

Socio-demography and Attachment-styles of Married and Cohabiting Individuals in a Representative Sample

Katja Petrowski^{*1}, Susan Schurig², Gabriele Schmutzer³, Elmar Brähler⁴

¹German Sport University Cologne, Institute of Prevention Research, Am Sportpark Muengersdorf 6, 50933 Cologne, Germany

^{1,2}Technische Universität Dresden, University Hospital Carl Gustav Carus, Department of Psychotherapy and Psychosomatic Medicine, Fetscherstraße 74, 01307 Dresden, Germany

^{3,4}University of Leipzig, Department of Medical Psychology and Medical Sociology, Philipp-Rosenthal-Straße 55, 04103 Leipzig, Germany

⁴University of Mainz, Department Psychosomatic Medicine, Untere Zahlbacher Straße 8, 55131 Mainz, Germany

^{*1}katja.petrowski@tu-dresden.de; ²Susan.Schurig@uniklinikum-dresden.de; ³gabriele.schmutzer@medizin.uni-leipzig.de; ⁴elmar.braehler@medizin.uni-leipzig.de

Abstract- Cohabitation is becoming more prevalent in western society so that up to 7.5 million cohabiting couples were reported in the USA for the year 2010. The present study investigated whether the cohabitants' attachment style might be one of the reasons for cohabitation gaining such popularity. Attachment styles as well as socio-demographic variables were compared in regard to the partnership status. A sample of 1,002 participants aged 18 to 60 were used as a representative sample ($M = 43.5$, $SD = 10.9$), of which 54% were female and 82% were married. The cohabitants were younger, more highly educated, and less frequently affiliated with a church. The cohabitants were more anxious-attached, especially those of a younger age. A one-point increase in value on the AAS anxiety scale almost doubled the possibility of cohabitation. Most of the variance can be explained by socio-demographic variables. However, based on these representative data, and after controlling for socio-demographic variables, attachment anxiety is still connected to cohabitation. The diverse results in the literature may be explained by differences in the socio-demographic characteristics of the sample.

Keywords- Adult Attachment Scale (AAS); Attachment; Cohabitation; Marriage; Representative Sample

I. INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, cohabitation has become more and more common in German society, as well as in other industrialized western countries. In 2004, 5.12 million cohabiting couples were reported, which is a 170% increase compared to 1980 [1, 2]. This trend was also observed in the USA, where the number of cohabiting couples rose to 7.5 million in 2010 [3].

Cohabitation refers to an arrangement where a couple lives together in an intimate relationship without legal sanction. There are two types of cohabitants: those who are engaged and living together for a brief period before marriage, and those who live together without definite plans for marriage. Hereafter, cohabitation will be defined as a relationship without commitment, where couples live together but stay apart in many respects, such as their finances and future plans, and value their personal independence more than non-cohabitants [4, 5].

Even though the first type of cohabitants lives together as a kind of premarital rehearsal, insuring that their future marriage will be a successful one, research shows that cohabitation has just the opposite effect. Approximately 40% of these cohabitants' relationships end within five years, while 55% of the relationships lead to marriage. Nevertheless, 40 to 85% of the latter's marriages end in divorce [6]. In addition, lower marital stability and quality are connected to previous cohabitation [7, 8]. One explanation might be that these couples married for the wrong reasons, e.g., such as previously having lived together. Another explanation might be that married couples who had been cohabiting with each other before marriage basically feel less strongly about the institution of marriage and are, therefore, less committed to it and more easily willing to divorce [6]. A third explanation might be the couples' differing opinions about marriage. Seventy percent of the cohabiting couples had differing ideas about marriage. Either only one of the partners wanted to get married or the process of getting married moved too quickly for one of them [9]. Furthermore, cohabitants who cohabit only with their future spouse have a much lower divorce rate than couples that have changing cohabitation partners before opting for marriage [10].

For decades, researchers have investigated why some individuals choose cohabitation and others choose marriage. Even though there were no differences in age and education between cohabiting and married couples in the 1990s [11], more recently, cohabitants have been shown to have a slightly lower socio-economic status and younger age (20% below 25 years of age) [1, 12-15]. One explanation might be that many cohabitants enter into joint living arrangements out of financial necessity [16, 17]. In contrast, a sizable number of cohabiting females were holding down a job [18]. Concerning the socio-economic

background of the individuals, it was found that the lower the education of a cohabitant's mother, the higher the probability of entering cohabitation at a young age [19].

As a possible model for cohabitation, the cost-effort model as well as the similarities and differences between cohabitation and marriage were investigated [20-23]. Recently, attachment theory has been employed as a model.

Bowlby [24] theorized that through the early experiences with the primary caregiver, individuals develop an internal working model of themselves and others. The individual develops beliefs about the self in regard to being worthy of care, love, and attention and about whether significant others are dependable, responsible, and trustworthy. These beliefs influence an individual's expectations, perceptions, and behavior in other and future relationships, including the attachment style in close relationships [25, 26].

Hazan and Shaver [26], as well as Collins and Read [27], found unique beliefs, emotions, and expectations for the secure, avoidant, and anxious/ambivalent attachment styles. Individuals with a secure attachment style generally tend to have positive beliefs about themselves (e.g. self-worth, social competence, sense of control) and their respective partner (e.g. trustworthy, dependable, and altruistic). On the other hand, individuals with an anxious/ambivalent attachment style have negative beliefs about themselves but positive views of their partner and an obsessive preoccupation with their partner. Individuals with an avoidant attachment style have a positive view of themselves but a negative view of their partner. They show fear of intimacy, a lack of acceptance of the partner's faults, and feelings of distrust towards others.

Since attachment style influences perception or beliefs about the selection of future partners, it may influence the partnership status [26]. One explanation for cohabitation is that the individuals who choose to cohabit are more avoidant-attached than paired or married individuals. Avoidant-attached individuals favor independence and self-reliance and need a sense of distance and autonomy.

Another explanation for cohabitation might be that the individuals who choose to cohabit are more anxious-attached than married individuals. Anxious-attached individuals may have experienced rejection by relationship partners who would not accept their anxiety, clinginess, and intrusiveness [28]. Therefore, these individuals may choose cohabitation due to separation anxiety [14]. In line with this, it was found that non-cohabitant college students were more likely to report higher attachment security [29]. In addition, cohabitants may also have an attachment figure other than their romantic partner to rely on [30]. However, cohabitants in a community sample showed higher attachment security [30].

Concerning the socio-demographic specificity of attachment style, no gender differences could be found [29]. However, a meta-analysis showed gender differences in romantic attachment [31]. Generally, females showed higher anxiety and lower avoidance than males. In respect to living arrangements, married women were more securely attached to their partner than cohabiting women, whereas the differences in attachment between married men and cohabiting men were not significant [32].

These contradicting results may be explained by the differences in the socio-demographic characteristics of the different samples. Therefore, the attachment differences between cohabitants and married individuals need to be investigated in a representative socio-demographic sample by taking the socio-demographic characteristics into account.

Since some of the cohabitants live together before marriage to improve their chances of having a successful marriage later (so called Type 1 cohabitation) [6], it can be assumed that these cohabitants may be of a younger age than married couples (H1). It may also be assumed that the second type of cohabitants without definite plans of marriage has less education and a lower income than married individuals (H2). Based on this theory, cohabitants are either more avoidant-attached because they favor independence and self-reliance and have a sense of distance and autonomy, or they are more anxious-attached due to previous rejections in relationships, whereas now their anxiety, clinginess, and intrusiveness is being accepted. Therefore, higher attachment anxiety or avoidance can be hypothesized for these cohabitants (H3). Since church affiliation has a significant effect on marriage rates and age at the time of a first marriage [33, 34], the study participants' church affiliation was included as a control variable.

II. METHOD

A. Description of Participants

In 2012, the USUMA (Unabhängiger Service für Umfragen, Methoden und Analysen) Berlin Polling Institute selected households and participants by random-route sampling. This means that first a target-home and then a target-person in every home was provided. Therefore, this survey fully met the scientific requirements regarding randomization [35]. Sixty-two percent of all contacted individuals filled out the questionnaire. Of these, the final sample of $N = 1,461$ individuals living in a partnership (married or cohabiting) was examined. The sample was weighted regarding sex and age to reflect the characteristics of the German population. Using information from the Federal Statistical Office, the final sample was approved to be truly representative of the German residential population in 2012. All the participants volunteered and received a data protection declaration in agreement with the Helsinki Declaration. The participants ranged in age from 16 to 88 ($M = 51.4$, $SD = 15.2$); 50% of the sample were female. Eighty-six percent of the samples were married, and 14% of them lived in a non-marital relationship. Concerning education, 84% had no high school diploma, and 16% had a high school diploma. Concerning

household income, 39 participants gave no response. Of the remaining participants, 30% earned below € 2000/ month, and 70% earned € 2000 or more.

In order to minimize the effect of widowhood [36], a subsample of 1,002 participants aged 18 to 60 ($M = 43.5$, $SD = 10.9$) was used. Fifty-four percent of the subsample were female; 82% were married, and 18% of them lived in a non-marital relationship (see Table 1). Concerning education, 83% had no high school diploma, and 17% had a high school diploma. Concerning household income, 25 participants gave no response. Of the remaining participants ($N = 977$), 20% earned below € 2000/month, and 80% earned € 2000 or more. Concerning church affiliation, 24 participants gave no response. Of the remaining participants ($N = 978$), almost three-quarters were affiliated with a church.

The study was approved in accordance with the ethics guidelines of the “German Professional Institutions for Social Research” (Arbeitskreis Deutscher Markt- und Sozialforschungsinstitute, Arbeitsgemeinschaft Sozialwissenschaftlicher Institute; Berufsverband Deutscher Markt- und Sozialforscher).

TABLE 1 DESCRIPTION OF PARTICIPANTS (N = 1002)

Variable	<i>M (SD)</i>	
Age	43.5 (10.9)	
	<i>n</i>	<i>Percentage %</i>
Gender		
Male	464	46.3
Female	538	53.7
Partnership Status		
Married	820	81.8
Cohabitant	182	18.2
Education		
High School Degree	171	17.1
No High School Degree	831	82.9
Household Income^a		
Below € 2000/Months	192	19.7
€ 2000/Months and More	785	80.3
Church Affiliation		
Yes	737	75.4
No	241	24.6

^a median split.

B. Instruments

Attachment styles were assessed with the German partnership version of the Adult Attachment Scale (AAS) [37]. The participants scored each of the 18 items using a five item Likert-type scale with values ranging from “not at all” to “very.” The factor analysis led to three main factors (each consisting of six items): capacity to feel close to the partner (“I find it relatively easy to get close to people.”); capacity to depend on others (“I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on others.”); and anxiety of losing an intimate partner (“I often worry that romantic partners do not really love me.”). A high value on the scale ‘close’ means a person is comfortable with closeness and intimacy. A high value on the scale ‘depend’ symbolizes no problems with dependency, and a high value on the scale ‘anxiety’ means a person often worries about being unloved. The reliability of all three scales was satisfactory ($\alpha = 0.72 - 0.79$) [38]. Based on the three subscales, adult attachment was measured. Secure attachment is characterized by high scores on the AAS ‘close’ and ‘depend’ subscales and a low score on the AAS ‘anxiety’ subscale. Avoidant attachment is characterized by low scores on the AAS ‘close’, ‘depend’, and ‘anxiety’ subscales. Anxious attachment is characterized by a high score on the AAS ‘anxiety’ subscale and moderate scores on the ‘close’ and ‘depend’ subscales.

The information on being in a cohabiting relationship (Item: “Do you live in a relationship”; “Are you married?”) was based on self-reported data.

C. Statistical Procedure

For the analysis, the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) in version 20.0 was used.

For the descriptive analysis of the individuals with a different relationship status, χ^2 tests for independent samples and a one-way analysis of variance was used. To test the requirements, the Levene test for variance homogeneity and the

Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for normal distribution were implemented. Both tests showed significant proof of the null hypothesis. Therefore, the requirements were given. Since the large sample size more easily leads to significant results, the effect sizes were calculated. A Cohen's $d \geq .20$ is a small but relevant effect, Cohen's $d \geq .50$ is a moderate effect, and Cohen's $d \geq .80$ is a strong effect [39]. A Cramer's $\phi = 0.1$ is a small but relevant effect, Cramer's $\phi = 0.3$ is a moderate effect, and Cramer's $\phi = 0.5$ is a strong effect [40].

In order to be able to predict cohabitation, a binary logistic regression analysis was used (married vs. cohabitate, coded as *married* = 0 and *cohabitate* = 1). Gender (male/female), education (high school degree: yes/no), income (household income below € 2000: yes/no), and church affiliation (yes/no) were included at the nominal level of measurement in the logistic regression. Age and the interviewee's means on the scales of Adult Attachment ('close', 'depend', and 'anxiety') were included at the interval level of measurement. All variables were included stepwise in the logistic regression analysis.

III. RESULTS

In the following analysis, attachment style, gender, age, education, household income, and church affiliation were compared concerning partnership status.

A. Socio-Demography and Relationship Status

Concerning *gender*, 48% of the cohabitants were male and 52% were female, whereas 46% of the married individuals were male and 54% were female. This gender difference was not significant ($\chi^2(1, N = 1002) = 0.20, p > .05$; Cramer's $\phi = 0.01$). The cohabitants had a mean *age* of $M = 35.8$ ($SD = 12.0$) compared to the married individuals with a mean age of $M = 45.3$ ($SD = 9.9$). The married individuals were mostly between 31 and 60 years old, whereas the cohabitants were 18 to 30 years old. This difference was highly significant ($\chi^2(2, N = 1002) = 149.76, p < .001$) with a Cramer's $\phi = 0.39$, which indicated a moderate effect. Twenty-six percent of the cohabitants had a *high school diploma*, compared to the married individuals' 15%. This difference was highly significant ($\chi^2(1, N = 1002) = 12.1, p < .001$) with Cramer's $\phi = 0.11$, which indicated a small but relevant effect. Concerning *household income*, 26% of the cohabitants earned below € 2000/month, and 74% earned € 2000/month or more. In contrast, 18% of the married individuals earned below € 2000/month, whereas 82% earned € 2000/month or more. This difference was significant ($\chi^2(1, N = 977) = 6.17, p < .05$) as well. However, Cramer's ϕ was 0.08, which indicated a too small and not relevant effect. Concerning *church affiliation*, 64% of the cohabitants were churchgoers and 36% were not, whereas 78% of the married individuals were affiliated with a church and only 22% were not. This difference was highly significant ($\chi^2(1, N = 978) = 15.0, p < .001$) with Cramer's $\phi = 0.12$, which indicated a small but relevant effect.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the cohabitants were younger than the married individuals, and our first hypothesis (H1) can be accepted. The individuals without a marriage license had a higher education, and there were no income differences. Therefore, our second hypothesis (H2) must be rejected. Furthermore, significantly more married individuals were affiliated with a church.

B. Attachment style

Concerning attachment style, the cohabitants showed significantly higher values on the AAS 'anxiety' compared to the married individuals (see Table 2). Cohen's d was 0.37, which indicated a small but relevant effect. Regarding *gender*, there were no significant differences in the Adult Attachment scales (Table 2). Concerning *age*, the age group 18 to 30 significantly showed the highest values on the AAS 'anxiety' compared to the other two age groups with $\eta^2 = 0.02$, which indicated a small but relevant effect as well (see Table 3).

Regarding *education*, the individuals with a high school diploma showed significantly higher values on the AAS 'depend' compared to the individuals without a high school diploma (see Table 2). But Cohen's d was 0.18, which indicated a too small and not relevant effect. The individuals with a *household income* below € 2000/month showed significantly higher values on the AAS 'close' compared to individuals with a *household income* higher than € 2000/month (see Table 2). Cohen's d was 0.19, which indicated a too small and not relevant effect as well. Individuals with a *church affiliation* showed significantly lower values on the AAS 'close' compared to individuals without a church affiliation (see Table 2). Cohen's d was 0.25, which indicated a small but relevant effect. The individuals with a church affiliation also showed significantly higher values on the AAS 'anxiety,' but Cohen's d was 0.15, which indicated a too small and not relevant effect.

In sum, the cohabitants were *more anxious-attached* (H3), especially the younger cohabitants. Concerning other socio-demographic specificities, the individuals with a church affiliation felt less comfortable with closeness. Concerning the other socio-demographic variables, the effect sizes were too small. Therefore, no additional relevant differences concerning attachment style could be found.

TABLE 2 DIFFERENCES FOR ADULT ATTACHMENT SCALE BY COMPARING MARITAL STATUS, GENDER, EDUCATION, AND INCOME (N = 1002)

Variable	<u>Married</u>		<u>Cohabiting</u>		df	t	d
	M	SD	M	SD			
AAS Close	3.72	0.66	3.67	0.65	1000	0.96	0.08
AAS Depend	3.69	0.75	3.62	0.78	1000	1.11	0.09
AAS Anxiety	1.95	0.76	2.24	0.84	998	-4.53***	0.37
		<u>Male</u>		<u>Female</u>			
AAS Close	3.69	0.67	3.72	0.65	1000	-0.83	0.05
AAS Depend	3.65	0.74	3.70	0.77	1000	-1.20	0.08
AAS Anxiety	1.96	0.75	2.05	0.80	998	-1.90	0.12
		<u>High School Degree</u>		<u>No High School Degree</u>			
AAS Close	3.75	0.67	3.70	0.66	1000	-0.89	0.08
AAS Depend	3.79	0.76	3.65	0.75	1000	-2.19*	0.18
AAS Anxiety	1.92	0.82	2.02	0.77	998	1.57	0.13
		<u>Household Income Below € 2000</u>		<u>Household Income € 2000 and More</u>			
AAS Close	3.81	0.66	3.69	0.66	975	2.30*	0.19
AAS Depend	3.62	0.76	3.70	0.76	975	-1.36	0.11
AAS Anxiety	2.10	0.79	1.98	0.78	973	1.88	0.15
		<u>Church Affiliation Yes</u>		<u>Church Affiliation No</u>			
AAS Close	3.67	0.64	3.83	0.69	976	3.33***	0.25
AAS Depend	3.67	0.74	3.72	0.81	378.71	0.89	0.07
AAS Anxiety	2.03	0.79	1.91	0.75	974	-2.17*	0.15

* $p < .05$; *** $p < .001$. $d \geq 0.20$ small effect.

TABLE 3 ONE-WAY ANALYSES OF VARIANCE (ANOVA) FOR EFFECTS OF AGE (18-30; 31-34; 46-60) ON THE ADULT ATTACHMENT SCALE

Source	<u>Age 18-30</u>		<u>Age 31-45</u>		<u>Age 46-60</u>		ANOVA				η^2
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	df	SS	MS	F	
AAS Close	3.65	0.62	3.75	0.66	3.70	0.67					
Between Groups							2	1.15	0.57	1.32	.00
Within Groups							999	432.79	0.43		
AAS Depend	3.67	0.76	3.74	0.74	3.63	0.77					
Between Groups							2	2.33	1.16	2.04	.00
Within Groups							999	570.07	0.57		
AAS Anxiety	2.22	0.87	1.94	0.72	1.99	0.78					
Between Groups							2	9.28	4.64	7.74**	.02
Within Groups							997	597.33	0.60		

** $p < .01$. $\eta^2 = 0.01$ small effect.

C. Predicting Cohabitation

In order to be able to predict cohabitation, age, education, household income, and church affiliation as well as AAS 'close', 'depend', and 'anxiety' scores were included stepwise (see Table 4). Since gender did not differentiate between the relationship statuses and adult attachment style in the χ^2 test, it was not included. The results of the logistic regression analysis showed that advanced age and not having a high school degree appeared less often together with cohabitation, whereas having a household income below € 2000/month appeared with almost twice the possibility of cohabitation. But as soon as the variable church affiliation was included in the analysis (step 4), household income was not significant. The variable "no church affiliation" appeared with more than twice the possibility of cohabitation. An explanation might be that household income and church affiliation correlated with high significance ($r = 0.25$, $p < .001$), so that the variable church affiliation at least gave some additional information.

Furthermore, a one-point increase in value on the AAS anxiety scale appeared with almost twice the possibility of cohabitation (step 5). The total explained variance of cohabitation or marriage was 22.6%. The highest explained variance

(20.1%) showed the socio-demographic variables in the first four steps of the analysis. After adding the attachment scales to the analysis, the explained variance increased only to 22.6%.

TABLE 4 SUMMARY OF STEPWISE LOGISTIC REGRESSION ANALYSIS PREDICTING COHABITATION (N = 952)

Variable	B	SE	Odds ratio	Wald statistic	95% CI		Nagelkerkes R ²
					Lower limit	Upper limit	
Step 1-3							
Age	-.08	0.01	0.92	83.31***	0.91	0.94	
Education ^a	-.55	0.22	0.58	6.12*	0.38	0.89	.182
Income ^b	.60	0.22	1.83	7.51**	1.19	2.81	
Step 4							
Age	-.08	0.01	0.92	87.01***	0.91	0.94	
Education ^a	-.46	0.22	0.63	4.27*	0.41	0.98	
Income ^b	.43	0.23	1.54	3.60	0.99	2.39	.201
Church Affiliation ^c	.72	0.21	2.06	12.29***	1.38	3.08	
Step 5							
Age	-.08	0.01	0.92	79.73***	0.91	0.94	
Education ^a	-.49	0.23	0.61	4.56*	0.39	0.96	
Income ^b	.37	0.23	1.44	2.49	0.92	2.27	.226
Church Affiliation ^c	.83	0.21	2.29	15.21***	1.51	3.46	
AAS Close	-0.01	0.19	0.99	0.00	0.68	1.44	
AAS Depend	0.29	0.19	1.33	2.34	0.92	1.93	
AAS Anxiety	0.61	0.16	1.84	14.48***	1.34	2.52	

^a no high school degree; ^b household income below € 2000; ^c no.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

IV. DISCUSSION

Cohabitation has become more and more common in western society, with up to 7.5 million cohabiting couples in the USA in 2010 [3]. There are different types of cohabitants postulated in the literature [4, 9]. This study investigated whether cohabitation is explicable by socio-economic developments or by attachment style. We hypothesized that cohabitants might be younger and with less education and income than married couples. Furthermore, we assumed that cohabitants are more avoidant- or more anxious-attached.

In sum, the representative data showed that the cohabitants are younger than married couples but have higher education. Cohabitants are less often affiliated with a church, which accords with the study by Kalmijn [33], who found that marriage is more prevalent in more religious countries. Furthermore, cohabitants are more anxious-attached, especially those of a younger age, so that an increase in anxiety almost doubles the possibility of cohabitation. However, attachment style has only a small effect. Most of the variance can be explained by socio-demographic variables. Advanced age and not having graduated from high school protect from cohabitation, whereas not being affiliated with a church more than doubles the possibility of cohabitation. A low household income appears in step three of the logistic regression with a higher possibility for cohabitation. After adding the variable "church affiliation," this significant influence disappears. As household income and church affiliation correlated as highly significant, one can say that church affiliation at least provides more information. In Germany, those affiliated with a church must pay church taxes; therefore, church affiliation is linked to greater expenses. Hence, people with a higher income can afford church affiliation more easily [41].

The first type of cohabitants are those who are engaged and living together for a brief period of time before marriage, compared to those who live together without definite plans of marriage [4]. The latter predominate in the current representative study since the cohabitants are younger and better educated. Since the participants are all above 18 years of age, their education (high school graduation: yes or no) may allow for higher cognitive freedom and independence. Therefore, one can assume that better-educated individuals choose cohabitation before marriage more frequently. Nevertheless, the socio-demographic characteristics definitely point towards the first type of cohabitation, even though previous experiences were not evaluated in the multi-topic investigation. However, the strong influence of socio-demographic variables has already been shown in other studies [14, 15].

Even though cohabitation seems to be a pre-state to marriage [4], there still remains the question of who chooses this pre-state to marriage. After controlling for socio-demographic variables, the present representative data clearly show that higher attachment anxiety is present in cohabitants compared to married individuals. Individuals with an anxious/ambivalent attachment style have negative beliefs about themselves but positive views of their partner or the others as well as an obsessive preoccupation with their partner [26, 27]. Individuals with high attachment anxiety are anxious about being abandoned, rejected, or left by the partner. These emotions are derived from a great need for closeness [37]. Anxious-attached individuals may have been rejected before by relationship partners who did not accept their anxiety, need for closeness, clinginess, and intrusiveness. Therefore, it cannot be determined whether the attachment anxiety is based on previous experiences or on the anticipation of marriage, which is an as yet unknown state that may trigger anxiety. As a second hypothesis, an avoidant attachment style was proposed for cohabitants. Since low closeness and low dependency as well as low anxiety were described as avoidant attachment

[27], the present results do not show any strong differences in attachment dependency and closeness between cohabitant and married individuals. Therefore, the anticipation of the unfamiliar situation of being married might trigger attachment anxiety in the cohabitants planning to marry.

The different samples in which college students and couples from a community sample were compared might be responsible for the diverse results in the literature [30, 32]. Therefore, based on the present representative data, attachment anxiety is foremost connected to cohabitation. The other published effects may be explained by differences in the socio-demographic characteristics of the sample. Similar results were shown by Hsueh and colleagues [15], where the effects disappeared after controlling for socio-demographic variables. Furthermore, there were gender effects reported in the literature [31, 32]. However, in our representative sample, no gender effects could be found.

Nevertheless, an unexpected result was found in the data. Individuals with a church affiliation felt less comfortable with closeness/intimacy than individuals without a church affiliation. There was no prior hypothesis about church affiliation and attachment style, but individuals affiliated with a church may have a different educational background, including religious instruction, and in this case, closeness/intimacy may be connected to feelings of shame, which may cause problems with closeness/intimacy. Further research in this field might prove useful.

The strength of this study is its large representative sample and the statistical approach to its results. However, a large sample size might easily lead to small but significant effects. To avoid this, we calculated effect sizes and only discussed effects that were strong enough. A further limitation of the present representative data is that they are exclusively cross-sectional. Therefore, the cohabiting individuals were not married at this specific measurement point or age. However, whether these individuals have since married or will be married in the future cannot be determined. In addition, it cannot be determined whether the individuals want to marry or will choose cohabitation as their lifestyle. In future research, both partners' attitudes towards marriage or cohabitation as well as the relationship and the length of the marriage will need to be taken into account. Furthermore, despite the large sample size and its representative nature, the subgroup of the cohabitants is relatively small. Therefore, our findings should be replicated based on a larger sample of cohabitants. With regard to the explained variance of approximately 23%, it is clear that other variables have an influence on the relationship status. Therefore, earlier relationship experiences and various attitudes towards marriage would be interesting factors in order to specify cohabitation. However, we were able to show that attachment anxiety plays a role and socio-demographic variables have a strong influence. This should be noted in future studies, especially in regard to sample selection.

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