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Attachment and Couple Satisfaction: The Mediating Effect of Approach and Avoidance Commitment

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Satisfactory couple relationships are demonstrated to have a myriad of benefits. However, the ability to establish couple satisfaction is shown to be strongly and negatively impacted by insecure romantic attachment patterns (i.e., anxious and avoidant attachment). This study sought to gain an enhanced understanding of the aforementioned link by means of investigating a novel mediator model incorporating two facets of romantic commitment: approach commitment (the desire to maintain a relationship due to benefits inherent within this) and avoidance commitment (the desire to maintain a relationship to avoid potential losses resulting from relationship dissolution). Bootstrap analyses demonstrated that insecure attachments were differentially related to commitment goals, such that anxious attachment was related with higher approach and avoidance commitment. Conversely, while avoidant attachment was negatively linked with approach commitment goals, no relation was revealed with avoidance commitment goals. Additionally, results demonstrated that one's idiosyncratic commitment goals partially mediated the strongly established link between insecure attachment and couple satisfaction.

■ **Keywords:** couple, attachment, commitment, satisfaction, goals

The attainment and maintenance of long-term satisfactory relationships is regarded as a significant and important life goal for overall mental and physical health (Davila & Bradbury, 1998; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Notwithstanding, the incessantly growing divorce rate attests to the difficulty of achieving such a desired goal, with an abundance of research demonstrating the devastating impact of relationship dissolution and divorce on general wellbeing (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001; Kurdek, 1991). In light of these findings, research has focused on ascertaining the causes of relationship dissolution. A particular focus has been deployed on identifying possible determinants of relationship maintenance (i.e., commitment) and couple satisfaction (Feeney, 2002). Attachment theory has proven to be one of the most comprehensive theories for understanding relationship formation, stability, and quality (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Nonetheless, a specified model linking romantic attachment, romantic commitment, and relationship satisfaction remains wanting prior to an enhanced understanding of these important relational processes and their interrelations. Accordingly, the present study aimed to examine a novel and systematic model investigating the mediating role of romantic commitment goals on the association between romantic attachment and couple satisfaction.

Romantic Commitment

Given its significant and diverse roles, varied definitions of romantic commitment have been developed in order to better comprehend the maintenance of love relationships. Nevertheless, romantic commitment is principally and largely conceptualised as a cognitive construct (Sternberg, 1986; Beach & Tesser, 1988). More explicitly, this is conceptualised as the intention to maintain a couple relationship in the future (Rusbult, 1983; Levinger, 1988; Stanley & Markman, 1992), despite its costs or benefits and possible fluctuations in positive feelings (Sternberg, 1986; Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). As a result of the assorted and disparate formulisations of commitment, Strachman and Gable (2006) proposed a more parsimonious definition based on Gray's motivational theory.

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According to Gray (1987, 1990), two motivational systems underlie emotions and behaviours to regulate aversive and appetitive motives (Carver & White, 1994). The aversive motivational system, referred to as the Behavioural Inhibition System (BIS), *inhibits* behaviours in response to a threat or to avoid unfavourable outcomes, and is associated with negative emotions such as anxiety, fear, and frustration (Gray, 1987, 1990). The appetitive motivational system, called the Behavioural Activation System (BAS), *initiates* or increases behaviours in response to signals of a reward and is linked with positive feelings, such as hope and happiness (e.g., Gray, 1987, 1990).

Drawing upon this theory, Strachman and Gable (2006) posited two facets of commitment that are similarly oriented with two distinct motivational goals, termed 'approach commitment' and 'avoidance commitment'. Approach commitment is conceptualised as the desire to continue a relationship in order to *maintain* the benefits inherent within this (e.g., companionship, shared activities). Alternately, avoidance commitment refers to a desire to continue a relationship in order to *avoid* potential losses that could occur from the relationship terminating (e.g., loneliness, financial hardships). In this way, approach commitment is regarded as a goal *towards* relationship stability and rewards, whereas avoidance commitment is viewed as a goal *away* from relationship instability and dissolution costs (Strachman & Gable, 2006). This formulisation is contended to provide a broader understanding of romantic commitment as both incentives to persist in the relationship and restraints to leave are addressed simultaneously (Strachman & Gable, 2006). Building on the prolific literature of motives and goals, it was believed that the incorporation of this innovative and inclusive definition of romantic commitment could help further clarify the role of commitment goals in romantic relationships. More specifically, these goals were anticipated to better inform the well-established association between couple satisfaction and romantic attachment.

Romantic Attachment

Attachment theory, originally developed by Bowlby (1969/1982, 1988), was first used to describe the enduring emotional bond uniting an infant and its primary caregiver. Based on one's idiosyncratic caregiver experiences, insecure or secure attachment strategies may develop. These strategies not only guide appraisals and expectations of others, but also continue to exert a central role in the development, maintenance, and quality of subsequent attachment relationships, including adult relationships (Bowlby, 1969/1982; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Shaver, Hazan, & Bradshaw, 1988). In adulthood, romantic partners are demonstrated to be the most significant attachment relationship formed (Bartholomew, 1993), with insecure romantic attachment most notably conceptualised in terms of *anxiety over abandonment* (defined as fears of abandonment and anger about separation in romantic relationships) and *avoidance of intimacy* (defined as a desire for limited closeness and the suppression of emotions in romantic relationships; Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998).

Insecure attachment patterns are believed to result from experiences with emotionally unavailable attachment figures in early life (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998). Explicitly, due to sporadically available caregivers, anxiously attached individuals are more likely to develop incessant worries regarding abandonment and rejection. In an attempt to cope, *hyperactivating* attachment strategies prototypically develop (i.e., exaggerated and intensified proximity seeking behaviours; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). In romantic relationships, hyperactivation is most often displayed by ceaselessly seeking reassurance regarding their partner's love and commitment at the expense of developing healthy autonomy and self-reliance (Mikulincer, 2006). Conversely, avoidantly attached individuals' early experiences with non-responsive caregivers is characteristically shown to result in the view of others as unavailable. To adapt to caregiver unavailability, *deactivating* attachment strategies typically ensue (i.e., the minimisation of proximity seeking behaviours) (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Fraley & Shaver, 2000). In romantic relationships, deactivation is typically displayed by high levels of self-sufficiency and autonomy, the dismissal of attachment threats and desires, and the demonstration of cold and detached behaviours in an attempt to restrain high levels of closeness (see Mikulincer, 2006).

Attachment and Couple Satisfaction

Overall, the term 'satisfaction' implies that a need or a desire has been fulfilled. Within attachment theory, these needs entail having a romantic partner who is available to provide a sense of security, closeness, and dependability, while simultaneously supporting autonomous activities when appropriate (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Given anxiously and avoidantly attached individuals' idiosyncratic difficulties establishing a healthy balance between autonomy and closeness (Mikulincer, 2006), they are more likely to experience lower levels of relationship satisfaction (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Such findings correspond with a large body of research consistently yielding significant inverse associations between attachment insecurity and couple satisfaction (e.g., DiFilippo & Overholser, 2002; Elizur & Mintzer, 2001; Rholes, Simpson, & Friedman, 2006; Ridge & Feeney, 1998; Roberts & Noller, 1997; Treboux, Crowell, & Waters, 2004).

As a result of this highly established link, a plethora of researchers have aimed to identify possible mediators (e.g., negative affectivity, maladaptive patterns of coping, low sensitivity to partner needs; see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007, for a review) that may further elucidate this

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understanding. Notwithstanding, there remain noteworthy and uncharted research avenues to be investigated for an improved comprehension of the mechanisms underlying the important association between romantic attachment and couple satisfaction. The present study sought to accomplish this task by exploring the novel mediational effect of commitment goals on this well-established relation.

Commitment Goals and Attachment

A large body of research has illustrated the significant and central relation between commitment and romantic attachment (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). As previously alluded to, attachment security depends on one's confidence in their attachment figure's continued care and availability in times of need. In the context of couple relationships, which significantly differ from parent–child dyads in that one partner may chose to terminate the relationship at any given time, security is all the more challenging to achieve (Duemmler & Kobak, 2001). Given insecurely attached individuals' tendency to question their partner's availability, they are more likely to encounter difficulties related to romantic commitment (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Specifically, aligned with the mechanisms of hyperactivation, anxiously attached individuals are more likely to persistently and intrusively seek out higher levels of commitment in their relationship (Mikulincer & Erev, 1991). They are correspondingly more prone to experience feelings of frustration instigated from their perception of their partner as incapable of committing as fully as they do (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Inversely, avoidantly attached individuals' deactivating strategies are shown to result in the minimisation of the importance of their relationship (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007), and consequently, reports of lower desires for (and experiences of) romantic commitment (Pistole, Clark, & Tubbs, 1995).

Studies to date have yet to examine the relation between romantic attachment and approach and avoidance commitment goals, despite both constructs ultimately aimed at understanding relationship motives. Based on previous literature, it may be postulated that due to fears of abandonment, anxiously attached individuals will tend to place a higher level of focus on prospective relationship threats and their costs, and consequently, demonstrate higher avoidance commitment goals. Contrarily, current research does not appear to support the articulation of a specified relation between attachment anxiety and approach commitment goals. That is, whereas it is conceivable that their fears of abandonment (Brennan et al., 1998) and concurrent desires for interdependence (Mikulincer & Erev, 1991) may bias them towards perceiving more positive aspects of their relationship, it is similarly feasible that their vigilance to signs of abandonment may minimise their ability to accurately assess or even experience positive aspects, particularly those implying security. Hence, their particular experience (or recognition) of the positive features of their relationship may influence whether approach commitment goals may be present. As such, no a priori hypotheses were put forth for the abovementioned association.

Contrarily, considering avoidantly attached individuals' tendency to use deactivating strategies, their discomfort with closeness, and minimisation of the importance of their relationship (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007), it is tenable that they may be more prone to minimise the positive aspects of their relationship, and consequently, demonstrate lower approach commitment goals. However, it is unclear whether this attachment orientation may influence relationship stability in the face of relationship dissolution costs (i.e., avoidance commitment). For instance, whereas avoidantly attached individuals may be unlikely to report persisting in their relationship to minimise interpersonal losses (e.g., loneliness), they may readily admit to those factors not characterised as such (e.g., financial costs). Hence, a specified relation between avoidant attachment and avoidance commitment goals similarly does not appear to be theoretically substantiated.

Commitment Goals and Couple Satisfaction

Lastly, in support of our proposed models, a plethora of research has demonstrated the well-established link between general romantic commitment and higher couple satisfaction (see Cate, Levin, & Richmond, 2002, for a review; Johnson, Caughlin, & Huston, 1999; Rusbult, 1980). Nonetheless, despite couple satisfaction being an important factor of romantic commitment, it is not a necessary feature (Strachman, 2008). In this way, an individual can be satisfied and committed to their relationship, whereas another may be equally committed but dissatisfied. Strachman and Gables' (2006) motivational perspective offers an explanation for the seemingly paradoxical relation between romantic commitment and relationship satisfaction. Specifically, they showed that approach commitment goals were positively, and avoidance commitment goals negatively, associated with couple satisfaction (Frank & Brandstatter, 2002; Strachman, 2008). This was explained by the tendency of individuals with higher approach commitment goals to endorse positive cognitive processing, focus on positive relationship characteristics, and attribute negative events to factors external to their partner (Gable, 2006; Strachman & Gable, 2006). Contrarily, those with higher avoidance commitment goals are more likely to endorse negative cognitive processing, recall threatening events, and display stronger reactivity to such events (Gable, 2006). Therefore, while both individuals with higher avoidance or approach commitment goals were more likely to persist in their relationship, lower couple satisfaction was reported by those

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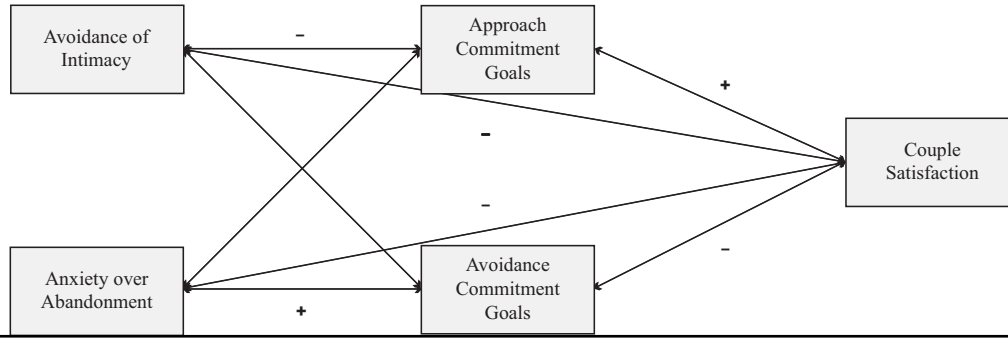


FIGURE 1

Hypothesised main and indirect effects between romantic attachment, commitment goals, and couple satisfaction

with avoidance (relative to approach) commitment goals (Strachman, 2008).

Objectives and Hypotheses

The present study aimed to fill gaps of previous research related to three important relationship domains: attachment, commitment, and couple satisfaction. Specifically, we aimed to gain an improved understanding of the interrelation between these constructs by the novel examination of approach and avoidance commitment goals as mediators of the link between insecure romantic attachment and couple satisfaction, respectively. First, as it pertains to main effects, we expected attachment anxiety and avoidance to be significantly and negatively associated with couple satisfaction. Second, we expected a significant and negative association between attachment avoidance and approach commitment goals. No a priori link was speculated between attachment avoidance and avoidance commitment goals. As it pertains to attachment anxiety, a positive association was expected with avoidance commitment goals. No a priori link was speculated between attachment anxiety and approach commitment goals. Third, we expected approach commitment goals to be significantly and positively associated with couple satisfaction, whereas a negative association was anticipated between avoidance commitment and couple satisfaction. Lastly, as it pertains to indirect effects, (1) no a priori hypotheses were stipulated for the mediation effect of avoidance commitment goals on the relation between attachment avoidance and couple satisfaction, (2) approach commitment goals were expected to partially mediate the association between attachment avoidance and couple satisfaction, (3) avoidance commitment goals were expected to partially mediate the association between attachment anxiety and couple satisfaction, and finally (4) no a priori hypotheses were stipulated for the mediation effect of approach commitment goals on the relation between attachment anxiety and couple satisfaction (see Figure 1). As previously alluded to, the aforesaid mediation models that were not explicitly outlined are due to a lack of theoretical and empirical research to support specified hypotheses or models. However, given their novelty and potential to demonstrate mediation effects, all mediation models were examined.

Method

Participants

A total sample of 301 individuals (249 women, 52 men) participated in this study. Eligibility criteria included current involvement in a romantic relationship of at least 12 months and being 17 years of age or older. The mean age of participants was 21.67 years (SD = 6.02, range 17-57), with a mean relationship length of 3.51 years (SD = 4.9). Within the sample, 32.52% were cohabitating with their romantic partner (M = 3.84 years, SD = 6.3), 8% were married (M = 10.08 years, SD = 9.99), and 7.69% had children (M = 2.57, SD = 1.43). The sample constituted primarily of Caucasians (76.51%, African = 7.23%, Asian = 7.82%, Native American = 3.01%, Other = 5.43%). The mean annual revenue of participants was $12,420 Canadian dollars (SD = 20 230).

Procedure

Participants were recruited through introductory psychology courses that allowed students to voluntarily participate in research for one course credit. Interested participants received a secure and encrypted Internet link (through Survey Monkey), which provided access to the online questionnaire package. The package comprised of an information letter outlining the voluntary nature of the study and the participants' right to withdraw at any given time, consequence-free, as well as a resource list of available psychological services in the area. The total time required to complete the entire package was 60 minutes; with the explicit questionnaires used in the present study requiring 20 minutes.

Measures

Sociodemographic Questionnaire. This measure was used to gather information on personal (e.g., age, gender,

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annual income) and relationship demographics (e.g., relationship status, relationship duration).

***Experiences in Close Relationships* (ECR; Brennan et al., 1998).** The ECR is a 36-item measure of romantic attachment, which is comprised of two dimensions: *anxiety over abandonment* (e.g., 'I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by my partner') and *avoidance of intimacy* (e.g., 'I try to avoid getting too close to my partner'). Each scale contains 18 items rated on a Likert scale, from 1 = *strongly disagree*, to 7 = *strongly agree*, with higher scores representing increased attachment anxiety or attachment avoidance. Alpha coefficients within the present sample were .92 and .90 for anxiety over abandonment and avoidance of intimacy, respectively, as compared to scores of .91 and .94 reported by Brennan and colleagues (1998). The quality of the ECR's two-factor structure has been demonstrated over the years by its excellent reliability coefficients, as well as its high construct and predictive validity among diverse populations (Alonso-Arbiol, Shaver, & Yarnoz, 2002; Lafontaine & Lussier, 2003; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002).

***Approach and Avoidance Commitment* (AAC; Strachman, 2008).** The AAC is a 12-item measure of *approach commitment (*'I want to continue having fun with my partner') and *avoidance commitment* ('I don't want to be single'. Each subscale contains six items rated on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = *not at all*, to 7 = *very much*, with higher scores representing increased approach and avoidance commitment. A confirmatory factor analysis showed that both subscales were only moderately correlated and offered an adequate fit to a two-factor model. Within the current study, alpha coefficients were .91 and .92 for approach and avoidance commitment, respectively, compared to Strachman's (2008) scores of .80 and .89.

***Dyadic Adjustment Scale — 4 items* (DAS-4; Sabourin, Valois, & Lussier, 2005).** The DAS-4 is a briefer version of the original 32-item DAS (Spanier, 1976), a widely used and psychometrically validated self-report measure of dyadic adjustment for individuals involved in a marital or cohabitating relationship (Bouchard, 2006). The DAS-4 items include questions such as: 'How often do you discuss or have you considered divorce, separation, or terminating your relationship?' Varying Likert-type scales are used and items are summed to obtain a global score, with higher scores reflecting higher couple satisfaction. Sabourin and colleagues (2005) found the DAS-4 to have adequate reliability ($\alpha = .84$), good discriminant validity between distressed and non-distressed couples (.82 and .94, respectively), as well as better predictive validity of relationship dissolution over a 2-year period than the DAS-32 (Sabourin et al., 2005). The Cronbach's alpha among the current sample was adequate with a value of .71.

TABLE 1

Intercorrelations of Primary Study Variables

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Avoidance	—	.132*	−.007	−.442***	−.444***
2. Anxiety		—	.226***	.060	−.188***
3. Avoidance commitment			—	.326***	−.031
4. Approach commitment				—	.425***
5. Couple satisfaction					—
Mean	2.16	3.57	2.02	4.88	2.29
Standard deviation	1.48	1.18	1.49	1.86	1.39

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Results

Preliminary Analyses and Inferential Statistics

Although a total of 301 participants were recruited for the current study, three did not meet the eligibility criteria and 12 failed to complete the questionnaire package beyond a few questions. These participants were therefore excluded and analyses were conducted among the remaining 286 participants. Single imputations (using the expectation-maximisation algorithm) were used to replace missing data (less than 1% of the dataset, missing at random). Logarithmic transformations were implemented to correct for violations of normality. Bivariate correlations were computed in order to verify preliminary relations amongst variables (see Table 1).

Main Analyses

Recent literature has suggested that bootstrapping, a nonparametric procedure for deriving an empirical sampling distribution (Efron, 1988), is one of the most powerful methods for evaluating the indirect effect of a mediator (M) on the relation between an independent variable (IV) and a dependent variable (DV) (MacKinnon, Fairchild, & Fritz, 2007; Preacher & Hayes, 2004; Hayes & Preacher, 2013). Furthermore, bootstrapping is now recommended over the causal step procedure proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986) as it provides more accurate estimates (minimising type I error rates) and has greater power in detecting indirect effects (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Bootstrap analyses with bias corrected and accelerated (BCa) confidence intervals (CI) were conducted within SPSS (version 19.0) to evaluate the significance of the proposed mediational models (MacKinnon et al., 2007). Andrew Hayes' MEDIATE syntax for probing mediational models was used to conduct the aforementioned analyses (Hayes & Preacher, 2013). Five thousand bootstrap samples were utilised, as recommended by Preacher and Hayes (2008), to create a pseudo population of direct and indirect effects. All four mediation effects of interest were examined within one mediational model by

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TABLE 2

Indirect Effects of Anxiety over Abandonment and Avoidance of Intimacy on Couple Satisfaction Through Approach and Avoidance Commitment

	Indirect effects of romantic attachment on couple satisfaction					
	Anxiety over abandonment			Avoidance of intimacy		
		BCa 95% CI			BCa 95% CI	
	Point estimate	Lower	Upper	Point estimate	Lower	Upper
Mediators						
Avoidance commitment	.003	.0005	.007	−.003	−.02	.007
Approach commitment	−.006	−.01	−.001	.14	.08	.20

Note: BCa = bias corrected and accelerated. Couple Satisfaction and Approach Commitment are reflected values.

the incorporation of attachment anxiety and avoidance as independent variables, (IV_1 and IV_2, respectively), avoidance and approach commitment as mediators (M_1 and M_2, respectively), and lastly, couple satisfaction as the dependent variable (DV). All associations required for mediation, as dictated by Baron & Kenny, were explored within each of our models.

Mediation Model

First, findings revealed that attachment anxiety and avoidance were both significantly related with couple satisfaction, $t = -2.86$, $p < .01$; $t = -4.73$, $p < .001$. Second, findings showed that higher attachment anxiety was related to higher avoidance and approach commitment goals, $t = 3.99$, $p < .001$; $t = 2.26$, $p < .05$, respectively. Conversely, while attachment avoidance was not shown to be significantly related with avoidance commitment goals, $t = -.63$, *ns*, this was demonstrated to be negatively related with approach commitment goals, $t = -8.58$, $p < .001$. Third, both avoidance and approach commitment goals were shown to be significantly and positively correlated with couple satisfaction, $t = 2.10$, $p < .05$; $t = 5.90$, $p < .001$, respectively. As it pertains to indirect effects (see Table 2), results revealed that (1) there was no significant indirect effect of avoidance commitment goals on the relation between attachment avoidance and couple satisfaction, (2) there was a significant indirect effect of approach commitment goals on the relation between attachment avoidance and couple satisfaction, (3) there was a significant indirect effect of avoidance commitment goals on the relation between attachment anxiety and couple satisfaction, and finally, (4) there was a significant indirect effect of approach commitment goals on the relation between attachment anxiety and couple satisfaction.

Discussion

The present study comprised of the examination of two mediation models whereby it was proposed that (1) low approach commitment goals would mediate the negative relation between attachment avoidance and couple satisfaction, and (2) that high avoidance commitment goals would mediate the negative relation between attachment anxiety and couple satisfaction. Both mediation models were empirically supported. In general terms, our findings helped clarify the relation between insecure romantic attachment and couple satisfaction by means of underlying commitment goals. Mainly, five conclusions can be drawn from our results.

Attachment and Satisfaction

First, consistent with our hypotheses and the existing literature focused on close relationships (see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007), attachment anxiety and avoidance were revealed to be associated with couple satisfaction. Explicitly, our research supported the widespread and acknowledged view of higher attachment insecurity as contributing to lower reports and experiences of couple satisfaction.

Attachment and Commitment Goals

The second conclusion pertains to the novel exploration of insecure romantic attachment and its relation with commitment goals. As hypothesised, results revealed that individuals reporting higher levels of attachment anxiety (i.e., fears of abandonment) were more likely to have commitment goals focused on avoiding the negative consequences of relationship dissolution. Results may be further elucidated by Alonso-Arbiol and colleagues' (2002) findings, which demonstrated that higher attachment anxiety was associated with higher levels of dependency in both emotional and instrumental contexts. Thus, higher dependence in combination with fears of abandonment may partially explain anxiously attached individuals' higher propensity to focus on the costs of terminating a romantic relationship (i.e., avoidance commitment goals). Moreover, avoidance commitment goals coupled with higher dependency may correspondingly explicate anxiously attached individuals' incessant demands for higher commitment (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007) and greater proneness to remain in unsatisfactory relationships (Davila & Bradbury, 2001). Additionally, results showed that high

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anxiety over abandonment was related to higher approach commitment goals. It can thus be inferred that, although anxiously attached individuals tend to focus on the losses associated with their relationship potentially coming to an end, they are also cognisant of its current rewards and positive attributes. In fact, some researchers have shown that those who demonstrate elevated anxiety over abandonment tend to rate higher on idealisation measures when asked to describe their romantic partner (Feeney & Noller, 1990) or their couple relationship (Feeney & Noller, 1991). This is also consistent with the original conceptualisation of anxious attachment as a negative view of self (i.e., as unlovable and profoundly flawed) combined with a positive evaluation of others (i.e., as worthy and needed for self to function; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991).

With regard to attachment avoidance, consistent with our hypothesis, results showed a negative relation with approach commitment goals; such that the more one demonstrated attachment avoidance the less likely they were to report maintaining their relationship as a result of its inherent benefits. These results may be enlightened by research findings of Mikulincer, Shaver, and Slav (2006), who found that avoidant individuals not only perceive less positive behaviours from their relationship partner than do anxiously or securely attached individuals, but moreover, they report lessened levels of gratitude for these behaviours even when acknowledged. In this way, avoidantly attached individuals' minimisation (or reduced recognition) of the positive features of their relationship may elucidate their preponderantly demonstrated thwarted desires for increased commitment. Furthermore, results showed that attachment avoidance was unrelated to avoidance commitment goals. Thus, the potential losses derived from a relationship ending do not appear to necessarily engender commitment levels among those exhibiting a discomfort with intimacy. Therefore, when compared to anxiously attached individuals, they may be less motivated to commit so as to prevent relationship dissolution costs. Overall, it can be concluded that avoidantly attached individuals are less likely to report persisting in their relationship due to its benefits, and are correspondingly less likely to be influenced by the costs of a relationship terminating when contrasted with anxiously attached individuals.

Commitment Goals and Couple Satisfaction

The third conclusion that can be derived from the present study relates to the complexity of the established relation between commitment goals and couple satisfaction. Consistent with our proposed hypothesis, our results indicated that the more one focuses on the positive aspects central to their relationship (e.g., approach commitment goals), the more likely they are to report higher couple satisfaction. Also consistent with our stipulation, results revealed that avoidance commitment goals were negatively associated with couple satisfaction. Thus, the more one chooses to commit to a romantic partner in order to avoid negative outcomes stemming from the relationship terminating (e.g., lack of partner alternatives, fears of being alone, financial dependency), the less likely they are to be content with their relationship overall. These findings replicate those obtained by Strachman (2008), thus confirming the pertinence of differentiating between approach and avoidance commitment goals in predicting relationship satisfaction.

Mediating Role of Commitment Goals

The fourth conclusion that emerged from the current findings pertains to the mediating effect of commitment goals on the relation between romantic attachment and couple satisfaction. First, results did not yield any significant indirect effect to support avoidance commitment goals as a mediator of the negative relation between avoidance of intimacy and couple satisfaction. The previously mentioned lack of association between attachment avoidance and avoidance commitment goals appears to explain this non-significant mediation effect. Specifically, considering that the costs of relationship dissolution do not appear to impact, either positively or negatively, avoidantly attached individuals' commitment goals, such goals did not elucidate lower levels couple satisfaction amongst these individuals. Second, consistent with our hypothesis, approach commitment goals were found to mediate the relation between attachment avoidance and relationship satisfaction. Explicitly, higher attachment avoidance, which was shown to be related with a decreased ability to either appreciate or acknowledge the positive aspects of one's romantic relationship, was in turn linked with lower couple satisfaction. According to Birnie, McClure, Lydon, and Holmberg (2009), avoidantly attached individuals often enter romantic relationships with negative partner and relational expectations that undermine their level of commitment. Given their expectation of negative events and anticipation of few positive events, avoidantly attached individuals often foresee their relationship as being prone to inevitably fail (Birnie et al., 2009). Perhaps these scripts, combined with a limited ability to acknowledge the positive aspects of their relationship (i.e., approach commitment goals), might not only explain why avoidant individuals are more likely to be discontent with their relationship (e.g., Feeney, 1999), but correspondingly, their tendency to demonstrate lower levels of general romantic commitment (Pistole et al., 1995).

Third, with regard to anxiety over abandonment, results indicated that high avoidance commitment goals mediated the negative relation with couple satisfaction. However, this significant mediation effect appears to be a spurious finding given that the positive link between the mediator variable (approach commitment) and both the

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independent and dependent variable (attachment anxiety and couple satisfaction, respectively) cannot logically explain, theoretically or statistically, the negative association between the independent and outcome variable. Given that main effects demonstrated within this study appear to be consistent with past research findings, it can be inferred that indiscernible results likely pertain to the indirect effect in question. Of note, the aforesaid mediation effect was not shown to be significant when models were examined separately for attachment anxiety and avoidance. Thus, the inclusion of multiple variables within one model, explicitly, the inclusion of both attachment dimensions, may lead to unexplained variance resulting in a type I error as it pertains to this statistically significant indirect effect. Further research is needed to further clarify this obscure finding. Nevertheless, results not only illustrate the complexity of the link between attachment, commitment goals, and couple satisfaction, but moreover, the need to examine models in diverse ways in order to clearly ascertain direct and indirect links.

As a final point of interest, given Rusbult's (1983) theory of commitment suggesting that satisfaction can predict commitment levels, mediational models examining satisfaction as a mediator of the link between attachment and commitment goals were similarly examined. Results demonstrated that avoidant attachment and its negative link with approach commitment goals was explained via higher couple satisfaction. No additional mediation effects were supported. Thus, results highlighted that, when involved in an unsatisfactory relationship, avoidantly attached individuals may be less likely to report persisting in their relationship due to the positive aspects inherent within this. Contrasting this model with the current study's primary model of interest highlights the reciprocity of the relation between commitment and satisfaction among avoidantly attached individuals whereby approach motives to maintain one's relationship may influence and be impacted by one's couple satisfaction. Accordingly, both models may prove to be useful in informing the link between attachment avoidance, commitment goals, and couple satisfaction depending on one's particular area of interest.

Limitations and Future Research

Although the current study provides important and innovative findings, a number of methodological limitations must be addressed. First, our correlational data limit causal inferences that can be drawn the data. Although commitment goals were postulated to lead to greater couple satisfaction, the reverse may also hold true. This was highlighted by the support of two distinct mediation effects whereby both satisfaction and commitment goals functioned as significant mediators. Prospective data incorporating longitudinal data are needed to explore the directionality of our models. A second limitation of the study pertains to the use of a relatively homogeneous sample primarily comprised of a younger university population. Future research may seek to replicate our models among heterogeneous samples (i.e., same-sex couples, older couples, a higher percentage of married couples, and individuals from varying economic and educational backgrounds) in order to increase the generalisability of results. Accordingly, the current findings can only be interpreted within the context of the particular sample used. Finally, the examination of dyadic processes (e.g., actor and partner effects) of attachment, commitment goals, couple satisfaction, and their interrelations could similarly be advantageous in furthering our understanding. For instance, a query of interest may be whether one's partner's commitment goals mediate the relation between one's romantic attachment and one's couple satisfaction. Despite some limitations, several methodological strengths that characterise our study must also be noted, including: (1) the use of individuals in a relationship of at least 12 months duration, (2) a comprehensive examination of two facets of commitment, (3) the novel examination of approach and avoidance commitment goals within an attachment perspective, and finally, (4) the exploration of innovative mediation models that permitted a more comprehensive understanding of the strongly established relation between insecure attachment and couple satisfaction by means of commitment goals.

Implications and Conclusions

In summary, a number of important empirical implications can be drawn from our results. First, the proposed mediation models offer both a parsimonious and original explanation of the relation between romantic attachment and couple satisfaction by means of Strachman's (2008) commitment goals. Previous research in romantic attachment had thus far overlooked the importance of motivational commitment goals. By including the approach and avoidance commitment constructs to our models, the present study fills a considerable gap in research regarding commitment and romantic attachment and its link with couple functioning. Furthermore, the study's mediation models similarly contribute to the integration of two prolific areas of social psychology (attachment theory and motivational psychology) for further comprehending couple satisfaction.

In addition, given the ongoing motivation towards attaining both relationship stability and satisfaction, but an increasing trend towards divorce, this study may also have a myriad of important clinical implications. As an illustration, the results of the present study may serve as reinforcement to therapeutic approaches, such as Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT; Johnson, & Greenberg, 1985), one of the most strongly validated couples' therapy approaches (Johnson, Hunsley, Greenberg, Schindler, 1999), which aims to improve couple satisfaction by

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means of attachment related processes. Our findings suggest that introducing changes to insecurely attached individuals' commitment goals may be a valuable way to reduce the likelihood of dysfunctional and dissatisfying relationships. Many couple counsellors employ diverse techniques, which encourage distressed couples to positively re-evaluate their commitment to one another (Strachman, 2008). Our results indicate that a particular emphasis on approach commitment goals, wherein individuals are taught not only to recognise positive relationship experiences when they occur, but also to internalise such experiences and their meaning, could be beneficial in increasing couple satisfaction (Birnie et al., 2009). This emphasis appears to be particularly pertinent for individuals exhibiting higher attachment avoidance. Moreover, our findings highlighted that although commitment is an important aspect of relationship functioning, the motives underlying commitment goals may play a more important role. Within clinical contexts, a greater focus on these commitment goals, in contrast to general commitment levels, may therefore be advised.

In conclusion, maintaining a stable and satisfying couple relationship is a challenging feat, which involves many factors. The present study was conducted with the aim of contributing to the understanding of these varying components as there remains much to be gained from determining the features of successful relationships, particularly their effective maintenance. The approach-avoidance commitment goals perspective provides a relevant and innovative angle to such issues.

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