

Attachment and Marital Adjustment

Robyn A. Parker and Evelyn D. Scannell

Raising couples' awareness of relationship issues that they might not have encountered or anticipated is a key aim of pre-marriage education programs. This paper discusses the role of 'attachment theory' in providing practitioners with a framework for helping couples build more satisfying committed relationships.

Pre-marriage education has a long history in Australia and there is a wide range of pre-marriage and relationship education programs offered by religious and secular organisations. Some of these programs, through raising awareness and teaching relationship skills, aim to prepare young couples for marriage, while others provide opportunities for married couples to identify their strengths and develop ways of dealing with current and potential problems.

A recent Parliamentary Report (1998) – *To Have and To Hold: Strategies to Strengthen Marriage and Relationships* – emphasises the need to identify and enhance relationship strengths, rather than concentrate on weaknesses and crisis intervention, and stresses the need for stronger government support for relationship education programs.

It is argued in the report that pre-marriage programs would curtail the increase in marriage breakdown and the associated financial and emotional cost to individuals and the community. Until recently, however, funding has been primarily directed towards services for couples and families already in crisis. The direct cost of marriage and relationship breakdown is estimated to



This is an edited version of a paper presented during the Sixth Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference in Melbourne, November 1998.

be around \$3 billion per annum; just \$3.5 million is spent on marriage and relationship education (Parliamentary Report: 50).

Practitioners in both the education and counselling fields draw on a vast body of theory and knowledge about relationships which provides both descriptive and explanatory information, and experiential learning tools and resources. A rapidly expanding field of research, attachment theory, provides a framework for explaining how relationships form, develop, and break down, and offers educators and counsellors tools for informing and challenging those preparing for, and experiencing difficulties in, marriage.

An explanation and discussion of attachment theory is presented in the accompanying box to this article.

The Study

The *Attachment and Marital Adjustment Study* spans the transition from unmarried to married. It was designed to: examine attachment styles and how they may change in the early transitional years of marriage; explore the relationship between expectations of marriage and marital satisfaction; and identify whether attachment style is related to the kinds of adjustment difficulties newlyweds may experience.

The study was conducted in two stages. The first stage gathered data on the pre-marriage characteristics of participants. The second stage followed a small group of the original sample approximately two and a half years after their marriage.

Stage one sample

In stage one, couples attending pre-marriage education programs in Melbourne during 1994–95 were invited to participate in the study. Members of 71 couples, and the female member of one couple, agreed to participate in the first phase of the study

Attachment Theory and Research



Attachment theorists argue that emotional bonds established in infancy form the basis of attitudes and behaviour patterns that individuals later bring to adult relationships.

An attachment relationship is an 'affectional bond' (Feeney and Noller 1991: 187) by which one individual seeks to maintain closeness to another (Ainsworth 1989). The goal of such relationships, in both infants and adults, is the maintenance of emotional as well as physical proximity, and a sense of felt security. Systematic observations of attachment behaviour originally focused on the responses of

infants and young children to separation from, and reunion with, their primary caregiver (Ainsworth et al. 1978). The infant's experiences of the caregiver's responses to these behaviours lead to the formation of an attachment relationship (Ainsworth et al. 1978; Campos et al. 1983).

Forming strong bonds with significant others is a matter of survival for human infants, and the ability to do so is innate (Campos et al. 1983; Reis and Knee 1996). People have a behavioural system that maximises survival by ensuring the close proximity of the caregiver, using the caregiver as a safe haven or source of protec-



– a total of 143 respondents (72 females, 71 males). The average age for the sample was 26.4 years, with a range of 21–39 years. Couples had been together on average between two and four years (minimum 7–12 months, maximum five years) and were attending the pre-marriage program

tion, and providing a secure base from which to explore the environment (Shaver et al. 1996). A complementary system in adult caregivers regulates the caregiver's responses to the infant's behaviour, and ensures that the infant's needs are met. The infant's survival is thus linked to the relationship and interaction of the infant's and the caregiver's behavioural systems (Hazan and Shaver 1994).

Attachment patterns continue into adulthood, although adult relationship strategies are not the same as those used by infants and children (Collins and Read 1990; Feeney and Noller 1990; Main et al. 1985; Shaver et al. 1996). Adults have a broader repertoire of behaviours in relationships than do infants (for example, very young infants can not physically follow their care-

on average four months prior to their wedding. The majority were living with either their parents (57.3 per cent) or with their partner (21 per cent).

Participants were primarily Roman Catholic (64.3 per cent), educated to tertiary (38.5 per cent) or VCE level (17.5

giver). Furthermore, adult attachments have a variety of functions, and are usually characterised by reciprocity, companionship, sexual bonds, mutual goals and experiences (Crowell and Treboux 1995; Weiss 1982, 1986).

Types of attachment

Attachments can be 'secure' or 'insecure' depending on the nature of the individual's relationship experiences throughout life. If the caregiver is sensitive and responsive, a secure attachment relationship may form. Secure infants tend to be happy, willing and able to explore their environment, and are responsive to comforting when distressed. Secure adults have relationships in which there are high levels of trust, support and intimacy, and a sensitive and

per cent), and employed in managerial or professional occupations. Most individuals (62.3 per cent) earned between \$20,000 and \$40,000 and most (77.6 per cent) shared financial commitments. Almost all (94 per cent) were to be married in a church, and most (74.1 per cent) planned to buy their own home following the wedding.

As would be expected, relationship satisfaction was extremely high for participants at this time.

Attachment styles

Attachment styles are characteristic specific behaviours that typify an individual's actions and reactions in relationships. In the study, attachment was assessed in two ways.

First, the two underlying dimensions of 'comfort with intimacy' and 'anxiety over abandonment' (see accompanying box) were assessed using a 13-item measure developed in Australia (Feeney 1990). Average scores on these dimensions indicated that the participants were relatively comfortable with intimacy and not overly anxious about abandonment.

The second attachment measure consisted of three short paragraphs which participants were asked to rate in terms of how well each statement described themselves.

The first paragraph, representing the *secure attachment style*, was: 'I find it relatively easy to get close to others and am comfortable depending on them and having them depend on me. I don't often worry about being abandoned or about someone getting too close to me.'

appropriate sharing of feelings and ideas (Hazan and Shaver 1987; Mikulincer and Nachson 1991; Simpson et al. 1992).

Infants who do not develop a secure attachment relationship will have insecure attachments. This happens if caring is slow, inappropriate, inconsistent, or absent. Insecure attachments can be 'anxious/ambivalent' or 'avoidant'.

Anxious/ambivalent infants may have received slow and inconsistent, or overly-intrusive caregiving. These infants cry easily, are not easily comforted, and are reluctant to explore their environment. Adults with anxious/ambivalent attachment styles fall in love easily, fear abandonment, experience emotional ups and downs, display 'needy but angry' patterns of behaviour, tend to be obsessively jealous and overly

The second paragraph, representing the *avoidant attachment style*, was: 'I am somewhat uncomfortable being close to others; I find it difficult to trust them completely, difficult to allow myself to depend on them. I am nervous when anyone gets too close, and often, love partners want me to be more intimate than I feel comfortable being.'

The final paragraph, representing the *anxious/ambivalent attachment style*, was: 'I find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like. I often worry my partner doesn't really love me or won't want to stay with me. I want to merge completely with another person, and this desire sometimes scares people away.'

Stage two sample

In 1997–98, approximately two and a half years after completing the first questionnaire, 26 couples were sent follow-up questionnaires. These were returned by 15 couples and the female member of one other couple – a total of 31 respondents. By then, couples had been married an average of 29 months.

Attachment styles

The underlying dimensions of 'comfort with intimacy' and 'anxiety over abandonment' were again measured.

As well, the ratings of the attachment paragraphs provided by these follow-up respondents prior to their marriage in the first stage of the study were used to classify respondents as securely or insecurely (avoidant or anxious/ambivalent) attached. Because of the small numbers who could be classified as avoidant or anxious/ambivalent, these participants were grouped together as insecure. Of the 31 respondents, 24 gave sufficient information to allow them to be classified.

Relationship satisfaction and ease of adjustment

Relationship satisfaction was measured using the Relationship Assessment Scale (Hendrick 1988). Participants' scores at this point in their marriage indicated that, on average, they were satisfied with their relationships.

dependent on, or desire to merge completely with, their partner (Brennan and Shaver 1995; Feeney and Noller 1990; Hazan and Shaver 1987; Mikulincer and Erev 1991).

Children who develop avoidant attachment styles may have received consistent rejection by the caregiver. Avoidant infants appear emotionally detached and unconcerned about whether the caregiver leaves or returns (Shaver et al. 1996). Adults with avoidant attachment patterns tend to deny attachment needs, are reluctant to trust others, avoid closeness and are often over involved with activities such as work (Brennan and Shaver 1995; Hazan and Shaver 1987 1990).

Insecure infants (anxious/ambivalent and avoidant) do not necessarily become

Ease of adjustment to marriage was measured by asking participants to indicate whether being married had been more difficult or easier than they had expected. On average, participants indicated that adjustment to marriage was as expected.

Marital adjustment issues were assessed with two open-ended questions: 'Which aspects of being married have you found the easiest (most difficult) to adjust to?' Participants could write as much or as little as they chose. Comments representative of participants' spontaneously generated responses are shown in Tables 1 and 2. There were some common themes across attachment styles (for example, housework, finances). However, there were some differences that will be discussed below.

For husbands, being comfortable with intimacy prior to marriage was related to higher relationship satisfaction. Satisfaction for husbands was also higher when adjustment to marriage was rated as easier than

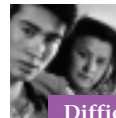


Table 1.

Difficult adjustment issues: wives

Secure (n = 4)

- Adjusting to his ways
- Having to think as a couple, become less selfish
- Having to consider partner's likes/dislikes
- Reflecting on/assessing the relationship
- Joint finances/budgeting
- Housework
- Sharing household/outdoor tasks
- Compromising on everything

Insecure (n = 8)

- Making time for each other
- Sex
- Missing the dating aspect/not as romantic
- General adjustment
- Trusting partner
- Learning about partner
- Sharing space/room/bed
- Joint finances/budgeting
- Housework
- Partner not contributing to housework as expected
- Communication
- Partner's occasional lack of mutual respect

insecure adults, possibly due to positive life experiences. This indicates that attachment styles can change throughout the lifespan.

Attachment and gender differences

Recent research has found that insecure men and women differ in a variety of ways. For example, insecure women experience jealousy and fears of abandonment. In contrast, insecure men lack trust, have low relationship satisfaction, and experience ambivalence (Hayashi and Strickland 1998).

Working models

Experiences with caregivers in infancy are believed to lead to the formation of 'working models' of both the caregiver and of the self. Working models are conscious

expected. For wives, high 'anxiety over abandonment' post-marriage was related to adjustment to marriage being more difficult than expected.

No changes in attachment dimensions were observed for husbands on either 'comfort with intimacy' or 'anxiety over abandonment'. For wives, however, scores on 'anxiety over abandonment' were significantly lower post-marriage than pre-marriage. As with husbands, 'comfort with intimacy' did not change for wives.

Discussion

After marriage, wives were less concerned than they were before marriage that their partner did not really love them or would leave. Perhaps fear of abandonment behaviours, such as jealousy and emotional ups and downs, also diminished as is suggested by various writers (Brennan and Shaver 1995; Feeney and Noller 1990; Hayashi and Strickland 1998). Results support the view that the longer the relationship lasts the less concerned wives are about being abandoned.

Husbands and wives who found marriage more difficult than expected experienced less relationship satisfaction than those who found marriage to be not as difficult as expected. Wives who found marriage to be more difficult than expected were more anxious than wives who found marriage was not more difficult than expected.

Satisfaction was also linked to men's pre-marriage 'comfort with intimacy'. If this was high pre-marriage, then relationship satisfaction was also high. If a husband was emotionally available ('comfortable with intimacy'), he was more likely to meet his partner's emotional needs and experience less disharmony and greater adjustment and relationship satisfaction.

Attachment style by adjustment issues

As discussed earlier, participants were classified into two categories, secure and insecure, based on responses to the three attachment paragraphs. Although some

and unconscious beliefs and expectations, feelings and memories about the sensitivity and responsiveness of the caregiver ('model of other'), and the worthiness of the self to receive such caring and attention ('model of self') (Collins and Read 1990).

Working models organise information about one's search for security (Ainsworth et al. 1978; Main, Kaplan, and Cassidy 1985). Success or failure in finding security is integrated into an individual's personality. Working models are applied to new relationships, and are generalised to significant other people. Attachment styles are characteristic specific behaviours that typify one's actions and reactions in relationships.

When adults form a new relationship, they bring with them their own working models and related behaviours. The rela-

precision was lost in combining the two insecure styles, the low frequency of anxious/ambivalent and avoidant participants necessitated this grouping.

The question regarding adjustment issues was open-ended, and for this reason some responses tended to be ambiguous. For instance, it was unclear whether the response 'communication' referred to a lack of communication, the type of communication, or differences in communication styles. However, although open-ended responses may be imprecise, some tentative themes can be drawn out of the responses shown in Tables 1 and 2.

First, there were some areas of commonality, with housework and managing finances being mentioned as difficult areas in the marriage by secure and insecure wives and insecure husbands. Commonly reported as contentious issues, housework and finances seem to cross the boundaries of secure and insecure attachment style.

Second, the responses of insecure participants were generally more specific than those of secure participants. For instance, whereas a secure wife mentioned 'adjusting to his ways', comments from insecure wives specified what things they had to adjust to – 'trusting partner', 'sharing space/room/bed', and 'partner not contributing to housework as expected'. Comments from insecure husbands include the specific 'dealing with partner's moods' and 'allocation of time together', compared with the more general 'leaving single life' mentioned by a secure husband. A characteristic of some insecurely attached people is a preoccupation with their relationship. This may mean they are more likely than securely attached people to report specific items.

Third, unlike wives, husbands talk in general terms of what being married has 'cost' them – for example, their single life, independence or freedom, and time for self or individual goals. This points to a difference in perceptions of marriage between men and women, but is not easily explained in attachment terms.

Fourth, comments from secure respondents are more narrowly focused than

those of insecure respondents. Secure respondents reported issues that related to respect and consensus such as 'adjusting to the partner's ways' (wife), and 'minor differences of opinion' (husband). Insecure respondents reported issues across a range of factors. For example, wives noted 'general adjustment', 'trust in partner', 'sex', 'finances', 'communication', 'expectations relating to housework', and 'lack of romance' as presenting difficulties for the relationship.

Regarding this fourth point, it should be recalled that insecure attachment may take two forms – anxious/ambivalent and avoidant. From the perspective of an anxiously attached wife these concerns may represent the thwarted need to merge completely with her partner, or questions

of commitment to the relationship and her husband's respect for her as a partner. Insecurely attached husbands mentioned 'time', 'compromise', 'expectations regarding housework', 'dealing with partner's moods', and 'maintaining intimacy' as difficult adjustment issues. Trust, time together, compromise, and intimacy would be expected to be important issues for avoidant men, given that research has identified their preference for independence and a reluctance to become too emotionally close (Bartholomew 1990; Hammond and Fletcher 1991).

These four aspects identified as areas presenting difficulties in respondents' marriages can be summarised as: common issues experienced by both partners; general versus specific issues; perception of marriage as involving loss; and singular versus multiple issues. They may be of use to practitioners in examining strengths and weaknesses in particular relationships. Further research may develop questions that examine qualitative and quantitative differences in these themes that possibly exist across attachment styles and gender.

Conclusion

Attachment theory describes how characteristic ways of acting in close relationships are developed and change over time. Responses of the small follow-up sample reveal themes which can be used to explore the attachment-marriage relationship. Results of this longitudinal study indicate that relationship satisfaction for husbands is greater after marriage if they are 'comfortable with intimacy' before marriage. For wives, marital satisfaction is related to the ease with which they adjust to marriage.

Although attachment styles are relatively stable, relationship experiences can initiate some changes over time. Given that getting married usually involves a major transition for the individual, change is likely to occur over the early transitional years of marriage. A small but significant

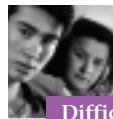


Table 2.

Difficult adjustment issues: husbands

Secure (n = 2)

Leaving single life/loss of freedom/independence
 Minor differences of opinion
 Having to consider partner's taste/ideas/philosophy
 Having other's standards imposed to some extent

Insecure (n = 10)

Getting used to living habits
 Coming to agreement on plans
 Extra time pressures
 Making important decisions
 Leaving single life/freedom/independence
 Minor differences of opinion
 Having to consider partner's taste/ideas/philosophy
 Having a partner – admitting to seeking her support
 Compromise on individual pursuits
 Allocation of time together
 Little time for self/individual goals
 Maintaining intimacy
 Organising finances
 Having to do things when spouse wants them done
 Expectations re household tasks/extra domestic duties
 The garden
 Anticipation of children
 Sharing tasks
 Dealing with partner's moods
 Partner's communication style

relationship created by a particular couple is shaped by their respective styles of relating, and the interaction of their respective relationship styles will subsequently influence their experience of that relationship.

Since working models are based on experience, these models can be modified when a person faces significant new experiences and information (Crowell and Treboux 1995; Hazan and Shaver 1987). It is in the creation of new knowledge and skills that the practitioner can intervene to provide new beneficial experiences for incorporation into couples' problematic relationships.

Indicators of attachment types

Two dimensions, 'anxiety about abandonment' and 'comfort with intimacy' are the

major components of adult attachment behaviour in marriage. These dimensions are a simple measure of beliefs and attitudes about relationships (Feeney 1990; Feeney, Noller, and Callan 1994). Strong comfort with intimacy and a lack of anxiety over abandonment indicate secure attachment.

These two dimensions also relate to working models because they describe positive and negative models of the self and others. A positive model of self and other is reflected in a secure attachment style. A combination of positive and negative models of self and other reflect an insecure style. Comfort with intimacy also reflects a positive model of self, while low anxiety about abandonment suggests a positive model of other.

Research identifying the role of adult attachment styles in marriage has implications for educational programs designed to strengthen relationships and for counselors working with couples in troubled relationships. By clarifying the deep-seated beliefs underlying particular behaviours displayed in relationships, and identifying whether particular marital adjustment problems are linked to attachment style, practitioners can raise couples' awareness of attachment issues and facilitate an individual's greater understanding of self and other.

– Robyn A. Parker
 Evelyn D. Scannell

change in 'anxiety over abandonment' was found for wives. Wives' abandonment issues *post-marriage* were also related to their ease of adjustment to marriage. In contrast, husbands' adjustment to marriage was related to their ability to form close emotional ties with their partner *pre-marriage*.

In attachment terms, this suggests that for husbands emotional availability in forming the relationship smooths the transition from being engaged to being married. For wives, transition to marriage is associated with diminishing levels of 'anxiety about abandonment' during the marriage, a likely product of the quality of the marriage to that point.

These attachment dimensions are also differentially related to the satisfaction reported by both husbands and wives. For men, relationship satisfaction is linked to premarital 'comfort with intimacy', but wives' satisfaction levels are related to the ease with which they adjusted to marriage.

The idea that husbands and wives face different adjustment issues is not new to practitioners. However, attachment theory offers a further useful way of helping couples, and reinforces the notion that a person's past experiences lead to attitudes and behaviours that are manifest in current relationships. Using attachment theory it is possible to increase awareness of the origins of such attitudes and behaviours, either through education or counselling. In this way potentially negative experiences may be avoided or explained, and the quality of relationships subsequently improved.

Results of the *Attachment and Marital Adjustment Study* suggest that 'comfort with intimacy' is particularly important for husbands' marital satisfaction, whereas 'anxiety over abandonment' is relevant for wives.

Thus, husbands who are comfortable about mutual dependency before they marry are likely to experience high relationship satisfaction. Dependence and interdependence are integral to the ideas and beliefs people hold about their worthiness to receive love and caring from others ('working model of self').

Those wives who find marriage a difficult adjustment tend to have higher 'anxiety over abandonment' than other wives. Uncertainty about their partner's commitment is integral to the ideas and beliefs people hold about how others are likely to respond to them as partners ('working model of other').

Raising couples' awareness of relationship issues they might have not encountered or anticipated is a key aim of pre-marriage education programs. Exploring attachment dimensions with a couple potentially increases the couple's understanding of themselves and their partner, thereby influencing the underlying beliefs which each partner brings with them and the sort of relationship each couple constructs.

Findings presented here regarding changes in some of those beliefs, and the differential impact on husbands and wives of deep-seated beliefs about how relation-

ships work, can be used as examples to illustrate the dynamic process of adjustment to being married. Complementary behavioural strategies that take into account individuals' different working models can then be developed to deal with issues that may arise in a given relationship.

The extent to which these strategies are developed by couples themselves, or suggested by educators as possible approaches, will be determined by the nature of the pre-marriage program. The diversity of methods of delivering programs means that information may be given didactically or used as tools for experiential learning. Regardless of the mode of program delivery or the way counsellors use the information, practitioners, as always, need to be aware of the potential damaging effects that uncovering highly sensitive issues may have on people's relationships.

Attachment theory provides a useful framework for viewing the differences in individual behaviours within a committed relationship. Attachment theory can assist educators and counsellors to achieve program objectives, and provide couples with awareness of issues which will contribute to the formation of solid, long-lasting marital relationships.

References

- Ainsworth, M.D.S. (1989), 'Attachments beyond infancy', *American Psychologist*, vol. 44, pp.709-716.
- Ainsworth, M.D.S., Blehar, M.C., Waters, E. & Wall, S. (1978), *Patterns of Attachment: Assessed in the Strange Situation and at Home*, Lawrence Erlbaum, Hillsdale NJ.
- Bartholomew, K. (1990), 'Avoidance of intimacy: an attachment perspective', *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, vol. 7, pp.147-178.
- Brennan, K. & Shaver, P.R. (1995), 'Dimensions of adult attachment, affect regulation, and romantic relationship functioning', *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, vol. 21, no. 3, pp.267-283.
- Campos, J.J., Barrett, K., Lamb, M.E., Goldsmith, H. & Stenberg, C. (1983), 'Socioemotional development', in M. Haith & J. Campos (eds) *Infancy and Developmental Psychobiology*, Wiley NY.
- Collins, N. & Read, S.J. (1990), 'Adult attachment, working models, and relationship quality in dating couples', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 58, no. 4, pp.644-663.
- Crowell, J.A. & Treboux, D. (1995), 'A review of adult attachment measures: implications for theory and research', *Social Development*, vol. 4, no. 3, pp.294-327.
- Feeney, J. (1990), 'The attachment perspective on adult romantic relationships', Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Queensland.
- Feeney, J. & Noller, P. (1990), 'Attachment style as a predictor of adult romantic relationships', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 58, no. 2, pp.281-291.
- Feeney, J. & Noller, P. (1991), 'Attachment style and verbal descriptions of romantic partners', *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, vol. 8, pp. 187-215.
- Feeney, J., Noller, P. & Callan, V. (1994), 'Attachment style, communication and satisfaction in the early years of marriage', in K. Bartholomew & D. Perlman (eds) *Attachment Processes in Adulthood. Advances in Personal Relationships*, vol. 5, pp.269-308.
- Hammond, J.R. & Fletcher, G.J.O. (1991), 'Attachment styles and relationship satisfaction in the development of close relationships', *New Zealand Journal of Psychology*, vol. 20, pp.56-62.

Hazan, C. & Shaver, P. (1987), 'Romantic love conceptualised as an attachment process', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 52, no. 3, pp.511-524.

Hazan, C. & Shaver, P.R. (1990), 'Love and work: an attachment theoretical perspective', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 59, pp.270-280.

Hazan, C. & Shaver, P.R. (1994), 'Attachment as an organisational framework for research on close relationships', *Psychological Inquiry*, vol. 5, no. 1, pp.1-22.

Hayashi, G.M. & Strickland, B.R. (1998), 'Long-term effects of parental divorce on love relationships: divorce as attachment disruption', *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, vol. 15, no. 1, pp.23-38.

Hendrick, S.S. (1988), 'A generic measure of relationship satisfaction', *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, vol. 50, pp.93-98.

Main, M., Kaplan, N. & Cassidy, J. (1985), 'Security in infancy, childhood, and adulthood: a move to the level of representation', Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development, vol. 50 (1-2, Serial No. 209), pp.66-104.

Mikulincer, M. & Erev, I. (1991), 'Attachment style and the structure of romantic love', *British Journal of Social Psychology*, vol. 30, pp.273-291.

Mikulincer, M. & Nachson, O. (1991), 'Attachment styles and patterns of self-disclosure', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 61, pp.321-333.

Parliamentary Report (1998), *To Have and To Hold: Strategies to Strengthen Marriage and Relationships*, Report of the Inquiry into Aspects of Family Services, House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, Canberra, June.

Reis, H.T. & Knee, C.R. (1996), 'What we know, what we don't know, and what we need to know about relationship knowledge structures', in G.J.O. Fletcher & J. Fitness (eds) *Knowledge Structures in Close Relationships: A Social Psychological Approach*, Lawrence Erlbaum, Hillsdale NJ.

Shaver, P.R., Collins, N. & Clark, C.L. (1996), 'Attachment styles and internal working models of self and relationship partners', in G.J.O. Fletcher & J. Fitness (eds) *Knowledge Structures in Close Relationships: A Social Psychological Approach*, Lawrence Erlbaum, Hillsdale NJ.

Simpson, J., Rholes, W.R. & Nelligan, J.S. (1992), 'Support seeking and support giving within couples in an anxiety-provoking situation: the role of attachment styles', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 62, no. 3, pp.434-446.

Weiss, R. (1982), 'Attachment in adult life', in C. Murray-Parkes & J. Stevenson-Hinde (eds) *The Place of Attachment in Human Behavior*, Tavistock Publications, London.

Weiss, R. (1986), 'Continuities and transformations in social relationships from childhood to adulthood', in W.W. Hartup & Z. Rubin (eds) *Relationships and Development*, Lawrence Erlbaum, Hillsdale NJ.

Robyn Parker is a Research Officer at the Australian Institute of Family Studies.

Evelyn Scannell is a Senior Lecturer, Psychology Department, Monash University.

This article is based on a paper presented at the Sixth Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference, *Changing Families, Challenging Futures*, in Melbourne, 25-27 November 1998. The authors acknowledge the cooperation of marriage education agencies, their educators, and their participants in allowing the data for this study to be gathered during their programs where time is at a premium.