

An Investigation of the Association between Adult Attachment
Styles, Emotional Intelligence and Marital Satisfaction as an
outcome.

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Abstract

Objective: The purpose of the study was to examine the role of adult attachment styles (secure, avoidant and anxious) and emotional intelligence in the prediction of marital satisfaction. **Method:** A survey including E.I, attachment and marital adjustment measures, was administered and completed online. A cross sectional design was used for this study and the sample consisted of 151 married Irish individuals (119 females, 32 males). **Results:** Correlational analyses revealed a negative association between anxious attachment and marital satisfaction and a positive relationship between avoidant attachment and marital satisfaction. Findings also revealed that secure attachment style and emotional intelligence significantly predict marital satisfaction, with EI being the strongest predictor. The implications for family and couples counselling is discussed. A more up-to date large-scale longitudinal study is recommended to examine these variables and how they interact over time.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Marriage is a union between two people who commit to continuously love and care for one another and to share the positive and negative experiences of marital life. The factors that contribute to a successful marriage have been continuously explored by researchers. According to Aldous (1996) a successful marriage is one in which both partners can enjoy a sense of identity and meaning in their lives. Similarly, Gottman & Levenson (1992) postulate that a satisfying marriage is one in which partners can experience greater relationship stability and lower rates of conflict and dissolution.

However, while marriage is considered a desirable romantic relationship, marital satisfaction can be difficult to obtain. As marriage is believed to be the most important intimate relationship and is central to family life, one would expect a deeper exploration into the factors that can contribute to the experience of marital satisfaction.

1.1 Defining marital satisfaction According to Durodoye (1997) marital satisfaction can be defined as an individual's appraisal of significant events and experiences within the marital relationship. Researchers are interested in marital satisfaction because of its important role in, the psychological well-being of both individuals within the marriage (Shek, 1995), and in the prediction of overall life satisfaction (Carr, Freedman, Cornman, & Schwarz, 2014). The rationale for studying marital satisfaction arises from its contribution to the maintenance of a happy secure family-life (Stack & Eshleman, 1998) and its benefits to society when such relationships are maintained. According to the CSO (2016), the number of separated and divorced people in Ireland, increased by 8.9 per cent between 2011 and 2016 and is continuing to increase. In consideration of these increasing divorce rates in the recent decades,

research has placed a focus on recognising the factors that contribute to a healthy satisfying marital relationship.

A satisfactory marriage can be described as a shield in which protects against mental pressures, negative experiences and life events. According to research satisfying marriages appear to be associated with an individual's attachment style and emotional intelligence. Individuals who are secure tend to experience higher levels of marital satisfaction than insecure individuals (Collins & Read, 1990; Simpson, 1990). Similarly, individuals who are emotionally intelligent experience greater levels of marital satisfaction (Hajihassani & Sim, 2018; Lavalekar, Kulkarni, & Jagtop, 2010). The literature will be explored and presented below.

1.2 Attachment Theory

One of the influential factors in a marital relationship is the attachment style of individuals. An attachment can be described as an internal working model which incorporates all expectations of the self and the way in which people respond either positively or negatively to these expectations (Bowlby, 1969). A basic principle of the attachment theory is the bonds that we form as a child continue to be important for our development of relationships throughout the lifespan. According to Hazan and Shaver (1987) our attachment style is related in a theoretically meaningful way to our mental model of the self and to the adult relationships we form in later life.

The Attachment System is an innate psychological system that motivates individuals to adopt proximity seeking behaviours in order to mitigate stress and protect against potential threats or dangers. Responsive attachment figures who are

attentive to the needs of infants promote a sense of security and stability in the attachment relationship. This attachment relationship is crucial for the development of the infant's sense of self and others. Hazan and Shaver (1987) developed a simple categorical measure of what was to be known as an attachment style. This measure was developed to assess individual differences in attachment behaviours. Mary Ainsworth (1989) proposed that there are three known parent-child attachment styles, secure, avoidant and anxious-ambivalent. Hazan and Shaver (1987) proposed that romantic love can be considered as an attachment process. Adult attachment relates to the way in which individuals recall and currently evaluate their overall childhood attachment experience.

According to the attachment theory, a satisfying relationship is one that ensures all basic needs are being met (Bowlby, 1969). Needs that aren't met or attended to may be the hidden agendas that disrupt the way individuals healthily resolve disputes and conflict (Gottman, Markman, Gonso & Notarius, 1976). The attachment theory describes what those needs are likely to be and emphasizes the importance of having those needs attended to. According to Hazan and Shaver (1994) the most important characteristics of a potential partner should mirror the very characteristics shown to be important in the attachment relationship in infancy. Trust and responsiveness are characteristics known to be important in a potential romantic partner. Trust promotes self-disclosure and the development of intimacy (Reis & Shaver 1988).

Attachment theory postulates that the emotional bond of an attachment can contribute to the maintenance of an unsatisfying relationship. Attachment in infancy is developed through proximity to the caregiver. Proximity alone can help maintain this bond (Weiss, 1982). Bowlby proposed that when the child is separated from the

caregiver anxiety can occur. This can have the same effect in adult romantic relationships. The duration of a relationship depends on the extent to which a couple will express affection, show respect, express admiration and gratitude to one another and the extent to which they are able to develop a climate of appreciation for one another instead of contempt or criticism (Gottman, 1993). Research states that secure attachment is related to the development of this specific climate and contributes to what Gottman (1993) called marital friendship.

1.3 Adult Attachment and Marital Satisfaction

Secure attachment has been found to correlate positively, and insecure attachment negatively, with relationship satisfaction (Collins & Read, 1990; Simpson, 1990). More securely attached individuals also maintain more stable romantic relationships than insecure individuals and report higher marital adjustment and satisfaction (Mikulincer et al., 2002). A meta analytic study measuring the effects of anxious and avoidant attachment on relationship quality found that both attachment styles negatively correlated with relationship quality and that avoidant attachment in particular was associated with decreased general satisfaction in relationships (Li & Chan, 2012).

Individuals with avoidant attachment are typically low in trust compared with secure individuals. Avoidant individuals tend to deny attachment needs (Hazan & Shaver, 1990), avoid emotional dependency, avoid commitment in relationships by fantasizing about engaging in a sexual act or actively engaging in casual sexual encounters with another person (Brennan & Shaver, 1995). According to Hazan and Shaver (1994) avoidant individuals also tend to be less invested in their relationships

and tend to remain emotionally and psychologically independent of their romantic partners. Engagement in these types of behaviours has a knock-on effect on the couple's relationship quality and satisfaction. The first clinical study to assess the association between adult attachment and marital satisfaction on a sample of 172 distressed couples (Mondor, McDuff, Lussier, & Wright, 2011) found that avoidant attachment style is a strong predictor of marital dissatisfaction.

Research has shown that attachment styles can have an influence on marital satisfaction by affecting both positive and negative attributions made by partners of their intimate relationship. According to Collins (1996) and Mikulincer (1998) anxious and avoidant participants made more negative attributions to relational events than did secure participants. Similar findings were reported by Simpson, Rholes and Philips (1996) in which anxiously attached individuals praised their partners negatively however, avoidant attachment did not affect appraisal. It was proposed by the authors that avoidant individuals tend to adopt self-protective behaviours in order to safe-guard their relationship with their partner (Simpson et al., 1996). In contrast anxious individuals tend to be preoccupied with their partner and express concerns about the stability and quality of their relationship. Individuals of an anxious attachment orientation will make strong efforts to maintain proximity to their partner and observe their relationship partner closely for indications of dwindling emotional or physical proximity (Cassidy & Berlin, 1994; Simpson, Ickes, & Grich, 1999). They tend to worry about abandonment and seek reassurance from their intimate partner (Collins & Read, 1990). They also tend to exhibit controlling behaviour (Collins & Read, 1990; Hazen & Shaver, 1987) which leads to conflict within the relationship (Downey, Freitas, Michaelis, & Khouri, 1998). According to research, anxious individuals are more

susceptible to experiencing stronger negative emotions (Simpson, 1990) and relationship dissatisfaction (Feeney, 1994; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994).

Individuals with a secure sense of self and others are characterised by the opposite of these insecure tendencies and behaviours. Secure people tend to hold more respect, admiration, and gratitude toward their romantic partner than insecure individuals (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2003). Secure individuals also tend to trust others, communicate easily, enjoy communication and do not worry about rejection or abandonment. They tend to maintain honesty and stability in their relationship and thus has a positive effect on their relationship satisfaction.

According to research attachment security has a significant association with marital intimacy (Maysseless, Sharabany & Sagi, 1997) and stronger marital cohesion (Mikulincer & Florian, 1999) and has a positive impact on marital satisfaction as individuals with secure attachment experience higher levels of marital satisfaction than insecure individuals (Nadiri & Khalatbari, 2018).

Feeney (1994) postulates that positive and secure models of the self and of intimate partners are related to marital satisfaction. According to Feeney (1994) different patterns of communication mediate the link between attachment security and intimate relationship satisfaction. How secure a person's mental working model is also influences their marital satisfaction.

Kobak and Hazan (1991) found that the security of a spouse's mental working model covaries with his or her relationship adjustment and relationship satisfaction. Individuals with a secure attachment tend to communicate and trust easily, they also tend to have more stability in their intimate relationships. Individuals with an insecure attachment tend to have less stability in their intimate relationships. They also tend to

be more fearful of rejection or abandonment. This fear prevents the individuals of feeling secure and comfortable in their intimate relationship and thus has a direct effect on their relationship satisfaction.

In conclusion, attachment is an important developmental process and the attachment theory allows individuals to understand their world and to create their internal working model. Understanding the different attachment styles and early maladaptive schemas can be taught in educational settings to raise awareness of adolescents and adults choosing an appropriate and compatible partner. Individuals who are aware of their specific attachment style may have the opportunity in receiving specialized help to get rid of insecure attachment and maladaptive schemes before marriage to prepare for a happy and healthy marital life.

1.4 Emotional Intelligence and Marital Satisfaction

Emotional Intelligence can be defined as the ability to perceive, recognise, express, utilise and control one's emotion and other person's emotions (Matthews, Zeidner, & Roberts, 2017). The Emotional Intelligence Theory postulates that a person's overall emotional intelligence encompasses four skills and abilities. These abilities include perceiving emotion, understanding emotion, utilising emotion to facilitate thought, and managing emotion in self and others. These emotional abilities form a hierarchy, with each ability increasing in complexity (Mayer, Caruso & Salovey, 1999).

According to Goleman (2001), emotional intelligence involves the capacity to manage mental status, mood and to regulate impulses in a desirable way. Research postulates that emotional intelligence can have major effects on various human

activities such as professional growth, family and marital life (Batoool & Khalid, 2009; Leucine, 2006). In support of this finding, research by Lavalekar, Kulkarni and Jagtap (2010) found that people who scored high on EI displayed higher marital satisfaction than those who scored low on emotional intelligence.

The affective communication and interaction between couples has been an area of interest for researchers in determining marital quality and adjustment (Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998; Driver & Gottman, 2004). According to research, the better spouses are at identifying, perceiving, regulating and expressing emotions, the more satisfying their relationships are. Fitness (2001) proposes that individuals with higher emotional intelligence have the capacity to better regulate their emotional reactions and thus it can be reasonable to predict that those with higher emotional intelligence may possess the capability to manage and resolve their disagreements in a more effective way, which in turn may predict higher satisfaction within the relationship.

Research has continued to find support for emotional intelligence as a significant predictor of emotional intelligence (Hajihassani & Sim, 2018). The specific components of E.I that relate to marital satisfaction have been an area of interest for researchers in this field. An analytical study revealed that components of emotional intelligence such as empathy, emotional expression, optimism, emotional self-awareness and impulse control, play a major role in the formation and maintenance of romantic relationships. (Batoool & Khalid, 2009). One study revealed that partner emotional intelligence was related to more constructive communication patterns which in turn influences relationship satisfaction (Smith, Heaven, & Ciarrochi, 2008).

Another important component of emotional intelligence, understanding emotions, in conjunction with insight into one's own emotions may guide individuals in developing relationships with more compatible partners. Individuals who can manage and control their emotions as well as other's emotions, are better able to form and maintain mutually satisfying relationships.

Having deficits in emotional intelligence can have a negative effect on marital satisfaction. One study revealed that couples with both partners experiencing low emotional intelligence tended to have the highest scores on negative relationship quality and conflict and lowest scores on support, depth and positive relationship quality (Brackett, Warner & Bosco, 2005). Fortunately, emotional intelligence can be improved by training (Fariselli, Ghini, & Freedman, 2008). One quasi-experimental study revealed that emotional-intelligence training led to improved close relationships (Nelis et al., 2011).

Therefore, according to these findings, if the result of the current study reveals a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and marital satisfaction it can be suggested that individuals receive emotional intelligence training to enhance their ability to identify, utilise and manage emotions within their intimate relationships as this will have positive impact on the quality of their marital relationship and overall marital satisfaction.

1.5 The current research study

1.5.1 Rationale. Based on self-report methodology, the present study was designed to assess the utility of attachment styles and emotional intelligence as predictors of marital satisfaction and to add to the growing body of literature in the area of attachment, emotional intelligence and marital satisfaction. Little research has investigated how emotional intelligence and attachment styles simultaneously effect marital satisfaction and so the present study aims to address this.

1.5.2 Hypotheses. Based on the research and literature in this area outlined above the hypotheses of the current study are:

Hypothesis 1- Anxious attachment will be negatively correlated with marital satisfaction.

Hypothesis 2- Avoidant attachment will be negatively correlated with marital satisfaction.

Hypothesis 3- Secure attachment will be a significant predictor of marital satisfaction.

Hypothesis 4- Emotional intelligence will be the strongest predictor of marital satisfaction.

Chapter 2. Method

2.1 Research Design

The current study was quantitative in nature and employed a between persons cross sectional survey research design. The predictor variables included attachment styles (secure, avoidant and anxious) and emotional intelligence and the Criterion variable was marital satisfaction.

2.2 Participants

Using a cross sectional design, 151 participants were recruited through an online survey. The sample included 78.8% females and 21.1% males. The statistical population included married people from Ireland. The sample was recruited through the social media network, Facebook, where several groups aimed specifically at married people were accessed. The sampling method of snowballing was also used as participants sent the survey to family and peers. Inclusion criteria for the present study were as follows: participants who volunteered to participate in the study must be (a) over the age of 18 and (b) married. Participation in the current study was completely voluntary.

2.4 Measures

Attachment Styles

The Adult Attachment Scale was used to assess adult attachment styles. This 18-item scale (AAS) was developed by Collins and Read (1990) and was based on multiple items from Hazan and Shaver's (1987) description of secure, anxious, and avoidant

attachment styles. Respondents are required to rate to the extent a statement relates to how they feel in their current intimate relationship on a Likert-Scale ranging from 1(not at all characteristic) to 5(very characteristic).

Research findings indicate that the AAS items fall into three dimensions, dependency, anxiety and closeness. For the purpose of this study, adult attachment style variables were operationalised by the close, depend and anxiety scores on the Adult Attachment Scale. Secure attachment is defined by high scores on Close and Depend subscales and low score on Anxiety subscale, Anxious attachment is defined by high score on Anxiety subscale, moderate scores on Close and Depend subscales and Avoidant attachment style is defined by low scores on Close, Depend, and Anxiety subscale.

The AAS measures beliefs about oneself and others that are consistent with the attachment theory and has been observed to exhibit good reliability. (Collins & Read, 1990). A test-retest reliability of 70% has been observed in the AAS (Kirkpatrick & Hazan, 1994). According to previous research findings an internal consistency for the scale was found with ranges from 0.60 to 0.75 (Collins & Read, 1990). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the current sample was 0.70.

Emotional Intelligence

The Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Scale (SSEIT), developed by Schutte et al. (1998), was used to assess emotional intelligence. This measure consists of 33-items assessing four subscales of emotional intelligence including, utilizing emotions, emotion perception, managing emotions in self and in others. The SSEIT includes a scale ranging

from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree) for responses. A total score is then obtained for the participant. An internal consistency of 0.90 has been observed by Schutte et al. (1998) for their assessment of emotional intelligence and with the same sample a 2-week test-retest reliability of 0.78 was reported. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the current sample was 0.92.

Marital Adjustment

The Dyadic Adjustment Scale, developed by Spanier in 1976, was used to measure different dimensions of marital adjustment. This 32-item self-report is widely accepted as a measure of relationship quality and adjustment. Items are scored on various Likert-type scales (items example: "In general, how often do you think that things between you and your partner are going well"). This measure is divided into 4 subscales: 1) Dyadic Consensus, 2) Dyadic Satisfaction, 3) Dyadic Cohesion, 4) Affectional expression. A total score summing up all items was used in this study, with higher scores representing higher levels of marital adjustment. The DAS has been used in more than 1000 studies (Spanier, 1988) and is continuously used in research today. It is often used in marital therapy studies and may serve as a dependent assessment of marital satisfaction (Whisman & Jacobson, 1992). According to previous research findings an internal consistency of .91 using a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was found for the DAS (Thompson, 1982). The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for the current sample was .94.

2.3 Procedure

2.3.1 Ethical Considerations. As the current research study did not target a vulnerable population, it was not expected that any serious ethical issues or risks would

arise. However, as the scales utilised in the study require participants to reflect on their personal experiences in close relationships and to report on information regarding personal topics, it was possible that some participants may become uncomfortable or distressed with the sensitive topics covered in the survey.

To address this concern, participants were provided with an information sheet before agreeing to take part in the study. The document provided all necessary information regarding the nature, aim and the participants role in the study. Other details of the study included (1) the participants right to withdraw from the study at any time (2) assurance that participant anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained throughout the data collection process (3) that no major risks are related to participation. The researchers and research supervisors full contact details were provided to allow participants to make enquiries relating to the research study. To address the potential risk of distress following participation in the research study, contact information for the *Samaritans* was provided for participants in the information sheet.

Certain criteria must be met before participation could take place and participants were informed of this before consenting to take part in the research study. Participants were made aware that they must be over the age of 18 and married to take part in the research study.

Participants were then presented with a consent form in which they had the option to select 'yes I give my consent to take part in the study'- if they chose to participate in the study. See appendix D for the full information sheet.

Participants were instructed to complete three questionnaires as part of the data collection process. Participants first completed an 18-item measure of adult attachment

styles (Collins & Read, 1990). Participants were instructed to read the statements presented in the survey and rate on a 5-point Likert scale the extent to which the statement relates to them and their feelings and experiences of romantic relationships. Participants were then instructed to complete a 33-item self-report measure of emotional intelligence (Schuttel et al., 1998), rating on a scale of 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree) the extent to which each statement applies to them. The final part of the survey required participants to complete a 32-item assessment of different dimensions of relationship adjustment (Spanier, 1976). The survey took approximately 15-20 minutes to complete.

Following completion of the survey, participants were presented with a debriefing sheet. The information provided restated what was presented in the information sheet. Participants were reminded that their confidentiality and anonymity would be maintained throughout the data collection process. No personal details would be collected from the participant. The researchers and research supervisors contact details were provided again for the participant as were the contact details for the *Samaritans* in cases of participant distress. Participants were then thanked for the contribution to the research study.

Once recruitment was complete, the questionnaire was closed publicly. The data gathered from the surveys was transported to Microsoft excel to prepare for statistical analysis of the responses.

Chapter 3. Results

3.1 Descriptive Statistics

3.1.1 Frequencies.

Table 1 displays frequency statistics for all categorical variables in the present data.

Variable	Frequency	Valid Percentage
Gender		
Male	32	79
Female	119	21

Frequencies for the current sample of married people on each categorical, demographic variable (N = 151)

3.1.2 Scale reliability statistics

Reliability statistics for the three scales used in the study -Adult Attachment Scale (Collins & Read, 1990), Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Scale (Schutte et al.,1998) and the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976)- were obtained using a Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

Variable	Number of items	Cronbach's alpha
Adult Attachment Scale	18	.70
SSEIT	33	.92
Dyadic Adjustment Scale	32	.94

3.1.3 Descriptive statistics.

Descriptive statistics for all continuous variables in the current dataset is presented in Table 3

	Mean (95% Confidence Intervals)	Std. Error Mean	Median	SD	Range
Secure AS	3.45(3.33-3.56)	.06	4	.71	1-5
Avoidant AS	3.23(3.11-3.35)	.06	3	.73	1-5
Anxious AS	2.76(2.63-2.89)	.06	3	.8	1-5
EI	116.8 (114.119.5)	1.4	120	16.7	59-157
MS	102.9(98.3-107.5)	2.31	110	28.4	12-147

Table 3

3.2 Inferential Statistics

3.2.1 Correlation analysis to test hypothesis 1. The relationship between anxious adult attachment style and marital satisfaction was explored using a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. Prior to this, preliminary analyses were conducted to ensure that the assumptions of linearity, normality and homoscedasticity were not violated. A weak to moderate negative correlation was observed between the two variables ($r = -.36$, $n = 151$, $p < .01$). This indicates that the variables share 13% of variance in common.

Next, hypothesis 2 was explored. The relationship between avoidant adult attachment style and marital satisfaction was investigated also using a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. A moderate positive correlation was observed between the two variables ($r = .46$, $n = 151$, $p < .01$). This indicates that the variables share 21% of variance in common.

After testing hypothesis 1 and 2, associations between all other variables were investigated also using a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. Secure adult attachment and emotional intelligence were significantly positively correlated with marital satisfaction, and these significant effects ranged from $r = .53$ (Secure AS) to $r = .75$ (EI). These results can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4. Correlations between all continuous variables.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. Marital Satisfaction	1				
2. Secure Attachment	.53***	1			
3. Avoidant Attachment	.46***	.57**	1		
4. Anxious Attachment	-.36**	-.42*	-.46***	1	
5. Emotional Intelligence	.75***	.47**	.55***	-.44*	1

Note. Statistical significance: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

3.2.2 Multiple Regression Analysis. Hypotheses 2 and 3 were examined using a multiple regression analysis. There was no violation of the assumption of multicollinearity and the data was suitable for examination through multiple linear regression analysis. Since no a priori hypotheses had been made to determine the order of entry of the predictor variables, a direct method was used for the analysis.

The four predictor variables used in the model explained 61% of variance in marital satisfaction levels ($F(5,144) = 45, p < .001$). Secure adult attachment style and emotional intelligence were found to uniquely predict marital satisfaction levels to a statistically significant level, with emotional intelligence being the strongest predictor: Secure AS ($\beta = .24, p < .001$) and Emotional Intelligence ($\beta = .68, p < .001$) (see Table 5 for full details).

Table 5. Multiple regression model predicting marital satisfaction scores

	R^2	β	t	B	SE	$CI\ 95\% (B)$
Model	.61***					
Secure Attachment		.24***	3.7	9.64	2.6	4.4 / 14.9
Avoidant Attachment		.03	.55	1.5	2.7	-6.8 / 3.9
Anxious Attachment		-.02	-.42	-.91	2.2	-3.4 / 5.1
Emotional Intelligence		.68***	10.1	1.2	.11	.92 / 1.4

Note. R^2 = R-squared; β = standardized beta value; t = t test statistic; B = unstandardized beta value; SE = Standard errors of B ; $CI\ 95\% (B)$ = 95% confidence interval for B ; $N = 151$; Statistical significance: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Chapter 4. Discussion

While there is a large body of research describing the association between adult attachment styles, emotional intelligence and marital satisfaction as an outcome, there is little research carried out on how they simultaneously effect marital satisfaction and the current study aimed to address this. Results of the current study are interpreted and summarised below.

4.1 Summary of Results

Anxious Attachment. Hypothesis 1 was supported, with the results of the correlational analyses confirming a negative association between anxious attachment style and marital satisfaction. Consistent with previous research anxious individuals experience lower marital satisfaction than secure individuals (Feeney, 1994; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994).

Anxious individuals have a more insecure sense of self than secure individuals and this drives their fear of rejection and abandonment. Anxious individuals also tend to monitor their relationship for signs of emotional and physical disengagement from their partner (Cassidy & Berlin, 1994; Simpson, Ickes, & Grich, 1999) and this has a negative impact on their relationship.

To avoid imagined abandonment anxious individuals may adopt controlling behaviours (Collins & Read, 1990; Hazen & Shaver, 1987) which may prompt arguments and conflict arising within the relationship and this will ultimately have a negative effect on marital quality and satisfaction.

Avoidant attachment. Hypothesis 2 was not supported with the correlation analyses indicating that a positive relationship exists between avoidant attachment style and marital satisfaction. This result indicates that avoidant attachment style is associated with high levels of marital satisfaction which contradicts research carried out by other studies that found avoidant attachment to be negatively associated with general support and satisfaction in relationships (Li & Chan, 2012) and that it is a significant predictor of marital dissatisfaction (Mondor, Mcduff, Lussier & Wright, 2011).

According to Collins (1996) and Mikulincer (1998) avoidant individuals are more likely to distance themselves from relational conflict and stress in order to protect themselves and their relationship. Collins (1996) states that avoidant individuals are less likely to negatively appraise their relationship or their spouse as such appraisals would indicate that they were not valued by others which would disrupt their self-perception as being independent and self-confident. Individuals who are avoidant tend to adopt distancing strategies and this may mitigate the awareness of distress within the relationship, which may lead to them underreporting the negative events within the relationship and viewing the relationship more positively than it is.

Secure attachment. Hypothesis 3 was supported. The results of the multiple regression analysis indicated that secure attachment is a significant predictor of marital satisfaction and that participants with a secure attachment style have higher levels of marital satisfaction than those who are insecure.

An extensive amount of research has shown similar findings (Collins & Read, 1990; Feeney, 1994; Mikulincer et al., 2002; Nadiri & Khalatbari, 2018; Simpson, 1990). This may be due to the individual having a more secure and positive sense of self and

others which has a direct positive impact on their relationship with their partner. An individual who is secure is more likely to trust and respect their partner and this will have a positive effect on their marital satisfaction (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2003).

Secure individuals tend to exhibit more effective communication patterns than insecure individual, which has a significant impact on their marital satisfaction. Effective communication between spouses is essential for a marital relationship to thrive. Anders & Tucker (2000) found that secure couples tend to share mutually constructive communication patterns as oppose to insecure individuals who report communication withdrawal and mutual avoidance (Domingue & Mollen, 2009).

Emotional Intelligence. Hypothesis 4 was supported. The results of the multiple regression analysis indicate that emotional intelligence is the strongest predictor of marital satisfaction. These results support the findings of Lavalekar, Kulkarni and Jagtap (2010) who found that people who score high on emotional intelligence display higher marital satisfaction than those who scored low on emotional intelligence. More recent studies have also found a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and marital satisfaction (Hajihassani & Sim, 2018).

According to Fitness (2001) marital satisfaction can be predicted by high emotional intelligence because spouses are better able to manage their emotional reactions and recognise their own and their partners emotions which will have a positive effect on the outcome of the marital relationship. Individuals who can manage their emotions within the relationship are able to resolve arguments in a more effective manner which may have a positive impact on marital satisfaction.

4.2 Strengths and limitations of the current study

A major strength of the study is that the up to date findings from the current research study contribute to the knowledge and research on the significant role of adult attachment styles and emotional intelligence in the prediction of marital satisfaction.

Another major strength of the study was that all scales used in the study, the Adult Attachment Scale (Collins & Read, 1990), the Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Scale (Schutte et al.,1998) and the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976), were highly reliable and commonly used in past research. The Dyadic Adjustment Scale in particular, has been commonly used in couple's therapy as a dependent measure of marital adjustment and satisfaction (Whisman & Jacobson,1992). The validity and reliability of the scales was ensured which is desirable for a study of a self-report design. This ensures that respondents can give valid descriptions of their experiences and feelings of close relationships, their emotional intelligence and their appraisal of their marital relationship.

There were also several limitations which should be addressed. First and foremost, the sample was cross sectional in design meaning that variables were measured at only one point in time and research has found that marital relationship dynamics and satisfaction changes overtime (Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994). A marital relationship follows a developmental trajectory of highs and lows and thus would be of benefit for future research to focus on the prediction of marital satisfaction overtime.

Secondly in relation to the sample, the sampling method was not very effective as only a small portion of the overall population contributed to the sample which means that it is difficult to infer if the current findings are representative of the Irish married population.

Thirdly, self-report measures were exclusively relied upon by the present study in order to assess emotional intelligence, adult attachment styles and marital satisfaction and this introduces self-report bias. Respondents may have found it difficult to consider and reflect on their emotions accurately which may have led to the overemphasizing or underreporting of certain emotions.

Another limitation of the study is that the research study did not account for couple's adult attachment style but focused on the individual's attachment style. Research postulates that both partners attachment styles have an impact on the marital satisfaction experiences within the marital relationship (Banse, 2004).

Having children and number of children were also not accounted for in the current study and this factor may have played a role in the prediction of marital satisfaction as research has indicated that having children may increase the stability of marriage but also decrease marital quality (Waite & Lillard, 1991)

Nonetheless the current study has contributed with more update findings, to the understanding of the role of emotional intelligence and adult attachment styles in simultaneously predicting marital satisfaction.

4.4 Recommendations for future research

The first recommendation for future research relates to the limitations of this study. As the current study utilised a cross-sectional design, longitudinal approaches are recommended for future research in this area. Marital satisfaction is an experience which changes over time, as a result of changes in the family dynamic, having children, growing as individuals, growing as a couple. Observing these constructs over time would be a valuable insight into how marital satisfaction changes overtime and how emotional intelligence and adult attachment styles contribute to this process.

Another recommendation for future research also relates to the limitations of the study. As the current study utilised self-report measures as the basis for data collection, it is recommended that future research focus on the observed behaviour of individuals. Surveys and questionnaires can only gather so much information, interviews and observation tasks may be more effective in obtaining more valid representations of participants feelings and experiences. For marital research it is important to observe how people interact with one another (Raush, Barry, Hertel, & Swain, 1974) in order to obtain more accurate representations of feelings and expectations within the close relationship.

4.5 Conclusion and implications

It can be concluded from this study that emotional intelligence and adult attachment styles play a significant role in the prediction of marital satisfaction. Being aware of one's own attachment style may be of importance in maintaining a happy healthy marriage. Understanding the different attachment styles and early maladaptive schemas can be taught in educational settings to bring awareness to how they affect the feelings and perceptions of oneself and their relationship with others. Therapy has also proven to be an effective tool in reshaping individual's mental schemas. Such therapies aim to eradicate maladaptive schemas and insecure attachment styles in effort to improve individual's relationship with themselves and their intimate partner. According to research, emotionally focused couple therapy which is based on the adult attachment perspective, has been reported to be one of the most effective and validated approaches to restoring harmony in close relationships and improving marital satisfaction to a high degree. (Beasley & Ager, 2019).

Similarly, being aware of one's emotional intelligence, learning how to manage one's emotions and the emotions of others can be of importance in maintaining a happy healthy, and secure marriage. Emotional intelligence was observed to be the strongest predictor of marital satisfaction and this has many implications for marital studies and therapy. Emotional intelligence training can help enhance areas of EI and this will help the individual in identifying their emotion, managing their emotional reactions, identifying other's emotions and communicating in accordance with these emotions, which will greatly improve communication within the marital relationship and inevitably the relationship quality and satisfaction.

Furthermore, the results of this study contribute, with more up to date findings, to the knowledge and research on the associations between adult attachment styles and emotional intelligence on the prediction of marital satisfaction. Hypotheses in this study were generally supported, particularly relating to emotional intelligence confirming to be the strongest predictor of marital satisfaction. It is recommended that future researchers adopt a longitudinal design to their study to greatly explore the trajectory highs and lows of the marital experience and how adult attachment styles and emotional intelligence influence this experience over time.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Adult Attachment Scale (Collins & Read, 1990)

Please read each of the following statements and rate the extent to which it describes your feelings about romantic relationships. Please think about all your relationships (past and present) and respond in terms of how you generally feel in these relationships. If you have never been involved in a romantic relationship, answer in terms of how you think you would feel.

Please use the scale below by placing a number between 1 and 5 in the space provided to the right of each statement.

	1-----2-----3-----4-----5	
	Not at all	Very
of me	characteristic	characteristic
		of me
(1)	I find it relatively easy to get close to others.	_____
(2)	I do <u>not</u> worry about being abandoned.	_____
(3)	I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on others.	_____
(4)	In relationships, I often worry that my partner does not really love me.	_____
(5)	I find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like.	_____
(6)	I am comfortable depending on others.	_____
(7)	I do <u>not</u> worry about someone getting too close to me.	_____
(8)	I find that people are never there when you need them.	_____
(9)	I am somewhat uncomfortable being close to others.	_____
(10)	In relationships, I often worry that my partner will not want to stay with me.	_____
(11)	I want to merge completely with another person.	_____
(12)	My desire to merge sometimes scares people away.	_____
(13)	I am comfortable having others depend on me.	_____
(14)	I know that people will be there when I need them.	_____
(15)	I am nervous when anyone gets too close.	_____
(16)	I find it difficult to trust others completely.	_____
(17)	Often, partners want me to be closer than I feel comfortable being.	_____
(18)	I am not sure that I can always depend on others to be there when I need them.	_____

Scoring Instructions for the Adult Attachment Scale

The scale contains three subscales, each composed of six items. The three subscales are CLOSE, DEPEND, and ANXIETY. The CLOSE scale measures the extent to which a person is comfortable with closeness and intimacy. The DEPEND scale measures the extent to which a person feels he/she can depend on others to be available when needed. The ANXIETY subscale measures the extent to which a person is worried about being abandoned or unloved.

Original Scoring:

Average the ratings for the six items that compose each subscale as indicated below.

<u>Scale</u>	<u>Items</u>
CLOSE	1 7 9* 13 15* 17*
DEPEND	3* 6 8* 14 16* 18*
ANXIETY	2* 4 5 10 11 12

* Items with an asterisk should be reverse scored before computing the subscale mean.

Appendix B.

The Schutte Self Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT)

Instructions: Indicate the extent to which each item applies to you using the following scale:

1 = strongly disagree

2 = disagree

3 = neither disagree nor agree

4 = agree

5 = strongly agree

1. I know when to speak about my personal problems to others

2. When I am faced with obstacles, I remember times I faced similar obstacles and overcame them

3. I expect that I will do well on most things I try

4. Other people find it easy to confide in me

5. I find it hard to understand the non-verbal messages of other people*

6. Some of the major events of my life have led me to re-evaluate what is important and not important

7. When my mood changes, I see new possibilities

8. Emotions are one of the things that make my life worth living

9. I am aware of my emotions as I experience them

10. I expect good things to happen

11. I like to share my emotions with others

12. When I experience a positive emotion, I know how to make it last

13. I arrange events others enjoy

14. I seek out activities that make me happy

15. I am aware of the non-verbal messages I send to others

16. I present myself in a way that makes a good impression on others

17. When I am in a positive mood, solving problems is easy for me

18. By looking at their facial expressions, I recognize the emotions people are experiencing

19. I know why my emotions change

20. When I am in a positive mood, I am able to come up with new ideas

21. I have control over my emotions

22. I easily recognize my emotions as I experience them

23. I motivate myself by imagining a good outcome to tasks I take on

24. I compliment others when they have done something well

25. I am aware of the non-verbal messages other people send

26. When another person tells me about an important event in his or her life, I almost feel as though I have experienced this event myself

27. When I feel a change in emotions, I tend to come up with new ideas|

28. When I am faced with a challenge, I give up because I believe I will fail*

29. I know what other people are feeling just by looking at them

30. I help other people feel better when they are down

31. I use good moods to help myself keep trying in the face of obstacles

32. I can tell how people are feeling by listening to the tone of their voice

2

33. It is difficult for me to understand why people feel the way they do*

Appendix C.

SCORING THE DYADIC ADJUSTMENT SCALE

Most persons have disagreements in their relationships. Please indicate below the approximate extent of agreement or disagreement between you and your partner for each item on the following list.

	Always Agree	Almost Always Agree	Occa- sionally Disagree	Fre- quently Disagree	Almost Always Disagree	Always Disagree
1. Handling family finances	5	4	3	2	1	0
NOTE: SCORING for Items 1-15 is the same						
2. Matters of recreation	5	4	3	2	1	0
3. Religious matters	5	4	3	2	1	0
4. Demonstrations of affection	5	4	3	2	1	0
5. Friends	5	4	3	2	1	0
6. Sex relations	5	4	3	2	1	0
7. Conventionality (correct or proper behavior)	5	4	3	2	1	0
8. Philosophy of life	5	4	3	2	1	0
9. Ways of dealing with parents or in-laws	5	4	3	2	1	0
10. Aims, goals, and things believed important	5	4	3	2	1	0
11. Amount of time spent together	5	4	3	2	1	0
12. Making major decisions	5	4	3	2	1	0
13. Household tasks	5	4	3	2	1	0
14. Leisure time interests and activities	5	4	3	2	1	0
15. Career decisions	5	4	3	2	1	0

	All the time	Most of the time	More often than not	Occa- sionally	Rarely	Never
16. How often do you discuss or have you considered divorce, separation, or terminating your relationship?	0	1	2	3	4	5
17. How often do you or your mate leave the house after a fight?	0	1	2	3	4	5
18. In general, how often do you think that things between you and your partner are going well?	5	4	3	2	1	0
19. Do you confide in your mate?	5	4	3	2	1	0
20. Do you ever regret that you married? (or lived together)	0	1	2	3	4	5
21. How often do you and your partner quarrel?	0	1	2	3	4	5
22. How often do you and your mate "get on each other's nerves?"	0	1	2	3	4	5

	Every Day	Almost Every Day	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
23. Do you kiss your mate?	4	3	2	1	0
	All of them	Most of them	Some of them	Very few of them	None of them
24. Do you and your mate engage in outside interests together?	4	3	2	1	0

How often would you say the following events occur between you and your mate?

	Never	Less than once a month	Once or twice a month	Once or twice a week	Once a day	More often
25. Have a stimulating exchange of ideas	0	1	2	3	4	5
26. Laugh together	0	1	2	3	4	5
27. Calmly discuss something	0	1	2	3	4	5
28. Work together on a project	0	1	2	3	4	5

These are some things about which couples sometimes agree and sometime disagree. Indicate if either item below caused differences of opinions or were problems in your relationship during the past few weeks. (Check yes or no)

	Yes	No	
29.	0	1	Being too tired for sex.
30.	0	1	Not showing love.

31. The circles on the following line represent different degrees of happiness in your relationship. The middle point, "happy," represents the degree of happiness of most relationships. Please fill in the circle which best describes the degree of happiness, all things considered, of your relationship.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Extremely Unhappy	Fairly Unhappy	A Little Unhappy	Happy	Very Happy	Extremely Happy	Perfect

32. Which of the following statements best describes how you feel about the future of your relationship?

- 5 I want desperately for my relationship to succeed, and *would go to almost any length* to see that it does.
- 4 I want very much for my relationship to succeed, and *will do all I can* to see that it does.
- 3 I want very much for my relationship to succeed, and *will do my fair share* to see that it does.
- 2 It would be nice if my relationship succeeded, but *I can't do much more than I am doing now* to help it succeed.
- 1 It would be nice if it succeeded, but I *refuse to do any more than I am doing now* to keep the relationship going.
- 0 My relationship can never succeed, and *there is no more that I can do* to keep the relationship going.

Appendix D.

Information sheet and consent form

Invitation to take part in study

My name is Orlaith Power, I am a final year BA Psychology student at National College of Ireland. As part of my final year project I will be investigating the relationship between attachment, emotional intelligence and marital satisfaction. With the utilization of an online survey I will be gathering data in relation to this research topic. My research study is supervised by my lecturer in Psychology at NCI, Dr. Andrew Allen.

Aim of Study

The aim of this research is to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence, attachment and marital satisfaction as an outcome.

Information sheet

To participate in this study, you must be aged 18 or over and married.

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be required to complete this questionnaire. Participation is completely voluntary, and each participant will have the right to withdraw at any stage of the research collection process without penalty.

Responses to this survey will be kept anonymous.

Inclusion Criteria

For the purpose of this research study, participants must be (a) over the age of 18 and (b) married.

- Yes, I am over 18 and wish to proceed
- Yes, I am married and wish to proceed

Consent Form

As a participant it is important that you are aware of all potential risks of participating in the current research study. If you become distressed or uncomfortable with some of the sensitive content or questions asked during your participation a helpline is provided for you in the debriefing form. If at any stage of the data collection process you wish to withdraw, you can do so without any penalty. The current study is completely voluntary, and participant's data will not be accessible by a secondary party. Anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained throughout and after the data collection process.

If you have any further questions you can contact me via email at

x16351531@student.ncirl.ie

I am fully aware of what the study entails, of all potential risks and of my role as a participant. I give my consent to participate in this research study.

- Yes, I give my consent to take part in this study

Appendix E

Debriefing sheet

Dear Participant,

Thank you for your voluntary participation in the current research study. It is of utmost importance to the researchers that participants' anonymity and confidentiality is maintained throughout the entire data collection process. All data will be kept safely and securely, and no secondary party will have access to this data.

I hope you enjoyed taking part in this study, your time and participation is greatly appreciated.

If at any point during participation you felt distressed please feel free to call this helpline, 116123 for support or if you prefer to contact via email it's jo@samaritans.ie.

If you have further questions regarding the research study do not hesitate to contact me via email x16351531@student.ncirl.ie or my supervisor via email at Andrew.Allen@ncirl.ie

