

Associations Between Attachment Insecurities and Psychological Violence in a Sample of Court-Mandated Batterers

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We conducted a survey-based study looking at the associations among attachment insecurities (anxiety and avoidance), relationship functioning, and psychological domestic violence. We looked at three relationship functioning variables (i.e., anger management, communication, and conflict resolution) and three domestic psychological violence variables (i.e., derogation and control, jealous-hypervigilance, and threats-control of space). Data were collected from 76 male and 21 female court-mandated batterers. Participants completed the self-report measures of attachment insecurities, relationship functioning, and psychological domestic violence-related variables. Overall, attachment insecurities were negatively associated with relationship functioning and positively associated with psychological domestic violence outcomes. Among the whole sample, attachment anxiety correlated positively with derogation and control and with jealous-hypervigilance. There were also differential attachment associations by gender. Attachment anxiety correlated positively with threats of controlling space only among men, and with derogation and control and jealous-hypervigilance only among women. Finally, avoidance correlated negatively with communication only among women. Overall, this pattern of results is consistent with

predictions derived from attachment theory: attachment insecurities are associated with poor relationship functioning and high rates of domestic violence.

Keywords: attachment anxiety; attachment avoidance; psychological abuse; controlling and abusive tactics; batterer treatment; perpetrators

Attachment theory has proven to be a useful theory to understand the dynamics of domestic violence. Described initially by British psychiatrist John Bowlby (1969, 1982), and further elaborated upon by Canadian psychologist Mary Ainsworth (1978), attachment theory posits that attachment to a caregiver is a powerful evolutionary-based drive necessary for successful social and emotional development, and in particular, for learning adaptive emotion regulation (Simpson & Belsky, 2008). Forty years of infant, child, and adult attachment research have indicated that insecure attachment, developed early in life, can have profound effects on interpersonal relationships, particularly with regard to anger and conflict (Ben-Naim, Hirschberger, Ein-Dor, & Mikulincer, 2013). Social science research has documented that individuals rated as having insecure attachment manifest emotional, cognitive, and behavioral challenges including increased negative emotionality (e.g., anxiety, anger, hostility), empathy deficits, and increased aggressive responses to conflict (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2015). Anger, hostility, and negative emotionality have been consistently associated with domestic violence perpetration (Birkley & Eckhardt, 2015; Capaldi, Knoble, Shortt, & Kim, 2012). Since attachment insecurity and domestic violence are both associated with poor emotion regulation skills, individuals scoring high on attachment insecurities (anxiety and avoidance) are expected to show greater rates of domestic violence perpetration (Dutton & White, 2012; Lawson & Malnar, 2011). In this study, we examined the association between attachment insecurities and variables associated with perpetration of psychological domestic violence among a group of court-mandated batterers.

Since the early to mid 1980s, domestic violence researchers have explored the concept of typologies in domestic violence perpetrators (Capaldi & Kim, 2007). At the same time, social psychologists began to explore the adult correlates of infant attachment and developed self-report methods of assessing different adult attachment styles (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Crowell, Fraley, & Roisman, 2016; Hazan & Shaver, 1987, 1990). By the 1990s, domestic violence researchers began investigating the association between secure and insecure attachment styles and abusive behaviors in adult relationships and found that perpetrators of domestic violence showed higher levels of attachment insecurity compared to their more secure counterparts (Dutton, Saunders, Starzomski, & Bartholomew, 1994; Holtzworth-Munroe, Stuart, & Hutchinson, 1997; Tweed & Dutton, 1998).

Attachment theory is a useful framework to understand individuals close relationships and the effects that interactions with early caregivers have on the ways humans cope with stress across the life span (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016b). According to this theory, human babies are born with a tendency to develop a close relationship with an older and wiser caregiver, called *attachment figure*, in order to promote survival of both the organism and the species. The main functions of attachment figures are to provide the individual with a *safe haven* in times of distress, and with a *secure base* from which to explore the world once security has been achieved. Attachment figures, however, differ in their ability to efficiently play these functions. According to the theory (Bowlby, 1980), good caregivers are sensitive and responsive to the individuals needs. Sensitivity refers to the attachment

figure's ability to accurately read the individuals sign's of distress, whereas responsiveness refers to their ability to respond to such signals in a way that is aligned with the individual's expressed need.

Sensitive and responsive caregivers promote in the individual an adequate sense of attachment security, a sense that attachment figures are willing and capable to provide support and care and a sense that the self of worthwhile such attention. Insensitive and unresponsive caregivers, on the other hand, promote development of a sense of attachment insecurity, reflected in a lack of trust in other's availability and willingness to provide love and support and/or doubts about the self-worth of receiving them.

Attachment insecurity can be organized around two dimensions: anxiety and avoidance. When in a relationship, individuals high in attachment anxiety tend to be overwhelmed by worries about abandonment, whereas those high in avoidance tend to avoid emotional intimacy and strive to remain independent and autonomous (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998). A large body of empirical evidence has shown that secure individuals (low on both attachment and avoidance) tend to have more stably and satisfying interpersonal relationships (e.g., Simpson, Collins, Salvatore, & Sung, 2014). Negative expectations about attachment figures among insecure individuals may even serve as basis for mental disorders, such as borderline personality (Dutton & White, 2012).

Attachment insecurities have been associated with physical and psychological domestic violence (Babcock, Jacobson, Gottman, & Yerington, 2000; Sonkin & Dutton, 2003) as well as other criminal behavior (Ogilvie, Newman, Todd, & Peck, 2014). There is evidence that individuals high on both anxiety and avoidance (called fearful) show the highest rates of abuse, suggesting that these dimensions have unique negative effects on relationships (West & George, 1999; Whitfield, Anda, Dube, & Felitti, 2003).

Dutton (2007) described the *abusive personality* as consisting of a constellation of psychological traits including fearful attachment, a history of parental shaming and rejection, and witnessing parental violence as a child. Others have found that the use of violence by one individual in a couple is predictive of future violence by that same individual or by their partner (Straus, Gelles, & Smith, 1990). Mutual domestic violence has also been associated with attachment insecurity. For instance, Bookwala and colleagues (i.e., Bookwala, 2002; Bookwala & Zdaniuk, 1998) have found that mutually violent couples scored higher on the preoccupied and fearful-avoidant attachment styles (styles associated with high anxiety, and with high anxiety and high avoidance, respectively), and reported experiencing more interpersonal problems than did couples involved in nonaggressive dating relationships. Other studies have suggested that the fear of abandonment characteristic of individuals high in attachment anxiety is associated with increased risk for violence due to the escalating potential of "demand-withdraw" communication patterns (i.e., Bélanger, Mathieu, Dugal, & Courchesne, 2015; Follingstad, Bradley, Helff, & Laughlin, 2002; Fournier, Brassard, & Shaver, 2011). Apparently, an anxious individual in a relationship with an avoidant person may *demand* more intimacy and attention, and if the avoidant person withdraws in response to those demands, the anxious individual's anger could escalate to violence (Miga, Hare, Allen, & Manning, 2010), where the highly anxious individual's tendency to distrust their avoidant partner has the potential to fuel the violence cycle (Buck, Leenaars, Emmelkamp, & van Marle, 2012). Attachment anxiety has also been associated with coercion and verbal abusive during interpersonal conflict in community and treatment samples (Feeney & Karantzas, 2017; Fournier et al., 2011; Henderson, Bartholomew, Trinke, & Kwong, 2005; Marshall & Holtzworth-Munroe, 2010;), and with expression of

pathological jealousy, which can be viewed as a direct or indirect attempts of reducing fear of abandonment (Hamel, 2014; Fournier et al., 2011; Hamel & Sonkin, 2019; Henderson et al., 2005; Sonkin & Dutton, 2003).

Attachment avoidance has also been associated with relationship violence (Collins, Cooper, Albino, & Allard, 2002; Dumas, Pearson, Elgin, & McKinley, 2008; Holtzworth-Munroe et al., 1997; Rankins, Saunders, & Williams, 2000; Roberts & Noller, 1998). According to Dumas et al. (2008), avoidant individuals in a relationship with a demanding preoccupied partner may become violent due to the emotional frustration of being unable to avoid their partner's demands for intimacy, particularly when the avoidant partner is high in hostility and dominance (Lawson & Malnar, 2011). Although both anxiety and avoidance seem to be associated with relationship violence, Mikulincer and Shaver (2016a) suggest that the anxiety component contributes more heavily to this negative outcome.

Unfortunately, psychological violence is very prevalent in our society (Rogers & Follingstad, 2014), and it increases risk of physical health problems, depression, substance use, chronic disease, and chronic mental illness (Coker et al., 2002; Follingstad, 2009).

There are different conceptualizations of psychological violence in the context of close relationships (Follingstad, Coker, Lee, Williams, Bush, & Mendiondo, 2015; Hamel, Jones, Dutton, & Graham-Kevan, 2015; Kelly, 2004; Leisring, 2013; Maiuro, 2001; Marshall, 1996; O'Leary, 1999). One such model is the conceptualization of psychological abuse consisting of restrictive engulfment (preventing or pressuring a partner from spending time in other activities due to fear of abandonment and insecurity), hostile withdrawal, denigration, and dominance-intimidation (Eckhardt, Samper, & Murphy, 2008; Murphy & Hoover, 1999; Murphy, Taft, & Eckhardt, 2007). Two studies have specifically examined the associations between attachment insecurities and different forms of psychological violence utilizing a valid and reliable measure (Murphy & Hoover, 1999). In one of those studies, McDermott Cheng, Lopez, McKelvey, Bateman, and Schneiderdult (2017) found that attachment anxiety was positively associated with all four types of psychological aggression (restrictive engulfment, hostile withdrawal, denigration, and dominance-intimidation) with females, but only restrictive engulfment with males. Attachment avoidance was positively associated with hostile withdrawal in males and females, and denigration in the male sample was related to restrictive engulfment. They also found that dominance orientations (i.e., nonegalitarian relationship beliefs signifying the desire to have power over and dominate one's partner) significantly positively mediated the associations between attachment and all four forms of psychological aggression in both samples. Also using Murphy and Hoover (1999)'s model of psychological abuse, Gormley and Lopez (2010) found that attachment avoidance, but not attachment anxiety, was correlated to emotional abuse, primarily denigration, dominance/intimidation, and hostile withdrawal.

Taken together, the studies presented so far indicate a positive association between attachment insecurity and relationship violence. However, only a few of those studies have explored the association between the two dimensions of attachment insecurities (anxiety and avoidance) and specific subtypes of psychological abuse as measured by valid and reliable instruments. Filling this gap in knowledge could ultimately help treatment providers develop effective attachment-based interventions that may reduce rates of domestic violence (Corvo, Cooney, & Sonkin, 2017). That was the purpose of our study.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the present study was to explore potential associations among dispositional attachment insecurities (anxiety and avoidance), relationship functioning, and psychological domestic violence in a sample of court-mandated male and female perpetrators of domestic violence. We assessed relationship functioning via three skills known to be necessary for healthy intimate relationships: anger management, communication, and conflict resolution. We assessed psychological domestic violence via three constructs: derogation and control, jealous-hypervigilance, and threats to control space. Based on previous findings, we predicted that anxiety, and avoidance to a lesser extent, would correlate positively with all three types of psychological abuse among both men and women. Based on findings that individuals scoring high in attachment insecurities tend to have poor emotion regulation and interpersonal conflict problem-solving skills (Schore & Schore, 2008; Simpson & Rholes, 2017), we predicted that both dimensions of attachment insecurities would correlate negatively with relationship skills. As far as we know, this is the first study to explore associations between attachment insecurities and psychological violence using the Controlling and Abusive Tactics Questionnaire (CAT-2; Hamel et al., 2015).

METHOD

The study sample was obtained from the case files of clients enrolled with Alternative Behavior Choices (ABC), a domestic violence perpetrator program with multiple locations in the San Francisco Bay Area, California (under the directorship of the fourth author). To be included in this study, participants had to have been mandated by a criminal court to participate in the program as part of their sentencing requirement and to have enrolled sometime after January 1, 2015. At intake, all clients who enter the ABC program undergo an extensive psychosocial interview and complete self-report measures of attachment insecurities, relationship functioning, and psychological domestic violence. To assess client progress as a function of participation of the program, all participants of the program complete the three questionnaires again upon program completion. For this study, we collected data from 97 participants (76 men and 21 women). All of which were at least 18 years of age. Data for the study was de-identified, and screened by the team of investigators. No other demographic data was provided. Given the comprehensive process of data collection limited cases were missing. In the case of missing data, the missing values were replaced by means where possible (Table 1).

TABLE 1. Demographics

Sex	% (n)
Male	78.4 (76)
Female	21.6 (21)

INSTRUMENTS

Attachment Anxiety and Attachment Avoidance

Participants completed the Experiences in Close Relationships Scale-Revised (ECR-R), the most widely used self-report measure of “trait” attachment security and insecurity. The ECR-R consists of two 18-item subscales corresponding to the two dimensions of attachment: anxiety and avoidance. Examples of items included in the anxiety dimension are “When my partner is out of sight, I worry that he or she might become interested in someone else” and “My partner only seems to notice me when I’m angry.” Examples of items included in the avoidance dimension are “I prefer not to be too close to romantic partners” and “I get uncomfortable when a romantic partner wants to be very close.” Participants rates themselves on a 1–7 Likert-type scale where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree. The responses for each scale are then averaged (where some items are reversed-keyed) resulting in two continuous scores—attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety. The lower the scores, the higher the attachment security. The higher the scores, the higher the attachment insecurity. Although there are no “norms” of the cutoff for security/insecurity, a recent online sample of over 17,000 people (73% women), the mean avoidance was 2.92 ($SD = 1.19$) and anxiety was 3.56 ($SD = 1.12$). The ECR-R Cronbach’s alphas for each of these subscales for others studies tend to exceed .90.

Relationship Functioning

Participants also completed the Relationship Functioning Self-Assessment (RFSA), a self-report measure adapted in 2002 by the third author (John Hamel) based on Neidig and Fredman’s (1984) model of couple functioning. The assessment contains seven categories (rows) of relationship functioning (personal responsibility, anger management, coping with stress, communication, conflict resolution, isolation/social support, control), and three descriptive statements (columns) in each area indicating what might be considered low, medium, and high functioning. For example, the Low Functioning statement for the “Anger Management” category includes: “short fuse, temper tantrums, high level of verbal aggression; any kind of physical aggression.” The Medium Functioning statement for the “Anger Management” category includes: “tries to express feelings properly, but often reacts before thinking; some verbal, no physical aggression.” The High Functioning statement for the “Anger Management” category includes: “Rarely lets partner push his/her buttons; able to think through options, choose his/her actions.” The participant is instructed to indicate on a 1–5 Likert-type scale (1 = very poor; 3 = fair; 5 = excellent) that best reflects his/her level of functioning. If the participant’s level of functioning is between “very poor” (1) and “fair” (3), they are instructed to circle “2” for “poor.” If their level of functioning is between “fair” (3) and “excellent” (5), they are instructed circle “4” for “good.” The third author (Hamel) utilizes the “Anger Management,” “Communication,” and “Conflict Resolution” scales in his treatment program, because domestic violence perpetrator treatment typically includes treatment goals of improving anger management, communication, and conflict resolution skill (Hamel, 2014). The RFSA has been limited to clinical settings and used primarily to help clients in setting treatment goals, its psychometric properties have yet to be examined.

Psychological Domestic Violence

Psychological domestic violence was assessed with The CAT-2, which is a gender inclusive instrument that measures individuals' use of controlling and abusive tactics in their relationship with an intimate partner (Hamel et al., 2015). The CAT-2 has a men and a women version. The men version includes 36 items organized around four dimensions: derogation and control, jealous-hypervigilance, threats and control of space, and sexual derogation. The women version has 35 items and is organized around three dimensions: derogation and control, jealous-hypervigilance, and threats and control of space). Items of this measure are answered on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (Never) to 4 (Frequent). The CAT-2 was significantly and positively correlated with the Measure of Psychologically Abusive Behaviors (Follingstad, 2011), a general aggression measure (Buss & Perry, 1992), and the psychopathy and narcissism subscales of the Dark Triad measure (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). The CAT-2 therefore has been shown to have good construct and convergent validity. Examples of items included in the derogation and control are "Ridicules partner" and "Treats partner like he/she is stupid." Examples of items included in the jealous-hypervigilance dimension include "Follows partner around" and "Searches partner's purse/wallet/cell phone calls." Finally, examples of items included in the threats and control of space dimension are "Verbally threatens to hurt partner" and "Threatens with gestures (e.g., staring)." Items were answered with a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (never) to 4 (frequent). High scores in each subscale indicate frequent engagement in problematic relationship behaviors. This study examined only the first three dimensions of psychological violence—derogation and control, jealous hypervigilance, and threats and control of space.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

IBM SPSS 24 was used by the research team to conduct analyses. Standard descriptive statistics were used to describe the sample. The research team conducted a series of tests to investigate differences in the psychological scales by gender using a series of independent *t*-tests. In order to test for associations with attachment, we used Spearman's rank order correlations and Pearson product-moment correlations.

RESULTS

First, we conducted a test for differences in all the main variables of the study: attachment insecurities, relationship functioning, and psychological violence variables according to gender. We did not find any differences in any of the variables tested (Table 2).

We then tested associations between attachment insecurities and three subscales of the RFSA Questionnaire separately for male and female participants, via a series of Spearman's rank order correlations. Results showed that among men, both attachment anxiety and avoidance correlated negatively with all three subscales of relationship functioning (Table 3). Among women, we found only one significant association with avoidance being negatively correlated with communication (Table 3). The Cronbach's alpha for the three item RFSA was 0.76.

TABLE 2. Independent Sample *t*-Test for Gender and CAT-2, RSFS, and ECR-R Subscales

Scales	Gender		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
	Male	Female			
CAT-2	22.93 (<i>SD</i> = 22.93)	19.45 (<i>SD</i> = 13.59)	.726	83	.470
RSFS	11.64 (<i>SD</i> = 6.71)	10.13 (<i>SD</i> = 2.12)	1.037	91	.219
ECR-R Anxiety	2.79 (<i>SD</i> = 1.21)	3.35 (<i>SD</i> = 1.38)	-1.849	91	.068
ECR-R Avoidance	2.84 (<i>SD</i> = .97)	2.94 (<i>SD</i> = .86)	-.487	91	.638

TABLE 3. ECR-R and Relationship Functioning Self-Assessment Spearman Rank Order Correlation for Males and Females

Measure	Anxiety	Avoid- ance	Anger Manage- ment	Commu- nicating	Resolving Conflict
1. Anxiety— Males	1.000	.421*** (<i>n</i> = 71)	-.491*** (<i>n</i> = 67)	-.442*** (<i>n</i> = 67)	-.506*** (<i>n</i> = 67)
2. Avoidance— Males	.421*** (<i>n</i> = 71)	1.000	-.374** (<i>n</i> = 67)	-.451*** (<i>n</i> = 67)	-.376** (<i>n</i> = 67)
1. Anxiety— Females	1.000	.345 (<i>n</i> = 22)	.006 (<i>n</i> = 22)	.121 (<i>n</i> = 22)	-.110 (<i>n</i> = 22)
2. Avoidance— Females	.345 (<i>n</i> = 22)	1.000	-.058 (<i>n</i> = 22)	-.145*** (<i>n</i> = 22)	-.400 (<i>n</i> = 22)

***p* ≤ .001. *** *p* < .001.

We also tested associations between attachment insecurities and three subscales of the CAT-2 separately for men and women. Among men, anxiety was positively associated with all three indicators of psychological domestic violence (derogation and control, jealous hypervigilance, and threats and control of space), whereas avoidance was positively associated with derogation and control and with jealous hypervigilance (Table 4). Among women, anxiety was positively correlated with derogation and control and jealous hypervigilance. No associations were found between avoidance and psychological violence variables among women (Table 4). The Cronbach's alpha for the three item CAT-2 was 0.78.

ATTACHMENT STYLES

Although the focus of this study was to examine the specific effects of attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance on self-report relationship functioning and controlling and abusive tactics in close relationships, we investigated the categorical attachment styles of the subjects in the study using norms proposed by Fraley (2012). The males had the following breakdown in attachment styles: Secure (low anxiety and low avoidance; *n* = 41) 54%;

TABLE 4. Intercorrelations for ECR-R and CAT-2 for Males and Females (Pearson-Product Correlation)

Measure	Anxiety	Avoidance	Derogation and Control	Jealous Hypervigilance	Threats and Control of Space
1. Anxiety— Males	1.000	.401*** (<i>n</i> = 71)	.627*** (<i>n</i> = 67)	.557*** (<i>n</i> = 67)	.495* (<i>n</i> = 64)
2. Avoidance— Males	.401***	1.000 (<i>n</i> = 71)	.397** (<i>n</i> = 67)	.391*** (<i>n</i> = 67)	.222 (<i>n</i> = 64)
1. Anxiety— Females	1.000	.209 (<i>n</i> = 22)	.482* (<i>n</i> = 20)	.452* (<i>n</i> = 21)	.134 (<i>n</i> = 19)
2. Avoidance— Females	.209	1.000 (<i>n</i> = 20)	.118 (<i>n</i> = 19)	-.367 (<i>n</i> = 19)	-.267 (<i>n</i> = 19)

p* < .05. *p* < .001. ****p* < .001.

TABLE 5. Categorical Attachment Styles for Males and Females

Attachment Categories	Secure	Dismissing	Fearfully Avoidant	Preoccupied
Males (<i>n</i>) %	(<i>n</i> = 41) 54%	(<i>n</i> = 17) 22%	(<i>n</i> = 13) 17%	(<i>n</i> = 5) 7%
Female (<i>n</i>) %	(<i>n</i> = 11) 53%	(<i>n</i> = 1) 5%	(<i>n</i> = 5) 24%	(<i>n</i> = 4) 19%

Dismissing (high avoidance and low anxiety; *n* = 17) 22%; Fearfully Avoidant (high avoidance and high anxiety; *n* = 13) 17%; Preoccupied (high anxiety and low avoidance; *n* = 5) 7%. The females had the following breakdown in attachment styles: Secure (*n* = 11) 53%; Dismissing (*n* = 1) 5%; Fearfully Avoidant (*n* = 5) 24%; Preoccupied (*n* = 4) 19% (Table 5).

In order to gain a better understanding of attachment styles among the sample, the criteria for the ECR-R criteria was used to determine attachment styles among men and women. The ECR-R scoring for an individual to be considered insecure on the ECR-R anxiety is classified as having a mean score above 3.56 (*SD* = 1.12) and a mean ECR-R avoidance score above 2.92 (*SD* = 1.19). Scores ranging from 0 to the average score for ECR-R anxiety and ECR-R avoidance was recoded as secure (0) and scores above the average were scored as insecure (1). The newly created variable, nominal categories (secure 0, insecure 1) for ECR-R avoidance and ECR-R anxiety was aggregated for a total score ranging from 0 to 2 with a score of 0 indicating a secure attachment, a score of 1 indicating an insecure attachment either on avoidance or anxiety, and a score of 2 indicating an insecure attachment for both avoidance and anxiety.

For ECR-R anxiety, the mean sample score was 2.95 (*SD* = 1.27), with men having a mean ECR-R anxiety score of 2.83 (*SD* = 1.22) and women having a mean score of 3.35 (*SD* = 1.38). ECR-R avoidance mean score for the sample was 2.95 (*SD* = 1.27), with

men having a mean score of 2.84 ($SD = .95$) and women having a mean score of 2.94 ($SD = .90$).

Among the sample ($n = 97$), nearly half of the sample (48.5%, $n = 47$) is classified as having secure attachment styles, followed by 28.9% ($n = 28$) of the sample having an insecure attachment style on either the avoidance or anxiety constructs, and nearly one quarter of the sample (22.7%, $n = 22$) having both avoidance and anxiety attachment styles. In terms of gender, 48% ($n = 36$) of the men had secure attachment styles in comparison to 50% ($n = 11$) of women exhibiting secure attachment. For having one insecure attachment, 29.3% ($n = 22$) of men and 27.3% ($n = 6$) of women could be categorized with one of the types of insecure attachment. Having both avoidance and anxiety insecure attachment styles, had the same percentage among men and women, 22.7% ($n = 17$ and $n = 5$).

To further investigate potential associations among dispositional attachment insecurities (anxiety and avoidance), relationship functioning, and psychological domestic violence, we employed a series of logistic regressions analyses to predict attachment insecurities. Although with three dependent variables the preferred analysis strategy would be multinomial logistic regression, the assumptions for using it were not met. Therefore, we performed two binary logistic regression analyses instead, since it remains robust even with violations of some of its underlying assumptions. Each of the two models consisted of a constellation of seven predictors, with two dependent variables. In the first model, the dependent variables were secure attachment and anxious attachment. In the second model the dependent variables were secure attachment and avoidant attachment. The study employed an analysis strategy that allowed for simultaneous entry of the independent variables. Results of the logistic regression analyses indicated that none of the models was statistically significant, indicating that the predictors as a set had no ability to predict group membership.

DISCUSSION

This exploratory study was to determine the association between attachment anxiety and avoidance and the Family Functioning Self-Assessment Scale (three subscales) and the Controlling and Abusive Tactics Scale (three subscales) in a sample of court-mandated male and female batterers. Our hypothesis was that attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance would negatively correlate with self-reported relationship functioning—managing anger, communication, and conflict resolution—with both the male and female subjects. The results partially supported our hypothesis in that attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance with the male subjects significantly, negatively correlated with all three family functioning scales. Research has documented that secure attachment is associated with many prosocial skills and personality characteristics (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2012), whereas insecure attachment often results in emotional, cognitive, and behavioral challenges including increased negative emotionality, such as anger, jealousy, and hostility (Dutton, Lane, Koren, & Bartholomew, 2016). Although the findings with the male subjects indicated a weak to moderate correlation, this was not unexpected in that other factors contribute to marital functioning in general besides attachment style (Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000). Such factors include psychopathology, personality dynamics, substance abuse, family history, and prior trauma.

Contrary to our hypothesis there was no association between attachment anxiety and self-reported relationship functioning with women. Furthermore, with women subjects

there was only a very weak, although significant association, between attachment avoidance and the communication. This later finding would make sense because the avoidant person withdraws from conflict and is typically less invested in communication of their own or their partner's emotions (Edelstein & Shaver, 2004). As a result, these individuals have the less experience developing their communication skills and therefore are likely to be less adept in this area.

One reason for this glaring difference between the male and female subjects was primarily due to the fact that the sample of female subjects was significantly smaller than the sample of men (21 women versus 76 men). Another possible hypothesis for the apparent differences between males and females is that women are generally more attuned to and value affective communication in their close relationships (Burlison, Kunkel, Samter, & Working, 1996). Therefore, they may tend to perceive themselves as more comfortable expressing and managing emotions, communicating, and more willing to resolve conflict than their partner and consequently, more likely to rate themselves in a favorable way.

The most significant finding was the moderate to strong association between men's attachment anxiety and all three forms of psychological abuse/control: derogation and control, jealous hypervigilance, and threats and control of space. Derogation and control had the strongest positive association, followed by jealous-hypervigilance and threats and control of space. Perpetrators high in attachment anxiety will typically utilize various forms of control in an attempt to soothe or regulate intense fears of perceived rejection and abandonment, and emotional feelings of jealousy experienced in close relationships. Emotional distress regulation will often take precedent over impulse control (Tice, Bratslavsky, & Baumeister, 2001). Many male perpetrators of domestic violence may use coercive control in an attempt to stop the partner from actions that evoke abandonment fears, such as preventing them from being with other people, habitual calling and texting to monitor their activities, controlling access to communication devices, and stalking (Allison, Bartholomew, Maysel, & Dutton, 2007). Cognitive depletion from high anxiety or other stressors have been found to impair top-down (i.e., executive control such as thinking, planning, organizing) processing and decision-making and consequently, creates vulnerability for impulsive behavior and short-term solutions, regardless of their long-term consequences (Wagner, Altman, Boswell, Kelley, & Heatherton, 2013). This cognitive depletion could be related to perpetrators' impulsive decisions to stop their partner from doing whatever they perceive is causing them distress regardless of the consequences to their relationship quality.

Many perpetrators also utilize derogation of the partner to humiliate or shame the loved one into compliance in an attempt to immediately reduce emotional distress in spite of the negative consequences to their relationship. All these efforts to control the partner from an attachment perspective are attempts to optimize the opportunity for the attachment figure to provide care and comfort, even though it may ultimately promote anger, resentment, and resistance to providing comfort and soothing in the future. Likewise, individuals high in attachment anxiety will often ruminate on their anger for long periods of time, and this anger may manifest during discussions or arguments in the form of intense criticism and derogatory comments (Birkley & Eckhardt, 2015).

The effects of attachment avoidance on controlling and abusive techniques, though significant, were not as strong, which was somewhat anticipated due to other findings in the literature (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016a). In this sample, the men's attachment avoidance only had a weak, but significant correlation to derogation and control and jealous-hypervigilance. Men's attachment avoidance, had no effect on threats and control of space.

Individuals high in avoidance would generally demand more emotional, if not physical, distance and therefore typically demand less proximity to their partner. However, highly avoidant individuals can be very derogatory and rejecting of their partners, particularly when they are paired with a highly anxious and dependent partner. This doesn't mean that avoidant individuals are less prone to violence, only that certain situations are likely to create the right context for aggressive behavior. When avoidant men are paired with an anxious partner, the partner's verbal demands for intimacy and closeness could trigger a violent response from the avoidant partner when verbal derogation and other control techniques don't deliver the desired effect—to stop their partner from making demands (Allison et al., 2007; Bartholomew & Allison, 2006). Doumas et al. (2008) found that pairing between an avoidant male and anxious female increases the risk for symmetrical violence due to negative and escalating demand-withdrawal dynamics. Henderson and colleagues found that the relationship between attachment avoidance and psychological violence was not as robust as attachment anxiety (Henderson et al., 2005).

Derogation of attachment figures have been found in the narratives of dismissing adults administered the Adult Attachment Interview (George, Kaplan, & Main, 1985; Roisman, Fraley, & Belsky, 2007), which is a key marker for the dismissing category. Although avoidant people typically tend to withdraw from conflict (Pietromonaco, Greenwood, & Barrett, 2004) they may become violent as a result of other factors, such as personality dynamics (Bookwala & Zdaniuk, 1998), partner infidelity (Murphy & Maiuro, 2009), or a history of childhood trauma (Godbout, Dutton, Lussier, & Sabourin, 2009). Avoidant individuals may on the surface appear emotionally cold, self-sufficient, and rejecting of emotional intimacy, their apparent downplaying of their emotional needs can ironically be thought of a defense against intense anxiety and hopelessness of anticipating their need for closeness rejected or rebuffed by their attachment figure (Edelstein & Shaver, 2004; Silverman, 2011).

This small sample of female subjects showed a moderate, but significant relationship between attachment anxiety and derogation/control and jealous-hypervigilance. These findings are once again consistent with previous studies described above. When taking all these findings in account, attachment anxiety appears to be the strongest predictor of psychological abusiveness for males and female perpetrators of domestic violence. In their review of the attachment research on relationship violence, Mikulincer and Shaver (2016a) conclude that although there is evidence for avoidance as a contributor to violence in close relationships, it may be the fearful type of avoidance (high avoidance and high anxiety) and that anxiety may be the *major culprit*. Therefore developing interventions specifically aimed at reducing attachment anxiety may ultimately address these common forms of coercive control and verbal abuse with domestic violence perpetrators.

The data results showed that there were no significant differences between male and female scores on the ECR-R subscales—Anxiety and Avoidance. Likewise there were no differences between males and females on their overall scores of the CAT-2 or the Relationship Self-Assessment. However, given the small number of women in this sample, it was decided to not combine the data due to concerns of drawing erroneous conclusions about court-mandated female perpetrators.

An interesting finding of our sample of perpetrators showed a surprisingly high number of subjects with secure attachment (~50%). Previous samples from the 1990s, indicated a much lower rate of secure attachment (~20%) with court-mandated perpetrators of domestic violence (Dutton et al., 1994; Holtzworth-Munroe et al., 1997). This could be for a variety of reasons. First, public policy has significantly changed since the 1990s. With

the advent of mandatory arrest policies, better police training and judiciary education and training, there may be more lower-level perpetrators coming through the criminal justice system than ever before. Additionally, studies comparing low-level violence perpetrators, with high conflict couples (with no violence) and high-level violence perpetrators, indicates that low-level violence perpetrators may have more in common with high conflict couples (with no violence), than with high level domestic violence perpetrators (Simpson, Doss, Wheeler, & Christensen, 2007).

Findings from this study strongly suggest that interventions with intimate partner violence (IPV) perpetrators ought to take into account the role that attachment style may have on a client's relationship dynamics, including his or her use of emotional and/or physical violence. A discussion of attachment issues should be included in IPV interventions regardless of modality, and certainly as part of any psychoeducational group curriculum, supplementing standard discussions of power and control and the different types of violence cycles. This not only addresses a known risk factor, but also contributes to a strong working alliance between therapist and client, which outcome research finds effective in reducing rates of recidivism. The batterer intervention program offered by the fourth author, for example, offers participants didactic material and workbook exercises on insecure attachment styles and their possible effects on emotion management and relationship conflict. As previously mentioned, participants are administered the Experiences in Close Relationships Questionnaire at intake (Hamel, 2014). Results are used to help these clients, male and female, better understand their behavior patterns, identify their relationship needs, and set personal goals for treatment. An anxiously attached man, for instance, may be persuaded to overcome his insecurities by building trust with his partner, learning ways to vocalize his needs, expand his support systems beyond his intimate relationship, and engage in meaningful, empowering activities.

The first author has also been treating male perpetrators of intimate violence in individual and group psychotherapy for almost 40 years. For the past 25 years he has been integrating attachment theory into an individual treatment model (Sonkin & Dutton, 2002). Although cognitive and behavioral interventions are still important elements of effective perpetrator treatment protocols, therapists can use these findings to integrate attachment theory principles into their current model. Anxiety about abandonment, engulfment, loss of control, powerlessness, attacks on self-esteem are common dynamics with individuals with insecure attachment (Stovall-McClough & Dozier, 2016). Perpetrators of partner abuse may be suffering from these symptoms as well, and may have learned to use physical and psychological violence to regulate these affect-laden cognitive processes. Emotion regulation (Gross, 2015) can be response-focused (emotions that are arising in the present moment) or antecedent-focused (predicting situations that are likely to trigger emotions). Anxiety can be powerful motivator of action or problem-solving and when violence has been used to regulate fear and anxiety in the past, it is more likely to be utilized in the present (DeWall, Gillath, Pressman, Black, Bartz, Moskowitz, & Stetler, 2014). Domestic violence therapists can target anxiety and learn more adaptive strategies, such as self-monitoring techniques, calming skills, predicting situations where its likely to arise and understanding it's origins, particularly with clients who either witnessed violence, or was victim to violence, earlier in their life.

Finally, there has been a growing body of research suggesting secure base priming can reduce attachment anxiety with individuals with insecure attachment (Gillath, 2018). Dutton and colleagues have studied the potential benefits of secure base priming on individuals

anger and reactivity (Dutton et al., 2016. Corvo et al. (2017) have likewise proposed utilizing secure base priming as an adjunct to standard batterer treatment. Although this hasn't been tested on a population of perpetrators in treatment, it's effect on the general population shows promise for some perpetrators of domestic violence.

LIMITATIONS

There are two important limitations to the study. First, all the assessments of attachment, psychological abusiveness and relationship functioning are all self-report measures. Self-report measures of attachment like ECR-R have been criticized for the vulnerability to social desirability effects (Crowell, Fraley, & Shaver, 2008). This could also be said about the other self-report measures utilized in this study (CAT-2 and Relationship Self Assessment). These social desirability effects may be particularly relevant with court-mandated perpetrators of domestic violence (Dutton & Hemphill, 1992) where participants may be highly motivated to minimize expressing openly their problems lest they get into more trouble. Another factor related to social desirability on self-report measures is that recent studies suggest that we may not be the best judge of our own flaws or shortcomings. Connelly and Hülshager (2012) recently conducted a study finding that others perceptions of us may be more accurate than our own perceptions. El-Alayli & Wynne (2015) found when couples were asked to evaluate each other's personality, they often rated themselves more favorably than their partners. These factors may have had an influence on these court-mandated perpetrators of domestic violence when completing the self-assessment measures. Additionally, clients attending domestic violence program usually have to sign an authorization to release information so that the program can communicate with probation officers in order to report progress or the lack thereof. They may worry that their answers will be shared with their probation officer, which could lead to negative consequences. Additionally, there was not literature that the Family Functioning Self-Assessment Scale has found to be a reliable measure of these factors. Finally, when court-mandated clients first enter treatment, they are often not convinced that they have problems needing to change (Sielski, Begun, & Hamel, 2015) and frequently are more likely to blame their partners, police or the courts for their having to attend treatment, and consequently vulnerable to minimizing their relationship and behavioral problems on assessment measures.

Another significant limitation, was the extremely small sample size of female subjects. Only 21 females (versus 76 males) were included in this sample which may have been a reason for the weaker, as well as the lack of, correlations found between attachment anxiety and avoidance and many of the measure subscales. A larger number of female subjects would be necessary in order to draw more accurate conclusions about the relationship between attachment and psychological abusiveness and relationship functioning.

In spite of these limitations, the findings suggest that therapists treating perpetrators of domestic violence should put more emphasis on addressing attachment anxiety, and avoidance, in their treatment of court-mandated perpetrators of domestic violence. Attachment theory informed therapeutic interventions, such as mentalization-based treatment (Bateman & Fonagy, 2013) and emotionally-focused therapy (Johnson, 2012) as well as other models (Fosha, 2013; Obegi & Berant, 2010; Sonkin & Dutton, 2003; Wesselmann, 2013) have shown promising outcomes with difficult-to-treat clinical populations. However, further study on female clinical populations of perpetrators will help us better understand the

relationship between attachment anxiety and avoidance and female psychological violence in intimate relationships.

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