A ROLLER COASTER OF LOVE: EXAMINING PERCEPTIONS OF INTIMACY,

COMMITMENT, AND SATISFACTION IN ON-AGAIN, OFF-AGAIN

RELATIONSHIPS

Presented to the Graduate Council of
Texas State University-San Marcos
In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of ARTS

by

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San Marcos, Texas
May 2010

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my grandmother, Marie Crook. I know you are always

watching over me.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank Dr. Cassandra LeClair-Underberg. Your wisdom, guidance, and never-ending support have provided me with strength and determination to pursue my goals feverishly. Your kindness, compassion, and constant dedication have helped me through difficult times, both academically and personally. I am forever grateful that you were willing to embark on this project with me and help guide me across the finish line. You have challenged me academically, and as a result, have made me a better scholar. I could not have asked for a more amazing mentor, role model, and advisor. Thank you for everything you have done for me thus far, all the support and guidance you have afforded me, and I look forward memories that will surely come in the future.

Secondly, I would like to thank my committee for helping to make this thesis possible. You both have assisted me and offered me continual encouragement throughout this process. Dr. Maureen Keeley, your passion for your research is inspiring. I am so thankful you were available to help guide me throughout my Graduate program. Dr. Felipe Gomez, thank you for your constant support and words of encouragement. I appreciate you allowing me to pick your brain for new ideas and I appreciate you encouraging and challenging me as a scholar.

I would also like to thank Dr. Marian Houser. Your passion for teaching and availability to students has shown me what it means to be an effective, passionate, and

gregarious instructor. I hope I can be half as charismatic in the classroom as you are. Thank you for inspiring me to better myself as an instructor and as a scholar.

Graduate school would have proved much more difficult without the friendships and support of my many amazing friends and colleagues. To my current and former office mates in CENT 311, you all have made an impact on my life in so many ways. I thank each of you for your constant support, words of encouragement, and times of laughter that has helped me through these past two years. Brendan Radomski and Jason Estes, you both are great research partners, but even more amazing friends. Thank you for always being available to lift my spirits and offer words of encouragement throughout stressful times. Dana Pedersen and Emily Honea, the support you both have shown me throughout this process has been unparalleled. You both are wonderful friends and I appreciate our many conversations in 321. Olga Kazakova and Valerie Ely, you both have been with me since the start of my undergraduate career. Our friendship is invaluable and I appreciate our many memories we have shared together and look forward to several more in the years to come.

Finally, I would like to thank my family. Mom and Dad, you have always encouraged me to do my best. Thank you for always being available to me and always supporting my decisions. Even if you did not agree with some of them, I appreciate the opportunity you afforded me to make my own choices and support me through the outcomes. The pride that you both have in me is what keeps me motivated to accomplish my goals and set the bar higher. I cannot express how thankful I am for you both. Sheri and Blake, thank you for being there to help keep me grounded. Our conversations remind me to not let life pass me by. Thank you for the love and support.

This manuscript was submitted on April 12, 2010.

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By

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May 2010

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On-again, off-again relationships, dating relationships in which the partners that have broken up and renewed at least once (Dailey, Pfiester, Jin, Beck, & Clark, 2009a) are becoming common alternatives to the traditional non-cyclical style of dating relationships. More and more individuals are returning to previous relational partners to give the relationship another chance. Approximately twenty percent of people are likely to participate in on-again, off-again relationships at some point in their lives (Dailey, et al.). Despite the growing numbers of participation in this type of relationship, little is known about how individuals communicate within these relationships.

Research about on-again, off-again relationships suggests that individuals who participate in these types of relationships have different experiences than individuals that participate in traditional non-cyclical relationships (Dailey, Hampel, Roberts, accepted; Dailey et al., 2009a). Since research has examined on-again, off-again relationships as a whole, it is necessary to study the individual characteristics of an on-again, off-again relationship.

The present study surveyed 227 people who were currently or previously involved in an on-again, off-again relationships. Participants completed an online questionnaire designed to assess attachment style, perceptions of intimacy, commitment, and satisfaction before and after a renewal of the relationship, and desire for reconciliation.

Results suggest that attachment style was associated for differences in intimacy before and after a renewal, and satisfaction after a renewal of an on-again, off-again relationship. Specifically, preoccupied and fearfully attached individuals experienced significant differences in regard to intimacy before a renewal. Secure and fearfully attached individuals experienced intimacy and satisfaction in the post-reconciliatory phase significantly different. Further, intimacy and commitment seem to influence the desire for reconciliation that on-again, off-again partners experience in their relationship.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Romantic relationships are organic; they travel through stages of development in which the partners connect and become closer, and later they may deteriorate as the partners disconnect and move apart. Romantic relationships can yield some of the most rewarding relational experiences people will experience in their life (Aune & Comstock, 1991). Given the rewards of romantic relationships, it is no surprise that much interpersonal research has focused on their initiation, maintenance, and decline of romantic relationships (Avtgis, West, & Anderson, 1998; Canary & Dainton, 2006; Knapp, 1978, 1984; Surra, Gray, Boettcher, Cottle, & West, 2006; Vangelisti, 2006).

Knapp's (1984) model of relational development puts forth that people travel through specific stages before the relationship ends. This model suggests that individuals do not have post-dissolutional contact. However, Agnew, Arriaga, and Goodfriend's (2006) review of research on romantic relationships found that breakups are usually measured as a dichotomous event. Individuals that enter back into a romantic

relationship with the same partner likely have post-dissolutional contact with their partner in order to re-initiate the relationship. Additionally, these relational partners likely go through the process of relational development and dissolution with the same partner multiple times. This process of breaking up and renewing the relationship multiple times is more commonly know as an on-again, off-again relationship (Dailey, Jin, Pfiester, & Beck, 2008). Although research has begun to examine the cyclical nature of dating relationships, little is known about communication surrounding the renewal of these relationships.

In sum, the traditional model of detailing romantic relationship formation and decline does not speak to the unique nature of on-again, off-again relationships. Thus, this study seeks to apply theory to on-again, off-again relationships in order to determine how interpersonal constructs vary in this understudied type of romantic relationship. To lend support for the current study, the following discussion details previous research of on-again, off-again relationships and provides a rationale for the study and its chosen variables.

Previous Research

Twenty percent of people likely participate in on-again, off-again (on-off) relationships at some point in their lives (Dailey, et al., 2009a). Of those individuals, about 33% experience multiple on-off relationships (Dailey et al.). Several studies have found that breaking up and renewing with the same partner at least once was reported by as much as 40% of their sample (Cupach & Metts, 2002; Davis, Ace, & Andra, 2000; Koeing Kellas, Bean, Cunningham, & Cheng, 2008; Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Palarea,

Cohen, & Rohling, 2000). This previous research establishes strong support for the calling of further investigation of these cyclical dating relationships.

People who choose to enter back into a relationship with a previous partner experience the stages of relational development and decay multiple times. Previous research examining on-off relationships has compared "traditional" non-cyclical relationships to cyclical on-off relationships utilizing an interdependence theory and uncertainty reduction lens (Dailey et al., 2009a). In examining on-off relationships, studies to date have examined relational maintenance, uncertainty, commitment, and a broad assessment of how on-off relationships and non-cyclical relationships differ (Dailey, Hampel, Roberts, accepted; Dailey et al., 2009a). Specifically, the strategies people utilize to manage the progression and deterioration of on-off relationships, as well as the strategies individuals use to reduce ambiguity surrounding both the breakup and the future of the relationship have been developed.

Further, the reasons for breakups and renewals have been explored qualitatively using interdependence theory as a theoretical framework (Dailey, Rossetto, Pfiester, & Surra, 2009b). This examination allows people to tell their strategies for reconciliation and reasons surrounding their breakup in their own words, allowing communication scholars a wider understanding of the repertoire of strategies people use in on-off relationships. Finally, why and how on-off relationships are renewed, how perceptions of on-off relationships change across multiple breakups and renewals, and the stressors and benefits that are involved in on-off relationships (Dailey et al., 2008) have also been examined. These studies have laid the initial groundwork for further explanation of on-off relationships.

Rationale

Research to date has explored on-off relationships at a fairly macro level, however, there is a calling to understand these unique relationships by examining them at a micro level. Particularly, by focusing on the specific relational constructs of intimacy, satisfaction, and commitment interpersonal scholars will be able to explore how perceptions of these variables influence communication within an on-off relationship. Examining these factors may also provide insight as to the potential factors that impact stability and dissolution for on-off relationships. A breakup can be stressful event for the non-initiator; especially when commitment, satisfaction and relational closeness are relatively high and the perceptions of alternate partners and the controllability of the breakup is low (Frazier & Cook, 1993; Simpson, 1987; Sprecher, Felmlee, Metts, Fehr, & Vanni, 1998). Thus, these factors may influence the desire for reconciliation of an on-off relationship as well as vary the perceptions of intimacy, commitment, and satisfaction before and after a renewal of an on-off relationship.

There is some evidence that suggests attachment style is closely related with perceptions commitment and satisfaction (Collins & Read, 1990; Morgan & Shaver, 1999; Simpson, 1990) and attachment style also has a clear connection to intimacy (Becker, Billings, Eveleth & Gilbert, 1997; Guerrero, 2008). Therefore, attachment style could be a possible factor as to how commitment, intimacy and satisfaction are perceived before and after a renewal of an on-off relationship. As such, it could prove insightful for scholars of interpersonal communication to examine attachment style and its influence on perceptions of commitment, intimacy and satisfaction in this "unconventional" type of relationship.

Summary

It is apparent that the prevalence of on-again, off-again relationships is rising; yet they remain significantly understudied in the field of interpersonal communication. Examining on-off relationships through an attachment theory perspective and focusing on the constructs of commitment, satisfaction and intimacy will provide a foundation for understanding the intricacies of these types of relationships. Therefore, Chapter 2 will lend support for this thesis by reviewing relevant literature about the theory, chosen variables, and phases involved in an on-off relationship. The remaining chapters present the methodology, results, and interpretation of an individual's attachment style on commitment, intimacy, and satisfaction before and after a renewal and its role in on-off relationship.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The current study sought to explore the relationship between attachment style, beliefs about commitment, satisfaction, intimacy, and the desire for reconciliation within on-again, off-again relationships. The purpose of this literature review is to offer a theoretical framework applying attachment theory to on-again, off-again relationships. This literature review begins by presenting an explanation and definition of on-again, off-again relationships. Then, theoretical foundations that summarize both the theoretical and empirical contributions relevant to attachment theory and attachment styles, specifically in adult romantic relationships, are presented. Next, a review of literature is presented about commitment, satisfaction, and intimacy as it relates to the present study. Finally, research about relational dissolution and reconciliation is presented and research questions are posed.

On-again, off-again relationships

On-again, off-again relationships (on-off) have become commonplace in our society. Previous research suggests that on-off relationships have an occurrence ranging from 3% - 40% (Baxter & Bullis, 1986; Cupach & Metts, 2002). Research focusing purely on on-off relationships suggests that over 60% of young adults at some point in time have experienced a relationship that terminated and later reconciled, with 75% of

those relationships experiencing at least two renewals with the same partner (Dailey, et al., 2009b). Further, another study suggest that 40% of participants were either currently involved in, or were most recently involved in, an on-off relationship (Dailey, et al., 2008). Thus, on-off relationships need to be comprehensively examined as their prevalence in our society is rising.

In on-off relationships romantic partners often terminate their relationship and later reconcile, with the potential of repeating the cycle several times (Dailey et al., 2009a). Rekindled relationships, those that reconcile after five or more years, initially start before the partners are 22 years old (Kalish, 1997); alluding to an idea that many on-off relationships begin when people are young adults. One explanation is that college aged young adults may perceive that they have access to more alternatives than their relational partner, which may facilitate breakups (Kalish 1997; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Further, because they are often part of the same social network and community for several years, they have more opportunity for post-dissolution contact with their previous partner, which may facilitate renewals (Dailey et al., 2009a) because of dissatisfaction with the alternatives after exploring them (Dailey et al., 2009a; 2009b). Therefore, on-off relationships are likely to occur when individuals started their relationship at a younger age and when they also have more opportunity for post-dissolutional contact.

Partners involved in on-off relationships often report more negative aspects of their relationship, mentioning characteristics such as conflict and aggressiveness, and fewer positive aspects of their relationship, such as validation and satisfaction, as compared to individuals in non-cyclical relationships (Dailey, et al., accepted). These traits often emerged in reports of the initial phase of the relationship. This suggests that

people involved in on-off relationships may perceive a lower quality of their relationship even before the cyclical nature of the relationship begins (Dailey et al.). Based on this research, on-off relationships need to be examined by focusing on relational influences including commitment, satisfaction, and intimacy to determine if the levels of each construct vary before and after a renewal and take into account the role attachment style plays. These relational influences can be examined through attachment theory, which is described next.

Attachment

Attachment theory provides a strong theoretical framework for studying interactions in close relationships, specifically in adult romantic relationships. The formation, maintenance, and dissolution of affectionate bonds in adult romantic relationships can be understood utilizing attachment principles (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Thus examining on-off relationships through an attachment theory lens allows for deeper examination of how an individual's attachment style influences the messages of commitment, satisfaction and intimacy in these relationships.

Attachment Theory

Attachment theory is a social scientific theory that is rooted by an ethological-evolutionary framework (Tucker & Anders, 1998). Proposed by Bowlby (1973), the original goal of attachment theory is to understand how parent-child interaction affects personality development (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). These early interactions set baselines that influence how children will bond and form attachments with others in their adult lives. Bowlby argues that humans have an inherent predisposition for forming attachments with other people, because these attachments serve as a protective function,

starting as young as infancy, and continuing throughout an individual's life. Attachment theory is guided by five primary principles: a) interactions early in life with caregivers lead to security or insecurity which sets the baseline for personality development and future attachments, b) working models of self and others combine to create an individual's attachment style, c) people with different attachment styles vary in terms of their perceptions, emotional experiences, and communication which combine to influence the quality of their relationships, d) though relatively stable, attachment styles can be modified, and e) attachment style can vary depending upon the type of relationship and the relational partner (Guerrero, 2008). Therefore, the interactions children have with caregivers lay a foundation for future attachments, influencing attachment styles that have the potential to be static, and thus influences an individual's personal relationships.

Thus, attachment theory suggests that these interactions early in a person's life influence their interactions with their relational partners later in life. Attachment theorists have posited that experiences from prior attachments with significant others guide peoples' expectations and beliefs about past, present, and future social interactions (Ainsworth, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). In the context of an on-off relationship, the significant other in terms of the dating relationship has remained constant while the status of the relationship has changed from dating, broken up, to dating again. Because of the cyclical nature of this type of relationship, the interactions with the partner will be based on the earlier attachments to the partner and will foster the partners' expectations and ideas about how they should interact with each other in the renewed relationship, and how the relationship should progress.

Experiences early on in one's life create "working models" or schemas that help people interpret the world around them (Becker et al., 1997), which then influence and help to create a person's attachment style. This attachment style affects an individuals' communication that impacts the quality of their relationship. An individuals' attachment style can change based on significant events they experience in their life, such as death, divorce, or the formation of a healthy relationship (Guerrero, 2008). These critical life events can influence the fluctuation of attachment style in a variety of relationships. To some, a breakup may be a noteworthy event in their life that may affect their attachment style. These attachment styles in turn may be related to the enactment of an on-off relationship. Thus if a breakup is significant enough to alter an individual's attachment style the relationship after a renewal may be a product of a modified attachment style. In order to better understand the relationship between attachment styles and on-off relationships, the following section describes the specific dimensions of attachment styles.

Attachment Style Dimensions

Since its conception, scholars have extended attachment theory to examine adult romantic relationships (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Collins & Read, 1990; Tucker & Anders, 1998). Hazan and Shaver (1987) translated the three styles of attachment seen in infants: secure, anxious/ambivalent, and avoidant (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978) into terms appropriate for adult romantic relationships. They identified three categories of attachment in adults; secure, fearful, and preoccupied.

The three main attachment styles; secure, fearful and preoccupied, vary by their unique characteristics, shape communication within romantic relationships, and may

influence an on-off relationship. People with a secure attachment style are characterized by a positive model of self and others (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Dutton & Winstead, 2006) and are generally self-sufficient and comfortable with intimacy in their relationships desiring both autonomy and closeness (Guerrero, 2008; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Securely attached people are those who value both their independence and connectedness within their relationships. A positive model of self contributes to the formation and maintenance of stable and satisfying relationships (Mikulincer, Florian, Cowan, & Cowan, 2002). These individuals are able to form close bonds with others and are comfortable depending on, and being depended on by others (Becker et al., 1997).

Individuals with a secure attachment style can rely on themselves, but do not mind asking for help if they need it. Securely attached people feel accepted and loved by their partners, which encourages them to reciprocate those feelings and strengthen their willingness to care for their partner (Mikulincer et al., 2002). Thus, they do not mind if their partner needs to seek help or support from them. Securely attached individuals are comfortable with relationship intimacy and have an internalized sense of self-worth (Dutton &Winstead, 2006). Further, securely attached individuals are more likely to talk directly about an issue they are experiencing with their partner (Jang, Smith, & Levine, 2002). Therefore, individuals with a secure attachment style are comfortable with feelings of intimacy and commitment in their personal relationships, and are likely more satisfied with their relationships.

People with fearful attachment styles are characterized by a negative model of self and others (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Dutton & Winstead, 2006), maintain emotional distance and are uncomfortable with intimacy (Trees, 2006). These individuals

are unlikely to form close attachments with their relationship partner thus hindering the development of intimacy in the relationship. Because they are uncomfortable with intimacy in their relationships, the distance they create serves as a buffer for them to lessen the potential of being hurt. Fearfully attached individuals are dependent on the approval from others, but because of negative expectations, they avoid intimacy in order to avoid the pain of rejection or loss (Dutton &Winstead). These individuals may have been rejected in past relationships and are often afraid of getting close to others though they desire the security of a close relationship (Guerrero, 2008). Brennan, Shaver, and Tobey (1991) noted that the fearful attachment type is similar to Hazan and Shaver's avoidant type. Therefore, individuals with a fearful attachment style experience lower levels of intimacy and commitment in their close relationships, and experience lower levels of satisfaction.

Individuals with a preoccupied attachment style are characterized by a negative self-model and a positive model of others (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Dutton & Winstead, 2006) desiring closeness but fearing not being loved enough in return and worrying about abandonment by their partner (Trees, 2006). Because they have a positive view of their partner but a negative view of themselves, these individuals fear that they are not good enough for their partner and thus worry about being left by their partner for a better alternative. Preoccupied attached individuals desire intimacy and place a higher value on close relationships than their individual personal activities (Guerrero, 2008). Due to the fear they experience in their relationships, preoccupied attached individuals will want to engage in activities with their partner rather than individualized activities to facilitate the closeness they desire in their relationship. Further, these individuals often

experience anxiety in their close relationships as they seek the approval of others (Dutton & Winstead, 2006).

Preoccupied individuals are more likely to feel intense negative emotions when their partners behave badly toward them, which leads them to experience negative emotions about their partners and relationships (Mikulincer, 1998) and increases the likelihood of overreact to relational problems (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). Individuals with a preoccupied attachment style are more likely than others to participate in on-off relationships (Kirkpatrick & Hazan, 1994). This may be due to the positive view of their partner and the desire to be close to them. Scholars have noted that the preoccupied attachment type corresponds to Hazan and Shaver's anxious/ambivalent type (Brennan et al., 1991). In sum, individuals with a preoccupied attachment style are likely to experience higher levels of intimacy and commitment but lower levels of satisfaction due to the fear of being left for a better alternative.

Attachment Style Strategies for Dissolution

A person's strategy to handle a breakup stems from their past experiences and relationships (Davis, Shaver, & Vernon, 2003). Securely attached individuals have likely experienced an open expression and communication of needs which elicits love and support from their partner, thus they are more likely to express their feelings openly to their partner and rely on friends and family members as positive sources of support and comfort following a breakup (Davis et al.). Because of the likelihood of securely attached individuals possessing greater communication skills (Feeney, 1999) they also should be able to understand their partner's point of view about the breakup, allowing them to react with less negative emotion (Davis et al.). Thus, securely attached individuals are more

skilled at adopting multiple perspectives due to their positive past experiences with their family members and previous partners, which affords them the opportunity to experience the ending of a relationship in a healthy way with lower perceptions negative affect.

Individuals with a fearful attachment style have experienced in the past that other people are unlikely to satisfy their needs and expressions of need may be ignored or punished by others (Fraley, Davis, & Shaver, 1998). These past experiences create a unique strategy of coping with a breakup. People with this attachment style demonstrate fewer emotional expressions including pleading, angry outbursts, and seeking social support, greater emotional avoidance, and greater self-reliance and use of nonsocial coping strategies (Davis et al., 2003). Fearfully attached individuals likely experience lower levels of satisfaction after the ending of a relationship, which may influence their communication within an on-off relationship when the partners reconcile.

Finally, individuals with a preoccupied attachment style have likely learned a coercive strategy in early relationships with caregivers that includes an erratic alternation between aggressive and threatening behaviors such as crying, screaming and throwing a tantrum, and coy behaviors such as glancing eye contact, meek and innocent expressions, and cocking the head to the side (Crittenden, 1992; 1997). Thus, adults with this attachment style are likely to use both aggressive and seductive behaviors in an attempt to restore the relationship (Davis et al., 2003). Preoccupied individuals likely experience high levels of negative emotion surrounding a breakup, but in spite of these negative feelings, attempt to restore the relationship due to their desire for a relationship with their partner.

Attachment style has been predictive of relational components such as satisfaction and commitment (Collins & Read, 1990; Morgan & Shaver, 1999; Simpson, 1990) and has a clear connection to intimacy (Becker et al., 1997; Guerrero, 2008) within close relationships. Thus, attachment style likely plays a role in the perceived levels of commitment, satisfaction, and intimacy before and after a renewal in an on-off relationship. A review of literature in regard to commitment, satisfaction, and intimacy will follow.

Commitment

Commitment has been defined as a tendency to preserve a relationship and to feel psychologically attached to the relationship in order to continue it (Canary & Stafford, 1992; Canary & Stafford, 1994; Rusbult, 1980; Rusbult, 1983), and is essential to the success of a close relationship (Rittenour, Myers & Brann, 2007). Therefore, being committed to a partner fosters feelings of closeness and encourages the relationship to continue and grow. Since feelings of commitment are a critical component of successful relationships (Rusbult, 1983), the more commitment a person feels toward another, the more likely they are to focus affective and cognitive attention toward the person (Beach & Tesser, 1988). The focus of this attention contributes to feelings of connectedness and closeness, contributing to the success of the relationship.

Securely attached individuals often experience greater commitment to their dating relationship (Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994; Simpson, 1990; Tucker & Anders, 1999). This may be due to the notion that securely attached individuals have both a positive model of self and others and are comfortable being connected and close with their partners. Likewise individuals that have a fearful or preoccupied attachment style often show

lower levels of commitment in their romantic relationships (Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994;

Levy & Davis, 1988; Shaver & Brennan, 1992; Simpson, 1990; Tucker & Anders, 1999).

These individuals are uncomfortable being in close relationships though they may desire

it, thus hindering their ability to commitment fully to their partner. Therefore, attachment

style may play a role in the levels of commitment partners in an on-off relationship

potentially experience before and after a renewal of the relationship.

Communicating Commitment

Communication is necessary in creating and expressing messages of commitment

(Sidelinger & Booth-Butterfield, 2008). Since commitment plays a fundamental role in

maintaining a successful relationship, the display of commitment through communication

is essential.   Duck (1991) posits that commitment is not automatic in relationships; rather

its development requires the partners to disclose their attitudes and beliefs to each other.

This disclosure contributes to the partners' perceptions of their own commitment to their

relationship.

Further, an individual's perception of their partners' commitment level also

influences their own commitment level to the relationship (Arriaga, Reed, Goodfriend,

Agnew, 2006). If relational partners do not actively disclose their feelings to their

partner, uncertainty may result. If a partner is uncertain about their partners'

commitment to the relationship, they may, as a result, decrease their own level of

commitment to the relationship (Sidelinger & Booth-Butterfield). Hence, the level of

disclosure within the relationship may influence perceptions of commitment both in

regard to the self and the partner, which may vary as a result of attachment style.

Satisfaction

Relationship satisfaction is widely studied (Donaghue & Fallon, 2003; Rusbult, 1983; Sprecher, 2001), and has been shown to be correlated with commitment (Floyd & Wasner, 1994; Rusbult), self-disclosure, love, sexual attitudes, and investment in the relationship (Hendrick, 1988; Rusbult); relationship stability (Sprecher, 2001); and intention to persist in the relationship, long-term orientation towards the relationship, and psychological attachment to the relationship (Arriaga & Agnew, 2001). Relational satisfaction has been defined as a person's attitude or affect about the quality of a particular relationship; typically in terms of the perceived quality of the relationship (Dainton, Stafford, & Canary, 1994).

When reflecting on a relationship, feelings of satisfaction couple with feelings of commitment to foster an impression of a successful relationship (Rusbult, 1983). This suggests that satisfaction and commitment are related constructs and should both be evaluated in research about romantic relationships. Evaluating satisfaction provides a global assessment of the state of the relationship at the time of the evaluation (Dainton et al., 1994). Thus, by evaluating satisfaction in an on-off relationship both before and after a renewal will likely provide a holistic view of the relationship and will also provide insight into the potential changes in satisfaction during the transitions in the relationship.

Scholars have found a significant positive association between secure attachment and satisfaction within a specific current dating relationship (Cozzarelli, Hoekstra, & Bylsma, 2000; Keelan, Dion, & Dion, 1998). Therefore, individuals with a secure attachment style are likely to be more satisfied in their dating relationships. Fearful and preoccupied individuals often experience lower levels of satisfaction within their

relationships (Brennan & Shaver, 1995; Levy & Davis, 1988). Thus, people with a fearful and preoccupied attachment style are likely to be less satisfied in their dating relationships as compared to people with a secure attachment style. In contrast, if an individual is securely attached, they should experience more relational satisfaction, however the more times a couple renews their relationship, the partners experience less relational satisfaction.

Research suggests that those individuals engaged in on-off relationships that experience more renewals, experience less relational satisfaction with their relationship (Dailey, et al., 2009a). However, individuals with a fearful and preoccupied attachment style may or may not experience lower levels of satisfaction after a renewal because they are predisposed to expect and anticipate problems in the relationship. Thus, this study can provide insights to this interaction between attachment style type and relational satisfaction in on-off relationships.

Communicating Satisfaction

Similar to commitment, satisfaction is expressed through high levels of self-disclosure (Hendrick, Hendrick, & Alder, 1988). Research suggests that the more satisfied the partners in the relationship are, the more likely they are to engage in positive communication patterns such as displaying more sensitivity and understanding towards their partner (Kirchler, 1988), and expressing more affection (Fineberg & Lowman, 1975). Displays of affectionate communication, including displays of smiling and laughing, affectionate words such as verbal proclamations of love, praise, or friendship, and/or physical contact including embraces and kissing (Twardosz, Schwartz, Fox, & Cunningham, 1979), contribute to perceptions of closeness, love, and relationship

satisfaction (Floyd & Morman, 1997, 1998). Thus, personal disclosure and verbal and nonverbal expressions of satisfaction with the relationship may influence perceptions of satisfaction within an on-off relationship.

Intimacy

Intimacy refers to the "feelings of closeness, connectedness, and bondedness in loving relationships" (Sternberg, 1997, p. 315). Intimacy in romantic relationships is determined by the level of commitment and positive affect, cognitive, and physical closeness an individual experiences with their partner in a reciprocal, though not necessarily symmetrical, relationship (Moss & Schwebel, 1993). Thus commitment fosters intimacy in romantic relationships. Perlman and Fehr (1987) define intimacy as the "closeness and interdependence of partners, the extent of self-disclosure, and the warmth of affection experienced within the relationship" (p. 16). Intimacy then is a sense of closeness coupled with affection that an individual experiences in relationships. Intimacy will generally decrease in a relationship over time due to increased predictability (Sternberg, 1986). Therefore, in an on-off relationship, there is the possibility for intimacy to increase after a renewal because of the insertion of a non-predictable event, the breakup.

Discrepancies between the partners in terms of their levels of intimacy and commitment can lead to decreased levels of satisfaction in the relationship (Sternberg, 1986). Because individuals with a secure attachment style show high levels of commitment and satisfaction in their relationships, it is likely that these people will also have high levels of intimacy in their relationship because they are comfortable being close to another person. Likewise, people with a fearful or preoccupied attachment style

would likely show lower levels of intimacy in their relationship because they distance themselves in the relationship.

Communicating Intimacy

Expressing and receiving both verbal and nonverbal forms of affectionate communication enhances the quality of romantic relationships (Floyd & Burgoon, 1999; Floyd, Hess, Miczo, Halone, Mikkelson, & Tussing, 2005; Le Poire, Duggan, Shepard, & Burgoon, 2002). Verbal expressions of intimate affection couple with nonverbal expressions and are used to communicate intimacy within romantic relationships (Floyd & Burgoon). For example, stating, "I love you" and providing a relational partner with an embrace communicates intimacy to the receiving partner. Further, proximity, such as positioning oneself closer to a partner can also communicate intimacy within the relationship (Morman & Floyd, 1999). Floyd and Burgoon (1999) posit that relational partners perceive nonverbal expressions of intimacy as more believable because communicators are less aware of their expressive behavior.

Moreover, intimacy can be communicated through verbal and nonverbal messages of affection, closeness, immediacy, expressiveness, interest, trust, openness, receptivity, familiarity, and similarity (Burgoon & Le Poire, 1999). Examples of the behaviors include physical touch, increased and direct eye contact, close proximity, positive affect displays such as smiling, and direct body orientation (Burgoon & Le Poire). Relational partners perceive their relationship as more positive when both partners engage in similar verbal and nonverbal displays of intimacy behavior (Floyd, 1999).

In sum, commitment, satisfaction, and intimacy are related to attachment styles in romantic relationships. Examining these three constructs in the setting of an on-off

relationship will allow for a deeper examination of the constructs before and after a renewal and will further provide insights as to how attachment style mediates the relationship between commitment, satisfaction and intimacy and the transitions in on-off relationships.

<div align="center">*Relational Transitions*</div>

The cyclical nature of on-off relationships suggests that the relationship involves multiple transitions. All relationships are marked by an initial development stage and several of those relationships are later terminated (Dailey et al., 2009b). On-off relationships involve a reconciliatory phase in which the relationship is renewed, and relational partners regress back to their prior relational status. Since the focus of this study is on breakups and renewals of on-off relationships as compared to the formation of these relationships, an examination of relational dissolution and relational reconciliation literature will follow.

<div align="center">*Relational Dissolution*</div>

Definition

Past romantic relationships often influence future romantic relationships (Ickes, 1983). People carry these past experiences with them between interactions and relationships and use these experiences to create a sort of schema that they can rely on in the future. Because relationships form and perish, relational dissolution is a process (Duck, 1982) that involves different trajectories depending on how the partners approach the process (Baxter, 1984). Hill, Rubin, and Peplau (1976) noted that up to 85% of breakups are sought more by one partner than the other. Because of the cyclical nature of on-off relationships, one partner most likely wants to continue the relationship when it

ends, thus they keep the door open for a renewal. Research shows that the majority of breakups in on-off relationships are not mutual, and one partner desires to continue the relationship when it ends (Dailey et al., 2009a).

Research suggests that the closeness of past relationships negatively impacts future relational commitment and satisfaction when the breakup is mutual between the partners (Merolla, Weber, Myers, & Booth-Butterfield, 2004). Individuals' who are emotionally close to their former partner, even if the breakup is mutual, are likely to carry some regret or hurt from the previous relationship to the next relationship. Thus, this would likely be true for an individual with a secure or preoccupied attachment style because they are often more emotionally close to their partner than those individuals with a fearful attachment style. This could impact the communication of people involved in on-off relationships because the partners may feel remorseful for their actions if they were the ones who instigated the breakup or even bitter towards their partner if they were on the receiving end of the breakup. The combination of hurt, regret and remorse may lead individuals to keep their emotions guarded, affecting the commitment and relational satisfaction with their partner because they could be trying to keep a barrier to protect themselves in case the relationship is terminated again.

Douglass & Atwell (1988) state that breakups are marked by a sense of growing apart from each other that often leaves the couple tumbling from problem to problem. Oftentimes, the initial breakup conversation triggers a degenerative spiral of negative events that then begins to engulf the couple. As relationships head toward relational dissolution, feelings of solidarity decrease (Merolla et al., 2004), as well as feelings of commitment, satisfaction, and relational rewards, while relational costs and relational

alternatives increase (Rusbult, 1980). Because of this, individuals engaged in an on-off relationship may have lower levels of commitment, satisfaction and intimacy before the reconciliation, and the potential for higher levels of commitment, satisfaction and intimacy towards the relationship after the renewal.

Sprecher, Felmlee, Metts, Fehr, and Vanni (1998) found that time does not necessarily mend all relational wounds that people experience following a breakup. Negativity towards the former partner and uncertainty surrounding the reasons of the breakup could still linger after the relationship ends. Individuals in on-off relationships must negotiate these feelings of negativity when they choose to enter back into the relationship. This negotiation could impact commitment, satisfaction, and intimacy after the reconciliation. The couple may experience initial lower levels of these constructs immediately after a renewal because they are still hurt by the ending of the relationship in the first place. Thus, commitment, satisfaction, and intimacy needs to be investigated prior to and following reconciliation in an on-off relationship.

Relational dissolution can be caused by negative attributions about the self or partner, communication problems, cohesion problems, or forces external to the relationships (Dailey et al., 2009b). Dissolution often negatively affects the partners' opinions of themselves and other activities in their lives such as sleep, productivity at work, and social relationships with friends and family (Stephen, 1987). However, positive outcomes of breakups, such as gaining relational wisdom, have been noted in research (Tashiro & Frazier, 2003). Specific examples of relational insight include learning that outside environmental stressors affect the relationship and learning how to cope with these events, improving communication with future partners, and learning to

pick a better partner for the next relationship (Tashiro & Frazier). People can use their

breakup experience to increase levels of relational competency and satisfaction in later

relationships (Buehler, 1987; Helgeson, 1994). Going through the breakup process allows

individuals to become aware of events and scenarios that they did and did not like in the

relationship. They can utilize this knowledge to help in the negotiation of future renewals

of the relationship. This process could encourage individuals to potentially change some

of their own negative characteristics or traits for the betterment of the relationship after

the renewal.

When people reflect on the ending of a relationship, they are often looking for

patterns of what went wrong this time around and the parallels to a previous relationship.

These perspectives work together to influence both the plans of how an individual should

act in, and the expectations for, future relationships (Harvey, Agostinelli, Weber, 1989).

Examining this in stride with on-off relationships, an individual's reflection of the

relationship may be influenced by the nature of the relationship itself. Further,

attachment style is likely to play a role in relational dissolution of on-off relationships.

Those individuals with a secure attachment style are more likely to be involved in a long-

term relationship, experience a more stable relationship, and suffer from fewer

disruptions of the relationship (Mikulincer et al., 2002).

Characteristics of, On-Off Relational Dissolution

People engaged in an on-off relationship often experience the dissolution of their

relationship lasting from one to two months before the relationship is renewed (Dailey et

al., 2009a). Reasons for relational dissolution in on-off relationships include physical

distance between the partners, such as being in a long-distance relationship,

communication problems within the relationship, a high degree of conflict or the partners not communicating effectively with each other, and negative behavior by either the self, partner or both (Dailey et al., 2009a; 2009b). Understanding the global reasons for on-off relational dissolution can provide insight into the potential level of change of commitment, satisfaction, and intimacy before and after reconciliation.

Further factors internal to the relationship such as satisfaction, commitment, and behaviors displayed within the relationship are hallmark differences between cyclical and noncyclical relationships (Dailey et al., 2009a). That is, things internal to the relationship as compared to factors external to the relationship such as geographic location, lead to the renewal and dissolution sequence. Additionally, partners in on-off relationships note more uncertainty in regard to the status of their relationship following a breakup than do people in noncyclical relationships (Dailey et al., 2009a). This can impact the strategy that the partners' use to end their relationship. On-off partners use pseudo de-escalation strategies, saying, "Let's take a break" more than noncyclical partners (Dailey et al., 2009a). Additionally, people in on-off relationships use more justifications when ending the relationship (Dailey et al., 2009a). Dailey and colleagues (2009b) found that on-off partners discussed breaking up as improving their relationship, and concluded that many partners in on-off relationships may use breakups as a way to redefine rather than terminate their relationship.

In sum, an individual's attachment style affects the strategy they use to regulate the feelings of distress associated with a breakup. This is likely to be relevant in on-off relationships because how an individual copes with the breakup may affect their subsequent levels of commitment, satisfaction, and intimacy following reconciliation.

Further, the dissolution strategy and reasons for dissolution may influence the strategy of reconciliation that the partners choose to use in their on-off relationship. A discussion of relational reconciliation follows.

Reconciliation

Definition

A central feature of on-off relationships is the occurrence of at least one renewal (Dailey, et al., accepted). Romantic reconciliation, or renewing, is a distinct compliance-gaining event that occurs in romantic relationships that have been terminated (Emmers & Canary, 1996). Reconciliation has been defined as former partners reverting back to their previous romantic relational state (Bevan, Cameron, Dillow, 2003). Thus reconciliation is getting back together with one's former partner and changing the relationship from the "off" to the "on" status. Reconciliation can be a possible option for former romantic partners who desire to give their relationship another chance (Dillow, Morse, & Afifi, 2008).

Conville (1988) noted that reconciliation is a relational phase that is characterized by stability and intimacy. Increased interpersonal contact and increased emotional and sexual intimacy between the former partners may lead to an increase in the partners' hopes to renew their romantic relationship (Lannutti & Cameron, 2003). Therefore reconciliation is a relational phase partner's traverse before renewing their relationships. Reconciliation requires that individuals have a collection of strategies that are more diverse than the strategies used for relational repair or maintenance because reconciliation involves altering, not continuing the norm of the relationship (Patterson & O'Hair, 1992). Reconciled relationships vary from traditional relationships because

partners have pre-existing knowledge of each other and pre-developed patterns of

interaction (Bevan et al., 2003; Patterson & O'Hair). Therefore, individuals engaged in

on-off relationships may alter their strategy of reconciliation based on this prior

knowledge of their partner, particularly if they have renewed their relationship more than

once. Little communication research has examined post-dissolution reconciliation

strategies; however Patterson and O'Hair and Bevan and colleagues findings indicate that

potential strategies for reconciliation are present in relationships.

Strategies of Reconciliation

Communication strategies refer to the interaction approaches that people decide to

use (Newton & Burgoon, 1990) to initiate, develop, maintain, terminate, and repair close

relationships (Dindia, 1991). Many strategies used in reconciliation are used similarly

across situations in romantic relationships, but there is also a uniqueness of the relational

messages in reconciling relationships (Patterson & O'Hair, 1992).   For instance, scholars

have related reconciliation messages to messages of relational maintenance (Patterson &

O'Hair) and found that during a reconciliation, the goal is to alter the norm in the

relationship as compared to maintain the norm. Thus the communication that occurs in

the reconciliation attempts to alter the current status of the relationship in which the

partners are broken up and they revert to the previous relational status.

Individuals attempting reconciliation have reported spontaneous development,

third party mediation and avoidance strategies as the least frequent strategies used

(Patterson & O'Hair, 1992). Spontaneous development occurs when couples spend

increasing amounts of time together after the termination of their relationship, leading to

the redevelopment of the relationship, which is positively influenced by the amount of

time that couples spend together (Patterson & O'Hair). Thus, the more time that is spent

together, the more organically the relationship reforms. Third party mediation involves

the use of an independent, outside party to hold an intervention or encourage

reconciliation by the partners (Patterson & O'Hair, 1992). Often, this is a friend that

engages in this role. Avoidance occurs when people try to evade discussion about the

issues associated with the break up and instead focus on the positive events of the

relationship.

More commonly, people engage in high affect or ultimatum, tacit or persistence,

mutual interaction, or vulnerable appeals (Patterson & O'Hair, 1992). High affect or

ultimatum strategies include affective expressions or using demands. Distressed couples

use more reciprocity in their display of negative affect and tend to disagree, disapprove

and criticize as compared to non-distressed couples which demonstrate more reciprocity

of positive affect (Courtright, Millar, Rogers & Bagarozzi, 1990). Therefore individuals

performing a high affect or ultimatum strategy are likely to reciprocate positive affect and

agree with their partner. Tacit and persistence strategies include asking the other person

to do something seemingly without intending to reconcile (Patterson & O'Hair). The

result of tacit and persistence is that the other partner usually tends to break down and

give in to the partners' requests. For example, the partner may request that their former

partner accompany them to the park, an innocent event that does not suggest an idea of

reconciliation.

Mutual interaction includes statements that place heavy emphasis on the role of

open communication in achieving reconciliation (Patterson & O'Hair, 1992) such that

one partner encourages the other to be open, honest, sharing their thoughts and feelings

with the other, and discussing where the relationship was heading. Couples engaging in patterns of behavior that are more direct and more involved in relational negotiations tend to have better odds of reconciling (Courtright et al., 1990). Finally, vulnerable appeals include statements that are direct requests for reconciliation, such that partners often offer reasons or descriptions as to why they are seeking reconciliation (Bevan et al., 2003).

These strategies offer insights to the renewal process, however they focus on reconciliation after just one breakup, when different strategies may be used after several renewals (Dailey et al., accepted). Gradual and mutual reconciliation is a common strategy reported in on-off relationships. This strategy involves couples spending more time with each other and an implicit reformation of the relationship over time (Dailey, et al.). Significant discussion, an explicit discussion about the state of the relationship has also been reported being used commonly in relationships of the on-off nature (Dailey et al.). These strategies are bilateral in nature (Dailey et al.), though the relationship may have been ended by one partner, both partners often desired or did not oppose a renewal with their former partner (Dailey et al., 2009b). A final strategy commonly used in on-off relationships involves the pseudo-breakup in which although a breakup was declared, the couple does not completely perform the termination of the relationship (Dailey et al., 2009b) rather they still engage in shared activities with each other.

Reasons for Renewals

Partners in on-off relationships attribute renewals to communicating more effectively with each other and a decrease in the amount of arguments between the partners (Dailey et al., 2009b). Additionally, partners noted changes in characteristics about either themselves or their partner. Specifically, individuals noticed that their

partners' behavior improved by them becoming more attentive, understanding, or apologetic or, self behavior improved by the individual being less stressed or thinking before communicating (Dailey et al.). Thus, partners seem to adapt their communication to their partner to facilitate the renewed relationship.

Renewed effort to the relationship by one or both partners as a potential consequence of increased time spent together which often led to increased intimacy between the partners has also been suggested as reasons for a renewal (Dailey et al., 2009b). Finally, Dailey and colleagues (2009b) noted that partners might experience continued attachment to their partner even after the breakup. This attachment to their partner led the individual to reconcile the relationship because they did not want to be without their partner. This could be related to an individuals' attachment style, which may contribute to their desire for reconciliation and consequential levels of intimacy, satisfaction, and commitment in the relationship. Lingering feelings of attachment promotes individuals to attempt reconciliation to regain the positive outcomes they experienced prior to dissolution, especially for those individuals who had large degrees of commitment and satisfaction before the dissolution (Frazier & Cook, 1993; Sprecher et al., 1998).

Overall, the number of renewals in on-off relationships is positively related to negative aspects of the relationship (Dailey et al., 2009a). For instance, individuals who report more ineffective conflict and more aggression from their partners also report more renewals in their relationship (Dailey et al., 2009a). Because of ineffective conflict or aggression, one partner may seek a breakup more than their partner. Due to this,

individuals engaged in on-off relationships may reconcile more since one partner presumably wants to continue the relationship.

Summary

The review of literature establishes support for the framework surrounding the study of on-off relationships. An individual's attachment style influences their commitment, satisfaction and intimacy within romantic relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Tucker & Anders, 1998) and thus may influence the strategies they use to reconcile with their former partner.

Empirical evidence supports the notion that on-off relationships are increasing in our society and need to have more research dedicated to examine their unique and dynamic nature. With a more comprehensive understanding of how attachment style influences the levels of commitment, satisfaction, and intimacy in the pre- and post-reconciliatory phases of an on-off relationship, the field of interpersonal communication will gain insight into an understudied and relatively novel relationship. Thus, the following research questions are posed for this study:

RQ1: How, if at all, does attachment style alter the perception of intimacy in the pre-reconciliatory and post-reconciliatory stage of an on-off relationship?

RQ2: How, if at all, does attachment style alter the perception of satisfaction in the pre-reconciliatory and post-reconciliatory stage of an on-off relationship?

RQ3: How, if at all, does attachment style alter the perception of commitment in the pre-reconciliatory and post-reconciliatory stage of an on-off relationship?

RQ4: How, if at all, does the perception of intimacy, commitment, and satisfaction before a renewal relate to the desire for reconciliation?

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This exploratory study utilized an online survey design with the goal of gathering data in regard to the research questions posited in Chapter Two. The independent variable in this study was attachment style. Dependent variables included perceptions of commitment, satisfaction, intimacy and desire for reconciliation.

Participants

Due to the limited amount of research examining on-off relationships, the goal of the proposed study was to broaden the scope of research of the communication that occurs within these dynamic relationships. Participants were recruited through a combination of network and snowball sampling. To encourage diversity of the sample, an online survey was utilized so individuals not currently enrolled at Texas State University had the opportunity to participate. By not restricting the sample to only undergraduate students with its corresponding socio-demographic restrictions, a more holistic understanding of on-off relationships was crafted.

Originally, the sample was restricted to those individuals currently in the on phase of an on-off relationship. However, due to the restrictive nature of this specific sample, the low response rate, and difficulties recruiting participants in this specific phase of an on-off relationship, the sample was opened to anyone who had ever participated in an on-

off relationship. In order for the participants to be considered viable, they must have adequately met the following criteria: 1) The participant was currently, or had ever been, involved in a romantic on-off relationship, defined as having broken up and renewed at least once, 2) The participant had to be at least 18 years old. It was appropriate to establish the relationship status of the participants, included as a survey item, because this study explored the levels of satisfaction, commitment and intimacy communicated to partners during the various stages of on-off relationships.

The online study yielded participation from 227 individuals. Just over two-thirds of the sample were female ($n = 159$, 70%) and about one-third were male ($n = 65$, 30%). The sample averaged 23 years of age ($M = 22.54$, $SD = 7.12$, range 18 to 88 years). Three-quarters of the sample was Caucasian ($n = 159$, 70%), 36 (15.9%) were Hispanic or Latino/a, 12 (5.3%) reported other or multiple ethnicities, 10 (4.4%) declined to report their ethnicity, 5 (2.2%) were African-American or Black, and 3 (1.3%) were Asian or Pacific Islander. Ten (4.4%) of the participants self-identified as homosexual, 211 (93%) self-identified as heterosexual, and 6 (2.4%) declined to answer. The length of their total relationship ranged from two to 534 months, with a median of 27 months ($M = 46.38$, $SD = 67.95$).

Because participants were asked to report on their most recent on-off relationship, which included previous relationships, they were also asked to report their current relational status: 115 (50.7%) reported they were not currently in the relationship, 111 (48.9%) reported they were currently involved in the relationship, with 165 (72.7%) reported they were dating, 13 (5.7%) reported they were engaged, 9 (4%) reported they

were married, and 17 (6.9%) reported other forms of the relationship. The number of times partners renewed ranged from one to 12 (M = 2.74, SD = 1.92, median = 2).

Participants were asked to report on the length of time in months since the most recent break up occurred (n = 118, M = 17.87, SD = 54.99, range .5 to 468 months) as well as the length of the break up (n = 99, M = 9.78, SD = 21.24, range 2 to 144 months). Participants were asked to report if they, or their partner, dated other people when their relationship was in the off phase: 111 (48.9%) reported they did not date other people, 100 (44.1%) reported that they did date other people, 110 (48.5%) reported that, to their knowledge, their partner did not date other people, and 105 (46.3%) reported that, to their knowledge, their partner did date other people. Finally, individuals reporting on a previous relationship were asked to report how long ago, in months, the relationship occurred (n = 118, M = 24.16, SD = 34.52, range .50 to 276 months).

Procedures

This study utilized an online survey consisting of self-report measures evaluating those currently in, or previously involved in an on-off relationship. Participants not currently involved in an on-off relationship were asked to reflect back to the most recent on-off relationship they participated in. Those participants currently involved in an on-off relationship were asked to reflect to before the most recent renewal of their relationship, and then to think about their relationship now, since the most recent renewal, as items were designed to inquire about the perceived levels of commitment, satisfaction and intimacy both before and since the renewal.

All participants were informed that their participation was entirely voluntary and they may have chosen to discontinue their participation at any time. All survey responses

were kept anonymous. All participants read and acknowledged their consent, done so by selecting a check box, indicating their willingness to participate in the study. Since the consent form did not require a signature of the participant, anonymity was ensured. The university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved this study.

Measures

Several instruments were employed to investigate the posed research questions. The following scales were included as survey items: Attachment Style Measure (Becker et al., 1997), an adaptation of the Quality Marriage Index (Norton, 1983), the relational satisfaction subscale from the Investment Model (Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998), the commitment subscale from the Investment Model (Rusbult et al.), the Measure of Commitment (Canary & Stafford, 1992), the Social Intimacy Scale (Miller & Lefcourt, 1982), Rubin's Love Scale (Rubin, 1970), and the Desire for Reconciliation scale (Dillow & Hale, 2001). The survey also included demographic questions developed by the researcher. All measures were included in a 108-item survey created for all participants to complete.

Researcher Designed Questions

Participants were asked at the beginning of the survey if they were currently involved in an on-off romantic relationship. If the participant answered "no", they were instructed to skip questions asking about the length of the relationship, and directed to answer questions about the status of the relationship and how long ago the relationship occurred. If the participant answered "yes" to this item, they were asked how long they had been dating in total, since the most recent renewal, and how long the break-up prior to the most recent renewal lasted. Additionally, all participants were asked specific

questions about the "off" phase of their relationship, including: "When your relationship was in the "off" phase did you date other people?" and "That you are aware of, did your partner date other people?" Next, all participants were asked about the number of times their relationship renewed. Finally, an open-ended response item was included to allow participants the opportunity to write a few sentences about what they, or their partner, said or did to encourage themselves, or their partner, to enter back into the relationship. This item was included to assess which reconciliation strategies were employed during the relationship and was placed at the end of the survey.

Attachment Style

Attachment style dimensions were assessed using Becker and colleagues (1997) attachment style measure. Though several attachment style measures exist, Becker and colleagues created a multi-item measure that incorporated items from other existing scales to produce a holistic instrument to measure secure, fearful, and preoccupied attachment styles for assessing both romantic and nonromantic attachments. This measure has been proven to be internally consistent, and is useful for assessing attachments in romantic relationships.

Becker and colleagues (1997) included 25 items into their final attachment measure. All 25 items are included in the present study as the measure of attachment style. A sample item includes, "I am uncomfortable being without close relationships, but I sometimes worry that others do not value me as much as I value them". Responses for each item are given on a 7-point Likert-type scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The ordering of the items in the questionnaire was randomly determined

(Becker et al.). Items 9, 12, 13, 14, 17, and 25 were reverse coded such that a score of 7 became 1.

Items referring to each attachment style are scored separately and summed across all items in that dimension, with higher scores indicating greater preoccupation, fearfulness, or security. Items 3, 5, 7, 11, 15, 21, and 24 are summed to yield a score the preoccupied style, items 4, 6, 14, 16, 17, and 18 are summed to yield a score for the fearful style, and items 1, 2, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 19, 20, 22, 23, 25 are summed to yield a score for the secure style. Grouping variables were created for each attachment style, 1 (preoccupied), 2 (fearful), 3 (secure), and participants were assigned to an attachment style based on the highest score for each variable. Becker and colleagues (1997) completed an exploratory factor analysis and determined the items had factor loadings on the preoccupied, fearful, or secure attachment style with alpha reliabilities of .84, .81, and .80, respectively. This study yielded alpha reliabilities of .80 for the preoccupied dimension, .83 for the fearful dimension, and .78 for the secure dimension.

Commitment to the Relationship

An item was included in the initial demographic section of the survey that was taken from Sprecher (1994), which asked participants who initiated the breakup. The item reads, "Think about who actually made the first steps to initiate the most recent breakup. Circle the number that best represents who initiated the breakup". The item is rated on a 7-point scale in which (1) indicates that the participant initiated the breakup, (4) indicates the breakup was mutual, and (7) indicates that the partner initiated the breakup. Thus, this item suggests the degree to which the partner initiated the most recent breakup.

This measure has been used to gather descriptive data in on-off relationships (Dailey et al., accepted). Moreover, a 7-point Likert-type item adapted from Sprecher (1994) asks participants to think about who made the first steps to initiate the reconciliation and renewal process. It reads, "Think about who made the first steps to initiate getting back together. Circle the number that best represents who initiated the renewal". The item is rated on a 7-point scale in which (1) indicates the self initiated the reconciliation, (4) indicates reconciliation initiation was mutual, and (7) indicates the partner initiated the reconciliation. Studies have used this item to gather descriptive data and correlations (Dailey et al., accepted; Sprecher, 1994). The current study found that participants reported the breakup was close to mutual, but more often initiated by the self ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 2.19$) and the renewal was also close to mutual, but slightly more often initiated by the partner ($M = 4.32$, $SD = 1.89$).

Commitment Before the Most Recent Renewal

Relationship commitment *before* the most recent renewal was assessed through Canary and Stafford's (1992) Measure of Commitment scale. This is a six-item measure that asks participants to indicate their level of commitment toward their partner. Items and instructions were modified to parallel the status of the relationship, such that, "I am committed to maintaining this relationship with my partner" became "I was committed to maintaining this relationship with my partner". A sample item includes, "I wanted this relationship with my partner to last as long as possible". Responses are solicited via a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Items are summed to create a total score; a higher score indicates higher levels of commitment. The Measure of Commitment scale is a reliable measure with reliability coefficients including

.83, .86, .88 and .92 (Canary & Stafford, 1992; Dainton & Aylor, 2002, Rittenour, Myers,

& Brann, 2007). The current study yielded an alpha reliability of .89.

Commitment Since the Most Recent Renewal

Perceived commitment *since* the most recent renewal was assessed through the

commitment subscale of the Investment Model (Rusbult et al., 1998). The commitment

subscale is a 7-item scale that measures global commitment to the relationship. Items

were modified to parallel the nature of the relationship the participant was reporting on.

For example, "I am committed to maintaining my relationship with my partner" became

"I am/was committed to maintaining my relationship with my partner".

Participants rated the items pertaining the level of commitment to their

relationship since the most recent reconciliation on an 8-point Likert-type scale ranging

from 0 (*do not agree at all*) to 8 (*agree completely*). Items 3 and 4 are reverse coded

such that a score of 8 becomes 0. Items are summed such that higher scores suggest

higher levels of commitment. The commitment subscale is a reliable measure with

internal consistency, with alpha levels ranging from .91 to .95 (Rusbult, et al., 1998).

Further, the subscale has been used successfully in a study examining on-off relationships

and yielded an alpha of .91 for those partners currently involved in the cyclical

relationship (Dailey et al., accepted). The present study yielded an alpha reliability of .93.

Satisfaction Before the Most Recent Renewal

The partners perceived satisfaction of the relationship *before* the most recent

renewal was assessed using the Quality of Marriage Index (Norton, 1983) adapted for

dating relationships. Items and instructions were modified to reflect the status of the

relationship, for example, "We have a good marriage" became "We have a good

relationship" and the tense was changed to reflect the nature of the relationship *before* the most recent renewal, thus "My relationship with my partner makes me happy" was changed to "My relationship with my partner made me happy".

The Quality of Marriage Index is a six-item instrument that measures the overall level of satisfaction within the relationship (Brann, Rittenour, & Myers, 2007). A sample item includes, "My relationship with my partner was very stable". Participants rated the first five items on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*very strongly disagree*) to 7 (*very strongly agree*). The sixth statement will be rated on a 10-point semantic differential scale with anchors of 1 (*unhappy*) to 10 (*happy*). Scores on the measure can range from 6 to 45, with higher scores indicating greater satisfaction of the relationship. The Quality of Marriage Index is a reliable measure with reliability coefficients of .93, .94, and .97 (Brann et al., 2007; Donnellan, Larsen-Rife, & Conger, 2005; Neff & Karney, 2005; Whisman & Delinsky, 2002). The current study yielded an alpha reliability of .92.

Satisfaction Since the Most Recent Renewal

The partners perceived satisfaction of the relationship *after* the most recent renewal was assessed through the satisfaction subscale of the Investment Model (Rusbult et al., 1998). Participants rated the first five items on a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*don't agree at all*) to 4 (*agree completely*). A sample item includes, "My partner fulfills my needs for companionship (doing things togher, enjoying each other's company, etc)". The final five items on an 8-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (*do not agree at all*) to 8 (*agree completely*). Items were modified to parallel the nature of the relationship the participant was reporting on. For example, "I feel/felt satisfied with our

relationship". Items are summed such that higher scores indicate higher levels of satisfaction. The satisfaction subscale is a reliable measure with internal consistency, boasting a Cronbach's α ranging from .92 to .95 (Rusbult et al., 1998). The current study yielded an alpha reliability of .94.

Intimacy Before the Most Recent Renewal

Intimacy *before* the most recent renewal was assessed using Rubin's (1970) measure of romantic love. The love scale is a 13-item measure, later reduced to 9-items Rubin (1973), which assesses feelings of intimacy, attachment, and caring for the partner (Caldwell & Peplau, 1984). A sample item includes, "If I was lonely, my first thought was to seek my partner out". Items are rated on a 9-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*not at all true, disagree completely*) to 9 (*definitely true, agree completely*). Items and instructions were modified to match the status of the relationship, so, "I feel like I can confide in my partner about virtually everything" became "I felt like I could confide in my partner about virtually everything". Items are summed with a higher total indicative of higher levels of higher feelings of intimacy. The love scale has high internal consistency, with alpha coefficients of .76 for dating partners (Cole, 2001), and .84 and .86 for women, and .86 and .84 for men (Dainton, et al., 1994; Rubin, 1970). The present study yielded an alpha coefficient of .86.

Intimacy Since the Most Recent Renewal

Intimacy *since* the most recent renewal was assessed using Miller and Lefcourt's (1982) Social Intimacy Scale. The scale is a 17-item measure that will evaluate participants' feelings of intimacy for their partner. Items were modified to parallel the nature of the relationship the participant was reporting on. For example, "How often

do/did you feel close to your partner?" Items are rated on a 10-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*very rarely, not much*) to 10 (*almost always, a great deal*). Items 2 and 14 are reverse coded such that a rating of 10 is scored as a 1 (Miller & Lefcourt, 1982). All items are summed to yield the maximum level of intimacy experienced in the present relationship. This measure demonstrates high internal consistency with a Cronbach alpha's of .91 and .86 (Miller & Lefcourt, 1982). Further, the Social Intimacy scale has a test-retest reliability of .96 over a two-month interval and .86 over a one-month interval, suggesting there is some stability in the maximum level of intimacy experienced over time (Miller & Lefcourt, 1982). The current study yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .93.

Desire for Reconciliation

Partners desire for reconciliation was assessed using Dillow and Hale's (2001) Likelihood of Reconciliation measure. The Likelihood of Reconciliation scale is an 8-item scale that assesses the participants' desire for reconciliation before the most recent renewal of their on-off relationship. A sample item includes, "I wanted my ex-partner and I to get back together in an exclusive romantic relationship". Participants rated the items on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strong agree*). Items 2, 4, 6, and 8 were reverse coded such that a rating of 7 was scored as 1. Items were summed, with higher scores suggesting a greater desire for reconciliation. The likelihood of reconciliation scale is a reliable measure with an alpha reliability of .97 (Dillow, Morse, & Afifi, 2008). This study yielded an alpha reliability of .93.

Demographics

The final section of the questionnaire included items relating to demographic information about the participant. Demographic items including the participants' age,

sex, sexual orientation, and ethnicity/race were placed at the end of the survey to combat

fatigue effects.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

To analyze the research questions posed in Chapter 2, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) and a multiple regression were used. The following discussion reports the results to the posited research questions in turn.

RQs 1, 2, 3: Attachment Style as Related to Perceptions of Intimacy, Satisfaction and Commitment

The goal of research questions one through three was to determine how, if at all, attachment style altered the perception of intimacy, satisfaction and commitment before and after a reconciliation of an on-off relationship. To analyze these questions, a one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was calculated using attachment style (preoccupied, fearful and secure) as the independent variable and the participant's scores for intimacy, satisfaction and commitment before and after a renewal as the dependent variables. The Box's test (Box's M = 37.57) revealed that equal variances can be assumed: $F(37, 20084) = .84$, $p > .05$; so Wilks' lambda (Λ) was used as the test statistic. Significant differences were found among attachment style on the dependent measures, Wilks' $\Lambda = .88$, $F(12, 410) = 2.18$, $p < .15$, multivariate $\eta^2 = .060$.

Analyses of variances (ANOVA) on the dependent variables were conducted as follow-up tests to the MANOVA. A significant difference was noted for intimacy before

a renewal: $F(2, 210) = 3.15$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .029$, satisfaction since a renewal: $F(2, 210) = 5.06$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .046$, and intimacy since a renewal: $F(2, 210) = 4.04$, $p < .02$, $\eta^2 = .037$.

In a follow up to these research questions, a Tukey HSD post hoc was conducted because it provides a more conservative estimate of significant differences between groups (Wrench, Thomas-Maddox, Richmond & McCroskey, 2008). The Tukey HSD post hoc indicated that there were significant differences for intimacy before a renewal between individuals with a preoccupied attachment style ($M = 6.7$, $SD = 1.35$) and individuals with a fearful attachment style ($M = 6$, $SD = 1.25$). Further, the Tukey HSD post hoc found that there were significant differences for satisfaction after a renewal between individuals with a fearful attachment style ($M = 3.7$, $SD = 1.35$) and individuals with a secure attachment style ($M = 4.4$, $SD = 1.32$). Finally, the Tukey HSD post hoc found that there were significant differences for intimacy since a renewal between individuals with a fearful attachment style ($M = 7.43$, $SD = 1.36$) and individuals with a secure attachment style ($M = 7.99$, $SD = 1.42$).

Table 1. MANOVA Means and Standard Deviations

		N	M	SD	Pre	Fear
Satisfaction Before						
	Pre	27	5.2	1.33	--	
	Fear	86	4.7	1.34	NS	--
	Secure	100	5.1	1.45	NS	NS
Commitment Before						
	Pre	27	5.1	1.53	--	
	Fear	86	4.9	1.39	NS	--
	Secure	100	5.2	1.32	NS	NS
Intimacy Before						
	Pre	27	6.7	1.35	--	
	Fear	86	6	1.25	*	--
	Secure	100	6.2	1.33	NS	NS
Satisfaction After						
	Pre	27	4	1.15	--	
	Fear	86	3.7	1.35	NS	--
	Secure	100	4.4	1.32	NS	*
Commitment After						
	Pre	27	5.4	1.75	--	
	Fear	86	5.6	1.85	NS	--
	Secure	100	6	1.86	NS	NS
Intimacy After						
	Pre	27	7.5	1.22	--	
	Fear	86	7.4	1.36	NS	--
	Secure	100	7.99	1.36	NS	*

*Note: NS = nonsignificant differences between pair means; * = significance using Tukey HSD procedure*

RQ4: Perceptions of Intimacy, Commitment, and Satisfaction as Related to Desire for

Reconciliation Before a Renewal

The goal of research question four was to determine how, if at all, perceptions of intimacy, commitment and satisfaction related to the desire for reconciliation of an on-off relationship. To analyze this question, a multiple regression was conducted using the participant's scores for intimacy, commitment and satisfaction as the dependent variables, and desire for reconciliation as the independent variable. The linear combination of the

dependent variables was significantly related to an individual's desire for reconciliation: $F(3, 218) = 21.147$, $p < .0001$. The sample multiple correlation coefficient (R) was .48, which indicates that approximately 22% of the variance in desire for reconciliation in the sample can be accounted for by the linear combination of an individuals perceptions of intimacy, commitment and satisfaction before a renewal occurs. However, only commitment before a renewal ($t = 2.63$, $p < .01$, $\beta = .21$) and intimacy before a renewal ($t = 4.72$, $p < .0001$, $\beta = .36$) account for any of the unique variance in an individual's desire to reconcile their on-off relationship.

Summary

Overall, the results from the current study indicate that attachment style does play a role in perceptions of intimacy, commitment and satisfaction before and after a renewal of an on-off relationship. Results also suggest that commitment and intimacy in an on-off relationship before a renewal accounts for the desire of the participant to reconcile the relationship. Further interpretations of the results are presented in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Summary of the Current Study

The purpose of this thesis was to examine how attachment style affects perceptions of intimacy, commitment, and satisfaction within an on-off relationship. An online survey was conducted where individuals who had ever dated the same person more than twice completed self report measures of attachment style, perceptions of intimacy before and after a renewal, perceptions of commitment before and after a renewal, perceptions of satisfaction before and after a renewal, and desire for reconciliation. Findings indicate that intimacy before a renewal, satisfaction after a renewal, and intimacy since a renewal significantly vary according to attachment style. Further, findings also suggest that commitment and intimacy before a renewal significantly influence the desire for reconciliation.

The following discussion will address the theoretical and practical implications of the results, including an interpretation of the findings, limitations of the current study, and recommendations for future research.

Discussion of Findings

The non-significant and significant findings of the study present an opportunity to comprehensively examine the ways in which attachment style influences perceptions of

intimacy, commitment, and satisfaction before and after a reconciliation of an on-off

relationship. It is important to note that though perceptions of intimacy, commitment,

and satisfaction are being evaluated; these perceptions are rooted in communication.

Several of the survey items ask about specific communication interactions within the

relationship. For example, several survey items allude to disclosure within the

relationship as well as the nonverbal and verbal expressions of affection and intimacy

displayed within the relationship. Thus, the responses of the participant are based on the

communicative interactions that occurred within the relationship.

The results are discussed in relation to each research question posed. Specifically,

results related to intimacy are interpreted, followed by those involving satisfaction, then

commitment, and finally, the interaction of intimacy, commitment and satisfaction before

a renewal as it relates to desire for reconciliation is discussed.

Perceptions of Intimacy in the Pre-Reconciliatory and Post-Reconciliatory Phase

Individuals with a preoccupied attachment style experienced significantly higher

levels of intimacy before a renewal within an on-off relationship than those individuals

with a fearful attachment style. Further, individuals with a secure attachment style

experienced significantly higher levels of intimacy after a renewal of an on-off

relationship than those individuals with a fearful attachment style. Thus, the current study

lends support for the literature that highlights differences between attachment styles and

its relation to intimacy in romantic relationships.

In regard to perceptions of intimacy before a renewal, preoccupied individuals are

more likely to desire intimacy in their romantic relationships. Additionally, preoccupieds

are more likely to idealize their romantic partners (Feeney & Noller, 1990; 1991), and

engage in more intimate verbal and nonverbal behaviors, potentially in part for their desire of intimacy (Guerrero, 2008) which may facilitate higher levels of perceptions of intimacy before a renewal of an on-off relationship. Likely the preoccupied attached individual is excited to have a companion they can shower with affection. Since they desire closeness and intimacy in their relationships, preoccupied individuals may reflect on the conversations with their partner and perceive higher levels of intimacy in the beginning phases of their on-off relationship.

However, there were no significant differences found in regard to how preoccupied individuals perceive intimacy after a renewal as compared to secure and fearfully attached individuals. Because preoccupied individuals fear that they will be left by their partner for a better alternative (Trees, 2006), individuals with a preoccupied attachment style in an on-off relationship would likely experience lower levels of intimacy after a renewal because their fear has come to fruition. The relationship, though it had been rekindled, had ended; likely leaving the partner with stronger fears of abandonment that may hinder verbal and nonverbal displays of intimacy within their relationship thus shaping their perceptions of their relationship after a renewal. Further, individuals with a preoccupied attachment style engage in lower quantities of nonverbal displays, including touching their partners less and smiling less frequently in interactions with their partners (Tucker & Anders, 1998). This lack of nonverbal expressiveness may also facilitate the lack of differences in regard to perceptions of intimacy.

Likewise, people with a fearful attachment style tend to fear intimacy (Hazan & Shaver, 1987) and are less dependent on their partner (Simpson, 1990) which could suggest lower perceptions of intimacy before and after a renewal of an on-off relationship

because these individuals fear developing an intimate connection through communication with their partner. Fearful partners tend to engage in less intimate nonverbal behaviors which may drive away secure partners, or reinforce the negative perceptions of the relationship that insecure partners possess (Tucker & Anders, 1998) thus reinforcing the lower levels of perceived intimacy in the relationship.

No significant differences were found in regard to how securely attached individuals perceive intimacy before a renewal as compared to preoccupied and fearful individuals. Because securely attached individuals desire both autonomy and connectedness in their romantic relationships (Feeney, 1999; Guerrero, 2008; Hazan & Shaver, 1987), they value their independence, which may be reflected in their evaluations of intimacy before a renewal. Perhaps securely attached individuals do not experience significant differences in regard to intimacy because they do not fear intimacy and its associated communicative displays as fearfully attached individuals do, nor do they desire it as strongly as preoccupied attached individuals.

However, individuals with a secure attachment style experienced significantly higher levels of intimacy after a renewal of an on-off relationship than those individuals with a fearful attachment style. Because secure individuals are comfortable with intimacy within a relationship (Dutton & Winstead, 2006), the renewal likely acts as a mechanism to reaffirm the feelings of connectedness with their partner. Securely attached individuals are more nonverbally expressive and engage in communicating more intimate nonverbal behaviors such as touch, direct gaze, and smiling (Tucker & Anders, 1998). This reaffirmation of closeness with their partner coupled with the display of intimate nonverbal behaviors has the potential to increase the perceptions of intimacy within the

relationship after a renewal because secure individuals tend to engage in maintenance behaviors within their relationships (Mikulincer et al., 2002).

Perceptions of Satisfaction in the Pre-Reconciliatory and Post-Reconciliatory Phase

No significant differences were found among attachment style in regard to levels of satisfaction before a renewal of an on-off relationship.

First, for those individuals who had already experienced a breakup in their on-off relationship their experiences during the off phase may influence their satisfaction upon the return to the relationship. Regardless of attachment style, an individual's communication with their partner would be impacted by what events occurred during the breakup. For example, a relationship in which one partner dates someone new during the off phase while the other partner does not, would likely result in a change of communication behavior between the couple. Thus, when the partners enter back into the relationship, there may be a baseline for satisfaction based upon their engagements during the off phase. This communication that occurs in the relationship is rooted in the events that surround the breakup and renewal and as a result influences our perceptions of our satisfaction, for example. Therefore, satisfaction may not significantly differ in regard to attachment style for individuals who experience a renewal of the relationship prior to the most recent breakup.

Additionally, previous literature focusing on on-off relationships suggests that individuals in on-off relationships experience lower levels of satisfaction due to the cyclical nature of the relationship (Dailey et al., accepted). Further, these decreased levels of satisfaction emerged in the initial phase of the on-off relationship, before the couple had reconciled. Perhaps individuals in an on-off relationship experience a lower quality

of the relationship, due in part to their communicative behaviors, thus lower levels of satisfaction before a renewal, regardless of their attachment style differences.

Individuals with a secure attachment style experienced higher levels of satisfaction than those individuals with a fearful attachment style. Given that positive communication and responsiveness are characteristics of satisfying relationships (Gottman, 1994; Reis, Clark & Holmes, 2004) it is not surprising that individuals with a secure attachment style experience higher levels of satisfaction in the post-reconciliatory phase of an on-off relationship.

Securely attached individuals engage in more open communication in regard to the content and amount of disclosure (Bradford, Feeney, & Campbell, 2002; Le Poire, Haynes, Driscoll, Driver, Wheelis, Hyde, Prochaska, & Ramos, 1997; Mikulincer & Nachshon, 1991). Since these individuals engage in more disclosures, it is likely during the reconciliatory conversation secure individuals are able to openly discuss the issues and problems surrounding the relationship before the reconciliation. Thus secure individuals likely establish a positive foundation for the relationship to move forward upon. This dialogue could facilitate the perceptions of satisfaction after a renewal.

Fearfully attached individuals have a more negative response to partners' disclosures (Mikulincer & Nachshon, 1991) and often desire distance and detachment in personal relationships. Thus, these individuals may experience lower levels of satisfaction after a renewal because they do not want to engage with their partner after a reconciliation of the relationship.

Further, on-off partners' satisfaction with the relationship decreases as the number of renewals increase (Dailey et al., 2009a). Individuals with a fearful attachment style

may experience lower levels of satisfaction after a renewal because they expect and anticipate problems within the relationship and are expecting the cyclical pattern to continue thus negatively affecting their communication and in turn their satisfaction within the relationship.

No significant differences were found in regard to how preoccupied attached individuals perceive satisfaction after a renewal as compared to secure and fearfully attached individuals. Because preoccupied individuals fear abandonment by their partner, satisfaction after a renewal may not be a significant factor in the relationship because the preoccupied's fear has been realized, their partner has abandoned them in the form of a breakup of the relationship. Thus the preoccupied person may desire to facilitate a sense of closeness to their partner to reestablish the bond they felt before the breakup, at the expense of experiencing significant levels of satisfaction within the relationship.

Perceptions of Commitment in the Pre-Reconciliatory and Post-Reconciliatory Phase

This study did not find any significant differences between attachment style and perceptions of commitment before or after a renewal of an on-off relationship. Strong commitment promotes relationship maintenance acts that are the specific means by which partners attempt to sustain long-term, well-functioning relationships (Rusbult, Madoka, Coolsen, & Kirchner, 2004). However, individuals that participate in an on-off relationship report lower use of maintenance behaviors, which likely leads to multiple transitions within the relationship (Dailey et al., accepted). Because participants of an on-off relationship do not frequently engage in maintenance acts, attachment style may not influence perceptions of commitment.

Further, commitment may predict positive prorelational maintenance behaviors (Rusbult, Drigotas, & Verette, 1994; Rusbult, Olsen, Davis, & Hannon, 2001), and on-off relationships tend to display lower levels of these behaviors (Dailey, et al., accepted), it is likely that regardless of attachment style, individuals do not perceive commitment differently before or after a renewal of an on-off relationship. Since satisfaction is often coupled with more communicative displays of commitment (Rusbult, 1983), and no significant differences were found in regard to satisfaction before the renewal of an on-off relationship, perhaps individuals did not experience commitment differently in their relationship according to attachment style.

Summary

Attachment style alters the perceptions of intimacy in the pre-reconciliatory and post-reconciliatory phase of an on-off relationship. Significant differences existed between secure and fearfully attached individuals in regard to intimacy and satisfaction after a renewal, and between preoccupied and fearfully attached individuals in regard to intimacy before a renewal. Next, results are interpreted in regard to the relationship between intimacy, commitment and satisfaction as it relates to the desire for reconciliation of an on-off relationship.

Interaction of Intimacy, Commitment, Satisfaction and Desire for Reconciliation

The current study found that perceptions of commitment and intimacy before a renewal of an on-off relationship significantly related to the desire for reconciliation. However, these perceptions only account for about twenty percent of the desire partners experience for reconciling an on-off relationship. Since messages of commitment fosters perceptions of intimacy (Moss & Schwebel, 1993) it is likely that these constructs work

together to encourage participants of an on-off relationship to want to enter back into the relationship after it has dissolved. When reflecting on the relationship while determining if the couple should reconcile, partners likely think back to the positive experiences in the relationship. If the partners perceived high levels of intimacy and commitment due to the verbal and nonverbal expressions with their partner before the breakup, they may deem that intimacy may be high after a renewal and therefore allow those thoughts to help influence their desire to reconcile with their partner.

Since commitment allows the relationship to continue (Rusbult, 1983), people that have strong perceptions of commitment to their relationship likely want to preserve the relationship and thus give it another chance. Likewise, satisfaction was not significantly related to the desire for reconciliation of an on-off relationship. Because messages of relational satisfaction parallel messages of commitment, individuals may pay closer attention to those messages of commitment when reflecting on entering back into the relationship. Messages of commitment and intimacy displays before the breakup may take more precedence than messages of satisfaction when reflecting on entering back into the relationship.

Summary

Perceptions of intimacy and commitment before a renewal of an on-off relationship significantly influence the desire partners experience to reconcile their relationship. Next, a discussion including the limitations of the study and directions for future research are presented.

Limitations and Future Research

This study is not without limitations. The following discussion details potential limitations of the current study.

Limitations

One limitation of the current study is the method of data collection. Though online surveys allow individuals who are not present at the researcher's institution to participate, it does exclude those individuals that do not have access to the Internet, which may lead to a biased sample. Further, a number of potential participants viewed the survey, but chose to not complete it. Thus, it could prove beneficial to evaluate how researchers can encourage participation from individuals via a mediated context. An additional limitation in regard to data collection is that the study sample was opened during data collection to a larger population due to lack of participation from those individuals currently in the on phase of an on-off relationship. Thus, the results could likely be different if the original sample had been kept in tact.

Since the study was available to anyone who had ever participated in an on-off relationship, likely there are differences in regard to how individuals who are currently involved in the on stage of an on-off relationship communicate intimacy, commitment, and satisfaction with their partner as compared to those individuals who are in the off stage. Likewise, individuals who reported on on-off relationships that occurred two to three years prior to the study may report differently because they have had more time to rationalize, sort through the interactions that occurred during their relationship, which may influence their perceptions.

This study was also limited in regard to the distribution of men and women who completed the survey. Just over two-thirds of the participants were female. This sex distribution could lead to a potential gender bias in the results. Moreover, only ten participants identified as homosexual; the overwhelming majority of participants were involved in heterosexual relationships. This unequal representation of homosexual and heterosexual relationships could lead to a bias in the results the sexual orientation of the participants may influence their communication of intimacy, commitment and satisfaction within their relationship.

Additionally, the overwhelming majority of the participants in the study were Caucasian. Individuals of different ethnicities may have different cultural values that may or may not discourage them from entering back into a relationship with the same partner. Therefore, it could prove insightful to examine cultural differences and values in regard to romantic relationships and the prevalence of on-off relationships in different cultures, so a more holistic picture of these relationships can be formed.

Further, previous research suggests that individuals with a preoccupied attachment style are more likely to participate in on-off relationships (Kirkpatrick & Hazan, 1994). However, participants in the current study were overwhelmingly secure (46.95%) and fearful (40.36%). Only 12.68% of the participants had a preoccupied attachment style. Therefore, the uneven distribution of participants with the various attachment styles in the current study could account for some of the non-significant findings in the results.

Directions for Future Research

Since the current study relied on network sampling, there is not a way to determine if only one or both partners were assessed. Thus it is likely that only the perceptions of one partner were measured. Intimacy, commitment, and satisfaction may be more of a function of both partners' attachment styles or an interaction between both partners' attachment styles (Bradford et al., 2002). Partner and couple effects suggest that the interaction between partners reflect responsiveness to the partners' attachment styles and the context of the relationship (Tress, 2006). Assessing intimacy, commitment, and satisfaction at the couple level may reveal how each partner's attachment style influences the perceptions of intimacy, satisfaction and commitment between the partners of an on-off relationship.

Further, future research should examine the interplay between the strategy of reconciliation, attachment style and its impact on the desire for reconciliation. Understanding how individuals with different attachment styles attempt to reconcile with their partner may provide additional insights into how committed or satisfied they were before the reconciliation. Again, examining these conversations at the couple level could allow for inspection upon the relationship between the strategy of the reconciliation, the partners' attachment style, and their resulting perceptions of intimacy, commitment and satisfaction after the relationship renewed.

Additionally, future research should examine just those individuals in on phase of an on-off relationship and focus on the specific messages communicated about intimacy, commitment and satisfaction. Future researchers could conduct a qualitative study in which couples could come to a lab and role-play the dialogue that they engaged in when

they were breaking up and renewing the relationship. Though this may result in a smaller sample, the specific messages and strategies would be available for further inspection and could be compared to the partners' specific attachment style.

Finally, future research should examine what accounts for the remaining 80% of the reasons that lead individuals to reconcile with their partner. Understanding what additional or outside factors encourage people to enter back into an on-off relationship may highlight significant differences between successful on-off relationships and those on-off relationships that experience several relational transitions.

Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to extend on the limited amount of previous research about on-off relationships by introducing a new theoretical perspective and focusing on the specific expressions of relational components. Specifically, the study sought to investigate if perceptions of intimacy, commitment, and satisfaction changed before and after a renewal of an on-off relationship as a result of an individual's attachment style. Further, this study sought to investigate if perceptions of intimacy, commitment and satisfaction before a renewal impacted the desire for reconciliation between on-off relationship partners. As the occurrence of on-off relationships is rising, there is a calling for research to examine the caveats of these relationships at a more concentrated rather than global level.

The results suggest that intimacy before a renewal varies significantly between individuals with a preoccupied and fearful attachment style, and both satisfaction and intimacy after a renewal vary significantly between individuals with a secure and fearful attachment style. The study did produce results consistent with attachment style

literature in regard to perceptions of intimacy and satisfaction. Additionally, the results suggest that both commitment and intimacy before a renewal impact the desire for reconciliation in an on-off relationship. In all, this thesis points to the unique structure of on-off relationships.

This study has implications for individuals themselves who participate in on-off relationships, as well as the friends and family members of those individuals. The current study highlights the importance of attachment style within romantic relationships. Thus it is important to help people learn how they form connections with other individuals and how those attachments impact their relationships.

Specifically, individuals can learn to appropriately adapt their communication to their partner if their attachment style varies from their own if they want to continue their relationship and improve commitment, intimacy and satisfaction after a renewal. Additionally, individuals can learn about the specific verbal and nonverbal messages that are communicated within romantic relationships that help to form perceptions of commitment, intimacy, and satisfaction. Continued research about on-off relationships in both a global and localized sense is necessary so that the depth and breadth of these relationships are appropriately examined and thus have the potential to offer greater insights into on-off dating.

STUDY ANNOUNCEMENT

Have you ever been in a romantic relationship in which you dated the same person at least twice? Whether or not you are currently dating that person with whom you have ended the relationship with, and gotten back together you are able to participate!

A researcher at Texas State University is conducting a study about on-again, off-again romantic relationships. If you are currently involved in, or have been previously involved with a relationship in which you dated your partner at least twice please consider participating in this study, which takes about 40 minutes to complete.

Answers are completely confidential & anonymous.

If you are interested in helping with this research, please visit the following link:
http://www.surveygizmo.com/s/181722/examining-on-again-off-again-relationships

Your participation in this survey will help the researcher to understand more about people's perceptions about their on-again, off-again relationships. Your participation may also prove interesting for you as your reflect on your own relationship while answering the questions. Your participation is greatly appreciated. Thank you so much for your time!

One final request -- whether or not you decide to participate in the survey, please consider passing this along to others who might.

Thank you!
- Brittani

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent

Consent Form

If you are currently involved in, or have previously been involved in, a relationship in which you have dated the same partner at least twice, and are at least 18 years old, you are invited to participate in a research study examining the dynamic nature of these types of relationships. The purpose of this research is to gain understanding of people's perceptions of their relationship before and after a romantic reconciliation. For further information regarding this study please contact the researcher, Brittani Crook at (512) 245-2165 ext. 1263 or brittani@txstate.edu.

If you decide to participate, you will complete an online survey that consists of 108 questions and will take approximately 40 minutes to one hour.

As there is no method for identifying the participants of this study, you will remain completely anonymous. The findings of this study can be provided to you if you email the researcher and request them (brittani@txstate.edu).

All data collected will be used towards completion of a Master's thesis. Only the researcher and the thesis committee will have access to the data currently collected, however the results may be used in the future for academic publication.

Sample items include:
1) I find it relatively easy to get close to others.
2) The degree of happiness, everything considered, in your relationship was:
3) I viewed my commitment to my partner as a solid one.
4) I felt that I could confide in my partner about virtually everything.
5) I wanted my ex-partner and I to get back together in an exclusive romantic relationship.
6) My partner fulfills my needs for companionship (doing things together, enjoying each other's company.)
7) My relationship is close to ideal.
8) I am committed to maintaining my relationship with my partner.
9) How often are you able to understand your partner's feelings?
10) How satisfying is your relationship with your partner?

There are no known risks to participating in this study. If participation should evoke any emotional discomfort during or after participation, please contact the Texas State University Counseling Center at 512-245-2208 or a counseling center of your choice. You will be responsible for any counseling fees incurred. If you choose to participate, a potential benefit from your participation includes that you will gain a greater insight into yourself and/or personal relationships

Your decision whether or not to participate will not prejudice your future relations with Texas State University-San Marcos.

If you decide not to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without prejudice. You may also choose not to answer any question(s) for any reason.

You are making a decision whether or not to participate. You may choose not to answer any question(s) for any reason. Your acknowledgement indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to participate. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice after signing this form. You may print a copy of this form for your own records.

Questions about the research, research participants' rights, and/or research-related injuries to participants should be directed to the IRB chair, Dr. Jon Lasser (512-245-3413 – lasser@txstate.edu), or to Ms. Becky Northcut, Compliance Specialist (512-245-2102), IRB reference number 2009R1633.

I agree to participate in this study. ____
I do not agree to participate in this study. ____

Participant Questionnaire

INSTRUCTIONS: Please read each question carefully as you respond to the following items. You will be directed to either think about your <u>current/previous romantic relationship before a renewal</u>, *or* <u>your current/previous romantic relationship after a renewal</u>. A *renewal* is defined here as breaking up and getting back together with your partner. You may choose not to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable. Thank you for your participation!

Are you *currently* involved in an on-again/off-again relationship? (A relationship that has broken up and renewed at least once.)

        Yes   No

How long have/were you been in a relationship with your significant other? (Please indicate a numerical value for years, months, and/or days.)

_____ Years   _____ Months   _____ Days

How long have/were you and your partner been dating since the most recent break up? (Please indicate a numerical value for years, months, and/or days.)

_____ Years   _____ Months   _____ Days

How long did the *most recent* break up last (in months)? (Please indicate a numerical value for years, months, and/or days.)

_____ Years   _____ Months   _____ Days

How would/did you characterize your relationship with your partner?

_____ Dating   _____ Engaged   _____ Married   _____ Other (please specify)

When your relationship was in the "off" phase did you date other people? (Off: you and your partner were broken up)

        Yes   No

That you are aware of when your relationship was in the "off" phase, did your partner date other people?

> Yes
>
> No

How many times have/did you and your partner renewed your relationship? (Renew: breaking up and getting back together. Please indicate a numerical value.)

> _____ Times

Think about who actually made the first steps to *initiate the most recent breakup*. Circle the number that best represents who initiated the breakup.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I did			We both did			My partner did

Think about who made the first steps to *initiate getting back together*. Choose the number that best represents who initiated the renewal.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I did			We both did			My partner did

If you are no longer with your partner, how long ago did this relationship end?

> _____ Years   _____ Months   _____ Days

The following items indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about your interactions with others. Circle the appropriate number according to the following scale:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	**Disagree**	**Slightly Disagree**	**Neither Agree nor Disagree**	**Slightly Agree**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**

I am relatively confident that other people will accept me as I am.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

I do not worry about being alone.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

I find others are reluctant to get as close as I would like.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

I am not sure that I can always depend on others to be there when I need them.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Sometimes people do not want to get close to me because I want so much to be close to them.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on others.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

I want to merge completely with another person.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

I do not worry about having others not accept me.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

I am nervous when anyone gets too close to me.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

It is easy for me to get emotionally close to others.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

I am uncomfortable being without close relationships, but I sometimes worry that others do not value me as much as I value them.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

I worry that I will be hurt if I allow myself to become too close to others.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

I want emotionally close relationships, but I find it difficult to trust others completely.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

I am comfortable depending on others.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

I often want to get closer to others than they want to get to me.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

People are never there when you need them.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

I know that others will be there when I need them.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

I find it difficult to trust others completely.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

I do not often worry about someone getting too close to me.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

I do not often worry about other people letting me down.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

I want to be completely emotionally intimate with others, but I often find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

I do not often worry about being abandoned.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

I find it relatively easy to get close to others.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

My desire to merge sometimes scares people away.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

I am somewhat uncomfortable being close to others.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

The following items ask you to think back to BEFORE the most recent renewal of your relationship with your partner.

Think back to before the most recent renewal of your relationship. If you are NO LONGER with your partner, think back to a time before you broke up and got back together. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements regarding your current relationship __BEFORE the most recent renewal__.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

---

We had a good relationship.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

My relationship with my partner was very stable.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Our relationship was strong.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

My relationship with my partner made me happy.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

I really felt like part of team with my partner.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

The degree of happiness, everything considered, in your relationship was

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10
Unhappy   Happy

*Think about your relationship before the most recent renewal. Indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements regarding your current relationship **BEFORE the most recent renewal** (select an answer for each item).*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	**Disagree**	**Slightly Disagree**	**Neither Agree nor Disagree**	**Slightly Agree**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**

I was committed to maintain this relationship with my partner.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

I wanted this relationship with my partner to last as long as possible.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

I thought it was unlikely that this relationship would end in the near future.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

I felt very close to my partner.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

There were no others I would want as my partner.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

I did not want another partner.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

*Think about your relationship before the most recent renewal. Indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements regarding your current relationship **BEFORE the most recent renewal** (select an answer for each item).*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Not at all true								**Definitely true**

If my partner were feeling badly, my first duty would have been to cheer him/her up.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9

I felt that I could confide in my partner about virtually everything.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9

I found it easy to ignore my partner's faults.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9

I would have done almost anything for my partner.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9

I felt very possessive toward my partner.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9

If I could never have been with my partner, I would feel miserable.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9

If I was lonely, my first thought was to seek my partner out.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9

One of my primary concerns was my partner's welfare.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9

I did forgive my partner for practically anything.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9

I felt responsible for my partner's well being.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9

When I was with my partner, I spent a good deal of time just looking at him/her.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9

I did greatly enjoy being confided in by my partner

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9

It would have been hard for me to get along without my partner.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9

The following items ask you to consider your relationship SINCE the most recent break up, but BEFORE the most recent renewal.

*Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements regarding your current relationship **during the phase SINCE the most recent break up BEFORE the most recent renewal**. (You and your partner were in the "off" phase: you were not yet dating each other as you had not renewed your relationship). If you are NO LONGER with your partner, think back to a time after you broke up and before you got back together.*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

I wanted my ex-partner and I to get back together in an exclusive romantic relationship.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

I did not want to get back together in an exclusive romantic relationship with my ex-partner.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

It was likely that I would try to get back together with my ex-partner in an exclusive romantic relationship.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

It was unlikely that I would attempt to get back together in an exclusive romantic relationship with my ex-partner.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

It was likely that my ex-partner and I would get back together in an exclusive romantic relationship.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

It was unlikely that my ex-partner and I would get back together in an exclusive romantic relationship.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

The chances of my ex-partner and I renewing our romantic relationship were very good.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

The chances of my ex-partner and I renewing our romantic relationship were not very good.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

The following items ask you to think about your relationship now, SINCE the most recent renewal.

*Think about your relationship now, since the most recent renewal. Indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements regarding your current relationship **SINCE the most recent renewal** (select an answer for each item). If you are NO LONGER with your partner, think back to a time after you got back together*

1	**2**	**3**	**4**
Don't agree at all	**Agree slightly**	**Agree Moderately**	**Agree Completely**

My partner fulfills/did fulfill my needs for intimacy (Sharing personal thoughts, secrets, etc.)

1	2	3	4

My partner fulfills/did fulfill my needs for companionship (doing things together, enjoying each other's company.)

1	2	3	4

My partner fulfills/did fulfill my sexual needs (holding hands, kissing, etc.)

1	2	3	4

My partner fulfills/did fulfill my needs for security (feeling trusting, comfortable in a stable relationship.)

1	2	3	4

My partner fulfills/did fulfill my needs for emotional involvement (feeling emotionally attached, feeling good when another feels good, etc)

1	2	3	4

Indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements regarding your current relationship __SINCE the most recent renewal__ (select an answer for each item).

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Do not agree at all			**Somewhat Agree**				**Agree Completely**

I feel/felt satisfied with our relationship.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

My relationship is/was much better than others' relationships.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

My relationship is/was close to ideal.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

Our relationship makes/made me very happy.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

Our relationship does/did a good job of fulfilling my needs for intimacy, companionship, etc.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

I want/wanted our relationship to last for a very long time.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

I am/was committed to maintaining my relationship with my partner.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

I would not/did not feel very upset if our relationship were to end in the near future.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

It is/was likely that I will date someone other than my partner within the next year.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

I feel/felt very attached to our relationship- very strongly linked to my partner.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

I want/wanted our relationship to last forever.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

I am/was oriented toward the long-term future of my relationship (for example, I imagine being with my partner several years from now).

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

*Think about how your relationship is now, since the most recent renewal. Indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements regarding your current relationship **SINCE the most recent renewal** (select an answer for each item).*

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Very   **Some of**   **Almost**
Rarely   **the time**   **always**

When you have leisure time, how often do/did you choose to spend it with your partner alone?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

How often do/did you keep very personal information to yourself and do not share it with your partner?

   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

How often do/did you show your partner affection?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

How often do/did you confide very personal information to your partner?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

How often are/were you able to understand your partner's feelings?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

How often do/did you feel close to your partner?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

How much do/did you like to spend time alone with your partner?

1   **2**   **3**   **4**   **5**   **6**   **7**   **8**   **9**   **10**

How much do/did you feel like being encouraging and supportive to your partner when they were unhappy?

1   **2**   **3**   **4**   **5**   **6**   **7**   **8**   **9**   **10**

How close do/did you feel to your partner most of the time?

1   **2**   **3**   **4**   **5**   **6**   **7**   **8**   **9**   **10**

How important is/was it to you to listen to your partner's very personal disclosures?

1   **2**   **3**   **4**   **5**   **6**   **7**   **8**   **9**   **10**

How satisfying is/was your relationship with your partner?

1   **2**   **3**   **4**   **5**   **6**   **7**   **8**   **9**   **10**

How affectionate do/did you feel towards your partner?

1   **2**   **3**   **4**   **5**   **6**   **7**   **8**   **9**   **10**

How important is/was it to you that your partner understands your feelings?

1   **2**   **3**   **4**   **5**   **6**   **7**   **8**   **9**   **10**

How much damage is/was caused by a typical disagreement in your relationship with your partner?

1   **2**   **3**   **4**   **5**   **6**   **7**   **8**   **9**   **10**

How important is/was it to you that your partner is encouraging and supportive to you when you are unhappy?

1   **2**   **3**   **4**   **5**   **6**   **7**   **8**   **9**   **10**

How important is/was it to you that your partner shows you affection?

1   **2**   **3**   **4**   **5**   **6**   **7**   **8**   **9**   **10**

How important is/was your relationship with your partner in your life?

1   **2**   **3**   **4**   **5**   **6**   **7**   **8**   **9**   **10**

What did you or your partner say or do that encouraged you/your partner to enter back into the relationship? Write 2-5 sentences.

Age: _____

Sex: ____ Male _____Female

Sexual Orientation: ____ Heterosexual ____Homosexual

Race/Ethnicity:

     _____ Black/African American

     _____ Asian American/Pacific Islander

     _____ Caucasian

     _____ Hispanic

     _____ Other/Multi-Racial

     _____ Decline to Respond

Thank you for completing this study. Your time is much appreciated.

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