

**Name: Sarah Mc Keon**

**Student number: 1319611**

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**Supervisor: Dr Rosie Reid**

**A correlational study of gender differences in secure attachment style, personality, and romantic relationship satisfaction.**

Sarah Mc Keon  
1319611

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Supervisor: Dr Rosie Reid  
Head of Department: Dr Sinead Eccles

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Department of Psychology  
DBS School of Arts

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**A correlational study of gender differences in secure attachment style,  
personality and romantic relationship satisfaction.**

**Abstract**

This study was conducted to assess the possible correlation between personality type, attachment style and relationship satisfaction in a sample of (N=103) participants, (N=33) men and (N=70) women all part-time students at DBS. The participants were asked demographic questions age, gender and relationship status. The Relationship Questionnaire (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) was used to evaluate attachment styles, personality type was examined using The Big Five Inventory (John, & Srivastava, 1999), and (Hendrick, Dicke, & Hendrick, 1988) Relationship Assessment Scale was administered to measure romantic relationship satisfaction. A Spearman's rho revealed high romantic relationship satisfaction is significantly correlated with secure attachment ( $r_s(99) = 0.25, p < 0.01$ ) and conscientiousness ( $r_s(98) = 0.19, p < 0.05$ ). An ANOVA indicated that married individuals have significantly higher relationship satisfaction than non-cohabiting persons ( $M=3.39, SD=1.02, p=0.018$ ). An Independent samples t-test revealed no gender differences in relationship satisfaction.

# Introduction

## 1 Attachment

Attachment theory was developed through the joint work of two theorists John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth. Bowlby stated that we can understand human behaviour only by considering the basic environment in which it evolved. Humans probably moved in small groups searching for food and when threatened cooperated to drive away predators and protect the sick and young. Children needed to stay close to caregivers to gain this protection therefore they must have evolved gestures and signals that promote and maintain proximity to caregivers (Crain, 2005, p44). Attachment behaviour is considered as a class of social behaviour as important as mating behaviour and parental behaviour (Bowlby, 1969, p179). Examples of these attachment behaviours are seen when a baby cries, the distress signal compels a parent to attend to the baby, and when a baby smiles, this prompts feelings of love in the parent resulting in the parent enjoying being close to the baby (Crain, 2005, p44).

### 1.1 Bowlby

Bowlby suggested a child's attachment developed over a number of phases. Birth to 3 months babies respond to people in the same basic ways, following their voices and faces indiscriminately. The baby will smile at any face, and crying and babbling bring them into close proximity with the caregiver. 3 to 6 months babies restrict their social responses to familiar people usually preferring two or three people and one in particular. This preferred attachment figure is the one who responded most to the baby's signals and interacted most positively with them. 6 months to 3 years the infant's attachment to a particular person becomes intense and exclusive expressing separation anxiety when the caregiver leaves the room. The infant develops a fear of strangers, and actively follows the caregiver when they

leave the room. They use the caregiver as a secure base from which to explore the environment and monitor the caregiver's whereabouts expressing anxiety if the caregiver is gone. 3 years to the end of childhood the child can visualise the caregivers behaviour while they are away resulting in the child being more willing to let them leave without being anxious (Crain, 2005, p45-51). Bowlby maintained that infants and children experience separation anxiety when a situation activates both escape and attachment behaviour but an attachment figure is not present. He claimed that an inability to form deep relationships with others results from when an attachment figure is too frequently substituted (Inge Bretherton, 1992). According to Bowlby adolescents break away from parental dominance and form attachments to parental substitutes, adults consider themselves independent but seek proximity from loved ones in times of crises, and older people become increasingly dependant on the younger generation. Bowlby stated that the need for close attachment is built into our nature (Crain, 2005, p52).

## 1.2 Ainsworth

Mary Ainsworth was influenced by William Blatz's psychological theory of how parent's may or may not provide children with security. Her research on infants in Uganda used Bowlby's phases of attachment and this led her to think about different attachment patterns among individual infants and how they use their mother as a secure base from which to explore. From her experiment the Strange situation (1970), in which babies and their parents were observed in a playroom, Ainsworth witnessed three patterns of attachment. Securely attached infants used their mother as a base from which to explore becoming visibly upset when the mother left. When the mother returned the infant greeted her and remained close to her for a while then actively explored the environment again. These parents were sensitive and responsive to their babies needs therefore the child was reassured. Ainsworth

saw this as the most healthy attachment pattern. Insecure-avoidant infants appeared independent actively exploring the room however they did not use the mother as a secure base but simply ignored her and did not become upset when she left the room or seek proximity to her when she returned. Also they avoided her when she tried to pick them up or engage with them. Ainsworth observed these parents were insensitive, interfering, and rejecting leading the child to believe they could not rely on their parent for support and becoming indifferent and reacting in a defensive way.

Bowlby suggested that this behaviour can become a permanent part of the personality resulting in an over self reliant and detached adult who can never let their guard down and trust others to develop close relationships with them. Lastly insecure-ambivalent infants were clingy and preoccupied with the mother and hardly explored at all. They were extremely upset when the mother left and when she returned they reached out for her one moment then angrily rejected her the next. These parents were inconsistent in responding to their child being warm and responding on one occasion and not on others. This left the child unsure whether the mother would be there for them when they needed her so they wanted to keep the mother close by all the time (Crain, 2005, p54-57). Winnicott (1952) suggests that separation anxiety is related to insecure attachment (as cited in Bowlby, 1973, p448).

### 1.3 Adult attachment

More recently Shaver and Hazan 1988 translated the work of Ainsworth's infant attachment into adult patterns of attachment claiming that those who describe themselves as secure, avoidant, or ambivalent in their romantic relationships report different patterns in their child-parent relationships (Inge Bretherton, 1992).

Weiss 1982 states that adult attachment differs from infant attachment in important ways. Childhood attachment consists of an attachment figure that provides but does not receive care



and an infant who seeks but does not typically provide security. In adult attachment relationships are reciprocal with each partner being a provider of care and a recipient (Hazan & Shaver, 1994).

Also a child's primary attachment figure is usually a parent where as an adult's is typically a peer, usually a sexual partner. These relationships involve integration of attachment, caregiving and sexual mating. Adult proximity seeking results from anxiety and distress but also from a desire to protect or offer comfort or to engage in sexual activity. Attachment moves from parents to peers when adult peers satisfy the same needs for emotional support and security that parents did in infancy. Parents are never completely abandoned as attachment figures but their place in the hierarchy changes by adulthood (Hazan & Shaver, 1994). Bonds between human beings developed because in order to reduce certain needs, such as for food or sex, another individual is necessary (Bowlby, 1979, p128).

Humans are naturally predisposed to form close relationships as certain basic needs are fulfilled in social relationships important for survival and reproduction. The need for emotional support, care, and sexual gratification are regulated by a behavioural system designed to respond to specific social cues therefore people should be attracted to others who display those cues. Given that the basic need for security is regulated by the attachment system, the characteristics of a potential partner should be the same as those central to attachment in childhood i.e. familiarity and responsiveness (Hazan & Shaver, 1994).

Hinz and Rubin showed we are attracted to people who share values, opinions, attitudes, and physical features similar to our own, Zajonc claimed increased exposure with someone we like increases our liking of that person, and according to Folks & Sears we preference for people who smile frequently, are good humoured, and make us laugh (Hazan & Shaver, 1994).

Mutual attraction and sexual passion are most important early in a relationship but the degree to which a partner provides comfort and emotional support increases significantly over time. What becomes most important is whether the partner is a reliable haven of safety, if partners fail to satisfy each other's needs for comfort and security then the result will likely lead to dissatisfaction (Hazan & Shaver, 1994).

According to attachment theory, relationship satisfaction depends on the extent that it meets basic needs. Trust is associated with open communication and satisfying relationships are not conflict free but involve trust that allows couples to argue constructively and to engage in problem solving behaviours. Anxiety from attempted separation can activate attachment behaviours and lead a person back to the relationship (Hazan & Shaver, 1994).

Research by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) developed four categories of adult attachment furthering Bowlby's and Ainsworth's work. The categories are secure, preoccupied, dismissive and fearful. Secure people have a sense of worthiness regarding love and expect that others are generally accepting and responsive. Preoccupied people view themselves as being unworthy of love but have a positive evaluation of others. Therefore they strive for self acceptance by gaining acceptance of others. Dismissive people view themselves as being unworthy and they have a negative evaluation of others as being rejecting and untrustworthy. Fearful people have a sense of their own self-worth but distrust others. Avoiding intimate relationships they adopt a façade of resistance and autonomy. They concluded that in dismissing style people downplay the importance of other people they have experienced as rejecting and are able to maintain high self-esteem. The preoccupied style people blame themselves for rejections by others and are able to keep a positive view of others. Only the fearful style was associated with social insecurity and lack of assertiveness (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Research by (Caron et al, 2012; Curran & Ruppel, 2012; Clarkin, 2013) found that avoidance was a direct predictor of romantic relationship

satisfaction, conflict and communication problems in relationships, and directly related to women's long term relationship satisfaction. Also (Kirkpatrick and Davis, 1994; Lee and Pistol, 2012) identified that secure attachment was a significant predictor of romantic relationship satisfaction.

## 2 Personality

Personality is “the psychological qualities that contribute to an individuals enduring and distinctive patterns of feeling, thinking, and behaving” (Pervin & Cervone, 2010, p8). There are many theories of personality.

### 2.1 Freud

Sigmund Freud was the founder of psychoanalysis. According to Freud attachment is an infant's choice of love object. At first the infant believes they are the desire of the mother and their unconscious drives are directed towards her as the source of their pleasure. The male child sees the father as a rival for mother's affection but is forced to identify with the father out of fear of castration; this is known as the Oedipus complex. For the girl she realises that her mother does not have the phallus and resents her for her own castration as well, this causes the girl to take the father as her love object because he has the phallus and to account for her own lack she wants to bare a child from him. This is called the Electra complex (Freud, 1923/1925, p249-255). His structure of personality consisted of three parts the Id, the Ego, and the Superego. The Id is the primitive and core structure from which the other structures emerge. It contains primitive thoughts and thoughts that are unacceptable to consciousness and it is the Id's goal to increase pleasure while decreasing tension and discomfort. Experiences denied or repressed can still affect a person's behaviour according to Freud. The Ego is the part of the personality in contact with the external world and develops

when the infant becomes aware of its own identity. The ego must control the impulses of the Id and seek pleasure in more opportunistic terms. The Superego serves as a censor over the thoughts and activity of the ego. It is the moral code of the personality, it is the conscience that prohibits the thoughts and actions of the ego to maintain the moral ideal of the individual (Frager & Fadiman, 2005, p23-25).

## 2.2 Rogers

Carl Rogers takes a phenomenological approach to the study of personality. This is an approach that investigates a person's conscious experiences and how they perceive the world. For other theorists at the time, conscious phenomenological experiences were not at the core of personality and for Freud emphasis was given to unconscious drives and defences. This meant that Rogers was an important voice in promoting phenomenology. He believed that personality is an internal experience with a subjective quality that relies on interpretation by the person having the experience and not determined by measurable physical responses while using scientific methods in an attempt to bring together the scientific and human aspects of personality. For Rogers the self represents an organised and consistent pattern of perceptions, a person perceives external objects and attaches meanings to them. The self maintains this patterned, integrated and organised quality even though it changes, this becomes the person's character and so the self is the personality. Rogers identified two aspects of the self, the actual self and the ideal self. The ideal self contains perceptions and meanings that are relevant to the self and are highly valued by the individual. People think about their present self, how they are currently, and also their potential future self, how they would like to be (Pervin & Cervone, 2010, p166-168).

This led Rogers to the belief that humans have a tendency to look forward towards personality growth and he called this self actualisation. Self actualisation entails a move from

dependency to independency to reduce needs and maximise pleasure and satisfaction derived from activities that enhance the individual. For Rogers anxiety stems from an 'incongruence' between an individual's perception of the self and their experiences, for example a person may describe themselves as never hating anyone but then experience hateful feelings resulting in anxiety (Pervin & Cervone, 2010, p172-175).

Rogers proposed that people have one basic psychological need, the need for positive regard in addition to food, water and shelter. The need for positive regard can draw a person's attention away from other personal values, they may neglect or distort their inner desires and lose touch with their own true feelings. Rogerian phenomenological theory continues to be a relevant part of modern research (Pervin & Cervone, 2010, p178-179/184-185).

### 2.3 Eysenck

Hans Eysenck founded the journal of personality and individual differences. He identified two superfactors in personality; introversion/extroversion and neuroticism (emotional stability/instability) two dimensions that any individual can be located in making it a nomothetic system of personality traits and later added a third superfactor called psychoticism completing his three factor theory PEN (Pervin & Cervone, 2010, p246-248/9).

Many theorists use a five factor model called the Big Five when measuring personality based on trait theories such as Eysenck's. The factors in this model are neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. Neuroticism includes the characteristics worrying, nervous, emotional, insecure, inadequate, hypochondria. Individuals who score low on this scale are calm, relaxed, secure, and self satisfied. Extraversion involves traits such as sociable, active, talkative, person-orientated, optimistic, fun-loving and affectionate. People who score low on this scale are reserved, task-orientated, aloof, retiring and quiet. Openness consists of curious, broad interests, creative, original, imaginative, and

untraditional. A person who scores low on this trait would be conventional, narrow interests, unartistic and unanalytic. Agreeableness includes the characteristics soft-hearted, good-natured, trusting, helpful, forgiving, and straightforward. A low score on this trait would mean a person is cynical, rude, suspicious, uncooperative, vengeful, ruthless, irritable and manipulative. Conscientiousness entails traits such as organised, reliable, hard working, self disciplined, punctual, scrupulous, neat, ambitious, and persevering. A person low on conscientiousness is aimless, unreliable, careless, negligent, lazy and hedonistic (Pervin & Cervone, 2005, p259-261).

Recent research carried out by (Lele & Adelphi, 2008; Claxton et al, 2012; Karakurt, 2012) found personality factors such as high agreeableness, high conscientiousness and high openness had a significant direct correlation on romantic relationship satisfaction and stability. (Karney and Bradbury, 1995, as cited in Karakurt, 2012, p127) found that agreeableness and conscientiousness were associated with relationship stability. Research by (Nofle & Shaver, 2006) found that avoidant attachment was strongly related to a lack of compassion, feelings of security increase empathy, forgiveness and altruism and insecure attachment correlates with not following through with commitments and a lack of careful decision making. While (Jenkins-Guarnieri, 2013) found that insecure attachment had a direct, positive effect on neuroticism and a direct, negative effect on extraversion. Similarly (Bohlin, 2013) found secure attachment correlates with extraversion. However (Reiner & Spangler, 2013) discovered no relationship between secure attachment style and personality.

### 3 Gender

The psychology of gender has developed from a description of sex differences to something that a person practices rather than a trait component of identity (Fischer, 2000, p5&6).

#### 3.1 Kohlberg

Kohlberg (1966) expanded on the work of Piaget in explaining children's concept of gender. He argued that a major concept that children face about gender is that it is constant and unchanging regardless of surface features. Kohlberg developed three stages of understanding gender based on interviews with young children. Gender identity is the first stage that occurs around the age of 2 whereby children are now able to label themselves as male or female based on physical characteristics for example a person is a girl because they wear a skirt. Between 3 and 4 years children move into the second stage called gender stability where they understand that gender is stable across time that if someone is male or female they remain male or female throughout life for instance boys grow up to be fathers not mothers. Lastly around 5 years of age children move to the third stage, gender constancy, where they now understand that gender is stable across time and situations. They know that gender stays the same regardless of the clothes they wear or activities they engage in (Golombok & Fivush, 1994, p76).

An assumption held by social learning theory is that we learn behaviour by related processes throughout life and it is through this we acquire and maintain gender. Modelling and imitating the behaviour of others and labelling clothing, toys and activities according to gender act as mediators and guide social interactions (Beall & Sternberg, 1993, p100-102).

### 3.2 Bandura and Mischel

Bandura (1977) and Mischel (1966, 1970) believed that gender role behaviours are acquired through the same process as all other behaviours resulting from differential reinforcement of boys and girls. For example girls will receive more positive responses for playing with dolls than boys, and boys will receive more favourable responses for playing with cars than girls. Also children learn about gender roles through modelling or observing individuals, learning about male and female roles and are more likely to imitate people that are the same sex as they are because they value behaviour considered more appropriate for their sex (Golombok & Fivush, 1994, p76).

### 3.3 Hochschild

Hochschild (1983) described 'emotional work' as the emotional effort made by men and women in relationships and that there are gender differences which embody the psychological effects of women not having and men having power. Gender differences are evident in the way women use sexual beauty and charm offering feeling to men in return for material resources they lack. Men on the other hand are characteristically seen as tough and in control. Thomas and Walker 1989 found in their research that women foster intimacy by smiling and laughing and communicate more often and more personally than men. Weiss 1990 identified that men focus on work-related problems and keep issues about work from their wives. The difference is women put emotional work in at home and men do it on themselves trying to conform to the ideology of being the bread winner (Bendelow & Williams, 1998, p211-215).

A study by Lesch and Engelbrecht (2011) found that females reported less relationship satisfaction than males. The results of a study by Wade and Coughlin (2012) indicate masculine ideology facilitated the relationship between male identity and romantic relationship satisfaction. Meyers (2007) found that relationship stability was independently



predicted by women's perceptions of their partners' levels of avoidance, and by men's perceptions of their own levels of avoidance and their partners' levels of avoidance.

#### 4 **Relationship satisfaction**

The structure of relationships has changed intensely since the 1970's. In the U.S. marriage rates declined from 70% in 1970 to 52% in 2000, people are waiting longer until they get married and occurrences of cohabiting couples have increased from 3.2 million in 1990 to 5.5 million in 2000 (Paludi, 2004, p70). (Agnew et al., 1998) refers to relationship satisfaction as the “positive versus negative affect experienced in a relationship and is influenced by the extent to which a partner fulfils the individual's most important needs”.

Carl Rogers describes a man-woman relationship as having permanence only to the degree that relationship satisfies the emotional, psychological, intellectual and physical needs of the people involved and that marriage of the future will be better than ever because partners will be more demanding of the relationship in their goals and ideals (Rogers, 1973, p18).

(Baumeister & Leary, 1995) suggest that high levels of romantic relationship satisfaction produce well being. (Brink et al, 2001) found that married couples and long term cohabiting couples have higher relationship satisfaction than dating couples with married individuals having the highest levels of relationship satisfaction. Other research has shown that males and females differ in their relationship satisfaction (Wood & Eagly, 2002) however (De Bolle et al, 2012; Wedding et al, 2012) found no significant difference between males and females in romantic relationship satisfaction.

### **Aims and objectives**

The purpose of this study is to assess the relationship between secure and insecure attachment and romantic relationship satisfaction. Also differences in personality traits in relation to romantic relationship satisfaction will be examined, and gender differences will be evaluated to determine if there are variations among men and women in romantic relationship satisfaction. This is to expand on previous research conducted in the field for future researchers who wish to explore this topic.

### **Hypothesis**

- 1) It is hypothesised that secure attachment style will correlate significantly with high relationship satisfaction.
- 2) It is hypothesised that insecure attachment will correlate significantly with low relationship dissatisfaction.
- 3) It is hypothesised that conscientiousness and agreeableness personality types will correlate significantly with high relationship satisfaction.
- 4) It is hypothesised that there will be gender differences in relationship satisfaction.
- 5) It is hypothesised that personality type will not correlate significantly with attachment style.
- 6) There will be a significant difference between married, cohabiting, and non-cohabiting individuals in levels of relationship satisfaction.

## **Methodology**

### **Design**

This study represents a cross sectional, quantitative, correlational design. Variables include personality type, attachment style, and relationship satisfaction with demographic variables gender, age, and relationship status.

### **Participants**

A convenience sample of 103 (N=103) part time DBS students was used for this study (N=70) females and (N=33) males. Of (N=103) participants (N=87) reported their age and this ranged from 20 years to 50 years (M=29.53) and (SD=7.227). (N=16) of the sample are married, (N=29) are cohabiting, and (N=55) are non-cohabiting.

### **Materials**

All instruments used were self-administered pencil-and-paper questionnaires, with one sheet of demographic questions gender (male, female), relationship status (married, cohabiting, non-cohabiting) and age. A cover sheet was also provided explaining the nature of the study and asking for the participants consent. To measure attachment style The Relationships Questionnaire (RQ) (Bartholomew and Horowitz, 1991) was used, the Big Five Inventory (BFI) (John, & Srivastava, 1999) was administered to assess personality type, and to investigate relationship satisfaction The Relationship assessment scale (RAS) (Hendrick, Dicke, & Hendrick, 1988) was chosen. SPSS version 18 was used to analyse the data collected.

### The Relationship Questionnaire

The RQ (Bartholomew and Horowitz, 1991) is a self report questionnaire designed to assess adult attachment. It consists of four short paragraphs that reflect each of the proposed attachment styles secure, fearful, preoccupied, and dismissive. Securely attached individuals are comfortable being in relationships and have a positive view of self and others. The preoccupied person is over dependent in relationships and they worry that others won't value them as much as they value others. The fearful style is distrustful and anxious in close relationships. Lastly dismissive individuals value independence and does not crave intimacy with others. Participants are first asked to choose one of the four attachment descriptions they feel their own attachment style is closest to, for example if a participant chose the first paragraph "It is easy for me to become emotionally close to others. I am comfortable depending on them and having them depend on me. I don't worry about being alone or having others not accept me" they would be describing themselves as securely attached. Then participants are asked to rate each of the four attachment styles on a 7-point likert scale as to how like or how unlike each style is to their own attachment style, 1 'being not at all like me' and 7 being 'very much like me'. The paragraph given the highest score corresponds to the participants overall attachment style. This measure is designed to obtain categorical and continuous ratings of the four attachment styles. The RQ has shown moderate stability over an 8 month test re-test period (Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1994) with reliability and validity levels considered satisfactory (Bartholomew & Griffin, 1994; Sumer & Gungor, 1999).

### The Big Five Inventory

The BFI (John, & Srivastava, 1999) is a 44 item self-report brief inventory that was designed to measure the Big Five personality dimensions (John & Srivastava, 1999). Items are measured on a five point scale where 1= disagree strongly and 5=agree strongly and respondents are asked to rate each item 1 to 5. Items correspond to the five subscales neuroticism, conscientiousness, agreeableness, extraversion, and openness. Those who score high on neuroticism are considered anxious and moody, conscientious people are ambitious and reliable, those high in agreeableness are thought to be trusting and good-natured, extraversion describes sociable and optimistic traits and individuals who score high on openness are creative and have broad interests (Pervin & Cervone, 2010, p261). Respondents are asked to rate items such as ‘I am someone who tends to be quiet’ and ‘I am someone who is talkative’. Scores are added up to create the five subscales and the highest scores determine the personality traits of the participant. (John et al, 2008) have shown that this scale has high levels of validity and reliabilities for the trait scales were found to be .86 for Neuroticism, .76 for Extraversion, .80 for Openness, .81 for Agreeableness, and .78 for Conscientiousness (Nofle & Shaver, 2006).

### The Relationship Assessment Scale

The RAS (Hendrick, Dicke, & Hendrick, 1988) is worded to suit all types of romantic relationships and not just marital satisfaction. It is a 7 item measurement and for each item is a 5 point likert scale, for instance a participant would rate each item from A to E such as “How much do you love your partner?” A being ‘not much’ and E being ‘very much’. Each letter is numbered 1 to 5 and the score for each item is then added up and divided by seven to get a mean score for each participant. The RAS has good test-retest reliability and has consistent measurement properties across samples of ethnically diverse and age-diverse

couples, as well as partners seeking marital and family therapy. It is a useful and brief measure for partnered love relationships in a wide variety of research settings.

### **Procedure**

Firstly permission was asked of DBS lecturers to enter their part-time classes and administer the questionnaire to their students. A brief introduction and outline of the research was given to the students along with an understanding that participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous. It was also explained that withdrawal from the survey could be done at anytime except after submission to protect anonymity. A questionnaire booklet was given to each student that included an information sheet with a question of consent. Each questionnaire within the booklet had appropriate instructions for completion. At the end of each booklet there was a page of services that provide support should any of the participants wished to make use of them (see appendix A for questionnaire booklet). The survey took 10 minutes to complete. The questionnaires were collected and participants including the lecturer were thanked for their time.

## Results

### Descriptive Statistics

There is total of (N=103) participants, (N=70) females and (N=33) males. 15% of the sample is married (N=16), 28% cohabiting (N=29), and 53% non-cohabiting (N=55). The mean age of participants is (M=29.53) with the range from 20 to 50 years.

Table 1: *Descriptive Statistics of Psychological Measures*

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation
Extraversion	3.37	0.80
Agreeableness	3.88	0.61
Conscientiousness	3.65	0.67
Neuroticism	2.98	0.81
Openness	3.69	0.54
Secure	4.18	2.07
Fearful	3.32	2.09
Preoccupied	3.06	1.97
Dismissing	3.52	1.92
Relationship Satisfaction	3.35	0.99

The mean score for personality type extraversion is (M=3.37) with a standard deviation of (SD=0.80). The mean score for males is (M=3.23) and females (M=3.44) suggesting no significant difference in gender.

The agreeableness personality trait has a mean of (M=3.88) and a standard deviation of (SD=0.61) of which females scored a mean of (M=3.91) and males (M=3.81). This suggests there is no significant difference between males and females.

A mean score of ( $M=3.65$ ) for conscientiousness personality ( $SD=0.67$ ) has a score ( $M=3.54$ ) for males and ( $3.71$ ) for females indicating no significant difference between men and women.

Neuroticism personality dimension ( $M=2.98$ ) and ( $SD=0.81$ ) has a female score of ( $M=3.08$ ) and a mean for males of ( $M=2.76$ ) suggesting that there is a significant difference in gender for neuroticism.

There is a mean score of ( $M=3.69$ ) for the openness personality trait and a standard deviation of ( $SD=0.54$ ). Males have a mean of ( $M=3.76$ ) and females ( $M=3.66$ ) which indicates there is no significant difference.

Descriptive statistics found the mean score of the variable relationship satisfaction to be ( $M=3.35$ ) and ( $SD=0.99$ ). Males have a mean of ( $M=3.77$ ) and females ( $M=3.59$ ) suggesting there is no significant difference between men and women.

Attachment style secure ( $M=4.18$ ) and ( $SD=2.07$ ) has a mean of ( $M=4.22$ ) for females and ( $M=4.09$ ) for males. This suggests there is no significant difference for gender.

Fearful attachment ( $M=3.32$ ) and ( $SD=2.09$ ) has a score for males of ( $M=2.55$ ) and ( $M=3.70$ ) for females indicating a significant difference between men and women.

An over all mean score of ( $M=3.06$ ) and ( $SD=1.97$ ) was found for preoccupied attachment. Females scored a mean of ( $M=2.99$ ) and males scored a mean of ( $M=3.21$ ) suggesting there no significant difference between males and females.

Dismissing attachment has a mean score of ( $M=3.52$ ) and a standard deviation of ( $SD=1.92$ ). Males have a mean ( $M=3.79$ ) and females ( $M=3.39$ ) which indicates that there is no significant difference in gender (see Table 1 for descriptive statistics).



### **Inferential Statistics**

A Spearman's rho was conducted to assess the relationship between relationship satisfaction, attachment styles and personality traits. Relationship satisfaction was found to have a significant positive correlation with personality type conscientiousness ( $r_s(98) = 0.19$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and secure attachment style ( $r_s(99) = 0.25$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), and a significant negative relationship with fearful attachment style ( $r_s(99) = -0.23$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and preoccupied attachment style ( $r_s(99) = -0.19$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The personality dimension neuroticism was found to have a significant negative relationship with secure attachment ( $r_s(100) = -0.23$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and a significant positive relationship with preoccupied attachment ( $r_s(100) = 0.24$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). The agreeableness personality trait was found have a significant negative correlation with fearful attachment ( $r_s(99) = -0.29$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Extraversion personality type has a significant positive correlation with secure attachment style ( $r_s(99) = 0.35$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). No other significances were found (see Table 2).

Table 2: Spearman's rho for Relationship Satisfaction, Attachment Styles and Personality

*Types.*

Variables	Rel sat	Open	Neur	Conscien	Agree	Extrav	Secure	Fearful	Preoc	Dis
Rel satisfaction	1									
Openness	-0.72	1								
Neuroticism	-.143	-.098	1							
Conscientious	.198	.159	-.265**	1						
Agreeableness	.128	-.082	-.409**	.311**	1					
Extraversion	.013	.039	-.392**	.157	.199*	1				
Secure	.257**	-.020	-.233	-.013	.134	.355**	1			
Fearful	-.237*	.101	.186	-.140	-.292**	-.098	-.184	1		
Preoccupied	-.196	.114	.249	-.136	-.035	.030	-.143	.264**	1	
Dismissing	-.121	-.026	-.194	.001	.032	-.034	-.307**	-.106	-.275**	1

\*p is significant at 0.05 level.

\*\*p is significant at 0.01 level.

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to assess the relationship between relationship satisfaction and relationship status. The analysis revealed that there was a significant difference between the three groups in terms of relationship satisfaction ( $F(2, 96) = 4.86$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Tukey HSD post hoc analysis confirmed that the differences were significant in nature between the married group ( $M=4.15$ ,  $SD=.82$ ) and the non-cohabiting group ( $M=3.39$ ,  $SD=1.02$ ,  $p=0.018$ ). Significance can be considered to exist however is marginal between the cohabiting ( $M=3.87$ ,  $SD=.89$ ) and non-cohabiting group ( $M=3.39$ ,  $SD=1.02$ ,  $p=.084$ ). The mean score for the married group is highest indicating higher levels of relationship satisfaction than the non-cohabiting group (see Figure 1).

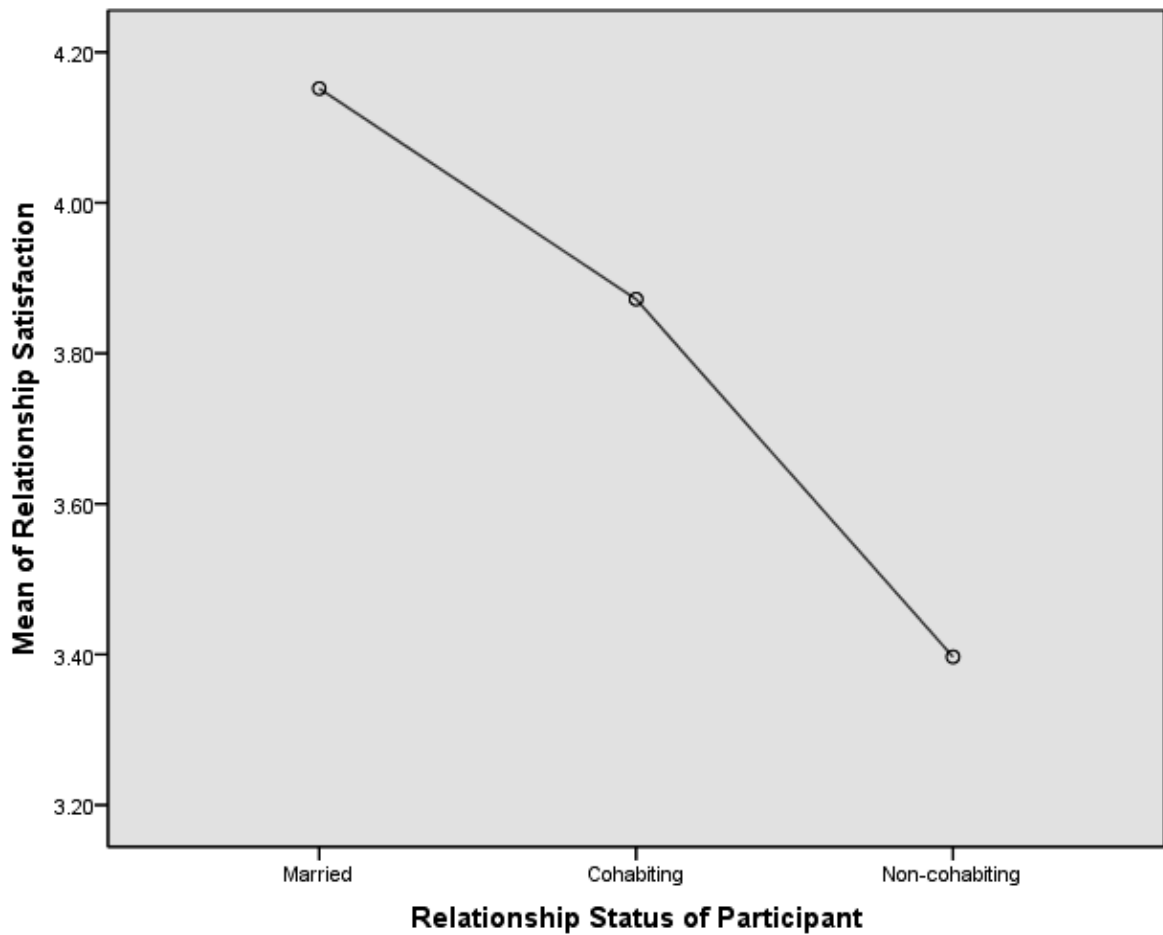


Figure 1: *Means plot for Relationship Status and Relationship Satisfaction*

An Independent samples t-test was conducted to investigate gender differences in relationship satisfaction, personality type, and attachment style. A statistically significant difference was found between females ( $M=3.70$ ,  $SD=2.08$ ) and males ( $M=2.55$ ,  $SD=1.92$ ) in fearful attachment style ( $t(100)=-2.67$ ,  $p=.009$ ) suggesting higher levels of fearful attachment in females. No other significances were found.

## Discussion

The aim of this research was to investigate gender differences in the relationship between personality type, attachment style and romantic relationship satisfaction. It was hypothesised that secure attachment style would correlate with high romantic relationship satisfaction and insecure attachment style would correlate with low romantic relationship satisfaction, also it was hypothesised that personality traits agreeableness and conscientiousness would correlate with high romantic relationship satisfaction and personality type would have a significant relationship with attachment style. More over it was hypothesised that there will be differences between married, cohabiting and non-cohabiting individuals in levels of relationship satisfaction, and males and females will differ in levels of relationship satisfaction.

Results of the analysis showed that secure attachment has a significant positive correlation with relationship satisfaction and extraversion; and a significant negative correlation with neuroticism. Fearful attachment style has a significant negative correlation with relationship satisfaction and agreeableness. Preoccupied attachment was found to have a significantly negative correlation with relationship satisfaction and a significantly positive relationship with neuroticism. Relationship satisfaction and conscientiousness have a significant positive correlation and no significant difference was found between males and females in levels of relationship satisfaction. More females were found to have fearful attachment than males and married persons have significantly higher relationship satisfaction than non cohabiting people but not significantly more than cohabiting individuals.

Hypothesis one was supported in that secure attachment correlated significantly with high relationship satisfaction when tested using a spearman's rho correlation. These results

coincide with those found by (Kirkpatrick and Davis, 1994; Lee and Pistol, 2012) indicating that secure attachment is a good predictor of relationship satisfaction.

Hypotheses two was supported as fearful attachment and preoccupied attachment were found to correlate significantly with low levels of relationship satisfaction corresponding with results discovered by (Caron et al, 2012; Curran & Ruppel, 2012; Clarkin, 2013). This shows that insecure attachment has a negative effect on relationship satisfaction.

Hypothesis three predicted that conscientiousness and agreeableness will correlate with high relationship satisfaction and there was partial support for this hypothesis. Similarly to (Lele & Adelphi, 2008; Claxton et al, 2012; Karakurt, 2012) a high score for conscientiousness was found to correlate significantly with high relationship satisfaction however there was no significance found for agreeableness and relationship satisfaction.

There was no support for the fourth hypothesis that there will be gender differences in relationship satisfaction as unlike (Lesch & Engelbrecht, 2011) no such significant difference was found in this study however this result was also found by (De Bolle et al, 2012; Wedding et al, 2012).

Hypothesis five proposed that personality type will not correlate significantly with attachment style and this was disproved. Results show that fearful attachment is highly correlated with low agreeableness and preoccupied attachment is related to high neuroticism similar to findings by (Jenkins-Guarnieri, 2013) while secure attachment correlates with low levels of neuroticism and high extraversion also found by (Bohlin, 2013).

There was support for hypothesis six that suggested there would be a significant difference between married, cohabiting, and non-cohabiting individuals in levels of relationship satisfaction. The ANOVA revealed that a significant difference exists between the three groups and a further post hoc Tukey HSD revealed the significant difference was specifically between married and non-cohabiting participants suggesting that married persons have

greater relationship satisfaction than non-cohabiting persons. The difference between cohabiting and non-cohabiting individuals was not found to be exactly significant however the difference was large and significance is considered marginal, cohabiting and married couples had little difference in levels of relationship satisfaction suggesting that relationship satisfaction is effected more by couples living together than being married or not.

The measures used in this study were all reported as having satisfactory validity and reliability. The Relationships Questionnaire (Bartholomew & Horowitz 1991) is a widely used measure and can be translated into other languages and be used cross-culturally (Schmitt, 2004). However it is quite a short self-report measure with only four likert scales for each attachment paragraph, a more precise measure would be the experiences in close relationships revised (ECR-R) questionnaire (Fraley, Brennan & Waller, 2000) as it is a more recent 36 item self report measure that is said to categorise predicted certain construct validity variables better than the RQ. Perhaps if used in this study the ECR-R would have made figures for individual's attachment styles more precise.

The Big Five Inventory (John, & Srivastava, 1999) is compatible with person-centred research and can help interpret personality types identified with different methods and in different cultures. It is considered to have a high level of reliability and validity. However not all personality constructs can be derived from this measurement and previous researchers who conducted a cross-measure analysis found BFI personality trait agreeableness to have the lowest correlations when compared with other personality measures (Nofle & Shaver, 2006). This weakness may be the reason for finding a non significant result in this study between agreeableness and relationship satisfaction.

The Relationship Assessment Scale (Hendricke, Dicke, and Hendrick, 1988) is a respectable measure in that it is widely used and it is worded to suit all types of romantic relationships and not just marital satisfaction, a reason for it's relevance in this study. It has

been found to have good reliability and can be used across a range of circumstances such as age and culture making this a reliable measurement to test in a broad sample. However the RAS is a self report questionnaire. Also items such as 'how many problems are there in your relationship' suggest answering in terms of the present moment without accounting for recent past problems or the intensity of the problems in the relationship.

### Limitations

There are also limitations of this study that need to be addressed. Firstly all instruments were self report questionnaires leaving room for error in such a case as individuals not answering honestly. The sample of participants is uneven with nearly two thirds being female leaving a small number of males, this could be the reason for finding no significant difference between males and females in relationship satisfaction as the sample of males may not have been large enough to get an accurate comparison. Also the groups for relationship status are not distributed evenly. Only sixteen participants out of 103 are married and over half of the sample are non-cohabiting which may explain why there is such a significant difference in relationship satisfaction between married and non-cohabiting participants. That particular group of married people may be satisfied in their relationships therefore the results could be one sided. This study did not have partner ratings therefore results relied on the participant to report fairly on their own view of their relationship. Using couples for this study may have given a more accurate result for relationship satisfaction and the predictors. Longitudinal research is considered the way of the future when assessing attachment and personality so possibly the same could be said for relationship satisfaction, it would also enable researchers to take into account satisfaction through the duration of a relationship as opposed to a one time report.

## Conclusion

In conclusion this research has found that secure attachment does predict relationship satisfaction. Extraverted and conscientious people have higher relationship satisfaction than neurotic individuals, and married and cohabiting persons are happier in their romantic relationships than non-cohabiting persons. This study may be limited because it was not longitudinal and the sample of participants was uneven in gender. However widely used reliable measures, that can be used across many contexts, of attachment, personality, and relationship satisfaction were implicated indicating that the results found are reliable and dependable for future research and to build upon research previously conducted in these fields. Future research may benefit from controlling for such things as an evenly distributed sample, partner ratings for relationship satisfaction, and more longitudinal investigations as these may provide more focused, accurate findings.



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# Appendix A

## Participant Information Sheet:

Hi,

My name is Sarah Mc Keon, I am a third year psychology student and for my final year project I am conducting research on gender differences in secure attachment style and personality type as predictors of romantic relationship satisfaction.

Completion of the questionnaire is entirely voluntary and responses will be kept anonymous. The questionnaire will take approximately fifteen minutes to complete in total. Participation in the survey can be withdrawn at any time except after it has been submitted to protect anonymity. Once the results have been analysed for the purpose of this study they will be destroyed.

Please tick the box to give your consent:

I am over 18 and wish to take part in this study

Please do not hesitate to ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to consider whether or not you would like to take part. For any queries that you may have you can email me at [REDACTED].

**Please answer the following:**

**Age:**

**Gender:**

Male

Female

**Relationship status:**

Married

Cohabiting

Non cohabiting

Here are a number of characteristics that may or may not apply to you. For example, do you agree that you are someone who *likes to spend time with others*? Please write a number next to each statement to indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with that statement.

1	2	3	4	5
Disagree Strongly	Disagree a little	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree a little	Agree strongly

## I am someone who...

1. \_\_\_ Is talkative
2. \_\_\_ Tends to find fault with others
3. \_\_\_ Does a thorough job
4. \_\_\_ Is depressed, blue
5. \_\_\_ Is original, comes up with new ideas
6. \_\_\_ Is reserved
7. \_\_\_ Is helpful and unselfish with others
8. \_\_\_ Can be somewhat careless
9. \_\_\_ Is relaxed, handles stress well.
10. \_\_\_ Is curious about many different things
11. \_\_\_ Is full of energy
12. \_\_\_ Starts quarrels with others
13. \_\_\_ Is a reliable worker
14. \_\_\_ Can be tense
15. \_\_\_ Is ingenious, a deep thinker
16. \_\_\_ Generates a lot of enthusiasm
17. \_\_\_ Has a forgiving nature
18. \_\_\_ Tends to be disorganized
19. \_\_\_ Worries a lot
20. \_\_\_ Has an active imagination
21. \_\_\_ Tends to be quiet
22. \_\_\_ Is generally trusting
23. \_\_\_ Tends to be lazy
24. \_\_\_ Is emotionally stable, not easily upset
25. \_\_\_ Is inventive
26. \_\_\_ Has an assertive personality
27. \_\_\_ Can be cold and aloof
28. \_\_\_ Perseveres until the task is finished
29. \_\_\_ Can be moody
30. \_\_\_ Values artistic, aesthetic experiences
31. \_\_\_ Is sometimes shy, inhibited
32. \_\_\_ Is considerate and kind to almost everyone
33. \_\_\_ Does things efficiently
34. \_\_\_ Remains calm in tense situations
35. \_\_\_ Prefers work that is routine
36. \_\_\_ Is outgoing, sociable
37. \_\_\_ Is sometimes rude to others
38. \_\_\_ Makes plans and follows through with them
39. \_\_\_ Gets nervous easily
40. \_\_\_ Likes to reflect, play with ideas
41. \_\_\_ Has few artistic interests
42. \_\_\_ Likes to cooperate with others
43. \_\_\_ Is easily distracted
44. \_\_\_ Is sophisticated in art, music, or literature



**PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING DIRECTIONS:**

1. Following are descriptions of four general relationship styles that people often report.

Please read each description and **CIRCLE** the letter corresponding to the style that *best* describes you or is *closest* to the way you generally are in your close relationships.

**A.** It is easy for me to become emotionally close to others. I am comfortable depending on them and having them depend on me. I don't worry about being alone or having others not accept me.

**B.** I am uncomfortable getting close to others. I want emotionally close relationships, but I find it difficult to trust others completely, or to depend on them. I worry that I will be hurt if I allow myself to become too close to others.

**C.** I want to be completely emotionally intimate with others, but I often find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like. I am uncomfortable being without close relationships, but I sometimes worry that others don't value me as much as I value them.

**D.** I am comfortable without close emotional relationships. It is very important to me to feel independent and self-sufficient, and I prefer not to depend on others or have others depend on me.

**Continued:**

2. Please rate each of the following relationship styles according to the *extent* to which you think each description corresponds to your general relationship style.

**A.** It is easy for me to become emotionally close to others. I am comfortable depending on them and having them depend on me. I don't worry about being alone or having others not accept me.

**B.** I am uncomfortable getting close to others. I want emotionally close relationships, but I find it difficult to trust others completely, or to depend on them. I worry that I will be hurt if I allow myself to become too close to others.

**C.** I want to be completely emotionally intimate with others, but I often find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like. I am uncomfortable being without close relationships, but I sometimes worry that others don't value me as much as I value them.

**D.** I am comfortable without close emotional relationships, It is very important to me to feel independent and self-sufficient, and I prefer not to depend on others or have others depend on me.

	<b>Not at all like me</b>			<b>Somewhat like me</b>			<b>Very much like me</b>
<b>Style A.</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<b>Style B.</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<b>Style C.</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<b>Style D.</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**Please circle the letter for each item which best answers that item for you.**

1) How well does your partner meet your needs?

**A**                      **B**                      **C**                      **D**                      **E**  
Poorly                                           Average                                           Extremely well

2) In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?

**A**                      **B**                      **C**                      **D**                      **E**  
Unsatisfied                                           Average                                           Extremely satisfied

3) How good is your relationship compared to most?

**A**                      **B**                      **C**                      **D**                      **E**  
Poor                                           Average                                           Excellent

4) How often do you wish you hadn't gotten in this relationship?

**A**                      **B**                      **C**                      **D**                      **E**  
Never                                           Average                                           Very often

5) To what extent has your relationship met your original expectations?

**A**                      **B**                      **C**                      **D**                      **E**  
Hardly at all                                           Average                                           Completely

6) How much do you love your partner?

**A**                      **B**                      **C**                      **D**                      **E**  
Not much                                           Average                                           Very much

7) How many problems are there in your relationship?

**A**                      **B**                      **C**                      **D**                      **E**  
Very few                                           Average                                           Very many

## **Thank you for taking part, your time is very much appreciated!**

If you have any questions or issues and wish to talk to someone the following organisations provide support:

The Samaritans is a confidential 24 hour support service, LoCall: 1850 60 90 90, email: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org).

Relationshipsireland.com offers confidential counselling and support services for the opportunity to resolve difficulties in your relationship, LoCall: 1890 380 380, email: [info@relationshipsireland.com](mailto:info@relationshipsireland.com).

Councellingdirectory.ie is Ireland's largest independent directory of accredited counsellors and psychotherapists with over 1200 listings.