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# Attachment theory as a predictor of communicative responses to infidelity

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ATTACHMENT THEORY AS A PREDICTOR  
OF COMMUNICATIVE RESPONSES  
TO INFIDELITY

by

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Bachelor of Arts Communication Arts and Sciences  
Pennsylvania State University  
2005

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the

**Master of Arts Degree in Communication Studies**  
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THE GRADUATE COLLEGE

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ABSTRACT

**Attachment Theory As A Predictor  
Of Communicative Responses  
To Infidelity**

by

Sandra Donovan

Dr. Tara Emmers-Sommer, Examination Committee Chair  
Professor of Communication Studies  
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This study set out to determine one's communicative responses to infidelity as predicted by attachment style. Three hundred and ninety-two participants responded to a measure of attachment and were then randomly assigned to one of three scenarios: imagining a partner's sexual infidelity, imagining a partner's emotional infidelity and imagining a partner's combined sexual and emotional infidelity. Participants then responded to a communicative response scale in reaction to the scenario. Results showed moderate support for attachment theory. Additional analysis revealed responses differed by infidelity type. Limitations and implications are discussed.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In the past three decades, researchers have begun to view infant attachment theory (Ainsworth, Blehar, Watters & Wall, 1978; Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980) as applicable to later life. Specifically, researchers have applied attachment theory to adult romantic relationships (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Hazen & Shaver, 1987). Previous research has used attachment theory to explain interpersonal and relational problems (Bartholomew & Horowitz), willingness to engage in intimacy (Guerrero, 1996), relational quality and trust in others (Collins & Read, 1990), approach/avoidance patterns in romantic relationships (Guerrero & Burgoon, 1996), forgiveness (Kachadourian, Fincham, & Dacila, 2004; Lawler-Row, Younger, Piferi & Jones, 2006) emotional responses to jealousy, and communicative responses to jealousy (Guerrero, 1998; Guerrero & Afifi, 1998; Guerrero, Andersen, Jorgensen, Spitzberg & Eloy, 1995). Although likely related to intimacy, trust, forgiveness, and jealousy, to name a few, research has yet to address fully is how attachment style influences communicative responses to infidelity.

Infidelity and its effects are of interest to both counselors and researchers. One statistic suggests that as many as nearly half of men and women reported engaging in extramarital relations during the course of their marriage (Gass & Nichols, 1988). The chance of continuing a happy marriage after infidelity is slim; despite this, many try with no success (Cherny & Parnass, 1995). Although marital counseling has helped some of these couples, it is unsuccessful with other couples (Cherny & Parnass). Understanding the communicative responses to infidelity might help counselors guide couples through

coping with infidelity by allowing patients to understand why they are acting and reacting in such a way and coaching couples toward positive communicative responses that may lead to reconciliation if the couples so wish. If reconciliation is not a consideration or an option, perhaps better understanding the circumstances and the communicative ways of coping with them could aid partners in achieving a civil post-(divorce) relationship.

Although research has indirectly explored communicative responses to infidelity, it has yet to explore these responses directly. This lack of attention exists for two reasons. First, infidelity has been included in larger groups of events in romantic relationships. In order to understand which communicative response(s) one will have, we must first understand communicative responses in similar events where infidelity has been part of the study, but not the focus of the study, such as, studies focusing on relational transgressions and hurtful events. Second, communication research has focused on responses to jealousy where there is an implicit link to jealousy and infidelity (see Guerrero, 1998; Guerrero & Afifi, 1998; Guerrero et al., 1995). Indeed, one common emotional response to infidelity is jealousy (Buss & Shackelford, 1997), however infidelity often elicits a multitude of emotions such as helplessness, sadness, relief, sexual arousal and humiliation (Shackelford, LeBlanc & Drass, 2000). Further, partners who learn of infidelity often experience a loss of identity, a loss of specialness, loss of self-respect and loss of control amongst other things (Spring, 1997). Therefore, depending on the emotion experienced, communicative responses to infidelity may or may not differ from communicative responses to jealousy. Given that infidelity is a common problem among romantic partners and the numerous emotional responses to it, infidelity warrants special attention from communication scholars. The present study differs from other

research in that it specifically aims to identify how attachment style relates to communicative responses to infidelity.

This study examines attachment theory in adult romantic relationships as a predictor to communicative responses to infidelity. First, attachment theory, infidelity and communicative responses are reviewed, and then an argument for the relationship between attachment style and communicative responses to infidelity is presented.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

#### Attachment Theory

Attachment theory was first developed as an evolutionary explanation describing the emotions infants experience when separated from their primary caregiver (Bowlby, 1969). Because of the need for an infant to maintain close proximity to his or her primary caregiver, the infant behaves in certain ways that encourage this close proximity and, therefore, protection. Children exhibit this behavior, attachment, when experiencing separation or loss from their primary caregiver (Bowlby). The caregiver's reactions to this behavior might influence a pattern of behavior to develop in the child; this becomes the child's attachment style.

Bowlby (1969) found that the interaction between the primary caregiver and child in the early years of life determines a child's attachment style later on in life. When mothers follow their children's lead and give prompt and appropriate responses to their children's requests for attention, their child develops a secure attachment style (Bowlby). When mothers are not attentive to their children's needs or respond inappropriately to their children's requests for attention or autonomy, the children develop an insecure style of attachment which exhibits itself in anxious or ambivalent behavior (Bowlby).

Attachment style is formed in infancy, but displays itself once the child begins to separate from his or her mother (Bowlby, 1969). Studies reporting the observation of both toddlers and pre-school age children indicate that children with secure attachment styles are more comfortable engaging in play with strangers (adults and children), smile

and laugh more, and are more aware of others' distress than children with insecure attachment styles (Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 1969).

Attachment styles develop because of the need for a caretaker (usually the mother) to protect the child (Bowlby, 1969). The child seeks to maintain proximity to the caretaker so that if a dangerous situation arises the caretaker can protect the child. From an evolutionary stance, this was important so children remained safe from predators. It was necessary for a child to make noise or follow the caretaker in order to maintain the security. When a caretaker leaves the child, some form of attachment behavior is activated to elicit security from the caretaker. A child may follow the caretaker, draw attention by making noise (crying) or both (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980). Depending on how the caretaker handles the attempt to maintain proximity, the child will develop a secure attachment style or an insecure style (Bowlby, 1969). If a child is constantly denied the feeling of security, the child will remain in a constant state of distress, constantly seeking proximity (Ainsworth, 1979; Bowlby, 1980).

Attachment styles persist beyond childhood (Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 1973, 1980; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Collins & Read, 1990; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994; Guerrero, 1996; Guerrero & Burgoon, 1996; Kobak & Sceery, 1988). The primary caregiver influences the initial development of the attachment styles, but as the child grows and engages in other relationships where dependence is necessary, the child's working model of self remains the same and affects other interpersonal relationships. If the child received prompt attention from caregivers at an early age, the child will believe s/he is lovable and deserving of attention (Bowlby, 1973). If the child did not receive the attention consistent with the child's needs, the child will not develop a secure attachment

style and think of themselves as either undeserving of attention or not needing others' attention (Bowlby). This carries into adulthood.

Adults form relationships with one another that sometimes involve dependency on others, much like the dependency a child has for a primary caregiver. For example, romantic relationships involve some level of interdependence between relational partners. In these relationships, attachment is formed between those in the romantic relationship, and much like in infant-caregiver relationships, if separation or loss occurs, sadness and mourning occur. The formation of such relationships builds over time and the ability to rely on one another is an important aspect in maintaining the relationship beyond sexual attraction (Ainsworth, 1989). Eventually, an attachment forms between romantic partners where each partner relies on the other to fulfill needs. Much like infant-caregiver relationships, different attachment styles can exist in romantic relationships.

Although Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1980) focused only on working models of the self, and therefore found only two attachment styles (secure and anxious/ambivalent), later research focusing on attachment styles in adults found greater variation in classification. Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) examined working models of the self and also working models of others in adults and identified four distinct categories of attachment; *secure, preoccupied, dismissive* and *fearful-avoidant*.

#### Adult Attachment Style

As mentioned, there are four types of attachment in romantic relationships (Bartholomew, 1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). The attachment styles are defined by an individual's willingness to engage in close interpersonal relationships. Secure and preoccupied individuals both seek close personal relationships but for

different reasons. Secure individuals enjoy close relationships with others. They perceive themselves as lovable and expect that others will accept them, therefore they do not feel anxious about relationships and do not avoid relationships (Bartholomew & Horowitz). Preoccupied individuals view themselves as unlovable yet view others positively. To feel secure they must have a counterpart and therefore are preoccupied with relationships (high anxiety and low avoidance) (Bartholomew & Horowitz). Dismissive and fearful-avoidant individuals avoid close personal relationships but for different reasons (Bartholomew & Horowitz). Dismissive individuals have a positive view of themselves, but that combined with a negative view of others leaves them feeling independent and that relationships are not necessary (high avoidance and low anxiety) (Bartholomew, 1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz). Fearful-avoidant individuals view both themselves and others negatively. They feel undeserving of love and do not trust that others will accept them; therefore, they avoid close relationships with others so they will not experience rejection, yet they yearn for their desires to be met (high anxiety) (Bartholomew, 1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz). Each specific attachment style is explicated below.

### *Secure Attachment Style*

Secure attachment is characterized by a positive view of one's self and a positive view of others (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1990). This allows secures to be comfortable trusting in others and comfortable in others trusting in them, thereby increasing the likelihood secures can successfully maintain close, interpersonal relationships, such as romantic relationships (Bartholomew & Horowitz). Indeed, on average, secures report their romantic relationships as lasting longer than other attachment styles report (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Bartholomew and Horowitz found secures to rate high on levels of

warmth and involvement in romantic relationships. Secures are perceived by friends as using prosocial behaviors, behaviors that maintain the relationship (Bippus & Rollin, 2003).

#### *Preoccupied Attachment Style*

Those with a preoccupied attachment style possess a negative working model of themselves and a positive working model of others (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Together, these working models create the need for preoccupied individuals to seek close, personal relationships. However, the need for relationships is strong and friends report that these individuals accidentally push people away because they are overbearing at times (Bartholomew & Horowitz). Preoccupied individuals often have trouble letting go of a relationship once it is terminated. When experiencing the dissolution of a romantic relationship, the preoccupied individual is more likely than other attachment styles to attempt to get the partner back and being angry and seeking revenge on the lost partner (Davis, Shaver & Vernon, 2003). Further, the preoccupation with the relationship was reported to interfere with other activities, such as school or work and a lost sense of identity (Davis et al.). Given the need for a romantic relationship is so strong, it is not surprising that preoccupied individuals report moving into a new relationship quickly after the dissolution of the last (Davis et al.).

#### *Dismissive Attachment Style*

Dismissive individuals' working models consist of a positive working model of the self and a negative working model of others (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). They create a positive self image in response to the rejection experienced by their caregivers, denying the need for attachment (Bartholomew, 1990). In adults, these working models

are associated with passive avoidance of romantic relationships with an emphasis on other activities such as work (Bartholomew). Dismissive individuals view relationships as unnecessary (Bartholomew; Bartholomew & Horowitz). Friends often report dismissive individuals as being cold, introverted and competitive (Bartholomew & Horowitz).

#### *Fearful-Avoidant Attachment Style*

Fearful-avoidant individuals want intimate relationships but avoid those relationships out of fear that their attachment needs will not be met (Bartholomew, 1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). This fear stems from their working models. Fearful-avoidant individuals possess a negative view of themselves and a negative view of others (Bartholomew & Horowitz). Although they have high dependency needs (high anxiety), fearful-avoidant individuals are afraid that others will not fulfill those needs and therefore avoid relationships in order to protect themselves (Bartholomew). Similar to those with a preoccupied attachment style, these individuals are susceptible to depression as their attachment needs are seldom met (Bartholomew).

In adult romantic relationships, the attachment figure is one's romantic partner. Attachment behavior initiates when there is a threat to that relationship and one perceives the possibility of separation or loss. Research has shown attachment style to influence one's communicative responses to such situations.

#### Communicative Responses

Many individuals enjoy romantic relationships, yet transgressions, hurtful messages and hurtful events are all common in these types of close relationships. The way one responds to a situation affects the future of the relationship. One option is to

employ communication that maintains or enhances the relationship, the other option is to employ communication that deescalates or terminates the relationship. Generally speaking, the tactics used in romantic relationships during periods of relational dissatisfaction (such as following a transgression) are either *constructive* or *destructive* to the maintenance of the relationship and simultaneously either *active* or *passive* and referred to as *voice* (constructive and active), *loyalty* (constructive and passive), *exit* (destructive and active) and *neglect* (destructive and passive) (Rusbult, Zembrodt & Gunn, 1982). It is important to note, as did Rusbult, Olsen (2001) that although constructive patterns of communication might serve to continue the relationship, it might not be beneficial to the partner who is making these accommodations.

#### *Constructive Communication*

Constructive communication refers to communication that maintains or promotes the relationship. It can be active in nature, referred to as voice in Rusbult's (1980) investment model, or passive in nature, referred to as loyalty in Rusbult's investment model. Examples of voice are, "discussing problems, compromising, seeking help from a therapist or clergyman, suggesting solutions to the problems, asking the partner what is bothering him or her, trying to change oneself or one's partner" (Rusbult et al., 1982). Later, Bachman and Guerrero (2006) identified more specific, communicative responses associated with voice. These include *integrative communication*, openly discussing problems and *relational repair tactics* which include being affectionate or complimentary to the partner. Passive, constructive communication is also known as loyalty. Rusbult et al. describe loyalty as, "waiting for things to improve, giving things some time, praying

for improvement (p. 1231). Bachman and Guerrero describe *loyalty* as cooperative behavior that involves waiting for improvement.

### *Destructive Communication*

Destructive communication refers to communication that declines or exits the relationship. Like constructive communication, destructive communication can be both active and passive. Active destructive communication is what Rusbult's (1980) investment model refers to as *exit*. Rusbult et al. describes exit as "formally separating, moving out of a joint residence, deciding to 'just be friends,' [and] getting a divorce. Bachman and Guerrero (2006) identified two types of communicative responses associated with exit such as some *de-escalation behaviors* (e.g., telling the partner s/he wishes to date other people), and *distributive communication* (e.g., yelling at the partner). Passive, destructive communication is referred to as *neglect* in Rusbult's investment model and is described by Rusbult et al. as "ignoring the partner or spending less time together, refusing to discuss problems, treating the partner badly emotionally or physically, criticizing the partner for things unrelated to the real problem, 'just letting things fall apart,' [and] (perhaps) developing extra-relationship sexual involvement" (p. 1231). Bachman and Guerrero identified specific communicative responses associated with neglect and they include some *de-escalation behaviors* (e.g., figuring out how to get out of the relationship), *revenge* (e.g., 'getting even' with one's partner) and *active distancing* (e.g., not calling or not initiating communication with one's partner).

The communicative response to negative events is dependent on a number of factors. Rusbult's (1980) investment model identifies three factors that affect the likelihood of remaining in a relationship; satisfaction prior to finding out about the

transgression, investment in the relationship and perceived poor alternatives to the partner/current relationship. Rusbult et al. (1983) also found these factors to predict one's response to dissatisfaction in a relationship, using either voice, loyalty, exit or neglect.

From an attachment perspective, one's goals are related to their working models (view of self versus view of other). Secure and preoccupied individuals will place importance on the relationship where the fearful-avoidant and dismissive individual will favor autonomy. These goals will affect one's chosen communicative responses.

Although communicative responses to hurtful events, relational transgressions (both broad categories which include infidelity) and jealousy (a common emotional reaction to infidelity) have been investigated in previous research, communicative responses specifically to infidelity has yet to be the focus of investigation. Infidelity is associated with hurtful events, relational transgressions and jealousy, but, as described below, differs and deserves researchers' attention.

### Infidelity

Previous research varies on the definition of infidelity (Blow & Hartnett, 2005). Drigotas, Safstrom and Gentilia (1999) define infidelity as "the combination of (a) the feeling that one's partner has violated a relationship norm regarding the nature of the partner's interactions with someone else and (b) the fact that violation of this relationship norm typically elicits sexual jealousy and rivalry" (p. 509). Shackelford and Buss (1997) define sexual infidelity as "sexual activity with someone other than one's long-term partner" (pp. 1034-1035), and emotional infidelity occurring when "one's partner channels emotional resources such as romantic love, time and attention to someone else" (p. 1035). This study will define infidelity as "the combination of (a) the feeling that

one's partner has violated a relationship norm regarding the nature of the partner's interaction(s) with someone else and (b) that violation of this relationship norm typically elicits sexual jealousy and rivalry," (Drigotas et al., pg. 509). A violation might include, sexual activity with someone and/or channeling emotional resources such as romantic love, time and attention to someone other than one's long-term partner while involved in a committed romantic relationship. To qualify as infidelity in this investigation, both components of this definition must be satisfied (i.e., satisfies "a" and "b" above). For example, a partner could spend time with or resources on another individual, but it does not involve infidelity (e.g., helping a family member or friend). On the other hand, an individual could experience sexual jealousy about or rivalry with another individual (e.g., a woman is jealous of and/or feels competitive with her partner's attractive co-worker) even though her partner has done nothing untoward in terms of breaking a relational fidelity rule.

Infidelity has serious implications for most relationships and individuals. Exclusivity is expected in most serious relationships. One study reports between 94% and 99% of married and heterosexual, cohabitating couples expect monogamy (Treas & Giesen, 2000). Yet, this expectation is not always met. For those who experience a partner's infidelity, there are possible psychological consequences that include, "damage to their self-image, personal confidence or sexual confidence, feelings of abandonment, attacks on their sense of belonging, betrayals of trust, enraged feelings" (Charny & Parnass, 1995, p. 100). For an individual experiencing a partner's infidelity, understanding communication surrounding the issue might allow one to understand the way s/he is acting (i.e., "Am I normal?" "What would others do in this situation?").

Understanding responses to infidelity might also allow a victim to learn of other ways to communicate to his or her partner. For example, a victim might feel that his/her way of communicating is the only way or the right way, but if that victim is aware that the feeling is a characteristic of attachment, s/he might be willing to explore other alternatives. Or, victims might not want to respond by using their initial reaction, but might not be aware of other options. Charny and Parnass found over 50% of victims of infidelity reported knowing of the affair but being unsure of how to address the issue, and therefore did not address it. Charny and Parnass suggest therapists focus on the victim in helping him/her stop the affair. Understanding the communication one uses when learning of infidelity is a step toward assisting individuals in communicating with partners who engage in infidelity. Stopping the affair might reduce the aforementioned psychological consequences of the experience. Therefore, understanding communication surrounding infidelity is practical.

Researchers have classified and studied infidelity under broader categories. Bachman and Guerrero (2006) classify infidelity as a hurtful event as it is a relational transgression that communicates a “devaluation of the partner or relationship” (p. 945). Metts (1994) and Metts and Cupach (2007) classified infidelity as a relational transgression as it violates relationship rules, whether implicit or explicit, and is considered a betrayal. Yet, compared to other relational transgressions (such as lying), infidelity is a unique threat in which a third party rival is involved in the primary relationship (Metts & Cupach). Other transgressions involve only the relational partners (e.g., deception or criticism). In the United States, where monogamy is expected, jealousy is a common response to infidelity (Shackelford & Buss, 1997) yet many other emotions

are present such as hopelessness and anger (Shackelford et al., 2000). These emotions exist because one feels a threat to the relationship and understand there is a possibility of loss. The possibility of loss initiates a course of action influenced by one's attachment style. The following explains the present study and hypothesizes attachment style as predictive of communicative responses to infidelity.

#### The Present Research

Given attachment style is initiated when one perceives a threat to the relationship and infidelity likely causes such threat, it is probable that infidelity will cause some level of dissatisfaction in the relationship. The problems most experienced by the different attachment groups may affect how they react to infidelity. Infidelity poses a threat to the primary relationship. As mentioned earlier, adults form an attachment with their romantic partner in satisfying relationships (Ainsworth, 1989) and infidelity diverts sexual and/or emotional resources away from the partner and to a rival. The threat of losing an attachment figure initiates attachment behavior (Bowlby, 1973). Therefore, attachment theory may partially explain an individual's reaction to infidelity.

Individuals will react to dissatisfaction in romantic relationships based on their previous level of satisfaction, their investment in the relationship, their perceived alternatives (Rusbult et al., 1983) and their goals (Guerrero & Afifi, 1998), both for themselves and for the relationship. How one perceives satisfaction, investment and alternatives can be linked to attachment style. Secure individuals usually report more satisfying relationships than other attachment styles (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991), and therefore are presumably generally satisfied with their romantic relationships. Secure individuals view themselves as loving and deserving of attention, and therefore believe

there are other alternatives to their partner. Both high satisfaction and a positive alternative are predictors of constructive behavior (Rusbult et al, 1983). Preoccupied individuals are heavily invested in a relationship (emotionally), as their self-worth is tied to their partner and their relationship (Bartholomew & Horowitz). High investment is associated with loyalty responses (Rusbult, 1980). Preoccupied individuals have negative views of themselves, or a view of themselves as not deserving love or attention, therefore perceiving a low quality of alternatives to the current relationship. A dismissive is described by friends as cold and often does not self-disclose (Bartholomew and Horowitz), therefore a dismissive would not have much invested emotionally in the relationship. As a dismissive is described as avoiding close relationships, this person would favorably view being alone and therefore perceive having a positive alternative to the relationship. Low investment and a perceived alternative correlates with a destructive communicative response (either neglect or exit) (Rusbult et al.). Fearful-avoidant individuals feel as though others cannot and do not meet their needs (Bartholomew & Horowitz) and, therefore, experience low satisfaction in relationships. High anxiety regarding relationships combined with a negative view of one's self leaves fearful-avoidant individuals perceiving being alone a negative alternative and finding another partner unlikely, therefore seeing no positive alternatives to the current relationship. Low satisfaction and no perceived alternatives correlates with destructive responses to the relationship (either neglect or exit).

Another factor influencing response to dissatisfaction is one's goals. Guerrero and Afifi (1998) tested communicative responses to jealousy and found two goals to affect participants' responses; *relational maintenance* and *self-esteem*. Communication is used

to accomplish the individual's goals (Guerrero & Afifi). For instance, those who wish to maintain their self-esteem and the relationship use active and constructive communication, such as integrative communication, more often than those who do not share those goals (Guerrero & Afifi). In part, one's attachment style will help form these goals based on two models; their model of themselves and their model of the other in the relationship which is based on their avoidance and relational anxiety. Infidelity threatens both self-esteem (Feeney, 2004; White & Mullen, 1989) and the relationship (Feeney). When it occurs, individuals will act to maintain their pre-existing models. For instance, secure's goals will be two-fold; maintaining their self-esteem and repairing the relationship while preoccupieds will seek to repair the relationship with no regard for their self-esteem (as they already possess a negative view of self). To accomplish these goals, a partner may choose from a variety of communication choices.

Those who wish to maintain their relationship (secure and preoccupied individuals) after infidelity will choose constructive communication whereas those whose goals do not include maintaining the relationship (dismissive and fearful-avoidant individuals) will choose destructive communication. Those who have strong self-esteem (secure and dismissive individuals) will choose active communication as they are not afraid of rejection. Those individuals with low self-esteem (preoccupied and fearful-avoidant individuals) will choose passive communication.

Secures have a positive working model of themselves and others, do not fear abandonment yet strive for close, personal relationships and (in comparison to other attachment styles) have the least interpersonal problems (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) suggesting their communication aims at maintaining relationships and they are

effective at doing so. Secures are most likely to express their feelings directly to their partner (Sharpsteen & Kirkpatrick, 1997), an integrative communication tactic (Guererro, Andersen, Jorgensen, Spitzberg & Eloy, 1995). In similar situations, those with a secure attachment style reported addressing the problem and seeking to maintain the relationship. For instance, when discovering deception in a romantic relationship, secure individuals reported talking about the issue with their partner rather than talking around the issue or avoiding the issue altogether (Jang, Smith & Levine, 2002). Further, this attachment group reported remaining in the relationship more often than terminating it (Jang et al.). When faced with jealousy, those whose goals involve relational maintenance and maintaining self-esteem, goals which a securely attached individual is likely to possess, were most likely to use integrative communication (Guerrero & Afifi, 1998). Further, secure individuals report high levels of relational satisfaction and perceive themselves as lovable (Bartholomew and Horowitz), both factors consistent with Rusbult et al's (1983) voice response. Therefore, hypothesis one predicts:

H1: Secures are more likely than other attachment styles to respond to infidelity with active, constructive communication (integrative communication).

Dismissives have a positive view of themselves, a negative view of others and view relationships as unnecessary (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Therefore, they seek to maintain their self-esteem, but not their relationship. Given their view of others is negative, they are less likely to care what others think about them. Therefore, when they choose to exit the relationship they can do so directly without fear of being criticized. In similar situations, those with high levels of avoidance reported terminating the relationship rather than remaining in the relationship, such as following the discovery of

deception (Jang, Smith & Levine, 2002). Further, dismissive individuals are likely to have low satisfaction with their partner, be minimally invested in a relationship and perceive positive alternatives to the relationship, Therefore, hypothesis two predicts:

H2: Dismissives are more likely than other attachment styles to respond to infidelity with active, destructive communication (such as distributive communication and telling him/her they should date other people).

Preoccupied individuals wish to maintain the relationship and this need is stronger than the need to maintain self-esteem as preoccupieds define themselves by their relational partner (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Sometimes, avoiding conflict maintains the relationship, and, therefore, is useful to the preoccupied individual. Further, those with a high desire to maintain the relationship use avoidance/denial as their primary communicative tactic (Guerrero & Afifi, 1998). Although these individuals have fragile self-esteem, they do not seek to preserve their self-esteem, as the relationship is a higher priority (Bartholomew & Horowitz). Unlike dismissives, preoccupieds will not remove themselves from the situation as control is a dominant feature of a preoccupied's personality (Bartholomew & Horowitz) and leaving the situation would forego control. In similar situations, those with preoccupied attachment styles attempted to maintain the relationship through indirect communication. For instance, when learning of deception, the preoccupied individual was most likely to talk around the issue with their partner and also more likely to avoid talking about the issue with their partner than the other attachment groups (Jang et al.,2002). Further, this attachment group was more likely to remain in the relationship than to terminate the relationship, suggesting avoiding the issue or indirectly addressing the issue served as constructive communication (Jang et al.).

When faced with jealousy, those solely interested in maintaining the relationship were most likely to use surveillance tactics, a passive form of communication (Guerrero & Afifi, 1998). Further, preoccupied individuals are likely to be highly invested in the relationship as the relationship is a high priority, relating to Rusbult et al.'s (1983) loyalty response. Preoccupieds perceive their current relationship as the best circumstance for themselves and, thereby, do not seek alternatives to their relationship. This perception correlates with constructive communication. Therefore, H3 predicts:

H3: Preoccupieds are more likely than other attachment styles to react to infidelity with passive, constructive communication (such as loyalty and relational repair tactics).

Fearful-avoidants are often too introverted and passive and possess a negative working model of themselves and the relationship (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). This suggests fearful-avoidants would likely use passive, destructive communication as they do not have enough self-esteem to pursue the relationship for fear of rejection and will not confront the partner to end the relationship for fear of being criticized. In similar situations, such as following the discovery of deception, fearful-avoidant individuals avoided their partner (Jang et al., 2002). Further, this attachment group was found to terminate the relationship more often than secure and preoccupied attachment groups suggesting destructive communication (Jang et al.). Further, fearful-avoidant individuals view others as incapable of meeting their needs (Bartholomew & Horowitz) and therefore are likely to be unsatisfied in the relationship. Therefore, hypothesis four predicts:

H4: Fearful-avoidants are more likely than other attachment styles to react to infidelity with passive, destructive communication (such as revenge, active distancing, or passive de-escalation).

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### Sample

Three-hundred and ninety-two ( $n = 392$ ) individuals participated in the survey. Regarding sex of participant, 232 were women, 154 were men, and 6 did not answer the question. Participants reported sexual orientation and 361 indicated that they were heterosexual, 19 were homosexual, four were bisexual, and eight did not answer the question.

#### Procedures

After receiving study approval from the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS), the researcher visited several communication basic courses as well as upper division courses (see Appendix A for IRB approval form). Data collection occurred in two waves. For the initial wave, the researcher visited various communication courses, explained the nature of the survey, and distributed an informed consent form to interested individuals. Participants had the option of participating in an online survey about attachment, infidelity and responses to infidelity or, should they not choose to participate in the study, had the option of reading a pre-assigned article about attachment and writing a one page summary. Participants who completed either option submitted a completion form to the researcher and were entered into a drawing for a \$25 Visa giftcard. This occurred over summer session and yielded very few and insufficient responses.

In the second wave of collection, the researcher visited the communication basic course as well as upper division communication courses. Visiting this variation of courses, particularly the basic courses, enabled the researcher to capture student

participants of varied majors and degree interests. Average student age, as demonstrated in other studies that have drawn participants from the same population, tends to be approximately  $M = 22.08$ ,  $SD = 4.72$  (Emmers-Sommer et al., 2010). As with the first wave of collection, the researcher visited each class and briefly explained the nature of the study. Participation in the second wave of collection—whether online survey or assigned article—resulted in the awarding of one point of extra credit. Awarding extra credit was more successful and yielded more participants. Once again, the researcher distributed the informed consent form to interested participants. The informed consent form included information regarding the nature of the study and a link to the online survey. Participants were instructed to follow this link to complete the survey online. Participants from either collection wave overwhelmingly chose to participate in the survey (see Appendix B) and were randomly assigned to one of three infidelity scenarios dependant on class and/or class section. Scenarios included; (1) sexual infidelity, (2) emotional infidelity, and (3) sexual and emotional infidelity. One hundred and forty-nine participants (38%) completed the sexual infidelity condition, 102 (26%) completed the emotional fidelity condition, and 141 (36%) completed the sexual and emotional infidelity condition. Participation took approximately 20 minutes of the participants' time and responses were confidential. IP addresses were not collected and participant responses were not linked with participants' names or identifying information. Survey participants reported demographic information, if they were now or ever involved in a committed, romantic, monogamous relationship, whether they were faithful to that past/current partner, and if their current/past partner was faithful to them. For those participants who reported unfaithfulness in a current or past relationship, participants

were asked to report the outcome in that relationship. Participants then completed a measure of attachment, responded to one of three infidelity scenarios, and completed a measure on communicative responses to infidelity. Following completion of the survey, the researcher for their entry into the drawing or their one point extra credit eligibility.

### Instruments

#### *Attachment scale.*

Survey participants completed the Experiences in Close Relationships scale – Revised (Brennen, Clark & Shaver, 1998). This 36-item instrument measures individuals’ degrees of avoidance and anxiety on a 1-7 Likert-type scale (1 = not at all, 7 = very much). For reliability purposes, 8 items were reversed scored. Reliability of the scale was an acceptable  $\alpha = .911$ .

To create the four attachment categories, participants were classified according to their scores as compared to the means of the avoidance ( $M = 2.76$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ) and anxiety ( $M = 3.23$ ,  $SD = 1.20$ ) subscales. Specifically, those participants who scored above the mean on avoidance and above the mean on anxiety were classified as having a “fearful-avoidant attachment style.” Forty participants who were randomized to the sexual infidelity scenario tested as/were classified as “fearful-avoidants” according to their self-reported score, 32 who were randomized to the emotional infidelity scenario, and 34 who were randomized to the sexual and emotional infidelity scenario were classified as “fearful-avoidants.”

Those participants who scored above the mean on anxiety, but below the mean on avoidance were classified as having a “preoccupied attachment style.” Thirty participants in the sexual infidelity condition, 18 in the emotional infidelity condition, and 37

individuals in the sexual and emotional infidelity conditions were classified as “preoccupieds.”

Those participants who scored below the mean on anxiety, but above the mean on avoidance were classified as having a “dismissive attachment style.” Thirty participants who were randomized to the sexual infidelity scenario were classified as “dismissive,” 23 in the emotional infidelity scenario, and 28 in the sexual and emotional scenario were classified as “dismissive.”

Those participants who scored below the mean on anxiety and below the mean on avoidance were classified as having a “secure attachment style.” Forty eight individuals were who randomized to the sexual infidelity scenario were classified as “secures,” 29 who were randomized to the emotional infidelity scenario, and 41 who were randomized to the sexual and emotional scenario were classified as “secures.”

*Communication response scale.*

Participants responded to the 1-7 (1 = very unlikely, 7 = very likely) Communicative Responses to Hurtful Events scale (Bachman & Guerrero, 2006). This 35-item, Likert-type scale measures the degree of likelihood of responding to their current or past relational partner upon learning of his/her infidelity in various manners on a continuum of passive/active and constructive/destructive. Specifically, an active/constructive response strategy includes being “integrative” and passive/constructive strategies include “relational repair” and “loyalty.” Passive/destructive strategies include, “de-escalation,” “revenge,” and “active distancing.” Finally, the active/destructive strategy includes “distributive.” Reliability for the 35-item measure was an acceptable  $\alpha = .708$ . Reliability for individual responses was:

integrative ( $n = 7$ ),  $\alpha = .859$ , relational repair ( $n = 7$ ),  $\alpha = .925$  de-escalation (passive) ( $n = 4$ ),  $.682$ , loyalty ( $n = 5$ ),  $\alpha = .869$ , distributive ( $n = 5$ ),  $\alpha = .828$ , revenge ( $n = 3$ ),  $\alpha = .880$  and active distancing ( $n = 3$ ),  $\alpha = .729$ . Finally, reliability could not be calculated for the active/destructive communicative response of “de-escalation” because it is one-item.

### Data Analysis

Statistical software (SPSS version 17) was used to analyze data. Because the coding of the attachment scale resulted in a binary measure, two independent-sample  $t$ -tests had to be conducted for analyses involving attachment. Specifically, the coding of the measure would identify a participant as, for example, “secure” or “not secure,” “preoccupied” or “non-preoccupied” and so on. To establish whether a parametric statistical test was appropriate, such as a two-independent sample  $t$ -test, the normality of distribution was examined by examining overall communicative responses to infidelity by gender, which allowed the researcher to capture distribution of the criterion variable for the entire sample. A Shapiro-Wilk ( $W$ ) statistical test was conducted and the appropriate Q-Q plot displayed. The Shapiro-Wilk test (Shapiro & Wilk, 1965) tests the null hypothesis that a sample came from a normally distributed population. A nonsignificant result indicates that the data do not significantly differ from theory, thereby indicating the sample was drawn from a normally distributed population. Results of the Shapiro-Wilk ( $W$ ) test indicated that overall communicative responses to infidelity represented a sample that hailed from a normally distributed population,  $W(385) = .996$ ,  $p < .45$ . The Q-Q plot appears below in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Q-Q Plot for Overall Communicative Responses to Infidelity by Gender

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

To begin, descriptive data offer an overall view of the sample in Table 1. As indicated in Table 1, the majority of men in this sample reported being a fearful-avoidant attachment style ( $n = 45$ ), closely followed by those reporting being the secure attachment style ( $n = 44$ ). The majority of women, however, reported being the secure attachment style ( $n = 71$ ) and this was trailed by the fearful-avoidant attachment style ( $n = 61$ ). Of those participants who reported having experienced infidelity in their relationship in Table 1, 48 reported that they were “still happily in the relationship,” 16 reported that they were “in the relationship, but dissatisfied,” 65 reported, “relationship ended due to unrelated issues,” 52 reported “relationship ended as indirect consequence of cheating,” 41 reported that the “relationship ended as a direct result of the cheating,” and 170 did not answer the question.

Table 1

## Descriptive Data of Sample

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Women	232	60%
Men	154	40%
Heterosexual	361	94%
Homosexual	19	4.9%
Bisexual	4	.01%
Current/Past Relationship Committed & Monogamous/Yes	285	74%
Current/Past Relationship Committed & Monogamous/No	101	26%
Participant Faithful to Current/Past Partner/Yes	82	22%
Participant Faithful to Current/Past Partner/No	284	74%
Participant Faithful to Current/Past Partner/Unsure	18	.04%
Current/Past Partner Faithful to Participant/Yes	132	34%
Current/Past Partner Faithful to Participant/No	210	55%
Current/Past Partner Faithful to Participant/Unsure	41	11%
Men with Dismissive Attachment Style	35	43%
Women with Dismissive Attachment Style	46	57%
Men with Fearful-Avoidant Attachment Style	45	42%
Women with Fearful-Avoidant Attachment Style	61	58%
Men with Preoccupied Attachment Style	30	36%
Women with Preoccupied Attachment Style	54	64%
Men with Secure Attachment Style	44	38%
Women with Secure Attachment Style	71	62%

## *Secures*

Individuals' responses to infidelity were tested by scenario based on attachment style. Hypothesis one posited, "Secures are more likely than other attachment styles to respond to infidelity with active, constructive communication (integrative communication)." Within the sexual infidelity scenario, H1 was not supported,  $t(146) = 1.73, p < .08$ . Additional analyses were conducted with the remaining seven communicative responses to infidelity, using the Bonferroni adjustment to control for an inflated familywise error-rate and a greater likelihood of committing a Type I error. The additional analyses demonstrated that "secures" significantly differed from non-secures (i.e., preoccupieds, dismissives, and fearful-avoidants) on the responses to sexual infidelity of revenge, active distancing, and de-escalation. Specifically, results indicated that secures ( $M = 1.97, SD = 1.48$ ) were significantly less likely to enact revenge responses than non-secures ( $M = 2.84, SD = 1.92$ ),  $t(146) = -2.73, p < .007$  and were less likely to enact active distancing ( $M = 3.26, SD = 1.71$ ) than non-secures ( $M = 4.26$ ),  $t(146) = -3.25, p < .001$ . Thus, whereas it was not supported that secures use active/constructive responses more than non-secures, they do use both active and passive destructive responses to sexual infidelity significantly less frequently than non-secures do. Within the emotional infidelity scenario, the hypothesis was not supported,  $t(100) = -.80, p < .42$ . Additional analyses, considering the Bonferroni adjustment, indicated that secures ( $M = 2.16, SD = 1.38$ ) significantly differed from non-secures ( $M = 3.58, SD = 1.58$ ) on relational repair,  $t(100) = -4.22, p < .0001$ , loyalty ( $M = 2.68, SD = 1.55$ ) versus ( $M = 3.86, SD = 3.86$ ),  $t(100) = -3.34, p < .001$ , passive de-escalation ( $M = 4.19, SD = 1.43$ ) versus ( $M = 3.19, SD = 1.31$ ),  $t(100) = 3.37, p < .001$ , and active de-escalation ( $M = 5.10,$

$SD = 2.22$ ) versus ( $M = 3.67, SD = 2.14$ ),  $t(100) = 3.01, p < .003$ . Finally, within the sexual and emotional infidelity scenario, hypothesis one was not supported (secures =  $M = 4.21, SD = 1.69$  versus non-secures,  $M = 4.68, SD = 1.49$ ),  $t(138) = -1.65, p < .10$ , nor did any additional analyses render significant differences among secures and non-secures on any communicative responses to sexual and emotional infidelity.

### *Dismissives*

Hypothesis two posited, “Dismissives are more likely than other attachment styles to react to infidelity with active, destructive communication” Within the sexual fidelity scenario, hypothesis two was not supported. Specifically, dismissives ( $M = 4.33, SD = 2.33$ ) did not significantly differ from non-dismissives (i.e., secures, preoccupieds, and fearful-avoidants) ( $M = 4.05, SD = 2.42$ ),  $t(146) = .55, p < .57$  in regard to active, destructive communication. Additional analyses on the seven remaining communicative responses to infidelity, considering the Bonferroni adjustment, did not render any significant differences.

Regarding emotional infidelity, hypothesis two was not supported,  $t(107) = -.399, p < .69$ . Additional analyses of the remaining seven communicative responses to infidelity, when considering the Bonferroni adjustment, did not render any significant results. Hypothesis two was not supported as it related to the sexual and emotional infidelity scenario,  $t(138) = 1.22, p < .22$ . Additional analyses indicated no significant differences between dismissives and non-dismissives on any of the communicative responses to the sexual and emotional infidelity scenario.

### *Preoccupieds*

Hypothesis three posited, “Preoccupieds are more likely than other attachment styles to react to infidelity with passive, constructive communication.” Within the sexual infidelity scenario, hypothesis three was not supported for either relational repair,  $t(146) = -.491, p < .62$  or loyalty,  $t(146) = 1.739, p < .08$ . Additional analyses on the remaining six communicative responses to infidelity did not render any significant results.

Regarding emotional infidelity, H3 was partially supported. Specifically, whereas H3 was supported regarding the passive constructive responses of relational repair and loyalty, analyses also demonstrated significant results for responses that were not specified when considering the Bonferroni adjustment on the remaining six communicative responses to infidelity. To begin, preoccupieds ( $M = 4.49, SD = 1.42$ ) used significantly more relational repair responses than non-preoccupieds ( $M = 2.90, SD = 1.56$ ),  $t(100) = 3.96, p < .0001$ . Similarly, preoccupieds ( $M = 4.75, SD = 1.49$ ) used significantly more loyalty responses than non-preoccupieds ( $M = 3.26, SD = 1.60$ ),  $t(100) = 3.61, p < .0001$ . In addition, further analyses beyond that relational repair and loyalty communicative responses indicate that preoccupieds ( $M = 5.46, SD = .95$ ) and also engaged more integrative responses than non-preoccupieds did ( $M = 4.41, SD = 1.56$ ) did,  $t(100) = 2.73, p < .007$ . Finally, H3 was not supported as it related to preoccupieds engaging the passive constructive response of relational repair more frequently than non-preoccupieds,  $t(138) = 1.53, p < .128$  or loyalty,  $t(138) = .495, p < .621$  as it related to the sexual and emotional infidelity scenario. An additional analysis, however, when considering the Bonferroni adjustment on the remaining six strategies did demonstrate that preoccupieds

( $M = 5.25$ ,  $SD = 1.35$ ) significantly differed from non-preoccupieds ( $M = 4.29$ ,  $SD = 1.55$ ) on active, constructive strategy of integrative,  $t(138) = 3.29$ ,  $p < .001$ .

#### *Fearful-avoidants*

Hypothesis four posited, “Fearful-avoidants are more likely than other attachment styles to react to infidelity with passive, destructive communication (such as revenge, active distancing, or passive de-escalation). As it related to the sexual infidelity scenario, H4 was partially supported. Specifically, fearful-avoidants engaged significantly more revenge ( $M = 3.38$ ,  $SD = 2.12$ ) responses than other attachment styles ( $M = 2.25$ ,  $SD = 1.61$ ),  $t(146) = 3.44$ ,  $p < .001$ . In addition, fearful-avoidants engaged more active distancing responses ( $M = 4.52$ ,  $SD = 1.91$ ) than non-fearful-avoidants ( $M = 3.71$ ,  $SD = 1.71$ ),  $t(146) = 2.45$ ,  $p < .015$ . Fearful-avoidants and non-fearful-avoidants did not significantly differ on the response of passive de-escalation,  $t(146) = 1.63$ ,  $p < .105$ .

Regarding emotional infidelity, H4 was not supported for revenge,  $t(100) = 1.26$ ,  $p < .209$ , active distancing,  $t(100) = .62$ ,  $p < .535$ , or passive de-escalation,  $t(100) = -1.12$ ,  $p < .264$ . Additional analysis did not yield significant results.

Finally, regarding sexual and emotional infidelity, H4 was not supported for revenge,  $t(138) = 1.80$ ,  $p < .074$ , active distancing,  $t(138) = -.309$ ,  $p < .758$ , or passive de-escalation,  $t(138) = -.257$ ,  $p < .797$ . Additional analyses did not render any significant results

#### Additional Analysis

Additional analysis yielded significant results. Participants who reported that they had been unfaithful ( $M = 3.97$ ,  $SD = 1.64$ ) significantly differed from respondents who reported not being unfaithful ( $M = 3.39$ ,  $SD = 1.58$ ) on the direct, destructive strategy of

“distributive” response,  $t(363) = 2.90, p < .004$ . Similarly, respondents who reported having been unfaithful ( $M = 3.13, SD = 2.03$ ) to their partner significantly differed from those who had not reported being unfaithful ( $M = 2.33, SD = 1.63$ ) on the passive, destructive strategy of revenge,  $t(363) = 3.68, p < .0001$ . Regarding respondents who reported that their partner had been unfaithful, participants differed only on the direct, destructive strategy of distributive. Specifically, individuals whose partners had been unfaithful engaged significantly more distributive responses ( $M = 3.80, SD = 1.60$ ) than those participants who responded that their partner had not been unfaithful ( $M = 3.37, SD = 1.65$ ),  $t(363) = 2.36, p < .019$ . Finally, additional analyses were conducted to ascertain if there were significant gender differences in reported unfaithfulness, partner unfaithfulness, gender differences in attachment style, or gender differences in communicative responses to infidelity. The only significant results are as follows, when considering the appropriate Bonferroni adjustments, within the sexual infidelity scenario, women ( $M = 4.90, SD = 1.52$ ) used significantly more integrative responses than did men ( $M = 3.95, SD = 1.67$ ),  $t(145) = -3.56, p < .0001$ . Within the emotional infidelity scenario, men ( $M = 4.20, SD = 1.74$ ) used significantly more loyalty responses than did women ( $M = 3.14, SD = 1.45$ ),  $t(97) = 3.29, p < .001$ . Finally, within the sexual and emotional scenario, none of the results were significant.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Discussion of Results

This study set out to determine the relationship between adult attachment style and one's communicative response to learning of a partner's infidelity. This study has both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, this research furthers attachment theory by supporting the idea that romantic relationships serve as an attachment relationship in adulthood. When individuals were confronted with a situation that threatened their attachment bond, attachment style was initiated and responses differed related to attachment style.

Also, these findings expand attachment theory. Previous research has found that individuals respond to threats to a relationship in accordance to their attachment style. This study presented participants with three situations, each a threat to the relationship. Yet, participants did not report responding to each scenario in the same way. That is, a secure did not report responding to sexual infidelity the same as emotional and the same as combined sexual and emotional infidelity. This finding suggests that one's response varies by situation and not simply attachment style. It could be that, given the age group, that responses to infidelity are more of a function of a lack of commitment, lack of investment, lack of satisfaction, and superior alternatives to one's current relationship. Although this investigation utilized Rusbult's (1980 and Rusbult et al.'s (1983) model in regard to the criterion variable (i.e., communicative response to infidelity as they related to active/passive axes and constructive/destructive axes), her model might be at play from the predictive variable side as well. Specifically, the participants in this investigation are

at a relational crossroads in many fashions—they are in late adolescence and at a time in life in which one is focused on one’s education, career, and “starting one’s life.” Many are not yet at the point of the career, family, children—nor may some ever be. However, for those who might eventually aspire to that sort of life, many are not yet at a point in life where greater degrees of investment and commitment are necessary nor perhaps desired. The high self-reported infidelity rate (60%) by the participants suggests that investment is likely low, commitment is low, satisfaction is low, and alternatives are attractive. Perhaps these variables are functioning or functioning concurrently with attachment styles at this point in the lifespan. Further research is suggested to examine this more equivocal time of life as well as how attachment and other investment model variables function across the lifespan as they relate to communicative responses to infidelity.

Additionally, this study furthered the application of Rusbult et al’s (1983) classifications of responses; voice, loyalty, exit and neglect. Previous research has applied the model to responses to relational transgressions and hurtful events. This study applied the model to responses to infidelity and found significant results according to attachment style. The following discusses the significance of the findings of this study.

For all attachment styles, the results of this study suggest that attachment styles respond to sexual infidelity differently than emotional infidelity. The study tested responses to infidelity by assigning participants to one of three scenarios; sexual infidelity, emotional infidelity and combined sexual and emotional infidelity. Each attachment style reported responding differently to each scenario. Two possible reasons

for this finding include; difference in expectations of partner and difference in perception of sexual versus emotional infidelity.

One dimension of attachment style is one's view of others. Secure and preoccupied individuals possess a positive view of others and fearful-avoidant and dismissive individuals have a negative view of others. This view of others might affect one's expectation of a romantic partner. Specifically, if a fearful-avoidant does not expect others to meet his/her needs, the fearful-avoidant might expect that his/her partner will betray him/her with another sexual relationship or that one's partner will seek an emotional bond with a rival. Expectations are known to affect the way one responds to similar situations, such as hurtful events (Guerrero, 2006). Specifically, Guerrero found that participants reported using destructive communication more often when faced with a violation that was perceived as a highly negative expectancy violation. Guerrero also found that if an action was perceived as intention, one was more likely to use destructive communication. In regard to fearful-avoidants in this study, fearful-avoidants reported using more destructive responses to sexual infidelity than other attachment styles, but this was not the case for either emotional infidelity or combined sexual and emotional as fearful-avoidants reported using significantly more loyalty responses for the combined scenario than other attachment styles. Possibly, emotional infidelity is not seen as negative of a violation as emotional infidelity to this attachment style as they did not report using significantly more destructive communication than other attachment styles. As fearful-avoidants avoid relationships because they expect others will not fulfill their needs, they might expect others to be emotionally unfaithful. This study did not test expectations and, therefore, research should explore this relationship further. Specifically,

future research should explore the feelings associated with both sexual and emotional infidelity for each attachment style, or the dimensions of each attachment style. If expectations of the partner vary, this might explain one's differing reactions to infidelity.

One's own behavior might affect one's perception of their partner's behavior. Approximately one third of participants reported being unfaithful to their partner. One might reason that if s/he had committed this behavior, that particular type of infidelity was acceptable. For example, if a participant engaged in sexual infidelity, s/he might reason that a one time, extra-relational experience is acceptable, but falling in love with someone is not. Similarly, if a participant has romantic feelings for someone other than his/her partner but does not engage in sexual behavior, s/he might consider engaging in sexual behavior unacceptable for the partner, but perceive emotional infidelity as a less negative transgression. Again, this was not addressed in this study and must be investigated further.

Another possible explanation for the reported difference to responses to infidelity types is the perception of sexual versus emotional infidelity. One type of infidelity might bother an attachment type more so than another type of infidelity, and therefore elicit different responses. Specifically, preoccupied individuals report feeling that their partner is not as emotionally interested in them as they are in their partner (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) than sexual infidelity as emotional infidelity will channel emotional resources (time and energy) away from the primary relationship. In this study, preoccupieds reported responding to emotional infidelity with constructive communication. As predicted, preoccupieds reported using more passive responses than other attachment styles. They also reported using significantly more integrative

responses, an active response. A possible explanation to this is the threat that emotional infidelity signifies for this attachment style. As preoccupieds have a need for relationships, they might fear discussing negative feelings regarding emotional infidelity, and therefore use passive, yet constructive, forms of communication to retain the relationship. In addition to using passive, constructive communication, preoccupieds also used passive constructive communication, specifically, integrative communication. It was hypothesized that the high level of anxiety associated with the preoccupied attachment style would lead to preoccupied's use of passive rather than active communication. Possibly, avoidance is a better predictor where the low level of avoidance associated with this attachment style, in combination with the high anxiety, led preoccupieds to take action to maintain the relationship as well as enact passive communication. These results are consistent with attachment theory in that the preoccupied individual feels a need to remain in a relationship. For the case of emotional infidelity, preoccupieds remained consistent with this theory in that they reported using constructive communication more often than other attachment styles. In the case of sexual infidelity, this was not the case. As mentioned, possibly the threat of sexual infidelity is not great enough for these attachment styles as sexual infidelity does not signify love and possibly does not threaten the longevity of the primary relationship. Of course, this study only explored responses and not the reasoning for the difference in responses and therefore should be explored in future research.

To understand how results can differ for some responses and scenarios and not others, the definition of infidelity is relevant. This study examined sexual infidelity, emotional infidelity and combined sexual and emotional infidelity. In similar studies,

sexual and emotional infidelity was not separated (see Bachman & Guerrero, 2006). The present study suggests that individuals respond to emotional infidelity differently than sexual infidelity and differently still in response to the combination of emotional and sexual infidelity. A revelation of this nature is a contribution of this investigation. This research suggests perceptions of emotional and sexual infidelity might differ based on attachment.

It was posited that secures would react to all types of infidelity by engaging in active and constructive communication (i.e. integrative communication) more so than other attachment styles, yet this hypothesis was not supported in any infidelity type. Although this hypothesis was not supported, some interesting findings arose. Although these findings did not support the hypothesis, some findings are in agreement with attachment theory. Specifically, secures were less likely than other attachment styles to use destructive communication (both active and passive) when learning of a partner's sexual infidelity. That is, they were less likely than other attachment styles to initiate communication that is destructive to the relationship. It was predicted that secures would engage in active and constructive behavior more often than other attachment styles. Results indicated that secures reported engaging in destructive communication less, but not in constructive communication more. Therefore, this finding supports attachment theory.

This differed from learning of a partner's emotional infidelity in that when learning of emotional infidelity a secure individual was more likely to respond by using active distancing or de-escalation (active and destructive) and less likely than other attachment styles to use relational repair and loyalty (passive and constructive). These

findings suggest that secure individuals are less likely to initiate the termination of the relationship through communication based on a partner's sexual infidelity, but are more likely to initiate termination of a relationship if discovering emotional infidelity, and, are less likely to avoid communication regarding emotional infidelity. Possibly, this is due to a secure individual's perception of the scenario presented in the study. One assumption was that secure individuals are typically satisfied with their romantic relationships as they report finding romantic relationships satisfying (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991), and therefore would like to engage constructive communication to restore the state of satisfaction. Examining attachment style in relation to the investment model (1980) might provide insight. Specifically, is there a higher cost associated with sexual infidelity or emotional infidelity?

Possibly, the presence of emotional infidelity signaled to participants that the relationship was not satisfactory while the sexual infidelity scenario type did not elicit that presumption. It is also possible that a secure individual perceives emotional infidelity as a greater violation than sexual infidelity and therefore expectancy violation has influenced the responses. Examining attachment style in relation to expectancy violation might provide insight. Is one type of infidelity perceived more negative than another type of infidelity? Does that perception vary in association with attachment style?

In regard to dismissive attachment style, dismissives were no more likely to use active and destructive communication than other attachment styles. A possible explanation is that dismissives do not view infidelity as a threat to their relationship because they did not value the relationship to begin with and, therefore, do not see a reason to communicate about the event. Another explanation is that dismissive

individuals report being introverted, cold and unexpressive (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) and possibly refrain from engaging in communication about the issue, regardless of the situation. This differed from reports on jealousy. Another study reported when faced with jealousy, dismissives utilized both active distancing and avoidant/denial behavior (Guerrero, 1998). The differing response is likely due to the dismissive's feeling of relationships being secondary and the positive view of self. Indeed, dismissive individuals reported feeling less fear of separation in regard to jealousy than other preoccupied and fearful-avoidants (Guerrero). Therefore, when feeling jealous, a dismissive might not expect that jealousy will lead to separation or loss but this might differ when a partner actually confesses to infidelity. Another explanation stems from the investment model. As mentioned previously, this particular demographic likely had little invested in the relationship in question. A dismissive in this demographic likely has even less invested than others in the sample as dismissives report focusing on other aspects of their life (work, hobbies) rather than relationships (Bartholomew & Horowitz). At this time in life when one is expected, even encouraged, to focus on a career, the dismissive individual is likely not to have an attachment with a romantic partner. The lack of significant results might be due to an absence of an attachment relationship for dismissives.

As secure and dismissive individuals' reported using different communication strategies for sexual versus emotional infidelity scenarios, preoccupied individuals did as well. Preoccupied individuals reported using both relational repair and loyalty more than other attachment styles when discovering a partner's emotional infidelity, but not when discovering a partner's sexual infidelity or when discovering a partner's combined sexual

and emotional infidelity. Preoccupieds also reported using significantly more integrative communication and significantly less de-escalation than other attachment styles when learning of a partner's emotional infidelity. Therefore, preoccupieds reported using significantly more constructive communication (both active and passive) when faced with a partner's emotional infidelity. Using constructive communication is consistent with previous research in that preoccupied individuals are concerned with maintaining the relationship. Using significantly less de-escalation than non-preoccupieds is also consistent with previous research in that a preoccupied individual would not be interested in terminating the relationship. Regarding sexual infidelity, preoccupieds reported using active communication, both constructive and destructive. A characteristic of a preoccupied person is that s/he is sometimes over expressive (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). This may account for the use of distributive communication in that a preoccupied person's high level of anxiety might cause the person to act out when feeling threatened by something such as sexual infidelity. It is interesting to note the difference between sexual infidelity and emotional infidelity in that the preoccupied individual did not report using this behavior when faced with emotional infidelity.

In regard to fearful-avoidant attachment styles, fearful-avoidants reported engaging more revenge and active distancing responses than non-fearful-avoidants, as predicted, for the sexual infidelity scenario. A characteristic of this attachment style is the feeling that others will not meet one's needs therefore, ending the relationship is logical as the point that one's needs are not being met is now supported. Additional analysis demonstrated that participants' reported using loyalty responses more often than other attachment styles when confronted with both emotional and physical infidelity. This is

interesting as loyalty is a relationally constructive response. It is possible that a fearful-avoidant does not actually perceive being alone as a positive alternative. Given a fearful-avoidant has high levels of both anxiety and avoidance, it is possible that the fearful-avoidant wishes to maintain the relationship (anxious) even though s/he is fearful of becoming disappointed, yet, the need for the relationship is not strong enough to risk rejection from the partner by using active communication. Possibly, a fearful-avoidant's level of investment is low. This is reasonable as a characteristic of a fearful-avoidant is low expression (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) and, if not expressing one's self to a partner, the level of emotional investment might be low, which is associated with destructive communication. Although fearful-avoidants engaged in both constructive and destructive behavior, these participants reported being more likely to use passive behavior, as predicted, when discovering a partner's sexual infidelity.

In addition to attachment style, responses also differed based on previous experience with infidelity. Both participants who committed infidelity previously, and those whose partners committed infidelity, reported engaging revenge and distributive behavior more than those who had not committed infidelity or who were unaware of a partner committing infidelity. Specifically, those who engaged in infidelity reported using revenge and distributive responses and those who reported a partner committing infidelity reported using distributive communication more than others. Possibly, those who have not committed infidelity or have not been a victim of infidelity underestimate the extent of likely damage to the relationship and, possibly oneself. Participants were not asked whether their committing infidelity was in response to a partner's infidelity or not, therefore, the revenge and distributive behavior reported by those who committed

infidelity might be due to a previous partner's infidelity. For example, a participant who has engaged in infidelity in the past might feel as though the choice was a result of his/her partner committing infidelity and therefore, the participant was angry and felt s/he needed to commit infidelity in order to get revenge or make the relationship even. A possible avenue for future research is to examine the role of revenge and distributive communication in committing infidelity. Specifically, did engaging in infidelity help the victim deal with his/her feelings or did this lead to additional anger, and distributive communication? Also, what was the outcome of the relationship following the revenge? How did the original offender respond to the act of revenge?

The difference in response to infidelity has practical implications. Some attachment styles were more or less likely to report initiating destructive communication for one infidelity type than the other. For example, secure reported responding to emotional infidelity with destructive communication more often than other attachment styles but reported using destructive communication less often with sexual infidelity than other attachment styles. Possibly, one infidelity type is more or less tolerable, causes more or less relational problems and/or leads to more or less forgiveness.

Psychological differences in the perception of infidelity might also exist based on infidelity type. Previous research has found sex differences in the way one views infidelity where emotional infidelity causes significantly more jealousy than sexual infidelity for women and sexual infidelity causes significantly more jealousy for men (Shackelford & Buss, 1997). Consistent with previous research, this study demonstrated significant differences in response to infidelity by sex. Specifically, men reported using more loyalty responses for the emotional infidelity scenario than women and women

reported using more integrative responses to the sexual infidelity scenario than men. Therefore, women report using relationally constructive responses to sexual infidelity, the infidelity scenario that bothers women less while men reported using constructive communication in response to emotional infidelity, an infidelity scenario that bothers men less. Although significant results exist, they do not account for the difference in attachment style.

Possibly, there are also differences in the way each attachment style experiences types of infidelity where one type of infidelity is particularly more bothersome to an attachment style than another type of infidelity. Regardless of psychological affects, this study supports communicative differences and therefore should be considered when addressing each type of infidelity. For example, when discovering a partner's sexual infidelity, one might find it more difficult than a previous incident involving emotional infidelity. Discussing differences in the scenarios and understanding that responses vary dependant on scenario type might help a victim of infidelity understand one's own emotions and responses and allow one to feel comfortable and at peace with the decisions made. Future research should explore the psychological effects of emotional and sexual infidelity on attachment style. Future research should also address the psychological effects on the dimensions of attachment. Specifically, research should address the psychological differences in processing infidelity as avoidance and anxiety vary.

The results of this study have practical implications for counselors. First, this study supports treatments that focus on infidelity. Currently, some infidelity treatments address the attachment bond and the threat that infidelity causes to an attachment bond. *Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT)* (Johnson, 1996), is one such treatment. This study

supports the existence of attachment bonds in adult romantic relationships. Further, EFT requires the therapist to determine the *attachment injury*, that is, an incident in which one's attachment needs were not met and, as a result, led to a severe decrease in trust in the relationship (Johnson). This study supports infidelity as an attachment injury in that responses to infidelity demonstrated significant results in accordance to attachment style. An attachment injury can affect relational interactions. In addition to determining the attachment injury, a goal of EFT is to understand relational interactions and aim to change those relational interactions. This study provides the counselor with a baseline comparison of typical responses for those couples where one or more partner might be minimally invested yet is still experiencing pain as a result of the attachment injury. Future research associating response with psychological experiences would allow the therapist greater insight into the psychological experience of infidelity by observing responses.

#### Limitations

There were several limitations of this study which include sampling and data collection. Participants were recruited using convenience sampling. This yielded all college students, mostly undergraduates. Most college students are not involved in, or have never been involved in, a relationship intended for marriage. The study assumed a romantic relationship as an attachment relationship, however, if one does not see a future with a person, s/he might not be entirely attached to that person. Therefore, discovering of a partner's infidelity might not have initiated attachment behavior. It was also found that approximately 60% of respondents have committed infidelity. If needs are being met by multiple partners, the concern for losing one partner, or for that partner engaging in

similar behavior, might not initiate strong attachment behavior. In the future, asking participants to think of their most important romantic relationship, rather than current or one in which infidelity occurred, might have elicited stronger feelings of attachment. Therefore, for multiple reasons, a student population might be less likely to view their romantic partner as an attachment figure. In addition, as discussed earlier, there might be other things functioning at this point in the lifespan that relate more to Rusbult's (1980) investment model and its attendant variables (commitment, investment, satisfaction, quality of alternatives).

In addition to this sample consisting solely of college students, the particular college where participants were recruited from exists in a sexually liberal city. Participants are exposed to sexually explicit billboards, advertisements, and other situations more often than the general population. Exposure to this environment, possibly from birth for some participants, might alter one's view on fidelity. Possibly, infidelity is viewed as less severe in this population than the general population where this type of exposure is minimal. This also might affect one's perceived alternatives, especially for the sexual infidelity scenario. When viewing available sexual partners on display (advertisements), one might (rightfully or wrongfully) perceive these options as available alternatives and therefore reducing the impact of a partner's infidelity. Specifically, one might feel that a partner's sexual infidelity is not overly bothersome because the victim is able to find suitable alternatives to this mate rather quickly. The sexually liberal nature of the culture in which the data were drawn, concurrent with the time of life for the participant, might function to affect communicative responses to infidelity. That said, however, it does not fully explain some distributive communicative responses to

infidelity. Specifically, if the participants are, indeed, more lax about infidelity, one would then likely not expect negative responses to engagement in infidelity because it is perceived as more acceptable. The dynamics of this finding are in need of additional attention and exploration.

Related, the number of unfaithful participants might also be of concern. As mentioned, nearly 60% of the sample reported committing infidelity in a previous or current relationship. Their feelings on this act were not evaluated (remorse versus apathy versus retaliation to a partner's initial infidelity). If participants view infidelity as common, they might not have felt as threatened by the situation as others might be. For example, if a participant committed infidelity, but had no intention on ending the primary relationship, that participant might not view infidelity as a threat to a primary relationship, but simply as a behavior that exists in addition to the primary relationship. For attachment behavior to initiate, one must feel a threat to the attachment relationship. However, infidelity was not explicitly defined for this question, therefore, it was left to participants' judgment as to whether they felt they were unfaithful or not. Therefore, it cannot be certain if participants were referring to sexual infidelity, emotional infidelity or both.

Another limitation that arose through the use of convenience sampling was that some participants were enrolled in advanced communication classes and have learned of attachment theory in their current class or a previous class. This might have affected responses to the attachment scale as respondents might have chosen responses to fit which attachment style they wanted to be or thought they should be. Similarly, this might have affected which responses to infidelity one chose, based on what s/he thought their

particular attachment style should choose or which communication responses are favorable. Future research should aim to recruit a broad range of participants involved in a serious romantic relationship.

This study was also limited in the way data was collected. Although online surveys provide benefits, they also provide limitations. Particularly, there is no way for a researcher to verify a participant completed the entire survey independently. It is possible that a participant began a survey and had someone else finish the survey or help with the survey. Additionally, a participant might have taken the survey in the presence of another, therefore feeling pressure to answer questions in a socially desirable way.

This study was also limited in the way of measurements, both through self-reporting and through the use of hypothetical scenarios. This survey asked respondents to self-report both attachment style and responses to infidelity. Participants might have responded in socially desirable ways. Specifically, respondents might report being less anxious regarding relationships as high anxiety and dependence is generally thought of negatively. Related, the binary coding of the Attachment measure was limiting in terms of analyses options.

Participants were presented with a scenario depicting one of three infidelity situations; sexual, emotional or both sexual and emotional. Participants were asked to imagine what they would do if placed in this situation. As this situation was hypothetical, respondents might have had a difficult time imagining what they would have done if they discovered their partner had committed infidelity. This is evident as those who had committed infidelity or whose partner had committed infidelity were more likely to respond with distributive communication and/or revenge, which is generally thought of to

be a negative response. Although difficult to manipulate infidelity in a romantic relationship, journaling might provide insight into actual responses to infidelity rather than hypothetical or imagined responses.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

Infidelity is not necessarily uncommon among dating and married couples. Although research has focused on other aspects of infidelity, it has not focused on communicative responses to learning of infidelity and the role attachment style plays in those responses. Understanding these responses is beneficial to counselors and individuals. That is, as infidelity is a concern for many couples, understanding responses to infidelity might help counselors guide couples toward healing and/or reconciliation. Understanding oneself and reasons for responding in such a way might help individuals change behavior to achieve their individual and relational goals.

Understanding these responses is also beneficial to researchers. Attachment theory began as a way to describe the relationship between an infant and the infant's caregiver. Now, a growing body of research has successfully applied attachment theory to multiple types of adult relationships. It is now accepted that adult romantic relationships act as attachment relationships and various situations can trigger attachment behavior. Understanding situations that initiate attachment behavior allows researchers to broaden the application of attachment theory.

Metts (1994) reported that of all transgressions reported by individuals, infidelity was reported as the most frequently occurring transgression. This current investigation furthers the understanding of the infidelity transgression; that is, how one might respond upon learning that a partner has committed infidelity. Previous research on

communicative responses has grouped infidelity with other hurtful events or transgressions. This research isolated infidelity and the types of infidelity, finding varying responses by type. Therefore, although infidelity is indeed a transgression and a hurtful event as Metts reports, this particular transgression and hurtful event have unique properties worth evaluating separately as responses vary within the different dimensions of infidelity (sexual, emotional, sexual and emotional).

Future research should focus on the way types of infidelity are experienced by each attachment style. This study suggests individuals respond differently to sexual infidelity versus emotional infidelity versus the combination of both sexual and emotional infidelity. Research should explore this further. A possible avenue for exploration is the emotion each attachment style experiences when faced with various forms of infidelity. Previous research has demonstrated sex differences in the perception of emotional versus sexual infidelity (see Schützwohl, 2005) based on an evolutionary view. This study suggests attachment style may have a similar effect on the way one perceives sexual versus emotional infidelity but must be further explored. Related, perhaps one attachment style experiences infidelity more frequently than other attachment styles. As reported in this investigation, many of the participants engaged in infidelity themselves. What was not examined, however, was why individuals engaged in infidelity. Specifically, was it a function of one's attachment style? Was it committed as retaliation or as revenge to a partner's initial act of infidelity? One must consider the age of the participants and what point they are in their lives regarding degree of commitment sought in romantic ties and what expectations/rules are related to those commitment expectations. Indeed, as addressed earlier in the Discussion section, with this age group,

many are seeking “Mr. or Ms. ‘Right Now’” versus “Mr. or Ms.Right.” Additional research is suggested as it relates to infidelity across the lifespan.

As romantic relationships continue, so too will infidelity. Infidelity can be a source for stress for couples, both married and dating. It is a problem seen by counselors regularly. Yet, as common as infidelity appears to be, this scenario is not completely understood. Research aimed at understanding this topic, especially the way one communicates about this issue, will prove beneficial for couples and counselors alike.

APPENDIX 1

IRB APPROVAL



**Social/Behavioral IRB – Exempt Review  
Modification Approved**

**NOTICE TO ALL RESEARCHERS:**

*Please be aware that a protocol violation (e.g., failure to submit a modification for any change) of an IRB approved protocol may result in mandatory remedial education, additional audits, re-consenting subjects, researcher probation suspension of any research protocol at issue, suspension of additional existing research protocols, invalidation of all research conducted under the research protocol at issue, and further appropriate consequences as determined by the IRB and the Institutional Officer.*

**DATE:** September 8, 2010  
**TO:** Dr. Tara Emmers-Sommer, Communication Studies  
**FROM:** Office of Research Integrity - Human Subjects  
**RE:** Notification of review by Dr. Charles Rasmussen, Co-Chair  
Protocol Title: **Attachment Style as a Predictor of Communicative Responses to Infidelity**  
Protocol #: 1003-3417

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The modification of the protocol named above has been reviewed and deemed exempt.

Modifications reviewed for this action include:

- Fall recruitment will now include these COM classes: COM 101, COM 217, COM 302, COM 400, COM 404, COM 415, COM 416 section 1, and COM 482.
- Compensation in these classes to offer 1 extra credit point.

This IRB action does not change your exempt status.

**PLEASE NOTE:**

Attached to this approval notice is the **official Informed Consent/Assent (IC/IA) Form** for this study. The IC/IA contains an official approval stamp. Only copies of this official IC/IA form may be used when obtaining consent. Please keep the original for your records.

Should there be *any* change to the protocol, it will be necessary to submit a **Modification Form** through ORI Human Subjects. No changes may be made to the existing protocol until modifications have been approved by the IRB.

If you have questions or require any assistance, please contact the Office of Research Integrity – Human Subjects at [IRB@unlv.edu](mailto:IRB@unlv.edu) or call 895-2794.

## APPENDIX 2

### SURVEY

#### Reactions to a Partner's Infidelity

Please answer the following questions. **SELECT THE SINGLE, BEST ANSWER**

1. Sex:  Male  Female
  
2. What sexual orientation do you identify with?  
 Heterosexual  Homosexual  Bisexual
3. Have you ever been, or are you currently, in a committed, romantic relationship? By committed relationship we mean one where there is an understanding, by both partners, that the relationship is monogamous.  
 Yes  No
4. Have you ever been unfaithful in a past or current committed relationship?  
 Yes  No  Unsure
5. Has your partner, in a past or current relationship, been unfaithful to you?  
 Yes  No  Unsure  I have never been in a committed relationship
6. If you answered yes to question #4, what was the outcome of the relationship?  
 I am still happily in the relationship  
 I am still in the relationship but not satisfied with the relationship  
 The relationship ended due to unrelated issues  
 The relationship ended as an indirect consequence of my partner being unfaithful (e.g., increased jealousy, lack of trust, etc. that eventually ended the relationship)  
 The relationship ended as a direct result of my partner being unfaithful

Please answer the following questions by choosing 1-7 where **1 is "not at all" and 7 is "very much."**

7. I prefer not to show a partner how I feel deep down.  
Not at all 1    2    3    4    5    6    7 Very Much
8. I worry about being abandoned.

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Much

9. I am very comfortable being close to romantic partners. (R)

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Much

10. I worry a lot about my relationships.

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Much

11. Just when my partner starts to get close to me I find myself pulling away.

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Much

12. I worry that romantic partners won't care about me as much as I care about them.

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Much

13. I get uncomfortable when a romantic partner wants to be very close.

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Much

14. I worry a fair amount about losing my partner.

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Much

15. I don't feel comfortable opening up to romantic partners.

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Much

16. I often wish that my partner's feelings for me were as strong as my feelings for him/her.

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Much

17. I want to get close to my partner, but I keep pulling back.

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Much

18. I often want to merge completely with romantic partners, and this sometimes scares them away.

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Much

19. I am nervous when partners get too close to me.

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Much

20. I worry about being alone.

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Much

21. I feel comfortable sharing my private thoughts and feelings with my partner. (R)

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Much

22. My desire to be very close sometimes scares people away.

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Much

23. I try to avoid getting too close to my partner.

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Much

24. I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by my partner.

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Much

25. I find it relatively easy to get close to my partner. (R)

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Much

26. Sometimes I feel that I force my partners to show more feeling, more commitment.

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Much

27. I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on romantic partners.

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Much

28. I do not often worry about being abandoned. (R)

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Much

29. I prefer not to be too close to romantic partners.

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Much

30. If I can't get my partner to show interest in me, I get upset or angry.

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Much

31. I tell my partner just about everything. (R)  
 Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Much
32. I find that my partner(s) don't want to get as close as I would like.  
 Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Much
33. I usually discuss my problems and concerns with my partner. (R)  
 Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Much
34. When I'm not involved in a relationship, I feel somewhat anxious and insecure.  
 Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Much
35. I feel comfortable depending on romantic partners. (R)  
 Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Much
36. I get frustrated when my partner is not around as much as I would like.  
 Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Much
37. I don't mind asking romantic partners for comfort, advice, or help. (R)  
 Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Much
38. I get frustrated if romantic partners are not available when I need them.  
 Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Much
39. It helps to turn to my romantic partner in times of need. (R)  
 Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Much
40. When romantic partners disapprove of me, I feel really bad about myself.  
 Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Much
41. I turn to my partner for many things, including comfort and reassurance. (R)  
 Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Much
42. I resent it when my partner spends time away from me.

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Much

Participants will randomly be assigned one of the following three scenarios.

*Scenario 1:* Think of a past or current committed romantic partner. Imagine that you find out that your partner has been having sex with someone else. Imagine your partner trying—and enjoying—many different sexual positions and activities with this other person. Imagine that most of your partner’s waking thoughts and fantasies are about having sex with this other person.

*Scenario 2:* Think of a past or current committed romantic partner. Imagine that you find out that your partner has fallen in love with another person. Your partner has become deeply emotionally attached to this other person, and thoughts of this other person consume your partner’s every thought.

*Scenario 3:* Think of a past or current committed romantic partner. Imagine that you find out that your partner has fallen in love with another person. Your partner has become deeply emotionally attached to this other person, and thoughts of this other person consume your partner’s every thought. .Imagine that you find out that your partner has been having sex with this other person. Imagine your partner trying—and enjoying—many different sexual positions and activities with this other person. Imagine that most of your partner’s waking thoughts and fantasies are about having sex with this other person.

After reading the above scenario, please think of **either (a)** a past, committed romantic relationship OR, (b) a current committed romantic relationship while you answer the following questions.

43. To your knowledge, has this past or current relational partner been unfaithful to you?

Yes

No

Unsure

While still thinking of your PAST OR CURRENT committed, relational partner, please answer the following questions by indicating how likely it would be that you react in the following ways by selecting 1-7 with **1 being “very unlikely” and 7 being “very likely.”**

43. I would try to talk to my partner and reach an understanding.

Very unlikely 1          2          3          4          5          6          7 Very likely

44. I would try to be romantic

Very unlikely 1          2          3          4          5          6          7 Very likely

45. I would explain my feelings to my partner.

Very unlikely 1          2          3          4          5          6          7 Very likely

46. I would date other people.

Very unlikely 1          2          3          4          5          6          7 Very likely

47. I would be patient and wait to see what would happen.

Very unlikely 1          2          3          4          5          6          7 Very likely

48. I would wait for things to improve.

Very unlikely 1          2          3          4          5          6          7 Very likely

49. I would act more affectionate towards my partner.

Very unlikely 1          2          3          4          5          6          7 Very likely

50. I would apologize for my previous behavior.

Very unlikely 1          2          3          4          5          6          7 Very likely

51. I would act rude toward my partner.

Very unlikely 1          2          3          4          5          6          7 Very likely

52. I would wish things would get better.

Very unlikely 1          2          3          4          5          6          7 Very likely

53. I would let things fall apart between us.

Very unlikely 1          2          3          4          5          6          7 Very likely

54. I would try to get even with my partner.

Very unlikely 1          2          3          4          5          6          7 Very likely

55. I would ignore my partner.

Very unlikely 1          2          3          4          5          6          7 Very likely

56. I would talk about our relationship.

Very unlikely 1          2          3          4          5          6          7 Very likely

57. I would give my partner the 'silent treatment'.

Very unlikely 1          2          3          4          5          6          7 Very likely

58. I would quarrel or argue with my partner.

Very unlikely 1          2          3          4          5          6          7 Very likely

59. I would wait and hope that things would get better.

Very unlikely 1          2          3          4          5          6          7 Very likely

60. I would seek revenge.

Very unlikely 1          2          3          4          5          6          7 Very likely

61. I would be more affectionate (e.g., be sexual).

Very unlikely 1          2          3          4          5          6          7 Very likely

62. I would make hurtful or mean comments to my partner.

Very unlikely 1          2          3          4          5          6          7 Very likely

63. I would yell or curse at my partner.

Very unlikely 1          2          3          4          5          6          7 Very likely

64. I would allow the relationship to die a slow death.

Very unlikely 1          2          3          4          5          6          7 Very likely

65. I would give my partner gifts.

Very unlikely 1          2          3          4          5          6          7 Very likely

66. I would spend more time with my partner.

Very unlikely 1          2          3          4          5          6          7 Very likely

67. I would stop calling or initiating communication.

Very unlikely 1          2          3          4          5          6          7 Very likely

68. I would initiate romantic dates and activities for us to do together.

Very unlikely 1          2          3          4          5          6          7 Very likely

69. I would share my hurt feelings with my partner.

Very unlikely 1          2          3          4          5          6          7 Very likely

70. I would suggest things that might help us.

Very unlikely 1          2          3          4          5          6          7 Very likely

71. I would calmly question my partner about his/her actions.

Very unlikely 1          2          3          4          5          6          7 Very likely

72. I would hope that if I just hang in there, things will get better.

Very unlikely 1          2          3          4          5          6          7 Very likely

73. I would tell him/her we should date others.

Very unlikely 1          2          3          4          5          6          7 Very likely

74. I would confront my partner in an accusatory manor.

Very unlikely 1          2          3          4          5          6          7 Very likely

75. I would figure out ways to get out of the relationship.

Very unlikely 1          2          3          4          5          6          7 Very likely

76. I would try to get back at my partner.

Very unlikely 1          2          3          4          5          6          7 Very likely

77. I would talk to him/her about what was bothering me.

Very unlikely 1          2          3          4          5          6          7 Very likely

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