



Research Article

Examining Predictors of Couple Satisfaction

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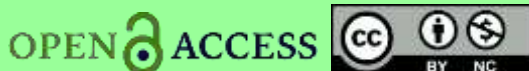
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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence, conflict communication styles, and attachment styles, and how these three factors interact to predict romantic relationship quality. The hypotheses of this study were: H1: Higher levels of emotional intelligence will be correlated with higher levels of romantic satisfaction. H2: Constructive conflict communication styles will serve as the mediating between higher emotional intelligence and higher romantic satisfaction. H3: A secure attachment style will serve as the moderating variable that strengthens the relationship between higher emotional intelligence and higher romantic satisfaction. 107 total participants were recruited for this study. Results showed that emotional intelligence and relationship satisfaction were not significantly correlated ($r = .153, p = .117$). The results also showed that there was no mediation of conflict style on the relationship between emotional intelligence and relationship satisfaction ($B = .163, p = .093, R^2 = .027$). Finally, the results revealed that a secure attachment style did not moderate the relationship between emotional intelligence and relationship satisfaction ($B = .0815, p = .8339$). However, it was found that the relationship between emotional intelligence and relationship satisfaction was moderated by an avoidant attachment style. Potential reasons for these results are discussed.

Keywords: Romantic relationship quality; marital quality; emotional intelligence; conflict resolution styles; attachment styles; secure attachment styles.

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Examining Predictors of Couple Satisfaction

The relationships that we share with others are arguably one of the most important aspects of our lives. More importantly, however, the quality of these relationships, and the satisfaction that we feel in these relationships, are of central importance. The quality of the relationships that we share with others has a strong bearing on our perception of our quality of life (Peplau, 1994), as well as significant effects on mortality rates (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010; Robles et al., 2014). A specific type of interpersonal relationship, a

romantic relationship, has especially far-reaching implications. A strong predictor of life satisfaction, psychological well-being, and physical health is being in a romantic relationship that is of high quality (Proulx et al., 2007). Higher levels of romantic relationship quality are significantly correlated a lower risk for mortality, lower levels of anxiety and depression, and better immune system functioning (Robles et al., 2014; Holt-Lunstad et al., 2008). Poorer general relationship quality in general is significantly associated with a higher risk for mortality



(Holt-Lunstad, 2010). Lower levels of relational quality are also associated with greater depression and lowered functioning of the immune system (Kiecolt-Glaser et al., 1987).

Given the far-reaching implications associated with romantic relationship quality, understanding the factors that contribute to it is imperative. Examining the predictors of romantic relationship quality, from here on abbreviated to relationship quality, has long been of interest to relationship researchers. Several prominent factors of relational quality have emerged from the literature, and continue to be stable predictive factors of relational quality (Joel et al., 2020). Relationship researchers have long examined how attachment styles, as well as conflict resolution styles, are strong predictors of relationship quality. More specifically, it is well evidenced that constructive conflict resolution styles and secure attachment styles are strong predictors of high relationship quality (Fincham et al., 2004; Bradbury & Karney, 1993). However, emotional intelligence, as a new and emerging concept within the literature, is not yet well studied within the context of romantic relationships. Some scholars have speculated the beneficial qualities that emotional intelligence could potentially bring to romantic relationships. However, there is a gap in the literature that examines emotional intelligence within the context of romantic relationships.

Statement of the Problem

Romantic relationship quality—an individual's perception that their relationship is relatively good versus bad— is a concept with important social implications. Relationship quality has a significant effect on perceived quality of life, mortality rates, and general psychological well-being (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010; Robles et al., 2014; Peplau, 1994). The factors that contribute to relational quality are the most studied concept in the intimate relationship's literature. The most prominent and well evidenced predictors of relational quality are conflict resolution styles and attachment styles (Fincham et al., 2004; Bradbury et al., 2000). However, emotional intelligence, as a new and emerging concept in the psychological literature, is not yet well studied in the context of romantic relationships (Fitness, 2001). Within the context of romantic relationships, emotional intelligence has potentially far-reaching beneficial qualities (Fitness, 2001). However, because of the newness of emotional intelligence as a construct, only a scarce amount of literature exists that examines its influence on romantic relationships. Therefore, the first purpose of this study will be to examine the influence of emotional intelligence on relationship quality. The second purpose of this study will be to examine the association between emotional intelligence, conflict resolution styles, attachment styles, and how these interact to predict relationship quality.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships between emotional intelligence, conflict resolution styles, and attachment styles as predictors of romantic relationship quality.

Significance of the Study

This study will provide valuable insight into different factors that contribute to romantic relationship quality. It is essential to have a thorough understanding of the factors that influence romantic relationship quality because of the extensive implications it has. Specific variables, such as conflict resolution styles, as well as attachment styles, have extensively been shown to be strong predictors of romantic relationship quality. However, the influence of emotional intelligence on relational quality is not yet well studied within the literature. Findings of this study may provide valuable insight for couples who suffer from low levels of romantic relationship quality. The results of this study could also provide valuable insight for couples therapy programs.

Definitions of Terms

To clarify the constructs and implications of this study, it is necessary to define the terms used throughout this study. The following definitions are given for the purposes of this study.

Emotional Intelligence: Emotional intelligence broadly refers to emotional competencies—perceiving, understanding, regulating, and constructively expressing emotions—that allow for the adaptive use of emotion (Malouff et al., 2013).

Conflict Resolution Style: A conflict resolution style is the process by which a dispute between two individuals is resolved (Balawajder, 2012).

Constructive Conflict Resolution Style: A constructive conflict resolution style is the employment of a constructive, mutually beneficial strategy during conflict, such as negotiating, reasoning, accommodating, or collaborating, to find solutions for a conflict (Balawajder, 2012).

Attachment Style: The default way in which an individual relates to other people, and broadly is either secure or insecure (Miller & Perlman, 2008).

Secure attachment style: A secure attachment style is an attachment style that is characterized by being comfortable with interdependence, as well as reliance on other people (Miller & Perlman, 2008).

Romantic relationship quality: An individual's assessment of the quality of their romantic relationship (Hendrick, 1988).

Theoretical Framework

The quality of the romantic relationship one has with their partner – relationship quality - is a concept with especially far-reaching implications. Relationship quality has significant effects on mortality rates, physical health, mental health, and general quality of life (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010; Robles et al., 2014; Holt-Lunstad et al., 2008). Because of the far-reaching implications associated with romantic relationship quality, understanding the factors that affect relational quality is imperative. Constructive conflict resolution styles, as well as having a secure attachment style, have both been extensively studied variables in terms of their effect on romantic satisfaction (Vollmann et al., 2019; Fincham et al., 2004). Constructive conflict resolution styles, such as negotiation and accommodation, have consistently been shown to be strong predictors of high-quality romantic relationships. Secure attachment styles, those characterized by an individual feeling relaxed and comfortable with trusting close others, have also been shown to be strong predictors of high romantic satisfaction. However, the influence of emotional intelligence on relationship quality is not yet well studied. Emotional intelligence refers to emotional competencies (perception, understanding, regulation, and constructive expression of emotions) that allow for the emotions to be used in adaptive ways (Malouff et al., 2013). Emotional regulation, for example, may appear to have obvious conceptual relevance to the quality of a romantic relationship; however, the

connection between emotional intelligence and relationship quality has not yet been thoroughly researched. The purpose of this study is to examine the relationships between emotional intelligence, constructive conflict resolution styles, attachment styles, and romantic relationship quality.

Research Questions & Hypotheses

Research Question: What is the relationship between emotional intelligence, conflict resolution styles, attachment styles, and romantic relationship quality?

H1: Higher levels of emotional intelligence will correlate to higher levels of romantic relationship quality.

H2: A constructive conflict resolution style will serve as the mediating variable between high emotional intelligence and high romantic relationship quality, as previous research supports the idea that emotionally intelligent couples tend to employ constructive conflict styles, and through this pathway, experience higher romantic relationship quality.

H3: A secure attachment style will serve as the moderating variable that strengthens the relationship between high emotional intelligence and high romantic relationship quality.

The conceptual framework for the proposed study is shown below in Fig. 1.

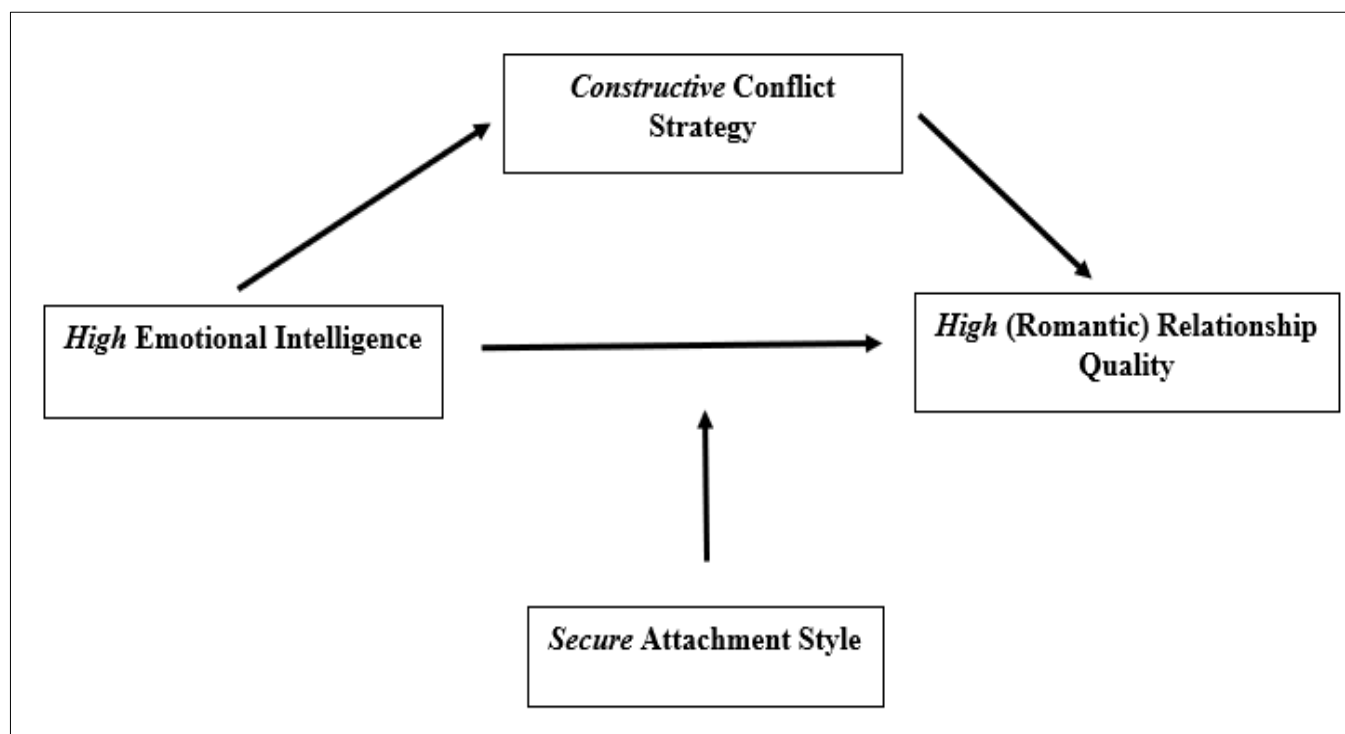


Fig. 1: Conceptual Model showing the proposed relationship between *high* emotional intelligence and *high* (romantic) relationship quality, as mediated by a *constructive* conflict style.



Literature Review

Emotional Intelligence

Historical Context and Gaps

Emotional Intelligence is a concept derived from the broad idea of Emotional Competence (Pérez-González et al., 2020). A collection of emotion-related skills (such as emotion perception, emotion knowledge, and emotion regulation) and dispositional qualities (such as emotional self-efficacy) that enable an individual to function effectively in contexts that are emotionally charged, have been collectively referred to as emotional competence. (Pérez-González et al., 2020). While the general concept of Emotional Competence has been used sparsely in the literature, it has lacked a comprehensive model to conceptualize it. Emotional intelligence has evolved to become the unifying framework for describing and assessing multiple components of Emotional Competence and has received unprecedented attention in the popular media and literature over the past three decades.

The field of Emotional Intelligence is a fairly new one- first coined by Mayer & Salovey in 1990 (Gayathri & Meenakshi, 2013). In its original idea, emotional intelligence was broadly proposed as the “ability to monitor one’s own and others’ feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions” (Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

Since its literary introduction in the early ‘90’s, the concept of an emotional intelligence has received tremendous attention in popular culture and media, partially due to Daniel Goleman’s best-selling popular book, *Emotional Intelligence* (Gayathri & Meenakshi, 2013; Mayer et al., 2008). However, although the concept of an emotional intelligence has been received enthusiastically by popular media and culture, the scientific data on emotional intelligence is only beginning to emerge (Fitness, 2001).

Approaches to Emotional Intelligence

Today, there are two distinct, albeit complementary models of Emotional Intelligence (EI) that dominate the literature: *Trait EI* and *Ability EI* (Gayathri & Meenakshi, 2013). Both models of EI, while measured differently, share significant conceptual overlap, as they are both derived from the general idea of Emotional Competence (Pérez-González et al., 2020). However, this thesis will focus solely on the

Trait EI: conceptualizes EI as a personality trait (Petrides, 2009). Based on the Trait Model, emotional intelligence is broadly defined as “how good we believe we are in terms of perceiving, understanding, managing, and utilizing our own and other people’s emotions” (Petrides et al., 2018). From this broad definition, Trait EI is theorized to be composed of 15 facets. The 15 facets of Trait EI are: “adaptability; assertiveness; the perception, expression, management and

regulation of emotions; self-esteem; low impulsiveness; relationship skills; self-motivation; stress management; social competence; trait empathy; trait happiness; and trait optimism” (Petrides & Furnham, 2001). Trait EI is generally measured through a self-report test, similar to a personality trait questionnaire (Petrides, 2010).

Trends and Themes in Trait Emotional Intelligence

Trait Emotional Intelligence. Trait emotional intelligence (EI) is conceptualized as a personality trait. Trait EI is comprised of four separate, yet interrelated, components: Emotionality, Self-control, Sociability, and Well-being (Petrides, 2010).

Emotionality. Individuals that are high in Emotionality in tune with others emotions, as well as their own. They are also able to clearly understand and express their emotions (Petrides, 2010). Individuals that are low in emotionality frequently struggle to comprehend their inner emotional states and have difficulty expressing their feelings to others (Petrides, 2010).

Self-control. Those that are high have a have a balanced degree of self-control. They are able to control impulsive behaviors and desires. People low in self-control are more likely to behave impulsively and have trouble regulating and controlling their emotions (Petrides, 2010).

Sociability. Those that are high are skilled at social interaction. They can effectively, confidently, and clearly communicate with people from a variety of backgrounds. Individuals that are low often believe that they are less likely to be effective networkers or negotiators in social interactions. They are unsure of what to do or say during socialization with others, and often appear withdrawn and reserved (Petrides, 2010).

Well-being. Those that are high often feel optimistic, and gratified, and contented. Those that are low tend to feel disappointed about life and are often pessimistic (Petrides, 2010).

Emotional Intelligence and Romantic Satisfaction

Schutte et al. (2001) speculate that many of the core components of emotional intelligence - such as understanding and regulating one’s emotions, being able to help others regulate their moods, and adaptive social skills - may be the foundations for building quality relationships with others. Schutte et al. (2001) argue that it would then be reasonable to expect that emotionally intelligent individuals would be more socially connected and have better relationships with others. Batool and Khalid (2011) also speculate that many core components of emotional intelligence, such as empathy, social skills, and assertiveness skills, may be the building blocks for the foundations of strong marriages. However, although scholars have emphasized the importance of emotional intelligence in intimate relationships, and have speculated



that more emotionally intelligent people should have happier relationships with their partners, only a sparse amount of literature exists that examines emotional intelligence within the context of romantic relationships (Fitness, 2001; Smith et al. 2008).

A small body of literature exists that examines the effects of emotional intelligence on the quality of romantic relationships (Smith et al., 2008). Of this small body of literature, the concept that emotional intelligence is positively correlated with relationship quality is supported (Heidari & Kumar, 2021; Brackett et al., 2005; Lavalekar et al., 2010; Schutte et al., 2001; Sidhu et al., 2019; Fakorede, 2019).

Emotional Intelligence and Relationship Quality

Smith et al. (2008), Heidari and Kumar (2021), and Fakorede (2019) examined the association between emotional intelligence and relationship quality.

Smith et al. (2008) explain that while emotional intelligence may seem to be obviously conceptually relevant to relationship quality, relatively few studies have examined this association. They hypothesized that EI would have a significant effect on romantic relationship quality. Their results indicated that self-rated EI was a significant predictor of relationship quality (Smith et al., 2008).

Heidari and Kumar (2021) explain that marital satisfaction is not something that comes naturally to an individual. Rather, the greater an individual's self-awareness and emotional skills - core components of emotional intelligence - the more likely they are to feel a strong sense of satisfaction in their marriage. To explore their rationale, Heidari and Kumar (2021) administered the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire-short form (TEIQue-sf), as well as the ENRICH marital satisfaction scale to participants. Their results demonstrated that emotional intelligence had a significant effect on marital satisfaction- as emotional intelligence increased, marital satisfaction did as well (Heidari & Kumar, 2021).

Fakorede's (2019) dissertation examined the association between EI and relationship quality in young adults and middle-aged adults. The results of the study indicated that there was a positive correlation between EI and relationship satisfaction- in both age groups of adults (Fakorede, 2019).

The previously mentioned studies by Smith et al. (2008), Heidari and Kumar (2021), and Fakorede (2019) support the idea that EI is an important predictor of relational quality. The notion that emotional intelligence is an important predictor of relationship quality is in agreement with previous theorists who speculate its importance in intimate relationships (Fitness, 2001; Petrides, 2001).

Overall, the concept that the Trait model of EI is supported by only a small amount of literature. Therefore, the first aim

of this study will be to add on to the small body of literature that examines the relationship between emotional intelligence and romantic relationship quality. Informed by these previously mentioned studies, the first hypothesis of this study will be:

H1: Higher levels of Emotional Intelligence will be correlated with higher levels of romantic relationship quality.

Conflict Resolution Styles and Romantic Relationship Quality

Conflict resolution styles have long been of interest to relationship researchers. More specifically, the effects of conflict resolution styles on relationship quality are well evidenced. A substantial body of research has examined the effects of conflict styles on various aspects of romantic relationships, including relationship quality (Fincham et al., 2004; Woodin, 2011; Driver et al., 2012; Fincham et al., 2004; Gottman & Notarius, 2000). In particular, the effects of constructive and destructive conflict resolution strategies have been well documented. As multiple comprehensive reviews of marital research suggest (Woodin, 2011; Driver et al., 2012; Fincham et al., 2004; Gottman & Notarius, 2000, Rands et al., 1981), constructive conflict resolution strategies, such as self-soothing or comprising, often are positively linked to marital quality. Conversely, destructive conflict resolution strategies, such as yelling or shutting down, generally have detrimental effects on marital quality.

Emotional Intelligence and Romantic relationship quality: The Underlying Mechanism of Conflict Resolution Styles

Having the ability to engage in constructive conflict resolution strategies would certainly require an individual to have the ability to perceive, manage, regulate, and express their emotions- core components of EI (Smith et al., 2008; Alonso-Ferres et al., 2019). "In fact, the art of knowing when, why, and how to say you are sorry in marriage, and the ability to practice forbearance even under the most trying circumstances, require many sophisticated emotional skills, including empathy, self-control, and a deep understanding of human needs and feelings. The interesting point about these skills is how remarkably similar they are to the proposed ingredients of emotional intelligence" (Fitness, 2001). Accordingly, the literature has shown that emotional intelligence plays a crucial role in the employment of constructive responses during conflicts (Alonso-Ferres et al., 2019).

Based on these presumptions, a large amount of research has examined the relationship between EI and chosen conflict resolution strategies (Winardi et al., 2021; Schlaerth et al., 2013). More specifically, however, the relationship between high EI, and the use of constructive conflict resolution styles, is well evidenced. However, a majority of this research has examined this association in

the context of the workplace (Winardi et al., 2021; Phaugad & Rajan, 2017; Schlaerth et al., 2013). Only a small amount of research has examined the relationship between EI and chosen conflict styles in the context of romantic relationships.

Emotional Intelligence and Couple Conflict Resolution Styles

Stolarski et. al, 2011 speculate that EI should play an essential role in conflict resolution styles utilized by couples. The scholars further explain that the accurate perception and understanding of others' emotions, as well as emotional self-regulation, may be key components of constructive conflict resolution. The researchers hypothesized that couples with high EI would be better at resolving conflicts and would use active and constructive strategies rather than passive and destructive ones. Their results indicated that EI was consistently positively related to self-report measures of constructive conflict styles, and negatively related to destructive conflict styles.

Monteiro and Balogun (2015) reason that within the context of romantic relationships, EI may be able to help explain how couples understand and deal with conflict. Emotional and social insight, as well as problem solving- the essence of EI- may be part of the skill repertoire that helps couples in handling conflict in a healthier manner. The researchers hypothesized that high EI would be positively related to the use of constructive conflict styles, such as accommodation and collaboration. Their results indicated that individuals with the highest EI reported engaging in collaboration, which is the most advanced form of conflict management. The researchers further explain that this is a noteworthy finding, as in the literature, collaboration is seen as the healthiest but most difficult approach to execute. What these findings highlight is that EI is an important factor in the use of higher-level relationship conflict strategies.

Batool and Khalid (2012) speculate that the secret of a healthy, loving marriage is not the absence of conflict, but rather, the manner in which conflict is resolved. The researchers reasoned that emotionally intelligent couples

tend to understand and manage the emotions of themselves and their partners. Because of their capacity to understand and regulate emotions, they may keep the relationship on track as a result of their social skill, empathy, and assertiveness, which aid in constructive conflict styles (Batool & Khalid, 2012). Batool and Khalid's (2012) results reported that EI was a significant predictor of conflict resolution in married partners "predicted 56% of the variance in conflict resolution of married partners," and note that previous studies have also emphasized the role of EI in conflict resolution styles (Batool and Khalid, 2012).

Emotional Intelligence, Couple Conflict Resolution Styles, and Relationship Quality

While previous studies support the notion that emotional intelligence has a positive correlation to couple relational quality, the underlying mechanisms for this are unclear. A small body of literature has explored the potential underlying mechanisms that explain the positive relationship between emotional intelligence and romantic relationship quality.

A small body of literature has examined the potential underlying mechanisms that may explain the positive relationship between emotional intelligence and romantic relationship quality (Smith et al., 2008; Zeidner & Kloda, 2013; Alonso-Ferres et al., 2019). Theorists have speculated that emotionally intelligent couples would be more likely to engage in constructive conflict styles with their partner, and through this pathway, experience higher relational quality (Smith et al., 2008; Zeidner & Kloda, 2013; Alonso-Ferres et al., 2019). Conceptually, these speculations would make logical sense: emotionally intelligent couples tend to engage in constructive conflict resolution styles with their partner (Stolarski et. al, 2011; Monteiro & Balogun, 2015; Batool & Khalid, 2012). Emotionally intelligent couples, through their use of constructive responses to conflict, should theoretically experience superior relational quality. See Fig. 2 for the proposed relationship between emotional intelligence, conflict resolution styles, and romantic relationship quality).

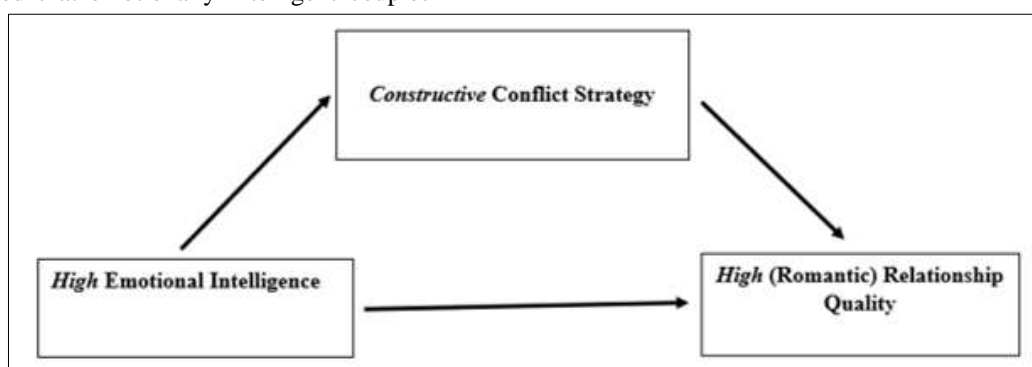


Fig. 2: A Conceptual Model showing the proposed relationship between *high* emotional intelligence and *high* (romantic) relationship quality, mediated by a *constructive* conflict resolution style



Smith et al. (2008) speculate that constructive conflict styles used by couples may be a potential underlying mechanism that helps explain the relationship between emotional intelligence and relational quality. Smith et al. (2008) proposed the question- Do emotionally intelligent couples experience greater satisfaction in their relationships? Are emotionally intelligent couples better equipped to employ constructive conflict strategies with their partners? To explore these questions further, Smith et al. (2008) proposed three hypotheses. Firstly, the authors hypothesized that EI would be positively correlated with relationship satisfaction. Secondly, the researchers hypothesized that couples high in EI would report engaging in constructive conflict strategies with their partner. Finally, it was hypothesized that couples low in EI would report engaging in destructive conflict strategies with their partner, such as demanding and withdrawing, or avoiding and withholding. Their results suggested that EI was positively correlated with relationship satisfaction, but only for men. It was also found that those high in EI reported engaging in constructive conflict styles with their partner. Conversely, those low in EI reported engaging in destructive conflict styles with their partner (Smith et al., 2008).

Alonso-Ferres et al. (2019) theorize that emotionally intelligent couples would be more likely to engage in constructive conflict resolution styles, and through this pathway, ultimately experience superior relational quality. The researchers examined the relationship between EI, conflict resolution styles, and relationship satisfaction in dating couples. Alonso-Ferres et al. (2019) explained that their “most noteworthy finding was that EI became a key factor associated to the adoption of adaptive conflict-facing responses... and, ultimately, to greater satisfaction with the relationship” (Alonso-Ferres et al., 2019). The researchers also noted that their results highlight the “importance of emotional skills in confronting conflicts that originate in intimate contexts such as romantic relationships” (Alonso-Ferres et al., 2019).

Other researchers have identified different factors that mediate the relationship between emotional intelligence and relational quality. Of these, perspective taking (Schróder-Abé & Schütz, 2011) and dyadic coping (Wollnya et al., 2020; Zeidner et al., 2013) were identified as mediating variables. This is particularly noteworthy, as perspective taking and dyadic coping certainly would help to facilitate constructive responses to conflict.

Thus, a small amount of previous research supports the concept that emotionally intelligent couples tend to employ constructive conflict styles with their partner, and through this pathway, experience higher relationship quality. Conversely, those with low EI tend to employ destructive conflict styles with their partner, and through this pathway, experience lower relational quality. Informed by this

previous research, the second hypothesis of this study will be:

H2: Individuals high in EI will report engaging in constructive conflict resolution strategies with their partner, and through this pathway, experience higher relationship quality.

Attachment Styles

Historical Context of Attachment Styles

The concept of an attachment style was first theorized by Bowlby in 1969 (Miller & Perlman, 2008). Long ago, developmental researchers began to realize that infants displayed three observable patterns of attachment to their major caregiving figure (usually their mother): secure attachment, anxious-ambivalent attachment, and avoidant attachment (Bowlby, 1969). The infants who had caregivers that were readily responsive and protective of them learned that others were trustworthy sources of security, and as a result, developed a secure attachment style (Bowlby, 1969; Miller & Perlman, 2008). By having a secure attachment style, these infants learned to have relaxed, trusting relationships with their caregiver and others (Bowlby, 1969; Miller & Perlman, 2008). However, infants that had unpredictable and inconsistent warmth and protection from caregivers developed an anxious-ambivalent attachment style (Bowlby, 1969; Miller & Perlman, 2008). The infants with an anxious ambivalent attachment style, because of the inconsistency of their caregiver, became clingy, nervous, and excessively needy in their relationship with their caregiver and others (Bowlby, 1969; Miller & Perlman, 2008). Finally, infants that received hostile or rejecting warmth and protection from their caregivers developed an avoidant attachment style (Bowlby, 1969; Miller & Perlman, 1969). The infants with an avoidant attachment style were withdrawn, often upset or non-trusting of others, and found difficulty in forming trusting, close relationships with others (Bowlby, 1969; Miller & Perlman, 1969).

Since the original theory of attachment in infants, researchers have proposed and examined attachment theory in adults. Hazan and Shaver (1987) were the first researchers to examine attachment theory in adults. They proposed that similar styles of attachment can be seen in adults within their close relationships with others (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). That is, adults can display a secure style of attachment with close others, marked by being relaxed and comfortable with depending on others. In contrast, adults can also display insecure styles of attachment with close others, marked by a lack of trust towards others and a lack of comfort in depending on others (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

Currently, it is believed that there are four different patterns of attachment styles seen in adults: secure, preoccupied, dismissive, and fearful. It is now generally accepted that there are “two broad themes underlie and distinguish the four styles of adult attachment” (Miller & Perlman, 2008).

First, people differ in their *avoidance of intimacy*. Those who have a low “avoidance of intimacy” are comfortable and relaxed in their close relationships. In contrast, those who are high in “avoidance of intimacy” feel uneasy with being close with others. Secondly, people differ in their *anxiety about abandonment*. Those who are low in “anxiety about abandonment” feel a low level of anxiety about somebody leaving them. In contrast, those who are high in “anxiety about abandonment” feel a large level of anxiety about somebody leaving them (Miller & Perlman, 2008). The level of each dimension lays a foundation for the four different styles of adult attachment: secure, preoccupied, dismissive, and fearful.

Secure Attachment. Those with a secure attachment style are low in their avoidance of intimacy, and low in their avoidance about abandonment. Those with a secure attachment style are “comfortable with intimacy and interdependence” (Miller & Perlman, 2008).

Preoccupied Attachment. Those with a preoccupied attachment style are high in anxiety about abandonment and low in their avoidance of intimacy. Those with a preoccupied attachment style are “uneasy and vigilant toward any threat to the relationship; needy and jealous” (Miller & Perlman, 2008).

Dismissing Attachment. Those with a dismissing attachment style are high in their avoidance of intimacy and low in their anxiety about abandonment. Those with a dismissing attachment style are “self-reliant and uninterested in intimacy; indifferent and independent” (Miller & Perlman, 2008).

Fearful Attachment. Those with a fearful attachment style are high in their anxiety about abandonment and high in their avoidance of intimacy. Those with a fearful attachment style are “fearful of rejection and mistrustful of others; suspicious and shy” (Miller & Perlman, 2008).

Attachment Styles and Romantic Relationship Quality

A large amount of previous research has supported the theory that adult attachment styles are an important predictor of relationship satisfaction (Vollmann et al., 2019). It is also well evidenced that those who have a secure attachment style have consistently higher levels of relational quality than those who have an insecure style of attachment (Vollmann et al., 2019; Senchak & Leonard, 1992; Gleeson & Fitzgerald, 2014). In addition, those who have a secure style of attachment have also been shown to experience better overall marital adjustment (Senchack et al., 1992). Insecure attachment styles have been shown consistently to be related to low quality romantic relationships (Vollmann et al., 2019; Senchak & Leonard, 1992; Gleeson & Fitzgerald, 2014).

Emotional Intelligence, Attachment Styles, and Relationship Quality

Thus, previous research has indicated that emotionally intelligent couples tend to employ constructive conflict styles with their partner. Through their employment of constructive conflict styles, these couples ultimately experience higher quality relationships. In addition to this, a secure attachment style is a foundational building block of a high-quality romantic relationship. Therefore, those who are emotionally intelligent, employ constructive conflict styles, and have a secure style of attachment, in theory, should experience the highest quality relationship.

Thus, informed by this previous research, the third hypothesis of this study will be:

H3: Having a secure attachment style will serve as the moderating variable between higher emotional intelligence and higher relationship quality (See Fig. 3).

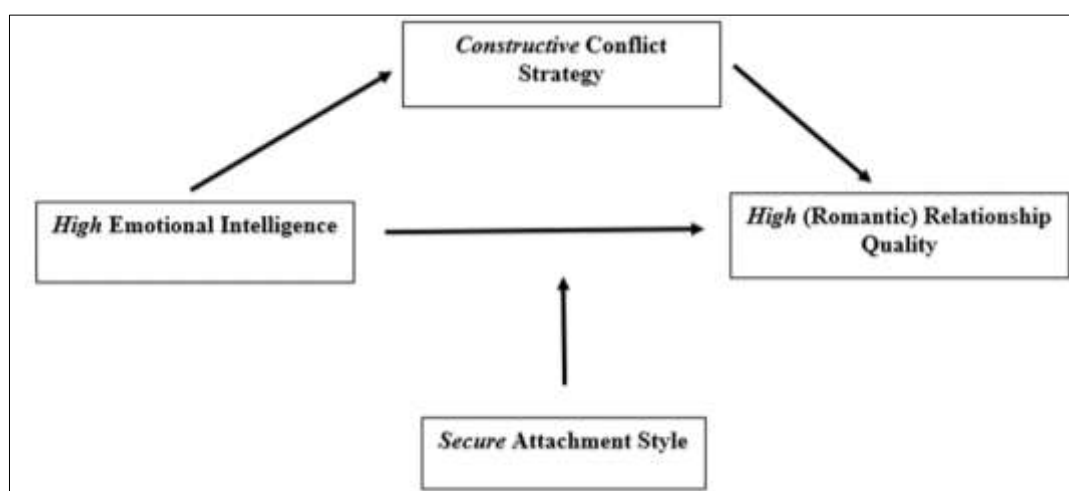


Fig. 3: A Conceptual Model showing the proposed relationship between *high* emotional intelligence and *high* (romantic) relationship quality, as mediated by a *constructive* conflict style, moderated by a *secure* attachment style.



Method

Recruitment and Participants

IRB approval for this study was given by the researcher's university before participant recruitment began. Participants were recruited from the graduate and undergraduate student population of the researcher's university, as well as through social media. Potential participants were recruited through a mass email sent from university professors at the researcher's university. The mass email contained an IRB pre-approved script containing a link to the consent form, demographic variable form, surveys, and debriefing form for the study. Potential participants from social media platforms were recruited through a pre-approved script for recruitment. Data collection for this study began on March 1st, 2022, and concluded on December 1st, 2022.

Procedure

This study utilized convenience sampling. All data for this study was collected through Qualtrics. Participants were sent an IRB approved email which contained a link to the survey. Participants were also recruited through social media. If participants met eligibility requirements, they were then able to complete four anonymous online surveys on Qualtrics.

Measures

The Relationship Assessment Scale

The Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS; Hendrick, 1988) is a 7-item test that uses a Likert measure of general relationship satisfaction. There are five response categories for each question, ranging from 1 to 5, however, the content of each response category differs. For example, the response categories for the item "In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?" range from 1 = "unsatisfied" to 5 = "extremely satisfied." In contrast, the response categories for the item "How well does your partner meet your needs?" range from 1 = "poorly" to 5 = "extremely well." To score this instrument, you add the items and divide by 7 to get an average score. Negatively worded items (i.e., items 4 and 7) are recoded prior to summation so that higher scores indicate greater relationship satisfaction. Total scores can range from 3 to 21, with high scores meaning higher relationship satisfaction. The items are general enough to be appropriate for dating couples, couples who are living together, or married couples (Hendrick, 1988). The RAS was chosen in this study to measure relationship satisfaction because a population of college students is likely to be in a wide variety of intimate relationships, such as dating couples, cohabiting couples, or married couples. Thus, because of the scale's ability to measure general relationship satisfaction in a wide variety of intimate relationships, it would be especially appropriate to use with a population of college students. (Hendrick, 1988) states that "the RAS has

a coherent factor structure, is internally consistent, is solidly and consistently related to measures of relevant constructs such as love and self-esteem and shows an extremely high correlation with the longer Dyadic Adjustment Scale, a well-respected measure of dyadic satisfaction."

Experiences in Close Relationships Scale- Short Form

The ECR-S (Wei et al., 2007) is a short version derived from the original Experiences in Close Relationships (ECR) scale. The ECR-S is a 12-item self-report test that measures an adult's attachment style. Respondents use a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (disagree strongly) to 7 (agree strongly) to respond to the items. The scale consists of two subscales that measure an individual's level of attachment anxiety and level of attachment avoidance. Attachment anxiety is defined as involving a fear of interpersonal rejection or abandonment. An example of a question from the anxiety attachment subscale is "My desire to be very close sometimes scares people away." Attachment avoidance is defined as involving a fear of interpersonal intimacy. An example of a question from the attachment avoidance subscale is "I try to avoid getting too close to my partner." People who score high on either or both of these dimensions are assumed to have an insecure adult attachment orientation. By contrast, people with low levels of attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance can be viewed as having a secure adult attachment orientation. (Items 3, 5, 7, and 9 are reverse scored). "In examining the shortened version, the results indicate that the 12-item ECR-S provides a reliable and valid measure of adult attachment. The psychometric properties (i.e., internal consistency, test-retest reliability, factor structure, and validity) of the short (12-item) version of the scale appeared to be comparable or equivalent to the original (36-item) version of the scale" (Wei et al., 2007).

Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire- Short Form (TEIQue-SF)

The Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire- short form (TEIQue-SF) consists of 30 items designed to measure global trait emotional intelligence. The TEIQue-SF (Petrides & Furnham, 2001) is derived from the full form of the TEIQue, which covers 15 distinct facets. Two items from each of the 15 facets were selected for inclusion in the short form, which uses a Likert-style response option format, ranging from 1 (Completely Disagree) to 7 (Completely Agree). An example of a question is "Expressing my emotions with words is not a problem for me." A global trait EI score is calculated by summing up the item scores and dividing by the total number of items. The TEIQue-SF does not yield scores on the 15 trait EI facets, instead, it yields a global trait EI score. In two studies examining the psychometric properties of the TEIQue-SF, Cooper and Petrides (2010) note, "At the global level, the TEIQue-SF showed very good psychometric properties at the item and global level...the studies suggest the TEIQue-



SF can be recommended when a rapid assessment of trait emotional intelligence is required” (Cooper & Petrides, 2010).

Conflict Behavior Questionnaire

The Conflict Behavior Questionnaire (Balawajder, 2012) is a 12-item scale that employs a multiple-choice design. Each question asks an individual what their response would be in reaction to a specific aspect of a conflict situation. An example of a question is: “If I do not like the way my partner acts, then: A. I bully him and show my displeasure B. I ask why he is acting this way, explain my own behavior and try to find a solution that satisfies both of us. C. I boldly defend my position, my case. D. I do not oppose him because it will not help.” Each answer choice is intended to categorize an individual into a specific style of conflict management: either yielding, attack, defense, or amicable settlement. In a study of the psychometric properties of the conflict behavior questionnaire, it was concluded that the Conflict Behavior Questionnaire “meets the essential accuracy and reliability requirements of a questionnaire [designed to measure conflict styles]” (Balawajder, 2012). The Conflict Behavior Questionnaire is an ideal measure for this proposed study because of its short length

h, ease of administration, as well as simplistic categorization of conflict styles.

Data Analysis

All data for this study was analyzed using SPSS software. To test hypothesis one, a correlational test was conducted to determine if the correlation between emotional intelligence and relationship satisfaction was significant. For hypothesis two, (as recommended by Baron & Kenny) firstly, a bivariate regression analysis was conducted to determine if the total effect of emotional intelligence on relationship satisfaction was significant. For hypothesis three, the PROCESS MACRO extension by Andrew Hayes was utilized in SPSS in order to determine the moderating effects of an anxious, avoidant, and secure attachment style.

Results

Demographic Data

There were 107 total respondents for this study. Of the 107 participants, 84 (78.5%) were female, and 24 (22.4%) were male. Participants were predominantly young adults (47.6% were age 18-25), Hispanic (48.5%), and well educated (56.2% were college degree holders). All demographic data is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographics of Sample

Demographic	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender:		
Male	24	22.4
Female	84	78.5
Age:		
18-25	51	47.6
26-35	34	31.7
35-46	10	9.3
46-60	10	9.3
60-75	2	1.8
75 and Older	1	0.93
Ethnicity:		
Hispanic	52	48.5
Caucasian	34	31.7
African American	12	11.2
Other	7	6.5
Asian	3	2.8

**Table 1:** Demographics of Sample (Continued)

Demographic	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Income:		
Less than \$15,000	32	29.9
\$15,000 to \$24,000	8	7.4
\$24,000 to \$35,000	8	7.4
\$35,000 to \$49,000	12	11.2
\$49,000 to \$74,000	28	26.1
\$74,000 to \$99,000	10	9.3
\$99,000 to \$149,000	8	7.4
\$149,000 to \$199,000	2	1.8
Highest Level of Education:		
8 th -12 th Grade	1	0.9
High School	16	14.9
Some College	30	28.0
Associate degree	8	7.4
Bachelor's degree	37	34.5
Master's degree	14	13.0
PhD or Doctorate	2	1.8
Religion:		
Christian	47	43.9
Catholic	16	14.9
Atheist	15	14
Non-Denominational	10	9.3
Agnostic	6	5.6
Baptist	3	2.8
Other	7	6.5
Length of Relationship:		
Less than one year	31	28.9
1-5 Years	47	43.9
6-10 Years	21	19.6
11-15 Years	5	4.6
16-40 Years	2	1.8
41 and longer	1	0.9

**Table 2:** Differences on emotional intelligence scores and relationship satisfaction scores by conflict style and attachment style

	Emotional Intelligence			Relationship Satisfaction		
	M	SD	n	M	SD	n
Variables						
Conflict Styles						
Amicable	5.10	.69	86	25.38	2.49	87
Defensive	4.94	.64	18	24.17	2.46	18
Yield	4.33	.58	3	22.67	3.21	3
Total	5.06	.68	108	25.10	2.55	108
Attachment Style						
Secure	5.13	.65	85	25.60	2.27	85
Anxious	4.92	.79	12	23.38	2.75	13
Avoidant	4.60	.70	10	23.10	2.85	10
Total	5.06	.68	108	25.10	2.55	108

Descriptive Statistics

The average EI score for all participants was 5.06 (SD = .68, n = 108), and the average RAS score for all participants was 25.10 (SD = 2.55, n = 108). Those with a constructive style of conflict (amicable style) had the highest EI scores (M = 5.10, SD = .69, n = 86), as well as the highest relationship satisfaction scores (M = 25.38, SD = 2.49, n = 86). Participants with a secure style of attachment had the highest EI scores (M = 5.13, SD = .65, n = 85), as well as the highest relationship satisfaction scores (M = 25.60, SD = 2.27, n = 85). All descriptive statistics are displayed in Table 2.

Inferential Statistics

Hypothesis One

Hypothesis one predicted that higher emotional intelligence would be correlated with higher relationship satisfaction. A Pearson product-moment correlation was used to test hypothesis one, with emotional intelligence (recorded as a score from 1 to 7) as the predictor variable and relationship satisfaction (recorded as a score from 0 to 30) as the outcome variable. There was a weak, positive correlation between emotional intelligence and relationship satisfaction, which was not statistically significant ($r = .153$, $p = .117$, $n = 107$). This contradicts the first hypothesis that high emotional intelligence would correlate with high relationship satisfaction. Thus, hypothesis one was rejected.

Hypothesis Two

Hypothesis two predicted that an amicable conflict style would mediate the relationship between emotional intelligence and relationship satisfaction.

The potential mediating role of an amicable conflict style was tested by the criteria of Baron and Kenny (1986), which suggested a research procedure to determine whether there is a mediation effect. To determine a mediation, four criteria must be fulfilled: (a) the independent variable must affect the dependent variable(s); (b) The independent variable must affect the mediator; (c) The mediator must affect the dependent variable(s); and (d) A significant influence of the independent variable on the dependent variable(s) weakens in the presence of the mediator.

In order to test criterion (a), a bivariate regression was conducted to analyze the total effect of emotional intelligence on relationship satisfaction. The total effect of emotional intelligence on relationship satisfaction was non-significant ($B = .163$, $p = .093$, $SE = .359$, $R^2 = .027$). With the failure of the first criterion of Baron and Kenny (1986), it was concluded that there was no mediation of an amicable conflict style in the relationship between emotional intelligence and relationship satisfaction. Thus, hypothesis two was also rejected.

Hypothesis Three

Hypothesis three predicted that a secure style of attachment would moderate the relationship between emotional intelligence and relationship satisfaction.

In order to test the moderating effect of attachment style on the relationship between emotional intelligence and relationship satisfaction, an SPSS extension, Process Macro, was utilized. Emotional intelligence was entered as the independent variable, relationship satisfaction as entered as the dependent variable, and attachment styles (categorically coded) were entered as the moderating variables.

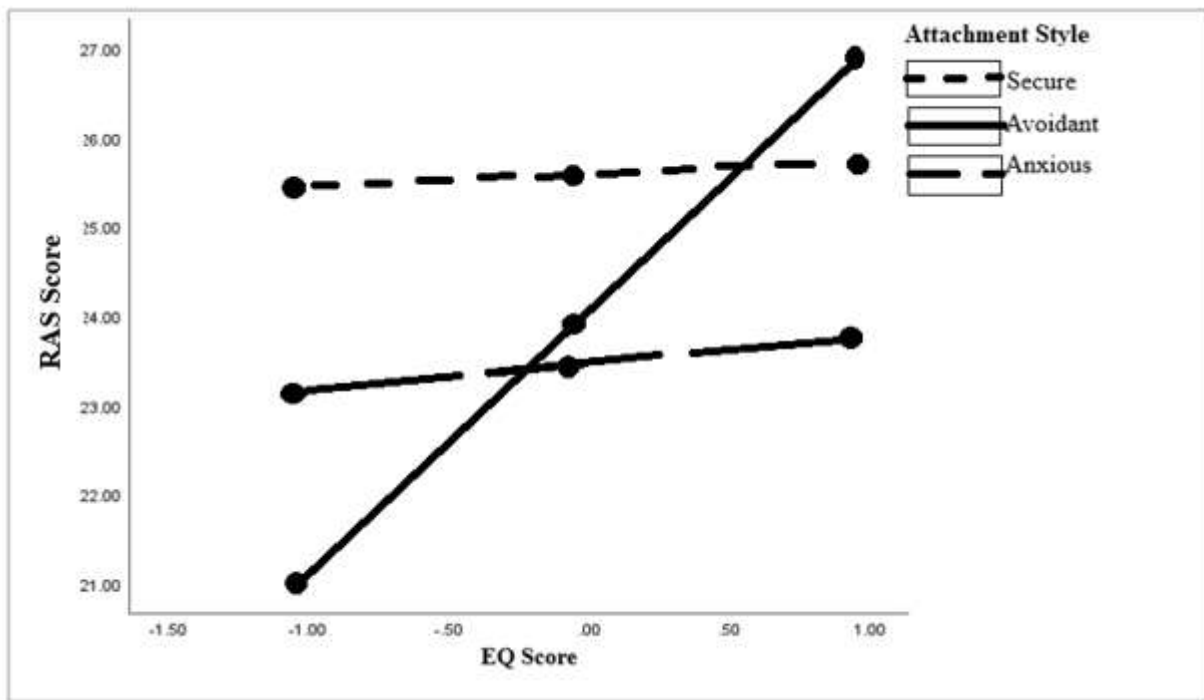


Fig. 4: Simple Slopes for the relationship between EI score and relationship satisfaction by a secure attachment style, avoidant attachment style, and anxious attachment style.

The moderation analysis revealed an overall model which was significant. Specifically, relationship satisfaction and EI were significantly moderated by attachment style ($R^2 = .1926$, $F(5,101) = 4.1897$, $p = .000$). Together, the predictor variables explained 19.26% of the variance in relationship satisfaction. However, the interaction between emotional intelligence and attachment style was non-significant (Change in $R^2 = .045$, $F(2,101) = 2.8431$, $p = .06$).

The interaction effect between EI and a secure style of attachment was significant ($B = -.2835$, $p = .8915$). The interaction effect between EI and an avoidant attachment style was significant ($B = 2.9185$, $p = .0190$). The interaction effect between EI and an anxious style of attachment was non-significant ($B = .2679$, $p = .7839$).

Simple slopes for the association between EI and relationship satisfaction were tested for secure, avoidant, and anxious attachment styles. Each of the simple slope tests revealed a positive association between EI and relationship satisfaction; however, this was only significant for the avoidant group ($B = 3.000$, $p = .01$). Neither the anxious group ($B = .3494$, $p = .6967$) nor the secure group ($B = .0815$, $p = .8339$) showed a significant relationship. See Fig. 4 for a graphical representation of the simple slope analysis.

Discussion

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and relationship satisfaction. This study also sought to examine whether the

relationship between emotional intelligence and relationship satisfaction was mediated through a constructive conflict style, or moderated through a secure attachment style. The results of this study indicated that while there was a weak, positive correlation between emotional intelligence and relationship satisfaction, the relationship between them was not significant. The results of this study also indicated that there was no mediation between these two variables through an amicable conflict style, nor was there moderation through a secure attachment style.

In line with the hypothesis that emotional intelligence and relationship satisfaction would be positively correlated, there was evidence for this within the results of this study. However, the relationship between these variables was non-significant. Contrary to the hypothesis that the relationship between emotional intelligence and relationship satisfaction would be mediated by a constructive conflict style, the results found no mediation effects. However, those with a constructive (amicable) conflict style did report the highest levels of relationship satisfaction, in comparison to individuals with destructive (yielding and defensive) conflict styles. Finally, also contrary to the hypothesis that a secure attachment style would serve as a moderating variable, the results showed no such evidence. However, the relationship between EI and relationship satisfaction was significantly moderated by an avoidant attachment style. In addition to this, those with a secure attachment style did report the highest levels of relationship satisfaction, in comparison to those with an anxious or avoidant style of



attachment. Overall, the three hypotheses of this study were rejected.

Potential reasons for the lack of significance in the relationship between EI and relationship satisfaction could be related to the lack of variability in the EI and relationship satisfaction scores. The participant range of EI scores was between 4-6, and all participants scored relatively high on the RAS measure. Because there were no low scores on EI, and participants scored fairly high on RAS, this study was unable to draw a correlation between low EI and low relationship satisfaction. In addition to the lack of variability in the data, the participant pool was also very homogenous (fairly well educated, middle to middle upper class, and religious), making variability in the results unlikely. While hypothesis three was not directly supported, this study did find that attachment style moderated the relationship between EI and relationship satisfaction; however, it was moderated by an unpredicted variable- an avoidant attachment style.

The results of this study contradict previous evidence that EI and relationship satisfaction share a significant, positive correlation. The results of this study also contradict previous evidence that emotional intelligence is related to constructive styles of conflict, as well as previous evidence that a secure attachment style will strengthen the relationship between EI and relationship satisfaction. There could be several potential reasons for the discrepancies between the results of this study and results of previous studies related to this topic. Previous research may have had more variability in their participant data (such as low EI and low relationship satisfaction scores), thus making finding statistical significance more likely. Other research may have also had much larger and more diverse sets of participant pools, thus making variability in the data more likely. Finally, previous research on this topic may have also used more valid or reliable measures of emotional intelligence, such as the longer form of the EI questionnaire used in this study, thereby giving a more accurate measure of EI.

Limitations and Future Research

This study was not without limitations. The participant pool of this study was quite homogenous (predominantly female, well educated, and Hispanic) limiting the generalizability of the results to other populations. Potential reasons for the homogenous population in this study could be related to the manner in which participants were recruited- such as through social media recruitment only reaching a certain demographic. In addition, a majority of the participants were recruited through the researcher's family members. Finally, recruitment was also aimed at the psychology graduate student population of the researchers university, which is a predominantly female, as well as Hispanic and Caucasian- thus making the graduate student population of

the researcher's university representative of a small demographic. Aside from recruitment limitations, this, a large set of participant data was excluded (43 participants total) due to Qualtrics errors in collecting data, limiting potentially significant results of this study. In addition, the short form of the trait EI measure that was used (for the purposes of practicality), which may have given less accurate measurements of EI scores than its longer counterpart. Finally, this study relied solely on self-report measures. While self-report measures may provide interesting and insightful insight, they are also inherently biased, thus limiting their accuracy.

Future research related to this topic should attempt to recruit from a more diverse population, thus increasing the likelihood of variability in the data. Future research should also utilize more reliable and valid measures for each variable, as the measurements used for this study were much shorter and less reliable than their longer counterparts (for the purposes of practicality). In addition to this, an ANOVA statistical analysis procedure may be more appropriate to analyze data for future research related to this topic, as ANOVA examines differences in averages between groups. As the p values of a majority of this study were non-significant, an ANOVA analysis would more thoroughly examine group differences on RAS scores by attachment style and conflict style. Lastly, future research should also examine why an avoidant attachment style may moderate the relationship between EI and relationship satisfaction.

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