Previous research and theories have stressed the importance of attachment throughout the life cycle. Primary attachment begins forming in an individual’s family of origin. As years go on, these patterns of attachment shape peer and romantic relationships (Bowlby, 1988). One’s family of origin is the group of people that one spends the most childhood years with emotionally and physically (Hovestadt, Anderson, Piercy, Cochran, & Fine, 1985). The goal of the present study was to examine how attachment security and closeness in young adult romantic relationships are influenced by the social and emotional environment of the family of origin. Understanding these influences can aid with the construction of effective treatments related to issues pertaining to young adult romantic relationships.

**Attachment Theory**
Attachment theory emphasizes how people have patterns of developing emotional connections with others that start in childhood and continue throughout their life (Bowlby, 1988). Three primary patterns of attachment are secure, anxious-ambivalent, and anxious-avoidant (Hazan & Shaver, 1994). The secure attachment pattern comes about when the caregiver provides availability, sensitivity, responsiveness, comfort, and protection. This reassures the individual and allows him or her to be confident in exploring the world. Anxious-ambivalent attachment comes about when there is conflict with the mother, specifically with inconsistency in availability and separations, as well as threats of abandonment. In response, the individual becomes doubtful and anxious about exploring his or her world. People with anxious-ambivalent attachment have a higher risk of separation anxiety and are often clingy. The anxious-avoidant pattern comes about from repeated rejections from the mother. The individual learns to expect this rejection over time and tends to become emotionally independent. These individuals are often described as narcissistic (Bowlby, 1988, as cited by Hazan & Shaver, 1994). Overall, attachment styles and patterns tend to be

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**ABSTRACT.** This study examined the association between family of origin social and emotional environment and romantic relationship closeness on romantic relationship attachment security. A convenience sample was taken of 52 undergraduate students who had been in a romantic relationship for a minimum of two months. Self-report questionnaires were used to assess how family of origin autonomy and intimacy and romantic relationship closeness (diversity, strength, and frequency) influenced romantic relationship attachment security (avoidance and anxiety). This study used multiple regression analyses to determine that family of origin autonomy was negatively correlated with avoidance, $t(1) = 4.58, p = .00$ and anxiety, $t(1) = 3.76, p < .001$, partially supporting the hypotheses. Implications, especially in the realm of family and couple counseling, are discussed.
Attachment progresses from primary parent-child attachment to include peer and friend attachment and, finally, romantic attachment (Feeney, J.A., 2004). Most young adults have their parents as their primary attachment figures but begin to develop attachment with peers and romantic partners. In early adulthood, parents still influence romantic attachment, but as an individual gets older, their influence declines due to increased importance of peer and romantic relationships (Dinero, Conger, Shaver, Widaman, & Larsen-Rife, 2008; Simpson, Collins, Tran, & Haydon, 2007). As romantic relationships continue into later adulthood, parents have minimal influence (Dinero et al., 2008). People who are in peer or romantic relationships characterized by caring and trust were more likely to transfer attachment-related components from their parents to peers and romantic partners than those in relationships without caring and trust (Fraley & Davis, 1997).

Attachment serves many important functions that affect the individual’s behaviors. The three central functions of all attachment relationships are proximity maintenance, safe haven, and secure base (Bowlby, 1988; Hazan & Shaver, 1994). Infants maintain proximity to their caregiver and resist separations. The infant also uses the caregiver as a secure base from which to participate in nonattachment behaviors, such as exploration. The caregiver also serves as a safe haven where the infant can turn for reassurance, support, and comfort (Hazan & Shaver, 1994). Preliminary parent-child attachment sets a secure foundation for future attachment (Feeney, B. C., 2004). Factors such as reliability, caring, trust, and intimacy that play an important role in forming attachment in infancy also influence the formation of adult attachment (Fraley & Davis, 1997).

Primary parent-infant attachment relationships consist mainly of external, observable interactions and behaviors. An infant typically needs physical contact to feel secure. Adult attachments, on the other hand, move toward a more internal process of feelings, expectations, and beliefs (Hazan & Shaver, 1994). Bowlby (1988) described these as internal working models. Although physical contact is still an important part of attachment security, it now incorporates merely knowing that the attachment partner can be there if needed (Hazan & Shaver, 1994). This “felt security” is what really matters (Sroufe & Waters, 1977, p. 1186). These needs for security are the most fundamental part of attachments (Hazan & Shaver, 1994).

Adult romantic attachment security is affected by the romantic partners’ levels of avoidance and anxiety. Avoidance is defined as dependency and uneasiness about closeness. According to Brennan, Clark, and Shaver (1998) anxiety in attachment security is defined as worrying about abandonment. A secure attachment occurs when both avoidance and anxiety are low. Preoccupied attachment occurs when avoidance is low but anxiety is high. Dismissive attachment occurs when avoidance is high but anxiety is low. Finally, fearful attachment occurs when both anxiety and avoidance are high (Brennan et al., 1998). Attachment has been an excellent predictor of relationship satisfaction in both men and women (Jones & Cunningham, 1996), and attachment style during adulthood is influenced by parent-child attachment patterns (e.g., Smith & Ng, 2009).

Family of Origin Social and Emotional Environment

Parent-child attachment encourages the social and emotional comfort in a child and helps establish attachments in the future. This attachment affects emotions in adulthood. There is also a direct link between a child’s emotional socialization within the family and emotions in adulthood (Smith & Ng, 2009). Simpson et al. (2007) suggested that infants transfer their attachment with their mother to peers in adolescent years, which in turn predicted emotional experiences in romantic relationships and social skills as adults.

A primary and important aspect of adult attachment security lies in the family of origin. The social and emotional environment, specifically created by parents, influences the quality of young adult romantic relationships (Conger, Cui, Bryant, & Elder, 2000). The social and emotional features of the family of origin, which predicted intimacy in young adult romantic relationships, include flexible family control, respect for privacy, and family cohesion. Attachment style is one of the important aspects of romantic intimacy (Feldman, Gowen, & Fisher, 1998).

Like attachment, autonomy and intimacy are important components for a healthy social and emotional environment in the family of origin. Autonomy is defined as seeking and maintaining one’s personal identity while intimacy is defined as a family’s closeness (Hovestadt et al., 1985).
Autonomy can be seen through an individual’s respect for the family of origin, clarity of their expression of thoughts and feelings, openness to their family when dealing with separation and loss, and responsibility to the family of origin. Intimacy can be assessed through how the family expresses their feelings, conflict resolution, trust, sensitivity, and the home’s atmosphere (Hovestadt et al., 1985). These two variables were used in the present study to assess the social and emotional environment of one’s family of origin.

The family of origin’s expressive atmosphere is an important component of the social and emotional environment. Smith and Ng (2009) found that young adults who were securely attached to their romantic partner usually had families of origin with higher levels of emotional expressive atmosphere (i.e., they were more likely to express emotions positively), and were more satisfied with their family of origin. More specifically, higher levels of emotional expressive atmosphere in the family of origin were linked with lower levels of avoidance and anxiety in adult romantic attachment. Therefore, people who are able to effectively express their emotions in the family of origin tend to have better attachment security. This is in part because the family of origin may promote the expression of one’s thoughts and feelings, which gives them comfort (Smith & Ng, 2009). However, when there is confusion over emotional interactions in the family of origin it raises levels of anxiety, which often causes suspicions and doubts for future romantic relationships (Benson, Larson, Wilson, & Demo, 1993).

**Romantic Relationship Closeness**

In addition to family of origin, qualities of the actual romantic relationships also influence romantic attachment. The interactions between romantic partners have been a major predictor of romantic attachment security (Dinero et al., 2008). The closeness of the romantic relationship as well as other factors including the relationship length and the individual’s age influence romantic attachment (Feeney, B. C., 2004). It takes about two years for romantic relationships to totally mature into an attachment relationship (Fraley & Davis, 1997). Though family-of-origin initially influences romantic attachment, that influence decreases over time when interactions with the romantic partner become more influential (Dinero et al., 2008). As the attachment with romantic partners grows stronger, attachment with parents becomes weaker (Feeney, B. C., 2004). This transferring of attachment is a gradual process (Hazan & Shaver, 1994). Attachment functions (e.g., proximity seeking, safe haven, and secure base) are transferred one by one and tend to go in the same sequence: proximity seeking behaviors followed by safe haven behaviors and finally the formation of a secure base (Hazan & Shaver, 1994).

Adult love is a function of attachment, caregiving (i.e., the need to provide care), and the sexual mating system (i.e., fulfillment of sexual needs; Hazan & Shaver, 1994). Sexual attraction is the first step in romantic attachment formation. In addition, there needs to be a strong need to be within close physical proximity (Hazan & Shaver, 1994). In adult romantic relationships, the sexual mating system is an important part of proximity seeking. Mutual sexual attraction and sexual interest are strong forces bringing two romantic partners together. However, the needs for comfort, security, and emotional support become more important over time. In other words, the needs for a safe haven for comfort and security become most important for a satisfying and lasting relationship. Adult romantic attachments tend to become a base of security under two crucial conditions. First, a clear and definite commitment, such as marriage, has been made, and second, the relationship needs to last for at least two years (Hazan & Shaver, 1994).

The more involved romantic partners are in each other’s lives, the stronger the attachment (Feeney, B. C., 2004). After all, proximity seeking is the initial and foundational attachment function for all attachments to form (Hazan & Shaver, 1994). Romantic closeness can be assessed through the frequency and diversity of interactions as well as the strength of impact the interactions have on the individual and his or her future (Berscheid, Snyder, & Omoto, 1989).

Existing research has suggested that the influences of both family of origin social and emotional environment and romantic relationship closeness are very important to the formation of attachment security in young adult romantic relationships. The existing research has led to the following hypotheses. First, the family of origin autonomy and intimacy (i.e., social and emotional environment) are negatively correlated with both romantic attachment avoidance and anxiety in young adult romantic relationships. The second hypothesis assessed in this study was that romantic relationship closeness, specifically frequency, diversity, strength are negatively
correlated with romantic avoidance and anxiety.

**Method**

**Participants**

A convenience sample of 52 participants (17 men and 35 women) was used in this study. Participants were students at Eastern Connecticut State University, a public liberal arts university located in a small city in the northeastern United States with approximately 5,500 students. Participants were between the ages of 18 and 25 with a mean age of 20.78 (SD = 1.63). Only participants in a romantic relationship for a minimum of 2 months were included; 48.08% of the participants knew their partner for less than two years. Most participants were White (90.38%). However, Black (6%), and mixed ethnic (Black/White, 2%; and Native American/White, 2%) were also present. Participants were first (11.5%), second (13.5%), third (44%), and fourth (27%) year students. This study was approved by the Committee for the Use of Human Subjects in Research.

**Procedures**

Participants completed demographic questions about age, gender, race, and class standing in addition to the Family-Of-Origin Scale (FOS; Hovestadt et al., 1985), Experiences in Close Relationship Inventory (Brennan et al., 1998), and Relationship Closeness Inventory (Berscheid et al., 1989). All scales showed acceptable reliabilities for the present sample (see Table 1). The incentive for this research was one experimental credit for psychology classes, often being general psychology students (PSY 100). Those who received credit came to the lab to complete procedures. Other participants were recruited on campus and completed the procedures at their current location.

**Measures**

**Family-Of-Origin Scale (FOS).** The FOS (Hovestadt et al., 1985) was used to assess the social and emotional environment in the family of origin. This is a 40-item self-report questionnaire divided into two 20-item scales: autonomy and intimacy. The FOS assesses health in the family of origin through the development of individual autonomy and intimacy. Family of origin autonomy is the family's ability to help create one's personal identity. The family of origin develops the individual's autonomy through clarity of expression, responsibility, openness to other family members, acceptance of separation and loss, and respect for other family members. Family of origin intimacy is an assessment of the closeness of relationships in the family. The family of origin establishes intimacy through mood and tone of the environment, the range of feelings expressed, conflict resolution, trust, and understanding/empathy. The items are rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). After negative questions are reverse scored, the autonomy and intimacy items are summed. Higher scores indicate the participant has higher levels of autonomy and intimacy and therefore a stronger social and emotional environment in the family of origin (Hovestadt et al., 1985).

Fine (1982, as cited in Hovestadt et al., 1985) administered the FOS with the Rational Behavior Inventory (Shorkey & Whiteman, 1977) and the Healthy Family Functioning Scale (HFFS; Sennott, 1981) and the instruments produced comparable results, demonstrating strong construct validity. The FOS started out with 89 items but was reduced down to the 40 most valid items. Hovestadt et al. (1985) demonstrated the reliability of the FOS, with a test-retest reliability coefficient of .95 for the whole instrument. Test-retest coefficients for autonomy and intimacy were .77 and .73, respectively; Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was .75 for autonomy and intimacy combined (Hovestadt et al., 1985).

**Experiences in Close Relationship (ECR).**

The ECR (Brennan et al., 1998) was used to measure attachment security. The ECR assesses adult romantic attachment by assessing avoidance and anxiety in the relationship. It is a 36-item self-report questionnaire split into two 18-item sections: avoidance and anxiety. Items are rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). After negative questions are reversed, the sum of the questions of avoidance and

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Step-wise multiple regression analyses were used to test the two hypotheses.

Table 1 contains descriptive statistics for each of the scales and Cronbach’s alpha values that were calculated for them. All scales showed acceptable levels of reliability based on the obtained alpha values. Our first hypothesis that family of origin autonomy and intimacy are negatively correlated with both avoidance and anxiety was tested via two multiple regressions analyses. The first multiple regression was used to evaluate how family of origin autonomy and intimacy influence romantic relationship avoidance. The overall model was statistically significant, \( F(1) = 21.02, p = .00, R^2 = .30 \). There was moderate negative relation between family of origin autonomy and romantic relationship avoidance (\( \beta = -.55 \)). Furthermore, a statistically significant relation was found between family of origin autonomy and romantic relationship avoidance, \( t(1) = 4.58, p < .001 \), but not for family of origin intimacy, \( t(1) = -.28, p = .78 \). Figure 1 shows a scatterplot of the relation between family of origin autonomy and romantic relationship avoidance. High levels of family of origin autonomy predicted low levels of romantic relationship avoidance.

The second multiple regression evaluated the association between family of origin autonomy and intimacy and romantic relationship anxiety. The overall model was statistically significant, \( F(1) = 14.13, p < .001, R^2 = .23 \). A significant relation was found between family of origin autonomy and romantic relationship anxiety, \( t(1) = 3.76, p < .001 \). A moderate negative relation was found between

Results
The purpose of this study was to examine how family of origin autonomy and intimacy (i.e., the social and emotional environment) and romantic relationships closeness (i.e., frequency, diversity, and strength) influences attachment security in young adult romantic relationships.

anxiety are obtained. Stronger attachment security is seen when levels of both avoidance and anxiety are low (Brennan et al., 1998).

The ECR is currently the best available self-report questionnaire of adult attachment with excellent construct validity (Brennan et al., 1998). It uses the 36 highest correlated items from every existing self-report measure of adult romantic attachment. Smith and Ng (2009) reported Cronbach’s alpha coefficients of .94 for avoidance and .91 for anxiety. Together, the alpha coefficients were .92 (Smith & Ng, 2009).

Relationship Closeness Inventory. The Relationship Closeness Inventory (Berscheid et al., 1989) was used in this study to assess early adults’ romantic relationship closeness. Relationship closeness assesses the frequency and diversity of interactions and strength of the impact. Frequency was assessed through the amount of time (in hours and minutes) the individual spends with their partner in a week. Diversity was assessed through a checklist of various activities completed with their partner in a week. The strength of impact assessed how the romantic partner influenced behavior, thoughts, and feelings using a 7-point Likert-type scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) as well as how the romantic partner influences future plans using a 7-point Likert-type scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (a great extent). After negative questions are reversed, the sum of the questions of frequency, diversity, strength are obtained. High levels of romantic relationship closeness are seen with higher frequency of interactions, diversity of interactions, and strength of impact (Berscheid et al., 1989).

The Relationship Closeness Inventory was compared with the Subjective Closeness Index and a modest significant correlation was found which indicates good construct validity (Berscheid et al., 1989). Test-retest reliability revealed desirable coefficients for frequency (.82), for diversity (.61), and for strength (.81). A study by J. A. Feeney (2004) found the Cronbach’s alpha reliability of the Relationship Closeness Inventory was .70.
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autonomy and romantic relationship anxiety ($\beta = -.48$), indicating that high levels of autonomy were associated with low levels of relationship anxiety. Figure 2 contains a scatter plot depicting the relation between family of origin autonomy and anxiety. No significant relation was found between family of origin intimacy and romantic relationship anxiety, $t(1) = 1.40, p = .17$. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was only partially supported.

Two multiple regression analyses were used to test the second hypothesis that romantic relationship frequency, diversity, and strength are negatively correlated with romantic relationship avoidance and anxiety. Multiple regression analyses were used to evaluate how romantic relationship frequency, duration, and strength influence romantic relationship avoidance and anxiety separately. No significant results were found. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

**Discussion**

This study found that family of origin autonomy, defined as the family’s ability to help establish individual identity (Hovestadt et al., 1985), was negatively related to both anxiety and avoidance. However, there were no significant results to support that family of origin intimacy, defined as family closeness (Hovestadt et al., 1985), influenced attachment security. Therefore, Hypothesis 1, that family of origin autonomy and intimacy is negatively correlated with romantic relationship avoidance and anxiety, was only partially supported. Family of origin autonomy—but not intimacy—was negatively associated with romantic relationship avoidance and anxiety.

Strong attachment security has been seen with low levels of both avoidance and anxiety (Brennan et al., 1998). With this in mind, results from this study suggested the stronger the family’s ability to develop the individual’s autonomy, the stronger the attachment security tends to be in young adult romantic relationships. In other words, individuals who are securely attached to their romantic partners had high levels of personal identity. This is consistent with La Guardia, Ryan, Couchman, and Deci (2000) who found the need for autonomy played a vital role in the security of attachments and Ávila, Cabral, and Matos (2011) who found parental attachment had both mediating and direct effects on autonomy development.

It is likely that autonomy influences attachment security because the individuals are not spending their time defending their identity when they have a good self-image. This allows them to be open to more experiences regardless of how it impacts their identity (Knee, Lonsbary, Canevello, & Patrick, 2005). This openness may potentially benefit their relationship. Furthermore, Greenberg and Mitchell (1983) proposed supporting one another’s autonomy in a romantic relationship is a crucial element in promoting attachment security and healthy functioning.

Interestingly, family of origin intimacy did not influence romantic attachment in the present study. This was inconsistent with Dinero et al. (2008) who found families’ interactions characterized with high levels of caring, support, and sensitivity and low levels of hostility and coercion had an indirect influence on romantic relationship attachment security in early years of relationships. However this study used different methods to measure their data, which could have contributed to the conflicting findings. They used a series of interviews led by observers trained to use the Iowa Family Interaction Rating Scales (Melby & Conger, 2001) to assess family of origin and the Relationship Scales Questionnaire to assess romantic attachment security (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). Characteristics of the sample could have also contributed to these differences finding. They assessed family interactions with children who were between the ages of 15 and 16 to see how it influenced romantic attachment security at age 25. Contrarily, the present study assessed young adults from the ages of 18 to 25 and assessed current family of origin intimacy and romantic attachment security. Further
research should look at how the family of origin’s current social emotional environment affects an individual’s romantic relationship attachment security in young adult populations.

This finding is also inconsistent with Smith and Ng’s (2009) who found high levels of family of origin expressive atmosphere were related to low levels of romantic attachment avoidance and anxiety. Similar to the present study, they also used the Experiences of Close Relationships scale (ECR; Brennan et. al, 1998) to assess romantic attachment avoidance and anxiety. They used the Family of Origin Expressive Atmosphere Scale (FOEAS; Yelsma, Hovestadt, Anderson & Nilsson, 2000), which was a revision of the Family of Origin Scale used in this study. The FOEAS was altered to specifically look at the family of origin’s emotional expressive atmosphere. Aspects of family of origin expressive atmosphere, including the family of origin’s range of emotions are also important components in family of origin intimacy (Hovestadt et al., 1985). Unlike the present study, Smith and Ng (2009) used participants ranging from the ages of 18 to 45. The present study looked only at young adults from the ages of 18 to 25. Unlike the sample from the present study, which consisted of all college students, only 45% of Smith and Ng’s (2009) sample were currently college students. Perhaps the differing characteristics in these samples could have influenced the inconsistent findings. Future research should look at how the different individual characteristics in populations, including age and education, could influence findings.

This study did not find any significant evidence showing that romantic relationship closeness variables (i.e., frequency, diversity, and strength) influenced romantic attachment security variables (i.e., avoidance and anxiety). Therefore Hypothesis 2 (i.e., romantic relationship closeness variables (frequency, diversity, and strength) is negatively correlated with romantic relationship avoidance and anxiety) was not supported. This suggested that the amount of time a couple spends together, the variety of activities they do, and the amount of influence the partner has on each other’s feelings, emotions, behavior, and future does not influence attachment security in romantic relationships.

This finding is inconsistent with a study by Dinero et al. (2008), which suggested that interactions between romantic partners were a major predictor of romantic attachment security. This is also inconsistent with a study by B. C. Feeney (2004), which suggested that romantic closeness also influenced attachment. The more involved the partners were with each other, the more attached they were. However, unlike these studies participants in the present study were all college students. This could suggest that young adults who are attending college might vary in the closeness variables (frequency, diversity, and strength) due to college related activities such as schoolwork, living situations, and extracurricular activities. These variables might change drastically between weeks and months depending on the school year. In addition, about half of the participants were in a relationship for less than two years, making it possible that their romantic partner was not yet an attachment figure. Participants in the study conducted by Dinero et al. (2008) used romantic partners who knew their partners for an average of 3.24–4.16 years. Similarly, participants in the study conducted by B. C. Feeney (2004) were romantically involved for an average of 4.40 years. Overall, not much research has been conducted illustrating the influence of romantic closeness on attachment security. This study can be used as a pilot study investigating the factors explaining why romantic closeness did not influence romantic attachment security in young adults.

Findings in this study add to existing research studying how the factors in family of origin and romantic relationships influence adult romantic attachment security. In particular, this study suggests the importance the family of origin has in developing an individual’s identity (i.e., autonomy). Autonomy in turn influences attachment security in young adult romantic relationships. Unlike other research, this study suggests the importance of the family of origin’s clearness of thoughts and feelings, individual responsibility, respect, openness, and openly dealing with separation and loss on romantic attachment security (Hovestadt et al., 1985). Future research should look deeper into the influences of these specific factors within autonomy and how they influence romantic attachment security.

There are many factors that have possibly influenced the findings in this study. B. C. Feeney (2004) found that relationship length and the individual’s age are key factors other than romantic closeness that influence attachment. It takes about two years for a romantic relationship to completely mature into an attachment relationship (Fraley & Davis, 1997). However, nearly half of the participants in the study knew their partner for less than two years. This could clearly affect results. Further
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research should be done determining the length of relationship and age of the individual on attachment. In addition, most young adults still have their parents as a romantic attachment figure but are starting to transfer their attachment to peers and romantic relationships (Fraley & Davis, 1997). As an individual gets older, their attachment is influenced less by family of origin and more by peers and romantic relationships (Dinero et al. 2008; Simpson et al. 2007). This could also affect results.

No demographic variables (e.g., ethnicity and gender) were examined in this study which could affect the validity of the results. Gender is especially important variable to investigate in future research. Past research has suggested there are gender differences and much of this can be due to different cultural sex roles (Feldman et al., 1998; Jones & Cunningham, 1996). However, Feldman et al. (1998) found a strong reduction in gender differences due to families becoming more accepting of androgynous behaviors. In addition, Hazan and Shaver (1994) justified that the major gender differences were found in the domains of caregiving and sexuality in romantic relationships but not attachment. Another limitation of this study is the sample itself. Participants were not very ethnically and socioeconomically diverse. This can affect the ability to use results from this study across settings due to the extensive ethnic and socioeconomic diversity in the world.

Since this is a correlational study, the true effects between the variables need to be observed in future research. The direction of the influence of the variables cannot be fully determined. For example, it is impossible to tell if family of origin influences romantic attachment or if romantic attachment changes a person’s perspective of the family of origin. Therefore, future research should use a longitudinal study to advance the understanding of the effects and true direction of these variables.

In spite of the limitations, the implications to the real world are very important. Family of origin primary attachment has predicted adult social skills and emotional experiences in romantic relationships (Fraley & Davis, 1997). The understanding of family of origin influences can stress the importance of intact, healthy families. In addition, understanding the various influences to attachment security in romantic relationships can lead to greater understanding of intimacy issues. This is also important for the overall well-being of each individual and their ability to have an enjoyable and nourishing romantic relationship (Conger et al., 2000).

Acknowledging the role autonomy has on romantic relationship attachment security can broaden the repertoire of effective interventions and treatments in family and couple therapy. This study shows the importance that the individual’s family of origin has in developing autonomy. Therapists and researchers can use the findings of this study to learn effective ways to help individuals seek and maintain personal identity, especially through the family of origin.

Results of this study support the notion that higher levels of family of origin autonomy, defined as the family’s ability to establish the individual’s identity (Hovestadt et al., 1985), are related to higher levels of romantic relationship attachment security. Though no true cause-and-effect relationship can be determined with this study, it is still an important addition to research that suggests that family of origin influences future romantic relationship attachments. Despite the limitations, this study has advanced the understanding of how family of origin influences future attachments.

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