

Goldsmiths  
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

PURDUE  
UNIVERSITY

Seeking Avoidants:  
Recruitment Issues in Designing  
an Attachment Intervention for Couples

Madoka Kumashiro  
Goldsmiths, University of London

Ximena B. Arriaga  
Purdue University

E.S.R.C.  
ECONOMIC  
& SOCIAL  
RESEARCH  
COUNCIL



### 'Interventions' to Bolster Attachment Security

- Aim: Introduce strategies, or 'exercises' that couples (non-clinical) can adopt to enhance attachment
- 2-step process to bolster attachment security
  - Manage immediate attachment concerns
    - Anxiety - assuage fears of abandonment
    - Avoidance – assuage fears of dependence
  - Redirect attachment insecurity over time
    - Anxiety – instill self-confidence
    - Avoidance – instill trust
- Preliminary study: Provide partners with communication strategies to manage immediate insecurities

### Method: Pilot Lab Experimental Study

- Assessed attachment styles - 1 paragraph to assign couples, then full 36 item ECR-R measure before conversation
- Assigned as Anxious or Avoidant based on 'Target' insecurity
- Assigned relatively more secure person to be 'Partner'
- 'Partner' randomly assigned to Control or Experimental
  - use different strategies, based on 'Target' insecurity:
    - 1) Anxious control (no instruction) vs.
    - 2) Anxious experimental ('Safe' communication)
    - 3) Avoidant control (no instruction) vs.
    - 4) Avoidant experimental ('Soft' communication)
- 6-min video-taped conversation on a target identified issue
- Pre- and post-conversation measures
- 2-week follow-up

### Challenges: Preliminary Data Analysis

- 80 couples in lab (mostly students for course credit)
- 30 couples and 25 individuals for 2-week follow-up
  - 3 break-ups: all in avoidance conditions
- Wrong assignment of couples –assigned as more/less secure and to anxious/anxiety by 1-paragraph measure
  - 22 couples did not fit criteria according to 36 item ECRR
  - Some couples are very secure
- Identified 'invalid' couples based on serious procedural issues or language barriers (n=11)
- Procedural issues (n=11): e.g., did not follow instructions or reported inability/unwillingness to follow strategy
- Language/culture issues (n=10): many international students
- Some couples not dating exclusively (n=5)
- More issues in avoidance (n=25) than anxious (n=10)
- Imbalance of gender: Anxious control partners mostly male

	Anxiety			Avoidance		
	Control	Exp	Total	Control	Exp	Total
	Total number of couples	15	18	33	26	21
Invalid couples	3	1	4	2	5	7
Wrong assignment	3	3	6	8	8	16
Procedural issues	2	1	3	1	6	9
Language issues	2	2	4	2	4	10
Not exclusively dating	0	0	0	1	4	5
Number of 'optimal couples'	11	12	23	15	7	22
Female Partners	3	9	12	13	13	26
Male Partners	12	9	21	13	8	21
'Optimal' Female Partners	1	5	6	9	4	13
'Optimal' Male Partners	10	7	17	6	3	9

	Anxiety			Avoidance		
	Control	Exp	Total	Control	Exp	Total
	T1 # of couples	15	18	33	26	21
T2 number of Targets	7	11	18	15	8	23
T2 number of Partners	8	12	20	13	11	24
T1 # of 'Optimal' couples	11	12	23	15	7	22
T2 # of 'Optimal' Targets	7	7	14	8	4	12
T2 # of 'Optimal' Partners	6	7	13	7	5	12
Break-ups	0	0	0	1	2	3
T2 'Optimal' Female Partners	1	4	5	4	3	7
T2 'Optimal' Male Partners	5	3	8	3	2	5

- Suggestions?
- New longitudinal experimental study to incorporate both assuaging anxiety and bolstering security
  - Recruitment of couples – especially avoidants
    - Limited resources for payment
  - Identifying couples who are suitable for the study
    - Identifying who is the more secure partner
    - Recruitment criteria, including relationship length, severity of attachment insecurity & relationship issues, sex, etc.
    - Identifying people who misrepresent themselves
  - Suitable comparison group?
  - Getting participants to adopt strategies
  - Assessing effectiveness
    - How long to follow-up?
    - Assessing change and measures - ECR-R is 36 items
  - Any other suggestions - ideas for bolstering security



