

Adult attachment and romantic partner preference: A review

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ABSTRACT

In this literature review we explore inconsistencies in studies relating self-reported adult attachment to romantic partner preference. Such studies have tested one of three hypotheses: that individuals prefer partners with a *similar* attachment style, a *complementary* attachment style, or the attachment style most likely to offer *attachment security*. Consistent with all hypotheses, secure individuals prefer similarly secure partners. Discrepancies are found, however, regarding insecure individuals' preferences. Evidence supporting similarity and attachment-security hypotheses is primarily reported in research on attraction to hypothetical partners. Evidence supporting the complementarity hypothesis comes from research on matching between partners in long-term relationships. We suggest that individuals' working model of other may be more salient during initial attraction, whereas individuals' working model of self may be more salient during relationship maintenance. We discuss these findings, focusing on individuals' needs for self-enhancement and self-consistency in relation to partner preference and attachment style.

KEY WORDS: adult attachment • partner preference • review

“... healthy personality functioning at every age reflects, first, an individual's ability to recognize suitable figures willing and able to provide him [*sic*] with a secure base and, second, his ability to collaborate with such figures in mutually rewarding relationships” (Bowlby, 1979, p. 104).

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Finding a romantic partner and developing and maintaining a long-term relationship with that person is a key social process that many strive to achieve. The success or failure of this endeavor can have significant consequences for individual happiness and well being and so gaining insight into the processes that guide the preference and selection of a partner, as well as the development from initial attraction to a successful long-term relationship, is important for both researchers and clinicians alike. The criteria by which individuals choose romantic partners is one of the oldest topics of study in the field of personal relationships, with research identifying such factors as physical attractiveness (e.g., Berscheid, Dion, Walster, & Walster, 1971), similarity in interests and values (e.g., Byrne, 1971), physical proximity (e.g., Festinger, Schachter, & Back, 1950), and reciprocation (e.g., Sprecher, 1998) among others to be important contributors to relationship initiation. However, since Hazan and Shaver's (1987) seminal work extending Bowlby's (1969, 1973, 1980) attachment theory to the study of adult romantic relationships, a body of research has emerged exploring partner preference on the basis of adult attachment style. Partner preference within this theoretical framework has been defined in terms of initial attraction and/or maintaining relationships with partners on the basis of *similar* or *complementary* attachment styles, as well as preference based on the level of *attachment security* a partner can provide. The present paper reviews the adult attachment literature on this topic.

Adult attachment

According to Bowlby (1969), the human infant is born with a biologically programmed system evolved to allow for the formation of an emotional bond, or attachment, with a primary caregiver. This attachment system allows for the infant to use their caregiver as a "secure base" (Ainsworth & Wittig, 1969) from which to explore their environment and whom, in times of danger or perceived threat, can be used as a source of comfort and protection. The *attachment pattern* an infant develops is dependent upon the nature of their caregiver's interactions with them. Through extensive home observations and use of the strange situation, Ainsworth et al. (1971, 1978) were able to determine that in cases where the caregiver was repeatedly and consistently responsive to their child's attachment needs, that child would develop a fundamental trust in their availability, that is, a *secure* attachment pattern. In cases of inconsistent or limited responsiveness to attachment needs, Ainsworth et al. (1978) put forward that the child would be unable to develop that same trust in caregiver availability and would instead develop one of two insecure attachment patterns: an *anxious-ambivalent* or *avoidant* attachment pattern.

Fundamental to these different attachment patterns is the concept of internal working models: representations that reflect, and develop in response to, specific interpersonal experiences, particularly those with early primary caregivers (Bowlby, 1973). These representations are to be carried

by individuals into adulthood. Functioning in similar ways as in childhood, they serve to guide and influence how individuals attend to, interpret, and behave in later close relationships (Pietromonaco & Feldman Barrett, 2000). According to Bowlby (1973), individuals hold two complementary internal models, a model of self, that is, how acceptable and loveable one is in the eyes of their attachment figure, and a model of other, concerning how responsive and available one's attachment figure is perceived to be. Although originally conceptualized as falling under one of three categories (Hazan & Shaver, 1987), subsequent to this, adult attachment has also been as divided into four attachment styles (Bartholomew, 1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) emerging from two underlying dimensions: *anxiety*, concerning the extent to which individuals worry about abandonment and rejection; and *avoidance*, concerning the extent to which individuals limit intimacy with others (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998; Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000).

A *secure* attachment style is characterized by low anxiety and low avoidance. Such individuals have a positive model of the self as worthy of love and a positive model of others as generally accepting and responsive. A *preoccupied* attachment style is characterized by high anxiety and low avoidance. These individuals are said to have a negative model of the self as unworthy of love and a preoccupation with a need for acceptance from positively evaluated others. However, because of this negative model of self, their expectation of others is that of being distant and rejecting. A *dismissing-avoidant* attachment style is characterized by low anxiety and high avoidance, manifesting as discomfort with intimacy and closeness in relationships. Such individuals have a positive model of the self as worthy of love but have a negative evaluation of others as clingy, needy, and dependent. Conversely, a *fearful-avoidant* attachment style is characterized by both high anxiety and avoidance and by negative models of both the self and of others. Although both dismissing- and fearful-avoidant styles are characterized by high avoidance, dismissing-avoidant individuals downplay their need for intimacy and closeness in relationships for fear it may infringe upon the autonomy and independence they desire (Fraley, Davis, & Shaver, 1998), whereas fearful-avoidant individuals desire closeness with others but fear their rejection and so maintain distance as a means to protect themselves (Bartholomew, 1990). It should be noted at this point that the studies reviewed in this paper have primarily used Hazan and Shaver's (1987) tripartite attachment styles (secure, anxious-ambivalent, avoidant) and Bartholomew and Horowitz's (1991) four categories (secure, preoccupied, dismissing-avoidant, fearful-avoidant). For the sake of comprehensibility and consistency, we chose to use the terms *secure*, *anxious* (to represent anxious-ambivalent and preoccupied), and *avoidant* (to represent avoidant and dismissing) throughout the remainder of this paper. It should also be noted that adult attachment styles as referred to in this review are based solely on the self-reporting of feelings of trust and behaviors rather than actual observed behavior. The potential limitation of self-report methodology as a basis for the construct of attachment styles is acknowledged, but

is outside the scope of this review (see Shaver & Mikulincer, 2004, for discussion of such issues).

As the internal working models of self and other differ with attachment style, so too do attachment goals. A major function of attachment relationships is attaining an emotional sense of safety, or felt security (Sroufe & Waters, 1977), and how individuals achieve this goal is largely dependent upon their attachment style (Pietromonaco & Feldman Barrett, 2000). With their low avoidance and low anxiety, the goal of felt security for secure individuals is achieved through maintaining a balance between the subgoals of high levels of intimacy and high levels of independence. For anxious individuals characterized by low avoidance and high anxiety, felt security is pursued through attempts to maintain high levels of intimacy and low levels of independence. Lastly, for avoidant individuals, felt security is achieved through the subgoals of low levels of intimacy and high levels of independence.

Adult attachment and attraction

Whilst an individual's own adult attachment style may determine how felt security is sought, the extent to which they are successful in achieving this goal is likely dependent upon their partner's attachment style and associated behavior. From this it is plausible that individuals might demonstrate preference for partners on the basis of their attachment style. With their congruent relationship subgoals and expectations, it could be expected that secure individuals would demonstrate preference for other securely attached partners, as such a pairing would better allow for the experience of the high levels of intimacy and independence both partners desire than would a secure–insecure pairing. For insecure individuals however, whose relationship subgoals may conflict with their expectations of others, predicting partner preference becomes more problematic. Nonetheless, three hypotheses predicting partner preference have emerged within the adult attachment literature: those of *similarity*, *complementarity*, and *attachment–security*. While all three hypotheses predict secure individuals to demonstrate preference for one another, variations exist in the predicted preferences of insecure individuals. A visual overview of partner preferences as predicted by the three hypotheses for each attachment style can be found in Table 1.

Similarity hypothesis. The similarity hypothesis predicts that individuals will show preference towards partners with an attachment style similar to their own. According to this hypothesis, avoidant individuals should demonstrate preference towards similar avoidant partners while anxious individuals should demonstrate preference towards similar anxious partners. Insight into this hypothesis might be gained through the application of self-enhancement theory (Baumeister, 1982; Greenwald, 1980; Jones, 1973; Kaplan, 1975), which suggests that individuals have a strong desire for positive feedback from others, enhancing their self-image. Accordingly, pairing with a partner with a similar attachment style and relationship goals, that is, similar desired levels of intimacy and independence, would provide both individuals with positive feedback as both would respond favorably to each other's attachment (see Table 1).

TABLE 1
The theoretical relationships between the similarity, complementarity, and attachment security hypotheses in terms of relationship expectations, subgoals, self-consistency, and self-enhancement

Attachment Style	Similarity Hypothesis	Complementarity Hypothesis	Attachment Security Hypothesis
Secure Individual	Partner preference: Secure	Partner preference: Secure	Partner preference Secure and then Anxious
Relationship expectation	Confirmed	Confirmed	At least partially confirmed
Relationship subgoal	Achieved	Achieved	At least partially achieved
Self-consistency	Maintained	Maintained	At least partially maintained
Self-enhancement	Achieved	Achieved	At least partially achieved
Avoidant Individual	Partner preference: Avoidant	Partner preference: Anxious	Partner preference Secure and then Anxious
Relationship expectation	Disconfirmed	Confirmed	Partially confirmed with Secure
Relationship subgoal	Achieved	Not achieved	Confirmed with Anxious
Self-consistency	Not maintained	Maintained	Partially achieved with Secure
Self-enhancement	Achieved	Not achieved	Not achieved with Anxious
			Partially maintained with Secure
			Maintained with Anxious
			Partially achieved with Secure
			Not achieved with Anxious
Anxious Individual	Partner preference: Anxious	Partner preference: Avoidant	Partner preference Secure and then Anxious
Relationship expectation	Disconfirmed	Confirmed	Disconfirmed
Relationship subgoal	Achieved	Not achieved	Achieved
Self-consistency	Not maintained	Maintained	Not maintained
Self-enhancement	Achieved	Not achieved	Achieved

Complementary hypothesis. The complementarity hypothesis predicts preference on the basis of how well partners confirm attachment-related expectations. According to this hypothesis, anxious individuals should demonstrate preference towards avoidant partners, as such a pairing would confirm their negative expectation of others as distant in relationships, whereas avoidant individuals should demonstrate preference for anxious partners, confirming their negative expectations of others as clingy and dependent. Although the notion of individuals being drawn to and remaining in relationships with partners who confirm negative expectations may seem counterintuitive, insight into this may be provided when drawing upon self-consistency theory (Snyder & Swann, 1978; Swann, 1983; Swann & Read, 1981). According to this theory, individuals have a strong desire to maintain a predictable social reality and by interacting with others who fit in with long-held expectations this allows for the maintenance of a consistent self-image. For example, for the anxious individual, an avoidant partner would confirm their negative self-view by responding negatively to their intimacy-seeking and would confirm their negative expectations through appearing distant and rejecting. Similarly, whilst an anxious partner's high intimacy and low independence would confirm the avoidant individual's positive view of self, these would confirm their negative expectations of others as clingy and dependent (see Table 1).

Attachment–security hypothesis. Lastly, the attachment–security hypothesis predicts that all individuals, regardless of attachment style and associated relationship expectations, should demonstrate preference for secure partners over all others as such partners offer the best opportunity for felt security and therefore the best potential for forming an emotional bond (Chappell & Davis, 1998; Latty-Mann & Davis, 1996). According to this hypothesis, individuals prioritize the goal of felt security over their relationship expectations. After primary preference for secure partners, anxious partners are preferred as a second choice, while avoidant partners are preferred the least. This order of preference among the insecure attachment styles is said to be due to anxious partners demonstrating more caregiving and relationship-positive characteristics, such as their desire for closeness in their relationships, than avoidant partners, whose high avoidance and more negative views of others make forming an emotional bond more difficult (Chappell & Davis, 1998; Latty-Mann & Davis, 1996).

Within the adult attachment literature, a number of studies have explored whether individuals select partners on grounds supporting the aforementioned hypotheses. The purpose of the review that follows was not to provide conclusive evidence for or against the overall occurrence of non-random pairing based on attachment style. Rather, the purpose was to explore the evidence that supports at least one of the three above hypotheses explaining the existence of partner preference based on attachment styles and to offer suggestions as to why discrepancies exist in the literature so as to encourage the continued advancement of this field of work.

Method

We searched for relevant studies via the computer database PsychINFO and the Google Scholar search engine using the keywords *attachment*, *partner matching*, *partner preference*, *couples*, and *non-random pairing*. Additional studies were identified by inspecting the reference sections of relevant articles. In addition, requests for studies were made to key authors in this field. Only peer-reviewed publications were included for review (to the exclusion of doctoral dissertations, book chapters, and unpublished conference papers). An article was selected if partner preference or matching was directly examined and reported non-random pairing of any type on the basis of adult attachment style. This broad criterion allowed for the inclusion of studies with results supporting (or not supporting) preference/matching on the basis of similarity, complementarity, or attachment–security. This criterion excluded publications in which no matching was found, as the aim of the present review was to examine differences across studies finding evidence of non-random pairing and to identify what might account for such differences. Studies with no evidence of preference/matching were not central to this aim and, therefore, were not included.

It should be noted at this point that adult attachment research is carried out within one of two “traditions” (Simpson & Rholes, 1998). The first comes from a developmental psychology perspective that uses the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) (George, Kaplan, & Main, 1985) to assess a construct reflective of adults’ memories of childhood experiences with their caregivers. The second comes from a social psychology perspective that employs self-report attachment measures (e.g., Collins & Read, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987) to assess a construct reflective of the way individuals consciously understand how they relate to and interact with romantic partners in their everyday lives. Recent research has demonstrated a lack of overlap between these types of measures and the constructs they assess (Roisman et al, 2007; Waters, Crowell, Elliott, Corcoran, & Treboux, 2002). Therefore, for the sake of clarity, the present review focused only on studies that utilized self-report measures.

Given the criteria we utilized, 16 articles (comprising 18 studies) were identified and selected for review (see Table 2).

Results

Studies investigated partner preference from one of two approaches, that of exploring attraction, in which participants are presented with descriptions of hypothetical partners and rate their attractiveness, and that of exploring matching between actual partners by assessing both partners’ self-reported attachment styles (see Table 2). Studies using both approaches have yielded results suggesting that secure individuals show preference for similarly secure partners. As discussed earlier, however, all three hypotheses predict such matching among secure individuals. Differentiating between the

TABLE 2
Differential characteristics of key empirical research on romantic partner preference in relation to adult attachment style

Manuscript and study	Focus	Sample	Design	Attachment measure	Supporting hypothesis	Publication source
Baldwin et al (1996) Study 3	Attraction to hypothetical partner	80 Individuals Not in relationship	Experimental	Hazan & Shaver (1987) ¹	Similarity	Journal of Personality and Social Psychology (JPSP)
Frazier et al (1996) Study 1	Matching between partners	83 dating couples ARL ≈ 3-6 months	Correlational	Collins & Read (1990) ²	Similarity	Personal Relationships (PR)
Study 2	Attraction to hypothetical partner	226 individuals Not in relationship	Experimental	H & S (1987)	Similarity	
Le Poire et al (1997) Study 2	Matching between partners	104 married or dating couples ARL = 11.3 years	Correlational	Own measure ³	Similarity	Human Communication Research
Klohnen & Luo (2003)	Attraction to hypothetical partner	S1 = 420 individuals S2 = 171 individuals S3 = 160 individuals (All subjects single)	Experimental	Bartholomew & Horowitz (1991) ⁴ Brennan et al (1998) ⁵	Similarity & Attachment-Security	JPSP
Collins et al (2002)	Matching between partners	224 couples ARL = 2.85 years	Correlational/ Prospective ^A	H & S (1987)	Complementarity	Journal of Personality
Collins & Read (1990) Study 3	Matching between partners	71 dating couples ARL = 17 months	Correlational	C & R (1990)	Complementarity	JPSP
Kirkpatrick & Davis (1994)	Matching between partners	354 dating couples ARL ≈ 12-18 months	Correlational/ Longitudinal	H & S (1987)	Complementarity	JPSP
Simpson (1990)	Matching between partners	144 dating couples ARL = 13.5 months	Correlational	H & S (1987)	Complementarity	JPSP
Chappell & Davis (1998)	Attraction to hypothetical partner	282 individuals 62% in relationship	Experimental	B & H (1991)	Attachment-Security	PR

Continued opposite

TABLE 2
Continued

Manuscript and study	Focus	Sample	Design	Attachment measure	Supporting hypothesis	Publication source
Latty-Mann & Davis (1996)	Attraction to hypothetical partner	285 Cases (Adult children & their mothers)	Correlational	H & S (1987)	Attachment-Security	Journal of Social and Personal Relationships (JSPPR)
Pietromonaco & Carnelley (1994)	Attraction to hypothetical partner	227 individuals 53% in relationship	Experimental	H & S (1987)	Attachment-Security	PR
Brennan & Shaver (1995)	Matching between partners	94 dating couples	Correlational	H & S (1987)	NA (Not Applicable)	Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin (PSPB)
Carnelley et al (1996)	Matching between partners	52 dating couples ARL = 21 months	Correlational	Own measure ⁷	NA	PR
Study 2	Matching between partners	36 married couples ARL = 14 years	Correlational	Own measure	NA	
Feeney (1994)	Matching between partners	361 married couples ARL ≈ 15 years	Correlational	Feeney et al (1994) ⁶	NA	PR
Feeney (1996)	Matching between partners	229 married couples ARL ≈ 10 years	Correlational	Feeney et al (1994)	NA	PR
Senchak & Leonard (1992)	Matching between partners	322 newlywed couples	Correlational	H & S (1987)	NA	JSPPR

Note. ARL = Approximate Relationship Length at time of study (= signifies as approximate estimation based on nominal data provided).

NA = Studies marked with NA (Not Applicable) report either no or inconclusive results for insecure/insecure pairing and do not indicate clear support for any of the hypotheses. All of these studies support the notion that secure match with secure but can not differentiate between the hypotheses in terms of insecure/insecure matching.

A Baseline attachment measure was taken from one member of the dyad on average 5.47 years prior to partner matching comparison (i.e., attachment style measure proceeds partner choice in 93% on the sample)

¹ Secure, anxious-ambivalent, avoidant. ² Close, depend, anxiety, based on H & R (1987). ³ A new measure focused on determining adult attachment style based on items referring to the subject's memory of child/primary caregiver relationship; forms secure, preoccupied, dismissing-avoidant, fearful-avoidant.

⁴ Secure, preoccupied, dismissing-avoidant, fearful-avoidant.

⁵ "Anxiety" and "Avoidance" - Security is defined by low scores on both dimensions. ⁶ "Anxiety over relationships" and "comfort with closeness," based on H & R (1987). ⁷ A 48-item multidimensional measure (Carnelley et al, 1994) which forms the two composite subscales fearful-avoidance and preoccupation.

hypotheses, and therefore gaining insight into the processes guiding partner preference based on adult attachment style, requires investigating the preferences of insecure individuals and, thus, is the focus of the review.

Correlational and experimental studies of initial attraction to hypothetical partners with insecure, that is, anxious or avoidant, attachment styles have provided somewhat inconsistent results. Whilst a number of studies have found evidence for the similarity hypothesis, others have found evidence in support of preference on the basis of attachment–security. For example, Frazier, Byer, Fischer, Wright, and DeBord (1996, Study 2) found that anxious individuals demonstrated preference for potential dating partners that most resembled their own attachment characteristics. Other studies, however, conflict with this finding. For example, supporting the attachment–security hypothesis, Chappell and Davis (1998) found that individuals were most attracted to secure potential partners, followed by anxious partners, and, lastly, by avoidant partners. More recently, Klohnen and Luo (2003) proposed, and provided evidence for, a modified attachment–security hypothesis suggesting all individuals should primarily choose secure partners, but that their own attachment style should moderate secondary choices. Irrespective of their own attachment style, individuals preferred hypothetical secure partners over individuals with other attachment characteristics. In their secondary choices, both anxious and avoidant individuals chose insecure partners matching their own attachment characteristics.

Pietromonaco and Carnelley's (1994) study reported findings suggesting evidence for attraction on the basis of complementarity. It should be noted, however, that this study was carried out before the attachment–security hypothesis was developed and tested (Latty-Mann & Davis, 1996) and so it is suggested that, after re-examining the results, this study could instead be cited as supporting preference on the basis of attachment–security. Regardless of self-reported attachment style, participants reported more positive feelings after imagining a hypothetical secure partner than an anxious partner, and reported the least positive feelings after imagining an avoidant partner. In addition, all participants reported that they would enjoy a relationship most with an imagined secure partner, less if the partner was anxious, and would experience the least enjoyment if the partner was avoidant. A similar pattern emerged also when participants rated how likely a relationship with the imagined partner would result in marriage.

Divergence exists in the results of studies investigating partner matching in actual couples. For example, while Frazier et al. (1996, Study 1) and Le Poire et al. (1997, Study 2) found individuals to be matched with partners with attachment styles similar to their own, Kirkpatrick and Davis (1994) found no evidence of avoidant–avoidant or anxious–anxious pairings. Further studies appear to support this latter finding of complementarity; for example, Collins and Read (1990) and Simpson (1990) both found that individuals low in comfort with closeness (i.e., avoidant) tended to be paired with individuals high in fear of abandonment (i.e., anxious). In addition, in a prospective study, Collins, Cooper, Albino, and Allard (2002) found that individuals self-identified as avoidant at approximately age 16 were likely to be matched with a partner high in anxiety at approximately age 22.

Several other studies investigating actual partner matching, however, reported either inconclusive or null effects. Carnelley, Pietromonaco, and Jaffe (1996), for example, found that preoccupied (i.e., anxious) individuals preferred complementary avoidant partners, but avoidant women preferred both preoccupied and similarly avoidant partners. Feeney (1994, 1996) found anxious individuals to be married to partners with similarly high anxiety, but also found a high proportion of men low in comfort with closeness to be married to partners high in anxiety. Further studies (Brennan & Shaver, 1995; Senchak & Leonard, 1992) failed to obtain significant findings for any insecure–insecure matching.

What might account for the above results? Table 2 presents the characteristics of the studies included for review. The similarities and differences among them might provide some insight in answering this question.

The empirical findings supporting the similarity hypothesis are predominantly from studies investigating attraction to a hypothetical partner. Three of these studies (Baldwin, Keelan, Fehr, Enns, & Koh-Rangarajoo, 1996, Study 3; Frazier et al., 1996, Study 2; Klohnen & Luo, 2003) used samples primarily consisting of college-aged individuals not in relationships at the time of the study. Two exceptions to this include Frazier et al.'s (1996, Study 1) study focusing on actual matching between dating couples with an average relationship length of 3–6 months, and Le Poire et al.'s (1997, Study 2) study focusing on couples with an average relationship length of 11.3 years. This latter study employed a non-standard adult attachment self-report measure that included items referring to memories of primary caregiver relationships. Given this exception, it appears that evidence for preference based on similarity emerges in studies using standard adult attachment self-report measures and that employ samples of either individuals not in a relationship or couples in relatively new relationships.

In contrast, the empirical findings supporting the complementarity hypothesis are predominantly from studies focusing on matching between actual partners in comparatively longer relationships: 17 months (Collins & Read, 1990), 1–1.5 years (Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994), 13.5 months (Simpson, 1990), and 2.85 years (Collins et al., 2002) respectively.

Lastly, the empirical findings supporting the attachment–security hypothesis are based solely on studies assessing the attraction value of a hypothetical partner. Differences do exist, however, in studies' sample composition, with three using a large number of individuals in relationships at the time of the study (Chappell & Davis, 1998; Latty-Mann & Davis, 1996; Pietromonaco & Carnelley, 1994) and a fourth, demonstrating support for both attachment–security and similarity, using individuals who were not in relationships at the time of the study (Klohnen & Luo, 2003). Whether being in a relationship or not influences individuals' attraction to a hypothetical partner remains, at this stage, unclear. However, it certainly seems plausible that an individual's relationship experiences at the time of the study may have an impact on the qualities they would find appealing in a partner and as such is an issue that should be considered in future research.

Discussion

What appears to emerge from this literature review is that, when given a choice of hypothetical partners, individuals will predominantly demonstrate preference on the basis of similarity and attachment–security, but in terms of whom relationships are maintained with, preference appears based on complementarity.

Some insight into this pattern may be provided by drawing upon the findings of Klohnen and Luo (2003), who found that self-reported avoidance was more strongly associated with attraction to hypothetical partners than was anxiety. From this pattern they suggested that individuals' preferences in terms of levels of intimacy and independence (that is, where individuals fall on the avoidance dimension) are more important in attraction than how positively or negatively individuals feel about themselves within their relationships (that is, where individuals fall on the anxiety dimension). Similarly, we suggest that the working model of other (the perceived availability and likely responsiveness of an attachment figure) may be more salient to individuals during initial attraction, while the working model of self (how acceptable and lovable an individual perceives themselves to be) may be more salient to individuals in the continuation of a relationship. This is not to imply that the two models function independently, but rather that different cognitions and emotions related to either model may be more available depending on the stage of the relationship (i.e., initial attraction or following relationship development).

As discussed earlier, a major function of attachment relationships is to provide feelings of security (Sroufe & Waters, 1977). In making choices of hypothetical potential partners, individuals' relationship subgoals for achieving felt security (Pietromonaco & Feldman Barrett, 2000), that is the prospects for reaching desired levels of intimacy and independence with that partner, are likely to influence preferences. How successful individuals would be in reaching their goals would be highly dependent upon the hypothetical partners' behaviours. We argue therefore that individuals are likely more aware of how they would like a partner to be (as relating to the model of other) than of how that partner might make them think and feel about themselves later in an actual relationship (as relating to the model of self). In this respect, an anxious individual should be attracted to either secure or similarly anxious partners as their similar desire for intimacy would be attractive to them. Conversely, an avoidant individual should be attracted to either secure or similarly avoidant partners on the basis of shared desires for autonomy. With attraction found to be based on similarity and attachment–security, this is indeed what the literature suggests (e.g., Frazier et al, 1996, Study 2; Klohnen & Luo, 2003). Further insight into similarity and attachment–security preferences in attraction may be found through the application of self-enhancement theory (e.g., Baumeister, 1982; Greenwald, 1980; Jones, 1973; Kaplan, 1975), which suggests that individuals are motivated to enhance their self-image through receiving positive feedback from others. In demonstrating preference towards partners whose attachment

characteristics are *similar* to their own (that is, similar desired levels of intimacy and independence), individuals are selecting partners who would be likely to respond positively to their own attachment behaviors, providing them with the positive feedback needed for self-enhancement.

When maintaining a relationship of some duration, goals relating to the model of self are likely to be more salient to individuals, as a partner's actual daily behaviors within that relationship are likely to make feelings of how lovable and accepted an individual perceives themselves to be more apparent. In this respect, an anxious individual might maintain a relationship with an avoidant partner, as that partner's subgoals of high levels of independence and low levels of intimacy would fit with that anxious individual's negative model of self as unworthy of love, along with also confirming an expectation of others as distant. Similarly, an avoidant individual might maintain a relationship with an anxious partner, as that partner's desire for intimacy would fit with that avoidant individual's positive model of self as worthy of love, along with their expectation of close others as needy and dependent. With partners in established relationships reporting complementary attachment styles, this too is supported by the literature (e.g., Collins & Read, 1990; Collins et al., 2002; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994).

Further support for how similarity and complementarity may predominate during initial attraction or when a relationship has developed may be found in research conducted outside the framework of attachment. For example, in their review of attraction research, Berscheid and Reis (1998) concluded that the principles guiding attraction may be manifestations of a preference for the familiar and safe over the unfamiliar and potentially dangerous. In reference to this, Klohnen and Luo (2003, p.720) suggest that "finding someone who is, or who is perceived to be, secure (i.e., safe) and/or similar (i.e., familiar) should be attractive because safety and familiarity are inextricably linked to well being and survival". Indeed, in initial attraction, when the model of other is suggested to play the bigger role, a partner with *similar* attachment subgoals would appear *familiar* to the individual as such a partner's desired levels of independence and intimacy would resemble their own. However, when applied to the long-term maintenance of a relationship, when aspects of the model of self are suggested to be more salient, familiarity may instead be found in a relationship where an individual's expectations and beliefs about their own (un)lovability are confirmed. For example, for the anxious individual, whose model of self and expectations are negative, a partner who confirms their self-image and negative expectations is in fact a "familiar" experience (based on previous experiences) and that familiarity may indeed be psychologically "safe". Conversely, a partner who would contradict the anxious individual's negative self-image and relationship expectations might be less "familiar" and less "safe", since that relationship would threaten a consistent self-image. As discussed earlier, self-consistency theory (e.g., Snyder & Swann, 1978; Swann, 1987; Swann & Read, 1981) suggests that individuals are motivated to maintain a consistent self-image, achievable through interacting with others who fit in with long-held expectations. Through maintaining a relationship with a complementary

(i.e., “familiar”) partner, an individual would achieve their desire to maintain a consistent self-image, even when, as in the case of anxious individuals, that self-image is negative. Research will need to further explore these issues in order to determine how exactly motives related to self-consistency and self-enhancement might influence partner preference on the basis of attachment style. Furthermore, research will need to directly test for whether the model of other is more salient in initial attraction and the model of self more salient in relationship continuation.

A second explanation for the observed findings is that differences in the hypotheses supported emerge not because of individuals’ working models, but rather because of differences in methodology. Studies investigating initial attraction typically utilize descriptions of hypothetical partners and require participants to either rate such partners’ attractiveness or to visualize relationship experiences with them. Such a research design has been widely used in studies investigating attraction within various theoretical perspectives (e.g., Byrne, 1971; Sprecher, 1989); however, recent research has suggested that the preferences individuals report in response to hypothetical partner stimuli may not be an accurate representation of their actual preferences in a real-world context. For example, studies investigating gender in a dating context have found the differences identified in men’s and women’s hypothetical partner preferences to disappear in real-life dating scenarios (Eastwick & Finkel, 2008; Kurzban & Weeden, 2005). Such a finding suggests that individuals may not have the introspective awareness to accurately predict their actual partner preferences. Indeed, Finkel and Eastwick (2008) suggest that individuals’ stated hypothetical preferences may simply reflect a reliance on a priori theories on the personal qualities deemed desirable in a partner. In the studies examining initial attraction in the current review, the finding of partner preference on the basis of similarity and attachment–security may have emerged not because of a greater salience of model of other, but rather may just be an artifact of the research design. In this sense, the preferences individuals report in response to hypothetical partners may not be representative of the relationship choices they would make in reality. Their hypothetical choices may instead represent judgments solely based on a priori beliefs of the types of characteristics they believe they might find appealing, without true introspection on those choices. For example, when presented with descriptions of hypothetical partners, anxious individuals might read a description of an avoidant partner and believe they would react negatively to their distant behavior. In an actual relationship, however, an avoidant partner’s behavior may also confirm negative relationship expectations and thus help maintain self-consistency for the anxious individual. It is unlikely that most individuals have such introspection when asked about hypothetical partners.

Furthermore, presenting individuals with descriptions of hypothetical partners that correspond to different attachment styles may be overly simplistic. Failing to consider additional factors found to be important in attraction research, such as physical appearance (e.g., Berscheid et al., 1971), similarity in interests (e.g., Byrne, 1971), reciprocation (e.g. Sprecher, 1998),

and wealth and resources (e.g., Buss, 1989), might further account for the differences in hypotheses supported between studies focusing on attraction and those focusing on actual matching. The methodology employed in studies on attraction may simply be lacking the real-world component that studies investigating actual partner matching possess. Future studies investigating initial attraction on the basis of attachment style would benefit from examining such processes in a real-life context, as it is through observing the initiation and development of real relationships that researchers will gain a more accurate insight into how individuals' attachment styles might drive their partner preferences.

There are conceptual caveats that must be taken into account not only when considering the above conclusions, but also in any future research carried out addressing partner preference on the basis of self-reported attachment style. Of particular importance are the issues of the structural nature and stability of individuals' attachment styles and related working models. Collins and Read (1994) put forward that an individual's attachment style and working models should not be conceptualized in the singular, but, rather, that adult attachment representations should be thought of as a network of interconnected models hierarchical in structure. They argue that at the top of this hierarchy are an individual's general attachment representations of self and other, followed by *domain-specific* models corresponding to particular kinds of relationships (e.g., romantic relationships), and followed lastly by *relationship-specific* models that develop as a result of new interpersonal experiences. Subsequent research has provided evidence to suggest that adults may indeed endorse more than one attachment style in their relationships (e.g., La Guardia, Ryan, Couchman, & Deci, 2000; Overall, Fletcher, & Friesen, 2003; Ross & Spinner, 2001). Additional research addressing attachment style stability has found evidence to suggest a susceptibility to change over time (e.g., Duemmler & Kobak, 2001) as information from new relationship experiences is accommodated by and integrated into existing models (see Davila & Cobb, 2004).

Both these issues have great potential to confound the results of studies looking at actual partner matching. If indeed self-reported adult attachment style can be influenced by a current relationship (either through the integrating of new experiences into existing models or through the formation of a new relationship-specific model), this raises the significant question of whether the results of studies looking at matching between actual couples are truly reflecting individuals' partner choices. That is, is the attachment style an individual is self-reporting at the time of measurement the same attachment style that influenced partner choice and relationship maintenance, or is that self-reported attachment style actually the result of experiences within that particular relationship? Future research might address this issue through the use of prospective longitudinal studies. In order to distinguish *cause* from *effect*, this type of research might follow individuals to assess self-reported attachment styles over time and establish how individual *attachment trajectories* (Duemmler & Kobak, 2001; Pietromonaco & Feldman Barrett, 2000) are influenced by actual variations in romantic

relationship experiences. That is, by assessing individuals' attachment styles from before entering a romantic relationship through to that relationship ending, and additionally over the course of any subsequent relationships, researchers may be better able to disentangle the degree to which an individual's attachment style plays a role in their choice of partner from the degree to which the development of their relationship affects how they see themselves.

There are but a few studies that have longitudinally monitored individual adult attachment style fluctuations and change over the course of a relationship (e.g., Duemmler & Kobak, 2001). While these studies have found individuals to become more secure over time, one could surmise that different attachment pairings might produce different attachment change outcomes. For example, would a secure–anxious pairing lead the anxious individual to self-report as similarly secure over time, as their partner's high intimacy would disconfirm their negative model of self as unworthy of love? Or would this eventually lead to a complementary pairing, with the secure individual self-reporting as more avoidant over time due to their anxious partner's combined low-independence and high-intimacy? Furthermore, after what length of time of being in the relationship would individuals begin having such an influence on their partners' self-reported attachment style? Indeed, of the six studies included in the current review in which results were inconclusive, three comprised samples of married couples with approximate relationship lengths of 14 years (Carnelley et al., 1996, Study 2), 15 years (Feeney, 1994), and 10 years (Feeney, 1996), with a fourth examining matching in newlywed couples (Senchak & Leonard, 1992). That these studies' results were inconclusive in finding support for any hypothesis, while the results from studies investigating relationships of comparatively shorter length (e.g., Collins & Read, 1990; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994) supported complementarity, suggests that individuals' attachment may indeed change the longer they are in a relationship. Future research will need to identify if and when such changes occur and to examine the specific changes in each type of attachment pairing.

A limitation that needs to be considered is that of the differences in attachment classifications used in the studies reviewed. Where some studies measured attachment as classified into three attachment categories (secure, anxious, avoidant) (e.g., Frazier et al, 1996; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994; Latty-Mann & Davis, 1996), others measured attachment using Bartholomew and Horowitz's (1991) four-style classification (secure, preoccupied, dismissing–avoidant, fearful–avoidant) (e.g., Chappell & Davis, 1998; Klohnen & Luo, 2003). Others still used dimensional rather than categorical measures of attachment, in which individuals' levels of avoidance/comfort with closeness and anxiety are assessed (e.g., Carnelley et al., 1996; Feeney, 1994). Research has suggested that attachment categories across measures do not always correlate. For example, Crowell and Treboux (1995) report that although Hazan and Shaver's (1987) three-category measure and Bartholomew and Horowitz's (1991) four-category measure are highly related in terms of method of self-classification, differences exist in classifications made across

the insecure categories, with research finding individuals self-reporting as anxious–ambivalent in the former measure to self-report as fearful–avoidant in the latter (see Brennan, Shaver, & Tobey, 1991). The conclusions drawn in the present review need to be considered with this limitation in mind.

A related issue is the use of categorical measures. Research suggests dimensional measures to be more accurate than categorical measures (e.g., Fraley et al., 2000); with several of the studies in the present review relying on categorical assessment, future research testing the notions put forward here concerning self–other models as more salient at different times in a relationship would benefit from employing dimensional attachment measures.

Despite these limitations, we hope this review of the literature and the questions raised will inspire researchers to extend this line of work further. A major needed piece of work would be a rigorous prospective longitudinal study that followed individuals from before entering relationships across a long period of time.

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