

## ATTACHMENT STYLES AS PREDICTORS OF THE PERCEPTION OF COUPLES' COHESION

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Hazan and Shaver (1987, 1994) stated that intimate relationships represent a prototypical attachment bond in adulthood. Secure attachment involves acceptance of mutual dependency and closeness, which leads to higher relational satisfaction (Collins, Cooper, Albino, & Allard, 2002). In contrast, insecure attachment is associated with fear of closeness, lower ability to negotiate distance in a relationship, and lack of trust or a constant strong need to merge with one's partner (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

We measured married couples' level of cohesion from the innovative perspective, as proposed by Gehring, Debry, and Smith (2001). Participants symbolically placed three-dimensional figures of themselves and their partner on a computer screen, with closer placement meaning a lower score and more cohesive relationship. We also measured attachment styles and general marital satisfaction. Our hypothesis was that securely (vs. insecurely) attached participants would define their relationship as more cohesive and, consequently, more satisfying. Participants were 222 married individuals (111 females;  $M_{\text{age}} = 37.54$  years,  $SD = 10.13$ ;  $M_{\text{duration of marriage}} = 11.84$  years,  $SD = 10.19$ ).

The  $t$  test results indicated that women were less satisfied with the relationship than were men,  $t(220) = -1.952$ ,  $p < .05$ , but that they perceived their relationships as more cohesive,  $t(220) = -2.073$ ,  $p < .05$ .

Spearman's rho correlations were calculated because the distribution of scores diverged from the norm, and the results indicated that among women, cohesion correlated only with marital satisfaction ( $r_s = -.23$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Men who perceived their relationships as more cohesive were more satisfied with their marriage

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( $r_s = -.23, p < .01$ ), more secure ( $r_s = -.23, p < .05$ ), less ambivalent ( $r_s = .33, p < .001$ ), and less avoidant ( $r_s = .33, p < .001$ ) than were women.

One-way analysis of variance results indicated that there was a main effect of attachment style and of cohesion on marital satisfaction, showing higher satisfaction when cohesion and security were high and insecurity was low. We found only one interaction among groups of women who evaluated their relationship as the most and the least cohesive, which was the interaction effect of secure attachment style and cohesion on marital satisfaction,  $F(1, 64) = 3.15, p = .040$  (one-tailed). That is, among women with a less secure attachment style, those who perceived their relationship as more cohesive were more satisfied than were women who perceived their relationship as incohesive.

The results extend theoretical assumptions that secure attachment style facilitates couples' better overall functioning to the new context of indirectly perceived cohesion in a romantic relationship. Among men, perceived cohesion was associated with both marital satisfaction and attachment styles, whereas among women who were insecurely attached, closer relationships promoted higher satisfaction. It is important to replicate these findings using a larger sample.

*Keywords:* attachment style, cohesion, romantic relationship, intimate relationship, adult attachment.

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