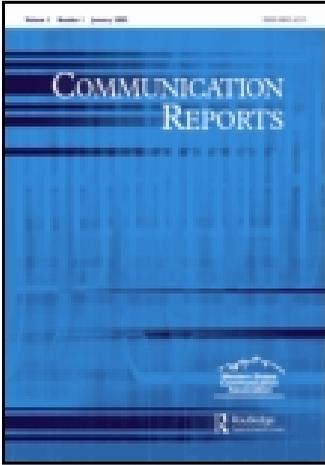


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Megan R. Dillow^a, Alan K. Goodboy^a & San Bolkan^b

^a Department of Communication Studies, West Virginia University

^b Department of Communication Studies, California State University, Long Beach

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Attachment and the Expression of Affection in Romantic Relationships: The Mediating Role of Romantic Love

Megan R. Dillow, Alan K. Goodboy, & San Bolkan

Extant research demonstrates interrelationships among attachment style, love, and affectionate expression, but is less edifying regarding how these constructs work together. Informed by attachment theory (Bowlby, 1980) and the conceptualization of love as a motivational force (Rempel & Burris, 2005), the current study posits love as a mediator of the associations among attachment styles and affectionate communication. To examine this claim, 173 individuals in romantic relationships completed a questionnaire assessing the variables of interest. A path model revealed significant indirect effects (with the exception of the secure attachment style), and love mediated the relationships among preoccupied and dismissive attachment styles and affectionate expression. These findings suggest the important motivating capacity of love, an often overlooked predictor of relational processes.

Keywords: Affectionate Communication; Attachment Styles; Romantic Love; Romantic Relationships

Affection (including expressing and receiving love and emotional support) has long been identified as one of three basic interpersonal needs that individuals fulfill in the context of satisfying relationships with others (Schutz, 1958). Communicating affection, “an individual’s intentional and overt enactment or expression of feelings of closeness, care, and fondness for another” (Floyd & Morman, 1998, p. 145), is

Megan R. Dillow (PhD, The Pennsylvania State University, 2006) and Alan K. Goodboy (PhD, West Virginia University, 2007) are Associate Professors in the Department of Communication Studies at West Virginia University. San Bolkan (PhD, University of Texas, Austin, 2007) is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication Studies at California State University, Long Beach. Correspondence to: Megan R. Dillow, 108 Armstrong Hall, P.O. Box 6293, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV 26506, USA. E-mail: mrdillow@mix.wvu.edu

therefore an essential behavior in any functional romantic relationship. Affectionate communication includes nonverbal behaviors such as kissing and hugging, as well as verbal affirmations of love and support (Floyd & Morman, 1998; Gullede, Gullede, & Stahmann, 2003). Communicating affection in relationships has a positive impact on a myriad of physical (e.g., the stress hormone cortisol; Floyd, 2006b; Floyd & Riforgiate, 2008) and mental health (e.g., depression; Floyd et al., 2005; Hesse & Floyd, 2008) outcomes. In addition, the expression of affection is associated with indicators of relational quality, including relational satisfaction (Gullede et al., 2003; Floyd et al., 2005; Floyd et al., 2009; Horan & Booth-Butterfield, 2010), relational closeness and happiness (Floyd et al., 2005; Hesse & Floyd, 2008), and liking and loving (Floyd et al., 2005).

Undoubtedly, partners who give and receive affection benefit both psychologically and physically, although expressing affection is not automatically positive (Floyd & Pauley, 2011). Further, despite its typical benefits, not everyone expresses affection equivalently. Floyd (2002) noted that some romantic partners are quite affectionate whereas others are not, and subsequent research suggests that the tendency toward expressing affection is both a trait and state (Floyd, Pauley, & Hesse, 2010), which begs the question: why do some individuals communicate more affection than others?

Two important influences on the expression of affection are an individual's attachment style (Floyd, 2002; Simpson, Rholes, & Nelligan, 1992; Simpson, 1990) and his/her experience of romantic love (Floyd & Morr, 2003). In addition, attachment styles have themselves been shown to influence the experience of romantic love (Madey & Rodgers, 2009). Extant research demonstrates clear associations between these sets of variables, separately, but when taken together, the findings suggest a larger pattern by which attachment styles affect romantic love, which then impacts affectionate communication. In fact, in articulating attachment theory, Bowlby (1980) himself suggested that the influence of attachment styles on relevant outcomes should be seen through the quality of an individual's "affectional bonds," effectively claiming a mediated relationship (p. 40). Despite this, the complexity of these interrelationships, wherein romantic love may be a conduit through which attachment styles impact the expression of affection, has not yet been fully considered. To test this postulation, the central aim of this study is to explore romantic love's role as a potential mediator of the relationships among attachment styles and affectionate communication.

Positioning romantic love as a mediator of attachment styles' effect on relationally relevant outcomes such as affection expression suggests that attachment's impact on those relational outcomes can be altered. Affectionate communication is a necessary behavior in close relationships, yet those with avoidant attachment styles (e.g., dismissive and fearful) should be generally less likely to communicate such affection. However, if love indeed functions to mediate this relationship, it may be that increased feelings of romantic love temper the antirelationship behaviors (e.g., evading close connections with others) that are enacted by those with an avoidant attachment style (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). This study represents one of

the first of its kind to examine the theoretically based claim that love (as an indicator of an individual's affectional connections with another) might intervene, in positive ways, in attachment's effect on relational outcomes. Establishing love as a mediator of these processes is particularly meaningful in the case of those with avoidant attachment styles, as love may represent a key variable that ameliorates the otherwise potentially damaging impact of avoidant attachment styles on relational processes.

Attachment, Love, and Affectionate Communication

Attachment theory considers the impact of individuals' perceptions of themselves and others on relational decisions, with the assumption that these perceptions are grounded in the types of attachment that were experienced as infants with primary caregivers. For decades, dispositional factors such as attachment style have been studied when examining individual differences in relational behavior. Attachment theory is based on Bowlby's (1973) work on understanding the relational bonds that are developed between infants and their primary caregivers. This work with infants spawned later research that extended the notion of attachment style into the realm of adult relationships. These efforts served as the impetus for a plethora of research regarding these individual differences in attitudes about individuals' positive regard for both themselves and others.

Based on Bowlby's (1973) early work with infants, Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) proposed a four-category adult attachment style typology that centers on individuals' perceptions of self and others. These evaluations lead to particular perceptions of and orientations toward close others and relationships. The first type of adult attachment style is termed *secures*, and these individuals are noted for having positive regard for themselves and for others. They are confident in their relationships with others and have a positive orientation toward love, believing in its enduring qualities, and a positive orientation toward others, perceiving that they are trustworthy (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). *Preoccupied* individuals are characterized by negative regard for themselves but positive regard for others. They are oriented toward love and others in the sense that they value close relationships and are quick to fall in love, yet they have trouble finding true or lasting love (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). *Dismissive avoidant* individuals have positive regard for themselves but negative regard for others, and *fearful avoidant* individuals display negative regard for both themselves and for others. Avoidant individuals are not oriented toward love or others; they are doubtful regarding romantic love and often experience emotional turbulence and fear of intimacy (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

Studies examining these attachment styles in the context of romantic and other types of relationships indicate a relationship between attachment style and the communication of affection. For instance, Tucker and Anders (1998) found that those with secure attachment styles generally engaged in more nonverbal immediacy behaviors such as increased touch, positive affect, and eye gaze, all of which are indicators of nonverbal affectionate expression, than those with avoidant attachment styles. Similarly, Guerrero's (1996) investigation of attachment styles and their impact on

intimacy and affiliation cues in romantic relationships revealed that individuals with secure or preoccupied attachment styles displayed more involvement behaviors which are representative of nonverbal expressions of affection, such as eye gaze, vocal and facial pleasantness, receptivity, attentiveness, and interest. Finally, Floyd (2002) found individuals with secure attachment styles and those who report more comfort with intimacy and closeness expressed higher levels of affection, while those with a fearful avoidant attachment style communicated lower levels of affection.

In addition to demonstrating associations between attachment and affection expression, extant research also reveals a connection between attachment and the experience of love. Indeed, Hazan and Shaver (1987) suggest that love and attachment are intertwined, conceptualizing romantic love as an attachment process by which partners bond with each other in ways similar to those of infants bonding with primary caregivers. Specifically, Hazan and Shaver found support for the notion that differently attached individuals have different love experiences. In particular, securely attached individuals perceived their love experiences to be “friendly, happy, and trusting” (Hazan & Shaver, 1987, p. 518). Conversely, those with an avoidant attachment style reported that their love experiences were characterized by fear of intimacy, and individuals with an anxious ambivalent attachment style (which corresponds to Bartholomew and Horowitz’s [1991] notion of a preoccupied attachment style) perceived their love experiences as “marked by jealousy, emotional highs and lows, and desire for reciprocation [of feelings]” (Hazan & Shaver, 1987, p. 518).

Scholarly research on love reveals various conceptualizations and operationalizations of the construct. For instance, love has been conceptualized as an interpersonal attitude encompassing elements of exclusivity, trust, caring, and dependence (Rubin, 1970), and this characterization of love has been investigated in conjunction with attachment styles (if at times indirectly). Although tangential to the overall goal of their study, Jin and Pena’s (2010) findings demonstrate a strong negative correlation between avoidant attachment and love. Alternatively, love has also been conceptualized as a tripartite combination of intimacy, commitment, and passion (Sternberg, 1986), and employing this operationalization, Madey and Rodgers (2009) found that insecure attachment (e.g., the preoccupied and avoidant styles) was negatively associated with each element of love. Just as attachment styles and love are related, the experience of love, in turn, is associated with affectionate communication.

“Of course, the experience and the expression of affection are inextricably linked,” according to Floyd (2006a, p. 5), but by the same token, they are distinct experiences. Individuals do not always express affection that they feel for another, perhaps because they perceive it would be inappropriate to do so (Floyd & Morman, 1997) or because they wish to strategically inhibit their affection expression (Ekman & Friesen, 1975). However, individuals frequently *do* express their affectionate feelings, such as love, for a partner. Floyd and colleagues’ research (Floyd, 2002; Floyd et al., 2005) indicated an association between judgments of relational importance and highly affectionate communication. Although not all relationships of importance are characterized by romantic love, those that are distinguished by love are likely considered important; thus, feelings of love should contribute to affectionate communication.

In addition, Floyd and Morr (2003) discovered that more affection is expressed in marriages as compared to sibling or sibling-in-law relationships, and most marital relationships, presumably, are characterized by romantic love. Taken together, these findings suggest that feelings of love encourage affectionate expression.

Other research offers more direct support for this supposition, such as Marston, Hecht, and Robers's (1987) investigation, which revealed a link between particular experiences of love (e.g., collaborative love, active love, traditional romantic love, intuitive love, etc.) and specific expressions of love (e.g., being supportive of each other, discussing emotions, discussing a future commitment, verbally stating "I love you," nonverbally communicating love, etc.). Additionally, first order correlations revealed a moderately positive association between love and the expression of physical affection (e.g., hugging, kissing, etc.) in marital relationships (Dainton, Stafford, & Canary, 1994). Finally, Floyd et al. (2005) found that love was positively associated with both expressed and received affection. Collectively, the results from these various studies demonstrate relationships between attachment styles and affection expression, attachment styles and romantic love, and romantic love and affection expression.

Although extant research suggests that associations exist among all of the variables of interest in the current study, their interrelationships may be more complex than has been fully considered thus far. Theoretically, the impact of attachment styles on affectionate communication should be operative through the quality of an individual's feelings for or emotions toward another (Bowlby, 1980; Pielage, Luteijm, & Arrindell, 2005)—in other words, through a person's love for another. Indeed, love has been posited as a motivating factor (Johnson, 2001), and Rempel and Burris (2005) conclude that love is "a motivational state in which the goal is to preserve and promote the well-being of the valued object" (p. 299). Communicating affection to a valued other is one way of encouraging that loved one's well-being (e.g., Komisaruk & Whipple, 1998). Positioning love in this way suggests that the experience of love may play a crucial role in better understanding the interconnections among attachment styles, love, and affectionate expression.

Individuals who espouse certain attachment styles may engage in more (e.g., those with a secure style) or less (e.g., those with avoidant styles) affectionate communication (see Tucker & Anders, 1998), yet hypothesizing love as a motivational force locates it as a potential mediator of the association between attachment style and affectionate communication. As such, even those who are typically emotionally distant in their relationships with others may override those general attachment-related tendencies and communicate more affection to their partner if they feel increased romantic love for that partner. Indeed, some empirical evidence exists to endorse the validity of this claim. Two elements of Sternberg's (1986) tripartite conceptualization of romantic love (i.e., intimacy and commitment) have been shown to mediate the association between attachment style and relational outcomes (i.e., satisfaction), providing preliminary support for the notion that attachment styles influence relationally relevant outcomes *through* the experience of love (Madey & Rodgers, 2009). This study is intended to assess whether romantic love operates similarly in modulating attachment's impact on affectionate communication.

Formally, the following hypothesis guides the current investigation:

- H1: The experience of romantic love mediates the relationship between attachment styles and the expression of affection in romantic relationships.

Method

Participants

Participants were 173 undergraduate students (68 men, 105 women) enrolled in communication classes at a large mid-Atlantic or southwestern university. After securing IRB permission, participants who were currently involved in a romantic relationship completed a questionnaire for minimal extra credit. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 52 years ($M=19.64$, $SD=4.11$). The vast majority of these romantic partners were in a seriously ($n=86$) or casually dating ($n=77$) relationship; the remaining minority were primarily engaged or married. Participants reported on a current romantic partner whose ages ranged from 16 to 52 years ($M=20.29$, $SD=4.95$). The length of romantic relationships ranged from one month to 30 years ($M=21.44$ months; $SD=40.65$ months).

Procedures and Instrumentation

Participants completed a questionnaire comprised of three measures and demographic items, in reference to themselves and their current romantic relationship. These measures were the Attachment Style Measure (Guerrero, Farinelli, & McEwan, 2009), Love Scale (Rubin, 1970, 1973), and Affectionate Communication Index (Floyd & Mikkelson, 2005; Floyd & Morman, 1998).

The *Attachment Style Measure* is a 25-item continuous operationalization of the four adult attachment styles (Bartholomew, 1990) based on previous measures (Feeney, Noller, & Hanrahan, 1994; Guerrero, 1996). Four subscales measured secure, preoccupied, fearful, and dismissive attachment styles. Responses were solicited using a 7-point Likert response format ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7). Previous reliability coefficients for these subscales have ranged from .84 to .91 (Guerrero et al., 2009). In this study, Cronbach alphas for each subscale were: *secure* ($M=33.05$, $SD=6.99$, $\alpha=.72$), *preoccupied* ($M=26.01$, $SD=8.02$, $\alpha=.78$), *fearful* ($M=18.05$, $SD=7.37$, $\alpha=.86$), and *dismissive* ($M=22.61$, $SD=6.18$, $\alpha=.72$).

The *Love Scale* is a 13-item measure of the degree to which a partner feels romantic love toward a partner (e.g., "I would do almost anything for my partner"). Responses were solicited using a 7-point Likert response format ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7). Previous reliability coefficients for this measure have varied from .84 (Dainton et al., 1994) to .90 (Jin & Pena, 2010). In this study, the Cronbach alpha was .85 ($M=66.86$, $SD=12.16$).

The *Affectionate Communication Index* is a 19-item measure of affectionate communication through three subscales: nonverbal expressions, verbal expressions, and

supportive affection. Responses were solicited using a 7-point Likert-type response format ranging from *never or almost never do this* (1) to *always or almost always do this* (7). Sample items include: “kiss on lips,” “say ‘I love you,’” and “praise his/her with compliments,” respectively. Previous reliability coefficients include .91 for the nonverbal subscale, .80 for the verbal subscale, and .77 for the supportive affection subscale (Floyd & Morman, 1998). In this study, Cronbach alphas were: *nonverbal affection* ($M=46.01$, $SD=6.79$, $\alpha=.74$), *verbal affection* ($M=27.85$, $SD=5.26$, $\alpha=.67$), and *supportive affection* ($M=31.16$, $SD=3.24$, $\alpha=.75$).

Results

The guiding hypothesis of this investigation predicted that the experience of romantic love would mediate the relationships among the four adult attachment styles (i.e., secure, preoccupied, fearful avoidant, and dismissive avoidant) and the three forms of affectionate communication (i.e., supportive affection, verbal affection, and nonverbal affection). The relationships were tested in the form of a path model using LISREL 8.8 (Joreskog & Sorbom, 2007) with maximum likelihood estimation. The model indicated good fit with the data, $\chi^2=20.77$, $df=12$, $p=.06$; $NC=1.73$; $CFI=.98$; $SRMR=.05$; $RMSEA=.06$ (see Figure 1 and Table 1 for parameter estimates, indirect effects, and correlations).

As the path model demonstrates the presence of significant indirect effects, Preacher and Hayes’s (2008) bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples was used to determine whether romantic love served to mediate the relationships between the various attachment styles and the three types of affectionate communication. Using this procedure, evidence of significant mediation is revealed if zero falls outside of the lower and upper limits of the 95% confidence interval. The results from these analyses revealed that love did not mediate the relationships between the secure or fearful attachment style and the three types of affectionate communication (i.e., all of

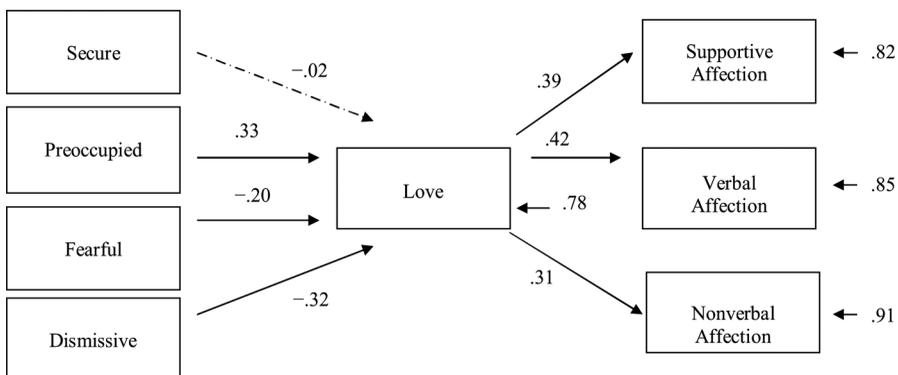


Figure 1 Path model with love as a mediating variable (standardized solution). All parameters (except Secure → Love which is nonsignificant and Fearful → Love where $p < .05$) are significant at $p < .01$.

Table 1 Indirect Effects of Attachment and Correlations between Variables

	Parameter	Standard error
Indirect Effects		
Secure – Vaff	–.01	.03
Secure – Saff	–.01	.02
Secure – Nvaff	–.01	.03
Preoccupied – Vaff*	.14	.03
Preoccupied – Saff**	.13	.02
Preoccupied – Nvaff**	.10	.03
Fearful – Vaff*	–.09	.03
Fearful – Saff*	–.08	.02
Fearful – Nvaff*	–.06	.03
Dismiss – Vaff**	–.14	.03
Dismiss – Saff**	–.12	.02
Dismiss – Nvaff**	–.10	.04
Correlations		
Secure – Preoccupied**	–.61	
Secure – Fearful**	–.43	
Secure – Dismissive	–.03	
Preoccupied – Fearful**	.51	
Preoccupied – Dismissive	.03	
Fearful – Dismissive**	.30	
Vaff – Nvaff**	.47	
Vaff – Saff**	.41	
Saff – Nvaff**	.53	

Note. Vaff = verbal affection, Nvaff = nonverbal affection, Saff = supportive affection.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

these 95% confidence intervals included zero within their lower and upper limits). However, romantic love did emerge as a significant mediator of the relationships between the preoccupied attachment style and supportive affection (.0095, .0672), verbal affection (.0194, .1157), and nonverbal affection (.0156, .1124). In addition, romantic love significantly mediated the associations between the dismissive attachment style and supportive affection (–.1249, –.0376), verbal affection (–.1977, –.0507), and nonverbal affection (–.2224, –.0597).

These results generally support the study hypothesis. The path model revealed the presence of significant indirect effects (with the exception of the secure attachment style, which was not significantly related to the experience of love) and the experience of romantic love was shown to mediate the associations among preoccupied and dismissive attachment styles and expressions of affectionate communication.

Discussion

The primary goal of the current investigation was to more closely examine the interrelationships among attachment style, the experience of romantic love, and the communication of affection. Although extant research has established connections among these constructs, this study imparts a more intricate understanding of these relationships by posing, and finding general support for, the supposition that the experience of love is a motivator that induces relationally relevant outcomes (such as expressing affection), at times despite the influence of attachment. In other words, even for those with avoidant attachment styles, who did report “less” romantic love, the experience of romantic love was strongly positively associated with nonverbal affection expression, verbal affection expression, and supportive affection expression. Further, romantic love mediated the relationships between preoccupied and dismissive attachment styles and the three types of affectionate communication. These findings provide some empirical support for Johnson (2001) and Rempel and Burris’s (2005) conceptualization of love as likely to provoke behaviors which should advance the happiness and overall well-being of a valued other, such as affection expression.

As anticipated, for preoccupied and dismissively attached individuals, romantic love is a conduit through which attachment style impacts the communication of affection, positioning romantic love as a potential regulator of attachment styles’ influence on relational outcomes. Theoretically, these results are consistent with attachment theory (Bowlby, 1980), indicating that the preoccupied and dismissive attachment styles impact relational functioning via the value of an individual’s emotional connections with another.

Practically, these findings denote the important role that is played by love in potentially overcoming the lack of emotional expressivity and decreased warmth that is characteristic of a dismissive attachment style, in particular (e.g., Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). That is, even though dismissive individuals may feel less romantic love for their partner in general, the results from this study indicate that they are likely to express the love that they do feel in nonverbal, verbal, and supportive ways, despite their general tendency to express little affection to close others. Put another way, experiencing romantic love for a partner may encourage dismissive individuals to engage in more affectionate communication than is typically characteristic of this attachment style.

In addition, romantic love encourages increased affectionate communication from individuals with a preoccupied attachment style. This is expected, as theoretically, these individuals are already predisposed toward displaying inflated levels of emotion with regard to their relationships (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). However, an extrapolation of the current study’s findings suggests that romantic love may serve to modify the relationship between the preoccupied attachment style and affection expression in an opposite manner, such that those who experience lower levels of love for a romantic partner may be less inclined to exhibit exaggeratedly high levels of emotion and affection toward close others, despite their general tendency to do so. In other words, preoccupied individuals may only display tendencies toward becoming

overly involved with and overstatedly emotional regarding their close relationships when they are deeply in love with their romantic partner. If they are not deeply in love with their partner, they may be inclined to temper the typical preoccupied behaviors that, due to their elevated dependence and intimacy needs, often place too many demands on partners (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991).

The previously discussed findings were anticipated, as were the results indicating that those with an avoidant attachment style (i.e., fearful or dismissive) reported weaker feelings of romantic love, findings which are consonant with Jin and Pena's (2010) research. However, the various attachment styles were not always associated with the experience of romantic love in the expected ways. Preoccupied individuals expressed stronger feelings of romantic love, a finding that is theoretically consistent, yet contradicts some available evidence regarding the relationship between the two. Conversely, secure individuals reported weaker feelings of romantic love, a finding which is inconsistent both with attachment theory and with extant research concerning the association between the two. As such, these results bear closer scrutiny.

Preoccupied individuals, who are oriented toward love but sometimes have difficulty maintaining relationships due to an especially elevated need for intimacy, expressed more feelings of romantic love in the current study. This finding is inconsistent with some available evidence indicating that insecure attachment is related to less experience of Sternberg's (1986) three components of love (Madey & Rodgers, 2009), but is consistent with Bartholomew and Horowitz's (1991) conceptualization of preoccupied individuals as prone to "exaggerated emotionality in discussing relationships" and increased emotional expressivity (p. 228). This finding may also be explained by the operationalization of love that was employed in the current study. Many of the items on Rubin's (1970) love scale reflect the type of dependent, need-based, "clingy" love that is characteristic of preoccupied individuals. For example, the 13-item love scale contains items that state "I feel very possessive toward my partner" and "If I could never be with (my partner), I would feel miserable" (p. 267). The nature of this particular measurement of romantic love demonstrates significant overlap with the typical behavior of preoccupied individuals in romantic relationships, which helps account for the positive association between a preoccupied attachment style and the experience of romantic love as it was assessed here.

Moreover, the measure of romantic love that was used here (Rubin, 1970) may also explain the negative relationship that was found between the secure attachment style and the experience of romantic love. As indicated, this particular love scale features a significant subset of items that assess dependent, need-based behaviors that should be indicative of preoccupied individuals but should not be characteristic of those with a secure attachment style, as secure individuals are thought to be oriented toward close relationships, desiring intimacy with others and feeling confident and assured in those connections (Floyd, 2002; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). According to their conceptualization, secure individuals should prove too assured in their relationships (and in themselves) to engage in many of the behaviors featured in Rubin's love scale (e.g., Floyd, 2002). Hence, the explanation for the lack of a significant association

between the secure attachment style and the experience of romantic love may be empirical in nature.

By the same token, however, it should be recognized that merely desiring closeness with others or perhaps being better positioned to approach and experience romantic love in a positive manner does not necessarily mean that securely attached individuals will actually *be* more in love with a current romantic partner. A variety of individual and relational factors besides desire for and comfort with relationships in the form of attachment styles doubtless contribute to the experience of romantic love (e.g., similarity, Byrne, 1971; perceptions of partner's use of relational maintenance behaviors such as positivity and assurances, Dainton et al., 1994), and it is possible that these factors (which were not assessed in the current study) at least partially explain the negative relationship between secure attachment and romantic love that was found here.

Limitations and Future Directions

The findings from this study, while particularly informative regarding the motivational role of love in affection expression, should be interpreted with an understanding of the limitations that were present. Qualitative distinctions among different types of romantic love exist, but those variations in romantic love were not assessed here. Rubin's (1970) love scale is most accurately representative of a form of companionate or storgic love (Hatfield & Walster, 1978), but it is those individuals who characterize their love as altruistic or agapic who are particularly likely to engage in behaviors intended to benefit a valued other (Batson, Turk, Shaw, & Klein, 1995; Post, 2002), such as communicating affection. Conversely, manic (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1986) or dependent love is more likely to be experienced by individuals with a preoccupied attachment style, and this type of need-based love often results in "clingy" behaviors that are ultimately intended to augment one's own well-being (Rempel & Burris, 2005). Thus, these individuals may communicate affection, as was the case in the current study, but their underlying motivations may be more self-centered in nature. As such, the claim that love stimulates behaviors that enhance a valued other's welfare may be too simplistic in nature. Future research should endeavor to examine various types of love and their influence on affectionate communication and other relationally relevant outcomes.

Along similar lines, it is worth noting that the overall mean score for the experience of romantic love in this investigation was not overwhelmingly large, suggesting that participants experienced only moderately high levels of love, in general. However, the average is on par with that of similar work (Jin & Pena, 2010), suggesting that these findings are not anomalous. That the experience of love emerged as a mediator of the associations between two of the four attachment styles and all forms of affectionate expression, notwithstanding this condition, speaks to the strength of the effect. Final limitations of this study include the reliability of the verbal affection subscale, which was slightly below generally accepted levels, and the use of correlational data, which prohibits the ability to posit or test true causal claims with regard to the nature of the relationships examined here.

Conclusion

Considered collectively, the findings from this investigation extend what is currently known about the experience of romantic love as an antecedent of important relational outcomes and a corollary of dispositional predictors of romantic relationship behavior. Specifically, these results position the experience of romantic love as a central construct in understanding the impact of attachment style on affectionate expression. That is, these findings suggest that the experience of romantic love may be the mechanism through which dispositional factors such as attachment style impact relationally relevant communicative behaviors, such as expressing affection. A more complete understanding of the complex factors that contribute to the expression of affection and how they contribute to the expression of affection is important, as affectionate communication has been linked to a variety of health (Floyd & Riforgiate, 2008) and relational benefits (Floyd et al., 2009; Hesse & Floyd, 2008).

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