

Distinguishing Dismissing From Fearful Attachment in the Association Between Closeness and Commitment

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Abstract

When avoidantly attached individuals are simultaneously high in attachment anxiety, they are inclined to experience strong internal conflicts between seeking and avoiding closeness. This research examined whether the extent to which closeness, assessed as the inclusion of other in the self (IOS), is associated with greater commitment varies within individuals high in attachment avoidance as a result of differences in ambivalence toward maintaining the relationship. In two studies ($N_1 = 1,604$, $N_2 = 2,271$), we found that the positive association between IOS and commitment was significantly weaker when attachment avoidance was combined with high (vs. low) attachment anxiety. In Study 2, we found lingering relational ambivalence even at high levels of IOS among individuals simultaneously high in attachment avoidance and anxiety, which in turn was related to relatively low commitment. Our findings highlight the role of relational ambivalence in avoidants' relationship functioning and the need to examine the interplay of the two attachment dimensions.

Keywords

attachment style, intimacy, commitment, romantic relationships

Closeness is a core feature of romantic relationships (Aron & Westbay, 1996), such that people are likely to end relationships (Le, Dove, Agnew, Korn, & Mutso, 2010) or seek alternatives (Lewandowski & Ackerman, 2006) when they do not feel much closeness. Research has shown that when closeness is conceptualized as self-other overlap, or inclusion of other in the self (IOS; Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991), higher levels of closeness to one's partner are related to indicators of high relationship quality such as commitment (Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998). However, little research has examined whether there are individual differences in the extent to which feelings of closeness are accompanied by greater commitment to the relationship. Guided by attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969), the present research examined the moderating role of attachment style in the association between IOS and commitment in two large data sets.¹ Specifically, we focused on (1) how attachment avoidance combined with high attachment anxiety relates to commitment under conditions of high closeness and (2) whether ambivalence about maintaining the relationship on the part of individuals high in both attachment avoidance and anxiety may interfere with translating high closeness into commitment. Although closeness typically has positive implications for relationship functioning (Rusbult et al., 1998), an individual who is simultaneously high in attachment avoidance and anxiety may experience a potent combination of intense

reassurance seeking, rejection fears, and distancing strategies (Jones, 2005) when they feel close to their partner. This state of ambivalence makes it likely that these individuals will dwell on negative outcomes of staying in the relationship and thus have weaker commitment.

IOS and Commitment

In romantic relationships, people often feel a sense of interconnectedness or “we-ness” and think of themselves and their partner as a unit rather than as two separate individuals (Agnew, Van Lange, Rusbult, & Langston, 1998). When boundaries between self and partner are blurred, people treat their partners' benefits as their own (Aron et al., 1991), show less actor-observer differences (i.e., make similar attributions for the partner as

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for the self; Aron & Fraley, 1999), and have difficulty differentiating their own traits from those of their partners (Mashek, Aron, & Boncimino, 2003).

Previous studies have found that, as with other behavioral or affective indicators of closeness (Berscheid, Snyder, & Omoto, 1989), IOS assessed using a pictorial measure of overlap between self and the partner (IOS Scale; Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992) is closely related to indicators of high relationship quality. In particular, given that closeness is associated with motivated cognition processes (e.g., positive illusions about the partner; Murray & Holmes, 1997) which foster a sense of conviction in maintaining the relationship, people who feel closer to their partner are less likely to feel ambivalent about staying in their relationship. As such, there is a positive association between IOS and commitment, which refers to the degree of long-term orientation toward the relationship (Rusbult et al., 1998). People who feel a sense of oneness are more committed to their relationships, and their inclination to prioritize partner or relationship goals to selfish goals (transformation of motivation; Rusbult & Buunk, 1993) is likely to increase their commitment further (Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster, & Agnew, 1999).

The Moderating Role of Attachment Style

One individual difference variable that can play an important role in the extent to which IOS is linked with greater commitment is attachment style (Gillath, Karantzas, & Fraley, 2016). According to attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969), early interactions with caregivers shape people's generalized beliefs (i.e., internal working models) of self and others, which in turn influence how they feel, think, and behave in future relationships (also see Fraley & Roisman, 2015; Roisman & Fraley, 2013). Attachment style reflects differences in working models and is conceptualized along two dimensions: attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998).

People who are high in attachment avoidance tend to distrust others and prefer to be self-reliant (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2012). Because attaining support from attachment figures is perceived as unlikely, avoidantly attached individuals rely on deactivating strategies to regulate their attachment system, distancing themselves from, rather than seeking proximity to, their partner (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002). Accordingly, attachment avoidance is associated with high expectations of failure in relationships (Birnie, McClure, Lydon, & Holmberg, 2009) and less willingness to commit to relationships (Simpson, 1990).

Attachment avoidance can take different forms, however, depending on an individual's level of attachment anxiety (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). People who are simultaneously high in attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety (fearful avoidants; Bartholomew, 1990) are theoretically distinguishable from those high in attachment avoidance but low in attachment anxiety (dismissing avoidants).² While dismissing avoidants use their engrained deactivating strategies to regulate their attachment system, fearful avoidants fail to adopt the deactivating

strategies successfully or consistently because they are shunning closeness out of fear of rejection rather than lack of interest in closeness (Simpson & Rholes, 2002).

Accordingly, one notable characteristic that makes fearful avoidants distinct from dismissives is their struggle between desire for closeness and desire for withdrawal (Bartholomew, 1990). Previous studies have indirectly suggested that if relationships do not provoke such strong internal conflicts, fearful avoidants are more willing than dismissing avoidants to pursue closeness. For example, fearful avoidants are likely to seek closeness from relationships with fictional characters (whose parasocial nature can create distance and safety; Rain, Cilento, MacDonald, & Mar, 2017) or with someone other than their primary partner (in whom they may be less emotionally invested; Allen & Baucom, 2004). However, when internal conflicts are salient and strong as when facing real closeness in their primary relationship, fearful avoidants may show an inconsistent pattern of behaviors as they cycle between strategies of excessive closeness seeking and emotional distancing (Marks, Trafimow, & Rice, 2014).

One way to understand fearful avoidants' internal conflicts is in terms of ambivalence, one of the defining characteristics of people high in attachment anxiety (Mikulincer, Shaver, Bar-On, & Ein-Dor, 2010). Because anxiously attached individuals have doubts about their self-worth and are worried about getting rejected, they are ambivalent in their pursuit of closeness (Collins & Read, 1990; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002). For example, attachment anxiety is related to holding both positive and negative views of a partner (Mikulincer et al., 2010), pursuit of both approach and avoidance goals during everyday interactions with a romantic partner (Locke, 2008), and high levels of both reward and threat perceptions in their relationships (MacDonald, Locke, Spielmann, & Joel, 2013). Furthermore, when it comes to committing to their relationship, these individuals flip back and forth because, despite their dependence on their partner pulling them toward staying in the relationship, their concerns about negative evaluations (low felt security) and dissatisfaction push them away (Joel, MacDonald, & Shimotomai, 2011). Importantly, to the extent that fearful avoidants are high in both avoidant and anxious tendencies, they should experience greater motivational conflicts, indicated by their inconsistent use of hyperactivating and deactivating strategies (Simpson & Rholes, 2002). That is, the feelings of ambivalence toward maintaining the relationship anxiously attached individuals experience should be especially intense among fearful individuals.

Given the marked differences in ambivalence between the two types of attachment avoidance, then, we might expect to see fearful and dismissing avoidants diverging in their experience of a highly interconnected relationship. Specifically, fearful avoidants are likely to remain relatively ambivalent toward maintaining their relationship even when they feel close to a partner, as the rewarding experiences of closeness are associated with multiple desires and defenses. This ambivalence should make it harder for them to commit to a relationship because people are inclined to feel uncertain about possible

outcomes of their decision when ambivalence is high (van Harreveld, Rutjens, Rotteveel, Nordgren, & van der Pligt, 2009). Even during positive interactions with the partner, fearful avoidants are likely to contemplate negative consequences of staying in the relationship, which interferes with their full commitment. On the other hand, for dismissing avoidants, feelings of closeness may be related to relatively greater commitment because strong closeness (once achieved) can alleviate dismissives' distrust of others and decrease their adherence to deactivating strategies without triggering strong fears of rejection. In sum, the association between IOS and commitment is likely to be weaker for fearful avoidants than dismissives due to their differences in relational ambivalence.

The Present Research

We conducted exploratory analyses to examine how attachment style moderates associations between IOS and commitment. Samples of romantically involved individuals were assembled based on how the constructs were measured, resulting in two large data sets. Having a large sample size was especially important in the present research as it allowed us to test the statistical interaction effects (between attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety) indicative of the differences between the two types of attachment avoidance (McClelland & Judd, 1993). In Study 1, we examined the moderating effect of attachment style on the association between IOS and commitment. Specifically, we tested a three-variable interaction between IOS, attachment anxiety, and attachment avoidance to examine whether IOS is related to relatively lower levels of commitment for fearful than dismissing avoidants. In Study 2, we sought to replicate the results of Study 1 and tested whether relational ambivalence toward the relationship could account for this difference. Given the absence of similar research in the literature, we report all possible simple slope analyses to show how the associations between IOS and commitment varied at different levels of attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety.

Study 1

Method

Participants

Participants were 1,604 individuals in romantic relationships (801 men) recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) with an average age of 35 years old (range = 21–73). Their ethnic backgrounds were 78.9% White and/or European, 7.9% Latino, 7.5% Native American, 6.8% African American, 6.0% Asian, 1.3% Middle Eastern, and 2.4% identified as "Other." More than half the participants (52%) were married, 25% were dating, and 22% were cohabitating or engaged. The results of a power analysis based on 10,000 simulations assuming a population with the same variance structure as our data set (Lane, Hennes, & West, 2016), indicated that we had 85% power to detect the three-variable interaction effect we found.³

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Between Variables in Study 1.

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Attachment anxiety	—	.41**	-.26**	-.17**
2. Attachment avoidance		—	-.44**	-.47**
3. IOS			—	.48**
4. Commitment				—
<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	3.07 (1.42)	2.39 (1.15)	5.24 (1.54)	6.45 (0.96)

Note. IOS = inclusion of other in the self.

** $p \leq .001$.

Materials and Procedure

As part of a larger questionnaire package, participants completed the following measures.

Attachment style. Participants completed an abbreviated 26-item version of the Experiences in Close Relationships Scale (Brennan et al., 1998), rating the extent to which they agreed with statements about their preferences in close relationships on a scale from 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 7 (*agree strongly*). This scale has a subscale measuring attachment anxiety, which was computed as the mean of 10 items including "I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by my partner" ($\alpha = .92$). A second subscale assessed attachment avoidance and was computed as the mean of 10 items including "I am nervous when partners get too close to me" ($\alpha = .92$).

IOS. IOS was assessed with the pictorial measure of the overlap between self and the partner (IOS Scale; Aron et al., 1992). Participants indicated which of the seven overlapping pairs of circles best represented their relationship with their partner.

Commitment. Participants responded to 3 items (e.g., "How committed are you to your relationship?"; $\alpha = .96$) from the Perceived Relationship Quality Components Inventory (Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000) on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*extremely*).⁴

Results and Discussion

Means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations for the variables are presented in Table 1. To examine the moderating effect of attachment style on the association between IOS and commitment, we conducted a multiple regression analysis including attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, and IOS, along with all two-variable and three-variable interactions as predictors (Table 2). All variables were centered before computing the interaction terms to minimize issues of multicollinearity, and significant interactions were probed using simple slope analyses (Aiken & West, 1991).

As shown in Table 2, main effects of attachment avoidance and IOS emerged, indicating that low attachment avoidance

Table 2. The Effects of Attachment Anxiety, Attachment Avoidance, and Inclusion of Other in the Self (IOS) on Commitment (Study 1).

Predictor	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI
Attachment anxiety	-.01	.02	.74	[-.04, .03]
Attachment avoidance	-.23	.02	<.001	[-.28, -.19]
IOS	.21	.02	<.001	[.18, .24]
Attachment Anxiety × Attachment avoidance	-.01	.01	.52	[-.04, .02]
Attachment Anxiety × IOS	-.02	.01	.02	[-.04, -.00]
Attachment Avoidance × IOS	.08	.01	<.001	[.06, .10]
Attachment Anxiety × Attachment avoidance × IOS	-.02	.01	<.001	[-.04, -.01]

Note. Unstandardized coefficients are reported. CI = confidence interval.

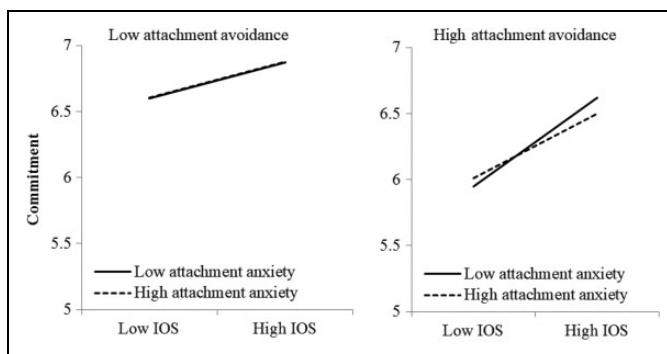


Figure 1. The interaction between attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance predicting the association between inclusion of other in the self and commitment. High and low values are indexed at 1 SD above and below the mean (Study 1).

and high IOS were uniquely associated with greater commitment. These main effects were qualified by a significant three-variable interaction between attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, and IOS (R^2 change = .005). Probing this interaction revealed that the two-variable interaction between attachment anxiety and IOS was significant at high, $b = -.05$, $SE = .01$, $p < .001$, but not at low levels of avoidance, $b = .003$, $SE = .01$, $p = .85$. As shown in Figure 1, the association between IOS and commitment was weaker for participants who were high in both avoidance and anxiety (fearful avoidants), $b = .23$, $SE = .02$, $p < .001$, than for those who were high in avoidance but low in anxiety (dismissing avoidants), $b = .37$, $SE = .03$, $p < .001$. Slope difference tests (Dawson & Richter, 2006) confirmed that these slopes were significantly different from each other, $t = -4.16$, $p < .001$.

When analyzed differently, the two-variable interaction between avoidance and IOS was significant at both low, $b = .11$, $SE = .02$, $p < .001$, and high levels of anxiety, $b = .05$, $SE = .01$, $p < .001$. Simple slope analyses indicated that the association between IOS and commitment was weaker for those low in avoidance and high in anxiety (preoccupied individuals), $b = .13$, $SE = .03$, $p < .001$, than for fearful avoidants, and for those low in both dimensions (secure individuals),

$b = .12$, $SE = .03$, $p < .001$, than for dismissing avoidants, respectively. The slopes were significantly different from each other, $t_s > 4.54$, $p_s < .001$. That is, the association between IOS and commitment was stronger for those high (vs. low) in avoidance at both high and low levels of anxiety. Our results remained the same when we controlled for relationship length.

The results of Study 1 indicated that closeness was associated with greater commitment to a lesser degree for fearful avoidants than it was for dismissing avoidants, providing support for the distinction between the two types of avoidance. Furthermore, our results also suggested that the link between IOS and commitment was weaker for preoccupied individuals than fearful avoidants. In fact, the association between IOS and commitment was weaker among individuals low (vs. high) in attachment avoidance (see Figure 1). One caveat, however, is that more than half of our sample was married, suggesting a relatively high level of commitment and relatively low variability in the responses. Possibly, then, we were not able to see a strong association between IOS and commitment especially among individuals low in attachment avoidance (as they have higher levels of commitment than those high in attachment avoidance) due to the lack of variability in commitment. In Study 2, we addressed this issue by analyzing a sample that varied more in commitment and assessing commitment in a manner that increases variability (i.e., using a 7-item rather than a 3-item measure, and using a 9-point rather than a 7-point Likert-type scale).

Study 2

In Study 2, we examined another large data set employing different measures of attachment style and commitment than used in Study 1 to replicate our findings and to explore a potential mechanism for the key effect. Specifically, we examined whether relational ambivalence can account for the interaction effect between IOS and the two attachment dimensions on commitment. We expected that fearful avoidants would remain relatively ambivalent toward staying in the relationship even when they feel close to the partner, which would in turn limit their commitment to the relationship. A conceptual model of this Moderated Moderated Mediation model (Hayes, 2018) is depicted in Figure 2.

Method

Participants

Participants in romantic relationships were recruited via MTurk. A total of 2,271 participants (308 men) completed the measures. On average, participants were 26 years old (range = 18–66) and had been in a relationship for 1 year (range = 3 months to 40 years).⁵ This sample consisted of younger participants in shorter relationships than Study 1 due to the initial recruitment criteria which involved being in a new relationship. Participants who were in a relationship for less than 3 months were excluded. The same power analyses as in Study 1 showed that we had 99% power to detect our effect.

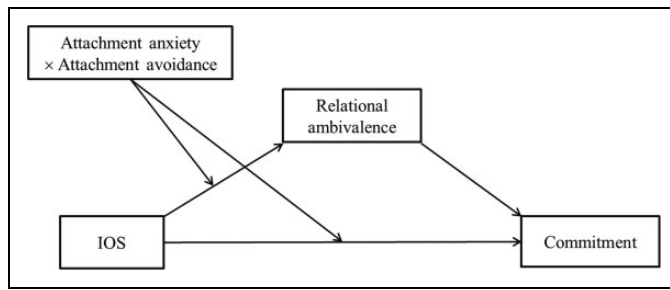


Figure 2. A conceptual model of Moderated Moderated Mediation model (Study 2).

Materials and Procedure

As part of a larger questionnaire, participants completed the following measures.

Attachment style. The Attachment Style Questionnaire (Feeney, Noller, & Hanrahan, 1994) was used to assess attachment style. Attachment anxiety was measured with 13 items including “I find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like” ($\alpha = .85$), and attachment avoidance was measured with 16 items including “I find it difficult to depend on others” ($\alpha = .73$). Responses were given on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 6 (*totally agree*).

IOS. The same measure was used as in Study 1.

Relational ambivalence. Participants responded to 4 items that assess their ambivalence about whether to stay in the relationship (Joel, Page-Gould, MacDonald, & Stanton, 2017). The specific items were “I flip back and forth about whether or not this relationship should last,” “I know exactly how I feel about this relationship (reverse-coded),” “My feelings about this relationship change frequently,” and “I’m still trying to decide whether or not this relationship is right for me” ($\alpha = .87$). Each item was measured on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 7 (*completely agree*).

Commitment. Seven items from the Investment Model Scale (Rusbult et al., 1998) were used to assess commitment (e.g., “I am committed to maintaining my relationship with my

partner;” $\alpha = .88$). Each item was measured on a 9-point scale ranging from 1 (*disagree completely*) to 9 (*agree completely*).

Results and Discussion

Means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations for the variables are presented in Table 3. The same multiple regression analysis was conducted as in Study 1 to examine the moderating effect of attachment style on the association between IOS and commitment. Replicating Study 1, a significant three-variable interaction was observed, $b = -.10$, $SE = .03$, $p = .001$, R^2 change = .004, such that the two-variable interaction between attachment anxiety and IOS was significant at high, $b = -.13$, $SE = .03$, $p < .001$, but not at low levels of avoidance, $b = -.003$, $SE = .04$, $p = .93$ (Figure 3). Simple effects tests revealed that higher levels of IOS were related to greater commitment among highly avoidant participants who were low in anxiety (dismissing avoidants), $b = .56$, $SE = .04$, $p < .001$, but this association was weaker among those who were also high in anxiety (fearful avoidants), $b = .36$, $SE = .03$, $p < .001$. The difference between these slopes was significant, $t = -4.20$, $p < .001$.

Analyzed differently, the two-variable interaction between attachment avoidance and IOS was significant at high levels of anxiety, $b = -.11$, $SE = .05$, $p = .03$, but not at low levels, $b = .05$, $SE = .04$, $p = .19$. The association between IOS and commitment was weaker for people high in both avoidance and anxiety (fearful avoidants) than for those high in anxiety but low in avoidance (preoccupied individuals), $b = .49$, $SE = .05$, $p < .001$, with a significant difference, $t = -2.65$, $p = .008$. Thus, when using a younger sample and a wider response range, there was no evidence that the association between IOS and commitment was weaker among people low (vs. high) in avoidance as in Study 1. Rather, the results in Study 2 indicate that the extent to which closeness is related to commitment is particularly weak among people high in both insecurity dimensions, highlighting the distinct nature of fearful avoidance.

Moderated Moderated Mediation Analysis

We tested whether the three-variable interaction effect on commitment could be accounted for by relational ambivalence. We conducted Moderated Moderated Mediation analyses with 5,000 resamples using the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Version

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Between Variables in Study 2.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Attachment anxiety	—	.47**	-.05*	.29**	-.14**
2. Attachment avoidance		—	-.15**	.27**	-.21**
3. IOS			—	-.34**	.42**
4. Relational ambivalence				—	-.65**
5. Commitment					—
M (SD)	3.32 (0.79)	3.47 (0.61)	4.92 (1.52)	3.12 (1.62)	6.71 (1.73)

Note. IOS = inclusion of other in the self.
* $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$.

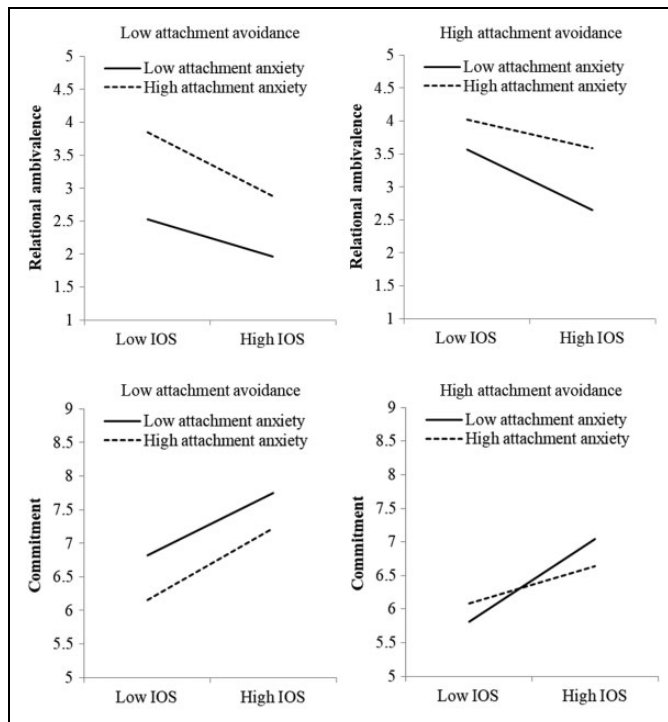


Figure 3. The interaction between attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance predicting the association between inclusion of other in the self (IOS) and relational ambivalence (top) and between IOS and commitment (bottom). High and low values are indexed at 1 SD above and below the mean (Study 2).

22; Hayes, 2017). In the model predicting relational ambivalence (Table 4), there was a three-variable interaction, such that the two-variable interaction between anxiety and IOS was significant at high, $b = .08$, $SE = .03$, $p = .009$, but not at low levels of avoidance, $b = -.06$, $SE = .04$, $p = .11$. As shown in

Figure 3, higher levels of IOS were related to lower relational ambivalence among highly avoidant individuals who were low in anxiety (dismissing avoidants), $b = -.41$, $SE = .04$, $p < .001$, but this association was weaker among those who were also high in anxiety (fearful avoidants), $b = -.28$, $SE = .03$, $p < .001$. The difference between the slopes was significant, $t = 3.15$, $p = .002$. When analyzed differently, the two-variable interaction between avoidance and IOS was significant at high levels of anxiety, $b = .11$, $SE = .05$, $p = .02$, but not at low, $b = -.06$, $SE = .04$, $p = .10$. The negative link between IOS and relational ambivalence was weaker for fearful avoidants than for those high in anxiety but low in avoidance (preoccupied individuals), $b = -.42$, $SE = .05$, $p < .001$, with a significant difference, $t = 2.87$, $p = .004$.

More importantly, we found that a 95% bootstrap confidence interval (CI) for the index of Moderated Moderated Mediation did not include zero, suggesting that the indirect effect of IOS on commitment through relational ambivalence depended on the interplay of avoidance and anxiety. Probing the moderation of moderated mediation following Hayes (2018), we found that anxiety moderated the indirect effect of IOS at high levels of avoidance, $b = -.05$, $SE = .02$, 95% CI $[-.08, -.01]$, but not at low levels, $b = .04$, $SE = .02$, 95% CI $[-.01, .08]$. Attachment anxiety was negatively associated with the size of the indirect effect among highly avoidant individuals, which suggests that the indirect effect of IOS on commitment through ambivalence was smaller among fearful avoidants than dismissing avoidants (Table 4). When analyzed differently, we found that avoidance moderated the indirect effect of IOS at high levels of anxiety, $b = -.07$, $SE = .03$, 95% CI $[-.13, -.002]$, but not at low, $b = .04$, $SE = .02$, 95% CI $[-.01, .08]$. Higher avoidance was associated with smaller size of the indirect effect among highly anxious individuals, suggesting that the indirect effect of IOS on commitment through

Table 4. Summary of a Moderated Moderated Mediation Model (Study 2).

Predictor	Relational ambivalence				Commitment			
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI
Attachment anxiety	.45	.04	<.001	[.37, .54]	.11	.04	.006	[.03, .19]
Attachment avoidance	.33	.06	<.001	[.21, .44]	-.10	.05	.05	[-.02, .002]
IOS	-.36	.02	<.001	[-.40, -.32]	.26	.02	<.001	[.22, .30]
Attachment Anxiety × Attachment avoidance	-.11	.05	.04	[-.21, -.003]	.07	.05	.13	[-.02, .16]
Attachment Anxiety × IOS	.01	.03	.75	[-.05, .06]	-.06	.02	.01	[-.11, -.01]
Attachment Avoidance × IOS	.02	.04	.50	[-.05, .09]	-.01	.03	.69	[-.07, .05]
Attachment Anxiety × Attachment avoidance × IOS	.11	.03	<.001	[.05, .17]	-.04	.03	.17	[-.08, .01]
Relational ambivalence					-.61	.02	<.001	[-.64, -.57]
Model R^2			.21				.47	
Moderated Moderated Mediation					Index			95% CI
Indirect effects at high (+1 SD) and low (-1 SD) levels of attachment dimensions					-.07			[-.10, -.03]
At low attachment anxiety and low attachment avoidance (secure)					.20			[.16, .24]
At low attachment anxiety and high attachment avoidance (dismissing)					.25			[.19, .30]
At high attachment anxiety and low attachment avoidance (preoccupied)					.25			[.18, .33]
At high attachment anxiety and high attachment avoidance (fearful)					.17			[.13, .21]

Note. Unstandardized coefficients are reported. IOS = inclusion of other in the self; CI = confidence interval.

ambivalence was smaller among fearful avoidants than preoccupied individuals. Taken together, these findings support the idea that fearful avoidants are less likely than individuals with other attachment patterns to translate closeness into less ambivalence toward maintaining the relationship and thus greater commitment.

General Discussion

The present results demonstrate that attachment style plays an important role in the association between closeness and commitment. Across two large data sets employing different but complementary measures, we found an interaction effect indicating that for individuals with a fearful attachment style, high levels of IOS were related to lower levels of commitment than they were for those with dismissing attachment style. Because the rewarding experiences of closeness are associated with conflicting motivations for fearful avoidants, they remain relatively ambivalent toward maintaining the relationship even when they feel close to their partner. Furthermore, this sense of relational ambivalence is likely to prevent fearful avoidants from committing to their relationship as it is harder for people to anticipate positive outcomes of their decisions when ambivalence is high (van Harreveld et al., 2009). Consistent with this idea, our results showed that fearful avoidants remained relatively ambivalent about maintaining the relationship in the context of a highly close relationship, which in turn was associated with relatively lower levels of relationship commitment.

These results extend previous work on attachment avoidance in important ways. First, while past studies focused on showing fearful avoidants' inability to deactivate their attachment system in times of distress relative to dismissives (Frias & Shaver, 2014), we demonstrated effects for fearful avoidants in a rewarding (rather than distressing) context. Our results suggest that even in the presence of the potential rewards of closeness, fearful avoidants can be distinguished from dismissives by their ambivalence and lack of commitment. Second, our findings suggest that a more nuanced approach is needed to understand the emerging evidence on buffering avoidance (Overall & Simpson, 2015). It is possible that the extent to which avoidants benefit from strategies for overcoming avoidant tendencies will vary depending on their level of anxiety. For example, thinking of one's romantic partner has been shown to buffer avoidant individuals from experiencing negative emotions (Stanton, Campbell, & Pink, 2017), but such a reminder of closeness may be less effective or even backfire for individuals who are also high in attachment anxiety because of the ambivalence it could trigger. In order to fully understand the effectiveness of interventions designed to reduce avoidant defenses (Overall & Simpson, 2015), the interplay of avoidance and anxiety should be taken into consideration in future research.

A key strength of the present research was the use of large samples especially given our examination of the interaction between the two insecurity dimensions. In previous studies, the interaction between attachment avoidance and anxiety has

often gone unexamined or undetected (e.g., Etcheverry, Le, Wu, & Wei, 2013; Mikulincer, Gillath, & Shaver, 2002) partly due to limited sample sizes that did not provide adequate power (McClelland & Judd, 1993). The lack of reliable tests for this interaction effect can limit our comprehensive understanding of attachment style and attachment avoidance in particular. In studies where different predictions can be made for fearful and dismissing avoidants, failing to examine the interaction may yield inconsistent or unexpected results (Mancini & Bonanno, 2009). Accordingly, despite the relatively small effect size, the three-variable interaction effect found in our studies carries important implications by demonstrating that relying solely on the avoidance dimension may conflate dismissing with fearful avoidance. In fact, the small effect size found in this study bespeaks why it is essential to have large samples, further raising the question of whether failures to find a significant interaction in previous research (e.g., MacDonald et al., 2013; Mikulincer et al., 2002) reflect lack of an effect or lack of statistical power.

Our findings also contribute to the literature on closeness by examining how the well-established link between IOS and commitment can vary for different people. Although past research has consistently found that higher IOS is related to higher relationship quality and stability (Le et al., 2010), individual differences that may moderate this association have remained relatively unexplored (Aron, Lewandowski, Mashek, & Aron, 2013). Demonstrating that increased feelings of closeness can provoke increased commitment to a greater extent for individuals with some attachment styles than others, our work provides new insights into the interplay of personality and the closeness in romantic relationships. Future studies may also examine the interactive effect of attachment style and IOS on commitment or other indicators of relationship quality at a dyadic level (e.g., Weinstein, Rodriguez, Knee, & Kumashiro, 2016). Potentially, insecurely attached individuals' partners, who report poor relationship quality (Givertz, Woszidlo, Segrin, & Knutson, 2013), may evaluate the relationship differently depending on the degree of closeness perceived by the insecure individual. Whether or in what respects high levels of IOS on the part of the insecure individual may improve or impair the quality of the partner's relationship experience is an avenue for future research.

Several limitations should be kept in mind when interpreting our findings. First, our sample for Study 2 consisted largely of female participants, which might limit the generalizability of the findings. Second, given our recruitment of coupled individuals (who tend to be more securely attached than singles; Chopik, Edelstein, & Fraley, 2013), the relatively fearful individuals in our samples may be more secure than fearful individuals as theoretically conceptualized or typically observed in clinical samples (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Third, our research does not allow us to make causal inferences. It may be the case that feelings of closeness are less likely to elicit commitment for fearful avoidants, or alternatively that fearful avoidants are more likely to back away from being too close to the partner if they feel highly committed to

the relationship. These are not incompatible possibilities especially given that the link between IOS and commitment is bidirectional (Agnew et al., 1998). As similar limitations hold for our mediational models (Thoemmes, 2015), future studies involving longitudinal methods or experimental manipulations of closeness (Stanton et al., 2017) or of commitment (Finkel, Rusbult, Kumashiro, & Hannon, 2002) will be needed to establish causal directions.

In conclusion, this research examined and found support for the moderating role of attachment style in the association between IOS and commitment. Our findings indicate that people with different attachment styles not only differ in how they define (Hudson & Fraley, 2017) or how much they want closeness (Slotter & Gardner, 2012), but also in how willing they are to stay in a relationship when they feel close to a partner. Although exploratory, these findings shed light on how closeness comes into play in fearful avoidants' relationships and highlights the role of ambivalence that may underlie their low commitment. Future research should further examine how feelings of closeness are differentially experienced for individuals high in attachment anxiety, avoidance, or both.


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Notes

1. Although the analyses were exploratory and no specific predictions were made a priori, we have structured the introduction to facilitate the reader's understanding of how the results ultimately emerged.
2. Typological terms are used throughout the article only for descriptive purposes; we conceptualized and measured attachment style using a dimensional model (Fraley, Hudson, Heffernan, & Segal, 2015), in which the prototypical attachment patterns are placed in two-dimensional space (Fraley & Spieker, 2003).
3. Syntax for the power analysis is available on Open Science Framework (<https://osf.io/nx7wf/>).
4. Results for the other variables of Perceived Relationship Quality Components Inventory in Study 1 and of Investment Model Scale in Study 2 are available on Open Science Framework (<https://osf.io/zdyfp/>).
5. This sample or a subset of the sample has been used in analyses published in Spielmann et al. (2013) and Spielmann, MacDonald, Joel, and Impett (2016).

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