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An exploration of marital interaction: The relationship between Gottman’s conflict resolution style and ‘four horsemen’, attachment theory, perception, gender and marital satisfaction.

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BA, Grad Dip Applied Psychology

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Abstract

The purpose of the current study was to examine links between Gottman’s (1994, 1999) conflict resolution (CR) styles and marital distress indicators (the four horsemen), adult attachment, and Snyder’s (1997) marital satisfaction inventory. (MSI-R). One hundred and one heterosexual couples (202 individuals; mean age = 43.5 years, $SD = 11.15$), currently involved in a marital style relationship (length of relationship $M = 19$ years, $SD = 10.8$), were recruited via undergraduate psychology students at a Melbourne university, who requested the questionnaires be completed by their parents or other relatives if they were not eligible for inclusion, and via a Melbourne relationship counselling centre. No evidence was found for matching of conflict resolution styles between partners in the couples, therefore hypotheses testing matching of conflict resolution style against marital distress indicators, marital satisfaction and attachment orientation were not supported. Women were found to score higher on the anxiety adult attachment dimension than men, but no gender differences were found on the ‘avoidance’ adult attachment dimension. Hypotheses testing links between adult attachment and Gottman’s conflict resolution styles (CR) were supported. Participants classified into the secure attachment category were found to score significantly higher in validating CR than those classified as avoidant (dismissive or fearful), and significantly lower in volatile CR than preoccupied
participants. Avoidant CR scores were found to be significantly lower amongst secure women than dismissive women, and amongst secure men than both dismissive and fearful men. The hypothesis that women would be higher in contempt and criticism than men was supported, whilst the prediction that men would be higher in stonewalling than women was not supported. Participants classified as secure were associated with lower levels of marital distress indicators and marital dissatisfaction variables than those classified as insecure, as predicted; however some gender differences were apparent in the pattern of differences between the attachment groups in these variables. The hypothesis testing partners’ similarity to one another on Gottman’s marital distress indicators was not supported; however strong support was found for the notion that partners believed themselves to be similar to their partners on these variables. The hypothesis that secure or dismissive participants would have greater perceived similarity than preoccupied or fearful participants was supported for men but not for women. The prediction that anxious attachment scores would be associated with higher accuracy of partner perception was supported for women but not for men. The prediction that anxious attachment would decrease with age and length of relationship was supported for women but not for men; and the final prediction that accuracy of partner perception would diminish with length of relationship was supported for men but not for women. Overall, results of the current study indicate that there are subtle differences between men and women in the
experience of distress in marital relationships, as well as in how relationships change over time. Further, the current research offers evidence that the conflict resolution styles proposed by Gottman may be related to attachment orientation, and may offer some explanation as to how various attachment needs are met via these different methods of marital interaction.
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Finally, I am grateful to all who participated in this research, who put aside the time to complete a complex questionnaire about their intimate relationship, and thereby assist in broadening the knowledge of the wider community.
Declaration

I declare that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree in any university, or other educational institution; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

I further declare that the ethical principles and procedures specified in the document on human research and experimentation issued by the Psychology Department of Swinburne University have been adhered to.

Susan Elizabeth Whelan
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Chapter 1: Overview of the thesis

Attachment theory, originally proposed by Bowlby (1958, 1960a, 1960b, 1969) as a theory largely related to infant and childhood functioning and relationships to parents and caregivers, has been widely researched in the latter part of the twentieth century in relation to adult behaviour in intimate, romantic and marital relationships (Clulow, 2001; Feeney & Noller, 1996; Hazan & Shaver 1987; Simpson & Rholes, 1998). Results of numerous studies linking attachment orientation to systematic differences in behaviour, experience and outcomes in adult relationships have been published so that presently, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, there is little dispute in the field of psychological research that attachment orientation, regardless of how it is measured or assessed, is a recognizable aspect of adult relationship functioning. However, the point that is contentious amongst marital therapists and researchers is how useful it is as a concept when one is directly involved in relationship counselling and therapeutic intervention (e.g., Gottman, 1999; Schnarch, 1997).

It has been suggested by some marital and relationship therapists (e.g., Johnson, 2003) that one main purpose of couple therapy is to try to teach the couple how to be more securely attached as individuals as well as how to develop their relationship so that it provides a “secure base” or a “safe haven” from which to go forth and explore the environment, and provides comfort and succour to return to in times of fatigue, threat or distress.
However, unraveling the psychological and behavioural underpinnings of attachment orientation and teaching secure attachment to those individuals who relate to others with more insecure attachment behaviours is not a simple task (Schachner, Shaver, & Mikulincer, 2003). Therefore even amongst those who work extensively with attachment theory there are difficulties at times applying the theory, and the abundant knowledge about human relating derived from it, to useful interventions in the therapeutic setting.

In contrast to the attachment research, which is highly theory driven, John Gottman began atheoretical observational studies into marriage in the early 1980s and has continued this work until the present time. Gottman (e.g., 1994, 1999) has focused on finding the differences between satisfying, non-distressed marriages and unhappy, distressed marriages. From these findings Gottman has proposed therapeutic interventions aimed at pointing out and reducing the behaviours and attitudes that have been found to be associated with distress in marriage, and enhancing or teaching the behaviours and attitudes associated with satisfaction with marriage. Gottman has explicitly stated that his notions are not reliant on a competence based model such as attachment theory (see Gottman, 1999, p 185). However, later in the same publication when describing ways to deal with resistance encountered in applying the proposed marital interventions (see Chapter 11), Gottman acknowledged that the attachment theory-based notion of internal working models of relationships was a necessary
consideration to deal with distortions in the client’s view of relationships, making it difficult for them to comply with the strategy to heal marital discord and distress. The distortions Gottman proceeds to describe could also be described as attachment orientation differences. For example one is a depression/low self esteem model and the other is an anti social model. The former could relate to the anxiety over relationships dimension of attachment behaviour or the anxious/ambivalent attachment style, and the latter could relate to the avoidance of relationships dimension or the dismissive or avoidant attachment style.

Therefore it seems that there may be a connection between the research findings provided by Gottman (1999, 1994a) and concepts such as internal working models pertinent to attachment theory. It was the purpose of the current research to explore these connections, posing the question: what are the possible theoretical underpinnings of the atheoretical notions of Gottman? Specifically, do Gottman’s findings relate systematically to the theoretical notions of attachment theory?

A further aspiration of the current research was to explore the notion of perception of self and of partner, with a focus on the distortions of these, and whether this aspect of human functioning (self and other perception) is associated with either specific attachment functioning or specific types of behaviour described by Gottman (1999, 1994a) as more or less functional in relationships. It was hoped that furthering
the understanding of perception in personal relationships may add insight to the research of Gottman and the understandings of adult attachment.

Finally, the current research sought to further clarify gender based differences in marital functioning in terms of attachment behaviour and orientation, Gottman’s (1994, 1999) marital distress indicators (the four horsemen), and marital satisfaction. According to Feeney and Noller (1996) gender differences in attachment behaviour are not thoroughly described or understood. Also, Gottman has found that there are gender differences in the likelihood of males and females exhibiting certain behaviours in marriage. For example, according to Gottman, women are more likely to criticize and men are more likely to stonewall. Additionally, women will tend to express more anger and contempt than men. Gottman also found that in distressed marriages women had stopped performing a unique role in the relationship of moderating the negativity of the interactions with positive input when their partner expresses a lot of negative affect. Whilst the current research did not design measures specifically aimed at this aspect of relationship functioning, the results were scrutinized with a focus on observing gender differences where they were evident.

The following chapters provide a review of the current research literature pertaining to marital interaction, Gottman’s research into marital relationships, adult attachment and marital satisfaction. Chapter 2 provides a brief description of marriage in Western countries. Links between marital outcomes and marital
satisfaction are explored. In chapter 3, Gottman’s (1999, 1994a) research into marital interaction is introduced. The main focus is on conflict resolution styles and marital distress indicators called by Gottman “the four horsemen”, a reference to the four horsemen of the apocalypse, and so named, according to Gottman, to indicate the dire consequences of their emergence and continued use in marital interaction. These four marital distress indicators are criticism, contempt, defensiveness and stonewalling.

In chapter 4 a brief history of attachment theory is provided, followed by an equally brief description of the adult attachment literature, including some discussion of the measurement and assessment of adult attachment, which has been quite a contentious issue throughout the 1990’s. A more thorough review of literature relating adult attachment and marital satisfaction follows to establish the relevance of adult attachment theory to research on marital relationships.

In chapter 5, links between Gottman’s marital research and attachment theory are proposed. It will be argued that some of the problematic relationship behaviours and characteristics identified by Gottman (1999; 1994a) to be associated with more negative relationship outcomes could be related to individual attachment style and associated attachment behaviours. It is proposed that the tendency to use the problematic behaviours identified by Gottman in relationships may differ systematically in individuals as a function of their attachment style.
In chapter 6 gender differences in marital behaviours relating to conflict resolution, marital distress indicators and attachment behaviours are discussed. Evidence to support the notion that there may be specific gender differences in the occurrence of some marital interactions has been found by Gottman (1999, 1994a) and by various researchers exploring adult attachment (Collins & Read, 1990; Feeney, Noller & Callan, 1994; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994) as well as researchers interested in social and cognitive differences between the genders regarding relationships (e.g., Acitelli & Young, 1996).

In chapter 7, the effects of partner similarity and perceived similarity are discussed, and linked with the influence of differences in the accuracy of self and partner perception. It is suggested that perceptual differences and distortions may occur systematically in association with attachment orientation. It is also suggested that the observations presented fit with Gottman’s (1994a, 1999) research findings.

Chapter 8 provides a review of who tends to be studied in relationship research and reviews the methodology of collecting data on marriage and relationships. Chapter 9 outlines the current study and includes the hypotheses tested in the present research. Chapter 10 is the method section and Chapter 11 is the results section. Chapters 12-15 discuss the current research findings. Chapter 16 provides a conclusion and summary of the current research.
Chapter 2: An overview of marriage and marital satisfaction

2.1 Statistical data about marriage in the Western world.

Marriage, or male/female coupling accompanied by an ongoing relationship including a sexual relationship, is an important and integral part of modern global human culture. Researchers report that marriage has a beneficial effect on the overall physical and mental health and well being of the individual. A range of explanations for this finding include factors such as the importance of another in the household, the value of a readily available source of support, social controls, and the regulatory functions provided by marriage (Gove, Hughes & Style, 1983; Gove, Style & Hughes, 1990; Umberson, Chen, House, Hopkins & Slaten, 1996). Throughout the current thesis the term marriage will be used to refer to both registered and defacto marriages as well as long-term male-female couple relationships. Generally these relationships involve cohabitation.

Viewed from a biological standpoint, marriage appears to serve a reproductive purpose ensuring survival of the species, and of an individual’s specific genes. A sexual relationship is generally an accepted part of the marital relationship even in the absence of children. Thus marriage serves to promote survival and thriving of the individual during their lifespan, as well as promoting survival of their offspring, to safeguard genetic survival, beyond their lifespan. Marriage could be described as a basic social unit upon which extended family, community groups, and
social structure are founded. A majority of men and women in a variety of cultures worldwide choose to raise their children within a marriage style relationship (Macionis & Plummer, 1997).

Lack of stability and harmony in marital relationships in Western cultures such as the United States of America, Europe and Australia have been shown to negatively impact on both the participants in the couple relationship, as well as the children of the couple in a variety of debilitating and damaging ways (e.g. Gottman, 1994; Gove & Hughes, 1990). There is some evidence suggesting that dissolution of marital relationships is related to serious physical and mental health consequences for all family members. For example, Bloom, Asher and White (1978) found increased risk of psychopathology and car accidents (including fatalities) following marital dissolution. An increase in the incidence of physical illness, suicide, violence and homicide associated with marital dissolution was found by Bloom et al., as well as Burman and Margolin (1992), and Verbrugge (1979). Evidence has suggested an association between dissolved marriages and decreased longevity (Berkman & Breslow, 1983); increase in the number of deaths from diseases (Bloom et al.; Burman & Margolin); and a significant degree of immunosuppression (e.g., Kiecolt-Glaser, Malarkey, Cacioppo, & Glaser, 1994; Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001). More specifically, Kiecolt-Glaser et al. (1997) found that health damaging endocrine changes for women were associated with decreases in marital satisfaction as well as escalation
of negative affect during conflict. Additionally Kiecolt-Glaser et. al. (1997) found poorer immunological responses for both men and women amongst respondents who displayed more negative behaviour during conflict and who characterized their disagreements as more negative, than respondents who displayed more positive conflict behaviours and descriptions of their conflict. In another study Kiecolt-Glaser et al. (1996) found higher daily stress hormone levels in women were associated with higher probability of a pattern of husband’s withdrawal in response to wife’s negative behaviour during conflict discussions. In summary, numerous studies have continued to find evidence for a negative impact of marital distress on cardiovascular, immune, neurosensory and various other physiological systems, all of which in turn contribute to negative health outcomes. These research findings demonstrate the pervasive nature of the effects of marital discord.

The elevated risk factors outlined above place marital relationships in a position of immense importance to the society of which they are a part. Distress in marital relationships, at times resulting in marital breakdown and dissolution, consumes significant community resources as well as creating stress in workplaces and schoolrooms across nations as individuals struggle to adjust to marital dysfunction as well as cope effectively with their daily tasks. Government, community and charitable organisations utilise considerable percentages of their resources in an attempt to assist affected individuals to absorb the psychological,
physical and economic impact of marital distress, separation and divorce. Therefore it is of some concern that the statistics relating to marriage in Western cultures over the past fifty or so years have demonstrated an increase in marital and family breakdown to a divorce rate of approaching 50%, which has remained relatively stable for the last twenty years (Pinsof, 2002).

Research in the United States of America has revealed that the percentage of first marriages in that country which will end in divorce over a forty year period is estimated to be between 50% and 67%, and for second or subsequent marriages about the same or 10% percent higher (Kreider & Fields, 2002; Martin & Bumpass, 1989). According to Snyder, Heyman and Hayes (2005) research literature suggests that at some point many, if not a majority, of marriages will be impacted by periods of turmoil, which may also include episodes of depression or anxiety for marriage partners, and will place the marriage at risk for dissolution. Laumann, Gagnon, Michael and Michaels (1994) found that only 33% percent of married individuals reported being “very happy” with their marriage, and Veroff, Kulka and Donovan (1981) found that marital difficulties was the most common reason cited for individuals seeking therapy.

Similarly, in the United Kingdom it is estimated that about 40% of marriages will end in divorce, and the estimate is only marginally smaller for Europe (Clulow & Mattinson, 1995). In Australia there have also been some noteworthy changes in the
trends in relationship patterns and family structure over the last 50 years. These include a rise in the number of lone parent families, continuing increases in the numbers of divorced or separated couples, an increase in the number of de facto relationships, as well as lower levels of partnering overall (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2000). According to the ABS (2000) between 32% and 46% of marriages are likely to end in divorce over all the years of marriage. These two figures have been calculated using different methods; one method calculates using past trends, the other uses current trends, neither can be absolutely certain about future trends as predictions of marital stability cover a very wide time span and may be influenced by unforeseen changes in social and cultural norms. Even at the lower percentage rate, at least one third of the population will be affected by marital dissolution. This heralds the need to fully understand the antecedents of marital dysfunction and dissolution, as well as develop strategies to aid optimal coping and prevention where possible.

However, understanding marital dysfunction, separation, and divorce, as well as the other options which appear to be replacing conventional marital relationships such as co-habiting prior to marriage or as an alternative to marriage, co-parenting children in the absence of state registered marriage or in the absence of a monogamous sexual relationship, is a complex study which can be prone to assumptions based on conventional ideas rather than current trends (Pinsof, 2002). Pinsof noted that there has been a transition in the latter half of the 20th century to
divorce as an end point of marriage rather than death. According to Pinsof this is due to an increase in human longevity, reproductive choice as a result of effective contraceptive measures, as well as improvements in the social, biological and economic conditions, and increased independence of women in Western cultures. Interestingly, Pinsof suggested that throughout the recorded history of marriage there has been an approximate average length of marriage of about twenty years, and that in earlier times (prior to 1950) death was much more commonly the cause of the end of a relationship than divorce. Post 1974, divorce overtook death as the leading cause of the end of marriage (Hagestad, 1988). Pinsof suggested that the increase in the divorce rate simply keeps the twenty year average constant.

The implication of this notion for marital counsellors and researchers is to remain mindful that divorce may not always be an unnecessary, negative or undesirable event. It may in some circumstances be indicative of psychological growth and development. Therefore, it may be beneficial to make a distinction between marital distress and divorce. Whilst marital distress may be quite detrimental to the individual and the relationship, divorce may ultimately be beneficial.

With due consideration of the above outline of the current state of marriage as a cultural institution, the target of the current research was an exploration of marital distress. The present research aimed to explore the attributes of relationship
interaction that may give marriage partners a choice to successfully remain married if their relationship has become distressed rather than find ways to prevent divorce per se. Research exploring the elements of successful versus unsuccessful interactional style in relationships may help couples experiencing high distress to make decisions as to whether their relationship is right for them and can be rectified, and what actions may be beneficial to attain their goals.

2.2 Marital satisfaction: definitions and measurement.

The rising rate of marital dissolution, and the gravity of the negative impact of marital distress and dissolution have encouraged research focusing on intimate relationships. Researchers have sought to define and understand the functions of marriage, and to define which elements constitute a satisfying marital relationship, and which elements contribute to marital distress. Empirical studies of marital/dyadic satisfaction and/or adjustment and the development of measurement scales and techniques date back to the first half of the twentieth century (e.g., Ferguson, 1938; Hamilton, 1929). Since then numerous measures have been developed, some aiming to define and measure the components of successful and satisfying marital relationships (e.g., Lock & Wallace, 1959; Snyder, 1979a, 1979b, 1997) and some aiming to gain a general global measure as simply as possible (e.g., Schumm et al., 1986; Sharpley & Cross, 1982).
In a study designed to distinguish, operationalise and clarify dyadic adjustment (relationship satisfaction) as a concept, Spanier (1976) listed all items that had been included in any scales used to measure marital satisfaction up to that time. Factor analysis of these (over three hundred) items, resulted in the development of the 32 item Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) comprising four components of dyadic adjustment: dyadic satisfaction, dyadic cohesion, dyadic consensus, and affectional expression, which could be used as subscales. According to Spanier these are essential and distinct dimensions.

In a later study in which Sharpley and Cross (1982) sought to replicate the findings of Spanier (1976), insufficient evidence was found to support the same four discrete dimensions. However, Sharpley and Cross found support for the DAS scale as a unidimensional measure of marital adjustment. In addition, they suggested that the majority of the thirty-two items in Spanier’s scale were unnecessary and that a measure of dyadic adjustment could be equally satisfactorily obtained by asking respondents just eight of the items on the scale. Sharpley and Cross further suggested that for a quick measure, a single global question (item 31 on Spanier’s scale) asking respondents to classify the degree of happiness in their relationship would be adequate, as they found it correctly classified sixty-five percent of cases into low or high dyadic adjustment groups, which is the single dimension of the scale they suggested was valid. However, in a study which tested the concurrent and
discriminant validity of the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMS) which comprises just three questions, Schumm et al. (1986) found evidence to support the notion that a brief measure such as the KMS offers advantages over a single item measure. The KMS comprises questions about three aspects of marital relationships: satisfaction with partner as a spouse, satisfaction with the marriage, and satisfaction with the relationship with spouse. Schumm et al. found that the answers to these questions were significantly different, demonstrating that the questions tapped into different aspects of relationship perception and functioning. This suggests that there may be subtle yet important differences in the factors that influence an individual’s response to global or brief marital satisfaction measures.

In an effort to more comprehensively understand the variety of behavioural, conceptual and emotional components of marital satisfaction, Snyder (1979) devised the Marital Satisfaction Inventory (MSI) and later, the Marital Satisfaction Inventory - Revised (MSI-R, 1997). In contrast to the briefer scales, this inventory comprises expansive and detailed items designed to collect data that not only measures whether marital satisfaction is low or high, but also aims to offer insight into why this may be the case. The MSI-R comprises eleven sub-scales, which are: global distress, affective communication, problem-solving communication, aggression, time together, disagreement about finances, sexual dissatisfaction, role orientation, family history of distress, dissatisfaction with children, and conflict over children, as well as two
validity scales. As can be seen from the list of sub-scales, the MSI-R focuses on a much more comprehensive range of the different aspects of marital relationships than previous scales, thus effectively isolating specific parts of relationship functioning for scrutiny. While earlier scales proposed distinct components of marital satisfaction, they still tended to lack the detail of the scales of the MSI-R. For example, the DAS may indicate that an individual rates their marriage as low in cohesion, or consensus or the KMS may indicate that an individual is not very satisfied with their spouse as a partner, but neither scale offers much information as to why. The MSI-R will indicate a lack of cohesion or consensus where it exists, as well as offer information as to which aspects of the relationship give rise to these feelings, for example, disagreements about finances, problem solving, distribution of household tasks, or sexual relationship among others.

Snyder (2002) suggested that the MSI-R (1997) is very useful in clinical work because of the specificity of the measure, particularly if each individual in a couple completes the inventory at the beginning of therapy and at strategic stages during the course of therapy. According to Snyder, this offers the clinician a wealth of information about the couple, including a “snap shot” view of how each of them is currently feeling, what areas of the marriage are perceived as difficult or problematic for each member of the couple, what areas of the relationship are responding to
therapy, and what the differences are between them in their perceptions of the relationship.

As can be seen from the sample of marital satisfaction literature described above, the parsimonious use of the response to a single global question (e.g., Sharpley and Cross, 1982) or a simplified set of questions (e.g., Schumm et al., 1986) which account for a high proportion of the variance in marital satisfaction, contrasts with a desire to distinguish and investigate the underlying elements giving rise to the global response (Snyder, 1979a, 1997). It is possible that the aims of the various researchers advocating the contrasting positions may be different. For clinicians aiming to utilize marital satisfaction measures and research to guide their clinical practice, detailed and inclusive knowledge of all of the components of marital satisfaction, right down to those which only contribute a small amount of variance in the overall score on the scale, may be of great use in thoroughly exploring and resolving various aspects of marital distress or dysfunction presented for treatment. In contrast, researchers motivated by a desire to ascertain a quick and simple measurement of overall marital satisfaction or distress in order to test it in relation to other variables may find that because the single dimensions within the measures correlate powerfully with the global measure it is of little value to them to account for the variance in more detail. The finding that any single dimension of a marriage causing distress would correlate strongly with a global measure of marital distress would be highly likely; however
measurement of the specific dimensions will yield more meaningful data to a researcher who is interested in the details of the distress as well as the overall level of it. Therefore, the implication that there is not much to be gained from inclusion of numerous dimensions if these dimensions correlate strongly with a global measure is strongly dependent on the purpose and nature of the research.

2.3 *Is low marital satisfaction an efficient predictor of divorce or marital distress?*

Although low marital satisfaction certainly appears to be a strong indicator of poor marital outcomes, the theories of contemporary marital therapists and researchers appear to suggest that it is not sufficient as a predictor of divorce or even high marital distress. It seems not all people who report low marital satisfaction will end their marriage in divorce, nor will they necessarily see the marriage as being in high distress. According to Gottman (1994, 1999) low marital satisfaction is a significant but weak predictor of divorce. Like Snyder (1979, 1997), Gottman has developed more detailed measures that identify specific problematic areas in marital relationships. However, while the MSI-R focuses largely on the content of disagreement or dissatisfaction in the marital relationship in order to target these areas in therapeutic interventions, Gottman has focused more intently on the style or process of the marital interactions than on the content of the disagreements. In this way Gottman has diverged from a pure marital satisfaction measure and has explored a broader behavioural and interactional arena. Gottman claimed that low
marital satisfaction is followed by ‘a cascade of processes’ (1994, p.120) that are far more effective as predictors of divorce than marital satisfaction measures. A more detailed description of Gottman’s theory of marital distress will follow in a later section.

Gottman (1994) suggested that current marital satisfaction is not necessarily associated with future marital stability or happiness. In concordance, Schnarch (1997) suggested that periods of discomfort in marriage, when partners challenge themselves and each other, are essential components of a passionate, lively, satisfying marital relationship, and offer the individuals within that marriage the opportunity to mature and differentiate. Schnarch asserted that this process of differentiation would enhance each person’s understanding of themselves and each other, as well as enhance the quality of the relationship. However Schnarch acknowledged that honesty with oneself and one’s partner would inevitably create conflict as well as a potential for greater intimacy, defined as truly knowing and accepting the self and another person, and passion defined as deep sharing of erotic pleasure. While engaging in this process it is likely that at times marital satisfaction may be low. However, according to Schnarch this is not necessarily indicative of the impending demise of the relationship, but may herald a period of struggle and growth towards differentiation and an even greater satisfaction within the marriage. These assertions support the notion that marital outcomes are influenced by a complex array of
variables. While marital satisfaction, measured even in the most detailed way may offer evidence to account for some of the variance in marital outcomes, it seems that other variables need to be ascertained and included to more fully understand the factors that influence marital outcomes.
Chapter 3: Gottman’s research

3.1 Gottman’s marital interaction theory.

Gottman (1993a, 1993b 1994, 1999) has conducted extensive research into the factors that contribute to success, distress, and failure in marriages, both as a sole researcher and in collaboration with many other researchers (e.g., Gottman & Silver, 1994, Gottman & Levensen, 1985, 1992; Gottman & Porterfield, 1981). The results of his research have consistently supported the association of specific behavioural and communication characteristics with either positive or negative marital outcomes. Gottman conducted longitudinal studies over a 15 year period with over 700 couples in America, in an effort to discover which particular emotional and behavioural factors contribute notably to success and failure in marital relationships. Gottman’s research was atheoretical in design, in that he extensively observed the behaviour of couples, often recording in auditory as well as visual form, many continuous hours of their interactions for behavioural analysis, scrutinizing both verbal and non-verbal communications. Gottman later researched outcomes in these relationships and drew conclusions from the observed correlations.

The work of Gottman (1993a, 1993b 1994, 1999) has indicated that marital relationships tend to consist of a number of distinct aspects of relationship, such as communication, friendship, shared meaning and goals, and mutual interest in partner’s life. According to Gottman, these are all affected by more generalised
themes that influence all areas of the relationship, such as positive versus negative or indifferent affect, and ability to soothe the self and/or the partner if physiological arousal begins to overwhelm or distort an individual’s cognitive ability to relate effectively to others (a process identified by Gottman as physiological flooding).

Gottman (1999) suggested that these factors were influenced by a mixture of what the individual brought into the marriage (intrapersonal factors including temperament and personal history) and what the effect of the marital interaction was on each of the individuals (interpersonal factors). Largely Gottman’s (e.g., 1993a, 1993b, 1994, 1999) work has focussed on observable behaviours in marital interactions rather than the influence of intrapersonal factors.

Gottman (1994, 1999) found strong support for the notion that the ratio of positive to negative interactions in marital behaviour is crucial to marital satisfaction. Gottman claimed that a ratio of five positive interactions to one negative interaction is required for a marriage to succeed. If the negative ratio becomes larger the marriage will begin to show signs of distress, and will be placed at increasing risk of dissolution. Gottman found this positive to negative ratio to be a useful general overriding principle, that could offer explanation for marital distress and breakdown regardless of the content of the interactions. That is, Gottman suggested that the affect with which partners deal with each other rather than the content of their disagreements and difficulties will be important in determining the outcome of their
interaction and more generally, the success of their relationship as a whole. Additionally, Gottman found that there were differences between distressed and non-distressed couples in that non-distressed couples were quicker to limit or neutralise negative interactions via non-reciprocation of negativity or shorter continuance of negative interactions. Thus the negative to positive ratio was maintained throughout conflicts. In addition, non-distressed couples had found a way to dialogue about their differences in a manner that acknowledged and respectfully allowed each person’s view without escalating the interaction into a negative interchange in which one person’s view must prevail.

Exploration of all of the aspects of marital relationship examined by Gottman (e.g. 1994, 1999) is beyond the scope of the current research. However, two aspects of marital relationships identified by Gottman as contributing notably to either stability or distress in marital relationships are; matching in conflict resolution style, and the presence of four marital distress indicators (the ‘four horsemen’). These are also associated with variation in the ratio of negative versus positive interactions within marital relationships. Therefore, these were selected for inclusion in the current research.

3.2 Gottman’s research into conflict resolution style

Gottman (1993a, 1993b, 1994) conducted extensive research into the conflict resolution patterns in marriages, to try to identify effective and ineffective conflict
communication behaviours between couples. The difference Gottman found between what he initially named regulated and non regulated couple relationships was in the ratio of positive to negative verbal and non verbal interactions. First, Gottman established that there was a consistent ratio of five positive to every one negative interaction and less negative affect reciprocity and continuance in couples who were in stable marriages (see section above). Second, Gottman (1994, 1999) established that amongst those with a stable marital relationship there appeared to be three qualitatively different ways in which couples discussed and resolved conflict: volatile, where couples tend to engage in passionate, loud and insistent debate, and need to express all their needs fully before reaching a resolution; validating, where couples tend to listen to one another and resolve conflict through compromise; and avoidant, where couples tend to avoid discussions which will lead to conflict and respond to differences by minimizing them and focusing on the many areas of agreement between them.

Further, Gottman (1993a, 1993b, 1994, 1999) identified that couples classified as using one of the three types of stable marital styles differed in a number of other interactional attributes whilst consistently maintaining the five positive to one negative ratio. Gottman found that first, the number and the intensity of both positive and negative interactions differed between the styles, such that volatile couples displayed a greater number and intensity of both positive and negative interactions,
while validating couples displayed less intensity and frequency of both positive and negative interactions, and avoiding couples displayed a minimum of both types of interactions. Second, the levels of persuasion used in conflict resolution discussions differed, such that volatile couples engaged in pervasive and persistent persuasion attempts from start to finish in their conflict resolution discussions; validating couples began their discussions with a small amount of persuasion which peaked in the middle of the conversation and reduced again as resolution and conclusion of the discussion was reached by negotiation; whereas avoiding couples did not appear to engage in persuasion or much negotiation at all. Third, responsiveness to either positive or negative persuaders in the discussions differed over the three styles. Gottman found that couples comfortable with a volatile style were persuaded by negative information from their partner and not by positive information, whilst couples with a validating style were influenced by both positive and negative information, and couples comfortable with an avoidant style were only persuaded by positive information in their discussions.

According to Gottman (e.g., 1994, 1999) each of these conflict resolution styles can be part of a healthy, stable and enduring marriage. Gottman's (1994) research suggested that in relationships where partners' conflict resolution styles are sufficiently matched so that the style of communication and the five positive to one negative interaction ratio is consistently maintained, the relationship will settle into
one of the three stable conflict resolution styles, and the participants in the relationship will be more likely to feel satisfied with the way in which their partner resolves conflict with them, which will contribute to greater marital satisfaction. This was labelled a ‘regulated’ style of marital interaction. However, difficulties may arise when couples’ conflict resolution styles are mismatched, so that the couple fail to establish a workable and consistent style that is acceptable to both partners. In this case the positive to negative ratio may be impossible to maintain and individuals may begin a process of negative assessment of their partner’s behaviour perceiving, their partner’s style to be highly problematic, in need of change or just plainly wrong. In this case the style of conflict resolution was labelled ‘non-regulated’ or hostile. Gottman identified two types of unstable (non-regulated) conflict resolution styles, hostile, and hostile-detached, which he suggested were the result of a failure to establish stability in one of the three workable styles of conflict resolution. Both these styles are associated with marital dissolution as they place the relationship in a chronic state of disequilibrium. The different The hostile style is characterised by a continued negative engagement between the couple where conflicts are battled out with overwhelmingly negative interactions which leave both partners unhappy and dissatisfied and form part of an on-going power struggle between them. The hostile-detached style is a further development of the hostile style, where couples have ceased to maintain engagement with one another and simply voice opposition and
indications of disinterest and disregard for their partner’s thoughts, feelings and decisions. In contrast, in marriages where differences in conflict resolution style are acceptable to partners, they may eventually cause minimal distress and a stable marital relationship may be possible, although Gottman (1994) stated that this eventual acceptance may be difficult for both partners and may require some kind of therapeutic intervention.

Apart from mismatches of conflict resolution style between partners, Gottman (1994) has further suggested that the term “non regulated” may be slightly misleading when referring to some unstable marital interactions. Gottman found that some of the couples labelled in the analysis as non regulated may be exhibiting relationship regulation in a different form, which may place these couples at a greater risk of marital dissolution, that is regulation around an unsustainable “set point”. For example, some dysfunctional marriages which ultimately end in divorce may tend to return constantly to a mode of interaction which unbalances the positive to negative ratio and places the couple in a state of chronic disharmony which is ultimately either unsustainable, or sustained only with a high degree of relationship dissatisfaction. Exploration of this behaviour would necessarily involve understanding the genesis of the set point. Attachment theory could possibly offer some insight into these phenomena.
In research to further explore the contribution of conflict resolution style to couple relationships, Gottman and Levenson (2002) found that amongst the couples with matched conflict resolution styles, when volatility between couples became unregulated and included too much negative affect, or when avoidant style became too neutral and there was insufficient positive affect, there is a high likelihood that divorce will be the ultimate result. This suggests that of the three stable conflict resolution styles the validating style may be the most robust, as it is probably more moderate than the other two styles, and possibly the easiest style with which to express and maintain positive affect throughout interactions, thereby boosting the positive to negative interaction ratio.

Long term marriage will usually involve some element of repeated and unavoidable conflict, as a result of two individuals cohabiting in a state of interdependence. It seems the validating style inhabits a central position in relation to the other two styles on the dimensions of persuasion, negotiation and frequency of, and response to, positive and negative interactions in marital conflict resolution style. This may mean that when there are fluctuations around the normative level in any of the styles, the validating style fluctuates into less extreme behaviour patterns than either the volatile or the avoidant style. The normative style of volatile conflict resolution tends towards the high use of negative persuasion techniques, therefore there may be a tendency for this to slip into a deficit in positive interactions relative to
negative interaction when the relationship is under pressure and conflict increases. Conversely, the avoidant style of conflict resolution tends not to utilise any persuasion and much less overall interaction, therefore when the relationship is under pressure there may be a lessening of contact such that there is insufficient positive input. Thus the volatile and avoidant styles may more easily diverge into patterns of elevated negative affect which overwhelm the dwindling positive affect and render the relationship unsustainable.

In later research into the conflict resolution styles outlined by Gottman (1994, 1999), Holman and Jarvis (2003) developed a measure using paragraphs based on descriptions of the three stable conflict resolution styles and a hostile conflict resolution style, and asked their research participants to rate the extent to which they tended to use that style of conflict resolution. These results were analysed using statistical cluster techniques which Holman and Jarvis claimed fitted the data to a four group model which matched Gottman’s four conflict resolution styles. Holman and Jarvis found that of the three stable conflict resolution styles, couples using a validating conflict resolution style reported higher levels of satisfaction, stability, positive communication and soothing than couples using either a volatile or avoidant style. These findings suggest that not all of the conflict resolution styles work equally well as Gottman originally claimed.
Both the above studies suggest that whilst stability can be achieved in marriages where any one of the three stable conflict resolution styles are in evidence, there may be some variation in the robustness of relationships using each of the styles, in that the volatile and avoidant styles may be more vulnerable to losing the crucial balance in terms of positive to negative interaction ratio. Therefore these relationships may at times be more at risk than relationships where the validating conflict resolution style is used.

Gottman (1993a, 1994, 1999) claimed that the positive to negative interaction ratio in marital relationships is an ever-present, underlying factor that works alongside other variables, influencing and constructing the emotional environment of the marital relationship. Other researchers similarly note that the balance of positive to negative interactions is an important component of marital relationships (e.g., Snyder, Heyman, & Haynes, 2005; Weiss & Heyman, 1997). Gottman also claimed that the three conflict resolution styles could work equally well if partners were well matched in their styles and happily continued to negotiate conflict in that way. However, the recent research cited above suggests a subtle caveat to that notion, in that two of the styles may be more easily unbalanced and thrown into disharmony. It is possible that the conflict resolution styles are linked systematically to other intrapersonal factors such as attachment orientation and that understanding the relationship between these aspects of marital functioning may advance knowledge in
the area of marital interaction. Attachment orientation has been found to influence the individual’s behaviour in relationships (e.g., Feeney & Noller, 1996), therefore it is reasonable to suppose that attachment behaviours will influence marital interaction. In light of this it is important to acknowledge that the notion of matching between partners on conflict resolution style is but a single aspect of the marital relationship, and cannot offer a definitive method of classifying relationships in isolation but can be useful to guide clinical understanding and intervention in conjunction with other considerations.

3.3 Gottman’s marital distress indicators (the “Four Horsemen”)

Gottman (1994, 1999) asserted that not all negative interactions have an equivalent effect on marital relationships, and that certain types of negative interactions have a particularly detrimental effect. These are criticism, contempt, defensiveness and stonewalling, a cluster of behaviours Gottman has named “the four horsemen of the apocalypse” as an indicator of the dire nature of their effect on marital relationships. According to Gottman, a mixture of behaviours that could be classified into these four types of communication or interaction tend to be present in distressed marriages. Criticism is identified by the practice of criticising the person rather than complaining about specific behaviours, so that any displeasure or discomfort is blamed on the personal attributes of the partner rather than attributed in some measure to both partners, to difference between partners, or to circumstance.
Contempt is identified as any message to the partner communicated either verbally or non-verbally that seeks to imply the contemptuous person’s superiority over their partner. Contempt includes such behaviours as rolling of eyes, impatient or dismissive drumming of fingers while partner is speaking or bidding for attention in some way, or any behaviour that aims to convey dismissal of whatever the partner is saying or doing. Defensiveness is identified as behaviour in which all attempts at communication by one partner are constantly blocked by the other partner by way of counter-questioning, or a “yes but” response, which denies or bounces back the communication rather than responds to it. In truly defensive behaviour there is a feeling for one partner that whatever they are trying to communicate to, or share with the other person is never heard, seen or acknowledged. In this way the partner appears to be impenetrable. Finally, stonewalling is identified as a practice whereby one person becomes outwardly totally non-responsive to the other. Gottman has found that when a person is stonewalling often their internal physiological responses, such as heart rate and galvanic skin response indicate quite a high level of arousal even though they often appear outwardly to be unaffected. Gottman has suggested that stonewalling may be a method learned by some people as a strategy for controlling powerful emotional responses such as anger that feel too overwhelming and perhaps uncontrollable. Gottman claims that unchecked, these behaviours will
overwhelm the marriage with negativity leading to distancing and isolation in the marriage and possibly divorce.

A literature search of research into marital distress has repeatedly demonstrated implicit support for Gottman’s (1993a, 1994, 1999) theory that these four factors are markers of negative marital functioning (e.g., Snyder, 2005). No evidence to the author’s knowledge has been cited to dispute this finding even when other notions proposed by Gottman have been criticised (e.g., Scott, Bradbury & Markman, 2000). Therefore, it seems important to understand more fully how Gottman’s research findings relate to other well established theories relating to relationship functioning such as attachment theory. The current research aimed to explore these links.
Chapter 4: Attachment theory

4.1 Intrapersonal Factors

In addition to the forms of interaction identified by Gottman (1993a, 1993b, 1994, 1994b, 1999) as interpersonal behaviours that pose a high risk to marital relationships, personal factors arising from within an individual may predispose certain people to experiencing difficulty in forming and sustaining stable and functional intimate relationships. Personality traits play an enormous role in the selection of partner and possibly have some impact on the success or failure of marital relationships (e.g., Gattis, Bern, Simpson & Christensen, 2004; Karney & Bradbury, 1995), however these tend to be fairly stable personal characteristics and are usually acknowledged and catered for in relationships rather than viewed as a problem in themselves. Personality disorders are also fairly stable individual characteristics (DSM IV, American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Whilst they may be problematic in relationships, if treated they tend to be regarded as a problem related primarily to the individual rather than related to relationships, and are treated through individual counselling. Bridging the gap between the interpersonal and the intrapersonal is attachment style (e.g., Bowlby, 1979; Clulow, 1995). Attachment behaviour is thought to be formed after birth as a response to treatment received in the first relationship(s) with caregivers and is regarded as a somewhat stable adaptation which can undergo some change in response to experiential intervention during the life-span via intimate
relationships with others. Attachment theory is one of the main theories utilized to examine and explain differences between individuals in their preferred intimate relationship style (Feeney & Noller, 1996; Simpson & Rholes, 1998).

4.2 A Short history of Attachment Theory

Attachment theory has its roots in psychoanalytic and ethological theory, and was formulated and annotated by Bowlby over a lengthy period commencing in 1929 when he worked in a school for maladjusted children, and later at the London Child Guidance Clinic (Bowlby, 1979). Bowlby chose to study children who had been removed from their home to a residential nursery or hospital because it was possible within an institutionalised setting, to observe in greater detail and with more control, the treatment and care the children received, and to observe their corresponding behaviours, than when they were at a private home in the care of their parents.

Bowlby (1940) began the process of publishing his theory with an article about the links between early environment and child development specifically related to neurotic characteristics. Over the following four decades Bowlby continued to develop attachment theory, applying it to normal human development as well as psychiatric illness and mental disorder, writing a variety of articles (e.g., Bowlby, 1953; 1958; 1960a; 1960b) and delivering numerous public lectures (Bowlby, 1979) outlining his work. Eventually Bowlby wrote a three volume set of books thoroughly outlining the theory (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980).
Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1979, 1980) suggested that attachment or affectional bonds between individuals form a necessary and integral part of human behaviour that continues in some form throughout the human life cycle. According to Bowlby, whilst attachment behaviour may be subject to some change through exposure to different relationship experiences, the style of attachment behaviour exhibited by a given individual will tend to be influenced by the attachment relationships of their early infancy. Bowlby (1973) proposed that these experiences create “inner working models” of self and other, upon which expectations about the functioning of relationships, and about what to expect from the social environment are based. Consequently, attachment will often be relatively stable throughout an individual’s life, particularly if the behaviour successfully aids them in creating and maintaining enduring affectional bonds.

Bowlby (1973) suggested that secure attachment provides the individual with a set of interpersonal and intrapersonal psychological and behavioural tools to aid in the maintenance of their wellbeing. These tools are emotion regulation behaviours and cognitions, and in the case of secure attachment augment the development of positive inner representations of self and others, as well as confidence to explore the environment, and partake in affiliation and care giving activities. Bowlby (1979) proposed that all human infants crave secure attachment to a primary care giver, usually the mother, and that maternal deprivation will create ambivalent feelings
within the child about the caregiver. The feelings of ambivalence will activate a range of secondary protest behaviours as an attempt to resolve or eradicate the inner conflict and regulate the emotional response to the experience. To be more precise, if an infant experiences a lack of care that disrupts their sense of safety they will activate a set of behaviours aimed to gain the attention they require in order to regulate their emotional response to the experience. If a simple protest does not elicit the desired response from the care-giver, a more demanding secondary protest behaviour will follow. Depending on whether a response is elicited and what type of behaviour appeared to the child to elicit that response, a pattern of behaviours with caregivers will develop designed to regulate the emotional experience of the child and keep the child as emotionally stable as possible. These secondary protest behaviours include overly anxious, clingy, aggressively demanding and hostile attention-seeking behaviours, as well as detached, seemingly disinterested and dismissive behaviours directed at the caregiver.

Bowlby (1979) noted that a particular child may exhibit one, all, or a variation of these behaviours in their reaction to frustration of their need to form a secure attachment. Bowlby observed that in response to disruption to a primary attachment relationship, infants appeared to progress from secure attachment behaviours through a variety of anxious demanding behaviours and into a state of despair and emotional detachment, which appeared to persist for a length of time commensurate
in some way with the amount of time the infant had experienced separation from their attachment figure. According to Bowlby, after a period of separation or parental unavailability, if the parent has a sufficiently secure sense of attachment within her own relationships with significant and trustworthy individuals she will be able to tolerate and understand her child’s protest and will aim to minimise a recurrence of the experience, thus offering herself as a secure base for the child, which acts as an antidote for the ambivalent feelings allowing the child to experience her as available, stable and secure enough to rely upon. Under these circumstances the behaviour of the child will progress back from emotional detachment through highly anxious behaviour to secure attachment behaviour.

However, as described above, the behaviours are varied and can be quite confusing and confronting for a parent, particularly given that the parent makes up the other half of the attachment relationship and their own attachment style may predispose them to sensitivities and reactions to some of these behaviours in even the youngest family member. Thus, according to Bowlby (1979), a lack of secure attachment experiences in parents can leave them without the necessary inner resources to understand and weather the storm of their child’s frustration, and may lead them to react in a manner aimed at alleviating their own attachment anxieties and regulating their own emotional response to their child’s protest. These parental behaviours may unwittingly contribute to further development of ambivalent feelings
within the child. In this way parental reaction or continued unavailability can fail to provide a secure base for the infant and confirm protest behaviours, signalling the child’s sense of insecurity in the attachment relationship, as an habitual way of responding in relationships. Research has found some evidence to support the notion that intergenerational attachment behaviours may tend to be similar (e.g., DeKlyen, 1996; Main & Goldwyn, 1985; Fonagy, Steele & Steele, 1991).

Further research into the formation and functioning of attachment behaviour in human infants by Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters & Wall (1978) resulted in the development of a test called “The Strange Situation”, which demonstrated specific differences between children in their attachment responses. The variation in infant behaviour was classified into three different attachment styles, one secure and two insecure. Secure attachment denoted an infant’s ability to trust their caregiver, use them as a secure base from which to explore the environment and confidently turn to them if they need comfort or reassurance. Anxious/ambivalent attachment was observed where infants appeared somewhat reluctant to explore their environment, reacting with a mixture of hostile anger and clingingness to any perceived unavailability of the caregiver, and seemed to demonstrate uncertainty about the accessibility of their caregiver. Avoidant attachment described attachment behaviour where the infant appeared to be emotionally detached, somewhat self-reliant and fairly
disinterested in the absence or presence of their caregiver, which appears to indicate a loss of confidence in their caregiver’s ability to be available to them.

4.3 A Brief introduction to Adult Attachment Research

In 1987, Hazan and Shaver extended the study of attachment styles and applied the theory to adult populations in the study of adult intimate relationships, and found that adults could also be classified into the same three attachment styles. In addition Hazan and Shaver found that the proportions of the sample reporting each of the three attachment styles were similar in the adult and child samples. This finding was supported by subsequent research (e.g., Collins & Read, 1990; Feeney & Noller, 1990; Mikulincer & Nachshon, 1991) and interpreted by some researchers to indicate stability of attachment style over the human lifespan (e.g., Collins & Read, 1990; Feeney & Noller, 1990). However, contradictory evidence supporting some flexibility and instability has also been found (e.g., Brown, 1988; Cowan & Cowan, 2001).

Over the following decade many studies were published exploring the relationship between adult attachment and the functioning of adult romantic and intimate relationships, as well as the measurement of adult attachment behaviour. Differences in attachment style have generally been found to be systematically and significantly associated with differences on other dimensions such as social support seeking (Florian & Mikulincer, 1995; Kobak & Screery, 1988; Simpson, Rholes &
Nelligan, 1992); caregiving in relationships (Kunce & Shaver, 1994; Simpson, et al., 1992); interpersonal communication competence (Anders & Tucker, 2000); marital adjustment (Kobak & Hazan, 1991; Senchak & Leonard, 1992); marital satisfaction (Feeney, 1994; Lussier, Sabourin & Turgeon, 1997); self disclosure (Mikulincer & Nachshon, 1991); and repressive defensiveness (Mikulincer & Orbach, 1995). Generally insecure attachment orientation has been found to be associated with less functional levels of the above behaviours, placing less secure individuals in positions of greater relationship distress and at greater risk for relationship difficulties and breakdown. Conversely, a more secure attachment orientation has been found to be associated with a greater ability to function well in close relationships and perform the interpersonal tasks that augment successful intimate relationships.

A more comprehensive review of the published research literature exploring the relationships between adult attachment and other individual and relationship characteristics is beyond the scope of the current research and can be found in a number of generally available publications (e.g., Feeney & Noller, 1996; Simpson & Rholes, 1998). Therefore, an overview of main research findings relevant to the current research follows.

4.4 Adult attachment measurement methods

Accurate and appropriate measurement and definition of attachment styles or dimensions is a topic that has been extensively explored in the adult attachment
research and various methodologies have been devised and disputed (e.g., Bartholomew & Shaver, 1998; Fraley & Waller, 1998; Fraley, Waller & Brennan, 2000; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). Hazan and Shaver (1987) began researching adult attachment styles with a simple three category self report measure based on the original three categories proposed by Ainsworth et al., (1978). Their measurement instrument comprised three paragraphs describing behaviour or attitudes typical of each of the different attachment styles; secure, anxious/ambivalent and avoidant. Participants were simply asked to select the one most like themselves, and thus were placed into that attachment category. Levy and Davis (1988) began working on a rating system for Hazan and Shaver’s categorical descriptions making it possible to sample the varying nature of individuals’ attachment experiences rather than classifying them into a single exclusive domain. Levy and Davis’ results suggested two underlying dimensions; avoidance/discomfort with dependency, and anxiety about abandonment.

Further research which broke down the Hazan and Shaver (1987) paragraphs into sentences and asked participants to rate them on likert scales also suggested two (Feeney, Noller & Callan, 1994; Simpson, 1990), or three (Collins & Read, 1990) underlying dimensions. These dimensions were later synthesised into two dimensions; “avoidance of closeness/dependency”, and “anxiety over attachment relationships” (Brennan, Clark & Shaver, 1998), and similarly, “comfort with
closeness” and “anxiety” (Feeney, Noller & Callan, 1994), which could be computed into four categories; secure, ambivalent, dismissive and fearful. Similarly, Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) developed a two dimensional model. The two dimensions were view of self, and view of other, and also resulted in the same four possible categories.

Through slightly different methodology, Main (1990) also proposed two dimensions of attachment behaviour, which she suggested were primary and secondary activations of the attachment system, therefore suggesting a sequential structure not necessarily suggested by the other dimensional models. The primary response system involved what Main called hyperactivation, which resulted in more intense and demanding attempts to reconnect with the attachment figure (as seen in anxious attachment style) and the secondary response involved a deactivation, which resulted in stopping all efforts to connect with the attachment figure and resorting to withdrawal into and reliance upon the self in order to minimise further experience of rejection and abandonment (as seen in avoidant attachment style). All of the above described attachment classifications and dimensions can be seen as responses of individuals as they attempt to maintain a safe and comfortable balance between independence and relationship. According to Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1980) both adults and children will show a preference for one primary attachment figure above all others. During infancy and childhood this will generally (but not always) be their
biological mother, and during adulthood this attachment will be transferred to a romantic or intimate partner. According to Bowlby, over the course of a lifetime, attachment experiences will be regulated via attachment behaviour which can be observed and measured in various ways as noted above. However the purpose remains constant: to attempt to maintain a sense of connection at whatever level feels “normal” to the individual, which is vital to humans for their internal sense of well being.

In spite of conflicts between researchers regarding which method of measuring attachment was most valid, all of the above two dimensional models appeared robust and valid and were widely utilised in research, as was the original three category model. According to some of the most recent research, attachment dimensions are thought to provide the most realistic representation of attachment orientation (Brennan, Clark & Shaver, 1998; Fraley, Waller & Brennan, 2000), and it is suggested by these researchers that attachment categories, whilst providing parsimonious statistical data analysis, may be a less realistic indication of any given individual’s attachment orientation, as individuals tend to engage in a variety of attachment behaviours, which may not adhere strictly to one particular style. However, in research comparing attachment classification via underlying dimensions with attachment categories measured with Hazan and Shaver’s (1987) categorical attachment instrument, Morrison, Goodlin-Jones and Uquiza (1997) found that the
two measurement methods returned similar classifications which were statistically significant. In further research comparing the four prototype system of classification developed by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) with the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI: Main, Kaplan & Casidy, 1985), and Hazan and Shaver’s (1987) three category measure, Bartholomew and Shaver (1998) found that there was significant convergence between the measures.

In research to explore the reliability and stability of attachment patterns over time, Scharfe and Bartholomew (1994) assessed participants with both a categorical measure and continuous ratings via three different methods, self-report, partner-report and semi structured interview at two separate times eight months apart. They found evidence for the relative stability of attachment classification over time, and across methods, with all correspondence between time one and time two classification into an attachment category above 64%, with the exception of preoccupied males who showed only 50 % correspondence. They found that overall, structured interview was the most stable assessment method over time, followed by partner-report, and then self-report, however all three methods were found to result in significantly similar attachment ratings. The interview technique (The Peer Attachment Interview), is based on the interviewers rating the participants according to the participants’ match with one of four prototypes, as set out by Bartholomew & Horowitz (1991). There was considerable agreement between four independent
coders who each rated the interview. Further analysis provided evidence that the underlying theoretical dimensions of view of self and view of other could reliably be calculated and measured by analysis of the interview measure. Similar results and generally slightly stronger evidence regarding stability of attachment classification over time have been found by a number of other researchers (Baldwin & Fehr, 1995; Dion & Dion, 1994; Keelan, Shaver & Brennan, 1992; Kirkpatrick & Hazan, 1994 Pistole, 1989; Senchak & Leonard, 1992). More generally, evidence of a significant level of convergence as well as some discrepancy has been found between dimensional, typological and categorical measures of attachment (for a review see Feeney & Noller, 1996; Simpson & Rholes, 1998). In combination, these results suggest that evidence for both stability and flexibility of individual attachment constructs and behaviours can be found over different times, relationships and circumstances.

Interestingly, all of these models remain remarkably strongly linked to Bowlby’s (1969, 1973, 1979, 1980) original conceptualisation of attachment theory. His theoretical basis has been extensively tested yet still remains a recognisable and valid way of assessing and understanding human functioning in relationships. Some of the variability observed may be due to measurement error as suggested by some researchers (e.g., Fraley & Waller, 1998; Fraley, Waller & Brennan, 2000), however a portion of the variance may also be due to actual fluctuations and variations in the
human behaviour under observation. According to Bowlby and Main (1990), attachment behaviours may be part of an habitual way of responding to relationships and may simultaneously tend to follow a trajectory depending on environment, from secure to hyperactivated (anxious and demanding) to deactivated (detached and withdrawn). This understanding of the functioning of attachment orientation in individuals may add explanatory power to the many and varied research findings so far.

4.5 Links between adult attachment and relationship satisfaction

Associations between insecure attachment, difficulty and distress in relationships, and lower overall relationship satisfaction have been well supported (Batholemew & Horowitz, 1991; Brennan & Shaver, 1995; Collins & Read, 1990; Feeney, 1999; 1994; 1996; Feeney & Noller, 1996; Feeney, Noller, & Callan, 1994; Fuller & Fincham, 1995; Lussier, Sabourin, & Turgoen, 1997). Insecure attachment was found to be associated with higher distress levels during stressful events (Feeney & Kirkpatrick, 1996; Mikulincer & Florian, 2001), and less reliance on support-seeking during stressful events (Fraley & Shaver, 1998; Simpson, Rholes & Nelligan, 1992). More specifically, avoidant attachment has been shown to be associated with more negative expectations about relationship partners (Collins, 1996; Collins & Read, 1990), and anxious attachment has been shown to be associated with more negative
self‐views (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Mikulincer, 1998) and higher levels of self‐attack (Morrison, Goodlin‐Jones & Uquiza, 1997).

Recent research by Meyers and Landberger (2002) explored the contribution of mediating or moderating variables, such as psychological distress and social support to the association between insecure attachment and relationship satisfaction. The research findings supported the notion that lower relationship satisfaction is directly associated with insecure attachment. In addition Meyers and Landberger found that secure attachment is generally associated with lower levels of psychological distress, which in turn is associated with greater relationship satisfaction. They suggest that individuals with a more secure attachment style are provided with an inner resource that functions as a buffer from psychological distress.

Similarly when examining the results pertaining to social support, Meyers and Landsberger found that avoidant attachment is associated with social isolation and that this in turn is associated with lower marital satisfaction. However the connections between these variables are arguably inextricable, in that what comprises secure attachment style is an ability to regulate affective experience through interdependence with others so that psychological distress is reduced. Further, a key component of avoidant attachment behaviour is a reluctance to trust and rely upon others in times of wellness or distress, so that affect can be regulated via internal controls rather than via interaction with others.
Research by Feeney (1999) has suggested that both attachment style and emotional control variables predicted relationship satisfaction with equal validity, and with relative independence of one another, which once again supported the notion that there is a strong and direct link between insecure attachment and relationship satisfaction, combined with contributions arising from other variables. Feeney found that insecure attachment was associated with greater control of both positive and negative emotion, regardless of whether it was partner related or not. In the same study, Feeney found insecure attachment to be associated with less frequent and intense experience of positive emotion, linked specifically with low comfort with closeness, a variable associated with dismissive and fearful attachment. Insecure attachment was also found to be associated with more frequent and intense experience of negative emotion, linked specifically with high anxiety over relationships, a variable associated with preoccupied or anxious attachment.

In another study into the effects of attachment orientation on intimate relationships Morrison, Goodlin-Jones and Uquiza (1997) found that individuals classified into different attachment groups described their relationships differently in terms of the levels of attack and control they experienced. This study used a three group attachment classification system similar to the Hazan and Shaver (1987) model. The individuals classified into the secure attachment group reported less enacting of attacking or protesting behaviours in their relationships than individuals in either of
the insecure attachment groups, and more submission than individuals classified avoidant. Individuals classified secure depicted their partner as less likely to attack them, and more likely to be submissive to them than individuals classified avoidant, and were less likely to report self-attack than individuals classified into either of the insecure attachment groups. Individuals classified avoidant were less likely to self-attack than individuals classified anxious/ambivalent. This research suggests that insecure attachment would be associated with greater levels of Gottman’s (1994, 1999) four horsemen (criticism, contempt, defensiveness and stonewalling) as these behaviours are often experienced in a context where a person is either attacking or defending. Interestingly these four horsemen are not submissive behaviours, which is the type of behaviour found by Morrison et al. to be associated with secure attachment orientation. The above cited research results support the overall link between insecure attachment and lower relationship satisfaction whilst they add some insight into the underlying associated variables and processes which may also contribute to this outcome.

In research exploring links between relationship satisfaction, attachment and mediating variables Morrison, Urquiza, and Goodlin-Jones (1997) found that perceptions of controlling and affiliative interaction mediated the strength of the association between attachment characteristics and relationship satisfaction. In subsequent research, Tucker and Anders (1999) found that attachment style appears
to influence the accuracy of interpersonal perception, which in turn impacts on relationship satisfaction. Tucker and Anders found that accuracy in interpreting one’s partner’s feelings about the relationship differed according to attachment style. Feeney, Noller and Callan (1994) suggested that insecurely attached individuals may distort, deny or ignore relationship-relevant material, which then leads to lower accuracy of partner perception. The notion that perception and interpretation of interaction and behaviour is an important component of relationship satisfaction has been indicated by a number of studies (Gottman, 1993; Gottman & Porterfield, 1991; Morrison, et.al., 1997). Thus the impact of insecure attachment on relationship satisfaction can be seen to manifest in layers of different behaviours associated with different aspects of attachment behaviour, which appears to differ in systematic patterns according to attachment orientation.
Chapter 5: Links between attachment theory and Gottman’s theories

Individuals with a more secure attachment style tend to hold more positive views of both self and other (e.g., Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Feeney & Noller, 1996) and therefore tend to display a greater ability to tolerate and cope with interpersonal distress, believing themselves to be sufficiently competent and loveable, and believing that other people can be competent, reliable and trustworthy. As a result these individuals may tend to either not display the characteristics Gottman (1994, 1999) describes as problematic, or respond to them differently if they do arise within their relationships. Gottman (1994) noted that non distressed couples exhibited a reduced tendency to reciprocate in kind when one partner displayed negative behaviour, resulting in a shorter continuance of negativity between the two partners in a relationship in the event of a negative interchange. This is consistent with the behaviour of individuals with secure attachment orientation.

5.1 Gottman’s conflict resolution styles and attachment theory

With regard to conflict resolution style, there are two streams of research findings indicative of possible links between attachment theory and Gottman’s atheoretical observational research findings. First, there is a possible link between differences in the ratio of positive to negative interaction found to be associated with different relationship outcomes by Gottman (1994), and differences in rates of positive and negative interaction found by attachment researchers to be linked with variation
in attachment security (e.g., Morrison et al., 1997). Gottman found that a ratio of five positive to one negative interaction was necessary to maintain functional levels of satisfaction and well being in couple relationships. Insecure attachment has been found to be associated with a higher tendency to have negative expectations of partner, and negative self-views. For example the model proposed by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) was based on the concept that attachment style differed according to variation in level of positive and negative concept of self and others. In addition, Feeney (1994) found that insecure attachment was related to more negative affect. This suggests that insecure attachment behaviours may be higher in negative content, thus disrupting the positive to negative ratio Gottman found to be pivotal in differentiating between distressed and non-distressed couples.

Second, the tendency of an individual to use one of the conflict resolution styles may be directly associated with their attachment orientation. Gottman’s (1994, 1999) principle assertions regarding conflict resolution within relationships were that the specific style of conflict resolution was not as important in considering relationship outcomes as whether partners are well enough matched in their preferred conflict resolution style to ensure that both operate within a similar framework. However, subsequent research has raised questions as to whether these assertions are as straightforward as they initially appear. Holman and Jarvis (2003) found that volatile conflict resolution style was related to significantly lower relationship quality and
higher levels of marital distress indicators, that is, Gottman’s (1994) “four horsemen”,
than validating conflict resolution style; and that avoidant conflict resolution style was
also associated with significantly higher levels of relationship distress indicators and
therefore lower relationship quality than validating conflict resolution style.

Gottman and Levenson (2002) found that too much negative affect in a couple
with a volatile conflict resolution style, or too little positive affect in a couple with an
avoidant conflict resolution style tends to be associated with poor relationship
outcomes, culminating in a higher incidence of separation and divorce amongst these
couples over the long term trajectory of marriage. Gottman, Murray, Swanson, Tyson
and Swanson (2002) explored mathematical modelling of marital interaction and
suggested that each of the three stable styles of conflict resolution may potentially risk
developing interactional styles associated with marital distress and dissolution rather
than stability and satisfaction if the characteristic ways of interacting associated with
each became unbalanced in terms of positive to negative interaction ratio.
Interestingly, Gottman et al. (2002) noted that the unbalancing of the positive to
negative ratio can occur as a result either of the marital interactions and/or as a result
of individual differences in the affective tone of the starting point for either individual.
The affective tone is referred to as a “set point” around which individuals will
fluctuate, described as an habitual affective style which may tend to be more or less
positive/optimistic or negative/pessimistic relating to concepts of self and of others.
According to Gottman et al. (2002) this combination of two people’s set points form the basis around which marital interaction is developed. Along with variations between individuals regarding their set point, Gottman et al. also present some evidence to suggest that there are individual differences in emotional inertia, which refers to the rate at which a given individual will change his or her frame of mind. Gottman has suggested that for some couples the set point to which they seem to return may be quite low in terms of positivity, thereby constantly returning the relationship to an interactional style that cannot maintain a functional positive to negative ratio. When this is combined with a high rate of emotional inertia it becomes difficult for couples to maintain sufficient positivity in their interactions for the marriage to be stable or satisfactory. These findings fit with the premise of attachment theory which suggests that an individual will have a characteristic attachment orientation to which they constantly tend to return.

The above research may indicate that whilst the three different conflict resolution styles established by Gottman (1994) can function well enough to provide a way of maintaining relationships, there may be qualitative differences or heightened risk of relationship problems associated with particularly the volatile and avoidant styles when compared with the validating style. These findings present a similar scenario to the one associated with differences in attachment orientation, in that insecure attachment will not necessarily preclude people from being involved in long
term relationships but may heighten their difficulties within their relationship as well as heighten the risk that the relationship will be less satisfying or stable.

More specific examination of the attributes of the different conflict resolution styles suggests further possible links with attachment behaviours. Volatile conflict resolution style is denoted by Gottman (1994, 1999) as a tendency to state all grievances openly and relatively spontaneously. Also individuals using a volatile conflict resolution style will tend to use negative interchanges to try to influence their partners. Their expectation is that a conversation or debate, which may be quite loud, passionate, and forcefully presented will follow, and the process will end with some kind of resolution. These behaviours demonstrate a high need to maintain proximity, gain reassurance and agreement from the partner and generally remain engaged until the threat to the relationship created by the conflict has passed. This kind of expression which is a mixture of high demand, argumentativeness and clinginess is often associated with anxious/ambivalent attachment (Ainsworth et al., 1978); or the dimensions of anxiety over relationships (Brennan, Clark & Shaver, 1998; Feeney, Noller & Callan, 1994); or hyperactivation of the attachment system (Main, 1990; Morrison et al., 1997) in the attachment literature. Conversely, avoidant conflict resolution style is described as a way of dealing with disagreements that requires very little input from the partner. There is often an awareness of the differences accompanied by a reduction of focus on areas of disagreement in the relationship, and
a tendency to deal with these differences by way of minimisation and withdrawal into the self. This is consistent with an inclination toward self-reliance and mistrust of others associated with an avoidant (Ainsworth et al., 1978) or dismissive (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) attachment style; or high avoidance of relationships (Brennan, Clark & Shaver, 1998), low “comfort with closeness” (Feeney, Noller & Callan, 1994), or deactivation of the attachment system (Main, 1990; Morrison et al., 1997) all indicative of avoidant attachment style.

5.2 Gottman’s “four horsemen” and attachment theory

“The four horsemen” described by Gottman (1994, 1999): criticism, contempt, defensiveness and stonewalling, can all be interpreted as parts of the repertoire of attachment driven behaviour. Extrapolating from the research findings, insecure attachment may be associated with higher levels of the “four horsemen” via the following behavioural and attitudinal associations.

Individuals who are high in the dimensions associated with an avoidant or dismissive style of attachment may tend to be highly critical and contemptuous of others as they tend to have a poor view and low expectations of others (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Feeney & Noller, 1996). Criticism and contempt may be defensive responses associated with avoidant attachment behaviours intended to minimize or deny the possibility of receiving care from others, thereby avoiding the possibility of experiencing disappointment or rejection. Defensiveness and stonewalling behaviour
may tend to be used by fearful or dismissively attached individuals in the belief that others cannot be trusted to comfort or help, or offer any useful feedback regarding them (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Brennan & Shaver, 1995; Collins & Read, 1990; Feeney, 1999; Feeney & Noller, 1996). Additionally defensiveness would assist an avoidantly attached individual to repress or deny the input from the partner in order to avoid the discomfort of negative emotional experiences such as perceiving the self as faulty. Any complaints may be interpreted as an attack on an already fragile self. Even though dismissive attachment has been found to be associated with a positive view of self it has been associated with behaviours that defend against any input to the contrary, often through repressive behaviour (Mikulincer & Orbach, 1995).

All of the four horsemen, stonewalling in particular, could be seen as part of the hyperactivation and deactivation of the attachment system suggested by Main (1990) and Dozier and Kobak (1992). Main suggested that deactivation of the attachment system is associated with avoidant attachment and that hyperactivation is associated with anxious attachment. Dozier and Kobak found that physiological signals such as galvanic skin response indicated that avoidantly attached individuals employed denial and diversion tactics to distract themselves from acknowledging any reaction to memories of attachment figures from childhood. In effect these results demonstrated evidence that stonewalling was more common amongst individuals with a tendency towards avoidant attachment style. This response fits conceptually
with the notion that avoidant attachment may be related to an increased tendency to use stonewalling as a defence against feeling negative emotions when couples are engaged in conflict. Gottman (1994) also found evidence of elevated physiological arousal in seemingly unperturbed defensive and stonewalling participants in his research.

Anxious or preoccupied attachment tends to be associated with a belief that one will never be loved enough, therefore a partner may be continually or overly criticised or held in contempt for not fulfilling this need. Contempt may be experienced by an anxiously attached person as a result of perceiving and believing that whilst partners are capable of supplying great support and nurture, they are not close, present and available enough, and they could and should be. Therefore the person high in anxious attachment may feel critical and contemptuous of their partner when he or she doesn’t measure up. In research exploring conflict in close relationships, Simpson, Rholes and Phillips (1996) found that individuals who were more anxious/ambivalent in their attachment style displayed less positive regard for their partners, and less positivity about the future of the relationship following a discussion of a major relationship problem than either secure or avoidantly attached individuals.

Initially these research findings may appear to contradict the notion put forward by Bartholmew and Horowitz (1991) that anxious or preoccupied attachment
in individuals is associated with positive beliefs about their partner in their intimate relationships. However, theoretically it may be precisely because of this belief in the value and ability of the partner to provide succour, that angry feelings may tend to be experienced by the anxiously attached individual when their partner does not provide the nurture they believe could and should be possible. In addition these findings demonstrate the ambivalent aspect of this style of attachment. That is, it is possible for an individual to simultaneously hold a belief that their partner is more important, capable and valuable than them, and is very important and valuable to them, and yet also feel anger and contempt for them. This may occur because the anxiously attached person idealises their partner and exaggerates their abilities; therefore they feel angry and frustrated when the partner does not live up to the ideal portrayal of them.

Similar to avoidantly attached individuals, anxiously attached individuals may find it difficult to tolerate complaints about themselves, as they tend to have negative self‐views, and may therefore tend to shield their fragile sense of self with defensiveness. In addition anxious attachment may be associated with defensive counter‐complaining, as anxiously attached individuals are often quite dissatisfied with the level of care demonstrated by their partner (e.g., Feeney & Noller, 1996; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). It is unlikely that anxious attachment is associated with stonewalling, since anxious attachment has been found to be associated with high self
disclosure, and difficulty suppressing negative emotions (Mikulincer & Nachshon, 1991).

5.3 Attachment style and abuse in relationships

In a study exploring domestic violence and attachment style, Babcock, Jacobson, Gottman and Yerington (2000) found that violence used by preoccupied males was associated with fear of abandonment, whereas violence used by dismissive males was associated with need for control. Interestingly, in the same study, which contrasted non-violent unhappily married men with violent married men, it was found that 74% of the violent men were classified into one of the insecure attachment categories, compared with thirty eight percent of the non-violent men. This is a stark example of the powerful and important influence attachment style may have on marital relationships and the differences in behaviours that different attachment orientations may affect. Similarly, Bartholomew, Henderson and Dutton (2001) found links between insecure attachment, particularly preoccupied and fearful attachment, and involvement in abusive relationships as both a recipient of abuse and as a perpetrator. Bowlby (1982) suggested that real or imagined threats of rejection, separation, or abandonment by partner can precipitate violent behaviour in insecurely attached individuals, whose histories have made them especially susceptible to anxiety and fears related to loss of the relationship. This suggests that attachment style may play an important part in how marital distress manifests.
5.4 Summary

Different attachment styles tend to be associated with systematically different behavioural tendencies in relationships. Some of these appear to fit with the behaviours identified by Gottman (1994, 1999) as important indicators of differences in marital outcomes. For example, Feeney et al. (1994) found that anxiety over attachment issues appeared to be the fundamental basis of a variety of negative and destructive patterns of communication in relationships.

However, in contrast to Gottman’s (1994, 1999) research, which focuses quite extensively on relationship outcomes, the majority of studies into attachment style tend to focus more on the attributes associated with different styles of attachment behaviour in individuals rather than the associated outcomes. For example, Mikulincer and Nachson (1991) found that avoidant attachment orientation was associated with lower levels of self-disclosure than anxious or secure attachment orientation; however, no further evidence linking this finding to probable relationship outcomes as a result of this tendency was presented. These and numerous other research findings linking attachment insecurity with less successful relationship behaviours and outcomes suggest that these two streams of research into intimate relationships may be linked.
Chapter 6: The influence of gender on marital interaction

According to Gottman (1994, 1999), gender differences tend to be relatively small in couples where their relationship is fairly stable and there is higher marital satisfaction, and become more pronounced as conflict within the marriage intensifies and stability and satisfaction decrease. In studies exploring gender and attachment, significant differences between males and females tend to be associated with insecure attachment orientation, whereas secure attachment orientation tends to be associated with very little difference between males and females (e.g., Feeney & Noller, 1996; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994).

According to Acitelli and Young (1996), there are differences in the way men and women think about relationships and in the way in which they perceive themselves in their relationships. In research investigating the extent to which men and women differ in their spontaneous discussion of their marital relationship in response to open-ended questions about their life since marriage, Acitelli (1992) found that women chose to speak more about their relationship than men. According to research into content and incidence of thought about relationships conducted by Burnett (1987) men tend to be interested in forming, keeping and maintaining relationships, but less concerned about what goes on within the relationship than women, who tend to be more concerned with relationship quality, events and experiences. In a review and summary of available research, Acitelli and Young
concluded that women tend to think more about relationships than men do, and their thoughts and analyses of relationships tend to be more complex than those of men.

6.1 Gender differences according to Gottman

According to Gottman (1994, 1999), gender differences become apparent in couple relationships when they are triggered by intense conflict. These differences tend to be in the areas of attributional processes, physiological processes and physiological recovery.

Attributional processes refer to processes in which partners assess, interpret and react to each other’s behaviour, Gottman (1994, 1999) found that some of the processes are specifically related to females and some to males. According to Gottman, it is essential to the long term stability of a relationship that the female be able to inject humour, soothing and caring into conflict interactions relating to a difficult relationship problem. In relationships where this is absent in the female partner, marital outcomes tend to be poorer. In order to be able to do this in the course of a difficult discussion involving conflict, the female partner needs to be able to attribute her partner’s behaviour as either neutral or positive, rather than negative. For example, Gottman found in observational research that if a female is able to see her male partner’s anger during a conflict conversation as information, and attribute it as a neutral interaction rather than attributing it negatively as a personal attack, it is more likely that there will be a stable marital outcome over the ensuing years.
Gottman also found that males’ attributional processes during conflict interactions with their female partners appeared to impact on the outcome of the relationship, in that males who were able to accept influence from their partners were more likely to be in stable successful relationships at followup.

Gottman (1994, 1999) also found gender differences in physiological responses to conflict in relationships with the finding that men remain physiologically vigilant longer than women following an unpleasant marital conflict. According to Gottman, in conflict situations men are more likely to indulge in distress-maintaining thoughts thereby becoming more aroused and remaining so, whereas women tend to rehearse relationship enhancing thoughts thereby soothing and calming their physiological reactions. Gottman has proposed that these differences form part of the evolutionary heritage of the human species (see Gottman, 1999 p 81).

With regard to the “four horsemen” marital distress indicators (criticism, contempt, defensiveness and stonewalling), Gottman (1994, 1999) found evidence of some gender differences in the behaviours of criticism and stonewalling, with men recording higher rates of stonewalling behaviour than women, and women recording higher rates of criticism than men. Gottman suggests that this may also relate to physiological differences between males and females, in that males may tend to stonewall in an attempt to keep control of their physiological arousal levels (which tend to remain higher for longer than women) during conflict.
6.2 Gender differences in adult attachment

Initial research conducted into adult attachment style, using a three category measure, suggested overall attachment style classification did not tend to differ according to gender, that is, each style tended to comprise approximately equal numbers of men and women (e.g., Brennan, Shaver & Tobey, 1991; Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). These findings are consistent with a lack of gender differences in frequency of attachment styles in studies of infant attachment (Feeney & Noller, 1996). Subsequently, measures of attachment designed to capture and report on different ways of expressing a particular attachment style were developed, and it is with these measures that complex and somewhat contradictory gender differences in expression of attachment styles have been recorded.

The two dimensional, four group attachment model based on the view of self and view of other, developed by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) appears to be somewhat more sensitive to gender differences than the three category model. In a study which required participants to endorse one of the four attachment categories established by Bartholomew and Horowitz, that is, secure, preoccupied, dismissive and fearful, Brennan and Shaver (1995) found that men endorsed the dismissive style with much greater frequency than women, and women endorsed the fearful style more often than men. It is interesting to note that both these attachment styles would most likely be classified into the avoidant attachment style using a three-category
measure. In other studies using this four group model measured on continuous scales rather than via endorsement of a most typical category, it has been found that male mean scores on dismissive attachment were significantly higher than female scores, whereas female mean scores on preoccupied attachment were significantly higher than male scores (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1994).

Using the dimensions of anxiety over relationships (Anxiety), and comfort with closeness (Closeness), Feeney et al. (1994) found gender differences in the relationships between attachment style, relationship satisfaction, and communication. Their results suggested different associations for men and women, of the two attachment dimensions with communication, conflict and relationship satisfaction measures. Their results provided evidence that for men, comfort with closeness was a far greater contributor to variance in the relationship function variables than anxiety; whereas the reverse appeared to be the case for women. It was found that for men, comfort with closeness was positively related to broad domains of relationship functioning such as relationship satisfaction and constructive communication processes, but for women this dimension was positively related only to accuracy at decoding and dealing constructively with neutral and negative nonverbal messages. The same study found that for women, anxiety was negatively related to relationship satisfaction, and communication quality and positively related to ratings of
domination and conflict; whereas for men, anxiety over relationships was related to elevated difficulty in decoding wives’ messages and negative conflict patterns, but was not significantly related to measures of communication quality. The researchers noted the reversal of the pattern of closeness being most relevant to men and anxiety being most relevant to women when it came to decoding of each other’s messages.

In further research into the relationship of gender, attachment style and attachment stability, Kirkpatrick and Davis (1994) found that avoidant men rated their relationships more negatively than anxious or secure men, and anxious women rated their relationships more negatively than avoidant or secure women. Further, Kirkpatrick and Davis found that this did not necessarily mean that their relationships were unstable or did not endure. They found that avoidant men paired with anxious or secure women, or anxious women paired with avoidant or secure men did not experience a significantly different relationship stability outcome from matched secure partners. Interestingly, Kirkpatrick and Davis also found that their sample did not contain any couples where both were avoidant or both were anxious. This suggests that specific combinations of insecure attachment behaviours may be complementary in relationships for some couples.

The results of these two studies suggest a pattern of differences between men and women as to which dimension is more prominently and significantly related to qualitative differences in their relationships. It would appear that men differ from
women in the effect that their endorsement of the avoidant attachment style (Hazan & Shaver, 1987), or low levels of the dimension of comfort with closeness (Feeney, et al., 1994) or high levels of the avoidance dimension (Brennan, Clark & Shaver, 1998) has on their relationships. Women appear to differ from men in the effect that their endorsement of the anxious/ambivalent attachment style (Hazan & Shaver) or high levels of the anxiety over relationships dimension (Brennan, Clark & Shaver; Feeney, et al.) has on their relationships. These results suggest that meaningful indicators of distress or satisfaction manifest on different attachment related dimensions for men and women.

In total, the above research findings present some seemingly paradoxical results which hint at the complexity of attachment behaviours. Whilst elevated avoidance or lower comfort with closeness in men, and elevated anxiety in women were each related to more negative assessments of the relationship (Collins & Read, 1990; Feeney, et al., 1994; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994), elevation on these dimensions was also found to be unrelated to relationship stability (Kirkpatrick & Davis). Speculations about these and other similar findings have led to the suggestion that the longer a couple stay together the more they adapt their attachment behaviours to enable the relationship to continue, since it has been found that there will be an alteration of a couple’s attachment style over time.
Research evidence has pointed consistently to a tendency for those who are low in closeness to be involved in relationships with those who are high in anxiety and the results tend to be skewed in the direction that the males are more commonly the more avoidant partner, that is, low in closeness, and the females tend to be the more anxious partner (Collins & Read 1990; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994; Simpson, 1990). Feeney and Noller (1996) suggest that these findings may be aligned with traditional sex-role stereotypes in which men are expected to be less concerned with the maintenance of relationships and more concerned with worldly achievements and the gaining of competence and independence in society, whilst women are expected to be the caretakers of relationships, more concerned with home and family, and more inclined to be dependent on men to augment their life in the wider community.

6.3 Gender differences: Links between adult attachment theory and Gottman’s theory

The above findings relating to gender differences in attachment behaviour are quite congruent with the gender differences outlined by Gottman (1999). The finding that low levels of anxious attachment may be protective of relationships for women fits with Gottman’s findings that a female’s ability to inject humour into difficult conflict interactions, soothe their partner, and attribute their partner’s behaviour neutrally or positively rather than negatively, is important in de-escalating conflict, and is also related to more positive relationship outcomes. Feeney et al. (1994) found
that elevated anxious attachment levels in women were related to the most destructive and negative communication patterns in couple relationships, often linked with behaviours such as demanding, criticising and hypervigilant concentration on any faults in the relationship and their partner’s behaviour. Gottman has extensively explored the detrimental effects of such intense and prolonged negativity in relationships. Consistent with the results in the attachment studies, Gottman has found that women tend to exhibit more use of criticism than men. Additionally, the finding that low levels of avoidant attachment (or high closeness) may be protective of relationships for men fits with Gottman’s (1999) finding that men who are comfortable listening to and accepting their partner’s influence are more successful in relationships.

Furthermore, the attachment research shows that elevated levels of anxiety in women and elevated levels of avoidance in men are not necessarily associated with relationship breakdown and can be quite stable over time. These findings are also consistent with Gottman’s (1994, 1999) data. Elevated levels of avoidant attachment in men may be related to a tendency to regulate high physiological arousal which may, under some circumstances, protect against the expression of overwhelming negative emotion by men, which in turn may enhance women’s ability to de-escalate conflict and soothe their partner in times of high distress or unpleasant relationship conflict. Additionally, the finding in the attachment research that women tend to have higher
levels of anxious attachment than men, is consistent with Gottman’s research findings that it is beneficial for the woman in the couple to take on the role of caretaker for the relationship. Therefore greater anxiety about the relationship is more adaptive for women than greater avoidance and detachment. Gottman found that in relationships where women are either unwilling, or unable to take on the role of softening difficult or unpleasant relationship interactions, the outcome tends to be much poorer, often culminating in low stability and satisfaction and ultimately separation or divorce. Findings by attachment researchers such as Kirkpatrick & Davis (1994) that the outcomes for avoidant women and anxious men tend to be stable or satisfactory only when they are paired with secure partners who would be more able to compensate for these individuals acting contrary to cultural stereotypes also fits with Gottman’s research.

Heavey, Layne and Christensen (1993) found further support for gender differences in marital interaction in research exploring the demand/withdraw pattern in couple marital interaction. The results of this study suggested that women generally tend to be more demanding as well as more likely to bring up an issue requesting change in the relationship, and men tend to be more withdrawing. Results showed that interactions in which men were demanding and negative and women were withdrawing were linked with increases in wives’ satisfaction at a one year follow-up, whereas the reverse pattern of interaction where women were demanding
and men withdrew was associated with decreases in wives’ satisfaction at one year follow-up. This research fits with notions of the potentially negative impact of women’s anxious attachment and men’s avoidant attachment, as well as the sex-role stereotyping that makes this behaviour pattern somewhat common.

The review of the literature above still presents some almost contradictory research findings. In contemplating the overarching meaning of the gender differences that have been found and how they relate to each other it appears that the findings of attachment theory and Gottman’s (1993, 1994, 1999) marital research largely complement each other and offer mutual support. However, what seems to emerge is a network of behaviours which differ across gender in subtle and complex ways, apparently aiming to maintain delicate balances of proximity, comfort and support to each partner. It may be that certain behaviours such as greater female responsibility for caretaking the conflictual interactions in the relationships have a critical point at which a positive in the relationship begins to function as a negative, in other words, whilst a little is good, more is not necessarily better. Gottman’s assertion that a strict five positive to one negative interaction ratio must be maintained may apply here.

According to numerous couple psychotherapy theorists (e.g., Clulow, 2001; Crowell & Dominique, 2001) the underlying aim of the behaviours is to provide a sufficiently secure base from which each member of the couple can function
effectively in the extended family, community, and larger society, and to which each can return to receive some kind of succour. It would appear that this may be achieved slightly differently for men and women.
Chapter 7: Perception of self and partner

7.1 Accuracy of perception of partner

In a study comparing perceptions of own and partner’s attachment characteristics, Ruvolo and Fabin (1999) suggested that because attachment orientation is formed so early in life, at an age where most human cognition is preconscious; and attachment style is a part of human behaviour which is relevant to all individuals; it is likely to be a filter through which individuals assess others both consciously and unconsciously. Ruvolo and Fabin further suggested that interactions with a partner tend to be affected by perception of partner, and that perceptions are affected by information internal to the individual doing the perceiving. As individuals are particularly attuned to recognising traits in others, which they perceive in themselves, their perceptions of their partners may be affected by perceptions of themselves. Thus marital interaction is likely to be affected by interpretations of behaviour by each individual, which are a blend of genuine characteristics and behaviour arising from within the perceiver, as well as imagined or projected characteristics and behaviours arising from within their partner. In support of this notion, results of research by Ruvolo and Fabin suggested that both men and women project their own attachment orientations onto their partners. The results of their study also suggested that this effect was increased as the level of emotional intimacy between partners increased. This increase would suggest that projection and
perceived similarity are somehow adaptive in relationships and may enhance positive marital outcomes.

This research adds further support to the notion of ‘social projection’ first put forward by Allport (1924), in which it was suggested that opinions, beliefs or feelings which arise within an individual are ascribed to another person or group of people. A somewhat similar notion described as self-expansion was proposed by Aron and Aron (1986), who suggested that in close relationships, an individual becomes psychologically identified with, and united with the partner. In subsequent research, Aron, Aron, Tudor and Nelson (1991) proposed that in close relationships an expansion of the self-concept occurs to varying degrees, and that the partner becomes incorporated into the individual’s self-concept. According to Ruvolo and Fabin (1999) projection could be the result of individuals using their own views as a source of information about others, or it may serve the purpose of lending support to the individual’s own beliefs. These theories suggest that human relationships and interactions are complicated by self-concept becoming blended with perception of partner so that accurate assessment of own and partner’s contribution to interactions may become unclear, and perceived similarity or dissimilarity may be overestimated by some people. Interestingly, it appears that some degree of this blending of perception of self and other, and exaggeration of similarity may be adaptive in relationships and serve to enhance relationship outcomes.
7.2 Partner similarity

Research evidence has indicated that generally intimate relationship partners will desire to believe themselves to be somewhat similar to their partner, and this often results in them believing they are more similar to their partners than they actually are (Acitelli, Douvan, & Veroff, 1993; Acitelli, Kenny & Weiner, 2001; Ickes & Simpson, 1997; 2003; Kenny & Acitelli, 1994; 2001). Research into partner similarity has suggested that similarity between partners is associated with positive relationship attributes such as stronger coping mechanisms and coherence between family members (e.g., Antonovski & Sourani, 1988), enhanced interpersonal attraction (e.g., Berscheid & Walster, 1979) and increased happiness in marital relationship (e.g., Allen & Thompson, 1984). However, subsequent research has suggested that some of the similarity reported in prior research is affected by partner perceptions of assumed similarity (Kenny & Acitelli, 2001), broader community attitudes and gender role stereotyping (Kenny & Acitelli, 1994), rather than unique similarity between the two individuals of a couple, as many of the variables tested are highly susceptible to social influence. This means that a substantial portion of the variance in the attributes tested for similarity was found to be shared with all other research participants as well as a particular participant’s partner.

To attend to this confounding of the similarity measures, Kenny and Acitelli (1994) tested the effect of gender role stereotyping on the relationship between
similarity and marital satisfaction and found no evidence to support the link that had previously been proposed between marital satisfaction and partner similarity, once stereotyping had been accounted for. Kenny and Acitelli (1994) found that a statistically significant link was evident between husbands responding as typical husbands and marital satisfaction in both men and women. This result supported the notion that stereotyping explains a portion variance in similarity studies, where similarity of values and attitudes are measured.

In further research, Kenny and Acitelli (2001) tested the contribution of accuracy (of perception of partner) and bias (i.e., assumed similarity) to partner understanding and concluded that whilst both accuracy and bias interact together to produce understanding between relationship partners, bias effects were consistently stronger than accuracy effects. Kenny and Acitelli (1994; 2001) still found some evidence of actual partner similarity, albeit reduced, when stereotypical and socially influenced responding had been partitioned off. The notion proposed by them at the conclusion of their study (2001) was that a blend of actual and assumed similarity used to guess the partner’s perceptions leads to greater accuracy of partner perception because actual similarity enhances perceived similarity as individuals use their own perceptions and responses to guess their partner’s perceptions and responses, and their starting point is low, yet significant actual similarity.
7.3 Empathic Accuracy.

Empathic accuracy between partners is a slightly different, although related aspect of relationship functioning to similarity between relationship partners. Whereas similarity refers to actual or perceived similarities between partners, empathic accuracy refers to the ability of partners to accurately acknowledge and understand their partner’s thoughts and feelings regardless of how different they may be to their own. According to Ickes and Simpson (2003) the coordination of a relationship so that it functions effectively over time requires that the participants are relatively accurate in their assessment and understanding of their partner’s thoughts and feelings. Generally greater empathic accuracy is associated with more success in maintaining satisfactory relationships in comparison with individuals who are less accurate in their empathic responses and understandings of their partners. However, paradoxically there are some times when accuracy can be detrimental to the stability of a relationship, and in these cases evidence has been found that individuals will not seek to accurately understand their partner’s thoughts and feelings, and will be motivated to avoid knowing certain truths about their partners (e.g., Ickes & Simpson; Simpson, Ickes & Grich, 1999). Conversely, at times an individual may sacrifice relationship stability to satisfy a need to know something about their partner even when it will negatively affect the relationship. In research to test for this phenomenon Simpson, Orina and Ickes (2003) found that relationship-threatening discussions
between couples were associated with declines in feelings of closeness after the discussion.

7.4 Adult attachment, accurate self perception, empathic accuracy and partner similarity

Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) based their attachment measure on differences between individuals in their perceptions of self and other, and found that a systematic difference on these two dimensions allowed for a valid classification of individuals into differential attachment categories. Subsequently attachment research has consistently supported the notion of differences in self and other perception between different attachment orientations (see Feeney & Noller, 1996; Simpson & Rholes, 1998, for a review). However self and other perception when measured to classify individuals into attachment categories is usually assessed subjectively via self report measures, and the accuracy of the perceptions of self and other is not examined. Therefore a question of accuracy of self and other perception as a function of attachment orientation is posed.

In research linking adult attachment and empathic accuracy, Simpson, Ickes and Grich (1999) found that in comparison with secure or avoidant attachment, anxious-ambivalent (preoccupied) attachment tends to be associated with a greater tendency to seek out accurate information about the partner’s thoughts and feelings (empathic accuracy), even when it is detrimental to the relationship. This notion of needing a higher level of information about the partner is consistent with the notion of
hypervigilance as an attachment response indicative of anxious/preoccupied attachment behaviours (Main, 1990), and is also consistent with the notion of anxious/preoccupied attachment being associated with a positive view of other people and a negative view of the self (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). This incorporates a belief that the other’s thoughts and feelings are very important and need to be known and attended to, combined with a belief that the self is not as important or valuable as the other, as well as a fear that the other (partner) may be disenchanted with the self. From this research evidence it seems that different attachment orientations may impact systematically on the processes involved in empathic accuracy, thereby explaining some of the variance in individual perception.

In other research linking attachment and perception, Tucker and Anders (1999) found that men who were anxiously attached were more prone to inaccurate perception of their partner’s feelings about the relationship. These results supported similar findings of Feeney et al. (1994), who found that men who were more anxious over abandonment tended to show less accuracy in decoding their partner’s messages regardless of whether the messages were positive, negative or neutral in content, or in the affect with which they were delivered. These results appear to partially contradict those of Simpson, Ickes and Grich (1999) cited above. However as cited above, the results were found for men rather than women, which suggests a gender difference may be contributing to variations and contradictions in the existing body of research.
Feeney, et al. also found that women who were less comfortable with closeness in their relationship showed less accuracy in decoding their partner’s negative messages, which supports Main’s (1990) notion of deactivation of the attachment system, and further supports the notion of gender differences. All the above research findings are indicative that an individual’s attachment orientation may interfere with the accuracy of their perception of themselves and their partner, and that these differences may be influenced by the gender of the individual. Collectively, these findings suggest complex relationships between the effects of gender and attachment orientation on self and partner perception, and indicate a need for further research into this area.

7.5 Gottman’s theory, attachment and perception accuracy of self and other

The above research findings fit quite neatly with Gottman’s (1994, 1999) proposal that relationships tend to have poorer outcomes where the woman is less able to soothe and humour her partner, and therefore is less able to de-escalate difficult conflict conversations, and where a woman is less able to attribute her partner’s messages as neutral or positive information, rather than negative. Further, Gottman found that in relationships where men perceive the influence of their partner as unacceptable, and are resistant to it, relationship outcomes are poorer. These incidences may be related to differences in perception of the self and the partner, rather than actual differences in preference or ability.
In summary, the attachment literature suggests that attachment orientation plays a role in variance in self and partner perception (e.g., Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991), whilst Gottman’s (1994, 1999) research suggests that self and partner perception may impact on the ability of partners to interpret interaction constructively and soothe or resolve conflicts. These observations suggest a rationale for examining accuracy of self and partner perception by comparing the responses of partners to identical questions about themselves and their partner and testing this against attachment orientation as well as relationship satisfaction and distress indicators.
Chapter 8: The Current Study

8.1 Collecting data on marriage

8.1.1 Who do we study? An important aspect to be noted with regard to much of the research cited above is that with the exception of Gottman’s (1999; 1994; 1993a; 1993b) research, most of the other studies have tended to use university or college students as participants. Even where married couples have been recruited as participants (e.g., Feeney, Noller & Callan, 1994) or an attempt has been made to sample more mature participants (e.g., Morrison, Urquiza & Goodlin-Jones, 1997), the average ages of participants has been in their early twenties and length of relationships have tended to be a maximum of approximately five years and a modal length of relationship well under this (i.e. one to two years). This suggests that a gap in the research exists in the area of the study of longer term relationships amongst an older age group.

It is also important to note that the participants in studies exploring relationships (both the attachment research and Gottman’s research) are generally currently in a relationship (either marital or dating), therefore the data collated would necessarily be skewed in the direction of more competence in relationships, and more secure attachment behaviours. In this regard, Gottman’s research extends past that of attachment research in that it reports on longitudinal outcomes of relationships over
greater time periods making it possible to compare data collected from couples who eventually divorced with those who stayed together.

8.1.2 Measuring marital/relationship satisfaction. Another aspect of psychological research into marital relationships worthy of further consideration is that of marital satisfaction, the measures of which have tended to be global measures offering little detail as to the variables contributing to experiences of satisfaction or distress. There is some evidence that some unhappy marriages apparently offering little satisfaction remain stable regardless of the distress of the participants, whereas other marriages will end much more quickly in divorce if participants are unhappy and that this may be partially due to variance in attachment style (e.g., Davila & Bradbury, 2001). It may be beneficial to aim to understand differences between individuals in different aspects of marital satisfaction and how these may interact with attachment orientation.

8.2 Validation of research findings on Gottman’s conflict resolution styles

The first research aim of the current study was to explore Gottman’s (1994, 1999) assertions about conflict resolution style in marriage. According to Gottman, there are three different types of conflict resolution style which are associated with stable marital relationships providing partners are well matched and prefer the same style. Therefore, the current research aimed to confirm these findings by examining both the frequency of endorsement of the different CR styles amongst couples as well as patterns of matching on conflict resolution styles between couples. These
differences in CR style were tested for satisfaction of the marital relationships using Gottman’s marital distress indicators, “the four horsemen” as well as the Marital Satisfaction Inventory-Revised (MSI-R)

Additionally, the current study aimed to test and replicate the research of Holman and Jarvis (2003), who created a four prototype measure based on Gottman’s conflict resolution styles. The current study utilized this measure with the aim to test and replicate the prior results with a diverse Australian sample.

8.3 Exploration of attachment, the MSI-R and Gottman’s conflict resolution and marital distress indicators

The second research aim of the current study was to explore the links between adult attachment style and Gottman’s conflict resolution styles and marital distress indicators, as well as the association between adult attachment style, Gottman’s research findings, and MSI-R profiles. This aim was formulated to deepen the understanding of the effect of attachment style on marital functioning, and to establish whether specific patterns of adult attachment are systematically associated with specific aspects of marital satisfaction or distress as measured by each of these instruments. Additionally it was hoped that the examination of the links between attachment research, the MSI-R, and Gottman’s research might expand current knowledge of how these systems of understanding marital functioning relate to each other. A further aim related to adult attachment style was to establish whether,
similar to Gottman’s notion of matching in conflict resolution style, matching of adult attachment style affects marital satisfaction.

8.4 Exploring similarity and difference between relationship partners

The third research aim proposed to explore the notion of similarity and difference between partners potentially impacting marital relationships. There were two broad dimensions to this aim: first, actual difference and similarity between partners on attachment, marital satisfaction and conflict resolution style; and second, perceived difference and similarity between partners on these dimensions. The questionnaire used as a measuring tool in the present research requested that participants answer some of the questions first to reflect their own attitudes and behaviour, and second to reflect their partner’s attitudes and behaviour. This request for one partner’s reflections or thoughts about the other partner was included to explore the notion that individuals may differ in their self perception, the accuracy of their perception of their partner, and/or their partner’s awareness of them.

8.5 Gender related difference

The fourth research aim was to examine and compare the responses of marital partners to explore differences and similarities which may be gender related. For example, according to Gottman (1999) males and females differ in their tendency to engage in marital distress behaviours. Gottman claimed that females tend to criticize more often than males and males tend to stonewall more often than females. In
addition, some gender differences have been found in the attachment literature, particularly to do with communication behaviors and frequency of endorsement of particular attachment style (e.g., Feeney & Noller, 1996; Feeney, Noller & Callan, 1994; Simpson & Rholes, 1998). The current research was designed to test for gender differences in attachment style, self and partner perception, conflict resolution styles and marital satisfaction/distress.

8.6 Validation of research results with a different sample

Another stimulus for the current research were publications reporting empirical data largely collected in the United States of America in the case of Gottman’s research and the MSI-R, and in the case of attachment research, often surveying a young college graduate population in either the United States of America, Europe or Australia. The current study was designed to survey an Australian population of varied age and relationship experience to compare results across different ages and level of experience in relationships, in a different culture.

8.7 Exploring the effect of age and length of relationship on attachment dimensions and marital satisfaction.

The current research aimed to survey a wide range of participants with a broad variety of age and experience in marital style relationships. Prior research has suggested that changes occur over time in relationships, therefore an aim of the current research was to explore mean differences in levels of relationship
satisfaction/distress, conflict resolution and attachment variables as a function of length of relationship. An example of these time related differences was reported by Thomas, Fletcher and Lange (1997) who found that couple empathic accuracy decreased as length of marriage increased. They speculated that there may be less motivation to focus on understanding and interpreting the partner’s behaviours as the relationship seemed to endure, and that there had possibly been adjustments made in earlier years to tolerate each other’s divergent behaviours. As high empathic accuracy is associated with anxious attachment, it was considered desireable to test for decreases in anxious attachment as relationship length increases.

8.8 Research questions

With these aims in mind, the following research questions were posed. The questions relate to the combination of responses of the couple. First, is matching in conflict resolution style systematically related to attachment style? For example, do those with a secure attachment style tend to choose partners with a matching conflict resolution style? Or conversely, do those with a secure attachment style more successfully deal with the conflict created by a mismatch in conflict resolution style? Second, are particular combinations of attachment style in couples more successful in achieving stable and satisfying marriages? Third, are differences in accuracy of self perception and perception of intimate partner, as tested by the endorsement/corroboration of the relationship partner, related to systematic
difference in attachment style, marital satisfaction or conflict resolution style? Fourth, is attachment style related to different patterns of elevated scores on the dimensions of the MSI-R? Fifth, are Gottman’s marital distress indicators related to the dimensions of the MSI-R? Sixth, are there gender differences in patterns of conflict resolution and marital distress?

8.9 Hypotheses

With the above research questions in mind the following hypotheses were posed. Hypothesis 1(a): that less matching of conflict resolution style would be associated with higher rates of Gottman’s marital distress indicators, and higher scores on the MSI-R. Hypothesis 1(b): that lower levels of matching in conflict resolution style would be associated with higher levels of insecure attachment, that is the anxiety and avoidance adult attachment dimensions.

Hypothesis 2: that men would have higher mean levels of the avoidant attachment dimension than women; and that women would have higher mean levels of the anxious attachment dimension than men.

Hypothesis 3: that (a) participants with anxious/preoccupied attachment style would have higher levels of volatile conflict resolution style than participants with secure attachment style; and that (b) participants with secure attachment style would
have higher levels of validating conflict resolution style than participants with avoidant attachment style; and that (c) those with avoidant attachment style would have higher levels of avoidant conflict resolution style than participants with secure attachment; and finally that (d) individuals with insecure attachment would have higher levels of hostile conflict resolution style.

Hypothesis 4: that (a) women would have higher mean contempt and criticism scores than men; and (b) that men would have higher mean stonewalling scores than women.

Hypothesis 5: that secure adult attachment style, measured categorically, would generally be associated with lower rates of Gottman’s marital distress indicators as well as lower scores on the MSI-R than insecure attachment.

Hypothesis 6: that higher levels of both the avoidant attachment dimension and the anxious attachment dimension would be associated with higher levels of Gottman’s marital distress indicators in participants’ self assessment as well as their partner assessment.

Hypothesis 7: in keeping with prior research that shows moderate levels of similarity still in evidence after stereotyping and other bias effects have been accounted for (e.g., Acitelli et al., 2001), that relationship partners would be somewhat similar to one another as evidenced by moderate correlations between each partner’s self assessment on the Gottman (1994) marital distress indicators.
Hypothesis 8: that perceived similarity between partners would be greater than actual similarity, indicated by lower mean difference scores between self assessment and partner assessment than between self assessment of one partner and self assessment of the other on the Gottman (1999) marital distress indicator scales.

Hypothesis 9: that individuals classified into the secure or dismissive attachment groups, who tend to have a positive view of themselves in relation to others (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) would have greater perceived similarity, indicated by lower mean difference scores between their own self assessment and their partner assessment on the Gottman (1999) marital distress indicator scales, than individuals classified into the preoccupied or fearful attachment groups, who tend to have a negative view of themselves in relation to others.

Hypothesis 10: that individuals classified into the preoccupied attachment group would have greater accuracy of partner perception (empathic accuracy) indicated by lower mean difference scores between their partner assessment and their partner’s self assessment on the Gottman (1999) marital distress indicator scales, than individuals classified into the secure, dismissive or fearful attachment groups.

Hypothesis 11: that increased length of relationship would be associated with increased difference score between self assessment and partner’s assessment (e.g., husband’s self assessment and wife’s assessment of him) on the Gottman (1994, 1999) marital distress indicators, as empathic accuracy becomes less important with
increased length of relationships (Thomas, Fletcher & Lange, 1997); and that scores on anxious attachment would decrease as length of relationship increases, consistent with associations between empathic accuracy and anxious attachment.
Chapter 9: Method

9.1 Participants

The participants were 101 heterosexual couples (202 individuals) who were at the time of the data collection involved in a marriage style relationship. Ten of the couples (20 participants) were classified as a clinical sample as they were either recruited from a Melbourne based Government funded relationship counselling clinic where they had attended for marital counselling or indicated on their questionnaire that they had attended marital counselling in the past 12 months. The remaining 91 couples (non clinical sample) were recruited by undergraduate university students as part of the students’ participation in psychological research. The sample largely comprised the parents of these undergraduate psychology students.

Participants were aged between 19 and 76 years, with a mean age of 45 years for men and 42 years for women (SD 11.6 for men, 10.7 for women), median ages were 46 and 44 respectively. Mean length of current relationship was 19 years (SD 10.8), with a median of 22 years. Eighty-two of the couples stated that they were in a legally registered marriage.

Of the women, 45.5% stated that secondary school was their highest level of education, while 40.5% had tertiary qualifications, 7% a trade certificate and 7% an Associate Diploma. Similarly, of the men, 38.6% stated that secondary school was their highest level of education, while 35.6% had tertiary qualifications, 14.9% a trade
certificate and 6.3% an Associate Diploma. When asked about approximate annual family income 11% of the couples stated they earned less than $20,000, 22% stated they earned between 21,000 and $50,000, 33% stated they earned between $51,000 and $80,000, and 32% stated they earned more than $80,000. For 2% this data was missing.

Eighty-five percent of the men were employed, 6% were not employed, 5% were retired and for 4% this information was missing, while of the women 73.3% were employed, 22.8% were not employed and for 4% of this data was missing (the proportionally larger percentage of women not employed may possibly be due to no response provided for home duties).

9.2 Measures

A questionnaire comprising all inventories used to compile the data was printed. Research packs were collated, which included two questionnaires with matching numbers on the front, two prepaid envelopes to ensure each partner was able to fill in the questionnaire privately and seal and send it anonymously, and an information sheet answering questions such as “who will see the information?” “What if my partner doesn’t want to participate but I do?” The research packs were then distributed to individuals interested in taking part in the research to be filled out in private and returned in the prepaid envelope. A copy of the questionnaire is attached as Appendix A. A copy of the information sheet is attached as Appendix B.
Demographics. The questionnaire initially gathered data about the participants’ age, length of current relationship, whether the marriage was registered, sex, highest levels of education, employment status, annual family income, and whether they were currently involved in relationship counselling, or had been in the last 12 months.

Conflict resolution style. Conflict resolution style was measured using a four item measure developed by Holman and Jarvis (2003) from Gottman’s (1994, 1999) observational data regarding different couple-conflict resolution types. It is important to note that the hostile conflict resolution style is the fourth style in the measures, however this is not a stable conflict resolution style. The measure comprises four paragraphs, each describing one of the conflict resolution styles defined by Gottman: volatile, avoidant, validating and hostile (see Appendix A). Respondents were required to rate each of the paragraphs on two 5-point likert scales ranging from 1 = ‘Never’ to 5 = ‘Very often’. The first likert scale was answered according to how well the paragraph described their own behaviour, and the second likert scale was answered to indicate how well the paragraph described their partner’s behaviour.

Marital Distress/Satisfaction. Two measures were used to explore marital distress and satisfaction. First Gottman’s (1994b) measure of four indicators of marital distress (the four horsemen): criticism, contempt, defensiveness and stonewalling was administered. The measure comprises four sections posing questions describing behaviours characteristic of each type of distress. Participants answer yes or no to
indicate whether they tend to behave in the described manner, then answer again to indicate whether they thought their partner behaved in the described manner. The instruction at the beginning of this section asked respondents to think back to the last disagreement or discussion they had with their partner and then answer the questions with that in mind. The criticism scale contained 21 items. A sample item from the criticism scale was “I thought it was important to determine who was at fault.” The contempt scale contained 26 items. A sample item from the contempt scale was “When we were discussing an issue in our marriage, I couldn’t think of much of anything I admired in my partner.” The defensiveness scale contained 22 items. A sample item from the defensiveness scale was “When my partner complained I felt unfairly picked on”. The stonewalling scale contained 13 items. A sample item from the stonewalling scale was “When my partner complained I felt that I just wanted to get away from this garbage”.

The second measure of marital satisfaction/distress was the Marital Satisfaction Inventory-Revised (MSI-R, Snyder, 1997). This inventory consists of 150 items each requiring a yes/no response. It comprises thirteen scales, two of which are validity scales, inconsistency and conventionalization; and two which pertain exclusively to children of the couple, and are therefore not applicable to all participants, dissatisfaction with children, and conflict over children. The remaining nine scales are global distress, affective communication, problem-solving
communication, aggression, time together, disagreement about finances, sexual dissatisfaction, role orientation, and family history of distress. The MSI-R has been the subject of considerable research over the past fifteen years since formulation and in the current revised version is considered very reliable amongst a broad cross-section of the USA population in both clinical and community settings (Snyder, 2004). The scale was tested and standardised on a sample of 2040 American respondents with geographical, cultural and socio-economic diversity consistent with the wider American population. According to Snyder both reliability and validity of the inventory are high. Cronbach’s alpha scores for the scales (excluding inconsistency scale) range between .70 for dissatisfaction with children scale (DSC) to .93 for global distress scale (GDS), with a mean coefficient of .82.

The inconsistency scale (INC) is based on twenty pairs of items which contain related content. These items are constructed such that item content is either similar and should therefore be answered in the same direction, or dissimilar and should be answered in the opposite direction. An example of an inconsistency scale pair of items is item 16 “There are many things about our relationship that please me”, and 128 “I believe our relationship is reasonably happy”. Inconsistency score increases if the answers to these two items are different. A high inconsistency score may indicate that participants are answering in a random or careless way or may not understand item content.
The conventionalization scale (CNV) is based on ten items designed to indicate whether participants are responding in a socially desirable rather than a realistic manner. Two examples of items from the conventionalization scale are “My partner and I understand each other completely”, and “My partner occasionally makes me feel miserable”. Answering true to the first item and false to the second would add to conventionalization score. Low scores on CNV suggest negative distortion of the respondent’s appraisal of their relationship.

The global distress scale (GDS) is designed to measure overall dissatisfaction with the relationship. Item content relates to unfavourable comparison with others’ relationships and pessimism about the future of the relationship. According to Snyder (2002) it is a good single indicator of affect in the relationship. An example of an item from the GDS scale is “Even when I am with my partner I feel lonely much of the time”.

The affective communication scale (AFC) assesses an individual’s dissatisfaction with the level of affection and understanding expressed by their partner. Item content relates to lack of intimacy, mutual self disclosure, affection and support. An example of an item from the AFC scale is “It is sometimes easier to confide in a friend than in my partner”.

The problem-solving communication scale (PSC) evaluates the level of ineffective problem solving within the relationship. Item content relates to
overreacting to problems, difficulties discussing highly sensitive issues and an inability to resolve differences between partners. An example of an item from the PSC scale is “There are some things my partner and I just can’t talk about”.

The aggression scale (AGG) was designed to measure the extent of physical aggression and intimidation experienced by one partner from the other partner within the relationship. An example of an item assessing physical aggression is “My partner has slapped me”; an example of an item assessing intimidation is “I have worried about my partner losing control of his or her anger”.

The time together (TTO) scale aims to assess companionship between the couple by assessing time spent together in leisure activities, and targets lack of common interests as well as lack of shared leisure time. An example of an item evaluating time together is “I wish my partner shared a few more of my interests”.

The disagreement about finances scale (FIN) measures the disharmony within the relationship which can be attributed to financial concerns. Three types of concerns are targeted in the scale: general concerns regarding finances, lack of confidence in partner’s financial management and arguments over finances. An example of an item evaluating disagreement over finances is “I trust my partner with our money completely”.

The sexual dissatisfaction scale (SEX) evaluates feelings of dissatisfaction with either the quality or frequency of sexual activity. Three target areas are assessed:
general dissatisfaction, insufficient affection during sexual relations, and unhappiness with partner’s level of interest in sexual activity. An example of an item evaluating sexual dissatisfaction is “My partner seems to enjoy sex as much as I do”.

The role orientation scale (ROR) assesses an individual’s preference for a traditional versus a non-traditional orientation with regard to marital and parental gender roles. Areas targeted by the measure are division of child-care and household work, relative importance of each partner’s career and relative status and influence of each partner in relation to the other. An example of an item evaluating role orientation is “A man should be the head of the family”. This scale is the only one in the MSI-R which is not indicative of greater dissatisfaction as the score rises. It is used rather to denote difference between partners in their orientation, which may increase distress rather than elevated scores.

The family history of distress scale (FAM) indicates the extent of any disruption of relationships within the respondent’s family of origin. The scale measures disruption in the parents’ marriage, and amongst family members, as well as unhappiness in childhood. An example of an item evaluating family history of distress is “I was very anxious as a young person to get away from my family”.

The dissatisfaction with children scale (DSC) assesses parental concern regarding the well-being of their children, as well as the quality of the relationship between respondents and their children. Item content covers four areas: concerns
over child’s adjustment, feelings of disappointment with child-rearing, absence of positive interaction with children, and overt conflict with children. An example of an item evaluating dissatisfaction with children is “Rearing children is a nerve-wracking job”.

Finally, the conflict over children scale (CCR) evaluates the level of conflict between partners over child-rearing practices. Item content targets three areas: partner’s inadequate involvement with children, upset in the relationship due to child rearing, and disagreements between partners about discipline. An example of an item evaluating conflict over children is “My partner and I rarely argue about the children”.

Attachment Measures. Three attachment measures were administered in the current study. Firstly Brennan, Clark and Shaver’s (1998) multi item measure of adult romantic attachment was used. This measures two underlying dimensions, anxiety and avoidance. These two dimensions were derived from a study which included and factor analysed all published and reasonably validated self-report attachment measures in a single questionnaire. This resulted in the formation of a two factor/four category model of attachment. The measure comprises 36 items, 18 measuring avoidance and 18 measuring anxiety. From these two scales, four categories of attachment can be calculated using a formula derived from hierarchical clustering
procedure. According to Brennan, Clark and Shaver, Cronbach’s Alpha for the avoidance scale is $\alpha = .94$, and for the anxiety scale $\alpha = .91$.

Brennan, Clark and Shaver (1998) found that there was a substantial similarity and a highly significant relationship between the attachment categories calculated using their measure and the attachment categories assigned through use of the Bartholomew and Horowitz four-prototype self-classification measure, although they did state that their measure was slightly more conservative than the Bartholomew and Horowitz measure and consequently is a little less likely to classify people as securely attached. Bartholomew and Horowitz’ (1991) measure was the second attachment measure used in the current research in order to compare the avoidance/anxiety measure with the self classification measure using data from a diverse Australian sample. The four attachment descriptions (prototypes) based on the model proposed by Bartholomew and Horowitz were listed with two 8 point likert scales under each. One was to answer for self, 1 = ‘Not like me at all’, to 8 = ‘Exactly like me’, the other likert scale was to answer for your partner, 1 = ‘Not like them at all’, to 8 = ‘Exactly like them’.

The final attachment measure asked respondents to allocate themselves and their partner to a single category out of the four listed in the previous question. The question was worded ‘Now circle one number below to indicate which of the four
descriptions above is most like you, and most like your partner’. There were two strips of numbers 1-4 for respondents to circle.

9.3 Procedure

Approval to conduct this research was sought and granted from the Research Ethics Committees at Swinburne University of Technology, and at Relationships Australia, Victorian Branch. Participants were given a research pack which contained two questionnaires an information sheet outlining some questions which may be asked, and answers to these, and two prepaid envelopes. Advice was provided that completion of the questionnaire was entirely voluntary and that withdrawal was acceptable at any time. Participants were encouraged to respond individually, and send their questionnaires, without any concern over whether their partner would also respond. The front cover of the questionnaire detailed contact numbers for the researcher, her research supervisor and the Swinburne University of Technology Research Ethics Committee. (See Appendix A and B)
Chapter 10: Results

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 13.0 was used to analyse the results. Extensive preliminary analysis confirmed that there were no violations of the assumptions of normal distribution (Pallant, 2005).

Missing data was replaced in the MSI-R scales, the Gottman marital distress scales (the Four Horsemen), and the avoidance and anxiety attachment scales where the number of missing variables in a scale was less than or equal to 2 items. The procedure used was calculation of the specific scale mean of the remaining items in the scale for each individual case and replacement with that unique mean.

10.1 Conflict Resolution Styles

Data regarding conflict resolution styles (CR) was collected via eight scales for each member of the couple. There were four styles measured for levels perceived within own behaviour, and the same four styles were measured for levels perceived in partner’s behaviour. Paired sample t-tests were conducted to explore differences in the measure of self assessed use of the four CR styles between members of each couple. In addition, one way ANOVAs were conducted to test for differences in endorsement of the four conflict resolution styles. These tests were conducted to establish matching between partners to test Hypothesis 1. The tests revealed that
there were significant differences in mean level of endorsement of the four CR styles, for both men and women, but no significant differences between males and their female partners in their mean self reported use of the different conflict resolution styles. The results are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations for Conflict Resolution Style Scores for Males and Females

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Volatile</th>
<th>Avoidant</th>
<th>Validating</th>
<th>Hostile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>2.16 (.96)</td>
<td>3.30 (1.16)</td>
<td>3.13 (1.09)</td>
<td>1.92 (.93)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>2.32 (.89)</td>
<td>3.21 (1.19)</td>
<td>3.14 (1.04)</td>
<td>1.95 (.97)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 202,
Means in each row with different superscripts are different at p<.005
Range = 0-5.

As can be seen in Table 1, the self assessment resulted in higher and similar levels of endorsement of both the validating and avoidant CR styles for both men and women, with significantly lower endorsement of the volatile and hostile styles for both men and women. The results are slightly different for men and women. For women levels of volatile CR were higher than Hostile CR, for men no difference was found. Further analysis indicated that men and women did not differ significantly when compared across gender for levels of each style. In comparison with the results of Holman and Jarvis (2003) where the respondents most frequently endorsed the validating style, the current sample differs in the more equal endorsement of both the validating and avoidant styles.
In response to the first research aim of the current study, to examine the influence of matching of CR on marital relationships, 4 paired sample t-tests were carried out to ascertain differences and similarities between how respondents perceived their own CR style and how they perceived their partner’s CR style. Results are presented in Table 2. below.

Table 2

Comparison of Self Perception and Perception of Partner; Means, Standard Deviations and Significance-values of Gottman’s Conflict Resolution Styles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Males Self Mean</th>
<th>Males Self SD</th>
<th>Males Partner Mean</th>
<th>Males Partner SD</th>
<th>Sig (2 tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Volatile</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>.145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidant</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>.007*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validating</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>.032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostile</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>1.025</td>
<td>.222</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Females Self Mean</th>
<th>Females Self SD</th>
<th>Females Partner Mean</th>
<th>Females Partner SD</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Volatile</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidant</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>.682</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validating</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>.046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostile</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>.010*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 100 Note: Bonferroni correction was applied, therefore sig level = p<.01*

As can be seen in Table 2, there were few significant differences between respondents’ perceptions their own and their partner’s frequency of use of the different conflict resolution styles. However, men perceived themselves to be more
frequent users of the avoidant CR style than their partners, and females perceived themselves to be less frequent users of the Hostile CR style.

To further explore the matching of conflict resolution style between partners a number of analyses were undertaken. First, differences between each of the partners’ conflict resolution (CR) scores were calculated for each item in the CR subscale. The score for each female’s self assessed CR style was subtracted from their male partner’s self assessed score. In addition each female’s assessment score of their male partner was subtracted from their male partner’s self assessed score, and each of the male’s assessment score of their female partner was subtracted from their female partner’s self assessed score. This process resulted in three CR difference scores: (a) one which compared each person’s self assessment with the self assessment of their partner; (b) one which compared the males’ self assessment with their female partner’s assessment of them; and (c) one which compared the females’ self assessment with their male partner’s assessment of them. To obtain an absolute difference score for all computations, negative scores were converted to positive scores. These were then added for all the four CR subscales and the total difference scores were compared. The greater the difference score, the less matching had occurred. The range of possible scores for overall difference was 0-48, and for each comparison, e.g., self assessment with self assessment, self assessment with partner assessment etc., was 0-12. Means and standard deviations are presented in Table 3 below.
Table 3

Means and standard deviations of conflict resolution style difference scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean difference between male and female partners in their self assessment</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>1.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean difference between male self assessment and their female partner’s assessment of them</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean difference between female self assessment and their male partner’s assessment of them</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean total difference between partners in all assessments</td>
<td>10.11</td>
<td>5.59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=97

As can be seen in Table 3 the mean difference scores were very similar across the different assessment groups. These results suggest that on average, the difference in self assessment score is an accurate indicator of the size of difference in conflict resolution style scores, hence to maximize possible variance in further analyses of these scores, the total mean difference score was the score used in further analysis of the impact of difference in CR.

To further explore matching in CR style, a simple match/mismatch variable comparing male self assessment with their female partner’s self assessment on each of the 4 CR styles was calculated. For each of the four CR styles a match variable was computed where 1=match, 0= no match. That is, if a male rated himself as a 3 on validating CR style and his partner rated herself as a 3 then the couple match score for validating CR would be 1. If the male rated himself as a 2 and his female partner rated herself as a 4 then the match score for the couple on validating CR would be 0.
These couple match scores were then added to give each of the couples a total match score which could range from 0-4, the results are displayed below in Table 3.

Table 4.

*How well do we match? Frequencies of matching in conflict resolution style between couples*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of matches</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>34.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>29.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen in Table 4 approximately 50% of participants had 0 or 1 match only and the remaining 50% had 2 or more matches. Viewed another way 80% of the participants matched their partner in responses 2 or less than 2 times out of four times, that is at best only a 50% match for the majority of the couples. These scores and the above difference scores were used later in the current research to test hypothesis 1(a); that less matching of CR style would be associated with higher levels of marital distress as measured with Gottman’s ‘four horsemen’ and the MSI-R and hypothesis 1(b) that lower levels of CR matching would be associated with higher levels of attachment insecurity.
The four CR results were then analysed with a K-Means hierarchical cluster procedure to test and replicate the research of Holman and Jarvis (2003). However, in contrast to their results, the four clusters requested in the current analysis did not clearly align with Gottman’s four conflict resolution styles, ‘volatile’, ‘avoidant’, ‘validating’ and ‘hostile’. Scrutiny of results of the cluster analysis suggested that one group could be distinguished and identified in terms of Gottman’s conflict resolution styles, which was a “low hostility” group characterised by a low hostility score, however there were similar levels of all the other conflict resolution styles in this cluster precluding it from being associated particularly with one of the other styles. For example, if the low hostility group had shown a high level of one of the other CR styles, it may have indicated a cluster for that style, a characteristic of which is low hostility, however this was not the case. The other three clustered groups appeared to be various blends of all of the four CR styles, with no other style clearly emerging in any particular cluster. It was therefore not possible to group respondents into CR styles for comparison, and the research proceeded using the measurements of levels of particular CR styles and CR matching and difference scores for further analysis.

10.2 Marital Distress measured with Gottman’s” four horsemen”

The data assessing Gottman’s (1994,1999) four marital distress indicators: criticism, contempt, defensiveness and stonewalling, was analysed to establish scale scores for males and females as they assessed themselves and their partners. First,
reliability of the scales was tested. Cronbach’s alpha for the scales is displayed in Table 5 below.

Table 5

Cronbach’s alpha for the Gottman marital distress indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Males Self</th>
<th>Males Partner</th>
<th>Females Self</th>
<th>Females Partner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Criticism</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contempt</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defensiveness</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stonewalling</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All the marital distress subscales compiled by Gottman appeared to yield acceptably reliable results in the present sample with the exception of female self criticism scale, which was marginal at \( \alpha = .69 \).

To examine the influence of levels of each of the four horsemen on marital relationships, and to explore self and partner perception, four paired sample t-tests were carried out to ascertain differences and similarities between how respondents perceived their own distress behaviour and how they perceived their partner’s distress behaviour. Results are presented in Table 6 below.

As can be seen in Table 6 males saw their partners as more contemptuous than themselves, and saw themselves as more prone to stonewalling than their partners. Interestingly the females saw themselves as more critical than their male partners rather than significantly more contemptuous. Neither males nor females
perceived any difference between themselves and their partners on defensiveness, and females perceived no difference between the sexes in levels of stonewalling, in contrast to the males’ perception.

Table 6

Means and Standard Deviations of Gottman’s Marital Distress Indicators; Self Perception and Perception of Partner

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Males Self</th>
<th>Males Partner</th>
<th>Sig (2 tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Criticism</td>
<td>9.36</td>
<td>10.18</td>
<td>.044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contempt</td>
<td>5.53</td>
<td>6.71</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defensiveness</td>
<td>9.05</td>
<td>8.84</td>
<td>.533</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stonewalling</td>
<td>6.75</td>
<td>5.24</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Females Self</th>
<th>Females Partner</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Criticism</td>
<td>11.63</td>
<td>9.41</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contempt</td>
<td>8.98</td>
<td>8.46</td>
<td>.026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defensiveness</td>
<td>10.44</td>
<td>10.19</td>
<td>.445</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stonewalling</td>
<td>7.01</td>
<td>6.82</td>
<td>.620</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=101 Note: Bonferroni correction was applied, therefore sig level = p<.01

Further paired t-tests were completed to compare the scores of males and females more specifically. These are presented in Table 7 below.

The results in Table 7 partially support Hypothesis 4 (a) that women would have higher mean contempt and criticism scores than men. Significantly higher mean contempt scores for women than for men were found when men assessed their
partners, and women assessed themselves. Women also assessed themselves as significantly higher in criticism, although the results for men did not support this. However the second part of Hypothesis 4 (b) that men would have higher mean stonewalling scores than women was not supported by the results, and the last comparison between male partner assessment and female self assessment shows that women rate themselves significantly higher than men rate them on stonewalling rather than the men showing any higher rating of stonewalling in comparison with the women.

The implications of the results presented in Table 7 are that females rate themselves as significantly more critical and contemptuous than males rate themselves. Males rate their female partner’s contempt as significantly higher than their own, but not their criticism. Females also rate themselves as significantly more stonewalling than their partners rate them. These results possibly suggest a gender difference in tendency to indulge in these types of behaviours. However, the results could also suggest a gender difference in tendency to acknowledge or accept distress behaviours. In each analysis it is the females who have acknowledged higher levels of the behaviours. It may be that men may tend to minimize and/or females may tend to exaggerate their own and/or their partner’s distress behaviours in marital relationships. It is noteworthy that females do not rate males as low on the
behaviours as men rate themselves, and conversely males do not rate females as highly on the behaviours as women do themselves.

Table 7

*Means, Standard Deviations of Gottman’s Marital Distress Indicators; Comparison of Males and Females*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Males Self</th>
<th>Females Self</th>
<th>Sig (2 tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticism</td>
<td>9.46</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>11.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contempt</td>
<td>5.47</td>
<td>4.72</td>
<td>8.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defensiveness</td>
<td>9.20</td>
<td>5.88</td>
<td>10.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stonewalling</td>
<td>6.70</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>7.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Males Self</th>
<th>Females Partner</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticism</td>
<td>9.47</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>9.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contempt</td>
<td>5.45</td>
<td>4.74</td>
<td>8.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defensiveness</td>
<td>9.34</td>
<td>5.99</td>
<td>10.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stonewalling</td>
<td>6.70</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>6.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Males Partner</th>
<th>Females Self</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticism</td>
<td>10.28</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>11.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contempt</td>
<td>6.66</td>
<td>5.46</td>
<td>8.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defensiveness</td>
<td>8.96</td>
<td>5.34</td>
<td>10.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stonewalling</td>
<td>5.24</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>7.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=99 Note: Bonferroni correction was applied, therefore sig level = p<.004
Slight difference in mean values on different tests due to missing data
To further explore the relationship between the males and females in the couples, Pearson product moment correlations of the 8 scales were conducted. Results are presented in Table 8 below.

Table 8

*Correlation Coefficients for Males and Females for Gottman’s Marital Distress Indicators.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Females self assessment</th>
<th>Females partner assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Crit</td>
<td>Cont</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males self assessment</td>
<td>Criticism</td>
<td>.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contempt</td>
<td>.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Defensiveness</td>
<td>.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stonewalling</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males partner assessment</td>
<td>Criticism</td>
<td>.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contempt</td>
<td>.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Defensiveness</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stonewalling</td>
<td>-.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=99 Bonferroni correction was applied, therefore sig level = *p<.001
Key: Crit=criticism, Cont=contempt, Def=defensiveness, Ston=stonewalling

The results presented in Table 8 show a number of interesting trends. However there are only two significant correlations. The results indicate that contempt is the only one of the four distress indicators that showed a statistically significant, although weak correlation between male partner assessment and both female self assessment ($r = .44, p<.001$), and female partner assessment ($r = .30, p < .001$). These results support the results reported above. It appears that women may be first, using more contempt in their relationships, and secondly be more aware of it.
Further, the results suggest that as the rate of contempt rises for women they are reporting more contempt in their male partners, but the reverse is not the case, in that men are not assessing their own contempt at a high level when their partners are.

For all the other distress indicators the correlations between the self assessments of males and females were not significant. This suggests that in terms of distress indicators, partners tend not to act in a similar way to each other, or that one party is less likely to recognise and acknowledge their behaviour, thereby keeping the correlation low.

Further exploration of the non-significant trends in the correlations revealed that for two of the marital distress indicators the correlations are quite reciprocal for males and females in their self and partner assessments. For example, for criticism, male self assessment and female partner assessment ($r=.33, p<.005$), and male partner assessment and female self assessment ($r=.32, p<.005$) are similar, and for defensiveness male self assessment and female partner assessment ($r=.24, p<.05$), and male partner assessment and female self assessment ($r=.24, p<.05$) are similar. This indicates that for these variables there is some agreement between partners as to their behaviour.
However, for contempt, correlation between male self assessment and female partner assessment shows a much weaker correlation $r=.26$ ($p<.05$) than correlations between female self assessment and male partner assessment, $r=.44$ ($p<.001$). Similarly for stonewalling, male self assessment and female partner assessment ($r=.32$, $p<.005$), and male partner assessment and female self assessment ($r=.22$, $p<.05$) are dissimilar, indicating less agreement between partners as to their behaviour.

In contrast to the lack of significant correlations found above, correlations examining the relationship between each person’s self assessment and their assessment of their partner were largely significantly correlated. The results are displayed in Table 9 below.

As can be seen in Table 9, moderate to strong positive correlations between an individual’s self assessment and their assessment of their partner were found for all of the ‘four horsemen’, for both sexes, with the exception that men’s assessment of their own criticism and contempt was not related to significantly elevated levels of their assessment of their partner’s stonewalling. That is, as men’s criticism and contempt rose they did not perceive their partner’s stonewalling to rise.
Table 9

**Correlation Coefficients for Males and Females Assessment of Self and Partner on Gottman’s Marital Distress Indicators**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Males partner assessment</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Criticism</td>
<td>Contempt</td>
<td>Defensiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males self assessment</td>
<td>Criticism</td>
<td>.55*</td>
<td>.44*</td>
<td>.53*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contempt</td>
<td>.51*</td>
<td>.73*</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Defensiveness</td>
<td>.58*</td>
<td>.61*</td>
<td>.82*</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Stonewalling</td>
<td>.86*</td>
<td>.49*</td>
<td>.61*</td>
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<td>Contempt</td>
<td>Defensiveness</td>
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<td>.43*</td>
<td>.52*</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.83*</td>
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<td>.61*</td>
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<td>.40*</td>
<td>.47*</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*N= 99  Note: Bonferroni correction was applied, therefore sig level = *p<.001

Finally a correlation of the four marital distress indicators with each other was conducted to ascertain how these variables may interact within the individual. Results are displayed in Table 10 below.
Table 10

*Correlations between participants self assessment of Gottman’s four marital distress indicators.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Males self assessment</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Defensiveness</td>
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<td>.63*</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stonewalling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

|                | Females self assessment |          |          |          |
|                |                       | Criticism| Contempt | Defensiveness| Stonewalling |
| Females self   | Criticism             | .54*     | .61*     | .35*     |
| assessment     | Contempt              |          | .69*     | .37*     |
|                | Defensiveness         |          |          | .51*     |
|                | Stonewalling          |          |          |          |

N=99 Note: Bonferroni correction was applied, therefore sig level = *p<.001

As can be seen in Table 10 all correlations were moderate to strong in effect size and significant at *p< .001*. This suggests that an individual who is using one of these behaviours is highly likely to also engage in the others, and the reverse would also be the case.

10.3 Marital Satisfaction measured with the MSI-R

Marital satisfaction was measured for each individual using the MSI-R. Table 11 below lists the reliability data for all of the MSI-R scales.
Table 11

Reliability Scores for MSI-R Scales for Males and Females in the Current Study and the MSI-R Normative Sample.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Males Cronbach’s Alpha</th>
<th>Females Cronbach’s Alpha</th>
<th>Overall Cronbach’s Alpha</th>
<th>MSI-R Normative Sample Cronbach’s Alpha</th>
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<tr>
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<td>.78</td>
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<td>CCR</td>
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</table>

N = 202. Note: Key: Conventionalization (CNV), Global Distress (GDS), Affective Communication (AFC), Problem Solving Communication (PSC), Aggression (AGG), Time Together (TTO), Disagreement about Finances (FIN), Sexual Dissatisfaction (SEX), Role Orientation (ROR), Family History of Distress (FAM), Dissatisfaction with Children (DSC), Conflict over Child Rearing (CCR)

As can be seen from the alpha coefficients listed above in Table 11 the reliability of data from the Australian sample taking part in the current research is quite similar to that of the American sample used to standardize the inventory. The mean overall coefficient in the current sample was $\alpha = .79$, compared with a mean overall coefficient of $\alpha = .82$ for the MSI-R normative sample.
The procedure for scoring for the MSI-R involves converting all the thirteen scale scores to T-scores with a mean of 50 and standard deviation of 10. Eleven of the scale scores are interpreted such that a higher score means a greater level of dissatisfaction with that aspect of the relationship. The exceptions to this are the conventionalization score, which indicates a possible problem at a range of >65 and a definite problem at a range of <45; and the role orientation score, which is indicative of differing levels of the respondent’s orientation towards traditional gendered marital roles, but does not necessarily indicate a problem at any specific level. Nine of the remaining scale scores can be interpreted such that a score of 50-60 indicates a possible problem and a score of >60 indicates a definite problem. The family history of distress scale is interpreted such that scores of 45-54 indicate a possible problem and score >55 indicate a definite problem, and for the inconsistency score, 55-65 indicates a possible problem and >65 indicates a definite problem. Scores were analysed firstly as scale scores and then as categorical scores using the above described methodology to place participants into one of three categories; good, possible problem and definite problem. There were 13 couples in which one or both of the respondents scored in the ‘definite problem’ category for inconsistency, however running statistics with and without them did not affect interpretation of results, therefore they were retained for completeness of data.
First, a series of paired t-tests were conducted to explore gender differences in scores. Means and standard deviations for all the scale scores are listed in Table 12 below.

The results displayed in Table 12 show only one significant difference between males and females in their mean scale scores, affective communication. This indicated that on average the sample used in the current research was very similar to the North American normative sample used by Snyder (2004) to validate the inventory. Group means in the current study ranged from 47.46 for males’ FIN scale to 56.27 for females’ role orientation scale.

To further explore the relationship between the males and females in the couples a number of Pearson product moment correlations of the MSI-R scales were conducted. First scale scores were correlated within males and females separately to explore within subjects effects. Results are presented in Table 13 below.
### Table 12

**Means, Standard Deviations for MSI-R Scores; Comparison of Males and Females**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Mean</td>
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<td>Conventionalization (CNV)</td>
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<td>7.92</td>
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<td>Global Distress (GDS)</td>
<td>50.47</td>
<td>7.87</td>
<td>51.17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Affective Communication (AFC)</td>
<td>52.58</td>
<td>6.99</td>
<td>49.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Solving Communication (PSC)</td>
<td>50.68</td>
<td>9.89</td>
<td>50.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggression (AGG)</td>
<td>49.99</td>
<td>8.47</td>
<td>47.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Together (TTO)</td>
<td>49.81</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>48.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagreement about Finances (FIN)</td>
<td>47.46</td>
<td>8.40</td>
<td>48.48</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sexual Dissatisfaction (SEX)</td>
<td>49.82</td>
<td>10.08</td>
<td>48.90</td>
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<td>Role Orientation (ROR)</td>
<td>56.22</td>
<td>9.76</td>
<td>56.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family History of Distress (FAM)</td>
<td>52.32</td>
<td>7.91</td>
<td>53.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissatisfaction with Children (DSC)</td>
<td>49.16</td>
<td>8.95</td>
<td>48.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict over Child Rearing (CCR)</td>
<td>49.24</td>
<td>8.30</td>
<td>48.61</td>
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</table>

N = 84  Note: Bonferroni correction was applied, therefore sig level = *p<.004  
Note: Key: Conventionalization (CNV), Global Distress (GDS), Affective Communication (AFC), Problem Solving Communication (PSC), Aggression (AGG), Time Together (TTO), Disagreement about Finances (FIN), Sexual Dissatisfaction (SEX), Role Orientation (ROR), Family History of Distress (FAM), Dissatisfaction with Children (DSC), Conflict over Child Rearing (CCR)

As can be seen in Table 13 global distress, affective communication, problem solving communication, time spent together, disagreement over finances and dissatisfaction with sexual relationship all exhibit strong positive relationships with each other for both males and females. Conventionalisation (CNV) is the only
variable which correlated negatively with the other variables. This is congruent with
the design of the inventory as the CNV scale is scored differently to the other scales,
with scores to depict the highest level of dissatisfaction falling at the low end of the
range. Very low conventionalization scores are indicative of negative distortions in the
appraisal of the relationship (Snyder, 2004). Therefore it is quite congruent that there
is a strong negative relationship between CNV and global distress for both males and
females.

Table 13

Correlation Coefficients Within Males and Females Separately on MSI-R Scales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CNV</th>
<th>GDS</th>
<th>AFC</th>
<th>PSC</th>
<th>AGG</th>
<th>TTO</th>
<th>FIN</th>
<th>SEX</th>
<th>ROR</th>
<th>FAM</th>
<th>DSC</th>
<th>CCR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CNV</td>
<td>- .73</td>
<td>- .68</td>
<td>- .75</td>
<td>- .40</td>
<td>- .56</td>
<td>- .45</td>
<td>- .54</td>
<td>- .10</td>
<td>- .17</td>
<td>- .24</td>
<td>- .35</td>
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<tr>
<td>GDS</td>
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<td>.73</td>
<td>.47</td>
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<td>.35</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.23</td>
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<td>AFC</td>
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<td>.13</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.15</td>
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<tr>
<td>PSC</td>
<td>- .55</td>
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<td>.15</td>
<td>.23</td>
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<td>.07</td>
<td>.09</td>
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<td>.69</td>
<td>.53</td>
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<td>.16</td>
<td>.08</td>
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<tr>
<td>FIN</td>
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<td>.48</td>
<td>.26</td>
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<td>.35</td>
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<td>.28</td>
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<td>.14</td>
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<td>SEX</td>
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<td>.20</td>
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<td>- .12</td>
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N=100 Note: Bonferroni correction was applied, therefore sig level = *p<.001
Note: Females are the top half of the table, males are the bottom half
Key: Conventionalization (CNV), Global Distress (GDS), Affective Communication (AFC),
Problem Solving Communication (PSC), Aggression (AGG), Time Together (TTO)
Disagreement about Finances (FIN), Sexual Dissatisfaction (SEX), Role Orientation (ROR)
Family History of Distress (FAM), Dissatisfaction with Children (DSC)
Conflict over Child Rearing (CCR)
Some of the differences between the sexes can be seen in the concern about partner’s aggression scale (AGG), which for men is not related to the other variables, whereas for women, moderate to high strength correlations were found between aggression (AGG) and global distress (GDS), conventionalisation (CNV), and problem solving communication (PSC). Also there appear to be gender differences in the dissatisfaction with children (DSC) and conflict over child rearing scales (CCR). Whilst conflict over child rearing and dissatisfaction with children exhibit a very strong and significant relationship for both men and women, the patterns of correlation between these and the remaining inventory scales appear to be different for males and females. For men there were no further significant correlations, whereas for women conflict over child rearing is moderately related to conventionalisation and problem solving communication. This may be indicative of women’s greater involvement with children.

The role orientation (ROR) and family of origin (FAM) scales appear fairly separate from the other scales. Role orientation is the only scale without a dissatisfaction value implied from the score.

Scale scores were then correlated between males and females to explore between subjects effects. Results are presented in Table 14 below.
Table 14

Correlation Coefficients Between Males and Females on MSI-R Scales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CNV</th>
<th>GDS</th>
<th>AFC</th>
<th>PSC</th>
<th>AGG</th>
<th>TTO</th>
<th>FIN</th>
<th>SEX</th>
<th>ROR</th>
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<td>.03</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.15</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.55*</td>
<td>.53*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCR</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-.30</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.00</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.42*</td>
<td>.65*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=100 Bonferroni correction was applied, therefore sig level = *p<.001

Note: Key: Conventionalization (CNV), Global Distress (GDS), Affective Communication (AFC), Problem Solving Communication (PSC), Aggression (AGG), Time Together (TTO), Disagreement about Finances (FIN), Sexual Dissatisfaction (SEX), Role Orientation (ROR), Family History of Distress (FAM), Dissatisfaction with Children (DSC), Conflict over Child Rearing (CCR)

There are a number of interesting observations that can be made from the correlations presented in Table 14. In general, similar to the separate correlations in Table 13 but weaker in effect size, global distress, affective communication, and problem-solving communication scales all exhibit a weak to moderate positive correlation between the males and females, demonstrating that as dissatisfaction in any of these areas rises for one partner, dissatisfaction in the other partner also tends
to rise. The subscales tend to be significantly and positively correlated between males and females for all but the aggression and family history of distress subscales. This indicates that the men and women in the present study tended to agree somewhat on their assessment of areas of dissatisfaction in their relationship. The time together disagreement about finances and sex are slightly less symmetrical between males and females indicating that although when dissatisfaction in any of these areas increases for one partner it also tends to increase for their partner, these scales are not all related to one another. For women as their time together score increases their male partner’s conventionalization tends to decrease, while their global distress, affective communication and DISSATISFACTION WITH SEXUAL RELATIONSHIP scores tend to increase, whereas for men as their time together score increases their females partner’s conventionalization tends to decrease while their global distress, affective communication, problem-solving communication and SEX all tend to increase. What can be extrapolated from these results is that increases in a male’s dissatisfaction with time spent together as a couple in satisfying ‘friendship’ activities (TTO) will tend to be related to slightly more areas of the relationship for women than increases in a female’s time together score will be for men.

There are also slight differences between the sexes for dissatisfaction with sexual relationship (SEX). For men SEX is related negatively to womens’ conventionalization and positively to ASC, problem-solving communication and time
together, whereas for women SEX is related negatively to mens’ conventionalization and positively to global distress, affective communication, problem-solving communication and time together. These results would suggest that for men global distress, and their tendency to rate the relationship negatively increases as their partner’s dissatisfaction with sexual relationship increases, whereas for women global distress does not increase as their partner’s dissatisfaction with sexual relationship increases but problem-solving communication, affective communication and time together do increase. The general trend appears to be that elevation in dissatisfaction in a particular aspect of the relationship for men is related to elevated scores over a slightly wider range of subscales for women than vice versa.

The role orientation scale seemed unrelated to the other scales, although it did relate moderately, and significantly to role orientation in the opposite gender. This indicates a tendency for similarity between marital partners in role orientation and provides some evidence that role orientation is unrelated to marital dissatisfaction, which supports the assertions of Snyder (2004) in the construction of the inventory.

10.4 Comparison of Gottman’s “four horsemen” and the MSI-R

In order to explore the relationships between Gottman’s four marital distress indicators and the MSI-R scale scores, all the scales were first correlated using Pearsons product moment correlations. The results are presented in Table 15 below.
First, it is important to note that some of the MSI-R scales and Gottman’s four horsemen appear to be tapping similar or related constructs in marital distress as evidenced by the number of moderate to strong correlations between the variables for both men and women. There were, however, some notable differences between males’ and females’ correlations of the four horsemen with MSI-R scale scores. The correlations found for the women generally were of higher strength than the men’s. This is congruent with the finding that there is a difference between men and women in their reporting of their own contempt. An exception to this trend was stonewalling in the males, which correlated negatively with conventionalization, and positively with global distress, affective communication problem-solving communication and disagreement about finances, whereas for women there were only two significant correlations, one negative with CNV, and one positive with problem-solving communication. In addition the women’s SEX scores correlated with their criticism, contempt and defensiveness, whereas for men SEX was correlated with defensiveness only. However, overall the trends appear to be fairly congruent between men and women.

Similar to results from the MSI-R correlations both within and between the males and their female partners (Tables 13 & 14), the role orientation and family history of distress, scales did not appear to be significantly related to the Gottman marital distress indicators. The dissatisfaction with children and conflict over child
rearing scales were also not related to the Gottman marital distress indicators, which makes conceptual sense as the marital distress indicators relate specifically to the marital relationship rather than the broader family context.

Further correlations were conducted to check whether male or female self assessments on the four horsemen were correlated with partner’s MSI-R scale scores. The only significant results showed that women’s global distress was correlated with males’ criticism \( (r = .34, p < .001) \), and women’s contempt correlated with males’ affective communication \( (r = .32, p < .001) \) (Bonferroni correction was applied, therefore significance level \( = p < .001 \)). These results are interesting in the context of considering self and partner perception and how this impacts relationships.
Table 15

Correlations of male and female self assessment on Gottman’s 4 horsemen with MSI-R scores.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CNV</th>
<th>GDS</th>
<th>AFC</th>
<th>PSC</th>
<th>AGG</th>
<th>TTO</th>
<th>FIN</th>
<th>SEX</th>
<th>ROR</th>
<th>FAM</th>
<th>DSC</th>
<th>CCR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Males</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticism</td>
<td>-23</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>.49*</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>-07</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contempt</td>
<td>-.44*</td>
<td>.44*</td>
<td>.44*</td>
<td>.55*</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.35*</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defensiveness</td>
<td>-.39*</td>
<td>.38*</td>
<td>.45*</td>
<td>.59*</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.33*</td>
<td>.34*</td>
<td>.34*</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stonewalling</td>
<td>-.33*</td>
<td>.36*</td>
<td>.40*</td>
<td>.55*</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Females** |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Criticism   |-.31 | .25 | .27 | .40*| .08 | .08 | .26 | .36*| .01 | -.04| .34 | .21 |
| Contempt     |-.62*| .60*| .56*| .76*| .26*| .45*| .40*| .40*| -.03| .05 | .25 | .28 |
| Defensiveness|-.55*| .43*| .41*| .58*| .24 | .30 | .35*| .45*| -.06| .11 | .32 | .16 |
| Stonewalling |-.33*| .23 | .18 | .31 | .19 | .11 | .20 | .21 | -.16| .07 | .27 | .16 |

N= 100 Bonferroni correction was applied, therefore sig level = *p<.001

Note: Key: Conventionalization (CNV), Global Distress (GDS), Affective Communication (AFC), Problem Solving Communication (PSC), Aggression (AGG), Time Together (TTO), Disagreement about Finances (FIN), Sexual Dissatisfaction (SEX), Role Orientation (ROR), Family History of Distress (FAM), Dissatisfaction with Children (DSC), Conflict over Child Rearing (CCR)

10.5 Conflict resolution and Marital Distress/Satisfaction

Pearson’s product moment correlations between conflict resolution styles (CR) and the MSI-R, and CR and Gottman’s four horsemen were conducted. The results for males are displayed in Table 16 below.

As can be seen in Table 16, for men’s reports, elevated levels of hostile CR style in themselves and their partner has a substantial and consistent moderate correlation with some of the marital distress indicators. The volatile CR style as perceived in both
the self and the partner was associated with self assessed criticism and concern about partner’s aggression (AGG). The differing results for hostile and volatile CR styles displayed in Table 16 details some of the difference between these two CR styles which may not have been apparent in previous results. Gottman (1994, 1999) has stated that the volatile CR style can be equally as stable as the validating and avoidant styles, whereas the hostile style is unstable, unsuccessful and predictive of marital problems, and dissolution. The results clearly show that the level of distress associated with Hostile CR style in either the self or the partner is greater and in a wider array of areas than the associations with the volatile CR style.

Table 16

Correlations between CR and Gottman’s marital distress indicators and MSI-R for males; significant results only

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MEN</th>
<th>Volatile</th>
<th>Avoidant</th>
<th>Validating</th>
<th>Hostile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self</td>
<td>Part</td>
<td>Self</td>
<td>Part</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGG</td>
<td>.37*</td>
<td>.38*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TTO</td>
<td></td>
<td>- .40*</td>
<td>.39*</td>
<td>.37*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.39*</td>
<td>.38*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.38*</td>
<td>.39*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.42*</td>
<td>.44*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticism self</td>
<td>.39*</td>
<td>.41*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticism partner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contempt partner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=101 Note: Bonferroni correction was applied, therefore sig level = *p<.001
The avoidant CR style was not associated with the marital satisfaction variables and the validating style was negatively associated only with dissatisfaction with time together (TTO) but not with Gottman’s (1994, 1999) marital distress variables. It is interesting that there is no negative relationship between validating CR style and Gottman’s four horsemen as conceptually it could be expected that a validating style would comprise fewer of these negative behaviours, however no such association was found. There were also a couple of correlations that were marginally significant. These were self assessed avoidant CR with self assessed stonewalling \((r = .31, p = .002)\) and self assessed contempt with partner Hostile CR style \((r = .30, p = .002)\). It is interesting to note that avoidant CR style may at times become stonewalling, which makes conceptual sense. Gottman states very clearly that each style apart from the Hostile style is stable and successful if there is a consistent balanced ratio of five positive to one negative interaction. Stonewalling may be the negative behaviour that those with an avoidant CR style may tend to engage in, similarly criticism may be the negative behaviour those of a volatile CR style tend to engage in. These behaviours may represent the area specific to these CR styles where trouble may begin if the positive to negative ratio becomes unbalanced. Comparable correlations for women are shown in Table 17 below.

Overall, the number of significant correlations for the women was more extensive than for the men and the correlations tended to be stronger. The
correlations between MSI-R subscales and CR style for the women followed a similar pattern to the men, with the addition that conventionalization was significantly and negatively correlated with Hostile CR style in self and partner, and positively correlated with validating CR style in partner for the women, but not for the men. This suggests that there may be a tendency for women to rate their partners as higher in validating CR style was linked with a tendency to distort the information about their relationship in a positive, or socially desirable direction. The moderate negative relationship between dissatisfaction with problem solving communication (PSC) and validating CR style in both self and partner indicated that for women the validating style may enhance problem solving in the relationship, however it is interesting that this correlation was not significant for men. There was a significant correlation between women’s assessment of their partner’s volatile CR and women’s own global distress. This suggests that volatile CR in men may be linked with global distress for women, whereas for men volatile CR in themselves or their partner was significantly correlated more specifically with concern about their partner’s aggression.

For the women, Hostile CR style correlated strongly with three of the four Gottman (1994, 1999) marital distress indicators for both self and partner. In addition validating CR style correlated moderately and negatively with two of the four Gottman indicators. The results reveal subtle yet persistent gender differences.
Table 17

**Correlations between CR and Gottman’s marital distress indicators and MSI-R for females; significant results only**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WOMEN</th>
<th>Avoidant</th>
<th>Validating</th>
<th>Hostile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self</td>
<td>Part</td>
<td>Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGG</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TTO</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSC</td>
<td>-34*</td>
<td>-45*</td>
<td>.52*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNV</td>
<td>.33*</td>
<td>-47*</td>
<td>-56*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.47*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticism self</td>
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<td></td>
<td>.39*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Criticism part</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.40*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contempt self</td>
<td>-37*</td>
<td>-49*</td>
<td>.67*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contempt part</td>
<td>-40*</td>
<td>-53*</td>
<td>.64*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defensive self</td>
<td>-34*</td>
<td></td>
<td>.44*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defensive part</td>
<td></td>
<td>.32*</td>
<td>.51*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stonewall self</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stonewall part</td>
<td>.32*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=101 Bonferroni correction was applied, therefore sig level = *p<.001

In order to test Hypothesis 1(a): that lower levels of matching in conflict resolution style would be associated with higher rates of Gottman’s marital distress indicators, and higher scores on the MSI-R, MANOVAs were conducted using CR matching variables as the grouping criteria. These ranged from 0 matches to 4 matches. No significant differences in means for MSI-R or Gottman’s indicators (4 horsemen) were found. Conflict resolution matching groups were then collapsed into two groups (where 0 or 1 match = 1, and 2, 3 or 4 matches = 2), and independent
samples t-tests were conducted. Once again there were no significant differences in mean scores on any of the marital distress scores found between the groups. Therefore it appears that the type of CR style exerts an influence rather than the matching of CR style, that is, correlations are significant indicating that some relationship exists, but there were no systematic differences in mean level of marital distress or satisfaction when cases are grouped according to CR matching.

10.6 Adult Attachment

Comparison of the attachment measures. Adult attachment was measured with three different measures to test for congruence of measures as well as to try to gain some insight into how respondents viewed their own attachment behaviour in relation to their partner’s attachment behaviour. The three measurement instruments were the Brennan, Clark and Shaver (1998) anxiety and avoidance scales, the Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) four prototype scales and a forced choice item which asked respondents to indicate which of the four Bartholomew and Horowitz paragraphs describing the prototypes best fitted themselves and which best fitted their partner. This forced choice item was then compared with the method for categorising proposed by Bartholomew and Horowitz (see also Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994), which was to place the person in the category they rated highest. Largely these two measures of attachment classification were the same, therefore the scores on forced choice responses were used.
First, reliability of the Brennan, Clark and Shaver (1998) scales were calculated: Cronbach's alpha for the avoidance scale was $\alpha = .88$ for males, and $\alpha = .93$ for females; and for the anxiety scale was males $\alpha = .90$, and females $\alpha = .89$. Therefore the scale was judged to be reliable. Second, validity of the attachment measures was explored by comparison of results of each measure with the other to check for convergent results. Initial analysis of the relationship between the different attachment measures showed that there were a number of significant weak to moderate correlations between the two scales in Brennan, Clark and Shaver' (1998) measure, avoidance and anxiety, and the self ratings on the Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) measure, which comprises four prototypes describing secure, fearful, preoccupied, and dismissive attachment styles, which participants rate themselves on with a likert scale between 1 and 8. The results are displayed in Table 18 below.

The results displayed in Table 18 suggest some congruence between participants' self assessments based on their own ratings of themselves and their partners on a prototypical measure (SEC, FEAR, PRE, and DIS), and scale assessment based on their scores on items designed to tap into attachment behaviours and attitudes (AVOID and ANX). All of the significant correlations are a good fit theoretically, showing relationships that would be expected according to attachment theory and the authors of the measures.
Table 18

*Correlation Between Attachment Scales and Self Rated Prototypical Attachment*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SEC Self</th>
<th>SEC Partner</th>
<th>FEAR Self</th>
<th>FEAR Partner</th>
<th>PRE Self</th>
<th>PRE Partner</th>
<th>DIS Self</th>
<th>DIS Partner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AVOID</td>
<td>-.36*</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.30*</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>-.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANX</td>
<td>-.20</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>.31*</td>
<td>.35*</td>
<td>.48*</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>-.14</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AVOID</td>
<td>-.32*</td>
<td>-.40*</td>
<td>.36*</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>-.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANX</td>
<td>-.33*</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>.37*</td>
<td>.33*</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>-.30*</td>
<td>-.019</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=100 Note: Bonferroni correction was applied, therefore sig level = *p<.001. All tests one tailed

Key: Self assessed secure attachment (SEC), Self assessed fearful attachment (FEAR), Self assessed preoccupied attachment (PRE), Self assessed dismissive attachment (DIS)
Scale assessed avoidant attachment (AVOID), Scale assessed anxious attachment (ANX)

The data indicates that secure attachment orientation (SEC) in self was negatively associated with the avoidant attachment dimension (AVOID) for both men and women, fearful attachment orientation (FEAR) in the self was positively correlated with the anxious attachment dimension (ANX) for men and with AVOID for women. This may indicate a gender difference in how fearful attachment manifests. Theoretically, according to Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991), fearful attachment would be associated with high anxiety and high avoidance, since fearful attachment was described by them as being the manifestation of negative view of both self and other. For men, FEAR in the partner was positively related to both AVOID and ANX, whilst for women it was related to ANX only. This suggests some
level of partner similarity but it is unclear at this stage whether that is perceptual or actual. Preoccupied attachment (PRE) in the self was positively related to the anxiety dimension (ANX) for both men and women, and dismissive attachment orientation (DIS) in the self was negatively related to the anxious attachment dimension (ANX) for women only. The current results are consistent with attachment theory, which proposes that preoccupied attachment is characterised by high anxiety over relationships and dismissive attachment is characterised by low anxiety over relationships.

The relatively low rate of significant correlations is not unexpected considering the stringent significance value applied to all the correlations and previous research exploring the inconsistency of adult attachment measures (e.g., Feeney & Noller, 1996, Simpson & Rholes, 1998). The lack of correlations may be due to a number of factors, which come under three general headings: first, measurement inaccuracy and/or inadequacy of the measure, and second, inaccurate self perception and/or reporting, and third, the nature of attachment behaviour within the individual. As mentioned above, there are elements of both stability and flexibility in attachment orientation, and discrepancies between different measures may be evidence of this. However the significant low to moderate strength correlations do indicate that certain aspects of attachment orientation are recognizable within the self whether measured
by prototype methodology or by the attachment scales. Generally, the results demonstrate that there is some proportion of shared variance in the measures.

The AVOID and ANX scales were then correlated to explore shared variance between the two scales. The results are displayed in Table 19 below.

Table 19

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>AVOID Males</th>
<th>ANX Males</th>
<th>AVOID Females</th>
<th>ANX Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AVOID Males</td>
<td>.33**</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANX Males</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.25*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AVOID Females</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.27**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANX Females</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=101 Bonferroni correction was applied, therefore sig level =* p<.01, **p<.001.
Key: Scale assessed avoidant attachment (AVOID).
Scale assessed anxious attachment (ANX)

Of interest in Table 19 is the highly significant positive weak to moderate relationship between the two attachment dimensions within the males and the females. This indicates that a relationship exists within individuals, between the two types of insecure attachment, in that elevated levels of one tends to be related to somewhat elevated levels of the other. This is a somewhat different result to previous studies that have found the two dimensions to be unrelated (e.g., Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994a, 1994b; Simpson et al., 1996; Simpson, Ickes and Grich, 1999; Simpson, Rholes & Nelligan, 1992).
Also found in the results was a significant weak positive relationship between anxiety in males and anxiety in females and no relationship between males and females on the avoidance dimension. Both of these findings are congruent with attachment theory. Anxiety over relationships involves a focus on the other person and the relationship, therefore it follows that increases in anxiety in one partner will be linked with increases in the anxiety in the other partner in cases where both partners tend towards anxiety as their habitual attachment response. Once again it is important to note that the effect size of the correlation is weak, indicating that only a portion of the variance in anxiety in the males is linked with anxiety in their female partner and vice versa, thereby indicating the variation in attachment pairings, and responses in the couples. In contrast, avoidant attachment responses in relationships involve less focus on the relationship and the partner, and a decrease in empathy and caregiving if anxiety in the self or the partner increases (Simpson, Rholes & Nelligan, 1992). Therefore, the lack of relationship between males and their female partners in their tendency towards avoidant attachment responses is congruent with the notion that avoidant attachment responses will be less linked with responses of the partner and more related to the individual’s own experience.

The forced choice prototype measures of attachment for self and partner were then correlated to ascertain the relationships between the prototypes as well as the
relationships between the partners on attachment orientation. The results are displayed in Table 20 below.

The correlations displayed in Table 20 are interesting for two main reasons. First, preoccupied attachment in self (PRE) was positively correlated with fearful attachment in self (FEAR) for both males and females, demonstrating a considerable degree of shared variance between these two attachment orientations. According to Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) fearful attachment and preoccupied attachment are both characterised by a poor view of self, therefore the current results are consistent with their model. Second, the significant correlations of the greatest effect size are between the ratings for the self on three of the attachment prototypes and the rating of the partner on these prototypes for both men and women. This indicates that the couples in the current study perceived themselves to be similar to their partners in attachment orientation, in all attachment styles except dismissing attachment. However the results show this was a perception only, and that actual self ratings of females did not correlate significantly with their male partners’ self ratings.
Table 20

Correlations of Assessments of Attachment for Self and Partner - Males and Females.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>13</th>
<th>14</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>16</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Males</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. SEC Self</td>
<td>.33**</td>
<td>-33**</td>
<td>-31*</td>
<td>-04</td>
<td>-04</td>
<td>-01</td>
<td>-12</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>-01</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>-15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. SEC Partner</td>
<td>-10</td>
<td>-19</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-01</td>
<td>-29*</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>-03</td>
<td>-01</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>-07</td>
<td>-10</td>
<td>08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. FEAR Self</td>
<td>.37**</td>
<td>.28*</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>-10</td>
<td>-10</td>
<td>-17</td>
<td>-01</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>-06</td>
<td>-14</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. FEAR Partner</td>
<td>.27*</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>-00</td>
<td>-12</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-12</td>
<td>-10</td>
<td>-01</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. PRE Self</td>
<td>.49**</td>
<td>-11</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>-12</td>
<td>-20</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>-04</td>
<td>-02</td>
<td>-07</td>
<td>-21</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. PRE Partner</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-09</td>
<td>-06</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>-02</td>
<td>-10</td>
<td>-05</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. DIS Self</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-13</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-04</td>
<td>.27</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. DIS Partner</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-13</td>
<td>-04</td>
<td>-11</td>
<td>-15</td>
<td>-03</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>-.14</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Females</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. SEC Self</td>
<td>.33**</td>
<td>-33**</td>
<td>-10</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-13</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. SEC Partner</td>
<td>-14</td>
<td>-33**</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>-05</td>
<td>-10</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. FEAR Self</td>
<td>.41**</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.32**</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. FEAR Partner</td>
<td>.28*</td>
<td>.2</td>
<td>-03</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. PRE Self</td>
<td>.35**</td>
<td>-23</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. PRE Partner</td>
<td>-03</td>
<td>-.29*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. DIS Self</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. DIS Partner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=101 Note: Bonferroni correction was applied, therefore sig level = *p<.003, **p<.001. All tests are one tailed.
Key: secure attachment (SEC), fearful attachment (FEAR), preoccupied attachment (PRE), dismissive attachment (DIS)
These results are congruent with the results displayed in Table 9 above, where it was demonstrated that correlations between self and partner ratings for the marital distress indicators were of much greater effect size and significance than self ratings of one partner correlated with self rating of the other partner. Of interest was the negative correlation between females’ preoccupied partner rating and females’ dismissive partner rating as well as the marginally significant correlation of males’ dismissive attachment with females’ partner assessment of dismissive attachment (r = .27, p<.004), indicating that females appear to be relatively accurate in identifying dismissive behaviour.

In further analyses, one or the other of the different attachment measures were used rather than all of them as the purposes and requirements of the analyses varied according to the hypotheses being tested. The Brennan, Clark and Shaver (1998) measure was used for analysis of individual attachment because it offers attachment dimensions as well as categories based on these, and was found to exhibit high reliability. The Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) measure was used to explore the questions about similarities and differences between self and partner, as participants had answered these items for both themselves and their partner.

*Gender differences in the anxiety and avoidance measures.* The Brennan, Clark and Shaver (1998) attachment measure was further analysed to test for any gender differences, and specifically to test Hypothesis 2: that men would have higher mean
levels of the avoidant attachment dimension than women, and that women would have higher mean levels of the anxious attachment dimension than men. T-tests were conducted using gender as the independent variable and the two attachment dimensional scales Avoidance (AVOID) and Anxiety (ANX) as the dependent variables. Means, standard deviations and significance values of the scales are presented in Table 21 below.

Table 21

*Means and Standard Deviations for Avoidance and Anxiety in Relationships.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Males</th>
<th></th>
<th>Females</th>
<th></th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance</td>
<td>46.94</td>
<td>17.32</td>
<td>45.15</td>
<td>20.06</td>
<td>.444</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>51.39</td>
<td>19.94</td>
<td>57.30</td>
<td>19.70</td>
<td>.017</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*N = 100*

Table 21 shows that while males and females were not significantly different in avoidance score, females were significantly higher in anxiety score than males. This difference in the anxiety scores partially supports Hypothesis 2, and is in line with sex stereotypes, which would predict that women would be much more concerned with relationships than men. However, it is interesting that the avoidance scores did not support Hypothesis 2 and did not show any evidence of sex stereotyping, in that the men's avoidance scores were not higher than the women's. The possible range of scores was 18-126, and the means for this sample were fairly low.
The scales were then analysed according to the Brennan, Clark and Shaver (1998) formula to assign the participants into four attachment categories for the purposes of some further analysis. However, caution is advised by the authors of the scale and by other researchers (e.g., Fraley, Waller & Brennan, 2000) that attachment is probably more realistically viewed as dimensions displayed to a greater or lesser extent in human behaviour, rather than as a discrete category into which individuals may be classified. Still, according to Griffin and Bartholomew (1994) attachment orientation and behaviour is better identified and understood, by both lay people and experienced attachment style raters alike, when described in terms of a prototype, to which an individual is matched to some degree, than as underlying dimensions, and analysis of the prototype measures have been found to adhere significantly to underlying dimensions (e.g., Feeney & Noller, 1996; Griffin & Bartholomew). This rationale formed the basis for proceeding with analysis of the data divided into categorical attachment styles using the formula outlined by Brennan, Clarke and Shaver, 1998). Details of the categorical analysis can be viewed in Table 22 below.
Table 22

*Categorical Attachment Data*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>females</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Total %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Secure</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>54.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fearful</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>13.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preoccupied</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>16.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismissive</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>14.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>202</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen in Table 22, 52% of the females and 58% of the males were classified as secure. The remaining 48% of females and 42% of males were classified into one of the insecure attachment categories. This is fairly consistent with the results of prior research (e.g., Brennan, Clark & Shaver, 1998; Feeney, 1999; Feeney & Noller, 1996; Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1994).

The self rated overall categorical measure based on the Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) categories and the Brennan, Clark and Shaver (1998) categories were compared. Each measure was recalculated so that there were two groups; secure and insecure, as the four original groups left the crosstabs matrix with insufficient cell counts to conduct chi square analyses. It was found that the two categorical measures were significantly different, for males $\chi^2(1)=6.475, p<.05$, and for females $\chi^2 (1)= 11.873, p<.005$. Sixty-eight percent of the respondents were classified into the same category with the two measures, using the two group secure/insecure classification method.
This is comparable with the scale authors’ original results. Once again, for parsimony the Brennan, Clark and Shaver (1998) categorical measure was used in the further analysis.

*Partner Matching of attachment.* A crosstabs analysis was conducted to explore the pairing of couples into the different attachment categories. However, the low numbers in the cells when all insecure attachment categories were analysed violated the assumptions for chi square analysis. Therefore for the purposes of performing a chi square analysis, the three insecure attachment categories were collapsed into one category and respondents were placed into secure and insecure categories. The chi square analysis was performed to ascertain whether there were statistically significant differences between males and females in their linking with either secure or insecure partners. Table 23 below displays the frequencies.

Table 23

*Frequencies of Secure and Insecure Partnering Within Couples.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Males</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Secure</td>
<td>Insecure</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>52</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insecure</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 23 shows that there were more males classified secure than females, and the number of secure females partnered with insecure males is lower than the rate of secure males with insecure females. Sixty-nine percent of women classified secure had partners in the secure attachment category compared with 62% of men. Thirty-seven percent of women classified insecure had partners in the secure attachment category compared with 31% of men. A chi square test revealed that these differences between males and females were significant \([\chi^2(1)= 4.690, p<.05]\).

10.7 Adult Attachment and conflict resolution.

Conflict resolution (CR) was further considered in two ways in the analysis of relationships between CR and attachment. First, mean levels of the different CR styles were analysed in relation to the different attachment categories, and secondly a correlation between attachment dimensions and CR scale scores was conducted to examine association between attachment dimensions and the different CR styles.

One way ANOVAs with the four attachment categories as the grouping factor and CR scores as the dependent variable were conducted to explore the relationship between attachment style and conflict resolution. The significant results are displayed in Table 24 below.
Table 24

Means and Standard Deviations for Conflict Resolution Style across the Four Attachment Categories Significant Results Only

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attachment Categories</th>
<th>Secure</th>
<th>Dismissive</th>
<th>Fearful</th>
<th>Preoccupied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Males</strong></td>
<td>Validating (Self)</td>
<td>3.44 (.104)</td>
<td>2.23 (.93)</td>
<td>2.54 (.97)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>Validating (Self)</td>
<td>3.37 (.94)</td>
<td>2.36 (.93)</td>
<td>2.87 (.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Validating (Partner)</td>
<td>3.24 (.107)</td>
<td>2.21 (.105)</td>
<td>2.73 (.116)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hostile (Self)</td>
<td>1.67 (.77)</td>
<td>2.21 (.89)</td>
<td>2.67 (.105)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hostile (Partner)</td>
<td>1.73 (.85)</td>
<td>2.36 (.108)</td>
<td>3.20 (.132)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Means in each row with different superscripts are different at p<.005, Tukey

The validating conflict resolution style was the only scale within the ANOVA for men to have significantly different mean CR levels across attachment groups. 

For women the one way ANOVAs showed a number of significant differences. There was a significant difference for women on their validating CR (self) score $F(3,98)=4.349$, $p<.01$, eta squared = .12, which is a medium to large effect size (Cohen, 1988). There was also a significant difference for women on their validating CR (partner) score $F(3,98)=3.409$, $p<.05$, eta squared = .10, which is a medium to large effect size. Another significant difference for women was in their hostile CR (self)
scores $F(3,98)= 5.135, p<.005$, eta squared =.14, once again a large effect size. Also for women, mean hostile CR (partner) scores were significantly different between attachment groups $F(3,98)= 8.260, p<.001$, eta squared =.21, a very large effect size.

In summary, for women it appears that secure attachment is associated with significantly higher endorsement of the validating CR style than dismissive attachment, and secure attachment is also associated with significantly lower levels of the hostile CR style than fearful attachment. These perceived differences applied to the women themselves as well as to their perception of their partners. All the eta squared values were relatively substantial indicating quite large effect sizes.

These results fit well with Gottman’s (1994, 1999) theory regarding conflict resolution style. Gottman claimed that hostile CR style is the only one that does not work well in stable marriages, and here it is found at the highest level in those classified into the fearful attachment category. According to Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) fearful attachment style is a problematic attachment orientation as it is characterised by a negative view of the self and of others, and is judged to be the least successful style for relationships.

*Conflict resolution style matching and adult attachment.* Conflict resolution style matching between partners was rigorously tested using the CR match categories as well as the CR difference scores, and the attachment dimensions as well as the attachment categories to ascertain whether a relationship exists between CR matching
and adult attachment. These analyses were conducted to test Hypothesis 1(b): that lower levels of matching in conflict resolution style would be associated with higher levels of insecure attachment.

First, to test hypothesis 1(b), a chi square analysis was conducted to explore relationships between the CR match categories and the attachment categories. Since a test which included all CR match categories (i.e., 0 matches through to 4 matches) for all couples as well as the four attachment categories violated the assumption that cell count is not less than five, CR match categories were collapsed into two groups 1= 0 or 1 match, 2= 2, 3 or 4 matches, and attachment categories were collapsed into two groups secure and insecure. It was found that the there was no significant relationship between CR match category and attachment category $\chi^2(1) = 1.144$, p>.05. Therefore hypothesis 1(b) was not supported by this test.

Next, a one way MANOVA was conducted with the five levels of CR match as the independent variable and attachment dimensions anxiety (ANX) and avoidance (AVOID) as the dependent variables. There were no significant differences found, therefore hypothesis 1(b) was not supported by these tests. To further validate these findings another one way MANOVA was conducted with attachment categories as the independent variable and CR scores as the dependent variable. No significant differences were found.
Further, to test whether mean difference scores between males and their female partners in their CR self assessment differed significantly between attachment groups two further one way ANOVAs were conducted, one for males and one for females. Mean difference score (calculation outlined in section 10.1) was the dependent variable and attachment groups was the independent variable. Once again no significant differences were found.

Finally Pearson product moment correlations were calculated between CR match scores and attachment dimensions, and CR difference scores and attachment dimensions. No significant correlations were found. Therefore hypothesis 1(b) was not supported by any of the tests. No evidence was found for a link between insecure attachment and matching in CR between partners in the couples.

In order to test Hypothesis 3, that (a) anxious/preoccupied attachment style would be associated with higher levels of volatile conflict resolution style than secure attachment style; (b) secure attachment style would be associated with higher levels of validating CR style than avoidant attachment style, and (c) that avoidant attachment style would be associated with higher levels of avoidant conflict resolution style than secure attachment, ANOVAs with planned contrasts were conducted. First, a planned contrast comparing mean levels of volatile CR across the secure and preoccupied attachment categories was undertaken. The attachment classifications used for this and other analyses comparing attachment categories were those
calculated from the Brennan, Clark and Shaver (1998) measure. The results are displayed in Table 25 below.

Table 25

Means and Standard Deviations for Volatile Conflict Resolution Scores Across Secure and Anxious/preoccupied Attachment Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Secure Attachment</th>
<th>Anxious/Preoccupied Attachment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volatile CR Self Male</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volatile CR Partner Male</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volatile CR Self Female</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volatile CR Partner Female</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N= 100. Note: One-tailed tests, p<.05.

As can be seen in Table 25 Hypothesis 3 (a) was supported. Those in the secure attachment category rated themselves and their partners significantly lower in volatile CR than those in the anxious/preoccupied attachment group, at p<.05.

To test part (b) of Hypothesis 3 that secure attachment style would be associated with higher levels of validating CR style than anxious or avoidant attachment style, a planned contrast comparing difference in mean levels of validating CR between the secure attachment category, and the fearful and dismissing attachment categories was undertaken. The results are displayed in Table 26 below.
Table 26

*Means and standard deviations for validating conflict resolution scores across secure and avoidant/fearful and dismissive attachment categories*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Secure Attachment</th>
<th>Fearful/ Avoidant</th>
<th>Dismissive/ Avoidant</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validating CR</td>
<td>3.44 (1.04)</td>
<td>2.54 (.97)</td>
<td>2.23 (.93)</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Male</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validating CR</td>
<td>3.05 (1.09)</td>
<td>2.77 (1.17)</td>
<td>2.54 (1.13)</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner Male</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validating CR</td>
<td>3.37 (.94)</td>
<td>2.87 (1.12)</td>
<td>2.36 (.93)</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validating CR</td>
<td>3.24 (1.07)</td>
<td>2.73 (1.16)</td>
<td>2.21 (1.05)</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner Female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=100. One-tailed tests. p<.05

As can be seen in Table 26 Hypothesis 3 (b) was supported. Those in the secure attachment category rated themselves and their partners significantly higher in validating CR than those in the fearful and dismissive attachment groups.

Finally, to test part (c) of Hypothesis 3, that avoidant attachment style would be associated with higher levels of avoidant conflict resolution style than secure attachment, a planned contrast comparing difference in mean levels of avoidant CR between the secure attachment category and the fearful and dismissing attachment categories was undertaken. The results are displayed in Table 27 below.
Table 27

Means and Standard Deviations for Avoidant Conflict Resolution Scores Across Secure and Avoidant/fearful and dismissive Attachment Categories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Secure Attachment</th>
<th>Fearful/Avoidant</th>
<th>Dismissive/Avoidant</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidant CR Self</td>
<td>3.19 (1.18)</td>
<td>3.46 (1.39)</td>
<td>3.85 (1.07)</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidant CR Self</td>
<td>3.09 (1.20)</td>
<td>2.69 (1.01)</td>
<td>3.00 (1.00)</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidant CR Self</td>
<td>3.08 (1.22)</td>
<td>3.13 (.91)</td>
<td>3.71 (1.20)</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidant CR Self</td>
<td>3.15 (1.23)</td>
<td>2.87 (1.06)</td>
<td>3.36 (1.12)</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner Female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N= 100. One-tailed tests. *p<.05.

As can be seen in Table 27, Hypothesis 3 (c) was supported for the females, and partially supported for the males. Females in the secure attachment category rated themselves and their partners significantly lower in avoidant CR than those in the fearful and dismissive attachment groups. However, close scrutiny of the mean scores for females shows that for self assessment the secure and dismissive attachment groups look very different, whereas the secure and fearful group means appear quite similar. For female partner assessments, those in the secure group have a higher mean avoidant CR score than the fearful attachment group and a lower mean avoidant CR score for the dismissive attachment group. In these particular results it appears that the two different types of avoidant attachment have different relationships with avoidant CR. It appears that avoidant CR may be linked more
with dismissive attachment than with fearful attachment for women. Males in the secure group were found to rate themselves lower on avoidant CR than those in the fearful or dismissive attachment groups, however this trend did not extend to their ratings of their partners. Similar to the women, mean self assessed avoidant CR score for the men classified as fearful was not as high as for those classified dismissive. In light of these observations the results should be viewed with caution.

Overall, the first three parts of Hypothesis 3 were supported demonstrating that the different conflict resolution styles appear to be linked with systematic differences in attachment style. The results suggest that secure attachment is linked with more use of validating CR, anxious/preoccupied attachment is linked with more use of volatile CR and avoidant attachment, particularly dismissive avoidant attachment is linked with more use of avoidant CR.

The final part of Hypothesis 3, (d) that insecure attachment would be associated with higher levels of hostile conflict resolution style was tested by collapsing the attachment groups into secure and insecure groups and conducting independent samples t-tests to test for differences between the two attachment groups in mean hostile CR style. The results for males showed that there were no significant differences in mean hostile CR style (self) or (partner) between the secure and insecure attachment groups. The results for females showed that mean hostile CR style (self) was significantly higher in the insecure attachment group (M=2.27, SD=1.07) than in
the secure attachment group ($M=1.67$, $SD=.77$; $t(97)=-3.22$, $p<.001$). The results for females assessment of partner’s hostile CR style was that mean scores were also significantly lower in the secure attachment group ($M=1.73$, $SD=.85$) than in the insecure attachment group ($M=2.50$, $SD=1.27$; $t(97)=-3.54$, $p<.001$). The results for the women support the notion proposed above that attachment style and conflict resolution style are linked. They also suggest that part of the difficulties faced by those with an insecure attachment style may be due to ineffective conflict resolution skills and overuse of hostile CR in problem-solving, which subsequently may overwhelm the relationship with negative interactions and affect, leading to relationship distress. These proposals are supported by results displayed in Tables 16 and 17 above displaying correlations between conflict resolution style and marital distress/satisfaction indicators for men and women. However one should remain mindful of the finding that there were no significant differences in hostile CR between secure and insecure attachment for men, therefore it may be that for men hostile CR is not associated with attachment orientation.

10.8 Adult Attachment and Marital Distress/Satisfaction

The relationship between marital satisfaction and adult attachment was explored by conducting a series of one way MANOVAs to test for systematic differences in the levels of the marital satisfaction variables over the four attachment groups (categories calculated with the Brennan, Clark & Shaver, 1998, measure) in
order to test Hypothesis 5: that secure adult attachment style would generally be associated with lower rates of Gottman’s marital distress indicators as well as lower scores on the MSI-R than insecure attachment. A series of three MANOVAs were conducted to avoid violating the requirement that there be more cases in each cell than dependent variables. Analyses were separately conducted for men and women. There were a total of eight dependent variables in each MANOVA testing Gottman’s (1994, 1999) marital distress indicators, and the MSI-R was broken into two analyses with six variables in each. The results are presented for males and females separately in Tables 28 and 29 below.

As can be seen in Table 28 there were differences in the means of six of the MSI-R sub-scales across the different attachment groups. In all analyses with significant differences, secure attachment was generally associated with significantly lower levels of marital dissatisfaction than fearful, preoccupied and dismissive attachment. The exceptions to this general trend were the subscales reporting disagreement about finances(FIN), where secure was significantly lower than dismissive attachment style only, and the scores for the defensiveness marital distress indicator where fearful and dismissive attachment styles were significantly higher than secure attachment style.
Table 28

Means and Standard Deviations for Gottman’s Marital Distress Indicators and MSI-R Scales

Across Four Attachment Categories for Males; Significant Results Only

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MEN</th>
<th>Secure Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Fearful Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Preoccupied Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Dismissive Mean (SD)</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TTO</td>
<td>44.89a (9.01)</td>
<td>56.75b (9.42)</td>
<td>55.27b (9.79)</td>
<td>56.47b (6.47)</td>
<td>10.67</td>
<td>3,77</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFC</td>
<td>49.66a (6.14)</td>
<td>57.25b (6.94)</td>
<td>56.27b (7.42)</td>
<td>57.40b (6.27)</td>
<td>10.49</td>
<td>3,77</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSC</td>
<td>46.11a (8.69)</td>
<td>60.63b (6.11)</td>
<td>57.27b (6.80)</td>
<td>57.07b (7.14)</td>
<td>14.87</td>
<td>3,77</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNV</td>
<td>55.23a (7.29)</td>
<td>47.38b (6.09)</td>
<td>49.00b (5.69)</td>
<td>46.73b (6.67)</td>
<td>7.88</td>
<td>3,77</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDS</td>
<td>48.45a (6.76)</td>
<td>58.50b (10.80)</td>
<td>53.18b (5.31)</td>
<td>54.93b (6.76)</td>
<td>6.71</td>
<td>3,77</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIN</td>
<td>45.65a (8.30)</td>
<td>51.22b (7.41)</td>
<td>51.90b (7.40)</td>
<td>54.23b (7.16)</td>
<td>5.21</td>
<td>3,77</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defensive</td>
<td>7.25a (5.26)</td>
<td>12.25b (5.61)</td>
<td>10.28b (5.54)</td>
<td>11.80b (5.18)</td>
<td>4.91</td>
<td>3,93</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=101 Scores in any row with different superscript are significantly different p<.05 (Tukey post hoc tests)
Note: Key: Conventionalization (CNV), Global Distress (GDS), Affective Communication (AFC), Problem Solving Communication (PSC), Aggression (AGG), Time Together (TTO), Disagreement about Finances (FIN), Sexual Dissatisfaction (SEX), Role Orientation (ROR), Family History of Distress (FAM), Dissatisfaction with Children (DSC), Conflict over Child Rearing (CCR)

It is important to note when viewing the mean differences scores on the MSI-R scales (excluding conventionalization) that scores of 50-60 indicate a possible problem in that area, whilst scores of 60 and above indicate a definite problem. All significantly different scores show elevation between 50 and 60 for the insecure attachment groups and just on or below 50 for the secure attachment group. This is indicative of insecure attachment being associated with possible problems in these marital satisfaction
variables. The scores for the conventionalization subscale are reversed, with higher scores indicating a tendency to view the relationship more positively, hence the difference in these scores showed secure attachment to be associated with significantly higher scores than the three insecure attachment categories.

The defensiveness measure was the only one of the four Gottman marital distress indicators that showed a significant difference across the attachment groups, similar to the differences found on the MSI-R scales, secure attachment was found to be associated with significantly lower scores on the defensiveness measure than either dismissive or fearful attachment. Differences across attachment groups for the stonewalling measure, were found to be marginally significant $F(3,93) = 3.22, p<.05$; once again the secure attachment group was found to be associated with the lowest mean score ($M=5.16, SD=3.65$), however in this instance fearful attachment was significantly higher ($M=9.08, SD=4.03$) rather than dismissive attachment ($M=8.36, SD=2.79$). All of the results for the men are congruent with the notion that insecure attachment is generally linked with poorer relationship quality, and therefore a higher likelihood that these areas are a problem in their relationship.

For women significant differences in mean scores were found for four of the MSI-R scales as well as three of the Gottman (1994, 1999) marital distress indicators assessed for the self and the partner across the different attachment categories. These results are displayed in Table 29 below.
As can be seen in Table 29, for females the mean levels of self assessed contempt in self and partner were significantly lower for the secure attachment group than for all three of the other attachment groups. For defensiveness in self, mean levels were significantly lower for the secure attachment group than for the preoccupied attachment group. Female’s assessment of their partner’s mean defensiveness levels was significantly lower for the secure attachment group than for the fearful and dismissive attachment groups. When females assessed their partner’s mean levels of criticism, it was also found to be significantly lower for the secure attachment group than for the fearful and preoccupied attachment groups. These results indicate that the women’s assessments of their partners tend to be quite consistent with their assessments of themselves according to their own attachment group. This is very interesting in light of self and partner perception, which will also be explored more fully in a later section of the present study.

Overall, the results presented in Tables 28 and 29 lend some support to Hypothesis 5: that secure adult attachment style would generally be associated with lower rates of Gottman’s marital distress indicators as well as lower scores on the MSI-R than insecure attachment. Where significant differences were found they were in the expected direction, with the secure attachment group having lower mean scores than the various insecure attachment groups. However, there were quite limited significant differences found in the marital distress/satisfaction variables associated
with attachment style differences. It appears that there may be many aspects of marital relationships that do not differ significantly according to attachment orientation.

Table 29

Means and Standard Deviations for Gottman’s Marital Distress Indicators Across Four Attachment Categories for Females, Significant Results Only

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WOMEN</th>
<th>Secure</th>
<th>Fearful</th>
<th>Preoccupied</th>
<th>Dismissive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TTO</td>
<td>45.20a (7.88)</td>
<td>53.25ab (13.74)</td>
<td>50.88ab (7.07)</td>
<td>54.30b (10.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFC</td>
<td>46.00a (7.07)</td>
<td>53.50b (9.21)</td>
<td>52.47b (5.13)</td>
<td>56.80b (7.30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSC</td>
<td>46.52a (8.59)</td>
<td>56.13b (6.89)</td>
<td>54.24b (5.13)</td>
<td>55.40b (6.60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDS</td>
<td>48.33a (6.63)</td>
<td>58.13b (6.53)</td>
<td>54.94b (7.81)</td>
<td>56.10b (9.31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critic (partner)</td>
<td>8.12a</td>
<td>10.76ab</td>
<td>11.52b</td>
<td>10.39ab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contempt (self)</td>
<td>6.71a</td>
<td>11.97b</td>
<td>10.37b</td>
<td>12.36b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contempt (partner)</td>
<td>5.61a</td>
<td>13.36b</td>
<td>10.11b</td>
<td>11.93b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defensive (self)</td>
<td>8.84a</td>
<td>10.93ab</td>
<td>13.26b</td>
<td>11.97ab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defensive (partner)</td>
<td>8.58a</td>
<td>12.92ab</td>
<td>12.11b</td>
<td>11.36ab</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=101 Bonferroni correction was applied, therefore sig level = *p<.005.
Scores with different superscript are significantly different (Tukey post hoc tests)
Key: Conventionalization (CNV), Global Distress (GDS), Affective Communication (AFC), Problem Solving Communication (PSC), Time Together (TTO)
To test Hypothesis 6: that higher levels of both the avoidant attachment dimension and the anxious attachment dimension would be associated with higher levels of Gottman’s marital distress indicators in both the self assessment and the partner assessment, Pearson product moment correlations were conducted. The results are displayed in Table 30 below.

Hypothesis 6: that higher levels of both the avoidant attachment dimension and the anxious attachment dimension would be associated with higher levels of Gottman’s marital distress indicators in both the self assessment and the partner assessment, was partially supported by the results. Sixty-three percent of the correlations across both males and females were significant positive relationships.

Twelve of the 16 correlations for men indicated a significant weak to moderate positive relationship between the marital distress indicators and the attachment dimensions. No significant association was found between the avoidant attachment dimension and criticism in the self or the partner and stonewalling in the partner. However the remaining variables, contempt and defensiveness in both self and partner and stonewalling in the self, were all associated. The anxious attachment dimension was associated with all marital distress indicators except criticism in the partner.
Table 30

Correlations Between Gottman’s Marital Distress Indicators and Attachment Dimensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MEN Avoidant attachment males</th>
<th>MEN Anxious attachment males</th>
<th>WOMEN Avoidant attachment females</th>
<th>WOMEN Anxious attachment females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Criticism Self</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>.34**</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticism Partner</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td></td>
<td>.32**</td>
<td>.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contempt Self</td>
<td>.32**</td>
<td></td>
<td>.31**</td>
<td>.30**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contempt Partner</td>
<td></td>
<td>.28*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defensiveness Self</td>
<td>.38**</td>
<td></td>
<td>.34**</td>
<td>.35**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defensiveness Partner</td>
<td></td>
<td>.28*</td>
<td>.32**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stonewalling Self</td>
<td>.39**</td>
<td></td>
<td>.39**</td>
<td>.30**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stonewalling Partner</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=100 Note: Bonferroni correction was applied, therefore sig level = *p<.005, **p<.001. One tailed tests

For women eight of the 16 correlations were significantly weakly to moderately positively correlated. The avoidant attachment dimension showed a moderate correlation with contempt in both self and partner, but no significant association with the other marital distress indicators. The anxious attachment
dimension was associated with criticism in the partner, contempt in self and partner, defensiveness in self and partner and stonewalling in the self.

For both men and women the anxious attachment dimension was related to a wider array of the marital distress variables in both self and partner. Women higher in avoidant attachment appear to be less affected by the marital distress indicators than men higher in avoidant attachment. Overall, for men the elevation of insecure attachment dimensions within themselves appears to be related to a higher likelihood of experiencing the marital distress behaviours either within themselves or from their partner.

10.9 *Relationships between attachment matching in couples, marital satisfaction/distress, and conflict resolution.*

The matching of attachment categories as either secure or insecure in males and their female partners was used to calculate four categories of couple attachment based on the different pairing patterns, that is, secure males with secure females, insecure males with secure females, insecure females with secure males and insecure males with insecure females. These were then tested using one way ANOVAs for differences between couple attachment matching groups in their mean levels of conflict resolution style and Gottman’s marital distress measures, as well as the MSI-R.
The first set of ANOVAs to be conducted compared the different couple attachment combinations across the CR styles. Two analyses were significant at $p<.005$. For the men’s hostile CR style self assessment scores there were significant differences between the different couple attachment combinations $F(3,98)= 4.79$, $p<.005$. The scores for the secure/secure attachment couples ($M=1.50, SD=.77$) were significantly lower than the male secure/female insecure couples ($M=2.27$) as well as the insecure/insecure couples ($M=2.19, SD=.102$). For the women’s hostile CR style partner assessment scores there were significant differences between the different couple attachment combinations $F(3,98)= 4.66$, $p<.005$. The scores for the secure/secure attachment couples ($M=1.69, SD=.84$) were significantly lower than the male secure/female insecure couples ($M=2.68, SD=.125$). It is of note that the significant differences have occurred only for the hostile CR style, which is the only style Gottman describes as unstable and intrinsically negative in relationships. There appears to be a gender difference indicated by the results, in that the results for the men pertain to their own hostile CR behaviour and the women’s results pertain to female’s assessments of their male partner’s hostile CR behaviour. The results support each other in the finding that the attachment combination secure male with insecure female is associated with significantly higher hostile CR score for the males than the secure/secure combination. According to these results the highest rate of hostile CR behaviour is amongst secure males who have insecure female partners.
Further MANOVAs were conducted to examine differences between the four couple attachment combinations across the marital distress indicators. As above, four separate MANOVAs were conducted to avoid violating the requirement that the cell size be greater than the number of dependent variables in each analysis. Therefore Gottman’s (1994, 1999) marital distress indicators and MSI-R subscales were tested separately for males and females. The results for Gottman’s marital distress indicators are displayed in Table 31 below. Because of the high number of variables tested only the significant results at $p<.005$ are shown.

First it is important to note that there were no significant differences found between the different couple attachment matches on the Gottman (1994, 1999) marital distress indicators for males. Second, as can be seen in Table 31, for females the secure/secure attachment couple combination tends to have significantly lower scores on the marital distress indicators than at least one of the other couple attachment combinations, which include at least one partner who has been classified as having an insecure attachment style. The significant differences tend to relate to the women’s own attachment style more than their partner’s attachment style, in that the couple combination where they are classified into the insecure attachment group (that is, male secure/female insecure, and insecure/insecure) tends to differ significantly from the secure/secure couple combination, whereas when they are secure (that is, female secure/male insecure) their scores do not differ from the secure/secure combination.
even if their partner was classified insecure. The results support hypothesis 5 that secure adult attachment would be associated with lower rates of Gottman’s marital distress indicators. The effect appears to be robust regardless of the partner’s attachment classification.

Subsequently further one way MANOVAs were conducted to compare the MSI-R subscales across the four couple attachment combination groups. The results are displayed in Table 32 below. Once again, because of the high number of variables tested only the significant results at $p<.005$ were included in the table.

As can be seen in Table 32, there were no significant differences found between the different couple attachment matches on the MSI-R for females. In addition, the results displayed in Table 32 follow a similar pattern for males to the pattern of results in Table 31 did for females, in that the significant differences tend to relate to the mens’ own attachment style more than their partner’s attachment style. The couple combination where the men are classified into the insecure attachment group (i.e., male insecure/female secure, and insecure/insecure) tends to differ significantly from the secure/secure couple combination, whereas when they are secure (i.e., female insecure/male secure) their scores do not differ from the secure/secure combination even if their partner was classified insecure. These results support earlier findings that the different measures of marital distress/satisfaction appear to be experienced and/or interpreted differently for men and women.
Table 31

**Means and Standard Deviations Across Four Couple Attachment Types for Gottman’s Marital Distress Indicators; Significant Results Only**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Secure Male/ Secure Female Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Secure Male/ Insec Female Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Insec Male/ Secure Female Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Insec Male/ Insec Female Mean (SD)</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Criticism Partner Female</strong></td>
<td>7.58a (3.76)</td>
<td>10.86b (3.34)</td>
<td>9.45a (3.15)</td>
<td>11.69b (3.85)</td>
<td>6.81</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contempt Self Female</strong></td>
<td>6.85a (5.09)</td>
<td>11.60b (5.21)</td>
<td>6.67a (4.03)</td>
<td>12.08bd (5.20)</td>
<td>7.85</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contempt Partner Female</strong></td>
<td>5.50a (4.64)</td>
<td>13.05b (5.96)</td>
<td>6.13a (3.83)</td>
<td>10.96b (5.39)</td>
<td>12.14</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Defensiveness Self Female</strong></td>
<td>8.44a (4.86)</td>
<td>13.33b (4.21)</td>
<td>9.27a (3.90)</td>
<td>11.71bc (4.36)</td>
<td>5.99</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Defensiveness Partner Female</strong></td>
<td>8.38a (4.82)</td>
<td>12.65b (4.48)</td>
<td>9.00a (4.29)</td>
<td>11.71b (4.38)</td>
<td>4.81</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=101 Scores in any row with different superscript are significantly different p<.005 (Tukey post hoc tests, all one tailed)

Results displayed in Tables 31 and 32 showed that attachment style exerted a different pattern of results for men and women across the two separate marital distress/satisfaction measures. According to these findings men appear to be more affected by their own attachment classification in terms of their own levels on the MSI-R subscales, than women. Conversely women appear to be more affected by their own attachment classification in terms of their own levels on Gottman’s (1994, 1999) marital distress indicators than men.
Table 32

Means and Standard Deviations for the MSI-R Subscales across Four Couple Attachment Types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Secure Male/ Secure Female</th>
<th>Secure Male/ Insec Female</th>
<th>Insec Male/ Secure Female</th>
<th>Insec Male/ Insec Female</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TTO Male</td>
<td>42.52^a</td>
<td>48.38^ab</td>
<td>54.17^b</td>
<td>55.44^b</td>
<td>9.42</td>
<td>(3,64)</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(7.63)</td>
<td>(9.36)</td>
<td>(6.65)</td>
<td>(8.40)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFC Male</td>
<td>47.67^a</td>
<td>51.75^ab</td>
<td>57.75^b</td>
<td>55.31^b</td>
<td>11.22</td>
<td>(3,64)</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(5.01)</td>
<td>(4.96)</td>
<td>(6.12)</td>
<td>(5.49)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSC Male</td>
<td>43.62^a</td>
<td>51.50^b</td>
<td>58.50^b</td>
<td>56.06^b</td>
<td>14.33</td>
<td>(3,64)</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(7.22)</td>
<td>(7.54)</td>
<td>(5.82)</td>
<td>(7.26)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNV Male</td>
<td>57.71^a</td>
<td>51.81^b</td>
<td>48.17^b</td>
<td>49.75^b</td>
<td>6.86</td>
<td>(3,64)</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(5.97)</td>
<td>(8.60)</td>
<td>(6.58)</td>
<td>(5.42)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDS Male</td>
<td>45.43^a</td>
<td>52.50^b</td>
<td>51.00^b</td>
<td>55.75^b</td>
<td>8.75</td>
<td>(3,64)</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(5.05)</td>
<td>(6.94)</td>
<td>(7.32)</td>
<td>(6.36)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=101 Scores in any row with different superscript are significantly different p<.004 (Tukey post hoc tests, all one tailed)

10.10 Self and Partner Perception and Similarity

A further aim of the current study was to explore the accuracy of self and partner perception, similarity between partners as well as the relationship of adult attachment orientation to perceptions of self and partner in relationships. To test Hypothesis 7; that relationship partners would be somewhat similar to one another as evidenced by moderate correlations between each partner’s self assessment on the Gottman (1994, 1999) marital distress indicators, the correlations of the male and
female self assessments presented in Table 8 were examined. As there were no significant correlations this hypothesis was not supported.

To test Hypothesis 8: that perceived similarity between partners would be greater than actual similarity indicated by lower mean difference scores between self assessment and partner assessment than between self assessment of one partner and self assessment of the other on the Gottman (1999) marital distress indicator scales, a number of computations were conducted to calculate difference scores. First, a total score for all the Gottman (1999) marital distress indicators (criticism, contempt, defensiveness and stonewalling) was calculated. Second, scores were calculated for the absolute difference between self assessment and assessment of partner, and between self assessment of one partner and self assessment of the other partner (i.e., self/self scores and self/partner scores for males and females separately) for the total marital distress indicator scores. Third, a paired samples t-tests was performed. The results for both men and women supported Hypothesis 8; mean difference score between male self assessment and female self assessment (\(M=15.48, SD=12.21\)) was significantly higher than both female self assessment with female partner assessment (\(M=6.45, SD=5.69\)) \(t=11.44\ (84), \ p<.0001\), and male self assessment with male partner assessment (\(M=6.01, SD=6.47\)) \(t=11.09\ (88), \ p<.0001\). This result provided strong support for the notion that perceived similarity between partners is greater than actual similarity.
To test Hypothesis 9: that individuals classified into the secure or dismissive attachment groups, who tend to have a positive view of themselves in relation to others (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) would have greater perceived similarity, indicated by lower mean difference scores between their own self assessment and their partner assessment on the Gottman (1999) marital distress indicator scales, than individuals classified into the preoccupied or fearful attachment groups, who tend to have a negative view of themselves in relation to others, one way ANOVAs with planned comparisons were performed. The results for men supported Hypothesis 9; mean difference scores for the secure attachment group ($M=4.68$, $SD=6.69$) and the dismissive attachment group ($M=5.01$, $SD=6.83$) were significantly lower than for the preoccupied attachment group ($M=8.00$, $SD=4.47$) and the fearful attachment group ($M=9.17$, $SD=8.36$), $t(89)=2.44$, $p<.01$. However, the results for women did not support Hypothesis 9 as there were no significant differences found between the attachment groups.

To test Hypothesis 10: that individuals classified into the preoccupied attachment group would have greater accuracy of partner perception (empathic accuracy) indicated by lower mean difference scores between their partner assessment and their partner’s self assessment on the Gottman (1999) marital distress indicator scales, than individuals classified into the secure, dismissive or fearful attachment groups, one way ANOVAs with planned comparisons were conducted.
The results for females supported Hypothesis 10. The mean difference score for the preoccupied attachment group ($M=12.31$, $SD=8.52$) was significantly lower than the means for the secure ($M=16.14$, $SD=8.25$), fearful ($M=23.93$, $SD=15.54$) and dismissive ($M=23.23$, $SD=7.98$) groups, $t(81)=3.33$, $p<.001$. However, the results for the males did not support Hypothesis 10 as there were no significant differences between mean difference scores for the men. These results suggest that attachment orientation does have an association with self and partner perception, but that there are gender differences. These findings provide partial support for research findings of Feeney et. al. (1994) and Ickes and Simpson (2003), and suggest that the contradictions in their findings may be related to gender differences.

10.11 The effect of relationship length on empathic accuracy and attachment.

To test Hypothesis 11: that increased length of relationship would be associated with increased difference score between self assessment and partner assessment on the Gottman (1994, 1999) marital distress indicators, as empathic accuracy becomes less important with increased length of relationships (Thomas, Fletcher & Lange, 1997), and that anxious attachment would decrease as length of relationship increases, consistent with associations between empathic accuracy and anxious attachment, Pearson’s product moment correlations between the empathic accuracy scores calculated to test hypothesis 10 and age, and between empathic
accuracy scores and length of relationship were performed. The results are displayed in Table 33 below.

Table 33

Correlations between age, length of relationship, and empathic accuracy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Males Empathic accuracy</th>
<th>Females Empathic accuracy</th>
<th>Males Anxious Attachment</th>
<th>Females Anxious Attachment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>-.23*</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>-.25*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of relationship</td>
<td>-.24*</td>
<td>-.18</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.26*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=89 Note: Bonferroni correction was applied, therefore sig level = *p<.01, One tailed tests
Note: Key: Empathic accuracy score = difference between self and partner assessment scores on the Gottman (1994, 1999) marital distress indicators, reversed so that A higher score = higher empathic accuracy

The results for women show support for Hypothesis 11, however the mens' results did not support this hypothesis. For women there is a weak negative correlation; showing that anxiety over relationships decreases as age and length of relationship increases. For men there was no significant relationship found between anxiety over relationships and age or length of relationship. However the correlations between empathic accuracy, age and length of relationship show a weak negative correlation between empathic accuracy and length of relationship for males, and a weak negative correlation between empathic accuracy and age for females. These results support the notion put forward by Thomas, Fletcher and Lange (1997) that empathic accuracy becomes less important over time as a marital relationship continues.
It would appear that women tend to become less anxiously attached as their relationship continues and as they age, whereas the same trend is not apparent for men. For men there is a decrease in empathic accuracy as their relationship continues but this trend is not evident for women. There was no evidence provided by the current research for any age related effects on empathic accuracy.
Chapter 11 Discussion

The purpose of the current research was multi faceted. Eleven separate hypotheses were tested as well as five broad research aims addressed. The results suggest a fairly complex set of relationships between behavioural tendencies in close relationships, attachment orientation, gender, and relationship satisfaction/distress. In each of the following sections, discussion of the hypotheses tested and the research aims will be elaborated upon.

11.1 Conflict Resolution Style

The first research aim of the current study was to explore Gottman’s (1994, 1999) assertions about conflict resolution style in marriage as well as test and replicate the research of Holman and Jarvis’ (2003) four prototype measure of Gottman’s conflict resolution styles. There are two main assertions in Gottman’s theory regarding conflict resolution style: first that validating, avoidant and volatile conflict resolution styles are equally stable and effective; and second that this principle holds providing the individuals in the couple are fairly well matched and both use the same style. On the basis of these assertions, the following research hypotheses were formulated. Hypothesis 1(a): that lower levels of matching in conflict resolution style would be associated with higher levels of insecure attachment, that is the anxiety and avoidance adult attachment dimensions; and Hypothesis 1(b) that lower levels of matching in conflict resolution style would be associated with higher rates of
Gottman’s marital distress indicators, and higher scores on the MSI-R. Hypothesis 3: that (a) participants with anxious/preoccupied attachment style would have higher levels of volatile conflict resolution style than participants with secure attachment style; that (b) participants with secure attachment style would have higher levels of validating conflict resolution style than participants with anxious or avoidant attachment style; that (c) those with avoidant attachment style would have higher levels of avoidant conflict resolution style than participants with secure attachment; and finally that (d) individuals with insecure attachment would have higher levels of hostile conflict resolution style. The current study found limited support for the two parts of Gottman’s notion, and hence for these hypotheses.

In response to the first part of Gottman’s (1994, 1999) assertions regarding conflict resolution style, limited support was found for the notion that volatile, avoidant and validating conflict resolution styles are equally stable and functional in marital relationships. The results found in the current study indicated that the hostile conflict resolution style was significantly related to elevated scores of the marital distress indicators for both men and women, while there were very few elevated marital distress or dissatisfaction indicators associated with the other three conflict resolution styles. However, for men there were elevated criticism and aggression scores associated with the volatile conflict resolution style. In addition, the results suggested that the volatile conflict resolution style is associated with an anxious
attachment orientation, which in turn is associated with more problematic relationship behaviours (e.g., Feeney & Noller, 1996; Simpson & Rholes, 1998). These results suggest that the volatile conflict resolution style may not be quite as stable or effective as the other two stable conflict resolution styles.

In response to the second part of Gottman’s (1994, 1999) proposals regarding conflict resolution styles, the notion that matching of conflict resolution styles would be associated with more positive marital interactions between participants in couple relationships was not supported by the current research results. Although the results showed patterns of association between individual participants’ conflict resolution style and other marital attributes, which were meaningful and theoretically consistent, no evidence was found for any significant partner matching. Therefore Hypotheses 1(a) and (b) were not supported by the current research. In part, this may be due to the measure of conflict resolution style which was used in the current study.

The Holman and Jarvis (2003) four prototype measure had only been used once (to the current researcher’s knowledge) in published research prior to the current research, and that was in the research conducted by the authors of the measure to create it. According to Holman and Jarvis, cluster analysis fairly neatly formed their data into four distinct groups, the characteristics of which were consistent with Gottman’s (1994,1999) four conflict resolution styles. This was not the case for the data of the present research. No unambiguous groups could be formed in order to
classify participants into a specific conflict resolution style. It became apparent from the current results that participants perceived themselves and their partners as using a variety of conflict resolution styles rather than tending towards one in particular.

One source of variation in the present results may be differences in the demographics from the group of participants Jarvis and Holman used to test the measure. Their participants were fairly young (mean age 25 years) and largely belonged to the Mormon religion, whereas the group of participants in the current study were more varied in age and presumably in religious background, since Australia has a fairly low rate of Mormonism in the general population (ABS, 2006). However, this does not really explain a complete lack of findings in this attempt to classify participants according to conflict resolution style, since Gottman seems so adamant that individuals will tend to use a particular style.

In an attempt to understand the discrepancy between the current study and the Holman and Jarvis (2003) study, a return to Gottman’s original research shows a noteworthy contradiction. First Gottman (1994) describes in some detail the methodology of observational laboratory research which has led him to assert that these three conflict resolution styles are stable and effective, and that a couple must develop one of the three and use that one rather than a combination of two or more, as he states that this would be destabilizing. Second, and in contradiction, Gottman (1999) listed conflict resolution style inventories designed to measure and classify
individuals’ conflict resolution style as an appendix, yet in the instructions for the scoring of these, suggested that an individual may be a percentage of one conflict resolution style and a percentage of another, that is, a blend of styles. This suggests that there may be an overlap between the CR styles, and that individuals may use a varied repertoire of conflict resolution behaviours. Furthermore, Gottman’s (1999) appendix suggested, that positive to negative interaction ratio may be a more precise indicator of conflict resolution style effectiveness than strict adherence to a specific style and matching between partners. The results of the current study are consistent with that notion.

Gottman (1994, 1999) developed the conflict resolution style theory through observation of couple interaction, and analysis of his methodology suggests that the most important relationship stability and effectiveness factor may be the positive to negative ratio, that is five positive interactions to one negative interaction. It may be that as long as this is maintained at a healthy level, the degree of couple matching on conflict resolution style is a secondary concern, that is, it just needs to be compatible enough to easily allow a five positive to one negative ratio to manifest in their interactions. In addition, results from the current study suggest that actual similarity of relationship partners is not as prevalent or important as perceived similarity between partners. Therefore, as long as couples perceive their partners to be quite like themselves, and the positive to negative ratio is balanced, this may be sufficient for the
relationship to continue to be viable and meet the requirements of the participants in it.

11.2 Marital distress/dissatisfaction indicators; Gottman’s four horsemen and the MSI-R

One of the aims of the present study was to test Gottman’s (1994, 1999) measures against the MSI-R (Snyder, 1997), which is a well established, validated and detailed marital satisfaction measure, to try to ascertain whether the behaviours and experiences found to be so important to marital functioning by Gottman are linked with the aspects of the marital relationship found to be important to other marital researchers such as Snyder.

The comprehensive sampling of the participants’ experiences of distressed and distressing behaviours measured using the Gottman (1994, 1999) measures of the four horsemen (criticism, contempt, defensiveness and stonewalling) and marital dissatisfaction measured with the MSI-R yielded, some very interesting results. This allowed detailed insights into the functioning of the marital relationships sampled. One of the benefits of using two quite different measures to assess marital functioning is that each seems to sample different aspects of the complex array of behaviours comprising marital interaction.

The Gottman (1994, 1999) marital distress indicators appear to give expression to emotional and attitudinal responses of one marital partner to the other marital
partner as an individual, as if the measure were assessing the level of positive regard for the partner quite directly and specifically, whereas the MSI-R appears to sample aspects of the marriage as it functions as a relationship system, comprising two people who are functioning together, and asking each to comment on how well they think the system functions, rather than how well they think their partner functions. As such, it is interesting to note that women and men appear to respond somewhat differently to the measures.

As a group, the women in the present study tended to rate themselves and their partners higher on the Gottman marital distress behaviours (criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling) than the men rated either their female partners or themselves. On one hand this may be because women indulge in these behaviours more frequently than men; however, on the other hand it may be that women are more willing and able to recognize these behaviours, and admit to them than men are. Additionally, Gottman (1994) found women tended to be higher in contempt and criticism than men, a notion somewhat supported by the current research results. However, the current results indicate that women also think their partners have higher levels of these behaviours. Therefore the difference between men and women appears to be, at least partly, a perceptual difference.

The results may be indicative of a need to educate men on the meaning and impact of their behaviours, if they are either experiencing these behaviours from their
female partners and not recognizing them clearly; or using them in their interactions with their female partners without recognition or acknowledgement of them. It may also be indicative of a need to educate women in more assertive, and less destructive patterns of relationship communication. These four destructive relationship behaviours are all designed to exert power in a somewhat covert way, via emotional discomfort and undermining the partner rather than via overt and direct challenge and action.

In contrast, the MSI-R (Snyder, 1997) tends to focus on and assess practical issues in the relationship such as finances, time spent together, affective and problem-solving communication, and sexual relationship. The MSI-R allows respondents to depict areas where they are experiencing dissatisfaction with the couple relationship. The trend noted in the current results was that for women, patterns of elevated scores indicating dissatisfaction tended to be more widely spread over a number of different relationship aspects than for men. That is, if men were dissatisfied with a particular aspect in the marriage, correspondingly women tended to be dissatisfied in not only that aspect but a number of other aspects as well. This fits well with the notion that men tend to be less concerned with the details of different aspects of the relationship experience and more concerned with maintaining the ongoing relationship (Burnett, 1987). Therefore, they may be less likely to look for a variety of areas of concern in a relationship, and more likely to limit their concern to those areas presenting as
obvious areas of dissatisfaction. Women’s tendency to speak more about their relationships than men when asked open ended questions about their lives (Acitelli, 1992) is also consistent with the results of the current study. Verbalizing more and exchanging information with others would tend to increase the connections women make between one area of concern in their relationship and another.

The results comparing Gottman’s (1994, 1999) marital distress indicators and the MSI-R suggest that the four destructive distress behaviours defined by Gottman are associated with very specific and important areas of marital function such as affective and problem-solving communication, sexual relationship, disagreements about finances, and time spent together, as well as global distress. In addition, the conventionalization score was found to be negatively associated with the Gottman marital distress indicators, meaning that as the four horsemen behaviours increased, negatively distorted cognitions regarding the partner tend to increase.

The nature of these results is correlational rather than causal, therefore it is not possible to ascertain whether one behaviour or experience precedes or precipitates another, but it is of vital importance to realize that they all tend to be interrelated, so that marital therapists can be aware of the range of difficulties and their related behaviours, which may be manifesting when a couple presents for counselling. It is also important to consider that women may tend to have a broader range of areas of
concern in their relationship than men, and that these concerns may be linked for women, whereas they may seem quite separate for men.

*Adult Attachment*

In the current study adult attachment was explored in relation to gender differences as well as marital dissatisfaction and distress. A central purpose of the current research was to explore links between Gottman’s (1994, 1999) atheoretical approach to understanding marital interaction, the MSI-R, and the perspective on adult intimate relationships offered by attachment theory. Therefore, a number of hypotheses were formulated and tested, which included comparisons of adult attachment scores and classifications with scores on the various marital functioning measures used in the present study.

Hypothesis 2: that men would have higher mean levels of the avoidant attachment dimension than women; and that women would have higher mean levels of the anxious attachment dimension than men, was only partially supported. Women were found to have a higher mean anxious attachment score than men, but there were no differences found between men and women for the mean avoidant attachment scores. This may be due to the nature of the respondents in the current study. They were all currently in a relationship at the time of participating, and the mean age and length of relationship were considerably higher than those in the prior studies cited. Therefore, the participant profile differs markedly from participants in
the other studies where gender differences have been found. In the study by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) where males reported higher scores for dismissive attachment than females, and females reported higher scores for preoccupied attachment than males, participants were recruited from undergraduate psychology classes at an American university, and their mean age was 19.5 years. It is quite likely these participants may not ever have participated in a marital style relationship, and possible that a number of them never will participate in a marital style relationship for a variety of reasons, not least that their attachment orientation may make it difficult or undesirable for them to be married.

In the study by Scharfe and Bartholomew (1994) where a variety of methods of attachment classification were utilized and compared, males were found to more frequently be classified into the dismissive attachment category than females, and females were found to more frequently be classified into the preoccupied attachment category than males. However the mean age of participants was quite low (24.5 years) compared with the current study, and although participants were required to be involved in an exclusive relationship for at least two years, the mean length of relationship was four years, which is also quite low compared with the demographics of the current study. Additionally an exclusive relationship does not necessarily mean marital style relationship, as it would include those who are dating steadily but not cohabiting. Therefore it is possible that some individuals tested in these prior
studies may have been highly avoidant, and may never be involved in a marital style relationship. In the current study individuals with attachment orientations similar to these highly avoidant participants may not be represented due to the criteria for inclusion in the current study that respondents must be in a marital style relationship. Additionally, it is possible that either women develop more, or conversely, that men develop less, of an avoidant or dismissive style when in stable and enduring relationships, thereby lowering the difference between themselves and their partners over time in a relationship.

However, consistent with results of prior research, the current results suggest that women generally tend to score higher on the anxious attachment dimension than men. It is interesting to view these results in the light of another finding of the current research, that for women, scores on the anxious attachment dimension decreased as age and length of relationship increased. Still, overall the anxious attachment mean score was elevated. This suggests that women may experience quite high anxious attachment in early marriage and that it may attenuate over time, almost as if the establishment and survival of the relationship may be enhanced by women taking a caretaker-of-the-relationship role, particularly early on in the relationship. This notion is consistent with Gottman’s (1994, 1999) findings that if the female in a relationship is not able to inject humour, soothing, and caring into conflict discussions, to soften the effect of the conflict, it is predictive of a poor relationship outcome. Gottman found
this to be applicable to females, not to males, which is indicative of a specific role played by women in relationships in facilitating their success. It is possible that this role augments an increase in the anxious attachment attributes, or hypervigilant attachment behaviour (Main, 1990). With regard to the lack of difference between the men and women in the current study on the avoidance attachment dimension, or deactivation of the attachment system (Main), it is possible that deactivation is not greatly required by either men or women in an established relationship.

The results of the current study largely supported Hypothesis 3: that (a) participants with an anxious/preoccupied attachment style would have higher levels of the volatile conflict resolution style than participants with a secure attachment style; that (b) participants with secure attachment style would have higher levels of validating conflict resolution style than participants with anxious or avoidant attachment style; that (c) those with avoidant attachment style would have higher levels of the avoidant conflict resolution style than participants with secure attachment; and finally that (d) individuals with insecure attachment would have higher levels of the hostile conflict resolution style. The findings suggest that attachment orientation and Gottman’s (1994, 1999) conflict resolution styles may be fairly strongly linked.

It is interesting to consider the following links that the current research suggests. Gottman claims all three of the stable, or regulated conflict resolution styles
are equally effective in relationships, yet it would appear that the validating style is more strongly linked with secure attachment; the avoidant conflict resolution style is linked with avoidant attachment orientation; and the volatile conflict resolution style is linked with preoccupied (anxious) attachment; and these attachment orientations are not considered equally successful in relationships (e.g., Feeney & Noller, 1996; Simpson & Rholes, 1998). Although the different attachment orientations have been extensively linked with different relationship behaviours, and these links have repeatedly suggested that insecure attachment is related to less successful relationships, individuals with somewhat elevated anxious or avoidant attachment scores still manage to have enduring relationships regardless of the drawbacks insecure attachment may engender. The current results appear to offer some insight into how those with a more insecure attachment orientation manage to resolve marital conflict and maintain their relationships. The results suggest that rather than any specific style of conflict resolution behaviour being of greater or lesser effectiveness in a general sense, it may be that the observable behavioural differences associated with the different attachment orientations, and with the different conflict resolution styles, function to maintain ongoing and relatively stable relationships by meeting the individual’s differing needs for distance and proximity determined by their attachment style. In other words, a person with an anxious attachment orientation may have much greater success in maintaining a stable relationship if they
are able to resolve conflict in a volatile manner with their partner rather than in a validating or avoidant manner. It may be that these conflict resolution style differences are a key to understanding essential differences between those with insecure attachment who succeed in maintaining enduring and relatively stable marital style relationships and those with insecure attachment who do not.

It is apparent from the current research findings that it may be prudent for marital participants and counsellors alike to be aware that different conflict resolution styles may be indicative of underlying attachment orientation. Further, while these different conflict resolution styles may function well enough in the relationship to achieve a workable equilibrium, and maintain the relationship on a daily basis, they may become problematic if they cease to achieve the desired result (i.e., resolution of conflict), and the marital interactions begin to become overwhelmingly negative. Both the volatile and the avoidant conflict resolution styles have more of a propensity to become destructive than the validating conflict resolution style if they are over used by one party without being counterbalanced by positive accompanying behaviours. Frequently, when individuals have a method of problem-solving, or coping with a situation that is effective, they habitually apply that methodology to novel, as well as routine situations, in the hope and belief that it will work again. If there is a situation in which their habitual methodology does not work initially, they will usually reapply the same method with a little more persistence, and possibly with a little more force
(Bootzin, Bower, Crocker & Hall, 1991). In contrast to the validating style, where using more of the same is unlikely to become a problem, the volatile style used more vigorously can quite easily become aggressive, and the avoidant conflict resolution style used more frequently can quite easily become neglectful. Both of these latter outcomes are likely to create or exacerbate relationship problems. Therefore it is possible that whilst all three conflict resolution styles are serviceable, and may even be necessary for some individuals, they may not be equally effective.

However, it is important to acknowledge the reasons the different styles may be in evidence. Attachment orientation is a set of learned responses, with a biological basis (e.g., Bowlby, 1969, 1973), initiated in infancy and largely formed prior to the capacity for self reflection. Therefore attachment orientation tends to be a fairly automatic and non self-conscious set of behaviours and beliefs about the world, so the individuals who tend towards an anxious attachment orientation, for example, and may also tend towards a volatile conflict resolution style, are not necessarily going to find it any easier to change their conflict resolution style than to change their attachment orientation. In this case, the volatile conflict resolution style is likely to be meeting some of their attachment needs such as the need to remain in contact with their partner and thrash out the conflict rather than to walk away, which would likely be experienced as abandonment. These needs tend to become pressing when the attachment system is activated by the conflict, and may over-ride other needs like the
need to stay calm, and be validating of their partner. It may be that in order for an individual high in anxious attachment to be in a relationship, they need to be able to express their attachment needs when the couple is in conflict via persistent demands or expression of negative feelings. Likewise, it may be important that an individual high in avoidant attachment be able to withdraw from conflict discussions and not have to return to them to go over the details, but rather to be spared the stress of confrontation, thus deactivating their attachment system, which meets their attachment needs.

Therefore, Gottman’s (1994, 1999) observation that each of these different conflict resolution styles appears to be functional, and can be part of a sustainable relating pattern, and the notion that it is not of too much concern which pattern a couple tends to engage in, is only a partial explanation of marital conflict resolution behaviour. Further explanation that could be proposed is that rather than being equivalent, the conflict resolution styles appear to be different expressions of attachment orientation, and indicate salient differences between couples, and whilst they function to maintain relationships and offer couples methods for dealing with their conflicts, they probably involve different levels of risk to the relationship, as well as different levels of felt attachment security. Thus the results of the current study offer further explanation and risk assessment of the diverse range of behaviours manifest in marital interaction.
The results pertaining to Hypothesis 2, discussed above, are also interesting in light of the results relating to Hypothesis 4: that (a) women would have higher mean contempt and criticism scores than men; and (b) that men would have higher mean stonewalling scores than women. This hypothesis was only partially supported. Women did have higher contempt and criticism scores than men, but men did not have higher stonewalling scores than women. It appears that the men sampled in this particular study did not show a greater inclination to turn away from their partners via stonewalling (or avoidant attachment behaviours) than the women. This result is inconsistent with prior research (e.g., Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Gottman, 1994; Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1994).

It may be that older men in established relationships such as those participating in the current study, have less need to deactivate their attachment system, and thus display avoidant or dismissive attachment orientation, the behaviours of which include stonewalling, than younger men who are yet to be in a longer term committed relationship, such as some of the men sampled in a substantial portion of the prior adult attachment research. Certainly many of Gottman’s research participants, where age of participants and length of marriage were reported (e.g., Gottman & Levensen, 1985, 1992), tended to be of a younger mean age and a shorter mean relationship length than the current research sample. Therefore, there may have been a higher proportion of couples who would eventually separate in Gottman
and Levensen’s data, which was the basis for Gottman’s (1994) theory. The results suggest that future research investigating whether marital interaction tends to alter over time may be worthwhile.

Further, many of the studies examining attachment differences between males and females have used participants who were younger, often unmarried, or married less than 5 years (e.g., Brennan & Shaver, 1995; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994; Simpson, Ickes & Grich, 1999, Simpson, Rholes & Nelligan, 1992). Therefore, in this prior research data, there may have been a higher proportion of men who were more likely to have relatively high avoidant attachment scores and therefore to stonewall. The inclusion criteria of the present study possibly skewed the data quite substantially towards less avoidant, stonewalling individuals, as these behaviours do tend to negatively impact relationships.

Adult attachment and marital distress indicators were the subject matter of Hypothesis 5: that secure adult attachment style, measured categorically, would generally be associated with lower rates of Gottman’s marital distress indicators as well as lower scores on the MSI-R than insecure attachment; and Hypothesis 6: that higher levels of both the avoidant attachment dimension and the anxious attachment dimension would be associated with higher levels of Gottman’s marital distress indicators in participants’ self assessment as well as their partner assessment.
Both of these hypotheses were supported to some degree by the results. Hypothesis 5 was supported with some marital distress/dissatisfaction variables having lower mean scores for those individuals classified as having secure attachment orientation than those classified insecure. The pattern of results was different for men and women, with the women tending to have lower scores on the Gottman (1994, 1999) marital distress indicators (four horsemen), if they were classified as having a secure, rather than an insecure attachment orientation, and no differences according to attachment classification on the MSI-R. In contrast, the men tended to have lower scores on some of the MSI-R scales if they were classified as having a secure attachment orientation, and not on any of the Gottman marital distress indicators with the exception of defensiveness, which was higher for those men classified as fearful or dismissive than for those classified as secure. For women, a preoccupied attachment classification appeared to impact the most, and was associated with elevated levels of contempt and defensiveness perceived in the self, and criticism perceived in the partner. For men, fearful and dismissive attachment classification tended to impact the most, and were associated with elevated levels of concern over time spent together, affective and problem-solving communication, global distress, and defensiveness.

These results lend further support to the notion of a gender difference in the salience of each of the different attachment classifications, and the impact of
attachment behaviours on aspects of marital satisfaction, as well as gender differences in responses to the measures of marital distress/dissatisfaction. According to the results of the current study for men, avoidant styles of insecure attachment, including dismissive or fearful attachment classifications appear to be associated with differences in their scores on marital satisfaction measures. In contrast, for women, differences in their scores on marital satisfaction measures tend to be associated with anxious styles of insecure attachment orientation, including the preoccupied classification.

In addition, the type of marital satisfaction variables that have been found to differ according to attachment style have been found to vary according to gender, with men showing differences according to attachment orientation on the MSI-R, and women showing differences according to attachment orientation on Gottman’s (1994, 1999) marital distress indicators. This may be related to the slightly different emphasis of these two measures of marital functioning, with the MSI-R more focused on assessment of the couple relationship as a unit, while Gottman’s measures are more focused on personal attributes of the individuals in the relationship. This is consistent with Acitelli and Young (1996) who suggest that in studies where participants were asked to talk about their relationships, men tended to consider their relationships as a whole and focused on whether or not they are in one, while women tended to focus more on the experiences they have in their relationships.
Similar to the current study, Feeney (1994) found that for women elevated scores on the anxiety over relationships attachment dimension were associated with more global difficulties in the relationship as a whole, indicated by lower relationship satisfaction and less constructive communication, whereas for men, these more global difficulties in the relationship were associated with lower comfort with closeness scores, which indicate elevation in the avoidant attachment dimension. It is interesting to note that the participants in Feeney’s research were far more similar to those in the present study, than the participants in many of the other adult attachment research studies were. Therefore it would appear that the current research supports the notion that the avoidant (Brennen, Shaver & Clarke, 1998), or comfort with closeness (Feeney, 1994) or deactivation (Main, 1990) attachment dimension may be a more pertinent dimension in relationships for males than for females; and the anxiety over relationships (Brennen et. al., Feeney), or hyperactivated (Main) attachment dimension may be a more pertinent dimension in relationships for females than males.

*Self and Partner Perception*

The current study matched the responses of each participant with their relationship partner, and the data from each couple was explored to determine the differential effects of perceived and actual similarity of marital partners, and the relationship of attachment orientation to these. Four hypotheses were tested. The first
of these was Hypothesis 7: in keeping with prior research that shows moderate levels of similarity still in evidence after stereotyping and other bias effects have been accounted for (e.g., Acitelli et al., 2001), that relationship partners would be somewhat similar to one another as evidenced by moderate correlations between each partner’s self assessment on the Gottman (1994, 1999) marital distress indicators. This hypothesis was not supported. The comparison of males’ self assessment scores on Gottman’s (1994) marital distress indicators with female self assessment scores showed no significant relationship. This result is contrary to the results of prior research (e.g., Acitelli et al.; Kenny & Acitelli, 1994, 2001), the results of which have suggested that similarity between partners is quite high when measured without statistically controlling for stereotyping and social bias effects, i.e., that a participant’s response is similar to all other participants’ responses due to the effects of cultural norms. Therefore, the results of the current study are somewhat surprising.

In a study of conflict behaviours in newlywed couples, Acitelli et.al. (1993) found that actual similarity (as different from perceived similarity) of destructive conflict behaviours was negatively correlated with marital well-being for both partners. Those results suggest that actual similarity of negative behaviours in relationships is entirely unhelpful, and may lead to the negative reciprocity cycle that Gottman (1994) noted in distressed couples, which tends to overwhelm the relationship with negativity and herald marital dissolution. Therefore, it makes sense
that the results of the current research show no actual similarity of negative interactions as the participants were all still in a marital style relationship, and so the data would be skewed towards those who do not tend to indulge in negative reciprocity.

The second aspect of self and partner perception tested was Hypothesis 8: that perceived similarity between partners would be greater than actual similarity, indicated by lower mean difference scores between self assessment and partner assessment than between self assessment of one partner and self assessment of the other on the Gottman (1994, 1999) marital distress indicator scales. The results for both men and women supported this hypothesis. These results are congruent with results of previous research (e.g., Acitelli, Douvan, & Veroff, 1993; Acitelli, Kenny & Weiner, 2001; Ickes & Simpson, 1997; 2003; Kenny & Acitelli, 1994; 2001), and suggest that marital partners perceive their own negative behaviours to be similar to those of their partner, even though the previous hypothesis provides evidence that this is not the case.

Hypothesis 9 was that individuals classified into the secure or dismissive attachment groups, who tend to have a positive view of themselves in relation to others (e.g., Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) would have greater perceived similarity, indicated by lower mean difference scores between their own self assessment and their partner assessment on the Gottman (1999) marital distress indicator scales, than
individuals classified into the preoccupied or fearful attachment groups, who tend to have a negative view of themselves in relation to others. The results for the men supported this hypothesis, but the results for the women did not.

Hypothesis 10 was that individuals classified into the preoccupied attachment group would have greater accuracy of partner perception (empathic accuracy) indicated by lower mean difference scores between their partner assessment and their partner’s self assessment on the Gottman (1999) marital distress indicator scales, than individuals classified into the secure, dismissive or fearful attachment groups. The results for the women supported this hypothesis while the results for the men did not.

The results pertaining to hypotheses 9 and 10 suggest that a subtle and quite complex gender difference may be in evidence. Extrapolating from these results, it would appear that men who are classified into the preoccupied or fearful attachment groups perceive their partners as less similar to themselves than do the secure or dismissively attached individuals. However this is not the case for women. It would appear that women who are high enough in anxiety over relationships to be classified into the preoccupied attachment group are more able to accurately assess and observe their partner’s actual behaviour and attitudes in relation to the four marital distress variables measured: criticism, contempt, defensiveness and stonewalling. However, no evidence was found that men who are classified as preoccupied were more accurate at partner assessment than men classified into the other attachment groups.
Considering the results of these two hypotheses in combination, it appears that the preoccupied attachment style may function differently for men and women. For men it appears to increase a feeling of difference from their partner, whilst not increasing the accuracy of their assessment of their partner. For women preoccupied attachment orientation appears to have no effect on their feelings of difference from their partners, but does appear to increase their accuracy in assessing their partners. According to Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991), preoccupied attachment is associated generally with negative views of self and positive views of others. The current results suggest that this may not translate into similar behaviour for men and women. According to results found in the present study a negative view of self indicated by classification into the preoccupied attachment group may result in males being more self conscious and hypervigilant about themselves possibly resulting in a higher likelihood that they would analyse their own behaviour as it reflects upon themselves, seeing it as different, perhaps less effective or conversely more functional than their partner’s behaviour. Possible evidence for this notion resides in the finding that men classified as preoccupied tended to see their behaviour as more different from their female partner’s behaviour than those classified into the other attachment styles, but there was no evidence that this increased their accuracy of assessment of their partner’s actual perceptions of themselves. For women, negative self view may translate into more consciousness of the other resulting in hypervigilant watching of
their partner’s behaviour rather than a focus on themselves, which may lead to a tendency to be critical and demanding as has been suggested by prior research (e.g., Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991), whilst not overly aware of the effect of one’s own behaviour on others. These suggestions are consistent with the notion of hypervigilant behaviour being associated with anxious attachment which was proposed by Main (1990).

Young and Acitelli (1998) argued that the positive view of one’s partner often reported by those with a preoccupied attachment orientation exists in conjunction with a lack of self value, which is qualitatively different to the positive view of both self and partner experienced by those with a secure attachment orientation. According to Young and Acitelli (1998) the preoccupied orientation results in unrealistic expectations of the partner, and what follows tends to be disillusionment (which could result in contempt and criticism) when the partner does not live up to expectations, and that this tends to occur more for married men than for women. Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) found that preoccupied individuals were likely to characterize themselves as friendly, but to be characterized by friends as dominating, intrusive and argumentative.

These findings suggest that the positive view of others reported by those with a preoccupied attachment orientation tends to have a negative impact on relationships because it involves unrealistic demands which indicate a lack of real
understanding or empathy for the partner. In order to fully comprehend the ideas proposed in the current study it is important to note the difference between the notion of empathic accuracy proposed by Ickes and Simpson (2003) and the meaning that is generally attached to the concept of empathy. The empathic accuracy referred to by Ickes and Simpson could more realistically be called accurate knowledge of the partner rather than empathy in terms of compassionate understanding and acceptance of the partner, which is usually assumed to be a part of empathic understanding. Accurate knowledge is not necessarily accompanied by acceptance or compassion, and this appears to be the case with those who are have a more anxious attachment style. Ickes and Simpson proposed that anxious attachment is associated with a tendency towards empathic accuracy even when greater accuracy in understanding the partner may result in gaining painful and unnecessary knowledge that threatens the stability of the relationship, increasing tension, suspicion and distress. As the available research has shown evidence that anxious/preoccupied attachment orientation disposes the individual to greater vigilance, and habitual attending to possible negative attributes in either the self or the relationship, it is possible that the painful knowledge gained through this focus is subject to negative cognitive distortion, and interpreted as more important than it is in the context of the relationship as a whole.
The gender differences found in the current study are consistent with a number of findings in previous literature. Acitelli et al., (1993) suggested that it may be more important for wives to understand husbands than for husbands to understand wives, as men are generally more powerful in relationships and therefore have less need to understand women; whereas for women, more understanding of men may empower them more in the relationship and increase their access to resources. Also, consistent with the gender differences in these findings, is Gottman’s (1994) finding that a wife’s ability to soothe her husband and inject humour and affection into negative interactions contributes to variance in marital outcomes whereas the same is not so for husbands.

Therefore the increased accuracy of partner assessment evidenced in the current results for preoccupied women, and the feelings of greater difference between self and partner evidenced in the results for preoccupied men, in combination offer increased understanding of how preoccupied attachment has the potential to impact negatively, yet slightly differently on relationships for men as compared with women.

11.4 Relationship length, age, attachment and empathic accuracy

The final hypothesis tested in the current study related to differences in empathic accuracy and attachment orientation associated with age and length of relationship. Hypothesis 11: that (a) increased length of relationship would be associated with increased difference score between self assessment and partner
assessment on the Gottman (1994, 1999) marital distress indicators, since empathic accuracy becomes less important with increased length of relationships (Thomas, Fletcher & Lange, 1997); and that (b) anxious attachment would decrease as length of relationship increases, consistent with associations between empathic accuracy and anxious attachment, was partially supported by the results. According to the current results, women tend to become less anxiously attached and less focused on empathic accuracy as their relationship continues and as they age, whereas for men there is a decrease in empathic accuracy as their relationship continues, but no correlation with age. These results support the findings of Thomas et al.

These findings are also consistent with the notion that anxious attachment in women may be adaptive to some degree, in that it increases women’s propensity to attend to, and take care of their relationships. Gottman (1994, 1999) has noted that marriages where women do not attend, soothe, and inject humour into their interaction with their male partner tend to have poorer outcomes. Therefore, the close attention to the thoughts and feelings of the other that are associated with anxious attachment and empathic accuracy would seem to be especially beneficial in the initial few years of a marital relationship. These attributes may greatly assist in the process of establishing the relationship, however the need to continue these behaviours may not be as pressing as the relationship endures.
Gottman and Levensen (2002) found that marriages of longer duration tend to have a critical period which may result in breakdown when the participants in the marriage are about middle aged. According to Gottman and Levensen this is most commonly due to an avoidant or disengaged style of relating to one another, which is often the result of a deficiency in the effort necessary to keep a relationship functioning well. The decline in empathic accuracy in both men and women, as well as the decline in anxious attachment for women noted in the results of the present research may be indicative of a general trend in marital relationships, which may culminate in dissolution if couples have not maintained sufficient positive interaction in their relationship to preserve the necessary five positive to one negative interaction ratio.

11.5 Gender differences

Gender differences in conflict resolution style. There were no significant differences between males and females on mean levels of any of the four conflict resolution styles. However, some gender related differences in conflict resolution style emerged when couples were placed into attachment combination categories, as explained below.

Gender differences in marital satisfaction/distress. Results of the current research highlighted the differences between men and women in their reports of experiencing Gottman’s (1994, 1999) marital distress indicators in their own behaviour and in their
partner’s behaviour. It appears from the results that the women recognised and identified with Gottman’s distress indicators in themselves as well as their partners more readily than the men. Group data showed that the women consistently rated their own criticism, contempt and stonewalling as higher than they rated their partner’s, yet the men did not entirely concur. Men rated only their partner’s contempt as higher than their own, and rated criticism, defensiveness and stonewalling as no different between themselves and their partner. However, there was a trend in the correlations towards those amongst both men and women, who rate themselves high on a particular marital distress indicator, to also rate their partner high on that variable. This trend was apparent on each of the Gottman marital distress indicators. From the current data it would appear that men and women may differ in both their perception of differing levels of criticism and contempt between them, as well as their actual levels. However, their perceptions of themselves compared with their partners are routinely moderately to strongly correlated, indicating two separate factors are at play. First, there appears to be a perception of the other as more similar to the self than is evident from comparison of self assessments of partners. Second, there appears to be some agreement between men and women that women evidence higher levels of contempt.

Marital satisfaction measured with the MSI-R showed little difference in mean scores between men and women. The only subscale where there were significant
differences was affective communication, where males were significantly higher than females in mean score, meaning that they tended to be a little more dissatisfied with the quality of affective communication between the couple than the females. However, it is important to keep in mind that neither the male nor the female mean scores were in the “problem” range of scores on the MSI-R. In addition, there were other subtle gender differences in the relationships between the subscales. For example, for women the aggression subscale was found to be related to more other subscales, disagreement over finances, global distress, conventionalization and problem solving communication, than for men where it correlated only with disagreement over finances. Similarly women evidenced a relationship between the conflict over child rearing subscale and other subscales, disappointment with children, global distress, conventionalization and problem solving communication, while men only had a relationship between the conflict over child rearing subscale and disappointment with children subscale.

Generally the results showed that more facets of the relationship were affected for women in relation to men’s dissatisfaction on a particular subscale than was the case for men in relation to women’s dissatisfaction on a given subscale. For example, for women as their dissatisfaction with time spent together increases their male partner’s global distress, dissatisfaction with affective communication and sexual relationship tends to increase, whereas for men as their dissatisfaction with time spent
together increases their females partner’s tendency to view the relationship positively tends to decrease, while their global distress, dissatisfaction with affective and problem solving communication, and dissatisfaction with sexual relationship all tend to increase. This is consistent with the notion of women having a more networked or related approach to dissatisfaction in relationships, where feelings and thoughts about one aspect of the relationship are linked with other aspects of the relationship, compared with men having a more compartmentalised approach, in which dissatisfaction in one aspect of relational functioning does not necessarily affect their thoughts and feelings about another aspect. These results are consistent with the assertions of Acitelli and Young (1996) that women tend to think about the style of interactions or process as important, whereas men tend to focus on content and problem solving and be less aware of, and place less importance on the process, which can result in partners having quite different perceptions of their relationship.

Gender differences in attachment. Whilst there were very few significant differences between men and women in their mean levels on the MSI-R subscales, the links between the MSI-R and attachment appear to be different for men and women, with some significant differences in MSI-R scales according to attachment orientation for men but not for women.

According to the results for men, difference in attachment orientation is linked with differences in behaviour and experience in the areas of time spent together,
affective communication, problem solving communication, and global distress, as well as a difference in tendency to positively or negatively distort the relationship (conventionalization). In contrast, for women, difference in attachment orientation did not seem to be linked with differences on any of the MSI-R subscales.

The links between Gottman’s marital distress indicators and attachment also appear to be different for men and women, with some significant differences in three of the four distress scales (criticism, contempt and defensiveness). Both men and women differed across attachment groups according to their own defensiveness, with secure attachment being linked with lower levels of these behaviours than the three insecure attachment groups. However, the results for women showed differences according to attachment orientation over a wider range of these variables: partner’s criticism, as well as contempt and defensiveness in both self and partner.

In summary, for the men, the differences were between the secure, fearful and dismissive groups, and were concentrated on the MSI-R scales that measure practical, more concrete relationship functioning such as communication and time spent together; whilst for the women the significant differences centred on the emotion and attitude based aspects of relationship functioning that are measured by the Gottman marital distress indicator scales and involve more measurement of awareness of own and other’s affective state than by concrete measures of activities or specific behaviours. Also for women, the differences tend to be between the secure and
preoccupied attachment groups. The results point to a qualitative difference between men and women in the ways they experience and express their own feelings and distress in relationships, as well as how they interpret their partner’s behaviour.

**Gender differences in couple attachment combination.** Results describing differences between couple combination of attachment style also indicated some subtle gender differences. The MSI-R subscale scores where significant differences were found between the different couple attachment combinations showed differences for women which were routinely linked with their own attachment orientation, with secure attachment being linked with lower distress scores than insecure attachment. The men’s results showed that attachment insecurity in their female partner elevated their own distress scores regardless of whether they themselves had been classified into the secure or the insecure attachment attachment group. This would appear to indicate that some of the types of marital distress or dissatisfaction measured in the current research are affected more by the female partner’s attachment style than by the male partner’s attachment style.

Some gender differences were apparent in conflict resolution style when groups were compared according to couple attachment combination. It was found that the highest rate of hostile conflict resolution behaviour is reported by both males and females to be amongst secure males who have insecure female partners.
Overall, scrutiny of these results suggests that attachment orientation may be expressed or experienced differently for men than it is for women. It is quite plausible that the methods of regulating affect and proximity in relationships is different in men and women due in some part to gender socialization effects (e.g., Acitelli & Young, 1996).

11.6 Implications and possible future research

Conflict resolution and attachment. One notion which could be extrapolated from the findings of the current study is that the different conflict resolution styles found by Gottman (1994, 1999) to be functional in stable marriages may be related to the attachment orientation of the individuals in the couple. It seems that volatile conflict resolution may be associated with anxious or preoccupied attachment; avoidant conflict resolution style may be associated with avoidant dismissive or fearful attachment; and validating conflict resolution style may be associated with secure attachment. This suggests that the differences Gottman has observed and documented may be evidence of how individuals tending towards an insecure attachment orientation behave to maintain their relationships. It is important to note in this speculation that the different styles of conflict resolution fit conceptually with the behaviours necessary for those with attachment insecurities to maintain a comfortable level of proximity and interdependence with their partner. That is, these different styles of behaviour may be essential to the enactors of them to maintain a
sufficient balance of proximity and distance or independence to enable them to comfortably remain in an ongoing marital style relationship. For example it has been found to be preferable for those with a more avoidant attachment style to maintain some distance in their relationships in order to feel independent and self reliant to some degree (e.g., Simpson & Rholes, 1998). Therefore it would be easier for these individuals to deal with conflict by distancing themselves from it and maintaining their self reliance as is the case with an avoidant conflict resolution style, than to have to become too painfully aware of differences with their partner, or to be asked to compromise their own feelings or beliefs.

It has been found to be the preference of those with a more anxious attachment style to maintain proximity and interaction at all costs in order to keep their fears of loss of the relationship at bay (e.g., Simpson & Rholes, 1998). Therefore the volatile conflict resolution style notionally is most suitable to allow for expression of fears and disappointments, which are often voiced as criticisms of the partner. In contrast, those with a more secure attachment style have been found to demonstrate an ability to accept fairly calmly their own and their partner’s differences and grievances as they arise, without this causing a great deal of distress in the process of negotiating relationships (e.g., Simpson & Rholes), and therefore tend to be more comfortable with a validating style of conflict resolution in which each person is listened to and responded to calmly.
Although insecure attachment has been found to be associated with poorer relationship outcomes, the suggested links between attachment style and conflict resolution style offered by these findings explains how it may be that those with insecure attachment classifications are still fairly substantially represented in the surveys of married couples, and may be maintaining these relationships through adoption of these various conflict resolution techniques. Whilst each technique has its risks if the behaviours become overwhelmingly negative in sentiment (Gottman, 1994, 1999), each also appears to have its uses according to the various needs for proximity and interaction arising from differences in attachment orientation.

Measurement of conflict resolution. The current research used a measurement instrument formulated by Holman and Jarvis (2003), which comprised four paragraphs pertaining to each conflict resolution style and asked respondents to rate themselves on each of these. This was found to be of limited use in the current study as the results could not be statistically analyzed to classify the participants into conflict resolution style groups, a process deemed to be very important by Gottman (1994) in his research. However, here an anomaly arose between the writings of Gottman (1994) and (1999). In 1994, Gottman suggested that it was most important that a couple settle into predominantly one style of conflict resolution, and that a combination of styles would result in an imbalance in the marital system, which according to Gottman would result in marital difficulty and distress. Gottman (1994)
strongly suggested that the main problem in conflict resolution between partners is the result of mismatching of conflict resolution style rather than the style itself. However, closer examination of the appendices of Gottman (1999) where the original inventories upon which Holman and Jarvis presumably based their measure, shows rather ambiguously that a respondent to these inventories may be classified as partly one conflict resolution style and partly another; that is, a combination of two or three of the conflict resolution styles. This seems to contradict theory suggested in the earlier publication. The current research results suggested that a more complex classification system for conflict resolution style is needed in order to ascertain whether a pure conflict resolution style is required for marital stability as originally suggested by Gottman (1994), or whether a compatible (and possibly unique) combination conflict resolution style is stable and effective. A suggestion for the future study into conflict resolution style would be to focus more on the positive to negative ratio in interactions, as this may be a more crucial component of effective conflict resolution than whether or not the individuals are exactly matched in their conflict resolution style, or whether they resolve conflict in their marriage using only one of Gottman’s conflict resolution styles. In addition, a more effective measure of conflict resolution style devised from the research suggested above would be a most worthwhile accomplishment.
Marital satisfaction attachment and gender differences. Another of the notions suggested by the current research findings is that males and females tend to differ in subtle ways in the manner in which they assess and respond to the experience of distress or dissatisfaction in marriage. This has been indicated by the main findings of the current study relating to marital distress and dissatisfaction, which were that overall, women tended to register their dissatisfaction via the Gottman (1994, 1999) measure more readily than via the MSI-R measure, whereas men tended to report their dissatisfaction via the MSI-R more readily than the Gottman measure. A possible explanation of this is that women may tend to be more concerned with the personal attributes of their partner, and how these are displayed, as well as how their partner acts in relation to themselves, whereas men tend to assess their marriage more as a system. It is also possible that the differences between men and women result in part from differential social and economic power in marital relationships between men and women, as well as different tendencies to gain personal identity through relationships. Because women tend to be more reliant on men for economic support, especially during child bearing, than men are upon women, and the personal identity of women tends to be defined by their relationships more than is the case for men, it is possible that women are very alert to behaviours in their male partners which devalue or disempower them, whereas men may be less attuned to these behaviours. Additionally this may explain why both the men and women in the current study
reported that women tended to be more critical and contemptuous than their male counterparts. Both these notions are consistent with prior research (e.g., Acitelli & Young, 1996).

Another finding of the current research was that for women, it appears the anxiety dimension of attachment orientation is the aspect of their attachment functioning which tends to be linked with elevated distress on the marital distress and dissatisfaction variables, whereas for men the avoidant attachment dimension appears to be linked to elevated marital distress and dissatisfaction. In other words when distress gets elevated women tend to become more anxious and men tend to become more withdrawn. It is also interesting that for women anxious attachment seems to attenuate with age and length of their relationships. This is consistent with the research findings of Thomas, Fletcher and Lange (1997).

Future research into the links between marital distress and attachment that could further illuminate the complex differences between men and women, and the different types of distress they experience would be beneficial to clinicians working with couples in their task of understanding the genesis of marital distress and finding ways to therapeutically defuse it. The current research demonstrates that a more complex investigation of the various components of marital distress, and the different ways in which these affect different individuals, would be more useful than a general measure of overall marital satisfaction to inform clinicians.
Overall, in considering the results regarding marital distress/dissatisfaction collated in the current study, it is important to note that all these participants are currently in a marital style relationship. Therefore it would be logical to assume that the sample is skewed, in that it comprises individuals who experience some degree of success in relationships. Even those in the clinical sub-sample were presenting as a couple to a relationship counselling service, which would generally indicate some degree of ability to take part in a relationship. Individuals with more profound relationship difficulties would not be likely to be included in a sample such as the present one.

_Perception of self and partner in relationships._ The main finding of the current study in relation to self and other perception was that in the area of marital distress, partners were not found to be similar to each other even though they reported that they were. This is an interesting finding in light of previous research (e.g., Kenny & Acitelli, 1994, 2001) which consistently reported that there is a certain portion of perceived similarity between partners that is actual similarity. It may be that the negative attitudes and behaviours studied in the current research have a qualitatively different effect on an individual’s ability to acknowledge them in self and see them in the partner. It is possible that negative attributes that are recognized as being part of an individual’s personal behavioural repertoire, are more tolerable if it is perceived that they are also displayed by the partner.
Perceptual accuracy and attachment. Another interesting research finding of the current study was that for women the anxious attachment dimension was positively associated with the ability to accurately perceive and report the actual behaviours and attitudes of the partner, that is, empathic accuracy increased as anxious attachment increased. However, for men elevated anxious attachment was associated with perceptions of greater difference between self and partner, but the different perceptions were no more accurate than the perceptions of those with lower levels of anxious attachment. The results for the women are consistent with research reported by Ickes and Simpson (2003); however the findings for males in the current research are slightly different to the prior research. The current study suggests that whilst anxious attachment has an effect on the perceptions of males, the accuracy of these perceptions is not enhanced, whereas Ickes and Simpson report that the increased accuracy of perception is greater for women with higher anxious attachment orientation but is still evident in men, but the effect is less powerful. In addition, the current study found that empathic accuracy decreased with age. This result supported the research of Thomas, Fletcher and Lange (1997).

The results of the current research in relation to self and partner perception suggest that further investigation of the differential effects of positive and negative attributes of the self on accuracy of perception of the partner, as well as investigation of the gender differences, would be most beneficial for clinicians working with
couples to enhance their understanding of themselves and each other. In addition, attachment orientation appears to play a role in perceptual accuracy. It may be beneficial to further investigate cognitive distortions which may be associated with attachment, and may impact negatively on relationship outcomes.

11.7 Limitations

Whilst the current study successfully surveyed 101 married couples with quite varied ages and lengths of relationship, on a range of marital behaviours, there were some limitations which apply. The current study combined a number of self report measures into one quite lengthy questionnaire, and this was the main data collection tool. Whilst detailed questionnaires, can provide a wealth of rich research data, they can also become overwhelming for some participants because of the time and concentration required to complete them. Therefore, a limitation of the current study was that a long questionnaire was utilized, which was not counterbalanced by way of varying the order of the measures included, therefore the responses may have been subject to a primacy effect.

An additional limitation of the current study was that it used a self report as the mode of measurement. Self report measures are intrinsically problematic because they rely so heavily on the supposition that participants’ responses represent their true experience, which may not be the case. In future research, collecting at least some of the data via a structured interview based on the same questionnaire, and
comparing that data with the results of the self report questionnaire data may be a good way to verify the results obtained from self report measures.

In addition, the Holman and Jarvis (2003) questionnaire used to measure Gottman’s (1994, 1999) conflict resolution styles may not have provided as accurate a measure as Gottman’s original list of questions, or Gottman’s observational measures. However, the current research is important in that it highlights this, and may stimulate interest in the development of a more effective measure. More generally, even though the Gottman (1994, 1999) measures used in the current study have been used extensively by Gottman in clinical applications, and have been constructed upon the basis of his research findings, none of them appear to have been extensively analysed for reliability and validity. Statistical studies of this kind would be most useful in verifying the measures.

The current research included a clinical sub-sample recruited from a relationship counselling agency in the interests of adding variance to the sample. A limitation of the current research was that there were too few of these couples recruited to usefully compare them statistically with the non clinical sample. Future research could aim to achieve sufficient numbers of clinical recruits for statistical comparison.
11.8 Conclusions

Overall, the current research contributes to the clarification of links between marital functioning, attachment orientation and Gottman’s (1994, 1999) research and theories. The current results suggest that there are links between Gottman’s systematic approach to relationship assessment, diagnosis of marital dysfunction, and treatment, and attachment orientation. The results suggest that a combination of these systems of understanding relationships may be beneficial in successfully developing interventions that work well in marital therapy. Whilst Gottman’s research findings provide an enormous amount of information about the common features of dysfunctional relationship behaviour, and Gottman’s (1999) suggested process for intervention and recovery of marital satisfaction is logical, there remains some couples who attend clinicians for couple therapy, who do not respond to this type of intervention. For work with these couples, it is hoped that the information offered by research such as the current research will enrich clinicians’ understanding of the underpinnings of the displayed behaviours, so that the wealth of practical wisdom embedded in Gottman’s theories can be blended with the depth of knowledge of human relating offered by attachment theory to create a greater awareness, which can prevail, thereby enhancing therapeutic outcomes.
References


Appendix A Research Questionnaire
My name is Sue Whelan and I am currently completing a Doctoral Degree in Counselling Psychology at Swinburne University of Technology. I am interested in the relationship between feelings of satisfaction, closeness and distress in marital relationships, the behaviours that accompany these feelings, and possible differences between men and women in their experiences of marriage.

All the information collected will be anonymous for the purposes of the research, but please feel free to discuss your answers or any issues the questionnaire brings up with your counsellor if you wish. Your counsellor will not have any access to your data, but each counsellor is aware of the sorts of questions you have been asked to consider, and will be happy to discuss these with you if you wish. I believe this may be of some benefit to couples seeking to better understand the sources of their marital satisfaction and/or distress, and to better understand how their relationship functions.

Please do not spend too long considering your answers. Often the answer that comes up quickly and spontaneously is the most accurate. You are free to discontinue the questionnaire at any time. Completion of the questionnaire will be taken as consent to participate in this study. If you have any concerns or are interested in the results of the research you may contact my academic supervisor Dr Bruce Findlay on 9214 8093. If anything in this project distresses you in any way please let myself, or my supervisor know, and counselling or an appropriate referral can be arranged.

If you have any complaint about the conduct of this research please contact The Chairperson, Social and Behavioural Sciences Ethics Committee.
School of Social and Behavioural Sciences, Swinburne University,  
P.O. Box 218       HAWTHORN  3122

OR

The Chair, Human Research Ethics Committee, Swinburne University,  
P.O.Box 218       HAWTHORN  3122

Many thanks for your participation

Sue Whelan…………………………

Dr. Bruce Findlay…………………………
Could you please begin by answering the following questions to create a brief personal snapshot of your general circumstances:

Age _____ (in years)

Length of current relationship ______ (in years)

Is it a registered marriage?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Sex

☐ Male
☐ Female

Highest level of education

☐ Secondary school
☐ Tertiary Degree
☐ Trade Certificate
☐ Associate Diploma

Are you currently employed?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Retired

Approximate family income

☐ Less than 20,000 per annum
☐ 21,000 – 50,000
☐ 51,000 – 80,000
☐ More than 81,000
Below are descriptions of how people in four different types of relationships handle conflict. We would like to see which type most closely describes how you and your partner deal with conflict in your relationship. After reading each paragraph, please circle a response in the boxes below it. Firstly in the box labeled ‘You’, circle an answer to represent your own thoughts, feelings, behaviour and attitude, and then in the response box labeled ‘Your partner’ circle an answer that describes their thoughts, feelings, behaviour and attitude.

Response Categories
1=Never  2=Rarely  3=Sometimes
4=Often  5=Very often

In our relationship, conflicts may be fought on a grand scale, and that is okay, since our making up is even grander. We have volcanic arguments, but they are just a small part of a warm loving relationship. Although we argue, we are still able to resolve our differences. In fact, our passion and zest for fighting actually lead to a better relationship, with a lot of making up, laughing and affection.

You

1=Never  2=Rarely  3=Sometimes
4=Often  5=Very often

Your Partner
In our relationship, conflict is minimized. We think it is better to “agree to disagree” rather than end up in discussions that will result in a deadlock. We don’t think much is to be gained by being openly angry with each other. In fact, a lot of talking about disagreements seems to make matters worse. We feel that if you just relax about problems, they will have a way of working themselves out.

You

1=Never 2=Rarely 3=Sometimes
4=Often 5=Very often

Your Partner

1=Never 2=Rarely 3=Sometimes
4=Often 5=Very often

In our relationship, when we are having conflict, we let each other know the other’s opinions are valued and their emotions valid, even if we disagree with each other. Even when discussing a hot topic, we display a lot of self-control and are calm. When
fighting, we spend a lot of time validating each other as well as trying to persuade our partner, or trying to find a compromise.

You

1=Never  2=Rarely  3=Sometimes

4=Often  5=Very often

Your Partner

1=Never  2=Rarely  3=Sometimes

4=Often  5=Very often

We argue often and hotly. There are a lot of insults back and forth, name-calling, put-downs, and sarcasm. We don’t really listen to what the other is saying, nor do we look at each other very much. One or the other of us can be quite detached and emotionally uninvolved, even though there may be brief episodes of attack and defensiveness. There are clearly more negatives than positives in our relationship.

You

1=Never  2=Rarely  3=Sometimes

4=Often  5=Very often
Your Partner

1=Never  2=Rarely  3=Sometimes

4=Often  5=Very often
The following questions are in 4 parts and are designed to assess your ways of interacting with your partner. Think about the last few times you and you partner had a discussion or disagreement and answer the following questions with this in mind. Please answer firstly for yourself and then indicate the answer that describes your partner’s behaviour or attitudes.

PART 1

1. I thought it was very important to determine who was at fault.
   YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

2. I saw it as my job to present all of my complaints.
   YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

3. I tried to see patterns and analyze my partner’s personality as part of my complaint.
   YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

4. I didn’t complain until I felt very hurt.
   YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

5. I tried to make a general point instead of being specific about one situation or action.
   YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

6. I analyzed my partner’s personality in addition to discussing specific actions that bothered me.
   YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No
7. I let things build up for a long time before I complained.

YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

8. I didn’t censor my complaints at all. I really let my partner have it full force.

YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

9. When I complained my emotions were very intense and powerful.

YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

10. I complained in part to get things off my chest.

YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

11. I did not state my complaints in a neutral manner.

YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

12. I didn’t try to be very rational when I stated what I thought was wrong.

YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

13. When I complained I felt explosive inside.

YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

14. When I complained I brought up my partner’s faults.

YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

15. There’s no stopping me once I get started.

YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

16. I resented having to bring up these issues in the first place.

YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

17. I regret my tactless choice of words when I complained.

YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No
18. Whenever I bring up a problem I know I am basically right.
YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

19. Whenever I bring up a problem it is my goal to get my partner to see that I am basically right.
YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

20. It was my goal to get my partner to accept some blame for the problem.
YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

21. When I complained I used phrases like “You always” or “You never”.
YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No
PART 2

1. When we were discussing an issue in our marriage, I couldn’t think of much of anything I admired in my partner.

   YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

2. When I got upset I could see glaring faults in my partner’s personality.

   YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

3. I just don’t respect some of the things my partner does.

   YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

4. I tried to point out ways in which my partner was inadequate in a particular situation.

   YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

5. I found it hard to have much pride in my partner’s qualities.

   YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

6. During the discussion I found myself putting my partner down.

   YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

7. There’s not a whole lot to look up to in the way my partner goes about things.

   YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

8. My spouse can be pretty arrogant at times.

   YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No
9. When my partner got negative I found myself thinking of insulting things to say back.

YOU: Yes No YOUR PARTNER: Yes No

10. My spouse can be pretty smug at times.

YOU: Yes No YOUR PARTNER: Yes No

11. My spouse was too stubborn to compromise.

YOU: Yes No YOUR PARTNER: Yes No

12. When my partner was upset with me I wanted to turn the tables and counterattack.

YOU: Yes No YOUR PARTNER: Yes No

13. I can’t help feeling that there is a lot of stupidity in my partner’s behaviour.

YOU: Yes No YOUR PARTNER: Yes No

14. It’s hard for me to see my partner’s point of view when I don’t agree.

YOU: Yes No YOUR PARTNER: Yes No

15. I often have no respect for my partner when we are discussing an issue.

YOU: Yes No YOUR PARTNER: Yes No

16. I just get fed up with all the negativity.

YOU: Yes No YOUR PARTNER: Yes No

17. I felt disgusted by my partner’s attitudes.

YOU: Yes No YOUR PARTNER: Yes No

18. My spouse can be pretty stupid at times.

YOU: Yes No YOUR PARTNER: Yes No
19. I disapprove of my partner’s behaviour.
YOU: Yes No YOUR PARTNER: Yes No

20. My spouse can be pretty inept at times.
YOU: Yes No YOUR PARTNER: Yes No

21. It was hard to respect my partner.
YOU: Yes No YOUR PARTNER: Yes No

22. When my partner is upset with me I think of all the ways I’ve been let down in the marriage.
YOU: Yes No YOUR PARTNER: Yes No

23. My spouse can be very selfish.
YOU: Yes No YOUR PARTNER: Yes No

24. I often feel a sense of righteous indignation when my partner is expressing something negative.
YOU: Yes No YOUR PARTNER: Yes No

25. When I get dumped on I think of ways to get even.
YOU: Yes No YOUR PARTNER: Yes No

26. When I see a glaring fault in my partner I can’t recall my partner’s positive qualities.
YOU: Yes No YOUR PARTNER: Yes No

PART 3
1. When my partner complained I felt unfairly picked on.
   YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

2. I felt misunderstood.
   YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

3. I don’t feel that I get credit for all the positive things that I do.
   YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

4. What went wrong was actually not that much my responsibility.
   YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

5. To avoid blame I had to explain why and how the problem arose.
   YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

6. I felt unfairly attacked.
   YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

7. When my partner complained, I realize that I also had a set of complaints that
   needed to be heard.
   YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

8. My partner’s negativity got too intense, too much, too out of proportion.
   YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

9. My partner was too touchy, got feelings hurt too easily.
   YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

10. There was some truth to my partner’s complaints, but it was not the whole truth.
    YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No
11. When my partner complained, I thought, “I am innocent of these charges”.
YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

12. When my partner complained I felt I had to “ward off” these attacks.
YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

13. I felt obligated to deny the complaints against me that were inaccurate.
YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

14. When I listened to my partner’s complaints I thought of my own that weren’t getting any attention.
YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

15. My partner’s views of the problem were too self-centred.
YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

16. I thought “What you say only bounces right off me”.
YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

17. When my partner complained I tried to think of ways to protect myself.
YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

18. When my partner complained I thought of a way to re-explain my position.
YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

19. When my partner complained I thought that if my position were really understood we wouldn’t have all these issues.
YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

20. It seems that all my partner can do is find fault with me.
YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No
21. Sometimes it feels like my partner is coming at me with a baseball bat.
YOU: Yes  No YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

22. During a hot argument I keep thinking of ways to retaliate.
YOU: Yes  No YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

PART 4

1. When my partner complained I felt that I just wanted to get away from this garbage.
YOU: Yes  No YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

2. I had to control myself to keep from saying what I really felt.
YOU: Yes  No YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

3. I thought, “It’s best to withdraw to avoid a big fight”.
YOU: Yes  No YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

4. I withdrew to calm down.
YOU: Yes  No YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

5. When we have a big blow-up, I just want to leave.
YOU: Yes  No YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

6. At times when my spouse is very negative, I think it is best just not to respond at all.
YOU: Yes  No YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

7. I’d rather withdraw than get my feelings hurt.
YOU: Yes  No YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No
8. I think that sometimes withdrawing is the best solution.

YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

9. I wondered why small issues suddenly became big ones.

YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

10. I withdrew when my partner’s emotions seemed out of control.

YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

11. I thought, “I don’t have to take this kind of treatment”.

YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

12. I didn’t want to fan the flames of conflict, so I just sat back and waited.

YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No

13. I hate it when things in our discussions stop being rational.

YOU: Yes  No  YOUR PARTNER: Yes  No
The following items are statements about you and your relationship with your partner. Read each statement and decide whether it is true or false for you. Then mark your answer in the place provided beside the statement. If the statement is true or MOSTLY true place a tick in the box marked T. If the statement is false or USUALLY UNTRUE place a tick in the box marked F. Mark only one box for each statement. If you want to change your response, draw an X over your old answer and then mark your new answer.

1. When my partner and I have differences of opinion, we sit down and discuss them
   \[ \checkmark \quad \square \]

2. I am fairly satisfied with the way my partner and I spend our available free time.
   \[ \checkmark \quad \square \]

3. My partner almost always responds with understanding to my mood at a given moment
   \[ \checkmark \quad \square \]

4. My childhood was probably happier than most.
   \[ \checkmark \quad \square \]

5. There are some things my partner and I just can’t talk about.
   \[ \checkmark \quad \square \]

6. It is sometimes easier to confide in a friend than my partner.
   \[ \checkmark \quad \square \]

7. My partner seems to enjoy sex as much as I do.
   \[ \checkmark \quad \square \]

8. I wish my partner shared a few more of my interests.
   \[ \checkmark \quad \square \]

9. During an argument with my partner, each of us airs our feelings completely.
   \[ \checkmark \quad \square \]
10. I was very anxious as a young person to get away from my family.  
   [ ] T  [ ] F

11. I would prefer to have sexual relations more frequently than we do now.  
   [ ] T  [ ] F

12. Even when angry with me my partner is able to appreciate my viewpoints.  
   [ ] T  [ ] F

13. My partner likes to share his or her leisure time with me.  
   [ ] T  [ ] F

14. There is a great deal of love and affection expressed in our relationship.  
   [ ] T  [ ] F

15. I am sometimes unhappy with our sexual relationship  
   [ ] T  [ ] F

16. There are many things about our relationship that please me  
   [ ] T  [ ] F

17. A lot of our arguments end in depressing stalemates.  
   [ ] T  [ ] F

18. Even when I am with my partner, I feel lonely most of the time.  
   [ ] T  [ ] F

19. I trust my partner with our money completely.  
   [ ] T  [ ] F

20. There are some things about my partner that I do not like.  
   [ ] T  [ ] F

21. Our relationship has been very satisfying.  
   [ ] T  [ ] F

22. My partner has slapped me.  
   [ ] T  [ ] F

23. Some equality in marriage is a good thing, but by and large, the man ought to  
   have the main say-so in family matters.  
   [ ] T  [ ] F
24. The good things in our relationship far outweigh the bad. T F

25. My partner and I decide together the manner in which our income is to be spent. T F

26. There are times when my partner does things that make me unhappy. T F

27. Two people should be able to get along better than my partner and I do. T F

28. I have never worried that my partner might become angry enough to hurt me. T F

29. There should be more childcare centres so that mothers of young children could work. T F

30. Our relationship is as successful as any that I know of. T F

31. Our relationship has never been in difficulty because of financial concerns. T F

32. My partner and I understand each other completely. T F

33. My partner has slammed things around or thrown things in anger. T F

34. Such things as laundry, cleaning and child care are primarily a woman’s responsibility. T F

35. I have often considered asking my partner to go with me for relationship counseling. T F
36. There are some things about our relationship that do not entirely please me.  T  F

37. If a child gets sick and both parents work, the father should be just as willing as the mother to stay home from work and take care of the child.  T  F

38. My partner and I need to improve the way we settle our differences.  T  F

39. My partner and I spend a good deal of time together in different kinds of play and recreation.  T  F

40. My partner doesn’t take me seriously enough sometimes.  T  F

41. My parents’ marriage was happier than most.  T  F

42. My partner is so touchy on some subjects that I can’t even mention them.  T  F

43. Whenever I am feeling sad my partner makes me feel loved and happy again.  T  F

44. I am somewhat dissatisfied with how we discuss better ways of pleasing each other sexually.  T  F

45. My partner and I don’t have much in common to talk about.  T  F

46. When we argue my partner and I seem to go over and over the same old things.  T  F
47. All the marriages on my side of the family seem to be quite successful.  

48. One thing my partner and I don’t fully discuss is our sexual relationship.  

49. My partner’s feelings are too easily hurt.  

50. It seems that we used to have more fun than we do now.  

51. Sometimes I feel as though my partner doesn’t really need me.  

52. My partner sometimes shows too little enthusiasm for sex.  

53. Our relationship has been disappointing in several ways.  

54. Minor disagreements with my partner often end up in big arguments.  

55. My partner and I have never come close to ending our relationship.  

56. Our financial future seems quite secure.  

57. There are times when I wonder if I made the best of all possible choices in a partner.  

58. I get pretty discouraged about our relationship sometimes.  

59. I have worried about my partner losing control over his or her anger.
60. Earning the family income is primarily the responsibility of the man.  
   T  F

61. My partner and I seldom have major disagreements.  
   T  F

62. It is often hard for us to discuss our finances without getting upset with each other.  
   T  F

63. My partner occasionally makes me feel miserable.  
   T  F

64. I have never felt better in our relationship than I do now.  
   T  F

65. My partner has never thrown things at me in anger.  
   T  F

66. The man should be the head of the family.  
   T  F

67. The future of our relationship is too uncertain for us to make any serious plans.  
   T  F

68. My partner is forever checking up on how I spend our money.  
   T  F

69. I have never regretted our relationship even for a moment.  
   T  F

70. My partner sometimes screams and yells at me when he or she is angry.  
   T  F

71. A woman should take her husband’s last name after marriage.  
   T  F

72. My partner and I are happier than most of the couples I know  
   T  F

73. Trying to work out a budget causes more trouble with my partner than it is worth.  
   T  F
74. The most important thing for a woman is to be a good wife and mother.

75. When arguing, we manage quite well to restrict our focus to the important issues.

76. Our daily life is full of interesting things to do.

77. Sometimes my partner just can’t understand the way I feel.

78. My parents didn’t communicate with each other as well as they should have.

79. My partner has no difficulty accepting criticism.

80. Just when I need it most, my partner makes me feel important.

81. My partner has too little regard sometimes for my sexual satisfaction.

82. My partner doesn’t take enough time to do some of the things I would like to do.

83. My partner sometimes seems intent upon changing some aspect of my personality.

84. My parents never really understood me.

85. My partner and I nearly always agree on how frequently to have sexual relations.
86. My partner and I seem to be able to go for days sometimes without settling our differences.  

87. I spend at least one hour each day in an activity with my partner.  

88. My partner does many different things to show me that he or she loves me.  

89. I have never seriously considered having an affair.  

90. I have important needs in our relationship that are not being met.  

91. Our arguments frequently end up with one of us being hurt or crying.  

92. At times I have very much wanted to leave my partner.  

93. My partner is a very good manager of finances.  

94. My partner has all of the qualities I’ve always wanted in a partner.  

95. There are some serious difficulties in our relationship.  

96. My partner has never pushed me or grabbed me in anger.  

97. Where a family lives should depend mostly on the man’s job.  

98. I might be happier if I weren’t in this relationship.  

99. My partner and I rarely argue about money.
100. There are times when I do not feel a great deal of love and affection for my partner. [T  F]

101. I have often wondered whether our relationship may end up in divorce or separation. [T  F]

102. My partner has left bruises or welts on my body. [T  F]

103. In a relationship the woman’s career is of equal importance to the man’s. [T  F]

104. I believe that our relationship is as pleasant as that of most of the people I know. [T  F]

105. I feel as though we live beyond our financial means. [T  F]

106. I don’t think any couple could live together with greater harmony than my partner and I. [T  F]

107. My partner has never threatened to hurt me. [T  F]

108. In a relationship, a major role of a woman is that of housekeeper. [T  F]

109. I have known very little unhappiness in our relationship. [T  F]

110. My partner buys too many things without consulting with me first. [T  F]

111. If a mother of young children works, it should be only while the family needs the money. [T  F]
112. My partner has never injured me physically.  

113. When we disagree, my partner helps us to find alternatives acceptable to both of us.  

114. Our recreational and leisure activities appear to be meeting both our needs quite well.  

115. I feel free to express openly strong feelings of sadness to my partner.  

116. I had a very happy home life.  

117. My partner and I rarely have sexual relations.  

118. Sometimes I wonder just how much my partner really does love me.  

119. I would like my partner to express a little more tenderness during intercourse.  

120. The members of my family were always very close to each other.  

121. My partner and I are often unable to disagree with one another without losing our tempers.  

122. I often wondered if my parents’ marriage would end in divorce.  

123. There are some things I would like us to do, sexually, that my partner doesn’t seem to enjoy.
124. My partner often fails to understand my point of view on things.  

125. Whenever he or she is feeling down, my partner comes to me for support.

126. My partner keeps most of his or her feelings inside.

127. Our sexual relationship is entirely satisfactory.

128. I believe our relationship is reasonably happy.

129. My partner often complains that I don’t understand him or her.

COUPLES WITHOUT CHILDREN STOP HERE AND GO TO PAGE 22. COUPLES WITH CHILDREN ANSWER THE FOLLOWING:

Do you have step children?  

Do you have your own biological children?

130. For the most part, our children are well behaved.

131. My partner and I rarely argue about the children.

132. My children’s value systems are much the same as my own.

133. My partner doesn’t spend enough time with the children.

134. Our relationship might have been happier if we had not had children.

135. My partner and I rarely disagree on when or how to discipline the children.

136. I wish my children would show a little more concern for me.
137. Our children often manage to drive a wedge between my partner and me.

T   F

138. My children and I don’t have very much in common to talk about.

T   F

139. My partner doesn’t display enough affection toward the children.

T   F

140. Our children do not show adequate respect for their parents.

T   F

141. My partner and I decide together what rules to set for the children.

T   F

142. Our children don’t seem as happy and carefree as other children their age.

T   F

143. My partner doesn’t assume his or her fair share of taking care of the children.

T   F

144. Having children has not brought all the satisfaction that I had hoped it would.

T   F

145. My partner and I nearly always agree on how to respond to our children’s requests for money or privileges.

T   F

146. Our children rarely fail to meet their responsibilities at home.

T   F

147. Our relationship has never been in difficulty because of the children.

T   F

148. Rearing children is a nerve-wracking job.

T   F
149. My partner and I assume equal responsibility for rearing the children.

   T  F

150. I frequently get together with one or more of my children for fun or recreation at
home.

   T  F
The following statements concern how you feel in romantic relationships. We are interested in how you generally experience relationships, not just in what is happening in your current relationship. Respond to each statement by indicating how much you agree or disagree with it. Write a number in the space provided, using the following rating scale:

______ I prefer not to show my partner how I feel deep down.

______ I worry about being abandoned.

______ I am very comfortable being emotionally close to my partner.

______ I worry a lot about my relationships.

______ Just when my partner starts to get close to me I find myself pulling away.

______ I worry that my partner won’t care as much about me as I care about them.

______ I get uncomfortable when my partner wants to be very close.

______ I worry a fair amount about losing my partner.

______ I don’t feel comfortable opening up to my partner.

______ I often wish that my partner’s feelings for me were as strong as my feelings for him/her.
I want to get close to my partner but I keep pulling back.  
I often want to merge completely with my partner, and this sometimes scares them away.  
I am nervous when my partner gets too close to me.  
I worry about being alone.  
I feel comfortable sharing my private thoughts and feelings with my partner.  
My desire to be very close sometimes scares people away.  
I try to avoid getting too close to my partner.  
I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by my partner.  
I find it relatively easy to get close to my partner.  
Sometimes I feel that I force my partner to show more feeling, more commitment.  
I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on my partner.  
I do not often worry about being abandoned;  
I prefer not to be too close to my partner.  
If I can’t get my partner to show interest in me, I get upset or angry.  
I tell my partner just about everything.  
I find that my partner doesn’t want to get as close as I would like.
I usually discuss my problems and concerns with my partner.

When I am not involved in a relationship, I feel somewhat anxious and insecure.

I feel comfortable depending on my partner.

I get frustrated when my partner is not around as much as I would like.

I don’t mind asking my partner for comfort, advise, or help.

I get frustrated if my partner is not available when I need them.

It helps to turn to my partner in times of need.

When my partner disapproves of me I feel really bad about myself.

I turn to my partner for many things, including comfort and reassurance.

I resent it when my partner spends time away from me.
Please read the following descriptions and indicate which one best describes how you feel and how you think your partner feels. Circle one of the numbers on each of the scales to indicate how much each interpersonal style describes you. Then answer it again below as you think your partner would answer it.

1. It is easy for me to become emotionally close to others. I am comfortable depending on them and having them depend on me. I don’t worry about being alone or having others not accept me.

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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Not like me</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Exactly like me</td>
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Answer for your partner

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<td>1</td>
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2. I am uncomfortable getting close to others. I want emotionally close relationships, but I find it difficult to trust others completely, or to depend on them. I worry that I will be hurt if I allow myself to become too close to others.

1 to 8 scale:

1 = Not like me
8 = Exactly at all like me

Answer for your partner

1 to 8 scale:

1 = Not like them
8 = Exactly at all like them

3. I want to be completely emotionally intimate with others, but I often find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like. I am uncomfortable being without close relationships, but I sometimes worry that others don’t value me as much as I value them.

1 to 8 scale:

1 = Not like me
8 = Exactly at all like me

Answer for your partner

1 to 8 scale:

1 = Not like them
8 = Exactly at all like them
4. I am comfortable without close relationships. It is very important to me to feel independent and self-sufficient, and I prefer not to depend on others or have others depend on me.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
1=Not like me at all
8=Exactly like me

Answer for your partner

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
1=Not like them at all
8=Exactly like them

Now circle one number below to indicate which of the four descriptions above is most like you

1 2 3 4

And most like your partner
Thank you very much for participating.

Please write any further comments in the space provided below

___________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________
Appendix B  Information Sheet
Couples Research-some questions you may wish to ask

**Do I have to be involved in this study?**
Participation is entirely voluntary and people may withdraw at any time.

**What if my partner doesn’t want to participate but I do?**
Ideally both partners should complete the questionnaires but if your partner decides not to be involved an individual can still complete the questionnaire.

**Who will see the questionnaires?**
The questionnaires are confidential, only the researchers will have access to the completed questionnaires.

How long will the questionnaire take to fill out?
Approximately 40 mins

**What will I get out of being involved in this research?**
Most people find it interesting to be asked questions about what they think and feel about their relationship, especially if they are contemplating marital counselling. There is little research in Australia about marriage, which involves longer term couples. Your participation will contribute to further understanding in the area of relationship interaction and counselling.

**Who are the researchers?**
Sue Whelan, who is an experienced relationship counselor, and staff from Swinburne University with experience and expertise in the areas of relationship and individual counselling, academic research and ethical issues.

If participants have any other queries or questions about the research they can contact one of the researchers: Sue Whelan on 9894 0825 or Dr. Bruce Findlay on 9214 8093