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Adult Attachment, Marital Functioning and Satisfaction in Intercultural Couples:
Implications for Clinical Practice

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Marriage and Family Therapy

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Abstract

Adult Attachment, Marital Functioning and Satisfaction in Intercultural Couples:
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By
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Master of Science in Counseling,
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The pioneering works of Harry Harlow, John Bowlby, Mary Ainsworth, Cindy Hazan, Philip Shaver, and many others focus on our innate human need to create attachment bonds with significant figures (i.e. parents, primary caregivers, romantic partners) throughout our lifetimes. But despite the vast research base supporting the existence of attachment bonds in both childhood and adulthood, there are areas of human relationships which warrant further investigation. The gap between attachment theory, marital relationship, and culture remain widely unexplored; for instance, research examining possible universal and culture-specific aspects of attachment in the context of intercultural marital relationships continue to be scarce. Therefore, the aim of this project is to help bridge the concepts of attachment, marital relationship and spousal functioning, as well as cultural diversity and their impact on clinical practice.
CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Despite the abundance of research in the fields of parent-child attachment and adult romantic love, collaboration between researchers attracted to adult romantic attachment and those interested in marital relationships remain limited (Selcuk et al., 2010). Based on Bowlby (1969) and Ainsworth’s (1979) propositions, attachment patterns established in childhood remain relatively stable over time and serve as templates for later adult attachments (Zeifman & Hazan, 2008); nevertheless, there is little information regarding the possible extent of the connection between parent-child attachments and later marital relationships (Cohn, Silver, Cowan, Cowan & Pearson, 1992). Although some emphasize the differences between parent-child and adult romantic relationships, with the latter usually involving sexual attraction, mutuality in providing and seeking security, and different genetic relations (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Zeifman & Hazan, 2008), there exists empirical evidence qualifying marital relationships as a form of an attachment relationship (Selcuk et al., 2010). Doherty and Feeney (2004) suggest that although adult participants in their study indicate multiple attachment figures, the participants identify their romantic partners (including spouses) as the most common attachment figure. In fact, the study reveals that partners outrank parents as primary attachment figures! Selcuk et al. (2010) purport adults’ reactions to separation in marital relationships bear similarities to children’s reactions to separation from primary caregivers. In addition, the researchers posit that the experience of a secure base (perceiving attachment figure as available or present in times of need/danger which encourages exploration) as an effect of an attachment bond that exists in childhood and adulthood. Based on previous research, further observations and
investigations are warranted to provide a clearer depiction of how childhood attachment histories may manifest themselves in later marital relationships (i.e. via marital functioning such as affect regulation, communication styles, and conflict resolution) and their impact on relationship satisfaction.

**Statement of Problem**

An overlooked topic within marital relationships includes intercultural marriages. Aldridge (1978) states that though intercultural marriages have become more widespread, “sociopsychological research in the area of intermarriage continues to be scant” (p. 355). Decades after Aldridge’s article, Troy, Lewis-Smith, and Laurenceau (2006) convey the same message that intercultural and interracial relationships are often understudied. Finding research evidence applying attachment theory to intercultural marriages further narrows one’s resources and highlights the inadequate attention towards a growing number of marital relationships. A portion of the available research base is often dated. Additionally, Ng, Loy, MohdZain, and Cheong (2013) call attention to the existing research support for the correlation between attachment and marital relationships; these studies have often been based on Western relational contexts. They suggest validating the generalizability of adult attachment and its findings to non-Western populations. Other suggestions include identifying possible similarities and differences between interracial and intraracial attachment styles (Troy et al., 2006), role of adult romantic attachment and cultural differences in relationship dissatisfaction (Friedman et al., 2010) and satisfaction (Skowronski et al., 2014), and marital functioning (interactional patterns between spouses) that maintain or enhance intercultural relationships (Gaines & Brennan, 2001).
Purpose of Project

The purpose of this paper and project is to bridge the gap between the widely documented attachment theory within the context of adult romantic relationships and heterosexual, intercultural marital relationships. Although Troy, Lewis-Smith, and Laurenceau (2006) find no significant differences between interracial and intraracial marriages in terms of divorce rates, recent studies such as that of Zhang and Van Hook (2009) and Bratter and King (2008) suggest strong associations between marriage dissolution and race/ethnicity. Although interracial couples may face unique challenges such as family opposition (Chan & Wethington, 1998) and differences in socio-economic statuses (Bratter & Eschbach, 2006), these considerations extend beyond the scope of this paper. The author hopes to create awareness and contribute to the limited writings focusing on intercultural couples while utilizing the attachment theory framework. The project will also serve as a guide for psychotherapists delivering culturally sensitive mental health services to diverse couples.

Terminology

The author will use the following key terms/terminology as part of the paper regarding parent-child attachment orientation, adult romantic attachment, measures of marital functioning and marital satisfaction. The classification of parent-child attachment types: secure, anxious-ambivalent, and avoidant will be defined according to Ainsworth’s Strange Situation operational definitions. Stayton and Ainsworth (1973) refer to an infant as having a secure attachment when the infant has formed predictable expectations of the mother to remain accessible or available. The mother’s consistent responsiveness to her infant’s needs and desires allow her to leave the infant’s immediate environment without
the infant engaging in inconsolable distress behaviors (e.g. protests, cries, chronic anxiety, etc.). For secure infants, Ainsworth’s concept of “secure base,” an infant’s use of the mother to explore novel environments without fear of the strangeness, will be included in the paper. Stayton and Ainsworth (1973) describe insecure infants as chronically anxious even before separation from their mothers. An anxious attachment style infant exhibits intense distress during separation from the mother; however, the infant seeks close contact upon the mother’s return while simultaneously rejecting the mother. In contrast to secure and anxious-ambivalent, Stayton and Ainsworth identify a third attachment style referred to as avoidant. Avoidant infants do not seek contact nor show distress upon separation from their mothers, they may also ignore their mothers upon reunion. In terms of adult romantic attachment orientations for spouses, the author will follow Hazan and Shaver’s (1987) categorization. Hazan and Shaver adopt Ainsworth’s classification of infant attachment styles, but they translate the terms to appropriately match adult behaviors and interactions. In their study, for instance, secure adults exhibit trust, friendship, and positive emotions in their romantic relationships. On the other hand, anxious/ambivalent adults show preoccupied behaviors such as obsession and chronic need for union, whereas avoidant adults convey fear of intimacy.

In relation to marital relationships, the author will define marital functioning as descriptions of couples’ affect regulation, communication style, and conflict resolution. Based on previous research such as that of Mikulincer (1998), Shi (2003), Domingue and Mollen (2009), Guerrero, Farinelli, and McEwan (2009), the listed elements for marital functioning can contribute to marital satisfaction and are indicative of attachment styles; therefore, marital functioning is defined based on those previously mentioned elements.
However, because the basis of marital satisfaction can differ from culture to culture such as love versus partnership (Lucas et al., 2008) and the focus of this paper is on intercultural couples, the author will consider and use Lucas et al.’s indicators for marital satisfaction such as the partners’ perception of love and spousal support for each other.

Lastly, the author will utilize the word “intercultural” based on Seshadri and Knudson-Martin’s (2013) definition of a married couple in which a husband and wife belong to various groups differing in beliefs, shared meanings, and traditions. Though Seshadri and Knudson-Martin (2013) attempt to distinguish between “intercultural” and “interracial,” the author will sometimes refer to the term “interracial” as a function of culture based on biological differences such as skin tone, facial features, etc.

**Organization of Project**

Although the paper begins with a brief overview of attachment theory’s development, it will also focus on the literature exploring the possible manifestations of parent-child attachment types from Ainsworth’s Strange Situation study in the context of adult romantic relationships and intercultural marriages. Could it be possible that cultural differences play a role in the formation of attachment bonds between parent and child, as well as romantic couples? Can these differences indeed affect personality development and spousal interactions? The author will investigate past and current research to find associations between attachment styles, spousal behavioral patterns, and their potential impact on marital satisfaction in married, intercultural couples. Later on, the author will discuss the implications of adult romantic attachment and marital functioning and satisfaction on theoretical orientations and interventions to improve treatment outcomes.
for intercultural spouses. Based on these factors, the author will provide an outline for an inclusive workshop targeting psychotherapists interested in working with intercultural couples.
CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Whereas the introduction includes key term definitions and a brief overview of attachment theory, this section will provide more in depth information on some of the theory’s foundational research. Firstly, the author will describe the works of Harry Harlow (1958), John Bowlby (1969), and Mary Ainsworth (1979) in order to provide a roadmap on the development of parent-child attachment bonds and classifications. Because this project aims to shed light on the possible connections between parent-child attachment bonds and later adult romantic relationships, Hazan and Shaver’s (1987) research on adult romantic attachment will serve as a guide to conceptualize manifestations of parent-child attachment styles within later adult romantic relationships and marriages. Lastly, the author will discuss the implications of attachment theory research on the project’s focal point: intercultural marital relationships.

Introduction to Attachment Theory’s Research Base

Human attachment theory describing parent-child relationships gained a strong foothold in the field of psychology and mental health within the 20th and 21st centuries and continues to flourish. The theory of attachment officially debuted in John Bowlby’s first volume of Attachment and Loss in 1969, wherein he identified attachment behaviors as a system of social behaviors necessary for human survival and serve as catalysts for “attachment bonds” (Ainsworth, Bell & Stayton, 1991, p.33). An attachment bond, an irreplaceable or never wholly interchangeable” emotional tie with an attachment figure, forms via attachment behaviors (Ainsworth, 1989, p. 711). As long-time colleagues, Bowlby’s approach to attachment deeply influenced Mary Ainsworth’s work with infants.
After her membership in Bowlby’s research team at Tavistock Clinic in the 1950s, Ainsworth continued to explore the possible mediators of strong parent-child attachment bonds and the potential adverse effects of absent or interrupted bonds on personality development (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). Her contributions to attachment theory included the concepts of “secure base,” where the presence of an attachment bond between parent and child facilitates exploration of the environment, and the categorization of infant attachment styles based on behavioral patterns exhibited during the Strange Situation studies (see Ainsworth & Bell, 1970; Ainsworth, 1979). Bowlby and Ainsworth’s pioneering work on attachment paved the way for a theoretical era in which a child’s interaction with a PC, instead of his/her fantasy world or unconscious thoughts, became the center of attention. Cassidy and Shaver (1999) estimate that a search engine will yield more than 10,000 page results of journal articles, entries, and anthologies related to attachment. More than a decade later, one might encounter more than 13,000 database search hits and approximately 3,520,000 results on an open search engine gathering literary works about attachment theory. Undoubtedly, these numbers attest to the continually expanding body of research related to attachment theory.

While the trailblazers of attachment theory such as Bowlby and Ainsworth focused on parent-child dynamics in terms of emotional, psychological, and biological needs exhibited by children, Hazan and Shaver (1987) extend the concept of parent-child attachment into the realm of adult romantic love and relationships. The application of attachment to romantic love (or pair-bonding) remained one of the most influential and empirically-grounded approaches, as well as a driving force in the generation of countless books, articles, research topics, theses, etc. related to the study of romantic relationships.
(Cassidy & Shaver, 1999; Fraley & Shaver, 2000). Attachment theory’s framework for
distinguishing adaptive from maladaptive relationship patterns and viewing different
relationship responses as previous adjustments to life circumstances or manifestations of
parent-child relationship(s) contribute to its large research base in human behavior and
development.

The Beginnings of Attachment Theory

Attachment refers to the process of creating and maintaining emotional ties with
close others. It includes one’s inclination to seek closeness and gain a sense of safety within
their familiar or intimate relationships, especially during stressful events. Holmes (1993)
views attachment as a spatial theory in which one experiences comfort in being near a loved
one or loneliness when away from that person. Ainsworth and Bell (1970) regard the desire
to seek and maintain varying degrees of proximity, whether physically or through
communication from a distance, to the attachment figure as one of the main indicators of
attachment. For many cases, attachment bonds form during infancy between a mother or
primary caregiver (PC) and an infant.

In a study with newborn rhesus monkeys in 1958, Harry Harlow portrayed infant-
caregiver attachment through the use of two “surrogate” mothers constructed from a wire-
mesh. Harlow covered one of the mothers in soft terrycloth and pads without a baby bottle.
In contrast, the other surrogate remained uncovered, but with a baby bottle attached to serve
as food/nourishment. According to his observations, Harlow described a strong attachment
between the baby rhesus monkeys and terrycloth mother despite its lack of nourishment.
Based on Harlow’s (1958) study, one can argue that the provision of nourishment itself
does not determine the strength of attachment between a child and caregiver; rather, a sense of comfort plays a primary role in the creation of a persisting attachment bond.

In his work, John Bowlby (1969) distinguishes the term “dependence” from attachment. In dependence, the link between mother and child primarily serves a physiological function; the child depends on the mother to gain nourishment. On the other hand, Bowlby (1969) claims attachment does not exist at birth or within the first weeks: “Attachment is altogether absent at birth and is not strongly in evidence until after an infant is past six months” (p. 191). He further explains that the initial existence of attachment behavior forms at the moment the infant recognizes and maintains his or her proximity to the mother/PC through “proximity-maintaining behaviours” such as crying, smiling, following, and clinging (Bowlby, 1969, p. 176). These behaviors serve a protective function by gaining and preserving closeness to individuals who may be seen as better equipped to handle stressors or capable of remaining responsive to needs of comfort (Bowlby, 1988, p. 27). Mothers and PCs assume the role of protectors against environmental threats (e.g. strangers) for infants. In addition to attachment’s biological function, Bowlby (1969) considers early attachments with parents or PCs as prototypes on which to base the foundation of future relationships (p. 377). Based on Bowlby’s (1969) ethological approach, attachment may operate as a biological adaptation to keep the young close to the mother; however, Harlow (1958) and Bowlby’s (1969) observations provide evidence that an attachment bond serves another purpose in addition to sustenance. An attachment bond provides safety, comfort, and a model for future emotional bonds with potential significant figures in one’s lifetime.
During the 1970s, Mary Ainsworth strengthened the theory of attachment as a behavioral system by recording children’s tendencies to seek closeness or proximity to primary attachment figures (e.g. mother, PC). In Ainsworth and Bell (1970), the researchers conduct a controlled experiment, called the Strange Situation, in order to determine the effects of mothers’ presence or absence on their infants’ exploratory and proximity-seeking behaviors. The participant pool consists of 56 infants between ages 49-51 weeks. Ainsworth and Bell explain that though an infant and a mother spend the majority of the time in close proximity in the beginning, the infant eventually embarks on his own to learn about his surroundings (exploratory behavior). Consequently, the mother retrieves the infant less frequently; however, moments of threat or changes in the environment urge the infant and mother to return to each other (attachment or proximity-seeking behavior). The researchers hypothesize infant exploratory behaviors as existing in balance and interacting with attachment behaviors (i.e. proximity-seeking behavior). For instance, the mother’s proximity influences the infant’s proclivity to navigate the new environment, even in the presence of a potentially alarming stimulus such as a stranger. Their study describes the idea of a “secure base” in which the presence of the attachment figure facilitates exploration. Ainsworth and Bell (1970) present the idea of secure base by noting that the infants show little to no alarm upon the introduction of stranger in the same room while the attachment figures (mothers) are present. However, when the attachment figures leave the room, the infants’ attachment behaviors encouraging closeness or proximity (e.g. crying and searching) increase while exploration decreases. Ainsworth and Bell’s results resemble those of other studies such as that of Cox and Campbell (1968), which suggest a correlation between the absence of attachment figure and decreases in
speech, movement, and play. Based on the research cited, the infants’ attachments to their mothers can influence their sense of security when exploring a novel situation. Being aware of an attachment figure’s presence reduces feelings of alarm or threat in the midst of an unfamiliar stimuli.

It would appear that infants and mothers create a unique bond within the first years of life that serve a biological and protective factor, as well as provide a template for future attachment figures. The results from the previous studies support the existence of an emotional attachment between a mother/PC and a child. However, indicating the presence of an attachment bond does not fully describe the differences in distress and reactions of infants upon the return of their attachment figures after separation. The next section will discuss the classifications of attachment behaviors which mainly focus on varying reactions toward the return of attachment figures from Ainsworth’s Strange Situation study.

**Ainsworth’s Classification of Attachment Behaviors**

The previous section covered the general nature of attachment between a mother/PC and child. But attachment is an overarching term used to refer to the more specific types and quality of bonds between a parent/PC and child. In their study, Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall (1978) assess infant behavioral reactions upon the return of the attachment figure (mother) in the Strange Situation to conceptualize the quality of parent-infant interaction. Based on the infants’ behavioral reactions to reunification, the researchers classify the infants’ attachment types in the following groups: Groups A, B, and C (Ainsworth, 1979). These attachment styles describe infants’ level of security and anxiety during brief separation and reunion with their mothers (Stayton & Ainsworth, 1973). Stayton and Ainsworth (1973) suggest that the infants in the study
organize their behaviors in varying ways depending on past parent-child interactions. For instance, they propose that an infant’s higher level of chronic anxiety concerning a parent’s whereabouts can indicate less security in a parent’s accessibility (e.g. infant’s crying does not necessarily elicit responsiveness from a parent). Indeed, Group C (anxious) infants from the Strange Situation study exhibit signs of anxiety before separation, which then changes to elevated levels after separation from their mothers; however, though these infants seek closeness upon reunion, they simultaneously resist contact with their mothers (Ainsworth, 1979). In stark contrast, Group B (secure) infants tend to explore their surroundings by utilizing their mothers as a secure base, which facilitates the exploratory behavior. In addition, Group B infants typically display distress and show a decrease in exploration after separation; however, upon reunion, Group B infants seek closeness and proximity from their mothers. Ainsworth (1979) suspects that mothers of Group B infants demonstrate higher levels of responsiveness to infant signals such as crying throughout the first year; therefore, Group B infants perceive their mothers as generally and consistently accessible despite brief separations. Unlike Groups C and B infants, Group A (avoidant) infants do not demonstrate distress cries during separation nor do they show consistent proximity-seeking behaviors upon reunification with their mothers. Ainsworth (1979) observes that Group A infants avoid, show a mixture of proximity-seeking and resistance behaviors, or ignore their mothers altogether. The findings from the Strange Situation study and previous observations from past research indicate the effects of a mother’s proximity, accessibility, and responsiveness on infant expectations and attachment styles.
Hazan and Shaver: Adult Romantic Attachment

Social psychologists, Cindy Hazan and Phillip Shaver (1987), conceptualize attachment theory and its processes in the context of adult romantic relationships. According to Hazan and Shaver (1987), the development of adult romantic love involves attachment processes that adults may experience differently based on their respective attachment histories with PCs and their working models (Bowlby, 1969). The progression of pair-bonding, a romantic relationship that qualifies as an attachment bond, between adults resembles the stages of parent-child attachment formation; ergo, individual differences arising from varying parent-child attachment styles can influence partner dynamics in later romantic relationships where attachment behaviors are elicited (Cohn et al., 1992; Fraley & Shaver, 2000; Zeifman & Hazan, 2008). Therefore, in their two-part questionnaire studies, Hazan and Shaver (1987) adapt Ainsworth’s descriptions of secure, anxious-avoidant, and avoidant attachment styles of infants into terms which more appropriately match adult love. For instance, one of the questionnaire measures for adult secure attachment reads: “I find it relatively easy to get close to others and am comfortable depending on them and having them depend on me. I don’t often worry about being abandoned…” (Hazan and Shaver, 1987, p. 515) The previous questionnaire item conveys security in and perceives accessibility of an adult attachment figure, a similar characteristic of infants exhibiting secure attachment behaviors with their mothers in Ainsworth’s study. Hazan and Shaver’s 1st questionnaire study assesses 620 completed questionnaires (205 men, 415 women; ages 14-82; average household income between $20,000-30,000) out of more than 1,200 in total. The authors reason that it is unnecessary to keypunch all of the replies when the data shows stability of major findings within the first few hundred
responses. The researchers perform a 2\textsuperscript{nd} questionnaire study given to 108 college students (38 men and 70 women) to test the validity of the 1\textsuperscript{st} study’s results. In addition, they include measurements to describe mental models of self and trait loneliness as they relate to attachment style. Studies 1 and 2 support the following:

- The frequencies of secure, anxious-avoidant, and avoidant attachment styles in Hazan and Shaver’s adult participant pool are relatively proportionate to findings in other parent-child attachment studies with infants (see Campos et al. 1983). However, it is not to say that attachment styles remain unchanged throughout human development.

- Participants with different attachment styles describe varying experiences of love. For example, participants classified as secure depict their relationship experiences as friendly, happy, and trustworthy. In contrast, participants with avoidant attachment styles report fear of intimacy or closeness, and those with more anxious-ambivalent styles describe a mixture of emotional highs and lows as well as obsession with their partners.

- Participants’ working models of self and others are related to attachment styles in terms of romantic partners’ availability/accessibility, expectations of romantic love and its course, as well as his/her own perception of worthiness.

- Results reveal greater association between trait loneliness and anxious-ambivalent attachment style than secure attachment style.

Based on Hazan and Shaver’s results, it appears that attachment orientation impacts later relationships with others and view of self, particularly with romantic partners.
Synthesis of Literature Review

Underrated Considerations in Attachment Styles and Adult Romantic Relationships

Bowlby’s ethological approach to describe the function of parent-child attachment remains to be one of the most influential theories in psychology (Easterbrooks & Lamb, 1979; Posada & Jacobs, 2001). Based on Bowlby’s theory, attachment behaviors, such as maintaining caregiver’s proximity or utilizing caregiver as a secure-base, is an evolutionary byproduct that ensured the survival of our species; therefore, all children across different environments should have the capability to exhibit secure-base behaviors and attach to their primary caregivers (PC) (Posada et al., 1995). But at the same time, considering the possible impact of both biology and culture on attachment relationships can provide information regarding how specific attachment behaviors are exhibited. Posada and Jacobs (2001) contend that culture and family play an imperative role in shaping communication and secure-base interactions between infants and PCs. Rothbaum, Weisz, Pott, Miyake, and Morelli (2000) argue that there is insufficient cross-cultural research on attachment and attachment theorists’ overemphasis on Bowlby’s evolutionary approach have led to the minimization of cultural factors. Friedman et al. (2010) note the importance of understanding individual differences that affect functioning and outcome in interpersonal relationships; hence, they also critique that most studies addressing these individual differences have been conducted within Westernized contexts. Though van Ijzendoorn and Kroonenberg (1988) suggest greater intracultural variations in attachment classifications, they also note intercultural differences specifically between Western European countries,
Israel, and Japan. Without discrediting Bowlby’s evolutionary approach, it appears that considering cultural factors with bearing on attachment development can provide a richer understanding of relational outcomes.

Proponents of Bowlby’s attachment theory agree that its core principles, such as secure base behavior, exist across cultural boundaries and do not doubt the theory’s cross-cultural validity (Posada & Jacobs, 2001; van IJzendoorn & Kroonenberg, 1988); however, attachment theory does not assume that attachment classifications are invariable between cultures (Lee, Grossman & Krishnan, 2008). Chao (2001) calls for the integration of cultural sensitivity and attachment theory in order to describe both universal attachment processes and their culture-specific manifestations. By adjusting Western theories to address cultural specificities, researchers can develop localized approaches to attachment and enrich its theorization and methodology (Chao, 2001). For attachment and parent-child interactions, what may be considered as typical in one culture may be viewed as pathological in another cultural setting (Keller, 2013).

As mentioned in Chapter 1, a primary objective of this project is to better understand Hazan and Shaver’s (1987) adult romantic attachment typologies and their possible effects on marital functioning in intercultural marriages. In addition to the scarce research data, focus on intercultural couples facilitates the consideration of cultural fit when studying “consequences of secure versus insecure attachment orientations on relationships” (Friedman et al., 2010, p. 123). But in order to bridge adult romantic attachment and culture, the following section will begin with a few studies on parent-child interaction patterns from Westernized and Non-Westernized cultures. As Bowlby (1969) and Ainsworth (1979) hypothesize, childhood attachment histories can serve as templates
for adult attachment orientations. Therefore, early parent-child interactions can provide some information regarding possible similarities and differences of attachment development between various cultures and how attachment may manifest later in life.

**Parent-child Interaction Patterns, Attachment Styles, and Culture**

Similarities in attachment security across cultures do not indicate the same attachment behaviors will occur to discriminate between secure and insecure attachment styles (van Ijzendoorn & Sagi-Schwartz, 2008). Trommsdorff and Kornadt (2003), while acknowledging the genetically-based evolutionary need for security, present various context- or culturally-related ways to fulfill attachment needs (e.g. primary caregiver serving as a secure-base via locomotion or conveying the feeling of one-ness). Relatedly, Rothbaum et al. (2000) challenge three core constructs frequently used in cross-cultural research to describe and support the universality of attachment theory and security: sensitivity, competence, and secure base hypotheses. These attachment constructs, or antecedents, are patterns of mother-infant interactions that can influence attachment quality (Ainsworth, 1985; Rothbaum & Morelli, 2005). Sensitivity hypothesis suggests the formation of infant-mother attachment depends on the mother’s awareness of the infant’s cues as well as the immediacy and accuracy of her response (Ainsworth et al., 1971). Competence hypothesis focuses on the quality of infant-mother attachment which can predict later social competency; in particular, secure attachment is associated with better social competence (Easterbrooks & Lamb, 1979). A sense of competence enables a child to realize his effect on the world around him and rely on his ability to exert some control over his surroundings; therefore, his capability to adjust his behavior based on new situations enable him to “cope flexibly and autonomously with the physical environment
and to improve communication with other people” (Ainsworth, 1985, p. 782). Secure base hypothesis describes the likelihood of infants to explore their environments within the proximity and protection of their mothers (Ainsworth & Bell, 1970). Though these antecedents have gained research support as indicators of attachment security (see Ainsworth & Bell, 1972; Ainsworth, 1985; de Wolff & van Ijzendoorn, 1997; Bakermans-Kranenburg, van Ijzendoorn, & Juffer, 2003), parent-child interactions that influence attachment security can be culturally specific (Trommsdorff & Kornadt, 2003).

Although the three antecedents (i.e. sensitivity, competence, and secure base) remain widely used as theoretical frameworks in attachment theory research, Rothbaum et al. (2000) question their universal validity and the assumption that cultural differences play a relatively minor role in attachment styles: “These hypotheses are embedded in Western, historical, social, political, economic, demographic, and geographic realities…” (p. 1095). Regarding sensitivity hypothesis, criteria for responsive and sensitive caregiving are likely to reflect some culture-specific values; for instance, maternal sensitivity in Japan encourages an infant’s dependency on the mother, whereas exploration and autonomy is promoted in the United States (Rothbaum et al., 2000). Waters and Cummings (2000) assume that sensitivity to infant cues contributes to attachment development; however, they do not assume that maternal sensitivity is equally prevalent across cultures nor is it communicated in the same manner. For instance, in Carlson and Harwood’s (2003) study of Puerto Rican and Anglo mothers, results suggest that maternal sensitivity may be culturally constructed as opposed to a universal definition. Carlson and Harwood (2003)
propose expanding maternal sensitivity’s definition to include culture-specific goals, values, and practices. At the same time, Carlson and Harwood (2003) acknowledge the need for both universal and cultural specificity:

Although the goal of providing protection from situations the parent views as stressful or dangerous remains universal, perceptions of danger or stress and means of protection will vary widely as a function of cultural meaning systems, contextual, and experiential differences (p. 69).

In another study, Harwood, Schoelmerich, Schulze, and Gonzalez (1999) compare maternal sensitivity of Puerto Rican and Anglo mothers through infant-mother interactional styles in four different situations (i.e. feeding, social play, teaching, and free play). Harwood et al. (2010) observe greater physical behavioral structuring of Puerto Rican mothers compared to their Anglo counterparts. Puerto Rican mothers are more likely to structure their infants’ behaviors through physical positioning and restraining in all four interactions (e.g. spoon-feeding an infant). In contrast, Anglo mothers in the same study are more likely than Puerto Rican mothers to provide verbal praises/feedback in order to structure their infants’ behaviors and encourage autonomy in feeding. Infant-mother interaction between Puerto Rican mothers and infants may appear intrusive from a middle-class, Anglo interpretation of attachment development; for instance, Ainsworth (1985) identifies mothers of anxious-ambivalent (or Type C) babies as either “interfering” or “ignoring” by offering close contact without infant requests for it or failing to respond to bids for close contact. Ainsworth et al. (1978) further describe interfering behaviors as an “overwhelming physical sense,” which may involve the following: snatching, moving, confining, and releasing the infant regardless of the infant’s current activity; the mother can restrict or restrain her infant’s movements by “direct physical intervention” (p. 363). Puerto Rican mothers from Carlson and Harwood’s (2003) study would be categorized as
“interfering” with anxious-ambivalent babies as evidenced by their greater physical involvement according to Ainsworth et al.’s (1978) definitions. Interestingly, Carlson and Harwood’s (2003) results suggest that although Puerto Rican mothers exhibit higher ratings of physical control compared to Anglo mothers, their infant-mother interactions are associated with secure attachment. On the other hand, high ratings of maternal physical control for Anglo infant-mother dyads are associated with insecure avoidant attachment. Expanding the conceptualization of maternal sensitivity by including culture-specific goals and practices can deepen our understanding of antecedents and development of secure and insecure attachments. Similarly, Trommsdorff and Kornadt (2003) support the fundamental role of sensitivity in fostering attachment while recognizing its variations between cultures. In a study comparing Japanese and German mothers’ responsiveness to their infants, Trommsdorff and Friedlmeier (1993) observe two types of responsiveness: proactive and reactive. Japanese mothers in the sample tend to respond before their infants exhibit needs, whereas German mothers frequently respond after their infants express needs. Ideal parent-child interactions in Japan emphasize interdependence, empathy, and connectedness rather than self-reliance, autonomy/independence, and self-assertion most often associated with individualistic, German parent-child interactions (Trommsdorff & Kornadt, 2003). Based on the previously presented evidence, caregiving practices related to parent-child attachments can vary across cultures. The diverse nature of responsiveness and sensitivity from culture to culture can have implications on the development of what attachment theory categorizes as secure or insecure attachments in children. Though a mother’s interference with a child’s autonomous actions is considered as intrusive by
imposing her own agenda (e.g. instructing, directing, controlling), these same interfering behaviors intended to mold an infant’s or a child’s behavior are considered ideal in a number of non-Western cultures (Keller, 2003).

In terms of competence hypothesis, indicators of individual competency can also vary between cultures; Western-based concepts of competence promote individual abilities, personal achievements, active exploration, and mastery of social environments (Matas, Arend, Sroufe, 1978; Rothbaum & Morelli, 2005). On the contrary, non-Western societies’ (e.g. Puerto Rico Japan, Cameroon) views on social competence emphasize interdependence, obedience, and harmony (Keller, 2003). Carlson and Harwood (2003) note that clinging or dependent behavior may be accepted and appropriate in a context where familial interdependence is valued, whereas the same behaviors may be perceived as maladaptive in cultures where individual autonomy is encouraged. For instance, infants exhibiting longer exploratory play, positive affect during exploration, and enthusiasm with symbolic play are identified as socially competent and characterized with secure attachment style in Western studies (Main, 1983; Matas et al., 1978). In Japan, a greater value is placed on emotional interdependence and favors limitations on separation between parent and child; therefore, Japanese infants tend to exhibit heightened distress during separation, resulting in less active exploration (Harwood, Miller, & Irizarry, 1995). Harwood et al. (1995) reason that because the Japanese infants’ heightened reactions are congruent with Japanese values and expectations, implications of their behavioral patterns on attachment classification would not be the same as it would be in the U.S. culture, which places value on the cultivation of independence. Japanese infants, similar to their U.S. counterparts, undergo a learning process to understand the meaning of competence based
on their social groups and on culturally desirable goals (i.e. optimal balance between independence and interdependence, appropriate levels of curiosity and attention-seeking behaviors) (Harwood et al., 1995). Again, it appears that culture-specific views about developmentally appropriate and ideal behaviors representing social competence warrant additional considerations in attachment and cross-cultural research studies.

One of attachment theory’s core tenets include the concept of secure base, which is exhibited by an infant’s exploratory and proximity-seeking behaviors (Bowlby, 1969; Ainsworth & Bell, 1970). Waters and Cummings (2000) consider secure base as “central to the logic and coherence of attachment theory and to its status as an organizational construct” (p. 3). Though secure base research on non-Western or non-industrialized cultures remain limited, Ainsworth’s naturalistic observation of Ugandan children demonstrating exploratory and proximity-seeking behaviors supports the validity of attachment theory and secure base behaviors across cultural and societal contexts (Posada & Jacobs, 2001). In Posada et al. (1995), the authors utilize the expertise of “indigenous researchers” to determine if conceptualizations of secure base behaviors vary across cultures or remain constant. Although Posada et al.’s (1995) study does not explicitly test the universality of attachment theory, experts from each country in the sample reveal similar definitions for attachment security and secure-base behaviors. For instance, experts from seven countries in the sample yield correlation indices ranging between .87 and .92 regarding their definitions of secure base behaviors. The authors also indicate that the experts’ interpretations of attachment security do not change significantly as a function of their nationality or culture. In addition, participating mothers in the sample describe ideal “secure child behaviors” that are substantially convergent with the experts’ definitions of
“optimal secure base behavior” across the countries (p. 48). Based on the results of the study, Posada et al. (1995) state that secure base behavior is a “characteristic of our species” and conclude that children from various cultural backgrounds (i.e. China, Colombia, Germany, Israel, Japan, Norway, and the United States) characterize their mothers as a secure base. However, the authors do not suggest that children across cultures organize their secure base behaviors in the same manner (p. 47). The variety of behavioral (as well as emotional) manifestations of attachment encourage the additional focus on cultural considerations.

Additionally, attachment classifications and the Strange Situation procedure from Ainsworth et al.’s (1978) study may be subject to cultural considerations as can be seen from Takahashi’s (1986) study. Considering the possibility of cultural influences on attachment development and perception of parent-child attachment in Strange Situation studies, clinical practitioners should remain aware of interactional patterns that deviate from the Western culture (Keller, 2013).

**Parent-child Insecure Attachment Distribution from Culture to Culture**

Cultural influences become more salient when conceptualizing constructs such as maternal sensitivity in research studies (Keller, 2013). In a sample of 87 Korean mothers and their infants, Jin, Jacobvitz, Hazen, and Jung (2012) suggest that secure attachment is associated with maternal sensitivity, but Korean mothers in the sample exhibit childrearing practices reflective of “emotionally close and indulgent mother-infant relationships” (p. 41). According to Jin et al.’s (2012) observations, Korean mothers in the study promptly approach and carry their infants upon reunification during the study’s version of the Strange Situation. Korean mothers show immediate responses and continue to remain close
to their infants even when the infants no longer show distress (Jin et al., 2012). In their conclusion, Jin et al. (2012) support the cross-cultural constancy of attachment theory’s core principles: almost all infants in the study display attachment bonds and the study’s results suggest significant correlation between attachment and maternal sensitivity. Nevertheless, they also highlight notable differences between insecure attachment classifications between Korea and the United States (i.e. distribution of insecure attachment styles and mothers’ reunion behaviors during the Strange Situation). And though their findings imply that attachment’s primary function of “protection and felt security” remains constant between cultures, Jin et al. (2012) mention that the distribution of attachment types in Korea closely matches those found in Japan compared to other cross-national samples. Attachment’s function of creating a parent-child bond (secure base) for protection and security cross cultural boundaries, but there appears to be cultural variations in developing this bond. Related to attachment classification, Keller (2013) states that the “only dimension that attachment researchers have recognized as cultural is the distribution of attachment qualities” (p.180). As recently mentioned, Jin et al. (2012) observe the universal purpose of secure attachment and secure base, but note the differing distribution of insecure attachment between cultures, such as Korea and the United States.

Within a decade of Ainsworth’s Strange Situation study and after approximately 2,000 replications, majority of the research base suggest global proportions of secure, avoidant, and anxious-ambivalent similar to those of Ainsworth’s sample (Behrens, Hesse, & Main, 2007). But in Takahashi (1986), 60 Japanese mother-infant dyads are recruited to examine if their behaviors during the Strange Situation are similar to mother-infant behaviors observed from Ainsworth’s original study. Takahashi’s objective is to
investigate whether or not the Japanese sample will yield similar distribution of attachment types and behavioral patterns to those found in Ainsworth et al.’s (1978) study in the United States. The first-born infants in the study, with a mean age of 12 months, share middle-class family backgrounds. Mothers in the study identify themselves as full-time primary caregivers (PCs) from nuclear families. Takahashi (1986) utilizes Ainsworth’s attachment types: A, B, and C classifications. In addition, ratings of the following attachment behaviors: proximity/contact seeking, contact-maintaining, distance reaction, resistance, and avoidance are borrowed from the original Strange Situation study and the frequencies of these behaviors are compared to Ainsworth’s American sample. The results of Takahashi’s study reveal insignificant differences in proportions of securely and insecurely (includes both A and C types) attached infants, 68% and 32% respectively between the two countries/studies. Infant-mother behavioral interactions also appear to be similar. The difference in attachment classification between the studies originated from the insecurely attached group; it seems that a greater number of Japanese infants qualify in the C group and far fewer infants in the A group compared to Ainsworth et al.’s (1978) sample. Japanese infants more frequently exhibit anxious-ambivalent attachment compared to avoidant attachment. It could be possible that the Strange Situation procedure induces extreme stress for infants with temperamental characteristics of being timid or fearful; thus, these infants may display anxious attachment behaviors despite their possible everyday secure attachments to their mothers (Takahashi, 1986). It also seems plausible that the Strange Situation itself demonstrates the culture-boundedness of the study’s methods. Takahashi’s study encourages sensitivity towards possible cultural differences in the levels of stress induced by the procedure in non-American samples. In this case, the Japanese
childrearing philosophy favoring close mother-infant bonds may lead to excessive stress during the separation stage of the Strange Situation (Keller, 2013). Takahashi also recommends careful evaluation of behavioral values (e.g. proximity-seeking and avoidance behaviors) that determine attachment classifications for the behaviors’ roles and frequencies in daily mother-infant interactions from various cultures. For example, diagnostic value placed on proximal behaviors in cultures where overdependence of infants on their mothers is encouraged should be adjusted. Takahashi states that proximal behaviors such as physical contact is frequently and dominantly used in the Japanese culture; therefore, “proximal behaviors among Japanese infants should be somewhat downplayed as a discriminant value” (p. 270). Takahashi’s 1986 study serves as an additional piece of evidence that attachment classifications, though possibly applicable to other cultures, may yield distributions that deviate from those seen in American samples. Though the secure attachment style remains evident in Jin et al. (2012) and Takahashi (1986) for non-Western samples, both studies note the differences in insecure attachment distributions. Both Korean and Japanese samples from Jin et al. (2012) and Takahashi (1986) provide data showing the greater frequency of anxious-ambivalent attachment style in East Asian samples compared to American samples. For both studies, parent-child behaviors that reflect cultural leanings toward frequent parent-child closeness and less emphasis on exploratory behaviors can be perceived as anxious-ambivalence based on Western values, such as “autonomy, exploration and other forms of individuation” (Rothbaum & Morelli, 2005, p. 103). In contrast, Rothbaum and Morelli (2005) describe Eastern values of “interdependence, harmony, and other forms of accommodation” as bases for Japanese idea of parent-child secure attachment.
Adult Romantic Attachment

Ainsworth (1989) describes various interpersonal relationships and attachment processes beyond infancy and she refers to one of them as an “affectional bond” with a romantic partner (p.711). In the article, Ainsworth identifies affectional bond as an attachment to a partner wherein one experiences the desire to maintain proximity, distress upon separation, and pleasure during reunion; however, Ainsworth cautions that because not all bonds are secure, criterion for closeness should be modified accordingly. Similarly, though a number of research studies attest to the universal human capacity to create attachment bonds as a result of evolution, not all are able to develop secure attachment styles with their primary caregivers (Bowlby, 1969; Ainsworth, 1989; Posada et al., 1995). These individual differences based on early parent-child experiences influence later development as expectations from childhood interactions become automatic and become mental representations for later close relationships (Waters & Cummings, 2000). In attachment theory, these automatic mental representations of self and other from a history of attachment-related interactions are referred to as working models (Bowlby 1969/1982; Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). Internal working models rooted from childhood eventually become core personality characteristics, which are then applied to new social situations and relationships, and shape attachment-functioning during adulthood (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Described in the earlier portion of the paper, Hazan and Shaver (1987) use Ainsworth’s (1979) parent-child attachment types (A, B, and C) in the context of adult romantic relationships: avoidant, anxious-ambivalent, and secure. Although Hazan and Shaver (1987) recognize the distinct differences between parent-child and adult romantic relationships (e.g. mutuality in providing and receiving protection and care, sexual
intimacy, potential changes in attachment style), they suggest fundamental similarities in the biological processes of facilitating attachment. Fraley and Davis (1997) and Hazan and Zeifman (1999) support the existence of full-blown attachment patterns with parents and romantic partners among their adult subjects; the studies’ results qualify pair-bonds/romantic relationships as bona fide attachment bonds. In adult romantic relationships, each partner serves as an attachment figure for the other; ideally, each partner can tolerate the anxiety of being both dependent and dependent-upon (Fisher & Crandell, 2001). Working models in couple romantic relationships are derived from the partners’ own relationships with their parents (Waters & Cummings, 2000). In general, avoidant partners tend to exhibit discomfort with closeness and intimacy by seeking emotional distance and preferring self-reliance; in contrast, anxious-ambivalent partners strongly yearn for closeness and protection, but greatly worry about their partners’ availability, responsiveness, and interdependence during times of stress or threats (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Partners scoring low in attachment avoidance and anxiety are classified as secure and these individuals tend to experience trust, friendship, comfort with closeness and interdependence, as well as the ability to effectively manage stress and threats in their romantic relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Most of attachment theory’s research base consists of infant observations and their interactions with primary caregivers; however, literature on the continuity of attachment into adulthood began to flourish due to the availability of longitudinal studies (Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985; Feeney & Noller, 1990). In addition, Weiss (1982) describes the parallelism between childhood and adult attachments and their implications on adult romantic relationships: “Attachment in marriage (or other adult pair-bonding) seems potentially lifelong…In
adults as well as in children, attachments appear to be relationships critical to continuing security…” (p.74). It was in the mid-1980s that Hazan and Shaver investigated the influence of attachment orientations on people’s perceptions, attitudes, and feelings about their adult romantic relationships.

Aside from investigations primarily spearheaded by Hazan and Shaver (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Shaver & Hazan, 1988; Shaver, Hazan, & Bradshaw, 1988), findings from Feeney and Noller (1990) validate the usefulness of applying an attachment theory framework to adult romantic relationships. Based on adult romantic attachment’s point-of-view, differences in early interactions with primary caregivers provide persisting variations in romantic relationship styles in adulthood (Feeney & Noller, 1990). Feeney and Noller (1990) utilize a self-report methodology with 374 undergraduate participants to explore the function of attachment style as a predictor of adult romantic relationships and to determine the replicability of Hazan and Shaver’s (1987) study. Items on the self-report measures include the following: “People almost always like me” and “It’s rare to find someone you can really fall in love with.” (p. 284). Results from discriminant analysis indicate highly significant relationships between attachment styles, histories, and mental models of the participants. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) also suggest a significant effect of attachment styles on the length of longest romantic relationships; for instance, participants classified as avoidant are more likely to report never having experienced being in love, not being in love during the time of the study, or rate their love experiences as slightly intense or not at all. In general, Feeney and Noller’s (1990) study replicate most of Hazan and
Shaver’s (1987) results. In particular, relative frequencies of attachment styles and the association between attachment history and mental models are similar between the two studies:

- Securely attached participants are more likely to report positive early family relationships and express trust in others.
- Anxious-ambivalent participants are more likely to express dependence and desire for commitment in romantic relationships.
- Avoidant participants are more likely to endorse items indicating mistrust and distance.

In addition, Feeney and Noller’s (1990) study reveals the influence of attachment style on adult romantic love as shown by the following outcome:

- Secure attachment participants are more likely to share the longest length of romantic relationships.
- Anxious-ambivalent type participants tend to report the least enduring romantic relationships.
- Avoidant participants are more likely to indicate low intensity love experiences.

In another study by Collins and Read (1990), participants’ (both men and women) attachment styles are correlated to their own and their partners’ evaluation of their romantic relationships. Beliefs and expectations of core principles that guide feelings of security in adulthood (i.e. close contact, intimacy, responsiveness) determine how the attachment system manifests itself in adult relationships (Collins & Read, 1990). In their conclusion, Collins and Read (1990) support the utilization of attachment theory as a framework for continued research regarding adult love relationships.
Thus far, there are evidence that qualify a pair-bond/romantic relationship as a form of attachment by identifying its parallelism to parent-child attachment based on the same developmental process and attachment behaviors (e.g. proximity-seeking and safe-haven behaviors, specificity to a particular individual, distress upon separation) (Hazan & Zeifman, 1999; Cassidy, 2000). But in addition to meeting attachment criteria, Hazan and Zeifman’s (1999) studies indicate that participants with different adult attachment styles consider various beliefs about romantic development and perceptions of their partners’ availability and trustworthiness. If it is possible that childhood attachment is influenced by cultural context, would the same apply for adult attachment considering that the attachment system stays active throughout one’s lifespan? Will secure, anxious-ambivalent, and avoidant adult attachment differ in distribution depending on culture? Can culture contribute to the different perceptions of partner responsiveness and security? If so, to what extent and nature will individual differences in adult attachment affect romantic relationships?

**Adult Romantic Attachment and Culture as a Moderator**

Though a growing body of evidence coincide with Hazan and Shaver’s (1987) findings regarding the continuity of childhood attachment orientations into adult romantic attachment types, research investigating the possible associations between attachments, quality of romantic relationships, and culture remain scarce. But in 2004, David P. Schmitt along with 100 social, behavioral, and biological researchers presented an extensive study called the International Sexuality Description Project (ISDP), which involved the investigation of 62 cultural regions with 17,804 participants in order to identify patterns of adult romantic attachment based on a self-report measure called the Relationship
Questionnaire developed by Bartholomew & Horowitz (1991). The participant pool consisted of 7,432 men and 10,372 women from a total of 56 nations, 13 islands, and 30 languages that represented the 62 regions. Samples were obtained through convenience sampling and most were recruited as volunteers (i.e. some received college credit or monetary compensation). Relationship Questionnaire items measured different attachment orientations and included, “It is easy for me to become emotionally close to others” or “I don’t worry about being alone or having others not accept me” to identify secure romantic attachment, “I want to be completely emotionally intimate with others, but I find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like” to measure anxious-ambivalent or preoccupied romantic attachment, and “I am uncomfortable getting close to others…I find it difficult to trust others completely, or depend on them” for avoidant or fearful romantic attachment (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). The ISDP study presented the following key points based on the collected data:

- Though secure attachment was found to be the most commonly endorsed attachment orientation in 79% of cultures, secure romantic attachment distribution was significantly lower than insecure romantic attachment orientations in several other cultures such as that of Japan and Taiwan.

- East Asian samples in general indicated higher levels of attachment anxiety and low levels of avoidance.

Although the ISDP utilized convenience rather than probability sampling, included college students as the majority participants in the pool, and used nonprofessional translation, the Schmitt and his colleagues attempted to reduce the confounding effects by controlling for demographic variables (e.g. age and gender), including available community samples, and
using translation/back-translation procedure. Nonetheless, secure and insecure attachment distributions between cultures as well as differing levels of attachment-related avoidance and anxiety suggest various possible developmental and relational consequences on adult romantic attachment (Schmitt et al., 2004). The findings converged with results from numerous studies such as Hazan and Zeifman (1999) and Cassidy (2000), which identify the role of early parent-child interactions in the development of childhood attachment and its influence on adult attachment and romantic relationships. Additionally, Schmitt (2007) postulates that geographical variations in romantic attachment may be influenced by a number of cultural variables such as religion, politics, or socioeconomic status.

Though studies such as Doherty, Hatfield, Thompson, and Choo (1994) validate adult attachment orientation as a predictor of romantic experiences and feelings across gender and ethnic groups, there is evidence suggesting culturally-based variations in adult and romantic attachment styles. Schmitt et al. (2004) and Schmitt (2007, 2010) identify secure attachment as normative in only 79% of cultures because several African, South/Southeast, and East Asian countries tend to exhibit more insecure than secure romantic attachments. In addition, Hofstede’s (2001) data reveal a negative correlation between a country’s rate of individualism and insecure romantic attachment patterns. Schmitt (2010) hypothesize that nations considered to be collectivistic are more likely to yield higher measures of insecure romantic attachment, possibly due to possibility of judging the “romantic self primarily in terms of interconnectedness and value provided by others” (p. 220). According to evolutionary psychologists’ and Bowlby’s perspectives, every child is equipped with the ability to develop secure attachments; however, context
specific and environmental adaptations can influence the development of later secure or insecure romantic attachment styles (Schmitt, 2008).

**Adult Romantic Attachment, Marital Functioning and Satisfaction**

Hazan and Shaver’s (1987) study indicates a strong correlation between individuals’ secure attachment style and overall positive perceptions of their romantic relationships (i.e. participants rate their love experiences as happy and trusting). On the contrary, other studies (Collins & Read, 1990; Feeney, 1994; Feeney, Noller, & Callan, 1994; Brennan & Shaver, 1995) have shown an inverse correlation between anxious-ambivalent/preoccupied and avoidant attachment styles and relationship/marital satisfaction. However, although these studies document a direct relationship between attachment and marital satisfaction, the underlying mechanism(s) of these two constructs remains unclear (Meyers & Landsberger, 2002). Meyers and Landsberger (2002) emphasize the need to evaluate marital functioning as a possible moderator or mediator between attachment styles and marital satisfaction.

Marital functioning (operationally defined in this paper as affect regulation, communication style, and conflict resolution) can help provide clues about each partner’s attachment orientations and may play role in the level of marital satisfaction. Similarly, Davila, Bradbury, and Fincham (1998) note the absence of available research evaluating how attachment affects marital satisfaction; therefore, in their study, the researchers hypothesize affect regulation (an element of marital functioning which includes both affective experience and expression) as a mediator of attachment and marital satisfaction. In their Study 1, Davila et al. (1998) recruited 117 couples in established marriages to develop the participant pool and complete the study’s questionnaires. Adult romantic
attachment measures include items from Hazan and Shaver (1987) to assess comfort with closeness and intimacy, while the Marital Adjustment Test (Locke & Wallace, 1959) and Semantic Differential (Osgood, Suci, & Tannenbaum, 1957) measure the concept of marital satisfaction. The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule measures affect regulation of the couples using a 5-point scale, very slightly/not at all (1) to extremely (5). Data results from Study 1 reveal the following:

- Insecure attachment (low levels of comfort with closeness, high anxiety about abandonment and rejection) is associated with a high level of negative affect regulation and low level of marital satisfaction.
- For wives, negative affect regulation shows a statistically significant relationship with marital satisfaction (i.e. inverse relationship between high levels of negative affect regulation and low marital satisfaction). Comfort with closeness is associated with marital satisfaction through affect regulation.
- For husbands, anxiety about abandonment has “an indirect association with marital satisfaction through negative affectivity and also a direct association with marital satisfaction” (Davila et al., 1998, p. 473).

Davila et al. (1998) discusses the indirect association between adult attachment and marital satisfaction mediated by affect regulation. Though the data analysis shows both direct and indirect relationships between attachment, affect regulation (marital functioning), and marital satisfaction, the results suggest the existence of associations between the three constructs. In their Study 2, Davila et al. (1998) recruited 172 newlywed couples from Los Angeles County. Study 2 utilizes the Revised Adult Attachment Scale (Collins & Read, 1990), an 18-item questionnaire measuring dimensions of adult romantic attachment such
as comfort with closeness, comfort with relying on others and belief that others are dependable, and anxiety about abandonment and fear of being unloved. Affect regulation measurements include the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (Neuroticism scale) (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1975) and NEO-FFI Form S’ Neuroticism scale (Costa & McCrae, 1992) in order to evaluate the spouses’ experience with negative affect (e.g. sadness, anxiety). Results from Davila et al.’s (1998) Study 2 with a different sample suggest the following:

• Evidence that negative affect plays a role as a mediator between attachment and marital satisfaction.

• Attachment dimensions (e.g. comfort with closeness and anxiety about abandonment) appear to have direct and indirect associations with marital satisfaction and affect regulation.

Cross-sectional data results cannot prove causality between the constructs of attachment, affect regulation, and marital satisfaction; however, Davila et al.’s (1998) work provides additional support that there exist associations between the three constructs. Further work is needed to strengthen the research base such as controlled, longitudinal studies with married couples examining attachment and relationship functioning (Davila et al., 1998).

In a different study, Fuller and Fincham (1995) explore the relationships between the following three variables with married couples: attachment style, affect regulation, and marital satisfaction. From the attachment theory lens, affect is the expression of a range of emotions and serves as “emotion signals” as a form of communication, especially during times of stress or threat (Cassidy, 1994). The researchers hypothesize that more securely attached spouses will experience more positive and less negative affect during stressful
marital situations, as well as report higher levels of marital satisfaction. Results from data analyses confirm a positive relationship between secure attachment and affect regulation compared to avoidant and anxious-ambivalent attachments. In particular, secure wives in the sample report more positive affect, less negative affect and anxiety, when compared to their more avoidant and anxious-ambivalent counterparts. Though the study’s data do not indicate a significant relationship between attachment style and marital satisfaction for both husbands and wives, a dimensional measure of attachment indicate a positive correlation between secure attachment and marital satisfaction and a negative correlation between avoidant attachment and marital satisfaction.

In a separate study measuring a different element of marital functioning, Guerrero et al. (2009) hypothesize that relational satisfaction and attachment styles are partially mediated by how partners view each other’s emotional communication. The researchers observe that participants report more satisfaction with secure partners who utilize prosocial emotional communication (e.g. seeking social support when needed, displaying general positive affect, and using assertion during anger), instead of resorting to active or passive aggression or hostility to communicate emotions such as anger. On the other hand, partners high in anxiety are associated with passive aggression when communicating anger, tendency to ruminate on negative thoughts, and more often express hostility towards their significant others (Guerrero et al., 2009). Participants high in avoidance are more likely to engage in detached emotional communication with less positive affect and low social support-seeking behaviors. But for the purposes of this project, the importance of the study lies in that it describes the partners’ own attachment styles and modes of emotional communication as well as their perceptions of the other partners’ attachment style and
emotional communication. For example, if one partner ranks high in avoidance while the other partner measures high in anxiety, their own emotional communication styles can affect their overall relational satisfaction. To elaborate, as the avoidant partner employs a detached communication style, he or she may trigger the anxious partner’s frustrations, doubts, and yearnings for attention (Guerrero et al., 2009). Guerrero et al.’s (2009) study provides additional evidence for the possible associations between partners’ attachment orientation, marital functioning, and marital satisfaction. Furthermore, attachment style has been identified as a predictor of several marital outcomes such as satisfaction, relationship stability, and conflict management strategies (Selcuk et al., 2010).

In an effort to investigate the possible links between romantic attachment style, marital functioning and satisfaction, Marchand (2004) examines a sample of 64 Caucasian, heterosexual, married couples recruited through advertisements and announcements. Marchand utilizes the 18-item Adult Attachment Scale (Collins & Read, 1990) to measure comfort with closeness, as well as anxiety over perceived abandonment and rejection. The study conceptualizes conflict resolution in terms of attacking and compromising behaviors and uses the 22-item Conflict Resolution Behavior Questionnaire (CRBQ; Rubenstein & Feldman, 1993), some of the items include the following to represent attacking behaviors: “Really get mad and start yelling” and “Say or do something to hurt his/her feelings.” The CRBQ incorporates the following items to indicate compromising behaviors during marital conflicts: “Try to work out a compromise” and “Listen to your partner and try to understand.” The third variable, marital satisfaction, is measured by the 32-item Marital Comparison Level Inventory (MCLI; Sabatelli, 1984) in order to evaluate the spouses’ perceptions of their marital quality. The MCLI includes statements such as “The amount
of mutual respect you experience” and “The amount of arguing over petty issues you experience” which are rated with a Likert-type scale ranging from -3 (much worse than expected) to 3 (much better than expected). Results from data analyses provide differential relationships between husbands and wives regarding attachment, conflict resolution behaviors, and marital satisfaction. Wives’ insecure/anxious attachment and marital satisfaction is partially mediated by their attacking behaviors in conflict resolution, but the same correlations do not apply to the husbands. Marchand (2004) suggests that wives’ levels of anxiety about abandonment or rejection may manifest as anger; therefore, wives may also resort to attacking behaviors during conflict resolution and contribute to lower marital satisfaction.

But will similar (or dissimilar) associations between adult romantic attachment, marital functioning, and marital satisfaction apply for intercultural couples with differing parent-child interactional histories, models of self and other, and overall cultural expectations of adult marital relationships? The next section will provide some of the available cross-cultural research between intercultural couples and intracultural couples based on attachment styles, marital functioning and satisfaction.

**Adult Romantic Attachment, Marital Functioning and Satisfaction in Intercultural Marriages**

As stated in Chapter 1 and in the earlier portions of this chapter, one of the project’s workshop objectives is to raise awareness about distinct cultural variations in how intercultural couples may approach their marriages and each other. Part of this goal includes conceptualizing each spouse’s adult attachment styles in the context of a romantic relationship and observing marital functioning particularly during conflict(s) (i.e. affect
regulation, communication style, and conflict resolution) in the hopes of enhancing overall marital satisfaction. The following section will provide an outline of the existing work in cross-cultural literature exploring the underlying influence of culture on adult romantic attachment, marital functioning and satisfaction.

Even in recent years, intercultural marriages have received insufficient attention and the studies conducted in the field of cross-cultural marriage have also been limited, partly due to the restricted focus of various “sociological, anthropological, religious, national, and psychotherapeutic factions conducting them” (Perel, 2000, p. 181). Intercultural romantic relationships as a whole have been perceived as outside of mainstream couple relationships, therefore inadequate attention is not surprising and little effort has been made to investigate individual patterns based on larger cultural contexts (Sullivan & Cottone, 2006). Nonetheless, Perel (2000) emphasizes the importance of “analysis of cultures” in order to better understand the interpersonal reality of intercultural couples entering treatment (p. 182). In an effort to expand the literature on intercultural marriages, several researchers have conducted cross-cultural studies with particular focus on the interplay between adult romantic attachment, marital functioning and satisfaction. Studies, such as Agishtein and Brumbaugh (2013), suggest that distributions of attachment orientations differ based on culture, country-of-origin, ethnicity, religious orientation, etc. Culture influences child-rearing practices and individual interpretations of those practices can impact later development related to attachment functioning (e.g. emotional expressions and responses), even within the context of romantic relationships and distressed marital relationships (Collins, 1996; Agishtein & Brumbaugh, 2013). The limited empirical evidence on intercultural marriages suggest that attachment styles and relationship
behaviors are socially and culturally informed; therefore, culture may moderate the associations between these two concepts (Yum & Li, 2007). Based on the body of research presented in the earlier portion of this paper, data from a range of studies have suggested differential child and adult attachment distributions between cultures. Researchers such as Leyendecker, Lamb, Scholerich, and Fricke (1997) attribute some of the distributional differences to key factors central to attachment formation, such as frequency and characteristics of mother-child interactions, which can vary as a function of culture. If childhood attachment and working models remain relatively stable until adulthood (Bowlby, 1969) and cultural variables can influence child and adult interpersonal behaviors (Agishtein & Brumbaugh, 2013), then one can reason that these elements (e.g. attachment style, marital functioning) will manifest themselves in intercultural romantic/marital relationships.

As discussed earlier, Davila et al. (1998) refer to both emotional experience and expression as part of affect regulation in marital interaction. In addition, based on Cassidy (1994), affect regulation and attachment quality are closely linked in that individual differences in the experience and expression of emotion may be influenced by an individual’s attachment history and early socialization. She further describes characteristics of secure and insecure attachment styles as they relate to emotional expression:

Individuals characterized by the flexible ability to accept and integrate both positive and negative emotions are generally securely attached; on the other hand, individuals characterized by either limited or heightened negative affect are more likely to be insecurely attached” (247).
During a couple’s interaction, each partner experiences and expresses a range of emotions in order to elicit certain responses from one another. But the manner in how they emotionally experience and express themselves may differ based on their earlier interpersonal interactions and expectations. These individual differences in interpersonal experiences can be influenced by cultural factors and pose challenges for spouses in general. However, Rubalcava and Waldman (2004) note the increase in difficulty between spouses in intercultural marriages because culture plays an imperative role in emotional expression. Intercultural spouses must gain awareness about their cultures’ organizing principles centered around emotional expressiveness, such as emotional vocabulary, display rules, and capacity for empathic involvement (Saarni, 1993; Rubalcava & Waldman, 2004). Sapriel and Palumbo (2001) provides an example by contrasting Western cultures’ preference for individuation and separateness and many Asian and Arab cultures’ tendency to favor connectedness and non-verbal attunement. When an intercultural couple involves a partner from an individualistic culture and another from a collectivistic culture, there is a greater likelihood that they will find it especially challenging to make sense of each other (Rubalcava & Waldman, 2004). In an excerpt from a clinical interview, Bystydzienski (2011) presents a married intercultural couple, Anita (Hispanic) and Burt (Anglo-American), describing differences in emotional expression:

Anita: “…I’m a warm, loving, caring person…The way I express myself, my loudness, my expressiveness is cultural… He [is] much more detached, stiff midwesterner.”

Burt: “In the culture I grew up in, you don’t express affect…adulthood was being totally independent and separate from others…” (p. 68).

The couple presented above exhibit how emotional experiences and expressions, or affect regulation, based on cultural differences can create relational conflict. Whereas Anita
describes Burt’s affect as “detached,” Burt perceives his behavior as “separate” and “independent” and associated with adulthood. However, Anita’s “loudness and expressiveness” are attributed to her culture as a way to express both positive and, presumably, negative feelings. Matsumoto (2006) explains that these cultural differences regarding expressive behaviors exist because of the variations in meaning cultures place on social relationships. Due to dissimilarities between cultural worldviews, beliefs, concepts, and values of relating to others, individuals may have different descriptions of and explanations for interpersonal behaviors. Again, according to Cassidy (1994) and Feeney (2016), one of the effects of attachment style and caregiver experiences on affect regulation is the manner in which individuals organize their emotional experiences and strategies for negative emotions based on previous attachment interactions. Combining cultural variables such as parent-child caregiving practices (see previous sections) and social expectations, it is plausible that partners may be operating from culturally-accepted or encouraged interactional patterns which can reflect their adult romantic attachment. Cultural values such as interdependence and family orientation make it common for individuals within the Asian and Hispanic groups to depend on others and seek social acceptance- behaviors that reflect anxious attachment in the Western culture (Sue & Sue, 2013; Wei et al., 2004). Additionally, social norms for regulating emotional expressions and reactions in many Asian cultures, such as Korea and Japan, include “restrained emotional composes” which are considered attributes of self-discipline and maturity; on the contrary, Western cultures perceive open and expressive emotional responses as indicators of care and engagement, even during intimate conflicts (Ting-Toomey, 2009). Gallo and Smith (2001) observe the mediating effect of negative attributions for spousal
behaviors on attachment style and marital dissatisfaction. If different cultures attribute positive and negative characteristics to particular behaviors based on social norms and expectations, then intercultural partners may have the tendency to explain each other’s emotional experiences and responses from their own cultural perspectives— which may prove to be inaccurate for their partners. Nonetheless, Ringstrom (1994) describes couples in an “optimal marriage” appreciate each other’s style of emotional expression and expansiveness, while also utilizing “their strong feelings as signals that indicate something to explore within themselves” (p. 163). Other goals for the workshop are to be able to facilitate interactions with cultural-sensitivity in order for spouses to convey “respect for the other’s cultural frame of reference” and develop “a mutually shared meaning” during marital conflicts (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001, p.58-59).

Sharaievska, Kim, and Stodolska (2013) explain that differences in cultural backgrounds, aside from different native languages, affect how spouses communicate. Varying communication styles remain noticeable in interracial marriages as one of the Korean wives in the study describes:

I’m from Kyungsang-do (province). We do not explain everything, but expect that the partner understands without explanation. But, Americans need to explain verbally everything. I think cultural difference is a really big problem” (Sharaievska et al., 2013, p. 453).

The participant also shares her view that the American culture tends “to be cold and shallow” (Sharaievska et al., 2013, p. 453). Using an attachment theory framework and considering this participant’s ethnic and cultural background, she is accustomed to an East Asian collectivistic society where the attachment norm tends to measure higher in anxiety (Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006); in contrast, Western cultures with individualistic leanings may appear higher in avoidance. Additionally, Friedman et al.’s (2010) result indicates
higher avoidant attachment style as more strongly associated with poorer relationship satisfaction in more collectivist cultures (e.g. Hong Kong and Mexico). The researchers elaborate that collectivistic cultures perceive avoidance attachment as less appropriate for relationships because it does not meet the culture’s expectation of interdependence. The unmet expectation(s) of appropriate relationship attachment can lead to frustration or disappointment within the spouse(s), as well as other relatives and family members. Tili and Barker (2015) conduct a qualitative study with nine marriages consisting of one Caucasian American and one Asian spouse to evaluate the spouses’ view on communication effectiveness and competence in order to address cultural differences. Successful and efficient communication is imperative for marital satisfaction; however, similar to Rubalcava and Waldman’s (2004) position, intercultural couples encounter difficulties with adaptation and communication due to their differences in cultural principles, viewpoints, and communication styles (Tili & Barker, 2015). Spouses in the study identify similar experiences of developing the need for openness in the marriage to understand each other’s culturally-based viewpoints. For instance, an Asian husband in the study (Makisig) shares one of his interaction styles with his Caucasian wife (Hannah): “…there are times when I expect her to understand without me having to be specific…it’s expected [in Filipino culture] that you should have figured it out…” (p. 200). However, Hannah shares her perception of Makisig’s upbringing related to communication: “They don’t communicate feelings. They just let it go” and further describes his behavior as avoidant (p. 202). Based on Hannah and Makisig’s descriptions, their distinct communication styles and attributions based on their own cultural knowledge hinder effective communication during marital conflict. Communication strategies that seem
avoidant or withdrawing can either convey control or an attempt to maintain relational harmony (Ting-Toomey, 2009). For Asians, Wei, Russell, Mallinckrodt, and Zakalik (2004) contend that it may be culturally appropriate to restrain responses during conflicts in order to maintain interpersonal harmony, which can be perceived as characteristics of avoidant attachment based on Western perspective.

An individual’s cultural background will affect how he or she will process and experience interpersonal conflict (e.g. goal compatibility, conflict resolution, and satisfaction); however, whereas one culture may encourage addressing conflict directly, another culture may discourage conflict altogether (Kaushal & Kwantes, 2006). According to Kaushal and Kwantes (2006), one’s priority to either tackle or avoid conflict will determine his or her strategy to resolve the situation. In addition, Grossman and Grossman (1990) reason that situations with high potentials for relational conflict can appear differently in various cultures, which depend on the “culture or individual acceptance of a ‘natural’ need for attachment with specific other people and on the frequency and magnitude of such demands” (p. 37). Cultural norms for appropriate attachment needs/behaviors influence the occurrence interpersonal conflicts and resolutions. Cultures often rely on varying methods to address these conflicts and Hsu (2005) provides an example of strategies used by a married intercultural couple, an Asian woman (Meilin) and a European-American (Tim). When difficulties arise Meilin often returns to her family-of-origin (FOO) in Taiwan to seek temporary refuge and parental guidance, an acceptable and expected behavior in the Chinese culture. Tim shares marital problems with friends and children’s school counselor. In the vignette provided, Meilin considers Tim’s actions as a violation of their privacy and an attempt to humiliate her. On the other hand, Tim unaware
of Taiwanese cultural norms, views Meilin’s departures as “desertion” and a precursor to separation (p. 232). In another case study, Hsu (2015) describes conflict resolution styles between a Hawaiian husband (Kalani) and a Caucasian American wife (Mary). Kalani, maintaining Hawaiian customs, chooses to suppress his complaints; on the contrary, Mary prefers to express, share, and apologize in order to resolve marital conflict (Hsu, 2015). Cultural underpinnings of conflict resolution can contribute to misunderstandings and inaccurate assumptions based on perceived behaviors, which can lead to marital disruptions and dissatisfaction. Negative perceptions and interpretations of spousal behaviors can be seen as personal attacks during conflicts (Hsu, 2015).

Feeney (1999) describes adult attachment types in romantic relationships in the following ways: securely attached partners are predicted to constructively handle conflict by “acknowledging distress and turning to others for support”; avoidant individuals have the tendency to limit acknowledgment of distress and expression of negative feelings “having learned self-reliance” from “rejecting or insensitive caregiving”; anxious types show vigilant awareness of conflict and negative feelings in order to “maintain contact with inconsistent caregiving” (p. 358). However, comparing these descriptions to those behaviors exhibited and perceived by the intercultural couples in the previous vignettes (i.e. Meilin and Kalani’s conflict resolution behaviors), partners may be viewed as insecurely attached related to insensitive or inconsistent parent-child interactions. Again, there is a lack of adequate research linking attachment behaviors to relationship maintenance in general and most of them were conducted in the United States, a largely individualistic culture; therefore, there is a need to expand the field’s understanding of the extent to which research originating from the U.S. apply to collectivistic cultures such as
Japan, Taiwan, and Malaysia (Ohbuchi & Takahashi, 1994; Hsu, 2005; Baptist, Norton, Aducci, Thompson, & Cook, 2012). In Tili and Barker (2015), intercultural couples consisting of one Asian and one Caucasian-American partners describe how they perceive and resolve conflict; for instance, spouses in the study emphasize the importance of both openness and willingness to change perspectives during conflict resolution. Whereas Asian partners adopt self-disclosure and directness favored by the mainstream Western culture, Caucasian American partners incorporate facework (i.e. behaviors that maintain, reestablish, or save one’s own image, another’s image, or both parties’ images; see Oetzel et al., 2000) into their conflict resolution behaviors. Given both quantitative and qualitative data from cross-cultural studies concerning childhood and adult attachment styles, romantic relationships, marital functioning and satisfaction, clinicians should remain cognizant about underlying cultural influences when assessing clients’ attachment orientations, relationship expectations, and patterns of interacting.

**Additional Research**

Ho et al.’s (2010) work is an investigative study to determine possible associations between mother-child attachment and romantic attachment with culture as one of the moderating variables. The study’s participant pool includes two populations, an American sample (N=214, 99 males, 112 females, 3 unspecified genders) and a Hong Kong sample (N=153, 71 males, 81 females, 1 unspecified gender). Participants are provided a battery of questionnaires (e.g. Experiences in Close Relationships Scale or ECR) assessing close relationship experiences in order to tap attachment anxiety and avoidance in both their romantic and mother-child relationships. Results from hierarchical regression analyses suggest a significant relationship between maternal and romantic attachment for both
samples and support the theorized stability of attachments; for example, maternal anxious and avoidant attachments correlate with anxious and avoidant romantic attachments. In addition, culture has a moderating effect on the association between avoidant romantic attachment and perception of partner support; for instance, perception of current partner support is a strong predictor of reduced avoidant attachment for the Hong Kong sample compared to the American sample. Ho et al. (2010), attribute the cultural difference to the value placed on particular interpersonal relationships by the two samples; the emphasis on harmonious interpersonal relationships from collectivistic cultures renders the Hong Kong sample more sensitive to disruptions in partner support. In addition, Rothbaum, et al. (2002) compare Western views on secure marital relationships from those of Japanese perceptions of secure marital relationships. Whereas U.S. couples generally value attraction and romantic love throughout their marriage, Japanese couples tend to place a stronger emphasis on loyalty and devotion to the family. Cultural differences play a role in determining how attachment styles manifest themselves in adult relationships, but a way to expand on this is to shed some light on the attachment and interactional patterns between partners in intercultural marriages. Perel (2000) states, “A significant dividend of embarking in and sustaining a cross-cultural relationship is the widening of experience and perspective it provides,” which also offers a richer understanding of intimate human relationships in an increasingly mobile and diverse world.

Being aware of these differences can help inform treatment planning, especially when working with interracial couples. Interventions that are customized to target each partner’s attachment needs/orientations and marital functioning can facilitate marital satisfaction that may lead to positive treatment outcomes.
Current Treatment Modalities for Couples Therapy

Though one cannot guarantee positive outcomes for all clients, tailoring treatments based on clients’ needs while remaining sensitive to their unique backgrounds can help therapists cultivate a safe therapeutic environment; in attachment terms, Mikulincer and Shaver (2007) state that therapists can often serve as a source of security and comfort for their clients. Because marital distress may arise from several sources such as personality incompatibilities, differences in values, principles, marital expectations, behavioral perceptions, etc., therapists should facilitate curiosity, acceptance, and understanding (Hsu, 2005). But part of providing effective therapeutic care involves remaining cautious of labeling “clients’ attachment levels…as healthy or unhealthy”; rather, therapists can utilize information based on how attachment development can affect relationship behaviors in order to sensitively challenge rigid worldviews and incite flexibility and openness between couples (Baptist et al., 2012, p.7; Dozier & Bates, 2004). In the following section, treatment modalities integrating attachment theory and cross-cultural research in an attempt to enhance marital functioning and satisfaction with intercultural spouses will be presented.

Attachment Theory and Cultural Adjustment

Attachment theory, as adapted by Hazan and Shaver (1987), qualifies an adult romantic relationship as a model of an attachment bond in adulthood. Though there are culture-specific manifestations of attachment behaviors, a romantic relationship (and its institutionalized form as marriage) serves as a secure base and safe haven for partners (Selcuk et al., 2010). Threats of or actual separation elicit distress from partners, while
“companionable interaction” and “mutual pleasure” strengthens partner security (Selcuk et al., 2010; Holmes, p. 12, 2001). Attachment also includes the concept of internal working models (IWM), which are organized expectations of self and others based on earlier interactions with attachment figures (e.g. parent or primary caregiver); for example, secure IWM of others allow an individual to predict that an attachment figure will be available and responsive to his or her needs (Bowlby, 1969). Consequently, a secure IWM of self will provide an individual with a sense of worthiness during situations which require comfort and support (Sroufe, 1992). Though Bowlby (1969) and Ainsworth (1979) propose the stability of IWM, dramatic changes do occur in the midst of forming a new attachment relationship or attachment loss (Kobak & Hazan, 1991). Bowlby (1981) refers to these attachment changes as revisions or updates in IWM. The extent of revisions to IWM vary from individual to individual; therefore, when an individual is able to include new information about self and other, then his or her IWM retain a certain level of accuracy (Bowlby, 1988). However, if new information is disregarded or ignored, IWM become outdated (Kobak & Hazan, 1991). Attachment in adulthood incorporates IWM in order to predict an attachment figure’s availability and a view of self as worthy of comfort. Hence, attachment security between spouses will include a sense of security in the other’s responsiveness and in the self as worthy of receiving and providing support.

Practitioners can place intercultural marriages and marital distress in the context of adult attachment by utilizing the concepts of attachment bond, IWM, and revisions to IWM. Because intercultural spouses face cultural differences in values (Agishtein & Brumbaugh, 2013), interactional/socialization histories (Yum & Li, 2007), and views of marriage and marital functioning (Rothbaum et al., 2002; Ho et al., 2010), their relationship
may undergo adjustment difficulties (Zaker & Boostanipoor, 2016). If spouses are unable to adjust their IWM, their expectations of each other’s availability and responsiveness become less accurate; in contrast, spouses who are successful in updating their IWM have more realistic expectations of each other’s availability and responsiveness (Kobak & Hazan, 1991). In short, one spouse’s IWM and the other spouse’s behaviors (also influenced by his or her own IWM) determine the activation or deactivation of the attachment system as a response to marital threats, distress, or other relational needs (Berman, Marcus, & Berman, 1994). Although Quinn (2013) analyzes adult marital relationships and attachment apart from the Western-based terms of secure base and safe haven, she acknowledges the cross-cultural variabilities in how attachment manifests itself in adulthood: “How attachment plays out in adulthood results from the cross-culturally variable patterns of child rearing and other local circumstances” (p. 216). For instance, Quinn (2013) contests the generalizability of “intersubjective attunement” or “intense emotional reaction” typically seen in American samples as ingredients for secure attachment (p.222). Based on this, marital relationships wherein one spouse may seem withdrawn due to limited emotional expression may be responding appropriately according to his or her culture’s expectations, but may come across as unresponsive according to Western ideals. For instance, Chinese individuals categorized as avoidant are more likely to exhibit avoidant attachment patterns in a socially acceptable way, but may be viewed as maladaptive in Western societies (Chui & Leung, 2016).

Adjusting spouses’ IWM would entail transforming their assumptions, expectations, and interpretations of each other’s attachment behaviors. Cobb and Davila
(2009) cite five therapeutic stages in adjusting IWM in order to facilitate changes in how individuals construe their social environment and convey their needs and desires within their relationships:

- **Fostering an optimal therapeutic alliance**- developing a working alliance which will allow for the exploration of behavioral, cognitive, and emotional components of attachment bonds
- **Increasing awareness**- assisting in the exploration of current attachment bonds and expectations from self and other in order to bring the unrecognized aspects of IWM to awareness (e.g. beliefs about relationships, behavioral patterns related to coping, etc.)
- **Fostering a corrective experience**- observing and processing emotional responses and cognitive evaluations in the present moment in order to create new attachment experiences between clients (spouses)
- **Explore past relational experiences**- recognize the influence of previous experiences on current cognitions, emotions, behaviors, and how those parts shaped current IWM
- **Continued reality testing**- recognize aspects of IWM that no longer apply to current relationships because they no longer suit the present circumstances and as Bowlby (1988) states, “to feel, to think, and to act in new ways” (p. 139).

One of the goals for therapeutic change includes the exploration of current IWM to identify sources of incompatibility (Cobb & Davila, 2009). Therefore, helping spouses track their perceptions, interpretations, expectations, and beliefs about their relationships will enable
them to recognize potential misconstructions based on their previous IWM, which are influenced by culture and previous experiences. Practitioners can offer both support and validation for both spouses while also facilitating more accurate views of attachment needs and expectations based on the spouses’ cultural differences and similarities.

**Emotionally-Focused Couple Therapy**

Western expectations and assumptions of normative behaviors do not necessarily apply from culture to culture due to differences in values and experiences; therefore, clinical biases toward what may be considered healthy behaviors may promulgate negative evaluations of other cultures (Zaker & Boostanipoor, 2016). Hence, treatment modalities applying culturally-sensitive methods are imperative, especially in a society where ethnic and cultural intermarriages are increasing. As intercultural spouses encounter greater marital discords, their tolerance for individual differences tend to decrease (Ishii-Kuntz, 1993).

Emotionally-Focused Therapy (EFT), an integration of attachment theory, experiential, and humanistic therapeutic approaches, is an evidence-based treatment model developed by Sue Johnson and Les Greenberg (Johnson & Greenberg, 1985). EFT utilizes emotion as an instrument for change and emphasizes the here-and-now “emotional, behavioral, and psychological” interactional experiences of clients (Greenman & Johnson, 2013). Greenman and Johnson (2013) describe EFT for couples as a therapeutic approach based on research correlating relationship distress and satisfaction; additionally, EFT conceptualizes couple’s interactions through an attachment lens of secure versus insecure emotional and behavioral patterns. Because EFT employs attachment theory’s concepts of secure base and safe haven (Bowlby, 1969; Ainsworth & Bell, 1970), marital distress is
viewed as a reaction to “threats or perceived threats to the attachment bond” and typically includes behaviors such as clinging and protesting to gain access or elicit responsiveness from a partner (Greenman & Johnson, 2013). EFT therapists support couples in therapy by restructuring repetitive and rigid interactional patterns that contribute to marital conflicts. For instance, an important aspect of EFT focuses on creating a sense of safety for each member of a dyad, which allows for flexibility in expressing needs and vulnerabilities for each partner in the romantic relationship (Johnson & Whiffen, 1999). EFT consists of three phases (i.e. de-escalation, changing interactional positions, and consolidation/integration) with nine steps delineating the development of new interactional patterns, emotional engagement, and trust between spouses (Johnson & Whiffen, 1999).

If EFT places marital conflict in the framework of perceived availability and responsiveness from partners, then intercultural couples (with their varying behavioral responses to conflict) will encounter challenges in navigating stressful interactions. Greenman and Johnson (2013) acknowledge the homogenous samples of mainly White, middle-class, heterosexual couples recruited for EFT research; for this reason, they consider the possibility that diverse couples may or may not reflect similar dynamics as exhibited by those in previous EFT studies. Though scarce, Greenman, Young, and Johnson (2009) provide preliminary EFT guidelines for working specifically with intercultural couples. EFT’s focus on the universal aspects of attachment theory, such as the evolutionary needs for “safety, comfort, and emotional closeness,” demonstrates its potential relevance and effectivity as a treatment modality for intercultural couples (Greenman et al., 2009). At the same time, EFT also considers individual differences partly due to early socialization based on cultural norms guiding relational interactions, cycles,
emotional displays (affect), and expression of needs. According to Johnson (2004) EFT’s theory of change hones in on expanding the couple’s experiences of themselves and their intimate relationship by creating safety in and new meanings from their interactions (i.e. validation and acceptance of each partner’s experiences in couple therapy). In the context of intercultural marriages, expanding the couple’s experiences will entail the recognition of cultural “norms, values, and expectations that contribute to their personal construction of, and emotional experience in, their relationship” (Greenman et al., 2009, p. 150).

In other words, EFT with intercultural couples highlights the universal attachment needs of emotional closeness, comfort, and safety, while considering the culture-specific ways in which partners attempt to meet these needs. Greenman et al. (2009) provide an outline of EFT’s three stages for working with intercultural couples:

*Stage 1 (Steps 1-4)*

- Decrease impact of negative interactional cycle on the couple by illustrating expressed behaviors and emotions that prevent safety and emotional closeness
- Therapist assists in uncovering cultural influences on assumptions and expectations of partner’s behaviors and expressed emotions within the relationship
- Therapist validates these cultural influences while reflecting impact on couple’s negative interactional cycle

*Stage 2 (Steps 5-7)*

- Identify the culture-specific ways in which partners obtain safety and closeness and how these may negatively impact perceived availability and responsiveness
• A partner in Stage 2 may express tears and outward expression of love and desires, while another partner may be more reserved; therefore, it is important to note the underlying similarity in attachment needs in order to facilitate new meanings from the couple’s interactional cycle.

Stage 3 (Steps 8 and 9)

• Establish a sense of safety and closeness within the marital relationship
• Therapist aids in problem-solving while reflecting and heightening the couple’s behavioral and emotional responses to each other

A short vignette from Greenman et al. (2009) will be included in Appendix A to illustrate a negative interactional pattern between a Middle Eastern wife (Sameera) and an English-Canadian husband (Scott).

Awareness of culture’s ability to shape or constrict couples’ affective experiences and interaction cycles can provide therapists and partners with a greater understanding on how to best offer and receive emotional support, express more vulnerable emotions, and cultivate safety during and after couple therapy (Greenman et al., 2009). EFT meets clients where they are and presumes the validity and legitimacy of their experiences (Johnson & Whiffen, 1999).

Implications of Previous Research on Author’s Project

Thus far, the review of literature covered theories explaining the existence of an attachment system from infancy to adulthood and its role in both parent-child and romantic relationships. Research providing data on universal and culture-specific manifestations of attachment behaviors (e.g. proximity-seeking) based on antecedents were presented in an effort to highlight cross-cultural underpinnings influencing parent-child attachment bonds.
and internal working models. Considering the differences in socialization of parent-child interactions and attachment was also an attempt to integrate the role of culture in influencing later adult romantic pair-bonds (i.e. adult romantic attachment, marital functioning and satisfaction). But what makes the author’s project distinct from correlational studies on attachment and adult romantic relationships is its emphasis on heterosexual, intercultural couples.

The project will implement a workshop drawing from the research evidence provided. Because intercultural couples come from diverse backgrounds with their own perceptions of “securely” attached or appropriate romantic relationships, they may expect to enhance dissimilar relational elements. The project’s workshop will aid therapists in tailoring interventions so that spouses can have the opportunity to improve or enhance their relationships based on their expectations and attachment styles. It will integrate research from treatment modalities such as emotionally-focused couple therapy with special attention on intercultural couples.
Chapter 3

Project Audience and Implementation Factors

Introduction

Research on attachment theory has flourished since the pioneering work of Harlow (1958), Bowlby (1969), and Ainsworth and Bell (1970). Early research on comfort and safety involved Harlow’s rhesus monkeys and Bowlby’s ethological approach to parent-infant interactions. Ainsworth and Bell (1970) observed infant responses to separation and reunification with primary caregivers/mothers in the Strange Situation study. Consequently, Stayton and Ainsworth (1973) classified infant attachment styles based on the infants’ responses to separation and reunification with attachment figures: secure, anxious-ambivalent, and avoidant. Later investigation regarding the constancy of childhood attachment orientations involved the work of Hazan and Shaver (1987) with adult attachment styles in the context of romantic relationships.

But despite attachment theory’s leaps and bounds, the territory of marital relationships and its subgroup, interracial marriages, remain underrepresented in research. Cohn et al. (1992) notes the limited information explaining the extent of the relationship between parent-child attachment and its effect on later marital relationship. And though the rate of interracial marriages exponentially increased within the last fifty years, it remains understudied and overlooked (Aldridge, 1978; Troy et al., 2006). Furthermore, Ng et al. (2013) draw attention to the homogeneity of participant pools involved in studies exploring the connection between attachment and marital relationships. These studies have often been based on Western relational contexts, therefore there is a need to replicate and determine the applicability of these studies on non-Western samples (Ng et al., 2013).
The purpose of this project is to shed some light on the possible interplay between adult romantic attachment, marital functioning and satisfaction, with special consideration on the role of culture. It will attempt to fill some of the missing gaps between the widely documented attachment theory within the context of adult romantic relationships and heterosexual, intercultural marital relationships. It is the hope of the author to encourage practitioners, psychotherapists, and other mental health providers to remain aware of their clients’ diverse cultural backgrounds and how culture can affect intrapersonal processing and interpersonal dynamics within intercultural marriages. In other words, the workshop aims to raise awareness about cultural variations concerning intercultural couples’ varying approaches to their marriages and toward each other. Practitioners will be able to conceptualize spouses’ adult attachment styles, behavioral and emotional manifestations of attachment orientations, and their effects on marital satisfaction. The project will also incorporate examples of potential challenges practitioners and couples may encounter during and outside therapy sessions. The intention of these goals is to deliver culturally-sensitive therapy in order to facilitate “respect for the other’s cultural frame of reference” and develop “a mutually shared meaning” during marital conflicts (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001, p.58-59).

**Development of Project**

The project’s inception was partly due to the author’s informal and clinical observations of intercultural couples (married and unmarried) in a fieldwork setting. As a trainee at a counseling center located in Los Angeles, she encountered populations from diverse cultural backgrounds. Clients, with each of their own understanding of the world based on early socializations and interactional experiences, convey their own
interpretations, predictions, and assumptions of their surroundings. For instance, a heterosexual married couple of five years sought therapy for marital distress and presented with “communication issues.” The wife, a first generation Filipino-American, described her husband as insensitive and selfish. The husband, a Caucasian-American from North Carolina, described his wife as “too dependent on her family [of origin]” and communicated the “lack of privacy” regarding their marriage. Approaching the couple from an attachment and EFT perspective, the author tracked maladaptive interactional patterns within the relationship; however, she also began to learn more about each of the couple’s relationship histories (e.g. parent-child, siblings, other partners, etc.) after their intake session. Though she considered the role culture played in the couple’s adjustment to marriage and life together, she wanted to explore if her perception of the couple’s attachment orientations and “secure versus insecure” behavioral patterns reflected the mainstream Western/American conceptualization. The author wanted to cultivate a safe working alliance and refrain from pathologizing one partner over the other, an especially crucial task for intercultural couples. The author believes that remaining aware of the tendency towards negatively perceiving, otherwise culturally-appropriate, behaviors/responses in a Westernized context will help develop a trustworthy client-therapist relationship. In the case vignette provided above, the author joined both spouses in attempting to understand the cultural similarities and differences in the way they related to one another and how these either helped or stymied their marital relationship.

Another reason for the author’s interest in this subject matter is her identity as an offspring of immigrant Filipino parents and her involvement in an intercultural romantic
relationship with a Brazilian-American male. Her own curiosity and awareness about challenges associated with multicultural relationships (e.g. individualist/collectivistic ideas of interpersonal relationships, family loyalty, rules) sparked her fascination. The comparison between her parent-child interactions and those of her romantic partner’s strengthened the saliency of cultural variations. In addition, the author recalled a scene from a Filipino soap opera involving an interaction between a mother and child during dinner. The child, in an attempt to repair her relationship with the mother, verbally expressed her apology; however, the mother did not directly address the apology and commanded her child to resume eating. From a Western perspective, this may appear as the mother’s rejection of her child’s bid for closeness. When the author discussed the scene with her father, he simply stated: “It might not make sense here [in the United States], but for me [as a Filipino] I understand that they made up already.” The next scene showed the mother and child taking a stroll together while the mother provided advice. This reinforced the idea that though certain interpersonal responses may seem atypical, unhealthy, or insecure based on Western conceptualizations, the same responses may be considered as appropriate or even encouraged in other cultures.

The workshop is patterned after EFT’s phases and includes cultural considerations regarding adult romantic attachment and couple functioning within the context of marital relationships. As stated throughout the paper, the scarcity of cross-cultural research for intercultural marital relationships emphasizes the need for additional resources. The author utilized the EFT model designed by Sue Johnson and Les Greenberg as a primary
foundation for the workshop outline. The author utilized Greenman et al. (2009) and ChenFeng, Kim, Wu, and Knudson-Martin (2016) to integrate possible intercultural concerns between therapists and their clients.

**Intended Audience**

The author intended for the project to be a workshop provided for mental health practitioners, particularly psychotherapists (i.e. licensed, interns, and trainees) in an effort to spread awareness of cultural influences on marital interactions and functioning from a psychotherapeutic standpoint. Though couples can attend the workshop, prior knowledge of theories or research about attachment and couple therapy will help the workshop’s clear delivery and coherence.

Though open to the general population, workshop attendees are encouraged to have prior knowledge about couple therapy and theories. Presentation terms and explanations are targeted for mental health practitioners and clinicians. Proficiency, or at least moderate familiarity, with psychological and mental health terminology is recommended. Interventions, considerations, and conceptualizations are included for primary use in psychotherapeutic sessions; however, lay-couples can utilize some of the information if concepts are well-understood. No certifications are required.

**Personal Qualifications**

A qualified presenter must have experience in conducting a presentation in front of an audience (small or large) and proficiency with basic computer programs (i.e. PowerPoint) in order to deliver the workshop. He or she should have adequate knowledge and professional training from an accredited institution to demonstrate competency in relaying workshop information. Though he or she does not need to obtain licensure or
specific certification, a potential presenter must have taken upper-level courses in one of the following topics: developmental psychology, social psychology, life-span psychology, diversity, and counseling theories. The workshop has not been formally translated into another language other than English. Therefore, if a presenter plans to deliver the workshop in another language, he or she must demonstrate fluency in that language and ability to accurately translate concepts.

**Environment and Equipment**

The workshop setting can be a conference room, classroom, or any space that can accommodate both smaller and larger groups. Tables, chairs, and writing paraphernalia will be needed for notetaking and comfort. The presenter will need a projector and accessible computer/laptop with PowerPoint in order to display the topic’s information. For larger groups, the presenter may need the help of audio equipment (e.g. microphone, speaker) to ensure clear communication and delivery of information. Because sensitive information may be shared during the workshop (although not required), confidentiality is of the utmost importance and cooperation from attendees is required. A brief questionnaire is distributed at the end of the presentation.

**Formative Evaluation**

Because the author would like to integrate and update the information provided during the workshop, clinical suggestions are welcomed. At the end of the workshop, a brief questionnaire is given to the attendees for feedback.

For preliminary approval, the author’s academic committee chair and readers provide their guidance and feedback throughout the development of the project.
Project Outline

The workshop will be divided into two sections: Part I and Part II. Part I entails introduction to the workshop and presentation of problems in research. It will also discuss basic theoretical concepts as a quick refresher-like crash course with operational definitions for key terms. Vignettes will be included to illustrate why the workshop will be helpful in delivering a culturally-sensitive treatment plan and session. Part I will contain information about cross-cultural research regarding childhood and adult attachment, marital functioning and satisfaction.

Part II will delve into specific conceptualizations and interventions that are intended to facilitate closeness, empathy, and deeper understanding of similarities and differences between intercultural couples. It will describe six steps that can be used and integrated in therapy sessions in order to incite awareness about the influence of culture on marital interactions. In addition, it will suggest a creation of a “subculture” that is unique to each couple’s relationship and tailored based on their acceptance of cultural differences and alternative ways of interacting.

The PowerPoint presentation for the workshop will utilize the three phases of EFT in conjunction with the project’s attempt to provide culturally sensitive treatment and the concept of relational “subculture.” Though the author uses EFT as a treatment modality, practitioners can integrate the workshop’s steps in their own models and theories of change as is appropriate.
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## Part II

### Objective/Goals of Treatment Interventions

#### Step 1 - Get to Know Your Clients
- Gain information about couple’s history together and significant relationship history (e.g. parent-child interactions, significant others)
- Therapist’s cultural goals (e.g. basic understanding of clients’ cultural norms)

#### Step 2 - Conceptualize and Assess Interactional Patterns
- Track interactional patterns such as pursue/withdraw, attack/attack, etc.
- Join clients’ worldviews and interpretations of each other’s behaviors and emotions
- Therapist’s cultural goals (e.g. assess with cultural sensitivity and remain informed about cultural norms for attachment behaviors)

#### Step 3 - Introduction of a Subculture
- Facilitate awareness of marital functioning (communication, affect regulation, conflict resolution) by processing here-and-now interactions and observations
- Acknowledge role of cultural origins and influence on interactions
- Introduce the idea of a “subculture,” interpretations and assumptions that couples can tolerate
- Therapist’s cultural goals (e.g. provide psychoeducation to strengthen understanding)

#### Step 4 - Facilitate Cultural Openness and Perspective
- Ensure safety in relationship when discussing cultural differences
- Model empathy, understanding, and curiosity about each other
- Therapist’s cultural goals (e.g. reframing attachment interpretations and behaviors by considering a cultural lens)

#### Step 5 - Creating a “Subculture”
- Negotiate compromises for couples with interactional differences based on culture
- Develop new ways of interacting by providing and receiving attachment needs upon gaining a better understanding of spouse’s expectations, assumptions, interpretations

#### Step 6 - Strengthen “Subculture”
- Consolidate safety and security within their relationship and their newly developed subculture
Chapter 4

Closing

This chapter will provide a brief summary of the previous chapters and review of the overarching goals of the workshop. In addition, suggestions for future research and implementation are provided.

Summary

Chapter 1 introduced the project’s overall aim of investigating possible associations between adult romantic attachment, marital functioning and satisfaction between intercultural couples, which practitioners can integrate into the treatment process. Key terms and operational definitions were provided for clarity and objectivity. In addition, the first chapter briefly mentioned foundational researchers who explored and assessed attachment in both children and adults. But most importantly it discussed the scarcity of available information regarding the applicability of attachment theory for diverse cultures and marital relationships.

Next, Chapter 2 delved deeper into the works of attachment theory and its evolution. The literature review presented pioneering studies which explored attachment orientations and their respective behavioral patterns in the context of parent-child relationships. Studies suggesting the qualification of adult romantic relationships as full-fledged attachments were also included and variations in attachment distributions across cultures were discussed. The synthesis of literature considers culture’s role in parent-child interactions and experiences, as well as its influence on spouses’ perception of their marital relationships and behaviors toward each other. The last portion of the chapter covered
current treatment modalities targeting attachment styles, marital functioning, and satisfaction in relation to intercultural marital relationships.

Finally, Chapter 3 focused on the project’s workshop and its layout. The chapter described implementation, requirement(s), target audience, and a general outline of the workshop. It summarized how the workshop was formed and the ideas that contributed to its development.

**Conclusion and Future Work**

A closer look at marital relationships through the lens of attachment theory will indeed offer a richer understanding of interaction patterns, assumptions, and expectations between spouses. Though older and recent research evidence suggest associations between attachment orientation and marital satisfaction, identifying behavioral manifestations that either mediate or moderate the two variables can influence the outcome of couple therapy. Additionally, the rise in intercultural marriages within the last half of the century stresses the need for greater cross-cultural research because of new challenges it can pose for practitioners. For instance, Sevier, Brew, and Yi (2016) cite some of the following treatment challenges for intercultural couples in terms of Evidence-based treatment (EST) models:

- Though standardized and designed to minimize variability between therapists, ESTs can overlook cultural influences and prevent flexibility in meeting clients’ needs in a culturally-sensitive manner
- Culturally-based key constructs, conceptualizations, and assessments in EFTs may not be appropriate for diverse couples (e.g. Western and Eastern interpretations of romantic love and satisfaction)
A grounded approach to research may provide a deeper understanding of particular cultural variations and experiences of intercultural couples. Adapting theoretical models based on “cultural fit” demonstrates the importance of considering attachment processes’ relational consequences across cultures (Friedman et al., 2010). Similarly, Johnson (1999) emphasizes the significance of upholding empirically-based universal constructs for conceptualizing basic human needs in relationships, while honoring unique individual experiences.

Enhancing practitioners’ ability to uncover strengths and similarities between intercultural spouses, despite culturally different viewpoints, is an added benefit to increasing cross-cultural research. Practitioners will be given the opportunity to work alongside couples toward their goals of more fulfilling and gratifying relationships (Sullivan & Cottone, 2006). Sullivan and Cottone (2006) highlight the need for continued work in this area to explore how cultural differences can drive distressed spouses further apart and develop strategies to overcome barriers in an effort to create “mutually fulfilling relationships” (p. 224).

Practitioners not only need to remain aware of culture’s role in the quality marital relationships, but also its effect on the therapeutic relationship and treatment. Tseng and Streltzer (2005, pp. 268-270) provide several key points in delivering culturally-sensitive treatment, which include considerations for practitioners themselves:

• Utilize “universal therapeutic mechanisms” such as mobilizing available resources and cultivating hope
Consider the sociocultural context of therapy, for instance, gaining additional knowledge about clients’ cultural backgrounds, norms, social structures, economic conditions, etc.

- Explore clients’ perceptions of psychotherapy and attitudes toward mental health (or illness) based on their cultural values

- Pay attention how clients describe their presenting problems because reports of mental, emotional, and behavioral states are also shaped by culture

- Remain aware of the different definitions of “normality,” which can depend on a culture’s value system- goals toward what may be considered as “healthy” may vary based on the sociocultural environment

- Determine the clients’ perception of the practitioner as an authority or an equal collaborator

- Be cognizant of the practitioner’s value system and its impact on the treatment process (e.g. Western therapist may view dependent behaviors as pathological, whereas an Eastern Asian therapist may perceive the same behaviors as appropriate)

The suggestions presented above can allow for a culturally-sensitive level of care for intercultural spouses entering therapy. One can also integrate these concepts into the workshop to increase practitioners’ awareness of their own cultural values influencing the therapeutic process.

Because the workshop is in its early stages and the research base for intercultural marital relationships are still limited, improvements can be made in several areas. Firstly, the workshop’s organizer can provide attendees with evaluation sheets to assess the
workshop’s delivery (e.g. clarity, organization, information, significance) in order to make the necessary adjustments for future presentations. Secondly, data supporting the effectiveness of the workshop in improving treatment outcomes need to be collected. Practitioners can administer periodic outcome scales in order to track the effects of the workshop’s principles on therapeutic progress. Third, the workshop needs to be assessed if it can be presented in a language other than English- after all, it is intended for spouses who may be fluent in other languages. The workshop needs to incorporate flexibility as new research evidence become available. Because the field is continuing to grow, the workshop should accurately include updated information. It is the ultimate goal of the author to provide an empathic, safe, and nonjudgmental space, wherein clients will be considered as part of their larger contexts without being pathologized.
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Appendix A

The following vignette is an excerpt and clinical explanation taken from Greenman et al. (2009) to demonstrate cultural considerations in terms of marital functioning between Sameera (Middle Eastern) and Scott (English-Canadian):

Scott and Sameera had been married for 15 years…Scott indicated that he often became frustrated with Sameera, according to him, she would criticize him angrily and incessantly…Sameera, on the other hand, said that Scott’s inattention to her emotional needs…left her no choice but to point out to him the various ways in which he needed to improve. The couple had heated arguments three to four times a week, usually about how abandoned Sameera felt when Scott tried to “keep the peace” during family conflicts. The arguments ended when Scott would leave the room… (p. 153)

In Stage I, the therapist explores the couple’s history and conceptualizes their interactional pattern (i.e. pursue/withdraw). In addition to tracking Sameera and Scott’s interactional pattern, the therapist notes the cultural elements that may contribute to the rigid, problematic cycle. Seemera’s Middle Eastern background views the expression of strong emotions as the cultural norm, whereas Scott’s cultural upbringing did not encourage open expression of strong emotions. Therefore, one of the therapist’s goals is to facilitate the recognition of cultural factors affecting interactional cycles. In Stage II, the therapist works with Sameera and Scott in identifying, expressing, asking for their emotional needs to each other. This therapeutic process includes the recognition of typical ways to approach emotions based on cultural norms and how these variations can reinforce attachment insecurities. Greenman et al. (2009) advises clinicians to remain aware of culture-specific ways that couples acquire and provide emotional support for each other in order to identify effective interventions.
Appendix B

Adult Attachment, Marital Functioning and Satisfaction in Intercultural Couples
Implications for Clinical Practice

Diane Paulette Tolentino
California State University, Northridge

PART I:
A Crash-Course Refresher

- Goals of Workshop
- Key Terms/Operational Definitions
- Problem Presentation
- Attachment Theory Concepts
- Attachment Theory’s Universality and Cultural-Specificity
- The Heart of the Matter: What About Intercultural Relationships?
Introduction

- Overall Goals of the Workshop
  - Explore the interplay between attachment orientations and marital relationships - How are attachment behaviors manifested in marital interactions?
  - Identify possible associations between attachment, spousal behaviors/interactions, and satisfaction in marriages
  - Discuss the influential role of culture and early interactions that affect couples’ marital relationships
  - Integrate cultural sensitivity in the treatment process by facilitating awareness, acceptance, and understanding of cultural similarities and differences between intercultural spouses
    - Developing a subculture between the spouses

Key Terms and Operational Definitions

Attachment Terms
- Ainsworth’s (1979) Classification
  - Secure
  - Anxious-ambivalent
  - Avoidant
- Attachment Behaviors
  - Secure base
  - Safe haven
  - Proximity-seeking
- Models of Self and Other
  (Rowley, 1969/1982)

Marital Relationship Key Terms
- Marital Functioning
  - Affect regulation (emotional expression and experience)
  - Communication style
  - Conflict resolution
- “Intercultural” Couples/Marriages
  - A relationship which involves spouses originating from groups differing in beliefs, values, and traditions (Dishorn & Runyan-Moore, 2013)
  - For the purpose of this workshop, “intercultural” will be defined as a couple of culture based on physical characteristics such as skin tone, facial features, etc.
...Existing cross-cultural research on attachment is limited in scope...

(Agishtein & Brumbaugh, 2013, p. 1)

What are Some Areas of Concern or Improvement?

- Exploration of attachment theory’s universal concepts and its culture-specific manifestations during parent-child interactions
- Limited research base bridging attachment theory and marital relationships, particularly intercultural marriages
- Though individual differences have been studied in the context of interpersonal relationships, the studies have been conducted primarily with Western populations

...What is normative in one cultural environment is regarded as a pathological condition in another

(Keller, 2013, p. 182)

- According to Keller (2013), enhancing attachment theory by including culture-specific socialization and parenting goals will contribute to its transformation as a more culturally-informed framework
...It is unknown to what extent culture has an impact on the relationship between attachment style and relational maintenance strategies as well as relationship quality

(Yum & Li, 2007, p. 72)

- Additional research evidence measuring the strength of culture’s influence on adult romantic attachment and marital interactions is needed to further inform work with intercultural couples

Quick Rundown of Attachment Theory Concepts and Research

Brief Summary
The Works of Bowlby and Ainsworth

- John Bowlby (1969)
  - Ethological approach to attachment: attachment serves a protective function
  - Attachment figures assume the role of protectors and infants engage in proximity-seeking behaviors to maintain closeness (e.g., crying, smiling, following)
  - Internal Working Models (Self and Other)
    - Organized expectations of self and others based on early interactions with primary caregiver(s)
    - Predictability that others will respond to needs and the self as worthy of receiving support
  [Bowlby, 1982]

- Mary Ainsworth (1979)
  - The Strange Situation study
  - Developed 3 classifications of infant attachment based on behaviors during separation and reunification with primary caregiver (mother): Types A, B, and C
  - Attachment Types
    - Type B (Secure)
    - Type C (Anxious-ambivalent)
    - Type A (Avoidant)

The Strange Situation Attachment Types

- Type B (Secure)
  - Infants explore novel surroundings by utilizing their mothers as a secure base
  - Infants show distress and a decrease in exploratory behaviors upon separation from their mothers
  - Infants seek closeness and exploratory behaviors increase upon reunion with their mothers

- Type C (Anxious-ambivalent)
  - Infants exhibit signs of anxiety before separation with less exploratory behaviors and anxiety increases upon separation
  - Infants display proximity-seeking behaviors upon reunification, while they simultaneously resist contact (e.g., alternating between clinging and pushing away)

[Stayton and Ainsworth, 1973]
The Strange Situation Attachment Types

- Type A (Avoidant)
  - Infants show little to no signs of distress upon separation from their mothers
  - Infants do not show consistent proximity-seeking behaviors during reunification with their mothers and at times ignore their mothers altogether

(Stayton and Ainsworth, 1973)

Attachment Theory’s Universal and Culture-Specific Concepts

Culture’s Role In Conceptualizing Attachment Orientations
Antecedents to Attachment Security

- Antecedents are constructs that describe patterns of parent-child interactions that influence attachment development and quality
  - Sensitivity
    - Attachment depends on the primary caregiver's awareness and immediacy of response to child's needs
  - Competence
    - Quality of childhood attachment influences social competence and autonomy to navigate his/her surroundings later in life
  - Secure base
    - Likelihood of exploring novel environments with a sense of protection and proximity from primary caregivers

(Ainsworth, Bell & Stayton, 1971; Ainsworth, 1985; Rothbaum & Morali, 2003)

"These hypotheses are embedded in Western, historical, social, political, economic, demographic, and geographic realities..."

[Rothbaum et al., 2000, p. 1095]

Though the previously mentioned attachment antecedents have been used to support the universal framework of attachment theory, Rothbaum et al. (2000) criticize the minimization of cultural-specific influences.
Maternal Sensitivity: 
Anglo-American and Puerto Rican Mothers

United States
- Greater verbal feedback for behavioral structuring
- Higher ratings of physical control during infant-mother interactions are associated with insecure/avoidant attachment

Puerto Rico
- Greater physical interventions for behavioral structuring such as physical positioning and restraining
- Greater physical control during infant-mother interactions are associated with secure attachment

(Carlson & Harwood, 2003)

Competence Hypothesis: 
United States and Japan

United States
- Longer exploratory play, positive affect, and enthusiasm identified as descriptors of secure attachment and socially competent behaviors

Japan
- Emotional interdependence, limitations on parent-child separation, and less active exploration are indicative of socially appropriate and competent behaviors

(Watn, 1983; Malas, Arend, & Staute, 1978)

(Harwood, Miller, & Israely, 1995)
Secure Base for Western and Non-Western Societies

- According to Posada et al. (1995), and in line with Bowlby’s ethological approach to attachment bonds, children from various cultural backgrounds utilize their primary caregivers as a secure base.
- However, the manner in which secure base behaviors are organized or manifested vary from culture to culture.

“...For example, we found that U.S. and Japanese mothers placed more emphasis than Israeli mothers on the child’s readiness to interact with mother...More than mothers from any other country, Colombian mothers valued having children return to mother, check her location, and go back to her when upset, bored, or in need of help.”

(Posada et al., 1995, p. 46)
The Heart of the Matter: Adult Romantic Attachment and Intercultural Marriages
Effects on Marital Functioning and Satisfaction

"The therapist recognizes that a patient’s difficulties are likely to have their origin in real-life experiences... The therapist thus seeks to guide the patient’s explorations toward earlier experiences—especially painful ones with parents—and to expectations about current relationships derived from the internal working models of self and attachment figure...


Internal working models are rooted from childhood interactions with primary attachment figures and serve as templates for future adult relationships.
Childhood Attachment Style and Adult Romantic Attachment Style

If internal working models persist into adulthood, then do attachment bonds exist as well?

- Hazan and Shaver (1987)
  - Adapted Ainsworth's attachment styles in the context of adult romantic relationships
  - Adult romantic love involves attachment processes otherwise known as “pair bonding” - that adults will experience based on their previous attachments with primary caregivers
  - Varying parent-child attachment styles can influence later partner dynamics in romantic relationships

Continuity of Attachment Bonds

- Hazan and Shaver (1987) in investigating the influence of attachment history from childhood hypothesize that significant romantic relationships are attachment processes
  - Relative frequencies of secure, anxious-ambivalent, and avoidant attachment styles in their study are similar to those of Ainsworth’s original Strange Situation study
  - Participants report different love experiences depending on their attachment styles
  - Internal working models of self and their relationships are found to be related to their attachment styles (i.e. different attachment orientations primarily have different beliefs/expectations about relationships)
“Pair Bonding”:
Adult Romantic Attachment Styles

- Selcuk, Zayas, and Hazan (2010) qualify adult romantic relationships as attachment bonds
  - The goal of an attachment bond is the same in childhood and adulthood: obtaining a sense of protection via proximity to attachment figure such as a parent, primary caregiver, and partner
  - Establish a sense of safety and comfort based on the accessibility and responsiveness of the attachment figure
    - For adults, safety and comfort are also influenced by their internal working models
  - Not all adult close relationships are attachment bonds. Just like how all childhood relationships are not necessarily attachment bonds

Guidelines for Attachment Bonds

- Maintenance of proximity to the attachment figure (i.e., romantic partner)
- The use of the attachment relationship as a safe haven during moments of threat or stress
- The use of the attachment figure as a secure base to facilitate exploration
- Experience of distress upon separation from the attachment figure
  - Distress is a benchmark of attachment in parent-child relationship and pair-bond

(Selcuk et al., 2010)
“In both early and adult life, contact with the attachment figure restores felt security and deactivates the attachment system.”

(Selcuk et al., 2010, p. 260)

**Adult Romantic Attachment Styles**

- **Secure Attachment**
  - Individuals tend to experience trust, friendship, and comfort with closeness in romantic relationships.
  - They can tolerate being dependent and dependent-upon by their partners.
- **Anxious-ambivalent Attachment**
  - Individuals yearn for closeness and safety, but often worry about their partners’ availability/accessibility during times of stress.
  - They are more likely to express dependence and desire for commitment.
- **Avoidant Attachment**
  - Individuals exhibit discomfort with closeness and interdependence.
  - They tend to seek emotional distance and rely on themselves.

(Feeney & Noller, 1990; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016)
Adult Romantic Attachment and Culture

If childhood attachment is influenced by culture and there is evidence for attachment continuity, then can adult romantic attachment be affected by culture as well?

- International Sexuality Description Project (ISDP) by Schmitt et al. (2004)
  - Included 17,000+ participants from 62 different regions (e.g., North and South America, Western and Eastern Europe, Middle East, parts of Africa, and South/Southeast/East Asia)
  - Participants were given the Relationship Questionnaire by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) in order to measure attachment orientations in romantic relationships
    - “It is easy for me to become emotionally close to others,” “I want to be completely emotionally intimate with others,” and “I am uncomfortable getting close to others...”

International Sexuality Description Project (ISDP)

- Schmitt et al. (2004) presented the following observations based on the study’s results:
  - Secure attachment, though the most commonly endorsed orientation by 79% of the cultures, was significantly lower than insecure attachment types in several other cultures such as Japan and Taiwan
  - In general, East Asian samples indicated higher levels of attachment anxiety and lower levels of avoidance
Throughout history and in most societies, intercultural relations have been considered outside the mainstream “normal” relationships...the lack of attention intercultural couples have received is not surprising.

(Sullivan & Cottone, 2006, p. 224)

The existing, though limited, empirical data studying intercultural marriages suggest the influence of social and cultural factors on attachment styles and relationship behaviors (Yum & Li, 2007).

Marital Functioning and Satisfaction

- **Affect Regulation**
  - Davila, Bradbury, and Fincham (1998) evaluated affect regulation (emotional experience and expression) as a function of marital satisfaction and its mediating effect between attachment orientation and marital satisfaction.
  - Negative affect plays a mediating role between attachment and marital satisfaction.
  - Attachment dimensions (e.g., comfort with closeness and anxiety about abandonment) appear to have direct and indirect associations with marital satisfaction and affect regulation.

- **Communication Pattern**
  - Guerrero, Farinelli, and McEwan (2009)
    - Participants reported more satisfaction with partners who utilized prosocial emotional communication (e.g., seeking social support, displaying general positive affect, and using assertion during anger), instead of resorting to active or passive aggression or hostility.
    - Partners high in anxiety were associated with passive aggression, tendency to ruminate on negative thoughts, and more often express hostility.
    - Participants high in avoidance are more likely to engage in detached emotional communication with less positive affect and low social support-seeking behaviors.
Marital Functioning and Satisfaction

- Conflict Resolution
  - Marchand (2004) utilized conflict resolution as a mediating variable between attachment and satisfaction
    - Conflict resolution was operationally defined as attacking and compromising behaviors
    - Results suggested differential associations between wives and husbands: Wives’ insecure/anxious attachment and marital satisfaction is partially mediated by their attacking behaviors in conflict resolution, but the same correlations do not apply to the husbands

Marital Functioning and Satisfaction in Intercultural Couples

- Will similar associations (or dissociations) between attachment style, marital functioning, and satisfaction apply for intercultural couples?
  - If so, in what ways are they similar or dissimilar?
- If spouses have differing parent-child interactional histories, models of self and other, and overall cultural expectations of adult marital relationships...how will these affect their marital relationships?
Cross-Cultural Studies: Intercultural Marriages (Affect Regulation)

Asian and Arabic Cultures
- Tendency to favor connectedness and non-verbal attunement

Western Cultures
- Preference for individuation and separateness

Sue & Sue, 2013; Wei et al., 2004

Korea and Japan
- Restrained emotional expressions are considered to be signs of self-discipline and maturity

United States
- Open and expressive emotional response is a sign of care and engagement

(Ting-Toomey, 2009)

Intercultural Marriages (Affect Regulation)

- Gallo and Smith (2001)
  - Observed the mediating effects of negative attributions for spousal behaviors on attachment style and marital dissatisfaction
  - If different cultures attribute positive and negative characteristics to particular behaviors based on social norms and expectations, then intercultural partners may have the tendency to explain each other's emotional experiences and responses from their own cultural perspectives— which may prove to be inaccurate for their partners.
Intercultural Marriages (Communication Pattern)

Asian Husband (Makisig) to his Caucasian American wife (Hannah):
- "...there are times when I expect her to understand without me having to be specific...It's expected (in Filipino culture) that you should have figured it out..."

Caucasian American wife (Hannah) referring to her Asian husband (Makisig):
- "They don't communicate feelings. They just let it go."

(Til & Barker, 2015, p. 200)

Intercultural Marriages (Conflict Resolution)

- Cultural norms for appropriate attachment needs/behaviors influence the occurrence interpersonal conflicts and resolutions
- Relational conflict (or the potential for it) can appear differently across cultures and depends on the "culture or individual acceptance of a "natural" need for attachment..." (Grossman & Grossman, 1990, p. 37)
• Hsu (2005) provides examples of varying conflict resolutions between intercultural spouses during conflict
  
  • Tim (European-American male) and Melin (Taiwanese female)
    • Tim shares marital conflicts with close friends and children’s school counselor
    • Melin returns to Taiwan and family-of-origin to seek parental guidance (a practice that is common and accepted in Taiwan)
  
  • Kalani (Hawaiian male) and Mary (Caucasian American female)
    • Kalani, upholding Hawaiian values, suppresses his complaints to maintain harmony
    • Mary prefers to express, share, and apologize in order to resolve marital conflict

• Cultural underpinnings of conflict resolution can contribute to misunderstandings and inaccurate assumptions based on perceived behaviors

  Tim and Melin’s perceptions of each others’ conflict resolution behaviors:
  
  • Melin considers Tim’s actions as a violation of their privacy and attempt to humiliate her
  • Tim perceives Melin’s return to her family-of-origin as desertion and abandonment

(Hsu, 2005)
It is recommended that rather than tagging attachment levels as healthy or unhealthy, clinicians can utilize what we have learned about how attachment influences the use of relationship maintenance behaviors to facilitate treatment.

[Baptist et al., 2012, p.7]

PART II:
Integrating Cultural-Sensitivity in Treatment with Intercultural Marital Relationships

- Objective/Goals of Treatment Interventions
- Steps 1-6 of Creating a Subculture Between Spouses
  (in conjunction with Emotionally-Focused Couples Therapy)
Objectives/Goals of Supplemental Interventions

- Maintain practitioners’ awareness of culture’s role in attachment and marital quality
- Remain cognizant of biases and potential tendencies to pathologize different value systems and their impact on the therapeutic process
- Enhance ability to uncover strengths of and similarities between intercultural spouses, which can aid spouses in overcoming difficulties and differences
- Contribute to the limited resources focusing on intercultural relationships
- Bridge the gap between attachment styles, marital functioning, and satisfaction based on clinical observations and treatment outcomes

Step 1 - Getting to Know Your Clients

- Gather information about the couple’s history together as well as previous significant relationships (e.g., parents, other partners and close relationships)
- Provide space for couples to share their expectations and beliefs regarding intimacy and marital relationships
- Illustrate the cycle of interaction and how it can promulgate the lack of safety and closeness in the relationship

(Johnson & Greenberg, 1985)

- Practitioners’ Cultural Goals:
  - Gain a basic understanding of each spouse’s cultural norms based on additional resources and self-reports
  - Place the spouses’ concerns in the context of their current and previous sociocultural environment(s)
  - Keep in mind questions such as: “How do the spouses express their emotions and behaviors based on their cultural backgrounds? How do these contribute to problem escalation and the other’s perception of distance?”
Step 2- Conceptualize and Assess Interactions

- Continue to track interactional patterns such as: pursue/withdraw, attack/attack, etc.
- Join client’s worldviews and interpretations of each other’s behaviors and emotions
- Uncover underlying emotions (secondary and primary) that are responses to their attachment needs and desires, but are currently disowned or unacknowledged
  [Johnson & Greenberg, 1989]

- Practitioner’s Cultural Goals:
  - Assess interactional patterns with cultural sensitivity and remain informed about cultural norms for attachment behaviors such as obtaining a sense of security and safety
  - Keep in mind questions such as “How do their cultural norms inform their ways of seeking closeness and autonomy? Do their cultures place emphasis on dependence or independence?”
  - Remain aware of any tendencies to perceive one culture as pathological and another as “normal”

Step 3- Introduction of a “Subculture”

- Once emotions (likely secondary) are identified, assist a spouse in deepening his/her here-and-now experience and distinguish primary emotions
- Facilitate the acknowledgement of disowned attachment longings in one spouse and express them to the other
- Assist the other partner in accepting and receiving the expressed emotions

[Greenman, Young, and Johnson, 2009]
Step 4 - Facilitate Cultural Openness and Perspective

- Aid in developing new interactive patterns through enactments and here-and-now experiences
- Continue to facilitate the expression of primary emotions in order to strengthen the establishment of safety and security in the marital relationship
- Maintain reengagement of withdrawn spouse and lowered hostility of the pursuing partner

(Greenman, Young, and Johnson, 2009)

Practitioner’s Cultural Goals:
- Model empathy, understanding, and curiosity about each other’s worldviews
- Work with spouses in developing culture-specific ways to meet each other’s needs and desires
- Negotiate compromises and integration of the spouses’ own culture-specific ways of obtaining closeness and safety; thus further creating a subculture

Steps 5 and 6 - Creating and Strengthening the Subculture

- Spouses have recreated a sense of safety and security in each other
- They can engage each other in problem-solving without attachment fears and question the other spouse’s availability and responsiveness
- Therapist and spouses heighten the new interactive patterns

(Greenman, Young, and Johnson, 2009)

Practitioner’s Cultural Goals:
- Develop new ways of interacting by providing and receiving attachment needs based on the spouses’ subculture
- Consolidate safety and security within the marital relationship and reinforce the newly developed subculture and marital functioning through role-plays, reenactments, here-and-now experiences
Additional Considerations for the Practitioner

- Though potential conflicts may arise as a result of variations in the couples’ attachment behaviors and marital conflicts, the following are helpful to keep in mind as a clinical practitioner based on ChenFeng, Lim, Wu, and Knudson-Martin (2016):
  - Create an environment in which the practitioner conveys his or her own understanding of the clients’ socio-emotional experiences
  - Remain aware of and interrupt power differentials between intercultural couples in order to foster alternative experiences through mutual support
  - Consider the roles of other societal discourses other than race such as age, gender, class, etc. and their effects on each client’s unique experiences

- As clinical practitioners, we must remain cognizant of our own values and societal discourses, and how they might affect our therapeutic relationships with our intercultural clients

References


References


References


Photo Credits

Photo 1:

Photo 2:

Photo 3: