Are you Satisfied? A Look at How Adult Attachment Style and Perfectionism Influence Romantic Relationship Satisfaction

by

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Abstract

This study is important in expanding the existing literature on the Perfectionism Social Disconnection Model (PSDM) and building an understanding of the connections between adult attachment style, maladaptive perfectionism, and romantic relationship satisfaction. This cross-sectional study examined the relationships between attachment style, maladaptive perfectionism, and romantic relationship satisfaction among a convenience sample of 214 adults currently in a romantic relationship. Based on previous literature and theoretical models, this study hypothesized that insecure adult attachment styles (anxious and avoidant) would directly and indirectly predict romantic relationship satisfaction for individuals currently in a romantic relationship through three mediation pathways of rigid perfectionism, self-critical perfectionism, and narcissistic perfectionism. Path analysis was conducted to test the hypothesized model. The current study found a direct link between higher levels of attachment avoidance and lower romantic relationship satisfaction. There was not a significant relationship between attachment anxiety and romantic relationship satisfaction. Further, there were direct links between insecure attachment styles (avoidant and anxious) and maladaptive perfectionism. Unexpectedly, there were no direct links between maladaptive perfectionism and relationship satisfaction. Participant's sex and current relationship length were used as control variables. Implications for future research include the necessity for further exploration of the interpersonal impacts of insecure attachment styles and maladaptive perfectionism. Perhaps incorporating more narrow interpersonal concepts (e.g., relationship length) instead of broad interpersonal concepts (e.g., relationship satisfaction) may allow for successful expansion of the PSDM. For practitioners, this research can help identify appropriate interventions to use with individual clients or couple's therapy and/or which areas to provide psychoeducation on with their clients.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Background

Romantic relationships are a salient dyadic relationship, particularly during adulthood. Furman and Buhrmester (1992) examined the benefits of these relationships such as providing a support system and providing safety, comfort, and stability. Although, it is important to note that not all romantic relationships provide these positive qualities. Whether a relationship provides these qualities or lacks them, there can be profound resulting impacts on the individual (Connolly & Konarski, 1994; Harter, 1999; Mackinnon et al., 2012; Reis et al., 2014; Seeman, 2000) and the relationship (Gottman & Levenson, 1992; Hudson et al., 2020). A primary construct in examining if romantic partners are happy or unhappy within their relationship is relationship satisfaction (Graham et al., 2011). Relationship satisfaction, like positive relationship qualities, is positively related to an individual's physical and mental health (Gottman & Gottman, 2017). Based on the literature, one can surmise that romantic relationship satisfaction is an important construct to understand, as it is directly related to personal wellbeing. Wellbeing is defined by "how people feel and how they function both on a personal and social level, and how they evaluate their lives as a whole" (Michaelson et al., 2012; p. 8).

There are a multitude of variables that can affect one's romantic relationship satisfaction, including interpersonal and intrapersonal factors such as perfectionism. Perfectionism is a personality trait where an individual experiences a combination of self-directed thoughts of needing to be flawless, setting extremely high standards for themselves, and resulting critical self-evaluation. These ideals can also be placed on others, such as a romantic partner. Both self-directed and other-directed perfectionism can negatively impact relationship satisfaction (Davis

et al., 2018; Mackinnon et al., 2012). The Perfectionism Social Disconnection Model (PSDM) provides a theoretical model to demonstrate how perfectionism develops and how this trait affects other constructs (Hewitt et al., 2017). This model argues that perfectionism is developed in early childhood through interactions between the child and caregiver. Any differences in the caregiver's and child's needs can then result in the development of an insecure attachment style for the child (e.g., anxious or avoidant). The child may then start engaging in perfectionistic behaviors to win approval and acceptance from their caregiver in order to feel secure. The perfectionistic child may then begin feeling socially disconnected from others, which can cause them to be less happy and satisfied in their relationships. While the development of attachment styles occurs prior to perfectionism, both concepts develop early in life. Further, based on the PSDM attachment styles are developed first which then leads to the development of perfectionism. An individual with an insecure attachment style (e.g., avoidant or anxious) is more likely to experience lower relationship satisfaction, commitment, and investment, poorer communication styles, while also experiencing increased levels of conflict and a higher number of romantic relationship dissolutions (e.g., Etcheverry et al., 2013; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994; Martin et al., 2012; Mohr et al., 2013; Šlosáriková, 2021). Further, individuals with insecure attachment styles more frequently engage in maladaptive behaviors, such as ending the relationship, trying to hurt their partner (e.g., emotionally, physically), ignoring their partner, or simply refusing to discuss a problem, in response to a partner's negative behavior (Pizzano et al., 2013). Additionally, both perfectionism and attachment styles are believed to remain relatively stable across one's lifespan, which further demonstrates the importance of these two constructs. As described, the PSDM provides the framework for connecting attachment styles and perfectionism, and both of these constructs have been shown to

profoundly impact relationship satisfaction.

Present Study

Currently, there are many studies demonstrating the connection between adult attachment styles and romantic relationship satisfaction and the relationship between perfectionism and romantic relationship satisfaction. The current study expands on current literature related to adult attachment to a romantic partner, multiple indicators of perfectionism, and their impacts on romantic relationship satisfaction by focusing on the linear relationship among these constructs. Further, some of the theoretical models (e.g., PSDM) and measures were developed more recently, so this study provides further empirical evidence for these measures and relationships among these concepts. Additionally, research has focused on the mediating relationship of perfectionism between adult attachment styles and personal wellbeing outcomes (Gnilka et al., 2013; Wei et al., 2004; Wei et al., 2006), so this study expands the current literature on the mediating relationship of maladaptive perfectionism between adult attachment styles and romantic relationship satisfaction.

Definitions

The following are definitions of key terms that are used throughout this text. These definitions are provided to aid in the understanding of research questions and hypotheses.

1. Attachment anxiety: Attachment anxiety is defined as fear of rejection or abandonment, especially when under distress, while simultaneously needing to feel accepted, close, or reassured by one's attachment figure. The attachment figure in the current study is the participant's romantic partner. This construct was measured using

the Anxiety subscale of the *Experiences in Close Relationship Scale-Short form* (ECR-S; Wei et al., 2007).

2. Attachment avoidance: Attachment avoidance is defined as a need for autonomy, discomfort in intimacy, and unwillingness to share personal information with one's attachment figure. The attachment figure in the current study is the participant's romantic partner. This construct was measured using the Avoidance subscale of the *Experiences in Close Relationship Scale-Short form* (ECR-S; Wei et al., 2007).
3. Maladaptive perfectionism: Maladaptive perfectionism is defined as being overly self-critical, "excessive concerns about making mistakes and disabling self-doubt," and believing that these "self-imposed standards or expectations are not being met" (Rice et al., 2005; p. 581). Maladaptive perfectionism was measured using the Big Three Perfectionism Scale (BTPS; Smith et al., 2016) by assessing three distinct maladaptive perfectionism sub-constructs (rigid perfectionism, self-critical perfectionism, and narcissistic perfectionism).
    a. Rigid perfectionism: Rigid perfectionism refers to the rigid insistence that one's own performance must be flawless, perfect, and without errors" (Smith et al., 2016; p. 671).
    b. Self-critical perfectionism: Self-critical perfectionism is operationally defined by combining four facets: concern over mistakes, doubts about actions, self-criticism, and socially prescribed perfectionism.
    c. Narcissistic perfectionism: Narcissistic perfectionism includes four facets: other-oriented perfectionism, hypercriticism, entitlement, and grandiosity.

4. Romantic relationship satisfaction: Romantic relationship satisfaction is defined as one's positive thoughts and feelings about their current romantic relationship. Romantic relationship satisfaction was measured using the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS; Hendrick, 1988).

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The current study tested a path analysis model where insecure adult attachment styles (both anxious and avoidant) would directly and indirectly predict romantic relationship satisfaction for individuals currently in a romantic relationship through three maladaptive perfectionism mediation pathways of rigid perfectionism, self-critical perfectionism, and narcissistic perfectionism. Specifically, hypotheses were that avoidant adult attachment would have a direct positive link to all types of maladaptive perfectionism, which would then predict lower romantic relationship satisfaction. Anxious adult attachment would have a direct positive link to all types of maladaptive perfectionism, which would then predict lower romantic relationship satisfaction. While not included below for clarity of the model, participants' sex and the length of their current relationship were used as control predictors for the outcome variable.

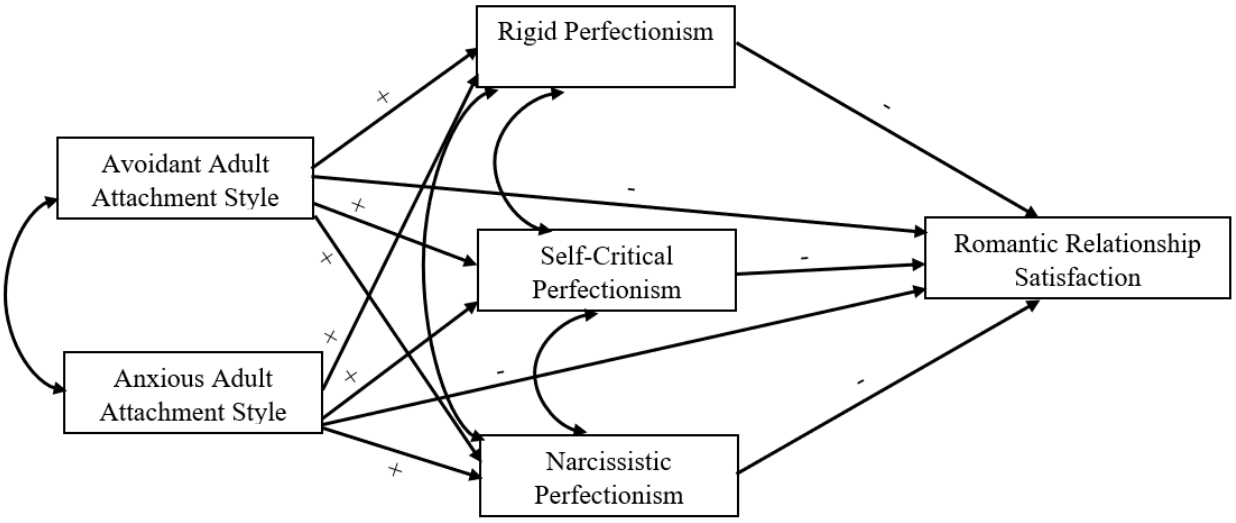

Figure 1: Hypothesized model

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

Romantic Relationship Satisfaction

In adolescence, friendships are the most salient interpersonal relationships in terms of social relations (Furman & Rose, 2015). This trend continues into early adulthood; however, in late adolescence and into early adulthood, romantic relationships gradually become more significant. This shift in relationship saliency is demonstrated with the increased amount of time spent with romantic partners while time spent with friends decreases (Furman & Collins, 2008). Romantic relationships become increasingly important throughout adulthood. These relationships often serve as a support system and can provide safety, comfort, and stability (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992). The support system, or lack thereof, that comes along with romantic relationships can have profound impacts on an individual's life and well-being. For instance, being in an emotionally supportive relationship can be a protective factor against health detracting behaviors (e.g., smoking), ultimately decreasing the individual's mortality risk (Seeman, 2000). These findings quite literally imply life or death importance of close relationships. Seemingly less consequential in comparison, individuals in high quality romantic relationships experience increased feelings of self-worth (Connolly & Konarski, 1994; Harter, 1999). Although, the literature is clear that in order to experience these positive outcomes, it requires more than just being in a romantic relationship. For instance, the quality of the romantic relationship is of great importance to an individual's personal wellbeing (e.g., mental health, life satisfaction) and relational wellbeing (e.g., relationship quality, relationship satisfaction). Individuals in relationships with positive interactions, such as showing affection and compassion, seem to experience benefit on their personal wellbeing (Reis et al., 2014), while

individuals who experience negative interactions, such as conflict, seem to experience negative impacts on their personal wellbeing, specifically depression (Mackinnon et al., 2012). In turn, these interpersonal interactions influence the quality of these romantic relationships. Hudson and colleagues (2020) found that relationship quality moderated the association between being in a romantic relationship and the individual's personal wellbeing. Notably, the higher the relationship quality, the higher the individual reported various aspects of their personal wellbeing, including higher life satisfaction, more frequent positive affect, and higher experiential positive affect.

Romantic relationship satisfaction is a primary component of determining if romantic partners are happy or unhappy within their relationship (Graham et al., 2011). Romantic relationship satisfaction refers to overall feelings and thoughts of content with one's romantic partner. The more satisfied a partner is with their relationship, the more likely their relationship is stable and the less likely it will end in dissolution of the relationship (Gottman & Levenson, 1992). Research has shown that individuals in stable, satisfying relationships report better physical and mental health than do individuals in unstable, unsatisfying relationships (Gottman & Gottman, 2017). For instance, individuals in stable, satisfying relationships have longer lifespans and are financially better off than individuals who are single, in an unhappy or unstable relationship, or in an uncommitted relationship. In turn, the individuals in happy, stable, committed relationships have children who tend to do better in most aspects of living, such as emotionally, financially, and relationally. Many internal and external factors can affect the level of romantic relationship satisfaction one experiences (Cahill et al., 2020; Gottman & Gottman, 2017; Bradbury, et al., 2000). One of these factors is the personality trait perfectionism.

Perfectionism and Romantic Relationship Satisfaction

An individual with perfectionism as a personality trait experiences a combination of self-directed thoughts of needing to be flawless, putting extremely high standards on their performance, and subsequent critical self-evaluation (Frost et al., 1990). While self-directed thoughts are a component of perfectionism, there are also components where these perfectionistic thoughts are directed at others (Nealis et al., 2015), such as romantic partners. In a dyadic relationship, such as a monogamous romantic relationship, both self-directed and other-directed perfectionism can have deleterious effects on overall relationship quality and satisfaction. For instance, Davis and colleagues (2018) used three facets of perfectionism (self-oriented perfectionism, socially prescribed perfectionism, and other-oriented perfectionism) in their study to determine participants' interest in romantically dating an individual with characteristics high on these separate facets compared to a non-perfectionistic individual. This study required the participant to read 3 made-up individuals' dating profiles. They found that participants who scored high on these perfectionism facets endorsed being more likely to desire a perfectionistic partner; however, non-perfectionist profiles and profiles not mentioning perfectionism were rated as more likable, more desirable as a relationship partner, and more warm. Interestingly, participants in this study also predicted that they would be less satisfied in a long-term romantic relationship with a perfectionistic partner. While the Davis et al. (2018) study had participants make assumptions about a non-existent romantic relationship, Mackinnon et al. (2012) recruited university students currently in romantic relationships. They found a positive correlation between perfectionistic concerns (i.e., socially prescribed perfectionism) and conflict, which indicates the more an individual is concerned with appearing perfect, the more conflict they experience in their romantic relationship. Furthermore, they found a negative correlation between perfectionistic concerns and intimacy in romantic relationships, which

indicates the higher an individual's perfectionistic concerns are, the lower their intimacy levels with their romantic partner. Cramer (2000) demonstrated that more conflict and unresolved conflict within a romantic relationship led to lower relationship satisfaction. Further, a longitudinal study conducted on coupled adults (included both partners) found that perceptions of higher intimacy behaviors by their partner were correlated with higher relationship satisfaction at a baseline which in turn was associated with higher relationship satisfaction after 13-months (Beaulieu et al., 2023). These studies provide evidence of how perfectionism can impact these dyads, but they do not explain where perfectionism stems from.

The Perfectionism Social Disconnection Model (PSDM) is a theoretical model that works to explain the development and impacts of perfectionism (Hewitt et al., 2017). The PSDM argues that perfectionism is developed through differences in the parent and child's needs, which can then lead to insecure attachment styles for the child (e.g., anxious and/or avoidant thoughts/behaviors). For the child to feel secure, the child begins to engage in perfectionistic behaviors to garner acceptance and approval from their parents and others. The PSDM further states that perfectionism is related to interpersonal issues which then leads the perfectionistic individual to feel socially disconnected from others. This feeling of social disconnection can then cause individuals to be less happy and satisfied in their relationships. Most importantly, the PSDM builds the framework for connecting attachment styles and perfectionism, which have each been shown to influence relationship satisfaction.

Attachment

Development of Attachment Style

Based on Bowlby's (1973) attachment theory framework, we know that early interactions between a child and their caregiver form the basis for expectations and behaviors in that child's

later adult relationships. These parent-child interactions begin during infancy with the infant continuously engaging in proximity seeking behaviors with their caregivers to promote their survival (Bowlby, 1969). Crying is an example of a proximity seeking behavior where the infant expresses their need, such as needing to be fed, changed, or comforted by their caregiver. The infant's attachment style is formed based on how the caregiver responds to these continual bids for their needs (Bowlby, 1969). As the child gets older and these parent-child interactions remain the same, the child begins to use this information to develop their own internal working model. Internal working models help individuals make sense of themselves and their environment, which includes learning how to interact with others and regulate their emotions (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2018).

Attachment styles have been divided into three main types: avoidant, anxious-ambivalent (often referred to simply as anxious), and secure (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Anxious attachment and avoidant attachment are often referred to more generally as insecure attachment styles. These three styles were developed by studying child-caregiver attachment behavior using the Strange Situation experiment. Specifically, Ainsworth and colleagues determined that a child's willingness or interest to explore their surrounding environment is aided by the child knowing that they can return to a secure "home base" when needed (1967). These attachment styles are displayed in early interactions between child and caregiver. For instance, if a *securely attached* child begins to feel uncomfortable or anxious, the child can return to their caregiver to receive reassurance and comfort. Caregivers of these securely attached children are described as generally responsive, more available, warm, and sensitive to their child's feelings. However, not all caregivers provide this security and support to their children. In child-caregiver relationships where the caregiver does not provide consistent and reliable security and support, the child can

develop an *insecure* attachment style (e.g., avoidant or anxious attachment styles). A child with an *anxious attachment style* may be less likely to independently explore their environment. Caregivers of children with an anxious attachment style are described as inconsistent and insensitive. These caregivers are likely to be inconsistent or unpredictable, where at times they express love toward the child and other times they do not provide the child what they need. These behaviors from the caregiver then lead to the child displaying protest behaviors, anger, distress at separation from the caregiver, and ambivalence toward the caregiver (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Levy, Blatt, & Shaver, 1998). The alternative type of insecure attachment is the *avoidant attachment style*. A child with an avoidant attachment style may be less likely to rely on their caregivers in times of need due to previous experiences of the caregiver being unreliable or dismissive. Ainsworth and colleagues (1978) note that although the child may appear aloof and detached, the child is likely experiencing an intense internal conflict between wanting to bid for their caregiver's attention and feeling angry and rejected by their caregiver. Caregivers of avoidant children are described as being aloof, hostile, rigid, and rejecting. These caregivers are likely to be unsupportive when their children are in distress. These behaviors from the caregiver then lead to the child avoiding the caregiver and overall behaviors of detachment.

Other environmental factors that can contribute to the development of attachment style include the absence of a caregiver, the caregiver leaving or returning after an absence, lack of responsiveness from the caregiver, and any distressing event (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Essentially, the theory states that attachment styles are developed based on the development of internal working models. An internal working model helps the child or individual understand themselves and their environment, such as how to interact with others and regulate their own emotions (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2018). If a caregiver is reliable and consistent with providing

comfort and affection when a child is in distress, then the child will develop a secure attachment style (Bowlby, 1973). This child's internal working model includes an increased confidence and trust that others (e.g., caregiver) will protect them. If a caregiver is inconsistent and unreliable in these same instances, then the child will develop an insecure attachment style. Specifically, caregivers who are inconsistent toward their child are more likely to develop attachment anxiety, while caregivers who are unreliable or dismissive toward their child are more likely to develop attachment avoidance (Bowlby, 1973). The insecurely attached child's internal working model differs in that they will learn to expect that their needs will not be met by others. These attachment styles remain relatively stable throughout an individual's life and become most noticeable when an individual is experiencing distress (Bowlby, 1973). Based on attachment theory, these attachment styles in the parent-child relationship can affect an individual's "expectations, emotions, defenses, and relational behavior in all close relationships" (Bartholomew & Shaver, 1998; p. 25). The close relationships that can be impacted include friendships, romantic relationships, and their own parenting styles with their child. This research demonstrates that behaviors and patterns individuals learn from early close relationships with caregivers impacts how they engage with their later adult relationships (Bartholomew & Shaver, 1998; Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

Early Attachment Style and Adult Attachment Style

As outlined above, attachment theory was originally used to explain the parent-child relationship and any distress that could arise within the child and caregiver relationship (Bowlby, 1988; Ainsworth, 1982). Hazan and Shaver believed that these early attachment styles partially explained later adult attachment styles, so they conducted research using these attachment styles to better describe and understand patterns within adult romantic relationships (1987). They used

the same three attachment styles developed by Ainsworth (1978): anxious-ambivalent, avoidant, and secure. Hazan and Shaver (1987) found that approximately 56% of their participants fell in the secure attachment style, with approximately 24% in the avoidant attachment style, and approximately 20% in the anxious-ambivalent attachment style. These findings were similar to those found in a study assessing attachment styles in the child-caregiver relationship where 62% had secure attachment, 23% had avoidant attachment, and 15% had anxious-ambivalent attachment (Campos et al., 1983). Interestingly, researchers have not found significant differences in these percentages between the binary genders (e.g., Stackert & Bursik, 2003).

Recently, self-report measures have been used to determine the degree in which an individual has avoidant attachment characteristics and the degree in which an individual has anxious attachment characteristics. These measures include dimensions or subscales that assess the level of avoidant attachment and anxious attachment. If an individual scores low on both dimensions, then they are believed to have a secure attachment style. While some research uses dimensional scores without categorization to understand participants' adult attachment styles, other research has categorized participants' into only one attachment style.

As described earlier, the development of these attachment styles is dependent upon the child-caregiver interactions, so it makes sense that these early attachment styles lead to different emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in later adult relationships. It is also important to note that attachment styles are believed to remain relatively stable across our lifespan (Bowlby, 1973). Researchers have continued to look extensively at how attachment styles affect close relationships in adulthood. Broadly speaking, secure adult attachment styles have been found to positively impact romantic relationships (e.g., Towler & Stuhlmacher, 2013), while insecure adult attachment styles have been found to negatively impact romantic relationships (e.g.,

Brennan & Shaver, 1995; Davis et al., 2003; Simpson & Rholes, 1998; Stackert & Bursik, 2003). The links between these concepts have increasingly been studied in recent decades. Stackert and Bursik (2003) found that adults with insecure attachment styles (avoidant or anxious) endorsed more relationship-specific irrational beliefs such as believing their partner is unable to change, disagreements are harmful, and partners should mind-read. In this same study, they found that adults who categorized themselves as having a secure adult attachment style reported higher romantic relationship satisfaction. This is presumably due to the lower levels of relationship-specific irrational beliefs with securely attached adults. An example provided by the authors states that an individual with "an avoidant adult attachment style who believes that disagreement is destructive may be less prone to talk openly about relationship problems" (Stackert & Bursik, 2003; p. 1427); therefore, this leads to more problems within the relationship and lower relationship satisfaction. Brennan and Shaver (1995) corroborate these differences in their study on adult attachment styles, affect regulation, and romantic relationship functioning. They found that anxious-ambivalent adults were more jealous and clingier than securely attached adults in their romantic relationships. They also found that insecurely attached adults (both anxious-ambivalent and avoidant) reported lower trust in others compared to securely attached adults. As these studies demonstrate, there are nuances among impacts on outcome variables dependent upon whether an individual has an anxious or avoidant attachment style, even though they are often referred to together as insecure attachment styles. Throughout this study, I will separately discuss these two insecure attachment styles and how they relate to other relevant variables. Additionally, over time the term "anxious-ambivalent" in describing attachment styles has been simplified by researchers by dropping the term "ambivalent" (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2018).

Anxious Attachment. A child with an anxious attachment style would ultimately feel less comfortable exploring their environment and would engage in more proximity closeness to their caregiver (Ainsworth et al., 1978). This attachment style is rooted in self-doubt and concerns that others will not be available to them in times of distress. As this child gets older, their attachment-anxiety can transfer to other interpersonal processes such as romantic relationships. Anxiously attached individuals often have interpersonal goals to meet their needs for closeness and support from others, while also being fearful of rejection (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2018). Their intense need for closeness and concerns about rejection can cause maladaptive patterns within interpersonal relationships, such as a higher likelihood to engage in intrusive behaviors (i.e., stalking their partner) within their romantic relationships (Lavy et al., 2013). Attachment styles also impact how individuals think about or perceive their interpersonal relationships. For instance, attachment-anxious/ambivalent (e.g., attachment anxious) individuals may have thoughts such as, "I often worry that my partner doesn't really love me or won't want to stay with me" (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; p. 515). These maladaptive thought and behavior patterns originate from and are manifested differently in the alternative insecure attachment style: avoidant attachment.

Avoidant Attachment. A child with an avoidant attachment style would typically avoid their caregiver and not seek comfort from them when in distress (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Further, if the caregiver tried to communicate with the child in these moments, the child would not respond. This attachment style is rooted in distrust of others' intentions, which pushes the individual to distance themselves from others and not rely on others for emotional or behavioral support. As this child gets older, their attachment-avoidance will transfer to other interpersonal processes such as romantic relationships. Avoidant-attached individuals often have interpersonal

goals to have autonomy and be self-reliant (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2018). Examples of an attachment-avoidant individual's thoughts are "I am somewhat uncomfortable being close to others" and "I feel difficult to trust them completely, difficult to allow myself to depend on them" (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; p. 515). These thoughts are then manifested into behaviors and interpersonal interactions such as the attachment-avoidant individual disclosing less of their personal thoughts and feelings to their partner and being less willing to engage in proximity-seeking behavior or ask for support in times of distress (Garrison et al., 2012; Lynch, 2013). Interestingly, there seem to be gender differences in this research where men with a dismissing (avoidant) attachment style had a higher number of past romantic relationships than other attachment styles (secure or preoccupied/anxious), while this same difference was not found in women based on their attachment style (Monteoliva et al., 2012). They also discovered that dismissing (avoidant) men more negatively viewed expressing their feelings to their partners than did the other attachment styles (secure and preoccupied/anxious). While secure women more positively viewed expressing their feelings to their partners than did either insecure attachment style. Based on these thought and behavior patterns, one can surmise how they may impact romantic relationships.

Recent evidence of the connection between attachment styles and romantic relationship outcomes includes a study by Hadiwijaya and colleagues (2020) to determine if the quality of the child-parent relationship predicted perceptions of support, intimacy, and passion within the adult-child's romantic relationships. This longitudinal study from the Netherlands is unique in that the study participants included each member involved (e.g., mother, father, adult-child, romantic partner) which allowed them to obtain multiple perspectives. Results showed that young adults with distant relationships with their parents reported low levels of intimacy,

support, and passion with their romantic partners. They defined distant relationships as both parties (parent or child) minimally supporting one another and minimally exerting power over one another. This distant relationship appears to be similar to an avoidant attachment style. With the tremendous impact attachment styles have on individual's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, it makes sense that these interpersonal interactions would in turn affect the overall relationship quality and satisfaction within their romantic relationships.

Adult Attachment Style and Romantic Relationship Outcomes

The implications of having an insecure attachment style can appear quite bleak for romantic relationships. In general, insecure attachment styles are connected to lower relationship commitment and investment, poorer communication styles, increased levels of conflict, a higher number of romantic relationship dissolutions, shorter length romantic relationships, lower romantic relationship satisfaction, and a lower likelihood to forgive a partner for a hurtful behavior (e.g., Etcheverry et al., 2013; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994; Martin et al., 2012; Mohr et al., 2013; Šlosáriková, 2021). Further, individuals with insecure attachment styles more frequently engage in maladaptive behaviors, such as ending the relationship, trying to hurt their partner (e.g., emotionally, physically), ignoring their partner, or simply refusing to discuss a problem, in response to a partner's negative behavior (Pizzano et al., 2013). Just as these attachment styles manifest in different thoughts and behaviors, they also differentially impact various relationship outcomes.

Anxious Attachment. As previously mentioned, attachment-anxious individuals tend to make intense bids for their partner's attention and support, yet they feel fearful that they will be rejected by their partner. This fear of rejection or abandonment causes the attachment-anxious individual to frequently seek out reassurance to quell these fears (Downey & Feldman, 1996;

Shaver et al., 2005); although, this same fear can cause ambivalence toward initiating bids or committing to a relationship (Mikulincer et al., 2010). Along these same paradoxical lines, Davis and colleagues (2003) found that an anxious attachment was negatively correlated with desires to look for a new romantic partner as well as the likeliness to enter new relationships. These thoughts and behaviors may be a result of using hyperactivating attachment strategies, a term coined by Cassidy and Kobak (1988). Attachment-anxious individuals often use these types of strategies to cope with feelings of distress. In the context of a romantic relationship, these strategies look like attempting to increase proximity, support, and love while also doubting that these needs will be met by their partner. If these needs are not met, the attachment-anxious individual will experience intense sadness or anger. These thoughts and behaviors add stress on relationships which can ultimately lead to the dissolution of that relationship. Related, Feeney and Noller (1990) found that anxious-ambivalent individuals had significantly shorter romantic relationships. This may be in part due to attachment-anxious individuals being less supportive, less responsive, and more negative toward their partners (Collins & Feeney, 2000). Attachment-anxious individuals are also more likely to withdraw from a relationship or have their partner withdraw, which is correlated with lower relationship satisfaction (Beeney et al., 2019).

The impacts of having an anxious attachment style are also seen after the dissolution of a romantic relationship. As Bowlby (1973) pointed out, behaviors related to attachment styles are exacerbated in times of distress, such as the dissolution of a romantic relationship. If a romantic relationship ends, attachment-anxious individuals are more likely to engage in vengeful behavior, use alcohol and drugs to cope with the loss, and report experiencing more intense physical and emotional distress post-breakup (Davis et al., 2003). Alternatively, attachment-

avoidant individuals engage in different maladaptive behaviors that negatively impact their romantic relationships.

Avoidant Attachment. Attachment-avoidant individuals tend to prefer autonomy, independence, and self-reliance (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2018). These characteristics can cause feelings of detachment from one's partner. Evidence for this detachment was found by these individuals reporting lower commitment and lower investments in their relationship (Pistole et al., 1995; Gere et al., 2013). These feelings are often displayed in various ways, such as showing less affectionate expressions in interactions with their partner like smiling (e.g., Dillow et al., 2014; Guerrero, 1996). Attachment-avoidant individuals have also been found to be less engaged and attentive to their partners during conversations (Tucker & Anders, 1998). These behaviors and higher scores on avoidant attachment are associated with lower relationship satisfaction and an increased likelihood of romantic relationship dissolution (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). These findings may be partially explained by these individuals using attachment-system deactivating strategies to cope with feelings of distress, such as handling distress on their own and distancing themselves from people or situations that activate the attachment system (Cassidy & Kobak, 1988). This strategy serves as a reinforcer to the idea of self-reliance being important. Specifically, this strategy works to decrease the individual's dependence on others (e.g., a romantic partner), while also avoiding acknowledgment of their own personal needs or weaknesses. The inability to acknowledge one's faults or needs begins to build a connection to another personality trait: perfectionism. Specifically, the PSDM provides evidence for the connection between perfectionism and attachment theory. The current study will examine perfectionism as a mediator between adult attachment styles and romantic relationship satisfaction.

Perfectionism

Perfectionism has varying definitions throughout the research literature. Initially, perfectionism was viewed as a singular dimension focused on self-directed thoughts (Burns, 1980). While there is not one singular way to define this construct in the literature, there are overlapping features across the various definitions. Rice and colleagues (2005; p. 583) define perfectionism as, "an internalized set of performance-related self-appraisals and motivations that are embedded within more basic and generalized expectations regarding personal worthiness and the perceived availability and responsiveness of significant others." Frost and colleagues (1990; p. 450) define perfectionism as, "high standards of performance which are accompanied by tendencies for overly critical evaluations of one's own behavior." Flett and Hewitt (2002) describe perfectionism more broadly stating it "is the striving for flawlessness." The common thread among these definitions is that the individual has extremely high standards for themselves. While having high standards is a main component of perfectionism, there are additional facets to consider.

Background and Development of Perfectionism

While perfectionism tends to have a negative connotation when discussed uni-dimensionally, there are benefits to certain aspects or types of perfectionism when viewed multi-dimensionally. Perfectionism can be viewed as a helpful or a detrimental personality trait depending on how it impacts various areas of an individual's life. Hamachek (1978) differentiated between these two types by referring to them as either a normal perfectionist or a neurotic perfectionist. By his definition, normal perfectionists have high standards for

themselves but remain flexible depending on the situational context, whereas neurotic perfectionists have high standards for themselves but do not allow for flexibility or mistakes which leads to feeling like nothing is ever completely finished or done to their high standards. More current research has differentiated between these types of perfectionism by referring to them as either maladaptive or adaptive. *Maladaptive perfectionism* can include being overly self-critical, "excessive concerns about making mistakes and disabling self-doubt," and believing that these "self-imposed standards or expectations are not being met" (Rice et al., 2005, p. 581). Being a maladaptive perfectionist can cause difficulties for the individual and their interpersonal relationships. Specifically, maladaptive perfectionism can lead to self-critical depression, compulsivity, and high levels of procrastination (Frost et al., 1993; Blankstein & Dunkley, 2002). Alternatively, *adaptive perfectionism* includes setting high standards or goals for oneself that increase one's self-esteem instead of decreasing it. These individuals reap benefits from this mindset by reporting higher self-esteem, low levels of procrastination, increased self-efficacy, conscientiousness, and good academic adjustment (Frost et al., 1993; Parker, 2002).

Hewitt and Flett (1991) developed a model to study dyadic perfectionism within this relational context that is broken into three main dimensions of maladaptive perfectionism: self-oriented perfectionism, other-oriented perfectionism, and socially prescribed perfectionism. Self-oriented perfectionism involves behaviors and expectations of oneself, simultaneously trying to attain perfection and avoid failures (Hewitt et al., 1991). Other-oriented perfectionism includes the expectations and beliefs about another individual's abilities. According to Hewitt and colleagues (1991), other-oriented perfectionists likely have unrealistic standards for their romantic partners, are concerned with others being perfect, and evaluate others based on these expectations and standards. While self-oriented perfectionism focuses on the self, other-oriented

perfectionism focuses on the other person, or in the purposes for the current study—the romantic partner. The last perfectionism dimension proposed by Hewitt and colleagues (1991) is socially prescribed perfectionism. In the context of a dyadic relationship, this dimension includes when one partner believes their romantic partner has "unrealistic standards" for them, harshly evaluates them, and pressures them to be perfect (Hewitt et al., 1991; p. 457).

While the Frost et al (1997) multidimensional perfectionism model and the Hewitt and Flett (1991) perfectionism model have been widely used in the perfectionism literature, Smith et al (2016) have developed an updated multidimensional perfectionism model that encompasses all current facets of maladaptive perfectionism in one scale. Previously, researchers have often used subscales from both Frost et al.'s (1997) and Hewitt and Flett's (1991) perfectionism scales to measure nuances of individual's perfectionistic tendencies; however, this new model allows for more concise and specific measurements of perfectionism. Smith et al (2016) developed the Big Three Perfectionism Scale (BTPS) which assesses three global factors: rigid perfectionism, self-critical perfectionism, and narcissistic perfectionism. Each of these global factors is comprised of several facets of perfectionism for a total of 10 facets. The first global factor is rigid perfectionism which refers to an individual's "rigid insistence that one's own performance must be flawless, perfect, and without errors" (Smith et al., 2016; p. 671). This global factor is made up of the self-oriented perfectionism and self-worth contingencies facets. The second global factor is self-critical perfectionism which includes the following facets: concern over mistakes, doubts about actions, self-criticism, and socially prescribed perfectionism. This global factor combines the concern over mistakes and doubts about actions facets from Frost et al (1997), the self-criticism facet from Dunkley et al (2003), and the socially prescribed perfectionism facet from Hewitt and Flett (1991). The third global factor is narcissistic perfectionism which includes

the following facets: other-oriented perfectionism, hypercriticism, entitlement, and grandiosity. The authors claim that this global factor is the sole self-report measure created "to assess individuals who believe they are perfect, superior to others, and justified in holding unrealistic expectations" (Smith et al., 2016; p. 672). This multidimensional approach to understanding and assessing perfectionism will provide further clarity and nuance to the relationships between adult attachment styles, perfectionism, and romantic relationship satisfaction.

Adult Attachment Style and Perfectionism

The literature has begun to demonstrate a connection between attachment styles and perfectionism. For instance, Rice and Mirzadeh (2000) determined that individuals with maladaptive perfectionism experienced high levels of parental criticism, which is a construct linked to insecure attachment styles. More specifically, both fearful and preoccupied attachment styles (i.e., insecure attachment) were linked to socially prescribed perfectionism (Flett et al., 2001). While there is literature that links these two constructs, the Perfectionism Social Disconnection Model (PSDM) expands the understanding of perfectionism and argues that perfectionism is developed early in life through parent-child interactions. For the child to feel attached to their caregiver, the child begins to engage in perfectionistic behaviors to garner acceptance and approval from their parents, themselves, and others. Flett and colleagues (2001) found a connection between individuals who categorized themselves as having a fearful or preoccupied (i.e., insecure attachment styles) attachment style and experiencing higher levels of socially prescribed perfectionism (i.e., maladaptive perfectionism). This bolsters one component of the PSDM. Flett and colleagues (2001) made the argument that socially prescribed perfectionism appears to represent an internal working model of early life experiences with salient relationships (e.g., caregivers). As discussed earlier, these repeated early interactions

between child and caregiver initiate the development of internal working models (Ainsworth et al., 1978). These internal working models are then used to understand future relationships. Based on this information, one can predict that similar connections would be found between adult attachment styles and perfectionism.

While the PSDM focuses on how the individual's perfectionistic tendencies can hinder their ability to connect with others, I first want to note how perfectionism can negatively impact the individual, as most of the research to date has focused on individual rather than relational wellbeing. Gnilka et al (2013) found that adaptive perfectionism was negatively correlated with both anxious and avoidant attachment styles. Further, these researchers used adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism as mediators between adult attachment styles and various personal wellbeing outcomes (e.g., depression, hopelessness, life satisfaction). They found that adaptive perfectionism was associated with more positive personal wellbeing, such as higher life satisfaction, lower levels of depression, and lower feelings of hopelessness. This study demonstrated inverse results for maladaptive perfectionism. Maladaptive perfectionism was positively correlated with negative personal wellbeing, such as higher feelings of hopelessness and lower life satisfaction. The relationships between insecure attachment styles (avoidant and anxious) and personal wellbeing (e.g., depression, hopelessness, life satisfaction) were mediated by maladaptive perfectionism. For example, if an individual scored high on avoidant attachment, they were more likely to also score high on maladaptive perfectionism which led to these poorer personal wellbeing outcomes. This pattern of results was also found by Wei and colleagues (2004, 2006) where maladaptive perfectionism mediated the relationship between insecure attachment styles (anxious and avoidant) and depression. For instance, if the individual is viewed as perfect, then they will ultimately be accepted, feel connected to others, and have a sense of

belonging. This ties into a dimension of perfectionism referred to as perfectionistic self-presentation. This is where an individual needs to present as perfect to others by minimizing or hiding their imperfections while highlighting their perfection (Hewitt et al., 2003). Chen and colleagues (2012) aimed to build upon the PSDM by studying the links between perfectionism, insecure attachment, and social disconnection in adolescents. Based on mediation analyses, fearful attachment (includes both avoidant and anxious attachment characteristics) had an indirect effect on social disconnection through nondisclosure of imperfection, a singular facet of perfectionistic self-presentation. In addition to these findings, preoccupied attachment (anxious attachment) was related to perfectionistic self-promotion (e.g., highlighting their perfections), while fearful attachment (includes both avoidant and anxious attachment characteristics) was related to nondisclosure of imperfection (e.g., minimizing or hiding their imperfections). This demonstrates some variation in how attachment styles can promote or inhibit different dimensions of perfectionism, while also providing empirical evidence for the PSDM.

Interestingly, Cerkez (2017) conducted a study to see if attachment styles impacted perfectionism in romantic relationships and found no differences between perfectionism scores and attachment styles. These results are contrary to the overwhelming amount of literature in these areas linking these constructs together. Since not all research has found an association between these constructs, it is important to further clarify and research these constructs as in the current study. Perfectionism, and specifically maladaptive perfectionism, has been demonstrably linked to anxious and/or avoidant adult attachment orientation, poorer relationship satisfaction and quality, and poorer mental health (Hewitt et al., 2017).

This striving for perfection, or appearance of perfection, is often connected to either an increased sensitivity to rejection or an increased amount of maladaptive interpersonal behaviors

(Hewitt et al., 2017). Barnett and Johnson (2016) had a related finding that maladaptive perfectionism led to lower levels of perceived social support. These individuals' perceptions are that others do not support them, which can then lead to that individual engaging in behaviors that do not promote interpersonal relationships. These behaviors or beliefs can then result in being rejected by others or self- or other-initiated social withdrawal. These findings directly correlate with the PSDM. While this model is relatively new, there is growing evidence that supports the PSDM's theoretical framework. Based on this theoretical framework, perfectionism is in the direct pathway between attachment styles and other variables (e.g., personal wellbeing, interpersonal factors). This model would then require perfectionism to be a mediator as it lies directly in the causal pathway. As described earlier, the PSDM links these interpersonal issues to the perfectionistic individual feeling socially disconnected from others. This begins to describe the impact of maladaptive perfectionism on dyadic relationships.

Perfectionism and Romantic Relationships

While there is limited research that has examined the full mediation pathway between adult attachment styles, perfectionism, and relationship outcomes, the research connecting perfectionism and relationship outcomes is more substantial. Stoeber and Stoeber (2009) found that 28% of a college student sample and 23% of an adult internet sample self-reported being perfectionistic in their romantic relationships. Perfectionism has been found to harmfully impact romantic relationships in a multitude of facets. Habke and colleagues (1999) established a negative correlation between partner-prescribed perfectionism (i.e., socially prescribed perfectionism) and sexual satisfaction within participants' marriage. Further, married individuals with higher partner-prescribed perfectionism had partners with lower marital happiness (Haring et al., 2003). Stoeber (2012) examined partner and actor effects and specifically measured

perfectionism as it related to romantic partners instead of 'others.' Stoeber (2012) found that the reporter's higher levels of partner-oriented perfectionism (i.e., other-oriented perfectionism) were related to their own lower levels of romantic relationship satisfaction and long-term commitment. Additionally, individuals who reported higher levels of partner-prescribed perfectionism (i.e., socially prescribed perfectionism) were more likely to have lower levels of romantic relationship satisfaction. Even in instances where the individual was not currently in a romantic relationship but had to predict their satisfaction level in a relationship with a perfectionistic partner, the study participants predicted they themselves would be less satisfied (Davis et al., 2018).

The current study aims to expand the existing literature to provide evidence on the links between adult attachment style, perfectionism, and romantic relationship satisfaction. Specifically, this study will determine the influence of maladaptive perfectionism on explaining the relationship between insecure adult attachment styles (both anxious and avoidant) and romantic relationship satisfaction.

Research Questions

Given past research (Stackert & Bursik, 2003; Brennan & Shaver, 1995; Hewitt et al., 1991) on the effects of attachment styles and perfectionism on young adult relationships, in the current study I examined the influence of adult attachment styles and perfectionism on the satisfaction of adults' romantic relationships.

Based on relatively limited prior research on links between attachment style, perfectionism, and relationship outcomes (Davis et al, 2018; Chen et al., 2012), I expected that participants who self-reported higher levels of insecure adult attachment styles (e.g., avoidant attachment and anxious attachment) would be more likely to experience maladaptive

perfectionism (e.g., self-critical perfectionism, rigid perfectionism, narcissistic perfectionism) which would then predict lower romantic relationship satisfaction. The current study tested a path analysis model where insecure adult attachment styles (both anxious and avoidant) were directly and indirectly predictive of romantic relationship satisfaction for individuals currently in a romantic relationship through three mediation pathways of rigid perfectionism, self-critical perfectionism, and narcissistic perfectionism. Specifically, I predicted that attachment avoidance would have a direct positive link to all three types of maladaptive perfectionism, which would then predict lower romantic relationship satisfaction. I further predicted that attachment anxiety would have a direct positive link to all three types of maladaptive perfectionism, which would then predict lower romantic relationship satisfaction. These direct effects and indirect effects were predicted to be simultaneously present. Then participant's sex and current relationship length were used as control predictors on romantic relationship satisfaction.

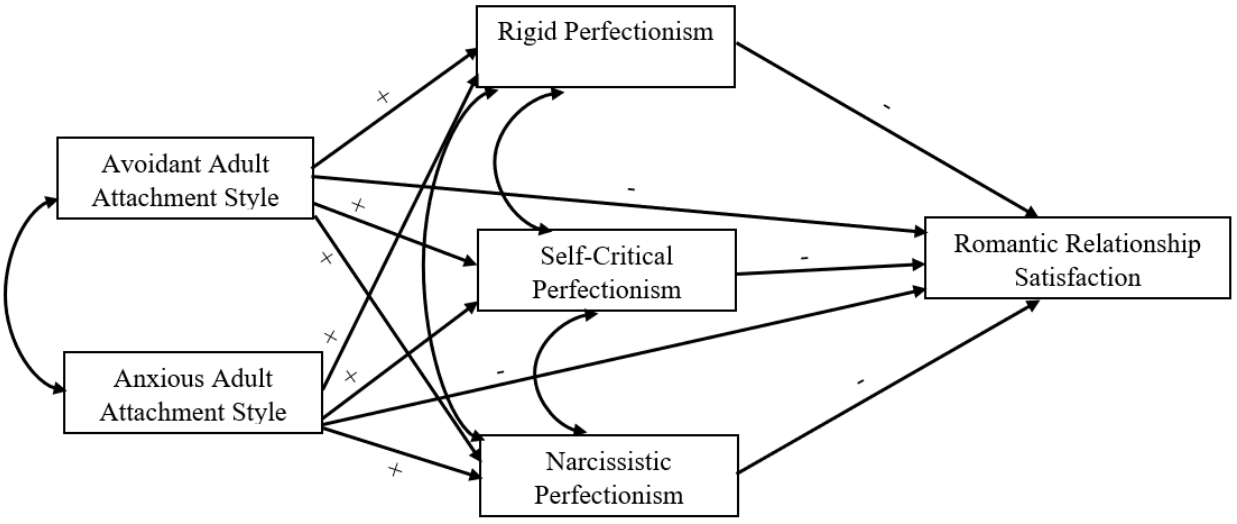

Figure 2: Hypothesized model

CHAPTER III

Method

Participants

Participants were eligible to complete this study if they (1) were 18 years or older, (2) were currently in a monogamous romantic relationship (e.g., dating, in an exclusive relationship, married), (3) current romantic relationship length was 6 months or longer, and (4) currently resided in the United States. The inclusion criteria were assessed using screener items (Appendix A). Participants were recruited through Prolific (https://www.prolific.com), an online tool to recruit research participants. Based on an estimated effect size 0.05 with an alpha = 0.05 and power = 0.80, the projected sample size needed with this effect size (GPower 3.1) is approximately $N = 147$. Thus, our sample size of 214 participants is adequate for the main objective of this study. Furthermore, this sample size is in line with related research on attachment styles, perfectionism, and romantic relationships where the sample sizes ranged from 78 participants to 241 participants (e.g., Madey & Jilek, 2012; Rice et al., 2005; Stackert & Bursik, 2003).

Initial data collection included data from 220 participants through the Prolific Academic research platform. Three participants failed one or more of the attention checks. An additional 3 participants did not meet the eligibility criteria outlined above. Therefore, 6 participants were removed from the data set, which left 214 participants as usable data.

Of the final analytic sample (N=214), 51.4% (n=110) identified their sex as a female and 48.6% (n=104) as a male. No participants identified as intersex. Participants' reported gender was slightly more nuanced with 49.1% (n=105) identified as a woman, 48.1% (n=103) identified as a man, 1.9% (n=4) identified as non-binary, 0.5% (n=1) identified as transgender, and 0.5%

(*n*=1) preferred not to respond to this question. Participants' age ranged from 19 to 79 years old (*M*=35.2, *SD* = 13.0). The majority (76.6%; *n*=164) of participants identified as White, 9.3% (*n*=20) identified as Hispanic or Latino(a/x), 7.0% (*n*=15) identified as Asian or Pacific Islander, 2.8% (*n*=6) identified as Black or African American, 0.9% (*n*=2) identified as Native American or American Indian, and 3.3% (*n*=7) preferred to self-describe their race. The self-described race responses included "bi-racial; European; mixed Asian/White; mixed Race/Bi-racial; multi racial (Filipina, Native American, White); Native American/White). The majority (75.2%; *n*=161) of participants identified as heterosexual, 15.0% (*n*=32) identified as bisexual, 1.9% (*n*=4) identified as gay, 1.9% (*n*=4) identified as queer, 1.4% (*n*=3) identified as asexual, 1.4% (*n*=3) identified as lesbian, 1.4% (*n*=3) identified as pansexual, 0.5% (*n*=1) preferred not to respond, and 1.4 % (*n*=3) preferred to self-describe their sexual orientation. The self-described sexual orientation responses included "ace lesbian; contextual; demisexual omniromantic." Participants were also asked to provide demographic information for their current romantic partner, including their age, sex, and gender. The ages ranged between 19 and 77 (*M*=35.6, *SD* = 13.2) for the romantic partners. Participants' current romantic partner's sex was identified as female 50.9% (*n*=109) and as male 49.1% (*n*=105). The current romantic partner's gender included 49.1% (*n*=105) identified as women, 48.1% (*n*=103) identified as men, 1.4% (*n*=3) identified as non-binary, 0.9% (*n*=2) identified as transgender, and 0.5% (*n*=1) preferred not to respond. The length of the current relationship ranged from 6 months to 640 months (*M*=122.1, *SD* = 127.3). The majority of participants' (55.1%; *n*=118) current relationship status was married, 41.2% (*n*=88) were in an exclusive relationship, and 3.7% (*n*=8) were in a dating relationship.

Measures

Demographic Questionnaire

The demographic questionnaire (Appendix B) gathered data that included the participant's racial or ethnic identity, sex, gender, age, sexual orientation, current relationship status, relationship length, partner's age, partner's racial or ethnic identity, and gender of one's partner. Participants' sex and current relationship length were used as control variables for the outcome variable.

Adult Attachment Style

The Experiences in Close Relationships Scale-Short Form (ECR-S; Wei et al., 2007) was used to assess adult attachment styles. Participants completed the unmodified ECR-S to measure their degree of attachment anxiety and their degree of attachment avoidance. Secure attachment is not directly measured with this scale, which is typical of measures of attachment style. This scale consists of two subscales: anxiety and avoidance. Each subscale consists of 6 likert-type scale items that range in degree of agreement from 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 7 (*agree strongly*) for an overall total of 12 scale items. Of the 12 items, 4 items are reverse scored (1 item from the Anxiety subscale and 3 items from the Avoidance subscale). Participants rate how well each item describes how they feel in their romantic relationships in general and does not target their current romantic partner specifically. The higher the participant's score on either subscale indicates higher insecure attachment styles on that dimension. A sample item from the Anxiety subscale is, "I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by my partner." A sample item from the Avoidance subscale is, "I want to get close to my partner, but I keep pulling back." The ECR-S has demonstrated test-retest reliability for both subscales (Anxiety = 0.82; Avoidance = 0.89) across a 3-week time period and internal consistency with coefficients ranging from 0.77 to 0.86 for

Anxiety and 0.78 to 0.88 for Avoidance (Wei et al., 2007). Discriminant validity is also shown through the low correlation of 0.28 between the two subscales, indicating distinct attachment styles (Wei et al., 2007). Further, convergent validity was demonstrated between the original long-form ECR (36-items) and the short-form ECR-S (12-items) through strong correlations for both subscales (Anxiety = 0.94; Avoidance = 0.95; Wei et al., 2007). Outcome differences between the two insecure attachment styles include attachment anxiety being positively correlated with excessive reassurance seeking and emotional reactivity, while attachment avoidance was negatively correlated with fear of intimacy and positively correlated with emotional cutoff (Wei et al., 2007). Outcome similarities include both insecure attachment styles being positively correlated with anxiety, depression, interpersonal distress, and feelings of loneliness (Wei et al., 2007). In the current sample, the Cronbach's alpha for the Avoidance subscale of the ECR-S was 0.83, which is considered good. The Cronbach's alpha for the Anxiety subscale of the ECR-S in the current sample was 0.75, which is considered acceptable. See Table 1 for each measure's descriptive statistics.

Perfectionism

The Rigid Perfectionism, Self-critical Perfectionism, and Narcissistic Perfectionism subscales of the Big Three Perfectionism Scale (BTPS; Smith, et al., 2016) were used to assess perfectionism. These three global factors of perfectionism (rigid perfectionism, self-critical perfectionism, narcissistic perfectionism) are made up of ten aspects of perfectionism (concern over mistakes, doubts about actions, self-criticism, self-oriented perfectionism, self-worth contingencies, socially prescribed perfectionism, other-oriented perfectionism, hypercriticism, entitlement, grandiosity). These subscales consist of 45 likert-type items that range in degree of agreement from 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 5 (*agree strongly*). The mean score method was used to

separately assess each of the three global factors. Therefore, the higher the global factor score, the higher the maladaptive perfectionism. A sample item from the Rigid Perfectionism factor is "I never settle for less than perfection from myself." A sample item from the Self-critical Perfectionism factor is "I judge myself harshly when I don't do something perfectly." A sample item from the Narcissistic Perfectionism factor is "It bothers me when people don't notice how perfect I am." The internal consistency among the global factors was high in previous research with αs ranging from .92 to .93 (Smith et al., 2016). Convergent validity evidence is provided by high correlations between the global factors (Rigid Perfectionism, Self-critical Perfectionism) and the subscales on the FMPS (Frost et al., 1990) and the HF-MPS (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). Specifically, Rigid Perfectionism had a positive correlation with personal standards and self-oriented perfectionism. Self-critical Perfectionism had a positive correlation with concern over mistakes, doubts about actions, self-oriented perfectionism, and socially prescribed perfectionism. Additionally, the BTPS global factors were correlated with the five-factor model of personality (Smith et al., 2016). Smith and colleagues (2016) found that Rigid Perfectionism was positively correlated with conscientiousness and neuroticism, and Self-critical Perfectionism was positively correlated with neuroticism and was negatively correlated with extraversion and agreeableness. They also found that Narcissistic Perfectionism was positively correlated with neuroticism and negatively correlated with agreeableness. In the current sample, the Cronbach's alpha for the Rigid Perfectionism subscale of the BTPS was 0.93, which is considered excellent. The Cronbach's alpha for the Self-critical Perfection subscale of the BTPS was 0.95, which is considered excellent. The Cronbach's alpha for the Narcissistic Perfectionism subscale of the BTPS was 0.90, which is considered good.

Relationship Satisfaction

The Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS; Hendrick, 1988) was used to measure romantic relationship satisfaction. This subscale consists of 7 likert-type scale items ranging in degree of satisfaction from 1 (*low*) to 5 (*high*). Of the 7 items, 2 items are reverse scored (item 4 and item 7). The higher the participant's score indicates higher romantic relationship satisfaction. A sample item from this measure is, "In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?" Correlations between the RAS and the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976) were high at the subscale level and the total scale (Dyadic Satisfaction subscale = 0.83; Total scale = 0.80; Hendrick, 1988). In the current sample, the Cronbach's alpha for the RAS was 0.92, which is considered excellent.

Procedure

This study was designated Exempt by the Institutional Review Board at Auburn University prior to data collection. Participants were recruited through the online research platform, Prolific Academic, and received monetary compensation of $1.73 USD deposited into their Prolific Academic account upon completing the study and approving their study responses. First, all participants were provided with the Prolific Academic posting form (Appendix C), which included a description of the study and requirements to receive compensation. If participants were interested in completing the study, they then read over the information letter that outlined the study and any potential benefits or risks of participation (Appendix D). Participants had to read over the information letter and mark if they did or did not consent to participating in the study. If "I do not consent" was selected, then the participant was diverted to a web browser asking them to close the browser window. Alternately, if "I consent" was selected, then the participant demonstrated their acceptance of the terms in the information letter and was diverted to the study questionnaires. All participants completed the following measures:

ECR-S (adult attachment style), BTPS (perfectionism), and RAS (romantic relationship satisfaction). Participants also completed a demographic questionnaire (Appendix B). If a participant did not meet the eligibility criterion based on their answers to the demographic questionnaire, then their data was not used in the final analyses; however, they still received compensation. All questionnaires were completed online using Qualtrics and took approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete. These measures were presented in random order to reduce ordering effects. However, all participants completed the demographics questionnaire last. There were three attention checks spread out across the questionnaires to check for participant attention and increase response validity. Participants who missed one or more attention checks were not included in the final dataset; however, participants were still compensated if they missed only one attention check. Once participants completed all components of the study, they were provided with a debrief form (Appendix E) with a list of mental health resources.

CHAPTER IV

Results

Bivariate Correlation Analysis

SPSS software was used to complete data cleaning and the initial statistical analysis process. There was no missing data at the item level or scale level, including the demographic items. Estimates of reliability were determined for each measure's subscales used in this study as reported in the Measures section of Chapter 3. Pearson correlations were conducted to assess the relationships among the study variables. Table 1 includes the descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations for all measures used. Relationship satisfaction was found to be significantly and negatively related to both attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety, as well as to self-critical perfectionism and narcissistic perfectionism. Relationship satisfaction was not found to have a significant relationship with rigid perfectionism. Outside of relationship satisfaction, all other measures (attachment x perfectionism) were found to be significantly and positively correlated. Participant's sex and current relationship length were used as control variables. Current relationship length was significantly and negatively correlated with attachment anxiety, rigid perfectionism, self-critical perfectionism, and narcissistic perfectionism; however, current relationship length was not significantly correlated with attachment avoidance or relationship satisfaction. Table 1 includes the descriptive statistics and correlations for all measures used.

Additionally, *t*-tests were conducted to examine potential differences on each study variable by sex (see Table 2). Female participants reported higher levels of self-critical perfectionism than their male counterparts. No other significant differences were found between participant's sex, although both attachment styles neared significant differences as outlined in Table 2.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations of Study Variables

Measure	*M (SD)*	Skewness	Kurtosis	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Relationship Satisfaction	29.4 (5.5)	-1.40	1.81	--	-.67**	-.31**	-.10	-.15*	-.17*	-.07	.10
2. Attachment Avoidance	13.3 (6.2)	0.98	0.62		--	.37**	.22**	.27**	.37**	.12	-.13
3. Attachment Anxiety	20.7 (7.2)	0.14	-0.53			--	.26**	.48**	.28**	-.13	-.37**
4. Rigid Perfectionism	24.5 (8.5)	0.32	-0.41				--	.73**	.57**	-.07	-.26**
5. Self-critical Perfectionism	50.7 (15.2)	-0.28	-0.77					--	.46**	-.17*	-.37**
6. Narcissistic Perfectionism	33.1 (10.0)	0.52	-0.09						--	.06	-.22**
7. Sex	1.5 (0.5)	0.06	-1.20							--	.06
8. Current Relationship Length	122.1 (127.3)	1.79	3.08								--

N = 214

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 2

t-tests Between Participant's Sex and Other Study Variables

Measure	*M (SD)*	*F*	*t*	*p*
Relationship Satisfaction		2.43	1.01	0.31
Female	29.7 (5.1)			
Male	29.0 (6.0)			
Attachment Avoidance		1.33	-1.71	0.09
Female	12.6 (6.0)			
Male	14.0 (6.4)			
Attachment Anxiety		3.73	1.83	0.07
Female	21.6 (7.6)			
Male	19.8 (6.6)			
Rigid Perfectionism		0.01	1.03	0.30
Female	25.1 (8.4)			
Male	23.9 (8.5)			
Self-critical Perfectionism		0.65	2.51	0.01**
Female	53.2 (14.8)			
Male	48.1 (15.2)			
Narcissistic Perfectionism		0.22	-0.81	0.42
Female	32.6 (9.9)			
Male	33.7 (10.1)			

N = 214
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Path Analysis

A path analysis was conducted using AMOS software to test the hypothesized model (see Figure 1). Path analysis allows for simultaneous analyses of direct and indirect effects with multiple variables. Direct effects are when an exogenous variable impacts an endogenous variable. Indirect effects are when an exogenous variable impacts an endogenous variable through a mediating variable. The hypothesized model also tested for goodness of fit by utilizing the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), a goodness-of-fit index (GFI), a standardized root mean square (SRMR), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). Based on the literature, the

initial hypothesized model predicted attachment styles (avoidant, anxious) are exogenous variables with both direct and indirect effects through maladaptive perfectionism (rigid perfectionism, self-critical perfectionism, narcissistic perfectionism) on romantic relationship satisfaction. As indicated above, sex and relationship length were used as control predictors of relationship satisfaction. The path analysis demonstrated an acceptable fit overall, including $\chi 2$ ($df = 6$) = 20.53, $p < .01$. Model fit was evaluated using various indices: a comparative fit index (CFI) close to 0.95 or larger, a goodness-of-fit index (GFI) close to 0.90 or larger, a standardized root mean square (SRMR) close to .08 or smaller, and a root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) close to 0.06 or smaller (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Additional fit statistics for the hypothesized model include CFI = 0.97; GFI = 0.98; SRMR = 0.05; and RMSEA = 0.11, (90% CI = 0.06, 0.16). Due to the good model fit and no Modification Indexes above 5, no modifications were made to the hypothesized model.

Results of this model are provided in Figure 2. The path coefficients are standardized to allow for ease of understanding the relationship between this model's variables. Further, R^2 effect size descriptors were used to determine the amount of variance explained for each endogenous variable (small = .02; medium = .13; large = .26; Cohen, 1988). As shown, current relationship length (control) and participant's sex (control) were not significant predictors of romantic relationship satisfaction.

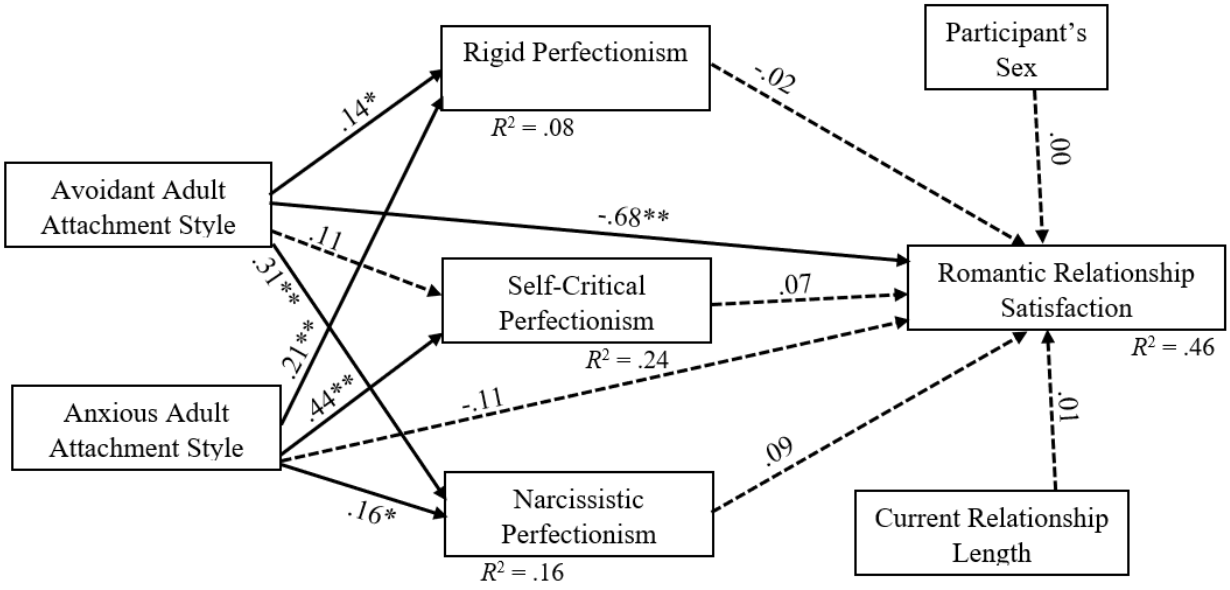

Figure 2: Hypothesized model depicting standardized coefficients; $N = 214$
Note: Solid lines indicate significant paths. Dashed lines indicate insignificant paths. All exogenous variables were covaried, but these lines were not included in the Figure for greater visual clarity.
** = Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). * = Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Consistent with hypotheses, higher attachment avoidance significantly predicted lower romantic relationship satisfaction (β = -.68, $p < .001$). Higher attachment avoidance significantly predicted higher levels of rigid perfectionism (β = .14, $p < .05$) and narcissistic perfectionism (β = .31, $p < .001$). However, attachment avoidance did not have a significant direct path to self-critical perfectionism. Higher attachment anxiety significantly predicted higher levels of rigid perfectionism (β = .21, $p < .01$), self-critical perfectionism (β = .44, $p < .001$), and narcissistic perfectionism (β = .16, $p = .016$). The included variables explained 24% of the variance in self-critical perfectionism ($R^2 = .24$), a medium effect; 16% of the variance in narcissistic perfectionism ($R^2 = .16$), a medium effect; and 8% of the variance in rigid perfectionism ($R^2 = .08$), a small effect. However, contrary to the hypotheses, attachment anxiety did not have a significant direct path to romantic relationship satisfaction. Further, there were no significant direct paths from the three types of maladaptive perfectionism to romantic relationship

satisfaction. The path model explained 46% of the variance in romantic relationship satisfaction (R^2 = .46), a large effect.

Estimated indirect effects from the attachment predictor variables to the relationship satisfaction outcome variable were calculated using bias-corrected bootstrap sampling with 2,000 bootstrap samples. Indirect effects from the attachment predictor variables to the romantic relationship satisfaction outcome variable were included to explain that section of the path model. For relationship satisfaction, there was a significant, albeit very small, indirect effect for attachment avoidance, with higher attachment avoidance indirectly predicting lower romantic relationship satisfaction (.03; 90% CI = .002, .08). While AMOS provided the overall indirect effect described above, AMOS does not automatically outline which mediating variable caused the significant indirect effect. Thus, additional analyses were conducted to determine which specific perfectionism variable(s) contributed to the significant indirect effect. However, while the specific indirect effects approached significance, none of the specific indirect effects were significant. Specifically, the indirect pathways through rigid perfectionism (-.002; 90% CI = -.03, .01), through self-critical perfectionism (.007; 90% CI = -.002, .04), and through narcissistic perfectionism (.03; 90% CI = -.001, .07) all included 0 in the confidence intervals. Relationship satisfaction did not have a significant indirect effect for attachment anxiety (.04; 90% CI = -.005, .10). The total effect for attachment anxiety was not significant (-.07; 90% CI = -.19, .04). However, the total effect of attachment avoidance was significant in predicting romantic relationship satisfaction (-.64; 90% CI = -.73, -.54).

CHAPTER V

Discussion

The purposes of the current study were to expand the current literature related to adult attachment, perfectionism, and their impacts on romantic relationship satisfaction by focusing on the linear relationships among these variables. Specifically, the current study investigated the relationship between adult attachment style and romantic relationship satisfaction, then explored maladaptive perfectionism as a mediator for that relationship. Additionally, some of the theoretical models (e.g., PSDM) and measures used in the current study were developed more recently. This study provides further empirical evidence for these constructs and measures. Prior research focused on the mediating relationship of perfectionism between adult attachment styles and personal wellbeing outcomes (Gnilka et al., 2013; Wei et al., 2004; Wei et al., 2006), so this study expands the current literature on the mediating relationship of maladaptive perfectionism between adult attachment styles and romantic relationship satisfaction.

Insecure attachment styles and maladaptive perfectionism are areas of concern within interpersonal relationships, particularly romantic relationships. Prior research demonstrates the influence of adult attachment styles on romantic relationships, including romantic relationship satisfaction (e.g., Etcheverry et al., 2013; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994; Martin et al., 2012; Mohr et al., 2013; Šlosáriková, 2021). An avoidant attachment style and an anxious attachment style have been found to negatively impact romantic relationship satisfaction (e.g., Beeney et al., 2019; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). The relationship between maladaptive perfectionism and insecure adult attachment styles has also been previously researched (Rice et al., 2005). Further, the literature has explored the relationship between maladaptive perfectionism and romantic relationship satisfaction (Hewitt et al., 2017). However, there are few

studies that have examined these concepts simultaneously. The current study allows for a simultaneous examination of these relationships and greater generalizability of results given a more diverse sample (e.g., participants' age, sex). In past literature, it is common for these studies to be completed with traditional college aged students and/or who primarily identify as women. The current study's sample includes a wide range of ages, and nearly half of the sample were men.

Prior to analyzing the hypothesized model, correlational analyses were run to determine basic relationships amongst the variables. The initial correlational analyses demonstrated that avoidant attachment and anxious attachment had a statistically significant relationship with romantic relationship satisfaction. These results are not surprising, as there is ample literature connecting these concepts (Hewitt et al., 2017). Further, the correlational analyses demonstrated that self-critical perfectionism and narcissistic perfectionism also had a statistically significant relationship with romantic relationship satisfaction; however, there was not a statistically significant relationship between rigid perfectionism and romantic relationship satisfaction. Rigid perfectionism is where an individual believes their own performance "must be flawless, perfect, and without errors" (Smith et al., 2016; p.671). Perhaps an individual who scores high on rigid perfectionism is more inward focused than the other two forms of maladaptive perfectionism which generally focus more on other individuals (e.g., narcissistic perfectionism) and perceived expectations of others (e.g., self-critical perfectionism). Therefore, individuals with higher traits of rigid perfectionism may not experience as much of an impact on their romantic relationship satisfaction.

When examining the hypothesized model, mixed results were found. Previous literature demonstrated links between attachment avoidance and maladaptive perfectionism (Chen et al.,

2012; Hewitt et al., 2017). I thus expected attachment avoidance to predict greater maladaptive perfectionism on all three global factors. However, this was not the case. In the path analysis, greater levels of attachment avoidance were only found to be associated with higher levels of two global factors of maladaptive perfectionism (rigid perfectionism and narcissistic perfectionism). Rigid perfectionism includes the following facets: self-oriented perfectionism and self-worth contingencies. This global factor measures an individual's rigid insistence that they perform flawlessly; however, it has less to do with other's expectations or concerns of how they are perceived. Narcissistic perfectionism includes the following facets: other-oriented perfectionism, hypercriticism, entitlement, and grandiosity. More specifically, this global factor is reportedly the sole self-report measure created "to assess individuals who believe they are perfect, superior to others, and justified in holding unrealistic expectations" (Smith et al., 2016; p. 672). These facets are in line with characteristics of an individual who has attachment avoidance, such as distrust of others, emotional independence and distance from others, and self-reliance (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Contrary to expectations, attachment avoidance was not found to be associated with self-critical perfectionism. Self-critical perfectionism includes the following facets: concern over mistakes, doubts about actions, self-criticism, and socially prescribed perfectionism. Further, attachment-avoidant individuals tend to not acknowledge their "personal faults, weaknesses, or needs" (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016; p. 176). This literature may explain why the current study did not find a statistically significant relationship between attachment avoidance and self-critical perfectionism.

As predicted, greater attachment avoidance was directly linked to lower romantic relationship satisfaction. These findings are consistent with the literature demonstrating the widespread detriment that attachment avoidance has on romantic relationships (Mikulincer &

Shaver, 2016; Pistole et al., 1995; Gere et al., 2013). The overall model effect size was large in its prediction of romantic relationship satisfaction, meaning that insecure attachment styles and maladaptive perfectionism factors explain a large part of the variance seen in romantic relationship satisfaction. Although, it is important to note the majority of this effect size is explained through attachment style, as none of the maladaptive perfectionism variables were directly related to romantic relationship satisfaction. Specifically, greater attachment avoidance had a minimal indirect predictive effect on lower romantic relationship satisfaction through the mediation of maladaptive perfectionism, even though the path from maladaptive perfectionism to relationship satisfaction was not statistically significant. Further, no specific indirect effects were found to be significant, which makes the overall indirect effect less relevant regarding additional implications. The difference between the overall indirect effect and the specific indirect effects may be explained by bootstrap analysis, as each bootstrap analysis is slightly different which impacts the confidence intervals. These results extend prior literature by testing a model using perfectionism as a mediator between adult attachment styles and romantic relationship satisfaction whereas prior literature (Gnilka et al., 2013) assessed this mediated relationship on personal wellbeing measures. While this study expands the PSDM to include an interpersonal concept (i.e., romantic relationship satisfaction), the results related to maladaptive perfectionism's influence on romantic relationship satisfaction are quite limited. Prior research demonstrated a connection between maladaptive perfectionism and romantic relationship satisfaction (Stoeber, 2012); however, the current study did not corroborate those findings. Perhaps a larger study sample would allow for these relationships to be better demonstrated.

There were also mixed results with the hypotheses on attachment anxiety. As predicted, higher levels of attachment anxiety were found to be directly associated with higher levels of all

three global factors of maladaptive perfectionism. These findings are consistent with the literature demonstrating links between attachment anxiety and maladaptive perfectionism (Chen et al., 2012; Hewitt et al., 2017).

Prior research has found attachment anxiety to be associated with lower romantic relationship satisfaction (Beeney et al., 2019) and poor romantic relationship outcomes (Collins & Feeney, 2000; Feeney & Noller, 1990). Thus, the current study predicted that greater attachment anxiety would predict lower romantic relationship satisfaction. However, contrary to this prediction, the current study did not demonstrate a statistically significant direct effect or indirect effect between attachment anxiety and romantic relationship satisfaction. This may be partially explained by Bartholomew and Horowitz' (1991; p.240) research that found individuals with a "preoccupied" attachment style tend to "blame themselves for perceived rejections and are thereby able to maintain a positive view of others." This positive view of others may extend into their overall relationship satisfaction. Perhaps if there are issues within the romantic relationship, the attachment-anxious individual focuses more on their intrapersonal characteristics instead of generalizing their concerns to the relationship at large.

In researching these concepts, participants' sex and current relationship length were identified as salient control variables. Some research has demonstrated that women scored higher than men on preoccupied attachment (e.g., attachment anxiety; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Contrary to those findings, the current study found no significant differences between males and females on adult attachment styles. Interestingly, the only significant difference based on participants' sex was that females self-reported greater levels of self-critical perfectionism than males. This may be explained by the many societal pressures and expectations put on females

within our society. There were no other differences found between participants' sex and other exogenous or endogenous variables.

Based on the assumption that the longer an individual was in a romantic relationship, the more satisfied they likely were and less maladaptive behaviors they exhibited, the current study also used the participants' current relationship length as a control variable. Surprisingly, the current relationship length was not significantly related to romantic relationship satisfaction or an avoidant adult attachment style. However, current relationship length was significantly related to all three global factors of maladaptive perfectionism and to an anxious adult attachment style. Specifically, the longer a participant was in a romantic relationship, the lower the scores on attachment anxiety and the levels of rigid perfectionism, self-critical perfectionism, and narcissistic perfectionism they reported. Perhaps this has to do with increasing self- and other-acceptance and comfort within the romantic relationship which then dampens maladaptive perfectionism. While no prior studies were found that directly examined the link between current romantic relationship length and maladaptive perfectionism, the literature clearly demonstrates a link between maladaptive perfectionism and poor relationship behaviors and outcomes (Stoeber, 2012), which could then be assumed to lead to shorter romantic relationships. Further exploring the connection between maladaptive perfectionism and adult attachment styles will continue to add to the literature on interpersonal and intrapersonal wellbeing.

Implications

The results of the current study provide several implications. Insecure attachment styles have been shown in previous research to be a salient factor of one's interpersonal wellbeing and intrapersonal wellbeing. This study adds to previous literature findings of the negative impacts of insecure attachment styles and maladaptive perfectionism on romantic relationships. Many

individuals and couples seek mental health treatment related to issues within their romantic relationship, indicating this is an important area to be cognizant of for not only researchers but practitioners also. Results of this study could be used in helping practitioners be aware of individual characteristics that may be contributing to their clients' romantic relationship dissatisfaction. This awareness may impact the types of interventions practitioners use with clients and/or which areas to provide psychoeducation on. For researchers, the implications open the door to further explore the interpersonal impacts of these concepts.

The current study's hypothesized model was based on the PSDM theory. The characteristics of the three global factors of maladaptive perfectionism are specific to an individual's intrapersonal traits. While these intrapersonal traits were hypothesized to influence a broad interpersonal trait (i.e., romantic relationship satisfaction), these relationships were not found in the current study. For researchers, the implications allow for further exploration into perhaps more narrow aspects of interpersonal relationships (e.g., relationship length, trust, empathy, conflict).

When it comes to maladaptive perfectionism, the current study found that females scored higher in self-critical perfectionism than males. Self-critical perfectionism, like the other forms of perfectionism, becomes a means of winning others' approval and ultimately being accepted. In comparison to the other two global factors, self-critical perfectionism includes concerns about making mistakes, doubting oneself, being self-critical, and experiencing socially prescribed perfectionism (i.e., our understanding of society's expectations for ourselves), whereas the other two factors are focused on needing one's own performance to be flawless based on their personal expectations (e.g., rigid perfectionism) or believing they are already perfect, better than others, and also hold unrealistic expectations for others (e.g., narcissistic perfectionism). This finding

may speak to the increased pressures on females to be 'perfect' within our society and how females internalize those societal pressures. Additionally, this concept may be useful for understanding effective parenting techniques, particularly with parents of females.

While the current study obtained only one partner's perspective, future research may benefit from obtaining both partner's perspectives which would allow for comparing their lived experiences. This might provide richer data interpretations for practitioners providing couples therapy. Further, this could provide more insight into how a couple's relationship satisfaction may differ within the same relationship based on each individual's attachment style and maladaptive perfectionism factors.

Limitations and Future Considerations

There were steps taken to strengthen the current study's design including randomizing the order measures were presented to reduce ordering effects and using multiple attention checks to enhance validity. However, there are limitations to note when examining this study. The current study was correlational and cross-sectional in nature. Even though path analysis was used, and the hypotheses were based on sound theory, the statistical relationships found in the correlational data do not represent causality in the traditional understanding of an experiment. Specifically, no exogenous variables were manipulated to determine the effects of that manipulation on the endogenous variables. Therefore, no causal inferences can be derived from this study's results.

Additionally, the study was relatively homogenous in race, gender, and sexual orientation. This sample was majority White, cisgender, and heterosexual participants, which limits the generalizability of the results to individuals of other races, genders, and sexual orientations. Expanding this research to include other diverse identities would add valuable information to the attachment style and maladaptive perfectionism literature.

Further, all the measures used in this study were self-report in nature. Individuals may fail to endorse less desirable or more stigmatized qualities due to lack of self-awareness or to control how others perceive them. Future studies could gather data from both romantic partners to allow for comparison of the results. By including both romantic partners, this could allow for a richer interpretation of attachment style and maladaptive perfectionism on their perceptions of various aspects of their relationship. For instance, one partner may have a drastically different level of relationship satisfaction based on their own experiences and interpretations.

Last, this study begins to expand the PSDM's theoretical framework. The PSDM theorizes that individuals with perfectionistic traits and insecure attachment styles will experience social disconnection. This social disconnection can lend to various intrapersonal and interpersonal issues. The current study found clear evidence for the relationship between insecure attachment styles and maladaptive perfectionism, as well as the relationship between an avoidant attachment style and interpersonal issues (i.e., lower romantic relationship satisfaction). However, the evidence was lacking for a connection between maladaptive perfectionism and romantic relationship satisfaction. While the current study did not support the PSDM theory well, research suggests there is a theoretical link between these concepts. Further exploration is required to provide a clearer picture of support, or lack thereof, for this theoretical framework in the context of interpersonal relationship concepts.

Conclusion

The current study examined the relationship between adult attachment style and romantic relationship satisfaction and the role of maladaptive perfectionism as a mediator in this relationship. Results supported previous literature on the impact of attachment avoidance on romantic relationship satisfaction; however, results did not support previous literature on the

impact of attachment anxiety on romantic relationship satisfaction. This study demonstrated that maladaptive perfectionism minimally mediated the relationship between attachment avoidance and romantic relationship satisfaction. Although it is important to note that while the specific indirect effects approached significance, none of the specific indirect effects were significant. However, maladaptive perfectionism did not have a direct link to romantic relationship satisfaction. Sex and the length of the current relationship were used as control variables. Sex was only significantly correlated with self-critical perfectionism, while the length of the current relationship was only significantly correlated with the three global factors of maladaptive perfectionism and attachment anxiety. Incorporating these findings into clinical work when providing couples therapy or discussing interpersonal issues would likely be beneficial to guide clinical interventions. This study provides minimal evidence of the PSDM theoretical framework as there was no direct relationship between the three global factors of maladaptive perfectionism and romantic relationship satisfaction. However, research should continue to explore and expand upon our understanding of the PSDM. The development of research in these areas is needed to understand the best way to serve individuals with maladaptive perfectionistic traits and insecure attachment styles.

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Appendix A

Inclusion Screener Questions

Inclusion Criteria: To participate you must meet the following criteria;

Are you currently 18 years old or older?
-Yes
-No

Are you currently in a monogamous romantic relationship?
-Yes
-No

What is the length of your current relationship?
# of years [text box]
# of months [text box]

Do you currently reside in the United States?
-Yes
-No

Appendix B

Demographics Questionnaire

What is your current relationship status?

a. Single (not dating)
b. Dating
c. Exclusive Relationship
d. Married
e. Separated
f. Divorced
g. Widowed

→ [If exclusive relationship or married are selected] How long have you and your current romantic partner been together? Please enter the length in years [text entry] and months [text entry]

What is your age in years?: _____years [text entry]

What is your romantic partner's current age in years?: _____ years [text entry]

Which of the following best describes your race/ethnicity? [can select multiple]

a. Asian or Pacific Islander
b. Black or African American
c. Hispanic or Latino(a)
d. Native American or American Indian
e. White
f. Other- please specify: _____ [text entry]

Which of the following best describes the race/ethnicity of your romantic partner? [can select multiple]

a. Asian or Pacific Islander
b. Black or African American
c. Hispanic or Latino(a)
d. Native American or American Indian
e. White
f. Other- please specify: _____

Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?

a. Asexual
b. Bisexual
c. Gay
d. Heterosexual
e. Lesbian

f. Pansexual
g. Queer
h. Prefer not to respond
i. Other- please specify: _____

Appendix C

Prolific Academic Posting Form

Close Relationships Study

Hosted by *Cassandra Grey*

$1.73 • 15 minutes • $6.92/hr • 200 places remaining

You will answer questions related to your close relationships.

You will also answer basic demographic questions.

In order to participate, you must meet the following criteria:

1) be at least 18 years of age,

2) currently in a monogamous romantic relationship,

3) you have been in your current romantic relationship for at least 6 months,

4) currently reside in the United States.

If you meet these eligibility requirements and are interested in participating, you may click on the link to participate.

Devices you can use to take this study:

Desktop Mobile Tablet

Open study link in a new window

Appendix D

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS AN IRB APPROVAL CODE WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN APPLIED TO THIS STUDY.)

INFORMATION LETTER
for a Research Study entitled
"Close Relationships Study"
IRB APPROVAL CODE #22-022 EX 2201, Grey

You are invited to participate in a research study designed to explore components of close relationships. This study is being conducted by Cassandra Grey, M.S., under the direction of Marilyn Cornish, PhD, in the Auburn University Department of Special Education, Rehabilitation, and Counseling. **To participate, you must (1) be at least 18 years old, (2) be in a monogamous romantic relationship, (3) be in this relationship for 6 months or longer, and (4) reside in the United States.** If you do not meet these requirements, you are not eligible to participate in this study and you should return your submission within Prolific.

What will be involved if you participate? If you decide to participate in this research study, you will complete an online questionnaire through Qualtrics. You will be asked to respond to questions related to your close relationships. You will then answer some demographic information about yourself. The survey will need to be completed at one time and is expected to take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

Are there any risks or discomforts? It is not anticipated that these procedures will cause you any harm. However, as some of these questions ask you to think about personal experiences, it could plausibly elicit feelings of psychological or emotional discomfort. To minimize these risks, you may skip any question that you do not wish to answer or that makes you feel uncomfortable. You are encouraged to complete the study at a private location of your choice so that others do not accidentally view your responses on your screen. You are also free at any time to choose to end your participation; however, if you do so, you are forfeiting compensation. In addition, psychological help-seeking resources will be provided at the end of the questionnaire should you determine you want to seek counseling for any concerns identified in this study. There will be no identifiable information collected so your participation will remain anonymous.

Are there any benefits to yourself or others? If you decide to participate in this study, there will be no direct benefit to you, although you may learn about psychological research from a participant's perspective.

Will you receive compensation for participating? To thank you for your time, you will be offered $1.73 (U.S. dollars), credited to your Prolific Academic account after valid participation has been ensured. The researchers will evaluate your response to three attention check items to help in their determination of valid participation.

Are there any costs? There are no costs associated with participation in this study.

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you decide not to participate after reading this information letter, you will not be eligible for compensation. If you agree to participate after reading this document, you are still free to withdraw your participation at any time during the study. If you choose to withdraw, you are forfeiting compensation.

Your privacy will be protected. We will protect your privacy and data you provide by not collecting any identifiable information in the study questionnaire. Your name will not be connected in any way to the responses you provide in the study questionnaire. Information collected through your participation will be combined with all other participants' responses and may be published in a professional journal and/or presented at a professional meeting.

If you have questions about this study, please contact the Primary Investigator, Cassandra Grey, M.S., at cjg0021@auburn.edu. You can also contact her faculty supervisor, Dr. Marilyn Cornish at mac0084@auburn.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Auburn University Office of Research Compliance or the Institutional Review Board by phone (334)-844-5966 or e-mail at IRBadmin@auburn.edu or IRBChair@auburn.edu

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, YOU MUST DECIDE IF YOU WANT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT. IF YOU DECIDE TO PARTICIPATE, THE DATA YOU PROVIDE WILL SERVE AS YOUR AGREEMENT TO DO SO. YOU MAY PRINT A COPY OF THIS LETTER FOR YOUR RECORDS.

Cassandra Grey, M.S.
Investigator Date

The Auburn University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from January 24, 2022 to --------- Protocol #22-022 EX 2201, Grey.

Appendix E

Debrief Form

Dear Participant;

If you have questions about your participation in the study, please contact me, Cassandra Grey, M.S. (*cjg0021@auburn.edu*), or my faculty advisor, Marilyn Cornish, Ph.D. (*mac0084@auburn.edu*).

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Office of Research Compliance (334-844-5966, IRBadmin@auburn.edu or the Auburn University Institutional Review Board (IRBChair@auburn.edu).

If your participation in this research study has raised concerns that you would like to discuss with someone, a referral list of mental health providers is attached to this document for your use. (Please remember that any cost in seeking medical assistance is at your own expense.)

Please again accept our appreciation for your participation in this study.

Cassandra Grey, M.S.
Name

Psychological Help-Seeking Resources
(Here are just a few resources that can help you begin your help-seeking journey.)

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)
https://www.nami.org/Support-Education
https://www.nami.org/help
https://www.nami.org/Support-Education/Mental-Health-Education

Psychology Today (therapist locator)
https://www.psychologytoday.com/us