

THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN ATTACHMENT STYLE AND UNI- AND BI-  
DIRECTIONAL PURSUER-DISTANCER PATTERNS IN COUPLES: A CLINICAL  
SAMPLE OF COUPLES IN COUNSELING

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L. Christopher Davies

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Karen Rosen

Sandra Stith

Eric McCollum

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by

Lorin Christopher Davies  
Karen Rosen, Chairperson  
Department of Human Development  
(ABSTRACT)

This study examined the relationship between adult attachment style and pursuer-distancer patterns in couples. Both uni- and bi-directional pursuer-distancer patterns were studied. Participants were 67 individuals (including 32 couples) in therapy. Each partner, independent of the other, completed an anonymous questionnaire containing the Multi-item Measure of Adult Romantic Attachment (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998) and a four-item measure of pursuer-distancer pattern designed for this study. The relationship between male dismissing attachment style and the presence of a pursuer-distancer pattern in the couple approached significance. Analyses of attachment style and the specific direction of the pursuer-distancer pattern as a couple-level variable were non-significant. However, when self-report of pursuer-distancer pattern was analyzed as an individual-level variable, a significant relationship was found between pursuing and a preoccupied attachment style and between distancing and a dismissing attachment style. Fearful attachment style was related to bi-directional pursuer-distancer pattern when measured by partner's report but not when measured by self-report. Dismissing and fearful attachment styles in males were related to lower relationship satisfaction in males and females. Pursuer-distancer patterns (particularly female-pursue and bi-directional patterns) were significantly related to lower relationship satisfaction in males and females. No relationship was found between attachment style or pursuer-distancer pattern report and the gender of the participant. Implications for treating pursuer-distancer patterns couples are discussed.

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## Chapter I

### Introduction

#### *Background*

For partners in healthy relationships, the cycle between relational closeness and distance resembles a sort of dance, with partners engaging one another to satisfy the desire for closeness and then mutually withdrawing to integrate the experience into their respective senses of self (Lichtenberg, 1991; VanLear, 1998). However, when romantic partners are asynchronous in this cycle or when they have differing schemas regarding closeness and distance, the sequence becomes more of a chase than a dance. One partner puts pressure on the other for closeness, leading to the second partner's withdrawal, and thus the cycle perpetuates itself. Anxiety over the level of closeness or distance drives both the pursuer and the distancer, the pursuer fearing loss of or abandonment by the other partner and the distancer fearing either eventual rejection or loss of autonomy or identity (Christensen, 1988; Feeney, 1999; Napier, 1978). However, despite the fact that this pursuer-distancer pattern (also called demand-withdraw pattern) is widely recognized in the literature and by clinicians, little empirical research has been conducted to investigate its causes and correlates.

Attachment may be a factor in the perpetuation of pursuer-distancer behaviors. The constructs of attachment and of child and adult attachment styles are the foci of a vast body of research and other literature, a full review of which is beyond the scope of this paper. Some authors have explained the theoretical significance of partners' attachment styles on pursuer-distancer patterns in couples, including speculation into an attachment mechanism in the development of pursuer-distancer patterns. LePoire, et al.

(1997) found that dismissive partners tend to disclose in ways that decrease intimacy (e.g., less disclosure and less emotional honesty in disclosure), and preoccupied partners tend to disclose in ways that increase intimacy (e.g., more disclosure, less selectivity over what they disclose, and more emotionality in disclosure). Pistole (1994) speculates that the combination of one partner with a preoccupied attachment style with another partner with a dismissing style may be particularly conducive to a pursuer-distancer pattern, since each partner's attachment-related reactions trigger those of the other partner. For instance, a preoccupied partner, characterized by fear of abandonment, may be more likely to pursue in response to distance, whereas a distancing or fearful partner, characterized as distrusting of or overwhelmed by others, may be more likely to withdraw in response to closeness. However, neither of the above articles involved the empirical study of the pursuer-distancer pattern. The present review of the literature, which was thorough but not necessarily exhaustive (utilizing multiple searches in the PsychINFO database, searches of cited references in articles found via database search, and other sources), revealed only two empirical studies that have examined the relationship between attachment style and the pursuer-distancer pattern.

Feeney (1999) examined the unstructured reports of 72 dating couples regarding their relationships. She found that attachment style of each partner (measured by self-assessment into one of four categories) was related to difference in partners' needs for closeness/distance (measured by unstructured report). Securely attached couples were less likely to report a difference in needs than were couples in which one or both partners was insecurely attached, although groups were of insufficient size to allow analyses of each specific attachment style. However, the greatest proportion of those wanting more

closeness was found in the preoccupied-type women group, and the lowest proportion was found in the dismissing-type men group, although no statistically significant differences were found. This study also did not specify whether couples experienced the reported difference in needs for closeness as a self-perpetuating cycle (i.e., one partner's pursuit leading to the other's withdrawal and vice versa), as is the case in pursuer-distancer patterns.

Within a sample of 64 monogamous dating, cohabitating, or married couples, Rodriguez (2000) examined whether the dissimilarity of each partner's attachment style from that of the other partner (using a four-category typology measured by questionnaire instruments) was related to whether a pursuer-distancer pattern exists in the couple (measured by the Communication Patterns Questionnaire; CPQ; Christensen, 1988). The relationship was not significant. However, the presence of a pursuer-distancer pattern (specifically woman-demand/man-withdraw) was found to be related to the presence of an anxious attachment style. A limitation of this study is that the CPQ only measures couple interactions taking place during the phases of discussion of a problem between the couple, and the generalizability of the CPQ to closeness struggles in general is questionable. This study is also limited by a small sample size, which may be the reason for the finding of few significant relationships.

No studies on the relationship between attachment style and pursuer-distancer patterns have yet been conducted that have had sufficient numbers of insecurely attached participants to permit analyses to be conducted successfully or that have utilized an instrument designed to assess globally for pursuer-distancer relationships. The present study addresses this gap in the literature.

### *Rationale*

Both of the above studies examined non-clinical samples. LePoire, et al. (1997) note that the various insecure attachment styles occur within normal samples in frequencies that are typically too small to allow for comparisons of all combinations of styles. This is one possible reason why no previous studies have found a significant relationship between specific attachment types and pursuer-distancer patterns. No studies on the relationship between attachment style and pursuer-distancer patterns have previously been conducted using a sample of clinical couples. Furthermore, no studies have been previously conducted that examine a bi-directional pursuer-distancer pattern (in which the role of pursuer/distancer alternates between partners). This pattern, though commonly observed by couples counselors, is widely ignored in the literature and has not been researched empirically prior to the present study. Napier (1988) and Pistole (1994) have each noted that partners in a pursuer-distancer cycle may sometimes switch roles, with the pursuer becoming the distancer and vice versa. For example, the pursuer may respond to an act of withdrawal from the other partner by withdrawing as well in an effort to protect him or herself from being hurt. Some other situational factors may also change, such as the pursuer working longer hours, which would at least temporarily make the pursuer less available. Under such circumstances, the former distancer may feel that there is too much distance in the relationship and become the pursuer.

There is a need for research that considers both uni- and bi-directional pursuer-distancer patterns and that utilizes samples with a sufficient concentration of insecurely-attached participants to provide adequate power for comparative analyses to be made between insecure types. The present study uses a clinical sample of couples that contains



a higher concentration of individuals with insecure attachment styles. A clinical sample is also particularly relevant, given that the study has implications in couples therapy. This study also involves assessment of both uni- and bi-directional pursuer-distancer patterns to determine, first, if the two patterns exist as distinct phenomena and to determine, secondly, the relationship between both types of pursuer-distancer patterns and all four attachment styles.

### *Significance of the Problem*

In a study by Sullaway and Christensen and in a later study by Christensen, Sullaway, and King (both cited in Christensen, 1988), couples' endorsements of a pursuer-distancer pattern as present in the relationship (as was the case for more than half of the couples participating in the former study) was significantly related to lower marital satisfaction. The latter study indicated the pursuer role to be more common among female partners and the distancer role to be more common among males. Because pursuer-distancer patterns are prevalent and correlated with relational distress, their assessment and treatment is of significant clinical importance. An implication of the present study is that awareness of clients' attachment styles may be useful for clinicians in noticing, conceptualizing, and treating pursuer-distancer patterns in couples. Research into the relationship between these patterns and attachment styles may provide a basis for studies regarding possible attachment mechanisms in the development and maintenance of these patterns. Emotion-focused Therapy, which focuses on attachment issues in couples' dysfunctional cycles (Johnson & Sims, 2000), is a specific model of Marriage and Family Therapy that may in the future be shown to have particular efficacy in treating couples with pursuer-distancer patterns.

### *Theoretical framework*

The present study approaches the problem from an attachment framework, which rests on the assumption that early and continued experience of individuals with their caregivers and the resulting schemata influence relationships throughout the life span and that attachment issues influence the seeking of closeness and distance in romantic relationships. Attachment is the “biologically based tendency to seek proximity to a preferred figure” (Pistole, 1994, p.148). It is a survival mechanism, operating from infancy throughout the life span, through which the individual can explore the environment using the attachment figure as a “secure base”, a source of safety and affect regulation (Bowlby, 1988). Infants and toddlers can develop anxious behaviors as a learned response to the unavailability of the attachment figure. Protest reactions (such as crying and clinging) to attachment figure unavailability are another part of the survival function of attachment. Based on early experiences with attachment figures, individuals develop somewhat stable schemas or “working models” of attachment, including beliefs and expectations about the availability of others to provide care and about the inherent likelihood of self as being worthy of or receiving care (Pistole, 1994).

Ainsworth (1978) developed a system for categorizing children’s styles of attachment into three types: secure, anxious-ambivalent, and avoidant. Main, et al. (1985) extrapolated child attachment styles to adult relationships, identifying adult attachment styles that correspond with Ainsworth’s typology of childhood attachment. Hazan and Shaver (1987) developed a three-category typology for categorizing adult attachment style (secure, preoccupied, and dismissing), to which a fourth category (fearful) was later added by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991). According to

Bartholomew and Horowitz, securely attached adults are characterized by comfort with both intimacy and independence and have a positive working model of self and of others. Preoccupied individuals are anxious and clingy in relationships, are preoccupied with the relationship, and have a negative working model of self and a positive working model of others. Dismissing individuals avoid intimacy as it poses to them a threat of the loss of self, autonomy, and independence. They have a positive working model of self and a negative working model of others. Finally, fearful individuals avoid intimacy out of a fear that they will be hurt by the other person or by eventual abandonment. They have a negative working model of both self and others.

The above-mentioned relational patterns associated with each attachment style have direct theoretical bearing on the pursuer-distancer pattern. While there are most likely many factors involved in the development of dyadic patterns, the research, though still in the early phase, suggests that attachment may be an important piece to explaining and treating pursuer-distancer patterns.

#### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of the present study is to explore the relationship between pursuer-distancer patterns and attachment style, distinguishing between uni- and bi-directional pursuer-distancer patterns and investigating a clinical sample. Specifically, the present study investigated the relationships between each of the various adult attachment styles and each type of pursuer-distancer pattern, including which attachment styles are related to the occurrence of uni-directional and bi-directional pursuer-distancer patterns in the couple.

The study utilized questionnaires to assess the attachment styles and reported presence of uni- and bi-directional pursuer-distancer partners in pairs of individuals who are seeking couples therapy. Attachment style groupings were compared based on the frequencies of occurrence of each type of pursuer-distancer pattern.

### *Research Questions*

This study addressed the following questions: First, is there a difference between securely and insecurely attached groups of individuals in the relative frequency of the presence of uni- and bi-directional pursuer-distancer patterns in their relationships? Second, is there a relationship between attachment style and uni-directional pursuer-distancer patterns or between attachment style and bi-directional pursuer-distancer patterns? Third, is there a relationship between the attachment dimensions of avoidance and anxiety and pursuer-distancer patterns. Fourth, is there a relationship between individuals' relationship satisfaction and attachment style? Fifth, is there a relationship between individuals' relationship satisfaction and a pursuer-distancer pattern in the relationship? (The fourth and fifth research questions replicate previous research.)

## Chapter II

### Literature Review

The purpose of the present study is to explore the relationship between adult attachment style and pursuer-distancer patterns in couples in therapy. Sixty-seven client participants (including 32 couples) were referred for participation in the study by 17 therapists practicing in the Washington, DC area. Client participants completed a self-report questionnaire measuring attachment style, pursuer-distancer patterns, relationship satisfaction, and demographic factors.

#### *Overview*

Within healthy romantic relationships, partners typically cycle between engaging one another to satisfy the desire for closeness and connection and then mutually withdrawing to integrate the experience into their respective senses of self (Lichtenberg, 1991; VanLear, 1991). Dialectical theory emphasizes the opposing forces of processes in human experience. Baxter (1990) suggests that the autonomy-connection dichotomy is the dialectical contradiction that is most central to interpersonal relationships. A relationship cannot exist without fostering connection and giving up some autonomy, but too much connection hurts a relationship through loss of individuals' identities. Cyclical alternations between connection and autonomy may take place over time in couples as a result of these contradicting forces.

For partners in healthy relationships, the cycle between relational closeness and distance resembles a sort of dance. However, when romantic partners are asynchronous in this cycle or when they have differing schemas regarding closeness and distance, the sequence becomes more of a chase than a dance. The two partners become polarized in

ostensibly opposite roles. One partner puts pressure on the other for closeness, leading to the second partner's withdrawal, and the cycle perpetuates itself. Despite the seeming disparity of partners' roles, anxiety over the level of closeness or distance drives both the pursuer and the distancer, the pursuer fearing loss of or abandonment by the other partner and the distancer fearing either eventual rejection or loss of autonomy or identity (Christensen, 1988; Feeney, 1999; Napier, 1978). However, despite the fact that this pursuer-distancer pattern is recognized in the literature and by clinicians, little empirical research has been conducted to investigate its causes and correlates.

Intergenerational theory provides a possible explanation for pursuer-distancer patterns in the constructs of differentiation and family-of-origin patterns (Bowen, 1978). Differentiation refers to the development and functioning of the self, independent of processes with others and independent of the general emotional field of the encompassing system (e.g., the family or the couple). Well-differentiated individuals are secure in their identities and are able to experience emotions and make decisions independent of the system. Although Bowen himself offers no explanation for pursuer-distancer patterns specifically, other authors have speculated that pursuer-distancer patterns might stem from a poorly developed sense of self (Lichtenberg, 1991) or from similar parent-child patterns in the family of origin (Napier, 1978). However, the relationship between pursuer-distancer patterns and Bowenian constructs of differentiation, enmeshment, disengagement, and family of origin have not yet been researched empirically.

Adult attachment offers another possible explanation for pursuer-distancer patterns in couples. Attachment is the "biologically based tendency to seek proximity to a preferred figure" (Pistole, 1994, p.148). Given that the themes of fear of abandonment,

rejection, proximity seeking, and separation anxiety are common to theories of attachment and of pursuer-distancer patterns, some authors have hypothesized that attachment mechanisms are at work in couples with pursuer-distancer patterns. Pistole (1994) speculates that coupling one partner with a preoccupied attachment style (characterized by a fear of abandonment and sense of dependence on attachment figures) with another partner with a dismissing style (characterized by a mistrust of others and a preference for self-sufficiency) may be particularly conducive to a pursuer-distancer pattern, since each partner's attachment-related reactions trigger those of the other partner. For instance, a preoccupied partner, who tends to cling and fear abandonment, may be more likely to pursue in response to perceived unavailability of the other partner. Conversely, a distancing or fearful partner, who tends to distrust others and fear losing autonomy (or possibly identity), may be more likely to withdraw in response to demands for closeness.

Only two empirical studies exist that investigate adult attachment and pursuer-distancer patterns (Feeney, 1999; Rodriguez, 2000). Both of these studies used non-clinical samples containing an insufficient number of participants with each insecure style of attachment to determine the relationship between pursuer-distancer patterns and specific attachment styles. Such a study has yet to be conducted using a clinical sample. Furthermore, no empirical studies have been conducted that examine a bi-directional pursuer-distancer pattern (in which the role of pursuer/distancer alternates between partners). Napier (1978) and Pistole (1994) have each noted that partners in a pursuer-distancer cycle may sometimes switch roles, with the pursuer becoming the distancer and vice versa. For example, the pursuer may withdraw in response to an act of withdrawal

from the other partner in an effort to protect him or herself from being hurt. Some other situational factors may also change, such as the pursuer working longer hours, which would at least temporarily make the pursuer less available. Under such circumstances, the former distancer may feel that there is too much distance in the relationship and become the pursuer.

The purpose of the present study is to describe the relationship between each of the various styles of attachment and uni- and bi-directional pursuer-distancer patterns in couples. LePoire, et al. (1997) note that the various insecure attachment styles occur within normal samples in frequencies that are typically too small to allow for full comparisons to be made. For this reason, and because research into the relationship between adult attachment and pursuer-distancer patterns has not been conducted within the population of couples in therapy, the present study uses a clinical sample containing a greater concentration of insecurely attached individuals than in normal populations. A clinical sample also has particularly relevant implications for couples therapy.

The constructs of attachment and of child and adult attachment styles are the foci of a vast body of research and other literature, a full review of which is beyond the scope of this chapter. This chapter reviews the literature on attachment as it pertains to couples relationships, particularly as it pertains to the pursuit of intimacy or independence in the relationship. This literature review, which was thorough but not necessarily exhaustive, began with multiple searches in the PsychINFO computer database. The relevant articles found in this search were also examined for references to other potentially relevant articles, and additional relevant articles were also found through other sources.



### *Pursuer-distancer Patterns*

Sullaway and Christensen found that more than half of the normal couples in their study reported the presence of pursuer-distancer patterns in their relationship (as cited in Christensen, 1988). Research suggests that pursuer-distancer patterns are significantly related to lower marital satisfaction (Christensen, 1988; Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Christensen & Shenk, 1991; Heavey, Christensen, & Malamuth, 1995). Because pursuer-distancer patterns are prevalent and correlated with relational distress, their assessment and treatment is of significant clinical importance. An implication of the present study is that awareness of clients' attachment styles may be useful for clinicians in noticing, conceptualizing, and treating pursuer-distancer patterns in couples. Research into the relationship between these patterns and attachment styles may provide a basis for studies regarding possible attachment mechanisms in the development and maintenance of these patterns.

Emotion-focused Therapy, which focuses on attachment issues in couples' dysfunctional cycles (Johnson & Sims, 2000), is a specific model of Marriage and Family Therapy that may in the future be shown to have particular efficacy in treating couples with pursuer-distancer patterns. Johnson and Greenberg (1992) propose emotion-focused treatment for pursuer-distancer and other dysfunctional dyadic patterns including highlighting and validating the attachment-related issues (such as loss, fear, and abandonment) that are present in the couple and helping the couple identify and modify the rigid coping strategies that maintain the pattern.

Pursuer-distancer patterns represent a struggle over emotional closeness and distance (Napier, 1978). However, pursuers and distancers may not be as dissimilar as

their polarized roles suggest. Both lack the ability to self-regulate closeness and intimacy, relying upon the other partner in the relationship to regulate closeness (Stosny, 1995).

Distancers are spared having to seek closeness and risk rejection, and pursuers are spared having to create space for autonomy.

Napier (1978) noted that covert patterns might exist in pursuing and distancing partners. The partner in the pursuing role may have a covert fear of closeness, which is assuaged by the withdrawal of his or her partner in response to demands for closeness. Similarly, a seemingly distancing partner may have a covert fear of abandonment and may find reassurance in the fact that his or her partner pursues closeness in response to distancing behaviors. Napier offers this as an explanation for the fact that pursuers and distancers often swap roles from time to time, reversing the pattern.

Another type of cyclical polarized dyadic interaction pattern is the demand-withdraw (or blame-withdraw) pattern, in which one partner typically makes demands or complaints regarding a particular problem involving the couple and the other partner withdraws or ignores (Christensen, 1988; Greenberg, 2002). This pattern is a sister pattern to the pursuer-distancer pattern in that one partner is consistently the one doing all of the “chasing”. In fact, the demand-withdraw pattern is sometimes conceptualized as a context-specific subtype of the pursuer-distancer pattern. Complaints or demands can be isomorphic with separation protest and bids for closeness, and Greenberg posits that they may sometimes be enacted to serve that very function. For this reason, some authors use the two terms (demand-withdraw and pursuer-distancer) almost synonymously (Christensen, 1988; Rodriguez, 2000). Other authors, such as Greenberg, make a soft distinction between the patterns while recognizing that there can be overlap between

them. Christensen found a high intercorrelation between the presence of these and other similar patterns in the self-reports of 61 married couples.

The present study is based on the assumption that the two patterns are functionally similar and that the demand-withdraw pattern is sometimes a manifestation of the pursuer-distancer pattern in a specific context, namely, interaction around a specific complaint or problem relevant to the couple. However, demand-withdraw patterns can in some cases be a function of dominance, rather than intimacy (Greenberg, 2002). The present study rests on the assumption that of the two patterns, pursuer-distancer patterns are more relevant to issues of closeness and autonomy. Therefore, emphasis in this study will be placed on pursuer-distancer patterns, and this term will be considered inclusive of demand-withdraw patterns.

*Research in pursuer-distancer patterns.* Most of the literature on pursuer-distancer patterns is hypothetical in nature, and little empirical research on the phenomenon has been conducted. Some empirical studies have been conducted examining pursuer-distancer patterns in relation to marital satisfaction.

Christensen, King, and Sullaway (as cited in Christensen, 1988) compared the relationship satisfaction scores of 61 married couples with their self-reports of the presence of several interaction patterns. They found that demand-withdraw and engage-avoid patterns, among others, were strongly and significantly related to lower relationship satisfaction.

Christensen and Heavey (1990) examined a sample of 31 families, some with boys diagnosed with ADHD and some with boys having no psychiatric diagnoses. In looking at demand-withdraw patterns in the couples, they found mother-demand and

father-withdraw to be significantly more common than the reverse, both according to self-report and observer ratings. Mother-demand and father-withdraw was especially more common than the reverse when the issue discussed was initiated by the mother.

However, the reverse was not significantly more common when the issue was the father's, suggesting that the gender differences in the pattern are not context specific. A greater presence of the demand-withdraw pattern (especially mother-demand/father-withdraw) was related to lower self-reported relationship satisfaction. This held true for demand-withdraw measured by self-report and by observer ratings.

Christensen and Shenk (1991) supported earlier findings by comparing groups of divorcing couples (n=22), clinical couples (n=15), and "happy" couples (n=25). They found that both the divorcing and clinical groups reported significantly more wife-demand/husband-withdraw interactions than did the happy group. Significantly more discrepancies between partners in their reports of desire for closeness and independence were observed among the divorcing and clinical groups, compared to the happy group. The latter finding was stronger among divorcing couples than among clinical couples, although only at a marginal level of significance.

The above studies on pursuer-distancer patterns and relationship satisfaction are all correlational, precluding inferences of causality or direction of effect. Heavey, Christensen, and Malamuth (1995) addressed this limitation by using a repeated measures design to examine the relationship between demand-withdraw interaction patterns and subsequent changes in relationship satisfaction. They observed 48 couples as they each discussed issues relevant to their specific relationship. Couples also completed a self-report measure of relationship satisfaction. Six weeks later, couples were mailed the

same relationship satisfaction questionnaire. Thirty-six couples returned the completed questionnaire. Demandingness and withdrawal were related to relationship satisfaction at both time 1 and time 2. In particular, male withdrawal predicted a decrease in female relationship satisfaction from time 1 to time 2. More particularly, a pattern of woman-demand and man-withdraw during the discussion of the woman's issue predicted a decrease in female relationship satisfaction. No other significant relationships were found. No differences were found when comparing married to unmarried couples. Although the design of the study does not allow definite causal inferences, it suggests that demand-withdraw patterns may have a deleterious effect on relationship satisfaction.

In another study, Rodriguez (2000) showed that demand-withdraw patterns (particularly woman-demand/man-withdraw) in couples were significantly related to lower relationship satisfaction. This finding supports the findings of Christensen, King, and Sullaway (as cited in Christensen, 1988), Christensen and Heavey (1990), and Heavey, Christensen, and Malamuth (1995).

### *Attachment*

Research on the concept of attachment began with the work of Bowlby who originated the concept of attachment. Bowlby (1979) defined attachment as an evolution-based survival mechanism by which infants elicit nurture and protection from their caregivers. In a three-volume work on attachment, Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1980), through observations of infants and their caregivers, identified three stages of infant response to separation from their caregiver. The first, *protest*, involves crying, clinging, searching, and resistance to soothing from others. The second, *despair*, involves sadness and passive behavior. The third, *detachment*, involves active avoidance of the caregiver upon

her return. Infants who are able to successfully attach to caregivers use caregivers as a source of security and affect regulation. This allows the infant to confidently explore his or her environment with the caregiver as a “secure base” to which the infant may return from time to time. Bowlby’s conceptualization of attachment as an evolution-based mechanism arose from the similarity he observed between attachment behaviors such as protest and despair exhibited by humans and those exhibited by other primates.

Bowlby (1973) proposed that infants develop, through early experience with caregivers, mental “working models” or paradigms regarding the availability of caregivers. These working models include expectations that give rise to patterns in the infant’s attachment behaviors. The working model includes expectations of the likelihood of others to provide care when needed as well as the likelihood or worthiness of the self to be the recipient of care and nurturing.

*Typology of attachment.* Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall (1978) built upon the work of Bowlby by developing a system for categorizing children’s styles of attachment. Ainsworth and her colleagues developed a research design known as the “strange situation” by which they conducted laboratory observations of infants and their mothers. In the strange situation design, the infant is placed with his or her mother in a toy-filled observation room. The design proceeds as follows: the mother is in the room with the infant; a stranger enters the room; the mother leaves the room, and the stranger remains with the infant; the mother returns to the room. The infant’s behavior is observed in each of these stages. Based on these observations, Ainsworth and her colleagues defined three types or categories of infant attachment: secure (“type B”), avoidant (“type A”), and anxious/ambivalent (“type C”).

Securely attached infants exhibit distress upon separation from the caregiver but are accepting of and easily soothed by the caregiver upon her return. Avoidant infants exhibit behaviors comparable to what Bowlby termed detachment. They are not visibly distressed by the caregiver's departure and are rejecting of the caregiver and display active avoidance behaviors upon her return. Anxious/ambivalent infants are more typically frightened by the presence of the stranger, exhibit distress and clinging behavior in response to the caregiver's departure, are not easily soothed, and show a mixture of diffuse proximity seeking and anger to the caregiver upon her return. Mothers of securely attached infants tend to be comfortable with physical contact with the infant and sensitive to the infant's needs. Mothers of avoidant infants tend to be uncomfortable with physical contact, prone to respond with anger to the infant, and insensitive to the needs of the infant. Mothers of anxious/ambivalent infants are also typically insensitive to the infant's needs and are inconsistent in the amount of care they provide.

Supporting the suspicions of Bowlby and Ainsworth that avoidant infants were defensively so and not merely indifferent to the departure of the caregiver, Sroufe and Waters (1977) found evidence that avoidance behaviors are coping mechanisms to deal with unpleasant affect such as separation anxiety. They observed infants who display avoidant behaviors, such as averting gaze from caregivers. These behaviors were found to be preceded by heart rate increase. Furthermore, heart rate decreased following the enacting of these behaviors.

Main (1981) and Main and Weston (1982) speculate that avoidant infants feel threatened by the caregiver and that infant avoidance behaviors constitute a coping mechanism to prevent infant flight from or aggression toward the caregiver. In this way

avoidance permits an escape from unpleasant affect and, therefore, facilitates other behavior options. Infant avoidance may also elicit approach by the caregiver. In these ways avoidance may actually serve to maintain proximity to the caregiver. However, this explanation does not explain why some avoidant infants continue to resist caregiver approach. Main and Main and Weston also present the possibility that infant avoidance may represent an attempt on the part of the infant to appease a caregiver who feels intruded upon by the infant.

*Adult attachment.* Main, Kaplan, and Cassidy (1985) were the first to extrapolate child attachment styles to adults, identifying specific patterns of adult attachment. Using the Adult Attachment Interview created by George, Kaplan, and Main, in which adult participants are asked about their recollections of early childhood attachment experiences, Main and her colleagues discovered several patterns of adult attitudes regarding childhood relationships. These patterns or categories of adult attachment reflected the adult's disposition regarding experiences with his or her family of origin.

Hazan and Shaver (1987) built upon the work of Main and her colleagues by categorizing adult attachment based on attitudes toward self and partner in current romantic relationships. Hazan and Shaver developed a three-category typology for categorizing adult attachment style corresponding with the child typology defined by Ainsworth, et al. (1978; secure, avoidant, and anxious/ambivalent). Participants were classified according to a scale developed by Hazan and Shaver. Participants classified themselves by endorsing one of three brief narrative self-descriptions, each description typifying one of the attachment styles. Secure adults saw themselves as likeable and others as good-hearted. Avoidant adults saw themselves as capable of being alone and



less prone to fall in love. Anxious/ambivalent adults lacked self-confidence and saw others as less prone than themselves to commit to a relationship.

Based on the concept of working models in attachment proposed by Bowlby (1973), Bartholomew (1990) proposed a four-category typology of adult attachment style reflecting two dimensions: working model of self (worthiness of love and care) and working model of others (trustworthiness and availability). Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) used a semi-structured interview to assess individuals' model of self and model of others. The two dimensions, model of self (positive or negative) and model of others (positive or negative), create a four-cell grid. Individuals were classified into one of four categories based on their models of self and others. The four categories are: secure, avoidant, preoccupied, and fearful. Securely attached adults are characterized by comfort with both intimacy and independence and have a positive working model of self and of others. Dismissing individuals avoid intimacy as it poses to them a threat of the loss of self, autonomy, and independence. They have a positive working model of self and a negative working model of others. Preoccupied individuals are anxious and clingy in relationships, are preoccupied with the relationship, and have a negative working model of self and a positive working model of others. Finally, fearful individuals avoid intimacy out of a fear that they will be hurt by the other person or by eventual abandonment. They have a negative working model of both self and others.

*Stability of attachment.* Typologies of adult attachment are based on the Bowlby's (1979) assumption that the mechanism of attachment is present throughout the life span. He postulated that working models guide the interpretation of continuing experience in a way that reinforces the working model. Main, Kaplan, and Cassidy (1985) tested whether

child attachment style is a stable construct over time. Using the strange situation procedure, they measured the attachment of 40 infants at age one and again at age six. They found attachment security at age one to be significantly correlated with attachment security at age six.

In longitudinal study of 49 children in Germany, Grossmann and Grossmann (1991) examined relationship between child attachment security and parent-child interaction quality, child-peer interaction, and child cognitive ability. Grossmann and Grossmann utilized interviews and multiple observational settings, including the strange situation. Attachment classifications based on observations of the children at age 6 were compared with interview data obtained from the same children at age 10. Children who were classified early as securely attached later reported more readiness to seek help or comfort from others when distressed. Conversely, children classified early as avoidantly attached tended not to seek help from others. There were an insufficient number of anxious/ambivalent children to allow comparisons to be made. These findings are congruent with those of Main, et al. (1985). Whereas Main, et al. found evidence for attachment stability in early childhood, the findings of Grossmann and Grossmann suggest stability in working models of attachment continues in middle to late childhood.

Howes and Hamilton (1992) conducted two longitudinal studies on children in day care and their teachers. Their findings were somewhat supportive of those of Main, et al. (1985). In the first study of 47 children, attachment to mothers was found to be modestly stable between ages 18 and 42 months. The second study of 86 children also showed stability of attachment classification, with 72% of children maintaining the same

attachment classification between 12 and 42 months. Chi square analyses showed anxious/ambivalent styles to be significantly more stable than avoidant styles.

There is a lack of longitudinal studies on the continuity of childhood attachment into adulthood. However, some studies have indicated that a relationship may exist between childhood and adult attachment. Hazan and Shaver (1987) found that adult attachment style was related to self-report of the quality of the childhood relationship with parents. In the first of two studies, using a sample of 620 respondents to a survey published in a local newspaper, hierarchical discriminant-function analysis revealed a distinct pattern associated with each attachment style. Secure participants typically had parents who were warm, accepting, and affectionate. Avoidant participants were typically found to have rejecting parents. Anxious/ambivalent participants were commonly found to have unfair fathers. In the second study, using a sample of 108 undergraduates in an Understanding Human Conflict course, hierarchical discriminant-function analysis revealed a similar pattern. Secure participants reported parents as being more good-humored, mothers as more understanding, and fathers as more warm and caring than did anxious/ambivalent participants. Secure participants also reported their mothers as being less rejecting and critical and their fathers as more fair than did avoidant participants. However, results revealed a tendency for bias in recollections of relationships with parents among the undergraduate sample. This was particularly true among the younger participants, who tended to idealize parents. No significant relationship was found between adult attachment and report of early separation from caregivers.

In contrast to Hazan and Shaver (1987), Collins and Read (1990) failed to find any significant relationships between reports of parent characteristics and adult

attachment, per se. The significant relationships they did find pertained to partner selection, which is posited to be a reflection of one's working model. The sample included 71 couples who completed a series of self-report questionnaires. In general, male and female participants who rated their own parents as warm were more likely to have partners who were comfortable with closeness and depending on others. Participants who rated their parents as cold or inconsistent were more likely to have partners who were uncomfortable with closeness and afraid of abandonment.

Feeney and Noller (1990) also failed to find a significant and consistent relationship between attachment to parents and adult romantic attachment in a sample of 374 undergraduates, most of whom were single. An exception to this, contradicting the findings of Hazan and Shaver (1987), is that a significant relationship was found among avoidant participants, who were more likely than other participants to report childhood separation from their mothers.

Although longitudinal research remains to be conducted on the continuity of child attachment patterns into adulthood, existing studies suggest that early childhood attachment experiences and patterns are related to patterns and working models in romantic relationships in adulthood. These studies provide evidence that attachment mechanisms, such as closeness, fear of abandonment, protest of separation, and dependence upon others, operate within adult romantic relationships in a similar way as in child-caregiver relationships.

*Attachment and working models.* The stability of attachment is assumed to be maintained through the establishment and entrenchment of working models. Research on

attachment and working models shows that adult attachment style is related to certain attitudes regarding self and others.

Hazan and Shaver (1987) conducted two studies, the first with a sample of 620 respondents to a newspaper quiz and among the 108 undergraduates in a course on human conflict. In the first study, secure participants scored significantly higher on trust, and friendship and significantly lower on fear of closeness than did other participants. Anxious/ambivalent participants scored significantly higher than other participants on jealousy, sexual attraction, obsessiveness, and a desire for union in romantic relationships. The second study showed secure participants to endorse significantly more statements indicating confidence in their own likeability and in others good-heartedness, compared to other participants. In both studies, secure participants claimed that love ebbs and flows but never totally fades. Conversely, avoidant and anxious/ambivalent participants believed love to be ephemeral. Avoidant and anxious/ambivalent participants differed, however, in that avoidant participants were significantly more likely to consider the finding of love to be a rare phenomenon. Anxious/ambivalent participants were significantly more likely than avoidant participants—and even secure participants—to report falling in love as being a frequent occurrence.

In the Feeney and Noller (1990) study cited above, factor analysis showed securely attached adults to have higher self-confidence and self-esteem than insecurely attached adults. Avoidant participants were shown to exhibit less idealism regarding their partners and higher avoidance of intimacy. Anxious/ambivalent participants tended to have love styles characterized by mania, obsessiveness, and dependence. Secure participants were distinguished from others by higher trust toward others, avoidant

participants by lower trust toward others, and anxious/ambivalent participants by higher dependence on others. These findings support those of Hazan and Shaver (1987).

Collins and Read (1990) further supported the findings of Hazan and Shaver (1987) and of Feeney and Noller (1990) in a study on 118 psychology undergraduates. They found significantly higher self-esteem and self-assuredness among secure participants than among other participants. Avoidant participants reported significantly less awareness of others than did secure participants and significantly less trust in the dependability of people than did secure and anxious/ambivalent participants. However, anxious/ambivalent and avoidant participants were each significantly less trustworthy of the motives of others than were secure participants, possibly reflecting anxious/ambivalent participants' fear of rejection. Anxious/ambivalent participants reported significantly less belief in people's self-efficacy (which, technically, includes their own self-efficacy) and were significantly more likely to have love styles characterized by obsessiveness and dependence.

Similarly, in a study on 74 undergraduate students in dating relationships, Feeney and Noller (1991) found that anxious/ambivalent participants described their relationships in terms of friendship significantly less often than secure participants. Anxious/ambivalent participants were also significantly higher than avoidant participants in their idealization of their partners.

In summary, the mental models of secure individuals seem to reflect self-confidence and trust in others. In contrast, the mental models of avoidant individuals reflect mistrust of others, and those of anxious/ambivalent individuals reflect low self-confidence and high dependence on (and simultaneous mistrust of) others. Hazan and

Shaver (1987) found anxious/ambivalent participants were most likely to consider others less prone than themselves to commit to a relationship. It appears the anxious/ambivalent individual's mistrust of others pertains to their anticipation of abandonment or rejection by others. None of the studies mentioned above examine the working models of individuals classified according to the four-category model proposed by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991). It remains to be studied how mental models of avoidant participants may differ between those classified as dismissing-avoidant and those classified as fearful-avoidant.

*Relationship factors in adult attachment.* Adult attachment style and dimensions of adult attachment have been shown by numerous studies to be correlated with couples' relationship factors. These factors include relationship satisfaction, partner selection, and couple interaction patterns. The remainder of this literature review will summarize the studies that examine these relationships.

No studies have shown a relationship between gender and adult attachment style. In fact, multiple studies have failed to find that there are gender differences in adults' attachment styles (Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Waldinger, Seidman, Gerber, Lien, Allen, & Hauser, 2003). However, one study (Feeney, 1999) found a relationship between gender and adult attachment style that approached significance, with males tending to endorse dismissive styles and females tending to endorse preoccupied and fearful styles. The lack of findings of a relationship between attachment and gender is congruent with the definition of attachment as a ubiquitous phenomenon.

*Attachment and partner selection.* Mental working models may have an influence in one's selection of romantic partners, although research indicating a relationship

between working models and partner selection has not been consistent. Theoretically, partners should tend to be selected based on the expectations inherent to the individual's working model. Furthermore, the combinations of the working models of the two individuals involved may make some patterns or constellations of attachment style pairs more likely or longer lasting (i.e., more prevalent). Two hypotheses have been studied regarding this relationship. The first is that individuals will be more likely to select partners with attachment styles similar to their own. The second is that individuals will tend to prefer selection of secure partners to insecure partners.

Simpson (1990) investigated a sample of 144 dating couples and found that men and women who scored higher on attachment security tended to be dating partners who were also high in attachment security, supporting the similarity hypothesis. Women scoring higher on the avoidant scale tended to be dating partners characterized by lower commitment and trust and higher insecurity. Similarly, men scoring higher on the avoidant scale tended to be dating partners characterized by lower trust and higher insecurity. However, both men and women who scored higher on the anxious/ambivalent scale tended to be dating partners scoring lower on commitment and interdependence (love, dependence, and self-disclosure). This pairing of anxious/ambivalent participants with partners having characteristics of an avoidant attachment style contradicts the similarity hypothesis.

Investigating a sample of 51 couples attending the University of Canterbury, Hammond and Fletcher (1991) failed to find any significant relationship between individuals' attachment styles and the attachment styles of their partners. Interestingly,



however, individuals higher in relationship satisfaction tended to perceive their partners and themselves as being more similar in attachment style.

Senchak and Leonard (1992) investigated a sample of 322 couples who were part of an ongoing longitudinal study on alcohol abuse and marital functioning. In contradiction to Hammond and Fletcher (1991), they found a significant tendency for partners to be similar in attachment style.

Kirkpatrick and Davis (1994) found zero pairings of avoidant and avoidant or anxious/ambivalent and anxious/ambivalent partners in a sample of 354 “seriously dating” couples in a Psychology of Marriage undergraduate course, which is consistent with the security hypothesis and not the similarity hypothesis of attachment pairings. They also made the counterintuitive significant finding of a disproportionately frequent pairing of anxious/ambivalent and avoidant partners. This latter finding supports the finding of Simpson (1990). However, the sample used by Kirkpatrick and Davis was biased in having a greater percentage of secure participants (about 75%) than the norm (55 - 60%), possibly due to the sampling criteria.

In a series of studies using samples of Introduction to Psychology undergraduate students, Frazier, Byer, Fischer, Wright, and DeBord (1996) partially supported the similarity hypothesis on attachment and partner selection. They found that not all individuals prefer securely attached partners. In the first study on 83 couples, they found that females scoring lower on anxiety in the relationship were significantly more comfortable with partners who also scored lower on anxiety. Similarly, in the second study on 266 individuals, secure participants rated secure and anxious hypothetical dating partners equivalently to each other and higher than avoidant partners. Avoidant

participants had no significant preference patterns. Anxious/ambivalent participants preferred anxious/ambivalent partners to other styles, having a significantly lower preference for avoidant partners than for secure partners. The third study, with a sample of 146 individuals, supported the findings of the second study and found, additionally, that secure participants preferred anxious/ambivalent partners to avoidant partners and that avoidant participants preferred secure partners over the other types. In the latter two studies, avoidant participants were least favoring of anxious/ambivalent partners and vice versa, directly contradicting the findings of Kirkpatrick and Davis (1994) and of Simpson (1990).

Latty-Mann and Davis (1996) investigated attachment style and partner selection using a four-category classification system that corresponds to the one proposed by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991). Using a sample of 285 psychology undergraduates, they found that participants of all four styles preferred a securely attached partner, supporting the security hypothesis. They also found that preoccupied (similar to anxious/ambivalent) partners were preferred to avoidant and ambivalent (similar to fearful-avoidant) partners, supporting the findings of Frazier, et al. (1996).

Findings on the pairings of adult attachment styles are mixed. Two studies have indicated that pairings of avoidant and anxious/ambivalent partners are disproportionately common (Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994; Simpson, 1990). However, studies that specifically examined partner preference failed to confirm this relationship. It remains to be determined whether this phenomenon is a result of partner preference or of subsequent effects of partners' respective styles on one another. It is possible that behavior patterns

associated with an anxious/ambivalent style elicit behavior patterns in the other partner that are associated with an anxious style, and vice versa.

*Attachment and relationship satisfaction.* Several studies have found attachment security to be related to satisfaction in romantic relationships. Pistole (1989) studied 137 undergraduate students in psychology. Analysis of variance and post hoc comparisons revealed that secure participants reported significantly more relationship satisfaction than did avoidant and anxious/ambivalent participants.

Simpson (1990) supported the above findings in a study on a sample of 144 dating couples. Couples' higher scores on security of attachment were related to significantly higher relationship satisfaction. Men's relationship anxiety was related to significantly lower relationship trust and relationship satisfaction. Women's relationship anxiety was related to significantly lower commitment and trust in the relationship. These findings were maintained after controlling for length of the relationship.

In the Collins and Read (1990) study of 71 couples, male partners' higher comfort with closeness was significantly related to female partners' reports of higher relationship satisfaction, as well as reports of significantly less conflict, less jealousy, more trust, and better communication. This finding supports the findings of Pistole (1989) and Simpson (1990). Similarly, male partners' higher reported trust and communication was significantly related to female partners' comfort with closeness. Male partners' relationship satisfaction, however, seemed to be related more to female partners' anxiety in the relationship, with lower female anxiety being associated with higher male relationship satisfaction, as well as with less conflict, more trust, and greater

communication. Females' lower anxiety and males' greater comfort with closeness were also significantly related to their own relationship satisfaction.

In examining relationship quality scores of 74 undergraduates in dating relationships, Feeney and Noller (1991) found that attachment security was related to most dimensions of relationship quality. However, they made the anomalous finding that avoidant participants reported greater enjoyment of the relationship than did anxious/ambivalent participants, with no significant differences between secure participants and the other two groups (avoidant and anxious/ambivalent). This finding is in contrast to the findings of other studies on relationship satisfaction and attachment style.

Hammond and Fletcher (1991), in a study of 51 couples at the University of Canterbury, New Zealand, examined the temporal relationship between attachment style and relationship satisfaction. Interestingly, they did not find secure attachment to be related to an increase (or any change) in relationship satisfaction between time 1 and time 2 (four months later). However, high relationship satisfaction at time 1 was related to an increase in secure attachment at time 2. These findings suggest that relationship satisfaction leads to a change in attachment style and not the other way around.

In a study on 354 dating couples, Kirkpatrick and Davis (1994) found that secure attachment in men was significantly related to men's higher relationship satisfaction, intimacy, trust/acceptance, and caring, compared to avoidant men, although there was no significant difference between the relationship satisfaction of secure and anxious/ambivalent men. These findings support those of Collins and Read (1990) and partially support those of Pistole (1989) and Simpson (1990). Women with avoidant

attachment styles were no different in relationship satisfaction. This finding fails to confirm that of Collins and Read. However, this study supported Collins and Read in the finding that men with anxious/ambivalent partners were significantly lower in relationship satisfaction (as well as lower in commitment, trust/acceptance, and intimacy) than men with secure partners. This support was only partial, however, in that no relationship was found between males' attachment and partners' satisfaction. The findings of Collins and Read were also supported in that anxious/ambivalent women were less satisfied (as well as less trusting/accepting) than secure women.

In their study on a sample of 83 couples in *Introduction to Psychology* undergraduate courses, Frazier, et al. (1996) found that men with secure attachment styles reported significantly higher relationship satisfaction than did men with avoidant or anxious/ambivalent styles. The same held true for women's attachment styles and their own relationship satisfaction, supporting the findings of most previous studies.

The findings of Cohn, Silver, Cowan, Cowan, and Pearson (1992) were similar to those of Feeney and Noller (1991). They studied 27 married couples and found that self-reported relationship satisfaction did not appear related to attachment style. However, when observers rated couples on communication, conflict, affect, and marital functioning, secure husbands were found to be significantly higher than other husbands in marital functioning and lower in conflict. Interestingly, no significant differences were found between attachment groups of wives, suggesting that attachment may be a factor in husbands' relationship functioning but not in that of wives.

Rodriguez (2000) examined whether the dissimilarity of partners' attachment styles was related to relationship satisfaction. Squared Euclidian distance scores revealed

that couples that were more similar in attachment style reported significantly greater relationship satisfaction.

In summary, it appears that secure attachment is related to higher relationship satisfaction in both men and women. In particular, avoidant attachment in men and anxious/ambivalent attachment in women seem to be most strongly related to low relationship satisfaction in the couple. Furthermore, relationship satisfaction may have an effect on attachment style, rather than the other way around. Finally, a couple of studies suggest that attachment related differences in relationship satisfaction might be better explained by relationship quality or functioning.

*Attachment and relationship quality.* Several studies have been conducted that look at the relationship between attachment and certain domains of couple interaction and functioning. Pistole (1989) found that anxious/ambivalent individuals obliged (unconditional acquiescence) their partners more often than did avoidant individuals and used less compromise (give and take) with partners than did secure and avoidant individuals. She also found that secure individuals had greater cohesion in their relationships than did anxious/ambivalent individuals. Similarly, Simpson (1990) found that couples' higher scores on the secure attachment dimension were related to significantly higher scores on interdependency (love, dependency, and self-disclosure), commitment, and trust in the relationship.

Feeney and Noller (1991) found that secure participants reported significantly more mutuality, or equality in partner supportiveness, in the relationship, compared to other participants. Secure participants also reported significantly more couple

orientation, or cohesion, than avoidant participants. There were no differences between attachment groups on reports of relationship problems.

Senchak and Leonard (1992) found that secure attachment was related to increased intimacy and relationship functioning and decreased withdrawal during conflict resolution. Both-secure couples give higher ratings of intimacy and of partner functioning than either mixed or both-insecure couples, although the latter finding only approached significance. Compared to both-secure couples, there was more withdrawal during conflict resolution in both-insecure and wife-insecure couples. The relationship between husband attachment insecurity and withdrawal was only marginally significant.

Cohn, et al. (1992) found significantly higher observer-rated conflict and significantly lower relationship functioning in couples with two insecurely attached partners, compared to couples in which one or both partners were securely attached.

Kirkpatrick and Davis (1994) found that women with avoidant partners were significantly more passionate than other women. Women with anxious/ambivalent partners scored higher than other women on relationship conflict. The presence of an anxious/ambivalent female partner was related to significantly greater reports, by both partners, of conflict in the relationship. Avoidant women also scored higher on conflict and lower on trusting/accepting than did secure women.

In summary, secure attachment was generally found to be associated with greater trust, commitment, communication, mutuality, and cohesion and less conflict in relationships, compared to insecure attachment styles. In particular, it appears that avoidant partners tend to be mistrusting and non-committed, and anxious/ambivalent partners tend to be more characterized by particularly high conflict.

*Adult attachment and closeness and distance in couples.* Several studies have investigated the relationship between adult attachment and proximity-seeking (pursuing) and autonomy-seeking (distancing) behavior. Carpenter and Kirkpatrick (1996) examined a sample of 34 college females in serious dating relationships along with their partners. Following baseline measures of heart rate and blood pressure, females were observed in stressful situations with their partners absent and with their partners present. All participants exhibited heightened physiological response in the stressful situation, compared to baseline. In addition, relative to baseline, anxious/ambivalent and avoidant women showed significantly more elevated heart rate and blood pressure when their partners were present versus when they were absent. This was not the case for secure women.

Investigating a sample of 40 high school students and adolescents in psychiatric hospitals, Waldinger, et al. (2003), found that dismissing participants wished for significantly more autonomy than did preoccupied participants. However, no significant relationship was found between attachment and desire for closeness. This finding does not necessarily contradict the hypothesis that attachment and pursuit of closeness are related. The authors suggest, consistent with Bowlby (1979), that desire for closeness is universal. Instead, differences in attachment exist in the ways in which individuals *cope* with expected responses of others to the individual's desires for closeness (i.e., proximity-seeking or autonomy-seeking). The authors note that desire for closeness does not necessarily manifest itself in proximity seeking. Their findings are congruent with the contention of Carpenter and Kirkpatrick (1996) that, for insecurely attached persons, the



presence of the partner in a stressful situation involves an internal conflict between desire to seek comfort and simultaneous fear of rejection.

Kobak and Hazan (1991) investigated a sample of 40 couples recruited through newspaper and radio advertisement. They found that husbands self-reported significantly less reliance on their partners than did wives. However, observers rated husbands as listening significantly more than wives in a confiding task. Due to the sample being skewed in the secure direction, analyses on attachment style could not be conducted. However, wives with greater attachment security (reliance on and trust in the availability of partner) showed less rejection of their partners in a problem-solving task and were accepted more by partners in a confiding task. Similarly, husbands with higher perceptions of wife availability exhibited significantly less rejection of and by partners and more validation of and by partners in a problem-solving task. The relationship between husbands' attachment security and husbands' self-disclosure was only marginally significant.

Investigating a sample of 104 married or seriously committed couples, LePoire, et al. (1997) found that dismissive partners tend to disclose in ways that decrease intimacy (e.g., less disclosure and less emotional honesty in disclosure), and preoccupied partners tend to disclose in ways that increase intimacy (e.g., more disclosure, less selectivity over what they disclose, and more emotionality in disclosure). Although none of the four studies summarized above examined the pursuer-distancer pattern, per se, they provide evidence to suggest that patterns in and conflict over closeness and distance in couples are each related to adult attachment.

### *Pursuer-distancer Patterns and Attachment*

Feeney (1999) was the first to conduct a study specifically on adult attachment and dyadic struggles over closeness and distance. She investigated a sample of 72 couples who had been dating for at least one year. In five-minute unstructured reports about their relationships, four out of five couples mentioned struggles over closeness and distance. The number of couples not reporting closeness/distance struggles was too small to allow comparisons by attachment style, and these couples were distributed evenly across all four attachment styles. However, the greatest proportion of those wanting more closeness was found in the preoccupied-type women group, and the lowest proportion was found in the dismissing-type men group, although these differences were not statistically significant. Furthermore, regression analyses showed that the attachment dimensions of comfort with closeness and anxiety over the relationship were related to a difference in partners' needs for closeness/distance for both males and females. At least one partner reporting struggles over closeness and distance was significantly related to higher relationship anxiety in the female (associated with a preoccupied style) and lower comfort with closeness in the male (associated with a dismissing style). This study did not specify whether couples experienced the reported difference in needs for closeness as a self-perpetuating cycle (i.e., one partner's pursuit leading to the other's withdrawal and vice versa), as is the case in pursuer-distancer patterns. Feeney identified three types of changes reported by couples in their closeness-distance patterns: abrupt (situational), gradual (developmental), and cyclical (alternating). Of these patterns of change, cyclical change was the most strongly associated with the presence of at least one insecurely attached partner, specifically a dismissing male partner.

Rodriguez (2000) is the only study that has been conducted on the specific construct of pursuer-distancer patterns (more specifically the demand-withdraw pattern). Using a sample of 64 couples in monogamous romantic relationships of at least six months, Rodriguez examined whether the dissimilarity of each partner's attachment score from that of the other partner (using a four-category typology measured by questionnaire instruments) was related to whether a pursuer-distancer pattern exists in the couple (measured by the Communication Patterns Questionnaire; CPQ; Christensen, 1988). The relationship was not found to be significant. However, the frequency of reporting of demand-withdraw pattern (specifically woman-demand/man-withdraw) was found to be significantly related to higher female relationship anxiety scores. A relationship between lower male comfort over closeness and increased report of a demand-withdraw pattern was also found that approached significance. The findings of Rodriguez suggest that relationship satisfaction is more strongly related to demand-withdraw patterns than is attachment. A limitation of this study is that the CPQ only measures couple interactions taking place during the phases of discussion of a problem between the couple, and the generalizability of the CPQ to closeness struggles in general is questionable. This study is also limited by a small number of participants classified into some of the insecure categories, which may be the reason for the finding of significant relationships to attachment dimensions but not to attachment styles.

In summary, only two studies have been conducted that specifically examined the relationship between adult attachment style and patterns of struggle over closeness and distance in couples. Both of these studies lacked a sufficient number of participants in

some cells to permit analyses to be conducted successfully by attachment style. The purpose of the present study is to address this gap in the literature.

The present study utilized questionnaires to assess the attachment styles and reported presence of uni- and bi-directional pursuer-distancer partners in pairs of individuals in therapy. The study addresses the following questions: First, is there a relationship between attachment security (secure or insecure) and a uni- or bi-directional pursuer-distancer pattern in the relationship (present or absent)? Second, is there a relationship between attachment style and pursual or attachment style and distancing in uni-directional pursuer-distancer relationships or between attachment style and bi-directional pursuer-distancer patterns? Third, is there a relationship between the attachment dimensions of avoidance and anxiety and pursuer-distancer patterns? Fourth, is there a relationship between individuals' relationship satisfaction and attachment style? Fifth, is there a relationship between individuals' relationship satisfaction and a pursuer-distancer pattern in the relationship? (The fourth and fifth questions replicate previous studies.)

## Chapter III

### Methods

The purpose of the present study is to explore the relationship between adult attachment style and pursuer-distancer patterns in couples in therapy. Sixty-seven client participants (including 32 couples) were referred for participation in the study by 17 therapists practicing in the Washington, DC area. Client participants completed a self-report questionnaire measuring attachment style, pursuer-distancer patterns, relationship satisfaction, and demographic factors.

There have been few studies conducted that examine the relationship between attachment style and the pursuer-distancer pattern. Those studies that have been previously conducted were limited by the infrequency of insecure attachment styles in their samples. No such studies had previously been conducted using a clinical sample or examining bi-directional in addition to uni-directional pursuer-distancer patterns. The present study used a clinical sample that may be assumed to be more generalizable to couples in therapy.

#### *Participants and the Recruitment Process*

The sample for this study consisted of married, dating, and cohabitating couples, living in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, who had been together for at least six months and who were current or recently terminated clients in therapy. The sample was entirely heterosexual. The settings of treatment included agency, private practice, and university-based clinic. Some participants may possibly have been court-ordered into therapy, but this was not measured in this study.

*Recruitment of participant clients.* Sixty-seven participants provided data for this study. To be eligible, both partners must have agreed to participate in the study. However, because partners completed questionnaires independently of one another, several questionnaires were received without a corresponding partner questionnaire. Data from these questionnaires were included in some of the analyses. There were 32 couples in which both partners completed and returned questionnaires. Couple-level analyses were conducted with these 32 couples.

*Recruitment of participant therapists.*

Participant clients were obtained by recruiting therapists via the email list for faculty, students, and alumni of the Marriage and Family Therapy Master's Degree program at Virginia Polytechnic and State University (Virginia Tech) in Falls Church, Virginia and through personal contact with colleagues of the researcher. These therapists worked and interned in a variety of settings in the region. Therapist interns in the Center for Family Services, the on-site Marriage and Family Therapy clinic at Virginia Tech, Northern Virginia Center, were also asked to participate. Therapists were solicited via email, telephone, letter, memo (for therapists in the Center for Family Services; see Appendix E), or in-person, informed of the purpose of the study, and asked to volunteer to distribute a questionnaire survey to willing and eligible clients in therapy. Participating therapists gave informed consent to participate in the study (see Appendix A).

Therapists were asked to report the lengths of their clinical experience and their primary work settings (see Appendix F). Seventeen therapists (four males and 13 females) participated in the study. Therapists ranged in experience from one to 25 years.

The mean number of years of experience was 6.88. Most did most of their clinical work in a university-based clinic setting (41.2%) or in private practice (35.3%; see Table 1).

Table 1  
*Work Settings and Years of Experience of Therapist Participants*

Factor (n = 17)	n	%	Mean	SD
Work Setting				
Private practice	6	35.3		
Inpatient	0	0		
Social service agency	3	17.6		
University-based clinic	7	41.2		
Other	1	5.9		
Years of Experience (n = 16)			6.88	7.57

### *Procedures*

Therapists were given pre-numbered questionnaires, informed consent forms (see Appendix B), and pre-stamped, addressed envelopes for clients' submission of questionnaires to the researcher, along with instructions for their submission. Questionnaires were numbered in pairs to allow for pairing of couples' data without allowing individuals to be identified. Therapists were instructed to request that participants complete the questionnaire following a therapy session and while still in the therapy building, to maximize safety and privacy and to minimize loss of data. Therapists were asked to instruct couples to complete the questionnaire independent of one another and not to share their responses with one another. Each partner was given a separate pre-addressed, pre-stamped envelope for submission of the completed questionnaire to the researcher.

Many participants were unwilling or unable to complete the questionnaire on-site. In these cases, participants were allowed to take the questionnaire and envelope home to complete and mail at their convenience. While allowing clients to complete the

questionnaire off-site was necessary to avoid overburdening participant therapists and clients, it was not ideal for control of confounds (e.g., possible collaboration). As an additional drawback of this procedure, many participants failed to complete and return the questionnaire. There was a 66.3% questionnaire return rate among individuals who agreed to participate in the study, and three couples were excluded from couple-level analyses because one partner failed to return his or her questionnaire. Questionnaire return rate is based on the ratio of the therapist-reported number of distributed questionnaires to the number of questionnaires received by the researcher.

Therapists obtained signed informed consent from client participants and submitted completed questionnaires and informed consent forms to the researcher. In signing the informed consent form, clients also gave authorization to their therapists to release information related to the study to the researcher. Clients were made aware of their freedom not to participate and were informed of their freedom to withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequence. Participating therapists solicited all eligible current client couples and new intakes in their caseload over a period of approximately six months.

### *Instruments*

The questionnaire completed by each partner included an adult attachment measure, items assessing for uni-directional and bi-directional pursuer-distancer patterns, demographic items, and a relationship satisfaction scale. The questionnaire was designed to take approximately 10 – 15 minutes to complete.

*Measurement of adult attachment.* The Multi-item Measure of Adult Romantic Attachment, a subscale of the Experiences in Close Relationships Scales (ECR; Brennan,



Clark, & Shaver, 1998) was used to measure attachment (see Appendix D). The measure consists of thirty-six Likert-type items. It is based on a four-category classification of adult attachment, defining the two dimensions as “anxiety” and “avoidance” (parallels to “model of self” and “model of others”, respectively). Items include the following: “I prefer not to be close to romantic partners,” (avoidance scale). “I worry a lot about my relationships,” (anxiety scale). Participants were categorized into one of the four attachment categories, based on computations using classification coefficients (Fisher’s linear discriminant functions) published with the instrument, according to their scores on the two dimensions of the measure. These two dimensions can be used as axes on which individuals’ scores can be plotted. The resulting four quadrants correspond to the four styles of attachment. Preoccupied attachment corresponds to a high score on anxiety and a low score on avoidance. Dismissing attachment corresponds to a high score on avoidance and a low score on anxiety. Fearful individuals have high scores on both avoidance and anxiety, and secure individuals have low scores on avoidance and anxiety.

A self-report scale was chosen because it is easier to administer than measures using structured interview and more reliable and valid than measures using self-assignment to a category. This specific self-report scale was used because it is the only such scale that uses a four-category typology (which is necessary, given the purposes of this study) and because it demonstrates superior psychometric properties compared to some other popular measures (Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000). The measure is significantly correlated ( $p < .0001$ ) with Bartholomew and Horowitz’s (1991) widely-used four-category, self-assessment measure, although the ECR is more likely than Bartholomew and Horowitz’s measure to categorize a participant as insecure (Brennan,

Clark, & Shaver, 1998). Brennan, et al. tested the ECR with a sample of 1082 Psychology undergraduates at the University of Texas in Austin. The avoidance scale of the ECR had an alpha of .94, and the anxiety scale had an alpha of .91. Test-retest correlation for the instrument is .94.

*Measurement of pursuer-distancer patterns.* No established instrument exists that assesses generally for pursuer-distancer patterns in couples relationships. The only instrument for measuring demand-withdraw patterns for which reliability and validity have been established is the Communication Patterns Questionnaire (CPQ; Christensen, 1988). However, the CPQ is specifically geared toward couples' conflict situations, measuring interactions taking place during the "before", "during", and "after" phases of discussion of a problem between the couple. It measures who usually initiates the discussion, whether one partner usually withdraws, and so forth. It does not assess for general struggles over intimacy and closeness between the couple. It also does not assess for bi-directional patterns. Therefore, the CPQ is not appropriate for measuring pursuer-distancer patterns in the general sense, particularly if these patterns are defined as struggles over closeness and distance.

In the present study, pursuer-distancer patterns were measured by self-assessment of each participant. Two questionnaires were constructed and pilot tested by the researcher on a snowball sample of seven couples (each partner completing separate, identical questionnaires) that originated with acquaintances of the researcher. The first questionnaire contained 20 yes-or-no endorsement items describing dyadic behaviors suggested by the literature to be characteristic of pursuer-distancer couples. The second questionnaire included single-paragraph descriptions of each of four pursuer-distancer

relationship categories: absence of pursuer-distancer pattern, uni-directional pattern in which the self is the pursuer, uni-directional pattern in which the self is the distancer, and bi-directional pattern. Each participant was instructed to endorse the one category that best describes his or her relationship. Descriptions of categories were composed based on descriptions of pursuer-distancer patterns found in the literature.

The pilot study was inconclusive due to a small sample size ( $n = 14$ ) and low variance in responses. (All participants endorsed the no-pursuer-distancer-pattern category on the category endorsement measure and identified few to none of the pursuer-distancer items on the yes-or-no endorsement measure as characteristic of their relationships.) Qualitative feedback from pilot-test participants indicated that the yes-or-no endorsement instrument was difficult to complete. Furthermore, some of those who declined participation said that they did so because they would have endorsed many of the pursuer-distancer items and felt uncomfortable in doing so. The couples that did participate all seemed ostensibly to have particularly healthy relationships. Therefore, it is uncertain whether the lack of variance was due to instrument limitations or to a highly biased sample. As a result, the yes-or-no endorsement instrument was discarded.

Following the pilot study, a panel of four experts in family therapy who were familiar with the construct of pursuer-distancer patterns further refined the category descriptions within the category endorsement instrument. This instrument (see Appendix C) was tested on a sample of 24 students in two Master's-level courses in Statistics at Virginia Tech, Northern Virginia Center. Participants completed the instrument at two times (time 1 and time 2 being separated by a two-week interval). Participants' responses were kept anonymous. Eight participants completed the instrument at only one of the

times and were therefore excluded. Among the remaining 16 participants, test-retest reliability was 100%. Thirteen of the 16 participants (81.3%) rated themselves as having no pursuer-distancer pattern in their relationships. Of the three participants (18.8%) who reported a pursuer-distancer pattern, one reported being the pursuer, one the distancer, and one a bi-directional pattern. This instrument was included in the questionnaire completed by the sample of couples in therapy.

The instrument, although not yet established in reliability and validity, has the advantage of being easy to administer and possessing face validity (as determined by the expert panel). The use of this instrument assumes that client couples possess sufficient insight into their relationship to accurately and reliably identify the presence of pursuer-distancer patterns. An alternative measurement option, using therapist assessment of participant couples, was rejected on the grounds that therapists would likely have ethical concerns regarding the sharing of this information, as well as on the grounds that clients may respond differently on the questionnaire if they expected the therapist to evaluate them.

*Measurement of demographic factors and relationship satisfaction.* The questionnaire included 13 items on demographic and other factors (see Appendix G). Demographic and other factors were: (1) gender, (2) age, (3) current relationship status (dating, living together, engaged, married, or other), (4) length of time in this relationship, and (5) highest education completed (no high school, some high school, graduated high school, some college, Bachelor's Degree, some graduate school, or graduate degree), (6) race/ethnicity (African-American/Black, Asian, Caucasian, Latino/Hispanic, Native American, or other), (7) personal income per year (\$0-19,999, \$20,000-39,999, \$40,000-

59,999, \$60,000-79,999, or \$80,000 or higher), (8) number of children from this relationship, (9) number of people living in household, (10) length of time in therapy with present therapist, and (11 – 13) the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMSS; Schumm, Nichols, Schectman, & Grigsby, 1983).

The KMSS is a Likert-type scale consisting of three items measuring satisfaction with the relationship (married or dating), the relationship with partner, and the partner, respectively. Ratings range from 1 (extremely dissatisfied) to 7 (extremely satisfied for each item). Item scores are added to calculate a total relationship satisfaction score. Schumm, et al. (1983) report reliabilities of each scale ranging from .89 to .98, with a test-retest reliability of .71 (times one and two separated by 10-weeks). They also reported the KMSS to be significantly correlated with two other established measures of relationship satisfaction, the Quality of Marriage Index and with the Dyadic Adjustment Scale. Crane, Bean, and Middleton (2000) determined a KMSS total score of less than 17 to indicate a distressed couple.

*Description of the sample.* The sample represented a variety of ages, races and ethnic groups, and education and income levels. The average age, income level, and proportion of minority status may be lower than in the population of couples in general but probably does not differ drastically from the population of couples seeking therapy. Participants also varied widely in how long they had been in the current relationship, previous relationship histories, and how many children they had (see Tables 2 and 3). Client participants' years of age ranged from 20 to 62. The majority of participants were Caucasian. All but two client participants (97%) had completed at least some college, 51.7% had completed at least some post-graduate work, and 78.8% had college and/or

graduate degrees. Personal income varied widely from \$0 to over \$80,000 per year.

Couples ranged in the lengths of their relationships from one to 23 years. The number of children from the current relationship ranged from zero to four. Eighty-four percent of couples were married. The average total relationship satisfaction score for individuals was 14.31, with 42 individuals (62.7%) reporting the couple to be classifiable as distressed according to the cutoff score of 17 determined by Crane, et al. (2000).

Table 2  
*Individual-level Demographic Factors and Relationship Satisfaction.*

Demographic Factor (n=66)	n	(%)	Mean	(SD)
Mean age (in years)			39.52	(11.54)
Highest level of education completed				
No high school	1	1.5%		
Graduated high school	1	1.5%		
Some college	12	18.2%		
Bachelor's degree	18	27.3%		
Some graduate school	13	19.7%		
Graduate degree	21	31.8%		
Race				
African-American	1	1.5%		
Caucasian	58	89.9%		
Latino	5	7.6%		
Other	2	3.0%		
Income (personal per year)				
\$0 – 19,999	12	18.2%		
\$20,000 – 39,999	11	16.7%		
\$40,000 – 59,999	13	19.7%		
\$60,000 – 79,999	6	9.1%		
\$80,000 +	24	36.4%		
Length of therapy				
Less than one month	6	9.1%		
One month	8	12.1%		
Two months	8	12.1%		
Three months	8	12.1%		
Four months	4	6.1%		
Five or more months	32	48.5%		
Relationship satisfaction				
Total satisfaction score			14.31	3.81
Individuals below cutoff for couple distress	42	62.7%		

Table 3  
*Couple-level Demographic Factors.*

Demographic Factor	<i>n</i>	(%)	Mean / (SD)	<i>n</i>
Relationship status				31
Living together	3	9.7%		
Engaged	2	6.5%		
Married	26	83.9%		
Mean length of current relationship (in years)			8.10 (6.62)	21
Mean number of children from this relationship			.68 (1.14)	31

### *Design and Analyses*

Previous studies (Feeney, 1999; Rodriguez, 2000) had attempted unsuccessfully to analyze data by constellations of both partners' adult attachment styles, yielding 16 possible constellations. The frequency of occurrence for some of these constellations was too low for these analyses to be conducted. The present study addressed this problem by examining adult attachment style at an individual level of analysis, rather than at a couple level. Individuals were grouped along two variables, pursuer-distancer classification of the couple (uni-directional/self-pursuer, uni-directional/partner-pursuer, bi-directional, and none present) and individual attachment style (secure, fearful, preoccupied, and dismissing). Due to some missing data, some couple-level analyses were conducted using 31 couples, and some individual-level analyses were conducted using 66 individuals. Other analyses were conducted using only data on which both partners agreed. The sample sizes for these analyses are reported individually.

## Chapter IV

### Results

The purpose of the present study is to explore the relationship between adult attachment style and pursuer-distancer patterns in couples in therapy. Sixty-seven client participants (including 32 couples) were referred for participation in the study by 17 therapists practicing in the Washington, DC area. Client participants completed a self-report questionnaire measuring attachment style, pursuer-distancer patterns, relationship satisfaction, and demographic factors.

#### *Descriptive Statistics*

The sample of the present study was expected to contain a higher proportion of couples reporting a pursuer-distancer pattern and a higher proportion of insecurely attached couples than a non-clinical sample. Internal consistency of the attachment instrument was computed for the sample of the present study. The avoidance scale had an alpha of .90, and the anxiety scale had an alpha of .91. Normative testing of the measure of adult attachment used in this study was conducted using a sample of 1082 undergraduates in Psychology. The measure classified 53.8% of the respondents as insecurely attached (fearful, preoccupied, or dismissing; Brennan, et al., 1998). In the present study, 65.7% of participants were insecurely attached, according to their scores on the attachment measure. A more detailed description of attachment style frequencies is given in Table 4. Interestingly, although a greater proportion of the present sample was classified as preoccupied and dismissing, compared to the normative sample, there was actually a lesser proportion of the present sample classified as fearful (11.9% compared to 23.0% of the normative sample).



Table 4  
*Description of Frequencies and Percentages of Attachment Styles in the Present and Normative Samples.*

Attachment Style	This Study (n=67)		Brennan, et al., 1998 (n=1082)	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Secure	23	34.3	500	46.2
Fearful	8	11.9	249	23.0
Preoccupied	21	31.3	174	16.1
Dismissing	15	22.4	159	14.7

In this sample, 57.6% of individuals reported a pursuer-distancer pattern in the relationship. There was a moderate agreement between partners (inter-rater reliability) in the report of the presence/absence and direction of pursuer-distancer patterns in the relationship (Kappa = .543;  $p < .0001$ ;  $n=62$ ). Fifty-six percent of couples agreed on the presence/absence and direction of pursuer-distancer patterns, and 91% agreed on presence/absence alone. Chi-square analysis revealed that couples who disagreed on the presence/absence of pursuer-distancer patterns were more likely to report a pursuer-distancer pattern than were those who did agree ( $\chi^2 (1, N = 32) = 9.791$ ;  $p < .01$ ). Furthermore, chi-square analysis revealed no significant relationship between attachment style and the agreement of partners in their reports of pursuer-distancer patterns in the relationship. For this reason, and because of limited agreement between partners, self or partner report of pursuer-distancer patterns was used in analyses, rather than couple-agreed report.

Bi-variate analyses were also conducted to determine whether client demographic factors were associated with either attachment style or pursuer-distancer patterns. This was done for the purpose of detecting the presence of potentially confounding variables. Separate chi-square analyses and ANOVAs were conducted for relationships between each demographic factor and each attachment style/pursuer-distancer pattern.

Demographic factors included the following: gender, age, relationship status, length of the current relationship, highest education completed, race/ethnicity, personal income, number of children from the current relationship, number of people in the household, and duration of current therapy. These analyses found no significant relationships between pursuer-distancer patterns or attachment styles and any of the demographic factors measured in the study. Chi-square analyses were also conducted comparing male respondents to females on attachment style and on pursuer-distancer classification. No significant gender differences were found.

#### *Attachment Security and the Pursuer-distancer Pattern*

The first question addressed by this study was whether there is a relationship between attachment security (secure or insecure) and the presence or absence of pursuer-distancer patterns in couples (present or absent). To test this, two chi-square analyses ( $n = 31$ ) were conducted. The first compared male attachment security with self-reported presence or absence of a pursuer-distancer pattern. The second compared female attachment security with self-reported presence or absence of a pursuer-distancer pattern. Neither analysis was significant. To further investigate this relationship, two additional chi-square analyses ( $n = 31$ ) were conducted, the first comparing male attachment security with partner report of the presence of a pursuer-distancer pattern and the second comparing female attachment security with partner report of a pursuer-distancer pattern. Male attachment security by partner report of pursuer-distancer pattern approached significance ( $\chi^2 (1, N = 31) = 3.677; p = .055$ ), but female attachment security did not (see Table 5).

Table 5

*Male Attachment Security by Partner-reported Presence of Pursuer-distancer Pattern.*

			Presence of Partner-reported Pursuer-distancer Pattern		$\chi^2(1)$	p
			Absent (n=14)	Present (n=17)		
Male Attachment - Secure/Insecure	Insecure attachment (n=21)	Count	7	14	3.677	.055
		Expected Count	9.5	11.5		
Secure attachment (n=10)	Secure attachment (n=10)	Count	7	3		
		Expected Count	4.5	5.5		

#### *Attachment Style and Uni- and Bi-directional Pursuer-distancer Patterns*

The second research question pertains to the relationship between attachment style and pursuer-distancer patterns. Two chi-square analyses ( $n = 31$ ) were conducted. The first compared male attachment style (secure, fearful, preoccupied, and dismissing) with self-report of pursuer-distancer pattern (self = distancer, self = pursuer, bi-directional, and no pursuer-distancer pattern). The second compared female attachment style with self-report of pursuer-distancer pattern. No significant relationship was found.

In an effort to further explore the relationship between attachment style and pursuer-distancer patterns, four follow-up chi-square analyses ( $n = 31$ ) were conducted comparing attachment style (secure, fearful, preoccupied, and dismissing) with presence/absence alone of a pursuer-distancer pattern. The first analysis compared male attachment style with self-report of pursuer-distancer pattern. The relationship approached significance ( $\chi^2(9, N = 32) = 16.120$ ;  $p = .064$ ). A greater observed number of dismissing men were found in pursuer-distancer couples than the expected value (see Table 6). The remaining three analyses; male attachment style by partner-report of

presence of a pursuer-distancer pattern, female attachment style by self-report of a pattern, and female attachment style by partner-report of a pattern; were not significant.

Table 6  
*Male Attachment Style and the Presence of a Pursuer-distancer Pattern.*

			Presence of Any Pursuer-distancer Pattern		$\chi^2$ (9)	p
			Absent (n=19)	Present (n=13)		
Male Attachment Style	Secure (n=10)	Count	7	3	16.120	.064
		Expected Count	5.9	4.1		
	Fearful (n=3)	Count	3	0		
		Expected Count	1.8	1.2		
	Preoccupied (n=10)	Count	7	3		
		Expected Count	5.9	4.1		
	Dismissing (n=9)	Count	2	7		
		Expected Count	5.3	3.7		

The size of the sample used in this study appears insufficient for analyses by attachment *style* to be significant when splitting the sample by gender. On the other hand, a problem arises when examining all individuals in the sample together, because the pursuer-distancer variable is a couple-level variable. Chi-square analyses were, nevertheless, conducted with all individuals in the study (n = 66), comparing individuals' attachment styles to their own *perceptions* of pursuer-distancer patterns in the relationship. However, although individuals' perceptions are treated as independent, these perceptions relate to a construct that is shared by partners in a couple. Therefore, individuals' perceptions are not truly independent. The results of the following two analyses should, therefore, be considered suggestive of a possible relationship requiring further study using a larger sample, rather than as conclusive.

In an attempt to further explore the relationship between attachment style and the specific direction of pursuer-distancer patterns, two chi-square analyses were conducted comparing attachment style and pursuer-distancer patterns both as individual-level variables. The first analysis (n = 66) revealed a significant relationship between attachment style and self-report of pursuer-distancer patterns in the relationship ( $\chi^2$  (9, N = 66) = 23.357;  $p < .01$ ). Comparison of expected cell values with observed cell values suggests that individuals with dismissing attachment styles tend to report being distancers. Secure individuals, on the other hand tend to report being in relationships without a pursuer-distancer pattern. Preoccupied individuals tended to report being pursuers. No clear pattern emerged for fearful individuals, and no attachment style was disproportionately frequent in its co-occurrence with a report of a bi-directional pursuer-distancer pattern (see Table 7).

Table 7  
*Attachment Style and Self-report of Pursuer-distancer Pattern.*

			Pursuer-distancer Pattern				$\chi^2$ (9)	p<
			Self = distancer (n=11)	Self = pursuer (n=14)	Bi-directional (n=13)	No pursuer-distancer (n=28)		
Attachment Style	Secure (n=23)	Count	3	2	4	14	23.357	.01
		Expected Count	3.8	4.9	4.5	9.8		
	Fearful (n=8)	Count	0	3	2	3		
		Expected Count	1.3	1.7	1.6	3.4		
	Preoccupied (n=20)	Count	1	8	3	8		
		Expected Count	3.3	4.2	3.9	8.5		
	Dismissing (n=15)	Count	7	1	4	3		
		Expected Count	2.5	3.2	3.0	6.4		

The second chi-square analysis (n = 63) was conducted comparing individuals' attachment styles and their partners' perceptions of pursuer-distancer patterns in the relationship. (The different sample size due to there being three participants lacking partner data.) Again, a significant relationship was found ( $\chi^2$  (9, N = 63) = 17.638;  $p < .05$ ). Comparison of expected cell values with observed cell values revealed a similar pattern for secure, preoccupied, and dismissing individuals as in the previous analysis. In addition, the second analysis showed that partners of fearful individuals were disproportionately more frequent in their reports of a bi-directional pursuer-distancer pattern (see Table 8).

Table 8  
*Attachment Style and Partner's Report of Pursuer-distancer Pattern.*

			Pursuer-distancer Pattern				$\chi^2$ (9)	p<
			Self = distancer (n=13)	Self = pursuer (n=10)	Bi- directional (n=13)	No pursuer- distancer (n=27)		
Attachment Style	Secure	Count	6	2	1	14	17.638	.05
	(n=23)	Expected Count	4.7	3.7	4.7	9.9		
	Fearful	Count	0	1	3	2		
	(n=6)	Expected Count	1.2	1.0	1.2	2.6		
	Preoccupied	Count	2	6	5	8		
	(n=21)	Expected Count	4.3	3.3	4.3	9.0		
	Dismissing	Count	5	1	4	3		
	(n=13)	Expected Count	2.7	2.1	2.7	5.6		

*Attachment Dimensions and Pursuer-distancer Patterns*

The third research question pertained to whether the attachment dimensions of avoidance and anxiety are related to pursuer-distancer patterns. The Experience of Close Relationships Scale (Brennan, et al., 1998) uses these two continuous dimensions to determine attachment style. A high avoidance score is associated with a dismissing

attachment style, and a high anxiety score is associated with a preoccupied style. A fearful attachment style is associated with high scores on both dimensions.

A series of four one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted with self-reported pursuer-distancer pattern (self = distancer, self = pursuer, bi-directional, and no pattern) as the independent variable. The dependent variables of the first, second, third, and fourth analyses were male avoidance, male anxiety, female avoidance, and female anxiety, respectively. The first ANOVA ( $n = 32$ ) found a significant relationship between male avoidance scores and pursuer-distancer patterns ( $F(3,28) = 4.367$ ;  $p < .05$ ). Tukey's post-hoc test revealed significantly higher avoidance among male distancers, compared to male pursuers and those in non-pursuer-distancer relationships. The second ANOVA ( $n = 32$ ) revealed a significant relationship between male anxiety scores and pursuer-distancer patterns ( $F(3,28) = 4.279$ ;  $p < .05$ ). Post-hoc test revealed significantly higher anxiety among male pursuers, compared to male distancers (see Table 9). The third and fourth ANOVAs ( $n = 31$ ), female avoidance by pursuer-distancer pattern and female anxiety by pursuer-distancer pattern, were not significant.

Table 9  
*Male Avoidance and Anxiety Scales and Self-reported Pursuer-distancer Pattern*

	Group Means				Analysis		
	Self = Distancer (n = 6)	Self = Pursuer (n = 6)	Bi-directional (n = 7)	No Pursuer-distancer (n = 13)	df	F	Sig.
Total n = 32							
Male Avoidance	4.2217 <sub>b</sub>	2.4998 <sub>a</sub>	3.0321	2.6445 <sub>a</sub>	3, 28	4.367	.012
Male Anxiety	2.6383 <sub>a</sub>	4.6283 <sub>b</sub>	3.6762	3.4182	3, 28	4.279	.013

Means with different subscripts were significantly different by Tukey's HSB post-hoc test ( $p < .05$ ).

*Attachment Style and Relationship Satisfaction*

The fourth research question replicates previous studies on attachment style and relationship satisfaction (Collins & Read, 1990; Frazier, et al., 1996; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994; Pistole, 1989; Simpson, 1990) and does so in the clinical population. A one-way ANOVA ( $n = 67$ ) was conducted examining the relationship between adult attachment style (independent variable) and self-reported relationship satisfaction (dependent variable). Upon the finding of a significant relationship ( $F(3,63) = 5.829$ ;  $p < .001$ ), post-hoc analyses showed that individuals with fearful and dismissing attachment styles reported lower relationship satisfaction than did securely attached individuals (See Table 10).

Table 10  
*Relationship Satisfaction Score by Attachment Style*

	Group Means				Analysis		
	Secure ( $n = 23$ )	Fearful ( $n = 8$ )	Preoccupied ( $n = 21$ )	Dismissing ( $n = 15$ )	<i>df</i>	F	Sig.
Total $n = 67$							
Relationship Satisfaction	17.13 <sub>b</sub>	11.25 <sub>a</sub>	13.95	12.13 <sub>a</sub>	3, 63	5.829	.001

Means with different subscripts were significantly different by Tukey's HSB post-hoc test ( $p < .05$ ).

To further explore this relationship, four separate ANOVAs ( $n = 32$ ) were conducted. The first revealed a relationship between male attachment style and relationship satisfaction in males ( $F(3,28) = 3.891$ ;  $p < .05$ ). Post-hoc analyses revealed that males' dismissing attachment style was related to lower male relationship satisfaction, compared to secure attachment. The second ANOVA revealed a relationship between male attachment style and relationship satisfaction in females ( $F(3,28) = 3.179$ ;  $p < .05$ ). However, post-hoc analyses revealed no significant relationships (see Table 11).



The third and fourth ANOVAs revealed that female attachment style was not related to male or to female relationship satisfaction.

Table 11  
*Male and Female Relationship Satisfaction by Male Attachment Style*

	Group Means				Analysis		
	Secure (n = 10)	Fearful (n = 3)	Preoccupied (n = 10)	Dismissing (n = 9)	df	F	Sig.
Total n = 32							
Male Relationship Satisfaction	17.70 <sub>b</sub>	14.00	14.30	11.00 <sub>a</sub>	3, 28	3.891	.019
Female Relationship Satisfaction	17.80 <sub>a</sub>	12.00 <sub>a</sub>	14.10 <sub>a</sub>	12.00 <sub>a</sub>	3, 28	3.179	.039

Means with different subscripts were significantly different by Tukey's HSB post-hoc test ( $p < .05$ ).

#### *Pursuer-distancer Patterns and Relationship Satisfaction*

The fifth research question replicates earlier studies examining the relationship between pursuer-distancer patterns and relationship satisfaction (Christensen, 1988; Heavey, et al., 1995; Rodriguez, 2000). A one-way ANOVA was conducted comparing pursuer-distancer pattern (self = distancer, self = pursuer, bi-directional, and no pursuer-distancer pattern; independent variable) and relationship satisfaction (dependent variable). The first ANOVA revealed a significant relationship between pursuer-distancer patterns and relationship satisfaction among all participants ( $F(3,62) = 8.704$ ;  $p < .001$ ). Post-hoc tests revealed that the presence of a pursuer-distancer pattern was related to lower relationship satisfaction than was the absence of such a pattern. No difference was found between directions of the pattern on individuals' relationship satisfaction scores (see Table 12).

Table 12  
*Relationship Satisfaction Score by Pursuer-distancer Pattern*

	Group Means				Analysis		
	Self = Distancer (n = 11)	Self = Pursuer (n = 14)	Bi-directional (n = 13)	No Pursuer-distancer (n = 28)	df	F	Sig.
Total n = 66							
Relationship Satisfaction	11.82 <sub>a</sub>	12.79 <sub>a</sub>	11.92	17.39 <sub>b</sub>	3, 62	8.704	.000

Means with different subscripts were significantly different by Tukey's HSB post-hoc test ( $p < .05$ ).

When males and females were analyzed in two separate ANOVAs, both males' ( $F(3,28; N = 31) = 4.613; p < .01$ ) and females' ( $F(3,27; N = 30) = 5.798; p < .01$ ) relationship satisfaction was significantly related to self-reported pursuer-distancer pattern (see Table 13). Post-hoc analyses revealed that male distancing was significantly related to lower relationship satisfaction in males and that female distancing was significantly related to lower satisfaction in females, compared to no-pursuer-distancer males and females.

Table 13  
*Male and Female Relationship Satisfaction by Self-reported Pursuer-distancer Pattern*

	Group Means				Analysis		
	Self = Distancer	Self = Pursuer	Bi-directional	No Pursuer-distancer	df	F	Sig.
Male Relationship Satisfaction (n = 31)	10.83 <sub>a</sub> (n = 9)	15.17 (n = 6)	11.57 (n = 7)	17.23 <sub>b</sub> (n = 13)	3, 28	4.613	.010
Female Relationship Satisfaction (n = 30)	9.00 <sub>a</sub> (n = 9)	12.67 (n = 2)	12.33 (n = 6)	17.79 <sub>b</sub> (n = 14)	3, 27	5.798	.003

Means with different subscripts were significantly different by Tukey's HSB post-hoc test ( $p < .05$ ).

## Chapter V

### Discussion

The purpose of the present study is to explore the relationship between adult attachment style and pursuer-distancer patterns in couples in therapy. Sixty-seven client participants (including 32 couples) were referred for participation in the study by 17 therapists practicing in the Washington, DC area. Client participants completed a self-report questionnaire measuring attachment style, pursuer-distancer patterns, relationship satisfaction, and demographic factors.

#### *Summary of the Findings*

The first research question addressed by this study was whether there is a relationship between attachment security (secure or insecure) and the presence or absence of a pursuer-distancer pattern. This study found such a relationship approaching significance among males, but not among females.

The second question researched by this study was whether there is a relationship between attachment styles (secure, fearful, preoccupied, and dismissing) and pursuer-distancer patterns (male-pursue, female-pursue, bi-directional, and no pursuer-distancer pattern). Although analyses of adult attachment style by specific direction of the pursuer-distancer pattern as a couple-level variable were not significant, dismissing attachment in males approached significance. That is, compared to other males, dismissing males more often tended to report the presence of a pursuer-distancer pattern in their relationships. Furthermore, individual-level analyses of self-reports of pursuer-distancer patterns revealed a significant relationship between pursuit and a preoccupied attachment style and between distancing and a dismissing attachment style.

The third question addressed by this study was whether the attachment dimensions of avoidance and anxiety are related to pursuer-distancer patterns. Avoidance in males was related to distancing, while anxiety in males was related to pursuing. However, there was no significant relationship between female attachment style and a pursuer-distancer pattern in the couple.

Overall, these findings seem to indicate that male attachment may be a more important factor than female attachment in pursuer-distancer patterns. It appears that there is a tendency for individuals, particularly men, with preoccupied attachment styles to be pursuers and for individuals with dismissing styles to be distancers in cyclical relational closeness/distance patterns. Although a causal or directional relationship may not appropriately be inferred from these findings, other research on the stability of attachment provides some evidence to suggest that the relationship between attachment and pursuer-distancer patterns may reflect attachment as a mechanism in the pattern (rather than the other way around). It is important to bear in mind, however, that the nature of this relationship is not clear.

The findings of the present study essentially converge with the findings of the two previous studies on the relationship between attachment and struggles over closeness and distance. In addition, the present study provides evidence of a relationship between specific styles of attachment and roles in pursuer-distancer patterns. Feeney (1999) and Rodriguez (2000) each found the attachment dimension of anxiety over the relationship to be related in females to conflicts over closeness and distance in the relationship. Rodriguez found female pursuit of closeness to be related in particular to female anxiety. Feeney and Rodriguez each found discomfort with closeness (similar to the attachment

dimension of avoidance in the present study) to be related in males to conflicts over closeness and distance, although this relationship only approached significance in the Rodriguez study. Neither study found a significant relationship between attachment style and struggles over closeness and distance.

Similarly, the present study found a relationship between the attachment dimensions of anxiety and avoidance to be related to pursuer-distancer patterns. However, the present study found only found this relationship in males' avoidance and anxiety. This finding differs from the findings of previous studies that female anxiety and male avoidance are most strongly related to pursuer-distancer patterns. This difference in findings may be the result of a difference in how struggles over closeness and distance are measured in the present study compared to previous studies. Feeney (1999) did not examine pursuer distancer patterns, per se, but individuals' reports of a desire for more closeness or more distance in the relationship. Interestingly, Feeney also found that struggles over closeness and distance that were cyclically alternating were most strongly related to males' dismissing attachment, which is similar to the findings of the present study.

In contrast to the present study, Rodriguez (2000) specifically examined demand-withdraw patterns (in which one partner makes demands regarding problems/issues and the other partner ignores or avoids discussing problems/issues). Pursuer-distancer patterns pertain more specifically to struggles over intimacy, affection, autonomy, and closeness (although a demand-withdraw pattern may in some cases represent a closeness-distance struggle). Demand-withdraw patterns are shown by Rodriguez and by Christensen (1988) to be related to gender (females being more demanding and males

being more withdrawn). It is possible that a reason for discrepant findings between the present study and that of Rodriguez is that there is not a gender difference between pursuers and distancers as there is in demand-withdraw patterns. However, the present study converged with previous studies in finding that male distancing is related to the attachment dimension of avoidance in males.

Feeney (1999) and Rodriguez (2000) also failed to find a significant relationship between attachment style and struggles over closeness and distance. The relationship was only found between continuous attachment *dimensions* and closeness-distance struggles. In contrast, the present study found a relationship that approached significance between male dismissing attachment style and a pursuer-distancer pattern (see Table 6). Furthermore, when treating pursuer-distancer pattern as an individual-level variable, the present study found that preoccupied attachment style (related to high relationship anxiety) was related to pursuit and that dismissing attachment style (related to high avoidance) was related to distancing (see Tables 7 and 8). These findings support those of Feeney and of Rodriguez that anxiety is related to desire for closeness and that avoidance is related to desire for distance.

Part of the second question addressed by this study was whether there is a relationship between adult attachment style and bi-directional pursuer-distancer patterns. In theory, the ambivalence and approach/avoidance fearful individuals exhibit could fit logically with a pursuer-distancer pattern that periodically changes directions (i.e., the pursuer becomes the distancer and vice versa). Inasmuch as fearful individuals are defined as being high in both anxiety and avoidance dimensions of attachment (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998), it could be speculated that alternation between pursuit in

response to separation anxiety and distancing in response to the fear of closeness and subsequent abandonment would be a common pattern for individuals with this attachment style. The results of the present study were not conclusive in answering this research question. One of the chi-square analyses conducted in this study showed bi-directional patterns (measured by partner's report) to be disproportionately more frequent among fearful individuals (see Table 8). However, this was not borne out in analyses by self-report of pursuer-distancer pattern. Furthermore, there were too few fearful individuals and bi-directional pursuer-distancer couples to conduct couple-level comparisons. Such comparisons would have involved treating each couple as a case, rather than each individual, and performing analyses separately on male and on female attachment (which would have been more appropriate, given that pursuer-distancer reports of partners in a couple are not truly independent). Therefore, the relationship between fearful adult attachment and bi-directional pursuer-distancer patterns remains uncertain.

The present study also replicated the findings of several previous studies on relationship satisfaction and attachment (Collins & Read, 1990; Frazier, et al., 1996; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994; Pistole, 1989; Simpson, 1990). Dismissing and fearful attachment styles (particularly dismissing males) were related to lower relationship satisfaction in males and females. This study also replicated previously conducted studies on relationship satisfaction and pursuer-distancer patterns (Christensen, 1988; Heavey, et al., 1995; Rodriguez, 2000). Pursuer-distancer patterns (particularly female-pursue and bi-directional patterns) were significantly related to lower relationship satisfaction in males and females.

The findings of this study supported those of Christensen (1988) that pursuer-distancer patterns occur frequently in couples. Furthermore, comparison of the results of this study with those of the Christensen study suggests that the rate of occurrence of these patterns in the clinical population may be greater than in the normal population. However, although Christensen found a more frequent occurrence of demanding (in a demand-withdraw relationship) among females than among males, the present study found no relationship between gender and the directions of pursuer distancer patterns. Although it is possible that this discrepancy represents a difference in the sensitivity of this study's pursuer-distancer measure with males than with females, it is also possible that an actual difference exists in the gender patterns associated with pursuer-distancer and demand-withdraw pattern. Females and males may be socialized to behave in gender-stereotyped ways in regard to which partner raises discussion about problems and which partner avoids discussion. However, desire for closeness is theoretically universal (Bowlby, 1979; Waldinger, et al., 2003). Therefore, a gender difference in struggles over intimacy and closeness would not be expected.

#### *Implications for Clinical Work*

This study provides further evidence of the importance of the issue of pursuer-distancer patterns in couples therapy. These patterns were reported by the majority of participants in this study and were related to relationship satisfaction. Therefore, they represent a relevant issue for couples. This study provides some evidence that pursuer-distancer patterns may be appropriately conceptualized as an enactment of adult attachment styles. While attachment is not necessarily the sole mechanism in pursuer-



distancer patterns, the results of this study suggest that attachment issues are related to the occurrence of pursuer-distancer patterns.

Conceptualizing pursuer-distancer patterns as manifestations of attachment involves recognizing that attachment issues might be a factor in struggles over closeness and distance. Such attachment issues include fear of abandonment, protest of separation, despair, and defensive resistance to the approach of caregivers/partners (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980). Individuals with preoccupied attachment styles tend to fear abandonment by attachment figures and therefore tend to respond to anticipated separation with clinging behavior and anxiety (Bartholomew, 1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985). The findings of the present study suggest that individuals with these characteristics tend to present as pursuers in pursuer-distancer couples. Individuals with dismissing attachment styles tend to respond to distress resulting from aversive attachment experiences (e.g., inconsistent care, abandonment, and abuse) by defensively resisting attachment figures. The findings of the present study suggest that such individuals tend to present as distancers in pursuer-distancer couples.

As attachment is presumed to be a biologically-based survival mechanism (Pistole, 1994), attachment issues likely reflect primal emotions. On an emotional level, couples may pursue and distance out of a very real sense of self-preservation. Recognizing these emotions and processes in treatment may be useful in interrupting and replacing dysfunctional patterns such as pursuer-distancer patterns.

#### *Limitations and Implications for Future Research*

The present study has several limitations that necessitate caution in interpreting its results. First, the study was limited because of time and resource constraints and a small

sample. The low questionnaire return rate, the scarcity of couples in therapists' caseloads, a lack of caseload turnover, and therapists' decisions to screen volatile couples or couples in crisis made for a smaller sample than that for which was planned. (A sample size of 60 – 80 couples was originally sought, given the chi-square analyses that were planned.) At the outset of the study, it was estimated that this sample could feasibly be obtained over the six-month period if at least ten therapists were recruited (six to eight couples per therapist, on average). When fewer questionnaires were returned than had been expected, the researcher attempted to recruit as many more therapists as possible through personal communication with associates and referrals from associates and to follow up frequently with all participating therapists and staff at the Center for Family Services. Despite these efforts, the number of couples from which data were obtained was small for the analyses conducted.

A small sample size decreases power, which may potentially prevent the finding of significant relationships that may exist. For this reason, future studies are called for to examine the relationship between attachment style and pursuer-distancer patterns, especially in light of the trends found in the individual-level and attachment dimension scale analyses in this study. Furthermore, a much larger-scale study might be able to examine specific constellations of couples' attachment styles to determine their association with pursuer-distancer patterns. As pursuer-distancer patterns are an interactive phenomenon, an examination of the interaction of attachment styles may be more appropriate in explaining this relationship.

A second limitation is that the instrument used to measure pursuer-distancer patterns lacks sufficient reliability and validity testing. However, the instrument showed

100% test-retest reliability in a small pilot test ( $n = 24$ ), and validity of the instrument is supported in that it is related to relationship satisfaction and adult attachment in the expected directions. Future development of a valid and reliable instrument for assessing pursuer-distancer patterns may improve the accuracy and generalizability of studies in this area. Although the measure used for this study had a high level of agreement within couples on the presence of pursuer-distancer patterns in the relationship, the low level of agreement of couples on the direction of the pattern may indicate a limitation of the instrument. However, it is also possible that the moderate disparity this study found within couples may be an indicator that measurement of pursuer-distancer patterns by self-report questionnaire is inherently flawed because of the biases of the respondent (i.e., partners' responses may differ from one another because they lack an objective view of the construct). For example, it is not uncommon for a partner who perceives herself or himself as the initiator of more than her or his share of the bids for closeness may have difficulty recognizing when she or he withdraws in response to the other partner's proximity seeking. As with any self-report measure, defensiveness, denial, or other personal biases may distort responses. Bi-directional pursuer-distancer patterns may be particularly difficult for a person to notice in his or her own relationship if the person holds the familiar sentiment of, "You always..." or, "You never..." Clinical assessment of pursuer-distancer patterns in future research (rather than use of self-report questionnaires) could potentially improve the reliability and validity of measurement of pursuer-distancer patterns.

Third, participating therapists have their primary responsibility to look after the safety and best interest of their clients. In the interest of clients' safety, therapists

screened out some clients that seemed unstable or in crisis or in which the therapist deemed any risk to any client as a result of completing the survey. Therefore, the sample may be somewhat biased.

Fourth, although therapists were all informed to instruct clients to complete the questionnaire independent of one another, it is possible that therapists sometimes neglected to do so or that client participants sometimes failed to follow this instruction. This instruction was also included on the informed consent form, but it is possible that participants may have sometimes failed to read the informed consent form carefully. Even if partners were never aware of one another's questionnaire responses, a participant's expectation that his or her partner *might* later become aware could lead to the participant answering questionnaire items inaccurately.

Finally, the specific attachment correlates of bi-directional pursuer-distancer patterns remain to be determined. The present study failed to detect a significant relationship between a bi-directional pattern and attachment styles or continuous attachment dimensions (i.e., avoidance and anxiety). It remains to be determined whether bi-directional pursuer-distancer patterns are related to different attachment styles than are uni-directional patterns. Future research could seek to discover if a unique attachment pattern exists for bi-directional pursuer-distancer couples.

### *Conclusion*

In summary, the present study provides some evidence to support the findings of previous studies (Feeney, 1999; Rodriguez, 2000) on the relationship between adult attachment and pursuer-distancer patterns. The present study also shows this relationship to exist in the clinical population. The relationship between attachment style and pursuer-

distancer patterns remains uncertain. However, this study's finding of a significant relationship between individual attachment style and individual self-report of pursuer-distancer pattern suggests that such a relationship may exist, although these findings are the result of analyses that violate the assumption of independence of data. In addition, the present study replicates the findings of previous studies that pursuer-distancer patterns and insecure attachment styles are related to lower relationship satisfaction in couples. Male avoidance seems particularly to stand out as related to lower relationship satisfaction.

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## Appendix A

### Participating Therapist's Informed Consent

#### **Title of the Study:**

The Association between Attachment Style and Uni- and Bi-directional Pursuer-distancer Patterns in Couples: A Clinical Sample of Couples in Counseling

#### **Investigators:**

This study is being conducted by L. Christopher Davies, candidate for a Master's degree in Marriage and Family Therapy at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. The faculty advisor is Dr. Karen H. Rosen. Christopher Davies can be reached at 703-346-5332.

#### **I. Study Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to examine couples' cyclical patterns of emotional closeness and distance in relation to partners' styles of attachment to romantic partners. Specifically, this study will examine dyadic patterns in which one partner pursues (pushes for more closeness) and the other distances (pushes for less closeness) in anxious response to one another. The study will determine whether and which attachment styles are related to pursuer-distancer patterns in couples receiving therapy. The focus will not be on the issue or issues that brought couples to therapy, nor will information gathered necessarily pertain to the therapy they are receiving.

#### **II. Procedures**

Your participation in this study will entail your requesting current and incoming client couples who meet the study's criteria to complete a 10- to 15-minute anonymous questionnaire (each partner completing the questionnaire independently of the other) pertaining to their styles of attachment and emotional closeness regulation in the relationship. You will be provided with questionnaires (pre-numbered in pairs—one for each partner) and informed consent forms for each client participant, as well as pre-addressed, stamped envelopes for mailing the completed forms. We request that you obtain a signature on the informed consent form for each participant and mail these signed forms in pairs in the envelopes provided. We request that you then provide each client with one of the paired questionnaires and one of the envelopes provided and instruct each client to complete the questionnaire in the waiting room following your therapy session (if feasible) or at home and mail the completed questionnaires separately in the envelopes provided. Please instruct each partner to complete the questionnaire independent of the other partner and not to share their responses with one another afterward. Participants will write no identifying information on the questionnaires, which will remain anonymous.

It is expected that the process of soliciting clients, obtaining informed consent, and instructing clients in the completion and submission of the questionnaire will take time (approximately five minutes per couple) beyond your normal schedule. The researchers anticipate completing the survey process by March of 2004.

The researchers will not be asking you to share information about clients, nor will identifying information for any client be linkable with questionnaire data.

#### **III. Benefits of this project**

Your participation in this project will provide the researchers with data pertaining to a distressing relationship pattern that affects, according to some studies, about 50% of couples. In doing so you will be aiding in the advancement of knowledge in this little-studied topic, which may potentially provide more insight into the mechanisms at work in perpetuation of these

patterns. These research discoveries may have implications in therapy that could help you in the future to treat these problems in your client couples.

**IV. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality**

Your demographic information and the names provided by clients on the informed consent form will be treated as completely confidential. Your name will be removed from the Therapist’s Demographic Questionnaire and will be replaced with a pseudonym and will be used for descriptive purposes only. Furthermore, all information obtained from clients’ completed questionnaires will be anonymous. Only the researchers and advisors will have access to the completed forms and questionnaires.

**V. Risks**

For participating therapists, the risks of participation are minimal. You may be slightly inconvenienced by the task of soliciting clients, obtaining signed informed consents, storing envelopes, and mailing completed forms.

**VI. Compensation**

There will be no compensation for participation in this project, except that a written summary of the findings of the study will be provided upon the request of interested participant therapists following the completion of the project.

**VII. Freedom to Withdraw**

If at any time you change your mind about participating in the study, or if at any time you are no longer willing or able to continue soliciting clients for participation (even if before the anticipated completion date of March 1, 2004), you are encouraged and free to withdraw your consent and cancel your participation.

**VIII. Approval of Research**

This research has been approved, as required for projects involving human subjects, by the Institutional Review Board of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and by the Department of Human Development.

**IX. Participant’s Responsibilities**

I agree to participate in this study, and I realize that my responsibility lies in soliciting current and future clients for participation, obtaining and submitting informed consent, and providing participant clients with paired questionnaires, provided envelopes, and instructions for completion and submission of questionnaires, from the present date until March 2004.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant’s Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**X. Participant’s Permission**

I have read and understand the informed consent and conditions of this project, and I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent for participation in this project. I realize that I have the right to withdraw at any time. Should I have any questions about this research, I will contact:

L. Christopher Davies  
Researcher  
(703) 346-5332

Dr. Karen H. Rosen  
Faculty Advisor  
(703) 538-8461

Dr. David Moore  
IRB Chair  
(540) 231-4991

## Appendix B

### Client Participation Informed Consent

#### **Title of the Study:**

The Association between Attachment Style and Uni- and Bi-directional Pursuer-distancer Patterns in Couples: A Clinical Sample of Couples in Counseling

#### **Investigators:**

This study is being conducted by L. Christopher Davies, candidate for a Master's degree in Marriage and Family Therapy at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. The faculty advisor is Dr. Karen H. Rosen. Christopher Davies can be reached at 703-346-5332.

#### **I. Study Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to examine how couples experience closeness in romantic relationships. We are interested in how you behave and feel in relationships with others, as well as behaviors and feelings in your current relationship. The focus will not be on the issue or issues that brought you to therapy, nor will information gathered necessarily pertain to the therapy you are receiving.

#### **II. Procedures**

Your participation in this study will entail completion of an anonymous questionnaire (which you will complete independently of your partner) pertaining to how you experience relationships with others and emotional closeness in your present romantic relationship. We will ask you to complete the questionnaire in the waiting room following your therapy session (if feasible) or, if not, at home. Please do not share your responses with one another after completing the questionnaire. Please mail the completed questionnaire separately from your partner's in the envelope provided. Please do not write any identifying information on the questionnaires, as these will remain anonymous. It is expected that the process of completing the questionnaire will take approximately 15 - 20 minutes beyond your normal schedule.

#### **III. Benefits of this project**

Your participation in this project will provide the researchers with data pertaining to relationship patterns that many couples experience. In doing so you may experience some satisfaction at having aided in the advancement of knowledge in the field, which may potentially provide more insight into how to help couples improve their relationships. These research discoveries may have implications in therapy that could help you or others in the future to manage relationship problems.

#### **IV. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality**

Your information (name) provided on this informed consent form will be treated as completely confidential. Only the researchers and advisors will have access to the completed forms and questionnaires. Furthermore, the information you provide on the questionnaire will be anonymous and not linkable to your name or any other identifying information.

#### **V. Risks**

The risks of participation are minimal. You may be slightly inconvenienced by the task of completing and mailing the questionnaire. It is possible that you might experience some mild discomfort in answering general questions pertaining to your feelings about your close relationships.

**VI. Compensation**

There will be no compensation for participation in this project.

**VII. Freedom to Withdraw**

If at any time you change your mind about participating in the study, you are encouraged and free to withdraw your consent and cancel your participation. You are not required to respond to any questionnaire item to which you do not feel comfortable responding.

**VIII. Approval of Research**

This research has been approved, as required for projects involving human subjects, by the Institutional Review Board of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and by the Department of Human Development.

**IX. Participant’s Responsibilities**

I agree to participate in this study, and I realize that my responsibility lies in the completion and mailing of the study questionnaire (in the pre-addressed, stamped envelope provided). I understand that this questionnaire is to be completed by me separately from my partner and mailed separately from my partner’s completed questionnaire. By signing this form, I also give my therapist permission to submit this form to the researchers (for their confidential records). (This consent form and completed questionnaires will be sent in separate envelopes so that your questionnaire information will be completely anonymous.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant’s Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**X. Participant’s Permission**

I have read and understand the informed consent and conditions of this project, and I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent for participation in this project. I realize that I have the right to withdraw at any time. Should I have any questions about this research, I will contact:

L. Christopher Davies  
Researcher  
(703) 346-5332

Dr. Karen H. Rosen  
Faculty Advisor  
(703) 538-8461

Dr. David Moore  
IRB Chair  
(540) 231-4991





## Appendix D

### Experiences of Relationship Closeness and Distance: Self-assessment Measure

*The following are brief descriptions of four categories of couples. Please read each one carefully and put a check in the box next to the category that best describes your current relationship. Please check only one box. These descriptions represent overall patterns in how couples experience closeness in their relationship.*

- Category A:** Overall, my partner is usually the one to push for more closeness and intimacy in the relationship. A lot of the time I feel that I need to push for more independence (for me or for my partner) in order to keep the relationship manageable. I am comfortable with being intimate or emotionally close once in a while, but I feel uncomfortable when my partner asks me to be more affectionate or open or to spend more time together. Often, I think my partner wants more togetherness than I want. It is at times like these when I try to make or ask for a little space. However, sometimes it seems like the more I try to make more space, the more my partner wants to be closer.
- Category B:** Overall, I put forth more effort than my partner in having closeness in our relationship. Sometimes I feel that my partner might be less invested than I am in the relationship. I do not wish to pressure my partner, but sometimes I suspect that if I did not ask my partner for time together, affection, or intimacy, it would rarely happen. Occasionally, I push really hard for closeness with my partner, which often makes my partner uneasy or uncomfortable. My partner often wants a little too much space or independence, and this makes me uncomfortable. When my partner is unavailable or withdrawn, these are the times when I am likely to crave closeness.
- Category C:** My partner and I are not always in sync with one another in terms of intimacy or closeness in general. It seems like one of us is usually “chasing” the other. There have been periods of time (at least one) in which I have felt that my partner was emotionally distant, to which I would often respond by feeling uneasy or anxious and pushing for more togetherness or affection. On the other hand, there have also been periods (at least one) during which I felt my partner to be somewhat demanding of closeness, openness, affection, intimacy, or time together, which often made me uncomfortable, uneasy, or anxious.
- Category D:** Neither my partner nor I put forth a great deal more overall effort than the other to promote closeness, openness, intimacy, or affection in the relationship. Although sometimes one of us may prefer more closeness or intimacy than the other, no one partner consistently pushes for closeness while the other pushes for independence. Much of the time, we both mutually seek closeness with one another. Occasionally, we have disagreements in our relationship. I am comfortable being open, affectionate, and intimate, and spending time with my partner, at least some of the time. I am usually comfortable with being asked by my partner for more or less affection, closeness, or time together.

# Memo

To: Clinic Staff  
From: Chris Davies  
CC:  
Date:  
Re: Chris's Thesis

---

Dear clinic staff,  
I am beginning the collection of data for my thesis on couples' experience of closeness and distance in their relationships. If you have a current client or are receiving a new intake that meets the following criteria:

- been in the relationship for at least 6 months (married, dating, engaged, or cohabitating)
- you are seeing both partners

...then you are eligible to participate. If this applies to you and you are willing to help, I would appreciate it immensely! Here is what participation involves:

- Inform clients about the study and obtain informed consent signature (place in a sealed envelope)
- Ask clients to complete a 15- to 20-minute, anonymous questionnaire immediately following the therapy session (or a later session) in the waiting room
- Clients will each complete identical questionnaires, independent of each other, place them in a sealed envelope, and deposit them in a box in the waiting room
- Ask clients not to share their responses with one another after completing the questionnaire

If you are willing to ask eligible clients to participate, please sign the attached informed consent form and therapist demographic information sheet and place them in my box. Thanks for you help!!

Chris

Appendix F

Therapist Demographic Information Sheet

**How many years have you been a therapist or therapist intern? (Round up to whole years): \_\_\_\_\_**

**What is the setting in which you do most of your clinical work?**

- Private practice
- Inpatient facility
- Addiction treatment center
- Social service agency
- University on-site clinic
- Other

Appendix G

Client Demographic Information Sheet and the *Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale*

**Your gender (circle one):**      Male      Female

**Your age (in years):** \_\_\_\_\_

**What is the status of your current relationship?**

- Dating
- Living together
- Engaged
- Married
- Other

**How long have you been in your current relationship?** \_\_\_\_\_ years, \_\_\_\_\_ months

**What is the highest level of education you have completed?**

- No high school
- Some high school
- Graduated high school
- Some college
- Bachelor's degree
- Some graduate school
- Graduate degree

**What category best describes your race/ethnicity?**

- African-American/Black
- Asian
- Caucasian
- Latino/Hispanic
- Native American
- Other

**What is your personal income per year?**

- \$0 – 19,999
- \$20,000 – 39,999
- \$40,000 – 59,999
- \$60,000 – 79,999
- \$80,000 or higher

**How many children do you have from this relationship?** \_\_\_\_\_

**How many people presently live in your household?** \_\_\_\_\_

**About how long have you been involved in therapy with your current therapist?**

- Less than one month
- One month
- Two months
- Three months
- Four months
- Five or more months

**How satisfied are you with your current marriage or relationship?**

Extremely									Extremely
Dissatisfied	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		Satisfied

**How satisfied are you with your relationship with your spouse or partner?**

Extremely									Extremely
Dissatisfied	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		Satisfied

**How satisfied are you with your partner as a spouse or partner?**

Extremely									Extremely
Dissatisfied	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		Satisfied

## Appendix H

### Curriculum Vita

**L. Christopher Davies**  
1600 S. Eads St. #124-S.  
Arlington, VA 22202  
Home Phone: (703) 346-5332  
Work Phone: (703) 538-8393  
Email: lodavies@vt.edu

#### PERSONAL

Date of Birth: February 12, 1978  
Citizenship: United States of America  
Marital Status: Single  
Current Position: Research Assistant, Virginia Polytechnic and State University,  
Department of Human Development.

#### EDUCATION

Baccalaureate: Brigham Young University  
BS, April 2001  
Psychology with a minor in Family Science (GPA: 3.82)  
High School Diploma: Citizens High School Average: 93% (GPA  
equivalent: 4.0)

#### EMPLOYMENT

*2001-2004*

*Graduate/Research Assistant, Virginia Tech, Department of Human Development.*  
Conducting a literature review and meta-analysis of empirical research on child abuse risk. Development of a child abuse risk assessment instrument for use by military Family Advocacy clinicians.

*2001-2001*

*Sports Camp Counselor, Brigham Young University Sports Camps.*  
Supervising camp participants (ages 11-18), conducting nightly devotionals, and assisting in coordinating activities, administrative duties, and emergency response.

*2000-2001*

*Teaching Assistant (Grader), Marriage, Family and Human Development, School of Family Life, Brigham Young University.*  
Assisting professor during classes, meeting with students to discuss course material and to advise, assisting professor with construction of examinations, grading and evaluating completed assignments, multiple course sections.

2000-2000 *Psychiatric Technician, Utah State Hospital*

Interacting with psychiatric inpatients, assisting patients in following treatment plan prescribed by mental health professionals, helping patients complete activities of daily living, redirecting patients who are acting out aggressively, charting patients' activities and assisting the RN in charge. Worked on boys and girls youth units, forensic unit, and several adult units.

#### RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Master's thesis involving collection of questionnaire data. Search and review of literature and coding and entry of data for meta-analysis on factors related to child physical abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect, working under Dr. Sandra Stith at Virginia Tech through the funding of the joint U.S.D.A.

Assisted Ph.D. student/BYU teaching staff member Chris Treadwell with doctoral dissertation study on the effect of the context of interpersonal relationships on emotion, particularly anger and guilt.

Completed Research Design and Statistics courses.

#### CLINICAL EXPERIENCE

2003-2004

Family Therapy Extern, Argus House, Arlington Juvenile Courts.

2002-2004

Marriage and Family Therapy Intern, Center for Family Services, Virginia Tech, Northern Virginia Center.

2002-2003

Co-facilitator, Couples Conflict Group, Virginia Tech, Northern Virginia Center.

#### CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Stith, S. M., Boykin, E. L., Davies, L. C., Alder, M. C., McPherson, M. E., & Penn, C. E. (April 17, 2003). *Family Violence Risk Assessment in the Military*. Poster presented at the Virginia Tech Research Exposition, Northern Virginia Center, Falls Church, VA.

Stith, S. M. & Milner, J. S. (January 9, 2003). *Development of maltreatment risk assessment tools: A joint services project*. Report presented at the Marine Corps Family Advocacy Subcommittee Meeting, Marsh Center, Quantico, VA.

Stith, S. M. & Milner, J. S. (August 14, 2002). *Development of maltreatment risk assessment tools: A joint services project*. Report presented at the Counseling, Advocacy, & Prevention Biennial Conference, Harrison Room, Doubletree Hotel, Crystal City, VA.

## PUBLICATIONS

Stith, S.M., Boykin, E. B., Davies, L. C., Alder, M. C., McPherson, M. A., Dees, J., Harris, J. M., Som, A. (2004). *Child maltreatment risk factor literature review*. Retrieved May 10, 2004 from, [http://www.nvc.vt.edu/mft/fap\\_downloads.html](http://www.nvc.vt.edu/mft/fap_downloads.html)

## COMMUNITY SERVICE

*1999-1999*

*Volunteer at Utah State Hospital, Boys Youth Unit (prior to employment at hospital)*

Participated in recreational activities with teens with mental disorders. Interacted with teens and modeled pro-social behavior.

*1997-1999 Volunteer full-time service mission, San Bernardino, CA*

Represented the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church).

Taught basic beliefs of the church to individuals and families. Encouraged family values within families, helping families to implement programs to increase communication and time together. Trained over 40 church representatives in both individual and group settings in interpersonal and teaching skills. Participated in humanitarian efforts in several communities adjacent to San Bernardino

*1997-1997 Volunteer teacher's aid at Sandia Elementary School, Apple Valley, CA*

Assisted teachers in a first-grade class. Interacted with students and assisted them with in-class assignments.

*1997-1997 Volunteer teacher's aid at Henderson Elementary School, Barstow, CA*

Assisted teachers in a third-grade class. Helped monitor and interacted with students on school grounds during recess. Helped coordinate group activities in class.

## MEMBERSHIPS

Psi Chi National Honor Society in Psychology

## AWARDS

Eagle Scout Award, 1993

Dean's List, winter, 2000

Fall/winter academic scholarship at Brigham Young University 2000-2001

Virginia Tech Graduate Student Association, Graduate Research Development Project grant of \$300 for Master's thesis project.

## AREAS OF INTEREST

Adult and child attachment

Communication patterns within the marriage relationship

Child and adolescent development

Couples Therapy