

# Predictor models of intimate partnership satisfaction: attachment, the capacity to mentalize and narcissism

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**Danica M. Nikolić Vesković<sup>1</sup>**

*University of Niš, Faculty of Science and Mathematics, Niš*

The aim of this study is to analyse whether attachment, mentalization and narcissism contribute to the prediction of intimate partnership satisfaction. The study included 222 respondents aged 18 to 50, all childless, who were in an intimate partnership or had been married from at least one year to ten years at most. The respondents filled out online questionnaires, including: the Serbian version of the Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (SM-ECR-R) questionnaire used for assessing attachment; the Mentalization Scale (MentS); the Narcissistic Personality Inventory NPI40 used for assessing the level of narcissism and the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) aimed at assessing intimate partnership satisfaction. The results indicate that higher levels of anxiety, avoidance, mentalization of others and narcissism predict lower intimate partnership satisfaction. Attachment, which developmentally precedes mentalization and narcissism, has the most significant independent effect on the prediction of satisfaction. The greatest predictive power was achieved by the predictive model which, at the same time, includes anxiety, avoidance and the mentalization of others. The conclusion of the study is that attachment, the mentalization of others and narcissism predict intimate partnership satisfaction.

**Key words:** attachment, mentalization, narcissism, relationship satisfaction

The quality of intimate partnerships is associated with numerous aspects of life, such as physical and mental health (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Joel et al., 2020; Meeks et al., 1998), one's personal and professional life and well-being of children (Joel et al., 2020). Research has shown that there is an association between the experience of quality in an intimate partnership and symptoms of depression (Wang et al., 2017; Whitton & Whisman, 2010),

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1 danica.nikolic@pmf.edu.rs

anxiety (Whisman & Baucom, 2012), as well as greater intimate partnership satisfaction accompanied by greater job satisfaction (Rogers & May 2003). A frequently studied construct in the context of intimate partnership satisfaction is the type of attachment. A meta-analysis (Hadden et al., 2014) determined a significant negative correlation between intimate partnership satisfaction, as well as anxiety, and the avoidant dimension of attachment in 31 independent effects.

The attachment theory highlights the importance of the quality of an emotional relationship formed between a mother and child during the first years of life, as well as its impact on the quality of attachment to someone close later in adulthood (Bowlby, 1969). It is assumed that first attachments in life are relatively stable, due to the mediation of internal working models and their influence on the formation of subsequent relationships with others (Bowlby, 1973). This assumption has been confirmed in numerous studies (Main et al., 1985; Armsden & Greenberg, 1987; Collins & Read, 1990; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994; Hazen & Shaver, 1987; Simpson, 1990). Researchers describe attachment using attachment patterns and/or dimensions which lie at its core – anxiety and avoidance. Anxiety represents a need for approval and fear of abandonment in relationships, while avoidance refers to avoiding a sense of closeness and dependency on others.

Numerous studies indicate that secure attachment, low anxiety and low avoidance are characterized by openness for closeness and intimacy, with a sense of mutual trust and satisfaction (Collins & Read, 1990; Hazen & Shaver, 1987; Simpson, 1990). People with secure attachment consider themselves worthy of love and attention; they do not mind their partner depending on them or them depending on their partner; they are not afraid that they will be abandoned (Hazen & Shaver, 1987), display better communication skills (Guerrero, 1996) and use more constructive strategies for conflict solving in their intimate partnerships compared to those with insecure attachment (Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1995). In avoidant attachment (low anxiety and high avoidance), due to negative expectations, closeness in relationships is avoided and its importance denied with a defensive attitude, while the importance of independence and self-sufficiency is emphasized (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). What characterizes people with this type of attachment is fear of closeness and the attitude that real love exists only in novels (Hazen & Shaver, 1987), coldness, mistrust, distance, and lower intimate partnership satisfaction (Collins & Read, 1990; Simpson, 1990), while their relationships are usually superficial and short-lived (Stefanović-Stanojević, 2011). In the preoccupied attachment style, with high anxiety and low avoidance, a person tries to compensate for their low sense of worth through extreme closeness with others, which renders that person vulnerable if it is not achieved (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). These people are obsessive in intimate partnerships,

demanding, jealous, in constant fear of abandonment, they strive towards a symbiosis, dramatic love at first glance (Hazan & Shaver, 1987) and seek constant confirmation of love (Collins & Read, 1990). People with fearful attachment (high anxiety and high avoidance) manifest an ambivalent attitude in their relationships with others. They are drawn to others due to their high dependency and seek self-validation through their relationships, but at the same time also flee from closeness due to fear of rejection (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994); hence, their intimate partnerships are rare or chaotic (Stefanović-Stanojević, 2011). Some researchers suggest that lower intimate partnership satisfaction among people with insecure attachment emerges in situations when a threat is perceived, when the attachment system is activated, while they do not need to be less satisfied in other situations (Little et al., 2010). Based on the activation model of the attachment system in adulthood, when perceiving a threat, people with secure attachment use strategies based on that style of attachment, while anxiously attached individuals experience hyperactivation of the attachment system and an excessive search for closeness and attention from the attachment figure (partner). Paying excessive attention to partner's availability and constant worry increase the likelihood of noting actual or imaginary signs of disapproval from the partner and of potential abandonment. In situations of the perceived threat, people with avoidant attachment try to prevent the activation of the attachment system using deactivating strategies, denying the need for attachment and striving to rely on themselves excessively (Mikulincer & Shaver 2003). Little and associates argue that, although the activation model of the attachment system emphasizes the characteristic behaviour of people with insecure attachment even in situations where there is no threat, the model still suggests that, when activated, insecure attachment systems are most detrimental for an intimate partnership. People with avoidance strategies, who tend to deactivate attachment system in threatening situations, still feel the need for love and intimacy on a subconscious level and can function similarly to people with secure attachment in situations when the attachment system has not been activated (Little et al., 2010).

The attachment theory and the psycho-analytical concept of narcissism describe a similar relationship style with others, both among people with avoidance attachment and among those with increased narcissism, as well as a similar model of parenting behaviour as a potential cause of avoidance attachment and narcissism. Some studies suggest that they have the same basic structure (Brennan & Shaver, 1998; Feintuch, 1998). The association between these constructs lies in the valuation of the child by the parents and the sense of protection the child has in his/her relationship with them, on the basis of which the child builds his/her self-respect. If a child in a secure relationship builds an internal working model of the self as worthy of love

and attention, and of others as available and responsive, he/she will probably develop a healthy level of self-respect and of what Kohut refers to as healthy narcissism. To the contrary, in an avoidant style relationship, which a child builds living with unavailable and rejecting parents, he/she develops an internal working model of others as unavailable, which creates danger of the development of pathological narcissism, due to a deficit in the interpersonal interpretative capacities of the child (Bennett, 2006). In the theory of the self, Kohut points out that inadequate parental responses, in the sense of emotional detachment during the process of transformation from infantile into healthy narcissism of adults, lead to a loss of the cohesive self, insecurity and the loss of self-respect, while an understanding of the child's needs and a warm and empathetic relationship helps in the development of an adequate level of self-respect (Topić Lukačević & Bagarić, 2018). Studies have found a positive correlation between avoidance attachment and narcissism (Adil & Kamal, 2005; Ahmadi et. al., 2013). We assume that the traits of narcissistic individuals such as the desire to have others admire them, the belief that they are special, unique and that they deserve special treatment (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), can lead to problems in intimate partnerships and lower satisfaction if the person feels their needs have not been satisfied. In order to keep up the adoration of others, narcissistic individuals use a perfectionist self-presentation (Casale et al., 2020). Furthermore, they expect perfectionism even from the idealized others since they believe they have the right to be in the presence of an idealized object. Narcissistic injury and the subsequent rage can ensue due to any experienced loss of perfectionism, that is, if the idealized others disappoint the narcissistic individual and do not meet their expectations (Nealis et al., 2015). Previous studies have attested to a negative correlation between narcissism and satisfaction in intimate partnerships, as well as the mediator effect of the idealized self-presentation in the case of high levels of narcissism on intimate partnership satisfaction (Casale et al., 2020). Additionally, numerous forms of behaviour have been linked to high levels of narcissism, which can in turn impact one's relationship with their partner, such as vindictiveness (Rasmussen, 2016), aggression in intimate partnerships (Keller et al., 2014) and lower dedication in an intimate partnership (Campbell & Foster, 2002; Zeigler-Hill et al., 2020).

The next construct that we associate with attachment and intimate partnership satisfaction is mentalization. It represents an imaginative mental activity which helps us understand the behaviour of others through their feelings, needs, desires, beliefs, goals, purposes and reasons. In addition to interpreting the behaviour of others, mentalization also refers to the interpretation of one's own behaviour and experiences (Fonagy & Allison, 2012). Growing up with parents with whom the child was securely attached

facilitates the development of the capacity to mentalize in the child (Bateman & Fonagy, 2010). Empirical studies have confirmed the existence of a positive correlation between the patterns of secure attachment and a more developed capacity to mentalize (Banjac et al., 2013; Fonagy et al., 1991), as well as the possibility of predicting the development of the capacity to mentalize among children based on the established secure attachment of both the children and the parents (Fonagy et al., 1998). Fonagy and Allison assume that mentalization developed to enable people to quickly and effectively interpret other people's behaviour. The ability to mentalize is developed through the constant interaction of the child and the parents so that the child's behaviours are interpreted by the parents and, after being processed, turned back. If this interpretation and processing of the child's signals and emotional reactions are adequate, the child is not overwhelmed by emotional turmoil and feels secure (Fonagy & Allison, 2012). The assumption is that this facilitates the development of self-control, the regulation of emotions (Fonagy et al., 1991) and attention (Bateman & Fonagy, 2010). Based on the aforementioned, we can see that a decreased capacity to mentalize can lead to problems in intimate partnerships and thus impact intimate partnership satisfaction. A decreased capacity to mentalize and the ensuing decreased self-control, the regulation of the negative affect and the feeling of being emotionally overwhelmed lead to behaviours such as yelling, property damage and causing harm to oneself or others (Adshead et al., 2013). To preserve satisfactory intimate partnerships, in addition to self-control and the reigning in of negative emotions such as aggression and hostility, cognitive processing of the events which caused them is needed, so that the thoughts and feelings associated with anger would be diminished or replaced by more positive ones, which in turn depends on the capacity to mentalize (Hegsted, 2020).

Understanding the concept of intimate partnership satisfaction through the relationship of attachment, mentalization and narcissism can help us to understand the impact which early life experiences have on our intimate partnerships. Awareness of how our personal history of close relationships during early childhood contributes to our intimate partnerships later on in life can contribute to our not blaming only our partner and the current events for any possible intimate partnership dissatisfaction. Therefore, it is possible to plan therapeutic interventions so that people could explore their internal reasons for any subjective sense of dissatisfaction in intimate partnerships.

The aim of this study is to analyse whether it is possible to predict intimate partnership satisfaction based on the dimensions of attachment, anxiety and avoidance. In addition, we aim at analysing whether and to which extent narcissism and mentalization contribute to improvement in predicting intimate partnership satisfaction.

## The method

### *Sample and procedure*

The sample used in the survey consisted of childless individuals in intimate partnerships or individuals who had been married, from at least one to ten years at most ( $M = 3.968$ ,  $SD = 2.97$ ). A total of 222 respondents took part in this study, 153 females and 69 males, aged 18 to 50 ( $M = 26.91$ ,  $SD = 6.89$ ). The respondents filled out survey questionnaires in electronic form. The questionnaire was e-mailed to a certain number of people in the author's environment, who were then asked to send out the questionnaire to other people from their own environment who fit into the afore-mentioned profile. The respondents were informed that the study was anonymous, voluntary, and that the results would be processed in group form and used for purposes of science and research. The study was carried out in Niš during 2021 on a convenience sample compiled using the snowball technique.

### *The instruments*

**The Experiences in Close Relationships questionnaire, ECR-R (Fraley et al., 2000) and the Serbian version of the Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised questionnaire, SM-ECR-R (Hanak & Dimitrijević, 2013).** The questionnaire consists of 36 items, one half of which refer to the dimension of avoidance, and the other half to the dimension of anxiety. The respondents answer by evaluating the claims on a seven-point scale regarding the extent to which they agree with each claim. The extent of agreement ranges from "I do not agree at all; I do not agree; I partly agree; I neither agree nor disagree; I partly agree; I agree" to "I completely agree". In this study, a good reliability of the subscales was determined,  $\alpha = .911$  for anxiety and  $\alpha = .839$  for avoidance, as well as for the questionnaire as a whole  $\alpha = .896$ .

**The Mentalization Scale (MentS) (Dimitrijević et al., 2018).** The scale is aimed at assessing three aspects of the capacity to mentalize, including: mentalization of the self, the mentalization of others and the motivation to mentalize, while a complete score is obtained at the same time. The scale consists of 28 items, for which the respondents state the extent of their agreement using a five-point scale ranging from "1 – completely untrue" to "5 – completely true". The reliability of the instrument both for the subscales and as a whole is satisfactory, and in this study had a value of  $\alpha = .804$ , (Mentalization of the self  $\alpha = .717$ , Others  $\alpha = .802$ , Motivation  $\alpha = .665$ ).

**Narcissistic Personality Inventory NPI40 (Raskin & Terry, 1988).** It is used to evaluate the narcissistic personality traits on a sub-clinical population. In this study, the Serbian version of the scale was used (Dinić & Vujić, 2019). The questionnaire consists of 40 pairs of claims in a forced-choice test.

The respondents answered by choosing one claim in each pair which they thought best described them and was closest to their feelings. The reliability determined in this study was  $\alpha = 0.861$ .

**The Relationship Assessment Scale RAS (Hendrick, 1988).** The questionnaire consists of seven questions which measure the general intimate partnership satisfaction. The respondents answer using a five-point scale where 1 refers to a low level of satisfaction, and 5 to a high level of satisfaction. In this study the reliability was  $\alpha = .920$ .

### *Data analysis*

The obtained data were processed using the analysis of variance and regression analysis. The analyses and statistical tests were carried out at a set level of significance of 0.05.

## **Results**

### *Descriptive statistics*

Table 1 shows means and standard deviations of the variables. Except for Narcissism, the average values for all variables are at a medium and high level (Table 1).

Table 1.

### *Descriptive analysis*

Variables	Min.	Max.	<i>M</i>	SD
Anxiety	1.06	5.94	3.01	1.18
Avoidance	1.61	6.33	3.51	0.85
Ment-Self	1.38	5.00	3.45	0.78
Ment-Others	2.40	5.00	4.01	0.58
Ment-Motivation	2.20	5.00	3.90	0.55
Mentalization	2.61	5.00	3.81	0.45
Narcissism	.03	.93	0.34	0.18
RAS	1.00	5.00	4.10	0.80

*Note:* Ment-Self – mentalization of the self; Ment-Others – mentalization of others; Ment-Motivation – motivation to mentalize; RAS – intimate partnership satisfaction

Analysing the distribution of the attachment style in the sample, it is found that 60.8% of the respondents are securely attached, 18.5% are dismissive, 13.5% are preoccupied and 7.2% are fearfully attached. An equal percent of both men and women are securely attached (60.7% women; 60.8% men). The dismissive pattern is found in 15.03% of women and 26.08% of men; 17.64% of women and 4.34% of men have the preoccupied pattern, while 6.53% of women and 8.69% of men have a fearful attachment pattern.

Table 2. Average values for intimate partnership satisfaction based on the attachment pattern

A Pattern	N	M	SD	Min.	Max.
Secure	135	29.95	4.53	13.00	35.00
Preoccupied	30	26.93	6.46	10.00	35.00
Dismissive	41	27.73	5.81	8.00	35.00
Fearful	16	23.75	7.46	7.00	33.00
Total	222	28.68	5.58	7.00	35.00

Note: A Pattern – Attachment pattern

The average values for intimate partnership satisfaction, depending on the attachment pattern, indicate that respondents with secure attachment manifest the highest levels of satisfaction, while those with fearful attachment manifest the lowest level of satisfaction (Table 2).

By applying the *F*-test it is determined that there is a significant difference in intimate partnership satisfaction between respondents with various attachment patterns ( $F(3, 218) = 8.683, p < .001$ ). The level of the effect of the difference of different attachment patterns in the average satisfaction was estimated by the partial eta-squared coefficient, with a value of  $\eta^2 = .107$ , which represents the difference of medium intensity. The results of the *Post hoc* (Bonferroni) test indicate that, based on intimate partnership satisfaction, there is a significant difference between the secure and preoccupied attachment patterns, as well as the secure and fearful, while there was no significant difference between the secure and dismissive attachment patterns. The extent of the difference in intimate partnership satisfaction was assessed by the square of the point-biserial correlation coefficient, which indicates that the difference between the secure and the preoccupied pattern is low-intensity, while it is medium-intensity between the secure and the fearful pattern (Table 3).

Table 3.

The post hoc test of the differences between intimate partnership satisfaction depending on the attachment pattern

I A Pattern	J APattern	M difference (I-J)	Standard error	Sig.	95% Confidence interval		$r_{pb}^2$
					Lower bound	Upper bound	
Secure	Preoccupied	3.01*	1.07	.032	.16	5.87	0.05
Secure	Fearful	6.20**	1.40	.000	2.46	9.94	0.13
Secure	Dismissive	2.22	.95	.121	-.30	4.74	
Preoccupied	Dismissive	-.80	1.28	1.000	-4.19	2.60	
Preoccupied	Fearful	3.18	1.64	.324	-1.19	7.56	
Dismissive	Fearful	3.98	1.57	.070	-.18	8.15	

Note: A Pattern – Attachment pattern; \*the difference in the M is significant at the .05 level; \*\* the difference in the M is significant at the .001 level



The values of Pearson's correlation coefficient for the dimensional variables are shown in Table 4. The negative correlation between Anxiety on the one hand and Mentalization of the self and total capacity to Mentalize on the other is of medium intensity, while the correlation between Anxiety and the Mentalization of others is of low intensity. The intensity of negative correlation between Avoidance and all the Mentalization variables is medium, except for Mentalization of the self, which is low. The correlation between Avoidance and Narcissism is negative and of low intensity. The intensity of negative correlation between Anxiety and Satisfaction in an intimate partnership is medium, while the negative correlation between Avoidance and Satisfaction is of low intensity. The correlation between the complete capacity to Mentalize, both of the self and others, on the one hand, and Narcissism, on the other, is positive and of low intensity. The positive correlation between Mentalization of the self and Satisfaction in an intimate partnership is of low intensity.

Table 4.

*Correlations between the dimensions of attachment, mentalization, narcissism and intimate partnership satisfaction*

	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.
1. Anxiety	.273**	-.531**	-.162*	.044	-.317**	-.129	-.330**
2. Avoidance		-.290**	-.333**	-.340**	-.443**	-.154*	-.294**
3. Ment-Self			.246**	.130	.661**	.142*	.194**
4. Ment-Others				.484**	.790**	.272**	-.098
5. Ment-Motiv					.720**	.038	.017
6. Mentalization						.211**	.058
7. Narcissism							-.066
8. RAS							

*Note:* Ment-Self – mentalization of the self; Ment-Others – mentalization of others; Ment-Motiv – motivation to mentalize; RAS – intimate partnership satisfaction; \*\* the correlation is significant at the .01 level; \* the correlation is significant at the .05 level

## Predictive models

The introduction of the dimensions of Anxiety and Avoidance set up basic predictive Model 1, while the regression analysis was used to ascertain that based on these values it was possible to predict intimate partnership satisfaction. The correlation coefficient between the measured values of intimate partnership satisfaction and the values predicted by the model is  $R = 0.392$ . The model explains 15.4% of the variance of the dependent variable ( $R^2 = 0.154$ ) (Table 5).

Table 5.  
*A comparative evaluation of the predictive models*

Model	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Standard error	Change Statistics				
				R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Significance F change
1.	.392	.154	.74	.154	19.887	2	219	.000
2.	.415	.172	.73	.019	4.942	1	218	.027
3.	.454	.206	.72	.052	14.418	1	218	.000
4.	.462	.214	.71	.007	2.048	1	217	.154

Note: Model 1, Predictors: Avoidance, Anxiety; Model 2, Predictors: Avoidance, Anxiety, Narcissism; Model 3, Predictors: Avoidance, Anxiety, Ment-Others; Model 4, Predictors: Avoidance, Anxiety, Ment-Others, Narcissism

By introducing Narcissism into basic Model 1 it was possible to establish Model 2. The results show that Model 2 is a better predictor of the value of the criterion variable compared to Model 1 (Table 5), considering that the correlation coefficient is higher by 0.23 compared to Model 1 and has a value of  $R = 0.415$ . The change is significant at the  $p < .05$  level. Model 2 explains 1.9% more of the variance (change  $R^2 = .019$ ); thus, Narcissism improves the basic predictive model.

The introduction of the entire scale of Mentalization into basic Model 1, as well as the subscales individually, determined that Mentalization of others contributes most to the improvement of the predictive model. Model 3, in which Anxiety, Avoidance and Mentalization of others are predictor variables, predicts the value of the criterion variable better compared to models 1 and 2, considering that the correlation coefficient is higher by 0.062 compared to Model 1, and has a value of  $R = 0.454$ , while the change is significant at the  $p < .001$  level. Model 3 explains 5.2% more of the variance compared to Model 1 (change  $R^2 = 0.052$ ) (Table 5); thus, Mentalization of others improves the basic model.

Model 4, with the predictor variables of Anxiety, Avoidance, Mentalization of others and Narcissism, does not significantly improve Model 3 as it barely explains 1% ( $R^2 = 0.007$ ) more of the variance. The correlation coefficient is higher by 0.008 compared to Model 3, and has a value of  $R = 0.462$  (Table 5).

Model 3, as the best predictive model, explains 20.6% of the total variance of the criterion variable, considering that the explained variance is 28.952 (Table 6).

Table 6.  
*Analysis of the variance of the predictive Model 3*

Source of variance	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Mean squared deviation	F	Sig.
Model 3	28.95	3	9.65	18.876	.000
Unexplained variance	111.46	218	.51		
Total variance	140.41	221			

Note: Criterion variable: RAS – Intimate partnership satisfaction  
 Model 3, Predictors: Avoidance, Anxiety, Ment-Others

Table 7.  
*The regression coefficient for Model 3*

Model 3	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	<i>t</i>	Sig.
	B	Standard error	$\beta$		
The constant	7.00	.48		14.543	.000
Anxiety	-.19	.04	-.29	-4.586	.000
Avoidance	-.28	.06	-.30	-4.498	.000
Ment-Others	-.34	.09	-.24	-3.797	.000

*Note:* Criterion variables: RAS – Intimate partnership satisfaction

In Model 3, all the regression coefficients are significant at the .01 level (Table 7). Mentalization of others contributes less to the predicted score of Satisfaction in an intimate partnership than Anxiety and Avoidance, considering that the value of the standardized coefficient of Mentalization of others is lower compared to the value of the standardized coefficient of Anxiety (-.289) and Avoidance (-.296), but it has the same direction of prediction.

## Discussion

The aim of this study was to analyse whether attachment, expressed through the dimensions of anxiety and avoidance, as well as narcissism and mentalization, predict the level of intimate partnership satisfaction.

The results show that attachment is a significant predictor of intimate partnership satisfaction. Reduced anxiety, i.e. a lower need for approval and smaller fear of abandonment from one's partner, along with lower avoidance of closeness and dependence on others, predict greater intimate partnership satisfaction. These findings are in line with those of some other studies (Ayenew, 2016; Barry et al., 2015; Butzer & Campbell, 2008). The internal working model of the self as one worthy of love and attention, as well as that of others as safe individuals to rely on (a positive model of the self, a positive model of others, low anxiety, low avoidance), which we build during childhood based on our relationship with our guardian (Bowlby, 1973), predict greater intimate partnership satisfaction in adulthood. During the activation of the attachment system, people with secure attachment know or believe that their needs can be satisfied in intimate partnerships, as well as that maintaining closeness in an intimate partnership is awarded and that the partner is available, responsive and attentive in threatening situations. The strategies of people with secure attachment lead to feelings of comfort in intimate partnerships, emphasizing the advantages of intimate partnerships over single life, and are based on general trust in others and the belief in their good will, which especially increases trust in one's partner and makes it easier to tolerate their ambiguous or negative forms of behaviour. These strategies even further facilitate an emotional exchange with one's partner (Mikulincer &

Shaver 2003). Increased anxiety in relationships (a negative model of the self, a positive model of others) is characterized by a hyperactivation of strategies of the attachment system, which leads to overly demanding and dependent behaviour in a partner relationship, as well as to chronic frustration due to unsatisfied needs for love and dedication. These strategies lead to catastrophic assessments of interpersonal conflict, which results in their escalation. Demanding behaviour, excessive requests for closeness, lack of trust and suspicion in one's partner can cause the other partner's negative emotions and their distance, which causes additional worry and uncertainty on the part of the person with anxious attachment (Mikulincer & Shaver 2003). Increased avoidance (a positive model of the self, a negative model of others) is characterized by a deactivation of the attachment system, which has a negative impact on the quality of the relationship because it leads to superficial and cold relationships, with lack of closeness and intimacy, as well as avoidance of finding solutions for the problem in the relationship. This kind of relationship can reduce the satisfaction of the other person in the relationship due to their feeling frustrated since their needs for closeness and intimacy are not satisfied, which can consequently lead to a decrease in satisfaction on the part of the person with avoidant attachment (Mikulincer & Shaver 2003).

Mentalization of others contributes to the prediction of intimate partnership satisfaction, but less so than attachment. Attachment developmentally precedes mentalization and therefore the internal working models of the self and others built during childhood have a more significant effect on intimate partnerships in adulthood than mentalization. A greater capacity to mentalize others predicts less intimate partnership satisfaction. Due to the greater emotional significance that intimate partnerships have, and probably due to the desire for a satisfactory and stable relationship, the interpretation of our partner's thoughts and feelings might seem overwhelming and may lead to a decrease in the intimate partnership satisfaction. We assume that in an intimate partnership there is greater sensitivity to our partner's thoughts, while their more intense interpretation and better understanding can create worry for the partner's emotional state and the relationship, which can lead to a decrease in satisfaction. On the other hand, due to the nature of intimate partnerships, in the sense of the existence of more intense feelings, it is possible that the interpretation of the thoughts and feelings of our partner will be disrupted by our emotions and lead to incorrect insight, the onset of worry, doubt, and thus result in a decrease in satisfaction. Our study found a positive correlation between the mentalization of the self and intimate partnership satisfaction. A greater capacity to mentalize one's own thoughts, feelings and behaviour leads to a person not being overwhelmed by negative emotions. Instead, one has better self-control and ability to, by later cognitive processing of the event (for example, their partner's actions), replace negative thoughts with positive ones (Hegsted, 2020), which would probably bring about a decrease in conflict, and thus contribute to greater intimate partnership satisfaction. As far as the link

between mentalization and attachment is concerned, the results indicate that higher levels of anxiety and avoidance correspond to lower levels of mentalization, and vice versa. Hence, we can conclude that our data are in agreement with the propositions that growing up with parents with whom we have secure attachment facilitates the development of the capacity to mentalize (Bateman & Fonagy, 2010; Fonagy & Allison, 2012).

The smallest contribution to the prediction of intimate partnership satisfaction was made by narcissism. It is possible that high levels of narcissism predict lower satisfaction due to the existence of a discrepancy between the expectation of special treatment and admiration, which people with high levels of narcissism expect from their partner, and what is actually happening, as well as disappointment which can be felt because one's partner is not ideal. Attachment contributes more to the prediction of intimate partnership satisfaction than narcissism, since it developmentally precedes it, and so it is possible that it has a greater impact on our relationships with others, especially intimate ones. Specifically, a child, depending on his/her attachment to the parents, builds internal working models of the self and others, and in turn develops his/her own sense of self-respect, that is, healthy or pathological narcissism (Bennett, 2006). Considering that the correlation between narcissism and avoidance is negative, the expected association between narcissism and avoidance was not found in our study. The explanation for the negative correlation might be found not in the psychoanalytical concepts of narcissism, but in the theories of social learning, based on which narcissism develops when a child grows up with parents who overestimate him/her, believing that the child is special and deserves more rights than others. Consequently, a child could internalize the belief that he/she is special and deserves privileges and special treatment (Brummelman et al., 2015). The inconsistent results of studies that analysed the association between attachment and narcissism, which sometimes indicate a higher level of avoidance in cases of a higher level of narcissism or vice versa, have been accounted for by some researchers by the way in which narcissism was measured, that is, the lack of differentiation between grandiose and vulnerable narcissism (Smolewska & Dion, 2005).

We can conclude that, among all the studied constructs, attachment has the most significant effect on the prediction of intimate partnership satisfaction. Mentalization of others significantly contributes to the improvement of the predictive power of attachment, and the overall capacity to mentalize has a positive correlation with secure attachment. Narcissism contributes least to prediction, and no positive correlation was determined between avoidant attachment and narcissism. The first attachments which we build with our guardians in childhood, building our internal working models of the self and others, shape the intimate partnerships we make in our adulthood (Bowlby, 1973). Increased anxiety, i.e. an increased need for approval from our partner and fear of abandonment, an excessive need for closeness and attention, as well

as frustration due to the feeling of our needs being unsatisfied, lead to decreased intimate partnership satisfaction. Increased avoidance of closeness and intimacy, as well as excessive relying on oneself, can lead to lower satisfaction of the other partner, and consequently on the part of the person with avoidant attachment. People with secure attachment generally trust their partner and believe in their availability and responsiveness (Mikulincer & Shaver 2003); they thus have greater intimate partnership satisfaction. Mentalization of others contributes to the predictive power of anxiety and avoidance, but also achieves a smaller effect on the prediction of intimate partnership satisfaction compared to attachment. Attachment developmentally precedes mentalization (Bateman & Fonagy, 2010; Fonagy & Allison, 2012) and it is possible that, as a result, it achieves a greater effect on the prediction of intimate partnership satisfaction. The increased capacity to mentalize others or a more intense interpretation of our partner's thoughts and feelings leads to a decrease in satisfaction, due to excessive attention being paid to our partner's emotional state and worry about the relationship. Narcissism has the lowest effect on improving the predictive power of attachment; however, it is still indicated that increased narcissism may lead to a decrease in intimate partnership satisfaction, if a person feels that their needs to be admired by their partner and to be given special treatment have not been satisfied.

The obtained findings provide a good basis for the continuation of research which would include a larger sample of respondents. The study included individuals in an intimate partnership who assessed their own attachment, narcissism, mentalization and intimate partnership satisfaction; the assumption is that a study of couples would provide us with a more complete image. At the same time, it would be possible to study whether and in which way attachment, narcissism and mentalization of one partner predict intimate partnership satisfaction of the other. For a more precise determination of the relationship between narcissism and attachment, it might be more suitable to use an instrument which measures vulnerable and grandiose narcissism separately.

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## **Prediktorski modeli zadovoljstva u intimnoj partnerskoj vezi: afektivna vezanost, kapacitet za mentalizaciju i narcizam**

**Danica M. Nikolić Vesковиć<sup>2</sup>**

*Univerzitet u Nišu, Prirodno-matematički fakultet, Niš*

Cilj ovog istraživanja bio je ispitivanje da li afektivna vezanost, mentalizacija i narcizam doprinose predviđanju zadovoljstva u intimnim partnerskim vezama. Istraživanje je obuhvatilo 222 ispitanika uzrasta od 18 do 50 godina koji su bez dece, u intimnoj partnerskoj vezi ili u braku, u trajanju od najmanje jedne a najviše deset godina. Ispitanici su popunjavali upitnike u elektronskoj formi i to: Upitnik „Iskustvo u bliskim odnosima” srpska modifikovana i adaptirana verzija, SM-ECR-R za procenu afektivne vezanosti; UM, upitnik za ispitivanje mentalizacije; Inventar narcističke ličnosti NPI40 za procenu nivoa narcizma i skalu RAS za procenu zadovoljstva u intimnoj partnerskoj vezi. Rezultati pokazuju da viši nivoi anksioznosti, izbegavanja, mentalizacije drugih i narcizma predviđaju manje zadovoljstvo u intimnim partnerskim vezama. Afektivna vezanost, koja razvojno prethodi mentalizaciji i narcizmu, ostvaruje najznačajniji samostalni efekat na predikciju zadovoljstva. Najveću prediktivnu moć ostvaruje prediktivni model koji istovremeno sadrži anksioznost, izbegavanje i mentalizaciju drugih. Zaključak istraživanja je da afektivna vezanost, mentalizacija drugih i narcizam predviđaju zadovoljstvo u intimnim partnerskim vezama.

**Ključne reči:** vezanost, mentalizacija, narcizam, zadovoljstvo vezom

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2 danica.nikolic@pmf.edu.rs