

## Adult Attachment and Single vs. Partnered Relationship Status in Polish University Students

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### Abstract

This study examined links between adult attachment and relationship status (single vs. partnered) in Polish young adults. Three hundred and seventeen participants (173 females and 144 males) aged 22-27 years ( $M=24.69$ ,  $SD=1.87$ ), completed the Polish-language version of the Revised Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS) used to measure adult attachment. All the respondents were heterosexual, unmarried and had no children. One hundred and fifty seven (49.50%) students declared being in a romantic relationship at the time of the assessment whilst 160 students (50.50%) were not. Results indicated that single participants reported higher levels of worry about being rejected or unloved (Anxiety dimension) and lower levels of comfort with closeness (Close dimension) and comfort with depending on others (Depend dimension). In terms of attachment categories, analyses indicated that higher proportions of single participants were categorized into fearful and preoccupied attachment styles and a lower proportion of them were categorized into the secure attachment style compared to partnered individuals. Discriminant analysis revealed that worry of being rejected or unloved (Anxiety dimension) was the strongest factor discriminating between single and partnered relationship status: the higher the anxiety dimension scores, the higher the chances of being single. No gender differences were obtained on attachment dimensions and styles.

**Keywords:** adult attachment, relationship status, single, partnered, young adults

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### Introduction

Among the most important emotional bonds in adulthood are romantic relationships and marriages (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007), and establishing a close, intimate bond with a romantic partner/spouse constitutes one of the most prominent

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normative developmental tasks for young adults (Erikson, 1980; Havighurst, 1981). Despite the presumed significance of this developmental task, many young adults find it difficult to establish secure and well-functioning intimate relationships (Collins, Cooper, Albino, & Allard, 2002), and remain, single for long periods. To some degree, these difficulties may be reflected in the number of never married persons who make up one of the fastest growing demographic categories in the United States (Seccombe & Ishii-Kuntz, 1994), and the analogous tendency is also observed in Poland (Czernicka, 2011). Therefore, it is important to examine circumstances associated with relationship status, in particular singlehood status.

The one factor that may influence how well developmental tasks regarding marital life and romantic activity, in particular initiation, consolidation, and maintenance of couple relationships, are managed, is the attachment-related process (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). The body of literature on adult attachment styles strongly supports the importance of secure attachments for well-being and interpersonal functioning (Kamenov, 2007). For this reason, there has been a growing interest in recent decades for using attachment theory and the concept of internal working models to understand variations in the quality of romantic and marital relationships (Lapsley & Edgerton, 2002). Research consistently indicates that individuals with different attachment styles differ greatly in the nature and quality of their close relationships (Collins, 1996; Collins et al., 2002). A vast body of literature links attachment styles to diverse aspects of intimate relationships in adulthood, including relationship satisfaction, styles of loving and beliefs about romantic love, relationship aggression, and strategies of conflict resolution (see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007, for a review). However, studies on adult attachment focus mostly on people in couple relationships, such as romantic relationships and marriages, with relatively little research on adults who are not partnered (Schachner, Shaver, & Gillath, 2008). Attachment style differences are known to be reflected in different interpersonal skills and patterns of interpersonal experiences, and the role of attachment styles may be observed in every stage of relationship development including flirting and dating, mate selection standard, mating preferences, relational beliefs and attitudes, intimacy, commitment, dyadic communication, conflict management within couple relationships, relationship satisfaction, and relationship stability (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Therefore, it is plausible that the attachment process also influences the actual engagement in a romantic relationship.

The theory of adult attachment styles has its roots in Bowlby's (1973) classic thesis on infants' emotional attachment to their primary caregiver. The theory of attachment offers a promising theoretical framework for understanding friendship, marriage, romantic and other human relationships (Kamenov, 2007). Hazan and Shaver (1987) were among the first to assess adult attachment styles empirically using the categorization scheme developed by Ainsworth and her colleagues (Ainsworth, Blehar, Walters, & Wall, 1978): secure, anxious/ambivalent, and avoidant attachment styles. Since their seminal study, adult attachment theory has

emerged as a primary theoretical framework for explaining the nature of adult intimate relationships. Hazan and Shaver's (1987) research showed that adults with different attachment styles differ markedly in the quality of their love relationships. Their results revealed that compared with the secure group, the two insecure groups (those with anxious/ambivalent and avoidant attachment styles) reported more negative experiences and beliefs about love and had a history of shorter romantic relationships (see also Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Collins & Read, 1990). Adults in the two insecure groups also reported more self-doubt and less acceptability to others than did those endorsing a secure self-description.

Subsequently, Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991), used the models of self and other as conceptualized by Bowlby (1973) to extend Hazan and Shaver's three-category model to a four-category model of adult attachment that includes the secure, dismissing, preoccupied, and fearful styles. Secure individuals have positive perceptions of themselves as well as of others. That is, they have a sense of self-worth plus an expectation that others are generally accepting and responsive. Hence, secure individuals are typically comfortable in close, emotional relationships and are relatively comfortable with intimacy, including sexual intimacy (see also Schachner & Shaver, 2004; Tracy, Shaver, Albino, & Cooper, 2003). They also tend to have long, stable, and satisfying relationships characterized by high investment, trust, and friendship (Schachner et al., 2008). Dismissing individuals perceive themselves positively while holding negative perceptions of others. In general, such individuals tend to feel overly independent and self-sufficient without close relationships. Preoccupied individuals are characterized by a low sense of self-worth but hold positive evaluations about others. They tend to be extremely dependent in their intimate relationships, seeking ever-closer emotional ties with others. Fearful individuals consider themselves to be unworthy and view others to be untrustworthy and rejecting. Such individuals are typically distrustful and uncomfortable in intimate relationships. Collins and Read (1990) used these cognitive models of self and others to develop a three-factor (three-dimension) measure of adult attachment that captures three fundamental aspects of adult attachment. These dimensions concern expectations and beliefs of availability and emotional responsiveness of a partner (Depend dimension), the confidence that a partner will continue to be loving (Anxiety dimension), and desire for close contact with the attachment figure (Close dimension).

To our knowledge, a few studies have directly examined the issue of the association between adult attachment and relationship status. The first investigation is a longitudinal study of 177 adults performed by Kirkpatrick and Hazan (1994) to prospectively explore links between the stability of adult attachment styles and of romantic relationships over a 4-year period. The study showed a significant prospective link between respondents' attachment styles and their relationship status 4 years later. Securely attached adults at the time of the initial survey were the most likely to be married and the least likely to be separated or divorced 4 years

later. Avoidant individuals, on the other hand, were the most likely 4 years later to be single and not looking for a partner or to be in a casual relationship (i.e., seeing more than one person). Persons with an ambivalent attachment style were the most likely to be searching for a partner at the 4-year follow-up. Additionally, Kirkpatrick and Hazan (1994) found that avoidant and ambivalent respondents were more likely than secure respondents to have at least one significant relationship end during the 4-year study interval; however, ambivalent adults were just as likely as securely attached individuals to be with the same partner 4 years later.

A second study that directly addressed this issue was Bookwala's (2003) study on a sample of 161 US undergraduate students between the ages of 18 and 20 years. The author compared adult attachment styles across three groups of young adults: those seriously dating someone, casually dating someone, and not dating. The results showed that respondents who were casually dating and not dating rated themselves higher on fearful attachment compared to those who were seriously dating. In general, Bookwala's (2003) research indicated that young adults characterized by a fearful (avoidant) attachment style are less likely to be engaged in a serious romantic relationship.

A third study on attachment and singlehood was conducted by Schachner and her colleagues (2008) using a sample of 142 US participants, aged 25-55. This study examined how long-term single people satisfy their attachment and sexual needs. They found that single participants were as likely as coupled ones to exhibit attachment security and rely on attachment figures. Schachner and her colleagues (2008) explain that that long-term singles, on average, may be just as secure as long-term coupled adults (Schachner et al., 2008).

Finally, a preliminary study was performed by Palus (2010) on a sample of 430 young Polish adults aged 20 - 35. Using the Polish version of the RAAS, she found that when compared to partnered adults single individuals tended to feel less comfortable with closeness and dependency, and were more likely to worry about being rejected or unloved. This study also found that single participants were more often categorized into fearful and preoccupied attachment styles and a lower proportion of them were categorized into the secure attachment style compared to partnered individuals.

In addition, some indirect support for the likely association between adult attachment and actual relationship status comes from research on loneliness, especially chronic or trait loneliness, which has indicated that non-secure attachment styles are linked to stronger feelings of loneliness (Shaver & Hazan, 1987). Shaver and Hazan (1987) found in multiple studies that individuals who characterized themselves as insecure in attachment (anxious/ambivalent or avoidant) were significantly more likely than the secure group to agree that they were and always have been lonely people. However, despite their self-reported history of loneliness, anxious/ambivalent individuals were less likely to expect to

always be lonely and could be described as hopeful and active in their search for attachment partners. In contrast, the avoidant group appeared to be especially isolated: avoidant individuals were significantly more likely than secure and anxious/ambivalent respondents to say that during the preceding few years they had not felt in tune with other people, had not been part of a group of friends, and had not had anyone they felt close to, and to believe that they will always be lonely. Hence, avoidant individuals may be especially likely to give up their quest for attachment partners.

### **The Present Study**

In contrast to the majority of research on adult attachment that has been conducted on individuals engaged in ongoing romantic relationships, we were especially interested in examining attachment styles in single young adults compared with individuals committed in a serious relationship. Thus, we concentrate on the association between attachment styles and being or not being in a committed romantic relationship (rather than a casual dating relationship). In addition, since reliance on categorical assessments of adult attachment may underestimate the relationship between attachment and various outcomes (Lapsley & Edgerton, 2002), and a dimensional model of attachment may better represent adult attachment (Collins & Read, 1990; Gallo, Smith, & Ruiz, 2003), we supplemented the use of categorical assessments of adult attachment with continuous dimensional ratings. The aims of this study were to examine the link between adult attachment and relationship status in a sample of Polish young adults and replicate the first study in Poland on attachment and relationship status performed by Palus (2010) but on a more homogenous sample in regard to age and relationship status. In particular, contrary to Palus's (2010) study, in the current study we concentrated on individuals aged 20 -27, that is, on university students excluding postgraduate persons, and we focused on individuals who were single or were committed in non-marital relationships excluding married adults as Palus (2010) did. First, we investigated the association between relationship status and adult attachment dimensions (Close, Depend, and Anxiety) as well as attachment styles (secure, dismissing, preoccupied, and fearful). Second, we examined the utility of attachment dimensions in discriminating between single and partnered individuals. We predicted that single individuals would be less comfortable with closeness and intimacy; they would feel to a lesser degree that they can depend on others to be available when needed; and they would be more worried about being rejected or unloved in comparison to partnered individuals. We also expected that single adults would be characterized by less secure patterns of attachment than partnered adults. In addition, we hypothesized that adult attachment styles would offer a useful tool for discriminating between single and partnered relationship status in young adulthood.

## Method

### *Participants and Procedure*

The study was carried out on a sample of students from different faculties (Humanities and Art, 60%; Mathematics, 20%; Management, 20%) of a university in Poland. The inclusion criteria were as follows: (1) a minimum duration of being single or partnered for at least 6 months; (2) not being married, divorced, separated, or widowed, (3) being childless, and (4) being heterosexual oriented. Five hundred questionnaires were originally distributed of which 436 were returned. One hundred and nineteen participants were excluded from the study due to incomplete data ( $N=20$ ) or not meeting the inclusion criteria ( $N=99$ ), yielding a final sample of 317 students; 173 females (54.60%) and 144 males (45.40%). Participants were 22-27 years old ( $M=24.69$ ,  $SD=1.87$ ) and resided in a large Polish city that has a population exceeding 500,000 inhabitants. The sample consisted of 160 single individuals with an average age of 24.34 ( $SD=1.87$ ) and 157 partnered individuals with an average age of 25.06 ( $SD=1.81$ ). The detailed demographic and relationship status information for the single and partnered groups are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Demographic and Relationship Status Information for the Single and Partnered Groups (N=317)*

		Single Individuals		Partnered Individuals	
		<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Gender	Female	99	61.90	74	47.10
	Male	61	38.10	83	52.90
Duration of Remaining Single vs. Partnered (months)	6-12	70	43.75	48	30.57
	13-19	6	3.75	10	6.37
	20-26	19	11.88	20	12.75
	27-33	11	6.88	8	5.09
	34+	54	33.75	71	45.22

*Note.* Percentages listed are within the single and partnered groups.

The questionnaire packages were administered in classrooms to groups of 30 to 60 students at a time and participation was voluntary. An explanation as to the purpose of the study was given as was assurance to the students that the information provided would remain anonymous and confidential. The instructions were read aloud. Participants completed a demographic questionnaire and a package of measures. In order to minimize the possible influence of the order of questionnaire presentation, all questionnaires appeared in the same ordinal position. The time of completion of the questionnaire package took participants approximately 20 minutes.

### *Measures*

*Relationship status.* Participants were asked to indicate their current relationship status using the following response alternatives: (a) currently NOT in a romantic relationship, (b) currently in a romantic relationship – but not engaged, (c) engaged and plan to get married, (d) married, (e) divorced, (f) widowed or (h) separated. Participants who endorsed Option (a) comprised the single group ( $N=160$ ) and participants who checked Option (b) comprised the partnered group ( $N=157$ ); respondents who endorsed Option (c)  $N=40$ , (d)  $N=53$ , (e)  $N=3$ , (f)  $N=1$  and (h)  $N=2$  were excluded from further analysis.

*Adult Attachment.* The Revised Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS; Collins, 1996; Polish adaptation – Palus, 2010) was used to assess the three attachment dimensions (Close, Depend, and Anxiety) and the four adult attachment styles identified by Bartholomew and Horowitz's (1991) (secure, dismissing, preoccupied, and fearful). RAAS is an 18-item self-report scale, that asks participants to rate the extent to which each statement describes their feelings and behaviors in romantic relationships in general (5-point Likert scale; 1 - *not at all characteristic of me*, 5 - *very characteristic of me*). Collins's (1996) RAAS is a slightly modified version of the Adult Attachment Scale originally developed by Collins and Read (1990) for the assessment of Hazan and Shaver's (1987) three attachment styles (secure, avoidant, and anxious–ambivalent) in the context of romantic relationships. Collins and Read's factor analysis of their scale in an undergraduate sample revealed three dimensions. The Close dimension refers to the extent to which a person is comfortable with closeness and intimacy. The Depend dimension refers to the extent to which a person feels he/she can depend on others to be available when needed. The Anxiety dimension refers to the extent to which a person is worried about being rejected or unloved. In the present study the internal consistency for the subscales was acceptable:  $\alpha=.72$ ,  $\alpha=.76$ , and  $\alpha=.87$  for the Close, Depend, and Anxiety scales, respectively. A scoring protocol converts dimensional scores into four categories (secure, preoccupied, dismissing and fearful) based on relationships between subscales and categories (Collins, 1996). The classification is based on the comparison of an individual's raw subscale scores against the theoretical mean cut-off points of a score of 3 on the three dimensions, with the CLOSE and DEPEND subscales scores being combined into one indicator called CLOSEDEP. This rule allows for assigning an individual: (a) the secure style, if he/she achieves a score higher than the cut-off point on the CLOSEDEP subscales and a score below the cut-off point on the ANXIETY subscale; (b) the preoccupied style, if he/she achieves a score higher than the cut-off point on both subscales; (c) the dismissive style if he/she achieves a score below the cut-off point on both subscales and (d) the fearful style if he/she achieves a score below the cut-off point on the CLOSEDEP subscales and above the cut-off point in the ANXIETY subscale. In the present

study 19 participants (6.00%) had midpoint scores that made it impossible to classify them into one of the attachment style categories; hence, these respondents were excluded for this analysis, resulting in a sample of 298.

## Results

Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. Comparisons of group means were carried out using *t*-tests. The chi-square test was employed to compare the distribution of attachment styles in the single and partnered groups. Finally, discriminant analysis was used to determine the utility of the adult attachment dimensions in distinguishing between the two relationship status groups. The significance level for all statistical analyses was set at .05.

It should be noted that no gender differences were found in attachment style categories or scores on attachment dimensions; thus, women and men were combined in the analyses. These findings are congruent with other authors' findings of no gender differences on attachment in infancy and adulthood (e.g., Gallo, Smith, & Ruiz, 2003; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Shaver & Clark, 1994). This pattern also is consistent with Bowlby's suggestion (Searle & Meara, 1999), that both males and females are equally likely to develop secure vs. insecure working models. The data on lack of gender differences are available upon request from the first author.

Differences in single and partnered participants' mean levels of comfort with closeness (Close dimension), comfort with depending on others (Depend dimension), and worry of being rejected or unloved (Anxiety dimension) are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. *Means and Standard Deviations on Attachment Dimensions for Single and Partnered Individuals*

Attachment Dimension	Single Individuals		Partnered Individuals		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Close	3.51	0.76	3.74	0.67	2.98	315 <sup>**</sup>	0.32
Depend	3.09	0.87	3.38	0.72	3.29	306 <sup>**</sup>	0.36
Anxiety	2.91	1.07	2.29	0.93	-5.66	315 <sup>***</sup>	0.62

\*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

As predicted, the single participants reported lower levels of comfort with closeness, lower levels of comfort with depending on others, and higher levels of fear of rejection compared with partnered participants. In terms of the distribution

of the four attachment style categories in the single and partnered groups as well, significant differences were revealed (see Table 3).

Table 3. *Distribution of Four Attachment Style Categories in Single and Partnered Group (N=298)*

Attachment style	Single Individuals (N=146)		Partnered Individuals (N=152)		$\chi^2(1)$	Cramer's V ( $\phi_c$ )
	f	%	f	%		
Secure	73	24.50	112	37.58	21.56***	.26***
Preoccupied	31	10.40	16	5.37	5.29*	.13*
Dismissing	12	4.03	9	3.02	0.40	.04
Fearful	30	10.07	15	5.03	5.50*	.13*

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

As Table 3 indicates, significantly more respondents with a secure attachment style were represented in the partnered group than in the single group. Conversely, individuals with preoccupied and fearful attachment styles were categorized more frequently as in the single group than in the partnered group. The proportion of respondents with the dismissing attachment style did not vary between the two relationship status groups.

Finally, a two-group, direct entry discriminant analysis was performed to determine the utility of the attachment dimensions in distinguishing members of the single and partnered groups (partnered status was coded as 1, and single status was coded as 2). The discriminant function was statistically significant, Wilk's  $\lambda = .91$ ,  $\chi^2(4) = 24.36$ ,  $p < .01$ , indicating that the attachment style dimensions played a small but significant role in distinguishing the single and partnered groups. The eigenvalue of the discriminant function was .11 and the canonical correlation was .31. With a canonical correlation of .31, it can be concluded that 9.60% (square of the canonical correlation) of the variance in the dependent variable was accounted by this model.

Tests of equality of group means showed that all three attachment dimensions, namely Close,  $F(1,315) = 8.91$ ,  $p < .01$ ; Depend,  $F(1,315) = 10.76$ ,  $p < .01$ ; and Anxiety,  $F(1,315) = 31.97$ ,  $p < .001$ , were significant factors in distinguishing between the two relationship status groups. Table 4 presents the pooled within-group correlations between the predictor variables and the discriminant function and the standardized function coefficients for each of the variables for the function; loadings  $\geq .30$  are considered substantial. The Anxiety dimension loaded most strongly and scores on the Close and Depend dimensions loaded significantly but less strongly on the discriminant function. As Table 4 also indicates, higher scores on the Anxiety dimension and lower scores on the Close and Depend dimensions predicted membership in the single group.

Table 4. *Correlations and Standardized Discriminant Function Coefficients for the Independent Variables*

Independent Variables	Correlation Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	$F_{1, 315}$
Anxiety	.98	.91 <sup>a</sup>	31.97 <sup>***</sup>
Depend	-.57	-.01	10.76 <sup>**</sup>
Close	-.52	-.19	8.91 <sup>**</sup>

*Note.* <sup>a</sup>Largest absolute correlation between each variable and the discriminant function.

\*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

The group membership prediction accuracy was measured on the analysis and the holdout sub-samples. The hit ratio for the original sample was 62.80%; when cross-validated, the hit ratio was 61.80%. To assess the appropriateness of these hit ratios and the classification accuracy for groups, two statistics were employed: the proportional chance criterion and Press's Q. The proportional chance criterion is the sum of the squared proportion of individuals in each group (50.00%). The overall classification accuracy for the original and cross-validation samples was better than expected by chance alone. Press's Q statistic of 20.70 also showed that predictions were slightly better than chance (using the critical value of 6.63 from the Chi-square distribution at the significance level of .01).

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine links between adult attachment and relationship status (single vs. partnered) in Polish university students. To date, the vast majority of research studies on adult attachment and intimacy have been conducted on individuals engaged in ongoing romantic relationships. We focused on the association between adult attachment conceptualized as attachment dimensions (Close, Depend and Anxiety), as well as attachment categories (secure, preoccupied, dismissing, and fearful attachment styles), and relationship status (being single vs. partnered). This investigation is the second to be undertaken with a Polish sample of young adults and replicates the previous study performed in Poland by Palus (2010). Our study not only replicates prior study by Palus (2010) but also expands it by using more homogenous sample in terms age and relationship status. Unlike Palus's (2010) study, we concentrated on individuals aged 20-27, that is, on university students, and we focused exclusively on individuals who were single or were committed in non-marital relationships. In particular, the focus on non-marital relationships in young adulthood and comparison of single participants with participants in romantic but not in marital relationships is important since the vast majority of young adults aged 20-25 or

even 30 in Poland and in the USA are predominantly involved in non-marital intimate relationships rather than in formal marital relationships (e.g., Braithwaite, Delevi, & Fincham, 2010).

The results of the current study are consistent with the predictions based on adult attachment theory (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Hazan & Shaver, 1987) and with prior research on US samples indicating that individual differences in attachment style are systematically related to various relationship behaviors and outcomes, including relationship status (Bookwala, 2003; Kirkpatrick & Hazan, 1994; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007; Schachner & Shaver, 2004). The current study found, as expected and congruent with the previous Polish study by Palus (2010), that single Polish individuals reported lower levels of comfort with closeness (Close) and with depending on others (Depend) and higher levels of worry of being rejected or unloved (Anxiety) relative to their partnered peers. These attachment dimensions, as Collins and Read (1990) found, appear to influence relationship characteristics, and organize a broad range of relational behaviors. Their data showed that individuals who are comfortable with closeness and able to depend on others tend to be expressive, to engage to a greater degree in behaviors promoting intimacy and dyadic communication and have greater feelings of self-worth and social confidence. Collins (1996) also reported that such adults are likely to demonstrate confidence in their relationships and their partner's love, and are less likely to respond with strong negative emotions. In contrast, Collins found that anxious persons who worry about being abandoned or unloved lack confidence in themselves and their relationships and are less trusting of their partners. These individuals also hold a more negative view of their partners (e.g., as more unresponsive, not trustworthy, and reject closeness), and a more negative interpretation of relationship events. They are also much more likely to experience emotional distress and nervousness. Given that differences on attachment dimensions influence couple functioning, we can conclude that such features as comfort with closeness and intimacy, ability to depend on others, and lack of worry about being rejected or unloved, may facilitate the initiation and maintenance of serious romantic relationships, and contribute to partnered status. In contrast, the opposite characteristics – discomfort with closeness and intimacy, inability to trust others and depend on them when needed, and fear of being abandoned and not being loved – may hinder the ability to establish and maintain a successful intimate bond with a partner and increase the likelihood of remaining single.

In line with our predictions, we found significant differences in the distribution of secure, preoccupied, and fearful attachment styles in the single and partnered groups, no differences were found with regard to the dismissing style. These differences can be viewed to reflect that people with different attachment styles differ in the extent to which they are motivated to seek closeness, avoid rejection, and maintain autonomy (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). The higher rate of secure attached individuals in the partnered group is consistent with previous studies

showing that securely attached adults are the most likely to be married and the least likely to be separated or divorced (Kirkpatrick & Hazan, 1994). The partnered status among securely attached individuals may be due to their interpersonal characteristics. Individuals with a secure attachment style are comfortable with closeness, able to depend on others, and not worried about being abandoned or unloved (Collins & Read, 1990; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). They also hold optimistic expectations that an ongoing relationship is going to last, and belief that partner is supportive and trustworthy (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). These features, in turn, are linked with multiple positive relational outcomes, for instance with a higher level of social competences in close relationships (Deniz, Hamarta, & Ari, 2005; Dereli & Karakuş, 2011; DiTomasso, Brannen-McNulty, Ross, & Burgess, 2003), as well as presenting a wider repertoire of pro-social behaviors which maintain relations, such as assuring the partner of one's involvement in the relation and demonstrating romantic feelings (Guerrero & Bachman, 2006). Thus, these positive traits of interpersonal functioning characterizing securely attached individuals may foster the establishment of and commitment to a relationship, and holding the partnered status. Intriguingly, the presented results are contrary to Schachner et al.'s (2008) findings that showed that single participants were as likely as coupled ones to exhibit attachment security. One possible explanation for this incongruity may stem from differences in the duration of the single status and the age of the sample across the two studies. In contrast to our participants, aged 22-27 ( $M=24.69$ ) and being single for at least 6 months, the participants in the Schachner et al.'s study (2008) were aged 25-55 ( $M=40$ ) and were recruited as "long-term singles" if they had been single for at least one year. It seems reasonable that with the passage of time in single status an individual may seek to ensure a feeling of security by reliance on alternate attachment figures such as siblings and friends. As a consequence, over time, singles may be as likely as coupled individuals to exhibit attachment security.

The predominance of insecurely attached individuals (those with preoccupied and fearful styles of attachment) in the single group may be linked with attachment insecurities that make persons less able to flexibly balance closeness and autonomy which makes these individuals more focused on reducing their relationship fears (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). They may be focused on relationship worries and threats that may result in distortion of beliefs and expectations regarding establishing an intimate bond. Furthermore, insecure people tend to exhibit lower psychological attractiveness in comparison to secure individuals (who are viewed to have the potential contribution to achieve happiness, safety and stability in a couple relationship), making attachment security a resource highly valued and looked for by people regardless of their own attachment style (e.g., Klohnen & Luo, 2003). However, some studies (see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007, for a review) reveal that even though secure potential partners are favored overall, insecure people are more favorable than secure people toward insecure potential partners)

which, in turn, may limit their chances to form a satisfying relationship. As Kirkpatrick and Hazan (1994) found, avoidant and ambivalent adults were more likely than secure ones to have at least one significant relationship end during the 4-year intersurvey interval.

To understand the predominance of preoccupied individuals in the single group we offer two plausible explanations. First, such features of preoccupied individuals as a lack of trust in the availability of the caregiver, low self-worth, fear of rejection, and a tendency to be dependent and clingy with partners (Davila, Steinberg, Kachadourian, Cobb, & Fincham, 2004), can make them less psychologically attractive partners for other people, and their clingy behaviors may prompt their partners to withdraw from them or the relationship (Tucker & Anders, 1998). Although preoccupied individuals are comfortable with intimacy and have a positive orientation toward relationships, they are characterized by a high level of fear of abandonment and rejection (Guerrero & Bachman, 2006). These latter characteristics may be more salient for their relationship status than their positive view of others and intimate relationships, resulting in their failure to engage in or maintain a serious intimate relationship. Thus, they may have a more active relationship history – they may enter more relationships but exit them more frequently, too. Second, the above mentioned traits may undermine their ability to experience a sense of being cared for and supported in a relationship (Davila et al., 2004), and therefore, encourage them to terminate their relationship, resulting in single status.

The higher rate of fearful attached individuals in the single group is consistent with previous research. For instance, Bookwala (2003) found in her study that individuals who viewed themselves as being fearful in attachment, that is, those who were likely to be uncomfortable in close relationships and feared hurt and rejection within such relationships, were less likely to be involved in serious romantic relationships. Also, Collins (1996) indicated that fearful persons are less likely to be involved in steady dating relationships. In addition, fearful attachment style is associated with a greater risk for trait or emotional loneliness (Emst & Cacioppo, 1999; Shaver & Hazan, 1987), and as Bookwala's study (2003) revealed, a behavioral concomitant of such trait loneliness appears to be a lower likelihood of involvement in a serious romantic relationship. People with fearful attachment are characterized by less confidence than secure individuals of being able to form a successful relationship, and are inclined to exhibit more dysfunctional relationship beliefs (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). They can also exhibit some difficulties with regulation of interpersonal closeness and distance (Feeney, 1999; Feeney & Noller, 1991). It seems that the fear of abandonment and the tendency to avoid close relations may generate significant limitations and difficulties in developing and engaging in behaviors that establish and develop relationships or result in intimacy (Adamczyk & Pilarska, 2012).

Despite the Avoidance dimension increasing the odds of being single or not being involved in serious dating in our study and past research (Davila et al., 2004; Kirkpatrick & Hazan, 1994), we found no significant difference in the prevalence of the dismissing attachment style between single and partnered participants. Dismissing persons avoid close relationships, are unmotivated to initiate or maintain intimate relationships, choose to withdraw socially and remain isolated, and in general, tend to feel independent and self-sufficient without close relationships (Bartholomew, 1990; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Thus, they may avoid establishing or maintaining an intimate bond, remaining single in order to protect them from hurt and disappointment. However, avoidant adults may not deactivate their attachment systems to the point of not caring at all about the absence of supportive relationships. Moreover, deactivating strategies may not be sufficiently strong or complete to inhibit the desire for greater security (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Thus, when committed in a relationship, individuals with a dismissing attachment style may function in an independent and self-sufficient manner; for instance, avoidant individuals are unlikely to share personal thoughts and feelings with others, enabling them to deflect unwanted closeness, intimacy, or nurturance (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). In addition, these individuals may select as their partners individuals with a fearful or avoidant attachment style who, in turn, may confirm their working model of self as strong and overly self-reliant (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

The current study has also demonstrated that an important factor affecting relationship status in young adulthood is one of three attachment dimensions proposed by Collins and Read (1990), the Anxiety dimension. The obtained results indicate that a high level of anxiety about being abandoned or being unloved contributes most to young adults' likelihood to be single. In contrast, the lower the level of worry of being rejected or unloved, the higher the probability of being committed. The significance of this component of working models was also revealed in Collins' (1996) study in which anxiety about relationships was found to be an important predictor of explanations for relationship events. Altogether, these findings support the assumption that concerns about being abandoned or unloved may be a more salient factor affecting relationship status (and functioning) than perception of the partner's caring and responsiveness. Individuals worried about being rejected may experience difficulties in setting aside their doubts in any relationships, constantly monitor their partners in the pursuit of signals that indicate a lack of caring, of things going wrong, and assume the worst in a relationship (Collins, 1996).

Although the effect sizes estimated by using Cohen's *d* and Cramer's *V* indicated low to modest associations between attachment dimensions and styles and relationship status, the present findings have significant theoretical and empirical implications in Polish society. First, similar to studies on attachment and relationships conducted in other countries, the vast majority of research in Poland

has used samples of partnered or married individuals (e.g., Liberska & Suwalska, 2011; Malina, 2011) with the exception of Palus' study (2010) which concentrated on single young adults. The present study extends this body of research by focusing on single adults and contributing knowledge on attachment issues and factors associated with relationship status in Polish university students. Second, the current study used the Polish-language version of the RAAS as did Palus (2010) in her study, which enables the comparison of results from Poland with the results gathered with English-speaking samples. This is significant because thus far studies with Polish samples have relied exclusively on Polish scales to measure adult attachment, such as the Questionnaire of Attachment Styles designed by Plopa (2005).

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

Several caveats must be considered when interpreting our findings. First, although sound theoretical reasons exist for hypothesizing that adult attachment may directly affect the engagement in a serious intimate relationship, these correlational data do not permit causal inferences. On theoretical grounds, we conclude that secure and insecure adult attachment styles facilitate or impede the development and maintenance of serious romantic relationships. However, it is reasonable that changes in relationship status may influence the stability of attachment styles. For instance, as Kirkpatrick and Hazan (1994) found in their longitudinal study, secure adults who experienced breakups were less likely to remain secure than were those who did not experience breakups, and avoidant respondents who initiated new relationships in the interim were less likely to remain avoidant than those who did not. Moreover, one's partner's attachment style may encourage security or insecurity of attachment style in adult relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). We recommend that future research use prospective designs and assess the attachment styles of both members of the dyad to assess more comprehensively the link between adult attachment and the propensity to engage in a serious intimate relationship. Second, because participants in this study were unmarried university students aged 22 to 27 years in relationships that had primarily lasted for less than three years, the results from the present study can be generalized only to the population of university, heterosexual, never-married, childless students at this developmental stage who were engaged in fairly short-lived relationships. Studies on older individuals and more diverse relationship statuses and lengths are necessary to understand the link between adult attachment and singlehood across the life span. On a related note, it is important to know individuals' past relationship experiences when studying the link between adult attachment and relationship status; the present study, however, assessed only current relationship status. We recommend that future research on adult attachment

and relationship status examine both relationship history and current relationship status. Another limitation is the lack of a direct cross-cultural comparison to determine differences between Polish and other (e.g., US) samples. The present study was conducted several years after earlier research on adult attachment and relationship status using US samples. It is feasible that relationship status may vary across different cultures due to differing cultural norms regarding relationship status; for example, cohabitation is less common in Polish society than in the US (Matysiak, 2009). Finally, in future research additional variables (e.g. interpersonal competencies, attitudes toward love and marriage, personality traits) should be taken into account in the analysis of factors associated with relationship status as the effect sizes obtained in the current study were low to modest in size. Such an approach would also explain additional variance in relationship status while ensuring that the link between adult attachment and relationship status persists after adjusting for such relationship-relevant factors (Kirkpatrick & Hazan, 1994; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

Despite these limitations, the present study is important in that it replicates previous studies examining the link between adult attachment and relationship status in a sample of Polish university students. The present study confirms the association between adult attachment and relationship status and in doing so, we have demonstrated that the theoretically consistent link between adult attachment and an individual's likelihood of actually engaging in a serious romantic relationship transcends cultures.

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## Odnos privrženosti i statusa veze među poljskim studentima

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### Sažetak

U ovome je istraživanju ispitana povezanost privrženosti odraslih i statusa njihove emocionalne veze (samci naspram onih u vezi) kod mladih odraslih u Poljskoj. Tri stotine sedamnaest sudionika (173 žene i 144 muškarca) u dobi između 22 i 27 godina ( $M=24.69$ ,  $SD=1.87$ ) ispunilo je poljsku verziju Revidirane skale privrženosti odraslih (RAAS; *Revised Adult Attachment Scale*), koja se upotrebljava za mjerenje privrženosti. Svi su sudionici bili heteroseksualni, nevjenčani te bez djece. Stotinu pedeset sedam studenata (49.50%) izjavilo je da su u vrijeme provođenja istraživanja u romantičnoj vezi dok 160 studenata (50.50%) u to vrijeme nije bilo u vezi. Rezultati su pokazali da sudionici koji su samci izvještavaju o višim razinama zabrinutosti zbog odbacivanja ili nevoljenosti (dimenzija *anksioznost*) te nižim razinama ugone u bliskim odnosima (dimenzija *bliskost*) i ugone zbog ovisnosti o drugima (dimenzija *ovisnost*). U terminima su kategorija privrženosti analize pokazale da je viša proporcija samaca klasificirana kao bojažljiv i preokupirajući stil privrženosti, a manja proporcija u sigurni stil privrženosti u usporedbi sa sudionicima koji su u vezi. Diskriminantna je analiza pokazala da je zabrinutost zbog odbacivanja ili nevoljenost (dimenzija *anksioznost*) najsnažniji faktor koji diskriminira između samačkoga i partnerskoga statusa: što su viši rezultati na dimenziji anksioznosti, to je veća vjerojatnost da će sudionik biti sam. Nisu dobivene spolne razlike u dimenzijama i stilovima privrženosti.

**Ključne riječi:** privrženost odraslih, status emocionalne veze, samci, partnerstvo, mladi odrasli

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