



Differentiating Between Attachment Styles and Behaviors and their Association with Marital Quality

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The purpose of this study was to distinguish between the influence of attachment styles and behaviors on marital quality for couples. Data were gathered from 680 couples in a married relationship. Results showed attachment style and behaviors predicted marital quality for both men and women, with higher levels of attachment related to greater quality. Attachment behaviors predicted more of the variance in quality than did styles. Specific implications regarding how therapists may wish to foster behaviors that promote attachment security in marriages are discussed.

Keywords: Attachment styles; Attachment behavior; Marital quality

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INTRODUCTION

Beginning with Hazan and Shaver's (1987) groundbreaking article on attachment in adult romantic relationships, there has been a flood of research articles regarding the role of attachment styles in marital relationships (Givertz, Woszidlo, Segrin, & Knutson, 2013). Attachment style has traditionally been described as a person's internal working model or an internalized set of beliefs or feelings about the safety/security of relationships, which is formed across time through interactions with others (Simpson, Rholes, & Phillips, 1996). This set of beliefs informs our relationships and guides our efforts to connect with or disconnect from others. Attachment security can be described as the experience that comes from "appraising attachment figures as accessible and responsive," whereas insecurity has been described as the distressing experience of consistent disconnection from an attachment figure (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007; p. 38). Research findings suggest that attachment insecurity in adulthood is negatively related to relationship quality (Feehey, 2008; Maunder, Hunter, & Lancee, 2011; Pietromonaco, DeBuse, & Powers, 2013), while attachment security is positively related to satisfaction in adult romantic relationships. Consequently, efforts to foster a secure attachment style have become a focus of researchers and clinicians working with couples (Benson, Sevier, & Christensen, 2013; Johnson & Greenman, 2013).

Yet, a number of clinicians and scholars are beginning to call for a focus on behaviors, in addition to the more global attachment styles, within couple relationships that promote secure attachment (Greenman & Johnson, 2013). Research that helps identify and foster

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specific behaviors within couple relationships relating to attachment security could provide concrete tools for intervention. This new area of research, which drills down into precise behaviors within a relationship, can add to our understanding of how certain attachment-related behaviors are predictive of marital satisfaction and stability (Sandberg, Busby, Johnson, & Yoshida, 2012). Although a number of attachment-based approaches to marital and family therapy, which focus on developing specific attachment behaviors in relationships, have received empirical support (Diamond, Diamond, & Levy, 2014; Furrow & Bradley, 2011), we could not find published manuscripts which use both attachment styles and specific attachment behaviors among couples to predict relationship satisfaction. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to compare the differing influence of attachment styles and attachment behaviors on relationship quality for married couples. Because both theory and research suggest attachment security in couple relationships influences physical, mental, and relational health, the current project aims to foster more specificity in measurement and intervention for clinicians working with couples.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Marital Quality

Because of the clear relationship between marital quality and both physical (Proulx & Snyder-Rivas, 2013) and mental health (Beach & Whisman, 2012), improving the quality of marriages has become a serious public health concern (Sandberg, Harper, Miller, Robila, & Davey, 2009). Specifically, marital distress, conflict, problems, and dissatisfaction have been linked to a number of significant physical and mental health problems: chronic fatigue (Goodwin, 1997), atherosclerosis (Gallo et al., 2003), hypertension (Wickrama et al., 2001), depression, anxiety, substance abuse (Whisman, 2007), and even mortality (Coyne et al., 2001). In short, poor quality marriages are very costly, both in terms of human and economic capital (Caldwell, Woolley, & Caldwell, 2007).

Marital Quality and Attachment

Previous research suggests that an individual's attachment style is a key predictor of marital quality (Feeney, 2008). Researchers have even developed models for how an individual's attachment style may influence romantic relationship satisfaction and interaction (Mikulincer, Florian, Cowan, & Cowan, 2002). Findings suggest that greater attachment insecurity is related to poorer relationship quality and functioning (Besharat, 2003; Gallo & Smith, 2001; Hollist & Miller, 2005), while greater attachment security is related to positive marital outcomes (Fuenfhausen & Cashwell, 2013). Specifically, in a review of over 50 studies assessing the relationship between attachment and marital satisfaction, Mikulincer and Shaver (2007) concluded that for both women and men, there is clear and consistent evidence that attachment insecurity is related to poorer marital satisfaction.

As research on couple-level attachment has gained momentum (see Cowan, Cowan, & Mehta, 2009), it is becoming clear that marital attachment is related to overall marital satisfaction as well (Alexandrov, Cowan, & Cowan, 2005). Specifically, research has shown that couple attachment is related to relationship stability and satisfaction, as well as positive couple communication (Sandberg et al., 2012). As researchers develop specificity in measuring and promoting couple attachment, clinicians and educators can more effectively implement interventions that help couples build security in their relationships. One potential area for specificity in attachment research is to distinguish between overall attachment styles and identifiable behaviors in an attachment relationship and examine how each of these constructs uniquely contributes to relationship quality.

Attachment Style versus Behaviors

Historically, research on attachment in adult romantic relationships has built upon traditional attachment style classifications such as secure, anxious, and avoidant (Ainsworth, 1973; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Because as human beings we have the inborn drive to seek and develop connections which provide security and safety (Van IJzendoorn & Sagi-Schwartz, 2008), strong attachment bonds can provide that safe haven and secure base which help to “buffer against the effects of stress and uncertainty,” as well as “promote the confidence necessary to risk, learn, and continually update models of self, others, and the world” (Johnson, 2003; p. 5). When an attachment figure is unavailable or nonresponsive, humans tend to respond in predictable ways; the absence of such a figure most often leads to distancing (avoidance) or hyper-vigilant (anxiety) behaviors (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). In reality, both avoidant and anxious behaviors serve the same purpose or adaptive/functional role, which is to help a person manage the experience of insecurity that accompanies the threat of isolation, loss, or abandonment (Johnson, 2003). In their comprehensive review of the literature, Mikulincer and Shaver (2007) concluded that both an anxious and avoidant style are associated with relationship dissatisfaction for adult women and men, with avoidance in men being more predictive of dissatisfaction for self and partner.

As mentioned previously, the concept of working models is central to an understanding of styles. It was originally proposed by Bowlby (1988) to help explain the process by which a child draws upon personal experience with significant others to develop an understanding of self (e.g., am I loveable?) and others (e.g., is s/he trustworthy?; see Simpson et al., 1996). These internal working models help individuals predict future interaction and adjust proximity-seeking behaviors to more effectively meet their attachment needs (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Therefore, an individual’s attachment style could be described as both “his or her most chronically accessible working model . . . and typical functioning” within attachment relationships (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007; p. 25). Yet, research suggests that attachment styles can and do change over time (Zhang & Labouvie-Vief, 2004) and in therapy (Stefini et al., 2013). Most research on couple-level attachment has centered on attachment style categories, specifically the way attachment styles are applied to or operate within couple relationships, rather than a focus on certain behaviors that promote security (Alexandrov et al., 2005; Wampler, Riggs, & Kimball, 2004).

Although the study of attachment *styles* focuses on the feelings or beliefs (i.e., the working model) of the individual regarding his/her romantic relationship, the study of attachment *behaviors* focuses on specific actions taken by a partner in a relationship that influence attachment security. Numerous researchers have studied behavior in general in couple relationships and have concluded that certain behaviors have been linked with marital happiness and stability while others are related to distress and instability (Collins & Feeney, 2000; Cordova & Scott, 2001; Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998). Specific to couple-level attachment, Rholes, Simpson, Campbell, and Grich (2001) found that wives’ perceived support from husbands mediated the negative relationship between attachment ambivalence and marital satisfaction. Similarly, Feeney (2002) found that expressing support for a spouse’s feelings predicted marital satisfaction.

Among common marital behaviors, it appears that accessibility, responsiveness, and engagement influence relationship quality and stability (Sandberg et al., 2012). In addition, research suggests these behaviors positively predict couple communication (authors, in press) and negatively predict relational aggression as well (authors, in press). In short, there is growing evidence to suggest that attachment styles and behaviors are distinct, yet related and helpful constructs for understating romantic attachment in adulthood. For example, Bowlby (1973) originally proposed accessibility and responsiveness are key,

measurable behaviors in relationships that largely determine a person's state of security. More recent research also states that these behaviors are necessary to create attachment security in adult romantic relationships (Mikulincer & Goodman, 2006). This suggests attachment-related behaviors, such as accessibility, responsiveness, and engagement, influence our internal working models over time, and thus influence styles. In the one known published study to use a measure of attachment styles and attachment behaviors in the same study, styles and behaviors were correlated, but statistically distinct (Sandberg et al., 2012). Both may add uniquely to our understanding of this "inborn regulatory system" that is central to human behavior and the development of "emotional stability, mental health, and satisfying, close relationships" (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007, p. 28).

In summary, attachment insecurity has been linked with dissatisfaction and lack of marital quality. Most of this research has been conducted with a conceptualization and measurement of attachment as a specific style (secure, insecure). Recent research has suggested that studying and measuring specific behaviors that promote attachment security in couple relationships may be of practical interest for clinicians. However, research that compares the influence of styles and behaviors on relationships, while testing for actor and partner effects for both spouses in heterosexual marriages, is lacking. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to compare the differing influence of attachment styles and attachment behaviors on relationship quality for married couples.

Accordingly, the following questions guided our examinations:

Research Question 1: Does an insecure attachment style predict variance in marital quality for self and/or partner?

Research Question 2: Do perceived attachment behaviors predict variance in marital quality for self and/or partner?

Research Question 3: Do perceived attachment behaviors predict more variance in marital quality than an insecure attachment style?

METHODS

Procedures

This study utilized data previously collected from the Relationship Evaluation Questionnaire (Busby, Holman, & Taniguchi, 2001; <https://www.relate-institute.org>), an online comprehensive assessment of the couple relationship. RELATE is a research-supported marital/relational assessment tool that aims to help couples identify areas of strength and/or weakness in their relationship. Individuals are referred to RELATE through undergraduate courses, from mental health professionals, and through Internet searches. The RELATE measures have withstood rigorous validity and reliability testing, showing test-retest and internal consistent reliability and content, construct, and concurrent validity (Busby et al., 2001). All participants provided consent for the use of their responses in research, and the institutional review board at an accredited university approved all procedures.

Sample

The measure of attachment behaviors was added to RELATE in 2011, therefore, the sample was drawn from the population of participant couples ($N = 2,694$) who completed the questionnaire between 2011 and 2013. Only data from married, heterosexual couples were included, resulting in an analytic sample comprised of 1,360 individuals (680 couples).

Husbands' age ranged from 19 to 68, with a median age of 30 years; wives' age ranged from 18 to 70, with a median age of 29 years. The majority (86.0%) of men were Caucasian, 4.1% were Hispanic, 4.0% were African American, and the remaining 5.9% identified as biracial, Asian, Native American, or an "other" ethnicity. Similarly, the majority (84.3%) of women were Caucasian, 4.3% were Hispanic, 3.5% were Asian, 3.2% were African American, and the remaining 4.7% identified as biracial, Native American, or an "other" ethnicity. Regarding education, 16.5% of men had less than a college degree; 29.0% were currently enrolled in college; 7.6% had an Associate's degree; 21.5% had a Bachelor's degree; and 25.5% had some education beyond a Bachelor's degree. For women, 7.1% had less than a college degree; 35.9% were currently enrolled in college; 12.6% had an Associate's degree; 21.2% had a Bachelor's degree; and 23.2% had some education beyond a Bachelor's degree.

Participants' marriage length ranged from under 3 months to more than 40 years, but the median and modal length of marriage in the sample was 1–2 years. Men averaged an annual income between \$40,000 and \$59,999 and women's income averaged between \$20,000 and \$39,999 per year. Most men (55.7%) and women (55.8%) in the sample reported an affiliation with the LDS church. The modal income-to-needs ratio (described below in the Measures section) for the sample was .85.

Measures

Relationship quality

Relationship quality was a latent construct comprised of measures from the Relationship Satisfaction, Relationship Stability, and Problem Areas scales (Busby & Holman, 2009). The Relationship Satisfaction scale is a seven-item scale, measuring participant's satisfaction with areas such as intimacy, love, and communication. Responses were given on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Very Dissatisfied) to 5 (Very Satisfied), higher scores indicated more satisfaction. Cronbach's alpha was .91 for men and .92 for women. The Relationship Stability scale (derived from the Marital Stability Scale; Booth, Johnson, & Edward, 1983) is a three-item scale asking respondents how often they thought the relationship was in trouble, how often they thought of ending the relationship, and how often they had broken up and gotten back together. Participants responded on 5-point Likert scale from 1 (Never) to 5 (Very Often), with higher scores indicating greater relationship stability. Cronbach's alpha was .74 for men and .77 for women. The Problem Areas scale (from the checklist areas in *RELATE*) is a 15-item scale that asks respondents how often they experience problems in the relationship in various areas, such as parenting, gender roles, and time spent together. Participants respond on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (Never) to 5 (Very Often), with higher scores indicating more problems. Cronbach's alpha was .82 for men and .81 for women. For each indicator (satisfaction, stability, and problem areas), a mean score was calculated. These mean scores were used as indicators of their own relationship quality, resulting in two dependent latent variables: *Husband's Relationship Quality* and *Wife's Relationship Quality*.

Attachment style

The Adult Attachment Questionnaire (Simpson, Rholes, & Nelligan, 1992; Simpson et al., 1996) is considered a measurement of archetypal attachment styles and was based originally on the work of Hazan and Shaver (1987). It asks participants to respond based "on their thoughts and feelings about romantic partners *in general*, including (but not limited to) their spouse" (Rholes, Simpson, & Friedman, 2006, p. 277). For this study, an attachment style latent variable was created using the avoidant attachment and anxious attachment subscales from the AAQ as indicators of the latent construct. This was done to

represent level of security in attachment style. Both subscales are scored such that higher scores indicate more secure attachment. Mean scores for subscales were used as the indicators of the latent variable. The avoidant subscale has eight items that measure a participant's level of avoidant attachment. Participants respond to statements such as "I don't like people getting too close to me" and "I find it difficult to trust others completely" on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Agree) to 6 (Strongly Disagree). Cronbach's alpha was .84 for both men and women in this sample. The anxious subscale has nine items that measure a participant's level of anxious attachment. Participants respond to statements such as "I usually want more closeness and intimacy than others do" and "I often want to merge completely with others, and this desire sometimes scares them away" on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Agree) to 6 (Strongly Disagree). Cronbach's alpha for this sample was .83 for men and .85 for women.

Attachment behaviors

Attachment behaviors were measured by the Brief Accessibility, Responsiveness, and Engagement Scale (BARE), which was created to provide "a brief self-report measure that can assess key attachment system behaviors" within couple relationships (Sandberg et al., 2012; p. 514). A latent construct was fit, measured by the three subscales of the Brief Accessibility, Responsiveness, and Engagement Scale, for men and women. Each subscale includes two questions, which were averaged and subsequently used as indicators of the latent construct. Participants responded on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (Never True) to 5 (Always True) to such items as "It is hard for my partner to get my attention" (accessibility), "I listen when my partner shares her/his deepest feelings" (responsiveness), and "It is hard for me to confide in my partner" (engagement). Responses were scored (or reverse scored) so that higher scores indicated more secure attachment behaviors. In previous research, the BARE has been shown to be reliable and valid, with Cronbach's alphas ranging from .66 to .85 and test-retest scores ranging from .60 to .75 on all six subscales (Sandberg et al., 2012). In the current sample, Cronbach's alpha for men was .62 (accessibility), .56 (responsiveness), and .75 (engagement). For women, Cronbach's alpha was .75 (accessibility), .53 (responsiveness), and .71 (engagement).

Control Variables

Marriage length, religion, and income were measured by a demographic checklist, with respondents indicating how they were classified in each category. A dummy code was created for k-1 categories of marriage length and included as a covariate. Because 55% of the sample identified as Latter-Day Saint (LDS), religion was dummy-coded so that those who were LDS = 1 and included as a covariate. Income was used to calculate an income-to-needs metric representing SES. For participants' reported household size, the midpoint of the income range they reported was divided by the 2013 federal poverty level for that specified household size (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2013). This yielded the income-to-needs ratio that was included as a covariate. The effect of each of these variables on men and women's relationship quality was controlled in the analyses.

Analytic Strategy

Preliminary analyses, including examination of observed variables' univariate and bivariate statistics, were conducted. Additionally, a confirmatory factor analytic measurement model including all latent variables was fit. This was done because a confirmatory factor analysis for attachment styles alone would have been unidentified, thus the full measurement model provides the needed degrees of freedom to estimate all constructs.

To answer research questions 1 and 2, we fit an actor-partner interdependence model (APIM; Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006) in which each partner's outcome (relationship quality) was regressed on his/her own predictors as well as the spouse's predictors (see Figure 1) in a structural equation modeling framework. This was done in order to remove measurement error from the study (latent) variables and model the true relationships between constructs (Bollen & Long, 1993; Kline, 2010). Because we modeled the correlation between attachment styles and attachment behaviors, the results of regressing relationship quality on these constructs are an estimate controlling for their association.

In order to compare the variances explained by attachment behaviors versus attachment style (research question 3), we examined whether models including attachment style only and attachment behaviors only fit the data. In order to compare the relative strength of each construct (i.e., attachment style and attachment behaviors) to predict relationship quality, we examined how much variance in the outcome was explained by each model. This provided an estimate of how well styles versus behaviors predict relationship quality; however, these models have different manifest variables from the hypothesized model, which did not allow us to compare model fit across all three models. Therefore, we fit the original hypothesized model again; this time constraining all parameters to zero that had an indirect or direct effect of attachment behaviors (i.e., removing the effects) on relationship quality. These parameters are the correlations between attachment behaviors and attachment style as well as the structural paths from attachment behaviors to relationship quality. We repeated the process, removing all effects of attachment style. Because this approach removes any statistical connection between theoretically related variables in the model, we anticipated poor model fit. However, this approach resulted in three

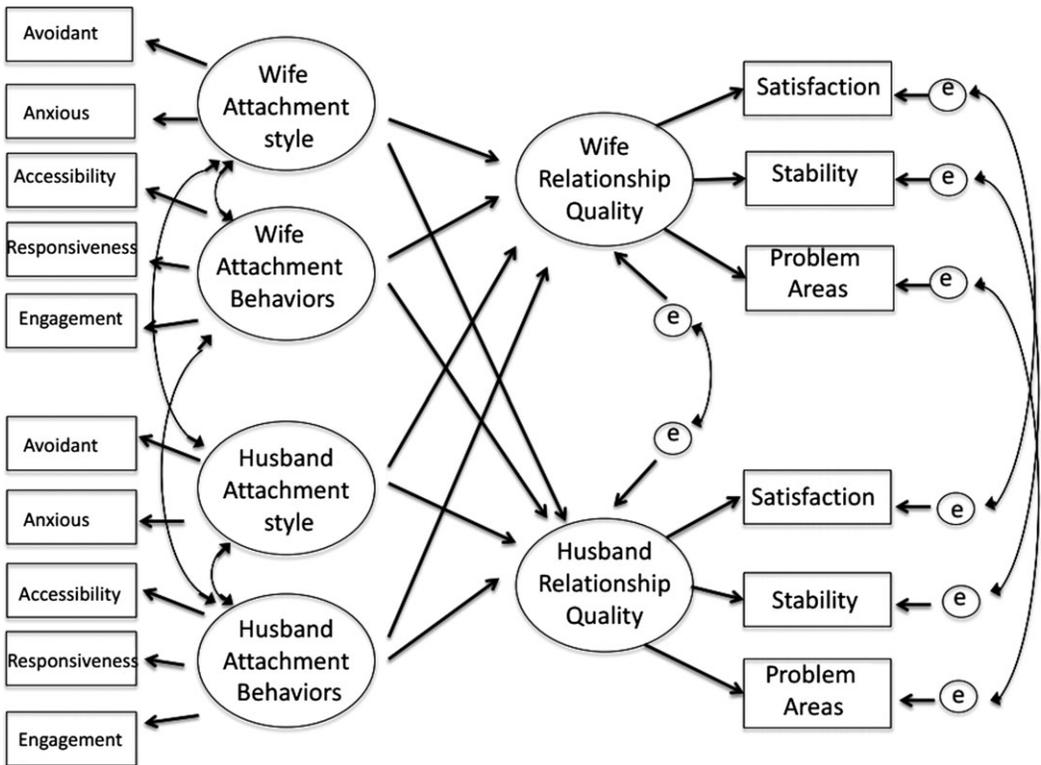


FIGURE 1. Influence of attachment style and attachment behaviors on relationship quality.

nonnested models (the original hypothesized model and the two new models) that had the same manifest variables, thereby allowing us to compare their relative model fit using the Akaike information criterion (AIC; Akaike, 1973) and Bayesian information criterion (BIC; Schwarz, 1978), where smaller values indicate better relative fit.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics of observed variables indicate that the sample has relatively healthy relationships, with secure attachment style and displaying high levels of attachment behaviors and experiencing good relationship quality (see Table 1). Bivariate correlations between observed variables show weak to strong correlations, ranging from .23 to .75 for men and from .16 to .73 for women (see Table 2). For the most part, attachment behavior indicators are more highly correlated with relationship quality indicators than avoidant attachment style. There is more variability when comparing the correlations of relationship quality outcomes with behaviors and outcomes with anxious attachment style.

Results of the measurement model including all latent variables indicate good model fit: $\chi^2(86) = 356.58, p < .001$; RMSEA = .07, 90% CI: [.061, .075], $p < .001$; CFI: .95; TLI: .94. Table 3 includes standardized factor loadings of all latent constructs.

Hypothesized Model

Results of the hypothesized model (Figure 1) showed acceptable model fit: $\chi^2(158) = 632.61, p < .001$; RMSEA = .07, 90% CI: [.062, .073], $p < .001$; CFI: .92; TLI: .90. For men's relationship quality, both actor effects were significant, such that more secure attachment style was positively related to relationship quality ($B = .30, SE = .10, p = .002$), and more secure attachment behaviors were positively related to relationship quality ($B = .57, SE = .08, p < .001$). There were no significant partner effects. The model accounted for 88.9% of the variance in men's relationship quality.

For women, both actor effects were similarly significant, where more secure attachment style was positively related to relationship quality ($B = .36, SE = .09, p < .001$), and more secure attachment behaviors were positively related to relationship quality ($B = .37, SE = .08, p < .001$). There was also a significant partner effect, where husband's attachment behaviors were positively related to wife's relationship quality ($B = .34, SE = .08, p < .001$). The model accounted for 83.2% of the variance in women's relationship quality.

TABLE 1
Descriptive Statistics of Observed Variables

	Men		Women	
	<i>N</i>	Mean (<i>SD</i>)	<i>N</i>	Mean (<i>SD</i>)
Attachment style				
Avoidant	680	4.95 (1.03)	680	4.98 (1.03)
Anxious	680	5.19 (1.05)	680	5.12 (1.18)
Relationship quality				
Satisfaction	679	3.70 (.87)	680	3.62 (.98)
Stability	679	4.25 (.73)	680	4.17 (.82)
Problem areas	680	3.80 (.54)	680	3.77 (.61)
Attachment behaviors				
Accessibility	593	3.94 (.90)	593	4.22 (.66)
Responsiveness	593	4.09 (.65)	593	4.29 (.63)
Engagement	593	3.89 (.87)	593	3.93 (.90)

TABLE 2
Bivariate Correlations between Observed Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Avoidant attachment	1	.298	.273	.321	.377	.293	.232	.293
2. Anxious attachment	.358	1	.226	.267	.438	.510	.492	.418
3. Accessibility	.329	.158	1	.452	.490	.397	.296	.436
4. Responsive	.294	.345	.469	1	.604	.571	.416	.456
5. Engagement	.322	.465	.465	.633	1	.745	.607	.579
6. Satisfaction	.317	.475	.327	.524	.730	1	.684	.656
7. Stability	.312	.507	.275	.444	.624	.729	1	.576
8. Problem areas	.333	.433	.408	.434	.619	.729	.651	1

Note. These correlations are presented for purposes of replication. The only estimated correlations are represented in Figure 1. All correlations are significant at the $p < .001$ level. Pearson's r for women is on the lower half of the diagonal and for men, the upper half.

TABLE 3
Standardized Factor Loadings of Latent Variables

	Factor loadings	
	Men	Women
Attachment behaviors		
Accessibility	.55 (.03)***	.51 (.03)***
Responsiveness	.68 (.03)***	.69 (.03)***
Engagement	.90 (.02)***	.93 (.02)***
Attachment style		
Avoidant	.44 (.04)***	.52 (.04)***
Anxious	.68 (.04)***	.69 (.04)***
Relationship quality		
Satisfaction	.89 (.01)***	.92 (.01)***
Stability	.76 (.02)***	.80 (.02)***
Problem areas	.74 (.02)***	.80 (.02)***

Note. *** $p < .001$.

Models with Attachment Style or Attachment Behaviors

Results of the attachment style model indicated good model fit: $\chi^2 (68) = 247.44$, $p < .001$; RMSEA = .06, 90% CI: [.055, .071], $p = .006$; CFI: .95; TLI: .94. For men, there was a significant effect of attachment style ($B = .64$, $SE = .08$, $p < .001$) and wives' attachment style ($B = .19$, $SE = .08$, $p = .02$). Similarly, for women, there was a significant effect of attachment style ($B = .59$, $SE = .07$, $p < .001$) and husbands' attachment style ($B = .21$, $SE = .08$, $p = .005$). The model accounted for 73.6% of the variance in men's and 71.3% of the variance in women's relationship quality.

Results of the attachment behaviors model indicated good model fit: $\chi^2 (97) = 426.83$, $p < .001$; RMSEA = .067, 90% CI: [.065, .078], $p < .001$; CFI: .94; TLI: .92. For men, there was a significant effect of attachment behaviors ($B = .77$, $SE = .04$, $p < .001$) and wives' attachment behaviors ($B = .16$, $SE = .04$, $p < .001$). Similarly, for women, there was a significant effect of attachment behaviors ($B = .61$, $SE = .04$, $p < .001$) and husbands' attachment behaviors ($B = .32$, $SE = .04$, $p < .001$). The model accounted for 83.8% of the variance in men's and 77.7% of the variance in women's relationship quality. Thus, the model with attachment behaviors explained more of the variance in marital quality than did the model with styles.

As expected, removing all effects of attachment style on relationship quality by constraining structural paths to zero resulted in poor model fit: $\chi^2(166) = 1086.12, p < .001$; RMSEA = .091, 90% CI: [.086, .096], $p < .001$; CFI: .85; TLI: .82. Similarly, removing all effects of attachment behaviors by constraining structural paths to zero resulted in poor model fit: $\chi^2(166) = 1407.17, p < .001$; RMSEA = .106, 90% CI: [.101, .111], $p < .001$; CFI: .80; TLI: .75. Comparative fit indices for all three models (hypothesized: AIC = 19062.785, BIC = 19395.991; style only: AIC = 19821.347, BIC = 20118.53; behaviors only: 19500.290, BIC = 19797.475) indicate that of the three models, the best fitting model is one in which the effects of both styles and behaviors are estimated. The next best fitting model is one in which only the effects of attachment behaviors are estimated. The worst fitting model of the three is one in which only the effects of attachment styles are estimated.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study suggest that both attachment style and attachment behaviors predict marital quality for both men and women, with higher levels of secure attachment and higher levels of attachment behaviors significantly related to higher levels of quality. These findings confirm previous research, which shows that attachment styles are related to couple functioning and relationship quality (Dickstein, Seifer, St. Andre, & Schiller, 2001; Gallo & Smith, 2001; Hollist & Miller, 2005) and that behaviors are also related to marital quality (Sandberg et al., 2012). In this study, the strongest model (predicted higher proportion of the variance) included both conceptualizations of attachment, suggesting both are important and add a valued, yet unique, approach to measuring attachment.

In addition, the results suggest that husband's attachment behaviors were significantly and positively related to wife's marital quality, which was the only partner effect when both styles and behaviors were included in the model. This finding supports previous research that suggests that female partner's perceptions of the relationship are influenced more by partner's attitudes and behavior than vice versa (Miller, Silvermany, & Falk, 1995).

Of primary interest and importance to the current study, the results suggest that attachment styles and behaviors are related but separate conceptualizations of attachment processes. As would be expected, the constructs were highly correlated (.74 for women and .75 for men), but were also statistically unique. Even when controlling for this correlation, both were significant predictors of marital quality. It is also interesting to note that the model with behaviors explained a greater proportion of the variance in marital quality for women (78% vs. 71%) and for men (84% vs. 74%) than did the model with styles. These findings suggest that measuring and focusing on attachment behaviors in therapy may uniquely contribute to efforts aimed at building security for couples in therapy. Adding a second way to conceptualize attachment needs and processes for couples in distress provides greater opportunities for therapists to provide effective help.

Implications for Clinical Practice

It is intriguing that focusing on and promoting certain attachment-related behaviors in therapy may help foster both couple attachment and relationship satisfaction (Johnson & Greenman, 2013). Although this may have been long held and treasured knowledge to couples therapists, research that confirms this clinical insight is still lacking. Although research has established that therapeutic intervention can influence changes in attachment style (Kinley & Reyno, 2013; Travis, Bliwise, Binder, & Horne-Moyer, 2001), few

studies have attempted to identify which in-session behaviors are related to changes in attachment security for couples (Dalglish, Johnson, Burgess Moser, Wiebe, & Tasca, 2015). The results of the current study suggest that therapists and researchers may wish to focus on the specific behaviors (accessibility, responsiveness, and engagement) that can lead to attachment-related change for couples.

For example, previous researchers have suggested that when an angry/hostile and blaming partner softens in therapy, and the previously disengaged/withdrawing partner responds to that softening with warmth and support, a bonding moment can occur for couples (Furrow, Edwards, Choi, & Bradley, 2012). Recent research also demonstrates these types of exchanges in therapy can result in improved attachment security (Dalglish, et al., 2015). Therapists working with pursue/blame and withdraw/avoid patterns may wish to take specific action to help blamers to soften and withdrawers to engage. This process would naturally increase behaviors that promote accessibility, responsiveness, and engagement in the couple relationship, behaviors that can be measured and tracked across therapy. By measuring and tracking attachment behaviors across sessions, therapists can give clients specific feedback and promote personalized experiences in therapy that address attachment insecurities unique to each couple. Clinical research has shown that when interventions are suited to match client need outcomes improve (Corning, Malofeeva, & Bucchianeri, 2007).

Because a number of attachment-based couple and family therapy models now exist, most with empirical support, clinicians can draw from a variety of perspectives on how to structure in-session interactions to meet attachment needs (Anderson, Beach, & Kaslow, 1999; Diamond et al., 2014; Johnson, 2004). The attachment-based model with the greatest empirical support at the couple level is Emotionally Focused Therapy (Johnson, 2004; Johnson & Wittenborn, 2012). In this model, therapists can find research-based support regarding in-session behavioral and emotional interactions between partners that lead to increases in attachment security and marital quality (Furrow et al., 2012; Dalglish et al., 2015). Focusing on attachment behaviors can help provide therapists with specific tools (both conceptual and executive) to use in session (see Johnson et al., 2005, for specific examples and practice tools) to promote both security and satisfaction.

Limitations and Future Research

The primary limitation of this study lies in the type of sample. Because the RELATE database is not drawn exclusively from a clinical population and is generally homogenous (relatively young and religious), it is not possible to know how these associations may differ for couples with clinical levels of distress, or with differing religious or nonreligious perspectives. Indeed, it is possible that between-couple variability in these associations exists and was not able to be captured using these data. Developing a clinical sample is the next logical step for researchers focused on attachment behaviors and their role in developing marital security and quality. Although attachment theory is established cross-culturally and speaks to universal human needs (Van IJzendoorn & Sagi-Schwartz, 2008), it would be important for future researchers to investigate similar models with a more ethnically and culturally diverse sample to see if specific attachment behaviors are more salient for couples from diverse groups. Unfortunately, the current study was limited in this regard by the homogenous sample.

In addition, our study is cross-sectional in design. Therefore, findings of the association between style and behaviors and relationship quality are somewhat less predictive in nature. Future research that allows examining the temporal relationship between predictor (s) and outcome will help validate the differential strengths of associations identified here.

A final limitation of this study is the lack of specificity in measurement. Because some questions in the AAQ are partner-specific and others measure a more global attachment style, it was not possible to assess whether the style reported captured exclusively the couple-level experience of attachment. Other measures are overtly focused on attachment to a current romantic partner (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994) and may be more helpful to future researchers. Indeed, the bivariate correlations between latent construct indicators suggest a general anxious attachment style is more highly correlated with outcomes than each couple-specific set of behaviors. This correlational finding may be explained because the measure of attachment anxiety is not partner-specific. In the end, the current study needs to be expanded to determine whether these findings are a function of the actual construct of attachment (style vs. behaviors) or simply the way it is measured (focus on a specific relationship vs. relationships in general).

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