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## Examining Relational Dynamics in Couples through an Art-Making Experience: A Replication Study

Kuangheng Hwang

*Loyola Marymount University*, [digitalkuang@gmail.com](mailto:digitalkuang@gmail.com)

Anna McNerney

*Loyola Marymount University*, [a.mcn67@gmail.com](mailto:a.mcn67@gmail.com)

Grace Palenik

*Loyola Marymount University*, [gpalenikhsieh@gmail.com](mailto:gpalenikhsieh@gmail.com)

Kathleen Scheppe

*Loyola Marymount University*, [kmscheppe@gmail.com](mailto:kmscheppe@gmail.com)

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Examining Relational Dynamics in Couples through an Art-Making Experience:

A Replication Study

by

Kuangheng Hwang, Anna McNerney, Grace Palenik, and Kathleen Scheppe

A thesis research paper presented to the

Faculty of the Department of

Marital and Family Therapy with specialized training in Art Therapy

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In partial fulfillment of the

Requirements Requirements for the Degree

Masters in Marital and Family Therapy with Specialized training in Art Therapy

May 2018

Signature Page

Researcher's Signature

  
Kuangheng Hwang, MA, MFT Associate, Art Therapy Trainee

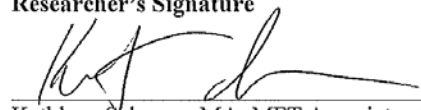
Researcher's Signature

  
Anna McNeerney, MA, MFT Associate, Art Therapy Trainee

Researcher's Signature

  
Grace Palenik, MA, MFT Associate, Art Therapy Trainee

Researcher's Signature

  
Kathleen Scheppe, MA, MFT Associate, Art Therapy Trainee

Researcher Mentor's Signature

  
Einat Metzl, PhD, LMFT, ATR-BC, CST

### **Abstract**

This qualitative research looked at the relational dynamics and attachment styles of research participants through individual and dyadic art-making tasks. This research is a replication study of Snir & Wiseman's (2010) research on *Attachment in Romantic Couples and Perceptions of a Joint Drawing Session*. In this particular research, three couples completed a demographic questionnaire, the ECR-S, the DAS, an individual art-making task, and a joint nonverbal drawing task with their partner, followed by a verbal reflection facilitated by researchers. Researchers found patterns suggesting attachment style may be correlated with an individual's cultural background, relationship satisfaction, past relationship experience, and the dyadic art making process and product. Limitations and considerations were further discussed for future research.

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## **Introduction**

### **Study Topic**

The purpose of this study was to examine the relational dynamics and attachment indicators, through dyadic art-making tasks, of couples who have lived together for six months or more. This study applied attachment theory and Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT) frames and instruments to assess the couples' dynamics and each partner's individual attachment style. The study replicated Snir and Wiseman's (2010) original research on *Attachment in Romantic Couples and Perceptions of a Joint Drawing Session*, using an art therapy method of a joint drawing between romantic partners to look for predictors of their relational dynamics in their individual attachment style and art-making behaviors.

This replication study utilized a similar design, with some changes in survey instruments, allowing researchers to focus more on cultural considerations in the U.S. and looking at current relationship satisfaction (EFT tool) beyond the attachment questionnaire. Our research was conducted at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, California while the original study took place in Israel. Overall, our motive was to further deepen an understanding of art-making with couples and attachment.

### **Significance of the Study Topic**

There was a magnitude of research and literature on attachment theory supported by Bowlby and Ainsworth from the late 1970s (Ainsworth, 1970, Bowlby, 1977, 1978). This research paved the path for attachment research focused on children and family dynamics in the 1980s (Heard, 1981, 1928). Johnson (2001) later used an attachment theory lens and EFT to explore couples' relationships. Yet, art therapy literature regarding the use of dyadic art-making to assess couple's attachment was limited. In addition, art therapy research and couples research



seemed to lack cultural considerations such as the impact of socio economic status, language, heritage, and belief and value systems on couples and couples' communications (Agishtein & Brumbaugh, 2013, Lee & Keith, 1994). Despite these absences, Snir and Wiseman's (2010) study found value in using the shared language of art-making processes as a way to better understand the dynamics of couples. The empirical data provided from that study and this replication could assist clinicians in identifying emerging themes that depict the communication and attachment styles of couples. By utilizing art therapy methods, a visual representation of couples' communication can serve as a clearer lens to analyze and understand attachment styles.

### Background of the Study

Attachment theory, developed by Bowlby and Ainsworth (1991), examined personality development by understanding a child's relationship to their caregiver. Attachment was evaluated by examining the caregiver's ability to provide comfort, proximity and attention in response to an expressed need (Fishler, Sperling, & Carr, 1990). Generally, attachment has been studied in caregiver-child relationships; however, some research has been done to apply an attachment model to adult romantic relationships (Fishler et al., 1990). Despite differences in the role of attachment from childhood to adulthood, Ainsworth's classifications of attachment are still relevant to assessing adult attachment (Fishler et al., 1990). George, Kaplan, and Main (1984) developed the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) which created parallel categories to Ainsworth's childhood delineations of attachment; their *autonomous* classification correlated with Ainsworth's *secure* category, *dismissing* was similar to *avoidant*, *preoccupied* to *ambivalent*, and a fourth category of *unresolved* related to Ainsworth's *disorganized* classification (Sochos, 2013). The AAI is currently the defining assessment on adult attachment (Sochos, 2013), but it is quite lengthy and has been critiqued for presenting a categorical rather than dimensional model of attachment (Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000). The Experiences in Close Relationships Scale (ECRS) was created by Brennan, Clark, and Shaver (1998) as a response to the AAI, and offered a measurement of attachment that was grounded in two scales; avoidance and anxiety. These measures of adult attachment guided the development of our study and the decision to include the ECRS as a measurement tool.

Attachment theory was the overarching influence on our approach to assessing adult romantic relationships; however, we also examined emotionally focused therapy (EFT) as a

secondary mode of understanding communication in romantic relationships. EFT was developed as a therapy specifically for couples experiencing distress (Johnson, 1996) and therefore it felt particularly relevant to our interests. In EFT, Johnson acknowledged the potency of emotions on attachment and relationships (1996), and she later cited attachment as an underlying theory that supported the treatment focus of EFT (Greenman & Johnson, 2013). Greenman and Johnson (2013) noted that in adulthood, romantic partners are the primary source of attachment, and distress in the romantic relationship is often a manifestation of attachment difficulties. Therefore EFT presented itself as an influential combination of couples and attachment theory that could be used as a lens for our research.

EFT approaches couples' dynamics through a here-and-now perspective, focusing on emotional expression and reception by partners (Wiebe & Johnson, 2016). Couples are taught to recognize their experience and attune to their partner, rather than solely listening to their own reactions to an experience (Wiebe & Johnson, 2016). This EFT focus coincides with the process of joint art-making, where here-and-now interactions are observed and recorded as visual interactions in the art product (Hinkle, Radomski, & Decker, 2015). The awareness and experiential quality of EFT may be heightened by pairing it with the physical process of art-making. Despite these similarities, little research has been done to examine EFT and joint art-making together.

Similar to research on attachment theory, the majority of joint art-making procedures have been studied with parent-child dyads or family drawings (Gavron, 2013, Goldner & Scharf, 2011). Kwiatkowska (1978) promoted the use of the family art evaluation which included a variety of individual and joint art procedures to understand family dynamics. More recently,

Gavron (2013) has used the Joint Painting Procedure (JPP) with parent-child dyads to assess dyadic relationships. The JPP has been modified for use with couples, renamed the Couples Joint Drawing (CJD), and has been thoroughly studied by Snir and Wiseman to examine couples' relational dynamics (2010, 2013, 2016). The CJD appeared to be an appropriate tool to combine our interest in relational dynamics and attachment within adult romantic couples. Our hope was to further develop a use of the CJD as a tool for understanding nonverbal relational dynamics as well as examining the art as a representation of those witnessed dynamics. Our study design took the form of a shared art task similar to the CJD, a conversation with the participants, and short assessments including the ECRS in order to explore adult attachment, relational dynamics, and couples' satisfaction through an art therapy approach.

Attachment theory, emotionally focused therapy, and joint drawings are the cornerstones for conceptualizing this research. The following literature review goes further into depth on these concepts and explores our specific research questions that grew out of this examination.

### **Literature Review**

Through this literature review we explored cultural considerations, relationship wellbeing, past romantic relationship experiences, and dyadic art assessment through the lens of attachment theory and emotionally focused therapy (EFT). Our literature search focused on scholarly research conducted between 1984 and 2017, published in peer reviewed journals mainly housed within psychology, art therapy, and family psychotherapy, both from the U.S. and internationally. Our search criteria focused on the influence and research of attachment theory and EFT in regards to cultural differences, art-making, and past relationships. Our review aided in understanding attachment representations in couples, and examined art as a modality of assessment for attachment within romantic dyads. This understanding then guided our study of couples' dynamics through art-making.

### **Attachment Theory**

A brief history of attachment theory served to guide our research and provided a base understanding of the roots of relational dynamics.

Fearon (2017) referred to attachment theory as a tendency for a child to pursue contact with a consistent caregiver when frightened, worried, or vulnerable. This contact then provided a sense of comfort for the child (Fearon, 2017). Fearon (2017) paid tribute to Bowlby as a founder in attachment theory and suggested that attachment between a child and a caregiver is a means of survival. Ainsworth (1995) later expanded on Bowlby's theory of attachment by studying women in Uganda with their babies. Ainsworth (1995) observed mothers carrying their babies and measured the amount of crying from an infant. Ainsworth concluded that babies with secure attachments cried when their mother wasn't there or there was an expectation of leaving; babies that were insecurely attached tended to fuss more without a rationale (1995). Ainsworth (1995)

recognized Bowlby's earlier works of attachment, and suggested that in attachment the mother served as a secure base, and patterns of care in the relationship created different attachment styles. Ainsworth divided attachment into secure and insecure categories, with insecure dividing further into anxious, ambivalent, and avoidant (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1990). According to Goldner, Gazit and Scharf (2017) these attachment styles can be understood by considering two continuums of insecurity: avoidance and anxiety, which interact to create different insecure styles through unmet needs. Avoidance manifested in an individual's discomfort or fear of intimacy while anxiety in attachment was characterized by a worry of abandonment, which fueled a drive for dependence on another (Goldner et al., 2017). These categories of attachment have stayed consistent over time and have shaped the spectrum of attachment research and spawned further therapeutic approaches, such as EFT.

### **Emotionally Focused Therapy**

Emotionally focused therapy (EFT) is an evidence based practice for couple's therapy. It was based on attachment theory and followed that an individual's attachment style determined the perception of responsiveness in a relationship (Wiebe & Johnson, 2017). EFT studied a couple's ability to regulate and respond to emotional needs and brought awareness to a couple's emotional responses that may stem from their attachment styles or concerns (Wiebe & Johnson, 2017). EFT also studied how a couple's relationship affected individual wellbeing; Wiebe and Johnson (2017) noted that EFT was beneficial for couples who experienced more distress. Secure attachments in a relationship contributed to an individual having a greater sense of wellbeing and being more likely to be resilient to distress (Wiebe & Johnson, 2017). The ultimate goal of EFT is to recreate a secure attachment bond and increase relationship satisfaction by strengthening security within the relationship (Wiebe & Johnson, 2016).

### **Cultural Considerations in Attachment Theory**

There have been many research attempts to understand how religion, gender differences, ethnicity, and collectivism or individualism affect the expression of attachment styles. This section utilized the concepts listed above to answer the question: How does culture inform attachment styles and influence a couple's relationship?

**Religion.** Lopez, Riggs, Pollard and Hook (2011) hypothesized that religious commitment would have a positive and significant effect on marital adjustment for both males and females. The study postulated that religious commitment might moderate the negative effect of attachment anxiety, or attachment avoidance, on marital adjustment (Lopez et al., 2011). However, Lopez et al. (2011) found that high religious commitment actually heightened the negative relationship of anxiety and marital adjustment when only one partner exhibited attachment anxiety. These partners became excessively sensitive and defensive, and showed fearfulness, jealousy, or hostile behaviors, which exacerbated the negative effect of this attachment in their marriages (Lopez et al., 2011). In contrast, for attachment avoidance, high religious commitment had a positive effect on marital adjustment; it had a protective effect when either one or both partners had attachment avoidance (Lopez et al., 2011).

Pollard, Riggs, and Hook (2014) examined how religious coping styles and attachment styles affect marital adjustment among 81 heterosexual couples. Pollard et al. (2014) described positive religious coping as having a beneficial, supportive connection with God, and negative religious coping as viewing God's power as evil and harsh. Pollard et al. (2014) found that individuals with attachment avoidance were less likely to use negative religious coping, but found that individuals with attachment anxiety were more likely to use negative religious coping and less likely to use positive religious coping. Pollard et al. (2014) suggested that individuals

with avoidant attachments were more likely to lack a secure and positive relationship with God. In comparison, Pollard et al. (2014) and Lopez et al. (2011) found that individuals with attachment anxiety more often had conflicted feelings and an inconsistent relationship to God. Pollard et al. (2014) postulated that positive religious coping strategies might help attachment avoidant individuals stay satisfied with their marriage over time. The individuals with attachment avoidance had more positive outcomes from positive religious coping than those with attachment anxiety, which is consistent with the results from Lopez et al.'s (2011) study. Pollard et al. (2014) found that when attachment anxiety was low, higher positive religious coping was associated with higher marital adjustment; however, with high attachment anxiety, negative religious coping strategies were able to positively buffer marital adjustment. Perhaps higher negative religious coping limits the effect of partner attachment anxiety (Pollard et al., 2014). It appears that religious commitment plays a role in positive or negative marital adjustment based on different attachment styles. However, when examining whether different religious denominations may affect attachment styles, Agishtein and Brumbaugh (2013) found no evidence of an influence.

**Ethnicity, collectivism and individualism.** Doherty, Hatfield, Thompson and Choo (1994) sampled four ethnic groups to determine cultural and ethnic influences on love and attachment. Participants were self-assessed to determine their attachment styles, attitudes toward passionate and companionate love, and whether they were from an individual or collective culture. Doherty et al. (1994) found that European-Americans were the most individualistic, Japanese-Americans and Pacific Islanders were intermediate in individualism/collectivism, and Chinese-Americans were the most collectivist. Doherty et al. (1994) found no evidence that people from diverse ethnic backgrounds differed from Western established attachment styles. In



all ethnic groups, men's and women's adult attachment styles were similar in attitude and behavior (Doherty et al., 1994). The anxious-ambivalent individuals were the most likely to be in a love relationship and scored the highest on the passionate love scale, followed by the secure subjects; avoidant individuals scored lowest on both passionate love and companionate love scales (Doherty et al., 1994). The secure subjects scored significantly higher on the companionate love scale while the anxious-ambivalent individuals were intermediate (Doherty et al., 1994). It is possible that the findings of the study were compromised because participants resided in the U.S. culture instead of their culture of origin. Ainsworth (1967) and Doherty et al. (1994) agreed that attachment styles were not different between cultures; however, a decade later, Schmitt et al. (2004) and Agishtein and Brumbaugh (2013) stated that different cultures do reflect different attachment formation.

Schmitt et al. (2004) examined whether the Model of Self and Model of Other attachment scales were valid across most cultures. If so, it would affirm the general hypothesis that an internal working Model of Self and Model of Other was a fundamental component of human psychology (Bowlby, 1988). However, Schmitt et al. (2004) found that the Model of Self and Other lacked cultural universality and did not fit the four dimensions of attachment styles across all cultures in the same way. Schmitt et al. (2004) found that secure attachment was the most common form of romantic attachment across 79% of cultures, which counted as a near pancultural construct; however, there were some exceptions: Ethiopia was considerably higher in dismissing, preoccupied, and fearful romantic attachments, and Belgium was higher in dismissing and fearful. In addition, in East Asians the preoccupied romantic attachment levels were higher than secure romantic attachment levels (Schmitt et al., 2004). The study was unclear why cultures would differ in frequency of romantic attachment styles, however, understanding

this could be a great contribution for treatments of attachment-related disorders in particular cultures (Schmitt et al., 2004).

Agishtein and Brumbaugh (2013) studied 485 subjects from over 67 countries of origin and found that attachment patterns changed depending on the region of origin, ethnicity, collectivism, and acculturation. Agishtein and Brumbaugh (2013) observed that the majority of psychology theories were developed based on the middle-class Caucasian society of Western cultures, which lacked sensitivity of diversity and globalization. To emphasize, Ainsworth (1967) stated that attachment systems were based on biological and behavioral factors. However, the influence of environmental and social factors should also be considered, because the values in different cultures would reflect different attachment formations (Agishtein & Brumbaugh, 2013).

Agishtein and Brumbaugh (2013) examined individuals from nine different regions, and found participants from Asia were more likely to have an anxious attachment style than people from Western Europe, Turkey, Caribbean and North and South America; Schmitt et al. (2004) supported that East Asians were especially subject to anxious-preoccupied romantic attachment. This might be explained because in many East Asian cultures people's sense of self-worth is heavily community driven and collectivistic; East Asians tend to judge themselves by interconnectedness and the value provided by others (Schmitt et al., 2004). In addition, participants from the region of South Asia (India, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh) exhibited a lower level of attachment anxiety than all other regions in the sample (Agishtein & Brumbaugh, 2013). Agishtein & Brumbaugh (2013) explained that this region generally identified with Confucian-based East-Asian collectivism, however, other collectivists in this study were from honor-based societies, which may explain some of the variations in attachment presentation amongst

collectivist cultures. Moreover, Agishtein & Brumbaugh (2013) confirmed that the level of acculturation into the dominant culture negatively associated with attachment anxiety and avoidance, meaning that higher levels of acculturation with the dominant culture resulted in more secure attachments. Finally, Agishtein and Brumbaugh (2013) argued that attachment behaviors differ across cultures; attachment styles from different cultures may not have the same consequences or negativities as from Western culture.

**Gender.** In a longitudinal study involving 354 heterosexual dating couples, Lee and Keith (1994) found intriguing attachment patterns: among the participating couples, no couple was found to have avoidant-avoidant nor anxious-anxious attachment pairings. Instead, Lee and Keith (1994) found avoidant participants tended to be paired with anxious partners. These findings also aligned with a study that revealed that individuals with avoidant attachment styles tended to feel more comfortable with an anxious partner and vice versa (Collins & Read, 1990; Simpson, 1990, as cited in Lee & Keith, 1994). Both male and female participants with anxious attachment styles often exhibited clinging, dependent and overbearing behaviors, often expecting their partners to be withdrawn, invulnerable, and dismissive, which matched with a partner with avoidant attachment style (Lee & Keith, 1994).

When considering gender differences in attachment style, and their correlation to relationship satisfaction, Lee and Keith (1994) found that an anxiously attached female's relationships were less fulfilled, viable, and caring than those of a securely attached woman's relationships. There were also more disagreements and ambivalent feelings for anxiously attached women than for securely attached women (Lee & Keith, 1994). Anxiously attached females self-reported to have less satisfaction in relationships and difficulty in trusting their partners in comparison to other attachment styles (Lee & Keith, 1994). Females with avoidant

attachment styles reported lower success in relationships and higher conflict-ambivalence than securely attached females, however, between anxiously and avoidantly attached females no significant difference in the ratings of the relationships were found (Lee & Keith, 1994). Lee and Keith (1994) reported that women rated their relationships as more passionate with an avoidant male than with an anxious male partner; women reported more conflict-ambivalence with anxious male partners than with other attachment style partners. Moreover, women rated relationships with avoidant male partners as more favorable than with other attachment style male partners (Lee & Keith, 1994).

Lee and Keith's (1994) findings aligned with other research, finding that avoidantly attached men with anxiously attached women reported less satisfaction, commitment, intimacy and more conflict-ambivalence than with securely attached partners (Pietromonaco & Carnelley, 1994, as cited in Lee & Keith, 1994). In fact, avoidant males, and anxious females, displayed the most negative ratings in all categories, they (and their partners) rated significantly less committed, passionate, caring, intimate, satisfied and viable in a relationship (Lee & Keith, 1994). Lee and Keith (1994) also addressed the impact of traditional gender roles on satisfaction in a relationship; individuals presenting with a typical masculine gender role asserted their independent identity and personal freedom; therefore, the typical anxious-preoccupied woman's possessive behaviors would be interpreted as a threat to a man's autonomy and liberty, which created a high level of conflict within the relationship.

Lee and Keith (1994) examined long-term stability in relationship development and found that the results were significantly impacted by gender, with the most notable finding being that anxiously attached men and avoidantly attached women exhibited the highest rates of breakup. Conversely, avoidantly attached men and anxiously attached women, who displayed the

most negative ratings in relationship satisfaction, had as much relationship stability as securely attached men and women who rated their relationships to be relatively satisfactory (Lee & Keith, 1994). Lee and Keith (1994) found that avoidant women were less motivated and less skilled in securing a relationship, and in turn, they had the highest break up rates. For avoidant men, the characteristics of conflict avoidance and low expectations appeared to contribute to the long-term stability, duration and commitment in their relationships (Lee & Keith, 1994).

Monteoliva, García-Martínez, Calvo-Salguero and Aguilar-Luzón (2012) studied the differences between gender and attachment styles in regards to attitudes towards communication, and the number of past partner relationships. The results of the relationship questionnaire revealed there were differences in attachment style and gender in relation to the two variables (Monteoliva et al., 2012). Regarding the number of past relationships, dismissing men had more past relationships compared with secure and preoccupied men (Monteoliva et al., 2012). However, dismissing women did not differ from women with other styles (Monteoliva et al., 2012). When men and women in the same attachment style were compared for the past relationships, the only difference was found between dismissing men and women, with women reporting fewer partners (Monteoliva et al., 2012). Monteoliva et al. (2012) argued these results were influenced by the sexual double standard concept, where sexual freedom among men is positively viewed, but for women is considered unacceptable. The study found that dismissing women's behavior regarding romantic relationships was more aligned with their gender role socialization than their attachment style; whereas dismissing men's behaviors and attitudes were aligned with both their gender role and their attachment style (Monteoliva et al., 2012).

Along with Lee and Keith (1994), Monteoliva et al. (2012) also agreed that traditional feminine gender roles influenced satisfaction in relationships. Females were encouraged or

expected to carry a greater sense of responsibility for, and to make greater efforts to maintain, relationships than men; the female sex also fostered the desire for emotional connectedness and the expression of feelings in relationships (Monteoliva et al., 2012). These characteristics align with characteristics associated with the avoidance scale of attachment (Goldner et al., 2017), therefore it is possible that avoidant women might have more difficulties in relationships because these responsibilities would likely not be addressed. Gender role appears to have a strong impact on romantic relationships and attachment styles that would influence the stability, number of past relationship and the attitude between the partners.

### **Effects of Attachment Styles on the Wellbeing of a Dyadic Relationship**

After exploring the cultural effects on attachment, this section explored individual and relationship wellbeing, partner expectations, and relationship satisfaction. With the recognition that attachment is personalized with each individual based on culture and infant experiences, the following section expanded on the importance and effects of personal attachment style in relation to dyadic relationships.

**Individual wellbeing.** Experiences in childhood and early adulthood shape identity and determine attachment (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007) . These experiences, and attachment, are what often influence the emotional maintenance of future romantic relationships (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). According to Weisskirch (2017), a person's wellbeing can be influenced in early adulthood because relationships are often a means of emotional support. In Weisskirch's (2017) research, attachment theory was applied in order to attempt an understanding of the influences of previous romantic experiences and self-efficacy within the romantic relationship. Through the lens of attachment theory, unmet needs and experiences from infancy can be passed on through adulthood and installed as patterns of insecure attachment (Weisskirch, 2017). This insecure

attachment can continue to be a “template” in relationships when communicating and dealing with emotional distress (Weisskirch, 2017, p.37). Personal emotional distress could affect the relationship and result in relationship distress, which Halford, Kelly, and Markman (1997) defined as a couple having difficulty expressing their emotional needs, resulting in unproductive communication patterns and negative views of the relationship. These patterns of attachment, associated with attachment avoidance, can affect intimacy, emotional dependence, and closeness in relationships (Weisskirch, 2017). Weisskirch (2017) studied how romantic relationships can serve as an outlet for emotional support. The amount of dependence and emotional distress present, seen through attachment avoidance patterns, can affect the wellbeing of the relationship and the individuals involved (Weisskirch, 2017).

Insecure and secure partners will exercise their wellbeing differently. Partners who feel secure in relationships may practice having more “positive psychological wellbeing” than a person feeling insecure, suggesting lower self-esteem and an increase in distress in insecure partners (Weisskirch, 2017, p.38). Weisskirch (2017) researched those who experience a higher sense of wellbeing and found that they have a higher sense of self-esteem, and thus have more personal self-efficacy, as well as in the relationship. Personal self-efficacy can benefit a couple by minimizing emotional and psychological distress and aiding in resolving conflict (Weisskirch, 2017). By decreasing individual emotional distress, the general wellbeing of the relationship is likely to improve and promote self-efficacy and individuation within the dyadic relationship. Johnson (2001) emphasized Bowlby’s belief that one’s identity and self-efficacy were formulated and sustained through interactions with others. Therefore, it would seem that self-efficacy has positive and reciprocate relationship with relationship satisfaction; as positive interactions with a partner would likely increase self-efficacy and vice versa. Positive or negative

interactions between a couple can stimulate a particular, often predictable, emotional response (Kobak, 1999). When the negative emotional response feels perpetual by a partner, the partner may anticipate the negative response. The anticipation and expectation of the emotional response may provide a felt sense of perpetual distress in the relationship (Johnson, 2001). It might be suggested that these emotional responses to distress, whether giving them or on the receiving end, may correlate with seeking safety and be rooted in one's early and familiar experiences.

Weisskirch (2017) acknowledged that there are gaps in the research on couples and self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is noted as an individual belief in the ability to control situations for a desired outcome (Weisskirch, 2017). Self-efficacy is acknowledged in couple's relationships and wellbeing due to the idea that individual self-efficacy can influence desired communication and even emotional responses (Weisskirch, 2017). The research postulated that a person's attachment style and self-efficacy can predict the general wellbeing of a relationship, however, Weisskirch (2017) suggested the research does not dive deep enough into the effects of general happiness, psychological distress, and self-esteem on relationship wellbeing. Also, those who were aware of their anxious attachment stressed the importance of practicing self-efficacy in order to obtain general happiness in a romantic relationship (Weisskirch, 2017). Overall, Weisskirch (2012) found that romantic relationships where partners exercise self-efficacy for wellbeing are more successful and have a stronger attachment bond. In addition, a partner's attachment style can directly impact the psychological wellbeing of an individual and couple satisfaction (Kobak & Hazan 1991). Thus, there appears to be a cyclical relationship between self-efficacy, attachment, and individual and relationship wellbeing.

**Partner expectations and satisfaction.** Uziel (2012) found that insecurely attached individuals were more likely to experience less satisfaction in dating and marriage, and could



have a difficult time coping with the stressors of romantic relationships. Partners with anxious attachment often questioned their partner's availability to the relationship, and their own role (Uziel, 2012). This concern of availability may be rooted in a desire for closeness and protection or, Uziel (2012) suggested that the need is coming from lack of self-esteem. Those that are avoidant tend to prefer more distance emotionally (Uziel, 2012), and may experience discomfort with dependence on their partner (Bowlby, 1969). Bowlby (1982) named this type of attachment decline as compulsive self-reliance, describing it as the product of one being uncomfortable with intimacy in a relationship. This idea suggested that personal attachment style is deactivated, or compensated, through the suppression of negative thoughts about conflict or self in order to diminish distress or fears in attachment and protect individual wellbeing (Naud et al., 2013). It's possible the deactivation of one's attachment style due to fears of closeness may directly affect relationship wellbeing.

Uziel's (2012) research suggested that it was fairly common for individuals to predict their partner's attachment style due to how present the attachment and emotional regulation was in the romantic relationship. Not only were attachment styles predicted through a partner's availability, or unavailability, but through societal expectations as well; gender norms and expectations play important roles in romantic relationships between partners (Uziel, 2012). For example, men may be more likely to suppress their anxieties due to societal expectations, leading them to present with more avoidant attachment styles.

In Uziel's (2012) study, self-regulation was assessed through the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQ-R L scale) which asks questions associated with, "do you practice what you preach" (Eysenck & Barrett, 1985 as cited in Uziel, 2012). This assessment characterized one's ability to practice self-control in "interpersonal contexts" (Uziel, 2012, p.224). Relationship

satisfaction was also assessed through scaling questions. Gender norms were found to be reinforced in the study through women being shown to have higher anxiety in a romantic relationship, whereas men were concluded to have more avoidance (Uziel, 2012). Holmes and Johnson (2009) noted that being informed of one's attachment style can make it easier for a romantic partner to predict the attachment style after being "exposed" over a period of time based on emotional responses and availability (Uziel, 2012, p.223). Uziel (2012) suggested that societal gender norms may push towards more distress particularly for anxious or insecure individuals in romantic relationships (Uziel, 2012). These norms may influence a desired public image in a relationship, and they may also reinforce unrealistic expectations in the relationship, leading to distress and conflict.

This literature provides an overview of potential expectations, need for closeness, or fears, based on personal attachment style. Often, personal wellbeing is protected by creating more distance in a romantic relationship, suggested by Bowlby (1969/1982). One's feelings of security and self-worth in a relationship may be based on met or unmet responses to personal needs (Johnson, 2001). Lastly, awareness of a partner's attachment style may resolve emotional distress between a couple (Uziel, 2012). These emotional responses, again, are not only formulated during infancy, but can be altered when new emotional bonds and relationships are created. Therefore, previous romantic relationships likely also influence attachment styles and communication patterns.

### **Couples' Relationship History**

Assessing couple's satisfaction and sources of relational distress may be further supported by an exploration of a couple's relationship history. Adult attachment follows similar patterns as a child-caregiver attachment (Hazan and Shaver, 1994), which led scholars to pursue

more in-depth understandings of the dynamics between different types of couples and how past relationships influence their attachment styles. However, of the large quantity of literature on couples' past relationships, there appeared to be a lack of studies on how attachment styles are linked to past relationships. However, much of the studies of couples that were most relatable to couples' attachments and history focused on two main themes: attachment injuries and reconciliation.

**Attachment injury: Divorce.** Simonič and Klobučar (2017) describe that through an attachment perspective, divorce is a disturbance and breakup of a strong attachment bond. Divorce also brings emotional, social, and financial consequences for children and spouses (Cherlin, Chase-Lansdale, & McRae, 1998; Pryor & Rodgers, 2001, as cited by Simonič & Klobučar, 2017), often leading to psychological stress that manifests in higher levels of depression and lesser satisfaction (Amato, 2000). Research showed that insecurely attached persons experiencing divorce have a much more difficult time than those with secure attachments, as they have less efficient coping strategies to face the injury; they often relive painful affects from past attachment relationships such as betrayal, guilt and rejection (Simonič & Klobučar, 2017).

**Attachment injury: Infidelity.** Believing that factors such as love and trust were strong predictors of relationship satisfaction over time, Zak et al. (2000) found that while individuals from divorced families trusted their current partner less than those from intact families, a much stronger influence of decreased trust and decreased experience of positive love stemmed from partner infidelity. According to Schade (2012), infidelity can be considered an "attachment injury," which is an intense trauma or "violation of trust that brings the nature of the whole relationship into question and must be dealt with if the relationship is to survive," (Johnson,

2005, p. 19, as cited by Schade, 2012). Zake et al. (2000) described the effects of infidelity as the thought that if one's previous partner was unfaithful, one may be primed to predict that the current partner will be also. Johnson et. al (2001) also supported the concept of infidelity as an attachment injury by stating that in regards to the matter, there is emphasis on the consequence of extreme emotional adversity of isolation and separation. From the EFT perspective, Wiebe and Johnson (2017) further elaborated that such emotional injury is rooted in the seeking of closeness as an adaptive and protective function against danger, and that the loss of such closeness (unavailability) with a partner will be perceived as threatening.

Helping couples heal through infidelity, Leone (2008) highlighted the causes, functions, meanings, and impact of infidelity, while emphasizing the importance of understanding specific meanings of an affair for each individual partner and couple. Leone (2008) also helped couples by framing the situation of infidelity as the traumatic loss of an attachment bond, and that common posttraumatic symptoms included intense emotions and disrupted functioning. Leone (2008) then monitored and steered empathic dialogue between the couple so that they could process the individual experiences of trauma, grief and loss, understand the factors leading to infidelity, and reestablish a sense of trust and safety.

**Reconciliation: Couples who get back together.** In an older study of divorce rates in the U.S., Gottman (1993) stated that 75% of couples in his research who separated eventually get divorced. This statistic inspired Plauche et al. (2016) to begin a formal inquiry examining those couples who did not divorce, asking questions that have relevance to future attachment research: Why did they not divorce? Did these remaining couples reconcile fully, find a compromise, or stay together unhappily? Though Plauche et al. (2016) suggested that answers to these questions remain sparse in current literature, their own qualitative research found that those who stayed

together developed relationship resiliency through five themes: shared difficulties, individual growth, perseverance, knowing what they are fighting for, and grand gestures. Though Plauche et al. (2016) did not present their findings through an attachment lens, they found that many of their research participants affiliated their marital resiliency to the strength of their bond with their partners.

Two studies highlight a spectrum of where to begin studying the process of marital stability: On one end of the spectrum through promoting awareness, Gottman (2004) cited that psychological studies have researched couples' interaction patterns in order to predict future marital dissolution (Gottman, 2004). On the other end through resiliency, Waite and Gallagher (2000) suggested that many couples who recover from unhappy patches can become happy again. Knowing both the destructive forces of marriage, as well as how marriages survive through inevitable struggles, highlighted the call for future research to assist clinicians in helping couples resolve marital issues before they lead to divorce.

To progress towards romantic satisfaction and commitment (Lopez, Morua, & Rice, 2007), a couple may strengthen their self efficacy, or the belief that one can control their actions to achieve an outcome (Bandura, 1997)., which may lead to increased conflict-resolution skills (Cui, Fincham, & Pasley, 2008). The healing process involves identifying and acknowledging each partner's needs from the other to feel safe, close, and connected (reference?). Those with an insecure attachment are more likely to report lower wellbeing, self-esteem, and greater psychological distress (Wei, Liao, Ku, & Shaffer, 2011, as cited by Weisskirch, 2017).

**Reconciliation: Gender differences in restorative communication.** As discussed above, gender differences in perceiving relationships as well as communicating feelings has played a significant role in couples research regarding attachment styles. Monteoliva et al.

(2012) found that men and women with the same attachment styles had different perceptions of their relationships. Men with anxious-ambivalent attachments were found to reveal more information than women, and men with avoidant attachments were perceived by their partners as less affectionate and less communicative (Collins & Read, 1990; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994; Pietromonaco & Carnelley, 1994, as cited by Monteoliva, 2012). Data from the study also revealed that women were more willing than men to disclose their feelings to their partner, which was believed to affect the perception of intimacy and closeness in the relationship (Monteoliva et al., 2012). Though recent studies provided substantial evidence that gender and gender roles have a moderating effect on the attachment styles of intimate relationships, the data was still deemed inconclusive, making the suggested correlation up for debate (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Despite limitations to the study by Monteoliva et al. (2012), there is a believed value to continuing investigations between how men and women view past relationships and it's influences on developing attachment styles, as it can assist clinicians in predicting detrimental communication patterns between couples facing difficulties.

### **A Review of Art Assessments on Attachment**

After identifying how attachment theory has influenced modern theoretical approaches to understanding adult romantic relationships, it was important to recognize how art therapy assessments have been used to identify and describe attachment styles in couples. Art therapy journals, most commonly *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, provided access to the accumulation of art-based assessment research on adult attachment. Assessments ranged from examining adult individuals, to parent-child dyads, and romantic partner dyads. The following sections were divided into art assessments that examine individuals' attachment style, assessments that

examine dyads and attachment, and finally, the resulting visual patterns developed from these art assessments.

**Exploring adult attachment through individual art assessments.** Despite the limited amount of research on art assessments, there was extensive literature on two art assessments that can be applied to attachment theory. Bird's Nest Drawings (BND) specifically function to glean information to inform a clinician's understanding of an individual's attachment characteristics (Kaiser & Deaver, 2009). Theoretically, BNDs depict attachment by using the metaphor of a bird and nest as a metaphor of the self and other, particularly in regards to nurturing (Kaiser, 1996; Kaiser & Deaver, 2009). The quality and form of the nest, its contents, and its support structure can all inform the security of the artist's attachment framework (Kaiser, 1996). The Formal Elements Art Therapy Scale (FEATS) is a commonly used set of global assessment scales that is combined with an art assessment to phenomenologically understand the qualitative data produced through art-making (Gantt, 2001). Kaiser and Deaver (2009) concluded that a global rating approach such as the FEATS provided the strongest correlation between formal art components in participant art and attachment categories. A global assessment offered a comprehensive understanding of the art product, rather than isolating single components out of context (2009). Through a review of relevant BND research, Kaiser and Deaver (2009) also identified that using three methods of data collection, specifically imagery, verbal discussion, and written survey responses, provided effective and valid correlations to attachment categories. These components were generally adhered to in all art assessments presented in academic literature, and allowed for cross-referencing interpreted data from the art with the intentions of the artist.

Most of the research done with BNDs has examined children's primary attachments, but Francis, Kaiser and Deaver (2003) established the effectiveness of the BND at assessing attachment in adults as well. However, there were a very limited number of studies that used the BND to assess adult attachment, particularly outside of clinical populations. Theoretical approaches to understanding childhood and adulthood attachment styles differed at times, but the general differentiation of secure and insecure has remained consistent and thus allows for assessments to carry over with the demographic change (Goldner & Scharf, 2011). For adults, the core struggle that is depicted through attachment styles is achieving a balance between intimacy and independence (Goldner, Gazit, & Scharf, 2017). This balance of intimacy and independence created the basis for assessment in adult attachment; each art assessment defined these concepts through a variation of formal elements identified in the participants' art through a global rating scale. The FEATS scale is often used in conjunction with an art directive called "the Person Picking an Apple from a Tree (PPAT)". Generally the PPAT is not used with the specific intention of understanding a participant's attachment style; however there are instances where has been interpreted from this perspective. Bat Or, Ishai, and Levy (2015) proposed that, similar to the BND, there could be a person-and-other metaphoric interpretation to the PPAT, lending it to attachment theory. Using PPAT scales and the FEATS, the factors of animation, organization, and realism were all correlated with adult attachment characteristics (Bat Or & Ishai, 2016). Animation, or the quality of the person attending to the tree, was interpreted as an individual displaying reaching out behaviors searching for intimacy in another (2016). Organization, or the coherence of the image, was tied to Milner's (1950) understanding of metaphoric self-other relationships (as cited in Bat Or & Ishai, 2016). Bat Or and Ishai (2016) approached their assessment using a variety of scales and theory to understand how the content



of the art could relate to attachment, and reinforced these observations through formal elements. They theorized that any art-based assessment could be interpreted through an attachment lens if there was a relationship between two or more objects because these could represent the self- and other- objects (Bat Or et al., 2015). However, the PPAT scales only found significant differences between attachment categories, not more specific attachment styles (2015). It appears that there is not currently an art assessment that can significantly provide correlations between scale data of participant artwork and the adult attachment categories of secure, anxious, avoidant, and fearful.

**Exploring attachment through dyadic art assessment.** Art assessment in dyads supplied a more varied spread of participants and constructs, but less specific correlations to attachment. Although not specifically naming attachment constructs, couples assessments again tended to look at connectedness and individuality, cornerstones of attachment characteristics. A popular assessment for couples as well as other dyads is the Couples Joint Drawing (CJD). The CJD provides two participants with an open directive to draw an image together on one piece of paper without verbal interaction (Snir & Wiseman, 2016). Sharon Snir has done a variety of analyses examining data from CJDs with cohabiting couples, with one in particular explicitly correlating the data with attachment (Snir & Hazut, 2012; Snir & Wiseman, 2010, 2013, 2016). Snir and Wiseman (2013) approached data collection by examining both the art product produced by the assessment as well as the observed interactions between the dyad during the art-making process. The CJD, as with other dyadic assessments, allowed for underlying behavioral content to influence the interpretation of the imagery data. This style of assessment provided bountiful secondary data to understand and validate attachment content within the art (2013). Using this multilayered approach to the data, Snir and Wiseman (2013) identified three distinct

drawing styles that appeared in the art of adult couples: balanced, complicated, and disconnected styles. It should be noted that these three categories did not encompass all of the art made by participants in their study, and Snir and Wiseman hypothesized the potential for a fourth category; this led to a recommendation of using the assessment as information but not ultimately as a diagnostic tool (2013). Continuing their analysis of data, Snir and Wiseman (2016) used the Experience in Close Relationships Scale (ECRS) in combination with CJDs to find that secure attachments were correlated with the balanced drawing style, and inversely insecure attachments correlated more with disengaged or complicated drawing styles. In another iteration of the CJD, Snir and Hazut (2012) acknowledged the value of multiple joint drawings in a single assessment; it allowed for a deeper examination of the participants' interactions and mediated for the unfamiliar experience of the drawing assessment. Despite this recognition, other studies using a multi-step CJD have not been done.

Although the focus of this review is on adult attachment, particularly in couples, it must be mentioned that there are more frequently examples of dyadic art assessment with parent-child dyads. The CJD has also been used as an alternatively named Joint Painting Procedure (JPP) to assess parent-child relationships, but not specifically attachment (Gavron, 2013). Gavron (2013) again named the value of observing nonverbal interactions during the art-making process because it can access subconsciously communicated content in the relationship. In Gavron's (2013) study, the JPP was used to assess motivation, dedication, and expression in relationships, as well as providing an opportunity to examine individual, context-specific needs influencing the art content. The dyadic approach, regardless of direct interpretation, provides a plethora of relational, and thus attachment-relevant, information in assessment. It can also be adjusted through interpretation to fit the developmental indicators that may influence attachment

presentations, as seen through the application to both child and adult attachment (2013). Another commonly used art assessment with children are Family drawings; they are highly correlated with attachment but have generally not been used to assess attachment in adults or dyads, although they are used with the family unit to provide information about relational dynamics (Goldner & Scharf, 2011).

The BND was also used as form of dyadic assessment in Goldner, Gazit and Scharf's (2017) study with expecting parents. In this use of the BND, participants were each asked to create a BND as well as complete questionnaires regarding their relationship to their partner as well as their unborn child (Goldner et al., 2017). The art-making was not done in dyads, but dyadic data was collected and analyzed. This approach to assessment did not provide the interactional data like other dyadic art assessments, but it did provide a variety of individual data that could create an understanding of individual attachment styles functioning together. Goldner et al. (2017) noted that this approach provided an understanding of gender differences in art product that could influence the assessment of attachment from the BND. It is critical to note that all of the above research on dyadic art assessment stems from studies performed with participants in Israel (Gavron, 2013; Goldner, Gazit, & Scharf, 2017, Goldner & Scharf, 2011; Snir & Hazut, 2012; Snir & Wiseman, 2010, 2013, 2016). It is possible that the results of these studies could be culturally specific and valid only with similar populations. It also highlights a clear gap and need for dyadic art assessment research to be done in North America.

**Attachment styles in art products.** Snir and Wiseman's (2013) CJD assessment created a set of three tentative art categories that are related to attachment: balanced, complicated and disconnected art styles. These categories identified characteristics in the art that related significantly to indicators of attachment styles as established by norms of the Current

Relationship Interview (CRI), a form of adult attachment assessment (2013). These categories should be examined for their capacity to be useful in other joint art-making tasks beyond the CJD. As they are defined in Snir and Wiseman's research, the balanced style was related to secure attachment; complicated was related to anxious ambivalent attachment; and disconnected was related to avoidant attachment (2013). According to Snir and Wiseman's (2013) findings, a balanced style is recognized by a joint image that is coherent and cooperative and demonstrates attunement. Behaviorally Snir and Wiseman (2013) noted observing "reciprocal additions to one another's work" that led to a cohesive image that could have been drawn by one individual (p. 504).

Complicated and disconnected styles were more difficult to discriminate with attachment styles in a significant manner, so the Snir and Wiseman identified them more generally as indicative of insecure attachment (2016). The complicated style was characterized by incoherence rather than unity, with specific instances of a participant attempting to maintain boundaries as well as inappropriate attempts to join disorganized images (Snir & Wiseman, 2013). Formal elements that were often identified in complicated style art included excluding frames, protective-barrier imagery, or imagery that covered up a partner's work (2013). The disconnected art style was defined by spatial distance between partners' art (2013). Rather than the incoherence that was present in complicated, disconnected art by couple could coexist but did not interact; however, Snir and Wiseman noted that there were often still similarities between the individual artworks on the page (2013).

Although other art assessments did not produce clear categories of attachment styles of art, there were corollary signifiers that guided interpretation of the art products. Francis et al. 's (2003) BND study found secure participants to include birds in their nests, and often trees to

support the nest. Kaiser and Deaver's (2009) BND review also noted a prevalence of green in securely attached art products. Goldner et al. (2017) used scales of vitality, bizarreness, and optimism as part of their assessment of art and interpreting closeness. Higher vitality and optimism were significantly associated with differentiation of the couples, lending itself to an interpretation of phenomena associated with secure attachment (2017). Bat Or et al.'s (2015) analysis of PPAT art found that art of securely attached participants was indicated by a coherent, visual narrative and reciprocal relationships between the person, tree, and apple. Bat Or and Ishai (2016) also found that organization and animation of imagery was positively correlated with secure attachment. These identified factors have the potential to be generalized to other art assessments examining attachment if similar scales such as the FEATS are used to evaluate the art.

A review of the literature on art assessments for attachment has identified a gap between two overlapping areas of study. There were a number of assessments that utilized a systematic, phenomenological approach to understanding adult attachment through art products, and there were similarly structured assessments that examined dyadic relationships through art-making. However, there has been little development of a systematic approach to assessing dyadic art-making through an adult attachment lens. There appears to be a continued need to combine assessments in dyadic art-making and adult attachment in order to create a more comprehensive, generalizable art assessment that uses attachment style as the discriminating variable to understand art products.

### **Summary**

Exploration through this literature review guided us in our process of understanding the complexity of attachment and bonding in adults. By exploring these concepts through a variety

of theoretical lenses, there is a greater sense of connectivity between the concepts surrounding attachment theory, art therapy, and emotionally focused therapy. Examining literature that studied both the past and present experiences of couples' relationships, with and without art-making interactions, guided the themes we looked for in our observations of couple dynamics.

### **Research Approach**

In order to better understand attachment styles and how couples interact through art-making, our research team aimed for a mixed methods approach that utilized qualitative and quantitative tools to explore how couples communicate through joint art-making. According to Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, (2007) a mixed methods approach is considered one of the three major “research paradigms” (qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods). According to Creswell (2014), when quantitative or qualitative approaches alone were inadequate to best understand a research problem, the mixed method design has been found to be useful. Benoit (2008) also stated that a combination of qualitative and quantitative insights could lead to a richer understanding of a given phenomenon because each method provided unique insights that cannot be obtained by the other method.

This research was a replication study from Israel that was conducted by Snir and Wiseman (2010), which utilized a mixed methods approach. Encouraging the pursuit of more replication studies, Kapitan (2010) stated that previous studies can be a source of inspiration for one’s own thinking and a blueprint or scaffolding on which to build a new, original research response. Our intention was to compare our findings with the findings of Snir and Wiseman in order to augment and validate meanings of couples’ art-making beyond any one setting. We originally intended to collect data that had both quantitative and qualitative inquiries through utilizing a mixed method analysis, as the benefits include increased insight (Creswell, 2014). However, due to minimal number of participants in our data gathering timeframe, we focused on the qualitative exploration.

Deaver (2002) characterizes qualitative methods as impressions, thoughtful analysis, observed themes, and subjective reflections and responses to a given situation (as cited by

Kapitan, 2010). Kapitan (2010) adds to the understanding of qualitative methods by breaking it down to two categories: context (how a particular piece of data fits within the whole picture) and perspective (where valid research is always a matter of relationship or standpoints of the participants). Kapitan (2010) adds to the understanding of qualitative methods by breaking it down to two categories: context (how a particular piece of data fits within the whole picture) and perspective (where valid research is always a matter of relationship or standpoints of the participants). Examples of qualitative couples' research include studies by Plauche (2016) and Shah (2016), who both found qualitative methods to be an effective tool in exploring the meanings people associate with their lived experiences, and unveiling themes and codes from textual data and documents. We followed closely to Snir and Wiseman (2010) with the intent to provide opportunities that reveal interpersonal themes and meaningful features in participating couples' metacommunication. Our approach therefore followed Snir and Wiseman (2010)'s explorations of interpersonal themes and meaningful features in participating couples' meta-communicative interactions.



## **Research Methods**

### **Definition of Terms**

- Attachment behavior. “Any form of behavior that results in a person attaining or maintaining proximity to some other clearly identified individual who is conceived of as better able to cope with the world” (Bowlby, 1982, p. 668).
- Anxious attachment. “Individuals characterized by high levels of attachment- related anxiety ...based on their attachment history of insensitive or inconsistent caregiving tend to hyper-activate the attachment system to attain proximity to the attachment figure” (Snir & Wiseman, 2010, p.117). Additionally, according to a study by Bartholomew, Henderson, & Dutton (2001) “when they feel the attachment figure is not being responsive, they experience anxiety and respond with high levels of attachment behaviors (e.g., clinging) in an attempt to have their need for support met” (Snir & Wiseman, 2010, p.118).
- Avoidant attachment. According to a study by Kobak and Sceery (1988), “individuals characterized by high attachment-related avoidance (classified as avoidant) based on an attachment history of parental rejection protect themselves against the anxiety aroused by rejection by deactivating the attachment system” (as cited in Snir & Wiseman, 2010, p.118). Additionally, a study by Cassidy and Kobak (1988) found that people with avoidant attachment “repress other thoughts and feelings that might activate the system, and dissociate emotional memories from other memories, thereby keeping the attachment system relatively inactive” (as cited in Snir & Wiseman, 2010, p.118).

- Couple. “Two people who are married or who have a romantic or sexual relationship”

(Merriam-Webster, 2015). In this research, couple refers to two people, either married or unmarried, who have a romantic relationship and have been living together for a minimum of 6 months.

- Joint drawing. “[The joint drawing technique] involves two participants drawing together on one shared page” (Snir & Wiseman, 2010, p.116).

- Secure Attachment. “Individuals low on both attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance (classified as secure) have learned, through sensitive caregiving, to trust the responsiveness and good intentions of others as well as their own capacity for problem solving” (Snir & Wiseman, 2010, p.117).

### **Design of Study**

This research was designed to explore the process of art-making in work with couples, and the use of art in assessing relational dynamics in couples. Based on a comparable research design utilized in a study conducted in Israel (Snir & Wiseman, 2010), couples who consented to participate in this study were required to answer a series of questionnaires and engage in drawing tasks. The data collected from both the questionnaires and the drawings were analyzed in response to the following research questions:

1. What are the culturally informed attachment styles that influence couples’ relationships?
2. How does a partner’s attachment style affect the general wellbeing of the relationship?
3. How are relationships and communication styles influenced by past romantic history?

4. How are patterns of attachment represented in the art of couples?

**Sampling.** Over the course of four months, Marriage and Family Therapy/ Art Therapy graduate students from Loyola Marymount University of Los Angeles gathered data following Snir's (2010) protocol in seeking couples ages eighteen and older who have lived together for six months or more to participate in an individual drawing and a joint drawing session. The researchers advertized the study through posters that were hung around the Loyola Marymount University campus to recruit research participants. The researchers also employed snowball sampling to reach out to more participants. Qualified participants could not have any personal or professional relationship with the researchers. The process of recruitment for this study was conducted in the Winter of 2017 over the course of five months. The sample size was based on the number of couples that volunteered and fit the criteria for participation.

**Gathering of data.** Potential participants communicated with researchers via email or over the phone regarding information about the procedure of the research and confirmed a time in which they were able to attend the study with their partner at the primary investigator's office. Sessions took place at Loyola Marymount University in the Family and Marital Therapy department. No compensation was provided. Each session began with the researchers reviewing the Participant Bill of Rights and the informed consent form with the participating couple. Participants then signed consent forms and completed a demographic questionnaire, an adult romantic attachment instrument (Experiences in Close Relationships Scale (ECR-S)), and the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS). Participants then were instructed to complete a non-directed drawing of their choice. This was followed by a nonverbal joint couple's drawing and a debriefing regarding visual meanings of their artwork and experiences of the shared and individual drawings.

**Presentation of data.** Data collected was provided from the researchers' designed demographic questionnaire, the ECR-S, the DAS, the joint artwork from three participating couples, the artwork from six participating individuals, and the researchers' observation notes from interviews. Materials provided for the individual and joint drawings were 8.5 x 11 inch white paper (individual drawing) and 12 x 18 inch white paper (joint drawing), a pack of 12 colored oil pastels, markers, and a pen. Researchers have analyzed the qualitative data utilizing parts the FEATS analysis as well as pulling themes from the written observations of the art-making sessions and debriefings.

Each couple was coded as couple 1 (CP1), couple 2 (CP2), and couple 3 (CP3). Individuals in each couple were coded according to their couple moniker: CP1 was comprised of male 1 (M1) and female 1 (F1), CP2 of M2 and F2, and CP3 of M3 and F3. Qualitative data was categorized and analyzed under recognized themes such as change, space, identity, nonverbal communication, verbal communication, and elements of the FEATS. Artwork was displayed in chronological order of which couple was seen first as a research participant. For each couple, individual artwork was presented followed by the couple's joint drawing. After the artwork was presented, tables detailing the questionnaire data and survey response were presented.

**Analysis of data.** Our data was collected in the form of questionnaire responses, individual and jointly created art, participant interviews, and researcher observations. The questionnaire data provided demographic responses as well as responses to the ECR-S and DAS. Each individual's responses were stripped of identifiers to protect confidentiality as best as possible and then paired with their partner's data within a table of all six participants. After organizing the data, the researchers began to look for emerging themes in the art, responses, and

observations. Written observations were categorized into a table to examine themes of attunement, communication, and behavioral interactions that appeared during the art-making process. Themes were found in the artwork by analyzing it with the FEATS analysis focusing on personal and dyadic style, energy, color use, and cohesion. Themes were gathered from all data sources and triangulated to create complex understandings of the couples' interactions. These themes were used to answer the research questions through comparison between couples, within couples, and to the original research data by Snir and Wiseman (2010).

Specifically, to understand how culture informed attachment styles and influenced a couple's relationship, researchers utilized the data from the demographic questionnaire, the ECR-S, DAS, and the observation notes from the individual non-directed drawings, the nonverbal joint couple's drawing, and the verbal debriefing of the shared and individual drawings to look for evidence cultural influences on a couple's dynamic.

In order to further look at relationship satisfaction and overall relationship wellbeing based on attachment styles, researchers looked closely at data gathered from the ECR-S, the demographics questionnaire, and relational themes presented in the artwork. Researchers also acknowledged any information regarding wellbeing and relationship satisfaction disclosed from participant interviews.

To better get a sense of how past relationships influenced the attachment styles of couples, researchers looked through the demographic questionnaire, observation notes, and art that the participants completed. Researchers were able to use these research tools to compare data and find any links to past partner influences.

In order to understand how patterns of attachment were represented in the art of couples, researchers examined the participants' art and their ECR-S scores. The ECR-S provided a general

idea of attachment patterns for each individual, which was used to link artwork to potential art categories from the previous Snir and Wiseman research. Joint artwork was examined in terms of content and form using the FEATS analysis, observation categories, and the art categories as defined in Snir and Wiseman (2013). By comparing couples' art to these categories, as well as to the art from each other participating couple, researchers hoped to gain more of an understanding of how the artwork indicated the attachment orientations of the couple.

### **Presentation and Analysis of Data**

The following data presented includes artwork from each couple, as well as a chart of highlighted themes in the imagery. Also included are charts displaying demographic questionnaire, ECR-S, and DAS responses from each participant, and visual representations of ECR-S and DAS data in the form of graphs.

#### **Artwork**

The artwork below is presented in order, by couple, with female individual drawing(s) first, then male individual drawing, and last, the couple's joint drawing. Below each piece of artwork is an excerpt of dialogue recorded from observations made by researchers.

#### **F1.**

*Figure 1.* Untitled. Couple 1, F1, individual drawing and title.



“The birds are us” (direct quote from F1 recorded in observation notes).

**M1.**

*Figure 2.* Untitled. Couple 1, M1, stylistic replication of individual drawing and title.



“M1 began by stating that this was a typical graffiti doodle he would make when he was younger” (direct quote from observation notes). Note: artwork was replicated and slightly altered to maintain participant privacy.

**CP1.**

*Figure 3.* Happy home of the special garden. Couple 1 joint drawing and title (CP1: M1, F1).





“F1 stated ‘both of us can’t imagine marrying our own versions of ourselves’. M1 says ‘I stop myself because I will just repeat what she said’” (direct quote from observation notes).

**F2.**

*Figure 4.* Snack vortex. Couple 2, F2, individual drawing A with collective title.



“F2 looked at drawing materials and blank paper. F2 stated, ‘I’m not sure what to draw’. F2 grabbed a green pastel and began drawing in the bottom right hand corner making up a triangle” (direct quote from observation notes).

*Figure 5.* Snack vortex. Couple 2, F2, individual drawing B and collective title.



“‘I’m going to do another one’. F2 began to draw a ‘creature’” (direct quote from observation notes).

*Figure 6.* Snack vortex. Couple 2, F2, individual drawing C and collective title.



“F2 decided the creature was going to work and the first drawing was his home. F2 looked at the creature and then the home and decided the creature ‘needed a pet’” (direct quote from observation notes).

**M2.**

*Figure 7. An oblong perspective. Couple 2, M2, individual drawing and title.*



“M2 mentioned early in his drawing that he is an artist and so he wanted to create something more ‘out of the box’” (direct quote from observation notes).

**CP2.**

*Figure 8.* A fan of: Taco-cat-pear-egg-home. Couple 2 joint drawing and title (CP2: M2, F2).



**F3.**

“When asked what the two would title the piece, M2 predicted that F2 would most likely name it as one word based on what was in the picture. F2 replied with, ‘like taco-cat-pear-egg-home?’” (direct quote from observation notes).

*Figure 9.* Full of glory. Couple 3, F3, individual drawing and title.





“F3 stated the picture looked peaceful which reflected her feelings of alone but not lonely. The road disappeared into the distance represented the future is unknown” (direct quote from observation notes).

**M3.**

*Figure 10.* Weird. Couple 3, M3, individual drawing and title.



“M3 picked out colors of markers, took off all the caps, and laid them out. ‘An image I had in the office. It just came to me...A mix of bright and dark colors’” (direct quote from observation notes).

**CP3.**

*Figure 11. One yet two. Couple 3 joint drawing and title (CP3: M3, F3).*



“M3: The line was my first thought, then I felt bad, then said no, just express it. I feel it was an expression of reality, I didn’t like it but it felt real.

F3: I didn't like the line. I felt pushed back, separated, so I intentionally crossed it and drew the sun, first thing that came to mind. (F3 teared up). I wanted to do something together. I intentionally waited for him for direction. I got direction and didn't follow it." (direct quote from observation notes).

### **Imagery Themes**

The chart below organizes observed patterns in the artwork of all 6 participants' individual artworks as well as the three joint artworks created by the couples. The categories named horizontally were informed by the FEATS art assessment categories, with a fixed range used to assess each art piece. The category of energy had a range of low, moderate, and high, and was dependent on the pressure and movement of the mark making. Page use was assessed through examining whether imagery extended to the edges of the page. Artwork that was not considered full was then designated into an estimated percentage of fullness. Content was examined for common themes and assessed for outliers. Nature was the most frequent theme, followed by nonrepresentational abstract imagery. Color was categorized through the number of colors present in the image, compared to other images in the sample. Most images featured a wide range of color, designating them as complex schemes.

The vertical, "dominant pattern" rows represent the most frequently assigned label within each assessment category. Each participant was compared against these dominant patterns to establish outlier characteristics of artwork.

*Figure 12. Imagery theme chart.*

	Energy	Page Use	Content	Color	Cohesion	
<b>F1</b>	High	Full	Nature	Simple scheme		*across three drawings
<b>M1</b>	Low	60%	Text-based	Black only		
<b>F2</b>	High	Average* 70%	Abstract/characters	Complex scheme		
<b>M2</b>	High	Full	Nature and abstract	Complex scheme		
<b>F3</b>	Moderate	Full	Nature	Simple scheme		
<b>M3</b>	High	Full	Nature and abstract	Complex scheme		
<b>Dominant Pattern, Individual</b>	High	Full	Nature	Complex scheme		
<b>CP1</b>	Moderate	Full	Nature	Moderate scheme	Integrated, logical, 1 plane	
<b>CP2</b>	Mixed, low	60%	Mixed theme, nature and abstract	Moderate scheme	Partial integrated, non logical, multi-plane	
<b>CP3</b>	Mixed, moderate	Full	Mixed theme, nature and abstract	Complex scheme	Splitting line, partial integrated, partial logical, 2 planes	
<b>Dominant Pattern. Couples</b>	Moderate	Full	Mixed theme, nature and abstract	Moderate scheme	Partial integration, partial logical, multi-plane	

mixed denotes two notable styles, rather than a blend

## Questionnaire Responses

**Demographics.** The chart below displays excerpts from the demographic questionnaire that each participant responded to. Data from the questionnaire informed researchers' understanding of participants' cultural identities and previous relationship history; some data has been removed in order to protect the identities of the participants. If a reader is interested in more details regarding the survey tool created for this research, please contact researchers.



Figure 13. Demographic chart excerpt.

DEMOGRAPHICS: QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES						
	Couple 1		Couple 2		Couple 3	
	M1	F1	M2	F2	M3	F3
Age	27	28	37	29	26	25
Gender	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Ethnicity	Caucasian	Jewish/White	White/Caucasian/Southern European	Caucasian, non-Hispanic	Hispanic	Hispanic
Religion	Catholic	Jewish	No	Yes	Christian	Yes
Additional cultural influences	Not practicing	Culturally	N/A	Non-institution affiliated Christian	Strong	Christian
SES	Upper-middle	Upper-high	Middle class	Middle class	Middle class	Middle class
Cultural Influences	Multi-religious household	Catholic and Jewish	TV, video games, internet, museums, books	Grew up in very rural setting, fluent in Spanish stemming from exchange in Argentina.	I grew up in Mexico, so I have a cultural mix of both Mexico and some from the USA.	I grew up with my mom being a widow, so I played a big part as a 2nd parent. Currently it is difficult for me to detach from my family (vice-versa) because we (my husband and I) live with them.
Similarities in couple's culture and culture of origin	Not deeply religious but benefit from holiday and family traditions	Religiously very, but values, monetary, relationships culturally similar	Similar but different, hers was a much smaller town	Similar, my partner has a semi similar culture with a few distinctions that add interest.	It is very different when we were first dating, it was hard for me to accept certain behaviors or language from her.	Somewhat different, he grew up in Mexico with both parents and I grew up in the U.S with a single mom. Although I am Hispanic, I identify as a mix, while my husband is strongly rooted in his Mexican culture.
Immigration History	Born in US	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Immigration 2	Grand parents from Ireland/Italy	*	Dad-Sweden, Grandparents-Italy 1940s	*	26 yrs ago	Peru and Mexico
Current Relationship Length	8 yrs	7 yrs	3-4 yrs	3.5 yrs	5 yrs	4+ yrs
Cohabitation Length	5 yrs	5 yrs	2 yrs	2yrs	7 months	7 months
Relationship Status	Married	Married almost 2 years	Divorced	Partnered, monogamous, cohabitating	Married	Married
Past Romantic History	3-4: Highschool GF was about 2 years. Other intimate partners 6 mo's or less. Married to wife who I have been with exclusively for 8 years.	1 serious boyfriend (high school sweetheart for 4 years). 1 other intimate partner that dated.	2 partners: a week long fling with a much younger girl, 12 years with my ex-wife.	5 intimate partners, 3 significant past relationships.	The most serious one was when I was 15 yrs old, it lasted 1 month, but I was in love before that I had many relationships that were just like a game.	1 past romantic relationships when I was young in high school, not intimate.
Art Making Experience	Used to love to sketch and recreate images, paintings of my favorite artists. no training.	Took some classes as undergrad.	BFA in Animation. Every day I practice in same way.	Casual-enjoy making art with groups.	I did it once with my current therapist. It was embarrassing for me cause I drew myself but it was very healing after.	I enjoy making art, especially painting with my husband. We do it for fun every once in a while.
Interest or Hesitation in Research	No	No, just always been curious about art therapy-thought about entering the program when I first graduated.	The truth can be hard.	Partner is an artist and we enjoy making art together.	I am expectant to see how my wife and I know more each other after this.	No, interest- I am excited to do it as a means for couple therapy. We typically just paint on our own canvases.

**ECR-S responses.** Each participant completed an ECR-S questionnaire, and the results from each participant are displayed in the chart below. Each questionnaire was scored according to the scoring guide, and average response scores were calculated to display a comparable number for each measured scale, relational anxiety and relational avoidance. These scores are displayed for each participant at the bottom of the chart, and are also displayed in a bar graph to visually compare the scores of each participant. Within couples, responses that had a response gap of two or more between the two partners were highlighted to examine potential differences within the dyad's experiences. If a reader is interested in more details regarding the survey tool utilized for this research, please contact researchers.

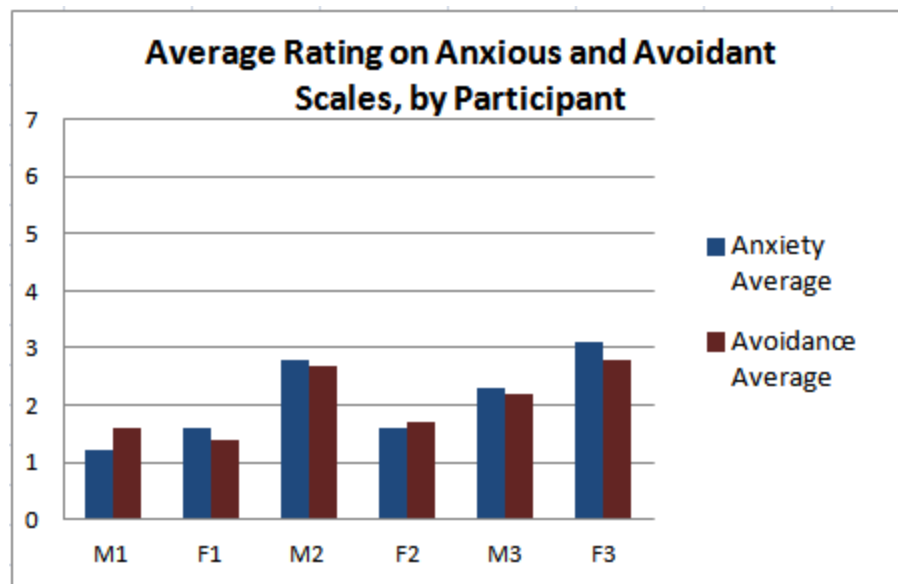
Figure 14. ECR-S response chart.

ECR-S: QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES						
Type of Relationship	Couple 1		Couple 2		Couple 3	
	M1	F1	M2	F2	M3	F3
	current romantic partner	current romantic partner	current romantic partner	current romantic partner	current romantic partner	current romantic partner
Q1	2	1	6	2	1	1
Q2	1	1	5	1	1	2
Q3	1	1	1	1	2	2
Q4	1	1	2	2	1	3
Q5	1	1	2	2	1	5
Q6	1	2	5	1	5	4
Q7	1	3	4	1	2	1
Q8	1	1	2	1	4	2
Q9	7	7	3	7	6	7
Q10	1	1	1	2	2	6
Q11	7	7	2	7	7	5
Q12	1	1	2	3	1	3
Q13	1	1	1	1	1	4
Q14	1	5	5	1	1	2
Q15	1	1	3	2	2	2
Q16	1	2	1	2	1	6
Q17	3	3	3	3	7	7
Q18	1	1	1	1	7	2
Q19	3	1	3	2	1	5
Q20	6	7	3	6	7	6
Q21	1	1	2	1	2	6
Q22	7	7	1	7	7	6
Q23	1	1	2	2	1	2
Q24	1	1	1	1	1	1
Q25	1	1	1	1	2	1
Q26	7	7	6	7	4	6
Q27	7	7	6	7	4	2
Q28	7	7	5	6	6	6
Q29	7	7	4	7	6	5
Q30	7	7	6	6	5	6
Q31	7	7	5	6	5	5
Q32	1	1	1	1	4	2
Q33	7	7	5	7	6	5
Q34	5	6	7	6	6	4
Q35	7	7	7	7	5	6
Q36	7	7	6	6	2	3
Anxiety Total	21	28	50	28	42	56
Anxiety Average	1.2	1.6	2.8	1.6	2.3	3.1
Avoidance Total	29	25	49	30	40	51
Avoidance Average	1.6	1.4	2.7	1.7	2.2	2.8

\*color highlight denotes  
difference of two or more  
between participants  
within couple

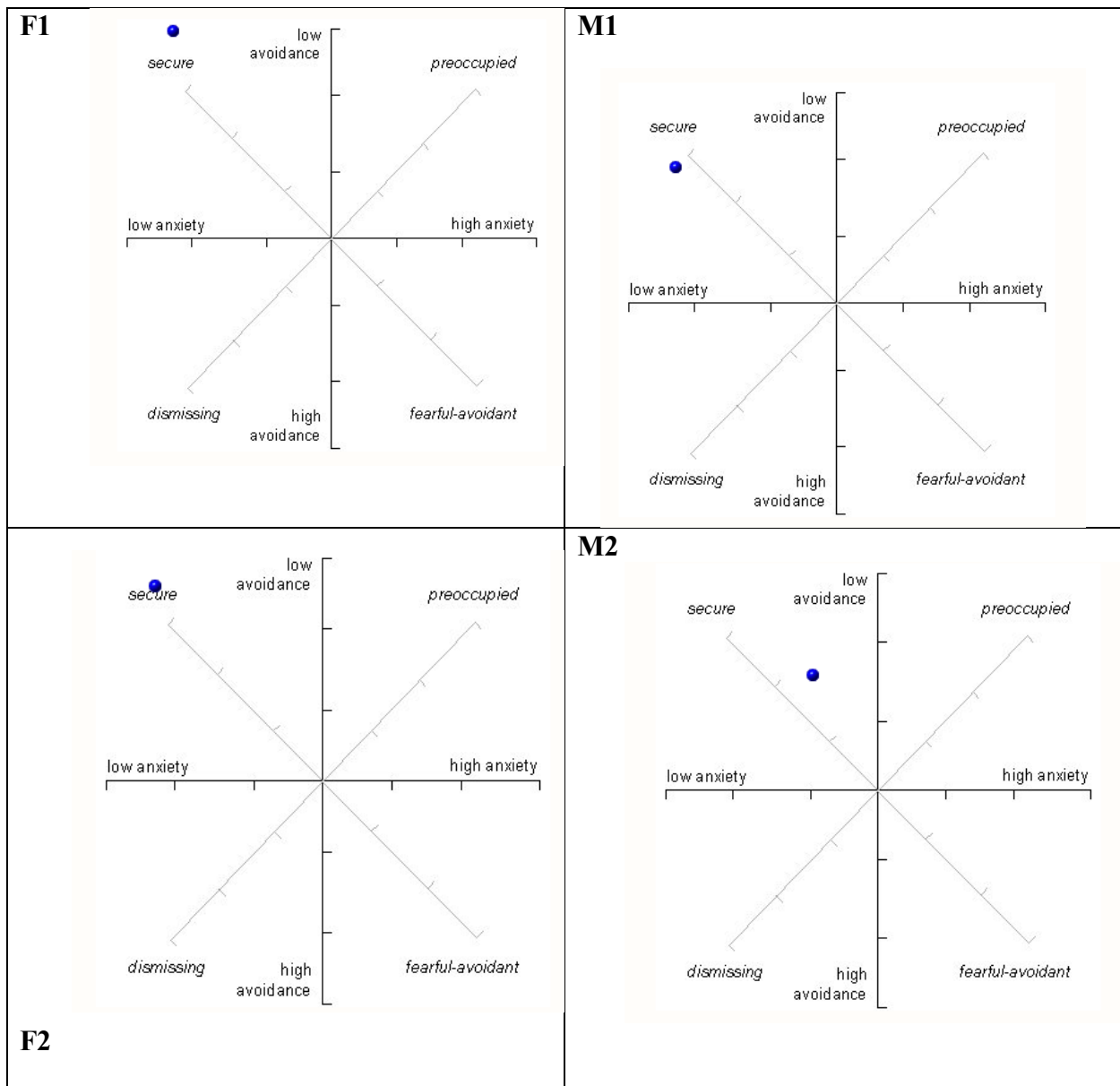
The below bar graph displays each participant's average score on the two axes measured by the ECR-S, relational anxiety and relational avoidance. Each question is scored from 1-7, with 7 representing highly anxious or avoidant, depending on the axis. All of the above participants scored comfortably within the secure range on both scales.

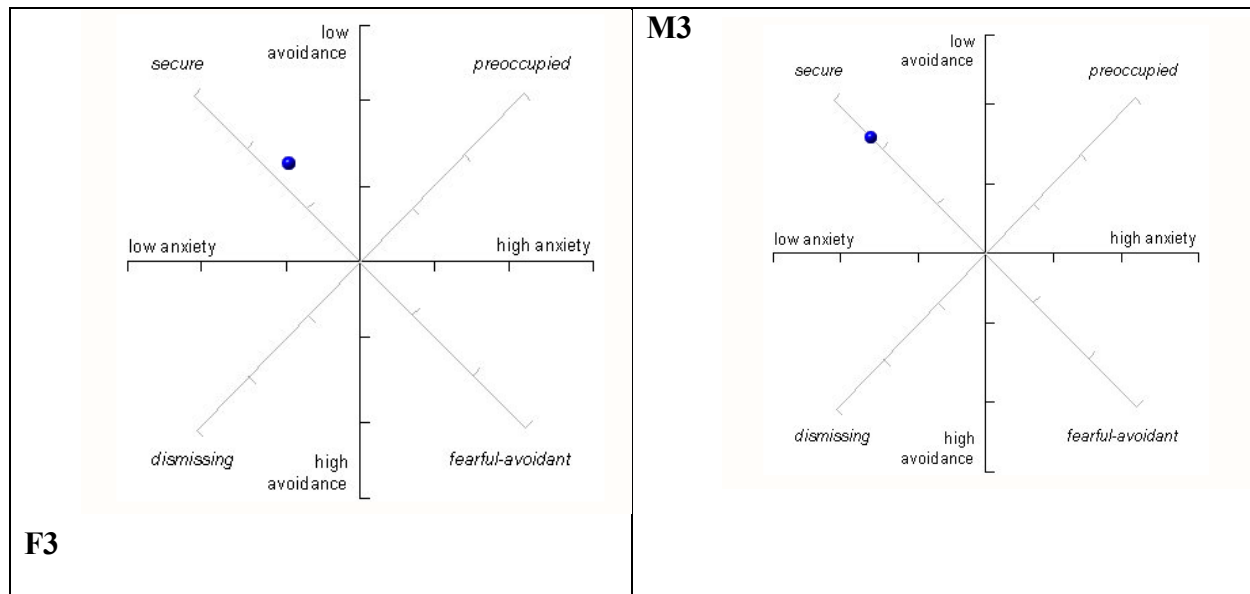
*Figure 15. Bar chart of ECR-S scores.*



**ECR-S graphed responses.** Each participant's ECR-S score was mapped across the two axes of measurement, relational anxiety and relational avoidance. Each scale ranges from secure to insecure in terms of the strength of anxiety or avoidance present. The upper left quadrant of the graph represents attachment security. The closer to the right that the score gets, the more anxiety is represented. The closer to the bottom that the score gets, the more avoidance is represented. Figure 16 depicts each participant within the secure quadrant, with some slight variation in the amount of avoidant or anxious attitudes expressed in the questionnaire. Graphs were generated with software supported by ECR-S author Fraley (n.d.).

Figure 16. Graphical representation of ECR-S scores.





**DAS responses.** Each participant completed the Dyadic Adjustment Scale in regards to their current partner. Responses are displayed in the chart below, and were scored according to DAS guidelines. The scoring includes a total as well as four component scores. Each score is included in the bottom section of the chart, and is also displayed in bar graph to visually compare the scores of each participant. Within couples, responses that had a response gap of two or more between the two partners were highlighted to examine potential differences within the dyad. If a reader is interested in more details regarding the survey tool utilized for this research, please contact researchers.

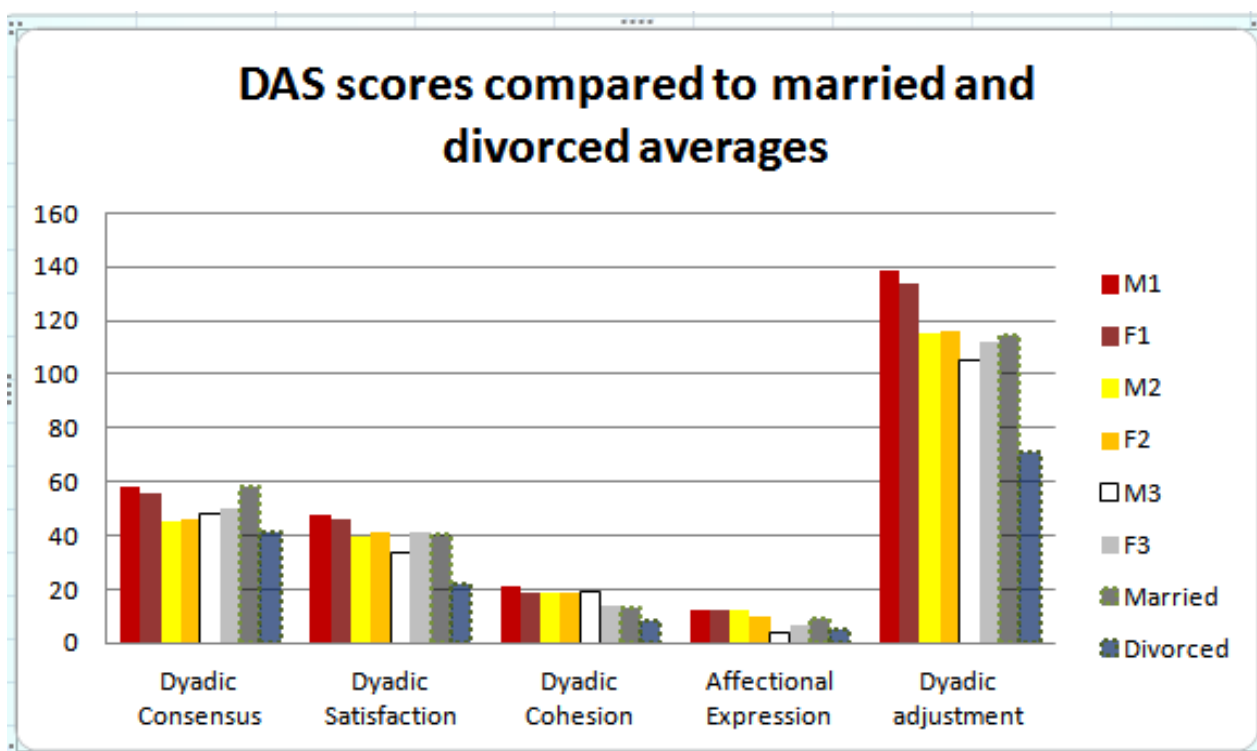
Figure 17. DAS response chart.

DYADIC AJUSTMENT SCALE: QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES						
	Couple 1		Couple 2		Couple 3	
	M1	F1	M2	F2	M3	F3
Q1	2	3	2	2	5	4
Q2	3	3	2	2	2	2
Q3	1	2	3	3	2	1
Q4	1	1	1	2	4	2
Q5	1	1	2	2	3	1
Q6	1	1	1	2	4	3
Q7	1	1	3	3	3	3
Q8	1	1	3	3	3	1
Q9	2	2	4	3	2	3
Q10	1	1	3	3	1	2
Q11	1	1	2	2	3	2
Q12	1	2	2	2	2	3
Q13	1	2	3	3	1	2
Q14	3	1	2	2	2	2
Q15	2	2	2	2	1	2
Q16	6	6	5	5	5	6
Q17	6	6	6	6	5	5
Q18	1	1	2	2	2	2
Q19	1	1	3	2	1	2
Q20	6	6	5	6	4	6
Q21	5	4	5	4	3	4
Q22	5	5	4	4	3	4
Q23	1	1	1	1	2	1
Q24	2	3	2	2	2	3
Q25	6	5	5	5	5	3
Q26	6	6	6	6	4	4
Q27	6	6	5	5	5	5
Q28	4	4	4	4	6	4
Q29	no	no	no	no	yes	yes
Q30	no	no	no	no	yes	yes
Q31	7	6,7	5.5	5	4	5
Q32	1	1	2	1	2	1
Dyadic Consensus	58	56	45	46	48	50
Dyadic Satisfaction	48	46.5	39.5	41	34	41
Dyadic Cohesion	21	19	19	19	19	14
Affectional Expression	12	12	12	10	4	7
Dyadic adjustment (total)	139	133.5	115.5	116	105	112

\*color highlight denotes  
difference of two or more  
between participants  
within couple

The below bar graph displays each participants overall DAS score (dyadic adjustment) as well as four component scores, dyadic consensus, dyadic satisfaction, dyadic cohesion, and affectional expression. Each participant independently completed this questionnaire in reference to their current partner. The bars are color coded by couple and individual, and each score can be compared to the average DAS score of married couples and divorced couples, sourced from original DAS research (Spanier, 1976, p. 23). All participant scores were comparatively close or higher than the average score of a married couple, indicating that likely all participants feel satisfied in their current relationship.

*Figure 18. Bar chart of DAS scores.*





## Results

Researchers' results are based on looking at attachment theory and the relational dynamics of each research participant gathered from the demographics questionnaire, the ECR-S scale, the DAS, individual art, nonverbal dyadic art, and researcher's notes and observations (reference *figures 1-18*). Results below are separated into explored questions such as, what are the culturally informed attachment styles that influence couples' relationships? How does individual attachment style affect general wellbeing and satisfaction of a dyadic relationship? How are relationships and communication styles influenced by past romantic history? Lastly, how are patterns of attachment represented in the art of couples? Each question was answered through suggested correlations from the data collected in regards to individual attachment style as well as dyadic adjustment.

### **What are the culturally informed attachment styles that influence couples' relationships?**

Researchers considered information collected from the DAS, ECR-S, demographics questionnaire, observation notes, and artwork to look for correlations between attachment security and religious identity, ethnicity, collective vs. individual culture, lastly, looked at how gender might inform attachment styles in a couple's relationship.

**Religion.** Researchers looked at DAS ratings, individual drawings, joint drawings, and observation notes to gather data about religious commitment and practices, and found that all couples mentioned their religious identity to some degree. Each couple presented with slightly different relationships to religious matters, with responses to partner agreement on "religious matters" varying from "always agree" to "occasionally disagree", and religious identities such as "Jewish" and "Catholic". Despite couples rating in agreement on religious matters, researchers observed some disagreement when couples addressed religious themes within their artwork. For

example, CP3 reported strong religious identity and practices (figure 13) and rated in agreement on religious matters (figure 17, question 3). However, in discussion of M3's individual artwork (figure 10), the couple appeared to have differing interpretations on the presence of religious content in the imagery. M3 named a desire for "something more" perhaps related to "science", rather than the religious interpretations suggested by his partner. The reflection on artwork appeared to highlight a gap in the couple's relationship to faith that was not captured within the demographics questionnaire or DAS. This gap, along with CP3's ECR-S scores (figure 15 depicts F3 and M3 scoring slightly higher in terms of anxiety and avoidance), led to researchers considering the significance of agreement on religious matters, and religious commitment. It is possible that differing individual commitment or agreement on religious matters within a couple may be correlated to attachment presentations or marital adjustment. Due to the small sample size, the researchers found it difficult to draw any concrete conclusions on how religion might affect attachment style or marital adjustment. However, researchers did note the challenge of examining religion in a questionnaire format rather than a survey. Based on participant responses, it became apparent that the term "religious matters" was likely interpreted differently by each participant, thus complicating interpretation of these responses even further.

**Collective and individualistic cultural identities.** As mentioned above, based on the ECR-S questionnaire, all participants scored within the secure attachment range. Due to smaller sample size, researchers also found limited cultural diversity among participants. However, based on participants self-reported cultural influences, it appeared that half of the participants identified with collective cultures and half with individualistic cultures. Researchers found participants' identities of collective and individualistic culture appeared related to the presence of a multigenerational household, immigration history, and acculturation.

**Collective culture vs. individualistic culture in relation to familial relationships.** The concepts of collective culture and individualistic culture were indirectly addressed in question 9 of the DAS, which asked participants to rate their agreeability with partners on the issue of “ways in dealing with parents or in-laws”. Researchers considered this statement to provide insight into partners’ level of agreement on matters related to family and culture of origin, and responses to this statement could be cross-referenced with self-reported cultural identities.

According to the demographic questionnaire, CP3 identified their status as married, and identified currently living with F3’s extended family as an additional cultural influence. CP3’s living arrangement with extended family may suggest a stronger influence of collective culture, where kinship, family, and community are valued over the individual, and harmony and group cohesion are extremely important (Cummins, n.d.). This is supported by CP3’s responses to DAS question 9, where they responded that they often agree on dealing with extended family. This agreement on extended family is likely influenced by each partner’s family/culture of origin. The potential influence of this collective culture on CP3’s relationship may be seen through F3 reporting difficulty detaching from her family of origin due to her previous familial role of being a “second parent” in a single-parent household (figure 13). The difficulties in detaching from extended family may be impacting the couple’s recent cohabitation and marital adjustment as compared to the other couples who did not report living with extended family. In contrast, CP1 was comprised of one partner with a collectivist cultural background and one partner with an individualistic culture, yet CP1 rated the same level of agreement on relationship with in-law and parents as CP3. As seen here, a limited sample size led to no definitive conclusions regarding the influences of collective culture versus individualistic culture among the participating couples.

**Immigration and acculturation.** Among the six participants, half reported having no immigration history while two reported first generation immigration status. Among couples with a reported immigration history, CP3 identified a difference in their levels of acculturation into the dominant culture that influenced their relationship (figure 13). According to Agishtein and Brumbaugh (2013), levels of acculturation in the dominant culture negatively correlate with attachment anxiety and avoidance. In CP3, F3 identified having a higher level of acculturation into the dominant culture compared with M3 however, F3 scored higher than M3 in anxiety and avoidance (figures 14-16). Flores, Tschann, Marin, and Pantoja (2004) found that among Mexican American couples, different levels of acculturation within a dyad could affect their marital adjustment and conflict, however CP3 rated securely on their ECR-S scores and rated as or more satisfied than the average married couple on the DAS (figures 14-18). With limited data, researchers were unable to provide further understanding as to how attachment styles or marital adjustment might interact with levels of acculturation.

**Gender.** All three female participants initiated drawing during the joint art-making, and were the principle responders to the research recruitment. In support of Monteoliva et al.'s (2012) findings on the gender roles in heterosexual relationships, all three female participants exhibited efforts to maintain connection with their partners; their initiations were observed through the nonverbal joint art process, as well as verbally during the reflection process. In terms of attachment ratings, Snir's (2010) study found that females scored significantly higher in relational anxiety than males. However, average anxiety scores by gender in this study were identical and therefore did not support Snir's findings. No significant correlations between gender and attachment style or relationship satisfaction could be made due to small sample size, however, gender role observations appeared to support established data. Due to our small

samples, unlike 60 couple participants in Snir's (2010) study, found that females scored significantly higher on anxiety than males, whereas males scored significantly higher on avoidance than females. Our data is identified as a fairly secure attachment.

### **How does individual attachment style affect general wellbeing and satisfaction of a dyadic relationship?**

As mentioned above, the researchers looked at the ECR-S scale, demographics questionnaire, DAS, notes and observations from the dyadic interview, and relational themes within the artwork to explore effects of attachment style on the general wellbeing of the dyadic relationship. Outcomes from the ECR-S scale determined that all participants fell into the securely attached category; and the DAS questionnaire similarly found that all couples rated highly in relationship satisfaction. Within these general ratings, there were some smaller variations within participants, and within couples, in terms of attachment security and relationship satisfaction. Gaps of couple satisfaction were identified with questionnaire responses where partner responses had a gap of more than two (see figure 14 & 17). Differences within couple questionnaire responses led researchers to consider how possible individual distress and relational distress might influence relationship satisfaction.

Researchers found that each secure couple experienced some degree of worry within the relationship, as well as concern for closeness of partner, and questions of relationship stability. Though there were some variation(s) of gaps in satisfaction among each couple, all couples reinforced their secure attachment with one another by reporting feelings of being generally "happy" on the DAS. Couples' feelings of dyadic happiness were also reinforced by each couple demonstrating positive interaction within the joint drawing process such as smiling, laughing/giggling, and eye contact with their partner. Within the artwork, themes of cohesion and

integration were apparent for all couples, which again provided support of each participant's personal attachment style and dyadic satisfaction. For example, researchers found few gaps in CP1's responses within the DAS and ECR-S (see figures 14 & 17). CP1's artwork also seemed to be the most integrated and cohesive, with all imagery existing on one linear plane. Cohesion appeared evident through observations of the art-making session; notes depicted that CP1 worked collaboratively and reciprocally to create integrative content and form (see figure 3). Similarly, CP2's responses depicted few gaps in satisfaction within their questionnaire responses, and their artwork (figure 8) demonstrated some degree of cohesion and integration. CP2's joint art work seemed to be constructed on multiple planes but had equal incorporations of partner's art content and style. Accordingly, CP3 was found to be secure in their dyadic relationship, but various gaps in satisfaction reporting were identified. There was a clear divisional line created in CP3's artwork, but there still remained degrees of integration within the artwork as researchers observed the crossing over of individual art content and style, across the dividing line (see figure 11). It is possible that the sensitivity of the joint art process reflected the agreement of dyadic adjustment reported. Couples who were found to have more gaps in satisfaction reportings seemed to make artwork that was less cohesive and on multiple planes. Those who had few gaps in satisfaction created more cohesive artwork on one plane. This notion, through the art, might reflect couple's satisfaction and level of attunement.

Researchers found that participants who rated having slightly higher anxiety than their partner (see ECR-S responses, figures 14-16) tended to mention their partner in the artwork. This mention of partner in the artwork might suggest individual's thoughts or worry about partner availability and closeness. This was noted, and in agreement with ECR-S ratings on questions about worry for partner availability, in F1's depiction of two birds together in her individual

artwork where she labeled the birds as “us”, referring to her partnership with M1 (see figure 1). Similarly F3, whose anxiety ratings were slightly higher than her partner, referenced wonderment of her “future” with partner (M3) through her illustration of a dirt road in her individual art (figure 9). However, as seen through each couple’s secure attachment, DAS scores, and willingness to participate in the research, it is likely that each participant experienced relationship satisfaction with their current partner. Since each participating couple presented with a secure attachment, researchers were unable to examine how relationship distress and satisfaction might manifest in insecurely attached couples. Without the ability to compare results from secure and insecurely attached participants, the findings from the data are limited. Yet, researchers found that the sensitivity of the art seemed to mirror couples attunement when considering space and cohesion within the art. The fewer gaps that were reported in between couple satisfaction seemed to reflect more cohesive art.

### **How are relationships and communication styles influenced by past romantic history?**

Much of the analysis on past partner history was gathered through analyzing the demographic questionnaire, ECR-S, and DAS. Researchers looked for differences in couples’ questionnaire responses between participants, as well as for any references to potential past partner influences in the observation notes from the art-making and discussion session.

Researchers aimed to draw on data that highlighted participants’ lived romantic experiences through examining language, relationship length, and qualities of past experience.

**Past Romantic History.** Based on findings from the questionnaire (figure 13), and scores on the ECR-S, all six participants scored within the normal ranges of secure attachment with their current partners, and all reported having at least one previous romantic partner. Four of the six participants reported previous high school relationships, with two of them being specified as

“serious” relationships. The length of the past relationships reported by the participants ranged from one week to twelve years, one of which included a previous marriage. All three couples identified as being in heterosexual relationships with their partners, and had been living together from a range of seven months to five years. CP1 and CP3 identified their relationship status as married while CP2 identified as partnered/monogamous/cohabitating. One couple verbally stated that a part of the reason for their participation in the research was to make it a “date night” while two other couples expressed that they enjoyed making art together. Although all six participants did not share any past romantic references in their individual art nor joint art, researchers were able to observe impact of past partner experiences as they were named in the reflection of the nonverbal drawing process.

**Observations.** Researchers were mindful in paying attention to any verbal or nonverbal acknowledgements of past romantic history during the art-making session. Among the three couples, only CP2 mentioned past relationship experiences, specifically regarding divorce. CP2 expressed, as a couple, their individual perceptions of past partner experience as a “good balance” for the two of them, possibly indicating an aligned view of past relationships as a benefit to their relationship. In CP2’s demographic responses, one partner identified as “divorced” while the other identified as “partnered, monogamous, cohabitation (figure 13). Although there is not a sufficient sample to observe patterns in the data, it is interesting to note the difference between CP2’s questionnaire responses alongside their verbal expressions about past relationships. In terms of attachment, it is possible that a previous marriage might lead to more hesitations in relational commitment, or perhaps nomenclature, as a defense against future attachment injury. Another possible relationship might be seen between amount of past romantic experience and attachment anxiety and avoidance. Though secure in their dyadic relationship,



CP3's responses in the demographics questionnaire and ECR-S pointed to possible correlating factors between short time span of living together (seven months) and higher levels of anxiety and avoidance (figure 13 & 14), as compared with other couples who had cohabitated longer.

**Terms of intimacy.** Language used to describe past partners in the demographic questionnaire provided another layer of data for researchers to examine in terms of intimacy and past history. Terminology used for past or present partners was considered as a potential indicator referring to level of intimacy with participants. Terms such as "fling", "sweetheart", and "boyfriend" were used to describe past relationships without providing detail, whereas other terms provided a richer context for understanding the past partner: "intimate partner", "relationships that were just like a game", and "significant past relationship" (figure 13). It is possible that participants' choice of terminology could provide a nuanced context with which to assess the quality of past relationships.

Along with terminology utilized within current romantic partners, researchers noted instances where verbal exchanges between partners appeared to indicate attunement. Researchers observed CP1 exchanging some degree of intimacy through the verbal process of titling their joint artwork. CP1 went back and forth exchanging and adding words while titling their artwork; adding the following words to each other's ideas: "Home", "Happy home", "of the special garden", then "Happy home of the special garden". This observed verbal exchange provided insight to the level of attunement in their secure partnership, as evidenced by their reciprocal finishing of one and other's sentences and built up themes of home. This correlated with observations of CP1's joint artwork as attuned, cohesive, and reciprocal (figure 3). Another example of attunement in communication was evident in CP3's post-art discussion. M3 and F3 each affirmed their partner's accurate interpretations of their individual art. These affirmations

indicated to researchers a level of attunement in their art-making as well as their patterns of communication.

### **How are patterns of attachment represented in the art of couples?**

Based on ECR-S responses, observations, and DAS responses, all participating couples appeared to be relatively secure in their attachment styles and relationship satisfaction. Figures 14-16 display each individual's ECR-S scores as a response chart, graphed comparatively to other participants, and graphed along a continuum of attachment. Despite the general security of each couple's attachment, distinct variations were noted in the joint artwork that seemed to classify the couples into the range of Snir's (2016) established patterns.

Artwork was compared across individuals, couples, and by gender, with specific focus on elements informed by the FEATS and Snir's (2013) defined joint drawing patterns. Defined art categories, as seen in figure 12, that distinguished individual art styles, as well as notable variation in the artwork, included FEATS-informed assessment of energy, color use, orientation, and space use, as well as content theme and general cohesion of imagery. These categories served as concrete indicators of art style that could be observed across individuals and couples. Changes in these patterns as a participant transitioned from individual to dyadic art-making were common and expected, however, these changes also highlighted areas where a participant had to adjust to their partner, and therefore indicated moments of dynamic interaction within the dyad.

**Individual art patterns.** Within individual art pieces, dominant patterns included nature as a content theme, use of complex color schemes, entire page filled with imagery, and high energy present in mark making (see figure 12). These individual observations served as a baseline to understand how individual style and art engagement changed during the joint art process, and how each participant's style varied in comparison to their partner's art style.

Within their individual art, CP1 had two completely distinct styles: M1 (figure 2) was an outlier across all final categories while F1 (figure 1) had a simple color scheme but fit into dominant categories for energy, space use, and theme. In contrast, CP2's F2 (figures 4-6) and M2 (figure 7) had very similar styles, despite F2 doing additional artwork. Both M2 and F2 had high energy and themes that included abstract and non logical imagery as well as complex color schemes. F2 used less space overall but also created more art products, and she did not specifically include references to nature or include any setting/background imagery in her artwork. For all three participating couples, within-couple variation in the individual artwork was common and did not appear to be correlated with attachment style, satisfaction, or joint drawing patterns.

**Joint art patterns.** The joint art products appeared to align themselves within Snir's (2016) patterns of balanced, complicated, and disconnected. A balanced pattern was defined as "coherent" and cohesive, displaying a collaborative style rather than two distinct or combative styles of imagery (Snir, 2013, p. 504). Behaviorally, participants communicate nonverbally and take turns reciprocating imagery (Snir, 2013). Elements of this pattern were visible in the artwork of all three participating couples. This supported Snir's research as it correlated with all couples scoring in the secure range of attachment. A complicated pattern was defined by Snir (2013) through the presence of disorganized or excessive imagery that often displayed protective boundaries or forced attempts at collaboration, leading to inconsistent interaction of imagery between the dyad. A disconnected pattern was identified through the presence of space or boundaries separating imagery, such that imagery existed independently of partner's imagery (Snir, 2013). Both CP2 and CP3 had elements of a disconnected pattern within their joint art, and had less secure scores on the axes of anxiety and avoidance, perhaps presenting micropatterns of these themes as they might appear in more distinctly insecure couples. These micropatterns,

where artwork featured some characteristics of another Snir style within their overarching designation of a balanced style, provided support for Snir's identified patterns, as well as support for a hypothesis that Snir's patterns exist on a continuum, rather than have discrete categories.

CP1's joint artwork (figure 3) demonstrated Snir's balanced pattern. It was cohesive and appeared to be created by one artist. There was one plane of orientation for the imagery, a singular theme and style, and apparent attunement through the back and forth nature of adding imagery and responding to partner's additions. CP1's joint work coincided with the dominant categories from the individual artwork: the artwork featured a nature theme, filled the entire page, had moderate energy, and a complex color scheme. CP1's individual styles were quite distinct and M1 was an outlier in each of the above categories, however, the joint artwork displayed complete cohesion and integration of the two styles.

CP2's art product (figure 8) was more difficult to classify within Snir's patterns. The complicated pattern presented a moderate fit with the multi-plane approach of the imagery. There appeared to be a lack of a consistent theme to the imagery, and it was difficult to assess how different aspects of the artwork fit together without referencing verbal reflections from the participants. Despite this, the image did not appear to present a desire to keep space separate or defended from a partner. Imagery was integrated into a singular form that displayed reciprocal engagement from participants, depicting clear elements of a balanced pattern as well. F2 and M2's individual styles were quite similar, and appeared to adjust cohesively into the joint work. As a dyad, their artwork had overall lower energy but fit similar patterns as their individual works. Despite disjointed aspects of the dyadic product, the artwork appeared to depict a process of collaborative play, due to the close proximity and nonlinear nature of the imagery. It is possible that CP2's joint work was difficult to classify within Snir's (2013) patterns, or within

the artwork of other participants, because of the abstract, nonlinear approach that each partner took, seen in both their individual products and the joint product.

CP3's joint art (figure 11) had qualities of Snir's disconnected pattern and complicated pattern; however it still displayed qualities of a balanced pattern as well. The dividing line down the center of the piece created physical distance and a barrier between the two artists. M3 and F3 mainly worked on their own sides of the page, however there was still some boundary crossing and behavioral communication that led toward a more balanced style. F3's art approach appeared to change more than M3's for this joint work, with her making a more abstract composition rather than a representational landscape like her individual work. CP3's joint art displayed the strongest boundaries between participants, through the split line and opposing planes of orientation, however there was still evidence of teamwork and sharing, as seen in M3's adoption of F3's smear technique, his addition of a moon to balance the two images, and mimicry of F3's flower pattern. Figure 11's dividing line leads the viewer to consider a complicated pattern of art-making, however, when examining both individual products as well as the complementary content in the imagery of the joint product, it becomes plausible to classify the product within the balanced category.

Ultimately, after examining both the individual and joint artwork of the three participating couples, the results appear to correlate with Snir's (2013) research and established patterns. These patterns were initially associated with characteristics and scores of attachment security and our results support those findings. All three couples rated as securely attached and displayed artwork with qualities of the balanced pattern. Our couples that rated slightly less secure on the ECR-S had more qualities of a disconnected or complicated pattern present in their art-making. It appears that the joint artwork of securely attached couples is dominantly

characterized by cohesive, coherent imagery that is reciprocal and collaborative. Couples with less security seem more likely to have distinct boundaries and less cohesive interaction in the art products.

## Discussion

Researchers' intentions for this study were to analyze the relational dynamics and attachment styles of research participants through individual and dyadic art-making tasks. Researchers applied an attachment theory framework and Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT) instruments to assess participants' dyadic experience and individual attachment styles, while replicating Snir and Wiseman's (2010) research design. Specifically, the researchers followed a similar art task and processing structure, and explored themes and patterns arising within individual and shared artwork as well as the DAS and ECR-S questionnaires. Several differences between the replication study and Snir and Wiseman's (2010) study include geographical and cultural context, with the original study taking place in Israel and this current replication study taking place in the United States (Los Angeles, CA). Snir and Wiseman's (2010) research also consisted of a large sample size, whereas LMU's research consisted of only three couples, six participants. Researchers incorporated Snir and Wiseman's framework of analysis as well as supporting literature (found in above literature review) to understand findings and effects of attachment related to culture, couples' satisfaction, past partner experiences, and art making.

## Findings and Clinical Applications

**Cultural considerations.** In examining cultural influences on attachment styles, researchers utilized the demographic questionnaire, DAS, and ECR-S responses, and observation notes from the dyadic art making process. Regarding religion, researchers found that, rather than differences in the presence or type of religious practice, it appeared that differences in a couple's relationship to faith may have correlations with dyadic adjustment or attachment presentations in a couple. Observations of CP3 found a gap in the couple's relationships to faith, however, this

was seen in the art-making process, rather than in the written data collection. The art-making process allowed researchers to notice gaps in how the couple discussed and related to their religious practice. This process also demonstrated the couple's interpersonal dynamics and how they were influenced by their relationships to faith. In contrast, CP2 had gaps in their reported agreement on religious matters, however neither referenced religion during their art-making or discussion session. The combination of written data and data from the observed art-making session providing multiple perspectives to enrich researcher's understandings of the relationship of culture, attachment, and satisfaction.

Researchers were unable to note distinct correlations between ethnicity or cultural background and attachment. However, immigration history and level of acculturation between partners appeared to have influence on CP3's dyadic adjustment, as supported by Flores et al.'s (2004) finding on the impact of acculturation on couples' distress. The data produced conflicting findings around partners' agreement, or cultural similarities, but did highlight how family of origin and presence of extended family in the home might affect marital adjustment, as seen in CP3's self-reported demographic questionnaire. Interestingly, CP1 had high agreeability on both religious matters and family matters, but identified significantly different cultural backgrounds, particularly in religion and families of origin (figure 13). Researchers suggested that perhaps different ethnic or cultural backgrounds between partners might highlight a couple's ability to be flexible and embrace each other's differences, which may in turn have a positive influence on the marital satisfaction.

Researchers also found that, within the three, securely attached couples in the sample, females initiated the art-making process every session. This may have implications in the impact of gender roles on partner dynamics. More research should be done to pursue how dyadic art-



making may highlight the influence of gender roles on partner dynamics and engagement, particularly in relation to attachment.

**Relationship wellbeing.** Researchers assessed general wellbeing of relationship through analysis of the ECR-S, DAS, joint artwork, and researcher observations. Possible distress was noted in the data through gaps of two or more in agreement between partner responses on the ECR-S and DAS (figures 14 & 17). Detecting definitive distress was difficult; all couples rated securely in their relationships, however all couples expressed some degree of worry within their relationship. Secure attachment designations and relationship satisfaction were further validated through couple interviewing and art engagement. All couples demonstrated behaviors during the art-making process such as laughter, smiling, proximity of partners, and turn-taking, suggesting some degree of positive relationship wellbeing and communication.

Researchers also examined the joint art to support findings of couples' satisfaction and secure attachment by looking at degrees of cohesion and integration within the joint artwork from each couple. Amongst the securely attached couples, there were varying degrees of cohesion seen in the joint art products. For example, CP1 appeared to make the most cohesive and integrated artwork, with content that existed on one plane (figure 3). CP2 created artwork with some integration but had content existing on multiple planes (figure 8) and was reported by the couple to be read/viewed on multiple orientations, or "rotating" (observed CP2 statement). These differences in cohesion and integration may be correlated with the couple's dyadic agreement and satisfaction, as found in their questionnaire responses. CP1 was found to have more agreement on DAS responses than CP2, which supports a positive relationship between DAS agreement and cohesion in the joint artwork. The joint art products seemed to amplify

small variations in distress or satisfaction, as reported in questionnaire responses, demonstrating the sensitivity of the art as a tool for examining relationship dynamics and satisfaction.

**Relationship history.** Among all six securely attached participants, each individual reported at least one previous relationship. Researchers found that couples with less relationship experience (figure 13), such as CP3's short period of cohabitation and limited past relationships, may exhibit more anxiety than couples with more relationship history. CP3 rated with slightly higher anxiety and avoidance than other couples, although all were within the secure range. Researchers also noted divorce as a potential factor in heightened relational anxiety, such as M2's higher anxiety ratings compared to other participants who did not name divorce in their relationship history (figure 14). A history of divorce may impact an individual's future attachments, possibly by producing ambivalence similar to M2's identification of divorced despite being in a cohabiting relationship (figure 13). Slight variations in anxiety ratings, particularly among securely attached couples, may be related to relationship history and could be explored in future research using the sensitivity of art-making to focus on the impacts of past relationships on current relationship dynamics. Understanding individual previous romantic relationships may assist clinicians working with couples by providing better insight into the impact of partner lived experiences on dyadic attachment.

**Joint art patterns.** The examination of the joint art products created in this research provided support for Snir's (2013) joint art patterns; each joint art product exhibited balanced pattern characteristics, such as cohesion of imagery and style (figures 3, 8 & 11). However, the joint art displayed elements of both secure and non-secure Snir patterns within the art of securely attached couples. The presence of other, non-balanced, pattern elements within balanced artwork lent itself to the idea that these patterns, and perhaps attachment presentations, are fluid along a

spectrum, rather than discrete categories. An example of this may be seen in CP2's joint artwork (figure 8) which included imagery depicting a collaborative process of art-making (balanced style), while also presenting imagery existing on multiple planes without cohesive contextual elements (disconnected). The presence of characteristics from multiple Snir patterns, which were associated with different attachment classifications (Snir, 2013), indicated that perhaps this art depicted a secure couple on a spectrum of attachment, leaving space for less secure dynamics to be present as well. This may also be supported by examining Snir's un-categorized couples (2013) who had artwork that could not be classified within distinct Snir categories, perhaps due to having characteristics of multiple identified patterns.

Based on the observed characteristics of multiple patterns in the joint art of the participating couples, it appears that the art may be a more sensitive tool for assessing attachment or relational challenges than a written assessment. The process of joint art-making, as well as the examined art products, highlighted moments of tension in regards to independence and connectedness in the couples. An example of this could be seen within CP3's joint art-making process, where the drawing of a dividing line appeared to momentarily disrupt the dynamics and engagement of the couple (figure 11). These moments, common in most couples, regardless of attachment style, may help clinicians to identify areas where a couple may struggle with relational communication, boundaries, or attachment issues. Rather than using a process of joint art-making to diagnosis attachment issues, this research recommends the use of art to support assessment and provide a richer context for understanding how a couple interacts.

A general lack of literature concerning dyadic art making through attachment theory and emotionally focused therapy, led researchers to replicate Snir & Wiseman's (2010) study and contribute to furthering research with couples and art-making . Researchers found that that art-

making was a more sensitive tool than written assessment, possibly due to its ability to create closeness between partners, demonstrate partner communication, and provide a tangible object that can be interpreted through a clinical lens. Through the application of the art process and participant reflection, cohesion and integration within the artwork appeared to be good indicators of how well a couple can communicate, work together, and dyadically come to understand one another.

### **Limitations and Future Considerations**

As noted above, a notable limitation of this research was the limited sample size. The limited number of participants limited the research to qualitative analysis without the ability to draw conclusive correlations. Researchers believe that the small sample size, and the geographical location of the research (Westchester, Los Angeles, CA), also contributed to the overall lack of greater cultural diversity among participants. All participants fell within the dominant cultures of Southern California: Caucasian/Hispanic ethnic background, fluent in English, heterosexual orientation, and from middle to upper middle socioeconomic status. Due to the design of a non-compensated, couples art-making research, the sampling may have also inevitably attracted couples who were already in securely attached relationships.

Future considerations recommend the use of more culturally sensitive tool to measure couple's dyadic adjustment, as parts of the DAS appeared to apply standards from a culturally Western perspective. A specific example on the DAS would be the question that appeared to measure the expressions of romantic love through actions such as kissing, which may not be a consistent measure across all cultures. Researchers also suggest that future studies include follow-up sessions in order to gain additional clarity on participant questionnaire responses and further reflections on the art-making session.

There is currently very little research beyond Snir's studies into dyadic art-making patterns; the absence of more supporting or contrasting research indicates the relative nascency of this topic of study and the need for further exploration. Researchers also noted a lack of new research related to past relationships which may be beneficial in understanding attachment and relationship dynamics. Cultural factors such as acculturation were also found by researchers to have potential significance in dyadic roles and adjustment in couples. Flores (2004) suggested that when a partner becomes acculturated more quickly than the other partner, it's possible it could cause more distress in a marriage. This research was useful when looking at CP3 and their dyadic relationship and their cultural values. However, there is an overall lack of culturally sensitive or inclusive research on attachment theory. These findings suggest the need for further research to be conducted with cultural sensitivity to attachment presentation variations. This research will hopefully lead to a more accurate and sensitive tool for measuring attachment.

New research from Girme, Agnew, VanderDrift, Harvey, Rholes, & Simpson (2018) developed another tool of examining variations in attachment in correlation with couples' satisfaction and distress. The research focused on the individual's experience of within-person fluctuations, over time, in security, towards a significant figure in their life, to predict future relationship wellbeing. The fluctuations in attachment were hypothesized to cause relationship distress and general decline of relationship wellbeing (Girme et al., 2018). Girme et al. (2018) created a scale in order to measure predicted future intimate relationship stability and found that those who scored low in anxiety and avoidance expected their relationship to maintain future stability. This study may assist in the future application of relationship satisfaction tools in attachment and relationship dynamics research. It may be useful to include a questionnaire on

relationship stability over time in order to gather supporting data regarding the relationship between satisfaction and attachment orientation.

### **Conclusion**

This replication study explored couples' relational dynamics through a dyadic art making process. This replication study analyzed three couples' dyadic relationships through individual and joint drawings, and a battery of questionnaires. The analyses and instruments were informed by attachment theory, and Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT). A literature review provided a framework of art therapy, art based assessment, attachment work, and EFT, especially as it relates to relationship satisfaction and distress. Considerations of cultural impact on attachment, as well as the impact of past romantic relationships on couples' dynamic were also explored. Participants were recruited through university posting and snowballing. Data was gathered from a demographics questionnaire, the ECR-S, the DAS, an individual drawing task, a nonverbal couple's joint drawing task, and researchers' observational notes. All couples were found to be securely attached and satisfied in their dyadic relationships, according to standardized instruments. Considerations of culture, relationship satisfaction/distress, past romantic experience, and art analysis were noted. Despite small sample size, researchers found that comparatively to the standardized instruments, the art served as a more sensitive tool in reflecting couples' cohesion and integration, illustrating communication patterns, ability to work together, and overall, reflect the particular relational dynamic of each couple. Though researchers were only provided with securely attached couples, researchers found meaning in the ability to deepen Snir's (2010) study by analyzing a range of secure relationships and experiences using art.

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## Appendices

### A. IRB Approval

**Paterson, Julie** <Julianne.Paterson@lmu.edu>

To

Einat Metzl-YahooForward

CC

Moffet, David Carfora, John Paterson, Julie

Today at 11:50 AM

Dear Professor Metzl,

Thank you for submitting your IRB application for your protocol titled ***Art Making with Couples – Looking at Couples’ Dynamic Creatively***. All documents have been received and reviewed, and I am pleased to inform you that your study has been approved.

The effective date of your approval is **November 29, 2016 – November 28, 2017**. If you wish to continue your project beyond the effective period, you must submit a renewal application to the IRB **prior to November 1, 2017**. In addition, if there are any changes to your protocol, you are required to submit an addendum application.

For any further communication regarding your approved study, please reference your **IRB protocol number: LMU IRB 2016 FA 46**.

Best wishes for a successful research project.

Sincerely,

Julie Paterson

Julie Paterson | Sr. IRB Coordinator | **Loyola Marymount University** | 1 LMU Drive | U-Hall #1718 | Los Angeles, CA 90045 | (310) 258-5465

**B. Subject Recruitment Flyer**

# COUPLES ART MAKING

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COUPLE'S EXPERIENCES THROUGH  
SHARED ART MAKING!

Are you and your partner  
over 18 and have been living  
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If yes, then we need you!

Please join us for a study  
regarding relationship styles  
and art-making!

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[einat.metzl@lmu.edu](mailto:einat.metzl@lmu.edu) or call  
(310)338.4561 to make an  
appointment for you and your  
partner to meet the team!

Study will be conducted at  
Loyola Marymount University  
campus in University Hall by  
graduate students in the  
Marital and Family Therapy  
program.

**RESEARCH TEAM: EINAT METZL (PI),  
ANNA MCNERNEY, GRACE PALENIK,  
KATHLEEN SCHEPPE, KUANGHENG HWANG**