

Adult attachment and dating strategies: How do insecure people attract mates?

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Abstract

When asked to choose among secure or insecurely attached partner prototypes, research shows that people tend to select secure individuals as their first choice. Despite this pattern, not everyone chooses secure partners in reality. The goal of this study was to examine the ways in which insecure individuals present themselves that might make them attractive to others. To achieve this goal, participants were led to believe that they were interacting with a possible date. That insecure individuals presented themselves as warm, engaging, and humorous people when communicating with potential mates were found. These findings suggest that insecure people have numerous dating tactics and positive qualities that they display to win over romantic partners.

Imagine a scenario in which a person is faced with a decision to date one of the three people. The first potential mate comes across as open and supportive, the second seems distant and noncommunicative, and the third is clingy and lacks confidence. Which one would likely be the best romantic candidate? Not surprisingly, research on this topic has found that people tend to be most attracted to others that resemble the first person or those who possess features that are characteristic of *attachment security*, rather than those who exhibit attachment insecurities (Latty-Mann

& Davis, 1996; Pietromonaco & Carnelley, 1994). Despite this trend in reported preferences, however, there is no definitive indication that insecure people are less likely than secure people to be in a romantic relationship at any given time, to have stable relationships, or to have dating opportunities (Feeney & Noller, 1992; Keelan, Dion, & Dion, 1994; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994). If insecure individuals possess unattractive qualities and behave in ways that are less desirable than those who are secure, how is it that insecure people nevertheless manage to have dating success? The goal of this study was to determine what characteristics insecure people display that may lead others to perceive them as suitable partners and examine some of the dating strategies that insecure people use to win over mates.

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An overview of attachment theory

Attachment theory is one useful framework with which to examine partner selection processes. Originally developed by Bowlby (1969) to explain the close bonds between children and their caregivers, attachment theory was given new life in the 1980s when Hazan and Shaver (1987) applied the tenets of the

theory to adult romantic relationships. As Bowlby did before them, Hazan and Shaver distinguished between secure and insecure orientations to close relationships. Security in attachment can be conceptualized as a function of two dimensions: anxiety and avoidance (Fraley & Shaver, 2000). *Anxiety* refers to variation in the degree to which people are sensitive to attachment-related concerns and rejection. For instance, people high in anxiety frequently worry about abandonment by loved ones and the perceived lack of closeness in their relationships. *Avoidance* refers to variation in people's tendencies to withdraw versus seek proximity to others to regulate attachment-related feelings. Individuals who are high in avoidance are uncomfortable with closeness and dependency in romantic relationships. Unlike insecure individuals, people characterized by high levels of attachment security (i.e., those who are low on both dimensions) are willing to rely on others for comfort and are confident that those close to them will be responsive and supportive in times of need.

Attachment theory and mate selection

Satisfaction and success in a given relationship is partially determined by the attachment patterns of the individuals involved. Past research indicates that secure individuals behave in ways that promote relationship well-being for both partners, whereas insecure people are more likely to encounter relationship dissatisfaction. Secure people tend to experience positive emotions, be committed, and be well adjusted in their romantic relationships (Simpson, 1990; Zhang & Hazan, 2002). For example, in a study demonstrating how security level affects the dynamics of support giving and seeking between partners, Simpson, Rholes, and Nelligan (1992) found that secure people were more likely than insecure people to soothe their partner and to be soothed when faced with a stressful situation. Secure partners are available to meet their mates' needs, provide comfort, and allow themselves to be relied upon. As in the parent-child relationships that Bowlby studied (1973, 1980), romantic

partners who are mutually available and responsive to one another facilitate a more satisfying and secure relationship dynamic. Indeed, attachment research demonstrates that the desirability of a potential partner increases accordingly with his or her ability to meet one's needs (Latty-Mann & Davis, 1996). When it comes to negotiation within relationships, secure individuals make use of constructive tactics such as discussing problems, whereas insecure people tend to use more destructive approaches such as making threats (Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1995). Factors such as these—mutual support, emotional expression, and communication—are all key components in determining the satisfaction and quality of a romantic relationship (Levy & Davis, 1988; Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1990). Thus, partner choice can result in alienation and conflict, or fulfillment and happiness, depending on the attachment dynamics of the relationship and the characteristics and actions of one's partner.

Extensive research has been conducted on the ways in which attachment security influences outcomes in established relationships. However, to date, the impact of attachment at the relationship formation stage has received very little attention. The few studies that have used attachment theory to understand how people initially approach potential partners demonstrate that attachment history can affect people's new relationships from the onset (Brumbaugh & Fraley, 2006; Eastwick & Finkel, 2008; Klohnen & Luo, 2003). Initial encounters are important, and first impressions have the ability to make or break potential long-term relationships, as people often decide whether an individual is a suitable partner within minutes of meeting him or her (Pines, 2005; Sunnafrank & Ramirez, 2004). Thus, even when formal bonds are not yet established, using individual differences in attachment to examine the earliest phases of romantic interactions can provide new insights into how people ultimately arrive where they do in their important relationships.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, research has consistently shown that when asked to decide among prototypically secure or insecure targets in an experimental setting, people tend to

select secure individuals as their first choice for a romantic partner (Klohnen & Luo, 2003; Latty-Mann & Davis, 1996; Pietromonaco & Carnelley, 1994). Attraction research outside attachment theory provides converging evidence that secure qualities are highly appealing in potential partners. For instance, research by Buss and his colleagues demonstrates that reliability, warmth, a trusting attitude, security, and low anxiety are the features that are reported cross-culturally as most attractive in mates for both genders (e.g., Botwin, Buss, & Shackelford, 1997). In open-ended responses regarding what first attracted people to their partners, Felmlee (1995) also found that people cited a caring nature, attentiveness, confidence, openness, and dependability as top-listed features. All these highly desirable attributes are representative of what it means to be a "secure" person.

Potential desirable correlates of insecurity

If involvement with a person who has a secure orientation leads to positive relational outcomes and if people are most attracted to others who are prototypically secure, how do insecure people succeed in obtaining mates in the real world in spite of their interpersonal disadvantages? Different explanations exist for what may cause individuals to form romantic relationships with insecure partners. One possibility is that insecure people may not be undesirable in every regard. It is feasible that attachment insecurities are associated with beneficial features and that these qualities may override or balance out the drawbacks of insecurity. For instance, anxious people may initially come off as attractive if others interpret their hypervigilance for being caring, interested, or attentive. Although their strong engagement in relationships may be motivated solely by a desire for attention in return, anxious people's strategies to minimize emotional distance and connect with others may nevertheless elicit a positive reaction from others in the beginning. Because of their neurotic tendencies, it is also possible that anxious people may at first seem more fascinating than secure people. Anxious individuals have been found to disclose

more personal information about themselves than those who are nonanxious (Mikulincer & Nachson, 1991). Therefore, an anxious person may approach a potential mate by openly communicating an onslaught of day-to-day worries and personal issues that could be interesting to someone hearing these concerns for the first time. This kind of disclosure about oneself, one's vulnerabilities, and one's emotions may serve to facilitate a connection with others.

Some research findings also indicate that attachment anxiety is not always unattractive. Eastwick and Finkel (2008) found that, regardless of one's global attachment style, the experience of attachment anxiety in developing relationships is common and need not be detrimental. In a new dating situation in which the feelings of others are ambiguous, anxiety can be functional if it communicates that one cares about the relationship and motivates people to cultivate warm relationships with others. Therefore, some aspects of attachment anxiety may be attractive at first. Over time, though, prolonged trait anxiety typically becomes problematic for relationship functioning.

Avoidant people, in spite of their need for distance and autonomy, desire social connections as well (Carvallo & Gabriel, 2006). In order to form social ties, avoidant people should be expected to highlight favorable features because they offer the worst opportunity for offering a secure bond and are the least willing to give support to mates in established relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1994). As with attachment anxiety, certain aspects of avoidant attachment might facilitate favorable impressions. For instance, avoidance is associated with the suppression of negative thoughts (Fraleigh & Shaver, 1997; Mikulincer, 1998). Therefore, avoidant people may be behaviorally motivated to reduce unpleasantness in their interactions as well by using dating tactics such as humor to keep interactions upbeat and free from negativity. Highly avoidant people may also come across as independent and self-sufficient. Although these traits may be unfavorable in the long run, they could indicate that a person is relatively autonomous, a signal that might

be desirable in the early stages of romantic attraction.

Intentional self-presentation in dating contexts

Although insecure people may naturally behave in some ways that are attractive, their dating strategies may also be deliberate. Self-presentation can often be a highly conscious process, especially in new relationships which place strong demands on behavior. In less routine situations such as these in which people feel they are being evaluated, self-presentation becomes more controlled (Leary et al., 1994; Schlenker & Pontari, 2000). Thus, when first dating, insecure people may deliberately choose what features they want to present and what features they wish to hide. Taken to the extreme, this self-awareness can lead to a misrepresentation of oneself. For example, research has found that people sometimes engage in deceptive self-presentation in order to obtain romantic partners (Rowatt, Cunningham, & Druen, 1999; Toma, Hancock, & Ellison, 2008). Insecure people may be especially inclined to duplicitous self-portrayals, as research demonstrates that they are higher in self-monitoring behavior (Gaines, Work, Johnson, Youn, & Lai, 2000). Thus, insecure people may be more likely to be guided by pressures from their social environment rather than by their own personality in new dating situations.

People's ability to defensively mask insecurities is also revealed through inaccurate responses on self-report measures of attachment (e.g., Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994; Leak & Parsons, 2001). Just as people falsely present themselves on paper, so may they attempt to manage the impressions they make when meeting new people in person. Past work that demonstrates that avoidant people sometimes disguise their true character suggests this may be the case. For instance, avoidant individuals present themselves positively and confidently, despite their underlying negative self-beliefs (Mikulincer, Dolev, & Shaver, 2004). Avoidant people have also been found to downplay their

interpersonal deficits in other ways, such as focusing on achievements in noninterpersonal domains (Brennan & Morris, 1997). Thus, avoidant individuals may inhibit expressions of avoidance, or deflect attention away from their attachment insecurity, by using positive self-presentation tactics when first meeting potential partners.

In summary, we propose that insecure individuals present themselves in a favorable light while getting acquainted with potential partners. Although past work suggests that insecure people may have some awareness of their negative qualities and consciously minimize these deficiencies, this need not always be the case. In other words, insecure people may genuinely exhibit some attractive features. Regardless of whether this process is intentional, positive qualities displayed by anxious and avoidant people may overshadow insecurities and make it more difficult for perceivers to determine whether others are truly secure or not when first getting to know them. Thus, people may be initially misled into thinking they have found a desirable mate, when really, what they have found is an insecure person with whom they will likely encounter considerable relational problems down the road.

Study overview

This study was designed to assess the influence of attachment on the earliest stages of relationship development. To our knowledge, this study is the first attempt to directly assess how insecure people present themselves in new dating contexts. Our main goal in this study was to determine what self-presentation strategies insecure individuals use that may initially cast them in a positive light and make them more attractive to potential dating partners. We examined the hypothesis that insecure people possess and display desirable qualities when courting potential partners. Specifically, because of their hypervigilance and intense desire to connect with others, we predicted that it would flow naturally for anxious individuals to act in an attentive, open, and friendly manner when becoming acquainted with potential partners. Because avoidant people wish

to deflect negative emotions, we hypothesized that avoidant individuals would use humor in new dating situations. Due to the lack of research relating to new dating situations and attachment, we did not make strong predictions about other positive qualities that avoidant people would display. However, based on the literature indicating that avoidant people are susceptible to mischaracterizing themselves and the fact that avoidant people are not without romantic relationships, we expected that avoidant people would convey additional desirable features to potential mates.

In order to examine these predictions and determine whether insecure people are especially likely to accentuate positive things about themselves, we adopted Simpson, Gangestad, Christensen, and Leck's (1999) videotaped interaction procedure. In this paradigm, people are led to believe that they are competing with others for a date with an attractive individual. Through this procedure our aim was to identify some personality features and behaviors of insecure people that potentially compensate for their insecure attachment style.

Method

Participants and procedure

One hundred fifty-six students (72 men and 84 women) from a large Midwestern university who were currently not in dating relationships were recruited from their introductory psychology classes in exchange for course credit. The mean age of the sample was 19.11 years ($SD = 1.31$). Sixty-three percent of the sample were identified as White, 15% as Asian, 7% as Hispanic, 8% as Black, and 7% as another ethnicity. Four participants identified as bisexual were included in the following analyses. Participants who were identified as homosexual ($n = 1$) and those who refused to be videotaped ($n = 9$) were excluded from the analyses, leaving 146 participants (66 men and 80 women) for the analyses reported below. The experiment was run with one participant per experimental session.

Participants were first asked to provide some basic demographic information and

complete the Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised Scale (ECR-R; Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000), which had Cronbach's α s of .90 for the anxiety dimension and .92 for the avoidance dimension. Example items from the ECR-R are, "I often worry that my partner doesn't really love me," which measures the anxiety dimension of attachment, and "I don't feel comfortable opening up to romantic partners," which assesses avoidance. Participants rated each ECR-R questionnaire item on a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) scale. Then, they were led to believe that they were involved in a study about how other people select dating partners. They were told that another opposite-sex participant ("the dater") was in the adjoining room and that the researchers were interested in how the dater makes choices and what types of questions the dater asks to come to a decision when deciding whether to select the participant or another participant for a lunch date. The participants were also told that the dater could not answer any questions from them during this part of the study. The experimenter encouraged participants to relax and try to be themselves.

The dater was actually one of four (two male and two female) physically attractive people who were previously videotaped for the purposes of this study.¹ Each confederate gave a brief generic, but pleasant introduction about himself or herself and inquired about the following: (a) "Please tell me about yourself, including what you like to do, and what you don't like to do"; (b) "Imagine that you are out and you see a very attractive man/woman. Show me what you'd do to get his/her attention"; (c) "Imagine that you've

1. Except for the variables of nervousness and eye contact in female participants, no significant differences in results were found as a function of which target was seen in the videotape. Specifically, female participants were more nervous with one male dater ($M = 1.45$, $SD = .37$) than the other ($M = 1.30$, $SD = .26$), $t(78) = 2.19$, $p < .05$, $d = .47$, and looked at the video camera less with the first male dater, respectively ($M = 2.22$, $SD = .36$) than the second ($M = 2.40$, $SD = .30$), $t(78) = 2.46$, $p < .05$, $d = .54$. The finding that the majority of participants' behaviors were the same toward each dater lends support to the idea that people generally tend to behave in the observed ways in new dating situations, regardless of the dating partner.

just met a very attractive man/ woman who you want to get to know better. How would you go about starting a conversation? Show me exactly what you would say and how you would say it"; (d) "Tell me what you think of me, based on what you've seen and heard today"; and (e) "Tell me how you approach relationships. For instance, are you open in relationships, do you enjoy emotional closeness, and do you worry about your relationships much?" When the dater appeared on the TV screen that was visible to the participant, the dater's pretaped introduction was played and the first inquiry (a) was made. As the participant responded to the question, the TV screen he or she was viewing went blank and his or her response was videotaped. After the participant was done answering the first question, the dater's second pretaped inquiry (b) was played to the participant and so on until the participant responded to all the dater's questions. To achieve the effect of a live interaction, the TV the participant viewed was connected to a VCR in the control room situated in the next door room where the bogus interaction was synchronized by an experimenter.

The videotaped responses of the participants were coded by seven trained raters who were unaware of the goals of the study and of the self-reported attachment style of the participants. The raters coded each participant's behaviors and statements during the interaction for features and behaviors related to the aspects of his or her character. Specifically, the coders assessed the extent to which each participant made eye contact toward the video camera, mirrored the dater's comments, and seemed nice, likable/popular, fun, interesting, confident, nervous, and distant during the entire interaction. The coders also rated the extent to which the participants responded to questions (b) and (c) that they would use a direct approach, humor, small talk, flattery, flirtation, and touch when approaching an attractive person. Flattery and apathy toward the dater were also assessed according to participants' reactions to question (d). The participants' response to the final question was coded for security. For this response, raters indicated how much participants said

they are willing to be close, how much they worry about relationships, and whether they are trusting and open. An overall global security score was also given by the raters, based on the entire interaction. Each item was coded on a 1 (*not at all apparent*) to 3 (*apparent*) scale. Interrater reliabilities between the seven coders for all the rated features were adequate as indicated by the intraclass correlation coefficients (Shrout & Fleiss, 1979), which ranged from .68 to .97.

In order to reduce our behavioral codes into more manageable clusters, we conducted a principal component analysis. Four components that accounted for 64% of the total variance were extracted. Based on the content of each, we named the four components Ingratiation, Social Engagement, Attachment Security, and Neuroticism. Table 1 shows

Table 1. *Principal component loadings of the individual behavioral codes*

Codes	Components			
	1	2	3	4
Flattering	.92	.18	.05	-.11
Neutral	-.83	-.29	.01	.12
Compliments physical	.82	-.04	.04	-.06
Compliments personality	.73	.31	-.02	-.06
Mirrors dater's statements	.50	.04	.17	.23
Nice	.16	.79	.15	-.01
Interesting	-.03	.74	.00	.20
Psychologically distant	-.49	-.68	-.13	.24
Fun	.22	.61	.09	-.18
Trustful	-.09	.12	.78	-.05
Willing to be close	.21	-.02	.77	.05
Security	.21	.43	.73	-.37
Open	.04	.08	.71	-.32
Nervous	-.02	-.06	-.15	.79
Confident	.36	.49	.30	-.55
Relationship worry	.12	.21	-.34	.55
Eye contact	.25	.34	-.26	-.41
Eigenvalue	3.62	2.83	2.60	1.85

Note. 1 = ingratiation; 2 = social engagement; 3 = attachment security; 4 = neuroticism. Extraction method = principal component analysis; Rotation method = varimax with Kaiser normalization. Eigenvalues reflect the rotated factor pattern.

the factor structure of the behavioral code components.

After the videotaped interaction segment of the study, participants were asked to complete the Dating Tactics Questionnaire (DTQ), designed specifically for use in this study, in which they rated the likelihood of making statements of flattery (e.g., "I would say that he/she is an interesting person"), statements of self-disclosure (e.g., "I would reveal some personal information about myself"), and more neutral statements (e.g., "I would ask what's new in his/her life") if they were to go on a lunch date with the dater. These items were rated on a 1 (*would definitely not do*) to 7 (*would definitely do*) scale. Participants also completed an attraction questionnaire assessing their attraction to the dater and these items were rated on a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) scale.² An example item from the attraction questionnaire is, "I would enjoy spending time with this person." Upon completion of the study, participants were given a manipulation check in which they were asked if they had any suspicions about the study.³ Finally, participants were fully debriefed about the details of the study before leaving.

Results

To examine how individual differences in attachment patterns influenced dating strategies, we regressed the dating behaviors on attachment-related anxiety and avoidance in a series of linear regressions. Our dependent variables in the following analyses include the four composite factors (Ingratiation, Social Engagement, Attachment Security, and Neuroticism), a few of the individual behavioral codes that did not cluster into factors (humor, touch, and distance), a few other individual behavioral codes that were of special note

(confidence, nervousness, and eye contact), self-reported dating tactics on the DTQ, and the word count of the participants' transcribed responses. Correlations between the individual behaviors and self-reported attachment on the ECR-R, as well as correlations between the ECR-R and the DTQ are presented in Table 2.

Dating strategies of anxious individuals

We first tested the prediction that high attachment anxiety corresponds to attractive self-presentation. We expected that those individuals high in attachment anxiety would exhibit qualities stemming from their over-attentiveness and need to forge close bonds. Therefore, anxious people should exhibit features indicative of their desire to engage with others. We regressed the Social Engagement factor on anxiety and found that Social Engagement was indeed positively related to anxious attachment, $\beta = .23$, $t(143) = 2.77$, $p < .01$. Table 3 includes the regression analyses for each of the individual behavioral codes. A regression on the word count of the transcribed videos indicated that anxious people had a tendency to talk more during the interaction. We also found that anxiety positively predicted the use of humor as a dating strategy. This pattern of results supported our hypothesis that attachment anxiety would be associated with positive personality qualities indicative of interest, warmth, and reaching out to others in new dating situations.

Next, we examined whether anxious people presented themselves as insecure or secure when interacting with potential dating partners. The regression of the Attachment Security factor on anxiety indicated that highly anxious people displayed a marginal tendency to present themselves as less secure to others, $\beta = -.15$, $t(143) = -1.78$, $p < .08$. In addition to conveying their insecurities about relationships, anxious individuals came across as more neurotic. Specifically, anxiety was positively associated with the Neuroticism factor, $\beta = .22$, $t(143) = 2.76$, $p < .01$, such that anxious people seemed generally less sure

2. Avoidant people tended to be less attracted to the targets overall, $\beta = -.20$, $t(143) = -2.42$, $p < .05$. Otherwise, attraction to the dater was not influenced by attachment style.

3. Twenty participants were skeptical that the dater was live in the next room (or thought that the dater may be an experimenter). Suspicious individuals' results did not differ from unsuspecting people, and so their data were retained for the reported analyses.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and correlations between self-report measures and individual features

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
1. ECR-R anxiety	—																	
2. ECR-R avoidance	.17	—																
3. DTQ security	-.18	-.37	—															
4. DTQ flattery	.08	-.07	.49	—														
5. Talkative	.20	-.09	.12	.18	—													
6. Interesting	.17	-.09	.20	.09	.56	—												
7. Humorous	.19	.17	-.04	-.06	.06	-.05	—											
8. Eye contact	-.00	.09	.04	.15	.15	.12	.08	—										
9. Psychologically distant	-.12	.16	-.11	-.15	-.50	-.36	-.14	-.41	—									
10. Physical touch	-.11	.12	-.13	.04	.02	-.00	-.07	.06	-.10	—								
11. Flattering	-.07	-.09	-.00	.12	.05	.04	.01	.08	-.18	.13	—							
12. Nice	.18	-.10	-.01	-.12	.35	.39	.10	.26	-.65	.08	.18	—						
13. Willing to be close	.05	-.37	.16	.17	.13	-.04	-.01	-.04	-.21	-.05	.07	.11	—					
14. Relationship worry	.42	.08	-.04	.07	.15	.18	.08	.01	-.00	-.04	-.04	.01	-.13	—				
15. Trustful	-.16	-.22	.21	.03	.08	.06	-.03	-.11	-.10	.01	.01	.20	.44	-.21	—			
16. Open	-.15	-.38	.26	.10	.07	.03	.02	.09	-.24	-.12	.05	.09	.45	-.31	-.31	—		
17. Confident	-.05	-.17	.15	.14	.37	.27	.07	.27	-.67	.10	.18	.41	.23	-.17	.26	.43	—	
18. Nervous	.06	.19	-.05	.03	-.00	.04	-.03	-.16	.20	.04	-.04	-.06	-.12	.24	-.23	-.23	-.52	—
<i>M</i>	3.24	3.18	5.04	4.69	3.41	1.87	1.21	2.33	1.71	1.49	1.19	1.88	2.20	1.40	1.71	2.19	2.40	1.41
<i>SD</i>	0.93	0.97	0.71	0.86	1.44	0.47	0.52	0.37	0.41	0.46	0.45	0.43	0.53	0.58	0.41	0.59	0.41	0.32

Note. All correlations $\geq .17$ are significant at $p < .05$. Variables 6–18 are coded items. $N = 146$. ECR-R = Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised Scale; DTQ = Dating Tactics Questionnaire.

Table 3. Summary of the hierarchical regression analyses testing the contributions of attachment and gender on dating features

	Talkative	Humorous	Eye contact	Physical touch	Flattering	Nice to be close	Worry	Trustful	Open	Confident	Nervous
Step 1											
Anxiety	.22*	.16*	-.15 [†]	-.13	-.06	.11	.41*	-.13	-.09	-.02	.03
Avoidance	-.13	.14 [†]	.19*	.14*	-.08	-.39*	.01	-.20*	-.36*	-.17*	.19*
Step 2											
Gender	-.13	.90*	-.17	-.32	-.62	.93*	.19	.31	-.27	.01	.26
Anxiety × Gender	.11	-.45	-.75 [†]	.10	.68 [†]	.01	-.63 [†]	.10	.55	.51	-.73 [†]
Avoidance × Gender	.04	-.94*	.97*	.46	-.07	-.93*	.30	-.24	-.09	-.53	.24

[†] $p < .10$. * $p < .05$.

of themselves.⁴ However, it appears that the positive association between anxiety and the Neuroticism factor was driven primarily by the relationship worry component of the factor, as indicated by the strong association between attachment anxiety and relationship worry ($r = .42$) and the lack of significant correlations between attachment anxiety and the other components of the Neuroticism factor (Table 2).

Dating strategies of avoidant individuals

We did not have strong predictions regarding what specific dating tactics avoidant people would employ, aside from the use of humor to alleviate negativity in initial interactions. In order to assess avoidant people's tendency to use humor as a dating strategy, we regressed humor on attachment avoidance and found the variables to be positively, though marginally, associated. This finding provided some support for our hypothesis that avoidant people would be more likely to use humor in their interactions.

Avoidant people displayed additional positive features in the videotaped interactions. The regression analysis of avoidant people's tendency to use touch to convey interest in potential mates was marginally significant. This analysis revealed that avoidance was positively associated with the use of touch to signal interest. An additional attractive feature was displayed by avoidant men in particular. Specifically, gender differences were found in how psychologically distant participants seemed. We performed hierarchical regressions in which anxiety, avoidance, and gender (weighted 0 for males and 1 for females) were included as predictor variables in the first step of the analysis, and the interactions between gender and the predictor variables were entered in the second step. The interaction between avoidance and psychological distance was such that men were no

4. The individual code "relationship worry" clustered under the Neuroticism factor rather than the Attachment Security factor. Anxious attachment and the Big Five personality trait of Neuroticism are known to be moderately related, but not redundant, constructs (e.g., Nettle & Shaver, 2006; Shaver & Brennan, 1992).

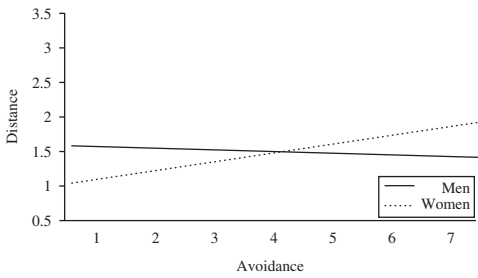


Figure 1. Psychological distance as a function of attachment avoidance.

more or less distant regardless of avoidance ($\beta = -.02$, *ns*), but avoidant women were significantly more distant ($\beta = .31$, $p < .05$), as might be expected of an avoidant person. Furthermore, the interaction (Figure 1) between avoidance and gender was significant. Participant gender also interacted with avoidance to predict the use of eye contact. Males who were more avoidant tended to look directly at the video camera when communicating with the ostensible dater, $\beta = .70$, $t(139) = 2.48$, $p < .05$. However, avoidance did not significantly influence women's tendency to gaze into the camera, $\beta = -.08$, *ns* (Figure 2). These findings regarding touch, distance, and eye contact are of interest because these are indicators that one wants to be close (physically and psychologically), as opposed to aloof, in relationships.

We next examined the presented attachment security of avoidant individuals. A regression of the Attachment Security factor on avoidance revealed that avoidance was negatively related to secure self-presentation, $\beta = -.41$, $t(143) = -5.38$, $p < .001$. Furthermore, this

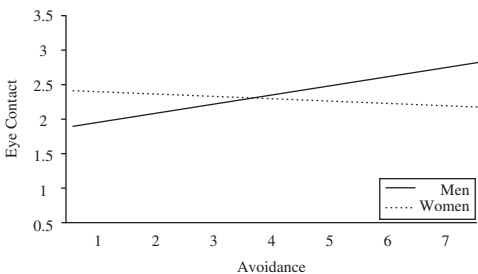


Figure 2. Use of eye contact as a function of attachment avoidance.

finding was corroborated by the self-reports of avoidant people. In order to examine the self-reported likelihood of making statements indicative of security on a first date, we regressed people's reported probability of using such statements (as indicated by participants' responses on the DTQ) on avoidance. We found that the participants' avoidance levels were predictive of a significant amount of variance in their reported dating strategies. A main effect emerged in which avoidant people were less likely to self-report making secure comments, $\beta = -.35$, $t(143) = -4.50$, $p < .001$. On the basis of these results, it appears that avoidant people not only present themselves as less secure to observers but also explicitly report that they convey less security in new dating situations.⁵

Individual differences in the use of flattery

We were also interested to determine whether insecure people were more likely to flatter or flirt with others when getting to know them. We found this not to be the case. There was no indication, by the Ingratiation factor or by self-reported flattery on the DTQ, that avoidant or anxious people used flattery or flirtation to attract mates. Thus, the findings did not suggest that insecure people use compliments to ingratiate themselves any more than do secure people.

Discussion

The primary goal of this study was to examine some of the interpersonal tactics that insecure people use when getting to know potential partners and assess the first impressions that insecure people make on others. Our findings provide additional evidence that attachment theory is not only applicable to established attachment bonds but can be applied to relationship initiation and attraction processes as

5. Although avoidance and the Neuroticism factor were not significantly associated, two individual components of the Neuroticism factor are of note. Specifically, participants' degree of avoidance was related to their confidence level and nervousness (individual codes), such that avoidant people seemed less confident, $\beta = -.17$, $t(143) = 4.52$, $p < .05$, and more nervous, $\beta = .19$, $t(143) = 5.61$, $p < .05$.

well. The results of the study reveal some positive qualities and self-presentation strategies that may make insecure individuals initially seem like appealing romantic mates.

Anxious individuals were especially adept at conveying positive qualities to potential partners. First, to outside observers, highly anxious people seemed more willing than nonanxious individuals to share and reach out to others. This willingness to engage with new potential partners included the characteristics of being nice, interesting, and conversational. It may be the case that anxious people's tendency to be overattentive is interpreted as niceness. An anxious person who is very invested and concerned with romantic partners may make a special effort to be polite and kind toward new individuals that they meet. Similar to the appeal of a person who has a highly agreeable personality (Botwin et al., 1997), anxious individuals' ability to be pleasant and friendly to new potential partners may make them more likable and attractive as dating partners. Furthermore, the qualities of warmth and a caring nature, which map onto niceness, are features that are rated as very important and highly attractive in romantic partners (Felmlee, 1995; McDaniel, 2005). Being perceived as nice is also one of the best predictors of securing a second date after having had a first date (McDaniel, 2005), and so this may be a good tactic to keep others involved in burgeoning relationships.

Another characteristic that anxious individuals had in their favor was the ability to seem like interesting people. Anxious people expressed a wider variety of aspects of themselves when communicating with potential mates and succeeded in appearing more fascinating to others. Presenting an exciting personality is another highly desirable characteristic to potential mates (Buss & Barnes, 1986). It is also possible that anxiety is somehow interesting to others if those with more dramatic or neurotic personality tendencies come off as more captivating than stable, secure types. This ability to seem intriguing and uninhibited may thus charm others into relationships with anxious people.

Along with discussing topics that made them appear interesting to others, anxious

individuals were also generally more conversational during the interaction. Anxious people may be more talkative during new dating scenarios because they believe it is an effective mating strategy. For instance, they may think that by talking a great deal they come off as energetic and attractive to mates. Alternatively, anxious people may lack self-censorship when meeting potential mates and may not have the control to inhibit themselves. In other words, they may say whatever is on their minds, regardless of whether it is appropriate to the setting. Future research could attempt to assess whether the talkativeness of anxious people helps or harms their appeal.

In sum, anxious people have a substantial number of positive qualities that they display to potential mates. This is interesting, given that past research suggests that highly anxious targets are sometimes the *least* attractive attachment type (Chappell & Davis, 1998; Latty-Mann & Davis, 1996). Because anxious people have a great deal going against them in terms of their relative attractiveness, this may explain why they attempt to conceal or obscure their negative features through the use of positive ones that they do possess (or at least can mimic). However, avoidant people may not feel the need to act in a similar way, given that they tend to be confident and have high explicit self-esteem (Brennan & Morris, 1997).

Although they did not display desirable qualities to such an extent as did anxious people, avoidant individuals also exhibited some positive features. For instance, humor was a strategy used by avoidant individuals (as well as by anxious people). The use of comedy and jokes has been found to increase cohesiveness in couples and be healthy for relationships (Avner, 1988; Campbell, Martin, & Ward, 2008). Being lighthearted and telling jokes in a dating scenario may serve the purpose of building rapport between individuals, and humor has been found to be a poignant and unique indicator of interest in burgeoning relationships (Li et al., 2009). Furthermore, people who are in a positive mood tend to evaluate their relationships more positively and feel closer to their partners (Forgas,

Levinger, & Moylan, 1994). Having a sense of humor when getting to know new people may serve to divert attention away from anxious or avoidant people's character flaws and put a cheerful spin on the interaction, thus making an insecure person more appealing to potential partners.

The use of physical touch to convey interest in potential partners was another strategy of avoidant individuals. This is a notable finding, given that avoidant people are characterized by a desire to withdraw from emotional closeness (e.g., Collins & Read, 1990). Contrary to past work that finds that avoidant people have an aversion to touch in established relationships (e.g., Fraley & Shaver, 1998; Simpson et al., 1992), this study suggests that this may not be the case at the beginning phases of romantic interaction. It appears that avoidant people are more likely to use touch to get closer to partners, while simultaneously being repulsed by a more emotionally intimate kind of closeness. Why might avoidant people rely on touch in new dating scenarios? One possibility is that avoidant individuals use touch to misrepresent themselves as being generally comfortable with closeness to others. In this way, avoidant people may use physical closeness as a proxy for psychological closeness. However, in reality this sense of closeness is likely to be superficial. Touch also often results in warm feelings and affection toward the source of the touch (Knapp, 1978; Regan, 1998; Wycoff & Holley, 1990). Physical contact from avoidant people may possibly be used to falsely signal a deeper emotional interest than is actually present and to persuade others to begin relationships with them.

Similar to avoidant people's report of using physical contact as a dating tactic, avoidant men made more eye contact with the video camera when speaking with the bogus partner. Making eye contact is another signal of willingness to be emotionally communicative and close (Farabee, Holcom, Ramsey, & Cole, 1993; Garcia, Stinson, Ickes, Bissonnette, & Briggs, 1991). Research on eye contact has also shown that increased eye gaze makes one more attractive to perceivers (Burgoon, Manusov, Mineo, & Hale, 1985). Therefore,

the use of eye contact may make avoidant men more attractive while simultaneously conveying a false interest in being emotionally close with partners.

Despite the positive impressions insecure individuals made on observers, insecure people were also judged more negatively in some regards. The bulk of these unfavorable impressions stemmed directly from attachment-related approaches and behaviors in relationships. In addition to these drawbacks pertaining to attachment, avoidant people also appeared less confident and more nervous than those who were low in avoidance. This finding is somewhat surprising given that avoidance is typically not associated with the outward display of either self-esteem or nervousness, at least on an explicit level (Mikulincer et al., 2004). Being required to participate in a romantic interaction may have caused avoidant people to become uncomfortable, especially because they were asked to talk about personal topics—something avoidant people typically strive to circumvent.

The fact that insecure people were immediately quite forthright about their insecurities corresponds to previous research showing that anxiety and avoidance is observable by new acquaintances in brief conversations (Banai, Weller, & Mikulincer, 1998). The display of anxiety in and of itself may not be unattractive, though, because initial anxiety is often normal and does not negatively affect a potential partner's reciprocation or enjoyment of first dates (Eastwick & Finkel, 2008). Therefore, combined with their other positive features, people who at first appear highly anxious may seem highly desirable as mates. It is only later, as relationships are established, that anxiety often becomes a nuisance for partners. During new relationship formation, however, it seems that insecure individuals do not try to directly conceal their specific insecure tendencies, such as their distrustfulness or abandonment concerns, and are fairly honest in their self-presentation in this regard.

Given that we found insecure people displayed appealing characteristics, it is worth speculating how these positive features interact with their insecurities in how others perceive them. Idealization of one's partner and

infatuation, especially at the beginning stages of courtship, is a phenomenon common in romantic contexts that may lead people into poor relationships (Kerckhoff & Davis, 1962; Murray & Holmes, 1993). Someone who is newly in love may be motivated to rationalize their feelings of adoration by focusing only on the positive features of a partner (e.g., Wilson & Kraft, 1993). Later in the relationship, though, reality may hit hard as the negative qualities in a mate become more apparent and disharmony escalates. In this scenario, an objective outlook may at first be absent as one fails to attend to the partner's undesirable characteristics, such as those that are indicative of attachment insecurity, and sees only his or her virtues. Sometimes, also, the types of qualities that are initially perceived as attractive or complementary in new mates are the same qualities that later prove to be problematic (Felmlee, 1995; Swann, Sellers, & McClarty, 2006). For example, a partner who at first seems fun-loving can later be seen as irresponsible or a mate who is initially admired for his independence eventually may be resented for his unsupportiveness. These types of processes may be further exacerbated by romantic partners' tendency to "put their best foot forward" during the initial stages of a relationship and highlight desirable features such as those that we observed, making it even more difficult for one to perceive critical and fundamental flaws in a mate that could result in a dissatisfying relationship in the future.

Implications, limitations, and future directions

A notable point of the findings in this study is that not only did insecure people display some attractive features, but also they displayed them *more* than secure individuals. This should not necessarily be taken as evidence that secure people are actually less interesting or likable people. It may be the case that secure individuals do not feel the need or pressure to play up these features when first getting to know someone and so do not exert an excessive amount of effort or place too much concern on initial self-presentation. Insecure people may also be motivated to engage in

strategic deception, exaggerate certain qualities, and present a side of themselves to potential dates that is not truly representative of their nature in order to seem more appealing and meet the demands of the opposite gender. If insecure people are aware of their deficiencies and their relatively lower status in terms of their romantic attractiveness, they may choose to use alternative strategies such as highlighting other positive features. Keep in mind, however, that this study was not designed to assess whether people's self-presentation was consciously motivated or whether it simply reflected their natural demeanor. It could certainly be the case that insecure people are simply more appealing in particular regards, compared to secure individuals. The fact that insecure people did not hide their respective attachment tendencies in this study points to this being a real possibility. Future research should examine whether the presented characteristics of insecure individuals are intentionally motivated by a desire to seem attractive or whether their displayed qualities reflect their actual personality.

Some limitations of the study reported here should be noted. It is important to consider how our findings could generalize to the real world. On the basis of this study alone, it is not possible to conclude that the dating strategies of insecure people would result in success in the actual dating marketplace. Keep in mind that the ratings were provided by trained coders and not by people who were judging others in a romantic context. We currently have a study underway to examine the attractiveness of secure and insecure individuals in a more naturalistic context (as compared to the assessment of written prototypes, typically used in this type of research).

Similarly, although we strived to make the experimental interaction procedure as believable and realistic as possible, a video interaction may have felt contrived to some and made them uncomfortable, causing them to act differently than they normally would around a potential date. Thus, the findings may be limited to the particular interaction task used in this study. The correlational design of this study also prevents casual

connections between attachment security and the observed behavioral outcomes to be made.

Despite these limitations, we were able to identify some variables that may lead people into relationships with insecure mates. In addition to the findings of this study, it is possible that other factors also lead to the selection of insecure partners. It would be useful to examine whether there are additional features of insecure individuals that make them attractive or, conversely, features of secure people that may make them relatively less attractive. For instance, pairing evolutionarily desirable qualities such as material resources or physical beauty may lead people to sacrifice security in mates. Another possible direction to take from the current research is to examine whether individuals may interpret the personality and attachment style of others differently based on their own attachment styles and personality. For example, prior work suggests anxious people tend to see other anxious individuals as more secure than do others (Chappell & Davis, 1998).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study identified some factors that may lead people into relationships with insecure partners. Insecure people were able to present themselves in a positive light to observers and often possessed attractive qualities to an even greater degree than secure people. The ability of insecure individuals to appear attractive, at least in the beginning phases of relationship formation, may be one way in which others find themselves in relationships with insecure partners despite their stated desires for secure mates. Through self-presentation techniques such as being nice, interesting, and humorous, insecure people may be capable of attracting even secure partners, in spite of their inherently insecure qualities. In sum, the findings from this study suggest that people may be attracted to insecure partners because those partners have other desirable characteristics or behaviors to compensate for their attachment-related shortcomings.

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