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Adult Attachment Styles and Their Correlation with Marital Adjustment and Divorce

Cheryl Jones
Utah State University

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ADULT ATTACHMENT STYLES AND THEIR CORRELATION WITH MARITAL ADJUSTMENT AND DIVORCE

by

Cheryl Jones

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DEPARTMENT HONORS

in

Family, Consumer, and Human Development

Approved:

Thorana Nelson
Thesis/Project Advisor

Kim Openshaw
Department Honors Advisor

David Lancy
Director of Honors Program

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, UT

2004
ABSTRACT

Adult Attachment Styles and its Relation to Marital Adjustment and Divorce

by

Cheryl Jones, Bachelor of Science
Utah State University 2004

Faculty Mentor: Thorana Nelson
Department: Family, Consumer, and Human Development

The theory of attachment is a fairly recent approach to studying the relationship between romantic partners. Attachment theory was originally studied to explain the needs and behaviors between infants and their primary caregivers. The attachment style that infants have with their primary caregiver characterizes them throughout their entire lives. Three different styles of attachment have been described: secure, avoidant, and ambivalent. Secure individuals find it easy to get close to others. Avoidant individuals are nervous when people get too close. Ambivalent individuals want to get very close to others and are fearful of abandonment.

Various research studies suggest that attachment styles formed in infancy carry over into adulthood and have an effect on their internal working model. This can affect the level of marital adjustment that is experienced. Thus, the ability to be close to another individual in adulthood is influenced by very early attachment relationships. Attachment styles may effect levels of conflict, communication, and adjustment, which may in turn affect marital status. Attachment processes in adults may play an important part in couple and family therapy.
The purpose of this research was to discover if attachment styles in adults relate to marital status. The sample consisted of 196 low income mothers of one year old infants. The marital status of young mothers was compared to their adult attachment styles as measured by the Attachment Style Scales (ASS) questionnaire (Becker & Billings, 1997). The results were statistically significant that married mothers had attachment styles that were more secure \( t = 3.10, p < .003 \) than divorced or separated mothers. Furthermore, ambivalent style was more common than avoidant style of insecure attachment among divorced/separated mothers. This research helps to suggest that attachment styles in adulthood influence romantic relationships and that it is a beneficial perspective in Marriage and Family Therapy.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank DeAnn Jones, a master’s student in the department of Family, Consumer, and Human Development for the data used in this research. The correlation of the variables of attachment style and marital status were not analyzed in her thesis research, and therefore were used for this presentation. I appreciate all the women who volunteered in this study.

I would also like to thank Thorana Nelson for helping me do this research in the first place. Her advice and expert wisdom has helped me along the way. I would like to also mention Maria Norton for helping me analyze the results and for her teaching me about writing a thesis.

Cheryl Jones
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND THE PROBLEM

Statistics on the rate of divorce in the United States show that marital relationships are suffering. Romantic relationships are widely studied by researchers, clinicians, and a wide range of other fields and interests. Many different dynamics and complexities are involved in a romantic or marital relationship. A great deal is involved to make love relationships strong and continue to progress and develop. Many different theories and research studies are directed to finding the aspects of a relationship that provide the most success and happiness. The formation of a strong relationship between a husband and wife in adulthood is very important and critical to success and happiness in a couple throughout their development. It is important that researchers examine important structures of marriage in order to evaluate the underlying causes of marital conflict and therefore find effective solutions.

The theory of attachment is a recent approach to studying this relationship between romantic partners. Attachment theory had originally been studied to explain the needs and behaviors between caregivers and their infants. John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth (Bretherton, 1992) developed the theory of attachment. Bowlby and Ainsworth discovered that there is more that a caregiver provides to an infant than basic needs. The three different styles of attachment have are secure, avoidant, and ambivalent. The attachment style that infants have with their caregivers characterizes people throughout their entire lives.
Feeney and Noller (1996) believe that attachment styles developed in infants affect the attachment styles characterized in later romantic relationships which can affect the level of marital adjustment experienced in romantic partners. Very early relationship bonds may affect the ability to be close to another individual in adulthood. The bond between spouses has many similarities to the bond between caregiver and child. Attachment theory can effectively be used to describe the relationships between romantic partners. The love felt as an emotion can also be explained through the theory of attachment. Further, the attachment style of partners affects their ability to communicate and their levels of functioning and conflict.

There is a large body of research intended to study relationship contexts dealing with communication and conflict resolution. Much of this research focuses on the behaviors involved in conflict, but relatively little attention has been placed on the underlying reasons that miscommunication and conflict arise. Attachment theory goes beyond what the conflict is about, to look at the reasons the conflict has not been managed effectively, and the patterns with which it occurs.

Attachment styles in couples may directly or indirectly effect potential divorce. Attachment styles may affect conflict and negative communication, which may in turn affect marital status.

It is important that marriage and family therapists address the issue of attachment in their married clients, because attachment styles may have a significant impact on marital communication, conflict, and marital adjustment. It is therefore important to address the reasons each partner reacts to a situation, examine possible new patterns of response, and then teach the partners how they can change their thinking and their behavior to deal with conflict more effectively (Johnson & Whiffen, 2003).
The purpose of this study is to show the importance of attachment styles in marital relationships and the need for these issues to be addressed in marital adjustment to produce change. The study examined the relation of mother's attachment styles and their marital status. The research study hypothesizes that in the sample of mothers, married subjects would show higher levels of secure attachment and divorced/separated would show higher levels of insecure attachment.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Origins of Attachment Theory

John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth (Bretherton, 1992) developed the theory of attachment. Each made important contributions to what is now recognized as attachment theory. John Bowlby graduated from the University of Cambridge in 1928 where he was trained in what is now referred to as developmental psychology. He later worked with Melanie Klein who believed that children’s emotional problems were caused by internal mechanisms such as fantasies and had nothing to do with the external world (Bretherton, 1992). Bowlby rejected Klein’s ideas and began to believe instead that family experiences were very important and likely the basic cause of emotional disturbance.

Bowlby was interested in a study conducted by Harlow (1958), who found that baby rhesus monkeys preferred a terry-cloth “mother” over a wire-mesh “mother” that provided food. Harlow went against other scholars who believed the reason infants prefer their mothers is that they provide food and satisfy basic needs. Harlow began to discover there were more factors that played into this relationship (Bretherton, 1992). Konrad Lorenz (1935) wrote a paper on imprinting that interested Bowlby as well, and strongly influenced Bowlby’s research as he began to develop a theory called attachment.

Bowlby (1973) defined four different components to attachment behavior. The first is proximity maintenance, which is the closeness established with the caregiver. The second is separation protest, which is identified when an infant resists separation from the caregiver. Third, the infant uses the caregiver as a secure base from which to discover
Ainsworth was interested in the security between parents and infants when she began working for Bowlby in 1950 (Bretherton, 1992). A few years later, after being influenced by Bowlby's ethological perspective on infant-mother attachment, she traveled to Uganda and conducted the first empirical study of attachment. She observed signals and cues between the infant and mother and noticed different patterns of behavior that she labeled as attachment. Some infants cried little and explored the world around them. Others cried frequently and did not explore their world and some had no differential behavior to the mother. Ainsworth discovered that the infants that cried little and explored their world had mothers who were more sensitive and in tune with their needs.

Ainsworth then conducted a study in Baltimore in which she developed a method called the Strange Situation. This measure is used to study attachments by looking at the differences in the child's behaviors when a mother leaves the room, a stranger enters, and the mother returns (Bretherton, 1992). Patterns demonstrated in the Strange Situation characterize attachment styles.

Ainsworth (1978) identified three types of attachment: secure, avoidant, and ambivalent. Securely attached infants react positively to the stranger when the mother is in the room. When their mother leaves the room, they become upset and are not consoled by a stranger, but calm down when the mother returns. Avoidant infants may or may not cry when the mother leaves the room and are just as likely to be consoled by the stranger as by the mother. When the mother returns, they are indifferent to the mother. Ambivalent infants stay very close to their mothers and are anxious with their mothers.
They are very upset when the mother leaves the room and are not comforted by her return.

John Bowlby began to produce volumes of books about the theory of attachment and Ainsworth continued to study attachment behavior in infants and parents. The theory of attachment is now very widespread and is moving in many new directions. Attachment styles carry on from infancy into adulthood. It is widely accepted and supported that adult attachment styles have been shown to be fairly stable throughout the lifespan (Feeney & Noller, 1996). The process of attachment is established from the beginning of a person’s life and plays a key role in the formations of an individual’s beliefs about himself or herself.

Attachment styles are self-sustaining (Feeney & Noller, 1996). An attachment style that characterizes a person affects many other systems and the various relationships the individual experiences (Hazen & Shaver 1988). Individuals who approach new social situations with a defensive attitude are more likely to be rejected, so their insecure attachment style is reinforced. Adult attachment has been applied to many different contexts, beginning with early studies of adult bereavement (Bowlby & Parkes, 1970). Attachment styles have also been applied to adults in their romantic relationships.

Development of Adult Attachment and Similarities with Infants

Attachment styles are built in infancy and become steadier over time. The evolution of attachments from infancy to adulthood has been examined by researchers. The four components of attachment: proximity maintenance, separation protest, safe haven, and secure base all play into that transition. An individual’s attachment with a caregiver begins to transition attachments with peers and romantic partners (Hazen &
Zeifman, 1994). Adults in romantic relationships with peers experience proximity maintenance by enjoying each other’s company and spending a lot of time together. Romantic partners feel anxious and want to be with each other again after separation. They are comforted by each other and turn to each other for support and encouragement, because they are built on a safe haven basis. They use the other partner as a secure base from which to explore their environment.

Hazen and Zeifman (1994) studied the process when young people begin to transfer their attachments from parents to their peers. Hazen and Zeifman (1994) believed that the transition is gradual and spreads out to other relationships. Some components are transferred earlier and some are transferred later. For example, proximity maintenance is the first to be transferred from parents to peers. As children grow older, they begin to spend more time with their peers and enjoy the company of peers more than with their parents.

Hazen and Shaver (1990) compared exploratory behavior in infants with occupational work behaviors in adults by describing different attachment behaviors. Secure adult partners worked hard and had a lot of job satisfaction and worked well with coworkers, but did not let work interfere with their marital relationships. Avoidant partners used work as a means of success and did not work well with others. They used work as a way to avoid socialization and to avoid close relationships. Their emphasis was on success at work and not relationship building. Ambivalent partners reported low job satisfaction and felt that their romantic relationships interfered with their work.
Working Models of Attachment

Attachment styles are based on the internal working model of an individual. Internal working models are very important to Bowlby’s (1969) theory of attachment. Individuals need two models: a model of their environment (environmental model) and a model of their own potentials and skills (organismic model). Bowlby believed that these models were the mechanism that made attachment lifelong. These inner working models are like a map or a guide to predict or interpret the behaviors of others in society as well as to plan one’s own behavior.

Children who have supportive parents are likely to develop inner working models that equip them for positive relationships with others and to explore their world with confidence (Feeney & Noller, 1996). Early experiences in life affect individuals throughout their lives. Working models are resistant to change because they often are self-fulfilling; behaviors that are based on these models are likely to produce consequences that reinforce the models.

Collins and Read (1994) believed that there are interrelated components that build working models. Memories of individual experiences with primary caregivers that are related to attachment show that secure individuals have warm memories of their parents, whereas insecure individuals have conflicting memories of their parents. The beliefs and attitudes of secure individuals reflect their positive models of both themselves and others. Avoidant individuals hold beliefs and attitudes about others that are not interpersonally related. Consequently, these people often are not involved in social relationships. Ambivalent individuals hold the belief that they must be wary of others and feel they have little control over their lives.
The goals and needs of individuals based on attachment was also looked at by Collins and Read (1994). Secure individuals seek to have a balance between closeness and autonomy. Avoidant individuals are achievement oriented, seek a great deal of autonomy, and fear getting too close to others. Ambivalent individuals seek intimacy but fear rejection and abandonment and are preoccupied with worry about their relationships.

When secure individuals are placed in a stressful situation, Collins and Read (1994) found that they have good coping mechanisms and can deal with stress effectively. Avoidant individuals deny their emotions and don't express themselves or seek help. Ambivalent individuals are very emotional, have a lot of anxiety, and may even display heightened distress to get a reaction.

Collins and Read (1994) believe that the working models we develop for our environment and ourselves shape our cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses to others. There are many ways that working models affect cognitive responses. One way is through selective attention. People pay attention to certain parts of stimuli and ignore other aspects. Individuals are more sensitive to information that is consistent with their beliefs and attitudes. Working models can also be affected by creating biases and altering previous memories. Finally, working models affect the way people interpret information about the world around them and from the people they are in contact with.

An individual's emotional responses to stimuli are affected by working models through primary and secondary responses (Feeney & Noller, 1996). Primary responses involve a direct reaction from the working model. For example, a person who is particularly sensitive to rejection might react with a lot of distress when a partner is late for a date. A secondary response is the emotion individuals feel after they take into
account their cognitive responses. The primary response can be maintained, amplified, or lessened depending on how the individual interprets the experience.

Individuals who have different attachment styles behave differently in relationships because they think and feel differently (Feeney & Noller, 1996). People have different plans and strategies stored in their cognitive and emotional functioning as a part of their working model. Their behavior is also partly based on their internal working model as it affects new plans in current situations. Secure individuals plan behavior based on emotional and cognitive considerations. Anxious individuals focus their behavior on emotional rather than cognitive factors. Avoidant individuals are more likely to base their behavior on cognitive reasoning.

Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) developed a four-category model that describes the behaviors elicited from attachment styles that are based on combinations of positive and negative internal working models. People with a dismissing or avoidant style are self-confident, hostile, and cold. They have low levels of intimacy in personal relationships. Individuals with a preoccupied or ambivalent style have high levels of self-disclosure and expression, reliance on others, and inconsistent caregiving.

Internal working models are often stable but can also be changed through various circumstances (Feeney & Noller, 1996). The biggest reason that these working models stay stable is that people select environments and partners that are consistent with their beliefs. Working models are most likely to change around major life events. They also may change through a combination of insight and positive relationship experience.
Adult Attachment and Love

Adult attachment studies have more recently begun to examine romantic relationships, starting with the work of Hazen and Shaver (1988). Hazen and Shaver applied the concept of romantic love as a process of attachment. Affectionate bonds between two individuals have complex emotional dynamics. That is, relationships between two romantic partners can be seen as attachments.

Hazen and Shaver (1988) looked at several aspects of romantic love, which looked at several aspects. They viewed love as an emotion or, rather, a complex pattern of typical elicitors and their responses. These can include a person’s closeness with another partner, the satisfying of one’s needs and the desire to give to the other, feelings of security, and having a trusting relationship. These behaviors produce feelings and emotions that are reciprocal and that coincide with Bowlby’s observations of felt security and proximity maintenance.

The key part of romantic love that Hazen and Shaver (1988) examined was its relation to attachment. They looked at behavioral and emotional similarities with Bowlby’s (1969) description of the attachment process. They found that eye contact, smiling, holding, the desire to share themselves with each other, caring about one another, and so on, are important to the whole spectrum of attachment in infancy and in adulthood. In all contexts of secure attachment, the attachment figure is responsive and the individuals feel secure. If one of the partners is gone, the other will move to regain proximity. This leads researchers to believe that the attachments found in parent-child relationships and adult romantic relationships and even all close relationships follow the same underlying processes of attachment.
In contrast to the similarities between attachments of parent-child and romantic partners, there are also differences between parent-child relationships and romantic relationships. Hazen and Shaver (1988) pointed out that in romantic love, the attachment is established through reciprocal caregiving, whereas the parent-child relationship is very one-sided on the part of the primary caregiver. The aspect of sexuality is found mainly in romantic relationships and not in parent-child relationships.

Hazen and Shaver (1988) believe that romantic love involves three different integrated behavioral systems: attachment, caregiving, and sexuality. These three aspects are present to ensure reproduction. The importance of each aspect varies across the span of the relationship, typically with sexuality being especially important in the early stages of romantic love. The process of attachment has a deep effect on the relationship throughout its span of time.

Hazen and Shaver (1988) compared attachment with previous theories of love. Anxious love (Feeney & Noller, 1996) is characterized by obsessiveness, anxiety, jealousy, and fear of abandonment. There are many different terms for this type of love but they all follow this general pattern of desperation. Anxious love is closely related to the ambivalent style of insecure attachment. Attachment theory stands apart from other theories of love because it has a method of describing how anxious love can come about.

Hazen and Shaver (1988) also looked at Sternberg’s (1986) triangular theory of love in relation with attachment. It involves three components: intimacy (emotional closeness), passion (physical and sexual attraction), and commitment (the decision to be together long-term). The purpose of all aspects is to maintain a healthy, functioning relationship.
Attachment Related to Marital Adjustment, Conflict, and Communication

Attachment styles in romantic or marital relationships have an impact on each partner’s ability to communicate effectively and to use methods of conflict management. It is important to look at the notion that individuals with a secure attachment are likely to have better strategies for dealing with conflict.

Kobak and Hazen (1991) tested the effect of working models on marital functioning. Spouses with a secure working model reported having a higher level of marital satisfaction. They were less likely to feel rejected during problem solving and were more likely to be consoled.

Pistole (1989) decided to investigate the impact of attachment styles on reports of conflict resolution in a sample of students in relationships. She looked at each partner’s concern for themselves and then concern for the relationship and correlated that with the different attachment styles of each individual. Pistole (1989) found that students with a secure attachment were better at different forms of conflict management. They were more likely to use an integrating strategy and to compromise than students with an insecure attachment were.

Feeney (1994) studied couples to assess conflict patterns, attachment, and marital satisfaction. She found that secure spouses often paired with a secure spouse and their satisfaction was generally high. On the other hand, when an anxious wife was paired with an avoidant husband, both partners experienced the least marital satisfaction. The most important predictor of satisfaction was mutual compromise of conflict.

Other findings have supported the relationship between a secure attachment style and mutual conflict resolution. Corcoran and Mallinckrodt (2000) conducted a study that
looked at concern for self and concern for others in conflict styles through the constructs of the working models proposed in the theory of attachment. They found that the most effective and mutually focused conflict resolution styles were used in individuals who had a positive working model and a secure style of attachment. Avoidant individuals were more likely to avoid conflict and not come to a resolution.

Senchak and Lenard (1992) found that secure couples, where both partners had secure attachment styles reported higher marital satisfaction and intimacy than relationships that were mixed with a secure and insecure partner, or with insecure couples. There was not a significant difference between mixed couples and insecure couples, which may mean that a marital relationship can become unstable by having just one partner with an insecure attachment.

Couples that have formed a secure relationship seem to be associated with interdependence, trust, commitment, and marital satisfaction (Besharat, 2003). The anxious and avoidant styles were related to more problems in their marital relationships.

Spouses who are in a relationship in which both partners have secure attachment report more love for their partners and less fear about their marital relationships (Volling et. al. 2001). They also had more shared interests and social networks than couples with insecure attachment styles.

Gender differences play into the functioning of attachment styles in romantic relationships. It is often believed that husbands are more likely to have an avoidant style of attachment, whereas wives are more likely to have an ambivalent style of attachment (Rothbaum et. al., 2002). Gender differences in conflict resolution do exist, but this is not as important as attachment style in relation to conflict resolution and relationship satisfaction (Shi, 2003).
Attachment styles seem to have a strong relation to marital adjustment, conflict and communication. Milulincer and colleagues (2002) provided evidence from various research studies that suggest that a secure attachment is related to positive beliefs about romantic relationships. People with a secure attachment also experience stable relationships in their lives. They have satisfaction in their marriage. Secure individuals also have effective patterns of communication and happy interaction in romantic couples.

It is logical to suppose that people who divorce or are separated from their spouses are likely to have had difficulty resolving conflict and experience poor communication. Stanley and colleagues (2002) found that negative interaction between partners such as conflict and poor communication was positively correlated with potential divorce.

Importance of Attachment Issues in Marital Therapy

The process of attachment is important to the entire life cycle. Clients often come to couple and family therapists because of conflicts with spouses, children, or other family members that may be causing depression and anxiety or because these relationships are beginning to fall apart. Using the process of attachment in marriage and family therapy is a fairly new approach to looking at the treatment of families and couples (Johnson & Whiffen, 2003). These new approaches use attachment theory for clinical understanding in helping their clients.

Using the theory of attachment as a premise for couple and family therapists helps give a broad and integrative theory of relationships, love, and the insight to change and better these relationships (Johnson & Whiffen, 2003). Changes can occur between particular couples and on different levels. From a systemic perspective, changes in one
member's attachment might affect the other members as well. Change occurs on behavioral and cognitive level, as well as through interactions with other members of a family.

The family systems theory that is used in marital therapy has been applied to attachment styles in relation to the “pursuing-distancing” cycle of marital conflict, which involves an ambivalent and avoidant partner (Rothbaum et al., 2002). Rothbaum et al. have found that adults with an ambivalent attachment seek partners with an avoidant style of attachment. The more the ambivalent partner focuses on the lack of attention from the avoidant partner, the more that partner tries to distance, and so it becomes a pursuing-distancing cycle. It is important to be able to break this cycle and bring both partners together to form a secure style of relating to one another.

Attachment styles and working models are important to marital functioning and may be an important area to be targeted in an intervention (Johnson & Whiffen, 2003). Attachment and working models are thought to be an individual characteristic, but they have different levels of security and can change due to experience within a particular relationship. Therapists can look at the partner’s view of themselves. The partner needs to learn how to see themselves positively, feel worthy of love and caregiving, willing to offer and accept help, be comfortable with expressing intimacy, and be able to depend on others.

Attachment styles continue to grow, develop, and become more stable throughout a person’s life span (Johnson & Whiffen, 2003). Change can occur throughout the development of attachment because of new experiences. One theory suggests that changing life experiences bring change. Another theory suggests that the mechanism for change happens when the nature or quality of the attachment bond allows for change in
the individual’s beliefs about themselves and others. This works to change their attachment and internal working model. This suggests that a possible way to create change in a therapeutic situation is to provide the couple with ways to change attachment-relevant behaviors within the relationship in order to affect the attachment bond of the couple.
CHAPTER III

METHODS

Purpose & Objectives of Methods

The purpose of the research was to discover if there is a relation between attachment styles in adults and marital status. Marital adjustment, conflict, and communication are affected by each partner’s attachment style; therefore, marital status may be as well. The marital status of young mothers, whether married or divorced/separated was looked at in relation to their overall attachment styles.

Procedures

Utah State University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the use of human subjects reviewed procedures for this study. The director of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program also gave approval for Woman, Infants, and Children (WIC) program in Logan UT, from the director of the Early Head Start (EHS) program in Logan UT, and from the director of the immunization clinic of the Bear River Health Department for Cache County, UT.

Mothers were recruited for this study from the waiting areas of the WIC and the immunization clinic in Logan Utah. Mothers from Early Head Start (EHS) were asked to come on a specific day and time to participate in the research. Mothers were approached individually and asked if they would like to participate after they were informed of the research. They then filled out the informed consent form and then the attachment questionnaire.
Population and Sample

The researcher collected data from a sample of low-income mothers. The participants in this study came from a convenience sample of 196 mothers who had infants between 11 months and 25 months of age. The vast majority of these mothers came from a population receiving support from WIC. The rest were from the immunization clinic and from Early Head Start. Basic demographic information was obtained about the participant's age and ethnicity.

To examine how attachment styles in adults have related to marital status, data were collected on 220 possible subjects and 193 were studied. The marital status of these young mothers in the sample, whether married or divorced/separated, was looked at in relation to their overall attachment styles. Participants were mostly young Caucasians at 86% of the sample (see Table 1). There were 183 married subjects and 13 divorced or separated subjects for a total of 196 subjects. The average age of the subjects was 26.4 years old. Each participant had at least one child between the age of 11 and 24 months. The majority of the sample had attended some college and the majority was also not employed.

The sample is representative of the larger population because the behaviors associated with attachment styles are stable across populations. Attachment styles are related to interaction patterns, and are not tied to maternal age, education, and Socio Economic Status (Crandel et al., 1997).
### Table 1 Descriptors of Sample

#### Age

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#### Ethnicity

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#### Education

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<td>Some college</td>
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<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College graduate</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>26.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post graduate</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Marital Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Divorced/Separated</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>93.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Employment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>71.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>28.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Measures and Instrumentation

Becker and Billings (1997) developed the Attachment Style Scales (ASS) measure. It was used to assess each mother’s attachment history and represents a combination of three previously developed attachment questionnaires (Hazen & Shaver, 1987; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Collins & Reed, 1990). The questionnaire separates respondents into three groups: secure, avoidant, and ambivalent attachment style. Scores received from the sets of items correlated with the Bartholomew and Horowitz measure. The scales on Becker and Billings (1997) rated high on internal consistency.

The Questionnaire presented statements grouped into each attachment style that were rated on a four-point likert scale. Each participant was measured on a separate variable for each type attachment indicating the degree that each was exhibited.
Attachment Style Scales (ASS)

Ambivalent-insecure
1. I find others are reluctant to get as close as I would like.
2. Sometimes people do not want to get close to me because I want too much to be close to them.
3. I am uncomfortable being without close relationships, but I sometimes worry that others do not value me as much as I value them.
4. I often want to get closer to others than they want to get to me.
5. 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.
6. My desire to merge sometimes scares people away.

Avoidant-insecure
7. I am not sure that I can always depend on others to be there when I need them.
8. I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on others.
9. *I am comfortable depending on others.
10. People are never there when you need them.
11. *I know that others will be there when I need them.
12. I find it difficult to trust others completely.

Secure
13. *I am nervous when anyone gets too close.
14. *I worry that I will be hurt if I allow myself to become too close to others.
15. *I want emotionally close relationships but I find it difficult to trust others completely.
16. *I do not often worry about someone getting too close to me.
17. I do not often worry about other people letting me down.
18. I find it relatively easy to get close to others.
19. *I am somewhat uncomfortable being close to others.

*Items are reverse coded.
Design

A survey design was used to collect data in the form of a questionnaire. The study used a cross-sectional design and correlated marital status with attachment style. The procedures measured the mothers' attachment style and their marital status. The mothers who were married and those who were divorced or separated were then looked at in relation to the mother's attachment style.

Analysis Plan

Marital status was collapsed into three groups: married, divorced/separated, and “other.” Those in the “other” group included single, never-married; living together; common law; etc. were not included in the data analyses. Only married and divorced/separated mothers were used in the analysis. There were 183 married mothers and 13 divorced or separated mothers, resulting in a total of 196 participants from whom data were analyzed.

An independent samples t-test was used to compare the means of attachment style of the group of married mothers with the group of divorced/separated mothers at a ninety-five percent confidence level.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Research Question

The research question was meant to determine whether married subjects would show a higher number of secure attachments and whether divorced subjects would have a higher amount of insecure attachments. An independent samples t-test compared the means of attachment styles between the divorced/separated group and married group of mothers. The difference in the means between divorced and married individuals was statistically significant as shown in Table 6. The married mothers were more secure and the divorced/separated mothers were more insecure. The ambivalent attachment style was more prevalent than avoidant style in divorced/separated mothers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2 t-test for Equality of Means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>t</td>
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<tr>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fearful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambivalent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insecure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overview and Summary of Research Findings

The research conducted has suggested that attachment styles in adults may play a role in marital adjustment, conflict, communication, and possible divorce. The study’s results were statistically significant that individuals who were married were more secure than those who were divorced/separated, who had higher rates of insecurity. This suggests that couples who have secure attachments may be more likely than those with insecure attachments to have better marital adjustment and communication resulting in more successful marital relationships.

Possible Application the Marriage and Family Therapy

A fairly new approach to helping marital relationships in Marriage and Family Therapy is to look at issues through an attachment perspective (Johnson, 9999). Attachment styles are an important aspect of romantic relationships. It is important to look at the characteristics of avoidance and ambivalence and how they shape the dynamics in relationships. Couples can be taught how to change their insecurity on cognitive, emotional, and behavioral levels. Therapists can provide couples with conflict resolution skills that focus on seeking and providing appropriate support, then altering attachment styles toward those that are secure. Therapists should help insecure couples reduce their fears of abandonment and their discomfort with intimacy, which should result in less conflict, and better resolution when conflict occurs.
Strengths and Limitations

One of the strengths of this study is that it is exploratory, in that, very little research has looked at attachment styles and its implications on marital status. It is an effective way to look at the differences between married and divorced/separated individuals on their attachment styles.

The sample used for this study was self selected and therefore has some limitations in selection bias. There were 183 married mothers compared with 13 divorced or separated mother which is a skewed sample.

Attachment styles evolve over time with life experiences, therefore the subject’s attachment style before divorce or separation might have been different than when it was measured. Further, other variables might have resulted in marital status other than attachment.

Future Directions

The results of this study suggest that further examination of the relationships between attachment, marital selection and formations of marital adjustment, conflict styles, and marital status are warranted. There is a need for follow-up research that will work to resolve the limitations of this study. A study needs to be designed to particularly explore attachment and its effects on marital status through longitudinal design. It would be beneficial to look at middle-class individuals who are in their 30s or 40s so that there will be a better married to divorced ratio.
It would be interesting to do a study using a pretest posttest research design with therapy as an intervention to see if attachment styles can change through therapy and if that helps marital satisfaction and marital adjustment.
REFERENCES


