it is possible to collect data regarding

physical aggression utilizing observable, quantitative methods. Previous studies have collected data simply by observing social interactions among children from a distance and recording the frequency of their acts of physical aggression. Additionally, acts of physical aggression can be clearly defined in operational terms. For example, frequency data of one partner slapping, hitting, or kicking their partner could be more easily recorded than acts of relational aggression, which tend to be more subjective in nature.

To competently judge relational interactions, further knowledge is needed that extends beyond the immediate situation being observed or inquired about (e.g., information about the relationship history of the aggressive partner involved). Additionally, differentiating which behaviors constitute relational aggression in the context of the situation from similar, non-aggressive behaviors should be clearly specified. Identical behaviors may be considered to be relationally aggressive in some situations and harmless in others. Understanding and incorporating contextual factors into analyses of relational aggression is key. Thus, when assessing relational aggression, the relevant behaviors may be overlooked unless competent examiners, who can access information about friendships and other relationships within the relevant peer group, are utilized.

Examining relational aggression presents further challenges. Unlike physical aggression (also referred to as direct aggression), acts of relational aggression are contingent upon the intention behind the behavior. Specifically, a person may gossip with no intention to harm another person, but do so anyway. Whereas acts of physical aggression (e.g., kicking or slapping one's partner) are nearly always intended to be aggressive, acts of relational aggression (e.g., gossiping or slandering one's partner) are

evaluated in a more subjective manner by the perpetrator and victim of the act. These challenges have created much difficulty in the development of empirically validated measures of relational aggression (Crick, 1995).

### **Gender Differences in Aggression**

**Gender differences in childhood.** Extensive research has been dedicated to the examination of gender differences in physical and relational aggression (e.g., Bookwala, Frieze, Smitch, & Ryan, 1992; Gray & Foshee, 1997). Gender differences in aggressive behaviors are evident throughout the lifespan. Among children, research findings have remained relatively consistent. Specifically, boys consistently display more frequent acts of physical aggression than girls (Hyde, 1984, 1986; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974, 1980). These gender differences among children have remained consistent in all countries for which data have been collected (Hyde, 1984) with indicators that these differences among children appear as early as age two (e.g., Hyde, 1984).

While significant amounts of research have been devoted to examining physical and verbal aggression among children (e.g., Crick 1997; Hyde, 1984, 1986; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974, 1980) fewer studies have examined relational aggression. However, studies consistently suggest that girls tend to utilize relational aggression more than boys (Craig, 1998; Crick, 1997; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). With that, researchers have speculated about the deficit in empirical research examining relational aggression among children. Crick (1995) posits that physical aggression is more easily observed, thus making it more easily examined than relational aggression.

**Gender differences in adulthood.** Although gender differences in children's use of physical and relational aggression are recognizable, gender differences in aggressive

behaviors among adults are less apparent. Regarding physical aggression among adults, some results indicate men engage in more physically aggressive behaviors than women (e.g., Archer, 2000; Eagly & Steffen, 1986; Magdol, Moffitt, Caspi, Newman, Fagan, & Silva, 1997), while other studies indicate that prevalence rates of physical aggression across genders are similar (e.g., O’Leary, Barling, Arias, Rosenbaum, Malone, & Tyree, 1989; Strauss & Gelles, 1986). Although their study utilized a probability sample of adults who had previously engaged in physically aggressive behaviors, O’Leary et al. (1989) indicated higher prevalence rates of physical aggression for women than men at multiple assessment periods. Despite these contraindicative results, physical aggression is still considered to be more common among men than women. This could be influenced by additional factors such as reporting bias – the tendency for people to consider similar behaviors to be more aggressive when committed by males as compared to females. Nonetheless, gender differences in physical aggression do not seem to be as significant among adults when compared to children.

Gender differences in relational aggression also seem to diminish as children mature into adulthood (Björkqvist, Österman, & Lagerspetz, 1994). In one study measuring relational aggression in romantic relationships using a sample of college students, similar levels of relational aggression were found for both men and women, although the men reported higher levels of victimization than did women (Linder, Crick, & Collins, 2002).

### **Development of Adult Attachment Theory**

In addition to gender, researchers have identified attachment style as an important variable in the understanding of an individual’s likelihood to engage in physical and/or

relational aggression. Each individual embodies an individual attachment style based upon their patterns of behavior and emotional reactions within close relationships. Adult attachment style is rooted in attachment theory, highly useful model for understanding the intricacies involved in couple relationship dynamics as well. In the past few decades, two primary perspectives on couples research from an attachment perspective have been utilized. The first utilized a developmental perspective on attachment in couples similar to prior studies examining attachment patterns in young children. Researchers adopting this theoretical perspective often utilize qualitative methods such as the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI; George, Kaplan, & Main, 1985) as the primary measure of adult attachment (Hesse, 1999; Waters & Cummings, 2000). The other perspective, which developed from research conducted by Hazan and Shaver (1987), relies primarily on a social psychology perspective and utilizes self-report measures of adult attachment rather than qualitative methods such as the AAI (Wampler, Shi, Nelson, & Kimball, 2003; Crowell, Fraley, & Shaver, 1999; Shaver, Belsky, & Brennan, 2000). The self-report measures have been validated by their ability to accurately predict features of romantic/marital relationships (Shaver, Belsky, & Brennan, 2000), thus increasing their usefulness among clinicians.

**Early developments in attachment theory.** Although adult attachment theory has only recently begun to be understood, its roots are traced to better developed theories of child attachments. Recent attempts to understand adults' close relationships from an attachment perspective have been significantly influenced by John Bowlby's influential work on attachment and loss (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980), which draw on concepts from a multitude of sources including psychoanalysis, ethology, and control system theory.

Bowlby (1973) considers attachment behavior to be any behaviors that resulted in a person attempting to remain close to a preferred individual, a phenomenon commonly observed in children. Additionally, Bowlby (1973) considers attachment behaviors to have evolved through natural selection. He postulates that attachment behaviors are purpose-driven – that is, behaviors common among infants (e.g., crying, smiling) serve a single function – to maintain closeness to the primary caregiver.

Bowlby (1973) recognizes individual differences in attachment behaviors, further illustrated by the following propositions: First, when a person is certain that an attachment figure is available whenever he or she wishes, the person is much less vulnerable to fear than a person who does not have such certainties. Second, confidence in the availability of attachment figures is built up through many years of development including infancy, childhood, and adolescence. These expectations developed by the individual during these years of immaturity tend to remain constant throughout the rest of life. As a result, the expectations developed by an individual regarding accessibility and responsiveness of attachment figures during infancy, childhood, and adolescence reflect the experiences those individuals have actually had. Central to these propositions is the role of the individual's expectations of attachment figures (Feeney & Noller, 1996). These expectations about the responsiveness and availability of attachment are central to the development of working models of attachment.

**Development of attachment styles among children.** Though Bowlby's (1969, 1973, 1980) contributions to the theoretical formulation of attachment were novel, the first detailed studies of individual differences in attachment were conducted by Ainsworth, who was strongly influenced by Bowlby's ideas. Through naturalistic



observations of mother-infant interactions in Uganda and in the United States, Ainsworth and her colleagues (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978) divided patterns of attachment behavior into three distinct categories: insecurely attached-avoidant (Group A), securely attached (Group B), and anxious-ambivalent or insecurely attached-resistant (Group C). The patterns of behavior that identify these three styles are analytically related to the amount of interaction between infant and mother and to the mother's sensitivity and responsiveness to the child's needs and signals. These patterns are related to the disparity in behavior shown in Figure 1, which shows the behavioral characteristics of the three styles as well as the related patterns of caregiving.

**Formation of adult attachment theory.** Although some theoretical work (e.g., Ainsworth, 1989) supports the significance of attachment relationships across the life span, it was not until Hazan and Shaver (1987; Shaver & Hazan, 1988) reported their novel studies of romantic love that the attachment perspective on adult romantic relationships became firmly established. Initial empirical studies of adult attachment consisted of two questionnaire-based studies of adult samples (Hazan & Shaver, 1987) exploring the association between attachment style and aspects of both childhood and adult relationships. For both studies, Hazan and Shaver utilized a forced-choice, self-report measure of adult attachment style. This measure consisted of three short paragraphs, one for each adult attachment style, with the item subject matter based on generalizations from the infant literature.

Hazan and Shaver (1987) indicate, in comparison with other attachment styles, participants who selected the secure description also reported warmer childhood relationships with both parents. These individuals considered themselves easy to get to

know, had few self-doubts, and viewed other peoples as well intentioned (Feeney & Noller, 1996). Additionally, they believed that romantic love exists and doesn't fade with time. Participants endorsing the avoidant attachment style were likely to perceive their mothers as cold and rejecting. Additionally, they were more likely than members of other attachment groups to question the persistent nature of love, especially romantic love (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Their most important love experiences were hindered by a fear of intimacy and a difficulty in accepting their romantic partners. Participants describing themselves as anxious-ambivalent usually reported that their fathers were unfair (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). They saw themselves as misunderstood by others as well as attributing multiple self-doubts to themselves. These individuals tended to report little difficulty in falling in love, but great difficulty finding true love. They also doubted the abilities of others to commit to a long-term relationship.

Hazan and Shaver (1987) recognize the limitations of the measures utilized for their studies. Because of the constraints on data collection, many of the measures were brief and involved very simple response alternatives. Participants were forced to choose one of the three attachment styles described, even if every aspect of the described attachment style did not apply to their personal style of attachment. More notable, subjects were asked to describe their experience of a single romantic relationship as opposed to general trends among all of their previous romantic relationships. This forced-choice measure did not allow for an accurate representation of participants' attachment style, despite its novelty.

The groundbreaking research of Hazan and Shaver (1987; Shaver & Hazan, 1988) inspired researchers to develop a more comprehensive, inclusive models of adult

attachment. Bartholomew (1990) presented a four-tiered model of adult attachment. Bartholomew's model (Bartholomew, 1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) was based on Bowlby's (1969, 1973) argument that attachment patterns reflect working models of both the self and the attachment figure. According to Bartholomew (1990), models of self can be dichotomized as positive (the self is seen as worthy of love and attention) or negative (the self is seen as unworthy). In the same way, models of the attachment figure can be positive (the other is seen as available and caring) or negative (the other is seen as rejecting, and/or uncaring).

Bartholomew (1990) further proposes that the working model of self (positive, negative) can be combined with the working model of the other (positive, negative) to create four adult attachment styles: secure, preoccupied, dismissing, and fearful (see Figure 2). As shown in Figure 2, the model of self reflects the degree of dependence on the acceptance of others (negative models of self are associated with dependence) while the model of the other indicates the extent of avoidance of close relationships (negative models of others are associated with higher levels of avoidance).

Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) developed prototypical descriptions of each of the four adult attachment styles in a similar fashion as the descriptions developed by Hazan & Shaver (1987; see Figure 3). Like the three-group measure, these descriptions can be presented to participants in either forced-choice format or through the use of rating scales. Unique to the four-tiered model are interview schedules that yield ratings on each of the four attachment styles (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Specifically, adults completing attachment style assessments would be classified as secure, preoccupied, dismissing, or fearful. Although utilizing qualitative methods, such as the AAI (Scharfe

& Bartholomew, 1994), allows the researcher to collect a significant amount of data, they prevent the researcher from obtaining optimal levels of reliability and validity due to a lack of objective measures.

### **Adult Attachment and Physical Aggression**

Researchers have identified adult attachment style as a significant influence on an individual's likelihood to engage in acts of physical aggression. Holtzworth-Munroe, Stuart, and Hutchinson (1997) compared attachment patterns among samples of violent and nonviolent husbands. Their findings indicate that, when compared to nonviolent husbands, violent husbands were shown to display more insecure, preoccupied, and disorganized attachment patterns (Holtzworth-Munroe, Stuart, & Hutchinson, 1997).

Mayseless (1991) suggests that physical aggression is likely when one partner feels the status of the relationship is unstable and/or feels little control over the relationship outcome. Additionally, Mayseless (1991) suggests that individuals exhibiting anxious-ambivalent and avoidant styles of attachment, as proposed by Ainsworth and her colleagues (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978), are more likely to engage in physical aggression than individuals with secure attachment.

Additional considerations regarding attachment style should be noted. For the avoidant individual, it is uncommon to trust or fall in love with another person. However, in the event that the avoidant individual were to become vulnerable to another person, the person's fears of rejection, abandonment, and/or loss of control in the relationship are likely to intensify (Mayseless, 1991). Since the avoider is usually in control of his/her impulses and usually obeys social norms, these fears of rejection,

abandonment, and/or loss of control may result in physical violence if there is sufficient justification for it and/or if the act of violence has been learned through socialization.

Anxious/ambivalent individuals are characterized by open expressions of proximity/contact seeking as well as aggressiveness. These types of individuals find themselves in a constant struggle to please their attachment figure, who often tends to be inconsistent with his/her reactions to the anxious/ambivalent individual's needs (Main & Goldwyn, 1989). Mayseless (1991) postulates that aggressiveness towards a romantic partner is inherent to the anxious/ambivalent individual's attachment style. Furthermore, because of the uncertainty of dating relationships, Mayseless (1991) indicates that anxious/ambivalent individuals are more likely to engage in physical violence in dating relationships.

### **Adult Attachment and Relational Aggression**

While significant research has been devoted to examining the relationship between adult attachment and physical aggression, limited focus has been applied to the examination between adult attachment and relational aggression. Similar to the studies examining attachment style and physical aggression, previous studies (e.g., Mayseless, 1991; Holtsworth, Stuart, & Hutchinson, 1997) have indicated a positive relationship between an individual's endorsed attachment style and their likelihood of engaging in relational aggression. Specifically, individuals with more insecure attachment styles (e.g., avoidant, anxious/ambivalent) are more likely to use relational aggression toward their romantic partner (Mayseless, 1991).

Although examining the physically and relationally aggressive behaviors of individuals within relationships is useful, it is equally important to understand the impact

of the attachment style of one's partner combined with one's own attachment style when interpreting prevalence rates of aggressive behaviors. It is possible that the characteristics of the attachment style of one's partner combined with one's own attachment style may yield more reliable, predictive data regarding the prevalence of aggressive behaviors. For example, an individual with a secure attachment style may engage in more aggressive behaviors when in a close relationship with an individual with an insecure attachment style than a partner with a more secure attachment style.

### **Attachment Style of Partner**

Individuals tend to choose romantic partners with similar attachment styles (Frazier, Byer, Fischer, Wright, & Debord, 1996). For example, anxious individuals tend to date anxious partners. In fact, previous studies indicate that individuals tend to prefer partners with similar attachment styles, even among insecure attachment styles (Frazier et al., 1996). Additionally, Frazier et al. (1996) indicate no evidence of anxious/avoidant partner matching. In fact, anxious individuals tend to be even more averse to avoidant individuals than individuals with secure attachment.

### **Limitations of Previous Research**

**Limited use of differing couple samples.** Although independent studies have utilized dating couples (Maysless, 1991) and married couples (e.g., Butzer & Campbell, 2008; Holtzworth-Munroe, Stuart, & Hutchinson, 1997), no independent studies to date have compared the impact of adult attachment on physical and relational aggression among dating, cohabiting, married, divorced (but dating other partners), and remarried couples within a single study.

**No inclusion of categorical data.** Previous studies (e.g., Holtzworth-Munroe, Stuart, & Hutchinson, 1997) have measured attachment according to the models of attachment comprised by Ainsworth et al. (1978) and Hazan and Shaver (1987). These models of attachment typically utilize scaling data as opposed to categorical data of adult attachment. Although studies utilizing these models are certainly useful, it is important to examine the construct of adult attachment from various methodologies. Using a categorical approach allows for easy grouping of individual and dyadic attachment scores that scaling data would not allow. Furthermore, using categorical data will allow each individual's score to be associated with the typical characteristics associated with each respective attachment category. For example, an examination of the levels of relationship aggression in couples consisting of a secure male and a dismissing female would not be possible with scaling data.

Additionally, most studies incorporating categorical data have classified adult attachment as either secure, avoidant, or anxious-ambivalent. In order to gain a more thorough understanding of dyadic adult attachment and its influence on relationship aggression, it is important to examine adult attachment utilizing a four-tiered model as well. Although previous models of adult attachment (e.g., Hazan & Shaver, 1987) should not be entirely dismissed, the aforementioned four-tiered model (secure, preoccupied, dismissing, and fearful) proposed by Bartholomew (1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) is considered to be a reliable, thorough model of adult attachment from a social psychology perspective.

**No examination of the dyadic component.** Although the effect of one's own attachment style has influenced one's choice of romantic partner (Frazier et al., 1996) and

one's individual likelihood of engaging in physical and relational aggression (Mayseless, 1991; Holtsworth-Munroe, Stuart, & Hutchinson, 1997), no previous studies have examined the impact of the "dyadic component" (the impact of one's partner's attachment style combined with one's own attachment style) on physical and relational aggression. By examining this dyadic component, a better understanding of the influence of one's own attachment style as well as their partner's attachment style on the likelihood that physical, sexual, and/or relational aggression was present within the relationship will be gained.

### **The Current Study**

The current study, therefore, examined the following questions: Which attachment dyads within romantic relationships are most common according to Bartholomew's model of adult attachment? Additionally, will individuals tend to select partners with similar or different attachment styles?

Furthermore, what influence does one's own attachment style combined with the partner's attachment style (e.g., dyadic component) have on physical and relational aggression utilizing Bartholomew's model (Bartholomew, 1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) of adult attachment. Specifically, which of the aforementioned dyads will yield the highest prevalence rates of physical and relational aggression? A sample consisting of dating, cohabiting, married, remarried, divorced (but dating), and widowed (but dating) couples was used (see Table 1 for further description of variables to be used in the current study).

### **Hypotheses**



**Hypothesis 1:** Utilizing Hazan and Shaver's (1987) model, individuals exhibiting insecure attachment styles (dismissing, preoccupied, or fearful) will indicate more frequent acts of physical and relational aggression in their relationships than securely-attached individuals. Differential inferential statistics were used to examine this hypothesis.

**Hypothesis 2:** Couples consisting of two secure partners according to Bartholomew's adult attachment model (Bartholomew, 1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) will exhibit lower levels of physical and relational aggression than couples consisting of one or more insecurely attached partners. Specifically, couples who exhibit secure adult attachment styles were less likely to be involved in a physically or relationally aggressive romantic relationship than couples who indicate more insecure patterns of attachment. Differential inferential statistics were used to examine this hypothesis as well.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Sample**

Data were collected from a database gathered using the *RELATIONSHIP Evaluation* (RELATE; Busby, Holman, & Taniguchi, 2001) instrument. The RELATE is designed for couples of all types, most of whom complete the inventory online. Many family therapists implement the RELATE into their practice with couples as well. Of the 1,346 partners examined, 1,082 were Caucasian, 43 were Hispanic or Latino, 43 were Asian or Pacific Islander, 43 were African-American or Black, 27 were biracial, 5 were Native American, and 2 indicated "Other." Ages of participants varied from age 18 to age 68. Most participants (approximately 57%) were between 18 and 30 years of age. Relationship statuses among participants ranged among the following types: 474 participants included were single, 290 were cohabiting, 318 were married (first marriage), 20 were married but separated, 91 were divorced, 64 were remarried, and 7 were widowed. Regarding sexual preference, 1,234 participants classified themselves as heterosexual, 13 were bisexual, and 19 were homosexual. It should be noted that homosexual individuals were included in the analyses for their specified gender regardless of their sexual preference.

Regarding education, 488 indicated that they had completed some college with no degree, 362 had completed a bachelor's degree, 227 had completed a graduate or professional degree, 58 had completed some high school, a high school diploma, or a GED, and 105 had completed an associate's degree. The most common income category for participants was a personal yearly gross income of less than \$20,000 (N= 487) while the majority of participants (approximately 66%) made less than \$60,000 annually. Regarding religious affiliation, 437 participants were Latter-day Saint (Mormon), 295 were Protestant, 186 were Catholic, 23 were Jewish, 6 were Islamic, 9 were Hindu, and 4 were Buddhist (see Table 2 for further description of sample).

### **Procedures**

Most participants took the RELATE inventory online, which allowed for the data to be automatically entered into the database. Data of participants who completed the inventory using paper and pencil measures were manually entered into the database. Each partner was instructed to take the RELATE separately, without discussing the inventory with their partner until completion. Couples successfully completing the RELATE inventory were compensated with a \$30 gift card from Amazon.com. Data for participants who took the RELATE in 2009 were used for the current study.

### **Measures**

**Attachment style and partner's attachment style.** Both partners completed two subscales of adult attachment: one for measuring avoidant attachment behaviors (see appendix A) and one for measuring anxiety behaviors (see appendix B). The items on each of these subscales were included on the Experiences in Close Relationships (ECR; Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998). Busby, Holman, & Taniguchi (2001) elected to utilize

a revised version of the ECR consisting of 17 items for the RELATE. Brennan, Clark, & Shaver (1998) reported that the ECR had a high level of internal consistency in a sample of undergraduates, with coefficient alphas of .91 and .94 for the anxiety and avoidance subscales, respectively. Results from similar studies of undergraduates (e.g., Lopez & Gormley, 2002; Lopez, Mauricio, Formley, Simko, & Berger, 2001; Lopez, Mitchell, & Gormley, 2002; Vogel & Wei, 2005; Wei, Mallinckrodt, Russell, & Abraham, 2004) also indicated a high level of internal consistency for the anxiety subscale ( $\alpha$  ranges from .89 to .92) and the avoidance subscale ( $\alpha$  ranges from .91 to .95). Regarding test-retest reliability, two studies have administered the ECR to samples of college students and reported test-retest reliability. Brennan, Shaver, and Clark (2000) reported test-retest reliabilities over a 3-week interval were .70 for both the anxiety and avoidance subscales. Lopez and Gormley (2002) indicated that the test-retest reliabilities over a 6-month period were .68 and .71 for the anxiety and avoidance subscales, respectively. Finally, as expected, the revised ECR measure utilized for the current study maintained high levels of internal consistency for the anxiety subscale and avoidance subscale with coefficient alphas of .82 and .85 respectively.

The avoidant measure consists of 8 items while the anxiety scale consists of 9 items. Scores for each item range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Examples of included items are “I find it relatively easy to get close to others,” and “I often worry that my partner(s) don’t really love me.” Some items were reverse-scored to increase internal validity. Means were computed for each scale, yielding an overall score for anxiety and avoidant attachment for each partner. Mean scores of 3.5 or below were considered “low” for each scale while mean scores of 3.6 or above were considered high.

A score of 3.5 was utilized as a dividing score because it is located exactly midway between 1 (lowest-possible score) and 7 (highest-possible score). Pairing the anxiety and avoidance scales will yield a classification of the individual into one of the four adult attachment styles (secure, preoccupied, dismissing, and fearful) described by Bartholomew (Bartholomew, 1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991).

**Attachment dyad.** Individual attachment scores were paired to form adult attachment dyads (e.g., secure/preoccupied, fearful/dismissing). Because it was expected that the majority of attachment dyads would be “secure-secure” pairs, insecure attachment styles (preoccupied, fearful, and dismissing) were combined. Dyadic scores were divided into one of three categories: (1) secure/secure, (2) secure/insecure, or (3) insecure/insecure.

**Physical/sexual and relational aggression.** Both partners completed subscales measuring relational (appendix C) and physical/sexual aggression (appendix D). Each measure consists of 4 items. Scores for each item range from 1 (never) to 5 (very often). Among items included are the following: “I try to make my romantic partner jealous when I am mad at him/her,” and “How often are YOU violent in any of the ways mentioned above (e.g., slapping, pushing, kicking, hitting hard with a fist, hitting with an object, or other types of violence) toward your current partner? Coefficient alphas for the physical/sexual aggression measure for male and female partners were .54 and .56 respectively. Coefficient alphas for the relational aggression measure for male and female partners were .49 and .43 respectively. These less than ideal alphas are likely due to the limited number of questions included on each measure, but are still consistent enough to be useful for the purposes of this study.

To examine individual trends in physical/sexual aggression, only self-report questions were utilized. However, when examining the overall level of physical/sexual aggression present within the relationship, means were computed for each scale utilizing all questions. Although the measures of relational and physical aggression may be limited in their depth of assessment, the significant sample size of participants who took the RELATE is expected to provide adequate compensation. Additionally, it was not possible to administer a more thorough measure of relational and physical/sexual aggression to the participants, as their identities are anonymous.

### **Plan of Analysis**

To determine which attachment dyads were most common among participants, frequency data of the various attachment dyads were utilized.

Next, to determine which types of individuals are more likely to exhibit relational and/or physical/sexual aggression, an independent samples T-test was computed to determine any differences between individuals with secure attachment styles and individuals with insecure attachment styles in their aggressive behaviors within their relationships.

Finally, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was computed to determine any differences among couples with two secure partners, couples with one secure and one insecure partner, and couples with two insecure partners regarding the amount of relational aggression within the relationship. Tukey's post-hoc analyses were computed to determine which couple dyads display the greatest levels of physical/sexual and relationship aggression.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

#### **Individual Differences in Attachment and Aggressive Behaviors**

A comparison of individual differences in relationship behaviors between attachment styles is listed in Table 4. To test the hypothesis that individuals reporting secure attachment patterns would report lower levels of aggressive behaviors in relationships than individuals reporting insecure attachment patterns, two independent samples t-tests (one for each partner) was computed to compare means between individuals with secure and insecure attachment patterns and their self-reported levels of relational and physical aggression within their relationships.

Regarding relational aggression, significant differences were found between individual attachment style (Secure = 1, Insecure = 2) and the reported level of relational aggression both for male partners ( $F=6.458, p < .01$ ) and female partners ( $F=13.884, p < .001$ ). Significant differences were also found between individual attachment style and reported levels of physical and sexual aggression for male partners ( $F=21.600, p < .001$ ) and female partners ( $F=36.523, p < .001$ ). These results indicated that individuals reporting secure-attachment styles are less likely to report engaging in physical, sexual, or relational aggression within their romantic relationship than insecurely-attached individuals. This pattern remains consistent between genders as well.

A summary of the analysis of variance (ANOVA) among each of the three attachment dyads (secure/secure, secure/insecure, insecure/insecure) and levels of relationship aggression can be found in Table 5 (Dyadic Adult Attachment and Physical/Sexual Aggression) and Table 6 (Dyadic Adult Attachment and Relational Aggression). Significant differences in physical/sexual aggression were indicated between attachment dyads. Individuals in secure/insecure and insecure/insecure attachment dyads indicated significantly higher levels of physical/sexual aggression than those in secure/secure dyads. It should be noted that differences among each attachment dyad were significant as indicated by the data in Table 5. These results were consistent for both males ( $F=13.500, p < .001$ ; see Figure 4) and females ( $F=17.034, p < .001$ ; See Figure 5).

Differences in relational aggression among attachment dyads were also significant. Specifically, individuals in secure/secure attachment dyads indicated the lowest levels of relational aggression followed by secure/insecure and insecure/insecure



dyads in order of increasing frequency of relational aggression within the relationship. Differences between each attachment dyad (secure/secure, secure/insecure, and insecure/insecure) were significant as indicated by the data in Table 6. These results were consistent for both males ( $F=13.854$ ,  $p < .001$ ; See Figure 6) and females ( $F=20.760$ ,  $p < .001$ ; See Figure 7).

### **Post-Hoc Analyses & Mann-Whitney U-Tests**

In order to determine where the significant mean difference were in the ANOVA analyses, Tukey's post hoc comparisons were computed and are displayed in Table 7. Of the twelve comparisons calculated, eleven were indicated as significant at or below the .01 level. For females, significant differences were indicated between each attachment dyad (secure/secure, secure/insecure, and insecure/insecure) for both physical/sexual and relational aggression. For males, significant differences ( $p < .01$ ) were indicated between each attachment dyad for relational aggression and between secure/secure ( $p < .001$ ) and secure/insecure ( $p < .001$ ) as well as secure/secure and insecure/insecure dyads for physical/sexual aggression.

Post-hoc analysis indicated overall non-significant differences for males in secure/insecure and insecure/insecure attachment dyads ( $p = .212$ ) regarding physical and sexual aggression. Because relationships with at least one insecure partner were indicated as more likely than relationships with two secure partners to exhibit patterns of physical/sexual aggression, it is possible that males exhibit similar levels of physical/sexual aggression when involved in a relationship with at least one insecure partner. This leads to speculation regarding the influence of gender on physical/sexual

aggression within these specific types of attachment dyads as females involved in each of these dyads displayed significant differences in physical/sexual aggression.

Additionally, in order to assess the values of attachment dyads with less than 50 couples, Mann-Whitney U tests were computed. Of the 110 U-tests computed (55 for physical/sexual aggression and relational aggression respectively), three yielded significant results for physical aggression and 11 yielded significant results for relational aggression. A summary of the significant tests is displayed in Table 8. Because the results of the ANOVAs previously mentioned yielded such significant results, it is likely that the Mann-Whitney U-tests were not ideal for the assessment of differences between groups. However, because 11 of the 16 attachment dyads consisted of less than 50 couples, a non-parametric ranking measure was deemed most appropriate. In sum, secure/secure attachment dyads were associated with the lowest levels of physical/sexual and relational aggression.

### **Frequency of Attachment Dyads**

A summary of the frequencies of attachment dyads is displayed in Table 3. As expected, the most common attachment dyad was secure/secure, consisting of 223 of the 696 couples. While 254 couples consisted of partners with similar attachment styles (e.g., secure/secure, dismissing/dismissing, fearful/fearful, preoccupied/preoccupied), 442 couples consisted of partners with differing attachment styles. Many couples consisted of one secure and one insecure partner (N=320) which contributed to our decision to compare three adult attachment dyads (secure/secure; secure/insecure; insecure/insecure) as opposed to sixteen dyads, many of which consisted of very few couples in comparison. For example, only seven couples consisted of a fearful male and preoccupied female.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

Dyadic adult attachment style, as indicated by this study, provides marriage and family therapists a means to predict the likelihood that physical/sexual and/or relational aggression exist within the relationship. Across relationship types and genders, relationships consisting of at least one insecurely-attached individual indicated significantly more physical/sexual and relational aggression than couples those consisting of two securely-attached partners. Furthermore, relationships with two insecurely-attached partners indicated the highest levels of both physical/sexual and relational aggression among all participating couples. Potential reasons for this trend and implications for marriage and family therapists will be discussed. Finally, the limitations of this study and recommendations for future research will also be posited.

## **Dyadic Adult Attachment and Relationship Aggression**

The evidence supports the hypothesis that insecurely-attached individuals commit more frequent acts of physical/sexual and relational aggression than do securely-attached individuals. Similar to previous research (e.g, Holtzworth-Munroe, Stuart, & Hutchinson, 1997), violent individuals indicated higher levels of violent behaviors in their relationships. Additionally, consistent with results of previous research (e.g., Mayseless, 1991; Holtzworth, Stuart, & Hutchinson, 1997), individuals with insecure attachment styles indicated higher levels of relational aggression in their relationships as well. Although the mean differences among participants regarding aggressive behaviors was seemingly small, the substantial sample size utilized facilitated significant results. It is no surprise then that relationships consisting of “secure/secure” dyads indicated the lowest levels of aggressive behaviors while “insecure/insecure” dyads indicated the highest levels of these same behaviors. It should be noted that, although the differences among attachment dyads were significant, the overall means were still very low for both males and females regarding physical/sexual (range from 1.12 to 1.33) and relational aggression (range from 1.34 to 1.75). However, because the sample size was sufficient, these significant differences should not be dismissed at this point.

**Influence of attachment theory.** The results of this study can further be explained by attachment theory. Individuals endorsing more secure attachment patterns are more likely to believe in the existence and resilience of romantic love, have few self-doubts, and tend to view others as well intentioned (Feeney & Noller, 1996). Bartholomew (Bartholomew, 1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) posits that secure individuals tend to view themselves as worthy of love and attention and their partner as

available and caring. Thus, it is understandable why they would exhibit fewer acts of physical/sexual and relational aggression within romantic relationships.

Regarding insecurely-attached individuals, it is possible to speculate the reasons why relationships consisting of individuals exhibiting high levels of anxiety and/or avoidance behaviors are likely to suffer physical/sexual or relational aggression between partners. Because individuals with increased patterns of avoidance in their relationships are likely reluctant to be vulnerable and intimate with their partners, sustaining a healthy romantic relationship may be difficult. For these individuals, losing control by becoming vulnerable with another individual may cause them to become aggressive toward their partner. For the highly anxious individual, whose behaviors are likely characterized by active efforts to seek close proximity and control in the relationship, aggressive behaviors may simply be inherent to their attachment style. If the security and/or safety of the relationship are compromised, anxious partners may become aggressive toward their partner. Bartholomew (Bartholomew, 1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) speculates that individuals exhibiting insecure attachment patterns view themselves as being unworthy and others as being ultimately rejecting and/or uncaring. These individuals consider themselves unworthy of love, refuse to allow their partner the opportunity to get close to them, and take out their frustrations in the relationship on their partner.

One of the goals of this study was to examine not only the influence of an individual's attachment style on their likelihood to become involved in an aggressive relationship, but to explore the mutual systemic influence of one individual's attachment style combined with their partner's attachment style on their likelihood to engage in physical/sexual and/or relational aggression. As expected, dyads with at least one

insecurely-attached partner displayed significantly higher levels of aggressive behaviors than secure/secure attachment dyads.

How, then, do insecurely-attached individuals begin and maintain healthy romantic relationships? Should therapists simply discourage these individuals from pursuing these relationships because of the increased likelihood for physical/sexual or relational aggression within the relationship? Of course, the answer to this question is “No.” As therapists, it is important for us to understand the dynamics of these relationships that create an environment conducive to aggressive behaviors rather than implementing a linear schema of causality into clinical practice.

When considering the various types of “insecure/insecure” attachment dyads, some seem to be more likely to foster aggressive behaviors than others. For example, it seems that the patterns of conflict avoidance and vulnerability associated with dismissing individuals would yield “dismissing/dismissing” dyads as no more likely to engage in aggressive behaviors than “secure/secure” dyads. Rather than address the conflict and attempt to reach a mutual resolution, “dismissing/dismissing” couples will likely act as if nothing were wrong, thus decreasing the possibility that physical/sexual and/or relational aggression will occur. Contrastingly, a relationship consisting of one preoccupied partner and one dismissing partner would, seemingly, be much more likely to lead to aggressive behaviors due to the persistent patterns of neediness and pursuing of the preoccupied partner combined with the avoidance of the dismissing partner. Further exploration of this issue is key to the ability of therapists’ and family scholars to interpret and understand the implications of an dyadic attachment on relationship aggression.

### **Limitations and Considerations**

Although the sample size for the current study was large enough to identify multiple significant results, the most common attachment dyad was “secure/secure” (N=228). The other most common male/female attachment dyads were “preoccupied/secure” (N=55), “secure/preoccupied” (N=54), “secure/dismissing” (N=54), and “secure/preoccupied” (N=54). Altogether, 548 of the 696 participating couples contained at least one secure partner. This inhibited an in-depth exploration of the various “insecure/insecure” dyads, which is why the various dyads were divided into three groups instead of sixteen. Although Mann-Whitney U-tests were computed to determine rank order among these smaller samples, little significance was indicated overall. Future studies should acquire sufficient samples of all attachment dyads to allow for thorough statistical analyses to be computed.

Furthermore, although the measure utilized for attachment was a condensed version of a consistently reliable and valid measure (ECR; Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998), the measures for physical/sexual and relational aggression were simply constructed for use in the RELATE inventory. Furthermore, the lack of internal consistency of each measure was indicated in the coefficient alphas for physical/sexual aggression (male  $\alpha = .54$ ; female  $\alpha = .56$ ) and relational aggression (male  $\alpha = .49$ ; female  $\alpha = .56$ ). Utilizing a self-reporting measure for physical/sexual aggression may also have yielded some inaccuracies, as participants may not have been willing to honestly answer questions that could be considered too intrusive for research purposes. Results from this study would be greatly enhanced if more thorough, valid tools for assessment of physical/sexual aggression were utilized.

Finally, although the sample used was large in size, a large proportion of participants were Caucasian (87%) and between the ages of 18-25 (40%). The lack of diversity in the utilized sample creates the possibility of extraneous factors influencing the outcome of the study. For example, adults between the ages of 18-25 have likely had less experience in romantic relationships than older adults. Thus, when asked questions such as “How often are YOU violent in any of the ways mentioned above (e.g., slapping, pushing, hitting hard with a fist, hitting with an object, or other types of violence), younger adults will have fewer experiences and a smaller time frame of reference from which to reach a decision than older adults.

Additionally, the majority of participants identified themselves as either Later-Day Saint/Mormon (38%) or Protestant (25%). While it is not possible to know for certain at this point, it is possible that the familial and relationship behaviors of these couples are influenced by their religious beliefs. Future studies should implement a more representative sample regarding age and religious beliefs.

### **Implications**

Because the relationship between dyadic adult attachment and relationship aggression is so significant, marriage and family therapists should consider implementing assessments for adult attachment style into their routine intake assessment materials. The potential benefits to this addition are significant. First, it equips therapists with a means to predict which couples are more at risk for aggressive behaviors based upon their indicated attachment styles. If an insecure/insecure couple presenting for marital therapy to work on their “communication problems,” the therapist will be more aware of the potential that this couple is also struggling with issues of domestic violence, anger, sexual



abuse, or relational aggression. Fortunately, valid, reliable measures of attachment such as the Experiences in Close Relationships (ECR; Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998) are available to therapists to utilize. Many couples openly present for treatment for issues of domestic violence or abuse. Including a measure of adult attachment in the assessment of these couples will provide the therapist with further insight into the conflict cycle of these partners than would be possible otherwise. Finally, if couples presenting for therapy are able to identify and understand their partner's attachment style, they can begin working on a structured treatment model to facilitate a healthy home environment conducive to relationship success.

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## APPENDICES

Table 1

*Independent and Dependent Variables of Current Study*

Variable	Type	Description
Attachment Style	Independent; Categorical Neither moderator nor mediator	Scores on continuous scales of avoidance and anxiousness were used to determine each individual's attachment style (secure, preoccupied, dismissing, fearful).
Partner's Attachment Style	Independent; Categorical Neither moderator nor mediator	Scores on continuous scales of avoidance and anxiousness were used to determine the partner's attachment style (secure, preoccupied, dismissing, fearful)
Attachment Dyad	Independent; Categorical Neither moderator nor mediator	Individual and partner scores on measures of attachment were combined to form various adult attachment dyads (e.g., secure/secure, secure/insecure, insecure/insecure)
Physical Aggression	Dependent; Continuous	Individual scores will vary for physical aggression based upon Likert scale data.
Relational Aggression	Dependent; Continuous	Individual scores will vary for relational aggression based upon Likert scale data.

Table 2

*Sample Used for Current Study*

Variable	Category	<i>N</i>	Percent
Age	18-25	509	40.00%
	26-35	428	34.00%
	36-45	190	15.00%
	46+	134	11.00%
Relationship status	Single	474	38.00%
	Cohabiting	290	23.00%
	Married (1st marriage)	318	25.00%
	Separated/divorced	111	9.00%
	Remarried	64	5.00%
	Widowed	7	0.50%
Race/ethnic group	African (Black)	43	3.00%
	Asian	43	3.00%
	Caucasian (White)	1082	87.00%
	Native American	5	0.40%
	Latino	43	3.00%
	Mixed/biracial	27	2.00%
	Other	2	0.20%
Religious affiliation	Catholic	186	16.00%
	Protestant	295	25.00%
	Jewish	23	2.00%
	Islamic	6	0.50%
	LDS/Mormon	437	38.00%
	Buddhist	4	0.30%
	Hindu	9	0.80%
	Other	4	0.30%
None	193	17.00%	

Table 3

*Frequency of Adult Attachment Dyads*

Male/female attachment styles	N	Percent (%)
Two secure partners (1)	228	32.76
Secure/secure*	<b>228</b>	<b>32.76</b>
One secure/one insecure partner (2)	320	45.98
Secure/preoccupied	54	7.76
Secure/fearful	27	3.89
Secure/dismissing	54	7.76
Preoccupied/secure	55	7.90
Fearful/secure	26	3.73
Dismissing/secure	50	7.18
Secure/preoccupied	54	7.76
Two Insecure Partners (3)	148	21.26
Preoccupied/preoccupied*	<b>16</b>	<b>2.30</b>
Preoccupied/fearful	12	1.72
Preoccupied/dismissing	20	2.87
Fearful/preoccupied	7	1.00
Fearful/fearful*	<b>10</b>	<b>1.44</b>
Fearful/dismissing	20	2.87
Dismissing/preoccupied	18	2.59
Dismissing/fearful	20	2.87
Dismissing/dismissing*	<b>17</b>	<b>2.44</b>
Preoccupied/preoccupied	16	2.30
Preoccupied/fearful	12	1.72
Totals	696	100.00
Same attachment style*	<b>254</b>	<b>37.49</b>
Different attachment style	442	63.51

*Note.* Matching attachment dyads are in boldface.

Table 4

*Individual Differences in Aggressive Behaviors Between Attachment Styles*

Type of aggression/attachment style	Males			Females		
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
Relational aggression						
Secure	363	1.37*	0.39	357	1.46**	0.41
Insecure	267	1.53*	0.46	274	1.69**	0.51
Physical/sexual aggression						
Secure	360	1.20**	0.38	357	1.12**	0.28
Insecure	268	1.33**	0.52	275	1.21**	0.41

*Note.* \* Denotes significant differences at the .01 level. \*\* Denotes differences at the .001 level.

Table 5

*Dyadic Adult Attachment and Physical/Sexual Aggression*

		Descriptive statistics			ANOVA	
		<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	Sig.
Male					13.50	0.000
	Secure/secure (1)	224	1.13	0.248		
	Secure/insecure (2)	264	1.27	0.391		
	Insecure/insecure (3)	137	1.33	0.482		
Female					17.034	0.000
	Secure/secure (1)	225	1.12	0.250		
	Secure/insecure (2)	234	1.21	0.342		
	Insecure/insecure (3)	139	1.33	0.436		



Table 6

*Dyadic Adult Attachment and Relational Aggression*

		Descriptive statistics			ANOVA	
		<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	Sig.
Male					13.854	0.000
	Secure/secure (1)	228	1.34	0.371		
	Secure/insecure (2)	262	1.46	0.436		
	Insecure/insecure (3)	140	1.58	0.463		
Female					20.760	0.000
	Secure/secure (1)	228	1.43	0.411		
	Secure/insecure (2)	264	1.57	0.443		
	Insecure/insecure (3)	139	1.75	0.548		

Table 7

*Tukey Post Hoc*

Variable	Dyad 1	Dyad 2	Difference ( <i>M</i> )	Sig.
Relational aggression (male)	Secure/secure	Secure/insecure	-0.11524	0.007
	Secure/secure	Insecure/insecure	-0.23509	0.000
Relational aggression (female)	Secure/insecure	Insecure/insecure	-0.11985	0.018
	Secure/secure	Secure/insecure	-0.13945	0.002
	Secure/secure	Insecure/insecure	-0.31588	0.000
Physical/sexual aggression (male)	Secure/insecure	Insecure/insecure	-0.17642	0.001
	Secure/secure	Secure/insecure	-0.14086	0.000
	Secure/secure	Insecure/insecure	-0.20660	0.000
Physical/sexual aggression (female)	Secure/insecure	Insecure/insecure	-0.06574	0.212
	Secure/secure	Secure/insecure	-0.08944	0.010
	Secure/secure	Insecure/insecure	-0.21205	0.000
	Secure/insecure	Insecure/insecure	-0.12260	0.002

Table 8

*Mann-Whitney U-Tests*

Aggression type	Male/female dyad 1	Male/female dyad 2	Male				Female			
			N	Rank	Z	p	N	Rank	Z	p
Physical/Sexual	Secure/fearful	Preoccupied/preoccupied	43	25, 17	-2.21	.027	43	25, 17	-2.37	.018
	Preoccupied/preoccupied	Dismissing/fearful	34	14, 20	-1.95	.051	36	14, 22	-2.39	.017
	Secure/fearful	Dismissing/preoccupied	44	26, 17	-2.21	.027	45	25, 20	-1.31	.189
Relational	Secure/fearful	Fearful/fearful	37	16, 26	-2.51	.011	37	19, 20	-0.46	.649
	Secure/fearful	Fearful/dismissing	47	22, 26	-1.00	.313	47	29, 18	-2.68	.007
	Preoccupied/preoccupied	Fearful/fearful	26	11, 18	-2.58	.010	26	13, 15	-0.69	.489
	Preoccupied/fearful	Fearful/secure	37	17, 20	-.909	.378	38	25, 17	-2.10	.038
	Preoccupied/fearful	Fearful/fearful	22	9, 15	-2.05	.043	22	12, 11	-0.07	.974
	Preoccupied/fearful	Fearful/dismissing	32	16, 17	-0.08	.954	32	22, 13	-2.83	.004
	Fearful/secure	Dismissing/dismissing	42	25, 17	-1.97	.049	43	21, 23	-0.37	.713
	Fearful/fearful	Fearful/dismissing	30	19, 13	-1.45	.148	30	21, 13	-2.31	.022
	Fearful/fearful	Dismissing/preoccupied	28	20, 12	-2.48	.013	28	17, 13	-1.22	.245
	Fearful/fearful	Dismissing/dismissing	27	19, 11	-2.74	.006	27	17, 12	-1.32	.204
	Fearful/dismissing	Dismissing/preoccupied	38	21, 20	-0.34	.731	38	16, 25	-2.54	.011

Figure 1

*Characteristics of the Three Major Infant Attachment Styles*

<i>Attachment Style</i>	<i>Infant Behavior</i>	<i>Quality of Caregiving</i>
Avoidant (Group A)	Detachment behaviors; avoidance of caregiver	Rejecting; rigid; hostile; averse to contact
Secure (Group B)	Active exploration; upset by separation; positive response to caregiver	Available; responsive; warm
Anxious-ambivalent (Group C)	Protest behaviors; distress at separation; anger- ambivalence to caregiver	Insensitive; intrusive; inconsistent

*Note.* Characteristics of the three major infant attachment styles. Adapted from *Adult Attachment* (p. 7), by J. Feeney and P. Noller, 1996, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc. Copyright 1996 by Sage Publications, Inc. Adapted with permission.

Figure 2 <i>Four-Group Model of Adult Attachment</i>			
	<b>Model of Self (Dependence)</b>		
		Positive (Low)	Negative (High)
<b>Model of Other (Avoidance)</b>	Positive (Low)	<b>SECURE</b> Comfortable with intimacy and autonomy	<b>PREOCCUPIED</b> Preoccupied (Main); Ambivalent (Hazan); Overly dependent
	Negative (High)	<b>DISMISSING</b> Denial of Attachment; Dismissing (Main); Counter-dependent	<b>FEARFUL</b> Fear of attachment; Avoidant (Hazan); Socially avoidant

SOURCE: Bartholomew (1990).

Figure 3

*Prototypical Descriptions of Four Attachment Styles*

**Secure:** It is relatively easy for me to become emotionally close to others. I am comfortable depending on others and having others depend on me. I don't worry about being alone or having others not accept me.

**Dismissing:** I am comfortable without close emotional relationships. It is very important to me to feel independent and self-sufficient, and I prefer not to depend on others or have others depend on me.

**Preoccupied:** I want to be completely emotionally intimate with others, but I often find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like. I am uncomfortable being close without close relationships, but I sometimes worry that others don't value me as much as I value them.

**Fearful:** I am somewhat uncomfortable getting close to others. I want emotionally close relationships, but I find it difficult to trust others completely or to depend on them. I sometimes worry that I will be hurt if I allow myself to become too close to others.

SOURCE: Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991)

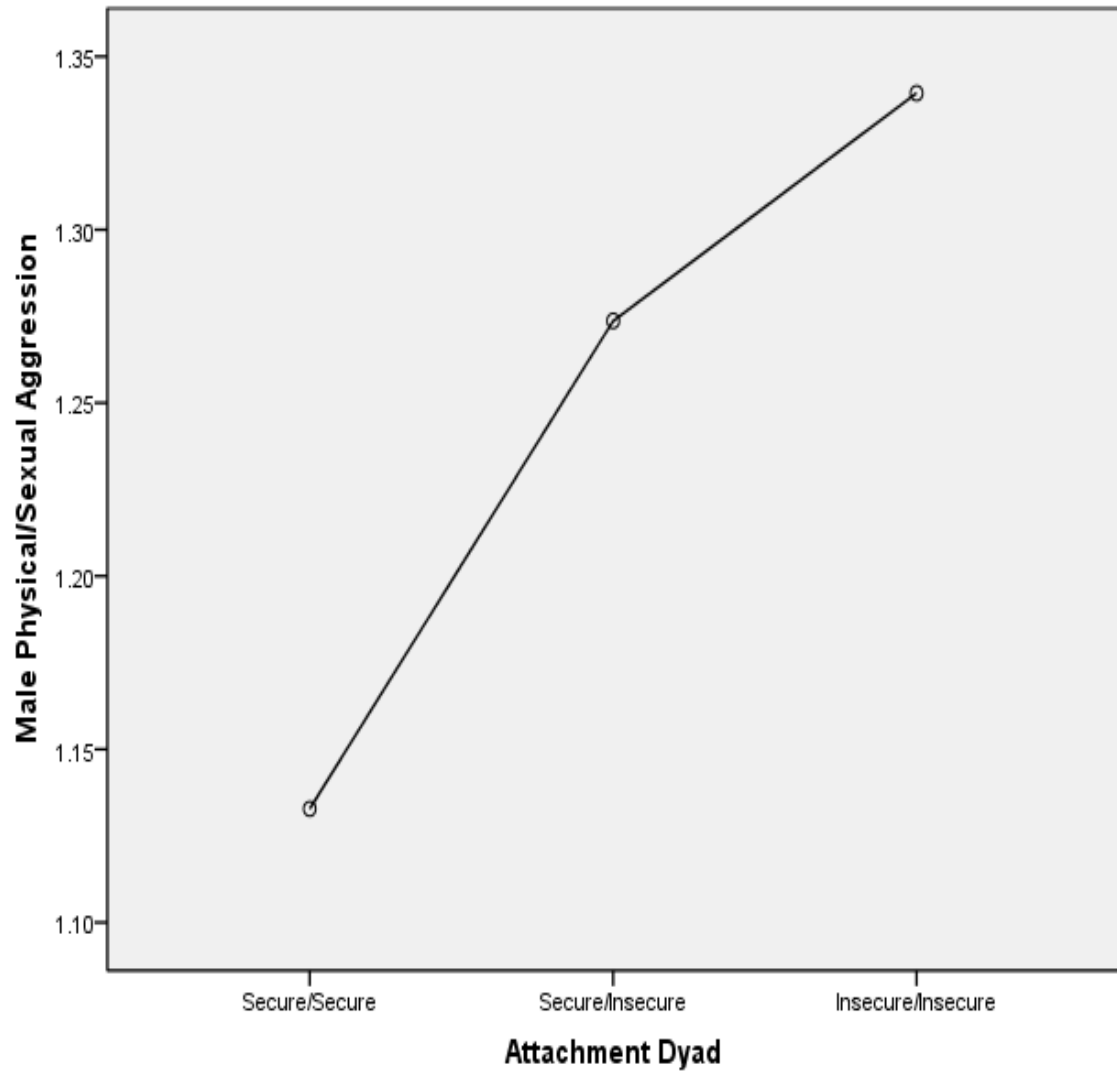


Figure 4. Male Physical/Sexual Aggression in Attachment Dyads

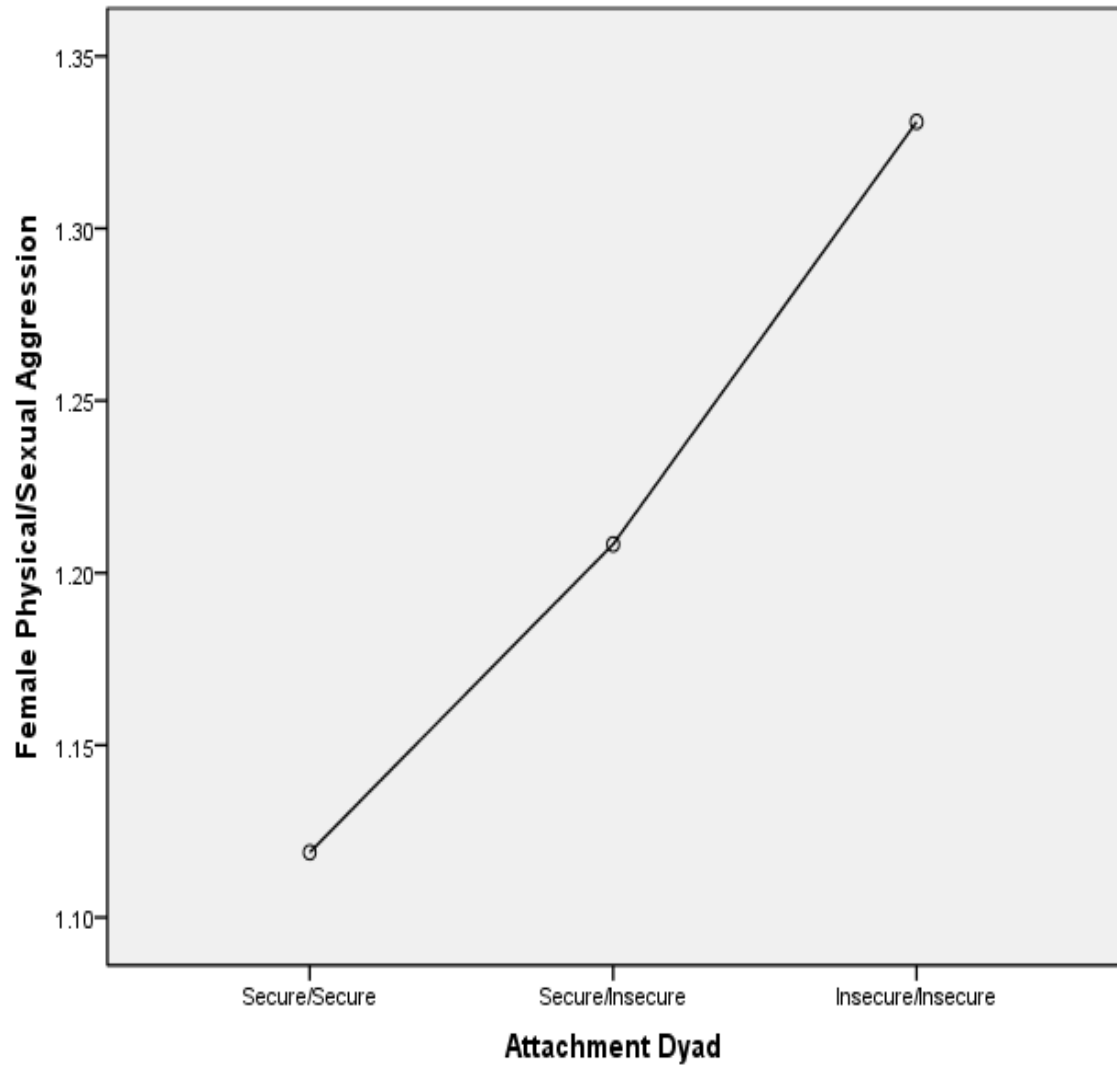


Figure 5. Female Physical/Sexual Aggression in Attachment Dyads



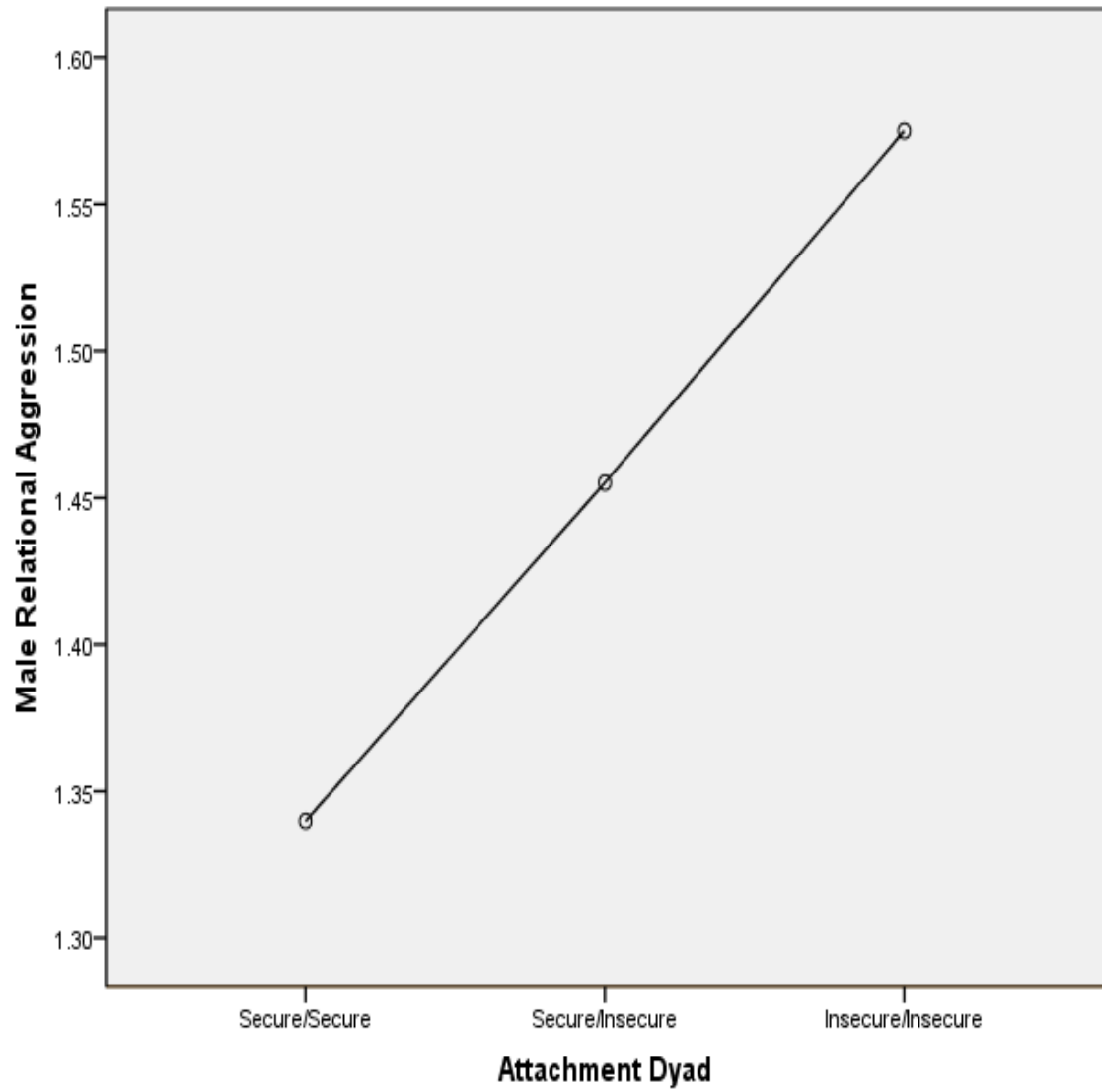


Figure 6. Male Relational Aggression in Attachment Dyads

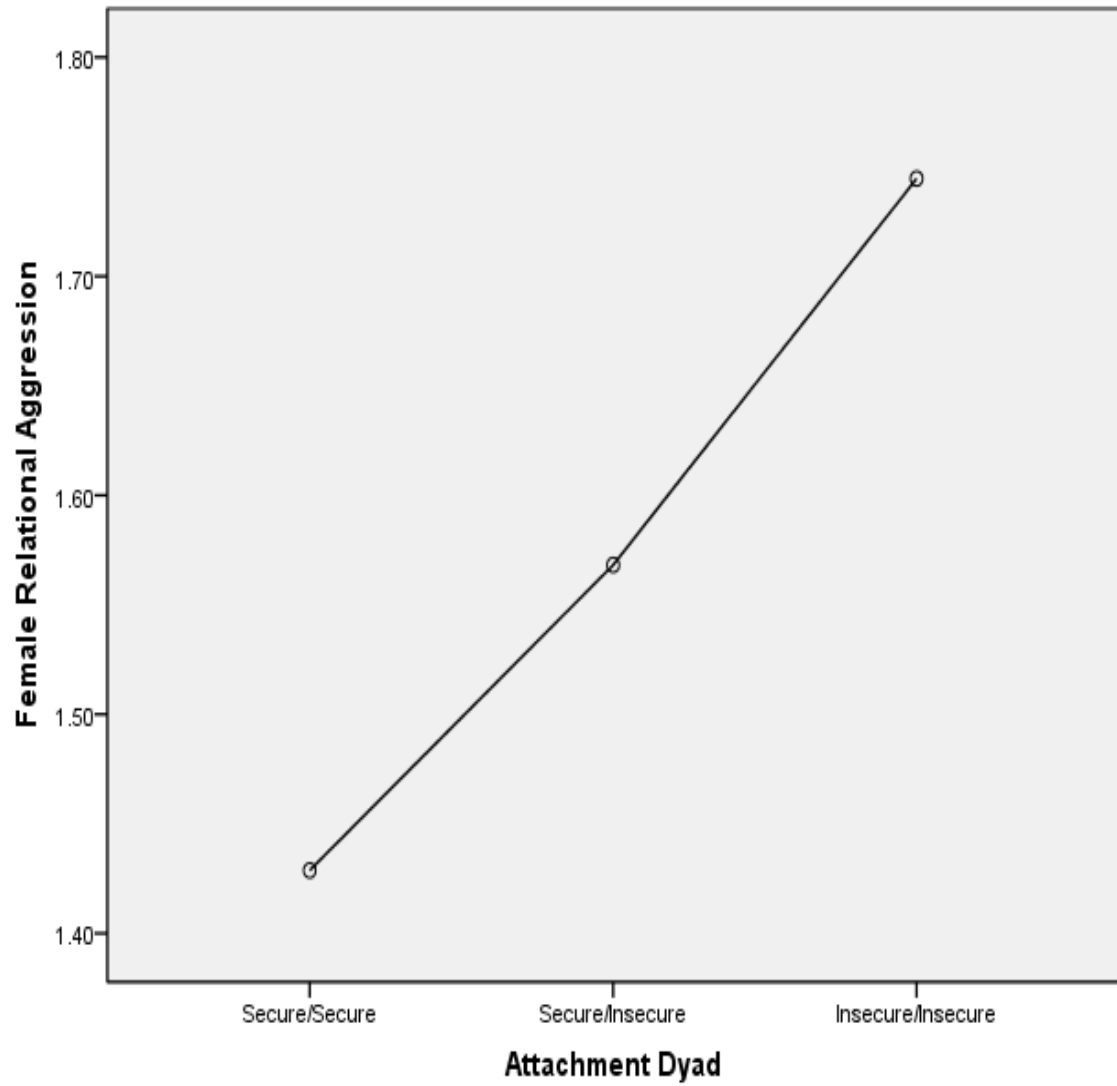


Figure 7. Female Relational Aggression in Attachment Dyads

Appendix A

*Attachment-Avoidant*

1= Strongly Disagree 2=Disagree 3=Somewhat Disagree 4=Undecided 5=Somewhat Agree 6=Agree 7=Strongly Agree

- 755. I find it relatively easy to get close to others.\*
- 756. I'm not very comfortable having to depend on other people.
- 757. I'm comfortable having others depend on me.\*
- 758. I don't like people getting too close to me.
- 759. I'm somewhat uncomfortable being too close to others.
- 760. I find it difficult to trust others completely.
- 761. I'm nervous whenever anyone gets too close to me.
- 762. Others often want me to be more intimate than I feel comfortable being.

*Note.* \* Items were reverse scored.

SOURCE: Adapted with permission from Busby, Holman, & Taniguchi (2001).

Appendix B	
<i>Attachment-Anxiety</i>	
1= Strongly Disagree 2=Disagree 3=Somewhat Disagree 4=Undecided 5=Somewhat Agree 6=Agree 7=Strongly Agree	
763.	I rarely worry about being abandoned by others.*
764.	Others often are reluctant to get as close as I would like.
765.	I often worry that my partner(s) don't really love me.
766.	I rarely worry about my partner(s) leaving me.*
767	I often want to merge completely with others, and this desire sometimes scares them away.
768.	I'm confident others would never hurt me suddenly by ending our relationship.*
769.	I usually want more closeness and intimacy than others do.
770.	The thought of being left by others rarely enters my mind.*
771.	I'm confident that my partner(s) love me just as much as I love them.*

*Note.* \* Items were reverse scored.

SOURCE: Adapted with permission from Busby, Holman, & Taniguchi (2001).

Appendix C

*Relational Aggression*

1= Never 2=Rarely 3=Sometimes 4=Often 5=Very Often

891. I have threatened to break up with my romantic partner in order to get him/her to do what I wanted.
892. I try to make my romantic partner jealous when I am mad at him/her.
893. I give my romantic partner the silent treatment when she/he hurts my feelings in some way.
894. If my romantic partner makes me mad, I will flirt with another person in front of him/her.

SOURCE: Adapted with permission from Busby, Holman, & Taniguchi (2001).

Appendix D
<i>Physical/Sexual Aggression</i>
1= Never 2=Rarely 3=Sometimes 4=Often 5=Very Often
<p>Sometimes differences in relationships may lead to slapping, pushing, kicking, hitting hard with a fist, hitting with an object, or other types of violence. With this in mind:</p> <p>244. How often is YOUR CURRENT PARTNER violent toward you?</p> <p>245. How often are YOU violent in any of the ways mentioned above toward your current partner?</p> <p>Sometimes individuals feel pressured to participate in physically intimate behavior when they don't want to. Please answer the following questions about this issue.</p> <p>246. How often have you been pressured against your will to participate in intimate sexual activities (such as fondling, oral sex, or intercourse) by YOUR CURRENT PARTNER?</p> <p>247. How often has your current partner been pressured against his/her will to participate in sexual behaviors (such as fondling, oral sex, or intercourse) BY YOU?</p>

SOURCE: Adapted with permission from Busby, Holman, & Taniguchi (2001).

VITA

Jonathan Burton Wilson

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF DYADIC ADULT ATTACHMENT  
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emphasis)

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Institution: Oklahoma State University

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ATTACHMENT ON PHYSICAL, SEXUAL, AND  
RELATIONAL AGGRESSION WITHIN  
ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Pages in Study: 63

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emphasis)

Scope and Method of Study: The purpose of this study was to identify if an association exists between dyadic adult attachment and physical, sexual, and relational aggression within romantic relationships. Participants were 696 couples who completed the RELATE in 2009. Subscales of the RELATE measuring adult attachment, physical/sexual aggression, and relational aggression were utilized to complete this study. Individuals were identified as secure, dismissing, preoccupied, or fearful based on their answers to the attachment measure. Attachment scores were then paired with their partner's score to form a dyadic adult attachment categorization. Differential inferential statistics were used to determine differences among attachment dyads in regard to physical/sexual and relational aggression.

Findings and Conclusions: Relationships consisting of at least one insecurely-attached partner indicated higher levels of physical/sexual and relational aggression from both male and female partners. Relationships consisting of two insecurely-attached partners indicated the highest levels of physical/sexual and relational aggression among all groups. The findings of this study highlight the need for therapists to incorporate a measure for adult attachment into their intake assessment measures to assess risk for relationship aggression and provide context for couples presenting with a history of relationship aggression.

ADVISER'S APPROVAL: Dr. Brandt C. Gardner

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