Attachment and Marital Functioning: Comparison of Spouses With Continuous-Secure, Earned-Secure, Dismissing, and Preoccupied Attachment Stances

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In a sample of 138 couples, the present study examined whether individuals' marital functioning related to both their own and their partner's attachment stance. Earned-secure wives managed their affect as well as continuous-secure wives during problem-solving discussions and better than preoccupied or dismissing wives. However, preoccupied and dismissing wives did not exhibit markedly different patterns of affect regulation in their marriages. Regarding individuals' marital functioning and partners' attachment stance, neither husbands' behavior nor perceptions related to their wives' attachment stance. However, wives of continuous-secure husbands exhibited more positive marital behavior than wives of dismissing and earned-secure husbands. Findings are discussed in terms of how attachment working models may account for both continuities and discontinuities between earlier caregiving experiences and functioning in adult relationships.

Previous studies suggest there may be considerable continuity between adverse caregiving experiences in childhood and marital difficulties later in life (Caspie & Elder, 1988; Eysenck & Wakefield, 1981; Quinton, Rutter, & Liddle, 1984; Snyder, 1979). However, there is also evidence that many individuals who experience adverse caregiving experiences are nonetheless able to establish strong and sustaining marriages (Rutter & Quinton, 1984). How can researchers understand when adverse caregiving experiences do and do not lead to difficulty in close adult relationships? That is, what mechanisms might account for continuities and discontinuities between earlier parent-child relationships and marital functioning later in life?

One promising approach is suggested by John Bowlby's (1969, 1973, 1980) attachment theory. Bowlby (1973) proposed that "confidence in the availability of attachment figures, or lack of it, is built up slowly during the years of immaturity—infancy, childhood, and adolescence—and that whatever expectations are developed during those years tend to persist relatively unchanged throughout the rest of life" (p. 202). Bowlby (1969) proposed that these expectations, or portions of these data were reported at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, March 1995, Indianapolis, Indiana. We gratefully acknowledge Sami Hanks for her continued efforts on this study.

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"working models," of attachment relationships reflect beliefs about how reliably and sensitively others will respond to one's needs and how worthy the self is of such responses. Consistent, sensitive parenting is thought to lead to secure working models, wherein others are viewed as dependable and supportive, and the self as worthy of that support. Alternatively, adverse caregiving experiences give rise to insecure models, wherein others are expected to be inconsistently available or overtly rejecting, and the self is seen as unworthy. Such models are thought to guide interpersonal appraisals and behavior throughout life, leading individuals to "recreate aspects of relationship systems previously experienced" (Stroufe & Fleeson, 1986, p. 53). Thus, qualities of one's working models with regard to attachment may be associated with functioning in adult intimate relationships, such as in marriages. The extent to which models of childhood attachment relationships are related to actual behavior in marital interaction has been rarely considered and is the subject of the current investigation.

Adult Attachment Style and Intimate Relationships

A large body of research has provided evidence for a link between adult attachment style and functioning in romantic relationships (e.g., Collins & Read, 1990; Feeney, Noller, & Callan, 1994; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994; Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1995; Simpson, Rholes, & Phillips, 1996). Although these studies have advanced our efforts to understand continuity between attachment experiences and adult relationship functioning, they have focused primarily on models of adult intimate relationships, and researchers have recognized the need for studies that more closely examine working models of childhood attachment relationships and how such models relate to marital functioning (Cohn, Silver, Cowan, Cowan, & Pearson, 1992). We propose that such an avenue of research is a necessary complement to those studies that focus on adult attachment style and would enrich the exploration of Bowlby's (1969, 1973, 1980) notion that the quality of earlier attachment relationships will have profound import for interpersonal functioning across the life span.

The Adult Attachment Interview

The Adult Attachment Interview (AAI), devised by George, Kaplan, and Main (1984), focuses on an individual's constructions of their childhood caregiving relationships, rather than of current intimate relationships. Two recent studies using the AAI found that more secure models of childhood relationships were related to better marital functioning (Cohn et al., 1992; Eiden, Teti, & Corns, 1995). In the current investigation, we used the AAI to focus on two main issues that remain relatively unexplored with regards to the link between models of childhood attachment relationships and marital functioning. First, we examined the relationship between an individual's attachment models and his or her marital behavior and perceptions and, in particular, looked beyond global secure and insecure distinctions and considered more specific attachment patterns. Previous studies have not investigated whether specific attachment stances (i.e., continuous secure, earned secure, dismissing, and preoccupied) may relate to particular strategies for regulating affect in marital relationships. Second, there has been little exploration of the association between an individual's marital functioning and his or her partner's models of childhood attachment relationships, and previous research examining this issue has been somewhat limited by a small sample size (e.g., Cohn et al., 1992).

The use of the AAI in the present study allowed us to further examine Bowlby's (1969, 1973, 1980) notion that the working models that an individual develops of earlier caregiving relationships will have a significant and enduring impact on the quality of other close relationships throughout life. The AAI calls for individuals to describe in a narrative fashion their relationships with their parents and various caregiving experiences during childhood. Individuals are classified as having secure or insecure working models, on the basis of the coherency of their accounts, rather than on the basis of whether such accounts are positive or negative (Main & Goldwyn, 1994). That is, individuals may be classified as secure either because they have provided convincing, consistent accounts of generally positive caregiving experiences or because they have acknowledged negative caregiving experiences, but have done so in a coherent and relatively objective manner. Conversely, individuals who provide incoherent
narratives, in the form of contradictory, minimizing, excessively angry, or vague accounts of attachment experiences, receive insecure classifications. Thus, AAI classifications reflect an individual’s current working models or state of mind with regards to childhood attachment relationships, and it is that current state of mind, rather than the reported positivity or negativity of earlier attachment experiences, that we expected to be associated with functioning in marital relationships.

The adult attachment classifications yielded by the AAI—secure, dismissing, and preoccupied—are considered to parallel the infant attachment patterns of secure, avoidant, and ambivalent, respectively, as identified by Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall (1978) in their seminal work using the Strange Situation paradigm. Within the insecure category, adults classified as dismissing devalue the importance of attachment relationships, whereas adults classified as preoccupied remain overly involved in past attachment experiences. Individuals classified as having a secure attachment stance provide coherent, balanced, and relatively objective accounts of positive and/or negative childhood attachment experiences and value the importance of attachment relationships. More recently, researchers (e.g., Main & Goldwyn, 1994; Pearson, Cohn, Cowan, & Cowan, 1994) have distinguished between two groups of secure individuals: those who convincingly describe positive childhood experiences (continuous secure), and those who recount difficult childhoods, but do so without either discounting the potential negative impact of such experiences or remaining entangled in such experiences (earned secure).

Relationship of Attachment Working Models to Marital Behavior and Perceptions

Dismissing and Preoccupied Attachment Stances

Individuals with insecure attachment models have presumably experienced rejecting or inconsistent caregiving and, moreover, have not come to terms with those earlier negative experiences. Thus, one may expect some continuity between their earlier caregiving experiences and their behavior in marital interactions, as well as their perceptions about their marriage. Kobak, Ruckdeschel, and Hazan (1994) have noted that insecure individuals may be more likely to anticipate negative responses from their marital partners and have difficulty managing negative emotion in marital interactions because of their experiences of negative, rejecting, or inconsistent caregiving. It is hypothesized, however, that although individuals with a dismissing attachment stance and those with a preoccupied stance have both experienced less-than-optimal parenting, they have developed different attachment stances because of variations in their particular early caregiving experiences (Ainsworth, 1982; Cassidy, 1994; Main & Goldwyn, 1994). That is, attachment researchers (Cassidy, 1994; Kobak & Duemmler, 1994; Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985) have proposed that the particular nature of an insecure individual’s attachment experiences may give rise to different constellations of working models about relationships and, correspondingly, different strategies for managing affect in close relationships. Cassidy (1994) has suggested that an avoidant attachment (analogous to a dismissing stance in adulthood) arises because the child’s signals of negative affect have likely been rejected by his or her caregiver and he or she comes to expect that expressions of emotional distress will drive others away. Thus, the avoidant child cultivates a strategy of minimizing displays of distress to maintain proximity to an attachment figure. Conversely, the child who has experienced inconsistent caregiving develops an ambivalent attachment (analogous to a preoccupied stance in adulthood), adopting a strategy of heightening affective expressions to elicit a more reliable response from an attachment figure. Cassidy had noted that “the negative emotionality of the insecure/ambivalent child may be exaggerated and chronic because he recognizes that to relax and be soothed by the presence of the attachment figure is to run the risk of losing contact with the inconsistently available parent” (p. 241).

Indeed, work on adult attachment style and affect regulation has suggested that different

1 More recently, a third insecure category—unresolved/disorganized—has been assigned to individuals who exhibit significant disorganization in their thinking or discourse when discussing experiences of loss or trauma. Such individuals are assigned to a secondary best-fitting category of secure, dismissing, or preoccupied, but are considered to have an overall classification of insecure.
patterns of insecurity may lead to different strategies for managing distress in close relationships (Feeney et al., 1994; Fraley & Shaver, 1997; Simpson, Rholes, & Nelligan, 1992; Simpson et al., 1996). Our goal was to explore whether similar links would be found between specific attachment stances that are based on childhood working models and particular patterns of affect regulation in marriage. We expected that in terms of marital behavior, dismissing spouses would exhibit less negative affect than preoccupied spouses during marital interactions, analogous to the “minimizing” strategy of avoidant children. We also hypothesized dismissing spouses to be more likely to withdraw during conflict as a way of managing any negative affect that threatened to emerge. Conversely, we expected preoccupied spouses to express less positive and more negative affect than dismissing spouses, so as not to appear “soothed” and “run the risk of losing contact” with their partner. In exploring how dismissing and preoccupied spouses might differ in their marital perceptions, we focused on three variables: the extent to which spouses felt their partners were responsive to their emotional needs, the extent to which they expressed a strong commitment to their marriage, and the extent to which they expressed strong feelings of love and attachment to their partner. In line with the notion that dismissing spouses are likely to minimize their emotional needs, whereas preoccupied spouses are likely to emphasize their emotional needs, we expected that dismissing spouses, relative to preoccupied spouses, would rate their partners as more responsive to their needs (to do otherwise would acknowledge their dependence on attachment relationships) and express less commitment to their relationship, and less intense feelings of love and attachment.

**Earned-Secure and Continuous-Secure Attachment Stances**

Individuals with secure working models are presumed to have some confidence that they will be responded to sensitively and supportively and, thus, are expected to be more comfortable with expressing their emotions to their romantic partners (Kobak et al., 1994). As noted earlier, researchers (e.g., Main & Goldwyn, 1994; Pearson et al., 1994) have begun distinguishing between two groups of secure individuals: continuous-secure individuals, who provide coherent accounts of generally positive childhood experiences, and earned-secure individuals, who recount difficult childhoods, but do so in a thoughtful, reflective manner and neither discount the potential negative impact of such experiences nor remain entangled in those experiences. Pearson et al. found that earned-secure parents exhibited as much warmth in their parenting as continuous-secure parents and significantly more warmth than insecure parents despite reporting more depression. More recently, Phelps, Belsky, and Crnic (1998) demonstrated that both earned-secure and continuous-secure mothers exhibited more positive parenting than insecure mothers under high-stress conditions, although no such differences were detected under low levels of stress. Such findings led us to question how earned-secure individuals would function in marital relationships. The identification of individuals who, in spite of apparently negative attachment experiences earlier in life, may go on to function competently in close relationships in adulthood (i.e., as parents and perhaps as spouses), would be an important step in understanding mechanisms that allow for departures from earlier negative developmental trajectories.

The departure that earned-secure individuals may make from earlier adversity is consistent with Belsky and Nezworski’s (1988) notion that “if the nature and quality of care provided to the child is changed and/or the child’s or adult’s working model of self and of relationships is modified, . . . one might anticipate change in developmental trajectories and thus appropriately speak of ‘lawful discontinuity’” (p. 14). Thus, we expected that despite their adverse caregiving experiences, the coherent, secure stance of earned-secure spouses would be the important determinant of their marital functioning. That is, we hypothesized that earned-secure spouses would not differ from continuous-secure spouses in their expression of positive or negative affect or tendency to withdraw during marital interactions and that they would perceive their marriages in generally positive ways, similar to those of continuous-secure spouses.

**Differences Between Secure and Insecure Subgroups**

Another question that arises is how each secure subgroup might compare with each
insecure subgroup in terms of marital functioning. On the one hand, in line with the notion of lawful discontinuity (Belsky & Nezvorski, 1988) we anticipated that, in addition to continuous-secure spouses, earned-secure spouses would also differ from dismissing and preoccupied individuals in their marital interactions and perceptions, despite their similarly adverse childhood caregiving experiences. However, because of the strategies that dismissing and preoccupied individuals may use to minimize or emphasize their distress, respectively, predictions regarding differences between specific secure and insecure subgroups become less straightforward. For example, although dismissing spouses’ strategy of minimizing distress might lead them to exhibit more positive and less negative affect than preoccupied spouses, it is unclear how they might compare with either secure group. That is, would dismissing spouses’ minimizing strategy be so “effective” that they might express as much or more positive affect and as little or less negative affect than one or both secure groups? Given the lack of empirical findings in this area, we limited ourselves to predicting that earned-secure and continuous-secure spouses would express more positive and less negative affect than preoccupied spouses and engage in less withdrawal than dismissing spouses. Regarding self-report measures, we hypothesized that preoccupied spouses would rate their partners as less emotionally responsive than earned-secure or continuous-secure spouses, whereas dismissing spouses would express less commitment and love than either secure group.

Influence of Partner’s Attachment Stance

In addition to considering the relation between an individual’s marital functioning and their own working models of childhood relationships, researchers have increasingly underscored the need to consider how a partner’s attachment models may relate to an individual’s marital behavior and perceptions as well. Berman, Marcus, and Berman (1994) have proposed that “for any couple, the nature of the attachment . . . internal working model . . . of each member of the couple both shapes and responds to the behaviors of the partner, in a complex interplay between overt behaviors and the meaning each person ascribes to these behaviors” (p. 227). Thus, if one spouse with an insecure attachment stance anticipates indifference or hostility from the other spouse and consequently engages in more negative marital behavior, the other spouse may be more likely to view him or her more negatively and react with their own negative behavior as well.

Again, although some studies have found links between one partner’s satisfaction or behavior in the relationship and the other partner’s models of adult intimate relationships (Collins & Read, 1990; Kobak & Hazan, 1991; Mikulincer & Erev, 1991; Senchak & Leonard, 1992), there are limited data examining the link between an individual’s marital functioning and his or her partner’s working models of childhood relationships. Owens et al. (1995) found that partners of individuals with secure childhood models were more likely to have coherent models of their current romantic relationship than partners of individuals with insecure childhood models. Cohn et al. (1992) found that couples consisting of insecure wives and secure husbands exhibited better marital functioning than couples consisting of insecure wives and insecure husbands, although because marital behavior was coded at the dyadic level, it is unclear whether these differences were due to husbands’ behavior, wives’ behavior, or both. However, to our knowledge no studies have yet explored differences among the various secure (continuous and earned) and insecure (dismissing and preoccupied) attachment stances with regard to their impact on the other spouse’s marital behavior and perceptions. Thus, in the present study, we considered these to be an exploratory set of analyses and did not make specific predictions regarding differences among secure and insecure subgroups.

In examining how an individual’s marital functioning might be related to his or her partner’s attachment stance, we also considered whether these links might be different for secure or insecure spouses. Thus, for example, might secure spouses function well in their marriages regardless of whether their partner had a secure or insecure attachment stance, whereas insecure spouses might be more likely compromised if paired with an insecure partner rather than a secure partner? Results from a study by Senchak and Leonard (1992) actually suggest the contrary, as their findings indicated that the marital functioning of secure individuals was compromised by being paired with insecure partners, whereas insecure individuals, although in gen-
eral did not function as well in their marriages as secure individuals, fared no worse when paired with an insecure partner than when paired with a secure partner. Thus, in the present study we also explored whether an interaction effect would be found between individuals' and their partners' attachment stances. To address this question, it was necessary to recombine the more specific secure (continuous-secure and earned-secure) and insecure (dismissing and preoccupied) subgroups into overall secure and insecure groups. Although it would have been ideal to maintain the subgroup distinctions to explore this final question, maintaining the finer distinctions would yield extremely small numbers within certain group cells given the relatively small proportion of preoccupied individuals in our study, as is typical for nonclinical samples.

To summarize, two major questions were addressed in the current study. First, are specific attachment stances associated with particular strategies for regulating affect in close relationships, as evidenced in individuals' marital behavior and perceptions? Specifically, would preoccupied individuals exhibit less positive affect, more negative affect, and less withdrawal than would dismissing individuals during marital interactions? Regarding self-report measures, we expected that dismissing spouses, relative to preoccupied spouses, would rate their partners as more responsive to their needs and express less commitment to their relationship and less intense feelings of love and attachment. We expected earned-secure individuals to function as well in their marriages as continuous-secure individuals, as assessed both during marital interactions and with self-report measures. We also expected both secure groups would exhibit less withdrawal than dismissing individuals and would express more positive and less negative affect than preoccupied individuals. Additionally, we hypothesized that dismissing individuals would express less commitment and less intense feelings of love, whereas preoccupied individuals would perceive their partners to be less emotionally supportive than either continuous- or earned-secure individuals on self-report measures of marital quality. Finally, we explored whether individuals' marital behavior and perceptions related not only to their own working models of childhood attachment relationships, but to their partners' attachment models as well.

In examining these issues, we controlled for three different factors in predicting marital functioning. First, as a broad demographic control, we considered the role of individuals' education level in predicting marital behavior and perceptions. Second, because there is ample evidence that couples' marital satisfaction declines over time (Cowan, Cowan, Heming, & Miller, 1991), we controlled for the length of time that couples had been married. Finally, as numerous studies have documented the links between attachment and depressive symptoms (Armsden, McCauley, Greenberg, Burke, & Mitchell, 1990; Kobak, Sudler, & Gamble, 1991) and depression and marital discord (Barnett & Gottlib, 1988; Beach, Sandeen, & O'Leary, 1990), we controlled for individuals' level of depression to examine the possibility that the relationship between attachment and marital functioning might be largely artifactual.

Method

Sample

The sample for the present study was part of a larger sample of 138 couples recruited prior to the birth of their first child for a larger investigation of couples' transition to parenthood. Couples were drawn from prenatal classes in four counties of a largely rural area of the southeastern United States. Of those couples contacted, 72% agreed to participate in the study; participating and nonparticipating couples did not differ on demographic variables. The mean age was 28.3 years (range = 19–41) for husbands and 27.2 years (range = 18–35) for wives. In this sample, 97% of the couples were Caucasian, with the remaining 3% being African American, as is representative of this rural area. Husbands' average years of education was 13.9 years (range = 9–22), and wives' average years of education was 13.8 years (range = 8–18). The average monthly income for husbands was $1,465 (range = $652–2,501) and for wives was $917 (range = $250–2,501). Couples had been married an average of 41.3 months (range = 3–204 months), and this was the first marriage for 88% of the husbands and 85% of the wives.

Procedures

Couples were interviewed at their homes prior to the birth of their first child. Husbands and wives were administered the AAI separately and by different interviewers. Each spouse then completed a battery of self-report questionnaires, which included several measures of marital satisfaction and perceptions of
one's partner, as well as a measure of depressive symptoms. Finally, couples participated in a marital problem-solving task, in which they were asked to discuss and to arrive at some resolution regarding a major area of disagreement in their relationship. Sample sizes may vary slightly by analysis because of incomplete data for a small number of participants.

**Measures**

**AAI.** The AAI is a methodology designed to assess an individual's current stance toward attachment (Main & Goldwyn, 1994). Participants are asked to describe their childhood relationships with each of their parents (and/or other relevant attachment figures) and to provide examples that support those descriptions; they are also asked to recount any experiences of rejection, loss, or separation and to describe how their parents responded when they were upset or sick. In addition, participants are asked to consider the causes of their parents' behavior and the impact that their relationships with their parents had on their development.

Interviews are audiotaped and transcribed and then coded in three phases using the written transcripts. First, ratings are assigned regarding the participant's probable experiences with each parent, including the degree to which a parent was loving, rejecting, neglecting, and role reversing. It is important to note that these ratings reflect the coder's best estimation of how the participant was treated by each parent during childhood, and coders do not necessarily assume participants' descriptions of their parents are veridical. For example, an individual who initially states that their parent was never rejecting in any way, but then provides several examples to the contrary, would receive at least a moderate (if not high) score on the rejecting scale. Second, ratings are made regarding various dimensions of the participant's current state of mind with respect to attachment including preoccupying anger, idealization, and derogation of attachment. Finally, on the basis of their current state of mind toward attachment and the coherency with which they recount past experiences, individuals are classified as secure, dismissing, preoccupied, unresolved with respect to loss or trauma, or cannot classify.

According to the classification system for the AAI (Main & Goldwyn, 1994), secure individuals value attachment relationships and are able to reflect on the importance of attachment-related experiences but remain coherent and relatively objective when considering such relationships. Dismissing individuals minimize the importance of attachment relationships, often either denying the occurrence of any negative childhood experiences or disavowing the impact of any negative experiences that are acknowledged. Preoccupied individuals remain overly involved in attachment relationships, manifested in either excessive anger toward attachment figures or a continuing sense of wanting to please attachment figures. An unresolved classification is assigned to individuals who exhibit significant disorganization or disorientation in their thinking or discourse when discussing experiences of loss or trauma. In rare cases, individuals are assigned to a cannot classify category when they do not exhibit any single consistent mental state or strategy when discussing attachment-related experiences (Main & Hesse, 1994, as cited by Main & Goldwyn, 1994). AAI classifications have been found to be unrelated to measures of nonattachment-related autobiographical memory, intelligence, and social desirability (Bakermans-Kranenburg & van IJzendoorn, 1993; Sagi et al., 1994).

Interviews were coded by an experienced rater who received extensive training in the AAI scoring procedures from Mary Main (the first author of the classification system for the AAI). This rater demonstrated good reliability with an expert coder and collaborator of Main's (E. Hesse) on a separate sample of interviews (coded at the same time as interviews for the current investigation) for both overall secure versus insecure classifications (93% agreement) and for the five more specific classifications (87% agreement).

For the purposes of our study, secure individuals were further categorized into continuous-secure (individuals who convincingly describe what seem to have been genuinely positive childhood attachment relationships) and earned-secure (individuals who recount difficult childhood attachment relationships, but do so in a coherent manner) subgroups, on the basis of a revision of the procedure suggested by Pearson et al. (1994). Those individuals classified as F3A² or F4A were considered to be continuous-

² According to Main and Goldwyn's (1994) Adult Attachment Scoring and Classification system, secure classifications are designated with an F. Individuals classified as F3A are considered to be secure/autonomous and are described as having primarily supportive caregiving experiences during childhood. Individuals classified as F4A are described as having generally supportive caregiving experiences, although there may have been some difficulty in their relationship with one or both parents. Other F classifications may include individuals who have some tendency toward dismissal of or preoccupation with attachment, but who nonetheless consider attachment relationships important in their lives and are able to remain fairly objective with regards to any specific attachment-related experiences.
secure; individuals classified into any of the other F subcategories but who had ratings of 5 or greater on the Loving scale and less than 5 on the Rejecting, Neglecting, and Role-Reversing scales for both mothers and fathers were also considered to be continuous secure. Individuals classified into any of the F categories other than F3A or F4A and who had ratings of less than 5 on the Loving scale or 5 or greater on the Rejecting, Neglecting, or Role-Reversing scales for either mother or father were considered to be earned secure.

To check the validity of this procedure for differentiating these two subgroups, individuals identified as earned secure were compared with continuous-secure, preoccupied, and dismissing individuals with regards to the ratings they were assigned on the Loving, Rejecting, Neglecting, and Role-Reversal experience scales of the AAI. Analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted separately for husbands and wives, followed by planned contrasts between the following groups: (a) earned secure versus continuous secure, (b) earned secure versus dismissing, and (c) earned secure versus preoccupied. It was expected that earned-secure individuals would be rated as having had childhood experiences with their mothers and fathers that were more negative than continuous-secure individuals but comparable with those of preoccupied and dismissing individuals. Results of these analyses, displayed in Table 1, indicated there were significant differences in the predicted direction between earned-secure and continuous-secure individuals on the AAI Childhood Experience scales. In addition, the few differences detected between earned-secure and either dismissing or preoccupied individuals were generally in the direction of earned-secure individuals being rated as having had more negative experiences than either of the insecure groups. Such results support the validity of our procedure to distinguish between continuous-secure and earned-secure subgroups within the larger

Table 1
Mean Scores on Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) Experience Scales by AAI Classification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AAI Experience Scale</th>
<th>Husbands’ AAI</th>
<th>Wives’ AAI</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C-S (n = 41)</td>
<td>E-S (n = 20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mother Loving</strong></td>
<td>7.20&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>4.89&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rejecting</strong></td>
<td>2.17&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>4.29&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Neglecting</strong></td>
<td>1.12&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>3.16&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Role Rev.</strong></td>
<td>1.98&lt;sub&gt;a,b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>2.68&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Father Loving</strong></td>
<td>6.46&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>3.89&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rejecting</strong></td>
<td>2.73&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>5.50&lt;sub&gt;c&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Neglecting</strong></td>
<td>2.05&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>3.68&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Role Rev.</strong></td>
<td>1.44&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>1.16&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
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Note. Means with different subscripts are significantly different at p ≤ .05. C-S = Continuous Secure; E-S = Earned Secure; Dism. = Dismissing; Pre. = Preoccupied; Role Rev. = Role Reversal.
secure classification. These results are also largely consistent with those obtained by Phelps et al. (1998).

On the basis of these classification procedures, the distribution of AAI classifications for husbands and wives was as follows: for husbands—continuous secure = 41 (30%), earned secure = 20 (15%), dismissing = 47 (34%), preoccupied = 10 (7%), unresolved = 17 (12%), and cannot classify = 3 (2%); for wives—continuous secure = 48 (35%), earned secure = 30 (22%), dismissing = 28 (20%), preoccupied = 9 (7%), unresolved = 20 (14%), and cannot classify = 3 (2%). Although the distribution of AAI classification for the wives in our sample was comparable with the distributions found in other nonclinical samples, the percentage of dismissing husbands in our sample was somewhat higher than what has been found in other studies reviewed by van IJzendoorn and Bakermans-Kranenburg (1996) in a recent meta-analysis. However, this same meta-analysis also found that among studies focusing on lower socioeconomic status samples, the dismissing category was overrepresented. Although many of these studies focused exclusively on women, Crittenden, Partridge, and Claussen (1991) found that 30% of the men in their study were classified as dismissing, a proportion very similar to that obtained in our sample. It may be that for individuals faced with social and economic adversity, it is adaptive to not spend a great deal of time reflecting on attachment-related experiences, but rather to assume a fairly stoic, unemotional manner, and in our sample, this may have been a strategy especially favored by men.

Spouses who were assigned a primary classification of either unresolved or cannot classify were not included in subsequent analyses. Currently, there is little known about the implications of these two attachment classifications for functioning in close adult relationships, and thus it was not possible to make clear predictions regarding patterns of marital behavior and perceptions that might be associated with such attachment stances.

Because previous research (van IJzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 1996) has suggested some evidence for assortative mating with regard to adult attachment stance (e.g., secure individuals are more likely to pair with secure mates and insecure individuals are more likely to pair with insecure mates) and because assortative mating could influence study results, we examined whether there was any evidence for such a pattern among the four AAI groups of interest in this study. Chi-square analyses revealed that there were no differences among the four AAI groups in terms of their likelihood of marrying a secure or insecure spouse, either for wives, \( \chi^2(12, N = 115) = 11.53, p = .48 \), or for husbands, \( \chi^2(12, N = 118) = 9.91, p = .62 \).

We also examined whether there were any differences among the four attachment groups with regards to several demographic variables, including education level, occupational level, income, length of marriage, and depression. ANOVAs revealed a significant main effect only for husband's depression, \( F(3, 112) = 4.72, p < .01 \). Planned comparisons indicated the preoccupied husbands reported significantly more depressed symptoms than did continuous-secure husbands, \( F(1, 112) = 12.10, p < .01 \); earned-secure husbands, \( F(1, 112) = 9.90, p < .01 \); and dismissing husbands, \( F(1, 112) = 13.41, p < .01 \).

**Perceptions of marital relationship.** Husbands and wives completed all self-report measures separately. Two subscales of the Four-Factor Scale of Intimate Relations (Braiker & Kelley, 1976) were administered to assess spouses' commitment to their relationship (Ambivalence) and feelings of positive regard for their partner and their relationship (Love). The Intimacy subscale of the Personal Assessment of Intimate Relationships (PAIR; Schaefer & Olson, 1981) assesses the degree to which spouses view their partners as emotionally sensitive and supportive.

**Marital interaction.** Couples were videotaped at home during a 15-min problem-solving task in which they were asked to discuss and attempt to resolve a major source of disagreement in their marriage. Prior to the interaction, each spouse completed the Relationship Problem Inventory (Knox, 1971), rating how much each of several possible areas of disagreement was a problem in their relationship. Spouses were then asked to review their lists of problem areas together and to select a topic they considered to be a primary source of disagreement in their relationship. After a couple had selected a topic together, their problem list was removed, and they were instructed to discuss the problem area they had chosen and to attempt to come to a mutually satisfying resolution to the problem.

These videotaped interactions were rated by trained observers, who were unaware of any other information about the couples, using a subset of codes from the Interactional Dimensions Coding System (Julien, Markman, & Lindahl, 1980). Lindahl and Markman (1990) have noted how difficulties in affect regulation may be reflected in the way emotions are expressed in family interactions: "Communication behaviors may be used to regulate one's own and

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3 Main and Goldwyn (1994) have suggested a more stringent procedure for identifying subgroups within the larger secure category, which results in the exclusion of some individuals from either a continuous-secure or earned-secure subgroup. Analyses conducted using Main and Goldwyn's procedure yielded results similar to those obtained with the procedure outlined above. For the purposes of this article, we present results that are based on the more inclusive procedure, so as to represent all secure participants in the sample.
other family members' affect, as well as signs or barometers of affect regulation processes. . . . In distressed families, the presence of dysfunctional processes of affect regulation will be evidenced in communication patterns and in modes of emotional expression" (pp. 99–100). Husbands and wives were rated separately on the degree of positive and negative affect they expressed and the amount of withdrawal they exhibited during the problem-solving discussion. Interrater reliability was calculated for 20% of the interactions and found to be acceptable (positive affect: $r = .67$; negative affect: $r = .88$; withdrawal: $r = .90$).

**Results**

**Relationship Between Individuals' Marital Functioning and Their Own Attachment Stance**

Our first set of analyses was designed to examine differences within and between secure (earned secure and continuous secure) and insecure subgroups (dismissing and preoccupied spouses) in terms of their marital behavior and perceptions. Analyses were conducted in the following manner. First, we conducted multivariate analyses of covariance (MANCOVAs) separately for wives and husbands to look at the relationship between an individual's attachment stance and his or her own marital behavior (positive affect, negative affect, and withdrawal), while controlling for the individual's education level, length of the couple's marriage, and the individual's depressive symptoms. A similar set of MANCOVAs was conducted to look at husbands' and wives' marital perceptions (Ambivalence, Love, and Intimacy) as they related to their own attachment stance. Planned comparisons were then conducted to examine differences within (earned secure vs. continuous secure; dismissing vs. preoccupied) and between (earned secure vs. dismissing; earned secure vs. preoccupied; continuous secure vs. dismissing; continuous secure vs. preoccupied) secure and insecure subgroups.

A MANCOVA revealed significant associations between wives' attachment stance and their behavior during marital interactions, $F(9, 253) = 2.56, p < .01$. Follow-up univariate analyses of covariance (ANCOVAs) revealed significant effects for wives' positive affect, $F(3, 106) = 3.79, p < .02$, and withdrawal, $F(3, 106) = 2.77, p < .05$. Planned comparisons (see Table 2 for group means) indicated that preoccupied wives expressed less positive affect than both continuous-secure wives, $F(1, 106) = 6.55, p < .02$, and earned-secure wives, $F(1, 106) = 10.56, p < .01$. Preoccupied wives also showed a trend toward expressing less positive affect than dismissing wives, $F(1, 106) = 3.70, p < .06$. Dismissing wives exhibited a trend towards expressing less positive affect than earned-secure wives, $F(1, 106) = 3.55, p < .07$. Dismissing wives also engaged in more withdrawal than both continuous-secure wives, $F(1, 106) = 5.39, p < .03$, and earned-secure wives, $F(1, 106) = 6.59, p < .02$.

A separate MANCOVA indicated that there was no relation between wives' marital perceptions and their own attachment stance, although wives who reported higher levels of depressive symptoms perceived their husbands as less emotionally responsive (Intimacy), $F(1, 104) = 9.30, p < .003$.

For husbands, there was no relationship between their own attachment stance and either their marital behavior or perceptions, although husbands' with higher levels of education exhibited more positive affect, $F(1, 107) = 20.42, p < .001$; less negative affect, $F(1, 107) = 5.63, p < .02$; less withdrawal in their marital interaction, $F(1, 107) = 11.34, p < .01$; reported feeling greater commitment (Ambivalence) to their marriages, $F(1, 107) = 9.88, p < .01$; and perceived their wives as more emotionally responsive (Intimacy), $F(1, 107) = 13.66, p < .001$, than men with lower levels of education.

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4 To examine the possibility that secure and insecure subgroups might differ with regard to the balance between positive affect and negative affect, we conducted additional analyses using the ratio between the amount of positive and negative affect the individual exhibited during marital interactions. However, analyses revealed no significant differences between or among secure and insecure subgroups with regard to the ratio between positive and negative affect.

5 Although there was no evidence of an overall pattern of assortative mating for the four attachment groups, we considered more specifically the possibility that earned-secure wives might be exhibiting more positive affect and less withdrawal than dismissing wives because they were more likely to be married to secure husbands than were dismissing wives. A chi-square analysis in fact revealed there was a trend suggesting that earned-secure women were more likely to be paired with secure husbands than were dismissing women, $\chi^2(1, N = 58) = 3.52, p < .07$. 
Table 2
Relation of Wives’ Marital Behavior to Their Own Adult Attachment Stance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wives’ marital behavior</th>
<th>Continuous-secure (Group 1, n = 48)</th>
<th>Earned-secure (Group 2, n = 29)</th>
<th>Dismissing (Group 3, n = 28)</th>
<th>Preoccupied (Group 4, n = 9)</th>
<th>Planned contrasts: ANCOVA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive affect</td>
<td>5.73</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>6.18</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>5.43</td>
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<tr>
<td>Withdrawal</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>3.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. ANCOVA = analysis of covariance.
a df's for all planned comparisons are (1, 106).

dismissing husbands expressed less positive affect, F(1, 105) = 7.81, p < .01, and more negative affect, F(1, 105) = 9.27, p < .01, than wives of continuous-secure husbands. Additionally, wives of earned-secure husbands also expressed less positive affect than wives of continuous-secure husbands, F(1, 105) = 4.60, p < .04.

A MANCOVA revealed significant associations between husbands’ attachment stance and their wives marital perceptions, F(9, 248) = 2.06, p < .04. Follow-up ANCOVAs revealed a significant main effect of husbands’ attachment stance for wives’ commitment (Ambivalence), F(3, 104) = 4.44, p < .01. Planned comparisons indicated that wives of dismissing husbands expressed less commitment to their relationship than did wives of continuous-secure husbands, F(1, 104) = 12.75, p < .01. Additionally, there was a trend for wives of preoccupied husbands, F(1, 104) = 3.19, p < .08, and wives of earned-secure husbands, F(1, 104) = 2.85, p < .10, to express less commitment than wives of continuous-secure husbands. For husbands, there were no effects of wives’ attachment stance for husbands’ marital behavior or perceptions.

Individuals’ Marital Behavior and Perceptions in Relation to the Interaction Between Their Own and Their Partners’ Attachment Stance

We conducted a final set of analyses to determine whether the interaction between an individual’s attachment stance and their partner’s attachment stance related to their marital education. Additionally, for husbands who reported higher levels of depressive symptoms, there were trends for these husbands to report feeling less commitment to their marriages, F(1, 107) = 3.82, p < .06, and to perceive their wives as less emotionally supportive, F(1, 107) = 3.35, p < .07.
Table 3
Relation of Wives' Marital Behavior and Perceptions to Husbands' Attachment Stance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wives' variable</th>
<th>Continuous-secure (Group 1, n = 41)</th>
<th>Earned-secure (Group 2, n = 19)</th>
<th>Dismissing (Group 3, n = 45)</th>
<th>Preoccupied (Group 4, n = 9)</th>
<th>Planned contrasts: ANCOVA</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wives' marital behaviora</td>
<td>Positive affect</td>
<td>6.10</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>5.16</td>
<td>1.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negative affect</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wives' marital perceptionsb</td>
<td>Ambivalence</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>1.10</td>
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</table>

Note: ANCOVA = analysis of covariance.
a dfs for planned comparisons are (1, 105).
b dfs for planned comparisons are (1, 104).

behavior or perceptions. As noted earlier, it was necessary to combine attachment subgroups into overall secure and insecure groups to have sufficient cell sizes for these analyses. MANCOVAs revealed no effects for the interaction between own and partner's attachment stance on either wives' or husbands' marital behavior or perceptions.

Discussion

The link between marital distress and difficulties in managing affect has been well documented (Gottman, 1994; Markman & Kraft, 1989). Gottman has noted that compared with satisfied couples, dissatisfied couples exhibit more negative affect and less positive affect. In the attachment literature, several lines of research suggest that earlier attachment experiences play a significant role in shaping how individuals come to manage their emotional experiences in peer (Cohn, 1990; Kobak & Scercy, 1988), parent–child (Kobak, Cole, Ferenz-Gillies, & Fleming, 1993), and romantic (Simpson et al., 1996) relationships. These findings from both the marital and attachment literature suggest that an exploration of differences in the ability to regulate emotions as a function of particular attachment experiences may illuminate one possible pathway between earlier parent–child difficulties and problems in later intimate relationships. Thus, the present study was aimed at expanding on previous research by examining the link between individuals' ability to regulate their affect in the context of their marital relationship and both their own and their partners' stance toward attachment, as reflected by particular constellations of working models of childhood relationships.

Although in analyses comparing specific attachment subgroups we found no association between attachment stance and the ability to regulate affect during marital interactions for husbands, wives' attachment stance was somewhat related to their marital behavior. As predicted, earned-secure wives regulated their affect as well as continuous-secure wives in their marital problem-solving interactions. Moreover, both earned-secure and continuous-secure wives expressed more positive affect than preoccupied wives and less withdrawal than dismissing wives. Previous studies using the AAI have generally included earned-secure individuals along with those who are judged to have had genuinely positive caregiving experiences (continuous secure) in one overall secure category. Consequently, the notion that it is the coherency, rather than the valence, of individuals' accounts of earlier caregiving experiences that is predictive of functioning in other close relationships has remained largely untested. Our findings that earned-secure wives regulated their affect as well as continuous-secure wives and more competently than dismissing and preoccupied wives provide partial support for this notion.

Our findings for earned-secure wives are consistent with both Pearson et al.'s (1994) finding that earned-secure individuals exhibit more competent parenting than insecure indi-
indviduals and with previous research (e.g., Rutter & Quinton, 1984) that suggests that although there is a significant association between disturbed parent–child relationships earlier in life and marital difficulties in adulthood, there are clearly discontinuities in this association as well. One question that arises concerns the process or processes that might allow some individuals with difficult childhoods to develop a secure attachment stance. In describing the notion of lawful discontinuity, Belsky and Nezworski (1988) have noted that “even if some developmental trajectories pose risks to the developing child, these risks can be reduced” (p. 14). One way such risks might be reduced is through participation in other healthier relationships (Belsky & Cassidy, 1994) that provide evidence that close relationships are not necessarily and uniformly painful or disappointing, and, thus, lead to the revision of working models in a more positive direction. Sroufe (1988) has emphasized that “the idea of working models means both that such models are active constructions forged over time and they are subject to change” (p. 22). Earned-secure individuals may be a particularly important group for further study, allowing researchers to examine some of the processes by which the intergenerational transmission of discordant family relationships might be disrupted.

Regarding our findings for dismissing and preoccupied spouses, our prediction that these two groups would exhibit different patterns of affect regulation in their marital behavior did not receive a great deal of support. Although preoccupied wives exhibited a trend toward expressing less positive affect than dismissing wives, these two groups did not differ in their levels of negative affect or withdrawal from their spouses. Our finding that preoccupied wives expressed less positive affect than dismissing wives is consistent with the notion that because of earlier attachment experiences, preoccupied individuals may come to expect that expressing positive emotions is not an effective way of maintaining the attention of an attachment figure. However, the lack of more consistent differences between dismissing and preoccupied wives in terms of their marital behavior raises the question of how meaningful these subgroup distinctions are with regards to how insecure individuals function in marital relationships. Alternatively, it may be that these two groups did not differ in their expression of negative affect or withdrawal because they used similar strategies in the service of different goals. For example, dismissing wives may express negative affect in hopes of pushing their partner away, thus abbreviating an emotionally arousing discussion, whereas preoccupied wives may express negative affect to provoke a response from their partner and to maintain their partner’s engagement in the interaction. Another possibility is that dismissing and preoccupied individuals may differ with regards to the particular kinds of negative affect they exhibit during marital conflicts. That is, dismissing individuals, by definition, regard attachment relationships in a dismissive manner, and some may even describe attachment relationships in a ridiculing or derisive manner (Main & Goldwyn, 1994). Such behavior may be related to Gottman’s (1994) dimension of contempt, a behavior that appears to be particularly damaging to marital relationships. Although preoccupied individuals might also exhibit higher levels of negative affect, their expressions of negative affect might entail more explicit expressions of anxiety or fear. As there are little other data on differences between dismissing and preoccupied individuals’ in terms of their marital functioning and, particularly, with regards to the specific forms of negative affect they may exhibit, this area of research clearly merits further investigation.

Regarding the link between individuals’ marital functioning and their partners’ attachment stance, although there were no associations between husbands’ marital behavior or perceptions and their wives’ attachment stance, significant findings were obtained for wives’ marital behavior as a function of their husbands’ attachment stance. Wives of continuous-secure husbands were more positive than wives of dismissing or earned-secure husbands and less negative than wives of dismissing husbands. These findings are notable in that they suggest that although earned-secure wives appear to function as well as continuous-secure wives in their marriage, there may be importance differences between earned-secure and continuous-secure husbands that were undetected by our marital interactions but may nonetheless have implications for their wives’ positive marital behavior. However, it is also important to note
that wives of earned-secure husbands did not differ from wives of continuous-secure husbands in their expressions of negative affect, as did wives of dismissing husbands. Given that negative affect appears to be the stronger predictor of marital dissolution, marriages with dismissing husbands may be at greater risk for negative outcomes than marriages with earned-secure husbands. More generally, it is important to note that these findings should be viewed cautiously as they were found in the context of a nonsignificant overall MANCOVA effect. Nonetheless, they do suggest some intriguing possibilities that seem worthy of further investigation.

One general question that arises with regard to our findings is why wives’ behavior, but not husbands’ behavior, was related to their partners’ attachment stance. One possible explanation may relate to differences in men’s and women’s responses to different attachment-related behaviors exhibited by their partners. That is, there is some evidence that women may find a partner’s discomfort with closeness the most distressing, whereas men may be more bothered by a partner’s anxiety or fears of abandonment (Collins & Read, 1990). Discomfort with closeness is most characteristic of a dismissing adult attachment stance, whereas anxiety about abandonment is most characteristic of a preoccupied stance, so we might predict that the most distress would be evident among wives of dismissing husbands and husbands of preoccupied wives. In our sample, we did find the wives of dismissing husbands exhibited less positive affect and more negative affect than wives of continuous-secure husbands. Although we did not find significant differences between husbands of preoccupied wives and any of the other groups of husbands, this may have been due to the small number of husbands of preoccupied wives (n = 9). Clearly, one goal for future research will be to obtain sufficiently large samples to examine the different effects of an individual’s particular secure (i.e., earned secure or continuous secure) or insecure (i.e., dismissing or preoccupied) attachment stance on their partner’s marital behavior.

One notable aspect of the current findings is that a link between attachment stance and marital behavior was found for wives but not for husbands. Caspi and Elder (1988) have speculated that women may be more likely than men to carry forward the remnants of earlier attachment relationships into adult intimate relationships, proposing that “while socialization into masculinity involves socialization into separateness outside the home and beyond the family, girls’ socialization is embedded in their own ongoing relationships within the family and stresses affective relationships to others” (p. 219). However, given our findings that wives’ marital behavior was also somewhat related to their husbands’ attachment stance, it is also possible that there is something about the behavior of at least dismissing and earned-secure men that is associated with less positive marital behavior from their wives, but simply was not captured in our marital interactions. One possible explanation is that although the link between men’s attachment stance and the ability to regulate their affect might not be evident in problem-solving discussions, such an association might be found in the context of marital interactions that do not directly involve conflict with one’s partner. Because previous research (see Gottman, 1994) suggests that conflict is more physiologically stressful for men in general than it is for women, it is possible that physiological factors may exert a stronger influence than earlier attachment experiences on men’s ability to regulate affect, especially during conflict. However, in marital interactions that involve expressions of distress regarding issues unrelated to conflict between spouses (e.g., problems at work), husbands’ attachment stance may be more strongly related to their ability to manage both their own affect, as well as respond to their partner’s affect. Some support is provided for this notion by Simpson et al. (1992), who demonstrated that men with a more secure attachment style provided more support to their dating partners during a stressful situation than men with a more insecure–avoidant attachment style. Thus, it may be that in our study, the less positive marital behavior of wives of dismissing and earned-secure husbands

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6 Interestingly, we did find in post hoc analyses that when education level was removed from the model (as husbands’ education level had accounted for such a large portion of the variance), husbands of preoccupied wives did in fact express significantly less positive affect than husbands of continuous-secure, earned-secure, and dismissing wives.
was due to behavior these husbands manifested during other types of marital interactions, such as when those wives sought comfort from their husbands about a problem unrelated to their marriage. A recent study by Pasch and Bradbury (1998) suggests that provision of support during couples’ discussions of nonmarital difficulties is an important predictor of marital outcome. It will be important for future studies to explore the implications of spouses’ attachment stances for how couples interact in a variety of contexts, including not only those that involve direct conflict between spouses, but also those in which spouses seek support from one another.

Although our findings revealed some associations between wives’ marital behavior and both their own and their husbands’ attachment stance, both wives’ and husbands’ marital perceptions were generally unrelated to either their own or their partners’ attachment stance. Our results were fairly consistent with those of Cohn et al. (1992), who found that husbands’ attachment stance was related to couples’ marital behavior, but found no link between either spouse’s attachment stance and their marital perceptions. We did find, however, an association between marital perceptions and depressive symptoms. Wives who reported higher levels of depressive symptoms perceived their husbands as less emotionally responsive, whereas husbands who reported greater depressive symptoms reported less commitment to their marriages and perceived their wives as less emotionally responsive. These findings suggest that although working models of childhood attachment relationships may relate to actual behavior in marital interactions, other factors, such as spouses’ level of psychological distress, may have a greater impact on marital perceptions.

**Limitations and Future Directions**

First, and perhaps most important, as the results from the present study are fairly modest, we must acknowledge the possibility that the connections between working models of childhood attachment relationships, as assessed by the AAI, and marital quality are not as strong as we and other researchers have presumed. An alternative possibility is that in light of what the AAI was designed to assess, there may be other aspects of marital functioning that would be more strongly predicted from AAI attachment classifications. That is, attachment researchers (Crowell, Fraley, & Shaver, 1999) have highlighted the point that the AAI was developed to assess how a parent might function as a caregiver or “to maximize the prediction of an adult parent’s infant’s classification in the Strange Situation” (pp. 452–453). Thus, as we noted earlier, it would be important to examine linkages between adult attachment stance and marital functioning in other contexts, such as when spouses are seeking emotional support from or providing emotional support to one another, as opposed to engaging in marital conflict. It may be that these contexts would tap more of the caregiving behavior that would be predicted from the AAI, and, thus, we would expect stronger links between the various adult attachment classifications and marital functioning in such contexts.

Second, the concurrent assessment of attachment stance and marital functioning requires us to be cautious in making assumptions about directions of influences. The very notion that an individual can “earn” a secure attachment stance is based on the premise that working models may be revised with new experiences, and marriage may lead to modifications of one’s working models of earlier attachment relationships. For example, an insecure individual who marries a supportive partner may not only become more adept at regulating their emotions, they may also begin to revise their attachment models in a more secure direction. That is, although an especially supportive partner cannot erase rejections or disappointments that one experienced in childhood, they may provide an atmosphere where such experiences can be safely discussed and expectations of new rejections are disconfirmed. In noting that it is likely that working models and experiences in ongoing relationships mutually shape one another, Kobak (1994) has emphasized the need for longitudinal studies that assess working models prior to the establishment of new relationships. Such studies would not only enhance researchers understanding of how such models might influence interactions in current relationships but also the extent to which these models may be revised to accommodate new experiences.

Finally, the present study did not find effects of the interaction between wives’ and husbands’ attachment stance for either marital behavior or perceptions. However, as these findings were
based on combining more specific attachment groups into overall secure and insecure groups, the need remains for a more refined examination of how the ability to manage affect in the marital relationship may relate to both one's own and to one's partners' particular stance toward attachment. For example, we might expect a preoccupied spouse to react to a dismissing partner in a different fashion than would a secure spouse (or for that matter, another dismissing spouse). Clearly, predictions about the nature of a couple's relationship become increasingly complex when considering both spouses' stances toward attachment, particularly if one moves beyond global secure and insecure distinctions and considers more specific variations within these larger classifications. However, our understanding of both the continuities and discontinuities between earlier attachment experiences and functioning in adult intimate relationships would likely be enriched by jointly considering the particular strategies each partner may possess for navigating the emotional landscape of their relationship.

**Implications for Application and Public Policy**

Findings from the present study suggest that one's current state of mind with regards to attachment relationships may have significant import for how emotional experiences are managed in the context of one's marital relationships. Thus, it may be important for mental health professionals working with individuals or couples on relationship issues to not only explore early family relationships but also to examine how individuals have to come to understand and regard such attachment experiences. Our results for earned-secure wives suggest that difficult childhood experiences alone may not confer a greater vulnerability for future relationship problems but rather whether such experiences are either denied or minimized, or alternately, remain overwhelming and preoccupying. Moreover, our findings add to a small but growing body of literature (e.g., Pearson et al., 1994; Phelps et al., 1998) that suggests that earned-secure individuals may be a particularly important group for further study in terms of enhancing prevention and intervention efforts. That is, understanding the processes that have allowed earned-secure individuals to apparently depart from earlier negative developmen-

tal trajectories may greatly assist in directing the appropriate resources (e.g., perhaps the availability of an alternate attachment figure) toward children and adolescents already identified to be at-risk because of less-than-optimal attachment relationships.

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(Eds.), Growing points in attachment theory and research (pp. 66–104). Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development, 50(1-2, Serial No. 209).


Received May 15, 1998
Revision received June 21, 1999
Accepted July 21, 1999