

## Love Schemas, Preferences in Romantic Partners, and Reactions to Commitment

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### Abstract

Researchers have proposed that people possess different love schemas and that these schemas may shape romantic preferences and reactions to impending commitments.

In Study 1, we tested two hypotheses: Hypothesis 1: Men and women will prefer potential dates who possess an “ideal” love schema (i.e., the secure). Hypothesis 2: If the ideal is unavailable, men and women will prefer potential dates whose love schemas are similar to their own. In order to test these hypotheses, men and women from the University of Hawaii, who varied in love schemas, were asked to indicate their preferences for potential romantic partners who varied in physical attractiveness, body type, and love schemas. It was found that people did indeed prefer the ideal (the secure) and (secondarily) those who were similar to them in attachment style—be it clingy, skittish, casual, or disinterested.

Study 2 was designed to test Hypothesis 3: Participants’ love schemas will shape their cognitions, feelings, and behaviors when they find themselves on the brink of making a serious romantic commitment. In order to test this hypothesis, men and women from the University of Hawaii were surveyed. Again, as predicted, it was found that the more strongly men and women endorsed the *secure* schema, the more calm and confident (and the less fearful and trapped) they felt when confronting pending commitments. The more strongly they endorsed the *clingy*, *skittish*, *fickle*, *casual*, and *uninterested* schemas, the less confident and calm and the more fearful and trapped they felt when confronting an impending commitment.

*Keywords: love schemas, romantic preferences, commitment.*

Recently, social psychologists have become interested in the impact of cognitive schemas on people’s cognitions, emotions, and behaviors in a variety of settings (see Fehr, 1993; Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Although cognitive schemas are relatively stable, theorists acknowledge that they do change over time and alter as social contexts alter (Baldwin & Fehr, 1995; Markus & Kunda, 1986; Markus & Wurf, 1987).

Social psychologists have also argued that people possess different love schemas—i.e., different cognitive models as to what it is appropriate to expect from oneself and one’s partners in love relationships. Recently, Hatfield and Rapson (1996) proposed a model

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designed to integrate the insights of attachment and stage theorists. Attachment theory has been a rich, broad, and generative theory. Theorists have argued that infants form different kinds of bonds with their caretakers (see Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bowlby, 1979; and Main & Solomon, 1990) and that these infantile patterns of attachment have a powerful impact on romantic attachments throughout the lifespan (see Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Researchers have amassed considerable evidence in support of this contention (see Cassidy & Shaver, 1999; Simpson & Rholes, 1998). Stage theorists (such as Erikson, 1982), on the other hand, have argued that infancy is only one stage in the life cycle. Throughout their lives, people face a continuing series of developmental tasks. Adolescents, for example, confront two tasks: they must develop a relatively stable, independent identity *and* they must learn how to participate in loving, committed, intimate relationships.

Building on the work of the preceding theorists, Hatfield and Rapson (1996) proposed that people's love schemas should depend on how comfortable they are with closeness and/or independence, and on how eager they are to be involved in romantic relationships. Those who are interested in romantic relationships were said to fall into one of four types: *The secure* (who are comfortable with closeness *and* independence), *the clingy* (who are comfortable with closeness but fearful of too much independence), *the skittish* (who are fearful of too much closeness but comfortable with independence), and *the fickle* (who are uneasy with both closeness *or* independence). (These are identical to the categories proposed by Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991 and Hazan & Shaver, 1997). Those who are relatively uninterested in relationships might fall into one of two categories—*the casual* (who are interested in relationships only if they are almost problem free), and *the uninterested* (who are not at all interested in relationships, problem free or not).

Hatfield and Rapson (1996) pointed out that the people's love schemas may have multiple determinants. They are shaped by children's early experiences (see Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1994) and they deepen as young people mature (see Erikson, 1982) and gain experience with the world (see also Cassidy & Shaver, 1999; Simpson & Rholes, 1998). Depending on their romantic experiences, people may become better (or less) able to deal with the vicissitudes of love relationships. Finally, of course, people may react differently in different kinds of relationships. The same person, for example, may cling to a cool and aloof mate but become skittish with a smothering one (Cassidy & Shaver, 1999; Napier, 1977; Simpson & Rholes, 1998).

The following studies were part of a systematic program of research designed to explore the usefulness of a Love Schemas model in predicting participants' attitudes and behaviors in romantic love relationships.

Levinger (1979) observed that there are five phases in personal relationships: (1) acquaintance, (2) buildup of an ongoing relationship, (3) continuation (couples commit themselves to long-term relationships and continue to consolidate their lives), (4) deterioration or decline of the interconnections, and finally, (5) ending of the relationship, through death or separation. In Study 1, we explored the impact of love schemas on the first stage in a relationship—on romantic preferences. In Study 2, we explored the relationship between love schemas and the second stage—on reactions to impending commitments. In other research we have explored the impact of Love schemas on participants' behavior in the later stages of relationships—in established relationships (Singelis, Choo, & Hatfield, 1995) and when relationships end (Choo, Levine, & Hatfield, 1995). Obviously, theorists will have to conduct a great deal more paradigmatic research before they can hope to determine which of the many current attachment models provide the greatest understanding of relationships: Shaver and Hazan's (1993) original model, Bartholomew and Horowitz's (1991) revision, or a combination of the two (Hatfield & Rapson, 1996).

## Study 1

### *Love Schemas and Preferences in Romantic Partners*

How might people's love schemas be expected to shape their preferences in romantic partners? Theorists have proposed four very different types of hypotheses as to what people find attractive in romantic partners. Recently, Krueger and Caspi (1993) attempted to sketch out the essential differences between these hypotheses. They noted: According to the *ideal partner hypothesis*, people compare potential dates to "an abstract ideal, about which there is a general consensus . . . according to the *similarity* hypothesis, people are attracted to similar others . . . according to the *repulsion* hypothesis, people are repulsed by dissimilar others . . . [and] according to the *optimal dissimilarity* hypothesis, people find others who are somewhat, but not entirely dissimilar from themselves, most attractive (pp. 107-109). Social psychologists have amassed considerable evidence for the first two hypotheses, some evidence for the third, and little or no evidence for the fourth hypothesis.

(1) *The ideal partner hypothesis.* Researchers have found considerable evidence that young people worldwide prefer partners who epitomize universal or cultural ideals—dating partners who are attractive, affectionate, intelligent, emotionally stable, sociable, and dependable (see Buss, 1994, or Hatfield & Rapson, 1993 and 1996, for reviews of this research).

(2 and 3) *The similarity and repulsion hypotheses:* Researchers have also amassed considerable evidence that young people are most likely to be socially and romantically attracted to those who are similar to themselves—in background, attitudes, beliefs,

personality, feelings, and behaviors (Buss, 1994; Burlison & Denton, 1992; Byrne, 1992; Hatfield & Rapson, 1993 and 1996; Lykken & Tellegen, 1993). Theorists have offered a number of speculations as to why people prefer potential dates who are similar to themselves. Rushton (1989) contended that people are genetically predisposed to look for such similarities. Byrne and his colleagues (1971), on the other hand, offered a cultural explanation for the fact that “birds of a feather prefer to flock together.” He proposed that most people find it rewarding when others share their views, challenging when they do not. Thus, they prefer to date and marry those similar to themselves. Rosenbaum (1986) argued that it is not so much that people *like* people who are similar to themselves, but that they *dislike* those who are not. Men and women, he contended, tend to be repulsed by potential dates, sexual partners, or mates who disagree with their cherished attitudes, beliefs, and values.

Whatever the reason—attraction, repulsion, or dire necessity— there is considerable evidence that people actually *end up* with dates and mates who are similar to themselves. People are most likely to marry those who are similar to themselves in race, ethnic background, socioeconomic status, religion, family size, physical attractiveness, age, intelligence, level of education, social attitudes, personality, and personal habits (Buss, 1994; Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986; Rushton, 1989). They are also most likely to marry those who confront similar mental and physical problems. People with psychiatric problems or personality disorders, or those who are mentally retarded, blind, or deaf tend to marry those who share their difficulties. So do alcoholics, drug abusers, or those with criminal records (Hatfield and Rapson, 1993; Rushton, 1989).

(4) *The optimal dissimilarity hypothesis.* Some social psychologists argue that men and women prefer romantic partners who are dissimilar to them in certain fundamental ways. In the 1950s, Winch (1958) proposed that people generally look for partners whose personalities *complement* their own. (For example, a dominant person may seek out a submissive mate.) Although marriage and family researchers devoted an enormous amount of research effort attempting to document that couples choose partners whose personalities are complementary to their own, this hypothesis received little or no empirical support (see Hatfield & Rapson, 1993, for a review of this research).

More recently, Winch's notion has been picked up, dusted off, refined, and has reappeared as the *optimal dissimilarity* hypothesis. Aron and Aron (1986), for example, argued that love can best be understood in terms of a deeply felt motivation to expand the self. Social psychologists are only beginning to test such notions (see Aron & Aron, 1986; Hatfield & Rapson, 1993; and Krueger & Caspi, 1993, for a review of this research).

The preceding research provides information as to the importance of a variety of personality traits in mate selection. On the basis of this research, we proposed two hypotheses concerning the impact of love schemas on mate selection:

*Hypothesis 1:* Men and women will tend to prefer potential dates who are perceived to possess an “ideal” love schema. (They should prefer those who possess a *secure* love schema to all others.)

(Note: If we were dealing with a somewhat younger population, both the secure and the casual schemas might be considered to be “ideal.”)

There is some sparse evidence in support of this contention. College students have been found to prefer the secure to either the clingy or the skittish (Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994; Krueger & Caspi, 1993; Pietromonaco & Carnelley, 1994). No one has yet examined whether or not the secure are also preferred to the fickle, casual, and uninterested.

*Hypothesis 2:* If the ideal is not available, men and women will prefer potential dates whose love schemas are similar to their own.

The evidence relevant to this hypothesis is inconsistent. Only five studies have touched on the question as to the extent to which people prefer (or at least end up) with potential dates and mates who possess similar love schemas (see Collins & Read, 1990; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994; Pietromonaco & Carnelley, 1994; Senchak & Leonard, 1992; Simpson, 1990). In a few of these surveys, social psychologists have found that people prefer partners whose love schemas are *similar* to their own. Collins and Read (1990), for example, proposed that “people may be attracted to others who have similar beliefs and expectations about love and who behave similarly in relationships” (p. 655). They added:

Working models about the nature of love and about oneself as a love object will influence how we respond to others, how we interpret others' actions, our expectations about what a partner should be like, and so on. For example, someone who is comfortable with closeness may be unwilling to tolerate a partner who avoids intimacy (p. 655).

They found that dating couples tended to end up with partners who shared similar beliefs and feelings about becoming close and intimate and about the dependability of others. Senchak and Leonard (1992) found that couples who were secure, preferred and actually ended up marrying partners as secure as themselves. Other attachment theorists, however, have contended that in the realm of love, “opposites attract.” Pietromonaco and Carnelley (1994) argued that in romantic relationships, men and women are primarily concerned with two things: (1) *Gender role appropriateness*. Presumably, it is more appropriate for women to acknowledge that they are clingy; men to admit that they are skittish, and (2) *Self-verification*. People tend to choose partners who confirm their views of the self in relation to others. Secure men and women should prefer

secure lovers (who confirm their belief that they are worthy of love). *Clingy women should prefer skittish men*—men whose style is in accord with traditional gender stereotypes and who confirm women's belief that they will be abandoned. *Skittish men should prefer clingy women*—woman whose style is in accord with traditional gender stereotypes and who confirm men's belief that their independence will be threatened if they risk getting close to another. To test their hypotheses, the authors asked participants (who identified themselves secure, clingy, or skittish) to imagine the thoughts and feeling they might have in a relationship with a secure, clingy, or skittish partner. How likely would they be to marry? They found little support for the complementarity hypothesis. Everyone, regardless of their own schemas, for example, responded the most positively to secure partners. Both the clingy and the skittish seemed to prefer the clingy to the skittish. In their numerous analyses, they did find some suggestive evidence in support of the complementarity hypothesis, however. Kirkpatrick and Davis (1994) argued that women who are clingy may prefer skittish men (and vice versa), because in a sense, they confirm their own worst fears:

For the anxious-ambivalent [i.e., clingy] person, the central relationship issues are the dependability, trustworthiness, and commitment of their partners. An avoidant [i.e., skittish] partner, who is concerned about too much intimacy and uneasy about commitment, displays an orientation toward the relationship consistent with the expectations of the anxious person. For the avoidant person, the distrust and demands for intimacy conveyed by the anxious partner likewise confirms his or her expectations of relationships (p. 503).

Collins and Read (1990) found that men and women who were clingy did *not* seek similar partners (who shared their worries about being abandoned and unloved). Rather, they chose skittish partners (who were uncomfortable with getting close). Simpson (1990) found that clingy women tended to pair up with skittish men, while skittish men tended to pair up with women who were insecure (either clingy or skittish). Kirkpatrick and Davis (1994) interviewed dating couples. They found no clingy-clingy or skittish-skittish pairs in the sample of seriously dating couples. They also found that affairs between clingy women and skittish men, although unsatisfactory, tended to be stable. (Similar results were secured by Brennan & Shaver, 1995).

These five studies do not really provide a definitive answer to the question with we are concerned: “Do women and men prefer romantic partners whose love schemas are similar to their own?” None of the six preceding studies really addresses this question. In one (Pietromonaco & Carnelley, 1994), participants were not asked what kind of partner they preferred for an actual relationship. They were merely asked to *imagine* being involved in a

series of relationships (secure, clingy, or skittish) and to indicate how comfortable they felt in each. (Young people could, of course, be attracted to prospective dates who thrilled and frightened them; disinterested in dates who were as comfortable as an old shoe). In other studies (Brennan & Shaver, 1995; Collins & Read, 1990; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994; Senchak & Leonard, 1992), participants were asked to indicate their love schemas *after* they were dating, engaged to be married, or already be married. In such studies it is impossible to know whether participants' schemas influenced their preferences or were influenced by the type of relationships in which they were involved. (One may well cling to a relationship that seems about to disappear; feel imprisoned by a date or mate who clings). In still other studies (Brennan & Shaver, 1995; Collins & Read, 1990; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994; Senchak & Leonard, 1992), couples were not asked whom they would prefer to date or marry; researchers simply tabulated the love schemas of engaged or married couples. Of course, what people want may be very different from what they are able to get. (Probably, for example, everyone would prefer a secure mate, but only those who are secure themselves are able to attract such partners.) Contrary to Kirkpatrick and Davis's thesis, (that gender roles shape preferences), perhaps women (taught to be clingy) would prefer a secure or clingy date (if only there were enough to go around), but alas, given the demographics, they may have to settle for a traditional skittish male. In any case, since we were unable to find any compelling evidence in support of Hypothesis 2, we proceeded to test this hypothesis in the following study.

## Method

### *Participants*

Participants were 73 men and 131 women from the University of Hawaii. Their average age was 22.22 ( $SD = 4.84$ ). Participants varied greatly in educational background: 41% had completed high school; 4% had additional vocational/technical training, 56% had completed at least one year of college; and 2% had received an M.A., Ph.D., or other advanced degree. Participants belonged to an array of religious groups: Catholic (42%), Protestant (16%), Buddhist (7%), Jewish (1%), Mormon (2%), "Other" (21%), and "None" (12%).

As is typical of Hawaii's multi-cultural population, the participants were from diverse ethnic backgrounds: African-American (1.0%), Chinese-American (6.9%), European-American (9.3%), Filipino-American (14.7%), Hawaiian (5.4%), Japanese-American (30.9%), Korean-American (3.4%), Samoan (0.5%), Mixed (without Hawaiian) (8.3%), Hispanic (0.5%), Vietnamese (1.0%), and Other-American (17.6%).

### *Measures*

*Assessing Love Schemas.* All participants were asked to read the six items comprising the Love Schema (LS) scale. The first three items of the LS scale were taken directly from Hazan's and Shaver's (1987) Adult Attachment Questionnaire (AAQ). The remaining three

items were constructed to tap the three love schemas that were not included in that scale. Participants were asked to rank and then to rate<sup>2</sup> the extent to which each of the six schemas seemed representative of their own feelings and experiences on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 100% (Always true of me) to 0% (Never true of me.) (For information on the reliability and validity of the AAQ, see Shaver & Hazan, 1993. There, the authors reviewed 150 studies utilizing this scale and reported compelling evidence that the AAQ is a reliable and valid measure of the secure, clingy, and fickle attachment styles. For information on the reliability and validity of the entire scale see Singelis, Choo, & Hatfield, 1995, Hatfield & Rapson, 1996, or Choo, Levine, & Hatfield, 1996).

### *Procedure*

Students were recruited to participate in a study of dating preferences. Upon entering the laboratory, they were handed a consent form that indicated that we were studying people's preferences in potential dating partners. Our ultimate goal, it was claimed, was to match participants with appropriate partners and to find out how well these pairings worked out. Participants were assured that they had the right to withdraw at any time.

Then participants were given the questionnaire. It asked them to provide some demographic data (including gender, age, education, and ethnic background) and to complete the LS scale.

Next they were shown six photographs (three men and three women), who were fairly attractive. The stimuli varied in ethnic background, attractiveness, and body type. Participants were told that since the students participating in the dating study may be heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual in their romantic orientations, we were allowing participants to indicate their potential interest (or disinterest) in partners of both sexes. First, participants were asked to *rank order* the six photographs in order of preference as a potential dating partner. Then they were asked to *rate* each of the stimuli on a 10-point scale, ranging from 10 (Extremely appealing), through 1 (Not at all appealing), to 0 (Would not consider this person). We were not interested in participants' responses to the photographs; this task was merely designed to increase the credibility to our cover story. We were only interested in what impact, if any, participants' schemas may have on their actual dating choices.

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<sup>2</sup> Originally, Hazan's and Shaver's (1987) AAQ was designed to assess the three attachment styles which were assumed to be orthogonal and mutually exclusive traits. More recently, many attachment theorists have come to recognize that attachment styles may alter with age and experience (Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1994). Recently, Shaver and Hazan (1993) introduced an up-dated version of their questionnaire which asked participants to rate the extent to which they agree with the three self-descriptions. Thus, in our study, in line with these changes, we asked participants to rate and to rank the extent to which they endorsed each of the six love schemas.

Then, participants were shown a set of six personality descriptions, describing potential dating partners who differed in their love schemas. Participants were asked to rank order the six personality sketches in order of preference for each as a potential dating partner. Next they were asked to rate how appealing each of the potential dating partners was on a 10 point scale, ranging from 10 (Extremely appealing), through 1 (Not at all appealing), to 0 (Would not consider this person).

Finally, participants were debriefed.

## Results

*Hypothesis 1.* We proposed that men and women would prefer romantic partners who possessed an “ideal” (or secure) love schema. When we examine Table 1 (which reports participants' first choices when *ranking* the relative desirability of potential dates possessing the six love schemas), we find strong support for Hypothesis 1.

Looking at men and women's preferences separately, we find that the pattern of dating choices varied significantly from that expected by chance (i.e., from equal frequencies in all cells): for both men ( $X^2 [5] = 193.88, p < .001$ ) and women ( $X^2 [5] = 519.73, p < .001$ ). Both men and women generally preferred potential dates who possessed a secure love schema. Men's first choice in a date was the secure woman 77% of the time; women chose a secure man 91% of the time. Men and women were also relatively positive about potential dates who said they were only interested in a casual relationship; 12% of men and 5% of women preferred dates who endorsed a casual schema. As the *ideal partner* hypothesis would predict, both men and women chose stable dates (secure and casual combined) more frequently than any others (all the rest combined). For both men (binomial  $Z = 6.56, p < .001$ ) and women ( $Z = 10.31, p < .001$ ) this difference was significant. Further, of those choosing a stable partner (i.e., secure or casual), significantly more men ( $Z = 5.71, p < .001$ ) and women ( $Z = 10.02, p < .001$ ) preferred a secure date over a casual date. Clearly, Hypothesis 1 is supported. Not surprisingly, men and women do prefer ideal partners.

Table 1  
Comparison of Men's and Women's First Choices in Ranking Their Own Love Schemas and Their Preferences in Various Dating Partners' Schemas

Love Schemas	Self-Reported Love-Schemas				Preferences in Dates			
	Men		Women		Men		Women	
	(N)	Percent	(N)	Percent	(N)	Percent	(N)	Percent
Secure	(37)	50.7	(65)	49.6	(56)	76.7	(119)	90.8
Clingy	(2)	2.7	(15)	11.5	(5)	6.9	(2)	1.5
Skittish	(3)	4.1	(17)	13.0	(0)	0.0	(2)	1.5
Fickle	(21)	28.8	(28)	21.4	(2)	2.7	(2)	1.5

Casual	(8)	11.0	(5)	3.8	(9)	12.3	(6)	4.6
Uninterested	(2)	2.7	(1)	0.8	(1)	1.4	(0)	0.0

We secured parallel results when we examined men's and women's *ratings* of dates possessing the various schema (see Table 2). Here too, potential dates who possessed a secure schema were rated highest in desirability. In repeated measures analyses, *post hoc* comparisons showed that participants rated potential dates who endorsed a secure schema more highly than those endorsing other schemas. For men, secure ( $M = 8.56$ ) was higher than clingy ( $M = 5.84$ ,  $F = 71.47$ ,  $p < .001$ ), skittish ( $M = 3.31$ ,  $F = 250.50$ ,  $p < .001$ ), fickle ( $M = 3.97$ ,  $F = 144.56$ ,  $p < .001$ ), casual ( $M = 5.82$ ,  $F = 61.83$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and uninterested ( $M = 1.53$ ,  $F = 364.58$ ,  $p < .001$ ). For women the results were similar with secure ( $M = 8.81$ ) higher than clingy ( $M = 4.27$ ,  $F = 306.98$ ,  $p < .001$ ), skittish ( $M = 3.47$ ,  $F = 484.54$ ,  $p < .001$ ), fickle ( $M = 2.75$ ,  $F = 628.44$ ,  $p < .001$ ), casual ( $M = 4.31$ ,  $F = 278.37$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and uninterested ( $M = 1.20$ ,  $F = 1198.36$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Thus, Hypothesis 1 received strong support in both the rating and the ranking data: both men and women clearly preferred an ideal (i.e., secure) date.

*Gender Differences in Love Schemas and Preferences.* Although this study was not designed to explore gender differences in love schemas or preferences, we were well aware that many scientists do view human behavior through the “lens of gender” and would be interested in any existing gender differences (Bem, 1993). Thus, we examined possible gender differences in (1) participants' self-ratings on the various Love Schema items, and (2) participants' preferences in partners possessing the various schemas.

We did not speculate about possible gender differences in participants' own love schemas. Had our participants been a decade younger, we might have predicted there would be gender differences in the endorsement of the various schemas. Erikson (1982) contended that boys find it easier to achieve an independent identity, but harder to discover how to get close to others than do girls. Such theorizing might lead us to predict that teenage girls might be more likely to endorse a clingy schema than would boys, while teenage boys would be more likely to endorse a skittish schema than would girls. Other theorists have observed that women mature faster than do men; that women learn earlier how to balance the demands of closeness and independence (Bem, 1993). Such theorizing would lead us to predict that teenage girls might be more likely to endorse a secure schema than would boys. Since our participants were college students, however, we were not willing to speculate about the impact gender might have on love schemas and/or on reactions to commitment.

In previous studies, researchers have typically found few if any gender differences in participants' Love Schema self-ratings (see Shaver & Hazan, 1993). Singelis and his colleagues (1995), for example, found that men were slightly less likely to endorse the secure and clingy schemas and slightly more likely to endorse the fickle, skittish, casual, and

uninterested schemas than were women. Only one of these gender comparisons was statistically significant however: men rated themselves as more casual about relationships than did women. In Table 2, we see that in this study we secured only two gender differences in self-ratings. Men ( $M = 6.32$ ) were slightly more likely to rate themselves as fickle than were women ( $M = 5.61$ ,  $t = 2.01$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and more likely to rate themselves as casual ( $M = 5.66$ ) than were women ( $M = 4.53$ ,  $t = 3.30$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

There were more substantial gender differences in men's versus women's ratings of potential dating *partners*. Men were more accepting of clingy, fickle, and casual dates than were women (see Table 2 for means and  $t$  scores, all  $p$ s less than .001). This is in accord with previous research that suggests that women may be more selective overall than are men (Buss, 1985).

Table 2  
*Gender Differences in Self-Reported Love Schemas and Preferences in Dating Partners' Schemas (Ratings)*

	Men		Women		$t$ value <sup>2</sup>
	Mean <sup>1</sup>	SD	Mean	SD	
<i>Love Schemas</i>					
Secure	7.37	1.90	7.18	2.05	0.68
Clingy	4.95	2.15	4.62	2.43	0.99
Skittish	4.71	2.10	4.97	2.41	-0.79
Fickle	6.32	2.46	5.61	2.36	2.01*
Casual	5.66	2.28	4.53	2.38	3.30**
Uninterested	2.41	1.82	2.56	2.11	-0.52
<i>Dating Preferences</i>					
Secure	8.56	1.84	8.81	1.78	-0.94
Clingy	5.84	2.30	4.27	2.70	4.16***
Skittish	3.31	2.20	3.47	2.27	-0.46
Fickle	3.97	2.30	2.75	2.23	3.72***
Casual	5.82	2.68	4.31	2.76	3.78***
Uninterested	1.53	1.94	1.20	1.64	1.31

1. The higher the score, the more participants reported possessing this love schema or preferring a dating partner described as possessing this schema.

2. \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

In Hypothesis 2, we proposed that men and women would have a positive bias in rating potential dates whose love schemas were similar to their own. In Table 3, we find strong evidence in support of this hypothesis. If the hypothesis is correct, we should find that the strongest correlations between participants' own LS and their ratings of the dates who possess the six LSs should appear on the diagonals (i.e., the secure should tend to prefer secure dates, the clingy should give a higher rating to the clingy than do others, etc.). To begin, we can see (Table 3) that all of the correlations on the diagonal are significant at the .001 level. To test the difference between the diagonal and off-diagonal correlations, all

correlations were first transformed to Fischer's Z and then averages were taken. The average diagonal element was .44 while the average off diagonal was .12. These are significantly different ( $t = 3.53, p < .05$ ). Thus, Hypothesis 2 is supported: people do tend to rate those who are similar to themselves than do others.

*Table 3*  
*Correlations of Participants' Love Schemas with Their Ratings of Various Dating Partners*

		Participants' Own Love Schemas (N=204)				
<i>Participants' Preferences in Dating Partners</i>	Secure	Clingy	Skittish	Fickle	Casual	Uninterested
Secure	<b>.29***</b>	-.07	-.11	-.04	-.12	-.20**
Clingy	.14	<b>.47***</b>	-.17	.11	.01	-.14
Skittish	-.13	-.05	<b>.44***</b>	.10	.18	.15
Fickle	.01	.11	.09	<b>.34***</b>	.23***	.02
Casual	-.10	-.21**	.21**	.07	<b>.58***</b>	.16**
Uninterested	-.13	-.11	.22**	.09	.22**	<b>.35***</b>

1. The higher the score, the more people reported possessing this schema or preferring a dating partner described as possessing this schema.

2. \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Finally, since some previous researchers have argued that certain kinds of gender differences in preferences are especially common, we next examined gender differences in the relationship between participants' own LS and those of the partners they prefer. We were especially interested in two types of differences. Attachment theorists (Collins & Read, 1990; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994; Pietromonaco & Carnelley, 1994) argued that skittish men would prefer clingy women and that clingy women would prefer skittish men. We found no evidence for this contention. Skittish men found clingy women relatively unappealing ( $r = -.14, p = ns$ ), while clingy women were slightly negative about skittish men ( $r = -.07, p = ns$ ). Skittish men and women did not differ significantly about the appeal of the clingy (for men  $r = -.14$ ; for women  $r = -.17$ ). Nor did clingy men ( $r = -.02$ ) and women ( $r = -.07$ ) differ significantly about the appeal of the skittish.

## Discussion

Clinicians have often asked: "Why do men and women have so much trouble in love relationships?" "Is the problem due to the fact that young people make poor initial choices?" Some contend that young men and women select romantic partners primarily or entirely on the basis of physical attractiveness and "chemistry." When early passions fade, they argue, couples may discover they have little or nothing in common. Other, more psychodynamically oriented therapists, assume that couples relentlessly seek for others with

various kinds of personalities—personalities that are similar to their parents', similar to their most powerful or troubled parent, or similar or complementary to their own personalities. (Of course, all clinicians are aware that many relationship difficulties appear only after people have dated or lived together for awhile and have begun to experience the inevitable problems that occur in all relationships.)

In Study 1, we found some evidence that young people at least *prefer* partners who are in some sense ideal. Young men and women preferred potential dates who possessed a secure love schema to all others. (They were also favorably disposed to those interested only in casual dating.) Not all young people can attain the ideal, however. Participants were also found to rate potential dates who were similar to themselves—in how much closeness (or distance) or involvement (or non-involvement) they desired—higher than did their peers. This seems to be a relatively sensible strategy—much more sensible than the process some clinicians and theorists have thought young couples were engaged in—searching for partners who confirm their worst fears.

Of course, Study 1 is only a first step in trying to understand the impact of the various love schemas on mate selection. By design, in this study participants were given clear and complete information about potential dates' love schemas, they made their selections on the basis of this and only this information, and they had every reason to expect that their preferences were likely to be honored. In real life, things are far more complex. People often lack definitive information about potential dates' preferences for closeness/independence and their availability/ unavailability. As a consequence, people may well make serious classification errors. (A clingy man, for example, may assume that everyone desires the same kind of a relationships that he does. By the time he discovers that his mate is skittish, fickle, casual about relationships, or uninterested in him, it may be too late. Only with experience will he learn that women differ markedly in their love schemas and that he must be attuned to these differences if he is to make a wise selection.) Secondly, potential dates may provide erroneous information about their own preferences for closeness/independence and availability/ unavailability. They may know their desires but assume that it is to their benefit to lie about their intentions. Or they may not know themselves well enough to provide the accurate information about their *modus operandi*. (When fickle men, for example, are in hot pursuit of an appealing woman they may honestly believe they want a close, committed relationship. It is only when they have "hooked" her that they discover that "for some reason" they have lost all interest in a relationship. It may take years . . . or a lifetime . . . before the skittish recognize that the problem is in themselves and not in their partners.) Thirdly, people may care about intimacy/independence and the availability of partners, but they may care even more about other things. (A man may discover he cares more about physical appearance than personality, for example. A lonely woman may throw caution to

the winds when she meets someone who shows a minimal interest in her.) Finally, what people want and what they can get may be two different things. People do not have unlimited choice. The secure and the similar are not available to everyone. People often have to settle for less than they desire.

In summary: In Study 1, we found that participants prefer mates who match the cultural ideal (the secure) and, secondarily, those who possess love schemas similar to their own. Subsequent research will of course be required to determine how good people are at identifying potential dates who match those preferences, how important these preferences are compared to other concerns, or how capable people are of translating preferences into action.

In Study 2 we will move on to the next stage in mate selection—the point at which people find themselves on the brink of making a serious commitment to another—in order to determine the relationship (if any) between love schemas and reactions to pending commitments.

## Study 2

### *Love Schemas and Reactions to Commitment*

According to Rusbult and Buunk (1993), commitment level is:

. . . a psychological state that globally represents the experience of dependence on a relationship . . . Commitment represents a long-term orientation, including feelings of attachment to a partner and desire to maintain a relationship, for better or worse. Thus commitment is defined as a subjective state, including both cognitive and emotional components, that directly influences a wide range of behaviors in an ongoing relationship. Highly committed individuals need their relationships, feel connected to their partners and have a more extended, long-term time perspective regarding their relationships (p. 180).

A variety of theorists have argued that people's love schemas (or attachment styles or developmental stage) should have an impact on their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors at the various stages of a love relationship (see Cassidy & Shaver, 1999; Hatfield & Rapson, 1996; or Simpson & Rholes, 1998, for a summary of this research). For some reason, however, the possible impact of love schemas on people's thoughts and feelings when contemplating a commitment to another has been relatively ignored. This omission is particularly surprising in view of the fact that it is at this point that we might expect people with different love schemas to differ the most profoundly. (Two researchers have explored the relationship between attachment style and the maintenance of early commitments [see Keelan, et al., 1994 and Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994]). This survey was designed to rectify that omission. It was designed to explore the relationship between participants' endorsements of

the various love schemas and their thoughts, feelings, and behavior when they found themselves on the brink of making a serious commitment. We proposed:

*Hypothesis 3:* Participants' love schemas will be correlated with the calmness and confidence of their reactions when faced with the possibility of a serious romantic commitment.

Specifically, we proposed that the more strongly participants endorse a secure love schema, the more calm and confident they will be when facing impending commitments. The more participants endorse a clingy schema, the more anxious and insecure they will be when commitment looms. Endorsement of a skittish schema will be associated with fear and worries about being trapped by impending commitments. What about those who endorse a fickle schema? Since the fickle experience the problems of both the clingy and the skittish (they desire what they don't have, but flee from what they do possess), we would expect the fickle to behave like the clingy when trying to win another's love and like the skittish when they have won that love and are faced with an actual commitment. The casual and uninterested, too, should drift away from commitment. Thus, we would predict that the more strongly people endorse the skittish, fickle, casual, and uninterested schemas, the more fearful and trapped they will feel when commitments loom. The following survey was designed to test these predictions. (We wish to caution readers that in this correlational study, we were limited to retrospective reports. Subsequent researchers may well wish to conduct longitudinal studies to test these same notions.)

## Method

### *Participants*

Participants were 78 men and 164 women from the University of Hawaii. They were interviewed in groups of four or five and given bonus points for their participation. Participants' average age was 23.07 ( $SD = 5.05$ ). As is typical of Hawaii's multi-cultural population, they were from diverse ethnic backgrounds: African-American (5.3%), Chinese-American (10.7%), European-American (14.3%), Filipino-American (11.1%), Hawaiian or part Hawaiian (11.1%), Japanese-American (26.6%), Korean-American (1.2%), Pacific Islander (1.2%), Hispanic (.4%), Vietnamese-American (.4%), Mixed (8.2%), and Other-American (9.4%). Twenty eight percent of participants were not currently dating anyone, 52.2% were casually or steadily dating, 8.2% were living with someone; 4.9% were engaged; and 6.2 % were married.

Participants were asked whether or not they had ever been "right on the brink of making a serious commitment to someone they loved (thinking about say, going steady, living together, becoming engaged, or married)." The 19 participants who said they had never been on the brink of making such a commitment were dropped from the sample. The

remaining participants were asked whether the person they loved was a man or a woman: 5.1% of the men and 2.4% of the women reported that they were describing a relationship with someone of the same sex; 94.9% of the men and 97.6% of the women were describing a relationship with someone of the opposite sex.

#### *Measures*

*Assessing Love Schemas.* Participants were asked to complete the LS scale. Most participants identified themselves as secure (62.2%). Others acknowledged that they were clingy (7.6%), skittish (10.5%), or fickle (12.2%). A few reported being casual (6.7%) or uninterested (.8%) in relationships.

*Assessing Reactions to Commitment (RC).* Participants were asked 15 questions designed to assess their thoughts, feelings, and actions when contemplating making a serious commitment to someone they loved. All 15 items began with the same stem: “*When I was on the brink of making a commitment . . .*” Possible answers to the 15 items ranged from (1) Strongly disagree to (7) Strongly agree. These 15 items were designed to measure the three theoretical constructs in which we were interested—*participants' retrospective reports* of a calm, confident; an anxious, insecure; or a fearful, trapped reaction to an impending commitment.

Our next step was to insure that the theoretically derived items did, in fact, cluster into three distinct domains. Thus, proposed measurement model was tested for internal consistency and parallelism with a confirmatory factor analysis (see Hunter's Confirmatory Factor Analysis Program [see Hunter, Cohen, & Nicol, 1982]). We found that in two of the clusters—the calm, confident and the fearful, trapped types—items did intercorrelate as expected. The items were internally consistent and parallel, each item had a factor loading greater than .40, and each made a positive contribution to scale reliability. There were problems with two of the anxious, insecure items, however. Two of the items: “. . . I wanted to spend every moment of my free time with my partner” and “. . . I spent dramatically less time with my friends; I spent all my free time with my boyfriend/girlfriend” had serious problems. The corrected item-total correlations (i.e., the correlation of the items with the total anxious/insecure sum, with the item in question excluded) were low ( $r_s = .25$  and  $.32$ , respectively). The inclusion of these two items also detracted from anxious, insecure scale reliability. (Chronbach's Alpha was  $.72$  with these items;  $.76$  without them). Thus, Items #11 and #13 were deleted from the final version of the anxious, insecure measure. In the end, six items were designed to describe a *calm and confident* emotional reaction to the impending commitment. These were: “I trusted that \_\_\_\_\_ was interested in me and only me; I was completely secure in my boyfriend's/ girlfriend's love; I knew that I could tell my lover my personal thoughts and feelings, without fearing that he/she would think less of me . . . or even leave me; I considered \_\_\_\_\_ to be a true friend, as well as a lover; I felt totally safe; and It was easy for me to depend on my boyfriend/girlfriend for emotional support.” The

distribution of the sum of these items was negatively skewed,  $M = 34.01$  ( $SD = 6.78$ ), but reasonably reliable, Chronbach's alpha = .837.

Five items were selected to measure an *anxious and insecure* reaction to the impending commitment. These were: "I was constantly jealous; I felt compelled to have sexual relations with my partner in order to keep him/her satisfied; I tried desperately to win his/her approval; I was uncertain that \_\_\_\_\_ loved me as much as I loved him/her; and I became extremely anxious whenever \_\_\_\_\_ failed to pay enough attention to me." The distribution of the sum of these items approximated normality,  $M = 15.67$  ( $SD = 6.67$ ), Chronbach's alpha = .760.

Finally, two items were designed to measure a *fearful and trapped* reaction when faced with commitment: "I often felt trapped; I needed a lot more time to be alone; and I often worried that I was making a big mistake by getting so involved so soon." The distribution of the sum of these items approximated normality,  $M = 6.44$  ( $SD = 3.23$ ), Chronbach's alpha = .657.

### *Procedure*

Participants were assembled in groups of four or five. They were told that we were interested in finding out a bit about how men and women from different cultural backgrounds viewed close relationships. We wanted to know something about the thoughts, feelings, and experiences they had had in romantic love relationships when they were on the brink of a serious commitment. They were told that their answers would be kept confidential.

The questionnaire began by asking participants to provide some demographic information. They were asked to indicate their gender, age, ethnic background, and dating or marital status. Next they were asked to complete the LS scale and the RC measure. Finally, participants were debriefed.

## **Results**

### *The Impact of Gender on Love Schemas and Reactions to Commitment*

In Study 2, there is no evidence that gender had any impact on love schemas. When we look at subjects' LS rankings, we find that gender was not related to the selection of one or another love schema as most typical of one's own feelings and experiences. A full 67% of men and 59% of women identified themselves as secure in love relationships. Only 4%, 8%, and 12% of men and 9%, 12%, and 13% of women (respectively) admitted being clingy, skittish, or fickle in their love affairs. Finally, 9% and 0% of men and 6% and 1% of women (respectively) identified themselves as casual or uninterested in relationships.  $X^2(5) = 5.20$ ,

$p = ns$ . Of course, the small  $N$  makes it unlikely that we would secure a significant main effect for gender. Nonetheless, the failure to find a significant relationship between gender and LS is consistent with the findings of previous researchers (Shaver & Hazan, 1993; Singelis, et al., 1995) who concluded that in college samples, gender does not have a significant impact on either attachment style or LS endorsement.

When we turn to participants' love schema *ratings*, again we find no evidence that gender and love schema are linked. Men and women did not differ in how secure they considered themselves to be ( $M = 65.86$  and  $62.68$ , respectively:  $F[1, 241] = .99$ ,  $ns$ ). Men rated themselves as slightly more clingy than did women ( $M = 35.55$  versus  $29.10$ ), slightly less skittish than did women ( $M = 35.97$  versus  $37.42$ ), and slightly more fickle than did women ( $M = 40.33$  versus  $35.34$ ), but although the first gender main effect approached statistical significance ( $F[1, 241] = 3.75$ ,  $p = .054$ ) none of the three differences was statistically significant. Men were slightly more casual ( $M = 38.94$  versus  $32.75$ ) and slightly more uninterested in relationships ( $M = 16.67$  versus  $16.62$ ) than were women, but again, none of these differences was statistically significant.

Gender *did* appear to have a significant impact on reactions to commitment. Men were less likely than were women ( $M = 32.68$  versus  $M = 34.59$ ) to report having a calm and confident reactions to commitment ( $F[1, 239] = 4.20$ ,  $p < .04$ ). Men were more likely to report being either more anxious and insecure or more trapped and fearful ( $M = 29.06$  and  $6.85$ , respectively) when facing a commitment than were women ( $M = 18.88$  and  $14.07$ , respectively). (The gender main effect was significant for the anxious and insecure reaction to commitment  $F[1,239] = 30.94$ ,  $p < .001$ . The gender main effect was not statistically significant for the fearful and trapped reaction to commitment, however. When we look at possible interactions between gender and love schema in shaping reactions to commitment, we find that none of the two-way interactions was significant.

#### *Love Schemas and Reactions to Commitment*

Now that we have discussed possible gender main effects and interactions, let us turn to the question in which we are most interested—the correlation between love schemas and reactions to commitment. Hypothesis 3 proposed that people's endorsements of the various love styles would have an impact on their thoughts and feelings as they approached a serious commitment. Table 4 provides strong support in favor of this hypothesis.

Table 4  
*The Correlation Between Love Schema Ratings and Reactions to Commitment*

Love Schemas	Reactions to Commitment			
	Confident	Calm Insecure Type	Anxious Trapped	Fearful Type
Secure	.25***			-.13*
Clingy	-.17**		.30***	.05
Skittish	-.23***		.08	.28***
Fickle	-.32***		.25***	.23***
Casual	-.25***		.16**	.23***
Uninterested	-.33***		.05	.28***

\*  $p < .05$   
\*\*  $p < .01$   
\*\*\*  $p < .001$

When we correlate participants' ratings of the extent to which each of the six LSs seems representative of their own experiences with their ratings of extent to which they experienced the three types of reactions depicted on the CS subscales, we find that the pattern of correlations is in line with our predictions. As predicted, participants' scores on the LS's secure item were positively correlated ( $r = .25$ ) with how calm and confident they were when facing a commitment. Endorsements of any of the other LS items (clingy, skittish, fickle, casual, and uninterested) were negatively correlated with feelings of calm and confidence when facing an impending commitment ( $r$ s ranged from  $-.17$  to  $-.33$ ). Also, as predicted, participants' scores on the clingy item were strongly correlated with how anxious and insecure they felt at commitment ( $r = .30$ ). Finally, also as predicted, scores on the skittish, fickle, casual, and uninterested schemas were correlated with feeling fearful and trapped when on the brink of commitment ( $r$ s ranged from  $.23$  to  $.28$ ). Scores on the secure item were negatively correlated ( $r = -.20$ ) with these same feelings. One finding is of special interest. We observed earlier that the fickle may well possess the problems of *both* the clingy and the skittish. When faced with a commitment, the fickle did seem to feel both anxious and insecure ( $r = .25$ ) and fearful and trapped ( $r = .23$ ).

Information as to how men and women reacted is available in Table 5 (for those interested in gender differences.)

Table 5  
Correlations of Men's and Women's Love Schemas with Their Ratings of Various Dating Partners

Men's Own Love Schemas (n=73)						
Men's Preferences in Dating Partners	Secure	Clingy	Skittish	Fickle	Casual	Uninterested
Secure	<b>.35**</b>	-.13	-.39***	-.15	-.24	-.31**
Clingy	.07	<b>.48***</b>	-.14	.05	-.06	-.11
Skittish	-.12	-.02	<b>.43***</b>	-.04	-.03	.05
Fickle	-.12	.11	.11	<b>.47***</b>	.33**	.06
Casual	-.09	-.18	.16	.13	<b>.41***</b>	.07
Uninterested	-.11	-.12	.17	.20	.16	<b>.42***</b>

  

Women's Own Love Schemas (n=131)						
Women's Preferences in Dating Partners	Secure	Clingy	Skittish	Fickle	Casual	Uninterested
Secure	<b>.27**</b>	-.04	.02	.04	-.03	-.16
Clingy	.16	<b>.47***</b>	-.17	.09	-.06	-.15
Skittish	-.13	-.07	<b>.44***</b>	.19	.30***	.19
Fickle	.06	-.09	.10	<b>.23**</b>	.11	.02
Casual	-.12	-.27**	.27**	-.02	<b>.62***</b>	.23**
Uninterested	-.15	-.11	.26**	-.01	.24**	<b>.33***</b>

1. The higher the score, the more people reported possessing this schema or preferring a dating partner described as possessing this schema.
2. Correlations shown in boldface and underlined are significantly different in men than in women ( $p < .05$ , two tailed).
3. \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

## Discussion

When people are in love, they are generally filled with high hopes. If the relationship goes well, they tend to take full credit for its success. If it fails, they may blame themselves. They may worry that they weren't good looking enough, personable enough, or skillful enough to make things go. Sometimes, people blame their partners for its demise. Those explanations may be correct, but sometimes disappointed lovers have ignored some critical factors, factors that existed long before they came on the scene—the personality, expectations, and experiences of themselves and their mates. People embarking on a relationship may possess very different love schemas. They may possess personalities that predispose them to be secure, clingy, skittish, fickle, casual, or uninterested in love affairs. Some young people may just be beginning to experiment with relationships (and thus are still too young to be more than casual about relationships.) Other, older and more experienced men and women, may have had a succession of love experiences that—for good

or ill—are reflected in their current love schemas. Finally, of course, people may employ different love schemas in different kinds of relationships.

In Study 1, we found some evidence that love schemas may have a critical impact on participants' romantic preferences. Young men and women preferred potential dates who possessed an "ideal" personality (strongly preferring those who possessed a secure love schema) to all others. They also showed a secondary preference for partners who were similar to themselves in how much closeness or distance and involvement or non-involvement they desired. This would seem to be a relatively sensible strategy. (It should be easier to succeed with someone who shares one's goals than with someone whose goals are antithetical to one's own.) It seems much more sensible than the process some previous social psychologists have speculated that they might be engaged in—searching for partners to confirm their worst fears. Previously, several psychologists (see, for example, Brennan & Shaver, 1995; Collins & Read, 1990; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994; Simpson, 1990) speculated that clingy women might prefer skittish men (and *vice versa*). In this study we found no support for this contention. We found no evidence that men and women *preferred* mismatched partners. It may be, of course, that men and women *end up* with mismatched partners due to the demographics of the market place.

In Study 2 we found that people who differed in their endorsement of the different love schemas also reported behaving somewhat differently when they found themselves on the brink of commitment. Only the secure reported approaching commitments with any measure of calm confidence. The clingy (and to some extent the fickle) were nervous and insecure—they worried that something, somehow, might fall through. And the skittish, the fickle, the casual, and the uninterested were just the opposite. They approached others' requests for commitment with great trepidation and reluctance.

The preceding studies can, of course, only be a first step in determining whether individual differences in love schemas might have a significant impact on participants' romantic preferences and on their willingness to make romantic commitments. Of course an extensive program of research will be required to determine (1) how tightly love schemas and romantic attitudes and behavior are linked, (2) which love schemas have the most important impact on romantic attitudes and behaviors, (3) the exact nature of these links, and (4) the stage(s) at which the schema and attitude/behavior links are most critical.

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Received: 09/02/2007

Accepted: 18/05/2007