Predicting the Relationship Satisfaction of Couples with Dependent Children: The Impact of Attachment, Conflict Styles and Emotional Intelligence

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Abstract

The purpose of the current study was to examine the associations between adult attachment, conflict resolution styles, emotional intelligence and relationship satisfaction, and to determine which of these variables were the most important predictors of relationship satisfaction in a sample of longer-term couples with one or more dependent children. One hundred and eleven heterosexual couples (222 individuals; Husbands’ age: $M = 44.9$ years, $SD = 8.3$; Wives’ age $M = 42.5$ years, $SD = 7.9$) currently living together in a marital relationship (length of relationship: $M = 17$ years, $SD = 8.4$) were recruited via snowballing of contacts known to the researcher and via undergraduate psychology students at Swinburne University in Melbourne, Australia who distributed the questionnaires to couples they knew who met the participation criteria. Each partner in the couple completed a separate questionnaire which included measures of their self-perceptions and their perceptions of their partner. The examination of gender differences generally indicated that husbands and wives tended to report similar relationship experiences, although differences in their perceptions of emotional intelligence and both the positive problem solving and compliance conflict styles were found. The hypothesis that lower levels of attachment avoidance and anxiety would be associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction was supported for both husbands and wives. The hypothesis that higher levels of positive problem solving and lower levels of each of conflict engagement, withdrawal, compliance and ineffective arguing would be associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction, was partially supported. Unexpectedly, husbands’ relationship satisfaction was not associated with their wives’ self-reports of positive problem solving or conflict engagement. The hypothesis that
higher levels of emotional intelligence would be associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction was partially supported. Contrary to prediction, both husbands’ and wives’ relationship satisfaction was most strongly positively associated with how emotionally intelligent they perceived their partner to be. The hypothesis that lower levels of attachment avoidance and anxiety would be positively associated with positive problem solving, and negatively associated with each of conflict engagement, withdrawal, compliance and ineffective arguing, was partially supported. Despite some minor gender variations, overall husbands’ and wives’ reported levels of attachment avoidance was found to be more strongly related to their self-reports and partner-reports of each conflict style, than was their attachment anxiety. The hypothesis that lower levels of attachment avoidance and anxiety would be associated with higher levels of emotional intelligence was partially supported. Again, both husbands’ and wives’ perceptions of their partners’ level of emotional intelligence was more strongly related to their own attachment dimensions than their own self-reported level of emotional intelligence. The hypothesis that higher levels of emotional intelligence would be associated with higher levels of positive problem solving and lower levels of each of conflict engagement, withdrawal, compliance and ineffective arguing was partially supported. Despite some gender variations, overall both husbands and wives reported engaging in more constructive, and less destructive, conflict styles if they perceived their partner to be higher in emotional intelligence. Of all the examined relationship variables, for both husbands and wives, only attachment avoidance, partner-report of emotional intelligence and ineffective arguing were found to be uniquely significant predictors of relationship satisfaction. Overall, the current findings suggest some subtle, but important
gender differences in the relationship experiences of couples with dependent children.

Further, the current research highlights which factors may be most important to identify and focus on within the context of couple therapeutic interventions.
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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 issues by the Psychology Department of Swinburne University have been adhered to.

Karen Tracey Johnson
March, 2010
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Chapter 1: Overview of Thesis

A good theory is like a “map that outlines the nature of the terrain and makes the difference between a glorious adventure and getting lost in the woods and reaching a dead end” (Johnson, 2003a, p.104). So whilst any one theory cannot answer all questions when working with the complexities of couple relationships, a theory can help guide and direct the therapist to ascertain the most effective ways to intervene when couples are experiencing relationship difficulties. Attachment theory was originally proposed by Bowlby (1973, 1980, 1982) as a way of understanding the bonds that occur between an infant and their primary caregivers. It was not until the late 1980s that Hazan and Shaver (1987) applied attachment theory in the context of adult love relationships, and since this time it has continued to have a strong influence in the field of couple therapy. Through its focus on couple relatedness, attachment theory has contributed a new layer of understanding to the interactions that occur between couples and has informed interventions designed to identify underlying fears of abandonment and to increase couple intimacy and connectedness through shared understanding and emotional caregiving (Johnson, 2003a, 2003b).

Around the same era that adult attachment theory evolved, Gottman (1993a, 1993b, 1994, 1999) embarked on extensive research into couple interactions that involved the clinical observation of couples and detailed recording of the way they typically interact, whilst measuring their physiological responses. From this observational research and subsequent longitudinal studies, Gottman extensively documented what he considered to be the fundamental factors that ensure the stability and success of long-term marital unions. Central to Gottman’s theories of couple interaction, were the conflict strategies that couples employ and the way in which these can predictably escalate into more destructive patterns over time if couples do
not find better ways to regulate their behaviour and attitude towards their partner when the inevitable disagreements occur. From this, Gottman proposed a typology of conflict styles which has formed the basis of several conflict measures that have been used in the context of research and couple therapy (e.g., Holman & Jarvis, 2003; Kurdek, 1994). Whilst Gottman has not explicitly examined a link between attachment theory and his conflict resolution styles, more recent research has examined the ways in which these approaches may inform each other based on the notion that excessive anxiety or avoidance within the couple system could interfere with the ability of couples to effectively comply with therapeutic interventions designed to alter their behaviour or cognitions (e.g., Marchand-Reilly & Reese-Weber, 2005; Pistole & Arricale, 2003; Whelan, 2006).

Emotion Focussed Couple Therapy (EFCT, Greenberg & Johnson, 1988) also surfaced during the 1980s and is a therapeutic approach grounded in Attachment Theory. This approach proposes that couples typically get drawn into more destructive conflict resolution strategies when the couple bond is threatened by a fear of rejection or abandonment. Therefore, EFCT posits that couples must be helped to explore their background family and relationship experiences which may be interfering with their ability to stay connected with their partner during times of couple distress. This therapy is based on the notion that unless couples are able to explore the underlying layers of their difficulties, then just teaching them more constructive conflict strategies and communication skills is unlikely to result in sustainable improvements to their relationship satisfaction. Central to EFCT is assisting couples to develop a greater capacity to understand, express and regulate both their own, and their partner’s emotional experiences, a skill commonly referred
to as “emotional intelligence” in the literature, that has been the subject of substantial empirical research since the early 1990s (e.g., Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

Although research on attachment theory, conflict resolution and emotional intelligence have been extensive in the realm of couple relationships issues, the current study sought to explore the connection between these factors in more detail and, in particular, to ascertain which of these are the most important predictors of relationship satisfaction. Past research was expanded upon by recruiting a sample of couples for the current study who were living together in a marital relationship and who had one or more dependent children. In this way, it was hoped that the relationship experiences of longer term couples could be examined, given that much of the past research has focussed on dating couples, shorter term marital couples, or couples without dependent children. Further, the current study included both self-report and partner-report measures so that each partner’s beliefs about themselves and their spouse could be examined in greater detail. As past research has also suggested some interesting variations in the relationship experiences of men compared to women, the current study sought to explore possible gender differences for couples who had been together for longer periods of time.

The following chapters provide a review of the past research literature regarding marital trends in Australia, attachment theory, conflict resolution and emotional intelligence in the context of couple relationships. Chapter 2 provides a brief overview of marital trends that have been observed in Australia as well as factors that have been found to be associated with marital satisfaction and a brief overview of different couple therapy interventions and their efficacy. Chapter 3 provides an overview of attachment theory, particularly as it pertains to adult romantic relationships and the constructs that have been developed to measure it. A more
extensive review of the literature that has examined the association between adult attachment and relationship satisfaction is provided, particularly with regard to couples with children. Chapter 4 provides a summary of Gottman’s research, focusing mainly on couple conflict resolution styles. A review of literature regarding the construction of various conflict measures and their association with relationship satisfaction is provided. The empirical links between conflict styles and each of adult attachment and emotional regulation are explored. In Chapter 5, a more extensive review of the literature pertaining to emotional intelligence is provided including a brief history of how the construct was developed and the controversy surrounding its measurement. A review of literature that has examined the links between emotional intelligence and each of relationship satisfaction, conflict and adult attachment follows.

In Chapter 6, the rationale for the current study is outlined, along with the aims, research questions and hypotheses. Chapter 7 is the Method section where details of the participants and the self-report measures used in the current study are explained. Chapter 8 is the Results section, which presents outcomes from the statistical analysis of the data. In Chapter 9, the results of the current research are discussed in light of the past research literature and current research aims. As well, a discussion of the implications of the current research together with possible limitations and directions for future research is provided.
Chapter 2: Marital Relationships and Relationship Satisfaction

2.1 Marital Trends in Australia

Australian families have experienced rapid changes over the past century. Only a few decades ago, getting married and having children was once seen as the “traditional thing to do” (Parker, 2000, p. 77) for many young Australian adults going through the normal transition from being dependent on their families of origin to gaining their independence as part of a couple. However, in reality, many of these couples had little idea of what they were launching into, expecting to just work things out as they went along, but at the same time, viewing marriage as a lifetime commitment. In more recent times, marriage has become only one of many roads to independence, with many young people choosing other options in their early years of adulthood, such as further education, career expansion or defacto relationships. Such changes have had a profound impact on the structure and composition of Australian families (Gilding, 2001; Parker, 2000, 2001; Weston, Stanton, Qu, & Soriano, 2001).

Despite a rise in population, crude marriage rates in Australia have continued to decline over the past two decades. In 2007, the marriage rate was 5.5 marriages per 1000 population, compared to 20 years ago, when the marriage rate was 7.1 per 1000 population. Further, Australians are marrying and having children later in life than they did 20 years ago, with the majority having lived together prior to marriage. Of those marrying, 78% are doing so for the first time (ABS, 2008a). Typically by the time couples do marry now, they have already bought a home and often progress to having children more quickly than was the norm in previous generations (Parker, 2002). Of families with children, almost 80% involve dependent children and in the majority of these families, both parents work either full time or part-time (ABS, 2008c). Whilst the overall fertility rates have also continued to decline steadily in
Australia since the baby boom in 1961, reaching an all time low of 1.73 births per woman in 2001, there was a slight increase in the fertility rate to 1.8 births per woman in 2005, with more women over 30 having babies (ABS, 2008c).

In comparison, divorce rates have decreased slightly, since peaking in 2001, with divorce rates in 2007 being 9.8% lower than they were in 2002. Approximately half of divorces granted involve dependent children under the age of 18 and most couples who divorce are in their early to mid forties. Although the median age at the time of divorce has increased, this is largely due to the fact that couples are marrying at an older age. Although the median length of marriage is 12.5 years, separation typically occurs several years before divorce proceedings are finalised which means that most couples who separate do so only after about 9 years of marriage (ABS, 2008b). Also interesting to note, is that these statistics do not include those couples who are in de facto relationships and who never legally marry.

It is however, important to make the distinction between divorce rates and levels of marital satisfaction. According to Pinsof (2002), current divorce trends should be viewed in the context of wider social changes such as increased human longevity, improved social and economic conditions and the rise in feminism, which have all contributed to divorce replacing death as the most common endpoint to marriage in the latter part of the 20th century. Prior to the 1950s, on average, couples remained married for only about 20 years, typically due to the death of one spouse. Therefore, Pinsof suggests that current divorce rates have simply served to maintain this 20 year average. Further, there is inherent danger in simply viewing long-term marital relationships as a “success” and divorce as a “failure”, given that some couples stay together long-term despite high levels of conflict and low levels of relationship satisfaction, whereas other couples divorce or separate in an attempt to
improve their lives or the lives of their children, rather than stay in a destructive relationship, and report being happier in the long run.

2.2 Factors Associated with Relationship Satisfaction

Given the wide-ranging social, emotional and financial implications of divorce or separation for families, an extensive amount of research has focused on factors that contribute to marital dissolution (Parker, 2001). However, there is also much to be gained by identifying factors that ensure relationships are more satisfying, despite the inherent difficulties that accompany long term couple unions, such as negotiating life transitions, children and work pressures. Regardless of changes in marriage and divorce rates and the increase in more informal couple living arrangements, most adults still aspire to have a long-term and enduring marital relationship with a partner, and many people who seek professional counselling or psychotherapy do so in an attempt to increase their relationship satisfaction and to resolve relationship difficulties (Parker, 2001; Shaw & Crawley, 2007).

Bradbury, Fincham and Beach (2000) conducted an extensive review of research literature in the 1990s that had considered interpersonal and contextual factors that have been found to determine marital satisfaction, as well as to explore important issues regarding the ways in which marital satisfaction has been conceptualised and measured. In this review, several important interpersonal factors were identified, including spouses’ perceptions of each other, their emotional responses, their patterns of conflict behaviour and their ability to problem solve. In terms of context, the review identified important factors such as socio-economic status, the presence of children, background family experiences, life stressors and transitions such as becoming parents. In particular, adult attachment theory, which addresses the way in which early childhood experiences with a primary caregiver are
implicated in the formation of close adult relationships, has received substantial attention in the literature (e.g., Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Collins & Read, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1994; Kirkpatrick & Hazan, 1994). With regard to the measurement of relationship satisfaction, Bradbury et al. identified numerous global measures of marital satisfaction, such as the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS, Spanier, 1976) and the Marital Adjustment Test (MAT, Locke & Wallace, 1959) which are well known self-report measures. Despite their wide use, such measures have also been found to measure different elements of marital quality. In conclusion, Bradbury et al. posit that although research on marital satisfaction conducted during the 1990s provided a wealth of information, research conducted in the current decade should have a more applied focus in the development of specific interventions designed to assist couples and families.

More recently Twenge, Campbell and Foster (2003) conducted a meta-analytical review of parenthood and marital satisfaction research. As suggested above, whilst in previous historical eras getting married and having children was seen as the normal pathway for young adults, couples are more likely these days to make a more informed decision about whether or not to have children and how many they will have, often based on their beliefs about the effect children may have on their relationship. The results of the meta-analysis showed that overall, couples who have children report lower levels of relationship satisfaction than couples without children and that people with more children are less satisfied that those with fewer children. Typically, for those couples with children, relationship satisfaction was lowest when children were infants, especially for the mothers. Interestingly, individuals from higher socio-economic groups experienced less relationship satisfaction than those from middle or low socio-economic groups. From this Twenge et al. imply that adults
with higher educational levels and incomes may experience greater role conflict and a reduction in personal freedom that comes with parenthood, perhaps because they have had a longer pre-parenthood period than adults of earlier generations. Overall, these results highlight parenthood in general as a crucial period in couple relationships. However, according to Twenge et al., these results, rather than being viewed as a reason to avoid having children, provide useful information to help couples have a more realistic expectation of parenting that in turn allows them to prepare for any potential stressors and therefore minimize the negative impact on their relationship.

According to the Relationships Indicators Survey recently conducted by Relationships Australia (RA, 2008), which was based on a random sample of 1,200 individuals from the general population, Australians have identified love, companionship and a desire to make a lifelong commitment as the three top reasons why people get married. Participants identified previous bad relationship experiences, (i.e., separation, divorce or other relationship problems), avoidance of commitment and a belief that people do not need to get married to be committed to their partner as the three top reasons why people do not get married. Stress, different goals/expectations of the relationship and lack of time to spend together were identified as the three factors that most negatively impact on relationships. As well, four out of ten respondents indicated they had experienced a lack of trust or problems with having or bringing up children.

2.3 Couple Therapeutic Interventions

Given the above factors, much empirical attention has been focused on the development of effective couple intervention programs aimed at helping couples to have more satisfying relationships (Johnson, 2003b). According to Bradbury (1995), there are three main variables that impact on relationship satisfaction. First, the
adaptive processes which are the cognitive, behavioural and emotional processes that occur between couples. In line with the findings of Gottman, (1998, 1999) if there are dysfunctions in the beliefs and expectations that each individual has, or in the way they are able to communicate effectively or manage conflict, this can lead to instability and deterioration of the relationship. Second, stressful events such as the transition to parenthood, increasing work demands or serious health issues are also likely to result in relationship difficulties if the couple lack effective communication skills and are unable to negotiate the changes to their relationship that may be required (Halford, Wilson, Lizzio, & Moore, 2002). Third, the individual vulnerabilities that each partner brings to the relationship such as their own family of origin experiences, personality traits or psychological issues are common risk factors associated with relationship difficulties. Consequently, it is important that assessment of couple issues includes consideration of these factors, which can then inform the appropriate interventions (Halford & Bouma, 1998).

2.3.1 Behavioural and Cognitive Behavioural Couple Interventions. Only two decades ago, couple therapy interventions to improve relationship satisfaction focused almost entirely on behavioural change whereby couples were trained to monitor their own and their partner’s behaviour and then to negotiate with each other in order to decrease unpleasant behaviour and increase pleasant interactions (Schmaling, Fruzzetti, & Jacobson, 1989). Behavioural interventions tend to be aimed at inducing tangible positive behavioural changes, decreasing destructive behaviours and therefore increasing couple collaboration. More recently, behavioural couple therapy has been expanded to a cognitive-behavioural approach to also incorporate interventions to highlight, and therefore challenge, the attributions that couples make about their own and their partner’s behaviour. Typically, cognitive-behavioural
interventions are designed to enhance the overall positive affect in the relationship in both non-conflict and conflict situations and to teach couples ways of reducing negativity, increasing positive affect and to identify conflict patterns (Gottman, 1999). Such strategies are structured around enhancing couple communication, teaching more effective conflict resolution skills as well as addressing problematic cognitive styles (Halford & Bouma, 1998).

There have been many studies that have evaluated the effectiveness of behavioural and cognitive-behavioural couple therapy programs (e.g., Baucom & Lester, 1986; Baucom, Sayers, & Sher, 1990) including preventative couple programs which are designed to help couples develop more effective communication and greater intimacy prior to entering a marital or long-term committed relationship (e.g., Markman, Floyd, Stanley, & Storaasli, 1988; Markman, Renick, Floyd, Stanley, & Clements, 1993; Markman, Stanley, Jenkins, Petrella, & Wadsworth, 2006). Although cognitive-behavioural approaches have been found to be effective in alleviating relationship distress, the level of improvement has been found to vary for men and women (Jacobson & Addis, 1993; Jacobson et al., 1984) and the long-term benefits have not been well established, with some couples relapsing over time (Dunn & Schwebel, 1995). Also, cognitive-behavioural approaches assume that individuals within the couple dyad are capable of gaining insight into the ways in which their behaviour and thoughts impact on their presenting difficulties. However, the ability to do this has been found to be limited due to cultural variations, the unwillingness of both partners to work collaboratively and take responsibility for their share of the relationship problems, and the presence of more severe emotional or behavioural problems such as depression or substance abuse (Dattilio, 2005; Schmaling et al., 1989). Research also suggests that cognitive-behavioural strategies are unlikely to be
effective if there are unresolved trauma issues that have led to loss of trust in the relationship, such as an affair (Baucom, Gordon, Snyder, Atkins, & Christensen, 2006). Such findings imply that a cognitive-behavioural approach may be limited in situations where underlying psychological or emotional issues are present.

2.3.2. Emotion-Focused Couple Interventions. Recent advances in neuroscience have suggested that emotions play an important role in determining what people tend to pay attention to and how they interpret the actions of others (e.g., Davidson, 2003; Ochsner et al., 2004; Schore & Schore, 2008). Therefore it has been suggested that cognitive interventions may only be helpful when individuals are calm, because rational thinking is more limited when people are in a state of physiological arousal (Atkinson, 2005). In couple work, affective communication is vital to relationship repair. If partners are able to access their underlying emotional responses and be attuned to their partner’s emotional responses, they tend to be more responsive to each other’s needs. Whilst emotions are adaptive, they can become problematic in relationships due to past traumatic events or when individuals have become adept at ignoring or dismissing them. Therefore one of the critical roles of the couple therapist is to teach new emotional skills to clients in order for them to develop and sustain new ways of relating to each other (Atkinson, 2005; Elliott, Watson, Goldman, & Greenberg, 2003; Webster, 2007)

Emotion-Focused Couple Therapy (Greenberg & Johnson, 1988) is based on attachment theory and posits that it is our bonds with close others that form the foundation of our emotional experiences in adult romantic relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1994). These bonds are developed during childhood and are based on the type of care an infant came to expect from his or her parents or close caregivers. Those individuals who are securely attached tend to form internal working models,
whereby they perceive themselves as worthy of love, and perceive others as dependable and trustworthy. Alternatively, those individuals who are insecurely attached tend to perceive themselves as unworthy of love and perceive others as unreliable and untrustworthy, often resulting in high levels of anxious and/or avoidant behaviours (Bowlby, 1973, 1980, 1982). Rather than cognitive schemas, these internal working models are the result of deeply ingrained beliefs that can only be changed through reparative emotional experiences (Johnson, 2003b).

From an emotion-focused perspective, couples become distressed when there is disruption to their attachment bond with their partner, which primarily evokes a fear of abandonment, and in turn can result in secondary emotions such as anger. Typically, partners act on their anger, attacking and blaming each other, without being able to express their underlying need for security. The main focus of emotion-focused couple therapy is to assist couples to recognise the destructive ways they are acting towards one another, to identify the reasons behind their anger and to help them to connect with, and express, their primary fears of abandonment. The aim is to assist couples to re-establish the attachment bonds between them and to replace destructive relational patterns with more constructive interactions (Byrne, Carr, & Clark, 2004). Therefore emotion and emotional experiences are seen as a powerful “agent of change” rather than just a part of the distress couples are experiencing (Johnson, 2004, pp.2).

There has been empirical support for the efficacy of emotion-focused couple therapy. A meta-analysis of eight studies that have examined the impact of this therapeutic approach found that it was superior to a control condition, with approximately 70% of couples reporting less distress and 90% of couples reporting significant improvement in their relationship (Johnson, 2003b). Other studies have
found emotion-focused couple therapy to be an effective intervention with both
distressed and moderately distressed couples (Baucom, Shoham, Mueser, Daiuto, &
Stickley, 1998; Dandeneau & Johnson, 1994; Denton, Burleson, Clark, Rodriguez, &
Hobbs, 2000), although a meta-analysis of 20 treatment outcome studies conducted by
Byrne et al. (2004) found that behavioural, cognitive-behavioural and emotion
focused approaches all produced significant treatment gains.

According to Johnson (2003b), much of the work of couple therapists focuses
on helping partners to form closer, more intimate relationships with each other. This
involves helping couples to discover more constructive ways of dealing with
inevitable conflicts, teaching them ways to manage their emotional responses so they
are able to influence and be influenced by each other, and helping them to tolerate the
anxiety often associated with close intimacy, without avoiding or abandoning one
other. The challenge is therefore to help couples develop a stronger sense of security
because when partners feel more secure they are better equipped to support each
other, manage their emotional responses and deal with conflict and relationship
stressors in a more positive manner. For this reason, it is important that therapists
know the fundamental elements to focus on in couple therapy so that they can assist
clients to “change the landscape of intimate relationships, not just the weather”
(Johnson, 2003b, pp. 3).

Overall, the above research findings suggests the importance of a more in-
depth examination of the link that may exist between the attachment, conflict and
emotional processes of couples, particularly at a time in the relationship when they
face the challenges of parenting dependent children. These are considered to be
important factors when developing more effective couple therapeutic interventions.
The following introductory chapters present a review of past literature in these areas.
Chapter 3: Attachment Theory

3.1 A Brief History of Attachment Theory

Since the 1980s, close romantic relationships of adults have been conceptualised from an attachment theory perspective as a way of understanding how bonds are formed and maintained, as well to explore the factors that make them satisfying and enduring (Hazan & Shaver, 1994). This research has been largely influenced by the writings of Bowlby (1973, 1980, 1982) whose theory of childhood attachment bonds provides an integrative approach that considers ethological, psychoanalytical and social-cognitive dimensions of personality development and human behaviour that influence humans throughout the course of their lives (Rothbard & Shaver, 1994).

Attachment theory was initially developed and extensively explored by Bowlby (1973, 1980, 1982) in the 1950s as a way of understanding how infants react to loss and separation from a primary caregiver (most commonly the mother) and the way in which the emotional bonds formed in infancy provide protection and security during experiences of distress or threat (Bowlby, 1982; Mikulincer & Florian, 1998). By conducting extensive observational research of young babies and children living in institutional settings, Bowlby was able to explore the emotional effects of prolonged periods of separation from their primary caregivers. He found that this separation, especially during the first three years of a child’s life, places the child at much greater risk of physical and psychological illness because it affects the infant’s innate need to form close emotional bonds. Typically, when infants feel scared or distressed they enact attachment behaviours such as smiling, crying, signalling or clinging that ensure protection and nurturing from the caregiver. If the caregiver is able to recognise and respond appropriately to the attachment behaviours, a close emotional bond develops.
between the child and the adult (Bowlby, 1982, 1988; Hazan & Shaver, 1994; Rothbard & Shaver, 1994).

According to Bowlby (1973, 1980, 1982, 1988) an infant’s attachment system is an innate behavioural system that functions as a “homeostatic” device which serves to regulate the degree of proximity to the caregiver depending on the perceived dangers in the environment. If no dangers are perceived, the attachment system is deactivated and the infant feels confident to explore the environment, often moving away to play independently from the attachment figure. However, if feeling threatened, the attachment system is activated and the infant seeks close proximity, comfort and reassurance from the attachment figure. The infant’s felt sense of security is determined largely by the sensitivity and responsiveness of the attachment figure. If the attachment figure provides a consistent and predictable level of care and nurturing, the infant develops a felt sense of security and comes to trust and rely on the attachment figure to provide the required level of support. If however, the attachment figure provides an overly intrusive or inconsistent level of support or rejects physical contact from the infant, the infant may become more anxious and clingy in an attempt to elicit support, displaying demanding, aggressive or hostile behaviours to gain attention. Alternatively, the infant may become seemingly independent, behaving in a detached or dismissive manner towards the attachment figure. Typically, when separated from the primary caregiver for extended periods of time, Bowlby found that infants progress through a relatively predictable sequence of behaviours beginning with protest where they cry out, search for the attachment figure and resist the efforts of others to soothe them. This is followed by despair where they exhibit sadness and passivity, then eventually, detachment where they no longer demonstrate emotional connection to the caregiver (Hazan & Shaver, 1994). Whilst
these strategies used by infants to cope with inadequate support from the attachment figure may be adaptive in the short term, allowing the child to cope in their immediate environment, they have been found to be problematic in subsequent relationships (Cassidy, 1999; Rothbard & Shaver, 1994).

Based on their early repeated attachment experiences within the first year of life, infants internalise these expectations of support into “working models” that influence their perception of future relationships. These working models consist of an accumulation of knowledge about whether the infant expects the attachment figure to provide support and nurturing in times of distress (model of other) and whether the infant believes he/she is worthy of love and support (model of self). The internal working models therefore form a template of what the child comes to expect in future relationships. In the earlier years of childhood, these internal working models are considered to be quite flexible and can change in accordance with the environment. However, they become more resistant to change if the same patterns of interaction between the child and the caregiver occur repeatedly. Therefore, having a consistently emotionally responsive caregiver during childhood creates the expectation that although difficult life experiences may occur, with the support of close others, these can be overcome. The child is therefore more likely to grow up to be a well adjusted and resilient individual. However, children who grow up without a secure base from which to explore their environment may find it much more difficult to overcome life stressors and therefore display greater vulnerability to adversity and experience difficulties in later relationships (Bowlby, 1972, 1973, 1988; Collins & Read, 1990; Rothbard & Shaver, 1994) which will discussed further below.
3.2 Childhood Attachment Research

In order to assess the attachment of infants, Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters and Wall (1978) developed a standardized laboratory condition known as the “Strange Situation”, designed to identify different patterns of infant-mother attachment bonds during the child’s first year of life. The assessment procedure, designed to activate the infant’s attachment system, involves observing patterns of interaction between the mother and child during brief repeated episodes of separation and reunion in an unfamiliar environment (Ainsworth, 1979; Hazan & Shaver, 1994). Ainsworth et al. were particularly interested in the degree to which the infant sought closeness and proximity to the mother, the responsiveness of the mother during times of infant distress and whether the infant explored the environment freely in the presence of the mother. Three distinct patterns of attachment behaviour were identified in the laboratory experiments and supported with observations in home settings. Secure infants tend to use their mother as a secure base from which to explore their environment when she is present in the room. Although the infant becomes distressed if the mother leaves the room, when she returns shortly after, the infant readily seeks contact with her and is comforted by the mother who is warm and responsive to the child, therefore quickly diminishing the child’s distress. Anxious/Ambivalent infants generally exhibit a level of anxiety even when the mother is present, displaying clingy behaviour and become increasingly distressed during periods of brief separation. When the mother returns, the infant tends to display ambivalence towards her, wanting to be close to her, but at the same time resisting any attempts of physical contact or interaction. Mothers tend to be either insensitive to the infant’s needs or overly intrusive. Avoidant infants appear quite detached from the mother when she is present in the room and rarely display any concern upon her departure from the room.
Upon reunion with the mother, the infant appears relatively disinterested in her, either displaying mixed ambivalence in proximity seeking or avoidant behaviours or otherwise ignoring her altogether. Mothers tend to display hostile or rejecting behaviour towards the child (Ainsworth, 1979; Ainsworth et al., 1978; Hazan & Shaver, 1994). In later research, a fourth category of infant attachment was identified, namely *Disorganised/Disorientated* which described a group of infants who did not readily fit into the above three attachment categories, displaying mixed and unpredictable patterns of interaction during periods of separation and reunion from the mother. This attachment pattern tends to arise if the primary caregiver is psychologically disturbed, neglectful or abusive (Ainsworth & Eichberg, 1991; Hazan & Shaver, 1994; Rothbard & Shaver, 1994). As children advance both cognitively and developmentally, shifts in the attachment relationship between parent and child also occur. Once the child reaches pre-school age and more active communication between parent and child occurs, the child develops greater understanding of the availability of the attachment figure, allowing greater tolerance for increased periods of separation. Also more advanced motor skills allow the child to play and explore at further distances from the parent. Another important shift occurs during adolescence where the child becomes more focussed on partnerships with similar aged peers, seeking increased autonomy from parents in early adulthood (e.g., Weiss, 1991). This does not necessarily mean that attachment bonds with parents dissipate, as most young adults maintain emotional bonds with their parents, even if the relationship has been neglectful or abusive (Ainsworth, 1989, 1991; Bowlby, 1982; Weiss, 1991)
3.3 Attachment in Adulthood

Bowlby (1979) proposed that the internal working models of attachment formed during childhood continue to influence the individual “from the cradle to the grave” (p.129). This is in line with Ainsworth’s (1989) view that the attachment bonds formed between an infant and the primary caregiver form a template that influences one’s expectations of the availability of support from close others in affectional bonds that develop during adulthood. These affectional bonds are distinguishable from other relationships in that the individual seeks a high level of closeness that, if satisfied, results in feelings of comfort and security (Ainsworth, 1989; Feeney & Noller, 1996).

The attachment perspective on adult romantic relationships became prominent during the 1980s largely under the impetus of research conducted by Hazan and Shaver (1987) who were the first to explore the links between attachment bonds formed in childhood and affectional bonds formed between adult couples (Feeney & Noller, 1996). Based on the typology of Ainsworth’s original three attachment styles, Hazan and Shaver developed the first self-report measure of adult attachment, consisting of three descriptions of attachment types: Secure, Avoidant and Anxious/Ambivalent. Respondents were required to select the one which best described their feelings towards their romantic partner. Consistent with the proportions of infants classified into the three attachment styles (Ainsworth et al., 1978), Hazan and Shaver found that approximately half of the respondents classified themselves as secure, with the remaining half divided almost equally between the two other categories. Those people who classified themselves as secure reported their romantic relationship to be happy, friendly and trusting. They were also more likely to report warm relationships with and between their parents. Those who classified
themselves as avoidant reported feelings of jealousy and a fear of intimacy, resulting in extreme emotional highs and lows in their romantic relationship. They were more likely to describe their mother as cold and rejecting. Those who classified themselves as anxious/ambivalent reported an obsession with their romantic partner, a strong desire for closeness, extreme physical attraction and jealousy. They were more likely to report that their father was unfair. Despite the claimed similarities between childhood and adult attachment styles, Hazan and Shaver (1987, 1994) acknowledged that adult relationships differ from parent-child relationships in fundamental ways in that they involve sexual intimacy and are generally reciprocal with both partners seeking as well as providing security.

This initial research by Hazan and Shaver (1987) was followed soon after by many studies that considered the association between adult attachment styles and other variables associated with intimate romantic partnerships (Feeney & Noller, 1996). For example, different adult attachment styles have been found to be differentially related to levels of relationship satisfaction and commitment (e.g., Collins & Read, 1990; Feeney & Noller, 1990; Feeney, Noller, & Callan, 1994); couples’ experiences of parenthood (e.g., Feeney, Alexander, Noller, & Hohaus, 2003; Vasquez, Durik, & Hyde, 2002); how couples manage conflict in their relationship (e.g., Campbell et al., 2005; Shi, 2003; Simpson, Rholes, & Phillips, 1996); as well as the ability to perceive and regulate emotions (e.g., Babcock, Jacobson, Gottman, & Yerinton, 2000; Creasey & Ladd, 2004; Kafetsios, 2004). Generally people with more secure attachment styles have been found to have more satisfying and enduring relationships than those with insecure attachment styles. Although a full review of studies that have examined the relationship between adult attachment and numerous relationship variables is beyond the scope of the present
3.4 Development of Further Adult Attachment Measures

As acknowledged by Hazan and Shaver (1987, 1994), the three-item forced-choice measure they originally developed was psychometrically limited, and consequently multiple item self-report measures were developed (Feeney & Noller, 1996). Whilst these were initially based on Hazan and Shaver’s three categories which were broken down into a number of individual items (e.g., Collins & Read, 1990), Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) were the first to develop a four-category model integrating Bowlby’s (1973) internal working models of self and other. Combining the internal working model of self as either positive (worthy of love) or negative (unworthy of love) with the internal working model of other as either positive (available and caring) or negative (rejecting and uncaring), four discrete attachment styles were defined, Secure, Preoccupied, Fearful and Dismissive. This four category model is presented in Figure 1. Both the secure and preoccupied attachment styles are characterized by a positive view of others, but where secure adults tend to see themselves in a positive light, preoccupied adults tend to believe they are unworthy of love. Both dismissive and fearful attachment styles are indicative of a negative view of others, but dismissive adults tend to maintain a positive view of self, whereas fearful adults tend to see themselves as unworthy of love (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991).

During the 1990s, a large number of self report adult attachment measures were created. Brennan, Clark and Shaver (1998) undertook a large factor analysis of several of these in an attempt to combine items into one questionnaire. From this analysis they discovered two higher order factors of avoidance and anxiety which they
considered to be conceptually related to the internal working models of self and other underlying Bartholomew and Horowitz’s (1991) attachment measure. Four distinct attachment categories were also identified: secure (low avoidance, low anxiety); preoccupied (low avoidance, high anxiety); fearful (high avoidance, high anxiety); and dismissive (high avoidance, low anxiety). This model is also represented in Figure 1.

Based on this, the Experiences of Close Relationships (ECR) scale was constructed which comprised 36 items of which 18 represent the anxiety subscale and 18 represent the avoidance subscale. According to Brennan et al., the ECR is psychometrically sound and produces statistically stronger results than other categorical self report measures.

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Figure 1. Four-category model of adult attachment (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) with higher order factors of Anxiety and Avoidance (Brennan, Clark & Shaver, 1998) in parentheses.
More recently, Fraley, Waller and Brennan (2000) conducted an Item Response Theory analysis of four commonly used self-report attachment measures in order to highlight any scaling difficulties and to further improve the psychometric properties of the attachment scales. Following this analysis, the Experiences in Close Relationships – Revised (ECR-R) scale was constructed which included 20 items from the original ECR scale. The ECR-R comprises two 18-item subscales of avoidance and anxiety and was found to exhibit improved psychometric properties over the ECR. Whilst categorical measures conceptualise attachment style as a discrete typology, continuous measures of attachment suggest that people vary on a continuum. According to the general consensus amongst attachment researchers, continuous measures allow for more precise statistical measurement of this construct (Fraley & Waller, 1998; Schachner, Shaver, & Mikulincer, 2003). The ECR-R was therefore used as the attachment measure in the current study.

3.5 Stability of Adult Attachment

Given that the internal working models of attachment developed during childhood are believed to be relatively ingrained cognitive, emotional and behavioural patterns that are formed on the basis of repeated experiences with our primary caregiver, change to these models is thought to be difficult, although not impossible (Hazan & Shaver, 1994). Whilst the degree to which early attachment models influence adult attachment patterns is not exactly known, research has indicated that adult attachment patterns tend to remain moderately stable, with stability co-efficients generally ranging from .4 to .7 over time periods of up to 24 months (for reviews see Fraley, 2002; Scharfe, 2003). However, according to Bowlby (1982), in order to be useful, working models of self and other must be open to revision in light of new
experiences (Johnson, 2003b). Therefore an individual’s ability to develop insight into the impact of past relationships and to be involved in other close relationships that are incongruent with past attachment experiences, are both avenues for possible change as new information becomes accommodated and assimilated into the individual’s present experiences, therefore altering the internal working models (Davila, Karney, & Bradbury, 1999; Feeney, 1999).

It should also be acknowledged, however, that there are several reasons why working models may remain relatively stable. First, individuals often select romantic partners and environments that confirm their beliefs about self and others. For example, Collins and Read (1990) and Simpson (1990) have both found evidence to suggest that within dating couples, secure individuals tend to partner with other secure individuals, whereas insecure individuals are more likely to be in a relationship with another insecure person. Specifically, anxious people typically partner with more avoidant people because the anxious partner’s expectation that close others are usually emotionally unavailable and the avoidant partner’s expectation that people become too clingy if allowed to get close, are confirmed by their interactions with each other. Second, our beliefs about how close others will treat us impacts on how we react to others. For example, if an individual believes others cannot be trusted, they will act defensively and therefore keep others at a distance. Third, social events and situations are commonly perceived in a biased manner that supports the existing working models (Collins & Read, 1990; Feeney, 1999; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994; Kirkpatrick & Hazan, 1994). Fourth, as the internal working models of attachment operate on an unconscious level, they are not likely to change unless they become more conscious processes (Obegi & Berant, 2009), usually through the development of increased
personal insight and the processing of deeper emotional experiences (Johnson, 2003b).

Based on Bowlby’s (1982) premise that change to internal working models is possible, many therapeutic interventions have been developed that seek to create new emotional experiences for clients, and in particular, couples. This is achieved through the therapist providing a secure base, whereby the client develops a level of trust that allows exploration of past and current events in a way that disconfirms past beliefs and fears. Further, the therapist can assist in helping to repair past attachment injuries by encouraging a reconnection with emotional experiences as well as more effective communication between couples so that they can learn to be more open and trusting of each other, therefore establishing closer emotional bonds and greater attachment security (Johnson, 2003b; Schachner et al., 2003; Solomon, 2003). The overall aim of therapy is to help couples understand, and in turn modify, the affective, cognitive and behavioural elements of their interactions with each other. The current research sought to extend the existing research in attachment processes as they apply to couple therapy by considering factors which may mediate the relationship between attachment style and relationship satisfaction.

3.6 Attachment and Relationship Satisfaction

The association between adult attachment styles and relationship satisfaction has received much empirical attention over the past two decades given that attachment theory is based on one’s ability to form and maintain close affectional bonds, particularly in marital relationships (Bowlby, 1979; MacDougall, 2003; Mikulincer, Florian, Cowan, & Cowan, 2002). Although using different methodology to measure attachment and relationship satisfaction, research generally supports the contention that secure individuals i.e., those low in avoidance and anxiety, tend to report greater
levels of relationship satisfaction than insecure individuals i.e., those high in avoidance and/or anxiety (for reviews see Feeney, 1999; Hazan & Shaver, 1994; Mikulincer et al., 2002). This relationship has also been found to be mediated by other variables such as level of relationship distress (Meyers & Landsberger, 2002) and conflict (K. Johnson, 2005). However, it should be noted that most of these reviewed studies focus on the *intrapersonal* effects of one’s own attachment style on self perceived relationship satisfaction.

Of equal importance, but receiving less empirical attention, is the consideration of *interpersonal* effects of attachment styles, that is, the impact that one partner’s attachment style has on the relationship satisfaction of the other partner (Kane, et al., 2007; Lussier, 1997; Simpson, Rholes, Campbell, Wilson, & Tran, 2002). Couples in particular experience considerable levels of interdependence as a result of similarity in socioeconomic and psychological factors at the time of pairing, the impact that each partner’s characteristics has on the other and the fact that each is exposed to similar social pressures and life events during the course of their union. These are factors that need to be taken into account when analysing dyadic data (Kenny, 1995; Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006). Studies that have examined the interpersonal effects of adult attachment have found that attachment style is related to how an individual perceives their partner (Ruvolo & Fabin, 1999). Further, individuals with insecure partners tend to report decreased relationship satisfaction. In particular, men tend to report lower relationship satisfaction when their female partners are highly anxious. In contrast, women tend to report lower relationship satisfaction when their male partner is avoidant (Banse, 2004; Collins & Read, 1990; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994; Simpson, 1990).
In a recent large study of 305 dating couple dyads, Kane et al. (2007) considered the association between one’s partner’s attachment style and both self and partner relationship experiences. After employing statistical techniques to control for the interdependence of couple data (Kenny et al., 2006), Kane et al. found intrapersonal effects such that each partner’s own attachment style was related to their own relationship satisfaction, with more secure individuals reporting greater relationship satisfaction than avoidant men as well as both avoidant and anxious women. Further, interpersonal effects revealed that women were less satisfied when their male partner was more avoidant and men were less satisfied when their female partner was more anxious. These relationships were generally found to be either fully or partially mediated by the perceived level of care provided by the partner. From these findings, Kane et al. concluded that secure individuals create a more loving couple relationship environment both for themselves and for their partner and are able to provide support and care for their partner in times of need. These findings suggest that secure individuals, who perceive themselves as loved and nurtured by others, demonstrate an increased capacity not only to regulate their own emotions in a relationship but to be emotionally responsive to the needs of their partner. However, Kane et al. acknowledge limitations in their study and in particular suggest that their findings should be replicated with a sample of older couples in longer term marital relationships in order to explore these gender differences more thoroughly. These were factors that the current study sought to address.

3.7 Attachment Theory and Parenthood

According to Bowlby (1973, 1988), the attachment system is most strongly activated in times of stress resulting from personal, environmental or relationship factors. This may be particularly prominent for couples during parenthood as they
manage various life transitions including the birth of children (Curran, Hazen, Jacobvitz, & Feldman, 2005; Helms-Erikson, 2001; Rholes, Simpson, Campbell, & Grich, 2001); juggling work and family commitments (Vasquez et al., 2002); and dealing with adolescent issues (Cui, Donnellan, & Conger, 2007). As couples try to deal with changes that occur during these times, often resulting in less available time to spend together, this may exacerbate relationship anxiety and avoidance of intimacy, resulting in increased conflict and decreased relationship satisfaction (Feeney et al., 2003; K. Johnson, 2005).

The impact of adult attachment styles on peoples’ experiences of first time parenthood has been well researched in the literature and generally supports the contention that being securely attached leads to more positive relationship outcomes, where lower levels of anxiety and avoidance at this time tend to result in increased relationship satisfaction (Curran et al., 2005; Feeney et al., 2003; Simpson et al., 2002). Despite this, the relationship outcomes for parents during times beyond the birth of the first child have been less researched. In one of the few studies to examine adult attachment and parenthood for longer term couples, Vasquez et al. (2002) conducted longitudinal research of parents from the time of the first pregnancy until 4.5 years following the birth, when most women had either returned to work or had given birth to a second child. This research examined the role of adult attachment style on the couple’s ability to meet the increasing demands of raising a child whilst combining work and family roles. Using Bartholomew and Horowitz’s (1991) four category measure of attachment, it was found that securely attached partners functioned more effectively in multiple roles than insecurely attached partners, maintaining stable relationships both at home and at work. Those who classified themselves as fearfully attached (negative view of self and negative view of others)
experienced the most stress and least rewards in both the family and work domains. Those who classified themselves as either dismissing (positive view of self, negative view of other) or preoccupied (negative view of self, positive view of others) reported functioning somewhere in between the other two groups. The authors conclude that those who have internalized positive ways of relating to others, experience more positive outcomes in various life domains. Although findings were limited by the demographics of the sample and the measure of attachment used, they provide a basis for considering the impact of attachment styles on the relationship satisfaction of couples in longer term relationships who have more than one child. The current study sought to explore this area further.
Chapter 4: Conflict in Marital Relationships

4.1 Conflict in Marital Relationships

Marital relationships generally begin with great hope and celebration. Yet inevitably through the course of long term relationships, “storms” occur and couples find themselves struggling with difficult issues that often require a great deal of effort and commitment to resolve. Whilst conflict is part of the natural course of relationships and may have a positive impact if couples manage to reconcile their differences constructively, it can also lead to anger, defensiveness, emotional detachment and possible separation if couples engage in more destructive forms of conflict engagement (Gottman, 1993b; Gottman & Levenson, 2002; Pistole & Arricale, 2003). Given the detrimental effects that separation and divorce can have not only on the couple, but their children, an extensive amount of research has focussed on conflict regulation and resolution in couple relationships in order to gain greater understanding of the factors that contribute to either the stability or demise of the relationship (Driver & Gottman, 2004; Gottman, 1993a, 1993b, 1994, 1999; Katz & Gottman, 1997; Kerig, 1996; Kurdek, 1995).

4.2 Gottman’s Couple Research

Early psychological research into conflict in couple relationships tended to rely primarily on couples’ self reports of marital difficulties, mostly due to the expense and difficulty of conducting observational research, and only a few of these studies were longitudinal. Although many psychological theories about how to repair distressed relationships existed, many of these were based on case studies, rather than on systematic empirical research. However, during the early 1970s in the USA, the increased focus on a behavioural approach to marital therapy coupled with the rising divorce rates provided the impetus for researchers to conduct direct observation of
couple behaviour in order to teach them skills for managing conflict more constructively (Gottman, 1994, 1998, 1999). During the 1980s, Gottman, both as an independent researcher and in collaboration with colleagues (e.g., Carstensen, Gottman, & Levenson, 1995; Driver & Gottman, 2004; Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998; Gottman & Levenson, 2002), began to conduct observational research on factors that predicted both the stability of marital relationships and the likelihood of divorce. After constructing an observational laboratory resembling an apartment where couples “lived” for 24 hours, Gottman videotaped interactions of couples during a 12 hour period. As well, their physiological responses were recorded and couples were interviewed about their family and marital history, including their plans for the future. Since 1980, numerous longitudinal studies have been conducted, which incorporate data from over 650 couples, the longest of which was carried out over a 15 year period. These include studies that have examined couples in the early years of marriage, during the transition to parenthood and in abusive relationships (Gottman, 1994, 1999; Gottman & Silver, 1998). Although the work of Gottman and his colleagues has examined many aspects of marital relationships, a full exploration of these is beyond the scope of the present research. Therefore the current study focussed specifically on the factors that are claimed to impact on marital satisfaction and the typology of conflict styles.

4.2.1 Factors that Contribute to Marital Distress. Based on his extensive observational couple research, Gottman (1993a, 1993b, 1994, 1999) has identified several destructive interactional patterns that are claimed to lead to marriage dissolution if not regulated. These are all based on the premise that conflict is a normal and healthy part of couple relationships that promotes growth and increased closeness when couples are able to reconcile their differences. According to Gottman
(1999, p.56), most long term couples have “perpetual problems” that tend to be areas of continuing disagreement throughout the relationship that are never completely resolved. What appears to be of most importance is the couple’s ability to regulate their discussion around these chronic underlying issues and make compromises that both are happy with, rather than to reach a gridlocked position which is more likely to lead to emotional disengagement from the relationship.

Gottman (1993a, 1993b, 1994, 1999) proposes a balance theory of marital relationships whereby relationships remain stable when there is a high set point ratio of positivity versus negativity in the behaviour, perceptions and physiology of each partner in the couple. The ability to maintain this balance depends on two factors: First, what each individual brings to the relationships such as their history of past relationships and individual temperament; and second the influence that each has on their partner through the process of interaction. This is consistent with the idea of interpersonal and intrapersonal effects of one’s attachment style as mentioned in the previous chapter and gives further support to the idea of considering both aspects in couple relationships.

Research by Gottman (1993a, 1993b, 1994, 1999) has consistently shown that if positive interactions outnumber negative interactions at a rate of five to one, then the relationship is likely to be on-going and stable because the “emotional bank account” (Gottman, 1999, p. 88) maintains a positive balance. Behaviourally, this includes such things as how often the couple reciprocate negative behaviours towards each other, how harshly partners initiate and engage in conflict discussions, as well as their ability to make and accept repair attempts. However not all negative behaviours have been found to be equally destructive in a relationship and four have been identified that are claimed make it increasingly difficult for a couple to communicate
effectively. These are known as the “Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse”: Criticism, Defensiveness, Contempt and Stonewalling. Criticism refers to making statements about things you think are fundamentally wrong with your partner that are likely to elicit a defensive reaction. Defensiveness is when one partner, feeling attacked, makes a counter attack, thus creating a cycle of blame and denial of self responsibility. Contempt is intentionally insulting or putting down one’s partner through harsh words or actions that are fuelled by negative thoughts about the stupidity or incompetence of the other. Stonewalling is when one partner withdraws from the interaction, not reacting or responding when approached to discuss an issue thus conveying a sense of disapproval or smugness towards one’s partner. Typically partners who stonewall tend to display little outward emotion, but experience heightened internal physiological responses. It is suggested that stonewalling may be used as a strategy to control strong emotions so as not to feel overwhelmed or out of control. Gottman’s research suggests that men are more likely to stonewall and that women are more likely to criticise, often leading to a common pattern of demand and withdrawal whereby one partner continually criticises whilst the other partner avoids and disengages from the discussion (Baucom, et al., 2007; Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Eldridge, Sevier, Jones, Atkins, & Christensen, 2007).

According to Gottman (1993a, 1993b, 1994, 1999), the Four Horsemen usually follow sequentially from criticism, to defensiveness, to contempt and then stonewalling, leading to progressively more emotional disengagement from the relationship and the increased likelihood that the relationship will either end or the couple will live separate lives under the same roof. However, it should be noted that these destructive behaviours do not just occur in the interactions of unhappy relationships, as even in happy and stable relationships, couples resort to criticism,
defensiveness and stonewalling at times, just with considerably less frequency. Further, more stable couples tend to be able to make successful repair attempts. However, of the Four Horsemen, contempt has been found to be the most destructive and rarely occurs in stable and happy relationships (Gottman, 1999).

As well as behavioural elements, Gottman (1993a, 1993b, 1994, 1999) has found that how couples perceive and interpret each other’s negative actions has an impact on the balance of positivity versus negativity in the relationship. Typically distressed couples tend to see the problems in the relationship as due to some inherent characteristic of their partner rather than situational factors. Over time, this can lead to couples seeing their problems as severe and unsolvable and deciding to work things out alone, thus resulting in them leading parallel and emotionally distant lives. In terms of physiological responses, it is important that couples can maintain a constant state of calmness rather than a heightened state of anxiety or arousal. If couples are unable to maintain the appropriate equilibrium, negativity between them builds up, leading to increased hostile thoughts, feelings and behaviour. This, together with high levels of physiological arousal, reduces the ability of each partner to listen to what the other is saying or to regulate their own or their partner’s emotions (soothing). This leads to an overwhelmed emotional state referred to as flooding that impacts on the way in which couples respond to the conflict (Gottman, 1993a, 1993b, 1994, 1999). Such findings imply the importance of partners being aware of, and regulating, both their own and their partner’s emotional responses in order to manage conflict more constructively.

4.2.2 Gottman’s Conflict Styles. The research by Gottman (1993a, 1993b, 1994, 1999) has also extensively examined the way in which couples fight and from this a typology of couple conflict styles has been developed. According to Gottman,
there are three types of stable happy couples which are referred to as regulated couples: Volatile, Validating and Conflict-Avoiding. Volatile couples tend to express the most emotion of all couple types and whilst there are numerous passionate expressions of anger, hurt and disagreement, there is also a counterbalancing large amount of expressed humour, love and affection between them. Validating couples tend to exhibit sound communication skills, with a well developed ability to listen and understand each other’s point of view, an ability to be in tune with their own and their partner’s emotions and mutual respect for each other. Conflict-Avoiding couples tend to minimize conflict by agreeing to disagree and therefore not getting involved in discussions about things they know they may never resolve. They neither attempt to change each other’s point of view nor reach a state of compromise. Whilst these three regulated couple types tend to manage conflict in quite different ways, each typically maintain a five-to-one ratio of positive versus negative interactions, thus making it more likely that the relationship will remain stable and ongoing.

It should be noted however, that despite each of these regulated couple styles being quite functional, according to Gottman (1999) potential problems can occur if there is a severe mis-match in the preferred conflict style of each partner in the relationship which may require therapeutic intervention to shift. Unless these mismatched couples are able to negotiate some middle ground and find a conflict style that is acceptable to both, they may begin a downward spiral of negative appraisal of each other’s behaviour and find themselves gridlocked in the destructive pattern of demand/withdrawal mentioned above (Baucom, et al., 2007; Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Eldridge, et al., 2007) where conflict becomes more unregulated and destructive.
In contrast to the regulated couple types, two non-regulated couple types, known as Hostile Couples have also been identified: Hostile and Hostile/Detached (Gottman, 1993a, 1994; Gottman & Levenson, 1992). Hostile couples frequently engage in high levels of personal attack and defensiveness, combined with an inability to validate their partner’s point of view. Hostile/Detached couples are typically emotionally detached from one another, but at times engage in high levels of attacking and defensive behaviour. Overall, both non-regulated couple types tend to have more negative than positive interactions, find it difficult to regulate their own or their partner’s negative emotions (i.e., become physiologically flooded and are unable to soothe themselves or their partner) and often display behaviours characteristic of the Four Horsemen. As a result, non-regulated couples have been found to experience lower levels of marital satisfaction and are at greater risk of marital dissolution than regulated couples (Gottman & Levenson, 1992). According to Gottman (1993a, 1993b, 1994, 1999), some gender differences may become apparent in the way men and women react when there is intense conflict within the relationship. Specifically, men are more likely to remain physiologically aroused for a longer period following conflict and are also more likely to exhibit stonewalling behaviours than women. Alternatively, women are more likely to be more critical and demanding of their partner than men. Consequently Gottman suggests that in order to regulate conflict more effectively, men may need to be more open to embracing their partners’ concerns rather than trying to avoid them, and women may need to so present their concerns without resorting to personal attacks or criticisms.

Gottman’s (1993a, 1993b, 1994, 1999) extensive research into couple conflict styles highlights the importance of considering how each member of a couple regulates conflict and the way in which this may impact on their relationship.
satisfaction. Importantly, the research informs marital intervention programmes, aimed at helping couples to strengthen the foundations of their relationship based on the assumption that negative interaction patterns are amenable to change. Therefore teaching couples to communicate more effectively, take responsibility for their actions, accept influence from each other, physiologically soothe and effectively repair after conflict, form the basis of Gottman’s marital intervention programs (Gottman & Silver, 1998; 1999; Liem & Pressler, 2005). Therefore factors that may impact on a couple’s ability to do this have been explored further in the current study.

4.3 Self Report Measures of Conflict Style

In a more recent study that explored Gottman’s (1993a, 1993b, 1994, 1999) couple conflict styles and aimed to develop a categorical self-report measure, Holman and Jarvis (2003) conducted a large study of both married and unmarried couples. After constructing four paragraphs describing the validating, volatile, avoiding and hostile conflict styles (hostile and hostile/detached were collapsed into a single style), Holman and Jarvis asked participants to rate how often both they and their partner use each style to deal with conflict in their relationship. Cluster analyses generally supported the existence of each of these four conflict styles for both men and women. However in some instances, the validating style combined with either the volatile or avoiding styles, indicating that couples may use a mixture of conflict styles. Those men and women who classified themselves as mainly validating in their approach to conflict reported higher relationship satisfaction, relationship stability and emotional regulation (i.e., soothing) as well as lower levels of physiological arousal (i.e., flooding) and less destructive conflict behaviours (i.e., criticism, contempt/defensiveness), than those classified into the other three conflict styles. As expected, participants who were classified into the hostile conflict style reported
lower levels of relationship satisfaction, stability and emotional regulation as well as higher levels of negative communication than those classified into the other three conflict styles. Those classified as avoiding or volatile rated in between the extremes of the validating and hostile styles. Despite Gottman’s assertion that the three regulated conflict styles (i.e., validating, avoiding and volatile) are equally functional, the findings of Holman and Jarvis suggested significant differences in the relationship quality of couples using these three conflict styles. It is possible that the volatile and avoidant styles may be more likely than the validating style to create a level of disharmony in the relationship, which could more readily lead to a cascade of hostile behaviours (Whelan, 2006) that are worthy of further investigation.

An earlier study conducted by Kurdek (1994) aimed to develop multi-item self-report and partner-report measures of conflict styles and communication based largely on earlier research by Gottman (1993a, 1994) and his colleagues (e.g., Gottman & Krokoff, 1989). The Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory (CRSI) is a 16 item scale, of which four items measure each of four conflict styles: Positive Problem Solving (e.g., the ability to compromise and negotiate); Conflict Engagement (e.g., making personal attacks and losing control); Compliance (e.g., giving in and not making an attempt to defend one’s own position); and Withdrawal (e.g., stonewalling). Both self-report and partner-report versions were created for each couple member to report how often they and their partner use each of the four conflict styles. To complement this, the Ineffective Arguing Inventory (IAI) was also developed by Kurdek to measure the way in which couples handle arguments. The IAI is an 8 item self-report measure designed to be completed by both partners that focuses primarily on communication patterns between the couple (e.g., whether arguments are typically resolved, unresolved, brief or ongoing).
In order to test the psychometric properties of the CRSI and the IAI, Kurdek (1994) conducted a longitudinal study using both homosexual couples and married heterosexual couples, although only the latter are reported here. Both the CRSI and IAI scales were found to be psychometrically sound and conformed to the expected four factor model and one factor model respectively. Each member of the marital couple completed the IAI, a measure of relationship satisfaction and both a self-report and a partner-report of the CRSI. For both husbands and wives, their self-reports of each conflict style were positively correlated with their partner-reports of each conflict style, with the exception of husbands’ self and partner-reports of positive problem solving, which were not related. This generally indicated that when individuals reported doing more of a particular conflict style, they also perceived that their partner did more of this particular conflict style. With regard to relationship outcomes, Kurdek found that for both husbands and wives, their self-reports and partner-reports of more frequent positive problem solving were related to increased relationship satisfaction. Further, more frequent conflict engagement and withdrawal were related to decreased relationship satisfaction. Overall, individuals who reported using a more compliant conflict style reported lower levels of relationships satisfaction, but the individual’s relationship satisfaction was not related to their partner’s use of this particular conflict style. For both husbands and wives, higher scores on the IAI were found to be strongly related to decreased relationship satisfaction and predicted declines in relationship satisfaction over time.

A subsequent study of newlywed couples (Kurdek, 1995), also using the CRSI, found that the conflict styles of both husbands and wives influenced both their own and their partners’ relationship satisfaction. Husbands and wives generally reported feeling more satisfied when they engaged in more positive problem solving
and less conflict engagement and withdrawal. Findings with regard to the compliance
conflict style were less consistent. Whilst husbands’ relationship satisfaction was
negatively related to only their self-report of compliance, wives reported being more
satisfied when both they and their husbands reported being less compliant.
Noteworthy interactions included the fact that lower relationship satisfaction was
more likely to be associated with the wife’s use of conflict engagement and husband’s
use of withdrawal, typical of the demand-withdrawal pattern mentioned above
(Baucom et al., 2007; Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Eldridge et al., 2007). For
husbands who withdrew, their relationship satisfaction was dependent upon their
wife’s conflict style, whereas wives who withdrew tended to experience a decrease in
relationship satisfaction, regardless of their husband’s conflict style. Although
extensive comparisons of husbands’ and wives’ self-reports and partner-reports of the
conflict styles were not made, the study found a strong relationship between
husbands’ self-report and wives’ self-report of conflict engagement and positive
problem solving, but only very weak or non-existent relationships between their self-
reports of withdrawal and compliance respectively. Such findings imply that within a
couple dyad, the interpersonal effects of conflict engagement and positive problem
solving may be stronger than for withdrawal and compliance. Therefore, if one
member of the couple is able to focus on the problem, without blaming and attacking,
the other partner is more likely to follow suit. Conversely, if one partner resorts to
“exploding” and letting things get out of hand, the other partner is also more likely to
be drawn into similarly destructive behaviours.

More recently, in three studies that explored the relationship between
Kurdek’s (1994) conflict styles and relationship satisfaction (Dwyer, 2005; Gaffney,
2007; McCarthy, 2006), each found that those individuals who reported using more
positive problem solving reported greater relationship satisfaction, whilst the reverse was found for those who reported using more conflict engagement, compliance, withdrawal or ineffective arguing. Gaffney also found that individuals reported more relationship satisfaction when they perceived their partner to do more positive problem solving and less conflict engaging, withdrawal and compliance. With regard to specific gender differences between husbands and wives in their self reports of specific conflict styles and relationship satisfaction, Dwyer found that only husbands’ and wives’ self-reports of ineffective arguing were significantly related. Further, when all conflict variables were included in a regression model, Dwyer found ineffective arguing to be a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction, whereas, the other four other conflict styles were not. Whilst on the whole, these studies (Dwyer, 2005; Gaffney, 2007; Kurdek, 1994, 1995; McCarthy, 2006) were limited by the representativeness of participants and the fact that the majority were not experiencing extreme levels of marital distress, each found the CRSI and/or the IAI to be reliable and valid measures that provide an easily administered assessment of both intrapersonal and interpersonal conflict styles within the couple dyad. As a result, these measures were used in the current study.

Although using various other self-report measures of conflict styles, there have been many studies that have considered the relationship between conflict regulation and relationship satisfaction. Overall, findings support the contention that if couples manage conflict in more constructive ways such as validating their partner’s views, compromising, and openly communicating, this typically results in greater relationship satisfaction. Alternatively, if couples manage conflict using more destructive means such as verbal or physical attacks, avoiding arguments or emotionally disengaging and refusing to communicate, then the relationship is likely
to be less satisfying (e.g., Fincham, Beach, & Davila, 2004; Greeff & de Bruyne, 2000; Kurdek, 1995; Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991; Ruskell-Chapin, Chapin, & Sattler, 2001; Schneewind & Gerhard, 2002). Differences in the way each partner in the couple manages conflict may also lead to decreased relationship satisfaction, particularly if the female partner demands and her male partner withdraws (Baucom et al., 2007; Bradbury et al., 2000; Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Eldridge et al., 2007; Heavey, Christensen, & Malamuth, 1995). Not surprisingly then, many marriage preparation and intervention programmes have focused on helping couples understand and modify their conflict styles (Cramer, 2006; Markman et al., 1988, 2006; Stanley, Markman, St Peters, & Leber, 1995), but this is not therapeutic work that should occur in isolation from other factors that may impact on relationship satisfaction. These will be considered further below.

4.4 Conflict Styles and Attachment

Whilst the above cited research into conflict styles considers the impact of functional and dysfunctional behavioural patterns on the relationship satisfaction of couples, it does not consider the impact of intrapersonal factors that each individual partner may bring to the relationship. Given that one’s own and one’s partner’s attachment style have been found to impact on relationship satisfaction (e.g., Feeney, 1999; Hazan & Shaver, 1994; Kane et al., 2007; Mikulincer et al., 2002), that a well established link has also been found between an individual’s own attachment style and conflict style (e.g., Corcoran & Mallinckrodt, 2000; Creasey, 2002; Feeney et al., 1994; Simpson, Rholes, & Phillips, 1996) and that attachment theory provides a strong theoretical framework within which to consider the interplay between intrapersonal and interpersonal factors in adult relationships (Bradbury et al., 2000), then this strongly suggests that the way couples manage conflict in their relationship
is systematically linked to their own and their partner’s internal working models of attachment. Further, research has shown that more insecure individuals exhibit less constructive problem solving skills than secure individuals, and that conflict threatens the security of the relationship which may increase stress (Kobak & Hazan, 1991), thus activating the internal working models of attachment (Bowlby, 1972, 1973, 1980, 1982).

There are other factors that suggest a relationship between adult attachment and conflict styles. First, adult attachment theory posits that one’s internal working models of relating to close others develop based on childhood experiences with parents, and in particular one’s mother (Bowlby, 1973, 1980, 1982). Becoming securely attached is related to the development of a positive view of self and a positive view of others, resulting in low levels of anxiety and avoidance in close adult relationships. Alternatively, insecure attachment manifests as negative views of self and/or other that may result in increased levels of anxiety and/or avoidance within the relationship (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Brennan et al., 1998). Insecure attachment has been found to increase negativity between the couple which may impact on the long term stability of the relationship unless resolved (e.g., Collins & Read, 1990; Feeney, 2006; Feeney et al., 1994; Simpson, 1990). This suggests that being insecurely attached may increase the number of negative couple interactions, thus disrupting the required balance of positive versus negative interactions that Gottman (1993a, 1993b, 1994, 1999) has found to be an important factor in ensuring the long term stability of the relationship (Whelan, 2006).

Second, the specific conflict styles proposed by Gottman (1993a, 1993b, 1994, 1999) and the four adult attachment styles based on the underlying factors of avoidance and anxiety (Brennan et al., 1998; Fraley et al., 2000), suggest
commonalities in the way couples behave in a relationship. Couples with a validating conflict style are able to communicate effectively with one another, listening to and validating each other’s point of view in a respectful manner and are more likely to find a compromise position when in conflict. These behaviours may indicate a positive view of self and one’s partner that allows the high degree of comfort with closeness and intimacy that is typical of secure attachment. The volatile conflict style involves quite passionate and emotional outbursts in order to engage one’s partner in conflict discussions which may be related to an increased need for closeness combined with a high level of anxiety demonstrated by preoccupied individuals. Avoidance of conflict is a way of minimising disagreements by staying calm and agreeing with one’s partner to keep the peace or refusing to become involved in arguments, indicating a low level of anxiety coupled with a high level of avoidance, typical of the dismissing attachment style. The hostile conflict style involves a high level of personal attack and defensiveness between couples, often combined with a level of emotional detachment from one’s partner, indicative of a high level of avoidance and a high level of anxiety associated with the fearful attachment style (Whelan, 2006).

It was on the premise of possible links between the four Adult Attachment styles (Brennan et al., 1998; Fraley et al., 2000) and Gottman’s (1993a, 1993b, 1994, 1999) typology of conflict styles that Whelan (2006) conducted a study that considered how these factors impacted on the relationship satisfaction of a sample of Australian couples. Using self-report measures of conflict styles (Holman & Jarvis, 2003), attachment styles (Brennan et al., 1998) and marital satisfaction (Snyder, 1979; Snyder, Aikman, & Maruish, 1999), Whelan found that securely attached participants scored significantly higher on the validating conflict style than those participants who
were high in attachment avoidance (i.e., dismissive or fearfully attached) and significantly lower in the volatile conflict style than those with a preoccupied attachment style (i.e., high anxiety, low avoidance). Secure individuals also experienced lower levels of marital distress and higher relationship satisfaction than insecure individuals. Further, those participants high in attachment avoidance scored significantly higher in the avoidant conflict style than those participants who were securely attached. Overall, insecurely attached individuals were found to have higher levels of hostile conflict behaviours than securely attached individuals. In line with Holman and Jarvis (2003), findings from the study did not support Gottman’s assertion that each of the three regulated conflict styles (i.e., validating, volatile and avoidant) are equally stable or that couples fare better when they are matched in their conflict resolution styles. Some subtle gender similarities and differences were also found in the way that men and women tend to experience and express relationship distress, as well as how they perceived each other’s behaviour. Specifically, with regard to the attachment variables, for both husbands and wives, those who reported more avoidance also tended to report more anxiety. Further, although husbands’ and wives’ levels of avoidance were not related, when husbands reported being more anxious, so too did their wives. Generally, husbands and wives were not found to differ with regard to their self-reports and partner-reports of conflict styles, although, husbands perceived themselves to do more avoiding than they perceived their wives to do, and wives perceived their husbands to be more hostile than themselves. Several limitations to the study were acknowledged, including the use of a categorical measure of conflict styles that had not been extensively psychometrically tested and the fact that the non-independence of the dyadic data was not accounted for statistically (Kenny et al., 2006). Despite this, the findings suggest some important
links between attachment styles and conflict styles worthy of further exploration in order to more fully understand the way in which one’s attachment orientation may impact on conflict regulation and in turn, the level of relationship satisfaction.

There have been numerous other studies that have considered the link between conflict styles and adult attachment. Whilst there is considerable variation in the type of instruments used to measure these variables, overall, results have supported the contention that individuals who are securely attached tend to be able to communicate openly, regulate and express their emotions more effectively and move to a state of repair fairly rapidly after a conflict situation. Those individuals who are more anxiously attached show a propensity towards clingy behaviour and are less able to regulate their emotional responses during conflict, due to their fear of abandonment. Avoidant individuals have been found to withdraw from conflict situations, become involved in more destructive conflict behaviours and do not readily agree to a compromise position (e.g., Corcoran & Mallinckrodt, 2000; Creasey, 2002; Feeney et al., 1994; Lussier, 1997; MacDougall, 2003; Marchand-Reilly & Reese-Weber, 2005; Pistole & Arricale, 2003; Shi, 2003; Simpson, Rholes, & Phillips, 1996).

In a study that examined the relationships between conflict styles (Rusbult et al., 1991) and Bartholomew and Horowitz’s (1991) four category model of attachment in a sample of dating individuals, Dougall (1998) found that those individuals with secure attachment were more likely to openly discuss and negotiate disagreements than insecure individuals. Preoccupied women were more likely to sit back and wait for things to improve whilst remaining loyal to their partner. Fearful men tended to disengage from the relationship and dismissive men were more likely to threaten to leave. More recently, Shi (2003), also using a sample of dating individuals, examined the relationship between conflict styles (Rahim, 1983) and the higher order
attachment factors of avoidance and anxiety (Brennan et al., 1998). Although there were no gender differences in the reported attachment styles and relationship satisfaction of participants, women were found to report more integrative conflict behaviour (taking the needs of self and partner into account) than men, and men were found to report more avoidant (withdrawing) conflict behaviour than women. Further, an individual’s level of attachment avoidance was found to be the most important predictor of conflict style. According to Shi, a high level of avoidance may have a much more detrimental effect on the relationship because it can lead to emotional withdrawal from the relationship, whereas a high level of attachment anxiety generally serves to keep the couple engaging with each other with the possibility of conflict resolution and repair. Further, more avoidant individuals have been found to experience lower levels of relationship distress than anxious individuals because when there is relationship conflict, they employ strategies that focus their attention away from the hurt and distress and may therefore be less motivated to resolve it (Feeney, 2004). Such findings are consistent with Gottman’s (1993a, 1993b, 1994, 1999) theory of conflict styles which posits that withdrawal and stonewalling are much more likely to lead to marital distress and dissolution than other regulated conflict styles, where a balance of more positive versus negative interactions is likely to be maintained. Whilst these studies were limited in the short term nature of the dating relationships, they imply an important relationship between adult attachment styles and conflict styles that is worthy of further investigation with couples in more long term relationships.

Couple research on conflict styles and attachment has shown that people in dyadic relationships often influence each other and it is important to take account of this interdependence (Campbell & Kashy, 2002). For example, highly anxious
individuals are more likely to perceive greater levels of conflict in the relationship than their partners and to believe that their partner is less satisfied than their partner actually reports (Campbell, Simpson, Boldry, & Kashy, 2005). As a result, they may behave in ways that undermine the stability of the relationship given their fear of being abandoned or rejected and this may differ according to gender. Anxious men have been found to behave in more jealous and possessive ways, whereas anxious women are more likely to become more hostile and less emotionally supportive of their partner (Downey & Feldman, 1996; Downey, Freitas, Michaelis, & Khouri, 1998). Further, research has shown that the attachment orientation of both spouses in longer term relationships impact on their reported conflict behaviours (Marchand-Reilly & Reese-Weber, 2005). Together such findings imply gender differences in the link between attachment and conflict behaviours that are worthy of further exploration in couple dyads, including the way in which perceptions of one’s partner impact on conflict behaviours and relationship satisfaction.

4.5 Conflict Styles and Emotional Regulation

As discussed above, individuals in close adult relationships experience a wide range of emotions, both positive and negative, which have an impact not only on their own behaviour, but on the behaviour of the other member of the couple dyad (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005). Gottman’s (1993a, 1993b, 1994, 1999) observational research of marital conflict has highlighted the way in which patterns of emotional responses impact on marital stability and satisfaction. If couples are unable to regulate the way they manage conflict when it occurs, then a downward spiral to emotional disengagement or volatile behaviour is possible.

In a recent study that examined the causal effects of emotions on the cognition and behaviour of couples, Tashiro and Frazier (2007) found that participants in a
negative emotional state were more likely to blame the internal characteristics of their partner for problems in the relationship and ignore external or contextual factors, than individuals in a positive emotional state. Further, couples in a negative emotional state who were less satisfied with their relationship were more likely to behave in more negative and less positive ways towards their partner than those couples in a positive emotional state. Although the study was limited in its use of a convenience sample of university students and employed methods of inducing emotional states that were not well validated, the findings imply that the emotional responses of individuals in a couple dyad may impact on the way each perceives and behaves towards their partner. Therefore, if couples are able to more effectively regulate their emotional responses, more favourable relationship outcomes are likely. As well, the study used multi level modelling statistical techniques (Kenny et al., 2006) to account for the interdependence of couple data and to examine how the characteristics of each partner affected both their own and their partner’s relationship outcomes which are methods used in the current study.

The relationship between conflict regulation and both the expression and regulation of emotional reactions has also been widely examined within the context of attachment theory (Campbell et al., 2005; Creasey, Kershaw, & Boston, 1999; Feeney, 1999; Mikulincer, 1998; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005) which provides a framework to consider why individuals and couples behave the way they do in close adult relationships. According to Bowlby (1973), individuals experience various emotional reactions if their ability to remain close to and feel secure with their attachment figure is disrupted. For example, anger may serve as a functional response to protest separation and elicit further support, but may also be dysfunctional if it becomes so intense that it becomes hurtful or damaging to the attachment figure
(Johnson & Makinen, 2001). Further, more constructive relationship behaviours and the expression of positive emotions from one’s partner are more likely to result in the individual feeling loved and secure, and in turn motivate the individual to be responsive and sensitive to their partner’s needs, thus creating a “dyadic cycle of positive interpersonal behaviour” (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005, p.156). Therefore, the way couples manage conflict and both express and regulate their emotional reactions may be viewed as a function of one’s attachment security which will be examined in more detail in the chapter below.
Chapter 5: Emotional Intelligence

5.1 What is Emotional Intelligence?

Emotional Intelligence is a construct that has been widely researched for almost two decades and is, in a sense, the interaction of the cognitive and affective mental functioning of an individual (Goleman, 1996; Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Emotions include such things as feelings, mood states and physiological sensations. They play a central part in close relationships, given that a variety of emotions arise during interactions with others that convey important information about the state of the relationship. For example, happiness is generally indicative of a sense of contentment and harmony in the relationship, whereas anger may indicate an underlying sense of injustice that may need to be resolved. Intelligence has many definitions, but in general terms refers to cognitive functions such as memory, abstract thinking, reasoning and judgement that influence how a person thinks about their experiences (Mayer, 2001; Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 1999; Mayer, Ciarrochi, & Forgas, 2001; Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Planalp, 2003; Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

Emotional Intelligence indicates a connection between one’s emotional experiences and intelligence and can therefore be thought of as the “ability to carry out accurate reasoning about emotions and the ability to use emotions and emotional knowledge to enhance thought” (Mayer, Roberts, & Barsade, 2008, p. 511). Individuals who are more emotionally intelligent are considered to possess emotional skills that enhance their lives, particularly when involved in relationships with others, whereas those who are less emotionally intelligent may be “impaired in emotional and social functioning” (Mayer, DiPaolo, & Salovey, 1990, p. 773).

Although the term “emotional intelligence” has appeared in the psychological literature for many years, it was not until the early 1990s that Salovey and Mayer
(1990) proposed a theoretical model that provided a framework to examine differences in emotional ability between individuals (Salovey & Grewal, 2005). This original framework conceptualised emotional intelligence as a set of mental processes that included one’s ability to appraise, express, regulate and utilize emotions in socially adaptive ways that could be measured through a series of tasks. Although it is assumed that everyone possesses these mental processes to some degree, there are deemed to be distinct differences in the ability of individuals to understand and express emotions, partly due to the environments in which they grew up. However, the model assumes that individuals can be taught the skills to improve their level of emotional intelligence and therefore improve their mental health and the quality of their relationships (Mayer et al., 1990; Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

The construct of Emotional Intelligence has been further divided into four separate, but related emotional abilities: perceiving emotions, using emotions, understanding emotions and managing emotions (Mayer et al., 1990; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Perceiving emotions refers to the ability to identify one’s own emotions, as well as the emotions of others. It is viewed as the fundamental component of emotional intelligence because all other emotional abilities are dependent upon it. Using emotions is the ability to fully utilise one’s emotional experience in order to facilitate more effective ways of thinking and problem solving. This could include, for example, using one’s sad mood to facilitate more reflective thinking about a situation. Understanding emotions is the ability to grasp the complexity of emotional experiences and how emotions may evolve over time (e.g., the initial anger following a relationship breakdown that may evolve into sadness and grief). Managing emotions refers to the ability to regulate the emotions of oneself and the emotions of others. For example, being able to use one’s anger in constructive,
rather than destructive, ways that result in desirable emotional responses and
behaviour from others (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Salovey & Grewal, 2005).

5.2 Measuring Emotional Intelligence

Since the introduction of the theoretical concept of emotional intelligence, two
main approaches in the measurement of the construct have emerged, namely ability
models and mixed models (Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 2000a). Ability models define
emotional intelligence as a set of distinct cognitive abilities that should be measured
using a more traditional performance based approach in line with other tests of
intelligence. These performance tests are evaluated against objective predetermined
scoring criteria. Well known performance measures include the Multifactor
Emotional Intelligence Scale (MEIS, Mayer et al., 1999), which was later updated to a
shorter version, known as the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test
(MSCEIT, Mayer et al., 2000a), followed by the MSCEIT version 2 (Mayer, Salovey,
Caruso, & Sitarenios, 2003). These performance based measures were each designed
to measure the four theoretical branches of emotional intelligence, as stated above,
using specific tasks such as viewing faces and pictures to identify emotions and
judging what actions may be most likely to result in a desired emotional outcome for
an individual in a specific scenario (Mayer et al., 2003).

Mixed models interpret emotional intelligence more broadly and include
cognitive ability as well as personality traits and dispositions, such as optimism and
motivation. Consequently, they are often referred to as measures of trait emotional
intelligence and are typically assessed using self-report measures to determine how
individuals perceive themselves to emotionally respond in particular situations
(Ciarrochi, Chan, Caputi, & Roberts, 2001a; Mayer et al., 2000a; Mayer, Salovey, &
Caruso, 2000b). There are numerous self-report measures of emotional intelligence,
the most prominent of which include the Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQI, Bar-On, 1997), the Emotional Competency Inventory (ECI, Goleman, 1998) and the Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS, Schutte et al., 1998). More recently the Swinburne University Emotional Intelligence Test (SUEIT, Palmer & Stough, 2001) was developed which measures five separate emotional intelligence dimensions.

There are several main differences between ability measures and self-report trait measures of emotional intelligence. Ability tests are designed to measure actual performance against set observable criteria, thus providing a more objective measure of an individual’s acquired level of emotional intelligence. Although it is claimed that ability measures may have some overlap with traditional measures of intelligence, this overlap has been found to be only moderate. However, they may be quite costly and time consuming to administer as a substantial number of observations are required before an individual’s level of emotional intelligence can be ascertained. Further, research has indicated that some ability measure scales have been found to have low levels of reliability due to such factors as cultural variation whereby individuals in some cultures may respond inconsistently to those in other cultures. Also there is lack of convergence in scoring methods for different ability measures, which are generally based on the assumption that there is a correct answer to the way in which a person should feel in certain situations, which is perhaps not always the case (Ciarrochi et al., 2001a). Alternatively, self-report measures are designed to measure an individual’s self-perception of their emotional skills and require individuals to have some insight into their personal experiences. Generally, they are readily administered and easy to score, and have been found to relate to personality traits of an individual rather than their general level of intelligence. It has been argued that although not measuring actual emotional ability, a measure of emotional intelligence that assesses an
individual’s belief about how they are able to manage and regulate emotions is just as important, particularly in the context of close relationships with others. Although self-report measures may also be subject to socially desirable responding, it is possible to overcome this by including a scale to control for this in statistical analyses (for reviews see Ciarrochi et al., 2001a; MacCann, Matthews, Zeidner, & Roberts, 2003; Matthews, Roberts, & Zeidner, 2004; Van Rooy, Viswesvaran, & Pluta, 2005).

Criticisms have emerged in the literature regarding the construct of emotional intelligence and the fact that no clear consensus about its definition and method of measurement has been established. Further it has been claimed that the considerable overlap between emotional intelligence and both traditional measures of intelligence and measures of personality, means that it fails to contribute substantially to research on human behavioural issues (Matthews et al., 2004; Waterhouse, 2006). However, emotional intelligence can be viewed as a relatively new construct that still requires further empirical validation in order to establish the best way to measure and define it. Consequently, to expect consensus at this time is perhaps unrealistic. Despite this, both ability and self-report measures have some empirical credibility in that they each appear to address two major underlying components of emotional intelligence, namely the awareness and management of the emotions of self and others (Cherniss, Extein, Goleman, & Weissberg, 2006) indicating the existence of both intrapersonal and interpersonal factors (Lam & Kirby, 2002) that would be particularly relevant to the study of close adult relationships. Given the above factors, it was decided to use a psychometrically tested self-report measure of trait emotional intelligence for the current study.
5.3 The Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale

The Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS, Schutte et al., 1998) was constructed based on the theoretical model of emotional intelligence developed by Salovey and Mayer (1990). From a pool of 62 items, Schutte et al. extracted a four factor solution, but found this to be uninterpretable. They therefore recommended a one factor solution and retained only 33 of the original items which were claimed to provide an overall emotional intelligence score. Factorial analysis of the scale in subsequent research has indicated the possible existence of four sub-factors, perception of emotions, managing emotions in self, managing others’ emotions and utilising emotions (Ciarrochi, Chan, & Bajgar, 2001b; Petrides & Furnham, 2000). However, findings regarding this have been mixed (see Gignac, Palmer, Manocha, & Stough, 2005; Saklofske, Austin, & Minski, 2003), possibly due to the predominant use of adolescent or young university student samples in this research.

Although some earlier self-report measures of Emotional Intelligence have been found to have poor reliabilities and have demonstrated considerable overlap with measures of personality (Davies, Stankov, & Roberts, 1998), the EIS (Schutte et al., 1998) has been found to be a valid and reliable measure of emotional intelligence that has only low to moderate correlations with the Big Five personality measures, Neuroticism, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness and Openness (Costa & McCrae, 1992), suggesting that it is measuring something related to, but distinct from personality factors (Ciarrochi et al., 2001a; Saklofske et al., 2003; Schutte et al., 2001). According to Chapman and Hayslip (2005), the EIS has also become a popular self-report measure of emotional intelligence in the literature because it is brief, easy to administer and readily available in the public domain. Further, it has been found to be reliable and valid in both a self-report and partner-report version.
(Schutte et al., 2001). For the above reasons, the EIS was used as a measure of emotional intelligence in the current study.

5.4 Emotional Intelligence and Relationship Satisfaction

Emotional Intelligence has been found to be related to numerous variables such as wellbeing, positive mood states, self esteem (e.g., Schutte, Malouff, Simunek, McKenley, & Hollander, 2002), life satisfaction (e.g., Gignac, 2006; Saklofske et al., 2003; Wing, Schutte, & Byrne, 2006) job satisfaction (Kafetsios & Zampetakis, 2008; Law, Wong, & Song, 2004), and academic achievement and deviant behaviour (Brackett, Mayer, & Warner, 2004). However, a full examination of all variables related to emotional intelligence was outside the scope of the present study. Of particular relevance to the current research, was the relationship between emotional intelligence and factors that impact on close adult relationships.

Although research has implied that people who are more emotionally intelligent have more satisfying personal relationships, there have been limited studies that have examined this directly, perhaps due to the relative infancy of this construct and a lack of consensus about the best way to measure it (Fitness, 2001). In one of the few studies to examine emotional intelligence and interpersonal factors, Schutte et al. (2001) found that emotional intelligence was positively related to empathic perspective taking, self-monitoring of emotional responses in social situations and social skills. Further, people scoring higher in emotional intelligence were found to be more co-operative with their partners, more comfortable being close and affectionate with others and reported higher levels of marital satisfaction than those people scoring lower in emotional intelligence. Additionally, those people who rated their partners as more emotionally intelligent reported greater relationship satisfaction than those people who reported that their partners were lower in emotional
intelligence. When a composite emotional intelligence score was calculated combining the participant’s and their partner’s emotional intelligence scores (as reported by the participant) this was also positively related to marital satisfaction. Women also reported higher levels of emotional intelligence than men. Finally, individuals were found to anticipate more satisfying relationships with partners who were perceived as higher in emotional intelligence and interestingly, there were no gender differences in men’s and women’s self-reports of emotional intelligence. A limitation of the research was the use of predominantly small convenience samples. Also, Schutte et al. included only individuals in relationships, rather than couple dyads, therefore a comparison between an individual’s perception of their partner’s level of emotional intelligence and their partner’s self-report of emotional intelligence was not possible. However, these findings imply that emotional intelligence is an important factor in interpersonal relationships, possibly related to one’s attachment style and conflict style that will be considered in detail below. Further, as identified by Schutte et al., emotional intelligence may be a skill that can be enhanced through training in order to help people establish more satisfying relationships and is therefore an important component to include in couple counselling interventions.

Brackett, Warner and Bosco (2005) conducted one of the few studies that has examined emotional intelligence and relationship satisfaction in a couple sample. Using an ability test of emotional intelligence (MSCEIT, Mayer et al., 2000a), the authors found that overall, females recorded significantly higher levels of emotional intelligence than males, although there was no relationship between an individual’s emotional intelligence ability and either their own or their partner’s reported relationship satisfaction. However, they found that when both partners had low levels of emotional intelligence, they experienced decreased levels of relationship
satisfaction. Contrary to expectation, when both partners were high in emotional intelligence, they reported lower relationship satisfaction than couples where only one partner was high in emotional intelligence. Brackett et al. speculate that perhaps when both partners are high in emotional intelligence, both see themselves as the “emotions expert” thereby increasing friction as they compete to take charge of the emotional aspects of the relationship. An important limitation to the study was the fact that most of the couples in the study had been dating for less than a year and did not cohabit. As identified by Brackett et al., it may be that emotional intelligence plays a more substantial role in relationship satisfaction once the union is more long term and committed. Further, the study used an ability measure of emotional intelligence rather than a self-report trait measure, which could have impacted on the findings. Although ability and trait measures of emotional intelligence are constructed in the same theoretical domain, as discussed above, they are operationalised in fundamentally different ways and it would reasonably be expected that there would be variation in their association with such factors as relationship satisfaction (Petrides & Furnham, 2003). Brackett et al. also suggested the possibility of examining emotional intelligence in the context of other factors such as conflict style and avoidant behaviour and their impact on relationship satisfaction, which the current study aimed to address.

Although not specifically using a measure of emotional intelligence, other studies have found an association between emotional skills and relationship satisfaction. Cordova, Gee and Warren (2005) found that the self-reported difficulty in identifying and communicating emotions was associated with marital satisfaction in a sample of married couples. Wives reported less relationship satisfaction and less intimacy when either they or their husbands reported experiencing difficulty in
identifying or communicating their emotions. However, husbands reported less 
relationship satisfaction when either they or their wives reported difficulty in 
identifying their emotions, or when husbands reported difficulty in communicating 
emotions. Husbands’ relationship satisfaction was not related to their wives’ reported 
ability to communicate emotions. Husband’s reported level of intimacy was 
associated with their own reported ability to identify and communicate emotions, but 
was not related to their wives’ self-reported ability to identify and communicate 
emotions. Notably, whilst there were no gender differences with regard to difficulty 
in identifying emotions, husbands reported greater difficulty communicating emotions 
than wives. Also, although there was no significant correlation between wives’ and 
husbands’ reported difficulty in identifying emotions, when wives reported difficulty 
in communicating emotions, on average, so too did their husbands.

These findings were in line with those of Lavee and Ben-Ari (2004) who also 
found that wives’ reported level of marital quality was positively related to both their 
own reported ability to express emotions and to their husband’s reported ability to 
express emotions, whereas for husbands, the reported level of marital quality was not 
related to either their own or their wives’ reported levels of emotional expressiveness. 
The authors suggest that perhaps women value the expression of emotion more highly 
than men in couple relationships (Cordova et al., 2005; Lavee & Ben-Ari, 2004). In 
each of these reported studies, couples were matched, allowing an examination of the 
association between each spouses’ reported relationship satisfaction and both their 
own, and their partner’s, self-reported emotion skills; however, their perceptions of 
each other’s emotional skills were not obtained. According to Cordova et al., further 
research is also required to examine possible gender differences in the emotional 
skills of couples in marital relationships.
More recently, Nikou (2005) used the Swinburne University Emotional Intelligence Test (SUEIT, Palmer & Stough, 2001) to measure an individual’s self-reported perception of both their own and their partner’s level of emotional intelligence. Nikou found no relationship between an individual’s perception of their own level of emotional intelligence and relationship satisfaction. However, women who perceived their partner to be higher on the ability to recognize and express emotions tended to have more satisfying relationships than those women who perceived their partner to be low on these emotional skills. The same did not hold for the men whose relationship satisfaction was not influenced by their perceptions of their partner’s emotional abilities. For women, those who perceived their partner to be better at expressing and recognizing emotions felt more emotionally intimate towards their partner, which in turn resulted in higher levels of relationship satisfaction. Both men and women reported greater levels of emotional intimacy, and therefore relationship satisfaction, if they perceived their partner to be better at controlling strong emotions such as anger, frustration and anxiety. A limitation of the study identified by Nikou was the use of individuals rather than couple dyads which did not allow for comparison between an individual’s perception of their partner’s emotional intelligence and the level of emotional intelligence actually reported by the partner. Further, specific gender comparisons were not conducted. Given that this was the first study to assess emotional intelligence in romantic relationships using the SUEIT (Palmer & Stough, 2001), then further research using a more established measure of emotional intelligence with a longer term couple sample would be beneficial, particularly to tease apart possible gender differences in emotional intelligence and relationship satisfaction between partners. Together, findings from these studies, whilst varied in their samples and methodology, imply important
connections between the perceived emotional skills of both partners in a couple and their level of emotional intimacy (the desire to feel close to one’s partner) and their relationship satisfaction that were explored in more detail in the current study.

5.5 Emotional Intelligence and Conflict

As identified in the previous chapter, individuals in couple relationships experience a wide range of emotional responses that have an impact both intrapersonally and interpersonally (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005). Further, Gottman’s (1993a, 1993b, 1994, 1999) research has indicated that when couples are able to effectively regulate their own and their partner’s emotions, disagreements are less likely to escalate into destructive forms of conflict that may result in decreased relationship satisfaction. This suggests the importance of individuals in a couple relationship being able to accurately identify and perceive both their own and their partner’s emotional responses.

In the abovementioned study of couples in dating relationships by Brackett et al. (2005), when individuals in the couple were both low in emotional intelligence (as measured by an ability test), the level of conflict was found to be higher than with couples of mixed or high levels of emotional intelligence. Further, low emotional intelligence couples were also found to report higher levels of negative relationship behaviours such as arguing, yelling, criticising and withdrawing. In another study that considered the relationship between emotional intelligence ability and social behaviour in a student sample, Brackett et al. (2004) found that although women were higher in emotional intelligence than men, the level of emotional intelligence was more predictive of life outcomes for men than for women. Specifically, men who scored lower in emotional intelligence reported experiencing poorer relationships with friends as a result of conflict behaviours such as yelling and fighting. From this the
authors conclude that perhaps women and men develop different emotional skills based on their socialization or brain development and that training men to increase their emotional skills may lead to more positive relationship outcomes.

There has been a limited amount of research that has considered the link between emotional intelligence and conflict styles. Recently, Dywer (2005) conducted a study that explored the relationship between emotional intelligence, conflict resolution styles and relationship satisfaction in a sample of 49 newly married couples (98 individuals). The self-reported level of emotional intelligence of each wife and husband was measured using the Emotional Intelligence Scale (Schutte et al., 1998). Conflict resolution styles were measured using both the Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory (CRSI) and the Ineffective Arguing Inventory (IAI) (Kurdek, 1994). Relationship satisfaction was measured using the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale, a 3-item self-report inventory (Schumm, Paff-Bergen, Hatch, & Obiorah, 1986). Dwyer found that there was no significant correlation between husbands’ and wives’ self-reports of relationship satisfaction, emotional intelligence and conflict styles, other than for ineffective arguing where there was a small positive correlation. Further, an individual’s self-report of emotional intelligence was found to be a significant predictor of both relationship satisfaction and conflict resolution styles. Individuals who reported higher levels of emotional intelligence tended to report higher levels of relationship satisfaction and to engage in more positive problem solving and less conflict engagement, withdrawal, compliance and ineffective arguing. However, an individual’s spouses’ self-report of emotional intelligence was not found to predict an individual’s relationship satisfaction or conflict styles. Further, of the five conflict styles, only ineffective arguing was found to negatively predict relationship satisfaction. When all emotional intelligence and
conflict styles variables were included in a hierarchical regression model predicting relationship satisfaction, only ineffective arguing was found to mediate the relationship between self-reported emotional intelligence and relationship satisfaction. As acknowledged by the author, the study was limited by a small sample size of couples who had been married for a relatively short period of time and who tended to be in highly satisfied relationships. Further, each individual’s perceptions of their partner’s level of emotional intelligence were not measured, nor were the effects of the interdependence of couple data or social desirability bias controlled for. Despite this, the study implies an important relationship between emotional intelligence, conflict styles and relationship satisfaction that is worthy of more in-depth exploration in a sample of longer term couples for whom conflict may be a more major factor in their relationship.

McCarthy (2006) also conducted a study that explored the relationship between self-reported emotional intelligence, conflict styles and relationship satisfaction in a sample of dating individuals. Emotional intelligence was measured using the SUEIT (Palmer & Stough, 2001). Conflict styles were measured using the CRSI and IAI (Kurdek, 1994), as well as a categorical measure of conflict styles (Holman & Jarvis, 2003). Relationship satisfaction was measured using the Relationship Assessment Scale (Hendrick, 1988) and the Positive and Negative Quality in Marriage Scale (Fincham & Linfield, 1997). Participants who reported higher levels of emotional intelligence were found to engage in more positive forms of conflict resolution, such as positive problem solving and validation, than those individuals who reported lower levels of emotional intelligence. Participants who reported lower levels of emotional intelligence reported more frequent ineffective arguing and using more destructive forms of conflict such as withdrawal and conflict
engagement than those individuals who reported higher levels of emotional intelligence. Those participants who reported higher levels of emotional intelligence reported higher levels of positive relationship satisfaction than those participants who reported lower levels of emotional intelligence. The study found some evidence to suggest that self-reported emotional intelligence partially mediates the relationship between conflict styles and relationship satisfaction. Specifically, those participants who reported a more validating conflict style tended to report being better at recognising and expressing their emotions, and in turn, reported a greater level of positive relationship satisfaction. Those participants who reported a more compliant conflict style perceived that they were less able to recognise and express their emotions, and in turn, reported a lower level of positive relationship satisfaction. Overall, when all emotional intelligence variables and conflict styles variables were included in a regression model, the most important predictors of relationship satisfaction were the self-reported ability to effectively manage negative moods and maintain positive emotions as well as the presence of destructive forms of conflict resolution such as hostility and ineffective arguing. Although several methodological concerns were identified and gender differences were not explored, McCarthy suggested the importance of exploring these factors further using a dyadic couple sample and including a measure of adult attachment style which are two important factors that the current study sought to address.

More recently, Smith, Heaven and Ciarrochi (2008) conducted a study that specifically considered the link between emotional intelligence, conflict communication patterns and relationship satisfaction in a couple sample, where the majority of couples had been together for more than 10 years. Each partner in the couple completed a self-report and a partner-report of the Trait Emotional Intelligence
Questionnaire-Short Form (TEIQue-SF, Petrides & Furnham, 2006). The self-report was the individual’s perception of their own level of emotional intelligence, whereas the partner-report was the individual’s perception of their partner’s level of emotional intelligence. There were no significant differences in the levels of self-reported emotional intelligence, partner-reported emotional intelligence, conflict communication patterns and relationship satisfaction of husbands as compared to wives. Although there was a moderate positive relationship between spouses’ reports of conflict styles and relationship satisfaction, there was no significant correlation between husbands’ and wives’ self-reports of emotional intelligence or between husbands’ and wives’ partner-reports of emotional intelligence. However, when each spouse reported themselves to be higher in emotional intelligence, they also reported that their partner was higher in emotional intelligence and their partner also reported them to be higher in emotional intelligence. According to Smith et al., such findings suggest some level of agreement between spouses as to how emotionally intelligent they perceive each other to be and that spouses may see themselves as having a similar level of emotional intelligence to their partner. Self-reported emotional intelligence was found to be positively associated with relationship satisfaction, but only for men. For women, those who perceived their partner to be higher in emotional intelligence reported greater relationship satisfaction. This is in line with the findings of Nikou (2005) which suggested that the relationship satisfaction of women is dependent upon how emotionally intelligent they perceive their partner to be, rather than on their own perceived emotional skills. Generally, Smith et al. found that the self-reported and partner-reported emotional intelligence of both spouses was positively associated with their self-reported constructive conflict patterns and negatively associated with their self-reported destructive conflict patterns, regardless
of the length of cohabitation. Smith et al. also found evidence to suggest some cross associations between one spouse’s self-reports and partner-reports of emotional intelligence and the other spouses’ self-reports of conflict styles, suggesting interdependence in the couple data (Kenny et al., 2006).

On the basis of this, Smith et al. (2008) also conducted a series of multi-level modelling analyses to determine the predictors of relationship satisfaction through examination of the actor and partner effects in the dyadic data, whilst controlling for the interdependence of couple data. The “actor-effects” are the self-reports and partner-reports of variables reported by each individual and how these predict that individual’s level of relationship satisfaction. The “partner-effects” are the self-report and partner-report variables reported by each individual’s spouse and how these predict that individual’s relationship satisfaction (Kenny et al., 2006). The actor-effects of self-reported and partner-reported emotional intelligence, as well as conflict styles, were found to be significant predictors of relationship satisfaction. When only the significant actor variables were analysed together, whilst partner-reported emotional intelligence was a significant predictor, the avoidance and withholding communication pattern was by far the most important predictor of relationship satisfaction. This is in line with Gottman’s (1993a, 1993b, 1994, 1999) suggestion that unregulated conflict styles that are characterized by hostile and detached behaviours, such as contempt and stonewalling, lead to lower levels of relationship satisfaction than regulated conflict styles, that at least keep the couple engaging with some hope of conflict resolution and repair. The partner-effects of self-reported and partner-reported emotional intelligence and conflict styles were not found to be predictive of an individual’s relationship satisfaction. From this, Smith et al. imply that in couple relationships, it is the individual’s perception of themselves and their
partner that creates “their subjective experience of the relationship and therefore their evaluations of satisfaction” (p.1323), rather than their partner’s perception of them. Smith et al. also found that couples in more satisfied relationships tended to have similar self-ratings of emotional intelligence and perceived themselves as having similar levels of emotional intelligence to their spouse than couples in dissatisfied relationships. Finally, an interaction effect was found whereby women in dissatisfied relationships tended to rate their partners lower in emotional intelligence than themselves, while women in satisfied relationships tended to rate their partners higher in emotional intelligence than themselves. This suggests that satisfied women tend to see their partner’s emotional skills in a positive light and is consistent with research that shows that positive bias in partner perception is related to relationship satisfaction (Boyes & Fletcher, 2007). Overall, Smith et al. conclude that couples who do not avoid conflict, who perceive themselves as being similar in emotional intelligence to their partner and who see each other in a positive light tend to be the most satisfied. Although the study was limited in that it used self-report measures without controlling for socially desirable responding, and employed a convenience sample of couples, the findings suggest important links between self and partner perceptions of emotional intelligence and their relationship to conflict styles that are worthy of further investigation.

5.6 Emotional Intelligence and Attachment

Whilst not directly examining emotional intelligence, there have been numerous studies that have considered how attachment security is related to emotional skills (e.g., Feeney et al., 1994; Mikulincer & Florian, 1998; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005). Whilst using different methodology and sample populations, this research generally suggests that more securely attached individuals possess more differentiated
emotional patterns and are better at perceiving and regulating both their own and others’ emotions than insecurely attached individuals, who experience and perceive a narrower range of emotions. According to Mikulincer and Shaver, future research in this area should consider the attachment orientation of both members of a couple in order to consider both intrapersonal and interpersonal processes in close adult relationships. Given that emotional intelligence is conceptualised as an individual’s propensity to accurately perceive, understand and manage emotions (Mayer et al., 2003), this intuitively suggests a link between attachment style and emotional intelligence worthy of further examination (Kafetsios, 2004)

There has been limited research to date regarding the relationship between emotional intelligence and attachment, and findings have been mixed. A study conducted by Boncher (2003) overall found no relationship between emotional intelligence ability and adult attachment in a large sample of university students from different cultural backgrounds. However, an identified limitation was the use of an emotional intelligence ability test without controlling for possible cultural bias. Further, participants were not required to be involved in a close romantic relationship in order to be included in the study which may have affected findings with regard to their attachment style.

Kafetsios (2004) also examined the relationship between emotional intelligence and adult attachment styles. Using an ability measure of emotional intelligence (MSCEIT, Mayer et al., 2003) and a four category measure of attachment (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) in a large community sample of individuals, Kafetsios found that secure attachment was positively related to all facets of emotional intelligence ability for both men and women. Preoccupied attachment was negatively related to emotional intelligence, but was only statistically significant for
emotional perception abilities. Fearful attachment was negatively related to emotional intelligence, but not at a statistically significant level. Contrary to expectation, dismissing attachment was positively related to emotional understanding for both men and women, possibly because these individuals, whilst high in avoidance, were low in anxiety and therefore able to still effectively process emotional information. The study also found evidence to suggest that women scored higher than men in the ability to perceive and facilitate emotions. The author suggests further research in this area using a more reliable attachment measure based on the underlying anxiety and avoidance dimensions such as the ECR-R (Fraley et al., 2000).

In another recent study, Kim (2005) examined the relationship between attachment and emotional intelligence and the mediating effects of self concept, in a sample of young undergraduate students. Using a self-report measure of emotional intelligence (Trait Meta-Mood Scale, Salovey, Mayer, Goldman, Turvey, & Palfai, 1995) and a three category attachment measure (Hazan & Shaver, 1987), Kim found that more secure individuals reported higher levels of emotional intelligence and this relationship was also partially mediated by the individual’s ability to integrate their own feelings and behaviour in the context of relationships with others (authentic self). Although there was no significant direct association between insecure attachment styles and emotional intelligence, people who were more anxious/ambivalent tended to have a lower authentic self and in turn a lower level of emotional intelligence. According to Kim, results from this study support the contention of attachment theory that internal working models influence both emotional and cognitive outcomes, but further research with an older, non-student sample is warranted. Together, the above limited findings regarding the association between emotional intelligence and
attachment suggest further direct examination of these factors in a sample of longer term couples using psychometrically sound self-report measures.

5.7 Emotion Focussed Couple Therapy: An Integration of Adult Attachment, Conflict Styles and Emotional Intelligence

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Emotion Focussed Couple Therapy (EFCT) was developed in the early 1980s to increase the focus on emotions and emotional experiences in couple therapy interventions (Greenberg & Johnson, 1988). EFCT is grounded in attachment theory and the assumption that our bonds with close others form the foundation to our emotional experiences in adult romantic relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). From an EFCT perspective, when the attachment bond between the couple is disrupted, this can evoke a fear of abandonment, often resulting in destructive conflict resolution behaviours such as attacking and blaming, rather than a more constructive expression of a need for closeness and security. The main aim of EFCT is to assist couples to recognise and take greater responsibility for their destructive behaviours, and to help them to connect with and communicate their primary fear of abandonment. In this way, the attachment bonds between the couple are re-established and conflict behaviours are modified (Byrne et al., 2004). Change is therefore facilitated through the identification and expression of the couple’s emotional experiences (Johnson, 2004). This approach to couple therapy together with the above research findings suggests an important link between emotions, attachment and conflict that requires more explicit examination of the ways these factors relate to each other and their impact on the relationship satisfaction of couples in long-term romantic relationships.
Chapter 6: The Current Study

6.1 Participants and Sample

Based on the research literature presented above, it appears that many studies examining factors that impact on the relationship satisfaction of heterosexual couples, have generally utilized samples of dating couples, or couples in the earlier stages of a marital relationship. Many of these samples have also been obtained from university or college settings. As a result, much of the research literature on couple relationship issues has involved younger adult participants, many of whom do not have children and have been in relatively short term marital relationships. Given that becoming a parent and managing the challenges of parenthood have been identified as an important transitional time in couple relationships, the current research sought to study couples with one or more dependent children who were in a longer-term marital relationship and to obtain a sample of participants from the general community where possible. An important element of the current study was also to obtain matched dyadic data, where both members of the couple completed their own questionnaire and provided their perceptions of themselves as well as their perceptions of their partner, in the context of the marital relationship.

6.2 Aims

Based on the research findings presented in the previous chapters, there were several aims of the present study. The first aim of the present study was to explore any possible gender differences in the attachment, conflict styles, emotional intelligence and relationship satisfaction of participants, given that research findings with regard to gender differences have been mixed. In particular, participants’ perceptions of themselves were compared to their perceptions of their partner, as well as to how their partner perceived them. In this way the similarity and differences in
individuals’ perceptions of themselves and their partner could be explored within the couple dyad.

Given that the relationship satisfaction of couples in marital relationships has been found to be related to the adult attachment variables, conflict resolution styles and emotional intelligence, the second aim of the current study was to explore these relationships more extensively, using psychometrically sound measures, including both self-report and partner-report versions of the conflict and emotional intelligence scales.

The third aim was to explore the relationship between adult attachment and conflict styles in more detail given that the literature has shown some inconsistent results, particularly regarding the attachment variables and the compliance conflict style. However, given the nature of the present sample, and the sound psychometric properties of the measures chosen for the present study, significant relationships between the attachment variables and all the conflict style variables were expected. The study aimed to expand on previous research findings by using both self-report and partner-report measures of conflict styles to examine how each of these were differentially related to participants’ attachment avoidance and anxiety.

The fourth aim of the present study was to examine the relationship between adult attachment and emotional intelligence, a research area that to date has received limited empirical attention, again expanding on past findings by including both a self-report and partner-report measure of emotional intelligence to examine how each of these relate to an individual’s attachment avoidance and anxiety.

The fifth aim of the present study was to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict styles, and to see if past finding with regard to
these relationships were supported, using measures of conflict styles and emotional intelligence in both a self-report and partner-report format.

The sixth and final aim of the present study was to conduct an exploratory analysis to determine which of the attachment, conflict and emotional intelligence variables were the most important predictors of relationship satisfaction in a sample of heterosexual couples in a longer-term marital relationship. To conduct an in-depth examination, initially the most important predictors of relationship satisfaction for wives and husbands were explored separately. Proceeding from this, the most important predictors of relationship satisfaction within the entire couple sample were examined, whilst taking into account the inter-dependence of the dyadic data.

6.3 Hypotheses and Research Questions

With the above research aims in mind, the following hypotheses and research questions were posed:

Research Question 1: Are there gender differences with regard to the attachment, conflict styles, emotional intelligence and relationship satisfaction of couples in longer-term marital couples with dependent children?

Hypothesis 1: Lower levels of attachment avoidance and anxiety would be associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction.

Hypothesis 2: Higher levels of positive problem solving would be associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction, whereas higher levels of conflict engagement, withdrawal, compliance and ineffective arguing would be associated with lower levels of relationship satisfaction.
Hypothesis 3: Higher levels of emotional intelligence would be associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction.

Hypothesis 4: Lower levels of attachment avoidance and anxiety would be associated with higher levels of positive problem solving and with lower levels of conflict engagement, withdrawal, compliance and ineffective arguing.

Hypothesis 5: Lower levels of attachment avoidance and anxiety would be associated with higher levels of emotional intelligence.

Hypothesis 6: Higher levels of emotional intelligence would be associated with higher levels of positive problem solving, whereas higher levels of emotional intelligence would be associated with lower levels of conflict engagement, withdrawal, compliance and ineffective arguing.

Research Question 2: Which of the attachment, conflict and emotional intelligence variables are the most important predictors of relationship satisfaction in a sample of longer-term marital couples with dependent children?
Chapter 7: Method

7.1 Participants

The sample originally comprised 127 female participants and 117 male participants. Participants were recruited in two ways. First, participants were recruited via the Research Participation Program (REP) at Swinburne University, Victoria, which is a program designed to encourage first year psychology students to participate in research as part of their undergraduate studies. These participants were largely the parents or friends of the students. Second, participants were recruited by networking personal contacts of the researcher.

After removing those individuals from the data set whose partner had not returned a questionnaire, the sample comprised 111 matched heterosexual couples (222 individuals) who, at the time of data collection, were living in a marital relationship with at least one dependent child. The length of the relationships ranged from one to 37 years, with a mean and median of 17 years ($SD = 8.4$). Ninety-eight couples were in a legally registered marriage and 13 couples were in a de facto relationship. Wives ranged in age from 23 to 61 years ($M = 42.51$, $SD = 7.91$) and husbands ranged in age from 25 to 65 years ($M = 44.99$, $SD = 8.31$).

Of the 111 couples, 10 couples had only one dependent child, 61 couples had two dependent children, 34 couples had three dependent children, four couples had four dependent children and two couples had five dependent children. Dependent children ranged in age from six months to 25 years. Although the majority of dependent children lived at home with the couples, 7 couples reported that they were supporting dependent children who lived away from home and 3 couples reported that they shared custody of their dependent children with a former partner.
Of the wives, 27% stated that their highest level of education was secondary schooling, 6% were currently completing a degree or diploma course, 45% had completed a degree or diploma course and the remainder had either completed or were completing post-graduate studies. Of the husbands, 33% stated that secondary schooling was their highest level of education, 5% were currently undertaking a degree or diploma course, 50% had completed a degree or diploma course and the remainder had completed post-graduate studies.

With regard to combined annual net couple income, 44% of couples stated that they earned in excess of $80,000 per year, 24% stated that they earned between $61,000 and $80,000, 20% stated that they earned between $41,000 and $60,000, 10% stated that they earned between $21,000 and $40,000 and 2% earned less than $20,000. Of the wives, 36% were in full-time employment, 38% worked part-time and 26% were not in paid employment. Of those wives who were in paid employment, 58% stated they worked in professional or managerial roles, and the remainder stated that they worked in administrative, or sales or other non-professional occupations. Of the husbands, 84% stated they were in full-time employment, 5% stated that they worked part-time and 11% were not in paid employment. Of those husbands that were in paid employment, 60% stated that they worked in professional or managerial positions, 15% stated they worked in trade occupations, and the remainder stated they worked in administrative, sales or other non-professional positions.

7.2 Materials

Participants were given a nine-part self-report questionnaire. The questionnaire comprised the following sections: (a) a Consent Information Statement,
(b) Demographic questions, (c) Experiences in Close Relationships- Revised Scale (Fraley et al., 2000), (d) Emotional Intelligence Scale (Schutte et al., 1998), (e) Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976), (f) Conflict Resolution Style Inventory (Kurdek, 1994), (g) Ineffective Arguing Inventory (Kurdek, 1994), and (h) Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (Reynolds, 1982). The questionnaire is included as Appendix A.

The Consent Information Statement provided details of the researchers, outlined the general aims of the study and advised that it had been approved by the Swinburne Human Research Ethics Committee. Further, it explained what would be required of couple participants who agreed to complete the questionnaire, the data collection and storage methods that would be employed to ensure anonymity and confidentiality of data, the participant’s right to withdraw at any time, as well as enquiry contacts and details of how counselling could be sought if necessary.

The demographic section asked general questions about the participant including age, gender, marital status, educational level, number and ages of dependent children, employment status and student status. As well it asked more specific questions regarding the living arrangements of all dependent children.

**7.2.1 Experiences in Close Relationships Questionnaire- Revised.** The Experiences in Close Relationships – Revised Questionnaire (ECR-R, Fraley et al., 2000) was used to measure two higher-order attachment factors, anxiety and avoidance. The total scale consists of 36 items, of which 18 measure anxiety and 18 measure avoidance. Participants were asked to rate the extent to which they believe each statement was true for them in their relationship using a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1= “strongly disagree” to 7= “strongly agree”. Wording of items was modified slightly to reflect participants’ current relationship with their partner. An
example of an anxiety item was, “I worry a lot about my relationship with my partner”, and an avoidance item was, “I get uncomfortable when my partner wants to be very close”. After reverse coding negatively worded items, item scores for each subscale were summed to obtain separate anxiety and avoidance scores ranging from 18-126, with higher scores indicating higher levels of anxiety or avoidance.

Fraley et al. (2000) reported a test-retest reliability alpha for the anxiety and avoidance subscales above .93. Other studies have also reported Cronbach’s alpha co-efficients for the two subscales above .90 (Fairchild & Finney, 2006; K. Johnson, 2005). Confirmatory factor analysis of the ECR-R scale confirmed a good fit for a two-factor model (Sibley, Fischer, & Liu, 2005). Sibley et al. confirmed the short-term stability, discriminant validity and convergent validity of the ECR-R. Specifically, the subscales were found to be significantly correlated in the expected direction with measures of loneliness, social support, touch and worry.

7.2.2 Emotional Intelligence Scale. The Emotional Intelligence Scale (Schutte et al., 1998) was designed to measure the extent to which individuals perceive, understand, regulate and harness emotions in themselves and others (Schutte et al., 2001). The original scale consists of 33 self-report items which measure an individual’s level of Emotional Intelligence. In line with the study by Schutte et al., (1998) an adapted version of the Emotional Intelligence Scale was also used for the present study which required respondents to rate their partner on each of the 33 items in addition to themselves. Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with each statement on a 5-point Likert scale from 1= “strongly disagree” to 5 = “strongly agree”. An example of a self-report item was, “I am aware of my emotions as I experience them”. An example of a partner-report item was, “My partner is aware of his/her emotions when he/she experiences them”. After reverse coding
negatively worded items, item scores for each subscale were totalled to obtain two emotional intelligence scores for each participant, one for self and one for partner, each ranging from 33-165 with higher scores indicating a higher level of emotional intelligence.

Schutte et al. (1998) conducted a series of studies to assess the reliability and validity of the Emotional Intelligence scale. They reported Cronbach’s alpha coefficients between .87 and .90 and a test-retest reliability of .78 over a two week period. Evidence for scale validity was found by correlating the Emotional Intelligence scale with various measures of emotional expression and awareness, attention to feelings, clarity of feelings, mood repair, optimism and depression, with all correlations found to be significant and in the expected direction. The scale has also been found to display discriminant validity when correlated with measures of academic intelligence in a sample of college students. In a related study using a different sample of college students, the scale was found to have discriminant validity with all of the Big Five personality factors, other than Openness to Experience (Schutte et al., 1998). The scale has been found to demonstrate criterion-related validity when correlated with measures of social support, parental warmth and face recognition in a sample of adolescents (Ciarrochi et al., 2001b).

A factor analysis conducted by Schutte et al. (1998) suggested a one-factor solution and based on this, the authors recommended using a total emotional intelligence score obtained from the 33 items. Although other factor analyses conducted have suggested a possible 4-factor solution (Ciarrochi et al., 2001; Petrides & Furnham, 2000), only a total emotional intelligence score was used in the current study.
7.2.3 Dyadic Adjustment Scale. The Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS, Spanier, 1976) is a 32-item scale developed to assess the quality of marital relationships and was designed for use with couples who are either married or living together in a de facto relationship. The items were drawn from a wide range of previous marital adjustment scales and were designed to measure four components of dyadic adjustment: (a) dyadic consensus which consisted of 13 items which asked participants to rate their level of agreement with statements on a 6-point Likert scale from 0 = “always disagree” to 5 = always agree”, e.g., “handling family finances”; (b) dyadic satisfaction which consisted of 10 items which asked participants to rate on variously anchored Likert scales, how frequently certain events occur in their relationship, the degree of happiness in the relationship and how they feel about the future of the relationship, e.g., “Do you confide in your partner?”; (c) dyadic cohesion which consisted of 5 items that asked participants to rate on variously anchored Likert scales how often they engage in joint interests/activities with their partner, e.g., “have a stimulating exchange of ideas”; and (d) affectional expression which consisted of 4 items that asked participants to rate on variously anchored Likert scales their level of agreement on statements regarding expressions of affection in their relationship, e.g., “demonstrations of affection”. After reverse coding negatively worded items, item scores for each subscale were summed to obtain an overall dyadic adjustment score ranging from 0-151 and separate subscale scores for dyadic consensus (score range 0-65), dyadic satisfaction (score range 0-50), dyadic cohesion (score range 0-24), and affectional expression (score range 0-12). Higher scores represented higher levels of dyadic adjustment.

Spanier (1976) reported Cronbach’s alpha coefficients of .96 for the total DAS and between .73 and .94 for the four subscales. Similarly, Sabourin, Lussier,
Laplante and Wright (1990) reported Cronbach’s alpha co-efficients of .93 for the total DAS and between .75 and .88 for the four subscales. A meta-analysis conducted by Graham, Liu and Jeziorski (2006) to examine the reliability and internal consistency of the DAS reported a mean Cronbach’s alpha co-efficient of .92 for the total DAS scale and ranging from .72 to .87 for the DAS subscales. With regard to the validity of the DAS, the factor structure of the original 32 items was assessed and found to fit a four factor model (Sabourin et al., 1990; Spanier, 1976). The DAS has also been found to correlate highly with other well known measures of marital adjustment. The criterion related validity of the scale was also established by administering the DAS to separate samples of married and divorced persons where a significant difference in dyadic adjustment was found between the two groups (Spanier, 1976). Findings with regard to gender differences in DAS scores have been mixed. Whilst Sabourin et al. (1990) reported no difference between the total DAS scores of men and women in a sample of 213 cohabiting couples, Sabourin, Valois and Lussier (2005) found that in a larger longitudinal couple study, women generally reported higher total DAS scores than males, although the difference was only marginally significant.

7.2.4 Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory. The Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory (CRSI, Kurdek, 1994) was designed to assess four styles of conflict resolution: positive problem solving, conflict engagement, withdrawal and compliance. The CRSI is comprised of both a self-report and partner-report format, with each section containing 16 items (four items representing each of the four conflict styles). The 16 self-report items ask respondents to rate themselves on how frequently they engage in each of the four conflict styles to deal with arguments and disagreements with their partner. The 16 partner-report items ask participants to rate
how frequently they believe their partner uses each style to deal with arguments and disagreements with them. All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1= “never” to 5 = “always”. Examples of items were as follows: conflict engagement, “exploding and getting out of control”; positive problem solving, “focusing on the problem at hand”; withdrawal, “remaining silent for long periods of time”; and compliance, “not being willing to stick up for myself”. Item scores for each conflict style were totalled for each couple member to obtain four self-report conflict style subscale scores and four partner-report conflict style subscale scores, each ranging from 4-20, with higher scores indicating a greater propensity to use that particular conflict resolution style.

The factor structure of the CSRI (Kurdek, 1994) has been assessed for both members of the couple and was found to fit the expected four factor model. The CRSI has been found to display acceptable reliability with Kurdek reporting Cronbach’s alpha co-efficients for each subscale ranging from .66 to .81 for self-reports and ranging from .84 to .88 for partner-reports. McCarthy (2006) also reported Cronbach’s alpha co-efficients for each subscale ranging from .69 to .81 for self-reports only. Kurdek conducted Pearson’s correlations to assess the stability of CRSI self and partner-report scores over a period of one year and these ranged from .46 to .83. Some evidence for the concurrent and predictive validity of the four subscales has also been established by correlating it with measures of relationship satisfaction. Generally, relationship satisfaction was found to be significantly positively associated with positive problem solving and significantly negatively associated with conflict engagement and withdrawal (Kurdek, 1994; McCarthy, 2006)

7.2.5 Ineffective Arguing Inventory. The Ineffective Arguing Inventory (Kurdek, 1994) consists of 8 items designed to measure how participants believe they
and their partner typically handle arguments in their couple relationship. Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with each statement on a Likert scale from 1= “strongly disagree” to 5= “strongly agree”. An example of an item was, “our arguments are left hanging and unresolved”. After reverse coding negatively worded items, scores were totalled to obtain an Ineffective Arguing score ranging from 8-40, with higher scores indicating greater levels of ineffective arguing in the couple relationship.

The factor structure of the IAI has been found to conform to a one-factor model (Kurdek, 1994). The IAI has also shown acceptable reliability with Cronbach’s alpha co-efficients reported to range from .86 to .89 for different couple samples (Kurdek, 1994; McCarthy, 2006). Kurdek conducted Pearson’s correlations to assess the stability of CRSI self and partner scores over a period of one year and these ranged from .63 to .84. Evidence for the concurrent validity of the scale was obtained by correlating IAI scores with relationship satisfaction, with those couple members reporting more ineffective arguing also reporting lower relationship satisfaction (Kurdek, 1994; McCarthy, 2006). Evidence for the predictive validity of the scale has also been obtained with those couples reporting a higher level of Ineffective arguing at the initial assessment, reporting decreased relationship satisfaction one year later (Kurdek, 1994).

7.2.6 Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale. The Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (MCSDS, Reynolds, 1982) is a 33-item scale designed to measure participants’ tendency to respond to self-report measures in a socially desirable way. For the present study, the 13-item short-form of the scale developed by Reynolds was utilised. Each item reflects a social situation to which the participant was asked to indicate whether it was an accurate description of what they
would normally do (e.g., “there have been occasions when I took advantage of someone”). In order to increase the reliability of the scale, the present study asked participants to rate each item on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 = “not true of me” to 5 = “very true of me”. After reverse scoring negatively worded items, item scores were totalled to give an overall social desirability score ranging from 13 to 65, with higher scores indicating a greater level of socially desirable responding by the participant.

Kuder-Richardson formulae scale reliability co-efficients above .76, inter-item correlations ranging between .32 and .56 and a test-retest correlation co-efficient of .74 have been reported for the 13-item short form of the MCSDS scale (Reynolds, 1982; Zook & Sipps, 1985). Using the 13-item version of the scale rated on a 5-point Likert scale, K.Johnson (2005) reported a Cronbach’s alpha co-efficient of .77. The 13-item short form of the MCSDS scale has also been found to be highly correlated with the 33-item version (Silverstein, 1983) and to display concurrent validity by correlating moderately with other social desirability scales (Reynolds, 1982).

7.3 Procedure

Participants for the current study were recruited in two ways as mentioned above. Students participating in the research as part of the REP program were informed of the nature of the study by either viewing an overhead at the start of their lecture, or accessing details of the study via their online study material. The students were then given the option of taking home a set of two printed questionnaires to be completed by themselves and their partner or giving them to another couple who met the participation criteria. Alternatively, they were able to access the questionnaire in an online version. Students were given course credit for completion of questionnaires. Second, participants who were recruited by networking personal contacts of the researcher completed printed versions of the questionnaire. The
printed questionnaire sets were pre-coded with a unique couple number to allow matching of dyadic data upon their return. When completing the online version, couples were asked to enter their own unique couple code comprising the last two letters of their street name and the last two digits of their home telephone number. To promote honest responding, couples were directed to complete their questionnaires independently of each other without referring to each others’ responses. Swinburne students were asked to return the completed questionnaires to a designated drop box at the university. All other participants were asked to return their questionnaires in the separate pre-paid envelopes provided with the questionnaire. Return rate was approximately 25%.
Chapter 8: Results

8.1 Preliminary Analyses

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 15 was used to analyse the data. Although there were originally 127 female participants and 117 male participants, 16 female cases and 6 male cases were removed from the data set because their partners had not returned a completed questionnaire. All further analyses were conducted based on the 222 remaining participants (111 matched couple dyads), which have hereafter been referred to as husbands and wives. Subscale scores were calculated according to the scoring procedures for each measure. In order to ensure clarity of terms when reporting results, “self-report” refers to an individual’s rating of his or her own level of emotional intelligence or conflict styles, while “partner-report” refers to the individual’s rating of his or her partner’s level of emotional intelligence or conflict styles.

8.1.1 Data Screening. Data was screened to detect out-of-range values and several data entry errors were corrected after referring back to the original questionnaires. There were no cases containing more than 30% of missing values that required deletion. There were three husband and wife cases where a variable contained more than 2 missing item values. For those cases, the subscale scores that contained the missing data were removed from the analyses. For variables that contained less than two missing values, the missing values were replaced with the mean of the remaining item scores for each subscale for each case (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001).

All continuous variables to be used in the analyses were checked for univariate outliers and normality of score distribution. For wives, the dyadic adjustment score was found to be negatively skewed due to two extreme outliers. The extreme values
were altered to one number below the nearest less extreme value to improve normality (Pallant, 2005; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Wives’ avoidance and anxiety scores were found to be significantly positively skewed, not as the result of extreme outliers. Logarithm transformations were performed on each of these variables which improved the normality of the avoidance and anxiety scores, decreasing skewness to non-significance (Pallant, 2005; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). For husbands, all continuous variables were normally distributed and no transformations were required.

For both husbands and wives, there was a strong positive correlation between the satisfaction subscale score of the DAS and the total DAS score (husbands: \(r = .87\); wives: \(r = .92\)). Therefore, the total DAS score was used as a measure of relationship satisfaction in all further analyses.

8.1.2 Descriptive Statistics and Internal Reliability of Main Measures.
Cronbach’s alpha coefficients were calculated to assess the reliability of all scales and subscales and are presented in Table 1 along with the mean, standard deviation and theoretical range of all measures for husbands and wives separately. Acceptable reliability was shown for all scales and subscales with Cronbach’s alphas above .71, with the majority above .80.

8.1.3 Relationship between Demographic Variables. Pearson’s correlation coefficients were conducted to explore the relationship between wives’ and husbands’ demographic variables. As might be expected, there was a strong positive correlation between wives’ age and husbands’ age (\(r = .87, p < .001\)). Both wives’ and husbands’ ages were strongly positively correlated with the length of the relationship (wives \(r = .77, p < .001\); husbands \(r = .70, p < .001\)), and the age of the first child (wives \(r = .76, p < .001\); husbands \(r = .77, p < .001\)).
Table 1

*Mean, Standard Deviation, Theoretical Range and Internal Reliability of Scales/Subscales*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Theoretical Range</th>
<th>Husbands</th>
<th>Wives</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Range</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>α</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance</td>
<td>18-126</td>
<td>45.83</td>
<td>18.83</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>18-126</td>
<td>45.15</td>
<td>19.58</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self EI</td>
<td>33-165</td>
<td>120.82</td>
<td>13.21</td>
<td>.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner EI</td>
<td>33-165</td>
<td>123.93</td>
<td>15.79</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self PPS</td>
<td>4-20</td>
<td>14.68</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self CE</td>
<td>4-20</td>
<td>8.45</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self WD</td>
<td>4-20</td>
<td>9.59</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self CP</td>
<td>4-20</td>
<td>8.96</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner PPS</td>
<td>4-20</td>
<td>14.58</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner CE</td>
<td>4-20</td>
<td>8.98</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner WD</td>
<td>4-20</td>
<td>8.89</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner CP</td>
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<td>8.10</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IA</td>
<td>8-40</td>
<td>19.14</td>
<td>6.35</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soc Des</td>
<td>13-65</td>
<td>44.31</td>
<td>6.62</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RS</td>
<td>0-156</td>
<td>110.89</td>
<td>16.09</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*N= 109-111 due to missing data.

*Note: Key : Self=Self-Report , Partner=Partner- Report , EI=Emotional Intelligence, PPS=Positive Problem Solving, CE=Conflict Engagement, WD=Withdrawal, CP=Compliance, IA=Ineffective Arguing, SD=Social Desirability, RS=Relationship Satisfaction, Sig= significance levels of t-tests to compare means of husbands’ and wives’ score. Bonferroni correction was applied, therefore significance level = p<.003*
8.1.4 Relationship between Demographic Variables and Main Variables. Pearson’s correlation coefficients were calculated between the demographic variables and the main variables to be used in the analyses. For wives, there was a weak significant positive correlation between social desirability and length of relationship \((r = .27, p < .01)\) suggesting that the longer wives have been in the relationship, the more likely they were to respond in a socially desirable way. There were also a weak significant correlation between wives’ age and each of wives’ avoidance \((r = .20, p < .05)\), wives’ partner-report of emotional intelligence \((r = -.21, p < .05)\), wives’ social desirability \((r = .22, p < .05)\), and husbands’ relationship satisfaction \((r = -.22, p < .05)\). This suggested that older wives tend to report being more avoidant, to perceive their husbands to be less emotionally intelligent, to respond in a more socially desirable way, and to have partners who report being less satisfied with the relationship.

Further, there were significant weak correlations between husbands’ age and each of wives’ avoidance \((r = .23, p < .05)\), wives’ partner-report of emotional intelligence \((r = -.25, p < .01)\), wives’ relationship satisfaction \((r = -.22, p < .05)\), and husbands’ relationship satisfaction \((r = -.22, p < .05)\). This suggested that older husbands were more likely to report being less satisfied with the relationship and to have wives who reported being more avoidant, who perceived their husbands as less emotionally intelligent and who also reported being less satisfied with the relationship. There were also weak correlations between the number of hours the husbands worked per week and both the wives’ self-report of positive problem solving \((r = .22, p < .05)\) and the wives’ self-report of conflict engagement \((r = -.29, p < .01)\). This suggested that the more hours husbands worked each week, the more positive problem solving and the less conflict engagement wives reported doing.
8.1.5 Relationship between Main Variables and Social Desirability. To determine the influence of socially desirable responding, Pearson’s correlation coefficients were calculated between the main variables and social desirability scores for husbands and wives separately. These are presented in Table 2. There were significant correlations between a number of the main variables and social desirability, particularly for wives, indicating that an individual’s desire to present themselves in a more socially desirable way influenced many of their self-report and partner-report variables. As a result of these correlations and those reported above, the effects of socially desirable responding and participants’ age were controlled for in the main analyses as noted.

8.2 Main Analyses

8.2.1 Exploring Gender Differences. In order to explore the research question regarding gender differences across the main variables, a series of paired samples t-tests were firstly conducted to explore differences in the mean scores of the self-reports and partner-reports of the main variables that appear in Table 1. After applying a Bonferroni correction and therefore testing significance at $p < .003$, there was a significant difference between wives’ and husbands’ self-report of emotional intelligence, $t(110) = 3.78, p < .001$. On average, wives perceived themselves to be significantly more emotionally intelligent than their husbands perceived themselves to be. There was a significant difference between wives’ partner-reports and husband’s partner-reports of emotional intelligence, $t(108) = -5.20, p < .001$. On average, wives perceived their husbands to be significantly less emotionally intelligent than the husbands perceived their wives to be. There was also a significant difference between
Table 2

Correlations between Main Variables and Social Desirability for Husbands and Wives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Social Desirability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Husbands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>-.17</td>
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<td>Partner-Report EI</td>
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<td>Self-Report PPS</td>
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<td>Self-Report CE</td>
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<td>Self-Report CP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Partner-Report CE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Partner-Report WD</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner-Report CP</td>
<td>-.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ineffective Arguing</td>
<td>-.19*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Satisfaction</td>
<td>.24*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N= 109-111 due to missing data.

Note: Key: EI=Emotional Intelligence, PPS=Positive Problem Solving, CE=Conflict Engagement, WD=Withdrawal, CP=Compliance, IA=Ineffective Arguing, Soc Des=Social Desirability, RS=Relationship Satisfaction. *=significant at p<.05, **= significant at p<.01, ***=significant at p<.001.
wives’ partner-report and husbands’ partner-report of positive problem solving, \( t(110) = -3.13, p<.003 \). On average, wives perceived their husbands to do less positive problem solving than the husbands perceived their wives to do.

Paired samples t-tests were also conducted to more specifically cross-compare husbands’ and wives’ self-reports and partner-reports of emotional intelligence. After applying a Bonferroni correction and therefore testing significance at \( p<.01 \), there was a significant difference between wives’ self-report of emotional intelligence and wives’ partner-report of emotional intelligence, \( t(110) = 7.99, p < .001 \). On average, wives perceived themselves to be significantly more emotionally intelligent than they perceived their husbands to be. Independent samples t-tests found that there was also a significant difference between husbands’ self-report of emotional intelligence and wives partner-report of emotional intelligence, \( t(110) = -4.85, p < .001 \). On average, husbands perceived themselves to be significantly more emotionally intelligent than their wives perceived them to be. There was no significant difference between husbands’ self-report of emotional intelligence and husbands’ partner-report of emotional intelligence. There was also no significant difference between wives’ self-reports of emotional intelligence and husbands’ partner-reports of emotional intelligence. This suggests that overall, whilst husbands perceived their wives to have a similar level of emotional intelligence to themselves, which was consistent with how emotionally intelligent the wives believed themselves to be, the same did not hold true for the wives who perceived themselves to generally be more emotionally intelligent than their husbands.

A series of paired and independent samples t-tests were also conducted to cross-compare wives’ and husbands’ self-reports and partner-reports of conflict styles. These are presented in Table 3 below. There was a significant difference between
Table 3

Means, Standard Deviations of Conflict Styles: Cross Comparison of Wives’ and Husbands’ Self and Partner Reports

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Wives (Self)</th>
<th>Wives (Partner)</th>
<th>Sig</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Mean</td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive Problem Solving</td>
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<td>13.62</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conflict Engagement</td>
<td>8.48</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>9.14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Withdrawal</td>
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<td>3.06</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compliance</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Problem Solving</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Conflict Engagement</td>
<td>8.45</td>
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<td>8.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawal</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compliance</td>
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<td>3.21</td>
<td>8.05</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Wives (Self)</th>
<th>Husbands (Partner)</th>
<th>Sig</th>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive Problem Solving</td>
<td>14.75</td>
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N=110,111 due to missing data.

Note: Key: Partner= partner-report, Self= self-report. Bonferroni correction was applied, therefore significance level = $p < .003*$
wives’ self-reports of positive problem solving and wives’ partner-reports of positive problem solving, $t(110) = 4.50, p < .001$. On average, wives perceived themselves to do significantly more positive problem solving than they perceived their husbands to do. There was a significant difference between husbands’ self-report of positive problem solving and wives’ partner-report of positive problem solving, $t(110) = -3.63, p < .001$ and a significant difference between husband’s self-report of compliance and wives’ partner-report of compliance, $t(110) = -3.69, p < .001$. Generally, husbands perceived themselves to do significantly more positive problem solving, and more compliance than their wives perceived them to do. Overall, whilst there was generally some agreement between husbands and wives regarding their self-reports and partner-reports of conflict styles, it is noteworthy that whilst husbands perceived their wives to engage in a similar level of positive problem solving to themselves, wives perceived themselves to do more positive problem solving than their husbands.

8.3 Correlations

In order to further explore gender differences, partial Pearson’s correlation coefficients were calculated to examine the relationship between the main variables for husbands and wives, whilst controlling for social desirability and age, and these are presented in Table 4. Husbands’ and wives’ scores were significantly positively correlated on the attachment variables (avoidance and anxiety), self-reports of conflict engagement and withdrawal, partner-reports of positive problem solving and conflict engagement, ineffective arguing and relationship satisfaction. This suggested that when wives report being more anxious or avoidant, their husbands also tend to report being more anxious or avoidant. When wives report that they do more conflict
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<th>PEI</th>
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<th>SCE</th>
<th>SWD</th>
<th>SCP</th>
<th>PPPS</th>
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<td>-.25*</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.47***</td>
<td>.63***</td>
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</table>

engagement or withdrawing, their husbands also tend to report doing more of these conflict styles. When wives report that their husbands do more positive problem solving and conflict engaging, husbands also report that their wives engage in more of these conflict styles. When wives report more ineffective arguing, their husbands also tend to report more ineffective arguing. Of particular note was the strong correlation between wives’ and husbands’ reports of relationship satisfaction, suggesting that when wives report being more satisfied with the relationship, their husbands also tend to report being more satisfied. Overall, these correlations indicated some agreement between spouses as to the relationship status.

With regard to emotional intelligence, husbands’ and wives’ self-reports of emotional intelligence were not significantly correlated and nor were their partner-reports of emotional intelligence. However, there was a significant positive correlation between wives’ self-report of emotional intelligence and husband’s partner-report of emotional intelligence. Similarly, there was a significant positive correlation between husbands’ self-report of emotional intelligence and wives’ partner-report of emotional intelligence. This suggested that for both husbands and wives, the more emotionally intelligent they perceived themselves to be, the more emotionally intelligent their partner also thought that they were.

Additional partial Pearson’s correlation coefficients were also conducted to explore the relationship between self-reports and partner-reports of emotional intelligence for husbands and wives separately, whilst controlling for age and social desirability. Husbands’ self-report of emotional intelligence was significantly positively correlated with husbands’ partner-report of emotional intelligence ($r = .40$, $p < .001$). Wives’ self-report of emotional intelligence was significantly positively correlated with wives’ partner-report of emotional intelligence ($r = .20$, $p < .05$). This
suggested that the more emotionally intelligent both husbands and wives perceived
themselves to be, the more emotionally intelligent they also thought their partner was.

More specifically with regard to conflict styles, partial Pearson’s correlations
in Table 4 show significant positive correlations between wives’ self-report of all four
conflict styles and husbands’ partner-reports of each of the same four matching
conflict styles. Further there were also significant positive correlations between
husbands’ self-report of the four conflict styles and wives’ partner-reports of each of
the same four matching conflict styles. This suggested that when both husbands and
wives perceived themselves to engage in more of a particular conflict style, their
partner tended to also think that they do.

To explore the relationship between wives’ self-reports and partner-reports of
custom styles and between husbands’ self-reports and partner-reports of conflict
styles, addition partial Pearson’s correlations, controlling for social desirability and
age, were conducted. These showed that for wives, there was a significant positive
relationship between their self-reports and partner-reports of positive problem solving
\( r = .47, p < .001 \), conflict engagement \( r = .31, p < .01 \) and withdrawal \( r = .41, p < .001 \). There was no significant correlation between wives’ self-report and partner-
report of compliance. For husbands, there was a significant positive relationship
between their self-reports and partner-reports of positive problem solving \( r = .59, p < .001 \), conflict engagement \( r = .61, p < .001 \), withdrawal \( r = .41, p < .001 \) and
compliance \( r = .22, p < .05 \). This suggested that generally, when wives and
husbands perceive themselves to do more of a particular conflict style, they also
perceive their spouse to do more of the same conflict style.
8.4 Exploring the Relationship between Attachment and Relationship Satisfaction.

In order to explore Hypothesis 1, that lower levels of attachment avoidance and anxiety would be associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction, Pearson’s partial correlation coefficients were calculated for both husbands and wives, controlling for social desirability and age. These are presented in Table 5.

Table 5
Partial Correlations between Attachment Variables and Relationship Satisfaction for Husbands and Wives, Controlling for Social Desirability and Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attachment Variable</th>
<th>Relationship Satisfaction</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>-.44***</td>
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<td>Husbands</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>-.23*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 104-105 due to missing data.
Note: * = significant at p < .05, *** = significant at p < .001

As expected, both husbands and wives who reported lower levels of avoidance and anxiety tend to report that they are more satisfied with their relationship and have partners who also report higher levels of relationship satisfaction. Notably, for both husbands and wives, there was a stronger correlation between the avoidance variables and relationship satisfaction than between the anxiety variables and relationship satisfaction suggesting that the reported level of avoidance has a greater impact on the relationship satisfaction than the reported level of anxiety.
8.5 Exploring the Relationship between Conflict Styles and Relationship Satisfaction

In order to explore Hypothesis 2, that positive problem solving would be positively associated with relationship satisfaction and that conflict engagement, withdrawal, compliance and ineffective arguing would be negatively associated with relationship satisfaction, Pearson’s partial correlation coefficients were calculated between self-reports and partner-reports of conflict styles and relationship satisfaction for both husbands and wives, controlling for social desirability and age. These are presented in Table 6.

There were significant positive correlations between wives’ and husbands’ self-reports and partner-reports of positive problem solving and both wives’ and husbands’ relationship satisfaction, with the exception of the correlation between wives’ self-report of positive problem solving and husbands’ relationship satisfaction which was non-significant. Generally, when both wives and husbands perceive that either they or their partner engage in more positive problem solving, they tend to also report greater relationship satisfaction. However for husbands, their relationship satisfaction was not related to their wives’ self-report of positive problem solving. Notably, for wives their relationship satisfaction was more strongly related to how much positive problem solving they perceived their husbands to do, than to how much positive problem solving they perceived themselves to do.

For both husbands and wives, there were significant negative correlations between their self-reports and partner-reports of conflict engagement and withdrawal and their relationship satisfaction, with the exception of the correlation between wives’ self-report of conflict engagement and husbands’ relationship satisfaction. For the compliance conflict style, the only significant negative correlations were between wives’ self-report of compliance and both wives’ and husbands’ relationship
Table 6

*Partial Correlations between Conflict Styles and Relationship Satisfaction for Husbands and Wives Controlling for Social Desirability and Age*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflict Style</th>
<th>Relationship Satisfaction</th>
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</thead>
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<td>Conflict Engagement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Withdrawal</td>
<td>-.52***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compliance</td>
<td>-.32**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ineffective Arguing</td>
<td>-.65***</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Partner-Report</strong></td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Compliance</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Husbands</strong> Self-Report</td>
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</table>

*N= 103-105 due to missing data.*

*Note: *= significant at *p* < .05, **= significant at *p* < .01, ***= significant at *p* < .001.*
satisfaction. These results suggest that generally, when both wives and husbands perceive that they or their partner engage in more conflict engagement or withdrawal, both partners tend to experience lower levels of relationship satisfaction. However, it is only when wives report that they engage in more compliant behaviours that both they and their husbands tend to report lower level of relationship satisfaction.

For ineffective arguing, only self-reports for wives and husbands were obtained. However, as expected, there were significant negative correlations between wives’ and husbands’ self-reports of ineffective arguing and their reports of relationship satisfaction. Therefore when either partner reports engaging in more destructive forms of arguing, they tend to also report a decrease in relationship satisfaction. Notably, of all the conflict variables, ineffective arguing was most strongly related to wives’ and husbands’ relationship satisfaction.

8.6 Exploring the Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Relationship Satisfaction

In order to explore Hypothesis 3 that higher levels of emotional intelligence would be associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction, Pearson’s partial correlation coefficients were calculated between relationship satisfaction and both self-reports and partner-reports of emotional intelligence for husbands and wives, controlling for social desirability and age. These are presented in Table 7.

For wives, their relationship satisfaction was significantly positively correlated with their partner-report of emotional intelligence and with their husbands’ self-report of emotional intelligence. This suggested that wives report more relationship satisfaction when they think that their husbands are more emotionally intelligent and when their husbands reported being more emotionally intelligent.
Table 7

Partial Correlations between Emotional Intelligence and Relationship Satisfaction for
Husbands and Wives, Controlling for Age and Social Desirability

<table>
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<td>.26**</td>
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<td>Partner-Report Emotional Intelligence</td>
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N = 103-105 due to missing data.
Note: *= significant at p < .05, ** = significant at p < .001, *** = significant at p < .001

For husbands, their relationship satisfaction was significantly positively correlated with their self-report and partner-report of emotional intelligence, as well as with their wives’ partner-report of emotional intelligence. This suggests that husbands tend to report greater relationship satisfaction when they think they and their partner are more emotionally intelligent and when their wives perceive them to be more emotionally intelligent.

For both husbands and wives, the strongest correlations were between their reported level of relationship satisfaction and how emotionally intelligent each perceived their partner to be. This suggests that an individual’s reported relationship satisfaction is more strongly related to how emotionally intelligent they think their partner is, rather than to how emotionally intelligent they perceive themselves to be. Further, although husbands’ reported relationship satisfaction is greater when their wives perceive them to be more emotionally intelligent, the same did not hold for
wives whose relationship satisfaction was not related to how emotionally intelligent their husbands perceived them to be.

8.7 Exploring the Relationship between Attachment and Conflict Styles

In order to explore Hypothesis 4, that lower levels of attachment avoidance and anxiety would be associated with higher levels of positive problem solving and lower levels of each of conflict engagement, withdrawal, compliance and ineffective arguing, Pearson’s partial correlation coefficients were calculated between the attachment variables and both self-reports and partner-reports of conflict styles for husbands and wives, controlling for social desirability and age. These are presented in Table 8.

For wives, their attachment avoidance and anxiety were significantly negatively correlated with both their self-report and partner-report of positive problem solving, as well as to their husbands’ self-report and partner-report of positive problem solving. The only exception was a non-significant correlation between wives’ anxiety and husbands’ self-report of positive problem solving. This means that generally, when wives report being more anxious or avoidant, both wives and husbands tend to perceive that they and their partner do less positive problem solving. Wives’ avoidance and anxiety were also significantly positively correlated with wives’ self-reports of withdrawal, compliance and ineffective arguing and with wives’ partner-report of conflict engagement and withdrawal. This means that when wives report being more avoidant or anxious they tend to also report engaging in more withdrawing, compliance and ineffective arguing and they also perceive their partner to do more conflict engaging and withdrawing as well. Both wives’ avoidance and anxiety were significantly positively related to husbands’ self-reports of compliance and husbands’ ineffective arguing. Only wives’ avoidance was significantly
Table 8

**Partial Correlations between Attachment and Conflict Styles for Husbands and Wives**

**Controlling for Social Desirability and Age**

<table>
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<th>Husbands</th>
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</thead>
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</table>

*N*= 104-105 due to missing data.

**Note:** *= significant at p < .05, ** = significant at p < .001, *** = significant at p < .001
positively related to husbands’ partner-report of withdrawal. This means that when wives report being more avoidant and anxious, husbands tend to report being more compliant and report engaging in more ineffective arguing. When wives report that they are more avoidant, their husbands tend to perceive their wives as being more withdrawn.

For husbands, their attachment avoidance and anxiety were significantly negatively correlated with their self-report and partner-report of positive problem solving as well as to their wives’ partner-report of positive problem solving. Husbands’ avoidance and anxiety were not significantly correlated with their wives’ self-report of positive problem solving. This means that generally, when husbands report being more avoidant or anxious, they tend to report doing less positive problem solving, they perceive their wives to do less positive problem solving and their wives also perceive their husbands to do less positive problem solving. Husbands’ avoidance and anxiety were significantly negatively correlated with husbands’ self-reports of compliance and ineffective arguing. There was a significant positive correlation only between husbands’ avoidance and husbands’ self-report of withdrawal. This means that when husbands report being more anxious or avoidant they tend to also report being more compliant and report engaging in more ineffective arguing. Husbands who report being more avoidant also tend to report doing more withdrawing. Husbands’ avoidance and anxiety were significantly positively correlated with husbands’ partner-reports of conflict engagement and withdrawal and with wives’ self-report of withdrawal and ineffective arguing. This means that when husbands report being more avoidant or anxious, they tend to perceive their wives to do more conflict engaging and withdrawing and their wives also tend to report being more withdrawn and report engaging in more ineffective arguing. Only husbands’
avoidance was significantly positively correlated with wives’ self-report of compliance and wives’ partner-report of conflict engagement and withdrawal. This means that when husbands report being more avoidant, their wives tend to report being more compliant and perceive their husbands to do more conflict engaging and withdrawing.

Of note was the fact that neither wives’ nor husbands’ reported levels of avoidance or anxiety were significantly correlated with their self-reports of conflict engagement or their partner-reports of compliance. This suggests that overall, an individual’s reported levels of avoidance and anxiety were not related to how much conflict engaging they think they do, or how compliant they think their partner is. Also noteworthy was the fact that the strongest correlations generally occurred between both partners own attachment variables and their self-report of ineffective arguing. For wives, their reported level of avoidance was next most strongly correlated with their self-reports of withdrawal, and their perception of their partner’s positive problem solving, whilst their reported level of anxiety was next most strongly correlated with their self-report of compliance. For husbands, their reported levels of avoidance and anxiety were next most strongly positively correlated with how much positive problem solving they perceive themselves and their partner to do.

8.8. Exploring the Relationship between Attachment and Emotional Intelligence

In order to explore Hypothesis 5 that lower levels of attachment avoidance and anxiety would be associated with higher levels of emotional intelligence, Pearson’s correlation coefficients were calculated between the attachment variables and both self-reports and partner-reports of emotional intelligence for husbands and wives, controlling for social desirability and age. These are presented in Table 9.
Table 9

*Partial Correlations between Attachment and Emotional Intelligence for Wives and Husbands, Controlling for Age and Social Desirability*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotional Intelligence</th>
<th>Wives</th>
<th>Husbands</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Avoidance</td>
<td>Anxiety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wives Self-Report EI</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner-Report EI</td>
<td>-.53***</td>
<td>-.37***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husbands Self-Report EI</td>
<td>-.25*</td>
<td>-.28**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner-Report EI</td>
<td>-.29*</td>
<td>-.28**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*N = 103-105 due to missing data.*

*Note:* Key: EI=Emotional Intelligence. *= significant at p < .05, ** = significant at p < .001, *** = significant at p < .001

For wives, their reported level of avoidance and anxiety were significantly negatively correlated with wives’ partner-reports of emotional intelligence, and with husbands’ self-report and partner-report of emotional intelligence. This means that when wives report being less avoidant or anxious, they tend to perceive that their husband is higher in emotional intelligence. Further, when wives report being less avoidant or anxious, their husbands tend to perceive both themselves and their wives to be higher in emotional intelligence.

For husbands, their reported level of avoidance was significantly negatively correlated with husbands’ self-report of emotional intelligence. Both husbands’ level of avoidance and anxiety were significantly negatively correlated with husbands’ partner-report of emotional intelligence and with wives’ partner-reports of emotional intelligence. This means that when husbands report being more emotionally intelligent, they tend to report being less avoidant. When husbands report being less
avoidant and anxious, they perceive their wives to be more emotionally intelligent and their wives also perceive them to be more emotionally intelligent.

Interestingly, wives’ self-reported level of emotional intelligence was not significantly related to either their own or their husband’s attachment avoidance or anxiety. However, for husbands, their self-reported level of emotional intelligence was related to their own avoidance as well as to wives’ level of avoidance and anxiety. This suggests that for wives, how emotionally intelligent they perceive themselves to be does not have as much impact on their own or their partners’ reported levels of avoidance or anxiety as it does for husbands. Further, the strongest relationships for both husbands and wives were between their attachment avoidance and their partner-reports of emotional intelligence. This suggests that individuals who perceive their partners to be more emotionally intelligence tend to report less avoidance.

8.9. Exploring the Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Conflict

In order to explore Hypothesis 6 that higher levels of emotional intelligence would be associated with higher levels of positive problem solving and lower levels of conflict engagement, withdrawal, compliance and ineffective arguing, Pearson’s partial correlation coefficients were calculated between both self-reports and partner-reports of emotional intelligence, and both self-reports and partner-reports of conflict styles for husbands and wives, controlling for social desirability and age. These are presented in Table 10.
Table 10

**Partial Correlations between Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Styles for Husbands and Wives, Controlling for Social Desirability and Age**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflict Style</th>
<th>Wives’ Reports</th>
<th>Husbands’ Reports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self EI</td>
<td>Partner EI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wives Self-Report</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Problem Solving</td>
<td>.31**</td>
<td>.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict Engagement</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawal</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.32**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compliance</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>-.23*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ineffective Arguing</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>-.44***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wives Partner- Report</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Problem Solving</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.52***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict Engagement</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.28**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawal</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>-.37***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compliance</td>
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<td>Husbands Self-Report</td>
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<td>Positive Problem Solving</td>
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<td>Withdrawal</td>
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<td>-.09</td>
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<td>Ineffective Arguing</td>
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<td>-.30**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Husbands Partner-Report</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Positive Problem Solving</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conflict Engagement</td>
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<td>-.02</td>
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<td>Withdrawal</td>
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<td>-.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compliance</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\( N = 103-105 \) due to missing data.

**Note:** Key: Self EI = self-report emotional intelligence, Partner EI = partner-report emotional intelligence. * = significant at \( p < .05 \), ** = significant at \( p < .001 \), *** = significant at \( p < .001 \).
For wives, their self-report of emotional intelligence was significantly positively correlated with only their self-report of positive problem solving. This means that when wives perceive themselves to be higher in emotional intelligence, they tend to report more positive problem solving. Wives’ partner-report of emotional intelligence was significantly positively correlated with wives’ partner-report of positive problem solving and with husbands’ self-report of positive problem solving. Wives’ partner-report of emotional intelligence was also significantly negatively correlated with wives’ self-reports of withdrawal, compliance, and ineffective arguing, with wives’ partner-reports of conflict engagement and withdrawal, and with husbands’ self-report of ineffective arguing. This means that when wives perceive their husbands to be higher in emotional intelligence, wives tend to report less withdrawing, compliance and ineffective arguing, and they perceive their husbands as engaging in more positive problem solving and less conflict engagement and withdrawing. Further, when wives perceive their husband to be higher in emotional intelligence, their husbands also report doing more positive problem solving and less ineffective arguing.

For husbands, their self-report of emotional intelligence was significantly positively correlated with both their self-report and partner-report of positive problem solving and significantly negatively correlated with their self-report of compliance. This means that when husbands report being higher in emotional intelligence, they tend to report more positive problem solving and less compliance and they perceive their wives as engaging in more positive problem solving.

Husband’s partner-report of emotional intelligence was significantly positively correlated with husband’s partner-report of positive problem solving. Husbands’ partner-report of emotional intelligence was also significantly negatively correlated
with husbands’ self-report of ineffective arguing, with husbands’ partner-report of conflict engagement and withdrawal, and with wives’ self-report of compliance and ineffective arguing. This means that when husbands perceive their wives to be higher in emotional intelligence, they perceive themselves as doing less ineffective arguing and they perceive their wives to do more positive problem solving and less conflict engaging and withdrawing. Further, when husbands perceive their partner to be higher in emotional intelligence, wives perceive themselves to be less compliant and to be doing less ineffective arguing.

For both husbands and wives, their perceptions of their partner’s level of emotional intelligence was generally more consistently related to their own self-reports and partner-reports of conflict styles than was their self-reported level of emotional intelligence. In particular, for both husbands and wives, the strongest correlations occurred between their partner-reports of emotional intelligence and their partner-reports of positive problem solving. This means that when wives and husbands perceive their partner to be higher in emotional intelligence, they tend to perceive them to also engage in more constructive forms of conflict resolution. This suggests that overall, if an individual perceives their partner to be higher in emotional intelligence, this is more likely to impact on the way conflict is resolved, than is an individuals’ own level of emotional intelligence.

8.10 Predicting Relationship Satisfaction from Attachment, Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Styles

In order to explore the research question regarding which of the main variables were the most important predictors of relationship satisfaction, hierarchical multiple regressions were first conducted considering the predictors of relationship satisfaction for wives and husbands separately. Prior to conducting the hierarchical multiple
regressions, the relevant assumptions of this statistical analysis were tested. First a
sample size of 111 was deemed adequate to include only eight independent variables
(Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Therefore only those variables that were significantly
correlated with relationship satisfaction at $r > .35$ were included in the analyses. The
assumption of singularity was also met as the included independent variables were not
a combination of other independent variables. Correlations between the independent
variables were examined for wives and husbands separately. No independent
variables were highly correlated with the exception of wives’ ineffective arguing and
wives’ partner-report of positive problem solving. A further examination of the
collinearity statistics revealed that these were within accepted limits so the assumption
of multicollinearity was deemed to have been met. Residual analysis and scatterplots
indicated the assumptions of normality, linearity and homoscedasticity were all
satisfied. For both husbands and wives, there was a linear relationship between the
dependent variable and all the untransformed independent variables. Therefore it was
considered appropriate to use the untransformed avoidance and anxiety scores for
wives in the hierarchical regression analyses in order to maintain consistency between
the two models. As an additional check, the model for wives was also run using both
the transformed and untransformed variables. As the interpretation of the results was
the same, the untransformed results have been reported. The Mahalanobis distance
scores indicated only one multivariate outlier for wives and husbands. The analyses
for wives and husbands were therefore conducted including the outlier and then
removing it. As the overall results did not differ, the results including the outlier were
reported (Pallant, 2005; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001).

For wives, a five stage hierarchical multiple regression was conducted with
wives’ relationship satisfaction as the dependent variable. As noted above, only the
wives’ self-report and partner-report variables that were found to be significantly partially correlated with relationship satisfaction at $r > .35$ were included in the regression model (refer to Tables 5-10 above). As wives’ age was not significantly correlated with wives’ relationship satisfaction ($r = .18, p > .05$), but wives’ social desirability score was ($r = .36, p < .01$), only social desirability was entered in stage one of the regression model to control for the effects of socially desirable responding. Attachment avoidance and anxiety were entered at stage two, the emotional intelligence variables at stage three, the conflict variables at stage four and ineffective arguing at stage five. The relationship variables were entered in this order for chronological plausibility and to test the mediating effects of emotional intelligence and conflict styles on the relationship between attachment and relationship satisfaction. Ineffective arguing, although theoretically related to the other conflict variables, was entered in the final stage to examine its specific impact on the other conflict styles as past research has shown it to be a more important predictor than the other conflict styles (McCarthy, 2006).

The regression statistics for wives’ self-report and partner-report variables are presented in Table 11. At stage one, social desirability contributed significantly to the regression model, $F(1, 106) = 15.30, p < .001$, and accounted for 12.6% of the variation in relationship satisfaction. Introducing the attachment variables in stage two explained an additional 49% of the variation in relationship satisfaction and this change in $R^2$ was significant, $F(2,104) = 64.91, p < .001$. Adding the partner-report of emotional intelligence in stage three explained an additional 6% of the variation in relationship satisfaction and this change in $R^2$ was significant, $F (1,103) = 17.90, p < .001$. Adding the conflict styles variables in stage four explained an additional 4% of
Table 11

Summary of Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis for Wives’ Self-Report and Partner-Report Variables Predicting Wives’ Relationship Satisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Squared Semi Partial correlation</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>∆R²</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1</td>
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<td>3.91***</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.13</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.33</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Anxiety</td>
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<td>.78</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Social Desirability</td>
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<td>.03</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Avoidance</td>
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<td>-6.15***</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partner-Report EI</td>
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<td>4.23***</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 3</td>
<td>Social Desirability</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>3.06**</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Avoidance</td>
<td>-.52</td>
<td>-6.15***</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partner-Report EI</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>4.23***</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 4</td>
<td>Social Desirability</td>
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<td>.01</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>-4.69***</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.10</td>
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<td>Partner Report EI</td>
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<td>3.26**</td>
<td>.03</td>
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<td>.01</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>.02</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.00</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
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<td>.02</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.00</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partner- Report EI</td>
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<td>3.35**</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>-.20</td>
<td>.00</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Partner-Report PPS</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Ineffective Arguing</td>
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<td>-4.38***</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>.05</td>
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</table>

N = 109-111 due to missing data.

Note: Key: EI = emotional intelligence (EI), PPS = Positive Problem Solving, * = p < .05, ** = p < .01, *** = p < .001.
the variation in relationship satisfaction, and this change in \( R^2 \) was significant, \( F(3,100) = 5.17, p < .01 \). Finally the addition of ineffective arguing in stage five explained an additional 5% of the variation in relationship satisfaction, and this change in \( R^2 \) was significant, \( F(1,99) = 19.15, p < .001 \). When all eight independent variables were included in the regression model, only wives’ social desirability, avoidance, partner-report of emotional intelligence and ineffective arguing remained significant predictors of wives’ relationship satisfaction. The most important predictor of relationship satisfaction was avoidance which uniquely explained 8% of the variation in relationship satisfaction. Together the eight independent variables accounted for 76% of the variation in wives’ relationship satisfaction. It should also be noted that although the wives’ self-report of withdrawal and wives’ partner-report of positive problem solving were significant predictors of relationship satisfaction in stage four of the model, when ineffective arguing was included in stage 5, these two variables were no longer significant. This suggests that these conflict styles share variance with ineffective arguing, which emerged as a unique predictor of wives’ relationship satisfaction.

For husbands, a four-stage hierarchical multiple regression was conducted with husbands’ relationship satisfaction as the dependent variable. Again, only husbands’ self-report and partner-report variables that were found to be significantly partially correlated with husbands’ relationship satisfaction at \( r > .35 \) were included in the regression analysis (refer to Tables 5-10 above). As husbands’ age and social desirability were only weakly correlated with husbands’ relationship satisfaction (age: \( r = .22, p < .05 \); social desirability: \( r = .24, p < .05 \)), the effects of these were not controlled for in the regression model. Husbands’ independent variables were entered in the same order as for the wives above. The regression statistics are in Table 12.
Table 12

Summary of Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis for Husbands’ Self-Report and Partner-Report Variables Predicting Husbands’ Relationship Satisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Squared Semi Partial Correlation</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>ΔR²</th>
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<td>.73</td>
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<td>.53</td>
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<td>Stage 2</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Partner-Report EI</td>
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<td>.75</td>
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<td>.03</td>
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<td>Anxiety</td>
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<td>.01</td>
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<td>.02</td>
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<td>-.36</td>
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<tr>
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<td>-2.00*</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>.62</td>
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<td>Stage 4</td>
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<td>-5.81***</td>
<td>.12</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Anxiety</td>
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<td>1.93</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partner-Report EI</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>1.98*</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-Report PPS</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-Report Withdrawal</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partner-Report PPS</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.59</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partner-Report Withdrawal</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-1.07</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ineffective Arguing</td>
<td>-2.8</td>
<td>-2.88**</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 109-111 due to missing data.

Note: Key: Emotional Intelligence (EI), Positive Problem Solving (PPS), * = p < .05, **= p < .01, ***= p< .001.
At stage one, avoidance and anxiety contributed significantly to the regression model, $F(2,105) = 60.13$, $p < .001$, and accounted for 53% of the variation in relationship satisfaction. Introducing husbands’ partner-report of emotional intelligence at stage two explained an additional 3% of the variation in relationship satisfaction and this change in $R^2$ was significant, $F(1,104) = 6.58$, $p < .01$. Adding husband’s four conflict style variables at stage three explained an additional 6% of the variation in relationship satisfaction and this change in $R^2$ significant, $F (4,100) = 3.97$, $p < .01$. Finally, adding husbands’ ineffective arguing in stage four explained an additional 3% of the variation in relationship satisfaction, and this change in $R^2$ was significant, $F (1,99) = 8.27$, $p < .01$. When all eight independent variables were included in the regression model, only husbands’ avoidance, partner-report of emotional intelligence and ineffective arguing remained significant predictors of relationship satisfaction. Together, the eight independent variables accounted for 65% of the variation in husbands’ relationship satisfaction. It should also be noted that although partner-report of withdrawal was a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction in stage three of the model, when ineffective arguing was included in stage four, this variable was no longer significant. This again suggests that partner-report of withdrawal shares variance with ineffective arguing, which emerged as the unique predictor.

8.11 Examining the Actor and Partner Effects

Further analyses were conducted using the both the HLM6 package from Scientific Software International (SSI) and SPSS Version 15, to determine the significant predictors of couple-level relationship satisfaction by examining the actor and partner effects whilst taking the inter-dependence of the couple data into account.
This is a model of dyadic data analysis known as the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM) that requires the data to be organised into pair-wise structure, with gender as the distinguishable variable (males coded 1, females coded 2; Kenny et al., 2006). This model suggests that each partner’s independent variable scores impact not only on his or her own relationship satisfaction (the actor effects), but also on his or her partner’s relationship satisfaction (the partner effects), as implied in the correlations reported above. In this way, the model takes into account the mutual influence that may occur between the husbands and wives in dyadic relationships (Campbell & Kashy, 2002). In the current analysis, data from 5 couples were excluded due to missing data, leaving 106 couples (212 individuals).

First, a separate data set was constructed that contained only the couple-level demographic variables that were common to both members of the dyad such as marital status, length of marriage and couple income. Secondly, a separate data file was constructed that contained only the individual-level variables such as age, level of education, social desirability, as well as the attachment, emotional intelligence and conflict styles variables that were included in the hierarchical multiple regressions above. The HLM analysis was run to establish which of these variables were significant predictors of relationship satisfaction whilst taking into account any clustering within couples. Only the independent variables found to be significant predictors of relationship satisfaction in the above hierarchical multiple regressions were included in the model. However, the effects of gender were also considered. There were no significant main effects for the couple-level variables or for gender, but social desirability, avoidance, partner-report emotional intelligence and ineffective arguing were found to be significant individual-level predictors of relationship satisfaction.
The model was refitted after removing the non-significant variables and the coefficients for the final model are in Table 13. The t-ratios suggest that avoidance was the most important predictor of relationship satisfaction. Low levels of avoidance and ineffective arguing were associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction. Higher values of partner-report emotional intelligence and social desirability were associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction.

Table 13

**HLM Model Predicting Relationship Satisfaction from the Actor Variables**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regression Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>t-ratio</th>
<th>df</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>111.09</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>144.18***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance</td>
<td>-.34</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-10.09***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner-Report EI</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>4.67***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ineffective Arguing</td>
<td>-.84</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>-6.04***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Desirability</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>2.17*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_N = 212 individuals (106 couples). Note: Key: df= degrees of freedom, EI=Emotional Intelligence. * = p < .05, **= p < .01, ***= p < .001.

8.11.1 Linear Mixed Model. In view of the lack of significant couple-level variables, conducting a Linear Mixed Model in SPSS Version 15 was considered the most appropriate method of analysis to further test the above significant relationships between the individual-level predictors and relationship satisfaction, taking into account both the actor-effects and partner-effects, and allowing for clustering within the couple. Possible gender interactions were also explored. It should be noted that
the “actor-effects” are those self-report and partner-report variables reported by each individual and how these predict that individual’s level of relationship satisfaction. The “partner-effects” are those self-report and partner-report variables reported by each individual’s spouse and how these predict that individual’s relationship satisfaction.

Prior to conducting the Linear Mixed Model, the relevant assumptions of this statistical analysis were tested. Firstly a sample size of 212 individuals was deemed adequate to include the required independent variables. Correlations between the parameter estimates were weak, confirming that there were no multicollinearity problems. An examination of the residuals suggested a valid analysis. With the exception of a couple of outliers, the residuals appeared to be reasonably normal in distribution with constant variance.

The results of the Linear Mixed Model are in Table 14. This shows that the only significant gender interaction occurred for the partner-effect of partner-reported emotional intelligence. Other than this interaction, there were no significant partner effects. As before, there were significant actor-effects in the case of avoidance, partner-report emotional intelligence, ineffective arguing and social desirability. The analysis was then re-run after removing all the non-significant coefficients and the results of this final Mixed Model are in Table 15. This analysis suggests that individuals who are less avoidant, partake in less ineffective arguing and who rate their partner as higher in emotional intelligence tend to report higher levels of relationship satisfaction. It should also be noted that those who report higher levels of relationship satisfaction tend to respond in more socially desirable ways which needs to be taken into account. Avoidance and ineffective arguing were the most important
Table 14

*Linear Mixed Model Predicting Relationship Satisfaction from Actor and Partner* Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>F-Statistic</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>89.68</td>
<td>.000***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (=1)</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance</td>
<td>Actor-Effect</td>
<td>40.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partner-Effect</td>
<td>.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner-report EI</td>
<td>Actor-Effect</td>
<td>10.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partner-Effect</td>
<td>.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ineffective Arguing</td>
<td>Actor-Effect</td>
<td>30.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partner-Effect</td>
<td>3.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Desirability</td>
<td>Actor-Effect</td>
<td>4.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partner-Effect</td>
<td>1.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (=1) x Avoidance</td>
<td>Actor-Effect</td>
<td>1.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partner-Effect</td>
<td>1.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (=1) x Partner-Report EI</td>
<td>Actor-Effect</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partner-Effect</td>
<td>4.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (=1) x Ineffective Arguing</td>
<td>Actor-Effect</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partner-Effect</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (=1) x Social Desirability</td>
<td>Actor-Effect</td>
<td>.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partner-Effect</td>
<td>.54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 212 individuals (106 couples).

*Note:* Degrees of Freedom = 194. Gender coded husbands = 1, wives =2. Note: EI= Emotional Intelligence, * = p < .05, ** = p < .01, *** = p < .001.
### Table 15

*Final Mixed Model Analysis Predicting Relationship Satisfaction from Actor and Partner Variables*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Actor/Partner Effect</th>
<th>Regression Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>t-statistic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td></td>
<td>118.29</td>
<td>11.65</td>
<td>10.16***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (=1)</td>
<td>Actor-Effect</td>
<td>-.34</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-7.35***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance</td>
<td>Partner-Report EI</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>3.65***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ineffective Arguing</td>
<td>Partner-Report EI</td>
<td>-.90</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>-7.18***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Desirability</td>
<td>Actor-Effect</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>2.50*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner-Report EI</td>
<td>Partner-Effect</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (=1) x Partner-Report EI</td>
<td>Partner-Effect</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>2.52*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*N = 212 individuals (106 couples).

Note: Degrees of Freedom = 207. Gender coded husbands=1, wives=2  Note: EI=Emotional Intelligence, * = p < .05, **= p < .01, ***= p < .001.

Predictors of relationship satisfaction, with avoidance only slightly more important than ineffective arguing. Overall, this suggests that an individual’s level of relationship satisfaction is affected by the individual’s own reports of variables (i.e., the actor effects) and not by their spouse’s reports of each variable (i.e., the partner effects).

With regard to the significant interaction, this indicates that for husbands, there was a significantly more positive relationship between the partner-effects of partner-reported emotional intelligence and relationship satisfaction than for wives. The regression coefficient figures in Table 15 indicate that for a unit increase in partner-effects of partner-reported emotional intelligence we would expect an average increase in relationship satisfaction of .15 (.20- .05) units for husbands and a decrease
in relationship satisfaction of .05 units for wives when the effects of the other significant variables are statistically controlled. This means that husbands tend to experience greater relationship satisfaction when their wives perceive them to be more emotionally intelligent. However, for wives, their relationship satisfaction was not significantly affected by how emotionally intelligent their husbands perceived them to be.

As discussed above, the residual analysis suggested two possible outliers. When these outliers were removed from the final Fixed Model analysis, the results were very similar, as shown in Table 16. Actor-effects of avoidance and ineffective arguing were still the most important predictors of relationship satisfaction, but with ineffective arguing showing as a slightly more important predictor than avoidance.

Table 16

*Final Mixed Model Analysis Predicting Relationship Satisfaction Excluding Outliers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Actor/Partner Effect</th>
<th>Regression Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>t-statistic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td></td>
<td>124.43</td>
<td>10.92</td>
<td>11.39***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (=1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>-18.65</td>
<td>8.76</td>
<td>-2.13*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance</td>
<td>Actor-Effect</td>
<td>-3.50</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-8.10***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner-Report EI</td>
<td>Actor-Effect</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>3.36**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ineffective Arguing</td>
<td>Actor-Effect</td>
<td>-1.01</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>-8.50***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Desirability</td>
<td>Actor-Effect</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>2.91**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner-Report EI</td>
<td>Partner-Effect</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (=1) x Partner-Report EI</td>
<td>Partner-Effect</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>2.12*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 210 individuals.

Note: Degrees of Freedom = 205. Gender coded husbands=1, wives=2. Note: EI= Emotional Intelligence, * = p < .05, ** = p < .01, *** = p < .001.
It should be noted that although Tables 15 and 16 suggest a significant gender effect, this is due to the significant gender interaction with the partner-effect of partner-reported emotional intelligence. A check of the 95% confidence intervals for the estimated marginal means for husbands and wives revealed an overlap, suggesting that when the covariates are set at their mean levels, there was no significant difference between the mean level of relationship satisfaction for husbands and wives.
Chapter 9: Discussion

A discussion and explanation of the results from the current study is presented in this chapter. The specific results regarding testing of the hypotheses and exploration of the research questions are firstly discussed. Proceeding from this, possible theoretical and therapeutic implications are discussed along with limitations of the current research and suggested areas of further research.

The purpose of the current research was threefold. First, gender differences in reports of each of the main variables for husbands and wives were explored. However, given variations in findings from past research, no specific predictions were made. Second, the associations between the attachment, conflict resolution styles, emotional intelligence and relationship satisfaction variables were explored to see whether past research findings with regard to the relationships between these variables were supported. Previous research was expanded upon by including both self-reports and partner-reports of the conflict styles and emotional intelligence variables. Six specific hypotheses were posed with regard to the expected relationships between these variables. Third, the study explored which of these variables were the most important predictors of relationship satisfaction in the current sample of couples living together in a marital relationship with one or more dependent children. In the following sections, each research question and hypothesis will be examined in further detail.

9.1 Gender Differences

The first research aim of the current study was to explore the gender differences in the reported levels attachment, conflict styles, emotional intelligence and relationship satisfaction of the participants, given that past research has shown mixed findings. As both t-tests and correlations were conducted to explore gender
differences, the notable similarities and differences between husbands and wives will be discussed separately with regard to each group of main variables.

9.1.1 Gender Differences and Attachment. With regard to the attachment variables, there were no significant differences between the husbands’ and wives’ reported levels of avoidance or anxiety. It should also be noted that in the current sample, on average, both husbands and wives reported relatively low levels of anxiety and avoidance which must be taken into consideration when interpreting the current findings. Further, as mentioned previously, wives’ avoidance and anxiety scores were also negatively skewed, whereas husbands’ avoidance and anxiety scores were not. This was consistent with the fact that the sample comprised couples from the general community, and not necessarily couples who were currently experiencing increased levels of relationship distress or who were seeking relationship counselling.

There was a positive correlation between husbands’ and wives’ reported levels of avoidance and anxiety. Specifically, when one spouse reported being more anxious or avoidant, their partner also reported higher levels of anxiety or avoidance respectively, although the strongest relationship existed between the spouses’ reported levels of avoidance. Similarly, when one spouse reported being more anxious, their partner reported being more avoidant, and when one spouse reported being more avoidant, their partner reported being more anxious.

These findings regarding the similarity and complementarity of husbands’ and wives’ reported levels of anxiety and avoidance were partially consistent with the findings of Whelan (2006), who found that although there was a positive correlation between husbands’ and wives’ self-reported levels of anxiety, there was no relationship between their self-reported levels of avoidance. Despite Whelan’s suggestion that perhaps attachment anxiety involves more of a focus on one’s partner
than attachment avoidance, in the current research the strongest relationship existed between spouses’ reported levels of avoidance which implies that both the attachment variables have an impact on the couple relationship. This may have been due to the fact that in the current research, the sample comprised couples with dependent children, whereas in Whelan’s sample this was not the case. The current findings were also consistent with research that suggests a general lack of gender differences in attachment style, that individuals may partner with people who meet their attachment expectations, and that partners may react to, or perceive each other, in a biased way that supports their internal working models of attachment (e.g., Collins & Read, 1990; Feeney, 1999; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994; Kirkpatrick & Hazan, 1994; Shi, 2003; Simpson, 1990). The findings also support the notion that one’s attachment security has an impact not only on the individual’s experience of the relationship, but also on that of the couple (Davila, 2003; Ruvolo & Fabin, 1999). For example, if one partner is highly anxious and therefore clingy and demanding of their partner, this may mean the other partner also becomes highly anxious and/or avoidant in order to deal with this. Similarly, if one partner is low in anxiety and/or avoidance, they are more likely to partner with someone who also reports low scores in these dimensions. The interpersonal effects of attachment security provide further support to the contention that the internal working models of attachment are malleable and that it is therefore possible for individuals to develop greater levels of attachment security if they are in a relationship with a partner who is less anxious or avoidant than themselves, or if they undertake couple therapy in order to increase their relationship security (Davila, 2003).

9.1.2 Gender Differences and Emotional Intelligence. With regard to the emotional intelligence variables, it was discovered that husbands and wives differed
with regard to their self-reports of emotional intelligence and their partner-reports of emotional intelligence. On average, wives perceived themselves to be more emotionally intelligent than their husbands perceived themselves to be. Further, wives perceived their husbands to be less emotionally intelligent than the husbands perceived their wives to be.

Considering the cross-comparisons of self-reports and partner-reports, it was discovered that husbands perceived that they and their wives had similar levels of emotional intelligence. Also there was no difference between how emotionally intelligent husbands thought their wives were, and how emotionally intelligent the wives perceived themselves to be. In contrast, wives thought that their husbands were less emotionally intelligent than themselves and also less emotionally intelligent than their husbands believed themselves to be.

In viewing the correlations between spouses’ self-reports and partner-reports of emotional intelligence, although there was no relationship between husbands’ and wives’ self-reports of their own emotional intelligence or between their partner-reports of emotional intelligence, when either spouse reported being more emotionally intelligent, their partner also perceived them to be more emotionally intelligent. Further, when either spouse perceived themselves to be more emotionally intelligent, they also tended to report that their partner was more emotionally intelligent.

Although the current study was one of only a few to date that have considered both self-reports and partner-reports of emotional intelligence, the present findings were generally consistent with several studies that have found females to either report being higher in emotional intelligence, or to score higher in emotional intelligence ability than males (Brackett et al., 2004, 2005; Ciarrochi et al., 2001b; Kafetsios, 2004; Lavee & Ben-Ari, 2004). However, the current findings were inconsistent with
Schutte et al. (2001) who found no difference in the self-reported emotional intelligence of men and women. They were also only partially consistent with those of Cordova et al. (2005) who found that men reported more difficulty in communicating emotions than women, but not in identifying emotions, and that there was a positive association between spouses’ reported ability to communicate emotions, but not their ability to identify emotions. The current findings were contrary to those of Lavee and Ben-Ari (2004) and Dwyer (2005) who found that husbands’ and wives’ self-reports of emotional intelligence were not related, and contrary to Smith et al. (2008), who found no differences, or significant correlations, between spouses’ self-reports or partner-reports of emotional intelligence. However, consistent with the present findings, Smith et al. found that when spouses think they are more emotionally intelligent, they tend to perceive that their partner is more emotionally intelligent and their partner also perceives them to be more emotionally intelligent.

Overall, the findings with regard to gender differences and emotional intelligence suggest that whilst spouses generally appeared to perceive their emotional intelligence skills as positively related, wives generally thought that they were better than their husbands at perceiving, understanding, regulating and harnessing both their own and their partners’ emotions, whereas husbands believed they and their wives had similar emotional skills. The current findings also imply that spouses’ perceptions of each other’s level of emotional intelligence may be more important to the relationship than how emotionally intelligent they perceive themselves to be, which will be discussed further below.

9.1.3 Gender Differences and Conflict Styles. With regard to the conflict style variables, generally there was no difference between husbands’ and wives’ self-
reported or partner-reported levels of the conflict styles variables (i.e., positive problem solving, conflict engagement, withdrawal, compliance and ineffective arguing), with the exception of their partner-reports of positive problem solving. Wives, on average, believed that their husbands did less positive problem solving than the husbands thought their wives did. For the cross comparisons of self-reports and partner-reports of conflict styles, again, husbands and wives generally reported similar scores, however, wives perceived that they did more positive problem solving than they perceived their husbands to do. Further, wives reported that their husbands did less positive problem solving than their husbands perceived themselves to do. The only other difference in conflict styles occurred for compliance, where wives perceived their husbands to be less compliant than the husbands perceived themselves to be.

Correlations between spouses’ self-reports of conflict styles suggested that when wives report doing more conflict engaging, withdrawing or ineffective arguing, so do their husbands. Correlations between spouses’ partner-reports of conflict styles suggest that when wives report that their husbands do more positive problem solving and more conflict engagement, their husbands also report that their wives do more of each of these conflict styles respectively. Although these relationships were generally weak to moderate, the strongest relationship occurred for spouses’ reports of ineffective arguing.

Correlations to explore the cross-relationships between spouses’ self-reports and partner-reports of conflict styles, showed that when both husbands and wives reported engaging in more of a particular conflict style, their partner also tended to think this was the case. Further, the associations between spouses’ own self-reports and partner-reports of conflict styles showed that with the exception of wives’ self-
report and partner-report of compliance, when spouses reported engaging in more of a particular conflict style, they also perceived their partner to do more of that same conflict style.

Although the current study explored comparisons of self-reports and partner-reports of conflict styles within couple dyads more extensively than past research, the findings regarding a lack of significant difference in the mean conflict style scores of husbands compared to wives, with the exception of positive problem solving and compliance, was partially consistent with the findings of Whelan (2006) who, using a different conflict scale to the present study, found that although spouses generally did not differ with regard to their self-reports of conflict styles, husbands thought they did more conflict avoiding than their wives, whilst wives perceived themselves to use the hostile conflict style less frequently than their husbands. The current findings were partially consistent with Shi (2003) who, also using a different measure of conflict styles in a sample of dating individuals, found that females reported being more integrative than males, which is akin to positive problem solving, and typically involves attempting to take the views of both partners into account, whilst males reported more conflict avoidance than females. The findings were also partially consistent with Smith et al. (2008), who found no difference in the conflict style scores reported by husbands and wives, and also found that the conflict style scores of spouses were positively correlated. Although Smith et al. utilised a different measure of conflict styles than the present study and only measured self-reports, the strongest correlations occurred between spouses’ self-reports of constructive communication and the woman demand/man withdraw pattern.

The findings regarding the positive correlations between spouse’s self-reports of conflict engaging, withdrawing and ineffective arguing were also partially
consistent with those of Dwyer (2005) who only measured self-reports of conflict styles and found no relationships other than for spouses’ self-reports of ineffective arguing. The current findings were also partially consistent with Kurdek (1995) who found a positive relationship between spouses’ self-reports of positive problem solving and conflict engagement, although ineffective arguing was not measured.

Overall, the gender differences with regard to conflict styles suggest that for the current sample, husbands and wives generally held similar perceptions of the way conflict is managed within the relationship, with the notable exception of positive problem solving. Although husbands perceived themselves and their wives as engaging in similar amounts of positive problem solving, on the whole, wives believed that they were better at constructive conflict resolution than their husbands. This may be related to the fact that wives also perceived their husbands to be less emotionally intelligent, and therefore perhaps did not think that their husbands were as good at negotiating and compromising as themselves. It may also be indicative of past findings that suggest that females tend to pay more attention to the interaction processes within the relationship and therefore do more conflict management than males (Acitelli & Young, 1996; Gottman & Krokoff, 1989).

Despite this, when one spouse reported engaging in a particular conflict style, there appears to be a general trend for that spouse to believe their partner does as well, and for their partner to concur. This is consistent with the findings of Gottman (1999) that it may be beneficial for couples to have some similarity in the way they manage conflict within the relationship so that they do not spiral into more unregulated and destructive behaviours. Although the findings with regard to the compliance conflict style were less clear cut, this may have been due to participants’ perceptions of what it means to be compliant, which could potentially be seen as either a negative element in
the relationship or something that perhaps does not have much impact. This will be addressed further in the sections below. It should also be noted that the strongest relationship occurred between spouses’ self-reports of ineffective arguing and between spouses’ self-reports and partner-reports of each of the conflict styles. This suggests that if one partner resorts to more destructive forms of arguing where issues are not readily resolved, the other partner is more likely to get drawn into similar behaviour, thus causing problematic stalemates in their ability to solve and repair conflict situations. Also, the findings imply that an individual’s perception of their own and their partner’s ability to manage conflict may potentially be more important to the individual’s experience of the relationship than their partner’s perceptions of how conflict is dealt with.

Further, as stated by Cordova et al. (2005), differences in the way males and females are socialized may have an impact on their development and perception of their emotional skills and conflict skills, given that girls are typically encouraged to express their emotions more than boys. Also, as mentioned above, research has suggested gender differences in the way partners think about relationships, with women tending to be the managers of couple conflict situations, who generally pay more attention to the process of the couple interaction and often want to confront issues and talk about their feelings. Alternatively, males tend to be more concerned with the content of the issue and want to find a solution to the problem, without necessarily expressing their feelings (Acitelli & Young, 1996; Gottman & Krokoff, 1989)

9.1.4 Gender Differences and Relationship Satisfaction. There was no difference in the relationship satisfaction scores of husbands compared to wives. There was also a good spread of scores in this measure and mean scores were only
slightly above the suggested distress cut-off score of approximately 100 (Graham, et al., 2006; Sabourin, et al., 1990; Sabourin, et al., 2005). Further, there was a moderate to strong positive correlation between husbands’ and wives’ relationship satisfaction scores, suggesting that when one partner reports feeling more satisfied with the relationship, so does the other partner. The current findings imply that for couples in longer term relationships, there is generally a sense of agreement as to the level of relationship satisfaction within the couple dyad and that the perceptions of one partner are also interpersonally related to the perceptions of the other.

Although a full review of all reported past research findings with regard to gender differences in relationship satisfaction was outside the scope of the present study, a comparison of past research on couple samples that have specifically explored gender differences has been reported. The current findings were consistent with those of Smith et al. (2008), who also used a sample of longer term marital couples and although using a different measure of relationship satisfaction, found no difference in the scores of husbands and wives and found a moderate association between the relationship satisfaction scores of each partner. The present findings were also generally consistent with Whelan (2006), who although using a more complex measure of marital satisfaction than the present study, found no difference in the relationship satisfaction scores of partners, other than for communication of affection and understanding, where husbands reported being more dissatisfied than wives. With regard to other studies that have also used the DAS (Spanier, 1976) as a measure of relationship satisfaction, Sabourin et al. (1990) found no gender difference in the reported relationship satisfaction of couples who had been living together for an average of 11 years and had an average of 2 children. However, Sabourin et al. (2005), using a short form of the DAS, found that in a sample of shorter-term couples
with only one young infant, females were marginally more satisfied than males. The current findings, however, were inconsistent with those of Dwyer (2005), who found no relationship between husbands’ and wives’ reported relationship satisfaction in a sample of newly-wed couples. Overall, the variation in findings appears to be associated with the differences in samples. Couples in the current sample were longer term couples with dependent children who had been together 17 years on average and had chosen to still remain together regardless of whether they found the relationship to be more satisfying or not overall, perhaps due to other factors such as their commitment to raising their children or possible financial advantages.

9.1.5 Variation in Gender Differences between Current and Past Research. The differences and similarities in the current gender findings compared to the previous research reported may be related to several factors. First, there were different measures of attachment, emotional intelligence, conflict styles and relationship satisfaction utilized which make direct comparisons with past research more difficult. In particular, the current study used measures of conflict and emotional intelligence which included both a self-report and partner-report format, thus making the present findings of gender differences far more comprehensive than past research. Further, a global measure of emotional intelligence and relationship satisfaction was used, rather than a measure that distinguishes different elements of these variables, possibly obscuring more specific gender differences that may be worthy of further investigation.

Second, as mentioned above, the past reported studies utilised an array of different samples, some of which were individuals in dating relationships, rather than couple dyads, also making direct comparisons difficult. Also, as suggested by Smith et al. (2008), the perceived similarities or differences between partners may be related
Spouses who are more satisfied with their relationship or have greater levels of emotional intimacy have been found to report greater perceived similarities, although in reality, they may actually be quite different (Acitelli, Kenny, & Weiner, 2001; Boyes & Fletcher, 2007; Ruvolo & Fabin, 1999). Unlike some past research reported above, where couples typically have higher average levels of relationship satisfaction (e.g., Dwyer, 2005; Smith et al., 2008), in the current sample, there was adequate variability in the spread of relationship satisfaction scores for both husbands and wives, as mentioned above, which could explain why there were more gender differences in the reported levels of emotional intelligence and conflict styles between longer term spouses than have been found in past research. Although this current section addressed specific gender differences in the reported scores of each variable, further discussion of gender differences in the associations between each of the main variables and relationship satisfaction will be conducted in the sections below.

9.2 The Relationship between Attachment and Relationship Satisfaction

The second research aim of the present study was to explore the relationship between the attachment variables (avoidance and anxiety), and relationship satisfaction. The hypothesis that lower levels of attachment avoidance and anxiety would be associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction was supported. For both husbands and wives, those who reported lower levels of avoidance and anxiety reported experiencing greater levels of relationship satisfaction. Further, when husbands reported lower levels of avoidance and anxiety, their wives also reported higher levels of relationship satisfaction. When wives reported lower levels of avoidance and anxiety, their husbands also reported higher levels of relationship satisfaction. These findings imply that an individual’s reported levels of avoidance
and anxiety may have an impact, not only on the individual’s feelings of satisfaction in the relationship, but on how satisfied their partner reports feeling. Notably, for both husbands and wives, the strongest associations occurred between attachment avoidance and relationship satisfaction, suggesting that whilst both the attachment variables are important, the reported levels of avoidant behaviour are likely to more negatively impact on relationship satisfaction than the reported levels of attachment anxiety. This is discussed in more detail in the sections below.

The current findings regarding the association between attachment and relationship satisfaction were, overall, in line with past research evidence. Although the past research detailed above used various measures of adult attachment and relationship satisfaction, the current findings were consistent with those mentioned in several reviews (Feeney, 1999; Hazan & Shaver, 1994; Mikulincer et al., 2002), and support the contention that secure individuals, who report lower levels of attachment avoidance and anxiety, tend to report greater relationship satisfaction, whereas insecure individuals, who report higher levels of attachment avoidance and/or anxiety tend to report reduced relationship satisfaction.

With regard to the interpersonal effects of adult attachment, the current results support the findings of Banse (2004), Collins and Read (1990), Kane (2007), Kirkpatrick and Davis (1994), and Simpson (1990), that individuals with insecure partners (i.e., partners who report high levels of avoidance and/or anxiety), tend to report decreased relationship satisfaction. However contrary to past research evidence, which suggests that for husbands, their relationship satisfaction is lower when their wives are more anxious, and that for wives, their relationship satisfaction is lower when their husbands are more avoidant (Banse, 2004; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994; Simpson, 1990), in the current study, for both husbands and wives, their
partner’s self-reported level of avoidance tended to have a more negative impact on the individual’s relationship satisfaction than the partner’s self-reported level of anxiety. This may be explained by the nature of the current sample which consisted of couples living together in a marital relationship with dependent children, whereas the past research typically utilized couples who were dating or in shorter-term relationships. According to Gottman (1993a, 1993b, 1994, 1999), when members of a couple react in times of distress by avoiding or “stonewalling” their partner, this can be particularly destructive to marital relationships and usually occurs gradually and in a progressive sequence when couples have been together for longer periods. This avoidant behaviour typically leads to a decline in marital satisfaction over time, perhaps more so than if partners react to distress by becoming overly anxious, which at least keeps them somewhat engaged with each other whilst attempting to work through difficulties (Shi, 2003).

9.3 The Relationship between Conflict Styles and Relationship Satisfaction

Also in line with the second research aim, the association between conflict styles and relationship satisfaction was explored. As noted above, both self-reports and partner-reports of each of the four conflict styles (positive problem solving, conflict engagement, withdrawal and compliance) were obtained from husbands and wives, whereas only self-reports of ineffective arguing were obtained. The hypothesis that higher levels of positive problem solving would be associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction, whereas higher levels of conflict engagement, withdrawal, compliance and ineffective arguing would be associated with lower levels of relationship satisfaction, was partially supported. These findings are discussed more specifically below, in relation to each conflict style.
For positive problem solving, both husbands and wives reported greater relationship satisfaction when they perceived themselves or their partner to engage in more positive problem solving, as well as when their partner reported this was the case. The only exception was wives’ self-report of positive problem solving which was not significantly related to their husbands’ reported level of relationship satisfaction, although there was a positive association. This could be explained by the fact that as mentioned above, husbands believed that they and their wives had similar levels of positive problem solving skills, whereas wives generally believed they did more positive problem solving than their husbands. For husbands, of more importance to their sense of feeling satisfied with the relationship, was perhaps the fact that they believed their wives did more positive problem solving, regardless of whether the wives actually reported that they did.

Considering the prediction that conflict engagement, withdrawal, and compliance would be negatively associated with relationship satisfaction, this was generally supported, with the exception of the compliance conflict style. Overall, wives and husbands reported more relationship satisfaction when they perceived either themselves or their partner to engage in less conflict engagement or withdrawal, as well as when their partner also reported this to be the case. The only exception was for husbands, whose relationship satisfaction was not related to their wives’ self-report of conflict engagement. Again this suggests that for husbands, of more importance to their relationship satisfaction was how much conflict engagement they perceive themselves or their wives to do, rather than what their wives actually report actually doing.

Interestingly, with regard to the compliance conflict style, both wives and husbands reported feeling more satisfied only when wives reported being less
compliant. Contrary to prediction, no other self-reports or partner-reports of compliance were related to reports of relationship satisfaction. This is possibly due to the fact that whilst wives’ relationship satisfaction was not affected by the actual or perceived compliant behaviour of their husbands, wives may feel less satisfied when they find themselves giving in and not defending their position in order to keep the peace. Given the strong relationship between husband’s and wives’ relationship satisfaction, it stands to reason that if wives feel less satisfied when they behave in this way, this is likely to have an impact on husbands who may also prefer their wives to be more openly expressive of their opinions. Also, as mentioned above, wives perceived their husbands to be less compliant than the husbands believed themselves to be. As a result, wives may generally have a sense that they tend to have to give in more than they think their husbands do, which may also impact negatively on their relationship satisfaction.

For ineffective arguing, both husbands and wives reported greater relationship satisfaction when each reported less ineffective arguing. Further, their reported levels of ineffective arguing were generally more strongly related to both their own, and their partner’s relationship satisfaction than the other conflict styles, suggesting that the couple’s ability to give each other a fair hearing and to actively address conflict issues rather than leaving them unresolved have an important impact on how satisfied each feel in the relationship.

Although using various measures of conflict styles and relationship satisfaction, the current findings were generally consistent with past research which suggests that couples tend to report more relationship satisfaction when conflict is managed in more constructive and less destructive ways (e.g., Fincham et al., 2004; Greeff & de Bruyne, 2000; Holman & Jarvis, 2003; Rusbult et al., 1991; Russel-
Chapin et al., 2001; Schneewind & Gerhard, 2002). With regard to research that also utilised Kurdek’s (1994) measure of conflict styles in either self-report and/or partner-report format, the current findings of the association between conflict styles and relationship satisfaction were partially consistent with the findings of Kurdek (1994, 1995), Dwyer (2005), Gaffney (2007) and McCarthy (2006) who generally found positive associations between spouses’ reported relationship satisfaction and their reports of positive problem solving, as well as negative associations between relationship satisfaction and reports of conflict engagement, withdrawal and ineffective arguing.

However, the current findings of the association between relationship satisfaction and compliance were only partially consistent with those of Kurdek (1994), who found that individuals’ relationship satisfaction was related only to their own reported levels of compliance, not to their partners’ reported levels of compliance. It was also only partially consistent with Kurdek (1995), who found that whilst wives’ relationship satisfaction was negatively related to both their own and their husbands’ self-reports of compliance, husbands’ relationship satisfaction was only negatively related to their own self-report of compliance. The current findings were also only partially consistent with those of Dwyer (2005), Gaffney (2007) and McCarthy (2006) who all found that relationship satisfaction was negatively related to self-reported compliance. This may be due to the nature of the samples used in these studies who were generally dating individuals or couples in shorter-term marital relationships, for whom giving in and not challenging their partner may have impacted more negatively on their relationship satisfaction than for longer-term couples who may feel they have more to lose and are thus more willing to let their partner have their own way in order to maintain the relationship status quo.
Overall, with regard to conflict styles, the current findings suggest that an individual’s perception of their own and their partner’s propensity to engage in constructive or destructive conflict behaviours, may have an impact on the relationship satisfaction of both members of the couple, giving further support to the interdependent nature of dyadic relationships (Kenny et al., 2006). However, it should be noted that the relationships between an individual’s self-reports and partner-reports of conflict styles were generally more strongly associated with their own relationship satisfaction, than to the relationship satisfaction of their partner, suggesting once again that an individual’s own perceptions are perhaps more influential on their relationship satisfaction than their partner’s perceptions. This is explored in greater detail below.

9.4 The Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Relationship Satisfaction.

In line with the second research aim, the association between emotional intelligence and relationship satisfaction was explored. As noted above, the current study included both a self-report and partner-report of emotional intelligence. The hypothesis that higher levels of emotional intelligence would be associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction was partially supported. Husbands reported feeling more satisfied when they perceived themselves or their wives to be more emotionally intelligent and when their wives perceived them to be more emotionally intelligent. Husbands’ relationship satisfaction was not related to how emotionally intelligent their wives perceived themselves to be. Wives reported feeling more satisfied only when they perceived their spouse to be more emotionally intelligent or when their husbands reported being more emotionally intelligent. Wives’ relationship satisfaction was not related to how emotionally intelligent they think they are themselves or to how emotionally intelligent their husbands perceived them to be.
These differences may be related to the fact that, as noted above, wives generally perceived themselves to be more emotionally intelligent than their husbands. For both husbands and wives, their relationship satisfaction was most strongly related to their partner-reports of emotional intelligence, especially for wives, suggesting that both spouses are more likely to feel satisfied with the relationship if they perceive their partner to be more adept at perceiving, identifying, and managing both their own and their spouses’ emotional experiences. This implies that emotional intelligence may be seen as a highly desirable partner quality in the context of the marital relationship that may be helpful to focus on in couple therapy interventions (Schutte et al., 2001). It also implies that spouses’ propensity to perceive their partners’ behaviour in a more positive light and as more similar to their own behaviour has a greater impact on the relationship than their partners’ actual reported behaviour (Boyes & Fletcher, 2007; Ruvolo & Fabin, 1999).

Although not all past research mentioned above utilised a self-report and a partner-report of emotional intelligence, or recruited a couple sample, the current research findings were partially consistent with those of Schutte et al. (2001) who found that individuals tended to report being more satisfied with their relationship when they perceived themselves or their partner to be more emotionally intelligent. The current findings were also partially consistent with those of Nikou (2005), who found no association between relationship satisfaction and self-reported emotional intelligence. Nikou also found that when women perceived their partner to be more emotionally intelligent, they felt more satisfied with the relationship. However, the same did not hold for males. The current findings were also partially consistent with the findings of Cordova et al. (2005) and Lavee and Ben Ari (2004), who although not specifically using a measure of emotional intelligence, generally found positive
associations between spouses’ relationship satisfaction and their self-reported emotional expression and communication.

In relation to more recent studies that have utilized couple samples, the current findings were partially consistent with Dwyer (2005) who found that both husbands’ and wives’ relationship satisfaction was positively related to their self-reports of emotional intelligence, but not related to their spouses’ self-report of emotional intelligence. The current findings were also partially consistent with Smith et al. (2008), who also measured both self-reports and partner-reports of emotional intelligence and found that husbands’ relationship satisfaction was most strongly related to their self-report of emotional intelligence, whereas wives’ relationship satisfaction was most strongly related to their partner-report of emotional intelligence.

Overall, although comparing past research with the current findings is somewhat difficult given that most of the previous research used varying measures and samples, and has not always included the complexity of comparisons that are contained in the current study, some interesting findings emerge. In combination, the current and past research findings concur that although an individual’s perceptions of their own emotional skills may have an impact on how satisfied they feel in the relationship, with some gender variations, when the intrapersonal and interpersonal effects of emotional intelligence are considered, it appears that the way in which each spouse views their partner’s emotional skills perhaps has more influence on relationship satisfaction than how emotionally competent they believe themselves to be. This is discussed more extensively in the sections below.

9.5 The Relationship between Attachment and Conflict Styles

The third research aim of the current study was to explore the relationship between the adult attachment dimensions (avoidance and anxiety) and the conflict
resolution styles. The hypothesis that lower levels of attachment avoidance and anxiety would be associated with higher levels of positive problem solving and lower levels of each of conflict engagement, withdrawal, compliance and ineffective arguing, was partially supported. Generally, with regard to positive problem solving, the relationship of this conflict style to both husbands’ and wives’ reported levels of anxiety and avoidance were in the expected direction, although notably, wives’ self-report of positive problem solving was not related to husbands’ attachment variables. Unexpectedly, when considering more destructive conflict styles, both spouses generally only reported more attachment avoidance or anxiety if they perceived their partner to do more conflict engaging. Although wives’ tendency to withdraw was related to both their own and their partner’s levels of avoidance and anxiety, husbands were likely to report being more avoidant or anxious only when they perceived their wives to withdraw. Although husbands’ and wives’ attachment variables were not significantly related to their partner-reports of compliance, generally both reported being more anxious or avoidant when they perceived themselves to be more compliant. Notably, the strongest association occurred between wives’ and husbands’ anxiety and their self-reports of compliance, indicating that both felt more anxious when they perceived themselves to be giving in to their partner in order to keep the peace. The strongest and most consistent relationships were between husbands’ and wives’ reports of ineffective arguing and their reported levels of avoidance and anxiety.

The current findings regarding the association between the attachment dimensions and conflict styles were generally consistent with the array of past research mentioned above, which, although using a wide variety of attachment and conflict measures that included only self-reports of conflict, generally found that more
secure individuals tend to exhibit more open and constructive ways of managing conflict in their relationships, whereas individuals who are more avoidant and/or anxious exhibit more destructive conflict strategies (Corcoran & Mallinckrodt, 2000; Creasey, 2002; Dougall, 1998; Feeney, et al., 1994; Lussier, 1997; MacDougall, 2003; Marchand-Reilly & Reese-Weber, 2005; Pistole & Arricale, 2003; Shi, 2003; Simpson, et al., 1996). The current findings were also partially consistent with those of Whelan (2006), who although using a different measure of conflict, as well as a categorical measure of attachment, found that secure individuals in long term marital relationships were more likely to engage in more validation, and less volatility, avoidance and hostility than insecure individuals.

Generally, the current findings support the contention that secure individuals, low in attachment avoidance or anxiety, generally report more constructive ways of managing conflict in the relationship, presumably because they tend to experience a more positive view of themselves and their partner. This then allows them to be comfortable with closeness and intimacy, and in turn gives them the potential to remain open and honest with their partner in order to resolve the inevitable couple disagreements. Alternatively, individuals who report being more anxious or avoidant generally resort to more destructive forms of conflict resolution perhaps due to their inability to tolerate the level of intimacy that is required to talk through relationship difficulties without either withdrawing from their partner or allowing their increased anxiety to draw them into attacking, blaming or acquiescing.

Overall, despite some minor gender differences as outlined above, there was an impressive level of similarity in the relationships between the spouses’ self-reports and partner-reports of the conflict styles and their own reported levels of avoidance and anxiety, suggesting that for both spouses, their own perceptions of the way they
and their partner manage conflict is more consistently related to their own attachment, than to their partner’s attachment. Further, spouses’ reported levels of avoidance were generally more strongly related to the self-reported and partner-reported levels of each conflict style than to their reported level of anxiety, suggesting that the spouses’ propensity to avoid or withdraw from their partner when under stress may be a more important predictor of conflict outcomes than attachment anxiety (Shi, 2003). Together, the current findings suggest the importance of considering the link between the attachment and conflict styles of both partners in the context of marital therapy so that nuances of their interdependence can be addressed in order to help each understand the impact that their behaviour has, not only on their own relationship experiences, but those of their partner.

9.6 The Relationship between Attachment and Emotional Intelligence

In line with the fourth research aim, the relationship between adult attachment and emotional intelligence was explored. A self-report of adult attachment and both a self-report and partner-report of emotional intelligence were included. The hypothesis that lower levels of attachment avoidance and anxiety would be associated with higher levels of emotional intelligence was partially supported. Wives tended to report being less avoidant and anxious when they perceived their husbands to be more emotionally intelligent, when their husbands reported being more emotionally intelligent, and when husbands perceived their wives to be more emotionally intelligent. The strongest relationship was between wives’ reported avoidance and wives’ partner-report of emotional intelligence. Wives’ attachment dimensions were not related to their own reported level of emotional intelligence.

Husbands tended to report feeling less avoidant and anxious when they perceived their wives to be more emotionally intelligent and when their wives’
perceived them to be more emotionally intelligent. Only husbands’ avoidance, not anxiety, was related to husbands’ self-reported level of emotional intelligence. Husbands’ attachment dimensions were not related to how emotionally intelligent their wives reported themselves to be. For husbands, the strongest association was also between their level of avoidance and how emotionally intelligent they perceived their wives to be.

Although the current research explored the association between attachment and emotional intelligence in more detail than the limited past research in this area, the current findings were generally consistent with research that suggests that individuals who are more secure tend to have better developed emotional skills than insecure individuals (e.g., Feeney et al., 1994; Mikulincer & Florian, 1998; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005). With regard to past research that has utilised an ability measure of emotional intelligence, the current findings were partially consistent with Boncher (2003), who found no association between dating individuals’ own level of emotional intelligence and their attachment style. The current findings were also partially consistent with Kafetsios (2004), who generally found that securely attached males and females had higher emotional intelligence ability, whereas insecure individuals had lower levels of emotional skills. With regard to the only identified study that has explored the association between attachment and emotional intelligence using self-report measures, the current findings were partially consistent with Kim (2005), who found that secure individuals tend to report higher levels of emotional intelligence, but found no direct relationship between insecure attachment and emotional intelligence.

Although for both husbands and wives the expected relationships between their attachment dimensions and their partner-reports of emotional intelligence and
their spouses’ partner-report of emotional intelligence were observed, some interesting gender differences emerged. Wives’ self-reported emotional intelligence was not related to their own or their husbands’ attachment dimensions, whereas for husbands, their self-reported emotional intelligence was related to their wives’ reported level of avoidance and anxiety as well as to their own reported attachment avoidance. This suggests that for wives, how secure they feel may be more dependent on their beliefs about their husbands as well as the interpersonal impact of their husband’s beliefs about them, than on their own self-views. Given that wives generally tended to perceive themselves as more emotionally intelligent than their husbands, it follows that they would generally feel more secure if they think their husbands have better developed emotional skills, and would therefore relate to their partners in a more positive way, in turn making their husbands feel more secure. For husbands, who generally believed that they and their wives had similar levels of emotional intelligence, of more importance was how emotionally intelligent they believed their wives to be, rather than what their wives actually reported to be the case.

Overall, the current findings with regard to the association between the attachment dimensions and emotional intelligence suggest that how emotionally intelligent individuals perceives their partners to be has perhaps a more important and consistent impact on individuals’ attachment security than their own emotional skills. This makes sense in the context of attachment theory which posits that the main desire of adults in close relationships is to be able to trust that their partners can be emotionally available, supportive and able to provide comfort during times of distress. If individuals perceive that their partners are unavailable, this is more likely to lead to relationship distress. Therefore, attachment is seen as important aspect of both the
individual and of the relationship, that work concurrently to create the shared couple experiences (Davila, 2003).

9.7 The Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Styles

In line with the fifth research aim, the association between emotional intelligence and conflict styles was explored. As noted previously, the current study included both self-reports and partner-reports of emotional intelligence and conflict styles. The hypothesis that higher levels of emotional intelligence would be associated with higher levels of positive problem solving, whereas higher levels of emotional intelligence would be associated with lower levels of conflict engagement, withdrawal, compliance and ineffective arguing was partially supported. For wives, their self-report of emotional intelligence was significantly positively related only to their self-report of positive problem solving. However, when wives perceived their husbands to be more emotionally intelligent, wives tended to report being less withdrawn, less compliant and to do less ineffective arguing. They also perceived their husbands to do more positive problem solving, less conflict engaging and less withdrawing, and their husbands also reported doing more positive problem solving and less ineffective arguing.

Similarly, for husbands, their self-report of emotional intelligence was significantly positively related only to their self-report and partner-report of positive problem solving, and significantly negatively related to their self-report of compliance. However, when husbands perceived their wives to be more emotionally intelligent, they perceived themselves to do less ineffective arguing and they perceived their wives to do more positive problem solving and less conflict engaging and withdrawing. Their wives also reported being less compliant and doing less ineffective arguing. Interestingly, for both husbands and wives, their self-reported
emotional intelligence was not related to their spouses’ self-report or partner-report of conflict styles. Similarly, neither wives’ nor husbands’ partner-report of emotional intelligence was related to their spouse’s partner-report of conflict styles.

Although the current research examined the association between emotional intelligence and conflict styles more extensively than past research, the current findings were partially consistent with Brackett et al. (2004; 2005) who both found that the emotional intelligence ability of individuals in a couple was associated with more destructive conflict behaviours such as yelling, criticising or withdrawing. The current findings were also partially consistent with those of McCarthy (2006) who utilised the same measure of conflict styles as the current study and found that higher levels of self-reported emotional intelligence in a sample of dating individuals was associated with more positive problem solving, less withdrawal, conflict engagement and ineffective arguing.

The present findings were also partially consistent with Dwyer (2005) who used the same measures of emotional intelligence and conflict styles as the current study and found that higher levels of self-reported emotional intelligence were associated with more positive problem-solving and less conflict engagement, withdrawal, compliance and ineffective arguing. Interestingly, the current findings also confirmed the finding of Dwyer that the conflict styles of each spouse are not associated with the self-reported level of emotional intelligence of the other spouse. As posited by Dwyer, the reported emotional skills of one spouse do not appear to be an important factor in understanding the conflict skills of the other spouse.

The current findings were partially consistent with those of Smith et al. (2008) who found that for husbands and wives, both their self-report and partner-report of emotional intelligence were associated with self-reports of more constructive and less
destructive conflict communication patterns, although in line with the current findings, the correlations were generally stronger for partner-reported emotional intelligence than for self-reported emotional intelligence. Smith et al. also found evidence of associations between one spouse’s self-report of emotional intelligence and the other spouse’s self-report of communication patterns that were not evident in the current findings. However, it should be noted that the communication patterns questionnaire used by Smith et al. measured each partner’s perceptions of the way they, as a couple, typically deal with relationship problems, rather than separately measuring each partner’s perceptions of how they and their partner manage conflict, which may account for the variation in findings. Also, Smith et al. found no gender differences in the reported levels of emotional intelligence and communication patterns, whereas in the current study wives generally believed they were more emotionally intelligent and better at positive problem solving than their husbands. Consequently, this may have impacted on the way wives in particular tended to view both their own and their partner’s conflict skills.

The inconsistency between the current and past findings is most likely related to several factors including the variation in measures and samples used, as well as the fact that past research has not included both self-reports and partner-reports of emotional intelligence and conflict. Despite some minor gender differences, husbands and wives were generally similar with regard to the association between their reports of emotional intelligence and conflict styles. For both, the strongest relationship occurred between each spouse’s partner-report of emotional intelligence and both their report of ineffective arguing and their partner-report of positive problem solving. This suggests that for both husbands and wives, if they perceived their partner to be
more emotionally intelligent, they also perceived that there is less ineffective arguing and that their partner does more positive problem solving.

Overall, the current findings suggest that how emotionally intelligent a spouse perceives their partner to be has more influence on how they perceive both their own and their partner’s conflict skills, than how emotionally intelligent each partner perceives themselves to be. This has important implications in the context of marital therapy given that both partners appear to be more likely to engage in constructive ways of managing conflict if they have a sense that their partner has well developed emotional skills and is therefore perceived as committed to working through difficult issues. In this context, the importance of dealing with issues that may be obstructing each partner’s ability to accurately identify and connect with both their own, and their partner’s emotional experiences becomes paramount. To help couples identify and commit to improving the way in which they manage conflict would therefore require some assessment of the attributions each makes and the perceptions each hold regarding their partner’s behaviour (Bradbury et al., 2000). Also, as suggested by Kurdek (1999), whilst intrapersonal factors may have an influence on the relationship in the earlier stages, longer-term relationships are more likely to be affected by the interpersonal variables that influence the way in which couples interact with and perceive each other, which makes sense when couples have been living together for extended periods and have children together.

9.8 The Main Predictors of Relationship Satisfaction

Given the inter-relationships between the main variables as examined above, the sixth aim of the current study was to explore which of the attachment, conflict and emotional intelligence variables were the most important predictors of relationship satisfaction. First, the prediction of relationship satisfaction was considered
separately for husbands and wives. It was discovered that for both partners, only their attachment avoidance, partner-report of emotional intelligence and ineffective arguing were uniquely significant predictors of relationship satisfaction. Attachment avoidance emerged as the most important predictor of both husbands’ and wives’ relationship satisfaction. Although it is acknowledged that other factors not included in the current study may also have contributed to the reported level of relationship satisfaction, attachment avoidance, ineffective arguing and partner-reported emotional intelligence together accounted for an impressively large proportion of the variance in relationship satisfaction.

For wives, whilst their self-report of withdrawal and their partner-report of positive problem solving were also found to be uniquely significant predictors of satisfaction, when ineffective arguing was taken into account, their effects were no longer significant. This suggests that ineffective arguing mediates the relationship between these conflict variables and relationship satisfaction. That is, these conflict variables have an indirect effect on relationship satisfaction through their effects on ineffective arguing. When wives report doing less withdrawing and report that their husbands do more positive problem solving, wives tend to report less ineffective arguing, which in turn results in greater relationship satisfaction. For wives, their tendency to respond to self-report questionnaires in a socially desirable way was also found to have a small significant effect on the prediction of relationship satisfaction, suggesting that wives tended to present themselves or view their relationship in a positively biased way. This should be taken into account when interpreting the present findings.

For husbands, although their partner-report of withdrawal was also found to be a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction, when the effects of ineffective
arguing were included, it no longer had a significant effect. Again, this suggests that ineffective arguing mediates the relationship between this conflict variable and relationship satisfaction. When husbands perceive their wives to do less withdrawing, husbands report less ineffective arguing and in turn, higher levels of relationship satisfaction.

Results of the multi-level analyses, taking account of the inter-dependence of the couple data, generally confirmed that only the individuals’ own perceptions (i.e., the “actor-effects”) of avoidance, partner-reported emotional intelligence and ineffective arguing predicted relationship satisfaction. None of the “partner-effects” were significant. This means that overall, it is each individual’s perceptions of themselves and their partner, rather than their partners’ perceptions, that have an impact on that individual’s level of relationship satisfaction. Specifically when individuals perceive themselves to be less avoidant, perceive their partners to be more emotionally intelligent and perceive that there is less ineffective arguing, then those individual are likely to report a greater level of relationship satisfaction. As suggested by Smith et al. (2008), although couples are involved in an interdependent relationship, it is their own perceptions of what goes on in the relationship that appears to have a more important impact on how satisfied the individual feels, rather than their partners’ perceptions of the relationship.

The only significant gender differences in the prediction of relationship satisfaction occurred for the “partner-effects” of partner-reported emotional intelligence. Although husbands felt more satisfied when their wives perceived them to be more emotionally intelligent, the same did not hold for wives, whose relationship satisfaction was not affected by how emotionally intelligent their husbands perceived them to be. These findings confirm the above correlational
analyses which suggested that husbands’ relationship satisfaction was moderately positively related to how emotionally intelligent their wives perceived them to be, whereas wives’ relationship satisfaction was not related to how emotionally intelligent their husbands’ perceived them to be. This also makes sense in view of the fact that wives generally perceived themselves to be more emotionally intelligent than their husbands, whereas husbands thought they and their wives had similar levels of emotional intelligence. As suggested above, perhaps wives behave more favourably toward their husbands when they perceive them to be more emotionally “in-tune”, which in turn impacts positively on husbands’ relationship satisfaction. Interestingly, there were no other significant gender interactions, suggesting that overall, husbands and wives tended to hold similar perceptions of the relationship and of factors that may impact upon it.

For previous research that has considered possible predictors of relationship satisfaction, the current findings were partially consistent with Dwyer (2005), who found that of the five conflict styles, only ineffective arguing negatively predicted the relationship satisfaction of newly-wed couples and that an individual’s level of self-reported emotional intelligence affected relationship satisfaction only indirectly through its effect on ineffective arguing. The current findings were also partially consistent with those of McCarthy (2006), who found that the most important predictors of relationship satisfaction were emotional skills and destructive conflict styles such as hostility and ineffective arguing, and partially consistent with Nikou (2005), who found intimacy to mediate the relationship between partner-reported emotional intelligence and relationship satisfaction.

In considering the only other known study that has undertaken multi-level modelling to explore predictors of relationship satisfaction in a longer-term couple
sample, the current findings were also partially consistent with those of Smith et al. (2008), who measured both “actor-effects” and “partner-effects” and found that only the “actor” variables of self-reported and partner-reported emotional intelligence, as well as the “actor-effects” of the communication patterns were significant predictors of relationship satisfaction. Although not specifically measuring adult attachment, Smith et al. found that the “actor-effect” of the avoidance and withholding communication pattern was by far the most important predictor of an individual’s relationship satisfaction.

Overall, the above findings suggest that although there are various inter-relationships between the attachment, emotional intelligence, conflict style and relationship satisfaction variables, the reported ability of partners to be able to remain close and connected with each other, and to engage in less destructive forms of arguing appear to be the most important factors in determining how satisfied each partner feels in the relationship. However, the way in which each partner perceives the emotional skills of their spouse also has some influence on how satisfied each may feel. Despite the minor gender differences reported above, overall, the findings with regard to the significant predictors of relationship satisfaction imply that for longer term couples, husbands and wives tend to hold remarkably similar perceptions of the factors that impact on their relationship satisfaction. This is not all that surprising given that the couples in the current sample had been living together, on average, for over 17 years and would be expected to generally hold similar views of the status of their relationship and of the major factors that impact on it.

The fact that attachment avoidance and ineffective arguing were both the most important predictors of relationship satisfaction also supports the contention of Johnson (2003a) that the couple relationship is most clearly defined by the ability of
the couple to provide a sense of security for each other, and that attachment injuries evoke a fear of rejection or abandonment, whereby partners come to see their partner as unreliable, thus blocking attempts at successful relationship repair. According to Bader and Pearson (2009), when attachment traumas are triggered in either member of a couple during intense arguments, those who are insecurely attached typically react in ineffective ways such as attacking, blaming or avoiding the conflict altogether, in an attempt to deal with the distress they are feeling, thus pushing their partner further away. This in turn re-triggers feelings of loss and abandonment that they may have experienced in earlier relationships and therefore re-confirms their expectations that close others cannot be trusted to provide support, thus eroding their desire to remain close and connected and decreasing relationship satisfaction.

9.9 Implications

The current findings have important implications in the context of couple therapy. In particular, they highlight the value of attachment theory in helping couples make sense of their maladaptive ways of behaving towards each other when the relationship is under stress, and to understand the reasons for this behaviour in the context of their family and relationship histories (Davila, 2003). Although in the past, many couple therapy interventions have focused on trying to improve the way couples communicate and resolve conflict in their relationship by employing behavioural and cognitive/behavioural interventions (e.g., Baucom & Lester, 1986; Baucom et al., 1990), findings from the current research add support to the contention that it is important to integrate the attachment security and perceived emotional skills of each partner into the assessment and treatment of couple difficulties, paying particular attention to their levels of attachment avoidance.
Typically in the therapeutic setting, when couples present for help, they are struggling as the result of the loss of a secure emotional connection with each other and therefore react to their unmet attachment needs by either becoming hyperactive in trying to maintain a connection, by shutting down from each other, or by employing a combination of both (Johnson, 2003a; Johnson & Makinen, 2001). The current findings suggest that whilst the anxiety associated with trying desperately to monitor the relationship and coerce one’s partner to engage needs to be addressed, particularly regarding the intra-personal and inter-personal impact of this type of behaviour, of more importance to the relationship satisfaction of the couple is to work through the difficulties they have in being able to stay emotionally and physically connected with each other. These avoidance factors are more likely to result in decreased relationship satisfaction, and perhaps relationship dissolution, over time.

Although the importance of assisting couples to communicate more effectively and to manage conflict in more constructive ways no doubt remains an important element of couple therapy, and is often the reason why couples present for therapy in the first place, the current findings have important implications for the way in which this is assessed and treated in couple therapy. The current findings suggest that conflict styles are indeed related to how satisfied partners feel, particularly their perceived ability to do more positive problem solving, less withdrawing and less attacking and blaming. However, it appears that the particular way in which couples go about resolving the conflict is perhaps not as important as them making some effort to confront issues without shutting down, and reaching a resolution that feels acceptable to both partners. So perhaps more important than assessing whether couples have a particular conflict style, is assessing their ability and willingness to stay connected with each other when there is conflict and to attempt conflict repair,
rather than trying to ignore or dismiss each others’ concerns. What it seems couples
are seeking is basically a “fair hearing”.

Importantly though, couples will be limited in their ability to resolve
arguments more effectively unless their underlying emotional responses that result in
negative cognitions and behaviour towards their partner are also explored. Each
partner comes to the relationship with certain expectations of ways they anticipate
close others will behave and react towards them, based on past relationships, and each
therefore looks for evidence in the couple relationship to confirm these deeply
ingrained beliefs (Johnson, 2003a). Exploring these issues within a safe controlled
environment that therapy hopefully provides, gives each an opportunity to express
their individual vulnerabilities and the defence mechanisms that have kept them from
developing greater intimacy. It also provides an opportunity for partners to see each
other and the relationship from a different perspective. Hopefully once past traumatic
events that are triggered by events in the current relationship are identified and
worked through in therapy, partners become more open, vulnerable and willing to
change. Further, reframing the ways in which the couples’ behaviour results in
difficulty maintaining closeness and intimacy, as a function of their attachment
insecurity, is also more likely to result in enduring changes rather than just trying to
teach couples how to communicate more effectively, because the focus becomes more
on helping couples to be better at supporting and providing care for each other, rather
than just being better at conflict resolution (Davila, 2003; Johnson, 2003a).

Whilst being more emotionally intelligent has been found to be a good skill to
possess in various life domains (e.g., Brackett et al., 2004; Schutte et al., 2002; Wing
et al., 2006), the current findings suggest that within the context of couple dyads, of
more importance to the relationship satisfaction of each individual, is that they
perceive their partner to be able to accurately identify, understand and regulate both their own and their spouse’s emotions. This has important implications for couple therapy, as spouses will most likely only start to be more open with each other if they believe that their partner is able to both openly express their own feelings, as well as validate the emotional experiences of the other without judging or blaming.

Despite suggestions that it is women who are perhaps looking for greater emotional intimacy in relationships, rather than men (Cordova et al., 2005; Lavee & Ben-Ari, 2004), the current research findings suggest that having a partner who is perceived to be more in touch with their emotions is important to the relationship satisfaction of both husbands and wives. Therefore, when working with longer term couples it may be useful in the initial stages of therapy to firstly assess their perceptions of their own and their partner’s level of emotional intelligence and their ability to resolve conflict in more constructive ways in order to determine whether there are important discrepancies.

Findings from the current study suggest that whilst husbands may see themselves and their wives as being equally emotionally intelligent and skilled in positive problem solving, wives perceive themselves to be more adept in these areas. Therefore, it may be important for husbands to understand the reasons why their partner sees them as being less emotionally intelligent and not as good at positive problem solving, even if husbands do not believe this is the case. This is particularly important given that past research has suggested that women typically enter couple therapy wanting change, but men are more invested in maintaining the relationship status quo (Jacobson & Addis, 1993). Providing couples with information about how their perceptions of each other influence how they behave and feel towards each other may be helpful if such discrepancies are more explicit. During further treatment, it
would then be important to help partners to improve the way they communicate with each other so that they develop a greater capacity, not only to understand the “problem”, but also become more adept at reading their partner’s emotional cues and communicating an understanding and empathy for their partner’s vulnerabilities. This makes sense in the context of applying therapeutic interventions designed to increase couple intimacy, which are more likely to be effective if partners believe their spouse is able to respond to them in an emotionally supportive and helpful way (Cordova et al., 2005).

As discussed in the Emotion Focused Therapy literature (Elliott et al., 2003; Greenberg & Goldman, 2008; Greenberg & Johnson, 1988), when partners become better at not just reacting to, or acting upon, their secondary emotions such as anger, but are able to connect with their own and their partner’s underlying primary fears and insecurities and are able to convey a deeper level of understanding about this, then greater intimacy between the couple is likely to develop through their disclosure and sharing of vulnerabilities. Further, avoidance of conflict, although making things easier for the couple in the short-term, becomes increasingly problematic for a couple over time because it can erode a sense of honesty, trust and security in the relationship, which are factors that form the basis of couple intimacy (Bader, Pearson, & Schwartz, 2000).

Whilst past research has shown various gender differences in factors that impact on relationship satisfaction, the current findings suggest that for couples who have been together for longer periods of time in a committed relationship involving the presence of dependent children, there is an overall sense of agreement between spouses as to the status of the relationship. In particular, for both partners, the same relationship factors were found to be the most important predictors of relationship
satisfaction. Although greater gender variation may exist for couples who are dating or have been together for shorter periods of time, or who do not have children, it seems that those who have been together longer and have in some respects survived the many trials of children, financial pressures, family crises as well as the on-going pressures of daily life as a couple, tend to develop a shared understanding of the relationship that can only be built over time (Bader et al., 2000).

9.10. Limitations and Possible Future Research

Although the current study substantially expanded on past research in this area by including an extensive range of measures and collecting data from 111 matched couple dyads, there were some limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, the study relied on self-report and partner-report measures, which contain the inherent limitation that participants’ responses may not accurately reflect the reality of their relationship experiences. Although a measure of social desirability was included in the current study, it may be advantageous if future research in this area could also incorporate data obtained via observations of actual couple interactions or structured interviews with the couple which would allow some comparison between the observed and self-reported data.

Second, although self-reports and partner-reports were obtained for the emotional intelligence and conflict styles scales, only self-reports of attachment and relationship satisfaction were obtained. This was due to the fact that only the emotional intelligence and conflict scales had been extensively psychometrically tested in past research in both a self-report and partner-report format. Further, including partner-reports of the attachment and relationship satisfaction scales would also have resulted in a very lengthy questionnaire that may have been potentially overwhelming for participants and that was outside the scope of the present research.
However, the current study highlights the possible advantages of exploring both self and partner perceptions across all variables which is a suggested area of expansion in future studies.

Third, whilst the current study highlighted some important relationships between the main variables, the findings were generally correlational and not causal. Although an individual who perceives themselves to be less avoidant, perceives their partner to be more emotionally intelligent and perceives that there is less ineffective arguing may report increased relationship satisfaction, it cannot be concluded that these factors cause the individual to feel more satisfied, as there may also be additional factors not examined in the present study which also have an impact on relationship satisfaction. Conducting research that explores these variables longitudinally, and includes other intra-personal factors such as personality or level of relationship commitment, may provide a more in-depth analysis of how couples’ relationship experiences may change over time.

Finally, whilst the current study included a sample of couples obtained through various means, it was generally a sample of convenience recruited via the researcher’s personal contacts and through first year university students who distributed the questionnaires to their parents or other couples known to them who met the participation criteria. This resulted in a sample of couples, who although they were in long-term marital relationships, were mostly well educated, employed in professional white-collar occupations and earning a combined income in excess of $60,000 per year. The questionnaire did not ask participants about their cultural background or whether they were currently attending or had previously attended couple therapy, which may have been helpful to have known. While the current study offers insight into the relationship experiences of these couples, the generalisability of
results are somewhat limited. Exploring these factors using a wider sample of couples, both heterosexual and homosexual, from different socio-economic situations and cultural backgrounds may be useful in order to validate the current findings.

9.11 Conclusion

Overall, the current findings contribute to the understanding of factors that impact on the relationship satisfaction of longer term couples with dependent children. The current research suggests that whilst there are some notable gender differences in the reports of attachment, emotional intelligence and conflict styles and their association with relationship satisfaction, generally spouses who have been together for longer periods of time have a fairly similar view of the relationship status. The current findings also suggest some important relationships between each of these main variables that highlight both intra-personal and inter-personal effects. In particular, the ways in which an individual perceives both themselves and their partner seem to have important implications for the relationship satisfaction of both spouses. Findings regarding the factors that predict relationship satisfaction in these longer term couples suggest the importance of assessing their levels of attachment avoidance, their perceptions of their partner’s emotional intelligence as well as their perceptions of how effectively they as a couple resolve arguments. It is hoped that the findings from this research provide further insight into factors that are important to address in the context of couple therapy, so that couples presenting with relationship distress are able to be supported and guided in a way that is more likely to result in increased couple intimacy and in turn, more sustainable therapeutic outcomes.
References


New York: Guilford Press.


Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.


Appendix A: Copy of Questionnaire
Consent Information Statement

ATTITUDES TOWARDS ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS OF COUPLES WITH CHILDREN

My name is Karen Johnson and I am currently completing a Professional Doctorate Degree in Counselling Psychology at Swinburne University of Technology, Hawthorn.

Thank you for your interest in this study. The aim of this research is to investigate couple’s attitudes towards their romantic relationship. Specifically, the research aims to investigate the relationship between emotions, feelings of closeness and the way couples deal with conflict and how these impact on relationship satisfaction.

I am looking for couples who are currently in a marital or de facto relationship and who have two or more dependent children.

Participation in the study involves filling in the attached questionnaire which should take approximately 40 minutes to complete. It will ask you questions about age, length of relationship, attitudes towards your partner, your emotions and how you handle conflict. Although some questions may seem repetitive, please try to answer every question as honestly as possible, without spending too long on any one item. Your first impressions are generally the best.

Please note that both partners are required to complete their own separate questionnaire and answer questions independently without referring to each other’s responses. Questionnaires have been coded with identical numbers and two prepaid envelopes provided so that they can be returned separately and then matched up when received, whilst maintaining anonymity.

Both partners will remain completely anonymous and all information provided will remain confidential. In addition, data for this study will be analysed and reported in group form only and publication of results in a national or international refereed journal is anticipated. However, results and published articles will not contain any personal or identifiable information about participants. Your participation in this study is also completely voluntary. Your initial agreement to participate does not stop you from discontinuing participation and you are free to withdraw at any time before submitting the questionnaire. Please note that return of the questionnaire in the prepaid envelope supplied will be taken as your consent to participate in the study.

This research conforms to the principles set out in the Psychology Discipline Statement on Research Ethics and has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee, Swinburne University of Technology. Should you have any queries about this study or would like to know the results, please contact my supervisor, Dr Bruce Findlay on (03) 9214 8093. It is not anticipated that any negative effect will arise from participating in the study, but if you do have any concerns about issues raised by the questionnaire, you can contact the Swinburne Psychology Clinic on 9214 8653 or (if a student) the Swinburne Student Counselling Centre on 9214 8025.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research project, you can contact:

Research Ethics Officer, Office of Research and Graduate Studies
Swinburne University of Technology,
PO Box 218 Hawthorn, Vic, 3122
Ph: (03) 9214 5218 Email: resethics@swin.edu.au

Again, thank you for your time and interest in this study.

Karen Johnson  Dr Bruce Findlay
PART 1. (DEMOGRAPHICS)

Please complete the following questions regarding some background information which will assist with interpreting the findings from this study. Please either fill in your answer in the space provided or indicate the appropriate response by placing a tick (✓) in the allocated space. Please note that throughout this questionnaire, the term "partner" refers to your long-term romantic partner with whom you are currently living.

1. What is your age? ........years
2. What is your gender? [ ] Male [ ] Female
3. Marital status: [ ] Married [ ] Defacto

4. What is the highest educational level you have obtained (please choose one):
   Secondary school [ ]
   Currently completing degree/diploma/certificate course [ ]
   Completed degree/diploma/certificate course [ ]
   Currently completing postgraduate course of study [ ]
   Completed postgraduate course of study [ ]

5. Length of current marital/defacto relationship with partner: ........years ........months

6. Number of dependent children that live with you and your partner: ........

7. Ages of dependent children that live with you and your partner:
   child 1: ........years ........months
   child 2: ........years ........months
   child 3: ........years ........months
   child 4: ........years ........months
   child 5: ........years ........months
   child 6: ........years ........months

8. Do all of these children live with your and your partner full-time?
   Yes [ ]
   No [ ] Please describe the living arrangements if dependent children do not live with you and your partner all the time

9. Your current employment status:
   full time paid work [ ]
   part-time paid work [ ]
   not currently in paid employment [ ] (go to question 12)

10. Job title (if applicable): .................................................................

11. Your average number of paid work hours per week: ........ Hours

12. The combined average annual income of you and your partner (after tax)
    Less than $20,000 [ ] $61,000 - $80,000 [ ]
    $21,000 - $40,000 [ ] more than $80,000 [ ]
    $41,000 - $60,000 [ ]

13. Your current student status (if applicable)
    full time [ ]
    part-time [ ]
    not currently studying [ ]

14. Your current course of study? (if applicable) ..................................
PART 2: (RELATIONSHIP)

The following statements concern how you feel in your relationship with your partner. Please respond to each statement by indicating how much you agree or disagree with it. Write the number in the space provided using the following scale.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

______ 1. I feel comfortable sharing my private thoughts and feelings with my partner
______ 2. I rarely worry about my partner leaving me.
______ 3. I worry that my partner won't care about me as much as I care about him/her.
______ 4. I prefer not to show my partner how I feel deep down
______ 5. I often worry that my partner doesn't really love me.
______ 6. I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on my partner.
______ 7. I often worry that my partner will not want to stay with me
______ 8. I am very comfortable being close to my partner.
______ 9. I often wish that my partner's feelings for me were as strong as my feelings for him/her
______ 10. I don't feel comfortable opening up to my partner.
______ 11. I worry a lot about my relationship with my partner.
______ 12. I prefer not to be too close to my partner.
______ 13. When my partner is out of sight I worry that she/he might become interested in someone else.
______ 14. I get uncomfortable when my partner wants to be very close.
______ 15. When I show my feelings for my partner, I'm afraid she/he will not feel the same about me
______ 16. I find it relatively easy to get close to my partner.
______ 17. I'm afraid that I will lose my partner's love
18. It's not difficult for me to get close to my partner.

19. My partner makes me doubt myself.

20. I usually discuss my problems and concerns with my partner.

21. I do not often worry about being abandoned by my partner.

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

23. I find that my partner doesn’t want to get as close as I would like.

24. I tell my partner just about everything.

25. Sometimes my partner changes her/his feelings about me for no apparent reason.

26. I talk things over with my partner.

27. My desire to be very close to my partner sometimes scares her/him away.

28. I am nervous when my partner gets too close to me.

29. I’m afraid that once my partner gets to know me, she/he won’t like who I really am.

30. I feel comfortable depending on my partner.

31. It makes me mad that I don’t get the affection and support I need from my partner.

32. I find it easy to depend on my partner.

33. I worry that I won’t measure up to other people.

34. It’s easy for me to be affectionate with my partner.

35. My partner seems only to notice me when I’m angry.

36. My partner really understands me and my needs.
PART 3: (EMOTIONS)

Below are a series of statements. Using the following scale, please write the number in the space provided that is most indicative of the way **YOU** typically think, feel and act.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
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</table>

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

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

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

4. Other people find it easy to confide in me

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

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

7. When my mood changes, I see new possibilities

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

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

10. I expect good things to happen

11. I like to share my emotions with others

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

13. I arrange events that others enjoy

14. I seek out activities that make me happy

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

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

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

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

19. I know why my emotions change
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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<td>1</td>
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20. When I am in a positive mood, I am able to come up with new ideas
21. I have control over my emotions
22. I easily recognise my emotions as I experience them
23. I motivate myself by imagining a good outcome to tasks I take on
24. I compliment others when they have done something well
25. I am aware of the non-verbal messages other people send
26. When another person tells me about an important event in his or her life, I almost feel as though I have experienced this event myself
27. When I feel a change in emotions, I tend to come up with new ideas
28. When I am faced with a challenge, I give up because I believe I will fail
29. I know what other people are feeling just by looking at them
30. I help other people feel better when they are down
31. I use good moods to help myself keep trying in the face of obstacles
32. I can tell how people are feeling by listening to the tone of their voice
33. It is difficult for me to understand why people feel the way they do

Now please write the number in the space provided that is most indicative of the way you believe YOUR PARTNER typically thinks, feels and acts.

1. My partner knows when to speak about his/her personal problems to others
2. When my partner is faced with obstacles, he/she remember times he/she faced similar obstacles and overcame them
3. My partner expects that he/she will do well on most things he/she tries
4. Other people find it easy to confide in my partner
5. My partner finds it hard to understand the non-verbal messages of other people
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Some of the major events of my partner's life have led him/her to re-evaluate what is important and not important</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>When my partner's mood changes, he/she sees new possibilities</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Emotions are one of the things that make my partner's life worth living</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>My partner is aware of his/her emotions as he/she experiences them</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>My partner expects good things to happen</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>My partner likes to share his/her emotions with others</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>When my partner experiences a positive emotion, he/she knows how to make it last</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>My partner arranges events that others enjoy</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>My partner seeks out activities that make him/her happy</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>My partner is aware of the non-verbal messages he/she sends others</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>My partner presents himself/herself in a way that makes a good impression on others</td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>When my partner is in a positive mood, solving problems is easy for him/her</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>By looking at their facial expressions, my partner recognises the emotions people are experiencing</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>My partner knows why his/his emotions change</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>When my partner is in a positive mood, he/she is able to come up with new ideas</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>My partner has control over his/her emotions</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>My partner easily recognises his/her emotions as he/she experiences them</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>My partner motivates himself/herself by imagining a good outcome to tasks he/she takes on</td>
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<td>24</td>
<td>My partner compliments others when they have done something well</td>
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<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>My partner is aware of the non-verbal messages other people send</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td></td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

26. When another person tells my partner about an important event in their life, my partner almost feels as though he/she has experienced the event himself/herself.

27. When my partner feels a change in emotions, he/she tends to come up with new ideas.

28. When my partner is faced with a challenge, he/she gives up because he/she believes they will fail.

29. My partner knows what other people are feeling just by looking at them.

30. My partner helps other people feel better when they are down.

31. My partner uses good moods to help himself/herself keep trying in the face of obstacles.

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

33. It is difficult for my partner to understand why people feel the way they do.

**PART 4. (SATISFACTION)**

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

For items 1-15, please write the number in the space provided using the following scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Always disagree</th>
<th>Almost always disagree</th>
<th>Frequently disagree</th>
<th>Occasionally disagree</th>
<th>Almost always agree</th>
<th>Always agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Handling family finances

2. Matters of recreation

3. Religious matters

4. Demonstrations of affection
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>always disagree</th>
<th>almost always disagree</th>
<th>frequently disagree</th>
<th>occasionally disagree</th>
<th>almost always agree</th>
<th>always agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Friends

6. Sexual relations

7. Conventionality (correct or proper behaviour)

8. Philosophy of life

9. Ways of dealing with parents or in-laws

10. Aims, goals or things believed important

11. Amount of time spent together

12. Making major decisions

13. Household tasks

14. Leisure time interests and activities

15. Career decisions

15a. Disciplining children

For items 16-22, please write the number in the space provided using the following scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>all the time</th>
<th>most of the time</th>
<th>more often than not</th>
<th>occasionally</th>
<th>rarely</th>
<th>never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

16. How often do you discuss or have you considered divorce, separation or terminating your relationship?

17. How often do you or your partner leave the house after a fight?

18. In general, how often do you think that things between you and your partner are going well?

19. Do you confide in your partner?

20. Do you ever regret that you married? (or lived together)

21. How often do you and your partner quarrel?

22. How often do you and your partner “get on each other’s nerves”?
For items 23-24, please circle the response that best applies to you

23. Do you kiss your partner?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Almost every day</th>
<th>Every day</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

24. Do you and your partner engage in outside interests together?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>None of them</th>
<th>Very few of them</th>
<th>Some of them</th>
<th>Most of them</th>
<th>All of them</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For items 25-28, please write the number in the space provided using the following scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Less than once a month</th>
<th>Once or twice a month</th>
<th>Once or twice a week</th>
<th>Once a day</th>
<th>More often</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

25. Have a stimulating exchange of ideas?

26. Laugh together

27. Calmly discuss something

28. Work together on a project

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

29. Being too tired for sex: Yes [    ] No [    ]

30. Not showing love: Yes [    ] No [    ]

31. The following scale represents different degrees of happiness in your relationship. The middle point, “happy” represents the degree of happiness of most relationships. Please circle the number which best describes the degree of happiness, all things considered, in your relationship.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extremely unhappy</th>
<th>Fairly unhappy</th>
<th>A little unhappy</th>
<th>Happy</th>
<th>Very happy</th>
<th>Extremely happy</th>
<th>Perfect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
32. Which of the following statements best describes how you feel about the future of your relationship (tick [✓] next to the ONE that best applies to you)

___ I want desperately for my relationship to succeed and would go to almost any length to see that it does.

___ I want very much for my relationship to succeed and will do all I can to see that it does.

___ I want very much for my relationship to succeed and will do my fair share to see that it does.

___ It would be nice if my relationship succeeded, but I can’t do much more than I am doing now to keep the relationship going.

___ It would be nice if my relationship succeeded, but I refuse to do any more than I am doing now to keep the relationship going.

___ My relationship can never succeed and there is no more that I can do to keep the relationship going.

PART 5: (CONFLICT)

Please rate how frequently YOU use each of the following styles to deal with arguments or disagreements with your partner by writing the number in the space provided using the following scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Seldom</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

___ 1. Launching personal attacks

___ 2. Focusing on the problem at hand

___ 3. Remaining silent for long periods of time

___ 4. Not being willing to stick up for myself

___ 5. Exploding and getting out of control

___ 6. Sitting down and discussing differences constructively

___ 7. Reaching a limit, “shutting down”, and refusing to talk any further

___ 8. Being too compliant

___ 9. Getting carried away and saying things that aren’t meant

___ 10. Finding alternatives that are acceptable to each of us
11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Never (1)</th>
<th>Seldom (2)</th>
<th>Sometimes (3)</th>
<th>Often (4)</th>
<th>Always (5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11. Tuning the other person out</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Not defending my position</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Throwing insults and digs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>14. Negotiating and compromising</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Withdrawing, acting distant and not interested</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Giving in with little attempt to present my side of the issue</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Now please rate how frequently you believe YOUR PARTNER uses each of the following styles to deal with arguments or disagreements with you.

| 1. Launching personal attacks |
| 2. Focusing on the problem at hand |
| 3. Remaining silent for long periods of time |
| 4. Not being willing to stick up for him/herself |
| 5. Exploding and getting out of control |
| 6. Sitting down and discussing differences constructively |
| 7. Reaching a limit, “shutting down”, and refusing to talk any further |
| 8. Being too compliant |
| 9. Getting carried away and saying things that aren’t meant |
| 10. Finding alternatives that are acceptable to each of us |
| 11. Tuning the other person out |
| 12. Not defending his/her position |
| 13. Throwing insults and digs |
| 14. Negotiating and compromising |
| 15. Withdrawing, acting distant and not interested |
| 16. Giving in with little attempt to present his/her side of the issue |
PART 6: (ARGUMENTS)

Below are descriptions of the kinds of arguments people in relationships are likely to experience. Write the number in the space provided using the following scale that best applies to you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. By the end of an argument, each of us has been given a fair hearing
2. When we begin to fight or argue, I think, “Here we go again.”
3. Overall, I’d say we’re pretty good at solving our problems.
4. Our arguments are left hanging and unresolved
5. We go for days without settling our differences
6. Our arguments seem to end in frustrating stalemates
7. We need to improve the way we settle our differences
8. Overall, our arguments are brief and quickly forgotten.

PART 7: (PERSONAL WELLBEING)

Below is a list of statements. Please look at each in turn, and indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement by writing the number in the space provided using the following scale.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

1. I tend to be influenced by people with strong opinions
2. In general, I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I live
3. I think it is important to have new experiences that challenge how you think about yourself and the world
4. Maintaining close relationships has been difficult and frustrating for me.
5. I live life one day at a time and don’t really think about the future
209

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
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<td>7.</td>
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<td>8.</td>
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<td>9.</td>
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<td>10.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.</td>
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<td>13.</td>
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<td>14.</td>
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<tr>
<td>15.</td>
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<td>16.</td>
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<tr>
<td>17.</td>
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<tr>
<td>18.</td>
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</table>

PART 8: (SELF PERCEPTION)

For each of the statements below, please indicate the degree to which they represent a description of yourself by writing the number in the space provided using the following scale.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not true of me</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>Very true of me</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
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<td>3.</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. It is sometimes hard for me to go on with my work if I am not encouraged.
2. I sometimes feel resentful when I don't get my way.
3. On a few occasions, I have given up doing something because I thought too little of my ability.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not true of me</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>Very true of me</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4. There have been times when I felt like rebelling against people in authority even though I knew they were right.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5. No matter who I'm talking to, I'm always a good listener.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. There have been occasions when I took advantage of someone.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. I'm always willing to admit it when I make a mistake.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. I sometimes try to get even rather than forgive and forget.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I am always courteous, even to people who are disagreeable.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10. I have never been irked when people expressed ideas very different from my own.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. There have been times when I was quite jealous of the good fortune of others.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I am sometimes irritated by people who ask favours of me.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. I have never deliberately said something that hurt someone’s feelings.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MANY THANKS FOR YOU TIME AND PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY.

PLEASE ENSURE THAT ALL QUESTIONS HAVE BEEN ANSWERED BEFORE PLACING QUESTIONNAIRE IN THE PREPAID ENVELOPE AND POSTING IT.

FOR SWINBURNE STUDENTS, PLEASE PLACE YOUR ENVELOPE IN THE ALLOCATED BOX ON 7TH FLOOR OF THE BA BUILDING.
Appendix B: Copy of Ethics Clearance
To: Dr Bruce Findlay/Ms Karen Johnson, FLSS

Dear Bruce and Karen

SUHREC Project 0607/114 Attitudes towards romantic relationships of couples with children Dr B Findlay FLSS Ms Karen Johnston Approved
Duration: 01/03/2007 To 31/12/2009

I refer to your response (emailed 13 February 2007 with revised consent information statement attached) to the ethical review of the above project undertaken on behalf of Swinburne's Human Research Ethics Committee (SUHREC) by a SUHREC Subcommittee. The response was put to a delegate of the Subcommittee concerned (SHESC1) for consideration and, I am pleased to advise, approved.

The standard conditions for on-going ethics clearance are as follows.

- All human research activity undertaken under Swinburne auspices must conform to Swinburne and external regulatory standards, including the current National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans and with respect to secure data use, retention and disposal.

- The named Swinburne Chief Investigator/Supervisor remains responsible for any personnel appointed to or associated with the project being made aware of ethics clearance conditions, including research and consent procedures or instruments approved. Any change in chief investigator/supervisor requires timely notification and SUHREC endorsement.

- The above project has been approved as submitted for ethical review by or on behalf of SUHREC. Amendments to approved procedures or instruments ordinarily require prior ethical appraisal/clearance. SUHREC must be notified immediately or as soon as possible thereafter of (a) any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants and any redress measures; (b) proposed changes in protocols; and (c) unforeseen events which might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.

- At a minimum, an annual report on the progress of the project is required as well as at the conclusion (or abandonment) of the project.

- A duly authorised external or internal audit of the project may be undertaken at any time.

Please contact me if you have any queries about on-going ethics clearance. The SUHREC project number should be quoted in communication.

Best wishes for the project.

Yours sincerely

Keith Wilkins
Secretary, SHESC1