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## The relationship between adult romantic attachment and compliance

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### ABSTRACT

Compliance has been mainly researched in the context of custodial interrogation and peer pressure to commit offences. In the present study compliance was studied in relation to adult romantic attachment. It was hypothesized that the relationship between compliance and romantic attachment would be strongest with maladaptive attachment and lowest with secure attachment. Three hundred and seventy seven pregnant women attending antenatal clinics at Primary Health Care Centres completed the Gudjonsson Compliance Scale (GCS), the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS), the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, and the Multi-item measure of adult Romantic Attachment, which consisted of Anxious and Avoidant dimensions (and additional quadrant framework consisting of Secure, Preoccupied, Dismissing, and Fearful attachment types). Compliance was significantly related to both Anxious and Avoidant attachment after controlling for self-esteem, depression, anxiety, and stress. A further analysis showed that compliance was highest among the Fearful type and lowest among the Secure type. The findings suggest that compliance is an important factor in relation to maladaptive adult romantic attachment.

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### 1. Introduction

The concept of compliance is central to the study of social influence (Bond & Smith, 1996). The purpose of the present paper is to investigate the relationship between compliance, as measured by the Gudjonsson Suggestibility Scale (GCS; Gudjonsson, 1989, 1997), and adult attachment. The previous work carried out on the GCS has focused primarily on compliance in interrogative situations (Gudjonsson, 2003, 2006; Sigurdsson & Gudjonsson, 1996) and susceptibility to being led, manipulated or pressured into criminal activity (Gudjonsson & Sigurdsson, 2004, 2007). More recently it has also focused on the vulnerabilities of certain groups to comply with pressure from others, such as patients with persecutory delusions (Levy & Gudjonsson, 2006), patients with Asperger's Syndrome (North, Russell, & Gudjonsson, *in press*), and the presence of symptoms of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) (Gudjonsson, Sigurdsson, Einarsson, Bragason & Newton, *in press-a*). Anxiety, low self-esteem and introversion have been shown to be moderately correlated with compliance (Gudjonsson & Sigurdsson, 2003; Gudjonsson, Sigurdsson, Brynjolfsdottir, & Hreinsdottir, 2002; Gudjonsson, Sigurdsson, & Einarsson, 2004), and these may explain some of the group differences found.

Gudjonsson (1989) defines compliance as “the general tendency or susceptibility of individuals to comply with requests and obey instructions that they would rather not do, for some

immediate instrumental gain” (pp. 535–536). Within this definition compliance can occur in different situations. Gudjonsson, Sigurdsson, Einarsson and Einarsson (*in press-b*) argue that although there are important distinctions between compliance in impersonal (e.g. during custodial interrogation) and personal (e.g. complying with the request of a close friend or a loved person) settings, both are significantly related to the broader psychological construct of compliance. For example, a principal component analysis of a specially constructed Situational Compliance Scale (SCS) showed that personal and impersonal relationship types of compliance items loaded on separate factors, but both correlated significantly with the GCS. The underlying psychological constructs were thought to reflect eagerness to please and avoidance of conflict and confrontation, which are the two factors that load most highly on the GCS (Gudjonsson, 1989). However, the authors argued that fear of emotional rejection and/or abandonment may also play an important part in the motivation behind compliance within personal relationships. Loving relationships, whether ‘passionate’ or ‘companionate’, both have important attachment-related functions, which may be threatened by fear of rejection and abandonment (Reis & Aron, 2008).

There is evidence that an attachment theory framework can be used to investigate individual differences in compliant behaviour. For example, Impett and Peplau (2002) studied the relationship of compliance with unwanted sex among women and attachment styles of Anxiety and Avoidance. Anxiously attached women most commonly consented to unwanted sex and often cited fears that their partner would lose interest in them if they did not comply

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with their request for sex. Some of the reasons given for consenting to unwanted sex (e.g. feeling obliged to have sex with a partner, fear of rejection, finding it easier to engage in sex than saying 'no'), suggested that both anxiety and avoidant attachment styles are relevant to studying compliant behaviour. Attachment styles have been shown to be highly stable from infancy into early adulthood, although they are subject to change depending upon salient life experiences (Waters, Merrick, Treboux, Crowell, & Albersheim, 2000).

Bartholomew (1990) suggests four attachment types: *Secure*, *Preoccupied*, *Dismissing* and *Fearful*. Only the *Secure* type is associated with a positive emotion. Insecure attachments are partly mediated by low self-esteem, with the *Preoccupied* and *Fearful* types being associated with lower self-esteem than the *Secure* and *Dismissing* types (Pickering, Simpson, & Bentall, 2008). Pickering et al. found that paranoid beliefs, but not hallucinations, were associated with insecure attachment. Negative self-esteem, the anticipation of a threatening event, and a perception of others as powerful, mediated the relationship between attachment insecurity and persecutory paranoia.

Brennan, Clark, and Shaver (1998) have reduced Bartholomew's four types into two dimensions: *Anxiety* (fear of rejection and abandonment) and *Avoidance*, which is made up of discomfort with closeness and emotional dependency. Brennan et al. (1998) developed a 38-item questionnaire, which measures the *Anxiety* and *Avoidance* dimensions in adult romantic attachment. Four clusters can also be obtained to calculate the number of people who fall into each of Bartholomew's four types (*Secure*, *Preoccupied*, *Dismissing* and *Fearful*).

The research question being asked in this study is whether there is a significant relationship between certain adult attachment types (i.e. *Anxiety* and *Avoidance* – and Bartholomew's four types) and compliance, as measured by the GCS. Since compliance, as measured by the GCS, is principally related to eagerness to please and avoidance of conflict and confrontation (Gudjonsson, 1989), we hypothesized that high negative emotions to do with adult attachment (i.e. high on *Avoidant* and *Anxious* attachments) will correlate positively with compliance. In addition, using Bartholomew's four types we hypothesized that out of the four types compliance will be highest among the *Fearful* type, which is comprised of high *Avoidance* and high *Anxiety*, and lowest among the *Secure* type (i.e. Low *Avoidance* and Low *Anxiety*). In view of previous research showing a significant relationship between compliance, anxiety and self-esteem (Gudjonsson et al., 2002), we included in the present study the *Depression Anxiety Stress Scales* (DASS; Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) and the *Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale* (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965). This will assist us in understanding the relative contribution of each variable to compliance.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Participants

The participants were 377 pregnant women attending antenatal clinics at ten Primary Health Care Centres in Reykjavik, Iceland. Their mean age was 29 years (SD = 4.9, range 18–44). The participants had completed a number of tests as a part of a national study into the mental health and wellbeing of women during and after pregnancy, and protective factors, such as interpersonal relationships and secure attachment.

### 2.2. Measures

*The Multi-item measure of adult Romantic Attachment* (MMARA; Brennan et al., 1998). This is a 36-item inventory, which is rated

on a 7-point scale (1 = 'disagree strongly' to 7 = 'agree strongly'), which contains two independent subscales – '*Avoidance*' (Alpha = 0.94) and '*Anxiety*' (Alpha = 0.91). Each subscale consists of 18 items. The correlation between the two scales is low ( $r = 0.11$ ). The '*Avoidance*' scale measures discomfort with interpersonal closeness and disclosure, avoidance of intimacy, and need for self-reliance. The '*Anxiety*' subscale measures preoccupation with attachment and relationships, jealousy, clinging to partners, and fear of rejection and abandonment. Fear of rejection and abandonment are central to the concept of '*Anxiety*' attachment.

Brennan et al. (1998) used the two higher-order factors, romantic anxiety and avoidance, to cluster participants into Bartholomew's (1990) four attachment types according to guidelines suggested by Hair, Anderson, Tatham, and Black (1995) and provide a statistical formula for categorizing the scores obtained on the 38-item scale into the four attachment types: *Secure*, *Preoccupied*, *Dismissing* and *Fearful*. This additional cluster based categorization was used in the present study to provide a more detailed analysis of the relationship between compliance and attachment types.

In view of the nature of the sample we chose to investigate romantic (i.e. intimate and domain specific) attachment rather than using a global measure of attachment.

The English version of the Scale was translated into Icelandic and then back translated from Icelandic into English by another translator.

*The Gudjonsson Compliance Scale* (GCS; Gudjonsson, 1989, 1997). This is a 20 item self-report scale which measures the extent to which an individual is prone to comply with the requests of others. The GCS is comprised of true/false statements. Scores range from 0 to 20, with a higher score indicating greater compliance. The Scale was developed for two different purposes. First, to identify persons who are susceptible to making a false confession under interrogative pressure. Secondly, to identify those who are susceptible to being pressured into crime by peers and others. The Scale's validity has been documented in both of these areas (Gudjonsson, 2003, 2006; Gudjonsson & Sigurdsson, 2007). The Cronbach's alpha coefficients have ranged between 0.71 and 0.75 in different studies (Gudjonsson, 2003).

*Depression Anxiety Stress Scales* (DASS; Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995). This is a 42-item self-report measure of depression, anxiety and stress. Each item is rated on a four point scale (0–3; never, sometimes, often, nearly always) and indicates how much each statement applied to the participant during the previous week. The three subscales, each consisting of 14 items, have been shown to have good reliability and convergent and discriminant validity (Crawford & Henry, 2003; Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995). The range of possible scores for each of the three subscales is between 0 and 42.

*The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale* (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965). This 10-item scale consists of positive and negative self-appraisal statements rated on a four point scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". Scores range from 10 to 40 with higher scores reflecting low self-esteem. The scale has good reliability and validity (Gudjonsson & Sigurdsson, 2003).

### 2.3. Procedure

This is a part of a larger study on pre- and post-natal depression in Iceland. The pregnant women were approached when they attended the first check-up at a Primary Health Care Centre in Reykjavik around the 12th week of pregnancy and asked to participate in a study of pre- and post-natal depression and the development of their children from birth to five years of age. They were provided with information about the study which they took home with them and when they attended the next check-up ses-

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