

Long-term partners' relationship satisfaction and their perceptions of each other's attachment insecurities

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Abstract

In this research, we examined actors' and partners' perceptions of each other's attachment insecurities and the associations of these perceptions with relationship satisfaction. A sample of 148 heterosexual couples completed measures of self and partner attachment insecurities and relationship satisfaction. Results indicate that partners agree in their perceptions of their own and each other's attachment insecurities (anxiety and avoidance). Based on the actor-partner interdependence model (APIM), we also found that both actors' scores on avoidance and their perceptions of their partner's degree of avoidance are associated with lower relationship satisfaction. Finally, we found that the way an actor perceives his or her partner's avoidance plays a mediational role in the association between partner's self-reported avoidance and actor's relationship satisfaction.

There is a large body of research showing a negative association between a person's scores on measures of attachment anxiety and avoidance, on the one hand, and his or her relationship satisfaction on the other (for a review, see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). In recent years, an increasing number of attachment studies have involved dyadic data analyses, which allow researchers to collect reports from both partners in a relationship and include them in a single analysis (Banse, 2004;

Butzer & Campbell, 2008; Molero, Shaver, Ferrer, Cuadrado, & Alonso-Arbiol, 2011). Such research generally shows that partners of anxious or avoidant individuals have lower relationship satisfaction than partners of secure individuals (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). This study goes a step further by considering partners' perceptions of both their own attachment insecurities and those of their mate, and the association of these perceptions with each partner's relationship satisfaction.

The likely importance of one partner's perceptions of the other partner's qualities or behaviors is suggested by both classical and contemporary research on person perception and close relationships. It is well established that people evaluate and behave toward each other based on their perceptions (Funder, 1995; Heider, 1958; Jones, 1990; Robbins & Krueger, 2005), and research such as that by Murray, Holmes, and Collins (2006) and Reis, Clark, and Holmes (2004) highlights the importance of the perception of partner characteristics or behaviors, such as

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responsiveness, for relationship adjustment. To date, however, few studies of adult attachment in dyadic (e.g., romantic or marital) relationships have included measures of partners' perceptions of each other's attachment patterns. This study adds to our understanding of how one partner's attachment insecurities are perceived by the other partner, and how these perceptions influence relationship satisfaction.

Attachment in romantic relationships

Attachment theory was formulated by Bowlby (1969/1982) and first tested empirically by Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall (1978) to explain the nature and patterns of infants' emotional bonding to their primary caregivers (usually including the mother). In 1987, Hazan and Shaver proposed the application of this theory to the study of adult romantic love and couple relationships. A few years later, Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) argued that what Hazan and Shaver called patterns of "romantic attachment" could be understood in terms of four attachment styles: secure, preoccupied, fearful, and dismissing. This conception of attachment patterns was supported by empirical analyses (e.g., Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998; Fraley & Waller, 1998; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994), and most recent studies have included continuous measures of the two underlying dimensions, calling them, as Ainsworth et al. (1978) did, attachment anxiety (characterized by being worried about rejection and abandonment) and attachment-related avoidance (characterized by being uncomfortable with closeness and interdependence and preferring to be highly self-reliant). Numerous studies based on these two dimensions have been published, many of them reviewed by Mikulincer and Shaver (2007). Since the publication of that book, hundreds of additional studies have been conducted.

Attachment and relationship satisfaction

In many studies, it has been found that attachment insecurities (both anxiety and avoidance) and relationship satisfaction are negatively correlated (e.g., Birnbaum, 2007; Feeney, 1994, 2002; Kachadourian, Fincham, &

Davila, 2004; Rholes, Simpson, & Friedman, 2006). There have been some gender differences in the case of avoidance, which seems to be more consistently associated with relationship dissatisfaction among men than among women. There seem to be no consistent gender differences in attachment anxiety (for a review of gender differences in adult attachment in different cultures, see Del Giudice, 2011). Regarding cultural differences, investigations conducted in Spain (Molero, Shaver, & Fernández, 2016; Molero et al., 2011) have found that avoidance, but not anxiety, was significantly related to relationship dissatisfaction.

Although the majority of studies have focused on the association between one person's attachment insecurities and his or her own relationship satisfaction (which we will call the individual perspective), there are also some studies of the joint influence of both partners' insecurities (the dyadic perspective). This research generally shows that partners of anxious or avoidant individuals have lower relationship satisfaction than partners of secure individuals (Banse, 2004; Butzer & Campbell, 2008; Feeney, 2002; Kachadourian, Fincham, & Davila, 2004; Molero et al., 2011; Shaver, Schachner, & Mikulincer, 2005). Using dyadic analyses, Ruppel and Curran (2012) found that attachment orientations play a moderating role in the association between relational sacrifices and relationship satisfaction. Givertz, Woszidlo, Segrin, and Knutson (2013), explored, also from a dyadic perspective, the mediational effect of interpersonal trust and loneliness in the association between attachment orientations and relationship quality. In the same vein, Karantzas, Feeney, Goncalvez, and McCabe (2014) found, from a dyadic perspective, that partner support, trust, and intimacy, among other variables, mediated the association between attachment orientation and relationship satisfaction.

Some researchers (e.g., Baldwin, Keelan, Fehr, Enns, & Koh Rangarajoo, 1996; Frazier, Byer, Fischer, Wright, & DeBord, 1996; Klohnen & Luo, 2003) have considered whether partners' attachment styles are related to each other, as might be expected based on the well-researched general hypothesis that similarity increases attraction (Byrne, 1971).

There is some evidence that secure individuals are more attracted to secure individuals, anxious individuals are more attracted to anxious individuals, and avoidant individuals are more attracted to avoidant individuals, although this pattern is not consistently observed (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007, p. 289). There is also some support for the complementarity hypothesis (e.g., anxious individuals preferring avoidant partners and vice versa) and for the attachment security hypothesis (general preference for secure partners; e.g., Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994; Pietromonaco & Carnelley, 1994; see Holmes & Johnson, 2009, for a general review). There is also recent evidence of coregulation of attachment styles by romantic partners. Hudson, Fraley, Brumbaugh, and Vicary (2014) found that after taking into account people's trait-like attachment orientations, changes in attachment security were coordinated within couples.

Regarding the effects of different attachment-style pairings on relationship satisfaction, there is evidence that the combination of an anxious person with an avoidant one is detrimental to relationship satisfaction, as is the combination of two anxious individuals (Allison, Bartholomew, Mayselless, & Dutton, 2008; Feeney, 1994; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994; Roberts & Noller, 1998). To date, however, no studies have considered partners' perceptions of each other's attachment anxiety and avoidance, which may also play a role in relationship satisfaction.

Perception of partner's characteristics

As John and Robins (1993) state, "Judgements by self and others are an indispensable methodological tool for researchers in the social sciences." The way partners perceive each other may be more important for their relationship than the way the two partners actually behave. That is, Mary's perception of what John is like may be more important for her relationship satisfaction than what John is actually like (although the two are likely to be related).

Perception of one's partner's characteristics may be considered a specific case of the more general phenomenon of person perception. In their meta-analysis of person perception

studies, Kenny and West (2010) examined two different processes, agreement and perceived similarity. Agreement refers to the extent to which different perceivers view a specific target in the same way. When one of the perceivers is included in the evaluation, we speak of "self-other agreement." The other process, similarity, refers to the extent to which perceivers see the target as similar to themselves. In this research, we focus mainly on self-other (i.e., actor-partner) agreement in the perception of attachment insecurities.

Kenny and West (2010) found that the visibility of the trait being judged led to greater agreement, but unexpectedly, familiarity with the target was associated with weaker self-other agreement. According to the authors, this may have happened in the studies they reviewed because the participants were generally not well acquainted. In this study, perceivers and targets have known each other well and lived together for a considerable length of time. We therefore expected that partners would agree to a significant extent in their perceptions of each other.

Despite the issue's importance, there have been relatively few studies of the relation between one dyadic partner's perceptions of his or her own qualities and the perception of those qualities by the other partner. In one of these studies, Murray, Holmes, and Griffin (1996) found that actors tended to see their partners in a more positive light than their partners saw themselves. These idealized constructions predicted greater relationship satisfaction. Saffrey, Bartholomew, Scharfe, Henderson, and Koopman (2003), moreover, investigated whether self and partner perceptions of interpersonal problems predicted relationship functioning. They found that partner perceptions predicted relationship functioning better than self-perceptions, and that positive perceptions of interpersonal problems were associated with positive relationship functioning. Watson, Hubbard, and Wiese (2000) studied married couples, dating couples, and friendship dyads and analyzed self and other ratings on the Big Five personality traits. They found significant self-other agreement in all three samples. Cross-sample comparisons revealed that partner agreement

was significantly higher in the married sample than in the other two samples.

There is also some research on perception of attachment-related characteristics. Ruvolo and Fabin (1999), using Bartholomew and Horowitz's (1991) brief measure (Relationship Questionnaire [RQ]) of the four attachment styles defined by model of self and model of others (secure, preoccupied, fearful, and dismissing), found evidence of "social projection"; that is, people tended to perceive their partners as more similar to themselves than they actually were. This effect was stronger when the degree of emotional intimacy was high. Bookwala (2002), using the RQ, found that interpersonal perception of attachment styles plays an important role in the level of aggression in romantic relationships. Cobb, Davila, and Bradbury (2001), also using the RQ, found that the self-report measures of a partner's attachment security served a relationship-enhancing function and was related to couples' supportive interactions. On the other hand, Strauss, Morry, and Kito (2012), studying a sample of psychology students, investigated the relation between actual, perceived, and ideal partner matching, on one hand, and relationship outcomes, on the other hand. They found that relationship outcomes were predicted by the actor's and partner's attachment dimensions as well as by ideal-perceived partner similarity and self-perceived partner similarity.

In sum, research on effects of self-partner agreement regarding attachment patterns has been scarce, and none of the reviewed studies have focused specifically on the association between the perception of partner attachment insecurities and relationship satisfaction. Moreover, the majority of studies have been conducted with university student dating couples. Due to the importance of the attachment construct in the realm of interpersonal relationships, we believe it is important to clarify the extent to which couple members are able to perceive the attachment insecurities of their partners and the effects of such perceptions.

This study was undertaken to increase our knowledge about these issues in a sample of long-term partners. Apart from the study by Strauss et al. (2012), this study is the only one

based on the fairly long, highly reliable, and well-validated Experiences in Close Relationships (ECR) measure of attachment anxiety and avoidance (Brennan et al., 1998).

The present research

This research has three main objectives: (a) to examine the degree of self-partner agreement in the evaluation of attachment insecurities, (b) to analyze the association between actors' and partners' perceptions of each other's attachment insecurities and relationship satisfaction, and (c) to explore the mediational effects of actor's perceptions of partner's attachment insecurities on the association between that partner's self-assessed insecurities and the actor's relationship satisfaction. (The third objective concerns whether, say, a woman's self-reported avoidance affects her male partner's relationship satisfaction directly or, instead, indirectly through his perception of her avoidance.)

Regarding objective (a), due to the observability of attachment characteristics, long-term couple members' familiarity with each other, and the relevance of attachment insecurities for the quality of a relationship, we expected significant self-partner agreement in the perception of attachment anxiety and avoidance. This is Hypothesis 1.

Regarding objective (b), we expected both that actor's and partner's own attachment insecurities would be negatively associated with partners' relationship satisfaction (Hypothesis 2a) and that an actor's rating of his or her partner's attachment insecurities (anxiety and avoidance) would be negatively associated with the actor's relationship satisfaction (Hypothesis 2b). Hypotheses 2a and 2b were tested using the actor-partner interdependence model (APIM; Kashy & Kenny, 2000; Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006).

Regarding objective (c), we explored the mediational role of actor's perceptions of the partner's attachment insecurities on the association between partner's self-reported insecurities and the actor's relationship satisfaction—that is, the extent to which Mary's perceptions of John mediates the

association between John's self-reports of insecurities and Mary's relationship satisfaction.

We conducted four structural equation models, two for anxiety (one for men and the other for women) and two for avoidance (one for men and the other for women). The independent variables were partner's self-report of anxiety (or avoidance). The mediating variable was actor's report of partner's anxiety (or avoidance). The criterion, or outcome, variable was the actor's relationship satisfaction. The existence of mediation would highlight the importance of the perceptions of one's partner on one's own relationship satisfaction.

Method

Participants and procedure

The participants, 148 heterosexual couples, were recruited by undergraduate psychology students at the Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED; National Open University, Spain) who received university credits for their participation. Each student contacted at least three participant couples and explained the general objectives of the research and the instructions for completing the questionnaire. Couples who volunteered to participate went to a website where the questionnaire could be completed online. Partners were asked to complete the questionnaire independently.

Participant couples came from widely distributed regions of Spain. Their ages ranged from 18 to 73 years ($M = 40.5$, $SD = 11.6$ for men and $M = 38.2$, $SD = 10.54$ for women). The inclusion criterion was a relationship length of at least 2 years, ensuring that partners knew each other well. The duration of their relationships ranged from 2 to 48 years, with a mean of 15.0 years and a standard deviation of 10.3. About 15% were not cohabitating couples, 25% cohabitated, and the rest, 58.4%, were married.

Instruments

Romantic attachment

Participants answered a Spanish version (Alonso-Arbiol, Balluerka, & Shaver, 2007)

of the ECR measure of attachment insecurities (Brennan et al., 1998). The ECR contains two 18-item scales that measure attachment-related anxiety ("I worry about being rejected or abandoned") and avoidance ("I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on my partner"). The measure has been used in hundreds of studies, in a variety of countries and languages, since 1998 (see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007, for a review). Participants also answered a reworded version of the ECR referring to their partner's anxiety and avoidance; for example: "My partner worries about being rejected or abandoned by me" (perceived partner anxiety) or "My partner finds it difficult to allow him/herself to depend on me" (perceived partner avoidance). Ratings were made on a scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), with higher scores indicating greater perceived anxiety or avoidance of the partner.

In this study, the internal consistency reliabilities (Cronbach's alphas) of the Spanish versions of the scales were .86 and .88 for actor anxiety and avoidance, respectively, and .87 and .87 for ratings of partner's anxiety and avoidance.

Relationship satisfaction

We used Hendrick's (1988) seven-item relationship assessment scale to measure participants' satisfaction with their relationship. This instrument was validated in Spanish by Moral (2008). The scale contains items such as "To what extent has your relationship met your original expectation?" (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *a great deal*). Higher scores on this scale reflect greater relationship satisfaction. The internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha) of the Spanish version of the scale was .86.

Sociodemographic variables

The participants also provided sociodemographic information (e.g., relationship duration, age, gender, and education level).

Analyses

The analyses regarding the influence of self's and partner's perceptions of attachment insecurities on relationship satisfaction were

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for all variables, broken down by gender

Variables	Men (<i>N</i> = 148)		Women (<i>N</i> = 148)		<i>t</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Self-rated anxiety	3.81	1.06	3.98	1.05	-1.43	.16
Self-rated avoidance	2.32	0.89	2.26	0.94	0.57	.06
Perceived partner anxiety	4.15	1.05	3.88	1.06	2.14*	.25
Perceived partner avoidance	2.53	0.88	2.66	0.94	-1.17	.14
Relationship satisfaction	5.86	0.84	5.81	1.02	0.43	.05

Note. Scores could range from 1 to 7.

* $p < .05$.

conducted with the APIM. When two individuals are members of a couple, their outcomes cannot be assumed to be independent; the outcomes are likely to be a function of both their own characteristics (actor effects) and their partner's characteristics (partner effects). Finding partner effects in the data provides evidence of the couple members' interdependence (Kenny et al., 2006). To estimate the actor and partner effects, we used multilevel modeling (MLM), which allows for the testing of interactions (Campbell & Kashy, 2002; Kenny et al., 2006). In particular, our MLM approach treated data from each partner as nested within their dyad. We coded gender as a dummy variable (0 for women and 1 for men).

We use structural equation modeling (SEM) to explore the direct and indirect effects of partner's self-report of anxiety (or avoidance) on the actor's relationship satisfaction, using the actor's ratings of her or his partner's anxiety (or avoidance) as a mediator variable. The model included residual correlations between self- and partner reports because the same person was assessed with the same measure (Orth, 2013). Amos version 22 was used for the analyses. The adequacy of each model will not be reported because all models were just-identified with perfect fit.

The mediational hypothesis was assessed by performing bootstrap analyses that simulated 2,000 samples (Cheung & Lau, 2008; Preacher & Hayes, 2008). When using this procedure, an indirect effect is significant if zero is not contained within the 95% confidence interval. The direct effect is tested prior to mediation to determine whether there is an effect to mediate,

and it is also tested after introducing a potential mediator to determine whether the direct path from the antecedents to the criterion is significantly decreased (for partial mediation) or has vanished completely (for full mediation).

Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations

The means and standard deviations for all variables are shown in Table 1, separately for men and women. We did not observe differences in the studied variables as a function of the length or status of the relationship (dating, cohabitating, or married). Regarding gender, we found only one difference between men and women: The men attributed more anxiety to the women than vice versa. Table 2 displays the zero-order correlations among the variables, separately for men and women. Most of the correlation coefficients are in the same direction and are of roughly similar sizes for men and women. The only significant difference in the correlations occurs in the association between partner-rated avoidance and relationship satisfaction. This correlation is more negative for women than for men ($z = 1.91, p = .05$, two-tailed). (When relationship length was statistically controlled, the pattern of correlations among the key variables remained essentially the same for both men and women, so we did not include this variable as a moderator in subsequent analyses.)

Zero-order correlations between men's and women's variables are presented in Table 3. In the diagonal of this table, it can be seen that there are statistically significant correlations

Table 2. Pearson correlations among variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. Self-rated anxiety	—	.24**	.54**	.41**	-.19*
2. Self-rated avoidance	.11	—	.33**	.63**	-.64**
3. Perceived partner anxiety	.53**	.30**	—	.20*	-.19*
4. Perceived partner avoidance	.37**	.62**	.23**	—	-.71**
5. Relationship satisfaction	-.23**	-.61**	-.29**	-.58**	—

Note. Women's coefficients are above the diagonal; men's coefficients are below the diagonal.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 3. Pearson correlations between men's and women's variables

Variables	1 (W)	2 (W)	3 (W)	4 (W)	5 (W)
1. Self-rated anxiety (M)	.36**	.30**	.64**	.19*	-.25**
2. Self-rated avoidance (M)	.32**	.58**	.12	.62**	-.46**
3. Perceived partner anxiety (M)	.57**	.09	.35**	.30**	-.17*
4. Perceived partner avoidance (M)	.24**	.63**	.33**	.46**	-.44**
5. Relationship Satisfaction (M)	-.26**	-.49**	-.15	-.54**	.57**

Note. The correlations between the same variable for men and women are in boldface.

M = men; W = women.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

between men's and women's self-rated anxiety and avoidance, as well as partner-rated anxiety and avoidance, and relationship satisfaction. These correlations indicate that the couple members' scores are not independent, which confirms the value of dyad-level analyses (Kenny et al., 2006, p. 28). In support of Hypothesis 1, we found high positive correlations between actor self-rated anxiety and the anxiety attributed to him or her by the partner. The correlations were also high for avoidance. Notably, the correlations were high regardless of gender. These results indicate that partners tend to agree about each other's anxiety and avoidance, although not perfectly (leaving some room for differences in perception).

Hypothesis tests based on the APIM

Hypotheses 2a and 2b were tested using the APIM (Kashy & Kenny, 2000; Kenny et al., 2006). The predictor variables in the model included self-reported attachment anxiety (actor and partner), perceived partner anxiety (actor and partner), self-reported attachment-related avoidance (actor and

partner), and perceived partner avoidance (actor and partner). We also considered gender and its possible interactions with the other variables, but we present here only the significant interactions.

As can be seen in Table 4, there were no significant effects for anxiety. However, as expected (Hypothesis 2a), actor's self-reported avoidance was negatively associated with the actor's own relationship satisfaction, as was (Hypothesis 2b) actor's perception of partner's avoidance. As indicated by a significant interaction with gender, perceptions of partner's avoidance were linked more closely with relationship satisfaction for women than for men.

Mediation test

Results show that the perception of partner's attachment anxiety was not a significant mediator of the relation between either men's or women's partner's attachment anxiety and their own relationship satisfaction (i.e., zero was contained with the 95% confidence intervals for these tests). However, in the case of avoidant attachment (see Figure 1), we found a mediational effect of partner's avoidance

Table 4. Actor and partner effects of anxiety and avoidance on relationship satisfaction

Predictor variables	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
Intercept	7.94***	.25
Gender	.13	.31
Self-rated anxiety		
Actor effect	-.06	.07
Partner effect	.02	.07
Perceived partner anxiety		
Actor effect	-.07	.07
Partner effect	.06	.07
Self-rated avoidance		
Actor effect	-.25***	.08
Partner effect	-.03	.08
Perceived partner avoidance		
Actor effect	-.26***	.08
Partner effect	-.18**	.07
Interactions		
Actor Perceived	-.35***	.11
Partner Avoidance × Gender		

Note. *b* represents an unstandardized regression coefficient.

** $p < .01$. *** $p < .005$.

(reported by the actor) in the association between partner's avoidance (reported by himself or herself) and actor's relationship satisfaction, and this occurred for both men and women. This mediation was partial in the case of men and complete in the case of women.

For men, the direct estimate of the path from women's self-reported avoidance to men's relationship satisfaction was significant ($\beta = -.50, p < .01$). When including the mediator, the direct path, although reduced in size, was still significant ($\beta = -.22, p < .05$), indicating only partial mediation. Bootstrapping revealed a significant indirect relation ($\beta = -.17, p < .01, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.326, -.065]$).

In the case of women, the direct estimate (without including the mediator) of the path from men's self-reported avoidance to women's relationship satisfaction was significant ($\beta = -.47, p < .01$). However, when we included the mediator variable (women's report of their partner's avoidance), the estimate was reduced to insignificance

($\beta = -.08, p = .32$), indicating full mediation. Bootstrapping confirmed that the indirect effect, through the mediator, was significant ($\beta = -.30, p < .01, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.457, -.121]$).

Discussion

Previous research suggests that self- and other perceptions by participants in social interactions are important for relationship outcomes and satisfaction (Kenny & West, 2010; Murray et al., 1996; Saffrey et al., 2003). However, there is relatively little research specifically in the field of close relationships dealing with this point, and the research that has been done has focused mainly on actor-partner agreement in the perception of personality traits (i.e., Decuyper, De Bolle, & De Fruyt, 2012; Watson et al., 2000). In this study, we investigated mutual perceptions of own and partner's attachment insecurities in long-term couples. At the same time, we examined, from a dyadic perspective, associations between these perceptions and relationship satisfaction. Our research addressed three main questions: To what extent do actors and partners agree in their perceptions of each other's attachment insecurities? To what extent do self-perception and partner perception of attachment insecurities predict relationship satisfaction? To what extent are the ways in which people perceive their partner important for relationship satisfaction? The answers to these questions are relevant to both research on person perception and the application of attachment theory to research on adult close relationships.

We found considerable actor-partner agreement in the perception of attachment insecurities. Supporting Hypothesis 1, there were significant correlations between actor's and partner's perceptions of actor's and partner's anxiety and avoidance. This result, which is new in the attachment literature, coincides with the more general literature on interpersonal perception (Kenny & West, 2010), which shows that self-other agreement tends to be higher when the characteristics under study are both visible and high in evaluative significance (the extent to which the characteristic implies something positive or negative about the target). Attachment anxiety and avoidance,

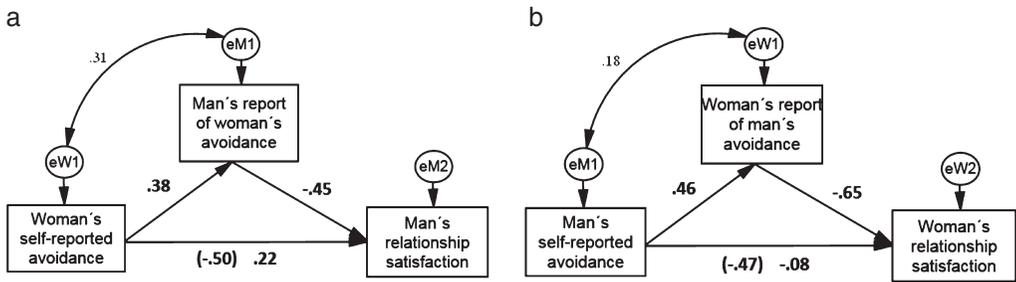


Figure 1. Standardized β coefficients (in parentheses), and standardized β coefficients reduced when the mediating variable is introduced between (a) woman’s self-reported avoidance and man’s relationship satisfaction or (b) man’s self-reported avoidance and woman’s relationship satisfaction.

as they were assessed in this research, are detectable in behavior, and they have high evaluative significance for close relationship partners (i.e., “My partner is worried about being rejected or abandoned” or “My partner doesn’t feel comfortable opening up to me”). Unlike the results reported by Ruvolo and Fabian (1999), the high self-partner agreement in the present study cannot be attributed mainly to social projection (the tendency to ascribe one’s own opinions, beliefs, or—in this case attachment insecurities—to one’s partner), because the association between the actor’s ratings of the partner and the partner’s self-reported anxiety or avoidance remained high and significant even when the actor’s self-reported anxiety or avoidance was statistically controlled.

With respect to the relation between attachment insecurities and relationship satisfaction, we found that self-rated avoidance and perceived partner avoidance were both negatively associated with relationship satisfaction. There is considerable evidence that (self-rated) avoidance is negatively associated with (self-rated) relationship satisfaction (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007, pp. 309–311). However, until now, it has not been empirically demonstrated that perceiving one’s partner as avoidant contributes negatively to relationship satisfaction.

We also found an interaction indicating that perceiving one’s partner as avoidant had a more negative effect on relationship satisfaction for women than for men. This finding may be related to inherent and/or cultural differences between men and women. According to

sex-role stereotypes (Eagly, 1987), perhaps especially in Spain (López-Sáez, Morales, & Lisbona, 2008), women value and express intimacy in dyadic relationships more readily than do men, and women may be especially sensitive to men’s avoidance and frustrated by it, especially in what they expect to be a very close relationship.

Contrary to our expectations, in the APIM analyses, we did not find statistically significant effects of self-rated or partner-rated attachment anxiety on relationship satisfaction, although there were significant associations assessed with zero-order correlations. This difference between the two kinds of analyses suggests that the significant correlations were due to the association between anxiety and avoidance. Once the unique effects of avoidance were taken into account, there were no significant unique effects of anxiety. In previous studies, most of which were not conducted in Spain, both avoidance and anxiety have been negatively related to relationship satisfaction (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007), although the effect of avoidance has often been stronger than the effect for anxiety, and the associations have been found using correlations rather than regression analyses.

Other investigations conducted in Spain (Molero et al., 2011; Molero et al., 2016) found the same pattern: Avoidance, but not anxiety, was significantly related to relationship dissatisfaction. In the case of avoidance, our results are consistent with the cultural fit hypothesis (Friedman et al., 2010), which predicts that attachment-related avoidance is

more strongly associated with relationship problems in collectivist societies. (There is no similar prediction regarding attachment anxiety.) According to Hofstede (2001), Spain is near the middle of the cultural dimension of individualism–collectivism, but when compared with the majority of European countries and the United States (where the majority of research on adult attachment has been conducted), Spain is clearly collectivistic. More research is needed to explore the effect of anxious attachment in relatively collectivistic societies such as Spain.

SEM analyses confirmed and clarified the APIM global model showing that perceived partner avoidance mediated the association between partner self-rated avoidance and actor relationship satisfaction. The mediation was total in the case of women and partial in the case of men. In other words, the way Mary perceives John's avoidance mediates the association between the way John describes himself and Mary's relationship satisfaction. In the case of men, the perception of partner avoidance was not as important because the mediation was only partial. Overall, these results indicate that a partner's avoidance in itself is damaging to one's own relationship satisfaction, but that one's perception of that avoidance is somewhat different from the partner's own perception (or description) of it, and the difference matters in its effect on one's satisfaction. This result is new in the attachment literature and underlines the importance of partner perception in determining relationship satisfaction. The SEM results are in line with the global APIM model because partner's avoidance is more detrimental for women than for men, and perceived partner anxiety does not have a significant effect on relationship satisfaction.

Although this study contributes to our understanding of the effects of mutual perceptions of attachment insecurities on relationship satisfaction in long-term couples, it is limited in certain respects. First, we used only questionnaires rather than behavioral observations. In the case of our study, however, the high degree of agreement between actor and partner ratings of each other's attachment insecurities suggests that self-reports of these

characteristics are relatively accurate. Second, although we gathered participants from different parts of Spain and with different age and education levels, the sample is not fully representative of the Spanish population. Third, in line with the majority of attachment research (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007), we assumed in our conceptual and statistical models that attachment insecurities lead to relationship dissatisfaction, but it is also possible that marital dissatisfaction, caused by many other variables, leads to insecurity in couple members and to their perception of insecurities in each other. This issue needs to be pursued in longitudinal studies. Fourth, because our study was conducted in Spain, its results need to be checked for generalizability to other countries and cultures.

In sum, this study contributes to greater recognition of the importance of partner perceptions in the realm of close personal relationships. In other fields of psychology—for example, in the study of leadership—subordinates' evaluations of their leaders' behaviors are more important to the employees' satisfaction than the leaders' self-evaluations (e.g., Avolio & Bass, 2004). Although the leader–employee relationship is clearly different from a romantic relationship, the perception of a partner's traits and behaviors is likely to be very important for romantic and marital relationships as well. Our findings may be useful for couple therapists, because the findings highlight the importance for relationship satisfaction of perceptions of a partner's attachment insecurities. It might be useful for therapists to engage in a discussion with partners about each other's attachment patterns and insecurities, and the ways in which these patterns and perceptions are perceived and affect relationship satisfaction. Early in the history of research on romantic relationships, including research stimulated by attachment theory, the focus was on each couple member's self-reported insecurities. Recently, in part because of the important opportunities offered by the APIM, there have been many more studies that simultaneously consider the characteristics of both members of couples (the dyadic perspective). In our opinion, it is now important to take a third step in this

direction by considering both self-perceptions and partner perceptions when studying the determinants of relationship satisfaction.

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