

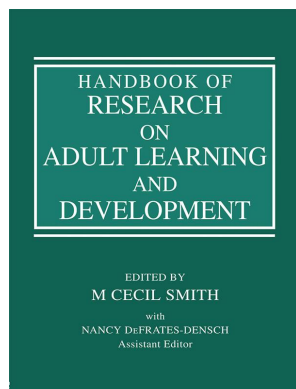
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Attachment and Marriage

Gary Creasey and Patricia Jarvis

An objective of this chapter is to articulate theory and research that may help us better understand successful marital processes and outcomes. Quite understandably, there are many theories that attempt to explain long-term marital stability, and there are numerous comprehensive analyses concerning conceptual, methodological and theoretical issues related to this field (Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Gottman & Notarius, 2002). Such another analysis is not the objective of the present review, rather, in this chapter; the role of adult attachment functioning in predicting important marital outcomes will be specified. This particular approach is not entirely novel, in that there is both existing theory (Karney & Bradbury, 1995) and research (e.g., Treboux, Crowell, & Waters, 2004) that have attempted to better establish such links. On the other hand, we suggest herein that such theory and research have not been well integrated, and links between attachment functioning and relationship success primarily are limited to studies involving college student dating couples. Although such research has paved some important groundwork in this area, it is unreasonable to predict that research findings from one very select population automatically generalize to another.

A chapter on attachment relationships within the context of marriage is an important topic for a handbook devoted to adulthood and adult development. Marriage is a significant behavioral context in which the majority of adults are situated at some time in their lives. Therefore, marriage provides an important setting for adult development to unfold. This chapter is organized into several sections. First, conceptual, theoretical and methodological advancements pertaining to the study of marital functioning are articulated. Next, basic research findings regarding marriage are presented, as well as the applicability of these results to popular theories of long-term marital success. Because attachment functioning may play a major role in explaining marital functioning, contemporary attachment theory is overviewed, as well as major methodological issues that face researchers that use this approach. Next, studies that have connected attachment processes with marital functioning are specified. The chapter concludes with a critique of this existing research, as well as a discussion regarding how attachment theory and methods can be better integrated into marital research.

Our chief focus on marital couples obviously ignores other important populations, namely same-sexed couples in long-term, committed, romantic relationships. This omission is a limitation of the review; however, there is another chapter devoted to same-sex relationships in this current volume (i.e., chapter 12). Further, there are heterosexual couples involved in lengthy and exclusive relationships that do not marry. The omission of this couple, however, pertains more to a lack of systematic research than anything else, in that, very few studies have been conducted with these dyads, and virtually none have focused on attachment issues. Finally, little is known about how adult attachment functioning influences committed relationships in other cultures. All of these populations

need more study to determine if the associations between attachment processes and marital success identified in the current review could be applied to other groups of adults in committed romantic relationships. Such studies may reveal that involvement in a high quality, secure romantic relationship over time may be more important for health and development than whether or not one is married in the legal sense.

Marriage and Divorce in the United States

Marriage is an important normative event for most adults in the United States, albeit not all people marry. In 2004, about 72% of the adult population in the United States had experienced one marital relationship, although, about 31% of men and 25% of women over 15 had never married (United States Census Bureau, 2004). Whereas most people marry, many adults today are postponing this important, legally recognized commitment. For example, between 2000 and 2003 the median age for first marriages was 27 and 25 years of age for men and women, respectively (Johnson & Dye, 2005). According to the aforementioned report, these averages are influenced by geographic region in that the median age for first marriages are higher in the Northeast and West, and lower in the Midwest and South. These regional statistics are influenced by many factors; however, it is estimated that rural adults marry at younger ages than people living in urban areas. Thus, this consideration could explain these geographic regional differences.

While marriage remains an institution in the United States, it is apparent when reviewing empirical research regarding this context, as well as a more causal review of mass media coverage of this topic, that more attention focuses on problematic/failed marriages than healthy relationships. The suspected instability of many marriages, experts claim, is supported by the “divorce rate,” a figure that ranges from 50% to a jarring 75% (Martin & Bumpass, 1989)—depending on one’s source. Perhaps to support these claims, in 2003 there were about 7.5 marriages per 1,000 adults and 3.8 divorces (National Center for Health Statistics, 2003). Further, when reviewing the number of marriages and divorces that occurred between January and August, 2005, most states report divorce rates of over 50% (National Vital Statistics Reports, 2006). These statistics appear alarming because an additional (and difficult to document) percentage of marriages remain in “permanent separation” limbo.

On the other hand, most marriage and family experts acknowledge that some of these pessimistic statistics are misleading. For example, simply comparing the number of new certified marriages to finalized divorces—whether at the national, state, or county/city level—is problematic because these data are drawn from very different populations of adults. Consider that the former pool is drawn from a more limited sample of adults (largely adults in their 20s), whereas the latter sample is drawn from a much larger population of married adults.

A more representative statistic, and one not widely cited in empirical studies or the media, concerns the percentage of marital couples that *actually become* divorced. According to U.S. Census statistics, the percentage of white, non-Hispanic adults in first time marriages that eventually divorce is about 30% (Bramlett & Mosher, 2001), a percentage that is lower now than 30 years ago (Kreider, 2001). It is also interesting that large-scale, longitudinal studies of community-residing adults rarely yield divorce rates over 25 to 30%. About the only consistent statistic on divorce concerns timing; most studies suggest divorce is most likely to occur in first-time marriages during the first 10 years of the relationship (Bramlett & Mosher, 2001).

Although the percentages of adults that eventually become divorced may be lower

than normally expected, marital dissolution and severe marital distress are pressing problems. While there are clearly cases when marital dissolution appears justified (e.g., an abusive relationship), the potential financial, emotional, psychological, and interpersonal risks of divorce are well known. In addition, ongoing marital discord presents potential health problems to husbands and wives, as well as for children residing in the household (Whisman & Bruce, 1999). Thus, when examining variables that predict marital success, it is prudent to identify constructs that influence both marital stability and satisfaction.

What Predicts Marital Quality and Stability?

Although some adults in distressed marriages may escape the potential physical and health outcomes commonly associated with such relationships, it is also true that poor marital quality (i.e., marital satisfaction) is an obvious predictor of marital stability. That is, consideration of divorce or separation, or marital dissolution is frequently preceded by chronic marital distress. Of course, most married adults occasionally feel dissatisfied in their relationship; thus, predicting marital stability with some degree of certainty requires a multivariate assessment of the marriage beyond an evaluation of marital satisfaction.

Marital quality is a benchmark variable that refers to the adult's overall evaluation of marital health. It is often used as an index of marital distress or satisfaction. In terms of assessment, two of the most commonly used measures are the 15-item Marital Adjustment Test (MAT; Locke & Wallace, 1959) and the 32-item Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976). The DAS was developed from the shorter MAT and taps agreement about standard marital issues (e.g., finances, sex, careers), and how frequently the couple does things together (e.g., household projects; recreation). Yet, there are concerns with this widely used assessment. Items on marital quality measures, such as the DAS, sometimes are similar to items on other measures of marital functioning (Fincham, 1998). There are multiple DAS items that inquire about specific types of conflict in the relationship; thus, it would not be surprising to obtain a significant correlation between the DAS and a conflict tactics measure because of item redundancy. Further, polling adults about how often they do things together (e.g., laughing, kissing) or how much they agree on issues (e.g., family matters)—standard DAS items—does not provide a measure of the adult's evaluation of the marriage. Thus, marital quality may be best assessed using shorter, more direct measures of marital satisfaction (Fincham, 1998). For instance, the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (Schumm et al., 1986) contains three short items that specifically inquire about marital satisfaction, such as “How satisfied are you with your marriage”?

How is marital quality, as a variable, used in research? Because chronic marital distress almost always precedes marital dissolution, marital satisfaction is often treated as an outcome, rather than independent variable for research purposes. That is, there is a process to separation and divorce; most couples who ultimately divorce do so via a lengthy period of marital dissatisfaction, followed by serious consideration of divorce, to actual separation and divorce (Gottman & Levenson, 1992). Thus, the successful *prediction* of which couples will become highly (and consistently) dissatisfied or satisfied over the course of their marriage constitutes an important research agenda.

Thus, what variables can reliably predict marital quality? Perhaps the starting place is to adopt a demographic approach—a tact that is frequently used by scholars who possess large, epidemiological data sets involving marital couples. When embracing such a

perspective, it has been documented that adults who marry young, are unemployed, of low education, or possess a divorce history are more prone to marital distress and divorce (Heaton, Albrecht, & Martin., 1985; Morgan & Rindfuss, 1985; Kurdek, 1993). However, while all of these variables hold some predictive power in forecasting marital distress and stability, they are relatively immune to change or intervention.

Why is there a connection between such demographic variables and marital distress? Quite possibly, there are additional variables that explain such an association. For example, according to the *stress/crisis perspective* (Karney & Bradbury, 1995), an accumulation of chronic life stressors can lower marital satisfaction more quickly among couples in certain demographic groups than dyads that have considerable resources (i.e., education, maturity, finances). That is, although chronic life stress and major life events (e.g., sudden financial hardship) are tied to marital quality in many couples (e.g., Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler, & Wethington, 1989), it is probable that young couples and/or couples with less economic means may be especially challenged in such circumstances.

Marital duration and age have been identified as variables that are diagnostic of marital quality. That is, most divorces occur within the first 10 years of marriage, and it has been widely held that marital satisfaction shows a curvilinear path over the course of the marriage. Although most of our knowledge about this subject has been gleaned from cross-sectional studies, marital satisfaction starts initially high during the newlywed period, appears to drop somewhat after childbirth, declines further as offspring negotiate adolescence, and then increases when children begin to leave the household (Doherty & Jacobson, 1982; Orbach, House, Mero, & Webster, 1996).

The finding that older couples (e.g., 60–70 years of age) report less conflict and display better conflict management skills compared to younger couples (Levenson, Carstensen, & Gottman, 1993) has been taken as support for another major perspective of long-term relationship development known as *socioemotional selectivity theory*. This approach assumes that there is an increasingly important need for supportive, close affiliations during later adulthood. Because of this need, older adults begin narrowing their social networks to achieve more emotional closeness within their most important relationships (Carstensen, 1991). Thus, the finding that older adults report more closeness in their marriages, fewer conflicts, and higher marital satisfaction has been taken as support for this approach (Levenson et al., 1993).

However, there have been recent concerns raised about the interpretation of these study results (Glenn, 1998; Hatch & Bulcroft, 2004). Most of the studies that support socioemotional selectivity theory have utilized cross-sectional designs. It is possible that the older couples *appear* to resolve conflict better because their peers or contemporaries who could not do so became divorced. This finding would suggest that the differences between younger (some of which will become divorced) and older couples could be due to non-equivalent sampling.

Further, in such cross-sectional studies, it is difficult to ascertain whether age, marital duration, or generational differences between the age groups are influencing the data. For example, during the Great Depression family members were routinely separated due to economic hardship and unemployment. Perhaps just remaining together as a couple was enough to serve as a model for a successful marriage, and these demanding times mandated conflict avoidance or quick marital conflict resolution. If any of these ideas are correct, then it is possible that the older marital couples of today have always had satisfying marriages (according to their definition) and had fewer conflicts than today's more confrontational younger couples. Indeed, studies incorporating sequential designs have documented that marital quality may be better predicted by cohort differences

than age effects (Glenn, 1998). Thus, while socioemotional selectivity theory appears to be a plausible theory regarding the evolution of general close relationships during adulthood, whether marital relationships, in particular, become closer and less conflict-ridden with age is debatable in light of these recent methodological challenges.

The association of broad demographic variables—such as age, education, or financial status—with marital quality and stability is a necessary first step in understanding risk and protective factors that might influence the marital process. Further, these may be the only data a researcher has at their disposal when using archival data sets involving large, community-residing marital samples. However, concluding that demographic variable “X” is associated with marital stability is like ascertaining that it usually rains when the barometer falls. It is difficult to conduct interventions at this level, much as it is difficult to change a weather pattern. Further, ascertaining that age or social class is correlated with marital success tells us little about the mechanisms responsible for the development or deterioration of a marriage.

Thus, to better clarify predictions, experts that conduct intervention work with marital couples often assess intrapersonal and interpersonal variables that may contribute to marital quality. Intrapersonal variables reside within the individual person and interpersonal variables reside at the level of the couple. These variables are attractive for study because they can be defined, measured, evaluated, and may be amenable to intervention efforts (Baucom & Epstein, 1990).

Intrapersonal Variables

Intrapersonal variables can either be proximal or distal (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). In terms of proximal variables, the aforementioned stress/crisis perspective of marital functioning stipulates that high levels of current, personal stress may produce more marital strain—a finding that has been well replicated (Bolger et al., 1989). Further, there may be other proximal variables that mediate or moderate associations between problematic temporal variables and marital functioning. For example, the way an adult copes with occupational stress may mediate associations between such stress and marital quality, or a large social support network may moderate such associations. Thus, the relationship between any given proximal intrapersonal variable (e.g., stress) and marital quality, could theoretically be mediated (e.g., personal coping styles), or moderated (e.g., social support networks) by other temporal variables.

There are also distal, intrapersonal variables that adults bring with them into new relationships (Karney & Bradbury, 1995); adults have differential past experiences that may have import in a new marriage. There is some evidence that adults who witnessed severe inter-parent discord or whose parents divorced may have more difficulties negotiating marital relationships compared to adults who have not experienced such events (Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004). Of course, linking distal developmental history variables, such as child maltreatment or parental divorce, to present marital functioning is somewhat akin to associating demographic variables to the marital process. One, it is difficult to change or conduct interventions with such information, and two, it is difficult to ascertain the mechanisms that link the variables.

To illustrate, serious inter-parent conflict experiences, or even a parental divorce may be co-morbid with other childhood variables, such as child maltreatment or peer victimization (Cummings & Davies, 1994). Such co-morbidity makes it notoriously difficult to isolate any specific developmental history variable that might be influencing a current close relationship. Simple links between such variables and marital functioning are

further mitigated by longitudinal findings that suggest many adults who have experienced adverse pasts (e.g., serious domestic conflict) are in satisfying marriages (Werner & Smith, 2001). It appears these adults have overcome previous risks and are functioning well in their relationships.

Another variable that couples bring with them into new marriages, and one that can be more reliably assessed than the adult's recall of childhood/adolescent relationship experiences, is personality functioning. This intuitively seems like an interesting area of study because personality traits, such as extroversion, agreeableness and openness to experience have been associated with life goals, interests, and needs. A couple who shares similar interests and goals would then be predicted to score high on compatibility, a premise that supports another theory concerning the prediction of successful marital processes—the *similarity hypothesis* (e.g., Bentler & Newcomb, 1978). That is, it is assumed that new couples who share similar interests, activities, and values will experience more satisfying marriages than couples who are more dissimilar. However, while a compelling hypothesis, the notion that compatibility singularly predicts marital success is one that has only received weak support (Kurdek, 1993; Watson et al., 2004).

Of course, personality characteristics could influence other components of marriage that may play a more central role in predicting marital satisfaction and stability, such as marital behavior or relationship cognitions (e.g., partner attributions). It is in this arena that research has been most promising; in particular, neuroticism—a personality disposition marked by high negative mood—is positively correlated with marital distress and instability (Kelly & Conley, 1987; Kurdek, 1993). Further, the relationship between a more distal variable, such as personality, and marital quality, can also be mediated or moderated by other variables. For example, adults who report high levels of general negative affect often possess problematic relationship cognitions, such as unrealistic expectancies regarding their partner or distorted attributions, such as, “She works long hours because she is interested in her co-worker” (Karney, Bradbury, Fincham, & Sullivan, 1994). Further, more neurotic adults who possess high levels of negative affect display more problematic marital behaviors. Pasch, Bradbury, and Davila (1997) noted that spouses who report more generalized negative affect were less receptive to supportive behaviors exhibited by their partners as they disclosed personal problems.

A related topic is that the personality structure of one adult may not mesh well with the partner. For example, a highly anxious person may not experience major marital problems if their spouse is less aroused or reactive to stress. However, this premise underscores a central problem with marital research in that many researchers often gather comprehensive data on one partner without garnering a similar assessment on the other partner. The fact of the matter is that there are two partners; thus, the contribution of each partner's developmental history and personal functioning must be considered when making predictions. Further, most studies linking personality and marital functioning are cross-sectional; there may be times personality dispositions are less tied to marital quality. In a longitudinal study, Karney and Bradbury (1995) noted that newlywed assessments of neuroticism were correlated with initial marital satisfaction, but was not predictive of changes in marital satisfaction over time. This finding suggests that personality plays an early role in marital satisfaction, but by itself is not a central cause of later marital instability.

Although links between personality functioning and marital behavior are well established, it is also known that problematic personality dispositions are difficult to “cure” and are at best managed (Butz & Austin, 1993). Thus, personality is somewhat akin to developmental history—we can assess it, but may not be able to treat it. However, there

are other intrapersonal variables that have received attention, such as marital cognitions. This construct concerns the couple's broad-based beliefs about marriage. Perhaps the earliest work in this area was assumed under *social exchange theories*, or the perspective that marriages begin, develop, and stay stable due to the perceived advantages and disadvantages of being married to the present partner, perceived barriers to relationship termination, and the attractiveness of alternatives to the present relationship (Levinger, 1976). According to this perspective, a relationship will end when the partner perceives little benefit to the present relationship, views few barriers or liabilities to ending the relationship, and attractiveness to alternatives to the present relationship are high (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). However, while people considering divorce probably make such appraisals, it does not explain how or why adults come to think this way (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Additionally—and the following statement does not assume social exchange theory is necessarily a bad theory of marriage—it is somewhat hard to imagine how such broad marital cognitions would be amenable to intervention or change.

A more recent approach concerns the assessment of more specific attitudes, expectancies, standards, and attributions adults possess regarding their partner. Studies have documented that women report more marital satisfaction when they perceive their spouses to be supportive and emotionally close (Mills, Grasmick, Morgan, & Wend, 1992). This finding has been documented for couples during the early (Julien & Markman, 1991) and later years of marriage (Acitelli & Antonucci, 1994). Further, marital partners who possess negative attitudes, expectancies and attributions regarding their partner report more marital distress and display more problematic marital behavior than their counterparts who do not hold such expectancies (Baucom & Epstein, 1990; Bradbury & Fincham, 1992; Fincham & Bradbury, 1987). Although much of this research is cross-sectional, there are longitudinal studies that have documented that problematic relationship cognitions are diagnostic of marital distress and dissolution over time (Carrère, Buehlman, Gottman, Coan, & Ruckstuhl, 2000). New researchers that desire to study marital relationship cognitions will note that this field is very large, and one should be sensitive to the fact that relationship standards, beliefs, expectancies, attitudes, and attributions all represent different constructs and are assessed with different instruments (Fincham, 1998).

The links between relationship cognitions and marital quality—as assessed via marital satisfaction—are so strong, it has been questioned whether or not these cognitions are just an artifact of such quality. That is, people in distressed marriages may develop distressed cognitions over time, rather than the other way around. This bias, known as the *sentiment override hypothesis* assumes that adults in highly distressed marriages possess a generalized negative sentiment regarding their partner that contaminates the way they complete self-report measures regarding their partner (Weiss & Heyman, 1990). For example, the adult may rate their partner as “always cruel” when, in fact, a casual observer would perceive the partner in a different light. Because it is important to establish that any relationship cognition measure assesses something distinct from marital quality, it has become a matter of practice to control for marital satisfaction when linking marital cognitions to reports of marital behavior.

To sum, there are numerous intrapersonal variables that can influence marital quality and stability. Marital partners bring certain vulnerabilities and strengths into relationships, and there are ongoing temporal variables, such as occupational stress, that adults “bring home” with them that may alter the course of a marital relationship for better or worse. Of course, while it is understandable that such intrapersonal variables are important for empirical scrutiny, it is also true that marital quality and behavior is shaped by

the way the couple “partners” or interacts on a daily basis. The study of such interpersonal variables will be specified next.

Interpersonal Variables

There exist different theories that account for how interpersonal variables may influence marital quality and stability. These theories are largely behavioral, and assume that certain patterns of marital behavior forecast subsequent satisfaction and stability. For example, “Well, we just do not communicate anymore,” seems to be the mantra of the typical distressed couple. Good communications skills are more highly correlated with marital satisfaction than any other type of marital behavior (e.g., frequency of sex, time spent together, shared activities) (Jacobson, Waldron, & Moore, 1980), and the primary presenting problem of couples in marital therapy (Smith, Vivian, & O’Leary, 1990). The predictive power of communication has also been studied in a number of longitudinal studies. For example, communication abilities in the early parts of marriage (e.g., premarital, newlywed) are diagnostic of changes in marital quality during the earliest months as well as later years of a marriage (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989; Markman, 1981).

Although some of the earliest work in this area focused on the effectiveness of couple problem-solving skills and conflict resolution, the long-term ramifications of such behavior are only more recently understood. For example, while at one time marital therapists may have encouraged couples to resolve their differences at all costs, one might wonder how this feat could be accomplished if the matter were *irresolvable*. Further, it is true that highly satisfied couples in long-term marriages often argue about the same subjects—suggesting that some couples, even happily married ones, have never resolved certain issues in their relationship (Gottman, 1994). Thus, there must be something else about the content of communication that is diagnostic of marital success.

A major agenda for research and practice during the last two decades has been to focus more thoroughly on the emotional content of couple communication. This “affective behavior” is diagnostic of relationship success across many close relationships (e.g., marital; long-term dating, same-sexed romantic relationships, dyadic friendships) (Arelano & Markman, 1995; Creasey, Kershaw, & Boston, 1999), predicts stability in relationships across different ethnic/racial groups (Oggins, Veroff, & Leber, 1993), and is an important component for relationship quality across most cultures (Gottman & Levenson, 1986).

Two major approaches that have been developed to study the emotional content of communication consist of social support and conflict management paradigms. A standard social support paradigm, developed by Bradbury and colleagues, consists of asking one member of the couple to divulge a personal problem, while the second plays the role of the empathic listener. After this observation (10–15 minutes), the couple switches roles and their behaviors are subsequently coded. For example, when using Bradbury’s Social Support Interaction Coding System (Bradbury & Pasch, 1994), the rater considers the behavior of the “helper” (e.g., positive instrumental or emotional support), as well as the “helpee” (e.g., clear communication of the problem).

In the conflict management paradigm, the couple must discuss sources of relationship contention. There are different methods that can be used to assess the couple’s conflict management skills; however, one popular method consists of asking the couple to resolve a minor relationship conflict, followed by a major one (Creasey, 2002; Simpson, Rholes, & Phillips, 1996). One of the most effective methods to capture the emotional content of the conflict management behavior is the Specific Affect Coding System (Gottman,

1996). When using this system, the coder uses voice tone and content, body posture, eye movements, and so on to evaluate both positive (e.g., validation, affection, interest) and negative (e.g., contempt, defensiveness, belligerence) conflict management skills.

The results of marital behavior collected in both social support and conflict management paradigms have led to some very compelling results that have implications for both research and practice. For example, while it has been widely documented that men and women report very different levels of emotional support in their marriage, there have not been consistent gender differences in the use of positive social support strategies during actual couple observations (Pasch et al., 1997). Further, the behavior exhibited in such paradigms is more diagnostic of future marital satisfaction and stability (Pasch & Bradbury, 1998) than data collected via self-report methods.

The outcomes for couples observed in conflict paradigms are also compelling. A high amount of negativity in conflict observations, as well as a high imbalance of positive and negative behaviors (e.g., many more negative than positive behaviors), forecasts future declines in marital satisfaction (Gottman, 1993; Pasch & Bradbury, 1998; Smith et al., 1990). High marital distress is correlated with more negative conflict management behaviors (i.e., high levels of negative affect during conflict) at all stages of marriage (Carstensen, Gottman, & Levenson, 1995). However, unlike behavior witnessed in social support paradigms, there are somewhat clear gender differences pertaining to conflict management styles. At all ages, women are more confrontational and display more negative affect (e.g., anger; sadness), whereas men are more often defensive and tend to escape or avoid conflict (Carstensen et al., 1995; Gottman & Krokoff, 1989). High amounts of certain negative behaviors, such as mutual contempt and belligerence, or high levels of wife criticism and husband defensiveness, are predictive of later divorce (Gottman, 1993, 1994). Thus, the data gleaned from a conflict management paradigm possess important predictive validity.

One might ask, "Should I use a social support or conflict management paradigm?" Although choice of methods is always dependent on the original research questions, we recommend the use of both assessments. Whereas behaviors captured in both paradigms are diagnostic of marital success (Heyman, 2001; Pasch & Bradbury, 1998), the positive and negative behaviors observed in these methods do not always correspond or overlap. That is, a spouse that is unsupportive to their partner's personal problems does not always have problems resolving conflict. Further, in terms of predicting marital success, although there is some shared variance concerning behaviors derived from these paradigms, there is unique predictive variance accounted for as well via each assessment (Pasch & Bradbury, 1998).

In summary, the reader is probably considering at this juncture that there are a wide assortment of demographic, intrapersonal, and interpersonal variables that could be used to study the ontogeny of marital quality and success over time. One lesson that has been learned from decades of marital research is that there are innumerable variables that influence the thinking and behavior of both members of the couple, including each other's thinking and behavior. For example, there are probably some adults who are experts at conflict management and routinely engage in behaviors that diminish a negative tide of problems as they emerge during a conflict discussion. However, it is difficult to firmly conclude that such phenomena occur because of the way marital studies are frequently designed and the couple data analyzed. Many marital and dating relationship studies rely on the perceptions of a single partner, and do not record the thinking or behavior of both partners.

Further, there are studies that do include observations of both members of the couple,

but the researchers analyze their data at the level of the individual, rather than the couple. For example, consider a researcher that is interested in associating occupational distress with marital behavior. It is quite popular, in such a study, to correlate the husband's distress with his behavior, and then associate the wife's distress with her behavior. However, the marital landscape is richer and more complicated than this particular analysis reveals. It is possible that the behavior of any one given marital partner is influenced not only by his or her distress, but the distress and behavior of the partner as well. An additional consideration is that this finding might be stronger for husbands than wives (or vice versa). Perhaps the difficulty facing researchers is that analyzing marital data at the level of the couple is somewhat complex, and requires one to consider husband and wife data *over* the course of the interaction (i.e., marked by time). Further, there are specific data entry and analytic considerations for evaluating such interactions. Interested readers regarding this issue may wish to consult particularly accessible sources by Kashy and Kenny (Kashy & Kenny, 2000; Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, in press).

Predicting Long-Term Marital Success: An Integrative Approach

Thus, there are a number of important variables that forecast marital success. A watershed event for marital researchers consisted of a now classic publication by Karney and Bradbury (1995) that delineates a vulnerability-stress-adaptation perspective regarding the marital process. In this model, *marital quality* is assumed to be a dependent variable, and is best predicted by marital adaptive processes, such as relationship cognitions (e.g., marital attributions) and behavior (e.g., socially supportive behavior; conflict management techniques). Further, it is correctly assumed that there are various enduring vulnerabilities, such as personality or developmental history variables that impinge on marital cognitions and behavior. However, more temporal stressful events and the aforementioned adaptive processes mediate the connections between such vulnerabilities and marital quality. Thus, a person possessing high levels of general negative affect may create more stress in their lives, which in turn, influences the way they think about their partner, or behave towards them. It is clear from reviewing this conceptual model that these marital experts have developed an important, testable framework for better understanding the marital process.

One of the central vulnerabilities alluded to in Karney and Bradbury's (1995) framework concerns the role of adult attachment functioning. In their theoretical framework, adult attachment is assumed to play the role of an enduring vulnerability that has a possible direct function in predicting both marital cognitions and behavior that, in turn, forecasts marital quality and stability. However, these theorists also assume that the strongest link between attachment and marital quality is indirect, and that, secure and insecure people may encounter different stressors or possess different stress appraisals that in turn affect marital quality. This idea is akin to a mediation model; it is theoretically assumed that Variable A (attachment functioning) causes Variable B (stress appraisal; poor coping), which in turn predicts an outcome, Variable C (adaptive processes). Given the central role of stress in mainstream attachment theories, this mediational model is well theorized, yet, attachment theory provides a framework for offering additional hypotheses. For example, the attachment system is presumed to activate during times of major stress, thus it is quite possible that the effects of stress (e.g., major financial problems) will adversely affect marital relationships in cases when one or both partners are insecure.

Indeed, in subsequent updates to the Karney and Bradbury model, it has been acknowledged that the outlined variables potentially can have reciprocal pathways

(Davila, Karney, & Bradbury, 1999). Thus, a highly satisfying marriage could buffer the impact of stressful events, or even influence attachment functioning. For example, it is possible that high marital satisfaction may alter the way the adult thinks about his or her own attachment functioning (cf., Bowlby, 1988).

Of course, there has been a substantial amount of attachment research involving marital couples pursued since 1995. There have also been important theoretical advances on this subject since the Karney and Bradbury (1995) publication. In the initial review, these authors relied heavily on Hazan and Shaver's interpretation of attachment theory that, at the time, suggested that an adult's ideology of close relationships is based on models of close relationships developed during infancy and childhood (Hazan & Shaver, 1987, 1994). Thus, a secure child should grow up to be a secure adult and to function well in all close relationships. Such a straightforward explanation of the role of adult attachment in predicting marital success is probably too simplistic, and even Karney and Bradbury voiced concerns that the relationship between adult attachment security and successful marital functioning may be moderated by other variables, such as the marital partner's attachment functioning. Another issue, and one not voiced in Karney and Bradbury's (1995) work, pertains to growing concerns regarding certain measurement techniques in the field of adult attachment (Waters, Crowell, Elliott, Corcoran, & Treboux, 2002).

In terms of the sections to follow, we overview some of these advancements, as well as lingering concerns in this exciting area of research. Thus, we begin with a survey of attachment theory and its theoretical role in predicting success in close relationships during adulthood. Next, methodological approaches regarding the assessment of adult attachment will be overviewed. After this discussion, marital studies that have involved attachment as a primary variable will be overviewed. Finally, alternative ways to consider the role of attachment functioning in marriage are presented, as well as suggestions for future research.

Contemporary Attachment Theory

The theoretical basis for most studies involving marital couples has been paved via Bowlby's ethological attachment theory. For many years, much of the empirical research involving his approach concentrated on infants. Bowlby (1969/1982) posited that close attachment relationships between infants and caregivers were necessary from a survival standpoint. In the spirit of ethological theory, Bowlby (1969/1982) asserted that attachment bonds should be witnessed across all cultures around the world. Ainsworth (1967) provided support for this premise by documenting that classic signs of infant-caregiver attachment (e.g., proximity seeking; stranger distress) can indeed be witnessed in other culture. However, while Ainsworth's work suggested that almost all infants become attached to caregivers, the caregiving environment has been theorized to produce differences in the *quality* of this attachment. To better capture this diversity, Ainsworth and colleagues developed the Strange Situation procedure (Ainsworth, Blehar, Walters, & Wall, 1978) in which infants are separated from, and reunited with their primary caregiver, as well as a "stranger" over the course of brief observational segments.

To assess quality of attachment, Ainsworth developed a classification system that identified three organized patterns of attachment. *Secure* infants actively explore their environment when not distressed; yet seek comfort and proximity from caregivers when upset, and a caregiver can readily comfort these babies. *Avoidant* infants distance themselves from caregivers and rely on themselves (or focus on the environment) for comfort. *Ambivalent* or *resistant* infants have difficulty with exploration, often angrily seek contact

with caregivers during times of duress, and yet cannot be comforted. The latter two classifications are signs of attachment insecurity. Attachment security is considered the modal attachment classification, and most closely linked with healthy development.

Infant attachment classifications modestly predict important outcomes during childhood and adolescence, such as social competence in the peer group, the ability to cope with stress, psychological health, and school adjustment (Thompson, 1999). There are a number of methodological and theoretical advancements in the field of adult attachment that allow for more systematic testing of Bowlby's original theoretical perspective. Bowlby's theory regarding the development of generalized attachment representations was advanced by the development of the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI; George, Kaplan, & Main, 1996). This 20-item interview was designed to assess one's state of mind regarding attachment to principal caregivers during childhood and adolescence, and is used to measure "the security of attachment in its generality rather in relation to any particular present or past relationship" (Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985, p. 78).

The AAI assesses cognitive processing of attachment relevant information in response to past, current, and future attachment experiences. Like the infant Strange Situation, the AAI coding scheme yields three organized attachment classifications (i.e., secure, dismissive, and preoccupied), but these evaluations are based primarily on the person's state of mind regarding attachment. After these classifications are derived, interviews can be classified as *unresolved/disorganized* with respect to past abuse or loss. It is important to note that reports of significant childhood maltreatment, as an example, do not automatically lead to an unresolved attachment classification.

Most adults do not find themselves squarely centered within these attachment categories. For instance, a secure adult may show some dismissing or preoccupied tendencies. Although the AAI classification allows coders to further subcategorize adults to capture such trends, this strategy is rarely undertaken because only a few participants in any given study may be represented within any subcategory. Partly in response to this issue, Kobak (1993) developed the 100-item Adult Attachment Interview Q-sort. When using this method, trained raters sort the items, printed onto cards, into a pre-determined distribution. Although this method has not been widely used by marital researchers, the approach possesses good psychometric properties and scores garnered from this instrument are associated with the traditional attachment categories in predictable ways (Allen, McElhane, Kuperminc, & Jodl, 2004; Kobak, Cole, Ferenz-Gilles, Fleming, & Gamble, 1993).

The development of the AAI represented a major advancement in the field of adult attachment and lends the researcher an important method to assess adult generalized attachment representations. Further, in relation to marital research, Bowlby's theory regarding generalized attachment representations, and the adult attachment classifications derived from the AAI that are thought to reflect these mental models, have important implications for considering the role of developmental history in predicting marital functioning. That is, a thorny issue for marital researchers has been the obvious methodological limitations inherent in assessing the adult's recall of past childhood events (such as the intensity or frequency of parental discord) that may have a bearing on present marital thinking or behavior. Experts that embrace attachment theory, in terms of Bowlby's tradition, would argue that obtaining a catalog of all of these possible events—whether real or imagined may be less rewarding than an accurate assessment of generalized attachment representations (cf. Hesse, 1999). That is, what has the most important impact on adult relationship functioning is not whether something good or bad hap-

pened during childhood. Rather, it is the state of mind regarding the recollection of past events that has the most important bearing on current mental and interpersonal health.

Because the AAI requires considerable training to master, there are a number of self-report questionnaires that assess general attachment security, such as the Attachment History Questionnaire (Pottharst, 1990), Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987), and Reciprocal and Avoidant Attachment Questionnaires for Adults (West & Sheldon, 1988), and a self-administered q-sort procedure, the Adult Attachment Q-sort (AAQS; Creasey, 2005).

Generalized attachment representations have been proposed to exert influence in very close relationships, and play a major role in the development of parenting, marital or long-term, committed romantic relationships, and adult child-parent caregiving relationships (Waters, Corcoran, & Anafarta, 2005). Although a case can be made that these representations influence all of these relationships similarly, the dynamics and needs in the relationships are different. Thus, whereas generalized representations are assumed to have a global influence on adult thinking, emotions, and behavior in very close relationships, adults may tailor their representations to adjust for the different relationship dynamics and demands across different attachment affiliations. For example, while infants are highly dependent on their parents, the encouragement of such one-sided dependence is unhealthy in adult relationships. Thus, although parent-infant and adult-romantic partners qualify as attachment figures, the perceptions of closeness, dependability, anxiety, trust, and commitment in these affiliations are dependent on the nature and maturity of the relationship (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Collins & Read, 1990).

In this regard, it is predicted that adults possess generalized representations, but eventually acquire relationship-specific representations as well (Creasey & Ladd, 2005; Furman & Simon, 2006; Roisman, Collins, Sroufe, & Egeland, 2005; Treboux et al., 2004). Paramount to this present chapter is the development of relationship specific expectancies of self and partners in romantic relationships. Hazan and Shaver (1987) proposed that romantic love could be conceptualized as an attachment process, speculating that the “attachment styles” of romantic couples were similar to what was originally observed by Ainsworth in her work with infants. These researchers constructed an attachment style measure in which respondents endorsed brief paragraphs depicting different patterns of attachment analogous to Ainsworth’s three organized attachment strategies. A secure adult trusts and feels emotionally close to others, experiences low relationship anxiety, and is comfortable depending on partners (and vice versa). An avoidant adult is uncomfortable with emotional closeness, reports low relationship anxiety, yet, feels uncomfortable depending on partners. Finally, an anxious or ambivalent adult reports high relationship anxiety, expresses concerns over partner availability, and has little trust in relationships.

Hazan and Shaver’s perspective on adult attachment has been extended on theoretical and methodological grounds. If working models of romantic relationships reflect both thinking about the viability of oneself as an attachment figure, as well as thinking about the worthiness of the romantic partner as attachment figure, then one could view themselves positively and/or negatively on these two self-other dimensions. Thus, according to Bartholomew and colleagues (Bartholomew, 1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991), on conceptual grounds, there should be four adult attachment prototypes, represented by attachment *security* (positive self, positive other), *avoidance* (positive self,

negative other), *preoccupation* (negative self, positive other) and *fearfulness* (negative self, negative other). To capture thinking across self-other dimensions, Bartholomew developed a series rating scales to assess attachment styles in close adult relationships (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994) in which the adult considers to what degree they are secure, avoidant, preoccupied, or fearful.

Other attachment questionnaires also yield continuous ratings of attachment security based on these self-other dimensions that tap feelings of closeness, dependability, and anxiety in close emotional relationships. However, respondents are provided different directions on how to complete these measures across studies. For example, respondents may be asked to consider how they generally view close relationships or be specifically instructed to think about romantic relationships. In the former case, the researcher is intent on assessing a more generalized way of thinking about attachment, as opposed to the adult's thinking about a specific relationship. Thus, it is possible that many of the aforementioned survey methods can be used to assess generalized attachment or more specific representations. However, we noted in our review of attachment-based studies using the aforementioned questionnaires that it was sometimes difficult to discern whether the research participants were instructed to think about their relationships with romantic partners, or if they were asked to consider their thinking in all adult close relationships.

Although considerable controversy remains whether adult attachment functioning is best captured via categories/prototypes or dimensions, a recent review of studies involving five popular attachment measures revealed that self-reported attachment security was consistently related to more romantic relationship satisfaction when using either approach (Stein et al., 2002). However, a number of experts believe that, on statistical grounds, it is best to use a dimensional method (Fraley & Waller, 1998). This is a prudent idea because most adults classify themselves as secure on attachment questionnaires and usually only a handful classify themselves as wholly preoccupied or fearful (Kobak & Hazan, 1991). Further, aside from preserving statistical power, it has been noted in adult attachment studies using narrative methods (such as the AAI) that many secure people, for instance, show some preoccupied or dismissing tendencies. A dimensional approach thus allows the researcher to study attachment processes in a continuous manner to capture such tendencies. When doing so, large-scale, factor analytic studies of popular attachment questionnaires have revealed that the underlying structure of such attachment measures can be reduced to two major higher-order continuous scales: Secure—Avoidance; Secure—Anxiety (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998; Fairchild & Finney, 2006). In most recent studies of adult attachment using questionnaire methods, researchers have used these two scales to assess attachment functioning. Whereas most attachment measures that assess romantic relationship representations are questionnaires, there are narrative or interview schedules that assess these relationship specific attachment representations (e.g., Current Relationship Interview, Crowell & Owens, 1996).

Thus, there exists a vast, somewhat conflicting literature on adult attachment that can be somewhat confusing to a new researcher. There are two major constructs—generalized and relationship specific attachment representations—that can be assessed by narrative/interview methods, questionnaires, and even q-sort procedures, such as the Marital Q-set (Kobak & Hazan, 1991) and the Romantic Partner Attachment Q-sort (Creasey, 2006). However, on conceptual and methodological grounds, it is hotly debated whether self-report questionnaires represent a valid approach to assess these mental models. It is assumed that attachment representations reside partly outside conscious awareness,

which means, that some adults may perceive themselves to be secure, when in fact they are not classified that way when using narrative methods.

This concern becomes more of an issue when one considers that security scores gleaned from questionnaires often do not parallel attachment classifications garnered from interview schedules (Crowell, Fraley, & Shaver, 1999; Holtzworth-Munroe, Stuart, & Hutchinson, 1997; Simpson, Rholes, Orina, & Grich, 2002). Further, while attachment classifications yielded from interview protocols are often quite stable over time (Treboux et al., 2004)—suggesting a formation of a stable, internalized working model of attachment—attachment data garnered from attachment questionnaires has displayed less success. Although security scores garnered from questionnaires display short-term stability (e.g., 3-weeks) (Sibley, Fischer, & Liu, 2005), they are often unstable over longer periods of time (Baldwin & Fehr, 1995; Fuller & Fincham, 1995). It has been suggested in this regard that these assessments may more likely tap current relationship feelings, as opposed to a deeply stored, internal working model of attachment (Waters et al., 2002).

Psychometric work on attachment instruments, is not often extensive, and is limited to the work of the researchers who developed the instruments. Thus, it is prudent to recommend that marital researchers interested in the impact of attachment functioning on marital health consider collecting additional data on general mood, personality, and social desirability—which would yield more complete, if no less complex, assessments of adult attachment.

Attachment and Marriage: Theoretical Associations

When considering some of the recent trends in adult attachment theory and research, it could be argued that central elements of Karney and Bradbury's (1995) theoretical framework of the marital process can be retained; however, other ideas can be added. In terms of the original framework, it is sensible to predict that attachment functioning has an important role in explaining the development of adaptive processes (e.g., conflict management skills) in a marital relationship. Further, it can be speculated that generalized attachment relationships play a more important task in the courtship period of a romantic relationship, and the early years of marriage, than in the later years. That is, this thinking represents a potential asset or liability that adults bring into very close relationships. Indeed, given the relationship standards of secure people, it would seem prudent to theorize that secure adults are more likely to find themselves in long-term relationships with similar-minded, secure adults (Mikulincer, Florian, Cowan, & Cowan, 2002). However, the notion that secure or insecure adults choose marital partners who are similar to themselves on attachment concerns is controversial and is explored further in this review.

Generalized attachment representations should also shape the attitudes, expectancies, and attributions we make about romantic partners (e.g., Collins, 1996). Secure adults should function as good support figures (or a secure base) for their partner and would more effectively resolve conflict than insecure adults. Thus, one can justify that generalized attachment representations forecast the development of adaptive processes (e.g., conflict management behavior) in a marital relationship (at least in the early years of the marriage), and that, such adaptive processes will mediate associations between these representations and marital quality.

Of course, with time, adults also develop specific attachment representations about romantic partners. Thus, a theoretical issue concerns the role of generalized and

specific attachment representations in the marital process and how marital behavior and quality is influenced when these models are compatible or incompatible. Although making predictions about marital success seems straightforward—for example, possessing insecure generalized and partner representations should spell doom for any close relationship—the extant research produces a more complex picture of this process.

Another consideration is that the relative influence of other potential variables that might affect marital quality can be weakened or strengthened by attachment functioning. For example, adults with mental health problems or certain personality difficulties (e.g., neuroticism) may be very difficult to cope with if they also possess insecure attachment representations. On the other hand, as an example, a depressed or highly impulsive adult who possesses a secure attachment representation may be able to negotiate marital interactions as well as an adult without such difficulties. Thus, the relationship between enduring vulnerabilities residing in the individual and marital quality and behavior could very well be moderated by attachment functioning.

Although some may consider attachment functioning to be more or less a trait, attachment representations probably do not influence adaptive behavior/thinking in relationships and subsequent marital success in such a straightforward manner. For example, stress plays a central role in attachment theory, and also has a place in theoretical frameworks of marital functioning (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Because stress is assumed to activate the attachment system, it is plausible to theorize that attachment functioning is most relevant when adults are facing major life events (e.g., becoming a parent) or chronic daily distress. Major stressors also may spark considerable discussion and conflict in couples, and/or one partner may need considerable support from the other. Thus, the relative influence of attachment functioning on marital behavior and stability may be somewhat dependent on ongoing stressors and demands in the adults' lives. In other words, there may be times in the life course of the marriage when attachment functioning does *not* play a role in shaping the daily thinking, emotions, and behavior of couples.

Another consideration is that working models of relationships, while theorized to be resistant to change, are open to revision (Bowlby, 1969/1982). It is possible that vulnerabilities within the adult, or the environment, can overwhelm the attachment functioning of even a secure person. For example, an adult with a history of depression that is otherwise secure may find themselves becoming more insecure if their lives are highly demanding or they encounter some major life event that is attachment relevant, such as their partner taking a job that requires considerable travel. Thus, there could be characteristics within the individual (e.g., personality, mental health functioning) that encourage changes in attachment functioning that, in turn, impinge on the marital relationship (Davila et al., 1999).

There can also be other attachment-relevant, major life events that have implications for attachment change, such as marriage itself. In fact, Bowlby (1969/1982) theorized that becoming married has important implications for potential modification of relationship representations. For example, because the honeymoon period is marked by high marital satisfaction, perhaps adults develop more secure representations of their partners. Such a finding could suggest that attachment representations might change as a result of the marital behavior of the partner (Davila et al., 1999). A partner who is unfaithful may cause an otherwise trusting, secure partner to become insecure regarding the relationship. Thus, while we assume that attachment functioning has a strong role in predicting marital behavior and quality, it can be theorized that the relationship between these variables is reciprocal as well.

Attachment and Marriage: A Review of the Research

In this section, research that has associated attachment processes with marital functioning are considered. In the first segment, we examine the phenomena of associative mating, exploring the possibility that adults with certain attachment stances marry partners having similar models. Next, because attachment functioning is theorized to influence adaptive processes in a marriage, such as conflict management skills, research that has associated adult attachment with such behavior will be specified. Because marital quality influences long-term marital stability, we next examine research that has correlated attachment functioning with marital satisfaction. Finally, we turn to research that has identified variables that might alter attachment representations over time.

Associative Mating

Do either secure or insecure people tend to marry partners with similar generalized attachment stances? Answering this query depends on the way generalized attachment representations are assessed. When adults are asked to categorize themselves as secure or insecure on self-report attachment questionnaires, there is high concordance for associative mating. Adults who consider themselves generally secure are often married to secure partners (Senchak & Leonard, 1992). What factors might account for such a finding? One possibility is that secure adults are overly “choosey” during the mate selection process, and negotiate a series of dating relationships before settling down into a more committed relationship that is compatible with their working model of what defines a successful, long-term relationship. Thus, because generally secure adults display highly supportive behavior in close relationships, we would expect that their secure partner is exhibiting the types of positive behaviors and emotions during the courtship period that serve as a reinforcing signal for a secure attachment representation. Of course, because there are few studies that have tracked adults through the courtship process, most of these ideas are at best speculative.

On the other hand, the finding that generally secure adults marry secure partners may be overly amplified by the fact that very high percentages (75% or more) of people categorize themselves as “secure” on attachment style questionnaires (Kobak & Hazan, 1991; Volling, Notaro, & Larsen, 1998). Thus, it is not surprising that high associative mating is particularly confined to adults who report that they are secure people, and in marital couples, there does not seem to be consistent pairing of any particular insecure attachment style. For example, more avoidant adults do not seem to pair with other avoidant adults. Further, the fact that secure adults do sometimes marry insecure partners is also a curiosity; however, this finding could be due to the fact that most adults, whether they are secure or insecure, often prefer secure people as potential romantic partners (Latty-Mann & Davis, 1996). If most people, regardless of attachment security, admire the relationship qualities of secure people, then there are only so many secure adults available for long-term romantic relationships. Thus, according to some attachment experts, the associative mating of secure adults has much to do with the availability of secure partners, and secure people are the one’s most likely to “attract and keep them” (Kirkpatrick, 1998, p. 376).

However, it is interesting that when generalized attachment representations are assessed using narrative methods, such as the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI), there appear to be lower levels of associative mating and no predictable “partnering” of people with various insecure styles (e.g., dismissing/avoidant male; anxious/preoccupied

women) (Crowell, Treboux, & Waters, 2002; Dickstein, Seifer, St. Andre, & Schiller, 2001; Paley, Cox, Burchinal, & Payne., 1999). If there is a trend, secure people are more likely married to secure partners; however, this finding is less strong than what has been documented when attachment is assessed via self-report questionnaires. These somewhat divergent findings could be due to certain nuances of narrative and questionnaire-based attachment measures that assess generalized attachment representations. Because self-report attachment questionnaires have been charged to be stronger measures of personality than attachment functioning (Waters et al., 2002), it could be that the associative mating between secure-secure adults is more due to compatibility of personality dispositions than attachment stances. This idea can be somewhat supported by critiquing popular items on self-report attachment questionnaires, such as, “*I find it easy to depend on others,*” or “*I find it difficult to get emotionally close to others.*” Because attachment figures, per se, are not specifically mentioned as relationship targets, it is possible that personality traits such as neuroticism or general agreeableness influence the adult’s responses on these surveys more than general attachment functioning. If this concern is true, then it would not be surprising to find a convergence of attachment styles in marital couples because the measures may be assessing personality compatibility as opposed to a stable, internalized attachment representation.

Although it is debatable whether generalized attachment representations play a strong role in eventual mate selection, it does appear that these general representations forecast how the adult views their partner as an important attachment figure. For example, generalized attachment representations predict the ontogeny of partner-specific representations (Crowell, Treboux, & Waters, 2002; Treboux et al., 2004). That is, a generally secure adult tends to hold a secure representation regarding their partner.

Attachment and Adaptive Processes

Because of the close ties of adaptive processes to marital quality and stability, it comes as no surprise that many studies have linked attachment functioning to important marital behaviors, such as conflict management tactics. It is compelling that the marital behaviors most frequently targeted for study—namely conflict management behaviors and the ability to function as an important source of support for a partner—are also “emotionally laden” behaviors. Because adult attachment pertains to a close emotional relationship, the relevance of attachment functioning to such adaptive processes in marriage would seem self-evident. Further, in cases where couples are encouraged to openly resolve conflict, or function as support figures to one another, the researcher is providing a potential context for activation of the attachment system (cf. Simpson et al., 1996). Thus, these particular marital interactions can be viewed as especially salient outcome variables for study in attachment-based research.

Conflict Management Skills. Most of the attachment research involving marital behavior has focused on associating attachment security with the ability to manage conflict with the partner. Theoretically, if a generalized attachment representation is a broad knowledge or resource base regarding emotional relationships (Treboux et al., 2004), generally secure adults should have a good working knowledge of how to regulate negative affect and relate to others (Kobak & Sceery, 1988; Powers, Pietromoco, Gunlicks, & Sayer, 2006) and would more smoothly negotiate marital conflict than insecure adults. This premise has been supported when adults, themselves, are the informants of such conflict behavior. For example, a secure generalized attachment representation, whether

measured via narrative (Crowell, Treboux, & Gao, et al., 2002) or questionnaire (Senchak & Leonard, 1992) methods, is tied to fewer self-reported conflict management problems in marital relationships.

Further, in studies involving direct observations of couple conflict management, most research has documented that attachment security has a role in predicting the use of more positive conflict tactics (Cohn, Silver, Cowan, Cowan, & Pearson, 1992). Adults with secure generalized attachment representations, as assessed by the Adult Attachment Interview, resolve conflict better than adults classified as dismissing or preoccupied. Further, preoccupied adults appear to resolve conflict somewhat more effectively than dismissing people (Babcock, Jacobson, Gottman, & Yerrington., 2000; Paley et al., 1999)—a finding that somewhat parallels the results of studies involving dating couples that have used similar methods (e.g., Creasey, 2002). This finding is curious, because it is well known that preoccupied adults lace attachment interviews (as well as therapy sessions) with angry discourse, and are often highly blaming of others for their relationship problems. One would think that their conflict interactions with marital partners would be equally chaotic; however, this does not appear to be the case. It has been speculated that more preoccupied or anxious adults, partly due to their lack of interpersonal relationship confidence or potential fears of abandonment may be somewhat inhibited during conflict negotiation (Creasey & Ladd, 2004; Feeney, 1998). However, after the interaction, they may obsessively ruminate over the encounter or bitterly complain to others about the behavior of their partner at a later date (Slade, 1999).

Although more secure adults seem to “argue better” than insecure people, it is less well known if generally secure, dismissing, or preoccupied adults possess any particular “style” of conflict negotiation. This is an important agenda for study, because certain conflict management profiles, such as angry, critical, attacking behaviors, or conflict withdrawal are tied to eventual relationship dissolution (Gottman, 1994). In terms of the latter, gradual disengagement from conflict by men is viewed as a major precursor to the divorce process, and we are encouraged by studies that have documented that secure men are generally more involved in marital interactions than their insecure counterparts (Cohn et al., 1992). However, it may be difficult to predict a certain “style” of conflict for any given secure, dismissing, or preoccupied adult because their thinking and behavior during the interaction is influenced by the attachment stance and behavior of their partner. This is an area that needs more investigation.

Researchers rarely focus on the conflict behavior of adults classified as unresolved due to loss or trauma (i.e., when using the Adult Attachment Interview) or who classify themselves as fearful on attachment style questionnaires. This might be an important research area, because it has been noted that unresolved adults in committed dating relationships show differential conflict management behavior in comparison to dismissing or preoccupied adults, such as overly controlling behavior (Creasey, 2002). Further, there is evidence to suggest that unresolved or fearful marital partners are more verbally and physically aggressive than secure, dismissing, or preoccupied adults (Crowell, Treboux, & Gao, et al., 2002; Dutton, Saunders, Starzomski, & Bartholomew, 1994; Holtzworth-Munroe et al., 1997).

Although it is understandable that generalized attachment representations may have some role in forecasting conflict management behavior, we also gradually develop partner-specific attachment representations. Like the findings associating generalized attachment representations and conflict behavior, it has been documented that secure representations regarding marital partners are positively associated with more positive behavior, and more insecure representations are related to the use of more problematic

behavior, such as hostile, verbal aggression (Treboux et al., 2004; Alexandrov, Cowan, & Cowan, 2005).

Similar to the research results regarding generalized attachment representations, adults who possess secure, dismissing, or preoccupied attachment stances regarding their marital partner do not seem to show any particular “style” of conflict behaviors in research to date. This finding could be due to the idea that adult conflict management behavior is heavily dependent on the attachment functioning and conflict management skills of the partner. For example, a dismissing adult may not be overly defensive when engaged in conflict with a secure partner. Further, another theory—and one that will be examined more thoroughly in a later section—is that the major predictor of marital behavior concerns the compatibility of our generalized attachment representation and our representation of our partner. For example, what type of conflict management behavior is observed when an adult possesses a secure generalized attachment representation, yet holds an insecure representation regarding his or her marital partner?

Supportive Behavior. Like conflict management abilities, the aptitude to provide and receive emotional support from marital partners is an important predictor of marital success. Similar to the findings regarding associations between attachment and conflict behaviors, adults who rate themselves as generally secure via surveys report high levels of supportive interchanges in their marriages (Cobb, Davila, & Bradbury, 2001). On the other hand, it is difficult to interpret such findings when data are from a single informant.

When analyzing supportive behavior at the observational level, adults who possess secure generalized (Crowell, Treboux, & Gao, et al., 2002b), or secure partner-specific (Kobak & Hazan, 1991; Treboux et al., 2004) attachment representations possess the ability to both effectively provide and receive social support in response to personally distressing issues. These findings have been replicated in younger and older couples, when using both narrative and q-sort methods (e.g., Marital Attachment Q-sort) (Kobak & Hazan, 1991). Further, Crowell and colleagues have noted that highly skilled adults are not only secure people, but also these skills seems to develop further over the course of the marriage in these secure adults (Crowell, Treboux, & Waters., 2002; Treboux et al., 2004).

Such highly skilled adults are assumed to have developed “secure base” behavior, and are thus able to show better interest in their partner’s concerns, can more optimally recognize and interpret their partner’s distress, and can more effectively respond to such distress over the life course of a marriage. Because these behaviors are highly indicative of an attachment relationship (e.g., Ainsworth, 1989), these researchers could be given credit for successfully specifying the evolution of such a relationship, which provides support for the idea that marital partners are true attachment figures. Perhaps this is the reason that researchers have had mixed success in drawing connections between attachment functioning (whether assessed via narrative or questionnaire methods) and supportive behavior in dating samples (e.g., Simpson et al., 2002). These mixed findings could be due to the fact that many dating couples have not yet formed a true attachment alliance, that is, the ability to effectively provide and receive support during personal distress are hallmark behaviors associated with true attachment relationships (Cassidy, 1999).

It should be noted that there is one study in which relations between attachment and supportive behavior in marital couples were specified using multiple measures of attachment. In a longitudinal study of married couples over a six-year period, Treboux and colleagues (2004) assessed generalized attachment representations using the Adult

Attachment Interview, and partner specific attachment representations using both the Current Relationship Interview and the Experiences in Close Relationships Scale (Brennan et al., 1998). In this study, relatively strong connections were noted between the interview-based assessments and the presence of supportive behavior in marital couples; yet, self-reported partner security was not significantly related to these behavioral observations. This was curious, in that the questionnaire used to assess partner attachment security contained questions pertaining to partner support and dependence. Thus, one's perception of a secure attachment, as assessed via self-report questionnaires, may not always mesh well with observations of supportive behavior in the relationship.

To summarize, attachment functioning plays a role in forecasting the development of important marital behavior. Secure people are effective at resolving conflicts and are able to competently provide and receive social support, whereas more insecure people are less skilled at these abilities. However, although there are a growing number of studies that have linked attachment processes to observed marital behavior, in some cases, we have only scratched the surface. It is still somewhat unclear how the attachment representations of both partners "work together" to produce a coherent and predictable set of marital behaviors. Also, it is very rare for researchers to study the marital behavior of couples sequentially over time. That is, we need to better pinpoint the actions of couples that *lead to* more or less supportive behavior over the course of an interaction.

Further, we proposed that attachment functioning can potentially moderate associations between intrapersonal, contextual, interpersonal variables and marital behavior. It is somewhat rare to locate studies that take these factors into consideration, and again, there may be times during the lifecycle of a marriage when connections between attachment functioning and marital behavior are stronger. For example, Paley and colleagues (2005) noted that marital and family interactions over the course of pregnancy are considerably worse when one (particularly new fathers) or both partners possess attachment insecurity. Thus, it is evident that more research is needed in this area in light of the aforementioned concerns.

Attachment and Marital Quality

Because marital quality (i.e., satisfaction or distress) is such a benchmark variable for marital researchers, it is not surprising that there are studies that have linked attachment functioning with this construct. The association between attachment and marital quality, not surprising, is a controversial issue, and is often dependent on the manner in which attachment is assessed. For example, generalized and partner-specific attachment representations assessed via attachment questionnaires are almost always associated with marital quality in predictable ways. That is, adults who perceive themselves to be generally secure or possess secure partner representations often report much higher marital satisfaction than adults who report themselves as insecure (Davila, Bradbury, & Finchman., 1998; Davila & Bradbury, 2001; Feeney, 1994, 1999; Hollist & Miller, 2005; Lussier, Sabourin, & Chantal., 1997; Mayseless, Sharabany, & Sagi, 1997; Treboux et al., 2004). In fact, and consistent with attachment theory, secure attachment representations have been shown to buffer couples from serious marital dissatisfaction during potential times of duress, such as when couples are faced with major family illnesses (Berant, Mikulincer, & Florian, 2003), when negotiating marital stressors (e.g., infertility) (Mikulincer, Horesh, Levy-Shiff, Manovich, & Shalev, 1998), and during the transition to parenthood (Curran, Hazen, Jacobvitz, & Feldman, 2005; Simpson, Rholes, Campbell, Tran, & Wilson., 2003).

In fact, sometimes the association between self-reported attachment and marital quality is *extremely* robust. Treboux and colleagues (2004) noted that self-reported, partner-specific attachment anxiety or avoidance highly predicted less marital satisfaction, as assessed by the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976) (respective correlations $-.52$ and $-.61$). Indeed, while some have charged that attachment questionnaires may be proxy measures of general personality (Waters et al., 2002) and/or subject to self-presentational biases, another interpretation is that they might be redundant assessments of marital satisfaction. That is, adults who are currently satisfied with their marriages may report that they are comfortable depending on their partner, feel emotionally close to him or her, and perceive little relationship anxiety. Thus, it could be that these surveys are tapping current feelings toward a partner; akin to supporting the sentiment override hypothesis reported earlier in this chapter. The concern arises that the measures may not be tapping any type of stable, internalized model regarding attachment (cf. Treboux et al., 2004).

The association between attachment functioning and marital satisfaction is less straightforward when considering studies that assess attachment processes using interview-based measures. While some have linked secure generalized attachment representations with higher marital quality (Das Eiden, Teti, & Corns, 1995), other research has established less strong associations (Cohn et al., 1992; Paley et al., 1999). Further, it is somewhat surprising that attachment classifications derived from interviews designed to assess relationship specific, attachment representations with marital partners are only modestly correlated with marital satisfaction (Treboux et al., 2004). This is a surprising finding, because classifications derived from attachment interviews are generally well correlated with objective assessments of marital behavior, such as conflict management behavior. However, it is also possible that the attachment constructs assessed via interviews are not temporary feelings the adult currently possesses regarding their partner. Rather, if these interviews were truly assessing internalized representations, then it would be expected that assessments such as the Adult Attachment Interview or the Current Relationship Interview might be more diagnostic of marital stability than any contemporaneous assessment of marital satisfaction. This particular premise has been borne out, in that attachment security in the early years of marriage is diagnostic of marital stability and dissolution (Treboux et al., 2004).

In sum, most studies document modest associations between attachment representations assessed via narrative methods and self-reported marital quality. This is not that surprising as a deeply internalized attachment presentation of a romantic partner may not always coincide with the way one currently feels about that partner. Further, the associations between attachment processes and marital satisfaction are purported to be more indirect than direct. Kobak and Hazan (1991) determined that the most highly skilled couples were ones who had partners with secure attachment representations. Indeed, there do exist some studies in which, both generalized attachment and partner-specific representations are assessed concurrently to forecast marital functioning. We next turn to some of this exciting work.

Compatibility of Attachment Representations

A recent research avenue concerns the compatibility of attachment security, or the joint role of husband and wife attachment representations in predicting marital functioning. Because attachment functioning does not strongly predict associative mating (Paley et al., 1999; Dickstein et al., 2001), it is possible that one marital partner may possess a

secure generalized attachment representation whereas the other may be insecure. Further, while secure generalized attachment representations are related to the development of a secure partner representation, this is not always the case (Crowell et al., 1999; Simpson et al., 2002). Thus, it is possible that one could possess a secure generalized attachment representation, yet, possess considerable insecurity regarding the partner.

In terms of generalized attachment representations, like research with dating couples (Creasey, 2002; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994), there is evidence that husband-wife attachment compatibility has an effect on marital satisfaction and behavior. Not surprisingly, marital health appears better when both partners are secure, and less optimal when both are insecure (e.g., Volling et al., 1998); however, this finding is stronger in studies that include self-report measures of attachment rather than narrative methods (e.g., Paley et al., 1999). In any case, regardless of the instrumentation choice, associations between joint generalized attachment representations and marital health/behavior in most studies are consistent, but also of modest strength.

Regarding the compatibility of partner-specific representations, most research suggests that marital behavior and satisfaction are higher when both partners' hold secure attachment stances of one another (Alexandrov et al., 2005; Dickstein et al., 2001; Kobak & Hazan, 1991). However, more recent research has examined the compelling idea that marital quality and health may be best determined by an assessment of *both* generalized and partner-specific attachment representations. Because these models are not always compatible (Dickstein, Seifer, Albus, & Magee, 2004), it is possible, for example, that an adult could possess an insecure generalized attachment representation and a secure partner attachment representation. Unfortunately, the exploration of this idea is somewhat underdeveloped because of the paucity of studies that have involved assessments of both types of attachment representations. Further, a coherent set of results or findings does not seem to be apparent when these representations are assessed using different methods (e.g., parent representation: questionnaire; generalized representation: interview) (Treboux et al., 2004; Simpson et al., 2002). However, Crowell and colleagues (Crowell, Treboux, & Waters 2002; Treboux et al., 2004) examined the impact of generalized and partner-specific representations over a six-year period, from the engagement period through the early years of marriage, using the AAI and the CRI.

The results of the aforementioned investigations support the premise that couples that contain an adult who possesses secure generalized- and secure partner-specific representations (or secure/secure) have better marital outcomes than adults who possess alternative models of relationships. Individuals who possess such secure/secure representations report positive appraisals regarding their partners and marriage, report low levels of relationship conflict, and function as effective support figures to their partner when they report contemporaneous stressors in their lives (Crowell, Treboux, & Gao, et al., 2002). The ability to serve as a support figure to a spouse in the face of stressful events is a benchmark criteria for a competent attachment figure.

Further, the suggestion that an insecure generalized attachment representation and an insecure partner representation (or insecure/insecure) spells marital doom would be challenged by this research. Insecure/insecure adults display low rates of socially supportive behavior and more relationship conflict; however, they do not report high amounts of marital dissatisfaction. As suggested by Treboux and colleagues (2004), perhaps these adults are comfortable with having their attachment representations confirmed and have become used to relationship adversity. These results confirm what has been demonstrated in the dating literature; couples possessing considerable attachment insecurity show high rates of relationship problems, but are more likely to remain

together than couples containing a secure and insecure partner (Creasey, Ladd, Dansfield, Giaudrone, & Johnson, 2005).

Indeed, couples are more likely to divorce if one member of the couple displays a secure representation, but has an insecure representation of their marital partner (or *secure/insecure*) (Crowell, Treboux, & Waters 2002). Further, secure/insecure individuals report the most relationship distress and exhibit some of the worst relationship behavior when they report major stress in their lives (Treboux et al., 2004). Quite understandably, this incompatibility in attachment representations is problematic because the partner's behavior, which is viewed as the chief force behind the development of partner representations (Davila et al., 1999), is inconsistent with the way the adult generally has come to think about attachment relationships. Although this is not something the secure/insecure adults may routinely think about, perhaps this idea becomes more apparent when an adult needs the support of a partner during times of stress and does not receive it.

Another intriguing finding concerns adults who possess an insecure generalized attachment representation, yet, have come to develop a secure representation of the partner (i.e., insecure/secure). Treboux and colleagues (2004) have noted that insecure/secure individuals report more relationship problems with spouses than adults that possess secure/secure attachment representations, but possess positive feelings towards their spouses and report low levels of conflict when they are experiencing low levels of stress. This finding has been partially replicated by others (e.g., Alexandrov et al., 2005), suggesting that a secure partner representation may serve as a buffer in preventing negative conflict escalation and preserving relationship harmony.

In summary, adults develop multiple mental models of relationships. A generalized representation is based on years of experience with principal attachment figures, whereas a relationship-specific representation is based on experiences with one person. While these models can be compatible, incompatibility is not necessarily a negative thing, at least in cases when the adult possesses an insecure generalized attachment representation, yet, possesses a secure representation of their partner. What is intriguing about this finding is that this generally insecure adult may have developed a secure representation of their partner, even in cases where that partner themselves is not necessarily secure (Crowell, Treboux, & Waters 2002).

What remains unclear is how mental models of partners evolve and synthesize, and if they are as resistant to change as more generalized attachment representations. In addition, while it is widely theorized that attachment representations "wag the tail," at least in terms of forecasting marital thinking/behavior, it is just as probable that this process can work in reverse order. Thus, although attachment representations are resistant to change, they are open to revision. In the next section, we will delineate variables that are thought to possibly alter attachment stances over time.

Changes in Attachment Functioning

Although attachment functioning is theorized to remain stable, there might be intrapersonal, interpersonal, and contextual factors that spur revision of attachment representations (Allen et al., 2004). Further, these factors probably do not function in a vacuum and can work in concert together. As an example, intrapersonal factors are analogous to enduring vulnerabilities, and the one most heavily discussed by Bowlby (1980) was depression. Certainly, depression can be viewed as an outcome of insecure attachment functioning because the individual potentially has received the message that they are unloved (Bretherton, 1985). However, not all depressed adults are insecure, but such

adults are potentially vulnerable to become insecure if they experience marital difficulties (an interpersonal factor), or major life stress (a contextual factor). In such cases, depressive symptoms could hypothetically worsen, and overwhelm the attachment system, which could lead to more insecurity over time (Bowlby, 1980). These are compelling ideas, but equally interesting would be the delineation of variables that lead to more security in adults over time. Unfortunately, this is an area that is more uncharted because such research requires an ambitious longitudinal design and the use of such designs are relatively lacking in most attachment-romantic relationship research.

However, there are scattered studies that have examined how certain intrapersonal variables—such as educational background, mental health history, and personality—may influence attachment functioning over time in marital couples (Crowell, Treboux, & Waters 2002; Davila et al., 1999). For example, highly educated people are more likely to develop secure partner representations, and individuals with poor mental health or certain personality dispositions (e.g., neuroticism) are more likely to shift from secure to insecure attachment stances (Davila et al., 1999). The role of personality, mental health, and educational status have been linked to attachment change processes in other populations, such as adolescents (Allen et al., 2004), and could serve either as risk or protective factors. As alluded to earlier, as an example, an individual with mental health problems could conceivably possess a secure attachment stance, yet, become more insecure over time if they lack a good social support network or encounter a major change in their attachment context (e.g., a spouse whose job requires considerable travel). One might expect that these individuals are more likely “wavering secures” and that major life changes may make them prone to develop more attachment insecurity than an adult without such vulnerabilities (Treboux et al., 2004).

Bowlby (1988) also proposed that marriage, in itself, might cause shifts in attachment representations over time. Some of the seminal work in this area has examined if positive marital functioning (an interpersonal variable) can have a constructive influence on the attachment system. Some researchers have examined if the development of a secure partner representation, in the face of positive marital behavior and high levels of marital quality, can potentially alter deep-rooted generalized attachment representations. For example, several studies have documented that attachment representations become more stable and secure during the honeymoon or newlywed period (e.g., Davila et al., 1999). In one study, Crowell, Treboux, and Waters (2002) noted that the presence of supportive marital behavior and a secure partner representation forecasted changes in generalized attachment representations, that is, from an insecure to secure stance. It is interesting to note that while most adults did not show major changes in generalized attachment representations, these were the major conditions that most likely provoked a change from a generally insecure to secure stance. Thus, there is the distinct possibility that secure partner representations, quite predictably, evolve from highly supportive marital behavior, where the partner repeatedly shows evidence that they are an important and effective attachment figure in the adult's life. This behavior, and the evolution of such thinking, wholly contradicts a deeply ingrained generalized attachment representation. What is somewhat surprising about such a finding is that the aforementioned researchers observed these changes over 2- to 6-year time intervals, a relatively short time frame when one considers the lifespan of a successful, long-term marriage.

It has also been suggested that chronic stress or major life stressors may also play a role in altering attachment representations. Because it is well known that stress can impinge on marital behavior, such conditions could alter attachment representations. For example, Crowell, Treboux, and Waters (2002) noted more instability in attachment

functioning over time when the couple encountered more negative life events. These researchers documented that the increases in these life events, such as serious financial problems, were more likely to lead to marital conflict, which in turn, predicted increases in insecurity. This finding has been replicated in other populations (e.g., adolescents) (Allen et al., 2004), and again presumably is due to a renegotiation of attachment representations in the face of the increased relationship conflict.

It should be pointed out again that longitudinal studies involving marital couples suggest that attachment representations are usually stable over time, which supports Bowlby's (1988) contention that internal working models are resistant to change. However, this work suggests that attachment representations are open to revision, in the face of personal, interpersonal, and contextual variables. The finding that these representations can change also supports the idea that there is not a clear direction of effect when it comes to the assessment of marital variables, such as attachment and marital quality, and that their association is indeed bi-directional over time and should be studied using time sensitive research designs.

Conclusions

Perhaps one of the most important contributions to the marital literature concerns the recent integration of adult attachment in major theoretical frameworks outlining variables that forecast marital quality and stability. It has long been held that the attachment system represents an important organizational construct for making predictions about success in close relationships during childhood, adolescence, and adulthood (Sroufe, 2005). Indeed, much of the marital research has taken this stance, and a majority of studies have documented that more secure adults display better marital behavior and achieve higher marital quality than more insecure adults.

Perhaps the most predominate finding we uncovered was that adults with secure attachment representations who are married to more secure partners display the most optimal marital functioning, a finding that is consistent with attachment theory, and not wholly unsurprising. Secure adults are highly valued by other secure and insecure adults, as more viable marital partners (Kirkpatrick, 1998) and they "show why" during conflict interactions, or during times when they are needed (Crowell, Treboux, & Gao, et al., 2002). Further, many studies have demonstrated that secure adults are more psychologically healthy and emotionally mature than insecure adults (Dozier, Stovall, & Albus, 1999), are more forgiving (Kachadourian, Fincham, & Davila, 2004), and are more sensitive parents (Hesse, 1999). Further, the finding that attachment security is the predominate attachment stance across cultures, and that most secure adults are married to secure partners, may be one reason that the majority of marriages do not experience health-threatening marital dissatisfaction or failure.

While it is not surprising that secure adults married to secure partners have more successful marriages, what is missing are studies that show more clear outcomes for adults who display other types of attachment pairings. In addition, we are not sure what to make of studies that conclude that more insecure adults manage conflict "worse" than secure adults, as well as research that documents that they are "less supportive" partners. It would seem that we could predict, using attachment theory, unique patterns of interaction concerning adults that are more dismissing/avoidant, anxious/ preoccupied, or unresolved/fearful. However, this is a daunting task because attachment security is the most predominate attachment stance across cultures (van IJzendoorn & Sagi, 1999); thus, there are fewer numbers of insecure people available in any given study.

Thus, while we know that the marital behavior and quality of couples is best when both adults are secure, much less is known about unique modes of interaction among couples with alternative representations at the dyadic level (e.g., dismissing husband/preoccupied wife; unresolved husband/secure wife). Again, this is an important agenda, because there are small scale studies suggesting that the adult attachment pairing most commonly witnessed in marital treatment settings is the highly engaged, preoccupied wife accompanied by a reluctant, dismissing husband (Byng-Hall, 1999). Unfortunately, it is difficult to interpret the meaning of this finding. Is this the type of couple most likely headed to marital disharmony, or is this the type of couple that is most likely to self-refer themselves to treatment? The answers to such questions are critical on a number of fronts. For example, it is well known that one type of marital couple that frequently experiences a divorce is the “demand-withdrawal” couple, marked by a highly critical, engaged wife and a stonewalling, inattentive, non-engaged husband (Heavey, Christensen, & Malamuth, 1995). Is the aforementioned attachment configuration predictive of such interactive behavior? This is an important issue, because this connection between these attachment stances and this profile of interactive behavior has been somewhat supported in dating couples (Feeney, 1994; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994). Further, other couples who show a risk for divorce are dyads marked by a highly controlling spouse and a nervous, tentative partner, as well as couples who display bitter, contemptuous, mutual hostility (e.g., Gottman, 1994).

The field has been somewhat handicapped because attachment methods that require a classification scoring system frequently yield low numbers of adults who are “purely” preoccupied or unresolved. This problem, to some degree, could be addressed via methodological advancements in this field. For example, many of the recently developed attachment questionnaires, such as the Experiences in Close Relationship Scale-Revised (Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000), allow researchers to assess general attachment security, anxiety, and avoidance in a more continuous manner. This type of assessment strategy makes theoretical sense in that secure people often report varying degrees of insecurity, and the same is true for more insecure adults. While some experts are critical of attachment questionnaires (Waters et al., 2002), there do exist alternative ways to continuously score narrative methods that assess generalized attachment representations (Adult Attachment Interview Q-sort; Kobak, 1993) and there are q-sort methods (Marital Attachment Q-sort; Kobak & Hazan, 1991; Romantic Partner Q-sort; Creasey, 2006) available to assess partner attachment security, avoidance, and anxiety in a continuous manner.

The aforementioned concern suggests a high need for more research in this area, but overall, it appears from the available research that secure attachment functioning is a valuable resource for marital couples. Further, because attachment is viewed as an organizational construct, it has been widely proposed that attachment functioning at any age could serve as a major buffer from past and present adverse events. As articulated recently by Sroufe (2005), “Secure people are just simply robust.” However, another lesson we learned from this review was that attachment security, in adults, does not seem to have a unilateral, main effect influence on interactive behavior in marital relationships. Attachment security can thus serve as both a mediator and moderator variable in theoretical frameworks of the marital process.

The idea that attachment functioning may play a role in moderating associations between personal/contextual risk factors and marital functioning is an exciting one because certain variables, such as general personality functioning or serious financial hardship cannot really be “cured.” On the other hand, the idea that attachment

functioning plays more of a moderating than a mediating role is not widely articulated in current theories of the marital process (e.g., Karney & Bradbury, 1995). We think this is a mistake because, in many ways, attachment functioning is quite stable over time, and resistant to major changes. This finding serves as verification that attachment functioning may not, in many instances, serve well as a mediating variable.

Of course, Bowlby (1988) argued that if the conditions are right, then attachment functioning can change over time, and in such cases, this construct therefore becomes more of a mediator than moderator variable. As alluded to before, highly stressful situations or personal vulnerabilities, such as depression, may potentially overwhelm the attachment system and result in more insecurity over time (Allen et al., 2004; Bowlby, 1980), which then leads to more marital distress. In fact, it is likely that these two constructs—namely, stress and depression—are not always independent of one another. As suggested above, it is probable that at most times, attachment moderates associations between depression and marital health, thus, serving a protective or buffering role. However, perhaps the “dam breaks” when the adult becomes highly stressed, resulting in increased insecurity and eventual marital problems. In this case, attachment is *mediating* the association between enduring vulnerabilities and marital health, and is not playing any moderating role. Therefore, the exact role of attachment functioning, in terms of serving as a mediating or moderating influence in terms of predicting marital functioning, may change with life circumstances or even maturity itself.

Thus, it is suggested that attachment functioning can change over time, and quite possibly develops for the better in many marital couples. However, there is little research that has traced the ontogeny of attachment processes over the course of a marriage (see studies by Crowell, Treboux, & Waters, 2002; Davila et al., 1999; Simpson et al., 2002; Treboux et al., 2004, for notable exceptions), and the extant work tends to involve the longitudinal study of newlywed or engaged couples over brief time periods. The evolution of attachment functioning throughout the marital life cycle would seem to be an important area of study. In fact, we are reminded of the comment that older adults frequently make to young teen couples that are contemplating marriage, “Marriage lasts a long time....the way you think about him/her may be different twenty years from now.”

Indeed, it is probable that the way we think about attachment issues, and our marital partner as an attachment figure, may change with cognitive development and changing life circumstances across adulthood. Whether or not attachment becomes more or less a salient issue over time is debatable, for example, if the prime evolutionary significance of adult attachment is mating, reproduction, and parental investment (Kirkpatrick, 1998). One could then argue that marital relationships become less salient from an attachment standpoint as children mature and leave home. On the other hand, some theorists posit that close emotional relationships become more salient as we age (Carstensen, 1991), particularly as we negotiate emerging attachment concerns during later adulthood (e.g., grandparenthood). Of course, supporting either hypothesis is difficult because there is a serious lack of longitudinal work in this area.

Another issue we addressed in this chapter concerned the possibility that adults possess multiple attachment representations. From a conceptual standpoint, this is one of the most important advancements in this field; for example, adults possess both generalized and partner-specific attachment representations (Treboux et al., 2004). While this idea makes sense, it is quite rare for researchers to assess these multiple representations concurrently in *both* partners, despite emerging evidence that suggests marital behavior/quality is best predicted by an assessment of the compatibility or incompatibility of generalized-partner attachment representations. On a related point, the set of intrapersonal,

interpersonal, and contextual variables that best forecast the development of partner-specific representations remains to be identified.

In terms of methodological issues addressed in review, perhaps one of the most pressing concerns pertains to choice of measurement techniques to assess both marital functioning and adult attachment. The good news is that there are some very strong assessment techniques used to assess marital behavior, cognitions, and quality. Further, marital stability can be readily ascertained via targeted queries (e.g., still married, divorced, separated). A difficulty is that divergent results are produced in studies that measure attachment functioning using narrative and questionnaire methods. The long-held viewpoint was that the assessments were targeting different types of representations using different methods (Crowell et al., 1999). For example, for many years, generalized attachment representations—that are presumed to reflect a lengthy history of relationship experiences with principal caregivers—were assessed via narrative methods. In contrast, more partner-specific representations were assessed via questionnaire methods.

However, more recent research, in which the same attachment representation has been simultaneously assessed using different methods (e.g., narrative and questionnaire) has suggested that narrative-based attachment data is more strongly tied to observations of marital behavior, whereas questionnaire-based data is more highly related to perceptions of marital functioning (Waters et al., 2002). The concern that is raised here is that attachment questionnaires that inquire about feelings towards romantic partners (e.g., “I tend to be mistrusting of romantic partners”) may not be assessing a stable, internal working model of attachment, but rather, one’s current marital satisfaction. In a worst-case scenario, it could be argued that these surveys are not functioning as attachment measures, but rather, proxy measures of marital satisfaction (Treboux et al., 2004). There is some evidence to support this argument; attachment functioning assessed via narrative methods is more stable than if measured using questionnaires (Crowell, Treboux, & Waters, 2002), and the attachment styles assessed via questionnaires sometimes show overly robust associations with marital satisfaction. Thus, there may be some pressure on attachment researchers that use such assessments to demonstrate that their instruments are assessing something distinct from marital satisfaction.

On the other hand, let us not assume that intensive, narrative methods that purportedly assess attachment representations are immune from concerns either. These interview techniques largely require intensive training to administer and score. Further, the psychometric properties of the interview methods described in this chapter have been largely determined in the labs of the developers of these instruments. In addition, while interview methods, are thought to tap the conscious and unconscious elements of attachment representations, there has not been intensive research to support the idea that this method assesses information stored at the unconscious level (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002).

In closing, there is a high need for more industrious research that links attachment processes to marital health and success. This work is exciting on both a theoretical and practical level. Although attachment representations are somewhat resistant to change, it is widely believed that they can be altered, unlike personality, and thus represent a prime intervention target for marital therapists. Indeed, it is somewhat curious that connections have not been better drawn between more specific marital relationship cognitions and generalized/partner attachment representations. That is, within a cognitive-behavioral framework of marital therapy, it is assumed that problematic marital behavior is largely based on faulty or distorted attitudes, expectancies, attributions and standards for both marital partners as well as the concept of a marital relationship, in itself. Thus, a chief

goal of treatment is to alter these marital cognitions, in the hope that healthy changes in thinking may modify problematic marital behavior (Baucom & Epstein, 1990). In particular, certain insecure attachment stances may predict unique types of expectancies, standards, and attributions adults may hold for marital partners. A final research agenda may be to conduct more research connecting different adult attachment classifications or styles with specific types of marital cognitions. Documenting unique profiles of thinking in these adults may have implications for more individualized marital therapy (Byng-Hall, 1999), in that, the approach to changing one's thinking about the marital relationship may be dependent on the adult's attachment stance, as well as their partner's.

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