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Attachment Style and Romantic Satisfaction as Predictors of Relationship Visibility on Facebook

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Attachment Style and Romantic Satisfaction as Predictors of

Relationship Visibility on Facebook

by

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Table of Contents

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Abstract

The current study investigates the influence of adult attachment style on romantic posting behaviors on Facebook. Attachment theory has been widely used to examine behaviors and attitudes within romantic relationships, but little research has been done to extend these findings to the context of social media. A survey of 212 participants was conducted using Amazon's Mechanical Turk. The results of a linear regression analysis showed that attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety predicted lower levels of romantic satisfaction, a finding reflective of previous attachment research (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Two separate regression analyses were conducted to examine possible predictors of participants' romantic displays on Facebook. The results of this study indicate that attachment style has an indirect influence on romantic posting behavior through its effect on relationship satisfaction. Specifically, romantic satisfaction is a stronger predictor of relationship visibility on Facebook than attachment style. The present study adds to the currently sparse body of research about romantic attachment and behavior on social media.

Attachment Style and Romantic Satisfaction as Predictors of

Relationship Visibility on Facebook

Since the rise of Myspace and Facebook in the early 2000s, social media has become increasingly integrated into society. Despite the growing popularity of social networking, little is known about its influence on close relationships. Not only has it fundamentally changed how people interact with each other, it also provides a public platform for people to display their own lives, often including their romantic relationships. The extent to which people integrate their romantic life into their online profiles varies from person to person. While some choose to keep their romantic life separate from their online presence, others post frequent, detailed accounts of their relationship experiences. Bowlby's (1978) theory of attachment, which explains why people hold certain beliefs and display certain patterns of behavior in close relationships, could be used to explain these differences in online behavior.

Attachment Theory

Attachment theory states that humans develop persisting psychological bonds with their primary caregiver, typically their mother, during infancy and early childhood. As originally conceptualized by Bowlby (1978), attachments serve an important evolutionary purpose. The attachment that a child has results in proximity-seeking behaviors such as crying that entice their caregiver to soothe them. By increasing their proximity to their caregiver, infants are more likely to receive the food and security that increase their chances of survival. Over time the quality and consistency of the caregiver's responsiveness shape the child's behaviors and expectations. These early experiences determine the type of attachment style that the child develops. Attachment styles are characterized by patterns of behaviors and attitudes towards relationships.

They remain moderately stable from infancy to early adulthood, and affect the type of emotional bonds they develop with other people (Fraley, 2002).

Initially, attachment theory encompassed three distinct attachment styles: secure, avoidant, and anxious-resistant (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). Children develop secure attachment when their caregiver is consistently responsive to their needs. Avoidant attachment is found in children whose caregivers were unresponsive to their needs. The anxious-resistant attachment style is developed when the caregiver is responsive but highly inconsistent. Both the avoidant and anxious-resistant attachment styles are categorized as types of insecure attachments. Each attachment style is characterized by behavioral tendencies that can be observed in children as young as 12 months old during a procedure known as the strange situation (Ainsworth & Bell, 1970). This procedure was designed as a way to observe the exploration behaviors of children with differing attachment styles when placed into a novel environment with their caregiver and an unfamiliar adult. The strange situation procedure consists of eight stages and takes place in an observation room containing toys for the child. The eight stages are described below.

At the beginning of the procedure, the child and mother are alone in the room together for about three minutes until a stranger enters the room. The stranger and mother converse for approximately one minute, followed by the mother exiting the observation room. This leaves the child alone with the stranger for their first encounter. After a few minutes, the stranger leaves while the mother returns, an event called the first reunion. During this reunion, the mother interacts with their child for a brief period of time before exiting the room again, leaving the child by itself for another few minutes. The child then encounters the stranger for a second time

when they enter the observation room. Lastly, the child has a second reunion with the mother as the stranger exits. The procedure is ended after final observation of the second reunion.

During the strange situation, securely attached children play with the toys and explore their environment while using their mother as a secure base. Although they are friendly with the stranger while the mother is around, they are avoidant of the stranger after the mother leaves. Children with secure attachment recover quickly from the stress of an absent caregiver when they are soothed. These behaviors are consistent with children who feel assured that their caregiver is able to meet their needs (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). Children with anxious-resistant attachments experience intense distress when separated from their mothers during the strange situation. They also exhibit more fear than securely attached children towards the stranger, even when accompanied by their caregiver. Compared to securely attached children, they are less likely to explore their surroundings. During unfamiliar circumstances, anxious-resistant children engage in a higher number of proximity-seeking and contact-maintaining behaviors such as clinging, resisting release, vocal protesting, and active gestures towards the mother. Children that experience inconsistent responsiveness feel unsure about their caregiver's ability to fulfill their needs. Anxious-resistant children have not learned which behavioral cues will be met with an appropriate action by the mother. This ambiguity leads to an increase in proximity-seeking and contact-maintaining behaviors with the goal of eliciting an appropriate response from the mother (Ainsworth & Bell, 1970). Interestingly, children with this type of attachment are the most difficult to soothe and sometimes show contradictory behaviors when the mother attempts to console them (i.e., crying if not held but pushing away when embraced). In contrast to the anxious-resistant attachment style, avoidantly attached children find that their attempts to alert their caregiver of their needs are met with little or no response. Consequently,

they show few signs of distress about the mother's absence during the strange situation. Their exploratory actions are more independent of the other than anxious or secure children, and the stranger's presence has little effect on their play. During the reunions, avoidant children seem disinterested in their mother's return. It's common for distressed avoidant children to show proximity-avoiding and contact-resisting behaviors like pushing, ignoring, turning away, and fussing.

Romantic Attachment

In 1987, researchers Hazan and Shaver applied the principles of attachment theory to romantic relationships. This connection was speculated based on the similarities between infant-caregiver relationships and romantic relationships. In both types of relationships, an individual relies on the other person (either caregiver or romantic partner) for emotional and physical needs. Similar to mother-infant attachment, romantic attachment relates to the expected consistency of a partner's ability to meet those needs. Parental and romantic relationships also share a high degree of physical and emotional intimacy that allows for the development of deep emotional connections. Oxytocin, the hormone released when infants bond with their mother, is produced during physical contact with romantic partners as well as other attachment figures (Feldman, 2012).

Hazan and Shaver (1987) found that attachment styles occurred in similar frequencies when comparing children and adult populations. Attachment styles developed in infancy and early childhood remain moderately stable through the end of adolescence (Fraley, 2002), but it remains unclear exactly how influential these early attachments are on romantic attachments developed later in adulthood. Hazan and Shaver (1987) found that attachment styles occurred in similar frequencies when comparing children and adult populations. However, recent research

suggests that attachment styles can vary depending on the type of relationship (Kamenov & Jelić, 2005). Those with secure parental attachments are more likely to have the same secure attachments in the context of other relationships (other family members, friends, romantic partners), but those with insecure parental attachments tend to be more varied in their attachment styles. Kamenov and Jelić (2005) found that individuals with insecure romantic attachments, particularly anxious attachments, typically rely on one or multiple other attachment figures to fulfill their needs when it becomes difficult to do so with their romantic partner. As with parental attachment formation, romantic attachment is also influenced by experiences with an attachment figure. Although changes in romantic attachment style are possible through experiences with multiple romantic partners, these changes are gradual. Acute, drastic shifts in romantic attachment style rarely occur (Fraley, 2002).

For the purpose of this research, romantic attachment will be analyzed primarily through a 4-group model of attachment originally proposed by Bartholomew (1990). Traditionally, the three attachment styles include secure, avoidant, and anxious. Bartholomew expanded this model by differentiating between four different styles of adult attachment: secure, fearful-avoidant, dismissive-avoidant, and anxious-preoccupied. Factor analysis of the 4-groups model suggests attachment style should be measured along two independent dimensions of attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance (Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000). This allows for a more precise measurement of adult attachment in that individuals are measured along a continuum of both factors. In previous models, insecurely attached individuals were either considered to have anxious attachment or avoidant attachment. The 4-group model creates a distinct style for individuals who possess both high attachment anxiety and high attachment avoidance. In Bartholomew's (1990) model, these individuals are categorized as fearful-avoidant. They

experience a fear of intimacy as typically described for individuals with high attachment avoidance. In addition, they experience the fear of abandonment that is traditionally associated with high attachment anxiety. The dismissive-avoidant attachment style is formed from high avoidance and low anxiety. These individuals have a low desire for intimacy and prioritize their autonomy over their close relationships. High anxiety and low avoidance indicate a preoccupied attachment. This style does not deviate from previous characterizations of attachment anxiety in that it designates a high need for intimacy and an overdependence on their partner. Consistent with Bowlby's (1978) original theory, Bartholomew described secure attachment as trusting, intimate, and independent. In context of the 4-group model, secure attachment is designated by low attachment avoidance and low attachment anxiety.

People with different attachment styles have different behaviors and beliefs concerning close relationships. These differing traits and beliefs about close relationships ultimately affect how people of different attachment styles experience romantic love. Just as the attachment style of infants affects the quality of their relationship with their caregiver, an adult's attachment style affects the quality of their romantic relationship (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). People have significantly different experiences in their romantic relationships based on their attachment style. In general, people with a secure attachment style experience more feelings of happiness, trust, and friendship in their close relationships than people with insecure attachment styles. They also tend to have longer relationships and are more accepting of their partner's faults. Of all the attachment styles, securely attached individuals typically experience the least amount of jealousy and fewest overall emotional extremes. These patterns arise from the expectation that their partner will be willing and able to satisfy their needs (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). Attachment anxiety is closely associated with extreme positive and negative emotional experiences,

including more frequent and intense feelings of jealousy. People with high attachment anxiety often have an obsessive preoccupation with their relationships. Conversely, people high in attachment avoidance have a higher fear of intimacy and tend to be more defensive with others. Attachment avoidance is linked to having fewer, more emotionally distant relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

Relationship satisfaction is one of the most important ways in which attachment style can affect a romantic relationship. There are certain behaviors and attitudes associated with each attachment style that affect both partners' satisfaction. For example, anxiously attached people tend to believe in love at first sight and idealize their partner (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). This idealization initially boosts satisfaction for both partners, especially for younger couples (Jones & Cunningham, 1996). However, attachment anxiety is also commonly associated with a fear of abandonment. This fear commonly manifests through clingy behaviors that lower the relationship satisfaction of their partners, especially if their partner has high attachment avoidance (Hammond & Fletcher, 1991). This rollercoaster effect of extreme lows and highs of relationship satisfaction is one explanation for the tendency of people with high attachment anxiety to have more frequent and shorter relationships than people with low attachment anxiety. Attachment avoidance is often associated with relationships that are less fulfilling due to fewer feelings of intimacy and closeness (Bartholomew, 1990).

Individuals who are securely attached are more likely than others to experience feelings of happiness from their close relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1987) While research has demonstrated a clear and consistent association with secure attachment and higher relationship satisfaction, there is some debate on the directionality of this correlation. Hammond and Fletcher (1991) suggest that experiences within a particular romantic relationship may alter one's

attachment style. In their research, they found that higher satisfaction in a romantic relationship could predict an increase in relationship security for both partners after a four month period.

Attachment Behaviors Online

Attachment styles can affect how people choose to communicate online. For example, attachment style has been used to determine what kind of technology is most satisfying to use when communicating with a romantic partner (Morey, Gentzler, Creasy, Oberhauser, & Westerman, 2013). High attachment avoidance correlates to a reliance on email for communicating more than texting or phone calls. Communicating through email allows the emotional distance that avoidant individuals prefer. Texting and phone calls allow more expressions of vocal cues and feelings of emotional closeness. These methods of communication appeal to people higher in attachment anxiety because they are more intimate and immediate. Morey et al. (2013) suggest that certain types of communication technology cater to the needs of each attachment style. These findings could extend to social media and the different methods of communication that exist within online social networking.

One study has examined this idea by looking at how attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety affect an individual's desire for relationship visibility on social media (Emery, Muise, Dix, & Le, 2014). How a person behaves on social networking sites affects relationship visibility. In other words, each partner's post online can affect how their relationship is perceived by the public. People with high attachment anxiety desire a higher level of relationship visibility on social media. This stems from their desire for intimacy, which increases when they interact with their partner on an online public platform. People with romantic anxious attachments also fear abandonment. This fear diminishes when they have more frequent interactions with their partner. Social media is useful to them in this way because electronic

communication is immediate and unlimited. The reasons anxiously attached individuals prefer high online relationship visibility are similar to the reasons why it does not appeal to people with high attachment avoidance. Relationship visibility increases feelings of commitment, intimacy, and dependence. These emotions are undesirable to avoidantly attached individuals who prefer to have more independence and self reliability.

Romantic Jealousy and Electronic Surveillance

Although the results of Emery et al.'s (2014) study are promising, more research is needed to fully understand the relationship between attachment style and romantic behavior on social media behaviors. This area of research is surprisingly lacking. One exception to this research gap is the topic of jealousy and electronic surveillance (Marshall, Bejanyan, Di Castro, & Lee, 2013).

Facebook and other forms of social media introduce new elements into partner monitoring. Online social networks provide many opportunities to track a partner, especially if that person is an avid user. People can update their location, their music and movie preferences, mood, and everyday activities. Social media can be used to observe communications between a partner and potential romantic rivals. It can also be used to monitor a partner's list of friends and other social connections.

In general, people with high attachment anxiety have a predisposition to feelings of romantic jealousy. They feel jealous more frequently and more intensely than people with low attachment anxiety. This is a consequence of their tendency to fear that their partners will leave them (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Considering that people high in attachment avoidance seek less intimacy and enjoy being more independent, they are less prone to jealous feelings (Ainsworth.

& Bowlby, 1991). This pattern extends to online communications as well. As Marshall, Bejanyan, Di Castro, and Lee (2013) explained in their study about partner surveillance through social media, attachment anxiety strongly correlates with romantic jealousy and romantic partner surveillance using Facebook. Attachment avoidance negatively correlates with jealousy and partner surveillance using Facebook. Trust mediates this relationship in that people with higher trust in their partner exhibit less partner surveillance and less jealousy. These conclusions were found in both survey and week-long observational experiments (Marshall et al., 2013).

Some characteristics of Facebook posts are perceived more negatively than others. For example, Fleuriet, Cole, and Guerrero (2014) studied people's emotional reactions to different Facebook posts. Participants viewed an example Facebook post and were told to imagine that it was posted by an unfamiliar person on their partner's Facebook wall. The posts they viewed had ambiguous text ("it was great to see you last night") with varying additional details. The posts that including a winking emoticon face or were posted by an attractive person elicited the most negative emotional responses. The winking face is significant because it gives a flirtatious connotation to the ambiguous message. The poster's attractiveness plays an important role in the interpretation of the message because an attractive person presents a larger threat as a romantic rival than an unattractive person. In terms of attachment style, Fleuriet et al. (2014) observed that individuals with preoccupied attachment (high attachment anxiety and low attachment avoidance) were the most likely to report a negative emotional reactions to a potentially jealous-inducing Facebook post. These participants also reported a more severe potential emotional reaction. This finding aligns with the idea presented by Hazan and Shaver (1987) that attachment anxiety includes a heavy emotional dependence on a partner, resulting in a hyperawareness of possible threats to the romantic relationship. Additionally, Fleuriet et al. (2014) found that

dismissively attached individuals (low attachment anxiety and high attachment avoidance) claimed they would experience the least amount of jealousy in response to a stranger's post on a partner's Facebook profile, which exemplifies their need for independence. A tendency for self-reliance causes those with dismissive romantic attachment to feel less emotionally distressed in the presence of a threat to their romantic relationships (Bartholomew, 1990). This study sheds light on how attachment styles can affect the interpretation of communication over social media. However, it should be noted that this experiment consisted of a hypothetical scenario. Participants in this study gave an estimate of what their emotional reaction would be to these posts, so these findings may not fully reflect the extent of emotional reactions in a real-world setting.

Jealousy that arises from partner surveillance on social media tends to be more intense than jealousy derived from in-person interactions because of the ambiguous and abundant nature of online material (Muise, Christofides, & Desmarais, 2009). When individuals monitor a partner's social media profile, the material they become exposed to is information that would be otherwise undiscovered. In addition, the online nature of social media also allows for constant and convenient monitoring. In these ways, partner surveillance on social media can be especially problematic. Fleuriet et al. (2014) suggest that jealousy and partner surveillance on social media create a negative feedback loop wherein a jealous individual monitors their partner's social media account, and this time spent monitoring a partner's account causes a subsequent increase in jealous feelings. This cycle is further perpetuated because people who are jealous and uncertain about their relationship are more likely to interpret ambiguous information in a more negatively skewed manner (Muise et al., 2009). Those with higher attachment anxiety can be particularly susceptible to getting caught in this negative feedback loop. Feelings of relational

uncertainty usually accompany attachment anxiety. Combined with a strong preference for intimacy, people with high attachment anxiety often use uncertainty-reduction behaviors to feel closer to their romantic partner (Fleuriet et al., 2014). Although online partner surveillance ultimately increases feelings of relationship uncertainty, the abundance of information found on social media profiles gives partner monitoring the semblance of an effective uncertainty-reduction strategy.

The acts of partner monitoring and partner surveillance are behaviors that occur by observing information on a partner's public social media account. Other research has ventured into the topic of electronic intrusion. This type of behavior involves accessing a partner's private online information without their consent. In the context of social media, this can refer to the person's private messages, closed groups, or other information not listed on their public profile. Electronic intrusion can also apply to technologies beyond social media such as text messages on a cell phone, private files on a laptop, or emails. Reed, Tolman, and Safyer (2015) found that the amount of electronic intrusion performed can vary based on attachment style. Dismissively attached people are the least prone to electronically intrude on their partner's information due to their high levels of attachment avoidance. Similar to the patterns found in partner surveillance, people with anxious attachments are more likely to electronically intrude on their partner in an attempt to ease feelings of uncertainty about their partner's commitment.

Partner surveillance and electronic intrusion can significantly affect a romantic relationship. Engaging in these types of behaviors ultimately increases relationship uncertainty, jealousy, and suspicion, which leads to dissatisfaction with the relationship (Marshall et al., 2013). People who discover these behaviors in their partner also become less satisfied in their relationship due to the lower levels of trust.

Romantic Displays

One way in which Facebook has integrated romantic relationships into its platform is allowing users to identify their relationship status. Users have many options to choose from when declaring the status of their romantic relationship, but commonly used ones include "single", "in a relationship", and "married." Facebook also encourages users to specify their romantic partner by listing them on their profile page. When both partners indicate their relationship status on social media, the relationship is colloquially called "Facebook official." Individuals are more likely to include a relationship status on their Facebook profile if their partner does as well (Papp, Danielewicz, & Cayemberg, 2011). In dating couples, declaring oneself as "in a relationship" on Facebook is associated with increased feelings of both love and jealousy (Orosz, Szekeres, Kiss, Farkas, & Roland-Lévy, 2015). Orosz et al. (2015) speculate that by declaring a relationship status on Facebook, an individual effectively takes themselves "off of the market" and indicates their lack of availability to other potential partners. Self-reported data in undergraduate samples show that people believe declaring a relationship on Facebook is a social indicator for seriousness and exclusivity Fox and Warber (2013). Making a relationship Facebook official may be especially enticing for those high in attachment anxiety. A publicly declared relationship status has the potential to reaffirm their partner's commitment to the relationship and relieve the anxiety of their partner being approached by other people. Interestingly, these potentialities of declaring a relationship on Facebook could have the opposite effect on those with high attachment avoidance. Their characteristic fear of intimacy and commitment might make declaring their relationship on Facebook an unpleasant prospect.

Photographs are a common way in which individuals express themselves and their affection for their partner on social media. Profile pictures are used to identify individuals and as

a form of self-expression. Sometimes individuals use pictures that include someone close to them such as a friend or romantic partner. Spouses who use these dyadic photographs for their profile picture have higher marital satisfaction and feel closer to their partner (Saslow, Muise, Impett, & Dubin, 2013). Another type of photograph that is shared on social media is the romantic selfie-pictures that include both individuals in a romantic relationship. Selfies differ from other types of photographs in that they are always taken by the self, usually with the intent to share on social media. In this case, the photograph is taken by one of the partners in a relationship. The frequency of romantic selfies posted can indicate the level of commitment in a relationship. For both men and women, a higher frequency of posting romantic selfies indicates more commitment to their relationship. Passion, as measured by Sternberg's triangular love theory, can predict an increase of men's romantic selfie posting behavior (Sabiniewicz, Borkowska, Serafińska, & Sorokowski, 2017).

The current literature presents conflicting support for the directionality of the relationship between the use of social media and relationship satisfaction. While some research provides support for the theory that individuals who are happy in their relationship post more about their partner online, other research gives evidence to the idea that people become happier in their relationship as a result of their affectionate displays on social media. Saslow et al. (2013) conducted a year-long longitudinal study that examined the martial satisfaction, closeness, and Facebook profiles of spouses. They found that spouses who were highly satisfied in their marriage were more likely to use dyadic profile pictures at three future points in time. This conclusion was reached after controlling for the confounding effects of personal happiness, personality, and attachment style. Interestingly, this study found that daily ratings of marital satisfaction were not able to reliably predict daily Facebook activity. Instead, the researchers

claim that social media reflects more broad trends of marital satisfaction and closeness. It's unclear if these specific findings would be easily applicable to non-marital relationships.

The extent to which each partner uses social media should be considered when examining the connection between online behavior and relationship satisfaction. The amount of time each partner spends using social media has an impact on the relationship. This is especially true in relationships where there is a real or perceived difference in the amount of time spent using social media between partners. According to the self-report surveys of young adults involved in romantic relationships, partners tend to share similar amounts of time on Facebook as well as displaying their relationship in similar ways (Papp et al., 2011). Despite this, there is a disconnect between an individual's time spent using social media and their partner's perception of how this negatively affects the relationship. When couples report their own usage along with their perceived partner's usage of social media, only their partner's use of social media correlates with low intimacy. In other words, people are more likely to blame a lack of intimacy in their romantic relationship to their partner's use of social media than their own (Hand, Thomas, Buboltz, Deemer, & Buyanjargal, 2013). This psychological predisposition is known as an attribution bias, which describes a consistent tendency to emphasize or misattribute the cause of a certain situation. In this case, the attributional bias is that people believe their partner's excessive use of social media is the cause for a lack of intimacy in their romantic relationship. In reality, the lack of intimacy could be equally caused by their own excessive use of social media. This finding is important considering that intimacy is a crucial component of having a satisfying relationship. Although the couples in Hand et al.'s (2013) study showed similar levels of engagement in Facebook, they did not believe that their use of social media caused distress within their relationship. This poses a difficult situation in which the behavior of one or both

partners decreases intimacy, yet the partner(s) does not believe their own behavior is problematic. This could cause people to be reluctant to change their own behavior and more likely to ask for a change in their partner's behavior instead. Disagreements like these would potentially lower the overall satisfaction of a romantic relationship.

In contrast to Hand et al.'s (2013) study, Nongpong and Charoensukmongkol (2016) surveyed dating and marital couples who experienced a significant difference in social media use between partners. Participants who thought their partner's use of social media as excessive were more likely to perceive issues of lack of caring, jealousy, and loneliness in their relationship. Only the lack of caring was related to a person's intent to break up with their partner. These perceived relationship problems were stronger when the difference in the amount of social media use between romantic partners was larger. In corroboration of Hand et al.'s (2013) findings, Nongpong and Charoensukmongkol (2016) found that individuals were more likely to perceive relationship problems when the other partner was the heavier user of social media.

Some literature has explored ways in which to remedy the negative influence that social media can have on romantic relationships. The findings of Hand et al. (2013) gives credibility to the idea that intimacy between partners functions as a mediating factor for the negative effects that partner's perceived social media use has on relationship satisfaction. Specifically, couples with more feelings of intimacy are less susceptible to social media's detrimental effects on relationship satisfaction. This offers a route in which attachment style can affect a romantic relationship in the context of social media. People who have secure attachment are more likely to develop higher and healthier levels of intimacy (Hammond & Fletcher, 1991). Couples in which both partners have secure attachment would consequently experience less relationship dissatisfaction as a result of social media use. Individuals with high attachment avoidance

typically do not develop the same levels of intimacy. Therefore it would be expected that couples who have at least one partner with high attachment avoidance would then be more susceptible to the negative effects of social media use. Conversely, individuals with high attachment anxiety desire much more intimacy in their relationships that often goes unfulfilled. If their partner is unable to meet that need, then the relationship may be more vulnerable to relationship dissatisfaction as a result of social media use.

Self Presentation on Social Media

The ways in which romantic partners decide to integrate their relationship into their social media profiles has a significant impact on the functioning of the relationship. Three conceptual ways in which we can analyze the intersection of Facebook and romantic relationships are the overlap of partners' Facebook profiles, public commitment theory and relationship visibility on Facebook. All three concepts involve varying motivations for self-presentation on Facebook. Overlap of Facebook profiles describes the elements of a Facebook profile that are shared between partners. This includes the pictures of both or either partner, friends they have in common, communications (posts, comments, etc.) about or towards the other person, and listed mutual interests such as a band or book series. Castañeda, Wendel, and Crockett, (2015) found that this overlap of Facebook profiles reflects the degree to which each partner integrates the other into their self-identity, also referred to as inclusion of others in the self (IOS). Both the overlap of partners' Facebook profiles and each partners' IOS scores positively correlate with relationship closeness. This study expands the usefulness of Facebook as a measure of inclusion of others in the self as well as a measure of closeness in a romantic relationship. Overlap in Facebook profiles also predicts commitment, investment, and quality of alternatives as measured using Rusbult's (1980) investment model, which uses satisfaction,

investment, and quality of alternatives to predict commitment to another individual. Facebook profile overlap was a stronger predictor of quality of alternatives than IOS. Castañeda et al. (2015) believe this result is due to the public nature of Facebook's platform. People emphasize their socially desirable attributes when using Facebook and other social media. Examples of this are presenting their more attractive photos and post about their achievements. This exaggerates their social desirability, which leads others to inflate their potential quality as an alternative to their current romantic partner. Overlap of Facebook profiles also deviates from traditional measures of IOS because it does not correlate with satisfaction in a relationship. This difference points to a conceptual discrepancy between Facebook profile overlap, which measures objective self-other integration, and self report IOS, which measures perceptual and behavioral self-other integration. Facebook intensity (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007), a measurement of an individual's engagement and frequency of use, is one possible explanation for this difference. People who are less engaged with Facebook may not put as much effort towards making it as reflective of their self-concept. Individuals lower in Facebook intensity also tend to have fewer Facebook friends, so those individuals also have a potentially smaller audience to view their profile. This gives the user less incentive to carefully pick what they post.

Public commitment theory states that an individual's perception of their self is influenced by how they present their self to others. People use specific self-presentation behaviors to portray themselves in ways that they would like others to perceive them. These attributes are internalized and become part of their self-concept. When applied to a social networking context, the way a person presents their relationship on Facebook influences their feelings about that relationship as well as the relationship's longevity (Toma & Choi, 2015). Self-presentation behaviors on Facebook include changing your relationship status to "in a relationship", posting dyadic

photographs, and posting on a partner's wall. These specific behaviors are intended to make others perceive that the partners are committed to their romantic relationship. Following the principle of public commitment theory, these behaviors cause people to feel more committed to their partner. Toma and Choi (2015) found that this increase of commitment makes a relationship more likely to last after a six-month period. Two behaviors, having mutual Facebook friends and posts initiated by the other partner, decreased feelings of commitment and the chance that the relationship would remain stable for six months. Toma and Choi (2015) predict that having a larger social network (mutual friends acquired through a romantic partner) actually increases the number of relationship alternatives. As explained by Castañeda et al. (2015), these alternatives presented through Facebook may appear more attractive. According to Rusbult's (1980) investment model, a higher number of alternatives and higher quality of these alternatives lowers the amount of commitment one has towards their current romantic partner. Another self-presentation behavior that decreases commitment is posts written by a partner. Toma and Choi (2015) believe that act of writing posts on a partner's wall increases one's individual's feeling of commitment, but a partner's post is perceived as a sign of possessiveness or even over-sharing. This double standard reflects the findings of previous studies that individual use of social media has a positive influence on a relationship while a partner's use of social media has a negative influence on a relationship (Hand et al., 2013; Nongpong & Charoensukmongkol, 2016). The application of public commitment theory to the portrayal of romantic relationships on Facebook shows the significance that self-presentation has on the experience of relationships.

Gender

One of the important factors to consider when researching romantic relationships is gender. In terms of attachment style, men and women tend to have different types of insecure

attachment (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Attachment anxiety is more common in women, which contribute to either a preoccupied or fearful attachment style, and attachment avoidance is more common in men, which contribute to a fearful or dismissive attachment style. Attachment styles can even manifest differently according to gender. An interesting example is the dismissive attachment style (Monteoliva, García-Martínez, Calvo-Salguero, & Aguilar-Luzón, 2012). The romantic experiences of men are more negatively affected by a dismissive attachment style than women. Specifically, dismissive men have more frequent break ups, less intimacy, and more negative attitudes about information disclosure than dismissive women. Monteoliva et al. (2012) believe this is because the dismissive attachment style, which is characterized by low anxiety and high avoidance, activates masculine stereotypes. These stereotypes include the idea that men should be more emotionally distant than women. Men's socialization promotes less disclosure of personal information, which decreases intimacy and increases the likelihood of relationship termination. Although attachment avoidance often includes a decreased desire for closeness, avoidant women are more likely to express a desire for closeness than avoidant men.

There are patterns of gender differences throughout the literature about social media use and how it relates to the functioning of a relationship. In terms of the emotional connection to Facebook statuses, the belief that making a relationship Facebook official indicates seriousness and exclusivity of a romantic relationship is stronger in women than in men (Fox & Warber, 2014). This increases the chance for conflict if both partners have differing beliefs about the meaning of particular online gestures. Women also typically express more feelings of jealousy when presented with ambiguous online comments from a stranger to their partner (Fleuriet et al., 2014). It's unclear if this difference is caused solely by inherent gender differences, women's socialization to frequently express emotion, or women's tendency to have higher attachment

anxiety. Although women do tend to show more anxious attachments, they do not differ from men in the frequency that partake in electronic intrusion of their partner (Reed et al., 2015). It's important to take these gender differences into consideration when doing attachment research. Since men and women have small but consistent differences in their levels of attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance, research should aim to identify if findings about relationship satisfaction and social media use are functions of attachment style or if they are a result of gender differences.

Present Study

This research investigated the role of romantic attachment style in relationship visibility on Facebook. Attachment style has been recognized as a significant factor in determining behaviors within a relationship, but research on romantic attachment behaviors in the context of social media and relationship visibility is lacking. The present study aimed to explore these gaps in the literature. Possible mediating factors, such as relationship satisfaction, gender, and Facebook intensity, were also examined. The research of Ainsworth and Bowlby (1991) as well as Hazan and Shaver (1987) show that secure attachments lead to longer, more satisfying relationships. In light of this previous research, I hypothesized (H1) that attachment style would significantly affect satisfaction in romantic relationships. Specifically, I hypothesized that high attachment avoidance and high attachment anxiety would predict lower romantic relationship satisfaction. This research also explored various models for predicting relationship visibility on Facebook. I expected to find a significant predictive model in which attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, and Facebook intensity will predict relationship displays on Facebook. This expectation is built upon a body of research that shows a complex, interactive relationship

between attachment theory and behaviors on social media that contribute to relationship visibility.

Method

Participants

This study included 212 participants that were recruited using Amazon Mechanical Turk. Participants included 73 men and 139 women. Although "Nonbinary/Genderqueer" and "Intersex" were possible options as well, all participants identified as either male or female. Participant ages ranged from ages 20 to 71 ($M = 34$, $SD = 9.52$). The ethnic distribution of sample was 79.7% White, 9% Black/African American, 6.6% Asian/Pacific Islander, 2.8% Hispanic or Latinx, 1.4% Native American or American Indian, and 0.5% other. The sample was largely heterosexual, with 91.5% of participants identifying as heterosexual/straight, 5.7% as pansexual/bisexual, 2.4% as gay/lesbian, and 0.5% as other. The majority (77.4%) of participants indicated that the length of their current relationship was more than two years. When asked about their current relationship status, 51.9% of participants indicated that they were married, 37.7% in a committed relationship, 5.2% in a casual relationship, and 4.7% were engaged. Note that participants who indicated their relationship status as "single" were removed from the sample before analysis of the data; the purpose of this research was to explore the behavior and attitudes of individuals who were in a current romantic relationship. Participants were also asked about the frequency of their face-to-face interactions with their partner, where 65.6 said almost every day, 17% said most days, 15.6% said occasional days, and 1.9% said almost never. The majority of participants also (79%) said that they lived with their partner. Finally, participants were asked if their relationship was "Facebook official," meaning that their Facebook profile stated the

nature of their romantic relationship. Most participants (77%) said "yes", while a minority (23%) said "no."

Procedure

All participants were recruited using Amazon Mechanical Turk, where they took an online survey and were compensated $0.35 for their responses. To be eligible for the survey, participants were required to be at least 18 years old, a resident of the United States, and be in a romantic relationship at the time of taking the survey. All data collected was anonymous. A consent form was given prior to the survey, and a debriefing form was provided at the conclusion of the survey.

Measures

Attachment style was measured according to the two-dimensional model of attachment that measures an individual's level of attachment-related avoidance and attachment-related anxiety in the context of romantic relationships. The shortened (9-item) version of the Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R) developed by Fraley, Waller, and Brennan (2000) was used. Six items were used to measure attachment avoidance (e.g., *I don't feel comfortable opening up to my* partner) and three items were used to measure attachment anxiety (e.g., *I often worry that my partner doesn't really care for me*). Attachment style items were answered on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 2 = *Disagree*, 3 = *Somewhat Disagree*, 4 = *Neither Agree or Disagree*, 5 = *Somewhat Agree*, 6 = *Agree*, 7 = *Strongly Agree*). Overall, the showed average attachment anxiety ($M = 2.60$, $SD = 1.59$) and attachment avoidance ($M = 2.30$, $SD = 1.11$).

Facebook intensity was measured using the Facebook Intensity Scale (FBI) developed by Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2007). It measures participants' number of Facebook friends as well as seven attitudinal questions about their Facebook use (i.e., *I am proud to tell people I'm on Facebook*), which were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly disagree*, 2 = *Disagree*, 3 = *Neutral*, 4 = *Agree*, 5 = *Strongly agree*). For the purpose of this research, one item that measured the amount of time participants spent on Facebook was removed due to its inconsistency with the rest of the Facebook intensity scale. The sample showed average Facebook intensity (M = 3.68, SD = 1.03).

Relationship satisfaction was used using the Kansas Marital Satisfaction scale (KMS), a scale that uses three items (i.e., *How satisfied are you with your partner?*). These items were answered on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *Extremely dissatisfied,* 2 = *Moderately dissatisfied,* 3 = *Slightly dissatisfied,* 4 = *Neither satisfied or dissatisfied*, 5 = *Slightly satisfied*, 6 = *Moderately satisfied*, 7 = *Extremely satisfied*). Relationship satisfaction for this sample was relatively high (M = 5.73. SD = 1.54).

Relationship displays on Facebook were measured using five items that ask about the participant's frequency of Facebook use in relation to their partner. These questions include *When you/your partner makes a post on Facebook, how often do you mention your partner/your partner mention you?*, *How often do you/your partner post photos that include your partner/you?*, and *In general, how often do you and your partner mention each other on Facebook?* These items were measured on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = *Never*, 2 = *Rarely*, 3 = *Sometimes*, 5 = *Often*, 6 = *Always*). These items were added together to make one average score of Facebook displays. This sample showed an average frequency of Facebook displays (M = 3.68, SD = .91).

Demographics and other personal information collected included age, gender, relationship status, Facebook relationship status, time spent with partner in person, length of current relationship, age, sexual orientation, if they lived with their partner, and ethnicity.

Results

A correlational analysis was used to understand the relationships between attachment anxiety ($\alpha = .88$), attachment avoidance ($\alpha = .86$), Facebook intensity ($\alpha = .85$), Facebook displays ($\alpha = .88$), and relationship satisfaction ($\alpha = .96$). Gender, relationship status indicated on Facebook, relationship status, and length of relationship were also examined (see Table 1). A separate analysis found that significant gender differences were only found for Facebook relationship status and relationship length (see Table 2). Specifically, women were more likely to have longer relationships and post their relationship status on Facebook. Ethnicity, sexual orientation, frequency of face to face interaction with partner, living status, and age were not included in these correlational analyses.

A linear regression analysis was conducted to test the hypothesis that attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety would predict relationship satisfaction. The overall model of predicting relationship satisfaction was significant $F(2, 209) = 76.93$, $p < .001$, with an R^2 of .42. Both attachment avoidance $\beta = -.57$, $t(209) = -8.93$, $p < .001$ and attachment anxiety $\beta = -.14$, $t(209) = -2.15$, $p < .05$ were significant negative predictors of relationship satisfaction.

To understand the influence different factors had on romantic displays on Facebook, two separate analyses were conducted. The first linear regression was conducted using attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, and Facebook intensity as predictors Facebook displays. The overall model of predicting Facebook displays was significant $F(3, 208) = 13.59$, $p < .001$, with an R^2 of .15. Facebook intensity $\beta = .27$, $t(208) = 4.19$, $p < .001$ was a significant positive

predictor, while attachment avoidance β = -.23, $t(208)$ = -3.03, $p < .01$ was a significant negative predictor. However, attachment anxiety β = -.10, $t(208)$ = -1.27, $p = .20$ was not a significant predictor.

The second regression was conducted to observe how relationship satisfaction would affect the results. For this regression, attachment avoidance, attachment anxiety, Facebook intensity, and relationship satisfaction were used as predictors of Facebook displays. The overall model was significant $F(4,207)$ = 12.27, $p < .001$, with an R^2 of .19. Facebook intensity was a significant positive predictor β = .26, $t(207)$ = 4.18, $p < .001$. Relationship satisfaction was also significant positive predictor β = .22, $t(207)$ = 2.67, $p < .01$. Attachment avoidance β = -.11, $t(207)$ = -1.22, $p = .22$ and attachment anxiety β = -.07, $t(207)$ = -.88, $p = .38$ were not significant predictors of Facebook displays.

Discussion

The aim of this research was to understand the complex relationship between romantic attachment style and behavior on social media related to relationship visibility on Facebook. Two dimensions of attachment style, attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance, were examined in relation to romantic relationship satisfaction. Both attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance were negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction. This means that higher attachment anxiety, as well as higher attachment avoidance, tend to be present with lower relationship satisfaction. The regression analysis indicated that attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance can reliably predict lower levels of relationship satisfaction. As expected, these results support the first hypothesis. This finding is consistent with decades of previous research that has followed Hazan & Shaver's (1987) application of attachment theory to adult romantic relationships.

Attachment theory, as developed by Ainsworth and Bowlby (1991), states that children whose primary caregivers are consistently responsive develop a secure attachment to their caregiver, while inconsistently responsiveness and no responsiveness lead to the development of anxious attachment and avoidant attachment, respectively. An extension of this theory to romantic relationships suggests that an individual's attachment style reflects their beliefs and behaviors within romantic relationships. Securely attached individuals expect their romantic partner to be responsive to their needs. In contrast, insecurely attached individuals anticipate an unresponsive or inconsistently responsive romantic partner, which leads to various behaviors that are harmful to the functioning of the relationship (Jones & Cunningham, 1996). These trends are further exemplified by the negative correlations between insecure attachment and relationship length as well as the negative correlation between insecure attachment and relationship status (see Table 1). In other words, participants who were high in avoidance or high in anxiety were more likely to have shorter, less committed relationships. These findings reflect those of previous studies (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

The primary goal of this research was to understand what factors determine an individual's frequency of romantic displays on Facebook. The first factor analyzed was Facebook intensity. Both regression analyses found that higher Facebook intensity predicted a greater frequency of Facebook displays. Facebook intensity measures an individual's overall usage and positive attitude towards the social media platform. Given that individuals who have higher Facebook intensity are more likely to post on Facebook in general (Ellison et al., 2007), it's not surprising to find that participants with high Facebook intensity posted more frequently about their partner. The fact that Facebook intensity was significantly correlated with Facebook

displays, but not with attachment anxiety or attachment avoidance (see Table 1), shows that it is a unique personality dimension with predictive value for romantic displays on Facebook.

In addition, I explored the impact of three factors that related to the participants' romantic relationship: attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, and relationship satisfaction. Neither of the regression models found attachment anxiety to have any predictive value for romantic displays on Facebook. Low attachment avoidance predicted more frequent Facebook displays in the first regression model. Interestingly, attachment avoidance had a larger impact on Facebook displays than attachment anxiety. Previous research does not indicate that an avoidant attachment is significantly more influential than an anxious attachment on social media behavior. A possible explanation for this is the utilization of two different conceptual frameworks used in attachment research. Studies that employ the more recent 4-group model of attachment, including the present study, measure attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety as two separate and continuous dimensions (Bartholomew, 1990). The more traditional attachment theory developed by Ainsworth and Bowlby (1991) use a categorical system in which individuals are labeled as having a secure, anxious, or avoidant attachment. The later may not allow for proper observation of people with the fearful-avoidant attachment style that is comprised of high attachment avoidance in addition to attachment anxiety. Even though the 4-group model does not discount any of the research done in a categorical framework, the addition of the fearful-avoidant style raises questions about the possible differential and overlapping effects of high avoidance combined with high anxiety. Future studies should seek to understand the advantages and consequences of each approach when conducting attachment research.

The predictive value of attachment style on Facebook displays diminished when including the influence of relationship satisfaction. In other words, relationship satisfaction has a

more direct influence on Facebook displays that attachment style alone. Specifically, participants who reported higher satisfaction in their relationships posted more frequently about their partner. These findings suggest an indirect influence of attachment style on Facebook displays and the resulting relationship visibility. Although attachment style affects satisfaction in a relationship, relationship satisfaction predicts the frequency of romantic displays on Facebook. More secure individuals, who possess lower attachment anxiety and avoidance, typically experience more satisfaction in their romantic relationships. This relationship satisfaction leads to more frequent romantic posting on Facebook. Conversely, high attachment anxiety or avoidance are associated with lower relationship satisfaction, which leads to fewer mentions of their partner on Facebook. In this way, attachment has an indirect influence on romantic Facebook displays. Attachment style alone was not able to accurately predict an individual's frequency of romantic displays on Facebook. This means that individuals with insecure attachment will still show frequent Facebook displays if they are highly satisfied in their romantic relationship. On the other hand, people with secure attachments but unsatisfactory relationships will likely have lower relationship visibility.

Surprisingly, few differences were found between genders. Although previous studies state that men and women typically show different attachment styles, this study was unable to replicate those findings (Ainsworth, Mary D. & Bowlby, John, 1991; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Only two variables significantly correlated with gender: relationship status on Facebook and relationship length. These correlations show that the women were more likely than men to have their relationship status posted on their Facebook profile, and they were more likely to be in longer relationships. Gender's overall lack of significance is most likely a consequence of the sample's gender distribution (65% women).

Due to sample demographics, this study is most reflective of individuals who are in long term or committed relationships. While these findings are still valuable, they may not necessarily hold true for younger couples or people who are dating casually. The nature of these relationships and the potential differing levels of commitment from each partner could heavily influence how they act on social media. A couple who has been dating for several years may be more inclined to publicly post about their partner than someone who has been casually seeing someone for a few months. Previous studies show that declaration of a relationship on Facebook is a widely considered sign of commitment (Fox & Warber, 2013; Orosz et al., 2015; Papp et al., 2011). The majority of participants in this study (77%) indicated that their relationship was Facebook official, which further exemplifies that this study's findings are more representative of people who are committed to their partner.

Limitations of this study should also be considered when interpreting these findings. These results can only be applied at the individual level. Although individual satisfaction is an important part of a romantic relationship, one partner's satisfaction does not necessarily speak to the functioning of the relationship as a whole. Limitations of the measures used in this study should also be noted. Previous research shows that self-reported behavior on social media use is often inaccurate (Hand et al., 2013). An effective method of overcoming the unreliability of self-report data is to directly observe the online behavior of participants. Additionally, the Facebook intensity scale (Ellison et al., 2007) has not been widely used in this field of research. Though it maintained high reliability, it's validity as a measure of attitudes and behaviors concerning social media should be more thoroughly examined.

Future research should seek to circumvent these limitations as well as explore additional influencing factors. The interaction of both partners' attachment styles could have an influence

on how they publicly display their relationship online. Although Facebook is a widely used website, other types of prevalent social media should be explored. Platforms such as Snapchat include an element of nonpermanent posting. This could be a highly influential factor when deciding to post publicly about a current romantic relationship. In addition, social media sites that aren't perceived to be as public or professional could have potential for more relationship visibility. Age is also an important factor to consider when studying the use of technology. Younger individuals that are more familiar with a particular platform are likely to behave differently than their older counterparts. Another interesting avenue of research would finding a potential causal relationship between online relationship displays/visability and relationship satisfaction. Although there is a clear relationship between romantic online behavior and satisfaction, the current literature is inconclusive about the directionality of this relationship (Hand et al., 2013). Research on technology and romantic relationships would benefit from any number of these factors being explored.

Overall, the present findings are an interesting addition to the growing research about online behavior in the context of relationships. This study reaffirms previous findings that attachment style is highly influential on romantic relationship satisfaction. More importantly, this study found that relationship satisfaction was a better predictor of relationship displays on Facebook than attachment style. Although attachment style affects romantic Facebook displays, its influence is more indirect through its connection to relationship satisfaction. Therefore, relationship visibility on Facebook is more indicative of how happy someone is in their relationship than their individual attachment style. The present study adds to the currently lacking body of literature about romantic attachment and social media behavior. This study brings us one step closer to understanding how underlying psychological principles affect our

behavior online, and area of research that becomes increasingly important as technology

becomes more integrated into society.

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Appendix A: Table 1

Table 1

Intercorrelations between variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1 Avoidance	-								
2 Anxiety	.56**	-							
3 Satisfaction	-.64**	-.45**	-						
4 Facebook Displays	-.30**	-.23**	.33**	-					
5 Facebook Intensity	-.04	.01	.04	.28**	-				
6 Gender	-.01	-06	-.02	-.09	.14*	-			
7 Relationship Status	-.03**	-.25**	.19**	.20**	-.09	.06	-		
8 Facebook Status	-.19**	-.12	.12	.40**	.14*	.10	.43**	-	
9 Relationship Length	-.24**	-.16*	.17*	-.22**	.06	.16*	.20**	.43**	-

*Note. *p < .05, **p < .01*

Appendix B: Table 2

Table 2

Independent t-Tests for Gender

Variables			Men		Women	
	t	df	M	SD	M	SD
Avoidance	.09	210	2.31	1.07	2.30	1.14
Anxiety	-.92	210	2.47	1.61	2.68	1.57
Satisfaction	.28	210	5.77	1.59	5.71	1.52
Facebook Displays	1.29	210	2.94	.877	2.77	.93
Facebook Intensity	-1.99	210	3.79	1.14	3.79	.96
Relationship Status	-.79	210	3.69	1.06	4.08	1.05
Facebook Status	-1.42*	131.54	1.17	.46	1.80	.40
Relationship Length	-2.40*	110.68	4.29	1.24	4.64	.88

Note. *$p < .01$