

ATTACHMENT THEORY AND REASONS NOT TO MARRY AMONG EMERGING ADULTS

By

ANGELA MAYO PALOMER

A Thesis Submitted to the Honors College

In Partial Fulfillment of the Bachelor's Degree with Honors in

Family Studies and Human Development

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

MAY 2012

Approved by:



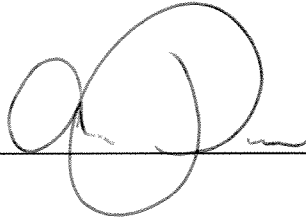
Dr. Melissa Curran

Department of Family Studies and Human Development

STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

This thesis has been submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for a degree at The University of Arizona and is deposited in the University Library to be made available to borrowers under rules of the Library.

Signed: _____

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a horizontal line at the end, positioned over the signature line.

Abstract

Using attachment theory, I examined reasons for not marrying, including doubts about the self and doubts about the partner, among emerging adults (N = 89; age range 18-25). To explain these reasons for not marrying, I used attachment theory to examine attachment dimensions: avoidance (positive view of self; negative view of others) and anxiety (negative view of self; positive view of others). Also from attachment theory, I examined reports of parental divorce, given its associations with relational struggles. I hypothesized that individuals: 1) higher on anxiety will have more reasons not to marry based on doubts about *self*, whereas individuals higher on avoidance will have more reasons not to marry based on doubts about their *partner* and; 2) experiencing parental divorce will have more overall reasons not to marry than individuals not reporting parental divorce. Using proc mixed and a t-test to examine each hypothesis respectively, I found that neither hypothesis was supported. I conclude that attachment dimensions during emerging adulthood are not associated with marital behaviors at this life stage. Further, parental divorce is not associated with reasons not to marry, likely given unequal sample sizes ($n = 20$ reported parental divorce; $n = 69$ reported no parental divorce).

Attachment Theory and the Delay in Marriage Among Emerging Adults

Introduction

Emerging Adulthood

Emerging adulthood is a phase of life that marks the transition between adolescence and adulthood. Spanning the ages of 18-25, this life stage is characterized by a period of identity exploration in various dimensions including completing educational goals, settling into a career, and most notably relationships (Carroll et al., 2007). Relationship formation is undoubtedly one of the primary goals of emerging adulthood. As one transitions out of adolescence, the emerging adult begins to take on the task of seeking to build an intimate relationship as predicted by Erikson's model of psychosocial development. Failure to commit to a relationship results in what Erikson termed isolation (Goldhaber, 2000). However, many emerging adults today appear to be experimenting with a series of relationships rather than settle with a single partner. Many of these relationships also involve cohabitation (Cherlin, 2010). This pattern of engaging in multiple relationships is unique compared to previous generations (Edin & Kefalas, 2005; Sassler, 2010). Could engaging in several premarital relationships affect emerging adults' ability to form attachments to a single partner and commit to a marital bond? If so, this may help explain why marriage rates among emerging adults have steadily dropped since the 1950s (Carroll et al., 2007; Kreider, Fields, & U.S. Census Bureau, 2002).

Delay in Marriage

The typical age of first marriage today is much higher today than in previous generations. In the 1940s-1950s, typical age of first marriage was 23 for men and 20 for women. In addition, the vast majority of young men and women (around 90%) were married at around these ages

(Cherlin, 2004). As of 2010, typical ages of first marriage have risen to 28.2 for men and 26.1 for women (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010b).

A closer look at U.S. Census Bureau statistics from within the last 10 years also reveals that a growing percentage of American young adults are delaying marriage; yet surprisingly, the majority of unmarried young adults eventually do marry around age 30. Pop psychology has dubbed this phenomenon “the age 30 deadline” (Henig, 2010). Using U.S. Census data from 2000, 2005, and 2010, the following trends are found: In 2000, 78.2% of 20-24 year-olds were listed as having never been married. For 25-29 year-olds in that year, that percentage fell to 45.2%. By age 30-34, only 26% were listed as never married. 2005 and 2009 show similar statistics (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). In 2005, 80.5% of 20-24 year-olds were listed as having never been married. Among 25-29 year-olds in that year, 48.4% were listed as never married. That percentage fell to 27.9% for 30-34 year-olds (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). In 2009, 84% of 20-24 year-olds were listed as having never been married. That percentage fell to 55.1% for 25-29 year-olds and 31.8% for 30-34 year-olds (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010a).

As shown by the statistics, the percentage of unmarried emerging adults (those in the age 20-24 range) has steadily risen even within the last 10 years. But why are more emerging adults choosing not to marry? What exactly contributes to delay in marital commitment within this population?

There is plenty of research that suggests completing educational goals greatly contributes to marital delay (Carroll et al., 2007; Carroll et al., 2009; Cherlin, 2004; Krieder et al., 2002; Sassler, 2004; U.S. White House Council on Women and Girls, 2011). Because most men and women believe that being economically stable is a prerequisite for marriage, many choose

to defer marriage until they complete the education and training necessary to put them in careers that will give them the economic stability they desire. The research argues that although both men and women delay marriage to complete educational and career goals, they are most likely to marry around age 30 when these goals are completed (Cherlin, 2004; Krieder et al., 2002). If we assume this assertion is true, then it sheds some insight into the U.S. Census statistics on young adults delaying marriage until age 30. The research also argues that both men and women are likely to marry others who have obtained the same level of education as they did (Cherlin, 2010). In addition, the higher one's level of education is, the more likely it is for that person to get married (Cherlin, 2010; Krieder et al., 2002). However, completing educational goals cannot entirely explain why emerging adults are delaying marriage. After all, it is perfectly possible for one to be married while obtaining a college degree. And although economic stability before marriage is desirable, it is not legally mandated. What other reasons may account for marital delay?

In his 2004 article *The Deinstitutionalization of Marriage*, Cherlin describes how the wider acceptance of cohabitation and divorce in today's society may have contributed to the delay in marriage among individuals. As previously noted, most emerging adults engage in a series of relationships, many of which involve cohabitation. Rates of cohabitation are on the rise and not all these couples who choose to live together necessarily get married. In addition, a "trial marriage" is rarely cited as a reason when couples were asked why they decided to move in together (Cherlin, 2004; Cherlin, 2010; Krieder et al., 2002; Kreider, Elliott, & U.S. Census Bureau, 2007; Sassler, 2010). In addition, cohabiting couples are also beginning to receive the same legal rights and protections enjoyed by married couples, perhaps giving young adults less

legal incentive to get married (Cherlin, 2004). In addition, it is possible that more relaxed divorce laws have eroded the importance of marriage in society, thus making it less of a priority for emerging adults (Cherlin, 2004). Cherlin goes on to suggest that the deinstitutionalization of marriage has broken down traditional marital roles. Marriage is no longer seen as a prerequisite for having and raising children. Men and women also have more egalitarian roles in the home due to women's participation increased participation in the workforce. Have these factors become associated with the devaluation of marriage in society, and consequently, the decline in marriage rates among emerging adults? On the contrary, marriage still appears to be highly valued today despite low marriage rates (Cherlin, 2004; Edin & Kefalas, 2005; Sassler, 2010).

Contemporary Views on Marriage

Today, marriage appears to be the supreme and most valued type of union, far above cohabitation or dating without living together (Edin & Kefalas, 2005; Sassler, 2010). This ideal of marriage still prevails despite the fact that marriage is no longer seen as a marker of adulthood, a requirement for childbearing and child rearing, or even living with a partner. So why is there such a significant disconnect between societal beliefs about marriage and society's marital behavioral trends?

Many young adults feel that an extended period of singleness is necessary for marriage readiness (Carroll et al., 2009, Edin & Kefalas, 2005). Most spend this time focused on identity formation, completing their education, and settling into their careers. Because young adults are also known to experiment with relationships, it is likely that they also spend this period of singleness dating multiple partners before settling down with their eventual spouse. Not surprisingly, one third of young adults feel ambivalent towards marriage and most feel

unprepared for it (Carroll et al., 2007). Among insecurely attached individuals in particular, it is likely that the various relationships they experience as young adults during this time reaffirm negative internal working models of either self or others that maintain their insecure attachment style. Bolstering negative beliefs about relationships among the insecurely attached may cause them to further avoid marriage. As for secure young adults who enter this period of serial dating with positive internal working models of both self and others, they may be less affected by negative dating experiences than the insecurely attached individuals. By maintaining their overall positive beliefs about relationships, they may have fewer reasons to avoid marriage than the insecurely attached.

Research also shows that another reason young women, low-income women with children in particular, delay marriage is because they desire a long courtship period to see if their relationship is strong enough for marriage (Edin & Kefalas, 2005). If previous relationships have indeed raised their attachment insecurity, this may explain why young adults feel that a long courtship is necessary to build a secure attachment relationship that will help solidify the marital bond.

Parental divorce and fear of divorcing your own partner may still affect young adults' attachment security and their desire to enter into marital unions. Despite the fact that divorce is now widely accepted, fear of divorce often prevents young women from marrying prematurely (Edin & Kefalas, 2005). Most young women claim that marriage is something they would like to enter into only once, and that marrying and quickly divorcing after greatly undermines the sanctity of marriage.

Attachment Theory

Overview of Attachment Theory

Although attachments are formed early in life with primary caregivers serving as the secure base, this role is shifted onto romantic partners upon reaching adulthood (Bretherton & Munholland 1999; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2006). Unlike childhood attachment bonds, adult attachments involve a sexual dimension and reciprocal rather than asymmetrical relationships (Bretherton & Munholland, 1999). Both partners must contribute equally to the relationship, otherwise a problematic power imbalance would arise. Individuals each enter a relationship with their own attachment histories, and their attachment style will impact their relationship with their partner. Understanding individual differences in attachment functioning can explain variance in relationship quality across couples.

The key components of attachment theory are internal working models and one's personal configuration of the attachment dimensions anxiety and avoidance. Internal working models are mental models of how one sees themselves and others; these models of self and others are then used to navigate and make predictions about relationships (Bretherton & Munholland, 1999). Internal working models of self serve as guidelines on how one sees themselves as acceptable or unacceptable to their attachment figures. On the other hand, internal working models of others allow one to gauge their perception of how responsive and supportive their attachment figures are (Bretherton & Munholland, 1999). Having positive models of both self and others results in having a secure attachment style. However, having either a negative model of self or a negative model of others results in an insecure attachment style (Bretherton & Munholland, 1999; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2006). Specifically, having a

negative model of self while having a positive model of others leaves one with an anxious attachment style; having a positive model of self while having a negative model of others leads to having an avoidant attachment style (Bretherton & Munholland, 1999).

Attachment is also measured by one's personal configuration of the attachment dimensions of anxiety and avoidance. While having low levels of both anxiety and avoidance is associated with having a secure attachment style, having high levels of either is associated with attachment insecurity. The dimension of anxiety refers to a fear of perceived rejection, excessive need of approval from others, and distress when one's partner is unavailable or unresponsive. Having a high anxiety level is also associated with assurance seeking and emotional reactivity (Wei, Russell, Mallinckrodt, & Vogel, 2007). Individuals with a high level of anxiety are usually clingy towards their partner and fear any sign of abandonment. They are likely to fall under the category of anxiously attached. The dimension of avoidance is associated with a fear of dependence and intimacy, a high level of self-reliance and reluctance towards self-disclosure with one's partner. Having a high avoidance level is also associated with emotional cutoff (Wei et al., 2007). These individuals are unlikely to use their partners as a secure base and are more likely to distance themselves rather than turn to their partner for support and comfort. Having a high level of avoidance is associated with having an avoidant attachment style.

At this point, it is important to note that the attachment dimensions of anxiety and avoidance that are used to classify attachment styles run along a continuum as opposed to being two mutually exclusive, dichotomous groups (Bretherton & Munholland, 1999; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2006; Wei et al., 2007). Although two individuals may be classified as avoidantly attached, it is possible one of them may have a higher level of avoidance than the other.

Likewise, it is possible for an individual to have high dimensions of both attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance. These individuals typically show characteristics of both types of insecure attachment styles and have greater difficulty with interpersonal relationships (Wei et al., 2007).

Attachment Styles

Securely attached individuals have positive models of both self and others (Bretherton & Munholland, 1999) and measure low on both dimensions of anxiety and avoidance (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2006). Having a secure attachment style also increases the likelihood of using security-based strategies. Security-based strategies help one achieve the goal of seeking comfort and support from a romantic partner to help regulate emotional affect (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2006). Such strategies encourage partners to act as attachment figures for each other while reaffirming each other's worthiness of love and commitment to the relationship. Not surprisingly, securely attached individuals can more easily identify events that strengthened their commitment to the relationship (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2006). The relationships of secure individuals are marked by higher levels of trust and commitment. In addition, while they are likely to sense partner's worries and be sensitive to their needs, they also recognize when their help is not needed (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2006). This keeps secure individuals from becoming clingy and over-involved like anxiously attached individuals.

Individuals with an anxious attachment style have a negative model of self and positive model of others (Bretherton & Munholland, 1999); they also have high levels of anxiety and low levels of avoidance (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2006). Because they face high uncertainty about being loved and being worthy of love, they are likely to be intrusive and overly dependent on their partner as a source of support. Anxiously attached individuals typically employ hyperactivating

strategies that cause them to become clingy and controlling because they perceive their attachment figure as unavailable (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2006). These individuals are more likely to remember events where their partners decreased their level of commitment to the relationship (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2006). When such events occur, they typically employ hyperactivating strategies to respond to their increased anxiety levels. Unfortunately, such behaviors may further push their partner away and cause them to further decrease their commitment levels. Because being clingy and dependent usually results in having poor boundaries, they are also more likely to become over-involved with their partner's problems (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2006). This makes them prone to codependent caregiving, even at the expense of their own personal well-being.

Avoidantly attached individuals have a positive model of self and a negative model of others (Bretherton & Munholland, 1999); they also have low levels of anxiety and high levels of avoidance (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2006). Avoidant individuals are reluctant to see their partner as a secure base and a safe haven of support. Thus, they dislike opening up to others and are apt to show disdain for others' neediness and weakness (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2006). They are also more likely to remember events where their commitment levels toward a relationship decreased (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2006). Placing emphasis on such events allows them to further detach themselves from a relationship, thus giving them less incentive to repair the relationship and seek comfort from their partner. Avoidant individuals are prone to using deactivating strategies geared towards denying attachment needs and avoiding closeness and dependence. By doing this, they distance themselves from others to avoid the stresses of dealing with an unavailable attachment figure (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2006).

It is interesting to note that regardless of personal attachment style, most people prefer to have securely attached relationship partners (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2006). Having a secure attachment style is associated with higher levels of marital satisfaction, intimacy, and cohesion. Securely attached individuals are also less prone to marital ambivalence and have a lower likelihood of divorce (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2006). In general, secure attachment is associated with more positive relationship functioning. It would also make sense to assume that securely attached individuals would have fewer reasons to avoid marriage than their insecurely attached counterparts. On the other hand, insecure attachment is associated with a host of negative relationship outcomes. For example, insecurely attached individuals are more likely to score higher on measures of negative emotional states including anxiety, depression, psychological distress, interpersonal distress, and loneliness (Wei et al., 2007). They also tend to have negative, biased beliefs and expectations about their romantic partner and their relationship that inhibit support-seeking and commitment. At the same time, they are also less likely to provide support than secure partners, thus further reducing the likelihood of having a high-quality, long-term relationship (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2006). These poor relationship outcomes may discourage insecurely attached individuals from entering into marital unions.

Attachment and Parental Divorce

Research also shows a strong association between young adults growing up with divorced parents and having troubled romantic relationships. Adolescents and young adults whose parents have divorced are more likely to have unrealistic expectations of romantic relationships and tend to be insecure with romantic partners. They also tend to have trouble maintaining relationships. These characteristics are indicative of being insecurely attached. But

how can growing up with divorced parents contribute to an insecure attachment style? First, parental divorce may lead to continued conflict between the parents, making them more likely to have poor cooperative parenting skills. Because quality of the interactions between divorced parents and their children may then be impaired, these experiences are more likely to be colored by negative affect resulting in poor psychosocial outcomes for the children (Luthar, 1999; McVoyd, 1989). Thus, children of divorced parents are more likely to describe difficult and lonely childhoods and report not feeling close to their parents (Amato, 2010; Van Boven, 2011). Neither trait is uncommon for insecurely attached individuals. In addition, growing up in a household without continuously married parents is also a risk factor for divorce. Not surprisingly, adult children of divorced parents are more likely to fear becoming divorced themselves and repeat their parents' relationship behaviors. (Amato, 2010; Van Boven, 2011). As briefly mentioned at the beginning of this paper, fear of divorce is also cited as one reason emerging adults avoid marriage.

Why Attachment Theory

I chose to explore the reasons behind marital delay from an attachment perspective because attachment is an under-researched area of marital formation. Although researchers have pointed out that romantic love and relationships may take many different forms depending on the attachment histories of the members of the couple (Feeney & Noller, 1996), I have seen no research that explains how one's attachment style may influence an individual's reasons on whether or not they should commit to a marital union. It has been suggested that an anxious attachment style is not associated with a greater likelihood to commit to a romantic relationship with a partner, while an avoidant attachment style is associated with a decreased likelihood of

commitment (Schindler, Fagundes, & Murdock, 2010). I predict that this orientation towards romantic commitment also extends to one's attitude toward entering into a romantic union. Thus, attachment theory should be applicable, especially if it is discovered that insecure attachment is the culprit behind the trends in marital delay.

Although attachment theory does note that attachment styles do run on a continuum, the existence of *two* distinct attachment dimensions (*anxious* and *avoidant*) serves as a convenient classification system. This makes attachment theory an easy-to-understand concept that can explain the differences in people's attitudes towards marital commitment.

Attachment theory is also an excellent conceptual model to use when examining marital formation. Because the attachment dimensions of anxiety and avoidance can be measured on a continuous scale, it is possible to use attachment theory to measure one's desire for marriage via psychometric tests (Wei et al., 2007; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2006). This makes attachment theory a good candidate for objective research.

Finally, the concept of internal working models also lays out specific reasons for delaying marriage. Positive models of self and others, the hallmark of secure attachment, would lead to few or no reasons to delay marriage (Bretherton & Munholland, 1999). However, a positive model of self and a negative model of others (i.e., being avoidantly attached) should be linked with a delay in marriage because this attachment dimension is characterized by having doubts about one's partner. Having a negative model of self and a positive model of others (i.e., being anxiously attached) should be linked with a delaying marriage because anxiously attached individuals are likely to have doubts about themselves as a relationship partner (Bretherton & Munholland, 1999).

Using attachment theory to guide my analysis of the data, I make the following predictions:

H1a) For individuals with an insecure attachment style, the anxiously attached will be more likely to have more reasons not to marry given doubts about themselves in the relationship.

H1b) On the other hand, the avoidantly attached are likely to have more reasons not to marry given doubts about their partner.

H2) I predict that individuals who reported having their parents divorce while they were children are more likely to have an insecure attachment style. I make these assertions because it has been posited that internal working models are typically passed from generation to generation, thus a person's attachment style is likely to reflect their parents' own attachment styles (Bretherton & Munholland, 1999). In addition, divorce is highly correlated with having an insecure attachment style (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2006), making this prediction highly plausible.

Methods

Participants

The sample used in this study was taken from a larger data set collected in Fall 2008 and Fall 2009. Participants were recruited through Family Studies and Human Development and Communications classes from a university in the southwest United States. Students themselves could either participate in the study or recruit friends and family who met the study's eligibility criteria by passing along fliers. To participate in the study, individuals had to be 18 years of age or older and in a coupled, romantic relationship for at least six weeks. Both members of the couple had to be willing to complete the survey and use their own email address to register for the survey. Although students who either completed the survey themselves or recruited

participants were offered extra credit as compensation, participation in the study was completely voluntary and students were given the option of doing a short written assignment as alternative means of earning extra credit. All survey respondents were informed of the purposes and procedures involved in the research project, and consent was obtained in accordance with the university's Committee on Human Subjects stipulations.

My final sample size was narrowed down to 89 unmarried individuals in heterosexual relationships. All participants were of the emerging adult age range, from 18-25 years old. Mean age of participants was 20.91 years. Of these 89 final individuals, 52.8% ($n = 47$) were female, and 47.2% ($n = 42$) were male. In terms of ethnicity, 67.4% ($n = 60$) reported being Caucasian or White, 16.9% ($n = 15$) reported being Hispanic or Latin American, 10.1% ($n = 9$) reported being of mixed race/ethnicity, 2.2% ($n = 2$) reported Asian or Pacific Islander, 2.2% ($n = 2$) reported American Indian or Alaska Native, and 1.1% ($n = 1$) reported African-American or Black. Approximately 89.9% ($n = 80$) were currently students, 9% ($n = 8$) claimed they were not students, and 1.1% ($n = 1$) of participants did not specify. In terms of education, the median was completion of some college or an Associate's degree 77.5% ($n = 69$), with others responding that they had completed high school, 14.6% ($n = 13$), earned a Bachelor's degree, 6.7% ($n = 6$), or completed some graduate school (1.1%, $n = 1$).

Length of relationship ranged from 2 months to 12 years and 6 months, with a mean of 2 years and 3 months. 79.8% ($n = 71$) of participants reported to be cohabiting with their partners while 20.2% ($n = 18$) claimed to be living separately. Of the cohabiting individuals, the average length of time they lived together was 11.12 months, or roughly less than one year. Length of cohabitation ranged from 3 months to 3 years and 10 months. 47.2% ($n = 42$) of participants

reported that their parents were continuously married while they were growing up. 15.7% ($n = 14$) reported their parents were divorced and remained single, 12.4% ($n = 11$) claimed their parents were divorced and remarried, 11.2% ($n = 10$) claimed their parents lived together or cohabited, and 13.5% ($n = 12$) did not specify their parents' marital status while they were growing up. Finally, 68.5% ($n = 61$) of participants reported to be seriously dating, 25.8% ($n = 23$) reported to be in a lifelong commitment, 2.2% ($n = 2$) reported to be casually dating, and 3.4% ($n = 3$) reported to be in a relationship type not specified in our survey.

Procedure

Participants were able to register for the study and access the online survey after reading information contained in fliers regarding the study. In addition to a baseline survey, participants also completed a daily diary. Because data from the daily diary were not pertinent to attachment, reasons not to marry, or parents' marital status, only data from the baseline survey are reported here. Participants were asked to complete all portions of the survey separately from their partner in order to avoid obtaining biased results. To ensure the identities of participants remained confidential, precautionary measures were taken during the data collection process and all identifying information was removed.

Measures

Reasons not to marry the current partner.

In order to assess the variable of reasons not to marry one's current partner, participants were asked to answer questions regarding 13 commonly reported reasons explaining why people avoid marriage (Edin & Kefalas, 2005; Gibson-Davis, Edin, & McLanahan, 2005). For example, one of these studies found that reasons not to marry could be classified into three

major categories of reasons (i.e., financial concerns, relationship quality, fear of divorce; Gibson-Davis et al., 2005).

Several items from our scale were further specific to reasons due to doubts about self versus doubts about one's partner (e.g., doubts about self as spouse; doubts about partner as spouse). Participants were instructed to rate each reason on a scale of 1 to 7 (1 = *not at all a reason for me*, 7 = *very true for me*) to measure how well they identified with each reason. Individuals were also given the option to include any other reasons they may have for not marrying, but for the purposes of this analysis, write-in answers were not examined.

I created two scales for the purpose of my thesis: Reasons not to marry specific to the *self*, as well as reasons not to marry specific to the *partner*. Of the thirteen items on the original questionnaire, I chose three items specific to doubts about self to measure the scale of *self*. These items include: 1) doubts about self as spouse; 2) doubts about self as parent; and 3) own capability of being an economic provider. The alpha for this scale of reasons not to marry specific to the *self* was 0.69. I also chose three items out of the original thirteen questions that were specific to doubts about one's partner for the scale of *partner*. These items include: 1) doubts about partner as spouse; 2) doubts about partner as parent; and 3) partner capability of being an economic provider. The alpha for this scale of reasons not to marry specific to the *partner* was low, scoring only 0.61. The other seven questions in the questionnaire were not used for this analysis because they were not specific to either *self* or *partner* as reasons for not marrying.

Attachment dimensions.

Attachment dimensions of *anxiety* and *avoidance* were measured using 12 items.

Participants responded to each item using a scale of 1 to 7 (1 = *disagree strongly*, 7 = *agree strongly*) to describe whether or not the item was representative of their experiences in romantic relationships (shortened version of ECR; Wei et al., 2007). Following instructions by Wei et al. (2007), the items were summed into two separate factors indicating attachment dimensions: *Anxiety* (e.g., “I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by my partner”) and *avoidance* (e.g., “I want to get close to my partner, but I keep pulling back”). After checking for reliability, the scale for *anxiety* was narrowed down to 5 items, with an alpha of 0.72. For this scale, we dropped one item pertaining specifically to the feeling of being abandoned (i.e., “I do not often worry about being abandoned”). Although this item theoretically would measure attachment anxiety, including it in the scale lowered the alpha score to nonsignificant levels so it was not included in the analyses. After checking again for reliability, the scale for *avoidance* retained the remaining 6 of 12 items; alpha here was 0.78. See Table 2 for a breakdown of questionnaire items by attachment dimension.

Parents’ Divorce

Parental divorce was measured through by taking categorical frequency data. If the participants’ parents were divorced, this was indicated with a 1 ($n = 20$). If participants’ parents were not divorced, this was indicated with a 0 ($n = 69$).

Plan of Analysis

Statistical analysis was then conducted using SPSS and SAS software. Results from the SAS analysis are reported in this paper. The data was run through a proc mixed analysis, using a repeated measures analysis with a compound symmetry structure. I chose a mixed procedure because the data came from nonindependent (interdependent) partners in coupled

relationships, rather than from independent, single, non-coupled individuals. This means that their scores on all the study variables, and especially on the dependent variable of reasons not to marry, should be more related to one another than what would be expected by chance, or if individuals were not in coupled relationships with one another. In addition, both attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance were entered at the same time as independent variables into each analysis. In total, I analyzed the results from two separate models: (1) Reasons not to marry specific to the *self* as the dependent variable, with attachment anxiety and avoidance as independent variables, and (2) Reasons not to marry specific to the *partner* as the dependent variable, with attachment anxiety and avoidance as independent variables.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics for all study constructs can be found in Table 3. Correlations for all study variables can be found in Table 4. These tables can be found after the References section.

Mixed models

Here, I report the results of my two hypotheses. Results for H1a and H1b are in Table 5, which can be found after the References section. I report the results of H2 in the text below.

H1a) For individuals with an insecure attachment style, the anxiously attached will be more likely to have more reasons not to marry given doubts about themselves in the relationship.

Here, I find that as predicted, attachment anxiety is significant. However, contrary to my predictions, attachment anxiety is negative ($b = -0.20$) rather than positive. Thus, Hypothesis 1a is not supported by the data.

H1b) On the other hand, the avoidantly attached are likely to have more reasons not to marry

given doubts about their partner.

Here, I find that as predicted, attachment avoidance is significant. However, contrary to my predictions, attachment avoidance is negative ($b = -0.17$) rather than positive. Thus, Hypothesis 1b is not supported by the data.

Taken together, these analyses show that individuals who score higher on attachment anxiety have significantly fewer reasons not to marry the partner given doubts about themselves. Further, individuals who score higher on attachment avoidance have significantly fewer reasons not to marry the partner given doubts about the partner. Thus, neither component of Hypothesis 1 is supported.

H2) *I predict that individuals who reported having their parents divorce while they were children are more likely to have an insecure attachment style.*

To test this hypothesis, I performed an independent samples t-test. Here, I specified parental divorce as the independent variable, with values of 0 and 1 (0 = *no parental divorce*, 1 = *yes parental divorce*). I then specified attachment anxiety as the first dependent variable, and then attachment avoidance as the second dependent variable.

For the first test, I set parental divorce as my independent variable and attachment anxiety as my dependent variable. The results of this analysis were nonsignificant: $t = -1.02$ (87), $p = .31$. For the second test, I set parental divorce as my independent variable and attachment avoidance as my dependent variable. The result of this analysis was also nonsignificant: $t = 0.03$ (87), $p = .98$. Thus, H2 was not supported.

Discussion

Ultimately, the results of this study did not yield any support for any of my hypotheses.

Emerging adults were found to have fewer not reasons to marry their partner based on doubts about partner. In addition, they were also found to have fewer reasons not to marry their partner based on doubts about themselves. These two findings contradict the predictions of attachment theory, which posits that individuals higher on either attachment or avoidance will have more reasons to avoid marrying their partner.

I also found no support for my second hypothesis. There was no significant relationship between parental divorce and an individual's reasons for avoiding or delaying marriage.

The results differed greatly from theoretical explanations. Perhaps the findings may be specific to *emerging adults*, a group of individuals whose life stage is characterized by transitions and identity exploration (Henig, 2010). If the sample had included respondents from other various life stages, such as adults beyond the stage of emerging adulthood (e.g., middle or mature adults), results may have been more reflective of the expectations of attachment theory.

Because the percentage of respondents whose parents were divorced while they were growing up was unequal (and much smaller) to the percentage of respondents whose parents did not divorce, the results for Hypothesis 2 may have been nonsignificant given a lack of statistical power. Results may have been different, that is significant, if both groups were represented by an equal sample size.

Perhaps emerging adults may delay marriage for reasons other than attachment. Literature cites several other factors that contribute to marital delay including pursuing academic and career goals (Carroll et al., 2007; Carroll et al., 2009; Cherlin, 2004; Cherlin, 2010). Young adults with high levels of educational attainment are the most likely to have high marital expectations and are most likely to eventually marry (Cherlin, 2010; Krieder et al., 2002; Sassler,

2010; U.S. White House Council on Women and Girls, 2011).

It is also important to note that attitudes and reasons not to marry do not necessarily reflect marital behavior. For example, in one study of lower income women with children, many of the women expressed a strong desire for marriage. In fact, findings from this study show that women from both the poor and middle classes still highly value marriage and consider it the most superior type of relationship. Many of these women still hope to marry someday, but for various reasons, choose not to do so (e.g., fear of divorce, financial concerns, concerns about partner infidelity; Edin & Kefalas, 2005). Although respondents indicated fewer attachment-based reasons for avoiding marriage than theoretically expected, this may not actually be representative of marital trends found among emerging adults.

Study Strengths

Strengths of this study include a focus on the target population, specifically emerging adults. Only respondents within the 18-25 age range were included in the final sample. All participants were unmarried to prevent married individuals from providing biased responses that would skew the results. I used a proc mixed model in SAS to analyze the data in order to address potential issues of interdependence given that these participants were in coupled relationships. This study was grounded in attachment theory, which I used to formulate my hypotheses and to design my analyses (*self* versus *partner* reasons for not marrying). I also focused on the literature of the age group (emerging adulthood). While looking through the literature, I found other explanations for attitudes toward marriage among emerging adults that were not related to attachment (e.g., achieving educational and career goals). However, for the purposes of this study, I focused in particular on attachment and how it related to views on

marriage among this population.

Study Limitations

However, this study is not without its limitations. The vast majority of participants (N = 89.89%) were students. Results may have been different if these participants had already completed their studies or were not in school, putting them at a different stage of their life. However, studies on 18-24 year old youth who do not go on to college show that many of these emerging adults struggle financially and have difficulty finding work beyond part-time, dead end positions. These youth are spending longer periods of time unemployed and are taking longer to settle into stable careers compared to a decade ago (American Youth Policy Forum, 2001). Considering the fact that financial concerns and a desire to achieve educational and career goals have been cited as a factor in marital delay among this age group, other untested variables may also be at play here (Edin & Kefalas, 2005).

The sample size, though not small (N = 89) could have been larger. This study also used a cross-sectional design in which data was collected over a specific period of time via an online survey. Future research could consider a qualitative approach; for example, having participants take part in a focus group that would allow them to provide their own reasons for not marrying or even provide explanations for why they responded to the survey questions items in the manner that they did. This would help expand on the on the data they provided in the online survey. Their explanations may also shed further light on why the responses they provided contradict what theory would predict. Future studies on this topic would also benefit from using longitudinal designs that would measure whether or not marital attitudes change as one progresses through emerging adulthood. A study by Willoughby (2010) found that adolescents

placed a higher value on marriage as they transitioned into young adulthood. Utilizing a longitudinal design would show whether or not emerging adults experience similar transitions as they age.

Conclusions

From this study, I conclude that one's attachment style during emerging adulthood is not associated with their marital behaviors at this particular life stage. Individuals who score higher on either attachment anxiety or attachment avoidance are not more likely to cite reasons for avoiding marriage than individuals who do not score highly on either attachment dimension. Thus, the delay in marriage among this age group is not indicative of a rise in the number of either avoidantly or anxiously attached individuals. Interest groups concerned about the lowering rates of marriage should look to other factors that may influence one's decision to avoid or delay marriage. In addition, parental divorce does not seem to be associated with reasons not to marry among emerging adults. Perhaps the greater contemporary acceptance of divorce as compare to previous generations may have made this cohort of emerging adults less likely to cite it as a reason for delaying marriage.

References

- Amato, P. R. (2010). Research on divorce: Continuing trends and new developments. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 72*(3), 650-666. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2010.00723.x
- American Youth Policy Forum. (2001). The forgotten half revisited: American youth and families, 1988 - 2008. Retrieved from <http://www.aypf.org/pressreleases/pr18.htm>
- Bretherton, I. & Munholland, K. A. (1999). Internal working models in attachment relationships: A construct revisited. In J. Cassidy & P. R. Shaver (Eds.), *Handbook of attachment: Theory, research, and clinical applications*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Carroll, J., Willoughby, B., Badger, S., Nelson, L., McNamara, B. C., & Madsen, S. (2007). So close, yet so far away: Marital horizons in emerging adulthood. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 22*(3), 219-247.
- Carroll, J. S., Badger, S., Nelson, L. J., Willoughby, B. J., Madsen, S. D., & McNamara, B. C. (2009). Ready or not? Criteria for marriage readiness among emerging adults. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 24*(3), 349-375.
- Cherlin, A. J. (2004). The deinstitutionalization of American marriage. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 66*(4), 848-861.
- Cherlin, A. J. (2010). Demographic trends in the United States: A review of research in the 2000s. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 72*(3), 403-419.
- Edin, K., & Kefalas, M. (2005). *Promises I can keep: Why poor women put motherhood before marriage*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Feeney, J., & Noller, P. (1996). *Adult attachment*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Gibson-Davis, C. M., Edin, K., & McLanahan, S. S. (2005). High hopes and even higher

- expectations: The retreat from marriage among low-income couples. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 67, 1301–1312.
- Goldhaber, D. E. (2000). *Theories of human development: Integrative perspectives*. Boston, MA: McGraw Hill.
- Henig, R. M. (2010, August 22). What is it about 20-somethings: The post-adolescent, pre-adult, not-quite-decided life stage. *The New York Times Magazine*, 30-37, 46-48. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/22/magazine/22Adulthood-t.html?pagewanted=all>
- Kreider, R. M., Fields, J. M., & U.S. Census Bureau. (2002). *Number, timing, and duration of marriages and divorces, 1996*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, Economics and Statistics Administration, U.S. Census Bureau.
- Kreider, R. M., Elliott D. B., & U.S. Census Bureau. (2007). *America's families and living arrangements: 2007*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, Economics and Statistics Administration, U.S. Census Bureau.
- Luthar, S. S. (1999). *Poverty and children's adjustment*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- McLoyd, V. C. (1989). Socialization and development in a changing economy: The effects of paternal job and income loss on children. *American Psychologist*, 44, 293-302.
- Sassler, S. (2004). The process of entering into cohabiting unions. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 66(2), 491-505.
- Sassler, S. (2010). Partnering across the life course: Sex, relationships, and mate selection. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72(3), 557-575.
- Schindler, I., Fagundes, C. P., & Murdock, K. W. (2010). Predictors of romantic relationship

formation: Attachment style, prior relationships, and dating goals. *Personal Relationships*, 17(1), 97-105.

Shaver, P. R., Mikulincer, M. (2006) Attachment Theory, Individual Psychodynamics, and Relationship Functioning. In A. L. Vangelisti & D. Perlman (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of personal relationships*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

U.S. White House Council on Women and Girls. (2011). *Women in America: Indicators of social and economic well-being*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, Economics and Statistics Administration.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2000). *America's families and living arrangements*. [Data file]. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/hh-fam/p20-537/2000/tabA1.xls>

U.S. Census Bureau. (2005). *America's families and living arrangements*. [Data file]. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/hh-fam/p20-537/2000/tabA1.xls>

U.S. Census Bureau. (2010a). *America's families and living arrangements*. [Data file]. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/hh-fam/cps2005/tabA1-all.csv>

U.S. Census Bureau. (2010b). *U.S. Census Bureau reports men and women wait longer to marry*. U.S. Census Bureau. Retrieved from http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/families_households/cb10-174.html

Van Boven, A. (2011). *Marital representations for expectant cohabitators with a history of personal and parental divorce: A qualitative study*. Retrieved from University of Arizona Library. <http://hdl.handle.net/10150/145003>

Wei, M., Russell, D. W., Mallinckrodt, B., & Vogel, D. L. (2007). The Experiences in Close

Relationships Scale (ECR)-short form: Reliability, validity, and factor structure. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 88(2), 187-204.

Willoughby, B. J. (2010). Marital attitude trajectories across adolescence. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 39(11), 1305-1317.

Table 1

Reasons Not to Marry

People have different reasons for NOT marrying their current partner. Please read the reasons below, and indicate any, would be a reason for you in your decision not to marry your current partner, either now in the future, using a 6-point scale:

How much of a reason for not marrying current partner?

	1	2	3	4	5	6
	Not at all a reason for me			Neutral		
1	--					Financial stability
2	--					Ability to pay for wedding
3	Self					Doubts about self as spouse
4	Partner					Doubts about partner as spouse
5	--					Quality of relationship
6	Self					Doubts about self as parent
7	Partner					Doubts about partner as parent
8	Self					Own capability of being economic provider
9	Partner					Partner capability of being economic provider
10	--					Fear of divorce
11	--					Infidelity
12	--					In-laws
13	--					Bringing children from own and partner's previous relationships together (i.e., blended or step)

Table 2

How You Feel in Romantic Relationships (Attachment Measures)

Respond to each statement by indicating how much you agree or disagree with it. Write the number in the space

following rating scale:

	1	2	3	4	5	6
	<i>Disagree Strongly</i>			<i>Neutral / Mixed</i>		
1	Avoidance	It helps to turn to my romantic partner in times of need.				
2	Anxiety	I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by my partner.				
3	Avoidance	I want to get close to my partner, but I keep pulling back.				
4	Anxiety	I find that my partner(s) don't want to get as close as I would like.				
5	Avoidance	I turn to my partner for many things, including comfort and reassurance.				
6	Anxiety	My desire to be very close sometimes scares people away.				
7	Avoidance	I try to avoid getting too close to my partner.				
8	<i>DELETED</i>	I do not often worry about being abandoned.				
9	Avoidance	I usually discuss my problems and concerns with my partner.				
10	Anxiety	I get frustrated if romantic partners are not available when I need them.				
11	Avoidance	I am nervous when partners get too close to me.				
12	Anxiety	I worry that romantic partners won't care about me as much as I care about them.				

Table 3			
<i>Descriptive Statistics for all Study Variables</i>			
Study variable			
	M	SD	Range
Attachment avoidance	34.31	6.15	20 to 42
Attachment anxiety	21.83	6.16	9 to 35
Reasons not to marry specific to self	0.9	4.89	2 to 21
Reasons not to marry specific to partner	8.07	4.23	2 to 18
	% divorced	% not divorced	
Parental divorce	22.50%	77.50%	

Table 4					
<i>Correlations Among Study Variables</i>					
	Attachment avoidance	Attachment anxiety	Reasons not to marry specific to self	Reasons not to marry specific to partner	Parental divorce
Attachment avoidance	--	--	--	--	--
Attachment anxiety	0.41*	--	--	--	--
Reasons not to marry specific to self	-0.15	-0.26*	--	--	--
Reasons not to marry specific to partner	-0.28*	-0.30*	0.54*	--	--
Parental divorce	0.11	-0.00	0.08	0.12	--

* $p < .05$

Table 5				
<i>Results of Mixed Models from SAS</i>				
	<i>Reasons not to marry specific to Self</i>		<i>Reasons not to marry specific to Partner</i>	
	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE
Intercept	14.40*	2.91	15.57*	2.45
Attachment avoidance	-0.04	0.09	-0.17*	0.07
Attachment anxiety	-0.20*	0.09	-0.08	0.97

* $p < .05$