

Monteoliva, A., García–Martínez, J. M.A. & Calvo–Salguero, A. (2016). Perceived Benefits and Costs of Romantic Relationships for Young People: Differences by Adult Attachment Style, *The Journal of Psychology*, 150:8, 931-948, DOI: 10.1080/00223980.2016.1217190

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00223980.2016.1217190>

## **Perceived Benefits and Costs of Romantic Relationships for Young People: Differences by Adult Attachment Style**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Bowlby's attachment theory suggested that the attachment experiences of early childhood influence adult approaches to close relationships. As a result of these experiences, the child develops typical mental schemas or internal working models. The aim of this study was to analyze how young people with different attachment styles perceive the benefits and costs involved in spending as much time as possible with their partner, and to determine whether their beliefs reflect the internal working models associated with their attachment style. A sample of 1,539 university students responded to the Relationship Questionnaire (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991), and to a questionnaire about behavioral beliefs (perceived benefits and costs). Results show that young people with different attachment styles hold different beliefs about the consequences derived from engaging in a specific behavior in romantic relationships. Secure and preoccupied individuals perceived more benefits than costs associated with the behavior, whereas dismissing and fearful individuals perceived more costs than benefits. Furthermore, secure and preoccupied individuals rated those behavioral consequences leading to enhanced intimacy or closeness more positively than avoidant individuals, whereas dismissing individuals rated more negatively those consequences that involved a loss of independence. These results confirm that a

congruity exists between the beliefs associated with the behavior studied and the internal working models related to each adult attachment style.

**KEYWORDS** Adult attachment style; behavioral beliefs; internal working models; intimate relationships

Close relationships are essential in people's lives. The development of intimate and satisfying affectional bonds throughout adulthood has been linked to higher rates of health and happiness, whereas a lack of close relationships predisposes people to experience problems such as dissatisfaction, loneliness, or low levels of psychological well-being (Hendrick & Hendrick, 2005; Popovic, 2005; Reis, 1990). Social psychology has put forward different theories to try and explain how we establish close or intimate relationships, and the reason for success in such relationships. Currently, the model most used in research on intimate relationships is the adult attachment theory (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991), which stemmed from the infant attachment theory developed by Bowlby (1969; 1982). The study presented herein is based on this perspective.

Infant attachment theory posits that the first affectional experiences that occur during infancy, particularly between infants and their main caregivers, will affect the nature and quality of subsequent interpersonal relationships in adulthood. These first interactions give rise to the so-called internal working models, understood as the cognitive representations or schemas that infants gradually construct based on their cumulative knowledge of self, their attachment figure, and the relations between the latter and self. The working model of self would represent an individual's beliefs about whether he/she is competent, and worthy of love and care, whereas the working model of others would encompass beliefs about whether the attachment figure is accessible, trustworthy, and sensitive to the individual's needs. Activation of these attachment schemas affects not only the way in which individuals process information relative to their interpersonal relationships, but also their attitudes and expectations about others, their feelings, and the way in which they behave in such relationships (Bretherton & Munholland, 2008; Collins, Ford, Guichard, & Allard, 2006; Feeney, 2002a). Attachment theory suggests that the cognitive models or schemas that arise during the first years of life will probably continue to affect us throughout life.

Hazan and Shaver (1987), pioneers in the development of adult attachment theory, examined this hypothesis in romantic relationships and found an analogy between

the attachment types described for infant–caregiver relationships and the attachment types found among adults “in love.” Based on the typology developed by Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters and Wall (1978) for infant attachment, Hazan and Shaver defined three attachment types in adults: secure, avoidant, and anxious–resistant. Subsequent studies showed that it was more appropriate to conceptualize adult attachment style as regions in a bidimensional space. Bartholomew (1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991), for example, considered the models of self and of others as two independent orthogonal dimensions with positive or negative valences, representing respectively an individual’s overall expectations and beliefs about self-worth, and about the availability of others (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994a). The combination of each dimension and its corresponding valence would define four attachment styles rather than three: secure (positive model of self and positive model of others); avoidant–dismissing (positive model of self and negative model of others); preoccupied (negative model of self and positive model of others); and avoidant–fearful (negative model in both cases), each duly reflecting individual differences in self-concept and interpersonal functioning (Bartholomew, 1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994b).

Brennan, Clark, and Shaver (1998; Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000), however, posit that there are two dimensions underlying the items used for the different measures of attachment: “anxious attachment” (associated with a fear of separation, abandonment, or not being loved enough), and “avoidant attachment” (associated with a feeling of discomfort with intimacy, dependency, and expressing feelings). People with low scores on both dimensions are considered to be securely attached adults, and would be individuals who have internalized a feeling of self-worth and feel comfortable in close or intimate relationships. In comparison, individuals who have high scores on anxiety and low scores on avoidance (preoccupied) are characterized by a low level of self-confidence. However, their positive model of others leads to their validating their low self-esteem through excessive closeness in interpersonal relationships, causing themselves extreme suffering when their needs for intimacy are unmet. Individuals who score low on anxiety and high on avoidance (avoidant–dismissing) feel competent and self-sufficient, but do not trust others. Lastly, individuals who score low on both dimensions (avoidant–fearful) are people who are highly dependent on others to validate their own worth, although their negative schema about others means that they reject intimacy in order to avoid the pain of possible rejection or

abandonment. Overall, secure people have a more favourable self-image and hold more optimistic expectations about others and about the world than insecure people (Baldwin, Fehr, Keedian, Seidel, & Thomson, 1993; Brennan & Bosson, 1998; Mikulincer, 1995); they also regulate their emotions better, which is central to mental health and social adjustment (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

Currently, the debate is still open on how adult attachment should be conceptualized and measured. Although it seems to be widely accepted that attachment styles fall along a continuum of two dimensions, and accordingly, that it is better to use dimensional rather than categorical measures (Fraley, Hudson, Heffernan, & Segal, 2015; Shi, Wampler, & Wampler, 2013), there is no clear agreement on how to conceptualize these dimensions. Notably, a large number of researchers consider anxiety and avoidance to be the two main dimensions underlying adult attachment (Feeney, 2002b; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

### **Attachment and Information Processing**

As postulated by Bowlby in his theory of attachment, internal working models contain beliefs and expectations about self, about others, and about the interaction between the two; they also involve motivational, emotional, and cognitive functions.

Research in social psychology has highlighted the influence of prior knowledge (schemas, expectations, etc.) in the processes of social perception and inference, affecting the way in which an individual processes information and forms social judgements (see Fiske & Taylor, 1991, for a review), and more specifically, the way in which individuals process information relating to their interpersonal relationships (Baldwin, 1992). Internal working models have been compared with certain knowledge structures such as “cognitive scripts” and “social schemas,” which guide an individual’s perceptions, attributions, memory, and social behavior. Similarly to these mental structures, internal working models act as filters in interpreting others’ intentions and behaviors in close relationships, enabling individuals to simulate and predict the most likely consequences of certain interpersonal behaviors (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Nonetheless, some authors posit that internal working models are distinct mental structures, and more extensive than cognitive schemas given that they encompass not only cognitive, but also affective and defensive components (Bretherton & Munholland, 2008). Results of different studies have confirmed the incidence of internal

working models in information processing, highlighting significant differences in the attributive styles found in each type and in how they perceive and interpret the same situation in ways that are consistent with their beliefs and expectations (Collins, 1996; Collins et al., 2006; Dwyer et al., 2010; Ein-Dor, Mikulincer, & Shaver, 2011; Gallo & Smith, 2001; Marks, Trafimow, & Rice, 2013; Mikulincer & Arad, 1999; Simpson, Rholes, & Winterheld, 2010).

Thus, Collins (1996), for example, found that in hypothetical couple situations, and once attachment systems were activated in the memory, participants made attributions that were consistent with the beliefs and expectations about self and others associated with each attachment style. Specifically, the explanations given by secure individuals reflected their positive models about self and others, were more optimistic, and reflected greater confidence in the relationship and in the partner's love; in contrast, preoccupied and avoidant individuals generally gave more pessimistic explanations that duly reflected a much more negative view of their partner, and a more negative perception of the situation.

Other studies have analyzed the congruity of each attachment style with regard to the way in which hypothetical behaviors in couple relationships are interpreted, showing that secure people process information in keeping with their scripts, whereas insecure people, especially avoidant individuals, process information in an inconsistent way (Marks et al., 2013).

Furthermore, Mikulincer and Arad (1999), while exploring the reactions of secure and insecure individuals to partner behaviors that disconfirmed their expectations, found that secure individuals are more likely to change their perception of their partner than insecure individuals. They also found that processing of the new information was biased by the mental attachment models for each attachment style. As reported by Shaver et al. (1996), secure individuals exhibit positive beliefs and expectations about human nature, and feelings of self-efficacy. In addition to this positive attitude, they also show a capacity or tendency to review their schemas in the face of new information in an optimistic way, that is, a capacity to adapt to changes in and create positive expectations about the relationship; accordingly, it is not surprising that these individuals exhibit higher levels of satisfaction and adjustment in their relationships.

In this sense, a great deal of research has been reported that clearly reflects the relationship between attachment style and the functioning and quality of romantic

relationships, in important aspects such as satisfaction, commitment, intimacy, or communication (Feeney, 2008; Simpson, Collins, & Salvatore, 2011).

Generally speaking, secure people have relationships that are characterized by intimacy, satisfaction, trust, and stability, unlike people with an avoidant attachment style (either fear-ful-avoidant or dismissing-avoidant), whose relationships are usually marked by low levels of intimacy, commitment, trust, and satisfaction (Butzer & Campbell, 2008; Jin & Pen~a, 2010; Monteoliva & Garc'ia-Mart'inez, 2005; Rholes, Peatzold, & Friedman, 2008; Schindler, Fagundes, & Murdock, 2010). Furthermore, people with a preoccupied attachment style report that their relationships are characterized by conflict, jealousy, and negative emotional experiences (Collins & Read, 1990). Other studies show that secure individuals seem to be more sensitive to their partner's needs than avoidant or preoccupied individuals (Feeney, 1999; Mikulincer & Selinger, 2001), and tend to take more care of them and become more involved in their romantic relationships (Collins & Read, 1990; Feeney & Noller, 1990), whereas avoidant individuals are less willing to share their free time with others (Monteoliva, Garc'ia-Mart'inez, Calvo-Salguero, & Aguilar, 2008; Tidwell, Reis, & Shaver, 1996). In the case of interpersonal communication, results obtained by different studies have highlighted that secure and preoccupied individuals are more willing to disclose different types of personal information than avoidant individuals (Grabill & Kerns, 2000; Tidwell et al., 1996).

Ultimately, it seems that the activation of attachment schemas influences the way in which we process information relating to our interpersonal relationships. These schemas affect our attitudes and expectations about others, our feelings, and the way in which we behave in such relationships, and are an important predictor of the nature and quality of interpersonal relationships (Simpson, Collins, Tran, & Haydon, 2007).

### **Objectives of This Study**

As previously mentioned, people with different attachment styles also hold different cognitive schemas about relationships, and therefore, exhibit different beliefs and expectations about self and others. These beliefs are important in that they may affect the good function- ing and quality of romantic relationships (Stackert & Bursik, 2003). Indeed, as some authors have reported, (Fletcher, Overall, & Friesen, 2006), the way in which individuals think about their partner

and their relationship is linked to the way they feel and behave within the relationship, and in general, to the way in which interaction occurs. The work presented here attempts to explore the beliefs exhibited by people with different attachment styles in their couple relationships, and to examine how these beliefs affect the quality of their relationships. A significant number of studies have focussed on aspects relating to information processing, depending on attachment styles, including how attachment schemas influence the way in which individuals process attachment-related information, the cognitive process when information is incongruent with their expectations, or their expectations about, and attitudes toward, interpersonal relationships in general (Dwyer et al., 2010; Ein-Dor, Mikulincer, & Shaver, 2011; Monteoliva, Garc'ia-Mart'inez, Calvo-Salguero, & Mart'ın, 2007; Simpson et al., 2010). However, little research has been carried out on the consequences that are perceived by individuals with different attachment styles when participating in typical behaviors in couple relationships, and whether their beliefs about the consequences are congruent with their attachment schemas. In other words: Does the perception of the consequences of displaying a certain behavior in a couple relationship differ significantly depending on an individual's attachment style? Are such beliefs about these consequences congruent with the internal working models for each attachment style? Does this perception of benefits and costs in the relationship affect the quality of that relationship?

Based on these premises, and as previously stated, the purpose of this work is to examine the beliefs that are held by young people with different attachment styles in their romantic relationships, particularly, with regard to a specific type of behavior: "whenever possible, to take my partner with me everywhere over the next 20 days," and to determine whether their beliefs reflect the internal working models associated with their attachment style.

This behavior has been chosen for several reasons: first, in the view of some authors (Feeney & Noller, 1990), not all interpersonal behaviors are considered attachment behaviors. Behaviors that might respond to the functions served by the attachment process include those that reflect a desire to possess or depend on the partner; second, different studies have shown that aspects such as the time we spend with others enhance the degree of intimacy or closeness between people (e.g., Reis & Patrick, 1996). Specifically, research on adult attachment has shown that individuals with negative working models of self or others are less willing to

share their free time with others, unlike individuals with positive working models (Tidwell et al., 1996).

Based on the literature on adult attachment, and on the different internal working models that characterize each style, the main hypotheses of this study are as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Of the four attachment styles, secure and preoccupied individuals will consider that spending more time with their partner will be more likely to bring positive consequences than negative consequences, whereas dismissing and fearful individuals will perceive the opposite to be the case. In other words, secure and preoccupied individuals will perceive more benefits than costs in exhibiting the target behavior than dismissing and fearful individuals.

Hypothesis 2: Of the four attachment styles, secure and preoccupied individuals will rate more favourably those consequences of spending more time with their partner that lead to enhanced intimacy and affectional closeness in the relationship (consequences such as spending more time together, sharing more things, or getting to know each other better).

Hypothesis 3: Compared to other attachment styles, individuals with a dismissing attachment style will be those who rate more negatively those consequences that involve a greater loss of independence (such as sharing more things, spending more time together, or loss of independence).

## **Method**

### **Participants and Procedure**

The sample consisted of 1,539 undergraduate students from the Universities of Granada and Jaen (Spain), of whom 912 (59.2%) had a partner at the time the research took place; the remaining 627 (40.7%) were not involved with anyone. Participants ranged in age from 17 to 30 years (M 20.7). The data were collected by means of a questionnaire that was administered to groups of 25 to 40 students during class time. Student participation was voluntary and anonymous.

### **Pilot Study**

Prior to administering the definitive questionnaire for this research, a pilot study was conducted, following the procedure proposed by Ajzen (2002), in order to



obtain behavioral beliefs about the consequences of engaging in the behavior, and respondents' evaluations of such consequences. A questionnaire was administered to a similar sample to the main study sample (N 112) for the purpose of identifying the modal salient beliefs held by the future study population. Salient beliefs are those beliefs which are more easily retrieved from memory. The questionnaire used to elicit these beliefs included open questions about the consequences, or advantages and disadvantages of engaging in the target behavior: "whenever possible, to take my partner with me everywhere over the next 20 days." Specifically, respondents were given a description of the behavior to be evaluated, and were asked the question: "What do you believe are the benefits or advantages/costs or disadvantages of engaging in such behavior?" A content analysis was made of the answers to these open questions, and the eight most frequent responses were selected. This number was chosen because, according to Ajzen, although the number of salient beliefs that should be selected for a specific study may vary, the ideal number lies in the range of five to nine given that a person is able to process only five to nine items of information at a time. Accordingly, the eight most frequent responses obtained were used to construct an instrument that would subsequently serve to evaluate behavioral beliefs in the main questionnaire.

## **Instruments**

**Adult Attachment Style.** This variable was measured using the two versions of the Relationship Questionnaire (RQ) developed by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991). The RQ measures adult attachment style by presenting four short paragraphs that describe prototypical attachment models applied to close personal relationships in general. Two types of measure were used: a categorical measure whereby participants received the four descriptions and had to choose which of the four best portrayed their behavior in intimate relationships; a continuous measure, whereby participants scored their level of agreement with each of the four descriptions on a scale of 7 (1 wholly disagree, 7 wholly agree). Following the recommendations of different authors, the order in which items were presented was counterbalanced (e.g., Hidalgo & Hernández, 2000).

Different studies have found that, compared to other measures of adult attachment, this measure shows the highest correlations between the categorical measure and the continuous measure (Tidwell et al., 1996). Generally speaking, the continuous

measure has shown greater reliability (reliability coefficient around .50 for the scales scoring each of the four attachment models) than the categorical measure (kappa coefficient around .35) (Crowell, Fraley, & Shaver, 1999). The RQ also had a convergent validity with other measures of adult attachment such as Hazan and Shaver's three-category measure (Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1994), or the Relationship Scales Questionnaire (RSQ; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994a). The four-category model was used rather than a three-category model due to the fact that a large number of studies have underlined the need to distinguish between the two avoidance styles (Mikulincer & Arad, 1999; Tidwell et al., 1996).

Behavioral Beliefs (Perceived Benefits and Costs). For the purpose of evaluating behavioral beliefs, participants were asked to indicate the probability of eight (four positive and four negative) relevant consequences occurring if they were to exhibit the behavior "whenever possible, to take my partner with me everywhere over the next 20 days." These eight beliefs, which were obtained from the previously described pilot study, were specifically four positive consequences: a) sharing more things together; b) feeling more secure; c) spending more time together; d) getting to know each better; and four negative consequences: e) losing other relationships; f) the relationship becoming more monotonous and boring; g) a loss of independence; and h) having more arguments. After participants had reported the perceived probability of each behavioral consequence, they were asked to evaluate the degree to which they felt that each of the eight consequences was positive or negative. Both the perceived probability and the evaluation were measured using bipolar scales ( -3 to 3), the former ranging from not at all likely to extremely likely, and the latter, from very negative to very positive.

## **Results**

### **Preliminary Analyses**

In order to determine the distribution of adult attachment styles, a frequency analysis was made using Bartholomew's classification system (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) as a categorical measure. Results showed that 39.6% of participants considered themselves secure, 21% preoccupied, 20.3% avoidant-fearful, and 19.1% avoidant-dismissing in close relationships, which distribution is similar to that found in previous studies (e.g., Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Brennan & Bosson, 1998). Nonetheless, it should be pointed out that in the majority of studies in which this classification system was used with samples of

university students in a similar age group to ours, the secure attachment style accounted for the largest percentage, whereas the distribution of the three other styles was more variable.

Furthermore, following Bartholomew and Shaver's procedures (1998; see also Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994a), two attachment dimensions were then computed from the continuous single item scales of the paragraph measure. These dimensions reflect self and other working models that underlie the four prototypical attachment styles. The underlying attachment dimensions can be derived from linear combinations of the prototype ratings obtained from the RQ (or the composite attachment measure). The model of self (anxiety) dimension was constructed as follows: [(secure dismissing) – (fearful preoccupied)], in which high scores reflect high levels of attachment anxiety and a lack of confidence. The model of others (avoidance) dimension was constructed as follows: [(secure preoccupied) – (dismissing fearful)], in which high scores reflect high levels of attachment avoidance and discomfort with closeness.

### **Beliefs Associated with Behavior depending on Attachment Style**

The objective of this study was to analyze whether there were differences in how young people with different attachment styles perceived the benefits and costs associated with “when- ever possible, to take my partner with me everywhere over the next 20 days,” and to analyze their evaluation of the consequences and determine whether such beliefs reflected the under- lying internal working models for each type.

First, correlation analyses were performed to measure the relationship between the two models (self and other), the four continuous measures of attachment, and all dependent variables (see Tables 1 and 2). The results showed that the model of others was significantly correlated with all dependent variables on the perceived probability of the consequence occurring, and also on the evaluation or weighting attached to each of the consequences (all p values < .01). However, the model of self showed significant correlations with all perceived consequences (all p values < .05), but not with the evaluation of each consequence.

Considering the type of behavior studied during this research, these results might have been expected given that the model of others is characterized by how comfortable or uncomfortable an individual feels about depending on, or being

close to his/her partner (low/high avoidance). The model of self is characterized by worry and fear of rejection or abandonment by partner (low/high anxiety) and, therefore, would be less associated with the behavior being analyzed.

Table 1. Correlations Between Model of Self, Model of Other, Attachment Styles, and Perceived Probability of each Behavioral Consequence (Perceived Benefits and Costs).

	Sharing more things together	Losing other relationships	Feeling more secure	Spending more time together	More monotonous and boring	Getting to know each other better	A loss of independence	Having more arguments
Self	.052*	-.142**	-.076**	.065*	-.137**	-.049	-.118**	-.124**
Other	.243**	-.201**	.288**	.211**	-.315**	.124**	-.298**	-.199**
Secure	.175**	-.186**	.135**	.158**	-.272**	.090**	-.244**	-.180**
Dismissing	-.239**	.161**	-.282**	-.146**	.299**	-.139**	.280**	.200**
Preoccupied	-.006	.081**	.143**	.027	.077**	.067**	.053*	.106**
Fearful	-.155**	.201**	-.110**	-.149**	.244**	.004	.230**	.191**

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

Table 2. Correlations Between Model of Self, Model of Other, and Evaluation of Behavioral Beliefs (Perceived Benefits and Costs).

	Sharing more things together	Losing other relationships	Feeling more secure	Spending more time together	More monotonous and boring	Getting to know each other better	A loss of independence	Having more arguments
Self	.044	.026	.050	.035	.039	.032	.079**	.050
Other	.337**	.073**	.268**	.382**	.093**	.271**	.125**	.106**
Secure	.241**	.006	.144**	.281**	.068**	.178**	.044	.099**
Dismissing	.283**	.091**	.260**	.353**	.069**	.230**	.169**	.067**
Preoccupied	.063**	.025	.114**	.057**	.015	.056**	.077**	.007
Fearful	-.192**	-.044	-.102**	-.195**	.078**	-.158**	-.008	.077**

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

Furthermore, these same tables show how the correlations between the continuous measures of attachment and the dependent variables follow a similar pattern overall to that found for the models of self and other. These results were to be expected given that the continuous measures of attachment were used to construct the models of self and other.

To test the proposed three hypotheses, multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVAs) were carried out, followed by multiple *post hoc* comparisons (with Tukey's HSD tests), using participants' beliefs about consequences and their evaluation of such consequences as dependent variables, and adult attachment style as an independent variable. The results obtained showed significant differences, depending on the attachment style, for the majority of variables analyzed.

The first hypothesis predicted that, in the case of secure and preoccupied individuals, positive consequences of "whenever possible, taking my partner with me everywhere over the next 20 days" would be more likely than negative consequences, the opposite being the case among dismissing and fearful individuals. The results of the MANOVA highlighted the significant main effects for each adult attachment style on all behavioral beliefs measured, both positive and negative (see Tables 3 and 4). As it can be seen, all  $p$  values  $< .001$  and  $h^2$  values between .011 – .139, except for "losing other relationships":  $p < .196$  and  $h^2 .003$ . As was expected, *post hoc* comparisons showed that, of the four attachment styles, secure and preoccupied individuals generally calculated a higher likelihood of all positive consequences occurring than fearful and dismissing individuals, and the latter perceived the highest likelihood of all negative consequences occurring (Table 5).

[Escriba texto]

Table 3. Adult Attachment Style Differences in Perceived Probability of each Behavioral Consequence and Results of the MANOVAs.

Consequences	$h^2$	$>F$	$>p$
Sharing more things together	.048	25.771	.000
Losing other relationships	.046	24.500	.000
Feeling more secure	.049	26.562	.000
Spending more time together	.024	12.820	.000
The relationship becoming more monotonous and boring	.096	54.532	.000
Getting to know each better	.012	6.304	.000
A loss of independence	.079	43.593	.000
Having more arguments	.049	26.155	.000

Table 4. Adult Attachment Style Differences in Evaluation of Perceived Benefits and Costs and Results of the MANOVAs.

Probability of consequences	$h^2$	$F$	$p$
Sharing more things together	.091	51383	.000
Losing other relationships	.003	1.566	.196
Feeling more secure	.050	26.904	.000
Spending more time together	.139	82.391	.000
The relationship becoming more monotonous and boring	.011	5.463	.001
Getting to know each better	.055	29.895	.000
A loss of independence	.012	6.426	.000
Having more arguments	.016	8.203	.000

[Escriba texto]

Thus, secure and preoccupied individuals thought (and, compared to dismissing and fearful individuals, considered much more likely) that taking their partner with them everywhere over the next three weeks would lead to their *sharing more things, feeling more secure and spending more time together*. Further, both avoidant styles considered that there was less probability of each of the positive consequences occurring. Thus, in the case of the consequence *spending more time together*, dismissing and fearful individuals alike had the lowest mean values. In the case of *sharing more things* and *feeling more secure*, dismissing individuals had significantly lower mean values than any other group. With regard to the consequence *getting to know each other better*, only individuals with a dismissing attachment style showed significant differences compared to secure and preoccupied individuals, but not when compared to fearful individuals, who showed no significant differences compared to secure and preoccupied individuals.

In the case of negative consequences, compared to other attachment styles, secure individuals reported the lowest probability of all consequences occurring, followed by preoccupied and fearful individuals, whereas dismissing individuals reported a greater likelihood on all consequences. Nonetheless, it should be noted that no significant differences were found between preoccupied and fearful individuals, nor between dismissing and fearful individuals, with regard to the consequence *having more arguments*, nor between dismissing and fearful individuals in the case of *losing other relationships* and *losing my independence*, although, in the latter case, significance was marginal ( $p < .067$ ).



[Escriba texto]

Table 5. Average Scores for Each Attachment Style and Post-Hoc Comparisons (Tukey's HSD Tests) Following Multivariate Analyses of Variance for Probability of Perceived benefits and Costs of Romantic Relationships.

Perceived Costs and Benefits	Attachment Styles			
	Secure(a)	Avoidant-Dismissing(b)	Preoccupied(c)	Avoidant-Fearful(d)
Sharing more things together	2.23 <sup>b,d</sup>	1.62 <sup>a,c,d</sup>	2.12 <sup>b,d</sup>	1.84 <sup>a,b,c</sup>
Losing other relationships	-.62 <sup>b,c,d</sup>	.34 <sup>a,c,d</sup>	-.17 <sup>a,b,d</sup>	.29 <sup>a,c</sup>
Feeling more secure	.85 <sup>b,d</sup>	.03 <sup>a,c,d</sup>	.99 <sup>b,d</sup>	.39 <sup>a,b,c</sup>
Spending more time together	2.46 <sup>b,d</sup>	2.10 <sup>a,c</sup>	2.36 <sup>b,d</sup>	2.11 <sup>a,c</sup>
More monotonous and boring	-1.12 <sup>b,c,d</sup>	.38 <sup>a,c</sup>	-.52 <sup>a,b,d</sup>	-.01 <sup>a,c</sup>
Getting to know each better	.71 <sup>b</sup>	1.31 <sup>a,c</sup>	1.75 <sup>b</sup>	1.57
A loss of independence	-.54 <sup>b,c,d</sup>	.87 <sup>a,c</sup>	.05 <sup>a,b,d</sup>	.49 <sup>a,c</sup>
Having more arguments	-.38 <sup>b,c,d</sup>	.63 <sup>a,c</sup>	.11 <sup>a,b</sup>	.35 <sup>a</sup>

*Note.* Superscripts indicate statistically significant comparisons ( $p < .05$ ) between each attachment style and the remaining styles.

Table 6. Average Scores for Each Attachment Style and Post-Hoc Comparisons (Tukey's HSD Tests) Following Multivariate Analyses of Variance for Evaluation of Perceived Benefits and Costs of Romantic Relationships.

Evaluated Costs and Benefits	Attachment Styles			
	Secure (a)	Avoidant Dismissing (b)	Preoccupied (c)	Avoidant Fearful (d)
Sharing more things together	2.53 <sup>b,d</sup>	1.81 <sup>a,c,d</sup>	2.39 <sup>b,d</sup>	2.10 <sup>a,b,c</sup>
Losing other relationships	1.77	1.90	1.70	1.84
Feeling more secure	1.94 <sup>b,d</sup>	1.17 <sup>a,c,d</sup>	1.88 <sup>b</sup>	1.66 <sup>a,b</sup>
Spending more time together	2.29 <sup>b,d</sup>	1.13 <sup>a,c,d</sup>	2.14 <sup>b,d</sup>	1.72 <sup>a,b,c</sup>
More monotonous and boring	2.32 <sup>b,d</sup>	2.02 <sup>a,c</sup>	2.22 <sup>b</sup>	2.12 <sup>a</sup>
Getting to know each other better	2.45 <sup>b,d</sup>	1.90 <sup>a,c</sup>	2.43 <sup>b,d</sup>	2.09 <sup>a,c</sup>
A loss of independence	-1.68 <sup>b</sup>	-1.99 <sup>a,c,d</sup>	-1.63 <sup>b</sup>	1.62 <sup>b</sup>
Having more arguments	-2.02 <sup>b,d</sup>	-1.61 <sup>a,c</sup>	1.87 <sup>b</sup>	1.68 <sup>a</sup>

*Note.* Superscripts indicate statistically significant comparisons ( $p < .05$ ) between each attachment style and the remaining styles.

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With regard to our second hypothesis, we expected both secure and preoccupied individuals to rate more favourably than dismissing and fearful individuals those consequences of “whenever possible, to take my partner with me everywhere over the next 20 days” that would lead to greater intimacy and affectional closeness in the relationship. Specifically, we expected to find differences in the evaluation of the following consequences: *spending more time together*, *sharing more things*, or *getting to know each other better*. Results of *post hoc* comparisons showed that, as predicted, secure and preoccupied individuals rated these three consequences more positively than fearful and dismissing individuals. The latter group rated the three consequences more negatively than all the other groups, except in the case of *getting to know each other better*, where, although they were not significantly different compared to fearful individuals, significance was  $p < .078$  (Table 6).

Lastly, our third hypothesis proposes that individuals with a dismissing attachment style would be the group that rated most negatively those consequences involving a greater loss of independence (such as *losing my independence*, *sharing more things*, and *spending more time together*). As previously indicated, in the case of *sharing more things*, and *spending more time together*, the results confirmed our predictions with regard to dismissing individuals. In the case of the consequence *losing my independence*, *post hoc* comparisons only partially confirmed our predictions (Table 6). Thus, the group of dismissing individuals rated *losing my independence*, as a consequence of exhibiting the target behavior, more negatively than the other three groups; no significant differences were found among the other three attachment styles.

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## **Discussion**

The aim of this study was mainly to determine whether the benefits and costs perceived in couple relationships differ, depending on adult attachment style. The objectives of the study are based on attachment theory, which posits that differences in expectations, beliefs, attitudes, and behavior in interpersonal relationships are, to a large extent, the result of adult attachment style, that is, of specific cognitive schemas about relationships that guide not only thoughts, but also feelings and behavior (Collins, 1996; Simpson, Collins, Tran, & Haydon, 2007).

The results of this study provide support for the idea that, as a result of the different internal working models involved, attachment styles reflect different beliefs in respect of the same behavior in romantic relationships. An overall analysis of the results obtained for the hypotheses shows that, as predicted, compared to all other attachment styles, secure individuals perceived more benefits than costs relating to the behavior, whereas dismissing individuals perceived more costs than benefits. In the insecure group, preoccupied individuals showed a greater perception of benefits compared to costs associated with the behavior.

Further, and in line with our predictions, secure and preoccupied individuals rated those behavioral consequences that led to greater intimacy or closeness more positively than avoidant individuals. Those with a dismissing attachment style evaluated the consequences that implied a loss of independence more negatively.

These findings confirm the results from other studies reporting the incidence of internal working models on the way people think, feel, and behave in similar interpersonal situations (Birnbaum, 2007; Collins, 1996; Dykas &

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Cassidy, 2011; Tidwell et al., 1996). For example, Tidwell et al. found that secure and preoccupied individuals spent more time interacting with others (partners or friends) than avoidant individuals, or more frequently displayed behaviors that could enhance closeness in their relationships. Furthermore, Collins found that, once these working models were triggered in a person's memory, they affected the processes of social perception and attribution in a way that was consistent with the beliefs and expectations about self and others associated with each attachment style. Thus, people with a secure attachment style interpreted events in a way that minimized their negative effects, whereas people with insecure styles maximized the impact of these effects.

In the case of this study, the data obtained for each attachment style group was congruent with their working models. For example, a secure attachment style is characterized by feeling comfortable with affectional closeness or intimacy, by the tendency to trust others when needed, and by a perception of self as a person who is loved and valued. This positive vision includes a perception of others as people in whom one can trust, and who are available when needed. In contrast, a preoccupied attachment style is characterized by a high desire for intimacy and closeness, largely disregarding the individual's own independence. However, such individuals tend to be excessively preoccupied and anxious about rejection or abandonment in the relationship (Feeney, Noller, & Hanrahan, 1994). Therefore, it is only logical that these two attachment style groups are those who perceived more advantages in exhibiting such behavior, and who rated more positively those consequences that would lead to greater closeness and intimacy in their couple relationship.

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In the case of avoidant individuals, they are characterized basically by their avoidance of intimacy. They try to keep some distance in their interpersonal relationships, and to avoid allowing people to become too affectionally close to them, either through a fear of rejection (fearful), or through their need for independence (dismissing). It is hardly surprising, therefore, that, in this study, avoidant individuals, and especially, dismissing individuals, who prefer to avoid intimacy and to keep some emotional distance in their relationships, should be those who perceived more drawbacks than advantages when thinking about spending as much time as possible with their partner, and those who rated more negatively the consequences involving greater intimacy in the relationship and a loss of independence.

This avoidant behavioral strategy has been reported by different authors for various situations. Some research on the type of everyday social interaction displayed by each attachment style found that avoidant individuals participate in fewer social activities, keep an affectional distance, and enjoy themselves less than individuals with other attachment styles (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Tidwell et al., 1996). Further studies have shown that the lower the level of emotional intimacy perceived by individuals scoring high on avoidant attachment, the greater their satisfaction in their relationship, unlike people scoring low on avoidance (Dandurand & Lafontaine, 2013).

As predicted by the attachment theory, the goal of avoidant individuals seems to be that of keeping control and independence in their closest relationships. The results of different research show the existence of several indicators that reflect the tendency among avoidant individuals to escape from intimacy: (1) they become less involved in stable romantic relationships; (2) they spend less time interacting with others (partner or

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friends); and (3) they disclose less intimate or personal information. The latter two indicators seem to be factors that lessen the probability of creating affectional bonds, or increasing the level of intimacy (Berscheid, Snyder, & Omoto, 1989; Reis & Patrick, 1996; Tidwell et al., 1996).

The results obtained from this study seem to confirm that internal working models represent an established cognitive system that predisposes an individual to perceive and interpret experiences in a way that is consistent with such models. Authors such as Collins and Read (1990; Collins, 1996), among others, suggest that these working models are used to filter and interpret external social information. In this study, it was found that young people with different styles of attachment interpreted the same situation in different ways, consistent with their beliefs and expectations.

In line with these results, it should be noted that theories on interpersonal relationships, based on a social exchange approach (Burgess & Huston, 1979; Kelley & Thibaut, 1978), posit that the outcome of any interaction will be determined by the perceived rewards and costs. Rewards would be the satisfaction and gratification that a person obtains from displaying a behavior, whereas costs would be the negative consequences. Rewards and costs depend on a person's experiences, beliefs, and the attributions they make about self and others. A relationship will last only if both partners perceive the rewards involved to be greater than the costs, and the relationship is more highly valued than alternative relationships (including not having a relationship). Thus, according to this theoretical approach, the way in which each member of a couple evaluates the benefits and costs perceived in their relationship will have an impact on their degree of satisfaction and on the good functioning of their relationship. Bearing in mind the high number of studies in the literature on attachment that have

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found that individuals with a secure attachment style exhibit the highest rates of satisfaction, intimacy, and perceived stability in their romantic relationships (Brennan & Shaver, 1995; Collins, 1996; Feeney & Noller, 1990; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994; Knobloch, Solomon, & Cruz, 2001; Monteoliva & Garc'ia, 2005), the results of this study show, in keeping with social exchange theories, that beliefs play an important role in explaining the link between attachment style and relationship satisfaction. Thus, the way in which individuals think about their partner and their relationships highly affects the functioning of their relationship. People who think that they are not worthy of love and affection, and/or that others are not worthy of trust, perceive the consequences of being close to their partner as being more negative than positive, and feel less satisfied than those who do feel worthy of love and affection, and/or trust in others.

In conclusion, this study shows that the perception held about costs and benefits in a couple-relationship vary as a function of attachment style. It might be useful to identify these beliefs so that professionals working in the field of interpersonal relationships can design programmes aimed at changing such beliefs and attitudes in order to foster trust and to reduce perceived costs in relationships. We believe that identification of these aspects would contribute to a better understanding of relationship problems and to greater satisfaction and adjustment in couple relationships.

### ***Limitations and Future Research Directions***

Before concluding, we should acknowledge some of this study's limitations. One limitation would be related to the instrument used to measure the adult attachment style. We have used the two versions of the Relationship Questionnaire (categorical and continuous measure) proposed by

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Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991), which, although it has proved to have certain weaknesses from a methodological point of view, has been validated and extensively used in previous studies. Nevertheless, it would be interesting to carry out future studies in which other adult attachment measures are included, such as those used by Brennan et al. (1998) (also see Fraley et al., 2000).

The findings of this study suggest some interesting implications in the area of interpersonal processes from both a psychosocial and clinical perspective. As previously described, avoidant individuals display more negative beliefs toward behaviors that can lead to establishing a stronger affective bond. Research has repeatedly shown that a lack of intimacy and of strong affective bonds affects an individual's physical and psychological health, leading to problems such as depression and loneliness, or increasing the likelihood of developing risk behaviors such as alcoholism that can affect his/her health (Brennan & Shaver, 1995; Reis & Franks, 1994).

Given that research has found that, generally speaking, individuals with an avoidant attachment style report less intimate or less close, and more unsatisfactory interpersonal relationships, and seem to be more prone to interpersonal and mental health problems (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Simpson, Rholes, & Nelligan, 1992), such individuals might be a risk group requiring further study to examine the consequences of their fear of intimacy in greater detail, and subsequently, to create mechanisms that will enable them to change their schemas about their relationships (e.g., their beliefs and expectations).

In the field of couple therapy, for example, it might be interesting to identify such beliefs, particularly in individuals with a history of insecure attachment.



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Knowledge about such beliefs would enable interventions aimed at restructuring their internal working models, that is, their view of self and of others, and thus, increase their trust in their partner and foster their capacity for intimacy.

Further, according to the approach based on models of attitude-behavior relations such as the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), behavioral beliefs are the foundations for forming favourable or unfavourable attitudes to behavior, which, in turn, are considered direct determinants of intention, and indirect determinants of future behavior. Based on this theory, it would be interesting to evaluate the beliefs held by individuals with different attachment styles about the consequences of engaging in certain interpersonal behaviors, and whether these beliefs are good predictors of the intention to engage in such behaviors, and of actual future behaviors, all of which could mean a major step forward in our knowledge of interpersonal functioning.

It is recommended that further studies be made, basically with people who have insecure attachment styles, in order to evaluate beliefs and expectations associated with behaviors that increase intimacy in interpersonal relationships. An evaluation of these aspects might prove helpful in changing their negative perception of intimacy and of the consequences of having closer affectional bonds in their intimate relationships.

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