

Avoiding Disclosure? A Study of Attachment Orientations and Daily Social Behaviors
Following Marital Separation

By

Jamie Vaughan-Signorini

A Thesis Submitted to the W.A. Franke Honors College

In Partial Fulfillment of the bachelor's degree

With Honors in

Psychological Science

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

MAY 2024

Approved by:

Dr. David Sbarra

Department of Psychology

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Abstract

In this honors thesis study, I examined the relationship between attachment avoidance, emotional disclosure, and separation-related psychological distress among recently divorced persons. Emotional disclosure is an important mechanism of support for securely attached individuals when coping with divorce, however its role as a coping mechanism for avoidantly attached adults is not well understood. Using the Electronic Activated Recorder (EAR), the study was able to naturalistically observe daily interactions to capture emotional disclosure in conversations. I hypothesized that participants who evidenced greater use of self-disclosure will show improved levels of separation-related psychological distress (SRPD). I also hypothesized people who report high avoidance and show greater within-person levels of emotional disclosure will also report higher SRPD. The hypotheses of this study were analyzed using multilevel growth modeling. Although the present study did not find significant support for the hypotheses, an exploratory study revealed that there is correlation between the separation-related psychological distress and gender, and between the separation-related psychological distress and the length of the relationship that may guide future research.

Key Words: Insecure Attachment, Avoidant Attachment, Self-disclosure, Emotional/Personal Disclosure, Divorce, Separation-Related Psychological Distress

Avoiding Disclosure? A Study of Attachment Orientations and Daily Social Behaviors Following Marital Separation

Marital separation and divorce are highly stressful life experiences. There are extensive studies covering the negative effects stress has on a person and how prolonged stress can lead to a multitude of undesirable outcomes (Coppola et al. 2023). However, a key question in the divorce literature is determining precisely who is at greatest risk for poor outcomes (Sbarra, Hasselmo & Bourassa, 2015). Attachment insecurity is a major risk factor (Sbarra & Borelli, 2019). Attachment styles were first observed in the Strange Situation experiment and produced working models of child behavior based on the “reunion” phase of the experiment. The behavior illustrated demonstrated the way in which a child is attached to the caregiver (Ainsworth, 1970). These observed behaviors were categorized as secure attachment or insecure attachment (Justo-Nunez, et al., 2022; De Sanctis & Mesurado, 2022). Children with secure attachments show positive feelings towards those who they are securely attached (Bretherton, 1992). This bond acts as a base in which children can gradually begin to explore. Exploration allows for a child to experiment and find new interests and develop new skills. Therefore, children with insecure attachments demonstrate an inhibition in forming new interests or skills. (Sanctis & Mersurado, 2011; Justo-Nunez, et al., 2022). These patterns of behavior and relating to others continue throughout the lifespan of an individual. Attachment styles in adulthood are categorized as secure, anxious, fearful avoidant and dismissive avoidant (Ainsworth, 1970).

Attachment and Risk for Poor Outcomes Following Divorce

Intimate relationships tend to be a primary relationship, such as a marital relationship, in which a person’s needs are expected to be met (Ries, 2017). Studies have shown an increase of

poor health outcomes specifically for divorced and separated individuals such as depression and general anxiety.

Disclosure

There are many lab-based studies that include The Interpersonal Process Model of Intimacy created by Reis and Shaver (1988). Intimacy is defined as the process of self-disclosure through expressing important self-relevant information and feelings to another person, and their response. This exchange of intimacy leads to the feeling of being cared for, understood and of being validated (Manne et. al , 2004). One can hypothesize the importance of self-disclosure and how it would be important in finding a new support system after a couple decides to divorce because the steady companionship found in a marriage no longer exists. If a person lacks the ability or desire to self-disclose, they hinder their ability to build strong connections and form support through and after one's divorce. Self-disclosure can be communicated through verbal and nonverbal communication and may include thoughts, feelings, or facts. An important note is the terms self-disclosure and emotional/personal disclosure are used interchangeably; study will be using the term emotional and personal disclosure.

Emotional disclosure is important in building relationships and increasing levels of intimacy. However, our willingness and comfort with emotional disclosure is rooted in our infant attachment and becomes hardwired throughout adulthood. (Cox, 2014) Relationships with others are considered a human need and are important contributing factors to wellbeing (Manne et. al. 2004). In adulthood, the patterns of attachment experienced with a primary caregiver as a child are often translated to a relationship with a romantic partner (Cox 2014). Through intimacy one's ability to build understanding, validation and care in a relationship improves.

Attachment

Individuals who score high in attachment anxiety display distress-related cues and hyperactive attachment needs in an attempt to regulate their levels of anxiety (Mikulincer & Sheffi, 2000). This can be characterized by controlling and clinging behaviors that minimize the distance between the person and others so the anxious individual can gain a sense of security and love. This behavior could be interpreted as the fear of abandonment or being unloved, resulting in overcompensation within relationships (Campbell & Stanton, 2019). In contrast, individuals who score high in attachment avoidance attempt to avoid close relationships and emotionally suppress attachment-related themes. Dismissive/avoidant attachment presents as dismissive or cold and self-reliant (Hazan & Shaver, 1990). Persons with attachment avoidance deactivate their attachment needs and distress cues and regulate their needs by emphasizing self-reliance (Mikulincer & Sheffi, 2000). This behavior could be interpreted as the fear of being hurt or rejected, so persons pursue autonomy and rely on repressive mechanisms. Attachment avoidant persons are not comfortable relying on others (Campbell and Stanton, 2019).

Although insecurity is a risk factor for poor health outcomes following marital separation, more research focuses on anxiety than attachment avoidance (Sbarra & Borelli, 2019). One social psychological study conducted by Mikulincer and Sheffi (2000) measured the effects of attachment style, positive affect, and cognition process. The study included one hundred and ten (N=110) undergraduate students and measured the effects of introducing a positive affect, such as receiving a small gift or visualizing a positive experience, on participants' social behavior and cognition. This study found that a positive affect failed to show any effect on avoidant persons and anxious persons. When compared to each other, anxious persons scored lower than avoidant persons. Participants with a secure attachment showed a positive effect with

the addition of a positive affect. One could argue that avoidant and anxious persons lack the ability to appreciate instances of positive affect. One could also argue this inability to appreciate the positives could also carry over into interpersonal relationships thus hindering the capability for intimacy.

Attachment Style and Emotional-Disclosure

Attachment style is also correlated to how a person regulates and responds to situations, particularly when a person feels threatened (Pietromonaco & Beck, 2019). Often when people feel threatened, physically, mentally, or emotionally, they look to their partner for support or comfort. Individuals with a secure attachment demonstrate an ability to share and express themselves during adolescence and adulthood. Secure individuals value the relationships with their family and look to those connections for support (De Sanctis & Mesurado, 2022). Attachment avoidant persons tend not to rely on family when they are experiencing stressful situations and undervalue relationships (De Sanctis & Mesurado, 2022). Lastly, people with anxious ambivalent attachments tend to develop anxiety and fear of abandonment during adulthood (De Sanctis & Mesurado, 2022).

Beyond Self-report in the Study of Self-disclosure

Much of the current emotional disclosure research available is reliant on self-report and subjective measures. With the assistance of the Electronic Activated Recorder (EAR), researchers have the ability to observe self-disclosure in a naturalistic setting. This device was first used in a 2001 study by Mehl et al., to sample naturalistic daily activities and conversations. The study asked fifty-two (N=52) participants to wear the EAR for a total of four days and the

device would capture a 30-second recording every 12 minutes. The EAR gathered unobtrusive, immediate, and objective information about daily behaviors and interactions (Mehl et al. 2001).

One naturalistic observation of couples coping with breast cancer using the EAR the relationship between coping with the breast cancer diagnosis and both participants' and spouses' psychological adjustment (Robbins et al 2014). Fifty-six (N=56) participants each wore the EAR device for a weekend and found that there is a relationship between emotional disclosure and psychological adjustment. Such emotional disclosures predicted a reduction in the cancer patient's avoidance/intrusive thought of cancer (Robbins et al 2014). One could argue that the emotional disclosure of participants also increased overall psychological wellbeing. However, individuals with attachment avoidance utilize deactivating strategies in an effort to prevent further distress (Cox, 2014). The current study is assessing if this perception of self-disclosure and wellbeing after a marital separation is beneficial to individuals with avoidant attachment styles since it is not their natural behavior to share or rely on others for support.

The Present Study

The ability to disclose strong thoughts and feelings to close others appears critical in coping with difficult circumstances (Robbins et al., 2014). Divorce is a risk factor due to the nature of losing part of a person's support network or main support person. To date, however, no studies have examined how people who have recently divorced or uncoupled with attachment avoidance use self-disclosure in their natural, everyday lives as a coping mechanism. This study aims to examine the relationship between attachment avoidance and emotional and personal-disclosure following a marital separation. This study will also explore whether there is a moderating effect of personal and emotional disclosure (among people with more attachment

avoidance) on the relationship between attachment avoidance and separation-related distress over time. I hypothesize that people who have experienced a divorce who report higher in avoidance and evidence lower levels of emotional disclosure will show decreases in levels of separation-related emotional distress over the five- month period of the original study. The second hypothesis of this study is that people who report higher avoidance and evidence lower levels of emotional disclosure will show a decrease in levels of separation-related emotional distress.

Methods

Participants

The participants were taken for a community sample (N=122) and are heterosexual adults (35 men, 87 women) who have recently divorced or uncoupled. On average, their relationships lasted 13 years (M=178.00, SD= 112.03) and had been separated for an average of 3.8 months (M=3.73, SD= 2.07) prior to the study. Participants' ages ranged from 24 to 65 years old (M=43.20 years, SD= 10.76). Participants included those who identified as non-Hispanic White (62.3%), Hispanic (22.1%), African American (4.95), Asian (2.55) and Native American (1.6%). The remaining 5.7% of the participants identified as "other". Participants income varied greatly with around 23.8% reporting an income less than \$11,999 per year, 32.8% reported making between \$12,000 and \$34,999 per year, 29.5% reported \$35,000 and \$74,999, and 7.4% of participant reported making more than \$75,000 per year, 5.8% of participants either did not know their yearly income or declined to answer. (O'Harra, 2020)

Study Design and Procedures

This study is a secondary analysis of the Divorce, Sleep and the Social Environment (DSE) Study conducted by Coppola, A.M., Mehl, M.R., Tackman, A. M., Dawson, S.C., O'Hara, K.L., & Sbarra, D. A (2023). All data and codebooks used for the original study are available at <https://osf.io/74x3c/>. The data of persons with avoidant Attachment styles will be compared to EAR data that was collected at three intervals over the span of five months looking for changes in participants' level of self-disclosure. The aim of the current study is to focus on attachment avoidance and levels of disclosure as it relates to distress levels after an uncoupling event.

Measures

This study will be focused on measuring the number of self-disclosures made and collected via the EAR for participants with avoidant attachments at each of the three intervals within the study conducted by Coppola et. al., (2023). The 12-item Experiences in Close Relationships Scale-Short Form (ECR-SF) participants were used to assess attachment styles. The number of self- disclosures were to be tabulated via EAR sound files. Data from the original study will be used to examine if the number of self-disclosures changes over the duration of the three recordings collected during the study.

EAR Assessment

The EAR was used to gather approximately 45 minutes of sound files per day, per participant. These sound files were then coded into categories based on the participants' interactions with others, the content of the interaction, context and “sound file history” which included what coders heard during the recording and within a few of the following sound recordings. (Coppola et al., 2023). Coders also accounted for the level of interaction the participants had with certain individuals based on the number of times the voice was heard

within the sound files. The increased frequency of communication with the same individual is interpreted as a person of more significance.

EAR Coding for Conversations and Personal Disclosure

The EAR sound files were coded into mutually exclusive conversation types; practical, small talk, deep/substantive conversation, personal/emotional disclosure, gossip and insufficient information. Practical conversations are conversations that serve a practical purpose and concern everyday tasks, “I need a new pair of shoes”. Small talk conversations are superficial conversations where no or little information is exchanged. If the conversation never took place nothing would be lost. An example of small talk would be “How’s the weather?”. Deep/substantive conversations are conversations that have a purpose of exchanging ideas, thoughts or values but do not include an emotional component. An example would be “I found this book interesting”. Personal/emotional conversations are when the participant is sharing their own personal feelings and the conversation passes the level of being trivial, such as “I am envious of Steve/Jane”, “I want to see my grandchildren graduate”, and “I am scared about going to the doctor”. Emotional disclosure data is represented as a percentage of total talk time (see Table 1) for the descriptive information. I partitioned the repeated disclosure variable into two components: a between-persons (time-invariant) variable and a within-person (time-varying) variable. Gossip is when a participant is talking about another person when that person is not present. Gossip can be positive, negative or neutral and can include spreading a rumor, “Did you hear about their breakup?”. Finally, insufficient conversation is when the participant is talking but not enough information is gathered for the conversation to be placed in a preceding category. An example would be a one word answer to a question that EAR did not capture.

Attachment Orientations

Participants attachment orientation was measured by using the 12-item Experiences in Close Relationships Scale- Short Form (ECR-SF). The 12-item scale included a 6-item subscale for anxiety and a 6-item subscale for avoidant. People high on avoidance endorse items such as, “I want to get close to my partner, but I keep pulling back” and “I am nervous when partners get too close to me.” This measurement included a 7-point that ranges from (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree. A higher overall score indicates a higher level of attachment insecurity. Attachment insecurity is operationalized into two categories: attachment anxiety (fear of abandonment and anxiety) and attachment avoidant (discomfort with dependency on other and with levels of closeness) (Coppola et al., 2023). Individuals displaying attachment anxiety display clinging behavior and attempt to overcompensate for their level of anxiety (Campbell & Stanton, 2019). Attachment avoidant individuals display hyper-self-reliance (Mikulincer & Shefli, 2000).

Separation-related Psychological Distress

The primary outcome for this study is separation-related psychological distress (SRPD), which is a composite of four standardized self-reporting questionnaires (BDI, IES, LOSROS, & ICG) assessing participants’ grief and emotional distress following the marital separation. Scores were rescaled using linear transformation into a percentage of maximum points that ranged from 0-100 with higher scores reflecting greater separation-related distress (Coppola et al., 2023).

Data Analysis

Hypothesis 1a: I expect that participants who evidence greater use of self-disclosure will show improved levels of separation-related psychological distress (SRPD). Self-disclosure is assessed repeatedly in our models and I expect this effect to operate at the within-person level—i.e., on occasions when people evidence more self-disclosure via the EAR, they will also evidence less SRPD.

Hypothesis 1b: Based on theoretical and empirical work suggesting that participants' high in self-reported avoidance characteristically engage in emotion-regulatory suppression, I hypothesize that avoidance will interact with self-disclosure such that people who report high avoidance and show greater within-person levels of self-disclosure will also report higher SRPD, and this effect will operate to slow the trajectory of SRPD improvements over time.

The hypotheses of this study will be analyzed using multilevel growth modeling conducted in the *nlme* package for the R software environment (Version 3.1-164; Pinheiro, Bates, DebRoy, & Sarkar, 2023). I will test Hypothesis 1a with an individual linear growth model to examine fixed and random effects of L1 predictor (emotional disclosure) on concurrent SRPD and changes in SRPD across three occasions. Covariates include: age, sex, time since separation, length of relationship, leaver status. I will test Hypothesis 1b with an individual linear growth model to examine fixed and random effects of L1 predictor (emotional disclosure) and L2 moderator (attachment avoidance) on change in SRPD across three occasions. The focal test of this hypothesis is an examination of the cross-level emotional disclosure X attachment avoidance interaction. In addition, because I partition emotional disclosure into its between- and within-components, I can also evaluate L2 X L2 interaction (between-persons emotional disclosure X attachment avoidance). The focal test of my interaction centers on the cross-level interaction, and I expect that people who report a high degree of attachment avoidance will evidence greater

levels of separation-related psychological distress (SRPD) on occasions during which they are demonstrating greater within-person emotional disclosures. The L2 X L2 interaction would reflect a similar process without any time-related variation; in this case, I would expect people who evidence greater between-person tendency toward emotional disclosure and report greater attachment avoidance will also evidence greater SRPD. Covariates include: age, sex, time since separation, length of relationship, leaver status, and attachment anxiety.

Results

Descriptive statistics for the primary study variables are presented in Table 1. The analysis of my preregistered hypothesis centered on examining the Avoidance X EAR Disclosure interaction term in a longitudinal multilevel model, which required specifying the change in separation-related psychological distress (SRPD) over a five-month period.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive	Mean	SD
Age	43.20	10.76
Gender	1.70	0.45
Relationship Length	178.00	112.03
Avoidance	2.89	1.05
Disclosure	0.013	0.01

SRPD 25.40 16.14

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the primary study variables.

Table 2

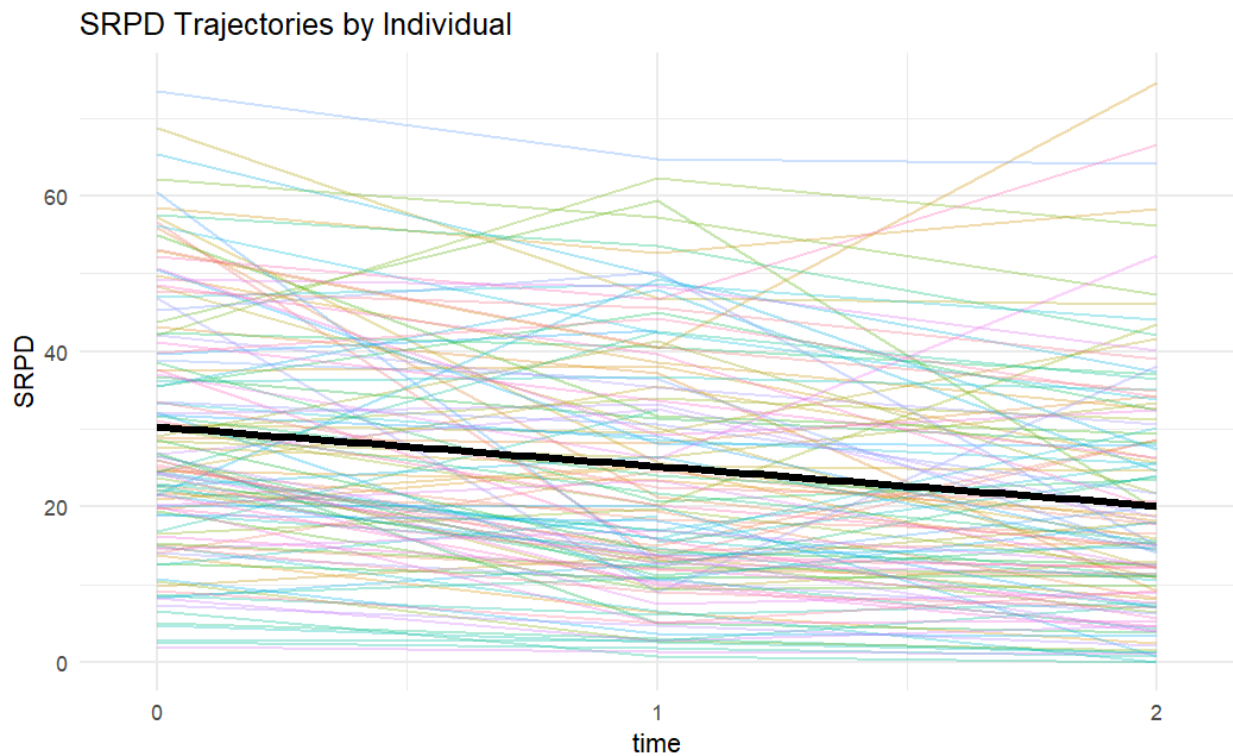
Model 1: Baseline Growth Model	b	SE	CI 95%
Time	-4.82	0.54	-5.88, -3.75
Model 2: Linear and Quadratic Growth	b	SE	CI 95%
Time	-7.30	1.76	1.14, 6.16
Time 2	1.24	0.84	-0.61, 0.13
Model 3: Growth Model with Covariates	b	SE	CI 95%
Time	-4.73	0.56	-5.84, -3.63
Age	0.24	0.13	-0.02, 0.51
Gender	7.49	2.66	-12.72, -2.26
Relationship Length	-0.03**	0.013	-0.06, 0.01
Separation Length	0.64	0.56	-0.46, 1.76

Leaver Status	2.08	2.52	-2.86, 7.02
Model 4: Growth Model with Main Effects	b	SE	CI 95%
Time	-4.73	0.56	-5.84, -3.63
Age	0.20	0.14	-0.08, 0.49
Gender	4.98	2.83	-10.50, 0.54
Relationship Length	-0.03**	0.01	-0.06, -0.009
Separation Length	0.36	0.57	-0.74, 1.47
Leaver Status	2.60	2.62	-2.50, 7.71
Avoidance	2.61*	1.18	0.03, 4.91
Emotional Disclosure Between Persons	-155.51	90.43	-331.01, 19.98
Emotional Disclosure Within Persons	-10.72	41.97	-92.18, 70.74
Model 5: Growth Model with Main Effects and Focal Interaction	b	SE	CI 95%
Time	-4.72	0.60	-5.89, -3.54
Age	0.20	0.14	-0.08, 0.49
Gender	4.83	2.83	-10.35, 0.68*

Relationship Length	-0.03**	0.013	-0.06, -0.01
Separation Length	0.30	0.57	-0.81, 1.41
Leaver Status	2.90	2.62	-2.20, 8.01
Avoidance	2.68*	1.18	0.37, 4.98
Emotional Disclosure Between Persons	-157.27	90.68	-332.86, 18.41
Emotional Disclosure Within Persons	158.59	121.79	-77.32, 394.50
Avoidance* Disclosure Within Persons	-58.75	40.43	-137.07, 19.58

p-value <0.05* p-value<0.01**

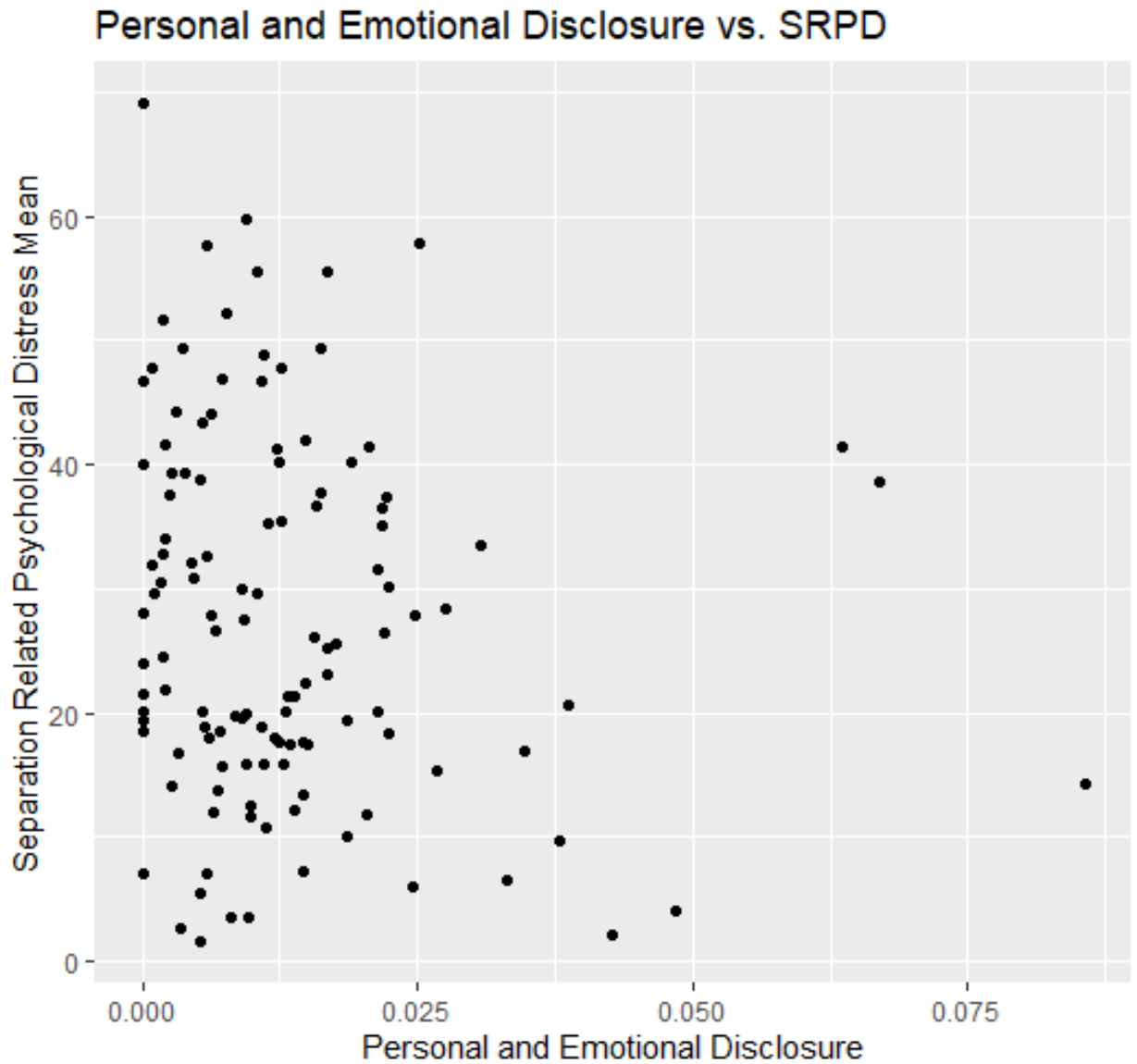
b: unstandardized coefficient; CI:Confidence Interval, SE: standard error Multiple statistical analysis were conducted to measure the effects of certain covariates and their interactions. Although there are a few areas of statistical significance they were not in relation to this study's hypotheses.

Figure 1

Every colored line represents one participant and their levels of separation related psychological distress over the course of the study.

The SRPD trajectories by individuals across all occasions are illustrated in Figure 1. As shown, participants steadily decreased in their separation-related distress over time. There is a weak negative non significant correlation between the observed personal disclosure and separation related psychological distress illustrated in Figure 2 ($r=-0.13$, $p=0.14$).

Figure 2



Each dot in Figure 2 represents a single participant. Linear and Quadratic Growth was run to examine the presence of a quadratic slope factor. However, none was found.

H1a: I expect that participants who evidence greater use of self-disclosure will show improved levels of separation-related psychological distress (SRPD). Model 4 in Table 2 examines the main effects of disclosure on SRPD. As shown, I find no evidence for significant within-person effects. In addition, the between-persons (time-invariant) disclosure variable was

also non-significant. The association between this variable and average SRPD is illustrated in Figure 1. Although the main effect of between-persons disclosure was not significantly different from zero in Model 4 ($p = 0.08$), it is possible these differences remain practically important. Figure 3 illustrates the fixed effect differences for (a) each 2-month change in time ($p = 0.00$), (b) gender ($p = 0.08$), (c) high/low avoidance ($p = 0.02$), relationship length ($p = 0.009$), and between-person disclosure. Although the magnitude for the fixed-effects for the between persons EAR disclosure was not statistically significant, I explored the effects of this variable on the separation relation psychological distress intercept, illustrated in Figure 3. This reflects the degree of deviations in self-reported psychological distress associated with each of five critical variables in the analyses. On the left side we see the fixed effect differences, that is the rate of change between each assessment period. Moving across the Figure to the right we see the relative fixed effect differences for four key variables associated with SRPD differences at the intercept. As shown for people who score high in between-person self disclosure we see a relative decrease of roughly two percent of SRPD, which is roughly half of the magnitude of overall fixed-effect change in SRPD observed at each measurement period. Although the fixed-effect for high EAR disclosure is comparable to roughly half of the fixed-effect differences relative to each occasion of measurement, the right portion of the figure illustrates the relatively large fixed effect deviations of the high risk groups, including people who are one standard deviation above the mean. The between-person variable is comparable to roughly half of the change in SRPD for each occasion of measurement, the illustration in comparison with people who are highly avoidant or male participants.

H1b: Based on theoretical and empirical work suggesting that participants' high in self-reported avoidance characteristically engage in emotion-regulatory suppression, I

hypothesize that avoidance will interact with self-disclosure. I found no evidence for the hypothesized Avoidance X EAR Disclosure interaction (using the within-person EAR disclosure variable, Model 5, Table 1).

In Model 1 (Baseline Growth; Table 2), I first characterized the observed rate of change in the SRPD across the study period. I observed significant declines in the SRPD over time, -4.82 , $SE = 0.54$, 95% confidence interval (CI) $=[-0.62, 0.14]$, $p=0$. Thus, we find in Model 1 that people begin the study reporting an average of 33.4% over SRPD (out of 100% total possible, which would reflect extreme distress on all scales) and evidence significant decline in SRPD over each of the follow-up assessments. In Model 2 (Linear and Quadratic Growth, Table 2), I examined the presence of a quadratic slope factor, which would reflect a slowing of decreases in SRPD over time; as shown, I find no evidence for this effect and therefore retained the linear change parameter as our primary representation of time.

Figure 3

Fixed Effects Associated with Differences in SRPD

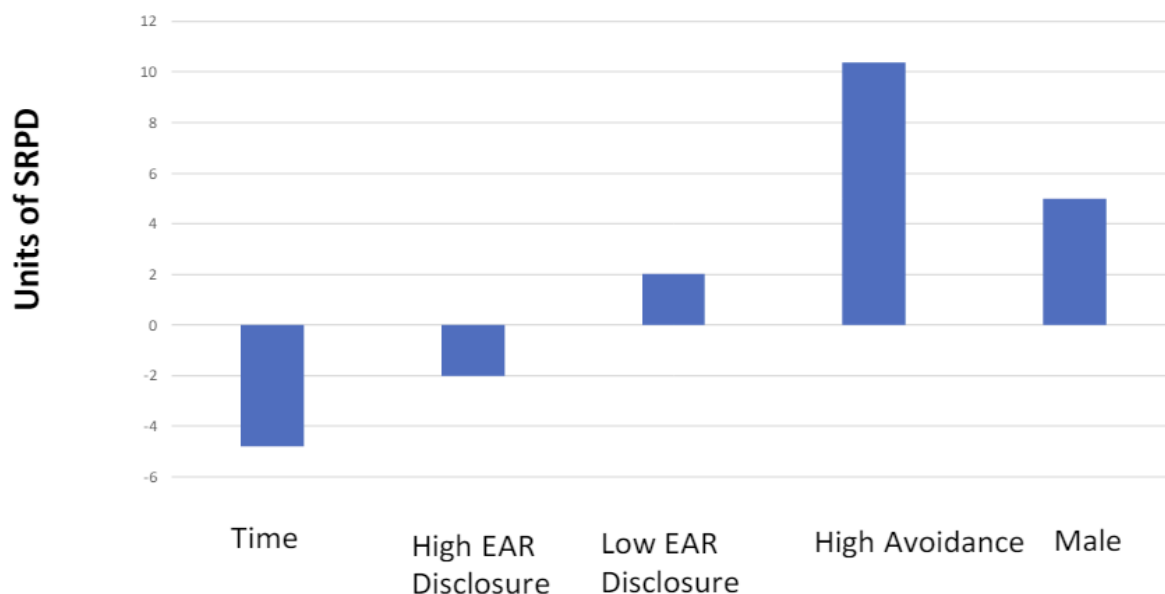


Figure 3 represents the main effects of the study against the other significant effects of the study. Although there is evidence of increased separation related psychological distress for individuals who have low levels of emotional disclosure, higher attachment avoidance and who are male the findings are not of statistical significance.

Model 3 (Growth Model with Covariates; Table 2) includes our set of five primary covariables (age, gender, relationship length, time since separation, and initiator status). As shown, I find evidence that men report greater overall distress than women at the start of the study and that participants who report having been in a longer relationship report lower levels of separation-related distress as shown in Figure 3. Model 4 (Growth Model with Main Effects; Table 2) includes the covariates and three main effects: attachment avoidance, between-persons EAR disclosure, and with-person EAR disclosure. As shown in the table, people who report

greater attachment avoidance also reported significantly greater separation-related psychological distress at the start of the study. Although the effect is not statistically significant, I also found that people who, on average, engage in more EAR-assessed emotional disclosure, tended ($p = .08$) to evidence lower levels of separation-related psychological distress across the study period. Figure 3 compares the magnitude of this main effect against other significant effects in the study. Finally, Mode 5 (Growth Model with Main Effects and Focal Interaction; Table 2), tested our preregistered hypothesis Avoidance X EAR Disclosure interaction (using the within-person EAR disclosure variable). I find no significant evidence for the hypothesized interaction effect.

Discussion

I did not find support for my preregistered hypothesis, as emotional disclosure did not interact with attachment avoidance to predict separation-related distress scores. Although the findings of my study were null, the original study was not designed with a focus on emotional disclosure and persons who display attachment avoidance, which was a considerable limitation. The finding of my study, the main effect of Model 4, emotional disclosure between-persons, ($p=0.08$) borders on significance. It would be of interest to conduct future studies further examining attachment avoidance and the interaction with emotional disclosure. As Figure 3 illustrates, the relatively large fixed effect deviations of the high risk groups, including high avoidance and male participants. The between-persons emotional disclosure variable is comparable to roughly half of the change in SRPD for each occasion of measurement, again illustrated in Figure 3. In gaining knowledge of where the struggles are in building support systems for individuals exhibiting attachment avoidance, we can become better equipped to create a system of support to help individuals cope with losses created by divorce and increase well-being. According to an observational study on pain, it was found that disclosure was

associated with more interpersonal engagement, and was shown to be one mechanism underlying successful emotional support (Wright et al., 2021).

Future research in the areas of psychosocial studies might be better suited to answer if there is a social aspect to the level of SRPD persons' experience after a divorce. For instance, could it be that the high level of SRPD yet low levels of emotional disclosure reported by male participants may be due in part to male stereotypes. One study conducted in Amsterdam found that men score lower in self-reported emotional intelligence questionnaires; however, the self report did not reflect their actual perception of the emotions tested (Fischer et al., 2018). The EAR could be very useful in further studies to test participants and gain objective observational evidence.

A gender divide is an important finding that should be explored further to understand the unique role that gender plays in both attachment formation and coping mechanisms in the context of dissolved relationships. By furthering research in the area of insecure attachment styles one might be able to create an intervention or education program that can impact the level of emotional distress a person might feel when experiencing negative life events, particularly tailored to high risk individuals. Overall, research could aid in creating a better system to support individuals who are experiencing higher levels of SRPD later in life.

For those who experience higher levels of attachment avoidance, a system that supports emotional disclosure from all genders could increase the ability to create secure attachments, decrease negative health outcomes and lead to lower levels of SRPD.

Limitations

The limitations of the current study included the design of the original study which was not focused on the interactions of emotional disclosure and psychological distress affecting people who demonstrate attachment avoidance. Although the sample size from the original study included 122 participants, those who demonstrated attachment avoidant were fewer in number. Another limitation was the amount of time the EAR was collecting participants' recordings. If recording longer periods of time or more frequent recordings, including weekdays, it would likely have the ability to pick up more instances of emotional disclosure. In our study, emotional disclosure came up fairly infrequently. Future studies may also include a self-report measure or daily diary of emotional and personal disclosure frequency to capture this variable beyond EAR collection days.

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