

**Exploring the Dynamics of Insecure Attachment Styles and Cultural Sexual Scripts in  
relation to Sexual Communication**

Monica Bridge

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### **Abstract**

The sexual relationship represents a vital ingredient of committed adult romantic relationships. Research has demonstrated that attachment styles and sexual scripts have important implications for sexual communication and sexual satisfaction. The present thesis sought to examine the influence of insecure attachment styles and cultural sexual scripts on sexual communication and satisfaction with the sexual relationship and explore the relationship between each variable. A second objective of the study was to analyze the moderating effects of gender on these relationships. A total of 94 participants were recruited and completed a questionnaire that assessed levels of attachment anxiety and avoidance, adherence to the traditional cultural sexual script, sexual communication satisfaction, and sexual satisfaction. The findings suggest that individuals high in attachment avoidance conformed to the traditional cultural sexual script, exhibited impeded sexual communication and lower levels of sexual satisfaction. Greater adherence to cultural sexual scripts was found to predict sexual satisfaction but did not have an impact on sexual communication. Furthermore, adherence to cultural sexual scripts was not found to mediate the relationship between attachment avoidance and sexual satisfaction. No moderating effects were observed for gender. The clinical implications of these findings and recommendations for further research are discussed.

*Keywords:* attachment styles, cultural sexual scripts, sexual communication, sexual satisfaction

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**Table of Contents**

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of contents	iv
Introduction	1
Sexual communication	4
Sexual communication and relationship length	5
Gender differences in sexual communication	7
Attachment Theory	8
Adult attachment and the sexual system	10
Attachment and sexual communication	11
Sexual script theory	13
Cultural narratives and gendered sexual scripts	13
Sexual communication and sexual scripts	16
Sexual satisfaction and sexual scripts	17
Sexual scripts and sexual orientation	18
Purpose and research question	19
Hypotheses	20
Methods	21
Participants	21
Sample demographic characteristics	21
Sample relationship characteristics	22
Sampling and data collection procedures	23

Ethics	24
Measures	24
Demographic data	24
Experiences in Close Relationships – Short form (ECR-SF)	24
Sexual Script Scale (SSS)	25
Sexual Communication Satisfaction Scale (SCSS)	26
Global Measure of Sexual Satisfaction (GMSEX)	27
Statistical Analyses	28
Preliminary analyses	28
Regression analyses	28
Linear regression analyses	28
Multiple linear regression analyses	28
Results	31
Preliminary analyses	31
Preliminary data screening	31
Independent observations assumptions	31
Descriptive analyses	32
Correlations	33
Simple linear regression analyses	34
Multiple regression analyses	39
Discussion	42
Attachment insecurity and sexual attitudes	43
Attachment insecurity and sexual communication	45

Attachment insecurity and sexual satisfaction	46
Sexual scripts	48
Moderating effects of gender on sexual scripts, sexual communication and sexual satisfaction	51
Clinical implications	51
Strengths	52
Limitations	53
Future Directions	54
Table of Tables	56
Table of Figures	57
References	58
Appendix A: Recruitment Poster	72
Appendix B: Saint Paul University Research Ethics Board Approval	73
Appendix C: Informed Consent	74
Appendix D: Sociodemographic Questionnaire	75
Appendix E: Experiences in Close Relationship – Short Form	79
Appendix F: Sexual Script Scale	80
Appendix G: Sexual Communication Satisfaction Scale	81
Appendix H: Global Measure of Sexual Satisfaction	83

### **Exploring the Dynamics of Insecure Attachment Styles and Cultural Sexual Scripts in relation to Sexual Communication**

*Sexual communication* refers to the process by which partners negotiate a sexual relationship. This includes disclosing sexual likes and dislikes, initiation and refusal of sexual activities, and conversations around safe sex behaviours (Byers, 2011). Sexual communication is a crucial element of adult romantic relationships and researchers have demonstrated that sexual communication is strongly associated with sexual well-being and overall relationship satisfaction (Litzinger & Gordon, 2005; Byers, 2011; Montesi, Fauber, Gordon, & Heimberg, 2010). Furthermore, sexual communication is a key predictor of *sexual satisfaction*, the “affective response arising from one’s subjective evaluation of the positive and negative dimensions associated with one’s sexual relationship” (Lawrance & Byers, 1995, p. 268). Likewise, effective communication about sexuality can lead to greater feelings of closeness and connection with one’s partner (Rehman, Fallis, & Sutherland, 2017).

Communication about sexual aspects of the relationship presents many obstacles for couples. Couples tend to avoid discussions concerning sexual problems (Byers, 2011) and, as a result, do not possess an adequate understanding of their partner’s likes and dislikes (MacNeil & Byers, 2005). Furthermore, communication and sexual issues are among the most frequently reported reasons for seeking couples therapy (Miller, Yorgason, Sandberg, & White, 2003; Whisman, Dixon, & Johnson, 1997) and unhappy couples attribute 50-70% of their relational distress to sexual issues (McCarthy & McCarthy, 2003). It is proposed that difficulties in the sexual relationship permeate into other areas of affectional bonding, such as touch, causing greater emotional and physical distance in couples (Johnson & Zuccarini, 2010).

Metts and Cupach (1989) identified a number of barriers to sexual communication, which included perceptions that discussions of sexual issues will result in threats to the relationship, partner, or self, questions of morality around discussing sexual topics, and lack of experience in communicating about sexual issues. Research on the topic of sexual communication has expanded our understanding of Metts and Cupach's proposed barriers. A study by Rehman, Balan, Sutherland, and McNeil (2018) exploring the barriers to sexual communication observed that when comparing scores on the Barriers to Communication Questionnaire between sexual and nonsexual conflict discussions, results showed that perceived threat to self was the only significant barrier. Furthermore, participants rated discussions concerning sexual conflicts as a significantly greater threat to self than discussions of nonsexual issues. Likewise, a study by Rehman, Lizdek, Fallis, Sutherland, and Goodnight (2017) examining conversations between couples concerning sexual and nonsexual problems found that participants reported higher levels of anxiety before discussing sexual problems with their partners. Participants identified specific topics that presented sexual and nonsexual conflicts in their relationship. The researchers analysed video-recordings of participants' discussions of sexual and nonsexual problems with their partners. Using an interpersonal approach, Rehman et al. (2017) coded the participants' interactions along two dimensions, warmth and dominance. The researchers observed that partners appeared more cautious when discussing sexual conflicts, demonstrating greater variability in their degree of warmth and greater stability of dominance, as opposed to discussing nonsexual conflicts. These findings give legitimacy to the claim that couples exhibit hindered communication when discussing their sexual relationship and provides a potential motivation for the avoidance of sexual communication.

The burgeoning research in the field of sexual communication has sought to identify the factors that influence our ability to communicate about sexuality in romantic relationships. Attachment theory offers a comprehensible framework through which we may conceptualize adult love. Studies exploring the sexual system have illustrated the similarities with the attachment system, particularly in the hyperactivation and deactivation of the system, that influence sexual attitudes, motives, and behaviours, and physiological and cognitive aspects of sexuality (Birnbaum, Mikulincer, Szepeswol, Shaver, & Mizrahi, 2014). Different attachment style exhibits distinct sexual attitudes and motives, and both are related to inhibited sexual communication (Davis et al., 2006). The relationship between attachment and sexual communication is further nuanced by gender, and researchers have suggested that adherence to traditional gender roles and the dominant cultural sexual script could account for these discrepancies (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016; Greene & Faulkner, 2005). Researchers have suggested that because of their impeded sexual communication, individuals will defer to the dominant cultural sexual script in order to assess what is expected of them in a particular sexual situation (Rehman, Fallis, & Sutherland, 2017). However, the relationship between attachment styles, sexual scripts, and sexual communication is still poorly understood, and research has yet to conceive an understanding of how these variables interact. The purpose of this research project will be to elaborate on and clarify the relationship between sexual communication, attachment styles, and sexual scripts, and explore the influence of gender on this relationship.

A review of the literature exploring sexual communication and its progression in romantic relationship will be examined. Foundational concepts of attachment theory, the expression of attachment bonds in adult relationships, and the relationship between attachment and the sexual behaviour system will also be presented. Furthermore, the development of sexual

scripts in relation to cultural factors will be provided, with a focus on how traditional gender roles influence the sexual script and its impact on sexual communication.

### **Sexual Communication**

Discrepancies in sexual preferences are inevitable within romantic relationships and sexual communication is a key factor in predicting sexual satisfaction (Diamond, 2013; Byers, 2011; Byers & Demmons, 1999). In a longitudinal study examining the association between relationship satisfaction and sexual satisfaction, Byers (2005) demonstrated that the quality of sexual communication played a critical role in mediating the relationship between relationship satisfaction and sexual satisfaction. Furthermore, low scores on the *Primary Communication Inventory* (PCI) at time 1 were negatively correlated with sexual and relationship satisfaction 18 months later. These results indicate the importance of sexual communication in limiting problems in the sexual relationship from intruding into overall relationship functioning.

Two mechanisms, the *instrumental pathway* and the *expressive pathway*, have been proposed to enhance the quality of sexual communication and, subsequently, sexual satisfaction (Cupach & Metts, 1991; MacNeil & Byers, 2005, 2009). The instrumental pathway allows couples to gain an understanding of their sexual preferences and make adjustments to meet their partner's needs. The self-disclosure involved in letting one's sexual preferences be known promotes relational intimacy, activating the expressive pathway and increasing sexual satisfaction (Cupach & Metts, 1991). In investigating the distinctions between these two mechanisms, MacNeil and Byers (2005) observed that the expressive function of sexual communication was more significant in predicting higher levels of sexual satisfaction in women, whereas the instrumental function yielded similar outcomes on sexual satisfaction scales for both men and women.

### ***Sexual Communication and Relationship Length***

The quality and type of sexual communication will inevitably evolve as relationships progress. A number of developmental models examining the establishment and progression of intimate relationships exist. Developmental models exploring the early formation of romantic bonds have proposed that individuals narrow their search for a partner based on mutual agreement of values, physical attraction, similarities in social status, and compatibility of emotional needs and roles (Jackson-Dwyer, 2013). Once a committed romantic relationship has been established, the relationship will proceed through sequential stages that will determine whether the relationship is sustained or terminated (Levinger, 1976). Theorists have also proposed process models of relationships. Altman and Taylor (1973) emphasized the role of self-disclosure in the development of relationships and proposed that the depth of self-disclosures between romantic partners increases as intimacy increases over the course of a relationship. Similarly, the Interpersonal Process Model of Intimacy describes how the type and quality of self-disclosure leads to feelings of closeness and connectedness, depending on how partners respond to these self-disclosures (Berg, 1987; Reis & Shaver, 1988; Reis & Patrick, 1996).

When examining sexual communication in relation to developmental stages of romantic relationships, Wheelless, Wheelless, and Baus (1984) observed that satisfaction with sexual communication varied depending on developmental stages of relationship. The researchers utilized self-report questionnaires to determine the relationship development phase and satisfaction with sexual communication. The results demonstrated that scores on the *Sexual Communication Satisfaction Scale* (SCSS) were significantly higher for participants in the highly developed stage than those belonging to the three beginning or three disengaging stages of relationships (Wheelless et al., 1984). A potential explanation for these findings could be that

partners rely more heavily on cultural sexual scripts in the early stages of romantic relationships, to ensure that they are complying with the perceived expectations involved in sexual relations (Metts & Spitzberg, 1996). As the relationship progresses, partners may deviate from these cultural sexual scripts in favor of sexual scripts that are more representative of interpersonal or intrapsychic needs.

In a study examining the effect of general and sexual communication on couples' overall and sexual satisfaction, Montesi, Fauber, Gordon, and Heimberg (2010) reported that both general communication effectiveness and open sexual communication contributed significantly to overall and sexual relationship satisfaction. Furthermore, a stronger relationship was observed for open sexual communication. The researchers also tested for the potential moderating effects of relationship length and gender on the relationship between sexual communication and satisfaction with the overall and sexual relationship. Relationship length did not significantly contribute to the variance between open sexual communication and overall relationship satisfaction (Montesi et al., 2010). However, the researchers observed that the interaction of gender and open sexual communication significantly contributed to the variance in overall relationship satisfaction, with male participants reporting a stronger association than females. In terms of sexual satisfaction, relationship length but not gender was found to significantly moderate the relationship between open sexual communication and sexual satisfaction, with longer relationships (more than one year) demonstrating a stronger association than couples who reported being in a relationship for less than a year. Montesi and colleagues (2010) did not report statistically significant support for the moderating role of gender on open sexual communication and sexual satisfaction. These findings demonstrate support for the importance of sexual communication in predicting overall and sexual relationship satisfaction and suggests that open

sexual communication becomes a crucial component of sexual satisfaction as the relationship progresses.

### ***Gender Differences in Sexual Communication and Impacts on Sexual Satisfaction***

The association between open sexual communication, overall and sexual relationship satisfaction, and gender observed by Montesi et al. (2010) supports the results obtained by MacNeil and Byers' (2005) in their analysis of the role of sexual self-disclosure in predicting sexual satisfaction of long-term heterosexual couples. However, in this study sexual self-disclosure was found to be strongly correlated to sexual satisfaction and understanding a partner's sexual likes and dislikes for men but was not for women. MacNeil and Byers (2005) proposed that men may be more likely to favour verbal sexual self-disclosures than nonverbal means or, alternatively, women may be more responsive and adapt to men's self-disclosures. Similarly, the researchers postulated that relationship length may play a role in determining whether men or women engage in sexual self-disclosures. They suggested that men may be more willing to communicate about sex in the early stages of the relationship, as relationship satisfaction is more dependent on sexual aspects of the relationship for men than it is for women. As the relationship progresses, sexual communication becomes a greater predictor in determining the overall relationship satisfaction for women (MacNeil & Byers, 2005). These studies highlight the nuances of sexual communication and the resulting impact on general and sexual relationship satisfaction.

The literature on the discrepancies in sexual communication as a function of gender portrays a complex relationship. MacNeil and Byers (2005) study on sexual communication suggests that the timing and effect of sexual self-disclosures varies for men and women. Studies examining sexual relationships have also demonstrated that sexual satisfaction is influenced by

gender. In a short-term longitudinal study examining fluctuations in reports of sexual satisfaction in newly married couples, McNulty and Fisher (2008) observed that gender differences were present in determining the factors that contributed to sexual satisfaction. The researchers recruited 72 newlywed couples who had not been married for more than six-months and observed variations in their sexual satisfaction over six-month period. Partners completed the Index of Sexual Satisfaction, recorded daily entries in a diary about their expectancies for satisfaction with their sexual activities and provided the researchers with an estimate of the number of times they had engaged in sexual activity with their partners. Ratings of sexual satisfaction at time 2 were predicted by changes in sexual frequency for men and expectations of sexual satisfaction for women at the time 1 (McNulty & Fisher, 2008). These findings suggest that satisfaction with the sexual relationship is related to distinct factors for men and women. As such, men and women may adopt different approaches to communicating about sex in order to increase sexual satisfaction.

### **Attachment Theory**

Attachment theory was first conceptualized by John Bowlby and further developed through the work of Mary Ainsworth (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Bowlby adopted an ethological approach to child development (Bowlby, 1988). He proposed an innate and species-universal behavioural system that enables an individual to develop particular behaviours that promote survival and reproduction. The behavioural system is a goal-directed process that is activated or deactivated in response to particular situations (Bowlby, 1969, 1973). He suggested that the system becomes activated in response to a threatening situation and is deactivated when the individual attains the set-goal for that particular situation. In this sense, the behavioural system serves to protect the individual and to orient them to seek support (Mikulincer & Shaver,

2016). This sequence of behaviours is observed in the infant's proximity seeking to the main caregiver and expression of distress in response to their absence. The caregiver becomes the main attachment figure for the infant providing them with a safe haven of comfort and protection and a secure base from which the infant may begin engaging in exploration. The attachment figure's responses to the infant's bid for comfort and security provide feedback and shapes the attachment system (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016).

In order to observe attachment relationships between children and their caregivers, Ainsworth and Wittig developed the "Strange Situation" experiment (1969). The children's responses to separation from their caregivers allowed Ainsworth to organize these behavioural patterns into three different categories. These three categories of attachment behaviours have now come to be known as the secure-, avoidant-, and anxious-attachment styles (Ainsworth & Bell, 1970). Infants who were secure demonstrated distress during separation with their caregiver but were quickly reassured by the caregiver's return. They were able to re-establish connection with the caregiver and continue to explore their environments. The avoidant children did not demonstrate any signs of distress following separation and avoid contact with the caregiver when they returned. Anxious children exhibited acute distress when separated from their caregiver and demonstrated hesitance towards reconnecting with the caregiver. Ainsworth recognized distinct caregiver responses that were associated with each attachment style (1973). Mothers of securely attached infants were emotionally available and responsive to proximity-seeking behaviours. Those with avoidantly attached children rejected the child's bid for comfort and security. For anxiously attached children the mother's responses were characterized by inconsistency and dissonance. The child's attachment relationship with their caregiver will become internalized and provide an internal working model for future relational interactions.

### *Adult Attachment and the Sexual System*

The attachment system persists throughout an individual's lifetime and becomes a framework from which the individual operates. Hazan and Shaver (1987) proposed that an individual's attachment style is also reflected in adult romantic relationships. The authors observed that similar patterns of attachment behaviours were found in adult romantic relationships. Securely attached individuals reported being able to get close to others and support their partners. Avoidant lovers demonstrated a fear of intimacy and closeness, as well as difficulties building trust in relationships. Anxious/ambivalent individuals were characterized by higher levels of worry, fear of abandonment, and a strong desire for union and reciprocation (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). These attachment patterns are evident at the early stages of a couple's relationship (Brymbaugh & Farley, 2006, 2007) and stronger attachment bonds form as the relationship progresses (Zeifman & Hazan, 2008).

Adult romantic relationships are comprised of three distinct and interrelated behavioural systems: attachment, caregiving, and sexuality (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Of particular interest for this study is the interaction between attachment and sexual systems. A reciprocal influence is observed between the attachment and sexual systems with the evolution of sex fostering deeper connections in human beings and attachment styles guiding the goals and expectations of sexual relationships (Birnbaum, 2010). The attachment system shapes the attitudes, fantasies, and subjective experiences of sexual activities (Davis et al., 2006). Individuals who are securely attached generally exhibit more positive feelings toward sex and are able to attend to signals of sexual arousal and attraction more effectively (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Securely attached individuals possess a greater sense of self-worth and self-esteem, and thus, do not employ sex as a means of obtaining love, appreciation, or acceptance.

Furthermore, they are less concerned with sexual performance and are able to engage in mutually satisfying sexual activity. Contrarily, insecure attachment styles hold more negative attitudes in regard to sexual activity and exhibit feelings of sexual inadequacy. These sexual attitudes are characterized by greater levels of sexual anxiety, lower sexual self-esteem, and perpetration and experience of sexual coercion. Distinctions in sexual attitudes, beliefs, and motives are also present when distinguishing between avoidant and anxious attachment styles.

A study by Davis, Shaver, and Vernon (2004) explored sexual motives in relation to attachment styles. The researchers performed a regression analysis of scores on the Experiences in Close Relationships scale (ECR) and motivations for sex questionnaire and observed that avoidant and anxious individuals possess different motivations for engaging in sexual activity. They found that attachment anxiety was positively correlated to engaging in sexual activity to promote emotional closeness and self-esteem enhancement, to gain a partner's reassurance and as a method of manipulation. Avoidantly attached participants utilized sex as means of exerting control and protecting oneself from a partner's negative affect. Furthermore, attachment avoidance was negatively correlated to emotional closeness and reassurance (Davis et al., 2004). Additional research has demonstrated that avoidantly attached individuals supported engagement in sexual activity for the purpose of self-enhancement and self-affirmation (Schachner & Shaver, 2004) and were more accepting of casual sex encounters as they were less emotionally charged (Spreecher, 2013). On the contrary, anxiously attached people use sexual activity as a means of gaining proximity to their partner and employ sex as a measure of relationship quality (Davis et al., 2006).

### *Attachment and Sexual Communication*

An individual's attachment style also has profound implications in regard to sexual communication. Attachment insecurities are associated with inhibited sexual communication, difficulties in sexual assertiveness, and a lack of conversation around safe sex practices (Feeney, Peterson, Gallois, & Terry, 2000). The pathway between insecure attachment and diminished sexual communication differs between anxious and avoidant attachment styles. The need for emotional distancing hinders exploration of sexual needs or desires and open communication in sexual relations for avoidantly attached individuals (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Whereas, the intense fear of rejection that occurs in anxiously attached individuals leads to greater deference to a partner and difficulties with sexual assertiveness (Impett & Paplu, 2002). Inadvertently, compliance to partners can lead to increased vulnerability of sexual coercion. The literature suggests that insecure attachment styles are related to hindered sexual communication.

The correlation between attachment insecurities and sexual communication is further complicated by the discrepancies found between genders. Among young men, attachment anxiety predicted less frequent engagement in sexual activity (Feeney, Nollet, & Patty, 1993). However, the attachment anxiety was positively correlated to frequency of sexual activity in young women (Cooper, Shaver, & Collins, 1998). This divergence in sexual activity could be accounted for by increases in deference behaviours observed in attachment anxiety (Davis et al., 2006) and traditional sex roles. Anxiously attached women comply with the higher rates of sexual intercourse traditionally expected of males, whereas anxious men adhere to the constrained sexual expression of the traditional female sex role (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). These gender differences are also observed in avoidant attachment, with women reporting higher rates of complying with unwanted sexual activity as a way of avoiding intimate discussion and self-disclosure (Impett and Peplau, 2002) and men using sexual coercion as an instrument of

self-affirmation (Davis et al., 2004). Furthermore, inhibition of sexual communication in women did not predict sexual satisfaction of their male partners, perhaps because of the predisposition for male sexual gratification in sexual encounters and the thwarting of emotional discussions inherent in traditional masculinity (Feeney, Hohaus, Noller, & Alexander, 2001). It is evident that the relationship between attachment styles, gender, and sexual communication is unclear and requires further research. A potential

### **Sexual Script Theory**

*Sexual script theory* was proposed by Gagnon and Simon and suggests that sexual behaviours are acquired through a process of socialization. That is, an individual's sexual attitudes and behaviours emerge from the shared beliefs of a collective group (Wiederman, 2015). These sexual scripts consist of the internal schemas created for sequences of behaviours, deriving from societal and cultural beliefs, that individuals associate with particular sexual situations (Gagnon, 1990; Reissing & Armstrong, 2017). For sexual behaviour to occur, scripts must develop on three levels: cultural scenarios, interpersonal scripts, and intrapsychic scripts (Simon & Gagnon, 1986). Cultural scenarios are comprised of institutions and symbols that represent the collective. The cultural scenarios provide an understanding of an individual's role that is further shaped by their interactions in particular situations, cultivating an interpersonal script. Intrapsychic scripts develop in response to the needs, desires, and fantasies that comprise the internal landscape of the individual (Wiederman, 2005). Together, these elements of the sexual script enable individuals to conceptualize what behaviours are sexual, the successive behaviours that lead to sexual activity, and the roles expected by each actor in this scenario.

### ***Cultural Narratives and Gendered Sexual Scripts***

The consistent evolution of social norms and cultural beliefs have transformed our understanding of sexuality. The advent of contemporary contraceptives, increased acceptability of premarital sex, and feminist movements have drastically changed the sexual scripts since the 1960s and 1970s (Willems, Sprecher & Beck, 2004; Higgins & Smith, 2016). These historical shifts in perceptions of sexuality have a significant impact on the sexual practices of individuals (Diamond, 2013). In Western industrialized countries, sexual relations within established romantic relationships account for approximately 90 percent of all sexual activity (Gagnon, Giami, Michaels, & Comonby, 2001; Willems et al., 2004). Furthermore, individuals who are in a committed relationship report engaging in sexual activity more frequently and experience greater satisfaction with their sex lives (Lawrance & Byers, 1995). The formulation of the conventional sexual script for these couples includes one to two occurrences of sexual contact per week and focuses primarily on penile-vaginal intercourse (Call, Sprecher, & Schwartz, 1995; Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, & Michaels, 1994).

Simon and Gagnon (1969) recognized that men and women developed different scripts as a result of contrasting psychosexual development. During adolescents, the physical features of sex take precedence in male sexual development. For females, the emotional aspects of sex are emphasized, with young women placing greater focus on romantic and affectional bonds and role performance. Research examining these divergent scripts have observed that, on average, men initiate sexual activity more frequently (Laumann et al., 1994) and seek variety and greater frequency in their sexual activity to experience sexual satisfaction (Simms & Byers, 2009). On the other hand, women experience greater sexual plasticity, meaning their sexuality is more malleable and evolves over time (Peplau, 2003). Although some might attribute these contrasting scripts to biological differences (Baumeister, Catanese, & Vohs, 2001) the influence of culture

on couple's sexual scripts is undeniable (Diamond, 2013). Mainstream media supports the construction of gendered sexual scripts in which men are perceived as the initiators of sexual activity, possessing greater levels of sexual desire and sexual knowledge. To the contrary, women are viewed as maintaining lower sex drives, emphasizing the emotional aspect of sex, and receive greater stigma for deviating from the traditional cultural sexual script (Masters, Casey, Wells, & Morrison, 2013; Kreager & Staff, 2009; Lai & Hynie, 2011). This traditional cultural sexual script promotes a *sexual double standard* that accepts and rewards men and condemns women for the same sexual activity (Jackson & Cram, 2003).

An exploration by Hauck (2015) of formal and informal sources of sexual education for young adults revealed that these sources cultivate sexual scripts that endorse the sexual double standard. The male participants in this study acknowledged that the formal sexual education they had received in school supported agency and desire scripts, affirming that sexual feelings and arousal are inherent and that they maintain the role of a sexual actor. These scripts were further supported by informal sources of sexual education, such as peer groups, mainstream media, and pornography. For the female participants, both formal and informal sexual education supported scripts related to gatekeeping and defensiveness towards sexual advances, and social repercussions of engaging in sexual activity (Hauck, 2015). Hauck's findings support additional studies that have found that men prioritize sexual performance and being sexually skilled, allowing them to engage in frequent sexual activity with multiple sexual partners (Sakaluk, Todd, Milhausen, & Lachowsky, 2014). Alternatively, Sakaluk et al. (2004) reported that women adhere to the gatekeeping and defensiveness role and are expected to delay sexual activity in favour establishing an emotional connection prior to sexual activity. According to the predominant cultural heterosexual sexual script, women are required to limit sexual desire as a

means of protecting their sexuality and social image, and men are expected to demonstrate high levels of sexual skills and knowledge in order to gain social prestige. It is evident that the sexual double standard is maintained in these contrasting and complimentary gendered sexual scripts.

### ***Sexual Communication and Sexual Scripts***

These gendered sexual scripts have significant implications in sexual communication. Adherence to the traditional heterosexual sexual script impedes female communication about safe sex practices and condom use (Hynie, Lydon, Côté, & Wiener, 1998) and undergraduate women who subscribed to traditional heterosexual sexual scripts reported that they were more likely to comply with unwanted, non-coercive sexual behaviours (Quinn-Nilas & Kennett, 2018). Furthermore, women experience greater negative social consequences as a result of their sexual activities (Laumann & Mahay, 2002; Aubrey, 2004). Researchers examining sexual script deviation observed that men expressed disapproval of vignettes in which women exhibited sexually assertive behaviours and lower interest in pursuing friendships or romantic relationships compared to women demonstrating sexually timid behaviours (Klein, Imhoff, Reininger, & Briken, 2018). These negative appraisals could function as a mechanism through which gender norms and cultural sexual scripts are reinforced in women. Likewise, when the study was replicated with female participants, they rated sexually timid men more positively and viewed sexually assertive men as being more aggressive. This finding could reflect female adherence to the gatekeeping and defensiveness scripts, thus favouring situations in which men adopt a more timid approach.

In a study exploring the amount and quality of sexual self-disclosure in relation to attitudes towards gender roles, Greene and Faulker (2005) observed that couples who endorsed less traditional sexual scripts reported more frequent exchanges of sexual self-disclosure and

dyadic sexual communication. However, increased initiation assertiveness behaviours were only related to less rigid belief in the sexual double standard in female participants. For men, the correlation was not significant. Additionally, the researchers observed that, overall, the couples in their sample endorsed less traditional heterosexual sexual scripts (Greene & Faulkner, 2005). This finding may indicate that individuals develop alternative sexual scripts in established long-term relationships. Another potential explanation for this could be the strong emphasis on the emotional dimension of sexual relationships in women and cultural acceptance of emotional disclosures made by women (Simon & Gagnon, 1969; Hollandsworth & Wall, 1977).

### ***Sexual Satisfaction and Sexual Scripts***

Inconsistencies in the sexual scripts of sexual partners can lead to lower levels of sexual satisfaction, especially if partners are unable to negotiate and create mutually satisfying scripts (Diamond, 2013). Research examining the influence of cultural sexual beliefs on sexual satisfaction have observed that men were more accurate in their perceptions of desired frequency of sexual behaviours in their female partners, whereas women tended to overestimate number of sexual interactions preferred by their male partners (Byers & Simms, 2009). Furthermore, studies have demonstrated that accurate perceptions by men of the sexual needs of their partners is more predictive of higher levels of sexual satisfaction in both partners (MacNeil & Byers, 2005; Miller & Byers, 2004). Miller and Byers (2004) suggested that the socialization of men to adopt the role of sexual actors may provide an explanation for the findings that sexual satisfaction within heterosexual couples is predicted by men's understanding of their partner's sexual needs and preferences. However, these studies did not account for the degree and quality of sexual communication within the relationship, which has been shown to be a key predictive factor of sexual satisfaction (MacNeil & Byers, 2005, 2009).

Another interpretation that has been provided to explain the discrepancies between the levels of sexual satisfaction reported by partners is the *social exchange perspective*. Each partner holds distinct sexual desires, preferences, and expectations, and assigns a particular value to each of these elements (Lawrance & Byers, 1992). Additionally, these values are typically in agreement with the cultural sexual script, which prioritizes emotional aspects of the sexual relationship for females and physical elements for males (Diamond, 2013). The emphasis on emotional components in females suggests that relational factors such as emotional closeness and security, may contribute to women's evaluations of the sexual relationship. However, these relational dynamics may not be as important in predicting sexual satisfaction for men.

### ***Sexual Scripts and Sexual Orientation***

The literature thus far has focused on the heterosexual sexual script that predominates the cultural narrative of sexuality. Historically, media and other cultural institutions have promoted the representation of heterosexual couples, overlooking same-sex couples. In 2018, LGBT characters accounted for only 6.4% of all characters on broadcast primetime shows (GLAAD, 2017). In addition to receiving greater exposure to heterosexual couples in media, research has also suggested that sexual-minority men and women have internalized the same heteronormative cultural sexual scripts as a result of receiving the same gender-related socialization (Laumann et al., 1994), which suggests that same-sex partners take on the same roles in their sexual scripts. Researchers have postulated that, because of these parallel scripts, same-sex couples require a greater degree of open communication regarding their sexual relationship in order to negotiate mutually satisfying script and have found that same-sex partners are more likely to alternate initiation of sexual activity (Lever, 1995; Bell & Weinberg, 1978). However, the increased need

for open sexual communication does not indicate that all same-sex couples are successful in resolving the discrepancies in their sexual scripts.

In addition to the increased need of open sexual communication in same-sex couples, studies have demonstrated patterns in the relationship between relationship satisfaction and sexual satisfaction that are distinct from those observed in heterosexual relationships. In their study examining the factors that influence sexual satisfaction in same-sex couples, Cohen, Byers and Walsh (2008) found that relationship issues predicted lower sexual satisfaction in both men and women. These results contrast the findings within heterosexual partners, which suggest that relational problems are exclusively related to women's ratings of their sexual satisfaction (Lawrance & Byers, 1995). However, ratings of overall sexual satisfaction have not been found to be significantly different between same-sex and heterosexual couples (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983). Furthermore, similar individual factors, such as attachment styles, depression, and relational satisfaction have been shown to impact sexual satisfaction in same-sex and heterosexual couples, with no statistically significant differences between these groups (Diamond, 2013).

### **Purpose and Research Question**

It is evident that attachment systems and sexual scripts influence one's ability to communicate about sex in committed relationships. However, the interaction between attachment styles and information conveyed from traditional cultural sexual scripts in the context of sexual communication has yet to be explored. The purpose of this study will be to better understand the barriers that are present in sexual communication and the dynamics that are present in the relationship between attachment styles, sexual scripts, and sexual communication. This study will explore whether a relationship exists between adherence to traditional cultural sexual scripts,

levels of attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety, sexual communication, and sexual satisfaction in adult romantic relationships. A second objective of this study will be to investigate whether this relationship manifests itself differently in men and women. Based on the literature review, it is hypothesized that:

### **Hypotheses**

#### ***Hypothesis 1: Higher levels of attachment anxiety will predict:***

- a) Greater adherence to the traditional cultural sexual script;
- b) Lower levels of sexual communication;
- c) Lower levels of sexual satisfaction.

#### ***Hypothesis 2: Higher levels of attachment avoidance will predict:***

- a) Greater adherence to the traditional cultural sexual script;
- b) Lower levels of sexual communication;
- c) Lower levels of sexual satisfaction.

#### ***Hypothesis 3: Greater adherence to the traditional cultural sexual script will predict:***

- a) Lower levels of sexual communication;
- b) Lower levels of sexual satisfaction.

#### ***Hypothesis 4: Greater adherence to the traditional cultural sexual scripts will mediate the relationship between:***

- a) Higher levels of attachment anxiety and lower levels of sexual communication
- b) Higher levels of attachment avoidance and lower levels of sexual communication
- c) Higher levels of attachment anxiety and lower levels of sexual satisfaction
- d) Higher levels of attachment avoidance and lower levels of sexual satisfaction

#### ***Hypothesis 5: Gender will moderate the relationship between:***

- a) Higher attachment anxiety and adherence to traditional cultural sexual script
- b) Higher attachment avoidance and adherence to traditional cultural sexual script
- c) Greater adherence to traditional cultural sexual scripts and lower levels of sexual communication
- d) Greater adherence to traditional cultural sexual scripts and lower levels of sexual satisfaction

## **Methods**

### **Participants**

Participants were eligible to participate in the research study if they were above 18 years of age, in a committed relationship and living with their partner for at least one year, and fluent in English as all the questionnaires were written in English. A total of 116 participants were recruited for this study, with 31 couple units. Of those 116 participants, 22 were excluded for having completed less than half of the survey, reducing the number of participants to 94. Couple units represented 62 (31 couples) of the 94 participants.

### ***Sample Demographic Characteristics***

Participants included 56 females (59.6%), 37 males (39.4%) and one participant that did not disclose their gender identity (1.1%). Participants were grouped by age, with the majority of participants between the ages of 25-34 (48.9%), and the remaining participants falling within the ages of 18-24 (24.5%), 35-44 (16.0%), 45-54 (9.6%), 55-64 (1.1%), and no participants above the age of 65. The sample consisted in large part of white/Caucasian participants (72.3%). 15% Asian (e.g. Chinese, East Indian, Japanese, Vietnamese), 3.2% Latino/Hispanic, 3.2% Middle Eastern, 1.1% Native Canadian/First Nation/Metis, and 4.3% Other. There were no participants

who identified as Black (e.g., Haitian, African, Jamaican, Somali) or as Pacific Islander. A summary of the demographic characteristics of the sample are provided in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
*Participant Sociodemographic Characteristics*

Variables	Counts	Percent
Gender		
Woman	56	59.6%
Man	37	39.4%
Other	1	1.1%
Age		
18-24	23	24.5%
25-34	46	48.9%
35-44	15	16.0%
45-54	9	9.6%
55-64	1	1.1%
65+	0	0%
Ethnicity		
White/Caucasian	68	72.3%
Asian (eg. Chinese, East Indian, Japanese, Vietnamese)	15	16.0%
Latino/Hispanic	3	3.2%
Middle Eastern	3	3.2%
Native Canadian/First Nations/Metis	1	1.1%
Other	4	4.3%
Black	0	0%
Pacific Islander	0	0%

### ***Sample Relationship Characteristics***

Most of the respondents (75.5%) identified as heterosexual, while 11.7% identified as bisexual, 8.5% identified as gay/lesbian and 4.3% reported their sexual orientation as Other. Participants reported being in a committed romantic relationship for 1-2 years (17.0%), 2-5 years (37.2%), 5-10 years (26.6%), 10-15 years (8.5%), 15-20 years (4.3%), 20-25 years (1.1%), and over 25 years (5.3%). In their current relationship, most respondents (71.3%) reported not having any children, 13 respondents reported having one child (13.8%), 11 respondents had two children (11.7%), and three participants had three children (3.2%). The majority of participants, 85, did

not report having any children from their past relationship (90.4%), while eight participants reported parenting one child (6.4%) or more (2.2%). A summary of the relationship characteristics of the sample is provided in Table 2.

**Table 2**  
*Participant Relationship Characteristics*

Variables	Counts	Percent
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>		
Heterosexual	71	75.5%
Bisexual	11	11.7%
Gay/Lesbian	8	8.5%
Other	4	4.3%
<b>Relationship Length</b>		
1-2 years	16	17.0%
2-5 years	35	37.2%
5-10 years	25	26.6%
10-15 years	8	8.5%
15-20 years	4	4.3%
20-25 years	1	1.1%
Over 25 years	5	5.3%
<b>Living Together</b>		
1-2 years	35	37.2%
2-5 years	31	33.30%
5-10 years	14	14.9%
10-15 years	4	4.3%
15-20 years	3	3.2%
20-25 years	3	3.2%
Over 25 years	3	3.2%
<b>Children in Current Relationship</b>		
0	67	71.3%
1	13	13.8%
2	11	11.7%
3	3	3.2%
<b>Children in Past Relationship</b>		
0	85	90.4%
1	6	6.4%
2	1	1.1%
3	1	1.1%

### Sampling and Data Collection Procedures

The researcher utilized a voluntary response sampling method. Participants were recruited for this study through the use of advertisements on online platforms, such as Kijiji, Facebook, and the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) Recruit Research Participant Portal (R2P2), and posters that were posted in the region of Ottawa (Appendix A). Couples who demonstrated interest in participating in this research study received an invitation via e-mail to complete the questionnaire online via SurveyMonkey. Each partner in the couple was provided with a unique study code that linked the partners and no identifying information, such as name or date of birth, was recorded in order to ensure anonymity. Upon completion of the questionnaires, participants received an electronic debriefing form and were provided with an e-mail contact if they wish to receive a summary of the results. Participants were asked to select whether they would like to be entered into a raffle to win one of 4 Amazon gift cards valued at \$250 as compensation for their time.

### **Ethics**

This study received approval from the Saint Paul University Research Ethics Board (Appendix B; REB file number: 1360.2/19). Participants were informed before beginning the survey of the purpose of the study, procedures to ensure confidentiality and conservation of data, the risks and benefits of participation, resources and the contact information for the research team. Implied consent was also obtained in the introduction to the survey (Appendix C).

### **Measures**

#### ***Demographic Data***

Demographic data were collected on participants including age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, length of their relationship, number of years they cohabited with their

partner, number of children, annual household income, and prevalence of mental illness (Appendix D).

### ***Experiences in Close Relationships – Short Form***

The Experiences in Close Relationship Questionnaire – Short Form (ECR-SF, Wei, Russell, Mallinckrodt, & Vogel, 2006; Appendix E) consists of 12 items measured on a seven-point Likert scale to assess adult attachment styles. The scale measures adult attachment on two dimensions: attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance. Mean scores were computed for the two subscales. Higher scores indicate greater attachment insecurity. Internal consistency reliability for the subscales ranged from  $\alpha = .77$  to  $.86$  for the Anxiety subscale and  $\alpha = .78$  to  $.88$  for the Avoidance subscale (Wei et al., 2006). The ECR-SF has yielded high test-retest reliability over a one-month follow-up  $r = .80$  and  $r = .83$  for the Anxiety and Avoidance subscales, respectively (Wei et al., 2006). The ECR-SF also demonstrates high construct validity with similar measures of attachment insecurity (Wei et al., 2006). The Anxiety subscale was significantly correlated with measures of excessive reassurance-seeking  $r = .41, p < .001$ , emotional reactivity  $r = .45, p < .001$  and emotional cutoff  $r = .30, p < .001$ . Similarly, the Avoidant subscale was found to have high construct validity with measures of fear of intimacy  $r = .74, p < .001$  and comfort with self-disclosure  $r = -.39, p < .001$ . Test-retest reliability was found to be similar to the original version of the ECR (36-item),  $r = .82$  for the Anxiety subscale and  $r = .86$  for the Avoidant subscale (Wei et al., 2006). In the present study, internal reliability for the ECR-SF was calculated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient ( $\alpha = .716$ ). The internal reliability for the ECR-SF subscales were  $\alpha = .66$  and  $\alpha = .80$  for Anxiety and Attachment, respectively.

### ***Sexual Script Scale (SSS)***

The *Sexual Script Scale* (SSS) is a 33-item questionnaire that measures adherence to the current dominant sexual scripts of heterosexual adults (Sakaluk, Todd, Milhausen, & Lachowsky, 2014; Appendix F). All items are scored on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly disagree*, 6 = *Strongly agree*). Scores on the SSS yield a mean score, with higher scores indicating greater adherence to the current dominant sexual scripts of heterosexual adults.

The development of this scale occurred following focus groups with young men and women regarding current sexual scripts. Exploratory factor analysis of the SSS revealed six interrelated factors: Casual Sex Scripts, Men as Sexually Simple, Men's Sex Drive, Importance of Men's Performance, Men as Players, and Women have an Emotional Orientation to Sex (Sakaluk et al., 2014). The internal reliability for the SSS was found to be  $\alpha = .90$ . Internal reliability for the six subscales are  $\alpha = .90$  for the Casual Sex Scripts subscale,  $\alpha = .81$  for Men as Sexually Simple subscale,  $\alpha = .84$  for the Men's Sex Drive subscale,  $\alpha = .72$  for the Importance of Men's Performance subscale,  $\alpha = .74$  for the Men as Players subscale, and  $\alpha = .75$  for the Women have an Emotional Orientation to Sex subscale (Sakaluk et al., 2014).

The SSS demonstrated high construct validity on similar measures of sexual scripts, such as the Sexual Double Standard Scale  $r = .64$  (Sakaluk et al., 2014). The Men as Sexually Simple and Importance of Men's Performance subscales were found to be significantly correlated to the Feminine Gender Role Stress Scale  $r = .20$  and  $r = .22$ , respectively (Sakaluk et al., 2014). Furthermore, the Masculine Gender Role Stress Scale was significantly correlated with the Men's Sex Drive and Women have an Emotional Orientation to Sex subscales,  $r = .46$  and  $r = .43$ , respectively (Sakaluk et al., 2014). Results of test-retest reliability analyses have demonstrated that the SSS exhibits significant stability over time ( $r_s = .31$  to  $.81$ ) (Fisher, Davis,

Yarber, & Davis, 2011). In the current study, internal reliability was calculated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient,  $\alpha = .92$ .

### ***Sexual Communication Satisfaction Scale (SCSS)***

The Sexual Communication Satisfaction Scale (SCSS; Wheelless, Wheelless, & Baus, 1984; Appendix G) is a 22-item measure that uses a 5-point, Likert-type scale to assess satisfaction with one's sexual communication with one's partner. SCSS yields a mean score. Lower scores on the SCSS indicate a greater degree of open sexual communication and satisfaction with sexual communication. The SCSS assesses sexual communication satisfaction along four subconcepts: (1) satisfaction with communication about sexual behaviour; (2) communication about what sexual behaviour is satisfying; (3) satisfaction derived from what is communicated by certain sexual behaviours; (4) willingness and/or ability to communicate about sex with one's partner. The internal reliability for the SCSS has been estimated at .94 (Wheelless et al., 1984). The SCSS has demonstrated significant construct validity with measures of overall communication, such as the Primary Communication Inventory  $r = .40$  (Montesi et al., 2010), and sexual satisfaction as measured by the Index of Sexual Satisfaction  $r = .77$  (Cupach & Comstock, 1990). In the present study, the SCSS demonstrated an internal reliability, calculated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, of  $\alpha = .97$ .

### ***Global Measure of Sexual Satisfaction (GMSEX)***

The Global measure of Sexual Satisfaction (GMSEX; Appendix H) scale was created by Lawrance and Byers (1995) and assesses sexual satisfaction. Respondents answer the question "Overall, how would you describe your sexual relationship with your partner?" along five 7-point dimensions, which include (1) Good-Bad, (2) Pleasant-Unpleasant, (3) Positive-Negative, (4) Satisfying-Unsatisfying, and (5) Valuable-Worthless. Higher scores on the GMSEX indicate

higher levels of sexual satisfaction. The GMSEX has demonstrated high internal consistency in community ( $\alpha = .96$ ) and student samples ( $\alpha = .90$ ), as well as with individuals who were in committed long-term relationships ( $\alpha = .96$ ) (Byers, 2005; Lawrence & Byers, 1995). The GMSEX has also been shown to be significantly correlated with scores on other measures of sexual satisfaction, such as the Index of Sexual Satisfaction (ISS) ( $r = .065, p < .001$ ) (Lawrence & Byers, 1992). The test-retest reliabilities of the GMSEX are at two-week follow-up .84 (Lawrence & Byers, 1995), two-month follow-up .72 (Mark, Herbenick, Fortenberry, Sanders, & Reece, 2014), three-month follow-up .78 (Byers & MacNeil, 2006), and 18-month follow up .61 (Byers & MacNeil, 2006). The internal reliability for the GMSEX for the current study was calculated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient ( $\alpha = .971$ )

## **Statistical Analyses**

### ***Preliminary Analyses***

Participant characteristics were examined through descriptive functions, which include frequencies, means, and standard deviations. Pearson  $r$  correlations and scatter plots were conducted to explore the strength and direction of the relationships between each variable.

### ***Regression Analyses***

To test the main study hypotheses, a series of linear and hierarchical regression analyses were performed.

### ***Linear Regression Analyses***

Separate regression analyses were conducted to test whether higher levels of attachment anxiety and avoidance would predict greater adherence to traditional cultural sexual scripts, lower levels of sexual communication, and lower levels of sexual satisfaction. Likewise, separate

linear regression analyses were performed for sexual scripts predicting lower levels of sexual communication and sexual satisfaction.

### ***Multiple Linear Regression Analyses***

**Attachment Anxiety.** In order to examine the mechanism through which attachment anxiety predicts sexual communication, a series of regression analyses were performed using the statistical model proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986). First regressing the mediator (sexual scripts) on the independent variable (attachment anxiety). Second, regressing the dependent variable (sexual communication) on the independent variable. Lastly, regressing the dependent variable on both the independent variable and on the mediator. In order to establish mediation, attachment anxiety must affect adherence to sexual scripts in the first equation and sexual communication in the second equation. For the third equation, adherence to traditional cultural sexual scripts must affect sexual communication.

Following Baron and Kenny's (1986) assumptions to test for the role of sexual scripts in mediating the predictive relationship between attachment anxiety and sexual satisfaction, the mediator (sexual scripts) was first regressed on the independent variable (attachment anxiety). The dependent variable (sexual satisfaction) was then regressed on the independent variable. In the third step of the model, the dependent variable was regressed on both the independent variable and the mediator. The hypothesis will be supported if attachment anxiety is found to significantly predict adherence to sexual scripts in the first equation and lower sexual satisfaction in the second equation. In the third equation, adherence to cultural sexual scripts must predict sexual satisfaction.

**Attachment Avoidance.** Baron and Kenny's mediational model (1986) was used to test the hypothesis that sexual scripts mediate the predictive relationship between attachment anxiety

(independent variable) and sexual communication (dependent variable). In order to satisfy the model's assumptions, the mediator (sexual scripts) was first regressed on the independent variable (attachment avoidance). Second, the dependent variable (sexual communication) was regressed on the independent variable (attachment avoidance). The final step performed was regressing the dependent variable on both the independent variable and on the mediator. To establish mediation, attachment avoidance must predict adherence to sexual scripts in the first equation and sexual communication in the second equation. Adherence to sexual scripts must predict sexual communication in the third step of the multiple linear regression analysis.

To test the hypothesis of attachment avoidance as a predictor for sexual satisfaction a series of regression analyses were conducted in accordance with the Baron and Kenny (1986) statistical model. In the first step, the mediator (sexual scripts) was regressed on the independent variable (attachment avoidance). Second, the dependent variable (sexual satisfaction) was regressed on the independent variable. The final step performed was to regress the dependent variable on both the independent variable and on the mediator variable. The hypothesis will be supported if attachment avoidance is found to significantly predict adherence to sexual scripts in the first equation and sexual satisfaction in the second equation. For the third equation, adherence to sexual scripts must predict sexual satisfaction.

**Sexual Scripts.** A multiple regression analysis was performed, according to the statistical model outlined in Baron and Kenny's mediational model, to test the hypothesis that sexual communication serves as a mediating variable in the predictive relationship between sexual scripts and sexual satisfaction. In the first step, the mediator (sexual communication) was regressed on the independent variable (sexual scripts). Second, the dependent variable (sexual satisfaction) was regressed on the independent variable. The final step performed was to regress

the dependent variable on both the independent variable and on the mediator variable. In order to support the hypothesis that sexual communication mediates the predictive relationship between sexual scripts and sexual satisfaction adherence to sexual scripts must lower sexual communication in the first equation and lower sexual satisfaction in the second equation. In the third equation, sexual communication must predict sexual satisfaction.

**Gender, Attachment and Adherence to Sexual Scripts.** To test the effects of gender on the relationship between attachment styles and adherence to traditional cultural sexual scripts, a series of hierarchical regression analyses were conducted. On the first step, attachment style was entered (separate analyses were conducted for attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance). On the second step, gender was entered. In the final step, the product of gender and attachment was entered in order to evaluate moderation.

**Gender, Adherence to Sexual Scripts, Sexual Communication and Satisfaction.** To test the effects of gender on the relationship between adherence to traditional cultural sexual scripts and sexual communication and satisfaction, a series of hierarchical regression analyses were conducted. On the first step, adherence to sexual scripts was entered. On the second step, gender was entered. In the final step, the product of gender and sexual scripts was entered in order to evaluate moderation. These steps were followed using sexual communication as the dependant variable and then repeated with sexual satisfaction as the dependant variable.

## **Results**

### **Preliminary analyses**

#### ***Preliminary Data Screening***

Mean scores for attachment (ECR), sexual scripts (SSS), sexual communication (SCSS), and sexual satisfaction (GMSEX) were inspected to assess normality through their standardized

skewness (*z-skew*) and standardized kurtosis (*z-kurt*). In accordance with George and Mallery's (2010) suggested parameters, scores with a critical value above 2.00 or below -2.00 were indicators of significant skewness or kurtosis. The data was found to be normally distributed according to the parameters set by George and Mallery (2010).

### ***Independent Observations Assumption***

Participants responded to the survey as couples, and as a result of missing data from some of the partners, the sample is comprised of couple pairs ( $n = 31$  couples; 62 individuals within couples) and non-paired partners ( $n = 36$  individuals). Given the main focus of the current project on individual level variables, the main analyses were performed using individual scores. However, to manage the interdependence in the data, couple scores were also calculated as a comparison. Couples were grouped together and a mean couple score was calculated for ECR anxiety subscale, ECR avoidance subscale, SSS, SCSS, and GMSS. A series of Pearson  $r$  correlations and regression analyses in accordance with the study hypotheses were conducted and compared to the correlations ran for the individual level analyses. The results from analyses conducted with couple scores were similar to the strength and direction of the analyses that were statistically significant in the analyses that used the individual scores.

### ***Descriptive Analyses***

The mean ECR-SF Anxiety score was 3.67 ( $SD$  1.04). The mean ECR-SF Avoidant score was 2.41 ( $SD$  1.09). The SSS mean score was 3.21 ( $SD = 0.77$ ). The mean scores on the subscales were 2.66 ( $SD = 1.26$ ), 4.1 ( $SD = 0.97$ ), 3.12 ( $SD = 1.45$ ), 3.22 ( $SD = 1.07$ ), 2.89 ( $SD = 1.15$ ) and 3.34 ( $SD = 1.22$ ) for the casual sex scripts, men as sexually simple, men's sex drive, importance of men's performance, men as players and women have an emotional orientation to sex subscales respectively. These findings are summarized in Table 3 and 4. The Sexual

Communication Satisfaction Scale (SCSS) mean score was 2.28 (*SD* 0.93) and the mean Sexual Satisfaction (GMSEX) score was 4.72 (*SD* = 1.11).

**Table 3***Total and Subscale Scores for Attachment (ECR-SF)*

Variables	ECR-SF
Anxiety subscale	
Mean	3.67
Standard Deviation	1.04
Range	4.5
Avoidance subscale	
Mean	2.41
Standard Deviation	1.09
Range	4.4

*Note.* ECR-SF = Experiences in Close Relationships – Short Form.

**Table 4***Total and Subscale Scores for Sexual Scripts (SSS)*

Variables	SSS
Total score	
Mean	3.21
Standard Deviation	0.77
Range	3.52
Casual Sex Scripts	
Mean	2.66
Standard Deviation	1.26
Range	4.33
Men as Sexually Simple	
Mean	4.10
Standard Deviation	0.97
Range	4.00
Men's Sex Drive	
Mean	3.12
Standard Deviation	1.45
Range	5.00
Importance of Men's Performance	
Mean	3.22
Standard Deviation	1.07
Range	4.80
Men as Players	
Mean	2.89
Standard Deviation	1.15
Range	4.5
Women have Emotional an Orientation to Sex	
Mean	3.34

Standard Deviation	1.22
Range	5.00

*Note.* SSS = Sexual Script Scale

### Correlations

A series of Person  $r$  correlation coefficients were computed to assess the relationship between attachment styles, cultural sexual scripts, sexual communication, and sexual satisfaction. A summary of these results can be found in Table 5.

**Table 5**

*Correlation between attachment-anxiety (ECR-SF), attachment-avoidance (ECR-SF), Sexual Scripts (SSS), Sexual Communication Satisfaction (SCSS), and Sexual Satisfaction (GMSEX).*

Variables	Anxiety	Avoidance	SSS	SCSS	GMSEX
1. Anxiety	-	.128	.074	.096	-.098
2. Avoidance	.128	-	.439**	.216*	-.410**
3. SSS	.074	.439**	-	.061	-.252*
4. SCSS	.096	.216*	.061	-	-.403**
5. GMSEX	-.098	-.410**	-.252*	-.403**	-

*Note.* ECR-SF = Experiences in Close Relationships – Short Form; SSS = Sexual Script Scale; SCSS = Sexual Communication Satisfaction Scale; GMSEX = Global Measure of Sexual Satisfaction.

\*  $p < 0.05$  level (2-tailed). \*\*  $p < 0.001$  level (2-tailed)

### Simple Linear Regressions Analyses

A series of regression analyses were conducted to assess the effect of attachment on sexual scripts, sexual communication, and sexual satisfaction, respectively. The impact of sexual scripts on sexual communication was assessed using linear regression analysis. Lastly, a linear regression analysis was performed to test the effect of sexual communication on sexual satisfaction.

#### ***Hypothesis 1a: Higher levels of attachment anxiety will predict greater adherence to the traditional cultural sexual scripts***

No significant relationship was found for attachment anxiety and traditional cultural sexual scripts  $r(88) = .074, p > .05$ . A statistically significant positive predictive relationship was

found between attachment anxiety and the 'Men as Players' subscale of the SSS  $r(88) = .236, p < .05$ . The hypothesis that higher levels of attachment anxiety predict greater adherence to the traditional cultural sexual scripts is not supported.

***Hypothesis 1b: Higher levels of attachment anxiety will predict lower levels of sexual communication***

There was no significant predictive relationship found between attachment anxiety and sexual communication satisfaction  $r(88) = .096, r = .37$ . The hypothesis was not supported.

***Hypothesis 1c: Higher levels of attachment anxiety will predict lower levels of sexual satisfaction***

Attachment anxiety did not significantly predict sexual satisfaction,  $r(88) = .098, p = .362$ . The hypothesis was not supported.

***Hypothesis 2a: Higher levels of attachment avoidance will predict greater adherence to the traditional cultural sexual scripts***

A statistically significant predictive relationship was found between attachment avoidance and cultural sexual scripts  $r(88) = .439, p < .001$ . A scatterplot summarizes the results (Figure 1). These results indicate that those who scored high on attachment avoidance of the ECR-SF also reported greater adherence to the traditional cultural sexual script. The findings support the hypothesis that higher levels of attachment avoidance predict greater adherence to cultural scripts.

A statistically significant predictive relationship was observed between attachment avoidance and 'Casual Sex Scripts'  $r(88) = .391, p < .001$ , 'Men's Sex Drive'  $r(88) = .292, p < .01$ , 'Importance of Men's Performance'  $r(88) = .323, p < .005$ , and 'Men as Players'  $r(88) =$

.406,  $p < .001$ . These results indicate that there are particular sub-scripts of the traditional cultural script to which participants adhere in relation to their attachment style.

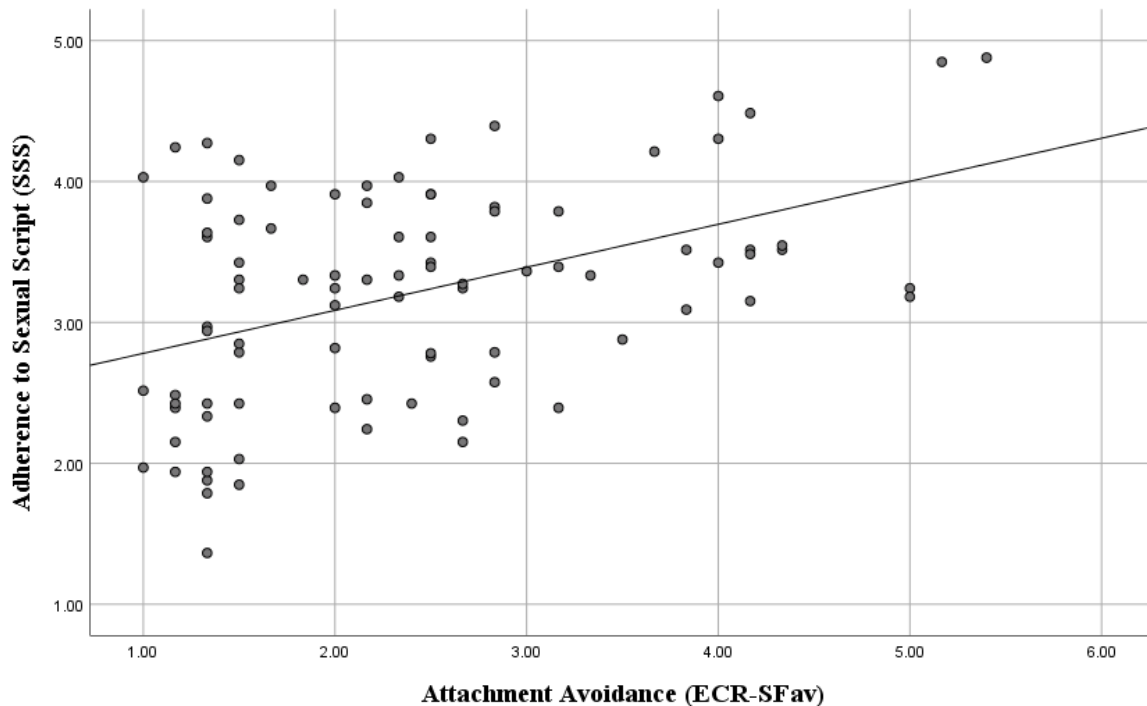


Figure 1. Scatterplot showing the relationship between attachment avoidance and adherence to sexual scripts.

***Hypothesis 2b: Higher levels of attachment avoidance will predict lower levels of sexual communication satisfaction***

Attachment avoidance significantly predicted sexual communication satisfaction  $r(88) = .216, p < .05$ . These results suggest that participants who scored higher on ratings of attachment avoidance reported lower levels of satisfaction with sexual communication. A summary of the results is provided in Figure 2. The hypothesis that attachment avoidance predicts lower levels of sexual communication satisfaction was supported.

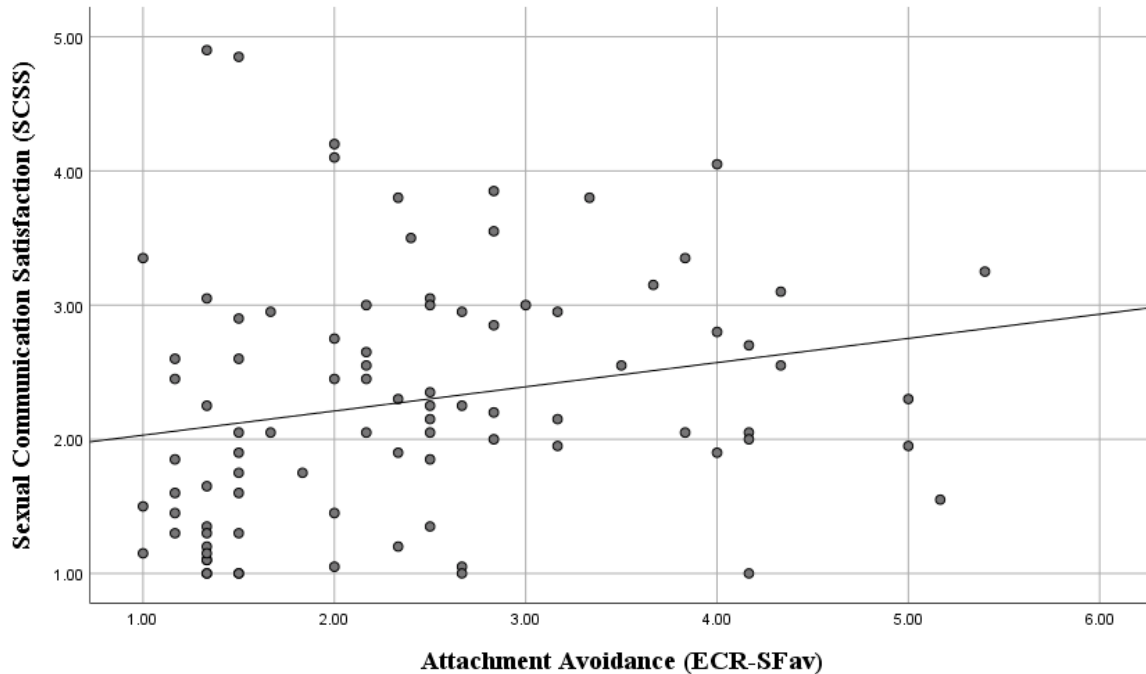


Figure 2. Scatterplot showing the relationship between attachment avoidance and sexual communication.

***Hypothesis 2c: Higher levels of attachment avoidance will predict lower levels of sexual satisfaction***

Attachment avoidance was found to significantly predict sexual satisfaction,  $r(88) = .410$ ,  $p < .01$ . These results suggest that only attachment avoidance impacts sexual satisfaction in committed romantic relationships and support the hypothesis that attachment avoidance predicts lower levels of sexual satisfaction. A scatterplot summarizes the results in Figure 3.

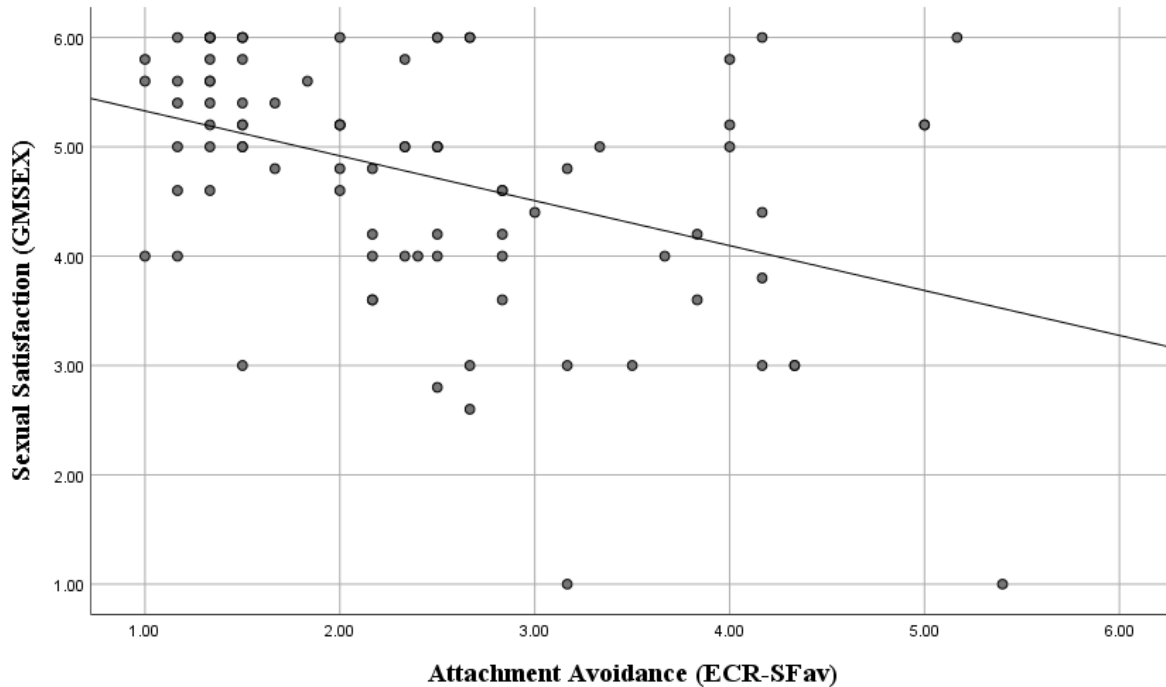


Figure 3. Scatterplot showing the relationship between attachment avoidance and sexual satisfaction.

***Hypothesis 3a: Greater adherence to the traditional cultural sexual script will predict lower levels of sexual communication***

Sexual communication satisfaction was not significantly predicted by adherence to sexual scripts  $r(88) = .061, p = .571$ , which suggests that adherence to traditional cultural sexual scripts does not influence one's satisfaction with sexual communication in their relationship. The hypothesis was not supported.

***Hypothesis 3b: Greater adherence to the traditional cultural sexual script will predict lower levels of sexual satisfaction***

Scores on the sexual script scale were found to significantly predict lower levels of sexual satisfaction  $r(88) = -.252, p < .05$ . These findings support the hypothesis that adherence to the sexual script is a predictor of lower levels of satisfaction in sexual relationships. The results are summarized in Figure 4.

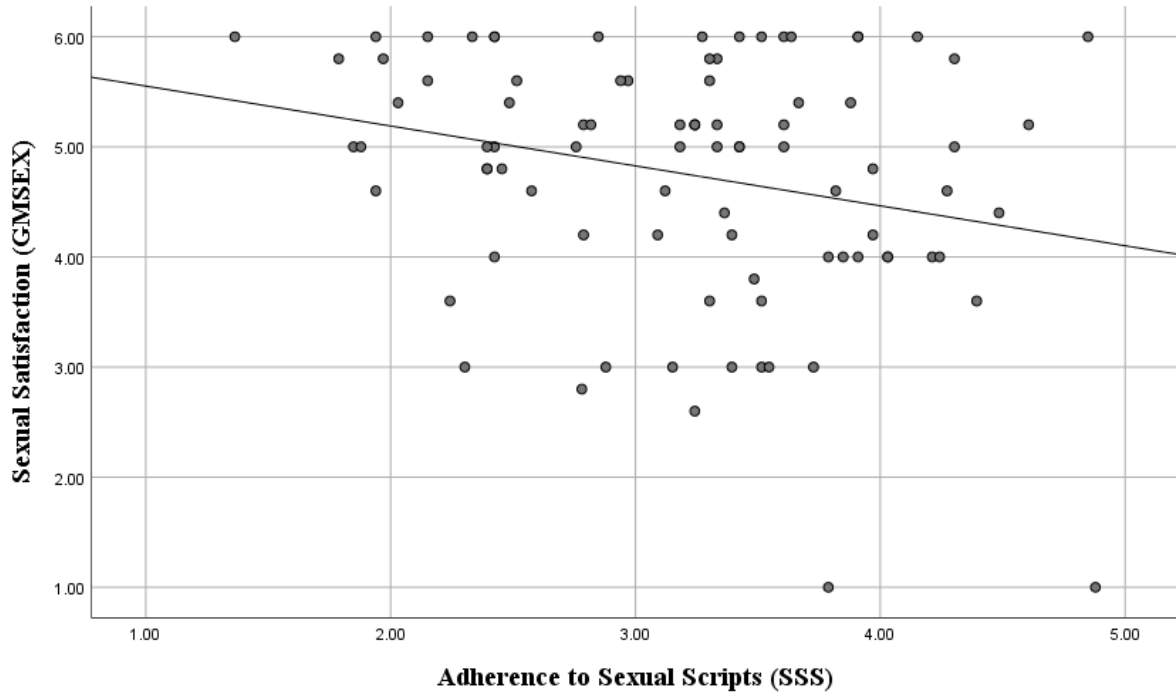


Figure 4. Scatterplot showing the relationship between adherence to traditional cultural sexual scripts and sexual satisfaction.

### Multiple Regression Analyses

***Hypothesis 4a: The relationship between higher levels of attachment anxiety and lower levels of sexual communication will be mediated by greater adherence to the traditional cultural sexual script.***

The proportion of variance in sexual communication attributed to each predictor variable was assessed using multiple hierarchical linear regression. Attachment anxiety was not predictive of sexual scripts or sexual communication, which violates the assumptions of the statistical model by Baron and Kenny (1986). Therefore, the multiple regression analysis could not be conducted and the hypothesis was not supported.

***Hypothesis 4b: The relationship between higher levels of attachment avoidance and lower levels of sexual communication will be mediated by greater adherence to the traditional cultural sexual script.***

Adherence to sexual scripts was not found to significantly predict sexual communication  $r(88) = .061, p = .571$ . Therefore, the assumptions of Baron and Kenny's (1986) mediation model were not met and the multiple regression analysis could not be performed. Hence, the hypothesis stating that adherence to sexual scripts mediates the relationship between attachment avoidance and sexual communication was not supported.

***Hypothesis 4c: The relationship between higher levels of attachment anxiety and. Lower levels of sexual satisfaction will be mediated by greater adherence to the traditional cultural sexual script.***

Attachment anxiety was not found to significantly predict adherence to sexual scripts  $r(88) = .074, p > .05$ , or sexual satisfaction  $r(88) = .98, p = .362$ . Therefore, a hierarchical regression analysis was not conducted as the assumptions set by Baron and Kenny (1986) were not met.

***Hypothesis 4d: The relationship between higher levels of attachment avoidance and lower levels of sexual satisfaction will be mediated by greater adherence to the traditional cultural sexual script.***

Attachment avoidance significantly predicted sexual satisfaction in Step 1,  $r(88) = -.411, p < .001$ . However, the mediation model was not significant as adherence to sexual scripts was not found to significantly contribute to the model in Step 2  $r(88) = -.128, p = .418$ . Table 6 summarizes the results from the hierarchical multiple regression.

**Table 6**  
*Hierarchical Multiple Regression of Sexual Satisfaction Model*

Variable	Step 1		Step 2	
	<i>B</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	5.74	< .001	6.06	< .001
Avoidance	-.411	<.001	-.372	< .01
SSS	-	-	-.128	.418
Model fit	$F(1,87) = 17.61$ <.001		$F(2,86) = 9.10$ <.001	

R <sup>2</sup>	.168	<.001	.175	.418
ΔR <sup>2</sup>	-	-	.006	.418

Note. SSS = Sexual Script Scale.

***Hypothesis 5a: Gender will moderate the relationship between higher attachment anxiety and greater adherence to traditional cultural sexual scripts.***

Attachment anxiety was not found to predict greater adherence to sexual scripts to a statistically significant degree  $r(87) = .074, p > .05$ . Likewise, gender was not found to predict greater adherence to traditional cultural sexual scripts  $r(87) = .093, p = .391$ . Baron and Kenny's assumptions for mediation (1986) were not satisfied and, thus, no multiple hierarchical regression analysis was performed.

***Hypothesis 5b: Gender will moderate the relationship between higher attachment avoidance and greater adherence to traditional cultural sexual scripts.***

In step 1 of the model, attachment avoidance was found to predict greater adherence to traditional cultural sexual scripts  $r(87) = .306, p < .001$ . However, gender was not found to significantly moderate the relationship between attachment avoidance and greater adherence to traditional cultural sexual scripts in Step 2  $r(87) = .093, p = .391$ . Therefore, a hierarchical regression analysis could not be performed according to the assumptions proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986). The results of the hierarchical regression analysis are shown in Table 7.

**Table 7**  
*Hierarchical Multiple Regression Testing for Gender as a Moderator between Attachment Avoidance and Adherence to Sexual Scripts*

Variable	Step 1		Step 2	
	<i>B</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	2.480	< .001	2.47	< .001
Avoidance	.306	< .001	.303	< .01
Gender <sup>a</sup>	-	-	.043	.783
Model fit	$F(1,86) = 20.71$	< .001	$F(2,85) = 10.28$	< .001
R <sup>2</sup>	.194	< .001	.195	.783
ΔR <sup>2</sup>	-	-	.001	.783

Note. <sup>a</sup> Female = 0, Male = 1.

***Hypothesis 5c: Gender will moderate the relationship between adherence to traditional cultural sexual scripts and lower levels of sexual communication***

A linear regression analysis showed that adherence to sexual scripts was not a statistically significant predictor of sexual communication  $r(87) = .061, p = .571$ . Furthermore, gender did not predict adherence to traditional cultural sexual scripts  $r(87) = .093, p = .391$ . Thus, a hierarchical regression was not conducted as the assumptions of Baron and Kenny's mediation model (1986) were not met.

***Hypothesis 5d: Gender will moderate the relationship between adherence to traditional cultural scripts and lower levels of sexual satisfaction***

In step 1 of the model, adherence to traditional cultural scripts was found to predict lower levels of sexual satisfaction  $r(87) = -.362, p < .05$ . However, in step 2 of the model, gender was not found to significantly predict sexual satisfaction  $r(87) = -.022, p = .927$ . Therefore, a hierarchical regression analysis could not be conducted as the assumptions of Baron and Kenny's (1986) were not met. Table 8 summarizes the results of the hierarchical regression analysis.

**Table 8**

*Hierarchical Multiple Regression Testing for Gender as a Moderator between Adherence to Sexual Scripts and Sexual Satisfaction*

Variable	Step 1		Step 2	
	<i>B</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	5.91	< .001	5.915	< .001
Avoidance	-.362	<.05	-.360	<.05
Gender <sup>a</sup>	-	-	-.022	.927
Model fit	$F(1,86) = 5.78$	<.05	$F(2,85) = 2.86$	.063
R <sup>2</sup>	.063	<.05	.063	.927
ΔR <sup>2</sup>	-	-	.000	.927

Note. <sup>a</sup> Female = 0, Male = 1.

## Discussion

The present study examined how insecure attachment and sexual scripts support or impede sexual communication and influence the levels of sexual satisfaction in committed adult

romantic relationships. The results of the present study demonstrated that adherence to the traditional cultural sexual script, which promotes sexual agency in males and endorses the gatekeeping role for females, was significantly predicted by attachment avoidance, but not attachment anxiety. Attachment avoidance also significantly predicted one's ability to communicate openly about the sexual relationship. Additionally, higher levels of attachment avoidance predicted lower levels of satisfaction with the sexual relationship. Interestingly, attachment anxiety was not found to be a significant predictor of adherence to the traditional cultural sexual script, sexual communication, or sexual satisfaction.

Analyses of the effects of greater adherence to the traditional cultural sexual script determined that it was a significant predictor of lower ratings of sexual satisfaction. However, it did not predict outcomes on reports of sexual communication. Multiple hierarchical regression analyses revealed that adherence to the traditional cultural sexual script did not mediate the relationship between attachment insecurity and sexual communication or attachment insecurity and sexual satisfaction. Statistical tests for moderation showed that gender did not moderate the relationship between attachment insecurity and adherence to the traditional cultural sexual script. Gender was also not found to be a moderating variable between cultural sexual scripts and sexual communication or satisfaction.

### **Attachment Insecurity and Sexual Attitudes**

The literature has demonstrated the influence of attachment styles and cultural sexual scripts on the sexual attitudes, behaviours and practices, and their unique impact on communication within sexual relationships (Davis et al., 2006; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Interestingly, only attachment avoidance was found to be a significant predictor of greater adherence to sexual scripts, less optimal sexual communication, and less satisfaction in their

sexual relationship. A possible explanation for the discrepancies between attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety lies in the different sexual attitudes, motives, and perspectives held by highly avoidant and highly anxious individuals. A crucial element that contributes to this divergence is the degree of emotional intimacy that is associated with sex. Individuals high in attachment avoidance create distance as a means of regulating emotion and experience discomfort with closeness (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). As such, attachment avoidance is characterized by avoidance of sex, suppression of sexual needs and desires, and distancing from sexual partners (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2008; Birnbaum & Reis, 2012). Conversely, individuals who are high in attachment anxiety seek protection and support in their interpersonal relationships (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). The highly intimate nature of sexual activities provides a mean for individuals high in attachment anxiety to obtain a sense of security and closeness (Birnbaum, 2015). This results in anxiously-attached individuals attributing greater value to the sexual relationship and becoming preoccupied in utilizing sex to fulfil unmet needs.

These discrepancies in sexual attitudes could account for the finding that only attachment avoidance is predictive of greater adherence to traditional cultural sexual scripts. The traditional cultural sexual script favours a less intimate view of sex and places a greater focus on the physical aspects of the sexual relationship, which may be more attractive to individuals high in attachment avoidance. The research has shown that individuals who score high on measures of attachment avoidance are more approving of casual sex and demonstrate a preference for impersonal, uncommitted sexual encounters over sexual relations with long-term, committed partners (Birnbaum, 2015; Spreecher 2013; Schmitt 2005). Individuals who are high in attachment anxiety prefer engaging in sexual relations within long-term committed relationships

(Gillath & Schachner, 2006). Thus, the traditional cultural sexual script may be rejected as it is not consistent with their need to achieve emotional closeness and reassurance.

### **Attachment Insecurity and Sexual Communication**

These distinct sexual attitudes held by those with high attachment anxiety versus those with high attachment avoidance may also account for the discrepancies found between attachment anxiety and avoidance and restricted sexual communication in the present study. Previous research has demonstrated a significant relationship between insecure attachment styles and inhibited sexual communication, characterized by lack of sexual self-disclosure and sexual assertiveness (Feeny et al., 2000; Impett & Paplu, 2002). Researchers have postulated that the emotional distance sought by individuals high in attachment avoidance leads to less open sexual communication and an aversion to exploring the sexual preferences of self and other (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2008). This interpretation is in line with the present study's findings that individuals who are high in attachment avoidance demonstrated a diminished tendency to communicate about their sexual relationship.

Individuals high in attachment anxiety are more likely to be hypervigilant with regards to their partner's signals of arousal and defer to their partner's preferences in order to maintain what they perceive to be a satisfying sexual relationship (Impett & Paplu, 2002). In the present study, attachment anxiety was not found to significantly predict lower levels of satisfaction with sexual communication. This could be due to individuals high in attachment anxiety demonstrating greater deference to their partner (Davis et al., 2006). Thus, anxious individuals impeded communication about their sexual preferences and relying more heavily on their partner's communications when navigating the sexual relationship. It is also possible that relational factors that were not measured in the present study attributed to the discrepancies

between attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance. Issues in the romantic relationship and lack of emotional intimacy have been shown to have a greater impact on the sexual relationship for individuals high in attachment anxiety (Davis et al., 2006). Since overall relationship satisfaction was not tested in the current study, the effects of relational satisfaction on the association between attachment anxiety, sexual communication and sexual satisfaction were not observed.

### **Attachment Insecurity and Sexual Satisfaction**

In terms of sexual satisfaction, only attachment avoidance was found to be a significant predictor of satisfaction with the sexual relationship. Researchers have observed that individuals who are high in attachment avoidance or attachment anxiety report experiencing more negative evaluations of their sexual activities (Birnbaum, Reis, Mikulincer, Gillath, & Orpaz, 2006), characterized by a greater degree of anxiety and unfavourable ratings of one's own sexual qualities (Davis et al., 2006). However, there are distinct processes operating within attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance that underly these evaluations of sexual activity.

The emotional distancing utilized by individuals who are high in attachment avoidance also favours a more detached approach to sex, separating the emotional component associated with sexual activity and not attributing little significance to the sexual relationship (Birnbaum et al., 2006). Furthermore, avoidant individuals are more likely to prioritize the physical features of sex (Davis et al., 2006). Sex that is more intimate might not coincide with the avoidant individual's preference for emotionally detached sex, which could explain the findings in the present study that individuals who were high on attachment avoidance reported lower levels of satisfaction with their sexual relationship. It is also possible that, by virtue of the attachment avoidance's dismissive attitude towards sex (Birbaum, 2007), the individuals who were high on

attachment avoidance did not perceive their sexual relationship as valuable, pleasant, or satisfying and, thus, scored lower on levels of sexual satisfaction.

A very different process takes place for individuals who are high in attachment anxiety when considering what constitutes unsatisfying sex for these individuals. Sex is utilized by anxious individuals as a means of seeking reassurance and validation and emphasize the need for emotional intimacy in the sexual relationship (Davis et al., 2006). Research has demonstrated that individuals high in attachment anxiety report greater dissatisfaction of the emotional connection with their partner during sex (Davis et al., 2006). Thus, it appears that satisfaction with the sexual relationship for individuals high in attachment anxiety is contingent on the experience of a strong emotional bond in the relationship. Furthermore, a reciprocal relationship between overall relationship satisfaction and sexual satisfaction has been observed in anxious individuals. Satisfaction with the overall relationship has been found to predict higher levels of sexual satisfaction. Likewise, the quality of the sexual relationship is perceived as an indicator of overall relationship satisfaction for individuals who are high in attachment anxiety and will engage in sexual activity in the hopes of enhancing satisfaction with the nonsexual relationship (Davis et al., 2006). This relational need for emotional closeness could explain why no relationship was found between attachment anxiety and sexual satisfaction in the current study. It is also possible that participants who were high in attachment anxiety rely on relational satisfaction when determining their degree of satisfaction with the sexual relationship. As overall relationship satisfaction was not measured in this study, it was not possible to determine whether these relational dynamics had an effect on sexual communication or sexual satisfaction.

Research observing the effect of couple therapy on outcomes of sexual satisfaction have observed similar results to those of the present study. In a study examining attachment change in

Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy (EFCT), the researchers observed that increases in sexual satisfaction following therapy was related to changes in attachment avoidance, but not attachment anxiety (Wiebe et al., 2019). These findings echo the results of the present study and suggest that a particular relationship exists between attachment avoidance and sexual satisfaction that is not observed in attachment anxiety.

### **Sexual Scripts**

The cultural sexual scripts that are integrated and internalized have been shown to influence one's ability to communicate about sexual preferences and discuss safe sex-practices (Hynie et al., 1998; Greene & Faulkner, 2005), resulting in lower ratings of satisfaction with the sexual relationship. Although adherence to the traditional cultural script was not found to predict lower sexual communication, it was a significant predictor of sexual satisfaction in the current study. In order to interpret these results, it is important to consider the flexible nature of sexual scripts.

Simon and Gagnon (1986) hypothesized that, as a result of societies understanding of appropriate sexual behaviours and ageing, the cultural sexual script was expected to shift across the lifecycle. In their examination of cultural sexual scripts, they observed that the cultural sexual scripts contingent on sexual behaviours experienced in adolescence and young adulthood remained relatively permanent throughout the life course and that the interpersonal and intrapsychic scripts remained contingent on attitudes of attractiveness and performance found in the dominant culture. Additional research examining the permanence and evolution of sexual scripts have reported that although traditional attitudes towards masculine and feminine sexuality remain prevalent at the culture-level sexual script, different processes are operating at the individual level to determine whether they will conform or transform the cultural sexual script

(Masters, Casey, Wells, & Morrison, 2013). Furthermore, in their qualitative analysis of the sexual scripts held by young adults, the researchers found that those who conformed to the traditional cultural sexual scripts were more likely to express dissatisfaction with their scripts.

The findings from the current study suggest that individuals who are high on attachment avoidance were more likely to adhere to the traditional understanding of masculine and feminine sexuality and conform to the traditional cultural sexual script. Furthermore, the relationship between adherence to traditional cultural sexual scripts and lower ratings of sexual satisfaction may reflect the findings of Masters et al. (2013) that those who conform to traditional cultural sexual scripts experience greater dissatisfaction with their script. It is possible that individuals high on attachment anxiety are more likely to transform or find exceptions in the traditional cultural sexual script to align with their relational needs for emotional closeness. However, more research is required to explore what processes underly the distinctions observed in attachment insecurities and adherence to traditional cultural sexual scripts.

Another important factor that contributes to fluctuations in sexual scripts is the length of romantic relationships. In the beginning stages of relationships, romantic partners tend to rely on the traditional cultural sexual script to guide the sexual relationship as there is limited information available to determine the sexual preferences and desires of new sexual partners (Metts & Spitzberg, 1996). As the relationship progresses, the couple may become less reliant on the traditional cultural sexual script and a script that is more representative of the couple's relationship may take shape. This shift requires negotiation and implies that there is a need for open communication regarding the sexual relationship. Wheeler and colleagues (1984) determined that partners who are in the more developed stages of relationship formation report greater levels of satisfaction with their sexual communication than those in earlier phases. The

current study explored the relationship between adherence to traditional cultural sexual scripts and sexual communication in partners who had been in a committed romantic relationship and living together for at least one year. It is possible that no significant relationship was found between adherence to traditional cultural sexual scripts and sexual communication as the partner's in this sample were in the later stages of relationship development.

Although no relationship was found between adherence to traditional cultural sexual scripts and sexual communication, lower levels of sexual satisfaction were predicted by greater adherence to the traditional cultural sexual script. In their study on sexual scripts, Masters et al. (2013) explored the discrepancies between the cultural, interpersonal, and intrapersonal sexual scripts held by young heterosexual adults. They observed that those who ingrained in the traditional cultural sexual script reported that they felt limited by these scripts demonstrated greater dissatisfaction with their scripts. The findings from the current study suggest that individuals who adhere to the traditional cultural sexual script may not be attuned with their interpersonal and intrapersonal scripts and neglecting to attend to the sexual preferences, resulting in lower levels of sexual satisfaction.

The finding that sexual scripts do not mediate the relationship between attachment insecurity and sexual communication and satisfaction suggests that these are two distinct factors that influence the sexual relationship. Attachment avoidance had a greater impact on sexual communication and satisfaction than did adherence to sexual scripts. However, adherence to traditional cultural sexual scripts may have a more significant effect on sexual satisfaction during periods of transition in the sexual relationship. The traditional cultural sexual script endorses sexual activity in young adults, disregarding the sexual needs of older adults, and overlooks the presence of sexual dysfunctions. Research has demonstrated that sexual dysfunctions

experienced by men are often viewed as more problematic by men (Fugl-Meyer & Fugl-Meyer, 1999; Aubin & Heiman, 2004). This could be because the traditional cultural sexual script upholds an image of men as sexual performers, high in arousal and desire (Hauck, 2015; Sakaluk et al., 2014). Thus, it is possible that adherence to the traditional cultural sexual script may have a greater impact when new factors enter the sexual relationship and that individuals high in attachment avoidance may be more susceptible to experiencing a decline in sexual satisfaction. However, more research is needed in order to better understand the effects of attachment avoidance and sexual scripts across the lifespan.

### **Moderating Effects of Gender on Sexual Scripts, Sexual Communication, and Sexual Satisfaction**

Gender was not found to predict greater adherence to sexual scripts, which suggests that men and women adopt similar scripts. As there was no significant relationship between gender and adherence to sexual scripts, the moderating effects of gender could not be tested. Furthermore, gender was not significantly associated with sexual communication and satisfaction. Studies examining gender differences in sexual communication and satisfaction have observed that men and women take different aspects of the sexual relationship into consideration when discussing sex with their partners and assessing sexual satisfaction (McNulty & Fisher, 2008; MacNeil & Byers, 2005). These discrepancies did not appear to be present in the current sample as gender was not found to predict sexual communication and sexual satisfaction. However, the study's small sample size, homogeneity of participants, and potential interdependence of the data may account for the absence of any effects of gender in this study.

### **Clinical Implications**

The findings from this study address a significant gap in the literature regarding how couples communicate about their sexual relationship and experience sexual satisfaction, which has important implications for the practice of couple therapy. Sexual dissatisfaction and issues with communication are commonly reported as the main concern for couples seeking therapy (Miller, Yorgason, Sandberg, & White, 2003; Whisman, Dixon, & Johnson, 1997). The findings from the current study suggest that attachment avoidance is a significant predictor of impeded sexual communication and lower levels of satisfaction with the sexual relationship. Additionally, greater adherence to the traditional cultural sexual script had an impact on sexual satisfaction but was not found to mediate the relationship between attachment avoidance and lower levels of sexual satisfaction. Thus, when working with couples who have demonstrated dissatisfaction with the sexual relationship it would be important to identify the underlying factors that contribute to the couple's presenting concerns around sex and tailor the treatment plan accordingly. Developing a more secure attachment has been shown to increase sexual satisfaction in partners with high attachment avoidance following EFCT (Wiebe et al., 2019). In addition to attending to the attachment bond, addressing preconceived notions of sexual relationships based on cultural scripts may further improve sexual satisfaction. This is especially relevant when working with couple's who are undergoing transitions in their sexual relationship as a result of illness, ageing, the birth of a child, or any other significant life transitions (Diamond, 2013). Further research is needed in order to develop and evaluate the effectiveness of therapeutic approaches that address sexual issues at both attachment insecurity and cultural sexual scripts.

### **Strengths**

This study was the first to assess the relationship between insecure attachment and adherence to the traditional cultural sexual script and their effects on sexual communication and sexual satisfaction within committed romantic relationships. Furthermore, this is the only known study to explore whether adherence to the traditional cultural sexual script acts as a mediating variable in predicting levels of sexual communication and sexual satisfaction as a function of attachment style. Another strength of this study was the use of a sample that consisted of couples. Furthermore, the study demonstrated clinically relevant findings that contribute to the knowledge of sexual relationships, as well as the practice of couple's therapy.

### **Limitations**

This study had several limitations. First, this study utilized a volunteer response convenience sample method which limits the generalizability of the results (Creswell, 2017). Furthermore, the sample sociodemographic characteristics revealed a homogenous sample comprising of a majority Caucasian, 18 to 34 years of age, heterosexual participants, who were in committed relationships that were less than five years in length and did not have children, indicating that the results may not be representative of the general population (Creswell, 2017). Furthermore, the study utilized a small sample size, which runs the risk of increasing the likelihood of Type II error (Ellis, 2010). Furthermore, the sample consisted of both couple units and individual participants yet the data was analysed as independent scores, which runs the risk of finding a significant result when it does not exist (Kenny, 1996).

This study utilized self-report measures of attachment, sexual scripts, sexual communication, and sexual satisfaction, introducing the potential for response bias (McBride, 2016). Furthermore, the attachment anxiety subscale of the ECR-SF demonstrated low internal reliability, which may have limited the ability to find an effect in attachment anxiety. Another

limitation of the current study was the use of a cross-sectional method. Thus, a causal relationship between attachment avoidance, adherence to traditional cultural sexual scripts, sexual communication, and sexual satisfaction cannot be inferred. Additionally, the correlational nature of the study neglected to observe the influence of extraneous factors on the outcome variables (McBride, 2016), such as relationship satisfaction which has been found to be a significant predictor of sexual satisfaction.

### **Future Directions**

The current study provides a foundation for further research on the relationship between attachment insecurity and adherence to traditional cultural sexual scripts and the resulting effects on sexual communication and satisfaction. Future research should address the limitations found within this study, such as the homogeneity of the sample and interdependence of the data. Considering alternative ways of measuring adherence to traditional cultural sexual scripts, sexual communication, and sexual satisfaction, such as qualitative interviews or diary studies, may provide a richer understanding of how attachment insecurities and cultural sexual scripts contribute to the quality of sexual communication and sexual satisfaction.

Exploring the particular dynamics that underlie sexual communication and satisfaction in individuals who are high in attachment anxiety. The present study did not find any significant relationship between attachment anxiety and sexual scripts, sexual communication, or sexual satisfaction. However, it would be important to gain a deeper understanding of how attachment anxiety influences the sexual relationship. Furthermore, further research should explore the impacts of attachment insecurity and cultural sexual scripts on the communication and ratings of sexual satisfaction of partners within romantic relationships. Particularly, examining how

changes in attachment styles and fluctuations in the sexual scripts affect partners' perceptions of the sexual relationship.

### **Conclusion**

This study has explored the relationship between attachment insecurity and adherence to traditional cultural sexual scripts, and their respective effects on sexual communication and sexual satisfaction. It found that attachment avoidance significantly predicted greater adherence to the traditional cultural script, impeded sexual communication, and dissatisfaction with the sexual relationship. Greater adherence to the traditional cultural sexual script was found to predict lower levels of sexual satisfaction but did not impact sexual communication.

Furthermore, adherence to traditional cultural sexual scripts did not mediate the relationship between attachment avoidance and lower levels of sexual satisfaction. This thesis also explored the moderating effects of gender on the relationship between attachment insecurity and cultural sexual scripts, sexual communication, and sexual satisfaction. Gender did not significantly moderate these relationships, nor did it moderate the association between adherence to traditional cultural sexual scripts and sexual satisfaction.

### Table of Tables

Table 1 <i>Participant Sociodemographic Characteristics</i> .....	22
Table 2 <i>Participant Relationship Characteristics</i> .....	23
Table 3 <i>Total and Subscale Scores for Attachment (ECR-SF)</i> .....	32
Table 4 <i>Total and Subscale Scores for Sexual Scripts (SSS)</i> .....	33
Table 5 <i>Correlation between attachment-anxiety (ECR-SF), attachment-avoidance (ECR-SF), Sexual Scripts (SSS), Sexual Communication Satisfaction (SCSS), and Sexual Satisfaction (GMSEX)</i> .....	33
Table 6 <i>Hierarchical Multiple Regression of Sexual Satisfaction Model</i> .....	40
Table 7 <i>Hierarchical Multiple Regression Testing for Gender as a Moderator between Attachment Avoidance and Adherence to Sexual Scripts</i> .....	41
Table 8 <i>Hierarchical Multiple Regression Testing for Gender as a Moderator between Adherence to Sexual Scripts and Sexual Satisfaction</i> .....	42

**Table of Figures**

<i>Figure 1.</i> Scatterplot showing the relationship between attachment avoidance and adherence to sexual scripts.....	36
<i>Figure 2.</i> Scatterplot showing the relationship between attachment avoidance and sexual communication.....	37
<i>Figure 3.</i> Scatterplot showing the relationship between attachment avoidance and sexual satisfaction.....	38
<i>Figure 4.</i> Scatterplot showing the relationship between adherence to sexual scripts and sexual satisfaction.....	39

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## Appendix A

### Recruitment Poster



## **Are you in a committed relationship? We would love to hear about your experience!**

Have you been in a couple relationship and have been living together for at least 1 year? Are you interested in contributing to research on relationships and coping?

The Couple Research Lab at Saint Paul University is recruiting couples to participate in an **online survey** on relationships and coping that takes approximately **30 minutes** to complete. Your responses are confidential and anonymous.

#### Eligible couples

- Over 18 years of age
- Living together for at least one year
- Able to respond to questions in English



This research will be used to help build our understanding of how to relieve relationship distress and build connection and resilience.

Participants will be entered into a raffle and have the **chance to win 1 of 4 Amazon gift cards worth \$250.**

## Appendix B

### Saint Paul University Research Ethics Board Approval



UNIVERSITÉ  
SAINT-PAUL  
UNIVERSITY

20-08-2019  
dd-mm-yyyy

Bureau de la recherche et de la déontologie  
Office of Research and Ethics

#### Comité de la déontologie | Certificat d'éthique Research Ethics Board | Ethics Certificate

**REB File Number** 1360.2/19

<u>Last name</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>	<u>Role</u>
Sara	Kriplani	Faculty of Human Sciences	Principal Investigator
Wiebe	Stephanie	Faculty of Human Sciences	Supervisor

**Type of project** Research Project-Master's

**Title** Reflective function and attachment in adult couple relationships.

<u>Approval date</u>	<u>Expiry Date</u>	<u>Decision</u>
19-10-2018 (dd-mm-yyyy)	18-10-2019 (dd-mm-yyyy)	1 (Approved)

**Update August 2019** Change of title of the poster, Addition of SPU logo and a picture

#### Committee comments

The Research Ethics Board (REB) approved the updated changes made to the recruitment poster. The researcher is invited to use the reference number 1360.2/19 when recruiting participants.

- In accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement, the Saint Paul University Research Ethics Board (REB) has examined and approved the application for an ethics certificate for this project for the period indicated and subject to the conditions listed above.
- The research protocol may not be modified without prior written approval from the REB. This includes, among others, the extension of the research, additional recruitment for the inclusion of new participants, changes in location of the fieldwork, any stage where a research permit is required, such as work in schools. Minor administrative changes are allowed.
- The REB must be notified of all changes or unanticipated circumstances that have a serious impact on the conduct of the research, that relate to the risk to participants and their safety. Modifications to the project, information, consent and recruitment documentation must be submitted to the Office of Research and Ethics for approval by the REB.
- The investigator must submit a report four weeks prior to the expiry date of the certificate stated above requesting an extension or that the file be closed.
- Documents relating to publicity, recruitment and consent of participants should bear the file number of the certificate. They must also indicate the coordinates of the investigator should participants have questions related to the research project. In which case, the documents will refer to the Chair of the REB and provide the coordinates of the Office of Research and Ethics.

Louis Perron  
Chair  
Research Ethics Board

## Appendix C

### Informed Consent

Reflective function and attachment in adult couple relationships

Informed Consent Form

**TITLE OF RESEARCH STUDY:** Reflective function and attachment in adult couple relationships

**STUDY RESEARCHERS:** Stephanie Wiebe, PhD., C. Psych., Sara Kriplani, B.A. (M.A. candidate), Monica Bridge, B.A. (M.A. candidate)

**Invitation to participate:** You are being invited to participate in this study about couple relationships. Stephanie Wiebe (PhD.), a clinical psychologist and assistant professor at the School of Counselling, Psychotherapy and Spirituality, is the primary researcher for this research study. This study will also serve as the basis for a Masters' thesis for Sara Kriplani and Monica Bridge.

**Purpose of the study:** This study is designed to gain a better understanding of how the way partners think and feel in relationships may impact the couple relationship.

**Participation:** If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a set of questionnaires online that will take approximately 30 minutes to complete. No identifying information will be collected in the questionnaires. In order to link your responses with those of your partner, you should have received a couple code from the researcher that you will need to enter the questionnaire. At the end of the questionnaire, you will be invited to enter your email address in order to be entered into a raffle with the chance to win one of four amazon gift cards worth \$250. You are free to choose whether or not to take part in the research study. Also, you are free to withdraw from this research study at any time. If you would like more information about something mentioned here, or if you have any other questions, please feel free to contact one of the researchers above.

**Risks:** The level of risk for participating in this study is minimal and may include experiencing uncomfortable or sad feelings when completing the questionnaires, as you will be asked questions about your emotions and your relationship.

If you experience emotional distress following completion of the study, you can access the following resources:

**Ottawa Distress Centre**

Distress: 613-238-3311; Crisis: 613-722-6914 or 1-866-996-0991

[www.dcottawa.on.ca](http://www.dcottawa.on.ca)

**Walk-in Counseling**

[walkincounselling.com](http://walkincounselling.com)

**Benefits:** By participating in this study you will be helping us to improve our understanding of couple relationships, which will allow us to develop better ways of helping couples relieve relationship distress and strengthen feelings of connection.

**Confidentiality and conservation of data:** The data you provide in this online questionnaire will be kept secure and confidential. We use an encrypted online survey provider and will be deleted once downloaded by the researchers. Your questionnaire responses will be stored separately from any identifying information (your email) that will be collected in order to contact you should you be the recipient of the raffle prize. Anonymity will be assured through the pooling of all data so that the published results will be presented in group format and no individual or couple will be identified. This anonymous pooled data will be stored on a password protected storage device. The data will be kept for 10 years at which point the data will be securely erased.

**Appendix D**

## Sociodemographic Questionnaire

What is your age (in years)?

- a) 18-24
- b) 25-34
- c) 35-44
- d) 45-54
- e) 55-64
- f) 65 and above

What is your gender?

- a) Male
- b) Female
- c) Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

How would you describe your sexual orientation?

- a) Heterosexual
- b) Bisexual
- c) Gay/Lesbian
- d) Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you been in your current couple relationship?

- a) 1-2 years
- b) 2-5 years
- c) 5-10 years
- d) 10-15 years
- e) 15-20 years
- f) 20-25 years
- g) Over 25 years (please specify number of years): \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you been living with your partner?

- a) 1-2 years
- b) 2-5 years
- c) 5-10 years
- d) 10-15 years
- e) 15-20 years
- f) 20-25 years
- g) Over 25 years (please specify number of years): \_\_\_\_\_

How many children do you have with your partner?

- a) 0
- b) 1
- c) 2

- d) 3
- e) 4
- f) 5
- g) More than 5

How many children do you have from previous relationships?

- a) 1
- b) 2
- c) 3
- d) 4
- e) 5
- f) More than 5

How would you describe your ethnicity?

- a) White/Caucasian
- b) Black (e.g., Haitian, African, Jamaican, Somali)
- c) Asian (e.g., Chinese, East Indian, Japanese, Vietnamese)
- d) Latino or Hispanic
- e) Pacific Islander
- f) Middle Eastern
- g) Native Canadian/First nations/Métis
- h) Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

Have you participated in couple therapy in the past?

- a) Yes
- b) No

If you answered yes to the previous question, when did you have your last session?

- a) In the past week
- b) In the past month
- c) In the past year
- d) In the past five years
- e) More than five years ago

Are you currently seeking couple therapy?

- a) Yes
- b) No

Are you currently participating in couple therapy?

- a) Yes
- b) No

What is your current annual household income?

- a) Under 20 000

- b) 20 000-50 000
- c) 50 000-100 000
- d) More than 100 000

Have you suffered from one of the following?

	Currently	In the past
Mood Disorder	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Anxiety Disorder	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Substance Use Disorder	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Schizophrenia	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Eating Disorder	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify):	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E

### Experiences in Close Relationship Scale-Short Form (ECR-S)

Instruction: The following statements concern how you feel in romantic relationships. We are interested in how you generally experience relationships, not just in what is happening in a current relationship. Respond to each statement by indicating how much you agree or disagree with it. Mark your answer using the following rating scale:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neutral	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

1. It helps to turn to my romantic partner in times of need.
2. I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by my partner.
3. I want to get close to my partner, but I keep pulling back.
4. I find that my partner(s) don't want to get as close as I would like.
5. I turn to my partner for many things, including comfort and reassurance.
6. My desire to be very close sometimes scares people away.
7. I try to avoid getting too close to my partner.
8. I do not often worry about being abandoned.
9. I usually discuss my problems and concerns with my partner.
10. I get frustrated if romantic partners are not available when I need them.
11. I am nervous when partners get too close to me.
12. I worry that romantic partners won't care about me as much as I care about them.

**Scoring Information:**

Anxiety = 2, 4, 6, 8 (reverse), 10, 12

Avoidance = 1 (reverse), 3, 5 (reverse), 7, 9 (reverse), 11

## Appendix F

### Sexual Script Scale

Each of the following items will have a 6-point scale option response.

*Please indicate how much you agree with the following statements*

Strongly disagree

1

2

3

4

5

Strongly agree

6

1. I think negatively of a man who has had a lot of sexual partners.
2. I have a hard time respecting a girl who has casual sex.
3. I have a hard time respecting a guy who has casual sex.
4. I think negatively of a woman who has had a lot of sexual partners.
5. I think men who have had a lot of sexual partners are shallow.
6. A man who has a lot of casual sex partners doesn't respect women.
7. I think women who have had a lot of sexual partners have low self-esteem.
8. I would respect a woman more if she didn't have sex early in a relationship.
9. Men who have had a lot of sexual partners are manipulators.
10. It's easy for a girl to turn a guy on.
11. Men are easily turned on.
12. It's easy for men to have orgasms.
13. Men are more easily aroused than women.
14. Men are simple when it comes to sex.
15. Women's sexuality is more complicated than men's.
16. It's easy for a woman to be good at sex because men are easy to arouse.
17. Men have stronger urges for sex than women.
18. Men need sex more than women.
19. Men have a higher sex drive than women.
20. Men have a stronger biological need for sex.
21. Women aren't as sexually driven as men.
22. For it to be good sex, both partners need to orgasm.
23. If a man wants a woman to sleep with him again, he has to give her an orgasm.
24. A man's ability to give a woman an orgasm is an indicator of his sexual skill.
25. Women can still enjoy sex without having an orgasm.
26. Having an orgasm is really important to women.
27. Men like being called a player.
28. Men think being a "player" is a positive thing.
29. It's an insult to be called a "player."
30. Men dislike being called a "player."
31. Women are more likely than men to get emotionally attached during sex.
32. Sex is more emotional for women than men.
33. Men are as likely as women to get attached after sex.

## Appendix G

### The Sexual Communication Satisfaction Scale

Sexual communication is more difficult for some people than others. It involves talking about sex, but it also involves actions that help partners understand what is appealing and unappealing in bed. Even people with strong relationships may find communicating about sex difficult, because there are many taboos against sexual expression. This isn't something most people get to practice a whole lot! Couples who communicate well about their sex lives can feel closer in general as well as more satisfied in bed, so it is worth the effort to keep each other informed about the experience.

Instructions: Circle the number above the statement that best answers each question

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral/No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

1. I tell my partner when I am sexually satisfied.
2. I am satisfied with my partner's ability to communicate his/her sexual desires to me.
3. I let my partner know things that I find pleasing during sex.
4. I am very satisfied with the quality of our sexual interactions.
5. I do not hesitate to let my partner know when I want to have sex.
6. I tell my partner whether or not I am sexually satisfied.
7. I am satisfied over the degree to which my partner and I discuss our sexual relationship.
8. I am not afraid to show my partner what kind of sexual behaviour I find satisfying.
9. I am pleased with the manner in which my partner and I communicate with each other during sex.
10. My partner shows me when s/he is sexually satisfied.
11. I show my partner what pleases me during sex.
12. My partner shows me things s/he finds pleasing during sex.
13. I show my partner when I am sexually satisfied.
14. My partner lets me know whether sex has been satisfying or not.
15. I am satisfied concerning my ability to communicate about sexual matters with my partner.
16. My partner shows me by the ways s/he touches me if s/he is satisfied.
17. I am satisfied with my partner's ability to communicate his/her sexual desire to me.
18. I know when my partner is sexually satisfied.
19. I am satisfied in the majority of our sexual interactions.
20. I am pleased with the manner in which my partner and I communicate with each other after sex.

Please add up the number value of each answer and enter the total score here \_\_\_\_\_ .

Look at the range of total possible scores below. Circle the statement that best represents your level of satisfaction based upon your score above.

0      10    20    30    40    50    60    70    80    90    100  
Strongly Satisfied    Satisfied    Neutral    Dissatisfied    Strongly Dissatisfied

**Appendix H**

## Global Measure of Sexual Satisfaction

Please select one of the following in response to the question: Overall, how do you describe your sexual relationship with your partner?

1	2	3	4	5	6
Very bad					Very good
1	2	3	4	5	6
Very unpleasant					Very pleasant
1	2	3	4	5	6
Very negative					Very positive
1	2	3	4	5	6
Very unsatisfying					Very satisfying
1	2	3	4	5	6
Worthless					Very valuable