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Fostering Attachment in Romantic Relationships Through Creative Art Therapies

Capstone Thesis

Lesley University

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Expressive Arts Therapy

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Abstract

Attachment theory examines the infant/caregiver's relationship by the attachment style they develop in the first years of life. Over time, these same attachment styles affect adult romantic relationships. Bowlby's defines four infant/children attachment styles as: securely attached, anxious-ambivalent-insecurely attached, avoidant-insecurely attached, and disorganized-disoriented-insecurely attached. These four styles transferred into three main types for adults: secure, anxious-ambivalent, and avoidant. A couple's relationship can become affected by personal values, behaviors, environmental situations, attachment styles, and beyond. This literature review discusses how couples behave, relate, and interact with one another based on their attachment styles and it also gives critical details on how communication, trust, and sex/intimacy play a role in making or breaking a relationship. It explained how expressive art therapy (ExAT) and dance movement therapy (DMT) could help couples rekindle their relationship should it go astray. This discussion portion recaps that attachment affects adult romantic relationships and touches upon ExAT recommendations, including studies with ExAT on attachment within adult romantic relationships, same-gender/diverse couples, attachment assessments, and additional ExAT interventions.

Keywords: attachment theory, adult romantic relationships, expressive arts therapy, dance/movement therapy, attachment assessments, attachment

Fostering Attachment in Romantic Relationships Through Creative Art Therapies

Introduction

Human connection is an essential part of development. Attachment is a vital aspect of this connection with others. Attachment theory “focuses on how relationships with attachment figures have an impact on development, adaptive functioning, stress management, safety, and well-being” (Trebourg et al., 2004, p.295). These relationships connections start forming at birth. Depending on the relationship development with the caregiver, future relationships become heavily affected by the attachment style the child has developed. This attachment can affect many aspects of their life.

Adult romantic relationships hold a vast amount of connection, and “romantic love can be understood in terms of the mutual functioning of three behavioral systems: attachment, caregiving, and sex” (Fraley & Shaver, 2000, p.136). The functioning of these behavioral systems impacts the positive and negative outcomes for romantic relationships. In relationships, adults bring emotions from childhood, good or bad, to their partner’s relationship. Fraley and Shaver (2000) explained, “the emotions and behaviors that characterize romantic relationships and infant-parent relationships share similar activating and terminating conditions and appear to exhibit the same latent dynamics” (p.135). Josephs (2017) considered in relationships,

love in both infancy and adulthood involves eye contact, holding, kissing, touching, caressing, smiling, crying, and clinging; the desire to be comforted by the relationship partner when distressed; the experience of anxiety, anger, and sorrow after separation and loss; and the experience of happiness and joy upon reunion. (p. 49)

According to Fraley and Shaver (2000) three kinds of attachment styles were noted within adults, “secure, anxious-ambivalent, and avoidant” (p.135). Other theorists (Grice, 1975;

Broderick and Blewitt, 2006) concluded there could be four attachment styles for adults: secure and dismissing-insecure, preoccupied-insecure, and unresolved-insecure. This capstone thesis is grounded in the three attachment styles as described by Fraley and Shaver's (2000).

These three attachment styles play an essential role in a romantic partner's behaviors and interests. It is human nature to be curious, to be loved and cared for, and to feel safe and happy. The importance of exploring the existing literature regarding romantic relationships and attachment styles is to understand foundations required for growth in a relationship that allows the individual to be authentic.

The literature reviewed for this capstone thesis explores the best approach for couples to strengthen their bond, recognize what influenced their attachment styles and to understand how their attachment style affects their current romantic relationship. Additionally, expressive arts therapies interventions and techniques were reviewed in the literature may nurture healthy relationship dynamics.

Literature Review

Bowlby (1969/1982, 1973, 1980) and Erikson (1950/1963) developed Attachment Theory. According to Broderick and Blewitt (2006) infants attach themselves to one or two of their caregivers within the first year of life, starting between 7 to 8 months old. Bowlby (1969/1982, 1973, 1980) described, “infant and caregiver participate in an attachment system that has evolved to serve the purpose to keeping the infant safe and assuring his survival” (Broderick & Blewitt, 2006, p. 133).

Erikson (1950/1963) followed Bowlby's (1969/1982, 1973, 1980) theory lines and concluded that there was more than just attachment to a primary caregiver. The caregiver's behavior affected the child's perspective of life and the security they felt within their world.

Erikson (1950/1963) asserted that good parenting provides a “sense of security, to give children the benefit of calm, reliable care, starting in the early years,” where they are more likely to have successful adult relationships within the future. (Broderick & Blewitt, 2006, p. 136). Broderick and Blewitt (2006) acknowledged that “children must form basic trust, sensitivity and understanding of responsive adults, which becomes important ingredients in the development of positive feelings about self and others” (p. 136).

According to Broderick & Blewitt (2006), infants create a working model for themselves and others. This model plays a vital role in how much the child will become optimistic, happy, and secure in taking risks, develop self-concepts, outlooks on life and adventures in the future. Attachment styles in infants/children are traditionally framed in four patterns: securely attached, anxious ambivalent-insecurely attached, avoidant-insecurely attached, and disorganized-disoriented-insecurely attached.

Broderick & Blewitt (2006) noted the work of Mary D. Ainsworth and her colleagues who designed the “strange situation test.” This test observed and assessed children’s reaction when the primary caregiver left the child in the room alone and then returned a few minutes later. This test is now “the preeminent means for assessing attachment quality and has been used in over a dozen studies since” its initial implementation (Broderick & Blewitt, 2006, p. 134).

Secure and Insecure Attachment Styles in Romantic Relationship

Bowlby’s (1969/1982, 1973, 1980) attachment theory helps adults in romantic relationships better understand themselves in personal ways. This theory allows them to look for qualities they admire, find a common interest in together, and express a relationship they desire with a new or current partner. Mikulincer (1998) explained each attachment style as

the secure style, defined by comfort with closeness and interdependence and by confidence in others' love, was associated with happy, intimate, and friendly love relationships. The avoidant style, defined by insecurity in others' intentions and preference for distance, was associated with fear of intimacy and difficulty depending on partners. The anxious-ambivalent style, defined by a strong desire for intimacy together with insecurity about others' responses, was associated with love addiction, passionate love, and fear of being unloved. (p. 1209)

In some relationships, Muller et al. (2000) stated that individuals

whose attachment style is characterized by a negative view of self, rely on affect rather than cognition to guide their behaviors, these individuals are unable to regulate their affective responses, and they have highly sensitive and easily accessible emotional systems. Such individuals tend to feel the 'rawness' of their emotions and are unable to organize experience of self in relation to others into verbal meaning. (p. 329).

Secure Attachment Style in Romantic Relationships

When children are securely attached to their caregivers, they become upset when their primary caregiver leaves, and upon return, they greet them with happiness and wanting to be held (Broderick & Blewitt, 2006). Secure individuals in romantic relationships "have a secure state of mind, present a coherent and objective view of positive or negative attachment relationships with parents and other attachment figures." (Trebooux et al., 2004, p. 296). Secure individuals also "present their experiences in a believable, organized manner, and they view attachment relationships as important influences on their development" (Trebooux et al., 2004, p. 296). Secure adults tend to "communicate in comfortable and open ways. They communicate effectively and

are less frequently involved in destructive arguments. Their empathic accuracy is greater than more insecurely attached individuals” (Josephs, 2017, p. 56).

Individuals with a secure attachment style have positive feelings about their relationships, and the “high negative events” (Treboux et al., 2004, p. 308) have little impact on their feelings about the relationship. This idea shows that “attachment security serves as a protective factor concerning life stress” (Treboux et al., 2004, p. 308). When an individual is securely attached to their romantic partner, they are honest with themselves, hold high values, view deception as unacceptable, and being intimate with the partner creates strength. Even though vulnerability is scary, it positively affects the couple's relationship (Josephs, 2017). Secure individuals are happy within their relationships because they feel confident, trustworthy, dependable, and nonjudged. They can react in kinder ways to their partner and show interest in activities the partner cares about immensely.

Insecure Attachment Styles in Romantic Relationship

Individuals with insecure attachment styles are “incoherent in their discourses about their current relationship, with respect to the value of the relationship, they may place strong emphasis on material goals (buying a house), leisure activities, or closeness at the expense of individual development” (Treboux et al., 2004, p. 296). Insecurely attached people display little trust in other individuals, believing they will become hurt, and this causes them to become less intimate with others.

In romantic relationships, insecurely attached individuals may carry many emotions that can affect their current relationship. These emotions can include uncertainty, nervousness, distress, and high or low expectations, to name a few, for the bond (Treboux et al., 2004). Individuals with insecure attachments have a hard time communicating with their partners. They

tend to disconnect, which can cause arguments, create tension, and not be fully present within the conversation. When the insecure partner is not fully present, the secure person does not feel significant. The secure person does not feel heard, making the relationship unlikely to “easily solve ongoing problems” (Fraley, & Shaver, 2000, p. 139).

Macdonald et al. (2012) explained that “in relationships, there is no limit to how much rewards can exceed threats, but typically there is a limit to how much threats can exceed rewards before the relationship ends” (p. 657). An insecurely attached individual in romantic relationships blames themselves for their inability to connect. According to Muller et al., (2000) insecure attachments “results from interactions that cause individuals to doubt the trustworthiness, responsiveness, and accessibility of others, and to question the integrity of the self” (p. 323). Insecure individuals are uncertain within a romantic relationship, which leads to confusion and ambivalence about the relationship. Macdonald et al. (2012) noted that individuals with anxious-ambivalent attachment styles are conflicted between their fears of rejection and their hopes for connection. Individuals with insecure attachments and ambivalence experience this ambivalence due to feelings of insecurity. This insecurity creates tension and negativity within the relationship between the two partners.

Anxious-Ambivalent Attachment Style in Romantic Relationships

Anxious-Ambivalent attached children are often distressed when separated from their primary caregiver, but they act angry towards the caregiver and often resist them upon return. They want nothing to do with the caregiver’s comfort (Broderick & Blewitt, 2006). Adults who are anxious-ambivalent (preoccupied) tend to “persistently seek reassurance from others that they are loveable, no matter how often that reassurance has already been provided” (Josephs, 2017, p. 55). Anxious-ambivalent individuals “might appear more attached to their partners than

secure individuals...highly anxious people are more likely to experience separation distress after temporary separations” (Fraley & Shaver, 2000, p. 139).

Individuals who have an anxious-ambivalent attachment style found their

emotions dominate their lives, and they are angrily preoccupied with whether others are interested in them. They fear that they are unlovable and feel worthless when alone, so that their anxiety and tendency to cling increase significantly when threatened with losing the partner” (Reeder & Duncan, 2001, p. 418).

The anxious-ambivalent “individual craves closeness and connection with others, but simultaneously worries about partner unavailability or not being valued by the partner” (Givertz & Safford, 2011, p. 149). These individuals become more involved with drugs and alcohol as a coping mechanism to deal with the emotions of suspicion, rejection, and “seemingly unprovoked aggression” about their fears of separation from the partner (Reeder & Duncan, 2001, p. 419)

On average, Men have an avoidant attachment type; while women are more inclined to have an anxious type (Fraley & shaver, 2000). Women with high anxious attachment styles feel incredibly nervous and anxious when their partner leaves. If the woman feels comfortable with an intimate connection with their partner, she can seek comfort and contact in physical, emotional, or mental ways (Fraley & Shaver, 2000). If the woman does not feel comfortable with intimacy, she will avoid contact or be dismissive when the partner returns. Anxious-ambivalent attached individuals “hope that others will offer support and love, despite believing that they themselves are not worthy of such care...that if the current partner can offer the kind of responsiveness they crave, others may be able to do so as well” (Rice et al., 2020, p. 10). By having their partner’s support, the anxious-ambivalent individual is encouraged to become more secure over time, even with a previous negative working model.

Avoidant Attachment Style in a Romantic Relationship

Children who display an avoidant insecure attachment seem unemotional when the caregiver leaves. Upon return, they tend to ignore the caregiver altogether, turning and moving away from them (Broderick & Blewitt, 2006). An adult who displays avoidant (dismissing) attachment tendency typically

view people as undependable...often inflate their working model of self, viewing themselves as self-reliant to protect themselves from feeling rejected by others...They are more likely to compartmentalize their experience with a specific partner and less likely to expect similar interactions with close others in general. (Rice et al., 2020, p. 10)

Individuals with avoidant attachment styles are “less interested than non-avoidant individuals in promoting warm and affectionate interactions and may have difficulty expressing their concerns and feelings, as well as responding sensitively to a partner’s needs and comments” (Josephs, 2017, p. 55). Partners of avoidant individuals might be most challenging because they

give in to preferences for less interdependence and intimacy; they may avoid immediate conflict. However, such acts are likely to leave the more secure partner feeling dissatisfied and result in poor relational quality or relationship dissolution. Such an outcome may reinforce the avoidant individual’s working model that others are unreliable (Rice et al., 2020, p. 3).

Avoidant individuals are more than likely to become negative, cold and avoid all intimacy at any cost. Attachment avoidance “reflects the extent to which an individual is uncomfortable with closeness and depending on others and prefers emotional distance and self-reliance” (Givertz & Safford, 2011, p. 149).

Children who display a disorganized-disoriented attachment are varied with avoidant and anxious attachment. They become stressed when the caregiver leaves and avoids her upon return (Broderick & Blewitt, 2006). Disorganized-disoriented attachment style was created for children who were difficult to place in the avoidant or anxious-ambivalent styles category. This attachment style difficulty is because of “contradictory, conflicted behaviors (approach and avoidant), misdirected movements, disorientation, ‘freezing in place’ for a significant length of time and fearfulness” (Broderick & Blewitt, 2006, p. 161). These children show high levels of stress that can go unmanaged, and they have trouble regulating their emotions. Adults who transition from disorganized-disoriented children to unresolved insecure attached individuals tend to have a lapse in reasoning and thinking logically. These individuals can change swiftly, but they also show signs of avoidant and anxious-ambivalent insecure style characteristics (Broderick & Blewitt, 2006)

Fundamental Values for Romantic Relationship

Couples need to have many essential values as a solid foundation in having a successful relationship. The author of this thesis paper decided to research three central values in relationships: communication, trust, and sex/intimacy because these three values become impacted by early attachment from a caregiver, and if developed in a negative sense (insecure attachment), it becomes detrimental towards the relationship. When couples recognize the attachment styles of their partners and themselves, these perceptions create opportunities to grow and avoid replicating possible maladaptive perspectives.

Communication in Romantic Relationships

Communication is an essential factor in understanding the couple's emotions, thoughts, actions, and ways of communicating. This communicative language is vital to grasp, understanding how the couple primarily functions and how

effective communication is not about what you say but how you say it. Securely attached people know how to express their viewpoints in ways that are more likely to elicit sympathy and understanding. In contrast, the insecurely attached appear to express themselves in ways that provoke either escalating angry arguments or hostile withdrawal. (Josephs, 2017, p. 59)

Secure adults have healthier outcomes when talking to their partners about their thoughts and feelings. After all, they

tend to engage in more self-disclosure and direct communication than insecure adults because they are confident enough to be assertive and trust that their partner will respond supportively. Insecure adults are more likely to cling, make demands, stonewall, or withdraw because they believe their partner will reject them or they are protesting the unresponsiveness of their partner". (Domingue & Mollen, 2009, p. 679)

Givertz & Safford (2011) wrote that "communication reinforces attachment style, and as such, communication acts as both a cause and a consequence of attachment" (p. 154). At times, this could be why it's hard in relationships; couples need to make an effort to work out their conflicts. Domingue and Mollen (2009) stated that "individual's attachment styles predict what expectations and beliefs they have for their partners, and their relationships, and what relationships goals they strive to achieve. Which in turn influence what thoughts, feelings, and behavior they engage in during conflict" (p.682). Communication within adult romantic relationships is a critical aspect in understanding the other partner as a whole, understanding

their boundaries, limits, goals, and desires within the relationship. If a couple does not develop a good communication foundation, there will be trouble creating unnecessary conflict and arguments in the relationship.

Trust in Romantic Relationships.

Trust is what holds a relationship together (Fitzpatrick & Lafontaine, 2017). A lack of trust in a relationship leads to more fights, unresolved feelings, anger, resentment, and breakups. Without trust in a relationship, the partner can feel alone, lost, unsafe, and insecure within themselves and within the relationship (Fitzpatrick & Lafontaine, 2017). Fitzpatrick and Lafontaine (2017) stated that "trust promotes the initiation, investment, and preservation of romantic relationships, whereas a lack of trust in the relationship often leads to relationship dissolution" (p. 644). Mikulincer (1998) wrote that a person's ways of coping with this betrayal might be a direct reflection, if not the product, of their level of trust. How individuals deal with their confidence within a relationship depends on their attachment style.

A secure individual "could develop a more open, selfless, and caring attitude towards their partners. They could become an active agent responsible for partner well-being and relationship quality rather than a passive recipient of caring and comfort" (Mikulincer, 1998, p. 1219). Since secure individuals have better communication skills than insecure individuals, it is easier for secure individuals to talk with their partners about their feelings of trust because they understand its vulnerability and violation. They have the confidence knowing if they bring up their concerns, their partner will not degrade them, disown them, abuse them, or leave them (Mikulincer, 1998).

An anxious-ambivalent individual seeks security by developing a sense of trust. (Mikulincer, 1998). Unfortunately, anxious-ambivalent individuals hold a negative sense of trust,

which can reactivate their insecure attachment style, fostering negative hypervigilance in the relationship (Mikulincer, 1998). Mikulincer (1998) asserted that "anxious persons basic doubts about a partner's responsiveness could lead them to feel greater levels of anxiety in response to a betrayal of trust and to engage in rumination about the conditions that can predict partners future responses" (p. 1221). Since avoidant individuals are not confident within themselves, they tend to distance themselves from their partners if a conflict or betrayal of trust happens. Mikulincer (1998) explained that avoidant individuals need to have control as their central mechanism for understanding trust in relationships.

The current literature on the relationships between men and women noted that gender differences could account for differences in the trust established in romantic relationships. Depending on their attachment styles, it can be contingent on how they approach their partners and handle conflict within the relationship. Fitzpatrick and Lafontaine (2017) explained, "if men and women are insecurely attached, they will not necessarily be less satisfied in their relationship when their partner has low trust in them, but rather this is more likely when they themselves have difficulty trusting their partner" (p. 657).

Men who are both high in avoidance and anxiety have lower trust in relationships with women. Thus, it made men dissatisfied in many relationships and found associations not to last very long. Women high in avoidance found they have the same effect in relationships with men. Fitzpatrick and Lafontaine (2017) explained this dynamic as

when men were more avoidant and women were more anxious, both partners were less satisfied in their relationship. As for partner effects, females' high attachment anxiety was shown to have a significant relation with their male partners' low degree of relationship satisfaction. (p. 643)

Domingue and Mollen (2009) explained, "insecure-insecure couples and secure-insecure couples reported higher levels of demand-withdraw and mutual avoidance and withdrawal communication." (p. 691). These couples tend to feed off each other and affect the whole dynamic of their relationship, leading to a lack of trust, dishonesty, disloyalty, and negativity.

When there is a lack of trust within a relationship, it is hard for individuals to feel secure, happy, healthy, and whole. Josephs (2017) explained, that it is difficult to be reflective when feeling hurt, shamed, anxious and angry, and it seems as though no one is likely to be sympathetic to one's feelings. The ability to accurately understand and empathize with the mind of a romantic partner deteriorates when responding defensively to feelings of criticism, rejection, betrayal or abandonment. (p. 62)

Sex/Intimacy in a Romantic Relationship

According to Morgis et al. (2019), "pattern[s] of communication can help partners better understand one another's likes and dislikes, resulting in the couples engaging in a sexual script that includes more pleasing and few displeasing activities" (p. 369-370). This helps the couples have an overall satisfying relationship. Morgis et al. (2019) explained, "only 26% of couples have clear understanding of their partner's concerns regarding their sexual relationship. This is problematic because effective sexual communication is a significant predictor of sexual well-being" (p. 368). Research also shows that the percentage of unhappy couples is 50-70% related to intimacy/sexual issues within the relationship (Morgis et al., 2019).

Securely attached individuals are more comfortable within their skin, thus makes them comfortable with their sexuality. It allows them to initiate sexual intimacy with their partner without fearing rejection. Securely attached individuals tend to disagree with casual sex, one-night stands, cheating, extra-pair sex activities, and insecurely attached individuals. These

individuals crave and look for healthy long-lasting relationships, that usually end in marriage (Josephs, 2017). Insecure individuals tend to have a more negative attitude towards sexual topics and sex. They are more likely to cheat on their partners, and they are less likely to put emotions into the sex act. They are good at separating lust and love when having sex with individuals, either a partner, casual sex, or with the cheating individual. Morgis et al. (2019) explained that "partners with weak or insecure attachment bonds often struggle to effectively communicate and express their needs for emotional and sexual closeness" (p. 369).

Avoidant attachment style individuals tend to stay away from sexual relations and intimacy often; avoidant men are less interested in sex and have fewer sex partners throughout their life span. Avoidant women tend to engage in sexual activities at a young age and are less likely to be in a committed relationship; they usually have casual sex, have extra-pair sex, or be polyamorous (Josephs, 2017).

Creative Arts Treatment for Romantic Relationships

Expressive art therapy can be crucial in allowing couples to manage their emotions, relate to their partner differently, and expand their experience beyond a cognitive one. The possibilities of the Expressive Arts Therapies to foster healthy interactions among couples and attune to their partner's needs were recognized by several scholars. For couples engaging in ExAT, scholars (for example, Lacson, 2020, Wagner & Hurst 2018, Harmon-Walker & Kaiser, 2015) have noted positive outlets for partners who struggle with voicing their concerns, allowing the arts to speak for them. Different modalities in expressive art therapy offer various interventions to help couples grow stronger.

Dance Movement Therapy Treatment for Romantic Relationships

Dance movement therapy helps individuals become in tune with their body's awareness. Dance movement therapy allows the individual time to become aware of how they feel and become conscious of how their partner might experience emotions on a kinesthetic level. When partners become attuned to each other's wants and needs, they have a better ability to have a solid relationship. Lacson (2020) explained, "attunement is the ability for partners to accurately read one another's nonverbal signals and respond in such a way that allows each partner to sense that their emotions or intentions are not only understood but also felt by the other" (p. 7). When partners feel heard and understood, it allows safety to form and allows trust to grow. Wagner and Hurst (2018) explained that.

when we have a secure attachment style, we will have developed what Kaplan called constancy-the ability to connect without feeling suffocated and disconnect without feeling abandoned. We are likely to operate out of our social engagement system even during stressful situations. We can postpone fight/flight until there are clearer signs of life-threatening dangers. (Attachment Theory, Para 3)

Individuals in romantic relationships become affected by past attachment developments from infancy. Still, throughout their adulthood, they have a chance to change their attachment patterns from insecure to secure with the help of their partners and therapy. This development change allows individuals the ability to "re-pattern attachment wounds from childhood and provides a psychoneurobiological basis for healing" (Lacson, 2020, p. 4).

One-way therapists can help couples heal their wounds and rebuild their relationship in a positive direction is to "identify dances that attempt to resolve childhood attunement needs, complicating their romantic dances. These dances can be addressed within the DMT counseling relationship both within the couple-hood and between therapist and client" (Wagner & Hurst

2018, D/M Therapy Theory, Para 3). The DMT therapist recognized that the couples struggled in relating to one another, and through guided dance, the team tapped into different personal and impersonal realms. These realms can help the pair accept various aspects of themselves and each other, receive the conversation flow through movement, and pass energy between the two partners. It enables the individuals to become aware of deep personal feelings they were not connected to before.

Mirroring Intervention in DMT for Romantic Relationships

Dance movement therapists can help couples through healing by an intervention called mirroring. Mirroring, as Lacson (2020) described,

addresses the theme of attunement in a couple's relationship and the face-to-face experience of mirroring allows partners to feel seen. It provides the mirroring partner with an opportunity to feel what it might be like to be in the other's experience, holding them in the nonverbal realm in a non-judgmental manner. (p. 5)

Therapists teach couples that mirroring allows them to behave empathically towards each other's feelings and desires. Therapists explained to pairs that behaviors such as:

mirroring, attuned listening, eye contact, reaching out, and tender touch lead to secure bonding and attachment in relationship whether between parent and child or between adults, by bringing these into the couple's awareness at key points during a session- with awareness of the difference between the parent/child version of these behaviors and the lover/lover version. The dance/movement therapist can foster secure bonding between partners. (Wagner & Hurst 2018, Incorporation of Couple Themes, Para 2)

This mirroring gives the partners time to attune into each other's nonverbal, implicit, body-level cues. By taking in "each other's nonverbal and symbolic communication, romantic partners can

meet each other where they are emotionally and identify with one another's experience on a level much deeper than what could be achieved through verbal communication and cognitive reasoning alone" (Lacson, 2020, p. 11).

When couples do not feel in sync with each other, they find their "partner was not able to mirror their movement with their body, were overwhelmed by feelings of frustration, humiliation, and helplessness. These feelings led to a discussion about experience missing from their intimate communication" (Engelhard, 2019, p. 137).

Expressive Arts Therapy Treatment in Romantic Relationships

Dance movement therapy has many benefits to helping couples rekindle their relationship, but another modality that can help is expressive art therapy. Expressive arts therapy has many services to help pairs build solid and healthy relationships. Through ExAT work, a couple will work through their issues and struggles using modalities. These can include art (drawing, painting, clay), music (instruments, writing songs), drama (writing and acting out plays), and play (using toy props to tell a story or situation). Through these modalities, couples can understand their relationship dynamics and how they relate to one another. Expressive arts therapy can help the therapist guide them through any art form activity. In the ExAT intervention, they touch upon

issues {that} can be discussed from new perspectives and where problems exist, the couple can see the problem as separate from the relationship allowing for greater expressions of relational grace. With the relationship recognized as a unique entity, the couple begins to form alliances to protect and enhance what is precious about the relationship and stand against any problems that might arise. (Beckenbach, 2014, p. 169)

There can be multiple interventions that can help couples appreciate each other better and realize how they can change. For ExAT, these interventions can include storytelling, making a bird's nest, and practicing mindfulness.

Storytelling Intervention by ExAT for Romantic Relationships

Story sharing is a unique process between couples because it allows partners to share personal stories with each other. Couples shares stories because "individuals have likely heard the personal stories of their partners and recalled and re-shared these with the partners as well as close friends and family to create intimacy" (Panattoni & Kirkegaard-Thomsen, 2018, p. 1416). When an individual tells a story and the partner can accurately recall the story, they feel heard, accepted, and unique. Panattoni & Kirkegaard-Thomsen (2018) explained this as "recalling and interpreting personal life stories and vicarious life stories of partners with the same motivational themes and redemptive structure may strengthen feelings of closeness, justify investment in the partner, and confirm one's own meaning-making" (p. 1418).

Stories can bring happiness and heartbreak, but overall, recalling the story, either good or bad, helps individuals feel significant and unique. Panattoni and Kirkegaard-Thomsen (2018) stated that "stories are the means by which people find meaning and explanation in their experiences, linking together sequences of events and attributing significance to the relationships between events" (p. 168). By sharing stories with a partner, individuals learn how to work cohesively and invest in the relationship—learning how to put in the effort and what effort might look like to them. If couples spent two hours writing personal stories each week, it shows overall benefits towards a healthier, stable relationship (Panattoni & Kirkegaard-Thomsen, 2018).

Bird's Nest Drawing Intervention from ExAT for Romantic Relationships

The bird's nest drawing (BND) is grounded in attachment theory. The bird's nest drawing activity helps couples and their therapist understand the assessment's cognitive, behavioral, and emotional aspects; "The bird's nest drawing is a single drawing art-based assessment developed as a projective measure of attachment security" (Harmon-Walker & Kaiser, 2015, p. 1). Bird's nest drawing finds examples of "protection, nurturance, a holding space, interpersonal closeness and parental attunement" for individuals in rekindling their relationships with their partner (Harmon-Walker & Kaiser, 2015, p. 1). The BND is "success-oriented" in a way that it won't give couples anxiety if they are "self-conscious about their drawing skills, and feel that they are unable to draw human figures well" (Harmon-Walker & Kaiser, 2015, p. 3).

The therapist leads the couple into a BND, where they ask the couple to draw a bird's nest and then discuss how the picture can relate to everyone's attachment styles. What Harmon-Walker & Kaiser (2015) have found during this intervention is "associations between the following indicators and secure attachment: the presence of a grounded tree, presence of a dry tree, portraying a large bird, use of over 20% of the paper space, and portraying a protected nest" (p. 3). Additional correlations include "drawing a baby bird and secure attachment and drawing a tiny bird (presumably small in size compared to paper space) and insecure attachment" (Harmon-Walker & Kaiser, 2015, p.3). Sketching a perfect stable home is something positive, something good to be proud of; a secure individual will not be afraid to show that to others. An insecure individual will feel uncomfortable showing their drawing to others. Insecure individuals will feel judged and possibly ridiculed, and most will not take the chance (Harmon-Walker & Kaiser, 2015).

Mindfulness Intervention from ExAT for Romantic Relationships

Mindfulness has many benefits for individuals who use its techniques. In recent years, dyad studies of relationships show mindfulness positively benefits relationship growth. Mindfulness may "improve romantic relationship functioning as it has been related to a variety of basic mechanisms that are vital for the functioning of romantic relationships" (Kappen et al., 2019, p. 2187). According to Kappen et al. (2019), when couples engage in mindfulness, improvements in emotion regulation and executive control have been reported. Some individuals can bring mindful attention to their everyday lives, called Trait Mindfulness, while others struggle with this concept. Kappen et al. (2019) affirmed that securely attached individuals reported higher rates of daily trait mindfulness while insecurely attached individuals reported discomfort practicing mindfulness daily.

This study on trait mindfulness concluded that "partners with higher levels of trait mindfulness were perceived by their partners to be more responsive and were themselves better at recognizing their partner's responsive behavior" (Kappen et al., 2019, p. 2187). Trait mindfulness is a better tool to help communicate emotions, deal with conflicts within the relationship, increase forgiveness to each partner, and lower stress levels. Trait mindfulness "buffered the negative impact of insecure attachment on relationship anxiety, destructive behaviors, and even the risk of breaking up" (Kappen et al., 2019, p. 2187).

Partner acceptance is another relationship-specific mechanism of mindfulness. In general, the individual's attitude acknowledges their partner's imperfections without feeling like they need to change who they are as a person (Kappen et al., 2019). Most individuals think this way when they are in a secure relationship and secure attachment with their partner. Insecure individuals have difficulty staying mindful because insecure individuals have a mindless state of mind. A mindless state of mind is

characterized by immersion in emotions, which can intensify negative emotion. If the partner engages in some kind of potentially negative behavior that triggers negative emotions, an individual low in mindfulness may find it relatively difficult to acknowledge and accept such negative emotions and may find it difficult to accept that the partner triggers such emotions. As a result, there may be a greater tendency of wanting to change the partners behavior (i.e., being unaccepting). (Kappen et al., 2019, p. 2187)

To boost relationship satisfaction while using mindfulness, the therapist focuses on interventions that target the couple's awareness of the partner's positive characteristics. The therapist teaches the couple a beneficial way to talk to one another, acknowledge the language they are using, and help bring their awareness to how their partner is feeling. Being aware of mindfulness will give the couple an overall higher chance of staying together in a long healthy relationship (Kappen et al., 2019).

Discussion

This literature review of attachment theory integrated knowledge and found that individual attachment styles significantly affect adult romantic relationships. When children attach to their primary caregiver, they develop a bond characterized as a secure or insecure attachment. The attachment style determines how the child interacts in future relationships.

The author of this thesis paper felt captivated by how childhood attachment development affects adult romantic relationships. Secure and insecure attached individuals develop personalities throughout their life span, including negative and positive traits. Their primary caregiver influences these traits by showing modeling, and attentiveness to the child through their developing bond.

This literature review recognized, anxious-ambivalent individuals cling to their partners, become overbearing, and worry about being hurt or abandoned, which makes them seem more secure in the relationship than an actual secure individual. Anxiety causes rifts within a couple's relationship, and these rifts create tension, arguments, and disappointment in the partnership, which ultimately makes the secure individual disconnect from the relationship.

This author understood that for couples to have a strong, healthy, long-lasting relationship, they need to listen to each other, build trust, and show empathy towards one another to understand thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Engelhard (2019) explained that when couples make a strong connection, "empathic understanding helps change patterns of behavior in a way that brings about closeness between the partners and emotional regulation, which is a key variable predictive of marital satisfaction" (p. 126). These behaviors allow the couple to "feel calm, safe, and secure, which in turn leads to regulated arousal states, and facilitates deepening of their emotional engagement" (Lacson, 2020, p. 11). When couples feel safe and heard, they are more inclined to share everything with their partners. They are more engaged in doing more wholesome activities and are willing to pay attention to their partner's needs, desires, and wishes from the relationship, this author as distinguished.

This thesis discovered communication, trust, and intimacy important for couple's romantic relationship. When pairs build their level of trust, compassion, communication, and empathy, they create a sense of attachment security in the relationship that can help protect the relationship and nourish it (Fitzpatrick & Lafontaine, 2017). This knowledge is crucial because it allows the relationship to grow and foster change. The change will be good for the partner's overall health and wellness within the relationship.

Stigma surrounding sex/intimacy created an undesirable effect on the couple's relationship. This lack of communication creates disconnection, non-empathy, and disillusion towards the romantic relationship, this author has noted. Couples need connection, freedom to communicate, and feel safe, which ultimately, in the end, unites the pair closer together.

Insecure individuals will repeat a harmful, challenging, unrealistic lifestyle with every relationship they have, either current or future. Unless insecure individuals find clarity, resources, and therapy to help them overcome these obstacles, they will continue to display the same behaviors. Couples with a secure partnership do not become inclined to repeat the same negative cycle. Secure and insecure individuals need to grasp that all people grow and transform, ultimately changing their relationship; this author had noted. Rice et al., (2020) stated, "attachment tendencies can change over time, and individuals can hold multiple different attachment representations" (p. 2). The writer of this paper determined that when an insecure and secure partner forms a romantic relationship, the secure partner can use positive modeling for the insecure partner. This modeling will help guide the insecure individual in building confidence, security, trust, and developing a secure attachment style (Treboux et al., 2004).

When individuals work on themselves and their romantic relationships, ExAT interventions help shape their mindsets to positivity and growth. Couples who work with ExAT and DMT can enable the duo to build a strong connection. These modalities give them the freedom to play, explore, advocate, and use their voices in a robust and nonjudgmental way, the literature review acknowledged. Mikulincer (1998) explained that if couples trust each other within sessions, it will lead to successful outcomes. Building confidence with their partner and enjoying each other's company builds strength. It helps the couple have positive outlooks, creates partner's availability, and how they respond to each other in a kind, caring fashion.

Dance movement therapy is another inspirational treatment because it fosters a couple's body dynamics, which helps the individuals understand their partner's body language. It allows individuals to feel witnessed, heard and acknowledged while doing mirroring with their partner. Become in sync with one's body is a great awareness to have, but to become in sync with a partner, builds and creates a whole new connection that can last a lifetime if nurtured and cared for rightly.

This literature review recommends that future studies on adult romantic relationships, attachment theory, and ExAT be conducted and produced. This author recommends researching homosexual couples, diverse/racial couples, and their attachment style that affects their relationship. This author could only find a few studies done by researchers on ExAT interventions with couples. There is not much data to gather from, and it would be encouraging to see what other kinds of interventions could help the pair build a stronger bond. Interventions that incorporate music, drama, and play therapy, including painting, poetry, writing songs, or playing musical instruments, are only a few among so many others.

This author recommends using ExAT intervention and attachment theory assessments to support a healthy relationship. These two tools working together will assist couples in understanding themselves better, helps the therapist see the relationship holistically and allows each individual to become aware of how they are displaying themselves within the relationship. There needs to be more research on how expressive arts therapy can help rekindle adult romantic relationships; because all we can hope for is more secure, happier, healthier outcomes in relationships.

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THESIS APPROVAL FORM

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In the judgment of the following signatory this thesis meets the academic standards that have been established for the above degree.

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