

# Project 1: Self Reported Attachment Styles, Empathy and Social Provisions

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- Research Purpose:** This project examines the relationship between self-reported attachment styles, self-ratings of empathy, and self-ratings of proximity-seeking when distressed in a university undergraduate population.
- Research Description:** Attachment theory is one of the most researched areas in psychology. Self-rating questionnaires of attachment styles in close relationships has in particular generated considerable research. For example, secure attachment has been found to be strongly related to recall of being positively parented. However, in an integrative overview of self-report measures of romantic attachments, Brennan, Clark, and Shaver (1998) found that attachment was more accurately conceptualised as consisting of current dimensions of anxiety and avoidance. In the process, they developed the Experiences in Close Relationships questionnaire to measure these dimensions. A revised version (ECR-R) was then developed by Fraley, Waller, and Brennan (2000) and its validity examined by Fairchild and Finney (2006). Part of that extensive research used the Social Provisions Scale (Russell & Cutrona, 1984), and found that participants' perceived degree of social support moderately correlated with secure attachment. Attachment theorists have also posited that secure attachment reflects capacity for empathy, that is, the capacity to recognise others' needs. Davis's (1983) comprehensive model of empathy includes *perspective-taking*, *empathic concern*, *personal distress* and *fantasy*.
- This project is a partial replication of two separate studies, the first of which examined the relationship between secure attachment and empathy (Britton & Fuendeling, 2005). The second study examined the relationship between secure attachment and proximity-seeking when distressed (Fairchild & Finney, 2006). This project will examine the relationship between the above three measures among undergraduate psychology students at this university. Participation will be voluntary and contribute to the students' credit.
- Participants:** Participants will be recruited from the USQ Psychology Dept undergraduate cohort, via the On Line Survey site. It is anticipated that approx. 100-150 participants are required. The student will need to put the questionnaires into a format that is on-line user-friendly, collate the data collected and be relatively independent in deciding on relevant statistical analyses. The student will be expected to read extensively, understand and debate the conflicting theories, and to keep a log of their research activity, meeting deadlines outlined by the Honours thesis examiner and supervisor.
- Methodology:** Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised  
Fraley, R. C., Waller, N. G., & Brennan, K. G. (2000). An item

response theory analysis of self-report measures of adult attachment. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 78, 350-365.

#### Social Provisions Scale

Russell, D.W. & Cutrona, C. (1984). The provisions of social relationships and adaptation to stress. *Advances in Personal Relationships*, 1, 37-67.

#### Interpersonal Reactivity Index

Davis, M. (1980). Measuring Individual Differences in Empathy: Evidence for a Multidimensional Approach. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 44(1), 113-126.

Data collection will be via the On Line Survey site (OLS). OLS will include consent form, demographic variables e.g. age, sex, number of 'serious' relationships (6mths or more), and whether or not in a current relationship. Data from this project will be shared with another Honours project.

#### **Data Analysis:**

Quantitative analyses will include descriptive, simple correlations and multivariate statistics.  
Data screening, checking psychometric properties of questionnaires, separating participants into particular groups based on questionnaire responses and perhaps proposing a graphic model of interconnections.

#### **Student friendliness:**

This project could be managed either externally or internally. No travel is required for data collection. Weekly supervision is required initially and then fortnightly depending on progress. The format of supervision will be determined in negotiation with supervisor and supervisee (e.g., face-to-face, phone).

**Expected research outcomes:** Poster at 2010 APS conference.

#### **Further reading:**

Britton, PC & Fuendeling, JM (2005). The Relations Among Varieties of Adult Attachment and the Components of Empathy. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 145(5), 519-530.  
Fairchild, AJ & Finney, SJ. (2006). Investigating Validity Evidence for the Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised Questionnaire. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 66; 116-135.  
Mikulincer, M & Shaver, PR. (2007). *Attachment in Adulthood: Structure, Dynamics and Change*. The Guilford Press.

#### **Ethics:**

- Ethical approval will be sought by supervisor; or
  - Ethics approved – number
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#### **Resources:**

- Project able to be funded within \$150 departmental limit
  - Project not able to be funded within \$150 departmental limit – additional funds will come from:
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