

# The Structure of Romance

## A Factor-Analytic Examination of the Relationship Scales Questionnaire

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The Relationship Scales Questionnaire (RSQ) was administered to 256 university undergraduates who filled it out in relation to romantic attachments. A series of factor analyses was conducted which showed little evidence for the four factors which were expected to underlie the four proposed subscales. A robust two-factor structure was observed with one factor relating to closeness/independence and the other concerned with anxiety/security. A two-dimensional classification system, based upon these two empirically derived scales, is proposed. This system yields four categories that are synonymous with the four attachment styles known as Secure, Dismissive, Fearful, and Anxious-Ambivalent. The RSQ, with minor modifications to its scoring, is argued to be a most useful measure for attachment researchers.

In recent years psychological researchers have rediscovered attachment theory and extended it to such new areas as chronic pain (Mikail, Henderson, & Tasca, 1994), sexual abuse and sexual offending (Alexander, 1992; Ward, Hudson, Marshall, & Siegert, in press), and close adult relationships (Collins & Read, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Levy & Davis, 1988). Closely associated with the proliferation of attachment research has been increasing interest in the assessment of attachment style and behaviour. The present paper is concerned with the psychometric properties of a promising new measure of attachment style in relationships, the Relationship Scales Questionnaire (RSQ), and in particular the construct validity of the RSQ.

Attachment theory was originally developed by Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1980) and refined by Ainsworth (Ainsworth, 1989; Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters & Walls, 1978; Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1989). In his original theory Bowlby, following his interest in the relationship between maternal loss and subsequent personality development, integrated concepts from ethology, cybernetics, information processing, developmental psychology, and psychoanalysis (Bretherton, 1992). Bowlby's key construct was that of the attachment system. The goal of this system was to regulate behaviours designed to obtain and maintain proximity to a preferred individual, the attachment figure, and so ensure that the infant is protected (Alexander, 1992). Functionally this system aims to maintain equilibrium between an individual and the environment (Bretherton, 1987). Attachments are thought to lead to positive emotional states such as joy (when attachments are renewed) and security (when the attachment bond is maintained). Negative emotional states can occur when attachments are threatened (anxiety and/or anger) or loss (sorrow and grief). Bowlby was careful however to stress that the attachment system is only one of several behavioural systems that act to regulate an infant's behaviour.

It is the putative significance of early attachment experiences for later adult relationships that has engendered considerable research attention amongst researchers in the fields of clinical psychology and social cognition of late. According to Bowlby the development of bonds to a caretaker during a child's early years constitute the first stage of the attachment process. Whether positive or negative, attachment relationships in childhood are considered to provide growing children with a template for the construction of their own future relationships (Bowlby, 1973; Hartup,

1986). Additionally, infants develop expectations about their own and other people's roles in their relationships. For example, they may see themselves as worthy and deserving of others' attention, or conversely, as worthless and undeserving of attention. It is Bowlby's thesis that the individual thus develops an internal working model about relationships, built around expectations, beliefs and attitudes resulting from those early attachment experiences. There is currently much debate regarding the structure of internal working models but most researchers agree that the essential components include memories of attachment related experiences, beliefs, expectations and attitudes about a relationship, and strategies and plans for achieving attachment goals (Collins & Read, 1994).

Recently, researchers have applied attachment theory to the study of adult romantic relationships. These relationships are thought to fulfil the requirements for attachment bonds (Weiss, 1982). Typically researchers have found a correspondence between attachment styles observed in infants and those observed in adults (e.g. Bartholomew, 1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). In a seminal study Hazan and Shaver (1987) translated descriptions of infant attachment into terms appropriate to adults. They developed three brief paragraph descriptions of adult attachment styles (corresponding to the three major infant styles), and asked subjects to choose the attachment type that best described their feelings in relationships. Their results suggested that adults with different attachment styles have different kinds of relationship experiences. For example, avoidantly attached adults admitted feeling distant from other people but did not necessarily report feeling lonely. While secure subjects were able to seek support from other people when necessary, and generally held more positive attitudes about interpersonal relationships.

Since this important study there has been an explosion of research and model building in the adult close relationship area. One prominent theorist in this regard has been Bartholomew (Bartholomew, 1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Based upon a two category model (self/positive & negative versus other/positive & negative) of attachment Bartholomew proposes four fundamental styles of attachment within intimate relationships: Secure, Preoccupied, Fearful and Dismissing. The latter two categories are considered to be separate variants of a broader class called Avoidant.

A major issue in attachment research with adults has recently been highlighted by Bartholomew herself, namely the importance of careful attention to measurement issues. Bartholomew comments that "...

our ability as researchers to test the theory and to accumulate convincing evidence of its usefulness is closely tied to the quality of our measures" (Bartholomew, 1994, p. 23). Bartholomew notes the proliferation of attachment measures as interest in this topic grows and sounds a cautious voice. For example, she observes that construct validity has yet to be demonstrated for any of the new measures available. Bartholomew also states that:

"the continued empirical and theoretical progress in the field of adult attachment will only be ensured if researchers begin to pay more attention to measurement issues and scrupulously avoid the uncritical adoption of any one measure as the indicator of adult attachment" (Bartholomew, 1994, p. 26).

A number of controversial issues have emerged in the search for a robust measure of adult attachment (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). For example, researchers have been unable to agree on the form or number of attachment dimensions, although there is converging evidence that a two dimensional structure is most likely (Brennan & Shaver, in press; Simpson, Rholes, & Nelligan, 1992). In recent papers Bartholomew has argued that the two general categories of self/other and positive/negative (and the four subcategories this generates) represent two general attachment dimensions (Griffin & Bartholomew, in press). She hypothesises that these two dimensions underlie the four attachment patterns described earlier. Brennan, Shaver, and Tobey (1991) examined the association between Bartholomew's (an earlier prototypical measure based on paragraph descriptions) and Hazan and Shaver's attachment measures. She found a common two dimensional structure underlying both, a secure versus fearful dimension and a close/preoccupied versus avoidant dimension. In a recent study Feeney and her colleagues (Feeney, Noller, & Callan, 1994) factor analysed a version of Hazan and Shaver's measure and found evidence for a two dimensional model (comfort with closeness & anxiety over abandonment).

There is also the issue of whether or not it is best to classify attachment in a dimensional, prototypical or categorical format. Clearly a solution to these problems needs to take into account the nature of attachment relationships, and well as continue the search for more psychometrically sound assessment instruments.

The purpose of the present paper is to examine one aspect of construct validity, namely the factor structure, of a promising new measure of adult attachment style, the Relationships Scales Questionnaire (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). This measure was based on earlier attachment scales and derives items

from the paragraph descriptions in Hazan and Shaver's (1987) attachment measure, Bartholomew and Horowitz's (1991) Relationship Questionnaire, and Collins and Read's (1990) Adult Attachment Scale. The Relationship Scales Questionnaire (RSQ) has certain advantages over earlier attachment measures such as Hazan & Shaver's (1987) three category model, or Collins and Read's three dimensional measure (1990). One strength is the fact that it has emerged from a cogent theoretical critique of Bowlby's construct of internal working models. The distinction between fearful and dismissive avoidance is also an innovation and appears to be supported by research evidence (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1990; Horowitz, Rosenberg, & Bartholomew, 1993). Bartholomew is careful to stress the dangers of measuring attachment with self-report scales only and recommends using a variety of methods at this stage of theory development (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). Clearly the RSQ merits further research.

It is clear that attachment style is an important mediator of relationship satisfaction in close adult relationships. Our ultimate goal is to examine attachment and romantic relationships among certain clinical groups (e.g. sexual offenders; Ward, Hudson, Marshall & Siegert, in press). However, in view of the measurement problems in this area it seems prudent to first establish the validity of assessment instruments before proceeding further. Therefore, as a first step in examining the construct validity of the RSQ, it was administered to a large group of undergraduates to determine whether a robust factor structure corresponding to the four subscales could be observed.

There are a number of different ways to undertake the search for factors when assessing the construct validity of a questionnaire. For example, look for factors suggested by a guiding theory, or alternatively simply accept the factor structure yielded by data. Walkey (1983) has argued that factor analysts would do better to attempt to replicate previously reported structures, or to look for factor solutions based upon sound theory, than to rigidly adhere to mathematical dictates that do not necessarily yield meaningful solutions. The success of this approach has been demonstrated with the General Health Questionnaire (Siegert, McCormick, Taylor, & Walkey, 1987), the WAIS-R (Siegert, Patten, & Taylor, 1988), and the Attributional Dimension Scale (Siegert & Ward, in press). We utilise this strategy in this paper.

## Method

### *Measure The Relationship Scales Questionnaire*

The RSQ is a 30-item self report questionnaire on which

respondents rate themselves using a five-point scale (from "not at all like me" to "very much like me"), in response to a series of statements about their close relationships (e.g. "I find it easy to get emotionally close to others", "I find it difficult to trust others completely"). Griffin and Bartholomew (1994) claim that this questionnaire provides scores on four separate subscales called Secure, Fearful, Preoccupied, and Dismissing. The preoccupied and fearful subscales are comprised of four items each while the other two contain five items. The RSQ can be worded in terms of general orientation to close relationships, orientation to romantic relationships, or orientation to a specific relationship. For the purpose of the present study it was oriented towards romantic relationships.

### *Subjects*

Subjects were 256 university undergraduates, 179 women, 77 men, in a first-year Psychology class at Victoria University, Wellington, New Zealand. Ages ranged from 17 to 47 with a mean of 22 (s.d. = 6). All participated on a voluntary basis and completed the RSQ anonymously. This project was approved by the University's Human Ethics Committee prior to commencement.

### *Factor Analyses*

A series of factor analyses was conducted. First a four-factor solution was derived in accord with Walkey's (1983) strategy and Bartholomew's four proposed subscales. After examining the resulting factor loadings, a three-factor solution was derived and subsequently a two-factor solution also. All analyses employed principal component factor analysis followed by Varimax rotation.

## Results

The results of the four-factor rotated solution for the 30 items of the RSQ are displayed in Table 1. Items are grouped according to the subscales described by Bartholomew. All loadings below 0.35 are removed for clarity. Inspection of Table 1 provides little support for a four-factor structure underlying the putative four subscales of the RSQ. Items 3, 9, 10, 15 and 28 are considered by Bartholomew to comprise the "Secure" subscale. However, inspection of Table 1 reveals that two items load highest on Factor 1, two more on Factor 2, and one item loads on both Factor 3 and Factor 4. A similar picture is observed for items 1, 5, 12 and 24 said to constitute the "Fearful" subscale. These items are spread across the four factors with three items loading high on two separate factors. The items said to comprise the Preoccupied subscale (i.e. items 6, 8, 16

& 25) are split across Factor 1 and Factor 2 with item 6 not loading highly on any factor. In fact item 6 is the one item supposed to contribute to two subscales i.e. "Dismissing" and "Preoccupied". The remaining subscale, "Dismissing," fares better with three out of four items (2, 19 & 26) loading on the same factor. The remaining thirteen items are not specified by Bartholomew to relate to any particular one of the four subscales. However, the presence of such a large number of "filler" items in a 30-item questionnaire might arguably be considered to obscure any four-factor subscale which does exist.

Consequently, a four-factor analysis was repeated including only the 17 items thought to comprise the

four subscales, omitting the filler items. As would be expected, the results of that analysis were slightly different from those of the first, but were in no way more supportive of the four-factor structure that would correspond in any way with the putative subscales. These results will not be presented for economy of space but are available upon request. Subsequently, two- and three-factor solutions employing all 30 items, were then extracted to see whether rotating a reduced number of factors would produce a robust and interpretable solution as Walkey (1983) has suggested. Of these solutions, only the two-factor solution produced a pattern of factor loadings that met with the statistical criterion of simple structure and the psychological

TABLE 1

Four-Factor Analysis with Varimax Rotation of RQ with items Grouped According to Subscales (n=271)\*

Item		ROTATED FACTOR PATTERN			
		Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
3	I find it easy to get emotionally close to others.		- 53		
9	I worry about being alone.	55			
10	I am comfortable depending on other people.			- 48	- 38
15	I am comfortable having other people depend on me.		- 60		
28	I worry about having others not accept me.	64			
1	I find it difficult to depend on other people.			49	42
5	I worry that I will be hurt if I allow myself to become too close to others	40			
12	I find it difficult to trust others completely.	50	40		
24	I am somewhat uncomfortable being close as I would like		56		38
6	I am comfortable without close emotional relationships.				
8	I want to be completely emotionally intimate with others.		- 51		
16	I worry that others don't value me as much as I value them.	68			
25	I find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like	51			
2	It is very important to me to feel independent.			72	
19	It is very important to me feel self-sufficient.			74	
22	I prefer not have other people depend on me.		61		
26	I prefer not to depend on others.			58	
4	I want to merge completely with another person.		- 41		
7	I am not sure that I can always depend on others to be.				61
11	I often worry that romantic partners don't really love me.	73			
13	I worry about others getting too close to me.		67		
14	I want emotionally close relationships.	35	- 41		- 38
17	People are never there when you need them.				65
18	My desire to merge completely sometimes scares people away	50			
20	I am nervous when anyone gets too close to me.	35	47		
21	I often worry that romantic partners won't want	74			
23	I worry about being abandoned.	70			
27	I know that others will be there when I need them.				- 68
29	Romantic partners often want me to be closer than		57		
30	I find it relatively easy to get close to others.		- 51		

\*NOTE: All loadings rounded off to two decimal places and decimal points removed for clarity. Only loadings above 0.35 are shown.

criterion of interpretability. These results are presented in Table 2. Inspection of Table 2 shows evidence of two robust factors that are readily interpreted.

Factor 1 comprises 20 items which load highly on it and only four that also load (to a lesser degree) on Factor 2. These items all have content that relates either to the desire for closeness or intimacy in a relationship, or the need for independence and distance. Moreover, the former (e.g. item 3, "I find it easy to get emotionally close to other people") typically load negatively on Factor 1. The latter (e.g. item 2, "It is very important for me to feel independent") typically load positively on Factor 1.

By contrast, Factor 2 consists of nine items which all load highly and positively on it and are all concerned with worry about relationships (e.g. item 11, "I often worry that romantic partners don't really love me"). This factor could be described as worrying, anxiety, or put another way, security versus insecurity.

In summary, a four-factor analysis of the RSQ found little evidence for the four factors which might be expected to underlie the four subscales posited by Griffin and Bartholomew (1994). Rather, a robust two-factor structure, comprising one factor concerned with a preference for closeness versus independence, and a second factor representing security/insecurity within relationships, was supported.

TABLE 2

## Two-Factor Analysis of RQ with Varimax Rotation (n=271)\*

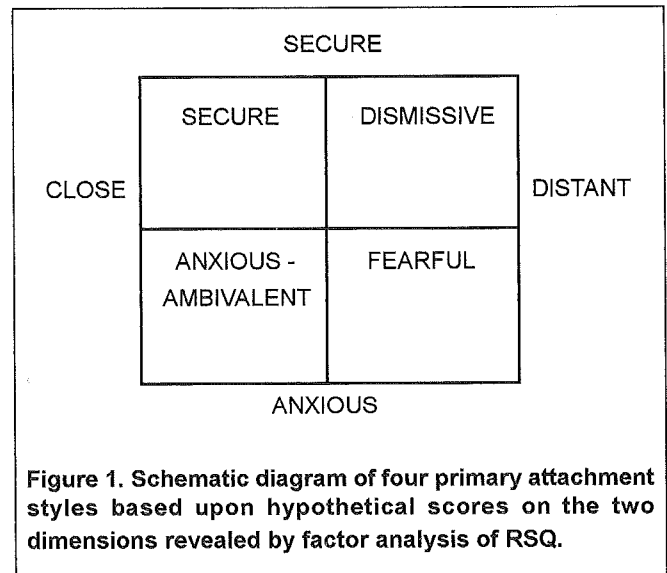
Item	ROTATED FACTOR PATTERN	
	Factor 1	Factor 2
1 I find it difficult to depend on other people	47	
2 It is very important to me to feel independent	54	
3 I find it easy to get emotionally close to others	- 46	
4 I want to merge completely with another person	- 42	36
7 I am not sure that I can always depend on others to be there when I need them	43	
8 I want to be completely emotionally intimate with others	- 53	
10 I am comfortable depending on other people	- 60	
12 I find it difficult to trust others completely	47	44
13 I worry about others getting too close to me		66
14 I want emotionally close relationships	- 51	
15 I am comfortable having other people depend on me	- 43	
17 I People are never there when you need them	40	37
19 It is very important to me to feel self-sufficient	39	
20 I am nervous when anyone gets too close to me	61	35
22 I prefer not to have other people depending on me	53	
24 I am somewhat uncomfortable being close to others	58	
26 I prefer not to depend on others		57
27 I know that others will be there when I need them	- 36	
29 Romantic partners often want me to be closer than I feel comfortable being	55	
30 I find it relatively easy to get close to others	- 43	
5 I worry that I will be hurt if I allow myself to become too close to others		36
9 I worry about being alone		57
11 I often worry that romantic partners don't really love me		70
16 I worry that others don't value me as much as I value them		70
18 My desire to merge completely sometimes scares people away		54
21 I often worry that romantic partners won't stay with me		68
23 I often worry about being abandoned		69
25 I find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like		57
28 I worry about having others not accept me		66
6 I am comfortable without emotional relationships		

NOTE: All loadings rounded off to two decimal places and decimal points removed for clarity

## Discussion

In the present study we attempted an evaluation of the factor structure of the Relationships Scales Questionnaire, a promising new measure of attachment style in adult relationships. Previously, Griffin and Bartholomew (1994) have said that this questionnaire provides scores on four separate subscales which they identified as Secure, Fearful, Preoccupied and Dismissing. In the present study however, a four-factor solution failed to show any substantial support for this interpretation of the subscale structure. Indeed there was no evidence that the specific items believed to comprise the four subscales load consistently highly on the same factors. Overall, little support was found for either a three- or a four-factor structure for the RSQ. Clear support emerged for a two-factor structure which comprised a closeness/independence factor and a security/anxiety factor. The items claimed by Griffin and Bartholomew to represent the subscales of the RSQ were apparently selected because they were each drawn from four paragraphs used in a separate measure the Relationship Questionnaire (RQ), and these paragraphs were thought to describe four primary styles of attachment. However, while these four attachment styles may be theoretically appealing, that does not guarantee that the same four dimensions will necessarily underlie the RSQ questionnaire, simply because the items are drawn from the original RQ paragraph descriptions. Griffin and Bartholomew (1994, p 27) say in this regard that the RSQ is "an indirect measure of the prototypes". Based upon the results reported here one might well ask where the four prototypical styles of attachments have gone. In fact, as will be demonstrated, the two-factor structure reported in the present study fits neatly with current thinking about typologies of attachment styles. As described in the introduction Hazan and Shaver (1987) found that adults experience secure, avoidant and ambivalent romantic patterns paralleling those attachment styles observed among infants by Ainsworth's group. Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) have since identified two distinct categories of avoidant individuals, namely fearful and dismissing. Such a four-category typology of attachment style can be perfectly represented by using the two dimensions observed herein in the factorial structure of the RSQ, to classify persons. This is displayed schematically in Figure 1, which shows how individuals can be placed in one of four categories of attachment style depending on their scores on each of two dimensions. Scores on any one dimension can be simply classified as "low" or "high", or alternatively converted to standard scores with a mean of zero. Hence a "secure" individual is one who reports a high level of closeness (or intimacy) and high security. A dismissive individual is independent, distant and

reports little "closeness", but is secure with this state of affairs and experiences no anxiety. The fearful-avoidant person also reports being distant from other people, but is worried or anxious as a consequence. Lastly, the anxious-ambivalent (also called "preoccupied") person reports a high degree of closeness in relationships, but also a high level of worry or anxiety about these relationships.



One major advantage of this proposed system is that it combines elements of both a categorical and a dimensional classification. It is our experience that many research participants protest when given four prototypical descriptions of attachment styles and asked to select the description that best describes themselves. The point is typically made that some people may fit in to more than one category at different stages in their life, or may display differing attachment styles in different relationships. The proposed categorisation allows for the fact that some people may, for example, be fairly near the mean on both dimensions and thus not fit neatly in to any single category. At the same time it allows for the ready identification (and quantification) of those higher scorers who exemplify specific attachment styles.

The fact that two clear dimensions were found in this study is consistent with the work of other researchers. It appears that no matter how attachment style is measured in adults or what scales are used, two dimensions consistently emerge. The factors found in our study are very close to the ones described by Feeney et al (1994). The factors labelled secure-anxious and close-distant correspond closely to her dimensions of anxiety over abandonment and comfort with closeness respectively. As discussed in the introduction Bartholomew has been quite explicit about the two dimensional structure underlying her attachment model.

She has also been increasingly pessimistic about the chances of developing a self-report scale capable of yielding four attachment patterns, primarily because of the operation of psychological defences (Griffin & Bartholomew, in press). However, the inability of the RSQ to yield four clear factors is a problem that needs to be addressed if it is to be retained as a measure of adult attachment style.

All of these issues highlight the importance of developing adequate measurement instruments in the attachment area. Research problems that merit close attention include the stability of attachment style over time, whether attachment is a personality trait or product of a unique person-situation interaction, and the validity of self-report versus interview methods of assessment. The problem of stability and change is a particularly salient issue. The limited amount of research undertaken into the stability of adult attachment patterns suggests that while these are moderately stable, interviews may be more reliable than other methods of assessing attachment (Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1994). The failure to utilise multiple methods may lead to a confounding of measurement error and stability, and therefore underestimate the true stability of attachment patterns and categories (Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1994).

To summarise, the present study examined the factor structure of a useful new measure of attachment style, the Relationship Scales Questionnaire. While little evidence was found for any four-factor structure relating to the four previously proposed subscales, a clear two-factor structure was reported. Moreover, the two factors which were determined empirically, can be related in a straightforward and logical way to the four major theoretical categories of attachment style that dominate current thinking on this topic. The RSQ then, with some minor modifications in scoring and interpretation, promises to be a practical and useful measure for attachment researchers.

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