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# The adult attachment interview and the relationship questionnaire: Relations to reports of mothers and partners

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## **Abstract**

The study asked the following questions: How do interview and self-report assessments of attachment status correspond? What is the relation between attachment status assessed by these methods to self-reports of relationships with mothers and partners? Participants were 53 married white women assessed with the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI), and the Relationship Questionnaire (RQ), and a variety of questionnaires assessing love, trust, and closeness in relationships with mothers and partners. Results indicated a trend toward a relation between AAI and RQ classifications: 81% of women classified as Secure with the AAI identified themselves as Secure with the RQ, but only 42% of AAI-Insecure women identified themselves as Insecure with the RQ. Secure and Insecure AAI groups did not differ in their reports of mothers or partners, whereas Secure and Insecure RQ groups did. Results indicated classifications derived from the measures are not equivalent.

In the past 10 years, the topic of adult attachment and close adult relationships has caught the interest of both social and developmental psychologists, and the research has drawn upon attachment theory and attachment research with parents and children. Despite this common basis, developmental and social psychologists have used different methodological and conceptual approaches in the study of adult attach-

ment. Developmental psychologists have studied attachment in both children and adults by observation and narrative assessments. In contrast, social psychologists have typically employed self-reports, borrowing terminology from the Bowlby–Ainsworth developmental research tradition to characterize feelings in close relationships. Our goal in this study was to explore the two approaches to the study of adult close relationships and to examine the degree to which there is common ground, or at least common ways, to understand key phenomena.

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## **The Attachment System and the Secure Base Phenomenon**

John Bowlby described the attachment behavior system as a motivational control system that has the goal of promoting safety and felt security in infancy and childhood through the child's relationship with the attachment figure or caregiver (Bowlby,

1982). The behavioral system is activated in times of danger, stress, and novelty, and has the outcome of gaining and maintaining proximity and contact with the attachment figure. The attachment figure promotes attachment behavior by being available, protective, and comforting when a threat or stressor presents itself (Waters, Kondo-Ikemura, Posada, & Richters, 1991). The child can confidently explore the environment, with the active support of the caregiver, secure in the knowledge that the attachment figure is there should any need arise. Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall (1978) termed this relationship between the child and the caregiver the *secure base phenomenon*.

Attachment relationships provide feelings of security and belonging, without which there is loneliness and restlessness (Ainsworth, 1985; Weiss, 1974). This is in contrast to elements of relationships that provide guidance or companionship, opportunities to feel needed or to share common interests or experiences, sexual gratification, feelings of competence, alliance, and assistance elements that may or may not be present in attachment relationships. Both Bowlby (1977) and Ainsworth (1991) noted that the attachment system is operative across the life span.

#### **Development and Continuity of Attachment Representations**

Current theory and research on adult attachment draws heavily on Bowlby's concept of attachment representations or working models. Bowlby (1973, 1980) hypothesized that individuals develop an attachment representation of the functioning and significance of close relationships (i.e., the sum of a person's beliefs and expectations about how attachment relationships operate and what one gains from them). These cognitive-emotional representations are based upon accumulated experiences in childhood attachment relationships. Drawing upon ideas from cognitive psychology, Bowlby hypothesized that representations are relatively stable constructs that operate

out of conscious awareness to guide thought, language, and behavior in relationships. Bowlby meant that in the course of repeated experiences and interactions with the caregiver(s), certain behaviors and expectations of the young child become automatic, not requiring active or conscious reappraisal for each relevant occasion. The child then abstracts from these schema a model or representation about how close relationships operate and how they are used in daily life.

Bowlby observed that in addition to being affected by actual experiences, children are strongly affected by what they are told, especially if it conflicts with their own experiences and impressions (Bowlby, 1973, 1980). Mental representations provide a mechanism through which subjective views and experiences (including explanations given by other people), rather than solely the objective features of experience, influence behavior and development. These ideas suggest that when objective and subjective views of attachment experiences converge, then the representation that develops is consistent, comprehensive, and coherent in its subsequent influence on attachment-related ideas, expectations, and behavior (Bowlby, 1973, 1980; Bretherton, 1985; Main, 1991). In the case of limited and/or conflicting information (e.g., a child experiences an unloving mother, but is told her mother is acting out of love), internally inconsistent and incomplete representations may develop. Hence, their subsequent relation to the ideas expressed by an individual might diverge from their influence on the individual's actual expectations and behavior in relationships.

Attachment representations initially operate within the specific childhood attachment relationship—that is, they are a representation of an attachment relationship. These specific representations then are thought to generalize and to guide behavior and thought in other close relationships across the life span (Bowlby, 1982, 1988; Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985). Representations suggest a mechanism by which early relationships serve as prototypes for

later love relationships (Waters et al., 1991). This concept of the general representation does not preclude the formation of specific representations regarding later relationships, but it does suggest that the attachment representation developed in childhood is the framework through which later attachment relationships are understood and the foundation upon which later representations are constructed (Owens et al., 1995).

### The Adult Attachment Interview

The Adult Attachment Interview (AAI; George, Kaplan, & Main, 1985) was among the first assessments developed to pursue an understanding of the attachment system beyond infancy. It was intended to assess the characteristics of mental representations proposed by Bowlby. The semistructured interview elicits information about an adult's early childhood experiences and the perceived influence of those experiences upon subsequent development. Scoring is based upon (a) the quality of parenting experiences in childhood, in the *coder's opinion, not the expressed views of the adult*; (b) the language used to describe past experiences; and (c) the ability to give an integrated, believable account of experiences and their meaning (Main & Goldwyn, 1994). Hence, the scoring system goes beyond the individual's report of what he or she feels about attachment and attachment experiences by having the goal of tapping processes that are not necessarily available to direct inquiry (Bowlby, 1988; George et al., 1985; Main et al., 1985). The coding yields classifications of secure, insecure-dismissing, and insecure-preoccupied states of mind with respect to attachment. Another classification may be given with one of the three major classifications for unresolved state of mind with respect to a loss or abusive experience. Depending on the research question, studies have used two broad classifications (secure versus insecure), the three major classifications, or four classifications, in which case the insecure-unre-

solved classification is given precedence over the major classification.

Construct and discriminant validity of the AAI has been well established. Discriminant validity for the four classifications<sup>1</sup> has been shown with respect to intelligence, social desirability, memory, social adjustment, and discourse style on a topic unrelated to attachment (Bakermans-Kranenburg & van IJzendoorn, 1993; Crowell et al., 1996; Sagi et al., 1994). In addition, correspondence between the four parental AAI classifications and the four infant attachment classifications obtained with the Strange Situation has been demonstrated with meta-analysis of nine studies: Over all the studies, correspondence is 63%, and with prebirth AAI assessments only, 65% (van IJzendoorn, 1995). There is also significant correspondence between parental security and their children's behavior at home assessed with the Attachment Q-sort (Posada, Waters, Crowell, & Lay, 1995). As expected theoretically, strong stability of classification has been demonstrated in a number of studies, 78% to 90% with the three classifications over periods up to 18 months (J. Crowell & Treboux, 1995). Continuity of attachment security from infancy to late adolescence and young adulthood has been found in two studies (Waters, Hamilton, & Weinfield, in press), although not in a study with a high-risk sample (Weinfield, Sroufe & Egeland, in review) or one in which the AAI was scored using a variation on the system (Zimmermann, Fremmer-Bombik, Spangler, & Grossman, 1995).

The four major AAI classifications correspond to specific parenting behaviors and key aspects of parent-child interaction (e.g., separation styles of mothers, parental ability to organize a task, affection and enthusiasm, abusive behavior) in studies of infants, preschoolers, school-age children, and adolescents, and in samples recruited from the general population and clinical

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1. We have noted studies that have used three or four AAI classifications. We have used the terminology *attachment security* or *AAI security* for studies that have focused on the secure-insecure distinction.

samples (Allen & Hauser, 1991; J. Crowell, O'Connor, Wollmers, Sprafkin, & Rao, 1991; J. A. Crowell & Feldman, 1988, 1991; Grossman, Fremmer-Bombik, Rudolph, & Grossman, 1988; Kobak, Ferenz, Everhart, & Seabrook, 1991).

Investigations of the AAI and adult partnerships have found that interactive and secure base behaviors of partners are related to AAI security (Cohn, Silver, Cowan, Cowan, & Pearson, 1992; Gao, Crowell, Treboux, & Waters, 1996; Kobak, 1991). Adults' AAI security relates to reports of aggression and intimacy in marital relationships (J. Crowell, Treboux, Owens, & Pan, 1995). In contrast, broad assessments of marital satisfaction and general discord, as well as passion and commitment to the relationship, have not been associated with AAI security, suggesting specificity to the attachment domain (J. Crowell et al., 1995; O'Connor, Pan, Waters, & Posada, 1995; Owens et al., 1995). The AAI classifications have been compared with classifications of state of mind regarding attachment derived from an interview about the attachment relationship with a current partner, the Current Relationship Interview (CRI) (J.A. Crowell & Owens, 1996). Overall correspondence between the AAI and the CRI is 65%, with similar correspondence for each of three major classifications.<sup>2</sup> This finding suggests that an individual's state of mind with respect to attachment is not dependent on the target relationship, but does suggest that there is room for co-construction of an attachment representation of a specific relationship (Owens et al., 1995). Overall, empirical evidence suggests the AAI classifications fit characteristics hypothesized for generalized representations of attachment relationships—that is, an ori-

gin in childhood, high stability, ability to tap automatic processes, and specificity to secure base and attachment-related behaviors and representations in relationships from infancy to adulthood.

### Self-Report of Attachment Style

Self-report attachment assessments have also been developed to assess adult attachment (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). The original assessment of this type was a single-item translation of each of Ainsworth's infant classifications (Ainsworth et al., 1978) into terms of adult love relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). The Relationship Questionnaire (RQ) is an adaptation of this measure that uses Bowlby's idea that attachment representations incorporate models of self and other (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). On the basis of the prediction that attachment patterns are evident in the adult's thoughts and feelings, RQ classifications describe feelings about the self and others in close adult relationships. We used the RQ, which discriminates two types of avoidant individuals, dismissing and fearful, because it conceptually appeared closer to the AAI four-classification system than did other self-report attachment measures. The classifications are (a) Secure, which reflects generally positive feelings about the self and others; (b) Dismissing, that is, the individual shows positive feelings about the self, but not others; (c) Preoccupied, there is anxiety about the self and a valuing of others; and (d) Fearful, in which there are negative feelings about the self and others. Bartholomew, Hazan and Shaver, and others have referred to these classifications as *attachment styles*, a term suggesting possible equivalence to the attachment patterns assessed by the Strange Situation (Ainsworth et al., 1978) and the Adult Attachment Interview.

The RQ classifications relate to more complex interview classifications about peers, using the same theoretical perspective, and interpersonal orientation and problems (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991;

2. The CRI has a fourth classification, Unresolved, that is given when the individual appears to be "unresolved" about a previous romantic relationship (e.g., thoughts of the past relationship are influencing behavior in the current relationship). It is not yet known if it should or will have correspondence to the AAI Unresolved category, as the phenomenon appears to be relatively rare in samples studied to date.

Dutton, Saunders, & Starzomski, 1994; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994; Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1994). Self-report classifications have been related to a variety of important relationship variables, including the use of social support and partners when stressed (Mikulincer, Florian, & Weller, 1993; Simpson, Rholes, & Nelligan, 1992), emotional supportiveness and concern for partners (Kunce & Shaver, 1991; Simpson, 1990), sexual behavior (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, in press; Simpson & Gangstead, 1991), and mutuality, interest, and enjoyment of friendship and romantic relationships (Collins & Read, 1990; Feeney & Noller, 1990; Shaver & Brennan, 1992; Tidwell, Reis, & Shaver, 1996). Of particular interest is the relation between the classifications and couples' observed secure base/safe haven behavior in a stressful situation (Simpson et al., 1992).

Stability of the RQ attachment style across 8 months has been reported as 63% for women and 56% for men (Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1994). Self-report classifications of attachment might be impacted by experiences in relationships, such that previously secure individuals may identify themselves as insecure following relationship breakup, or a new relationship may lead previously avoidant individuals to identify themselves as secure (Kirkpatrick & Hazan, 1994). Overall, it appears that self-report classifications of attachment style in close relationships show a relation to secure base and attachment-related behavior in adulthood. However, they do not show high stability, and their association to other self-report relationship variables extends beyond those specific to attachment.

In the past, some researchers have presented the AAI and self-report measures as having more in common than not (J.A. Crowell & Waters, 1994; Hazan & Shaver, 1994). Despite their origins in Bowlby's attachment theory, these measures differ significantly in methodology and the targeted relationship. The way a person speaks about attachment-related issues in the AAI, rather than the manifest content of the interview, is the critical factor in assign-

ing a classification. In contrast, self-report assessments of attachment style utilize the participant's rating of conscious feelings in close relationships. In addition, the AAI uses the discussion of the parent-child relationship as the basis for scoring, whereas the RQ assesses feelings in close adult relationships.

There has been some investigation of methodological issues with the AAI, the RQ, and its companion interviews developed by Bartholomew (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Bartholomew & Shaver, 1997). For example, the RQ corresponds significantly to classifications derived from the interview about peer relationships, but less well to the classifications from the parallel interview about the family (Bartholomew & Shaver, 1997). In another study reported by Bartholomew and Shaver (1997), interviews of bereaved individuals were independently scored using AAI scoring criteria and Bartholomew's interview scoring system, and there was significant correspondence. These authors suggest there is a continuum of measures based on methodological considerations and relationship focus. They also state a need for studies that examine the differential prediction of the various measures.

### *Research questions*

This study examines two issues important to attachment assessment and theory. First, How do interview and self-report assessments of attachment status correspond? Attachment theory and previous research suggest there is an underlying general representation of attachment. Hence, if two measures assess similar constructs, there should be correspondence regardless of the target of the relationship. However, because attachment representations are hypothesized to be cognitive constructs that influence behavior outside conscious awareness, we hypothesized that the AAI and self-reports are not assessing equivalent constructs. Specifically, we expected attachment status assessed with the AAI to

be weakly related to self-report attachment status.

The second issue is: How does attachment status assessed with the AAI, and with the RQ, relate to self-reports of general trust in relationships and feelings of closeness, love, and trust in relationships with mothers and partners, and a self-report measure developed to parallel AAI scoring and classifications—the Adult Attachment Questionnaire (AAQ)? That is, do the RQ and the AAI capture similar information? Because the AAI has strong attachment specificity, we hypothesized that AAI security would not be related to broad characterizations of relationships with either parents and partners using rating scales. We expected that feelings of security assessed with the RQ would be related to other self-reports of feelings in close relationships with mothers and partners, including the AAQ, because of common methodology and because the content of the RQ refers to broad-based feelings in close relationships.

## Method

### *Participants*

Participants were 55 white women, most of whom were married (93%) with an average of two children per family. Mothers were recruited from towns surrounding the university by advertisements in preschools and village newspapers to participate in a study of family relationships. Mothers of preschoolers were recruited because they provided a relatively uniform sample, and are the group most studied with the AAI. The study was explained to the women by giving them a lay person's description of convergent and discriminant validity. Our goal in this explanation was to increase tolerance of repetitive items and care in responding to the items.

The mean age of the women was 34.5 years, and they were from middle or working-class backgrounds. Over half had earned a 4-year college degree (average = 14.7 years of education), and approximately half were full-time homemakers. Two par-

ticipants were dropped from the sample: one because she was significantly different from the other women in terms of demographics (19 years old, single, with two children), and one because her taped interview was inaudible. The final sample consisted of 53 participants.

### *Procedure*

Participants were seen in two sessions, 2 weeks apart on average. In the first session, they came to the laboratory to complete the questionnaires. They were interviewed with the Adult Attachment Interview in the second session.

### *Measures*

*Adult Attachment Interview (AAI).* The interview (George et al., 1985; Main & Goldwyn, 1994) asks the adult for adjectives describing childhood relationships with each parent and incidents or experiences supporting those adjectives. She is asked about feelings of rejection, experiences of being upset, ill, and hurt, and about separations, losses and abuse. In addition, the adult is asked about changes in her relationship with her parents since childhood, for descriptions of her current relationship with her parents, and for her understanding of her parents' behavior. Finally, the participant is asked about the effects of early childhood experiences on her adult personality and parenting as well as her concerns and hopes for her own children.

Determination of attachment classification is based on the coder's rating of the participant's childhood experiences and present state of mind regarding attachment experiences (Main & Goldwyn, 1994). Childhood experiences with each parent are rated for loving behavior, rejection, neglect, pressure to achieve, and involving/role-reversing behavior. State of mind regarding attachment is rated on scales of coherency (believability, sufficient information, relevance to topic, order and clarity), idealization of parents, stated lack of recall, derogation of attachment or attachment

figures, passivity of thought, and active anger toward parents. Based on the pattern of scale scores, each interview is assigned to one of three classifications best reflecting the individual's overall state of mind with respect to attachment: (a) Secure/Autonomous with respect to attachment; (b) Insecure/Dismissing of attachment; or (c) Insecure/Preoccupied with, or entangled by, past attachments. The Insecure classification of Unresolved with respect to past abuse or loss is assigned in conjunction with a best-fitting alternative category. Individuals assigned to the Unresolved category are considered Insecure in this study, even if the major classification is secure. Table 1 summarizes the characteristics of the classifications.

The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. Transcriptions were scored by two coders (JAC and DT) blind to all other information. Interrater agreement was assessed using 23 randomly selected transcripts (43%). Agreement for this sample on the three major attachment classifications was 81%,  $k = .64$ ,  $p < .001$  and 78% for four classifications,  $k = .67$ ,  $p < .001$ .

Disagreements between coders were resolved by conference. The distribution of four classifications is shown in Table 2.<sup>3</sup> This distribution is similar to that reported in a meta-analysis of previous studies using the AAI (van IJzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 1996).

*Self-identified attachment style:  
Relationship Questionnaire (RQ)*

The RQ (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) assesses participants' self-described attachment style. The participant selected one of four attachment styles that best described her typical feelings in close relationships. The RQ rating scales were not used in this study. In an adaptation of the measure (Hazan, 1990), the participant also selected one of the four descriptions of her relation-

ship with her mother and with her father during childhood that paralleled the four self-descriptions. The descriptions of the parent classifications are presented in Table 3. This version was of interest because it targeted the relationship with each parent. Distributions of RQ feelings in close relationships classifications, and mother and father classifications, are presented in Table 2.

*Ratings of relationships*

We chose measures that were identified by their authors as attachment relevant, such as the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987), or those that tap attitudes and behaviors judged to be attachment constructs, such as trust (Holmes, Boon, & Adams, 1990; Rotter, 1967; Sternberg, 1988), and perceived acceptance versus rejection in childhood (Epstein, 1983; Lichtenstein & Cassidy, 1991). The measures were scored using 7-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 = *not at all true* to 7 = *extremely true*. Alpha coefficients presented are from this sample of participants. In addition, a measure of the general expectation of trust was administered to compare with assessments of trust in specific relationships.

*Interpersonal Trust Scale (ITS).* The ITS (Rotter, 1967) is a 40-item scale designed to assess a participant's general expectation or inclination to trust, trust being defined as a belief in the truthfulness of communications. The items reflect trust of peers and ordinary people as well as of powerful, distant figures and institutions ( $\alpha = .67$ ).

*Attachment relationship with mother scales.* These measures were modified in two ways. First, most of the scales have items about relationships with both mothers and fathers. Empirical evidence suggests that the mother-child relationship is more powerfully associated with attachment representations and behavior across childhood than is the father-child relationship (Fonagy, Steele, & Steele, 1991; Main et al., 1985; Ricks, 1985). Therefore, to optimize

3. The distribution of three classifications was secure, 58% ( $n = 31$ ); dismissing, 30% ( $n = 16$ ); preoccupied, 11% ( $n = 6$ ).



**Table 1. Adult Attachment Interview classifications**

	Secure	Dismissing	Preoccupied	Unresolved
Past experiences	Loving, supportive parents OR any type of negative experience	Parents rejecting of attachment Pushed to be independent	Role-reversing parenting Tied to parents by guilt or overinvolvement	Loss of significant person Physical/sexual abuse by parent
Present state of mind	Acknowledges importance of early relationships in personal development Balanced and empathic view of self and parents Affectively rich Clear and coherent	Minimizes or denies effects of early experiences Idealizes parents Poor recall Emphasis on personal strength Incoherent: lack of evidence, remote, terse	Preoccupied with parents Active anger at parents OR vague, passive speech Confusion and ambivalence  Incoherent: unclear, irrelevant, oscillating	Disbelief of occurrence Feelings of causing loss/abuse Disoriented/disorganized speech Psychologically confused statements Unusual ideas/beliefs

**Table 2.** Distribution of attachment classifications and styles

Measures	Attachment Classifications							
	Secure		Dismissing		Preoccupied		Unresolved/Fearful	
	(n)	(%)	(n)	(%)	(n)	(%)	(n)	(%)
Adult Attachment Interview	28	53	12	23	6	11	7	13
RQ attachment style	37	70	6	11	8	15	2	4
RQ with mother	28	53	5	9	14	26	6	11
RQ with father	21	40	11	21	15	28	5	10

the likelihood that associations between attachment classifications and self-report measures would emerge, participants responded to items about their experiences with mothers only. Second, some of the measures chosen were designed for adolescents rather than adults, and they ask about the current relationship with parents, whereas other measures ask about past relationships with parents. Because we were working with adults, each measure (except the AAQ) was given in its original form and a revised form, so that both current relationships and past relationships with the mothers were reported by participants.

*Mother-Father-Peer Scale: Mother Scale (MFP-M).* The MFP-M is the 36-item Mother subscale of the Mother-Father-Peer Scale (Epstein, 1983), which assesses the participant's relationship with her mother in childhood on the following di-

mensions: *Encouragement of Independence versus Overprotection, Acceptance versus Rejection, and Idealization of the Parent.* The Encouragement subscale assesses the extent to which the caregiver accepted and supported the child's independence, self-reliance, and development of social skills ( $\alpha = .86$ ). The Acceptance subscale assesses how well the caregiver communicated love, acceptance, and appreciation ( $\alpha = .84$ ). The Idealization subscale reflects the degree to which strong virtues are attributed to the caregiver ( $\alpha = .91$ ). The modified MFP-M assessed the *current relationship* with mothers on the same dimensions: Encouragement of Independence versus Overprotection-Current ( $\alpha = .79$ ), Acceptance versus Rejection-Current ( $\alpha = .85$ ), and Idealization-Current ( $\alpha = .86$ ). The MFP Scale has been related to self-esteem, and a wide range of personality variables (Ricks, 1985).

**Table 3.** Adult attachment prototypes: Mother and father versions

Classification	Description
Secure	She (He) was generally loving and understanding. She (He) was good at knowing when to be helpful and when to let me do things on my own.
Dismissing	She (He) was generally fine but not very affectionate. She (He) taught me at an early age to be independent and self-sufficient.
Preoccupied	She (He) was generally loving but not as understanding as I would have liked. She (He) loved me, but didn't always show it in the best way.
Fearful	She (He) was generally unpredictable and sometimes even hurtful. She (He) had her (his) own problems and they sometimes got in the way of her (his) ability to take care of me.

From Hazan C. (1990).

*Inventories of Mother Attachment—Past and Present (IMA)*. The IMA is the Mother Attachment scale of the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachments (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987) developed to assess adolescents' attachments to their parents. Consisting of 25 items, the IMA reflects three components of attachment relationships. The *Trust* scale assesses "felt security" or trust that the mother understands the individual's needs and desires. The *Communication* subscale assesses the individual's perceptions of the mother as a sensitive and a responsive caregiver. The *Alienation* subscale assesses anger and emotional detachment from the mother. A modified version of the IMA about *adolescence* was given: Trust in adolescence (alpha = .95; Communication in adolescence, alpha = .93; Alienation in Adolescence, alpha = .85). The IMA was administered to the women in its original form to assess *current relationships* with their mothers (Trust, alpha = .94; Communication, alpha = .93; Alienation, alpha = .87). The questionnaire has been related to life satisfaction and self-concept (Greenberg, Siegel, & Leitch, 1983).

*The Relationship with Mother Questionnaire—Past and Present (RMQ)*. The RMQ (Schwartz, 1989) measures the degree of emotional attachment and coalition in the mother–daughter relationship. The RMQ consists of 22 items and two subscales. The *Emotional Attachment* subscale reflects the level of emotional closeness and acceptance the daughter perceives from her mother, and the *Coalition* subscale assesses the level of emotional fusion or alliance between mother and daughter against the father. Participants answered questions for their relationship with their mothers *during adolescence* in a modified version of the scale, and for the *current relationship* with the original scale. The Emotional Attachment–Adolescence subscale yielded an alpha coefficient of .92 and the Coalition–Adolescence subscale yielded an alpha coefficient of .89. The Emotional Attachment–Current scale yielded an alpha

coefficient of .94 and the Coalition–Current scale had an alpha coefficient of .90.

*Adult Attachment Questionnaire (AAQ)*. The AAQ (Lichtenstein & Cassidy, 1991) was intended to screen for the four adult attachment patterns of the AAI classification system. Many items were taken from prototypic AAI transcripts. A measure under development, it was included in this study to examine its correspondence to the AAI, and the scales had not been developed to yield classifications. It consists of 80 items reflecting both perceptions of childhood attachment experiences (ages 3 to 8 years) with a primary caregiver, and present state of mind with respect to attachment. The subscales are (1) *Anger* (e.g., "My mother's issues are still interfering with my life," alpha = .72); (2) *Role-reversal* (e.g., "I remember as a child feeling a desire to protect my mother," alpha = .83), which were intended to be characteristic of the Preoccupied group; (3) *Rejection* (e.g., "My mother was not very affectionate," alpha = .63); (4) *Dismissing* about feelings and the influence of relationships (e.g., "My family was not particularly intimate, but this has never bothered me," alpha = .57) were intended to be associated with the Dismissing group; and (5) a *Balanced* perspective was intended to be most evident in the Secure group as it implies a willingness to see both positive and negative in both parent and self (e.g., "Neither my mother nor myself is perfect, but somehow we made it through my childhood," alpha = .64).

#### *Partner relationship scales*

*Relationship Trust Scale (RTS)*. The RTS (Holmes et al., 1990) is a 30-item scale that assesses five dimensions of interpersonal trust with a specific partner. The *Responsiveness* subscale reflects the perception that the partner cares for, is considerate of, and responsive to the participant's needs (alpha = .89). The *Dependability–Reliability* subscale assesses the belief that the partner is reliable, honest, and dependable (alpha = .90). The *Faith in Partner's Caring*

subscale reflects confidence in the belief that the partner cares and will continue to care in the future ( $\alpha = .87$ ). The *Conflict Efficacy* subscale assesses perceptions of the couple's ability to resolve conflicts effectively ( $\alpha = .85$ ). Finally, the *Dependency Concerns* subscale addresses concerns about depending on the partner and being vulnerable ( $\alpha = .38$ ). Relationship trust has been found to relate positively to self-disclosure, affection, relationship satisfaction, comfort with closeness in couples, and self-reports of attachment style (Boon & Holmes, 1990; Collins & Read, 1990; Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna, 1985; Simpson, 1990).

*Triangular Theory of Love Scale (TTLS).* The TTLS (Sternberg, 1988) is a 45-item scale that assesses three components of love. The *Intimacy* subscale refers to feelings of closeness and connection with one's partner ( $\alpha = .92$ ). The *Commitment* subscale refers to making the decision that one loves one's partner and will continue to maintain that love ( $\alpha = .93$ ). The *Passion* subscale reflects the romantic and sexual aspects of the relationship ( $\alpha = .92$ ). These aspects of the relationship with the partner are strongly related to marital satisfaction (Sternberg, 1986, 1988).

## Results

The results are presented in three sections. The first section examines the relation between the Adult Attachment Interview and the Relationship Questionnaire classifications. The second section explores associations between the AAI classifications and the interpersonal trust scale, the relationship-with-mother questionnaires, the partner relationship questionnaires, and the AAQ. The last section examines associations between the RQ classifications and the rating scales listed above.

Based both on theory and sample size, the comparison between the Secure classification and the combined Insecure classifications was considered the critical analysis to examine relations among the measures.

However, the table presenting the relation between the AAI and the RQ shows the four classifications for each measure (Table 4), and mean scores on rating scales for each of the AAI and RQ classifications are presented (Tables 5 and 6).

### *AAI classifications and adult attachment styles (RQ)*

We expected attachment status assessed with the AAI to be weakly related to the status of the RQ feelings in close relationships. Poor correspondence was predicted for individuals who had insecure (i.e., incoherent and inconsistent) representations assessed with the AAI. Participants most often identified themselves as Secure with the RQ, ranging from 40% (with fathers) to 70% (close relationships). Overall, the distributions of the self-designated classifications were similar to the distributions of the AAI classifications, although more participants identified themselves as Preoccupied with the RQ than as Dismissing with the RQ especially with their parents, whereas about twice as many participants were classified as Dismissing with the AAI versus Preoccupied with the AAI.

There was a trend toward a significant association between AAI classifications and RQ self-identified attachment style, using Yates' corrected chi-square analysis of Secure versus Insecure ratings, ( $\chi^2 = 3.25$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = .07$ ;  $kappa = .23$ ,  $p = .07$ ). The four-group correspondence is presented in Table 4. Eighty-one percent of participants classified as secure with the AAI identified themselves as secure with the RQ; 42% of participants scored as Insecure with the AAI identified themselves as Insecure on the RQ, with between 0% and 33% correspondence of specific Insecure groups. Examining these findings from the perspective of the RQ, 58% of participants who identified themselves as Secure with the RQ were classified as Secure with the AAI, whereas participants who identified themselves as Insecure with RQ were classified as Insecure with the AAI in 69% of cases.

No significant association was found be-

**Table 4.** AAI classifications and Relationship Questionnaire feelings in close relationships: Yates' corrected chi-square = 3.25, *df* = 1, *p* = .07

	AAI Classifications			
	Secure ( <i>n</i> = 26)	Dismissing ( <i>n</i> = 12)	Preoccupied ( <i>n</i> = 6)	Unresolved ( <i>n</i> = 8)
<i>RQ Classifications</i>				
Secure ( <i>n</i> = 36)	21 (81%)	8	2	5
Dismissing ( <i>n</i> = 6)	1	3 (25%)	1	1
Preoccupied ( <i>n</i> = 8)	4	0	2 (33%)	2
Fearful ( <i>n</i> = 2)	0	1	1	0 (0%)

tween AAI classifications and the classifications of childhood attachment relationship with mother (Hazan, 1990), ( $X^2 = 1.92$ ,  $df = 1$ , *ns*), or with father ( $X^2 = 1.59$ ,  $df = 1$ , *ns*), using Yates' corrected chi-square analysis of Secure versus Insecure ratings. The RQ feelings in close relationships was not related to the self-selected classifications of the relationship-with-mother ( $X^2 = .62$ ,  $df = 1$ , *ns*), but rather to the relationship-with-father classifications ( $X^2 = 4.10$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = .04$ ). Forty-nine percent of the individuals who described themselves as secure in relationships reported feeling close with their fathers, and 42% of the individuals who described themselves as insecure in relationships reported feeling insecure with their fathers. However, if the individual re-

ported feeling insecure with her father, she reported herself as insecure in close relationships in 81% of cases. Mother and father classifications were unrelated ( $X^2 = 1.07$ ,  $df = 1$ , *ns*).

#### AAI classifications and relationship scales

*The Interpersonal Trust Scale (ITS).* The ITS was analyzed separately because its broad content and lack of correlation with other self-report measures suggested that it was assessing a different construct. Using a *t*-test ( $df = 50$ ), no significant differences in responses to the Rotter Interpersonal Trust Scale were found between AAI Secure and Insecure classifications (see Table 5).

**Table 5.** Mean scores, standard deviations, and significance of AAI classifications with rating scales

	Mean Scores and SDs of AAI Classifications				Comparisons Secure vs. Insecure <i>t</i> (50)
	Secure ( <i>n</i> = 26)	Dismissing ( <i>n</i> = 12)	Preoccupied ( <i>n</i> = 6)	Unresolved ( <i>n</i> = 8)	
<i>Interpersonal Trust</i>	107.5 ( <i>SD</i> = 13.9)	111.9 (11.2)	110.3 (11.6)	108.9 (7.1)	<i>ns</i>
<i>Perceptions of Mother as Loving (MANOVA df = 2.50)</i>					<i>ns</i>
Past relationship	0.11 (1.00)	0.22 (1.16)	-0.92 (0.87)	0.03 (0.86)	
Current relationship	0.08 (0.99)	0.10 (0.89)	-0.89 (1.41)	0.24 (0.61)	
<i>Partner Loving factor</i>	0.56 (2.33)	-0.36 (1.97)	-1.12 (4.04)	-0.42 (3.33)	<i>ns</i>

*AAI classifications and relationship-with-mother scales.* Because the AAI has strong attachment specificity and because attachment representations are considered to be unavailable to conscious awareness, we hypothesized that AAI security would not be related to broad characterizations of relationships with mothers, including the AAQ, which is intended to correspond to the AAI.

High correlations existed among the relationship-with-mother subscales of the questionnaires (median correlation,  $r = .67$ , range .09 to .96). To reduce the number of variables in this relatively small sample, principal components analyses were performed on the eight past subscales, and also on the eight current subscales. Each analysis yielded one factor with an eigenvalue greater than 1 that was retained (Kaiser, 1960). Based on factor loadings greater than .3, each factor appears to reflect a loving, warm relationship with mother, both in the past and currently. Hence, the factors were named *Perceptions of Mother as Loving-Past* and *Perceptions of Mother as Loving-Current*. The correlation between the two factors was  $r = .86, p \leq .001$ .

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) of Secure versus Insecure AAI classifications was conducted using the two Mother Loving factors. No significant difference was found between Secure and Insecure AAI classifications for the Mother Loving factors,  $Rao's R = .26, p = .77$  (see Table 5).

#### *Adult Attachment Questionnaire (AAQ).*

The AAQ was analyzed separately from the other relationship-with-mother scales because of its intended specific association with the AAI. Because of significant correlations among the scales, a between-groups (AAI Secure, AAI Insecure) MANOVA was conducted on the five dependent variables, the scales of Balance, Dismissing, Anger, Role Reversal, Rejection. The MANOVA was not significant,  $F(5,47) = 1.8, p = .12$ .

*AAI classifications and partner relationship scales.* AAI classifications were examined

in relation to the self-report questionnaires concerning the relationship with partner (Holmes et al., 1990; Sternberg, 1988). Because of the high correlations among the subscales of the two questionnaires (median correlation  $r = .78$ , range .59 to .97) and to reduce the number of variables, a principal components analysis (PCA) was conducted on the eight subscales. The PCA yielded one factor with all scales receiving factor loadings greater than .80. This factor, reflecting a trusting and loving relationship with a partner, was labeled *Partner Loving*. A  $t$ -test of the Secure versus Insecure classifications was conducted using the Partner Loving factor (see Table 5). Although women classified as Secure had higher mean scores than did women classified as Insecure in reports of loving partners, the difference was not significant,  $t(51) = 1.6, p = .13$ .

#### *RQ classifications and rating scales*

We expected that feelings of security assessed with the RQ would be related to other self-reports of feelings in close relationships.

*The Interpersonal Trust scale (ITS).* No significant differences in response to the Rotter Interpersonal Trust Scale were found between Secure and Insecure RQ classifications with a  $t$ -test ( $df = 50$ ) (see Table 6).

*RQ classifications and relationship-with-mother scales.* A MANOVA of Secure versus Insecure RQ classifications using the Mother Loving factors was not significant,  $Rao's R = 2.2, p = .12$ ; Mother in the present,  $F = 4.4, p \leq .05$ ; Mother in the past,  $F = 2.4, p = .12$  (see Table 6).

*RQ classifications and Adult Attachment Questionnaire (AAQ).* A between-groups (RQ Secure, RQ Insecure) MANOVA was conducted on the AAQ scales, and there was a trend toward significance,  $Rao's R(5,46) = 2.2, p = .07$ . Univariate  $F$  scores of the individual scales revealed that participants classified as Secure with the RQ were

**Table 6.** Mean scores, standard deviations, and significance of RQ classifications with rating scales

	Means and SDs of RQ classifications				Comparisons
	Secure ( <i>n</i> = 36)	Dismissing ( <i>n</i> = 6)	Preoccupied ( <i>n</i> = 8)	Fearful ( <i>n</i> = 2)	Secure vs. Insecure <i>t</i> (50)
<i>Interpersonal Trust</i>	109.1 ( <i>SD</i> = 11.7)	105.0 (17.0)	112.5 (12.1)	103.5 (4.9)	<i>ns</i>
<i>Perceptions of Mother as Loving (MANOVA (df = 2.50))</i>					<i>ns</i>
Past relationship	0.12 (0.91)	-0.09 (0.70)	-0.00 (1.21)	-1.95 (0.11)	
Current relationship	0.21 (0.99)	0.10 (0.59)	-0.39 (1.40)	-1.55 (0.61)	
<i>Partner Loving factor</i>	0.79 (2.27)	-1.05 (2.72)	-1.85 (3.09)	-2.53 (2.24)	-3.3**

\**p* ≤ .05. \*\**p* ≤ .01.

less balanced in their reports of the mothers (Secure  $M = 23.5$ ,  $SD = 6.4$ ; Insecure  $M = 27.2$ ,  $SD = 4.9$ ,  $F(5,46) = 4.2$ ,  $p \leq .05$ ), less angry at their mothers (Secure  $M = 14.4$ ,  $SD = 6.5$ ; Insecure  $M = 20.0$ ,  $SD = 8.2$ ,  $F(5,46) = 6.9$ ,  $p \leq .05$ ), and reported less rejection from their mothers than did Insecure participants (Secure  $M = 62.1$ ,  $SD = 28.5$ ; Insecure  $M = 81.2$ ,  $SD = 37.1$ ,  $F(5,46) = 4.1$ ,  $p \leq .05$ ).

**RQ classifications and partner relationship scales.** A *t*-test ( $df = 50$ ) of the Secure versus Insecure RQ classifications was conducted using the Partner Loving factor (see Table 6). Individuals who identified themselves as Secure reported more loving partners than did those in the Insecure group.

**RQ mother and father categories.** The RQ mother categories did not relate to the Interpersonal Trust scale, or to reports of loving partners. In contrast, a MANOVA of the RQ Mother Secure versus Insecure classifications revealed that women who endorsed the Secure classification with their mother reported more loving mothers, *Rao's R* (2.50) = 22.1,  $p \leq .001$ , both past,  $F = 43.9$ ,  $p \leq .001$ , and currently,  $F = 33.0$ ,  $p \leq .001$ . There were also significant differences between the RQ Mother Secure and

Insecure classifications on the AAQ scales of Mother role-reversing,  $F = 5.5$ ,  $p \leq .05$ , Mother rejecting,  $F = 39.6$ ,  $p \leq .001$ , Anger at the mother,  $F = 10.3$ ,  $p \leq .01$ , and Balanced views of the relationship,  $F = 16.9$ ,  $p \leq .001$ . The RQ father categories did not relate to the Interpersonal Trust scale, to reports of loving mothers or partners, or any of the scales of the AAQ.

## Discussion

The well-documented validity of the Adult Attachment Interview renders it a useful and important tool in the study of adult attachment. Unfortunately, it is an expensive and complex measure to administer and score, and this has limited its availability and usefulness to many researchers. A self-report equivalent of the AAI would be extremely valuable, as it would broaden and advance the study of adult attachment. Although the difficulties in creating such a self-report assessment are predictable from attachment theory, this study was initially guided by the hope that a simple, interesting, and established self-report assessment could serve as an AAI equivalent.

The findings of this study demonstrate that the AAI and the RQ classification do not assess equivalent constructs. This does

not imply that each assessment is not useful, only that they are not interchangeable. There are two possible interpretations of the minimal relation between the two measures. First, method variance could account for the differences between the AAI and the Relationship Questionnaire, or the AAI and any other similarly phrased self-report assessment. Second, the RQ could assess a wider range of relationship correlates within the domain of adult relationships. Examination of the measures and their correlates provides insight into their meaning.

#### *The question of method variance*

Although method variance may, in part, explain the differences in findings for the two measures, there are also important differences in what is meant by security for each measure. It is logical that the women who feel they have good close relationships with their partners, and to a lesser extent their mothers, currently report feeling comfortable and confident in relationships in general. In contrast, AAI security is not dependent on good experiences with parents or partners, but rather on understanding the significance and meaning of one's attachment experiences as reflected in the coherence and consistency of the narrative. Having positive attachment experiences is obviously one way for a person to develop a secure pattern with respect to attachment; however, a number of individuals rated as Secure with the AAI report negative attachment experiences with parents. Similarly, not all people rated as Insecure with the AAI had negative experiences with parents from a broad perspective. These individuals report having fun with their parents, having parents buy them things, take them places, and show interest in their education or activities. Thus, in many cases, the parenting problem is specifically within the domain of attachment, not a failure to be involved with the child or provide positive experiences.

The targeted relationship (parent-child versus adult) does not appear to be the reason for the relative lack of correspondence

between the AAI and RQ. Consistent with the relations between the AAI and CRI, neither the AAI nor the RQ attachment status in this study appeared to be strongly related to a specific target relationship, although the association of the RQ with reports of the partner is stronger than those of the relationship with the mother. Previous work shows the AAI is associated with behavior across attachment relationships, but with specificity to attachment behavior and to self-reports of specific behaviors or feelings theoretically expected to relate to attachment. In contrast, the RQ classification appears to be related to broad characteristics of current relationships. This finding is consistent with the low stability of self-report measures, and suggests the RQ classifications may be current relationship-dependent and not highly attachment specific.

#### *Attachment and social competence*

Attachment theory presents two ways of understanding the role of childhood attachment experiences in developing and maintaining social relationships. First, the prototype hypothesis states that the parent-child relationship serves as a prototype for later close relationships (Waters et al., 1991). A second critical idea from attachment theory is that the secure base phenomenon facilitates social competence. That is, the secure child feels comfortable exploring and capitalizing on opportunities because of his or her knowledge of the ongoing support and availability of the attachment figure. Therefore the secure child may be more likely to try new things, practice skills, and become increasingly competent. However, there is nothing about the secure relationship with parents that guarantees success in any particular activity or new relationship. Success in a new relationship is also dependent on other characteristics of the individual, such as attractiveness, temperament, talents and abilities, and characteristics of the particular relationship, such as sexual attraction, personality of the other individual, common interests and goals. Hence, attachment



organization is expected to be, at best, only moderately related to broad social outcomes and comfort in relationships (J. Crowell et al., 1995).

The descriptions of feelings in close relationships of the RQ do not manifestly present attachment-specific behaviors or feelings, as identified by the secure base phenomenon. In contrast, the feelings of comfort and anxiety, desire for intimacy or distance are very likely influenced by current relationships, broad social experiences, personal characteristics, experiences in romantic relationships, and overall social competence in relationships, as well as experiences specifically within the attachment domain. Hence, the self-report measure appears to behave as a social competence variable, relating to good experiences and feelings of comfort in close relationships.

How can we understand the association between the AAI and the RQ and the lack of association between the AAI and the classification of the relationship with the mother (Hazan, 1990)? As just noted, secure-attachment experiences with parents and secure representations of attachment should optimize competence in other relationships and domains; hence, the modest relationship between the AAI and the RQ assessment of orientation to current relationships can be understood. However, when broad questions are asked about relationships with parents such as with the questionnaires or the self-designated classification of the relationship with each parent (Hazan, 1990), we do not see an association

with the more attachment-specific AAI. Because security as scored with the AAI is based solely on the coherence and consistency of the narrative as described above, memories or evaluations of past relationships with parents, even within the AAI itself, are not relevant to the scoring of attachment security.

In conclusion, the methodology and the domain of information of the AAI and RQ are not equivalent. The sample size in this study is small and the targeting of a homogeneous group of mothers limits the generalizability of these findings. A number of the findings in the study approach significance, and would probably have been significant with a larger sample size. Nevertheless, even with the likelihood of Type II errors, the results are consistent with hypothesized predictions. The findings suggest ways of understanding important theoretical and measurement issues. In addition to issues addressed above, it is important to note that at times the use of attachment terminology in the Bowlby–Ainsworth tradition for self-report assessments has tended to imply equivalence. It would be much less confusing if the self-report constructs consistently used distinct labels, such as comfort in close relationships rather than security, distancing rather than dismissing, etc. Future research could then more clearly examine how the attachment system and feelings about close relationships connect with broader issues of social competence, adaptive functioning, and relationship outcome.

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