

# **Minimal Dating As A Result Of Repeated Futile Dating**

## **Attempts:**

**An enhancement of cognitive theory approaches**

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by

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## Abstract

Dating fulfills many roles, including enhancement of interpersonal competence, promotion of life enjoyment, status enhancement, establishment of independence from family, experimentation in intimate relationships, and preparation for long-term relationships or marriage. Some have difficulty in this area, and consequently date minimally. Minimal dating has been studied for many years. The current conceptualization is that minimal dating results from decreased initiation behavior. Decreased initiation behavior is conceptualized as resulting from behavioral causes such as anxiety, skills deficits, or physical unattractiveness, and from cognitive-behavioral causes such as negative self-statements, or difficulty presenting oneself attractively due an overly negative view of oneself. Many interventions have been designed to deal with minimal dating, centering around skills training, cognitive re-appraisal of the situation, or decreasing the anxiety inherent in dating situations. These interventions typically produce mediocre results.

This is a study examining minimal dating, its etiology, the consequences of prolonged dating frustration, and the resulting syndrome. This is a theoretical study in which an extensive literature review will be utilized to outline and explicate the key issues. The purpose of this study is to enrich the current conceptualization of minimal dating. Specifically, it is proposed that minimal dating can result from negative core beliefs formed at an early age by the caregiver's maladaptive interactions with the infant at an early age. These core beliefs may influence the formation of an insecure attachment style which, when carried into adulthood, causes the individual to have difficulty connecting with the opposite sex. This results in frustration, eventually leading to the development

of learned helplessness and minimal dating. The individual with minimal dating typically continues to desire heterosocial interactions, but no longer attempts them because they feel they have no control over the negative outcome they expect. Behavioral interventions will not address their underlying issues, and thus may have little, if any, effect on their dating problems. Implications for treatment are discussed. A case study of a minimal dater is presented to relate the hypothesis of minimal dating presented in this document to a particular case.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### The Role of Dating

Dating has been defined as “a dyadic interaction that focuses on participation in mutually rewarding activities that may increase the likelihood of future interaction, emotional commitment, and/or sexual intimacy” (p. 5, Sugarman & Hotaling, 1989). Dating will be distinguished as separate from the more regular interactions of a relationship in that there is no commitment (Hope & Heimburg, 1990). Dating fulfills many social requirements. It aids in the development of interpersonal competence. The individual is highly motivated to become more interpersonally competent by the prospect of having a romantic relationship. Dating also is a form of recreation, entertainment, and sexual stimulation. Dating can also provide enhancement of status within the peer group. Individuals who are able to procure a date or a romantic relationship with someone of equal or greater social status garner the respect of their peers. Dating also provides the opportunity for experimentation, particularly with sex-role behaviors and sexual activity. Under the guise of a non-committed relationship, the individual can begin to apply the social rules regarding sex-roles, and modify his beliefs as needed. As well, the individual can begin to experiment with being sexually active, learning what type of partner they are compatible with, and what type of sexual behaviors they prefer. Dating in its more serious form becomes courtship, and is one of the most common forms of mate selection in the U.S. Committed dating relationships can also provide a form of attachment which

helps the individual to feel secure (Cutrona, 1982; Damon, 1983; Kelly and Hansen, 1987; Hansen, Christopher and Nangle, 1992; Weiss, 1974).

Dating is a social activity that enables the individual to achieve many important goals. Not all individuals motivated to be in a dating relationship are able to successfully engage in this activity, however. There are those, who for reasons to be discussed, have difficulty in this important area. They will be referred to as minimal daters.

### Minimal Dating

Minimal dating first received focused attention in the late 1960's and early 1970's, when researchers turned their attention to this social problem largely unexplored by psychologists. Minimal dating has typically been described as a condition in which the dating frequency of the individual is well below the norm for reasons other than availability of dates, time constraints, or other logistical issues. Klaus, Hersen and Bellack (1977) established the 'norm' as approximately 5 ½ dates a month for college men and women in the United States. Although it would be helpful to have data on the dating frequency of older-aged individuals in the United States, an extensive literature review did not locate statistics for this group. As well, there appeared to be no data on other country norms for any age group or gender.

Researchers have viewed minimal dating as a substantive issue to focus on, because it is a legitimate social problem. The inability to engage in a romantic relationship can be a major cause of distress. Our culture puts a high value on being in a romantic relationship. Inability to initiate dating behavior has been associated with incidences of depression, alcoholism, sexual dysfunction, academic failure, decreased self-esteem, loneliness, and a sense of desperation (Bellack & Morrison, 1982; Cutrona, 1982; Galassi & Galassi, 1979;

Jones, Cheek, & Briggs, 1986; Peplau & Perlman, 1982; Rubenstein & Shaver, 1982).

The inability to form a romantic relationship has been associated with an inability to cope with life transitions (Arkowitz, 1981). Minimal dating is often the reason that college students seek help at counseling centers (Arkowitz, Hinton, Perl, and Himadi, 1978). College students surveyed on this topic have expressed more interest in learning how to interact successfully with the opposite sex than they did in receiving help in choosing a vocation or learning about their abilities, interests, intelligence, and personalities (Martinson and Zerface, 1970). In addition, in some instances the condition of minimal dating is associated with measurable physical symptoms, such as an abnormally elevated heart rate in dating situations. Minimal dating occurs often enough in college populations so that adequate sample sizes are possible for research (Hope and Heimberg, 1990; Borkovec, Stone, O'Brien, and Raloupek, 1974; Bryant and Trower, 1974; Curran, Gilbert, and Little, 1976). Minimal dating is currently an important social problem that warrants continued attention.

The terms "minimal dating" or "minimal dater" are not the only ones used to describe an infrequent dating pattern. Numerous terms or descriptors are associated with the experience of minimal dating. Minimally dating individuals have been described as having social-evaluative anxiety (Watson and Friend, 1969) or social anxiety (Clark and Arkowitz, 1975; Schlenker and Leary, 1982). They have been described as having heterosexual or heterosocial dating anxiety (Bander, Steinke, Allen, and Mosher, 1975) or heterosocial anxiety (Haemmerlie and Montgomery, 1982; Leary and Dobbins, 1983). They have also been described as having dating anxiety (Arkowitz, Hinton, Perl and Himadi, 1978; Hope and Heimburg, 1990). Minimal dating has been described as

heterosocial dysfunction (Hansen, Christopher, & Nangle, 1992), or heterosocial inadequacy (Lipton and Nelson, 1980), or as social inadequacy (Arkowitz, 1981). Minimal daters have been referred to as ‘non-dating individuals’ (Twentyman and McFall, 1975). And finally, they have been referred to as minimal daters (Himadi, Arkowitz, Hinton, and Perl, 1980).

As the use of these terms suggests, most researchers have focused on the anxiety typically associated with minimal dating. One of the more popular terms in the field is “dating anxiety,” because it clearly identifies this component as central. Hope and Heimberg (1990) uses the term “dating anxiety,” defining it as “distress associated with interactions with potential romantic partners prior to the development of a full-fledged relationship”. Leary and Dobbins (1983) also focus on the anxiety component, defining heterosocial anxiety as “anxiety arising from real, anticipated, or imagined interactions with others of the opposite sex.”

Notwithstanding this focus on anxiety within the field, this author has chosen to use the term ‘minimal dating.’ This term has been chosen because it is the broadest label for a condition that could arise from many causes. This is especially appropriate for the focus of this paper, which approaches the issue of minimal dating from the viewpoint of errant core belief’s formed through maladaptive attachments to their primary caregiver, and the resulting difficulty attaching to romantic partners in adulthood. While anxiety is involved in this transaction, it is seen as a by-product, rather than the main impediment to successful dating. Thus, the label of ‘minimal dater’ is more appropriate than one that incorporates anxiety into its definition.

### Explanations for Minimal Dating

Having a label for the problem of minimal dating is only a start. In order to address this issue, we must understand what influences the development of minimal dating. Researchers have developed numerous theories to explain possible influences. Some researchers, utilizing a behavioral approach, have postulated that minimal dating is due to avoidance of dating situations due to conditioned anxiety (Arkowitz et al., 1978). The person is viewed as adequately skilled in heterosocial interactions, but has come to associate anxiety with these interactions, and thus avoids them. Other behavioral researchers have proposed that minimal dating is due to anxiety resulting from anticipating negative consequences due to a lack of heterosocial skills (Curran and Gilbert, 1975; Curran, Gilbert, and Little, 1976; McGovern, Arkowitz, and Gilmore, 1975; Barlow, Abel, Blanchard, Bristow, and Young, 1977; MacDonald, Lindquist, Kramer, McGrath, and Rhyne, 1975; Twentyman & McFall, 1975, Bellack and Morrison, 1982). Other theorists propose a more cognitive-behavioral approach, in which it is proposed that the thinking of minimally dating individuals is distorted; either they judge themselves too harshly, or they do not recognize positive outcomes. They avoid dating situations because of their expectations of a poor outcome (Clark & Arkowitz, 1975; Haemmerlie & Montgomery, 1982; Rehm and Martson, 1968; Glass, Gottman, and Shmurak, 1976). Other cognitive-behavioral theorists have postulated that the anxiety which produces avoidance behavior is associated with the individual's physical unattractiveness (Berscheid and Walster, 1974). Schlenker and Leary (1982), utilizing a cognitive-behavioral approach, postulate that minimal dating is influenced by self-presentational problems. According to these theorists', individuals avoid social

interactions because they do not have confidence in their ability to project the image they think they should, feel anxious as a result, and avoid these social situations. Other researchers have suggested a marriage of behavioral and cognitive-behavioral approaches. For instance, Gormally, Varvil-Weld, Raphael, and Sipps (1981) suggests that minimal dating could be influenced by either social skills deficits or negative cognitions.

According to the theories outlined in the previous paragraphs, there are several basic reasons that an individual develops the problem of minimal dating. Most researchers, taking a behavioral approach, feel that the primary problem is anxiety, although they have different explanations as to how the anxiety develops. This anxiety causes avoidance behavior, and thus minimal dating results. Several researchers have assigned anxiety a more secondary role in their explanation of minimal dating, instead taking a more cognitive-behavioral approach and focusing on the errant cognition's of the individual. These errant cognition's influence the individual's motivation to date, thus reducing dating activity.

Many researchers have taken their work a step past conceptualization, to treatment (McGovern et al., 1975, Grossman, 1989, Twentyman & McFall, 1975, to name a few). These researchers have developed interventions based on their unique conceptualization of what influences dating frequency. Following is a brief overview of these interventions.

#### Interventions Developed to Treat Minimal Dating

Separate approaches to solving the problem of minimal dating have been developed. Some researchers have developed behavioral interventions aimed at increasing social

skill. For instance, they have developed training manual's (McGovern et al., 1975; Grossman, 1989), educational groups (McDonald et al., 1975), role-playing or behavioral rehearsal (Twentyman & McFall, 1975; Foster, 1988; Curran & Gilbert, 1975; Curran et al., 1976; Gormally et al., 1981; Bander et al., 1975; Glass et al., 1976), or practice dating (Martinson and Zerface, 1970; Rehm and Martson, 1968; Foster, 1988; Christansen et al., 1975). Still other behavioral researchers have utilized anxiety-reducing techniques to address minimal dating (Curran & Gilbert, 1975).

Other researchers have utilized cognitive-behavioral interventions to treat minimal dating. For instance, some researchers have attempted to produce positive interactions with females in hopes of increasing the individual's positive appraisal of their dating prowess, thus reducing their anxiety and avoidance of dating situations (Haemmerlie & Montgomery, 1982,1984; Martinson & Zerface, 1970; Glass et al., 1976; Gromally et al., 1981). Another cognitive-behavioral researcher utilized group counseling to correct the errant cognition's of the minimal dater (Glass et al., 1976).

As can be seen, there are numerous interventions for minimal dating. With the variety of interventions, it would seem that this problem has been adequately addressed. However, this is not the case. In the following section, a critical review of the interventions designed to date will show that there is still work to be done in this field.

#### Statement of the Problem

The problem is twofold. One, minimal dating is a clinical problem, yet current interventions do not address the clinical issues behind the behavior of minimal dating. For instance, there may be issues of dependency, insecurity, unrealistic expectations, and so on. Second, the conceptualization of minimal dating is limited in its' scope. While

the current conceptualization is useful in understanding some cases of minimal dating, no theory can explain every case. This is reflected in the low efficacy rates of the currently available interventions for minimal dating (Bellack & Morrison, 1982).

Researchers in the field of minimal dating have noted a need for a re-evaluation of current approaches to the problem (Galassi & Galassi, 1979, Hope & Himadi, 1990; Hansen et al., 1992), because of the narrowness of the approach to minimal dating and the mixed results of interventions. Researchers have pointed out that the population of minimal daters is heterogenous (Galassi et al., 1979), suggesting that one type of intervention will not suffice. Several have noted that the problem itself is multi-dimensional (Haemmerlie & Montgomery, 1982; Hope & Himadi, 1990), requiring a combination of interventions in order to effect change. Arkowitz (1988) notes that dating problems can be a result of emotional and motivational factors, suggesting that lack of motivation and the role of emotional health be examined as possible contributors to minimal dating. Cutrona (1982) suggests that teaching an individual social skills is not enough; the attitudes that impede social adjustment must also be addressed. Although researchers have suggested that this area of research needs new treatment approaches, very little has been done to make this happen.

It is possible that some cases of minimal dating result from the individual having developed a form of learned helplessness (Seligman, 1972) after repeated futile attempts to be successful in dating. It may be that the reason that they have been unsuccessful is that they have errant core beliefs regarding their value of themselves, and the value of others, that influences their attitude and approach to dating situations. Researchers in the field of attachment theory (Bartholomew & Kent, 1992; Feeny & Noller, 1996; Rhodes,

et al., 1998) propose that the difficulties in intimate relationships have their roots in the individual's attachment style. According to attachment theory and research on attachment styles, the individual's interactions with a primary caregiver in infancy determines whether he develops a secure or an insecure attachment style. Insecure attachment styles are proposed to have developed from inconsistent or unavailable caregiving (Ainsworth, 1978; Bowlby, 1982). This insecure attachment style then follows the individual through his life (Bowlby, 1982). From a cognitive-behavioral perspective, the formation of a particular attachment style results from errant core beliefs formed from these early interactions with their primary caregiver. Having felt unloved, they may have developed the belief that they were unlovable. Having felt that they could not depend on their caregiver, they may have developed the belief that others were untrustworthy. Based on these core beliefs, they may have developed characteristic patterns of interacting with potential dating partners that appear as particular attachment styles. Those individuals with insecure attachment styles will probably find dating interactions difficult, frustrating, and distressing, because they have unresolved issues from their inadequate childhood attachments which interfere with healthy relationship formation. They may develop a form of personal learned helplessness (Seligman, 1972), leading to minimal dating.

Thus, a cognitive-behavioral interpretation of dating difficulties influenced by attachment theory suggests that some individuals who suffer from minimal dating probably have learned maladaptive attachment behaviors that affect their ability to have healthy relationships. Current conceptualizations of the causes of minimal dating do not address this possibility, and current treatments for minimal dating do not treat it. These

facts suggest that at least some of those individuals being treated with current interventions are not receiving effective treatment.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the current theoretical conceptualization of the cause of minimal dating, and then to provide an enrichment to this conceptualization.

The method of study will be a literature synthesis of attachment theory and learned helplessness. The original difficulty in dating interactions (attachment theory) progresses to the syndrome of minimal dating as the individual loses hope of being able to influence their success in dating (learned helplessness).

In this study, an insecure attachment style is hypothesized to be a precursor to the observable behaviors of minimal dating. This theoretical investigation will explore how an insecure attachment style may affect an individual's success in obtaining a date (Ainsworth, 1978; Bowlby, 1982). Specifically, an individual who has an insecure attachment style (characterized by dismissing, avoidant, or fearful behaviors) may approach dating situations with negative expectations, and motivation that is either too high or too low for the comfort of others. Their motivation can be too high because they expect their potential mate to repair the emotional damage caused by their insecure attachment to their primary caregiver, and thus the relationship is of abnormal importance. Alternatively, their motivation can be too low because they expect that their potential mate will duplicate their childhood experiences with their primary caregiver, and thus they do not place much energy into the relationship. It may be that due to their negative outlook and their errant motivation, dating is a distressing, unrewarding experience that causes sufficient distress, to the point of exasperation in some individuals.

This study explores the possibility that these individuals develop learned helplessness (Seligman, 1968). This author explores the potential for the theory of learned helplessness to be used to understand the end result, minimal dating, in many cases.

If these individuals learn what caused them to have repeated dating failures, this knowledge may increase their motivation to initiate behavior change in how they approach and relate to the opposite sex (Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978). Other previously explored concepts such as social skills training and self-presentation skills will still need to be addressed in treatment, but more properly as an adjunct focus to treatment. It is expected that clients who are given this more complex approach will increase their dating frequency, as they resolve attachment issues and begin to feel that the interactions they have are mostly positive.

In order to further investigate and elucidate the relevant issues involved in minimal dating from the perspective of attachment theory and learned helplessness theory, a case study consisting of a participant seen for 28 individual sessions has been conducted, involving a person who presented with minimal dating. This case study had two purposes. First, it illustrated a standard of clinical competence in this area of problem focus. Secondly, it addressed the theoretical foundation of this study by illustrating how attachment theory and learned helplessness theory could be used to understand this case of minimal dating. In order to accomplish these two goals, the client's attachment issues were explored. Specifically, the client was questioned about the nature of his attachment to his caregiver and the other parent. The client's relationship history was analyzed for evidence that the original caregiver attachment style has carried through into their adulthood. The effects of this attachment style on his relationships and his overall

satisfaction with his relationships was explored. The client was queried as to his current dating status, frequency of contacts, and general attitude towards dating, in an effort to understand the contributor of learned helplessness to the problem.

#### Relevance to Clinical Theory

Low efficacy in the dating arena elicits a whole host of problems which can have a strong impact on the individual's wellbeing (see review, page 5). Since current interventions do not seem to always be effective, it is important to continue to approach this issue with new perspectives. It is the goal of this study to provide an enhancement of current conceptualizations of the causes of minimal dating, based on the inclusion of attachment theory and learned helplessness theory.

Helping individuals who suffer from minimal dating solve this social dilemma can result in an increase in life satisfaction as they become able to achieve an important and pivotal interpersonal goal. In addition, more success in this area can result in a decrease in frustration, levels of depression, and feelings of loneliness. The individual can be expected to have increased levels of self-confidence and self-esteem as their efficacy in this area increases. Helping individuals to successfully pass through the stage of Intimacy vs. Isolation (Erikson, 1959) can be one very useful way of facilitating healthy development.

Individuals who are helped can be expected to also have more positive views towards the mental health field, which may result in higher levels of mental health care utilization.

Martinson & Zerface (1970) state:

The counseling profession must make a more concerted effort to correct developmental deficiencies such as troublesome non-dating behavior in college

students if it is to succeed in its objective of facilitating the healthy development of the individual (pg. 40).

#### Limitations of this Study

The focus of this study is to enrich the current conceptualization of the cause of minimal dating, and to theoretically ground this enrichment. By exploring the current literature on minimal dating, and then adding attachment and learned helplessness theories, it will expand our understanding of minimal dating. This study will be limited in its scope, because it is a theoretical synthesis without empirical support. It is limited to an examination of one male's experience of minimal dating. Thus, this study will reflect the individual's personality to some degree. Further study will be needed to validate this theoretical enrichment. Specifically, an empirical research study that examines the influence of attachment style on a person's success in dating would be helpful.

The ramifications of an insecure attachment style on dating may be different in women. This study examines the impact of an insecure attachment style on initiation behaviors, and the resulting minimal dating. Since women are much less inclined than males to initiate dating behavior (Grossman, 1989; Arkowitz et al., 1978), their insecure attachment style may be manifested in different ways. Since traditionally their dating role has been more passive (e.g., accepting or declining a request), their insecure attachment style may be more likely to affect their satisfaction with the relationship, and their ability to commit to it long-term. According to attachment theory, they would have a negative view of their own loveableness, and would tend to deny that others' care for them or are trustworthy.

Since there may be gender specific roles in dating (Arkowitz, 1975), the understanding of a woman's experience of minimal dating is outside the scope of this study. The woman's experience of minimal dating from the perspective of attachment theory would be an ideal area for further research. Some important questions in this regard are: How do women differ in their experience of minimal dating? Do they develop minimal dating as a result of an insecure attachment style? What are the implications for treatment in women?

Another limitation of this study is its focus within the Caucasian, middle-class American culture. Surely minimal dating exists as a problem in other cultures, but the implications may be very different. For instance, in a culture where arranged marriages are still practiced, the minimal dater has other possible solutions to the dilemma of dating. Likewise, in some cultures wherein the courting process is highly ritualized and the individual need not design their own approaches, the possibility of developing minimal dating decreases. Notwithstanding the fact that individuals from other cultures experience their own set of difficulties in the dating arena, it is beyond the scope of this study to address these cultural differences.

Yet another limitation on this study is its exclusive focus on heterosexual interactions. This focus is not intended to deny that homosexual individuals may have similar concerns in this area. Quite the contrary, homosexual individuals will need to deal with general social stigma concerns in addition to ways to approach a potential partner. They must also worry about whether the other shares their sexual orientation.

Another limitation involves the age of the individual. Since minimal dating usually requires repeated failures, it is less likely that individuals who have recently entered the

dating 'scene' (i.e., adolescents) will experience the degree of frustration and distress associated with this condition. This observation does not imply that an adolescent with an insecure attachment style will not experience dating problems when they first begin to date. However, as a person grows older, new factors become part of the picture, so that the reasons for minimal dating that an older individual has may be quite different than the reasons that an adolescent encounters. An older individual would have dealt with this issue for a longer period of time, resulting in more established feelings of resistance or cynicism toward change. In addition, they may tend to put less importance on romantic relationships, as careers and long-term friendships have developed to compensate for the lack of a partner, which affects their motivation to deal more directly with the issue. Alternatively, they may be more distressed or even resigned than the younger person, since they may be past the age of expected marriage. In either case, there seem to be qualitative differences in older vs. younger male's experience of minimal dating. Thus, this study focuses on the minimal dating experiences of males 25 years old and older. However, it would be interesting to propose for future research a longitudinal study identifying at risk minimal daters and identifying early attachment problems.

The individual's socio-economic status (SES) may also play a role in their ability to date. An individual with a higher SES may have more options available to them if they have suffered from minimal dating, such as joining a dating service or a social club, which would address initiation difficulties. However, individuals with low SES may not have these options. Therefore, SES may play a role in the development of minimal dating. This study does not address this issue; it should be explored further in future studies.

Finally, this study utilizes a single case design in order to demonstrate the clinical application of this theory. Kazdin (1992) notes that "...an important limitation of the case [study] is that *many alternative explanations usually are available* to account for the current status of the individual other than those provided by the clinician" (p. 156).

Kazdin also suggests that since this design relies on anecdotal retrospective information, there exists the possibility of bias. He also notes that conclusions garnered from this single subject design may not be generalizable to other individuals or situations.

Nonetheless, Kazdin attributes "...major scientific advances..." (p. 152) from case studies. He notes "...a case study often provides a dramatic and persuasive demonstration and makes concrete and poignant what might otherwise serve as an abstract principle" (p. 155), and he adds "...seeing is believing..." (p. 155). As such, a case study is being utilized with the intention that the condition of minimal dating will be vividly illustrated in the experiences of a subject selected for his problems in the dating arena.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE SYNTHESIS

In order to fully understand the nature of minimal dating, an extensive literature review has been compiled. In this literature review, the importance of dating is examined, in order to justify the focus of this study. Next, the problem of minimal dating is explored, including what constitutes minimal dating, how it affects the individual, what researchers think contribute to this condition, and current interventions. Then, an enrichment of the current conceptualization of what contributes to minimal dating is proposed and explored. This enrichment is influenced by the tenets of attachment theory and learned helplessness theory.

### The Role of Dating

Dating fulfills many social requirements, including promotion of interpersonal competence; recreation, entertainment, and sexual stimulation; enhancement of status within the peer group; experimentation, particularly with sex-role behaviors and sexual activity; and courtship and mate selection (Damon, 1983; Kelly & Hansen, 1987; Hansen et al., 1992; Martinson & Zerface, 1970). As well, it provides a sense of attachment and

security for individuals (Weiss, 1974). Dating is a social activity that enables the individual to achieve many important goals.

### Interpersonal Competence

Social interactions play an important role in the lives of most individuals. We are, after all, 'social animals' (Bellack & Morrison, 1982). We are motivated to engage in, and thrive on social interactions with others. In order to be successful in our social interactions, we must learn successful behaviors. Winch (1974) views dating as serving the function of socialization, providing males and females with an opportunity to associate with each other, thus teaching them social skills. Through group dating and double dating, we learn ways of interacting with the opposite sex (Kelly and Hanson, 1987). We then practice these behaviors, and cull those that are punished or not reinforced, while keeping reinforced behaviors (Kelly, 1982; Kelly & Hansen, 1987). The skills necessary to successfully date, such as initiating a conversation, conducting an appropriate conversation, paying attention to timing and non-verbal behaviors (Prisbell, 1989) are also skills utilized in other social interactions. Because dating is often fun and exciting, individuals are highly motivated to engage in this activity. As their skills increase in this area, their overall social skills increase as well. Individuals who do not have the opportunity to engage in such peer activities have fewer opportunities to learn social behaviors, and fewer opportunities to practice behaviors (Hansen et al., 1982). As a result, their overall social skills will probably be less developed, and their interpersonal competence will suffer.

### Recreation, Entertainment, and Sexual Stimulation

Not only does dating provide an opportunity for the individual to hone their interpersonal skills or to begin laying the foundation of a relationship, but it is usually a quite enjoyable activity that is an end unto itself (Winch, 1974, Prisbell, 1989). There is, of course, the enjoyment from having a companion to engage in pleasurable activities. However, there is more to a dating partner than a source of companionship. There is often a feeling of passion. Berlyne (1960) notes that the initial stages of relationship formation are characterized by factors such as novelty, uncertainty, and lack of predictability; all of which contribute to a sense of excitement and stimulation. There is the possibility, often unspoken in the beginning stages, of love. The concept of love has been explored by numerous authors.

For the purposes of this study, love will be defined as an intense, pleasant emotion that an individual feels when romantically interested in another. Love has been referred to in literature over the ages as “the sweetest joy... (P.J. Bailey, *Festus: A Love and Garden*, 1839),” a “dear ravishing thing (Aphra Behn, *The Emperor of the Moon*, 1687),” the “Poetry of the senses (Honore de Balzac, *The Physiology of Marriage*, 1829).” Love has been compared to the “uncertain glory of an April’s day (William Shakespeare, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, 1594-1595).” (All quotes taken from Green, 1984). Psychologists have written on this topic, as well. Frankl stated that “love is the ultimate and the highest goal to which man can aspire” (Weyand, 1994). R.D. Laing felt that love justified living (Weyand, 1994).

Obviously, the experience of dating has a great deal of appeal, because it offers so much in the way of pleasurable rewards. Therefore, the motivation to engage in dating activities is high. Martinson and Zerface (1968) noted that college students are more

concerned and interested in learning to get along with the opposite sex than they are with help in learning about their abilities, interests, or personality.

### Status Enhancement

The process of getting a date, or refusing a date can be a status enhancing activity (Hansen et al., 1992; Damon, 1983). By obtaining a date with someone who is considered popular and/or attractive, the individual gains the respect and/or admiration of his peers. Refusing a date, especially if the requestor has a respectable position in the peer group, can be the individual's way of valuing themselves to their peers. By turning down an attractive opportunity, they are saying, in effect, that they have more attractive options, implying that they are themselves more attractive. This idea is based on the Rank-Order Paradigm (Wheeler, 1991). Essentially, the more desirable a particular goal is, the higher a person who achieves it is ranked, compared to his/her peers. Thus, in the social arena, an individual who obtains a date with an individual generally considered attractive and desirable increases in respect and esteem in the eyes of his/her peers.

Sexual intercourse, usually done in the context of dating, can also be a status-enhancing activity (McCabe, 1984; Hansen et al., 1992). Having engaged in sexual intercourse implies that the individual was able to influence the other through their attractiveness or personality to the extent that they were willing to be quite intimate with them. For males, being able to gain favor with multiple female partners implies a degree of prowess that engenders the respect of his peers and increases his social value. Other males associate with him in the hopes that they too will gain this prowess; he is considered a valuable commodity. Dating has also been viewed as the closest approximation to a rite of passage in America (Douvan and Adelson, 1966). The ability

to successfully achieve this rite of passage is a status-enhancing accomplishment especially if the individual is able to achieve this before others in his/her peer group, or to achieve it with more style (i.e., with an especially attractive individual) than his/her peers.

### Experimentation

Dating is an opportunity for both sexes to test their expectations and attitudes towards courtship and marriage. It allows both partners to see if the others' personality is a good match, whether they have enough in common, and whether or not they have compatible ideals (Burgess & Locke, 1963). Winch (1974) described dating as a period in which the individual could explore their relationship options without a commitment. It is a fun, stimulating way of exploring the personality and values of a potential love interest. It is a time when both sexes find out their 'stimulus value' for the opposite sex (Winch, 1974). In other words, they learn whom they can reliably approach and get a positive response, and who will reject them due to their lower level of attractiveness, social status, or other issues.

### Courtship and Mate Selection

Dating often begins as a pleasurable activity with no other specific goal (Winch, 1974). However, as dating progresses, the individual is learning about how to relate to another on an intimate basis. During a longer-term dating relationship partners have an opportunity to learn how to maintain relationships over periods of difficulty. They learn more about what they need in a partner in order to be committed to them. They see how a committed relationship affects one's social and personal life. Long-term dating relationships can be seen as 'practice' for marriage; it has many of the components of

marriage without the commitment to stay with the person for life. Most people find their marriage partner through this process.

### Attachment and Security

Weiss (1974) proposed that dating relationships provided a key element in the mental health and wellbeing of an individual; attachment. The individual gains a sense of security and 'place' from such relationships. Weiss (1974) felt that attachment-providing relationships establish a feeling of comfort and a sense of being at home. This comfortable feeling may be a result of having what Bowlby (1988) termed a 'secure base.' Children gain security in knowing that their primary caregiver will be there for them physically and emotionally when they need it. Essentially, adults who enter into a committed dating relationship achieve this same sense of security. The absence of this attachment provision leaves the individual feeling lonely and restless.

### Minimal Dating

Dating is an important activity in the normal development of an individual, as it provides many important psychological and emotional needs. As well, it prepares the individual for more important life-stages, such as courtship and marriage. Many individuals engage in dating activity with only minor difficulty. However, there are some individuals who date infrequently, or not at all, because they are not successful in their interactions for various reasons. Following is a review of the condition of minimal dating. The various terms utilized to describe this condition will be explored. Then, the criteria for minimal dating will be examined. Following this, the effects of minimal dating on the affected individual will be examined. Finally, the current explanations for this problem will be scrutinized.

### Terms for Minimal Daters

Very few studies agree on the term that should be given individuals with dating problems. Individuals with dating initiation problems have been referred to as having social-evaluative anxiety (Watson & Friend, 1969). These researchers define this condition as distress, discomfort, fear, and anxiety in social situations, based on concerns of a negative evaluation by peers. Clark and Arkowitz (1975) labeled individuals with dating problems as suffering from social anxiety. They define this state as discomfort in, and avoidance of, social situations. Schlenker and Leary (1982) utilized the same term, defining it as anxiety resulting from real or predicted personal evaluation in real or imagined social situations. Bander et al. (1975) label those with dating problems as suffering from “heterosocial dating anxiety,” which is a conditioned fear of social encounters, coupled with insufficient social skills, misconceptions, and inappropriate fears of dating and of the opposite sex. Haemmerlie and Montgomery (1982) define the problem as heterosocial anxiety, but do not offer a definition of this term. Leary and Dobbins (1983) define “heterosocial anxiety” as anxiety resulting from the prospect or presence of interpersonal evaluation in real or imagined social settings. Arkowitz et al. (1978) term the problem “dating anxiety”, defined as excessive and inappropriate anxiety in dating situations. Hope and Heimberg (1990) also use this term, defining it as distress associated with interactions with potential romantic partners prior to the development of a full-fledged relationship. Hansen et al. (1982) suggest the use of the term “heterosocial dysfunction”, as a more general term which subsumes the inclusion of all other basic definitions of minimal dating. Lipton and Nelson (1980) term dating difficulty as “heterosocial inadequacy,” but do not offer a definition. However, Arkowitz (1981)

terms the problem “social inadequacy”, describing it as social performance problems mediated by emotional, motivational, or cognitive factors. Twentyman and McFall (1975) utilize the term “shy non-daters,” operationalizing their term as the inability to interact with members of the opposite sex. Finally, Himadi et al., (1980) use the term “minimal dater.” They describe minimal daters as anxious and impaired in both same and opposite sex relationships.

Hope and Heimberg (1990), noting the disparity in the field, suggest that the label be ‘dating anxiety,’ since they feel the major contributor to dating initiation problems is the anxiety felt in the initiation phase. Leary and Dobbins (1983) also focus on anxiety as the central component, but they suggest the label be ‘heterosocial anxiety.’ However, the majority of treatment programs developed to deal with dating initiation problems focus on the skills or the cognition’s of the individual, not the anxiety. It is assumed that the anxiety will decrease as a consequence of the behavioral treatment, without direct attention to it (Curran & Gilbert, 1975; Curran et al., 1976; McGovern et al., 1975; Gormally et al., 1981; Barlow et al., 1977; MacDonald et al., 1975; Twentyman & McFall, 1975). Thus, using a term which addresses only the anxiety component of the problem may be misleading.

For the purposes of this study, the author will utilize Himadi et al., (1980)’s term ‘minimal dating.’ This term will be used because it is more comprehensive than other terms that are focused towards specific issues, such as anxiety or skill deficits. The term ‘minimal dating’ describes the outcome of anxiety problems or skill deficits, and is general enough so that other influences can be included in the conceptualization of dating initiation problems.

### Criteria for Minimal Dating

Consensus in the field of minimal dating about criteria used to identify individuals who suffer from minimal dating has not been forthcoming. Some researchers have used dating frequency to identify the minimal dater. Grossman (1989) identified minimal daters as those dating between 0 and three times per month (median = 1). MacDonald et al. (1975) identified minimal daters as those who had had no more than four dates in the past 12 months (.33 dates per month). Gormally et al. (1981) identified minimal daters as those who had not more than two dates a month for the past six months. Klaus et al. (1977) identified minimal daters as those who dated 0 to one time a month; while high-frequency daters were identified as those who dated two or more times a month.

Some have used anxiety measures to identify the minimal dater. Borkovec et al. (1974) identified minimal daters as those who identified themselves as having at least “some” fear in social situations (on a scale ranging from ‘none’, ‘very little’, to ‘some’; no other measure was utilized). Arkowitz (1975) identified minimal daters as those who scored in the top 25% of a group of participants administered the Social Avoidance and Distress Scale.

Still others have combined the measures of level of anxiety and frequency of dates. Himadi et al. (1980) identified minimal daters as those who had an average of .79 dates in the past six months and felt either “somewhat” or “very” anxious in heterosexual social situations. Haemmerlie and Montgomery (1982) identified minimal daters as those who scored one standard deviation above the norm on the Situation Questionnaire (social anxiety measure) and had not more than .67 dates per month in the past three months (percentiles reported as quoted in the studies). McGovern et al. (1975) identified

minimal daters as those who had dated no more than three times in the past month, and no more than seven times in the past 6 months, and identified themselves as either “somewhat” or “very” anxious in social situations. Curran et al. (1976) identified minimal daters as those who reported significant anxiety and low dating frequency. However, the number of dates was not specified. Twentyman and McFall (1975) identified minimal daters as those individuals who had no more than one date in the past month and reported having significant anxiety in social situations.

Several researchers have noted the wide divergence among researchers in the criteria for minimal dating (Hope & Heimberg, 1990; Galassi & Galassi, 1979). This lack of agreement on criteria constituting minimal dating makes it difficult to compare one study to another, or to arrive at a consensus about effective treatment.

For the purposes of this study, minimal dating will be defined as a condition in which there exists significantly decreased heterosocial initiation and activity, with or without accompanying anxiety, which is contrary to the individual’s desire to date or be in a relationship. The criteria for what is considered significantly decreased heterosocial initiation and activity will be based on Klaus et al.’s (1977) survey of dating interactions. These researchers found that the average college male dates an average of 5.49 times per month. They also identified minimal daters as those who dated less than two times a month. These criteria compare well with Grossman’s (1989) study in which the median dating frequency for the minimal dater was one date per month. It is also at about the median between a study which identified minimal dating as 2 or less dates per month (Gormally et al., 1981) and another study which identified minimal daters as those who had dated an average of .33 dates a month (MacDonald et al., 1975).

This writer's decision to decrease the emphasis on anxiety as the primary factor in dating initiation problems will be explained in detail shortly, in the following pages. Essentially, this study exists to show that there is at least one other avenue than simple anxiety to arrive at the problem of minimal dating. Before we examine this avenue, however, the literature will be reviewed on the effects of minimal dating, suggested causes, and treatments to solve the problem.

### Effects of Minimal Dating

Researchers have found an inverse correlation between competence in the area of dating, and loneliness (Jones et al., 1986; Peplau & Perlman, 1982). Namely, those individuals with low levels of heterosocial competence tend to experience more loneliness. Jones et al. (1990) describes loneliness as "...a subjective dissatisfaction with one's relationships" (p. 251). Lonely individuals identified one main reason for their loneliness as having no spouse or lover (Rubenstein & Shaver, 1982). Lonely college students felt that the only way they could mitigate their loneliness was to find a boyfriend/girlfriend (Cutrona, 1982). Weiss (1974) identifies marriage or committed heterosocial relationships as being of primary importance in alleviating loneliness.

The impact of loneliness on the individual's mental wellbeing has been well documented. Loneliness has been correlated with many clinical signs of distress:

...with such emotional and quasi-emotional variables as tension, fatigue, confusion, boredom, restlessness, emptiness, hopelessness, and helplessness, and inverse correlation's with vigor, energy, and morale. In addition, loneliness is strongly associated with the experience of depression and anxiety" (Jones et al., 1990, p. 252).

Even more interesting, loneliness appears to be related to the emotional quality of the relationships the individual engages in (Jones et al., 1990). Those individuals who are

too defensive to interact in a genuine manner are prone to feeling lonelier, suggesting that heterosocial competence includes the ability to interact in a genuine manner.

Minimal daters report increased depression due to their extreme difficulties in this area (Arkowitz et al, 1978). Depression may result from the chronic loneliness the minimal dater experiences. Unable to mitigate their loneliness, they may feel that they will be lonely indefinitely. As one subject in a study by Cutrona (1982) states, “I get especially lonely when I realize that I am an isolated person...it’s depressing because I might always feel this way” (p. 299). As Cutrona states, “if students feel that their loneliness is caused by something beyond their control, they are likely to become discouraged and cease efforts to improve their situation” (p. 295).

This sense of uncontrollability was observed by Seligman et al. (1972). The theory of learned helplessness was developed based on experiments with dogs in the 1960’s. Later reformulated for humans (Abramson et al., 1978), the general premise of the theory was that under conditions in which the individual perceived that they had no control over their desired outcome, they cease trying and become depressed and lethargic.

Bellack and Morrison (1982) suggest that the depression associated with minimal dating results from “...a loss of reinforcers because of various interpersonal-skills deficits” (p. 733). Essentially, these individuals are denied the pleasure that social interactions, specifically dating interactions, provide. They tend to perseverate on this loss of social interactions, and communicate their negativity and resentment to those around them. This negative focus has the unfortunate effect of further alienating them, as it is aversive to others.

Another common experience among minimal daters is a sense of desperation. In a study conducted by Rubenstein and Shaver (1982), lonely respondents identified one of their main feelings as desperation. They endorsed self-descriptors such as “panicked,” “helpless,” “afraid,” “without hope,” “abandoned,” and “vulnerable” (p. 212).

Rubenstein and Shaver (1982), utilizing an 84-item loneliness questionnaire of their own design, found a strong correlation between being unattached and the feeling of desperation. Of course, this sense of desperation is counterproductive. Minimal daters tend to search desperately for a partner, and cling to any partner they find (Teicher, 1972). What interactions they have with the opposite sex are characterized by fear of isolation and dependency (Prisbell, 1989). The result can be a Catch-22 situation; they rebuff potential partners due to their intensity and desperation, further increasing their intensity and desperation.

Burdened with feelings of loneliness, depression and desperation, college students may be too preoccupied to place much emphasis on their academic life. It may seem more important to decrease their depression and sense of isolation. Or, it may be that they are too emotionally distraught to be able to concentrate on their studies. Regardless of the cause, several researchers noted that minimal dating was associated with academic failure or drop-out (Arkowitz, 1978; Galassi & Galassi, 1979; Bryant & Trower, 1974).

Another area of concern in regards to minimal dating is the effect on ‘normal’ development. Erikson (1959) considered the formation of a close intimate bond (often found in a long-term dating relationship or marriage) to be an important developmental milestone. He termed this developmental stage as ‘Intimacy vs. Isolation.’

Where a youth does not accomplish such intimate relation with others...in late adolescence or early adulthood, he may either isolate himself and find, at best, highly stereotyped and formal interpersonal relations (formal in the sense of lacking in spontaneity, warmth, and real exchange of fellowship), *or he must seek them in repeated attempts and repeated failures* (emphasis added) (Erikson, 1959).

Thus, the individual who does not have the ability to establish intimate relations through dating and long-term romantic relationships may continue in a cycle of ‘repeated attempts and repeated failures’ of dating. He may suffer from a sense of isolation and may not be able to move to the next stage in his development because he lacks sufficient psychic energy. This situation can have deleterious effects on his progression through future stages of development, and may hamper his ability to achieve the degree of life-success he had aspired to.

Researchers have also suggested that inadequate social skills can result in the development of psychopathology. Arkowitz (1981) postulated that socially unskilled individuals would be less apt to be able to deal with many life transitions, for instance, the death of a loved one or a divorce. Without the ability to gather adequate social support at this crucial time, the individual may develop a depressive or anxious disorder. They would be less able to deal with a geographical relocation, as it would be difficult to establish new friendships and an adequate social support system. Job changes would be difficult, as the socially unskilled individual would find it hard to interview, and would have trouble fitting into a new work environment. Retirement would be difficult, as well. The socially unskilled individual would have trouble finding fulfilling friendships and

social activities to replace their work time. Without the requisite skills, Arkowitz postulates that “serious psychopathology” would result, presumably from the increased stress and lack of social support (p. 298).

In summary, minimal dating appears to have many deleterious effects on the affected individual. The minimal dater may struggle with feelings of loneliness, depression, a sense of desperation, academic failure, and sometimes may even develop psychopathology. These individuals’ psychic development may become arrested, decreasing their effectiveness in future life challenges.

Minimal dating is a serious problem that requires effective treatment. In order to develop effective interventions, the problem of minimal dating needs to be accurately conceptualized. Following is a review of the current conceptualizations of what causes minimal dating. Following that section will be a suggestion of an enriched conceptualization, one that focuses on attachment style.

#### Explanations of Minimal Dating

Over the past three decades, there have been a number of theories developed to explain the phenomenon of minimal dating. Essentially, the current conceptualizations can be grouped into behavioral and cognitive-behavioral subtypes. Behavioral conceptualizations include: 1) Anxiety theory, and 2) Social skill deficit theory. Cognitive-behavioral conceptualizations include: 1) Cognitive theory; 2) Physical attractiveness theory; 3) Self-presentation theory; and 4) Multi-dimensional theories. The following is a review of these theories.

#### Behavioral

anxiety theory.

Some researchers have postulated that minimal dating is a result of conditioned anxiety (Foster, 1988; Arkowitz, et al, 1978; Curran & Gilbert, 1975). In this model, the person is assumed to have adequate social skills. However, when they engage in dating interactions, they feel anxious. Hansen, et al. (1992) suggests several reasons why a dating individual might experience anxiety in their first few interactions with the opposite sex. They may be so desiring of a heterosocial relationship that they may begin to place too much importance on this relationship, and thus have anxiety concerning possible failure to achieve this goal. They may also feel performance anxiety as they realize the social importance and status-grading quality of dating. Further, they may feel unsure of their abilities, as they are new at dating, and may wonder if they are performing adequately. Finally, they may become anxious at the prospect of physical involvement with the opposite sex (Kelly, 1982).

According to the conditioned anxiety model, the individual makes the association between this anxiety and the situation, and the situation eventually begins to elicit anxiety, based on a classical conditioning paradigm. This anxiety causes an avoidance of such situations, thus preventing the person from disconfirming the validity of this anticipatory reaction.

social skills deficit theory.

Other researchers have proposed that minimal dating results from a lack of heterosocial skills (Curran & Gilbert, 1975; Curran et al., 1976; McGovern et al., 1975; Gormally et al., 1981; Barlow et al., 1977; MacDonald et al., 1975; Twentyman & McFall, 1975). The social skill deficit theory is based upon the assumption that minimally dating individuals lack the necessary social skills to deal with dating, such as

reading cues, knowing when to respond to cues, asking someone on a date, and carrying on a conversation. When they attempt to initiate dating behaviors, they are turned down due to an ineffective approach. As the failures accumulate, they begin to experience anxiety at the thought of initiating dating behaviors. Initiation of dating behaviors decreases or discontinues, and skills therefore do not improve.

#### physical attractiveness theory.

Some have postulated that minimal dating results from repeated rejection due to physical unattractiveness (Berscheid & Walster, 1974). Physical attractiveness theories of minimal dating focus on an individual's self-presentation as the major contributor to dating success or failure. The person does not present as an attractive individual, either because the person simply is unattractive, or because he or she does not know how to present himself or herself in an attractive light. In either case, the person is predictably rejected when he or she attempts to initiate a dating situation. As a result of this rejection, they begin to feel anxious when in dating situations.

#### Cognitive-Behavioral

##### cognitive theory.

Cognitive theories of minimal dating focus on the individual's negative evaluation of their heterosocial skills (Arkowitz, 1981; Clark & Arkowitz, 1975; Haemmerlie & Montgomery, 1982; Rehm and Martson, 1968; Glass et al., 1976; Michenbaum et al., 1976; O'Banion et al., 1978). Even if their skills are adequate, the minimally dating individual tends to feel inadequate in dating situations. As a result, the individual makes negative self-statements about their heterosocial skills when thinking about initiating, which leads to anxiety and avoidance of dating situations. They look for the actions of

others to confirm their negative beliefs about themselves, often distorting them and drawing inaccurate conclusions. They also minimize the significance of positive interactions with others. The minimally dating person avoids dating situations due to the feeling of incompetence and the subsequent anxiety anticipated.

#### self-presentation theory.

A variation on the aforementioned cognitive theory is a theory with a primary focus on the manner in which the individual presents himself (Schlenker & Leary, 1982). The individual wants to make a particular impression on others, but doubts that they will be able to. The less likely they feel they will be able to create this impression, the more anxiety they feel in these situations. This is different from the physical attractiveness theory in that physical attractiveness theory does not assume the individual has insight into their appearance or self-presentation. Their lack of success is a result of their physical unattractiveness, whether they are aware of it or not. With self-presentation theory, the individual is preoccupied with their appearance and presentation, independent of their physical attractiveness. If they are convinced that they will not be able to create the impression they want to, they will withdraw from the situation, resulting in minimal dating.

#### Multi-Dimensional Theories.

A few researchers have proposed that a combination of behavioral and cognitive-behavioral influences causes minimal dating, such as skills deficits and negative cognition's, or physical unattractiveness, negative expectations, and a lack of confidence. For instance, Gormally et al.(1981) suggests that minimal dating is a result of a combination of social skills deficits and maladaptive thinking. As an example of

maladaptive thoughts, Gormally et al. (1981) suggests “unrealistic interpretations of a rejection.” Prisbell (1989) suggests that minimal dating results from a lack of confidence, negative self-perceptions of physical attractiveness, and an expectation of negative evaluations by others.

### Summary

According to current theorists, anxiety is a component in all conceptualizations, whether it is explicitly stated or implicitly implied. Behavioral theorists postulate that the main cause of minimal dating is debilitating anxiety caused by a lack of dating skills, attractiveness, or simply the lack of ability to mitigate normal anxiety. Cognitive-behavioral theorists look more at the underlying thoughts of the individual, and trace the resulting anxiety to overly negative thinking, or a lack of confidence in one’s abilities. With these two conceptualizations come separate approaches to solving the problem. Behavioralists, who see anxiety as being caused by more surface level concerns, design interventions to address these concerns. Cognitive-behavioralists, who view the anxiety as being caused by the individual’s thought processes, design interventions to address these errant thoughts, either directly or indirectly. Following is a review of the numerous interventions developed to treat minimal dating.

### Interventions Developed to Treat Minimal Dating

Treatments based on behavioral and cognitive-behavioral theories have been designed for minimal dating. Behavioral interventions are designed to increase social skills, thus reducing dating anxiety, or simply directly reduce anxiety in dating situations. Cognitive-behavioral interventions are designed to decrease negative self-statements concerning dating, while increasing positive self-statements, with a postulated increase in

dating frequency and success. Combined interventions synthesize behavioral and cognitive-behavioral approaches, with the assumption that a multi-faceted approach will be more effective.

### Behavioral Interventions

#### Social Skills Interventions

Prisbell (1986) identified social skills as one important element of heterosocial competence. Hansen et al., (1992) defines heterosocial skills as the “behaviors necessary for initiating, maintaining, and terminating social and/or sexual relationships with persons of the opposite sex” (p. 373). Specifically, heterosocial skills include knowing how to initiate and maintain a conversation, how to accurately read and understand the emotional states of others, how to know what to expect and value in social interactions, and how to be able to accurately perceive and react to the impact of their behaviors on others (Hansen, et al., 1992; Conger & Conger, 1982; Kelly, 1982). Galassi and Galassi (1979) identify heterosocial skills as those needed to initiate, maintain, and end a heterosexual relationship.

Malatesta and Adams (1986) outlined several elements they considered important in the development of heterosocial skills. One important element was sensitivity to and discrimination of relevant heterosocial cues. With this skill, the individual can limit their exposure to rejection and maximize their potential successes. Another important element was the ability to evaluate an individual given the social context and their behaviors, in regards to their viability as a potential date. Once the individual has determined that the person they are interested in is a viable possibility, they must be able to chose an

effective approach strategy from an adequate repertoire of skills. Finally, they must be able to interpret the other's verbal and non-verbal responses and respond appropriately.

Hansen et al. (1992) outlined the mechanisms which normally facilitate the development of heterosocial skills during adolescence. The individual must be exposed to appropriate social skill models. They must be exposed to the consequences (punishment or reward) of their attempts at social behavior. They need to have the opportunity to engage in peer activities that will give them the opportunity to practice their new skills. They need to believe they have some control over their success or failure in this area. Finally, they should make positive appraisals of themselves and others (Kelly & Hansen, 1987).

Some researchers see the development of adequate social skills as the most important factor in increasing dating frequency and success. They have designed interventions to help the individual to increase their social skill. They have utilized various methods to do so, including training manuals, educational groups, role-playing, behavior rehearsal, and practice dating.

Training manuals are a form of bibliotherapy, and are designed to provide the interested individual with helpful information without the need for direct therapist intervention and the resulting cost. Educational groups also provide useful information regarding dating skills, but in a format where the individual can ask questions and give feedback to the instructor. Role-playing is designed to give the individual near real-life experiences in dating initiation behavior, increasing their skills, with the benefit of support and feedback. Behavior rehearsal provides the individual the opportunity to learn and practice new skills, but without the pressure of a role-play. Finally, practice dating is

designed as a hands-on treatment intervention wherein the individual learns new skills in a ‘sink-or-swim’ fashion, by going on dates labeled ‘practice.’ Following is a review of studies that put these various interventions into use in experimental research.

training manuals.

McGovern et al.(1975) developed a training manual with a behavioral rehearsal component and applied it in an intervention to treat minimal dating. In this study, 34 male undergraduate students were included, and 10 of these were placed in a control group. Participants were screened for appropriateness based on their responses to the Social Activity Questionnaire. This measures dating frequency and comfort, satisfaction, and skill in present dating situations. Other criteria for inclusion in the study included participants not having dated more than three times in the past month or more than seven times in the past six months; if they had dated at levels above this, they were excluded. Additionally, participants needed to rate themselves as experiencing either moderate or high anxiety in social situations. As well, they needed to have a moderate-to-high desire to increase heterosocial skills, and a moderate-to-high motivation to increase current dating frequency.

Participants were provided with a Social Interaction Training Manual, which educated them on the ‘basics’ of dating, such as starting a conversation, asking for a date, and how to handle themselves in the first few dates. It also contained instructions in appearance and dress, telephoning and planning the date, and social “turn-ons” and “turn offs.” They then participated in six weekly sessions in which the manual was discussed, and dating situations were practiced in triads with another subject and a female trainer. The outcome of these practice sessions were then processed in group. Two variations were

added to this study; in one, the discussion group time was utilized to rehearse situations with a confederate, and in the other, these situations were rehearsed in a natural environmental setting (e.g., Student Union, on campus).

The researchers determined improvement post-treatment by a series of tests. Participants were administered pre- and post-treatment the Social Avoidance and Distress Scale, the Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale, the S-R Inventory of Anxiousness, the Survey of Heterosocial Interactions, and a self-rating form to rate anxiety and skill in heterosexual interactions. The researchers found that the training manual intervention produced a statistically significant increase in skill and comfort in heterosexual interactions. However, this increase in skill and comfort did not translate into statistically significant increases in dating frequency. Thus, this intervention does not appear to solve the dilemma of minimal dating, regardless of level of anxiety.

One methodological concern with this study was the small control group. This makes it difficult to determine whether or not confounding variables such as interest of the researchers or group interaction influenced the outcome of this study. Overall, the small sample size decreased the generalizability of the results. A conceptual concern in this study was that the participants had only to identify themselves as somewhat anxious in order to be included. It seems that this study did not make a clear distinction between the 'normal' level of anxiety felt by most individuals, and the unusually high level of anxiety felt by minimal daters. Leary and Dobbins (1983) note that "nearly everyone experiences apprehension and anxiety in social encounters from time to time (pg. 1347)." Bryant and Trower (1974) note that "...it is probable that some degree of anxiety in social situations is normal...(pg. 15)." Thus, the participants who reported being "somewhat" anxious

may have not had a very serious problem. Supporting this point, the researchers reported that, of the original participants who had identified themselves as having dating problems, many refused to participate in this study. The researchers surmised that this refusal was due to the high levels of anxiety that these individuals experienced when they considering being involved in this study. Thus, the participants who really needed an intervention for minimal dating dropped out. This lack of participation by more anxious individuals brings into doubt the usefulness of this program.

educational groups/role-playing/behavior rehearsal.

McDonald et al. (1975) also designed an intervention based on the assumption that minimal dating was a result of deficient social skills. However, these researchers chose to provide education in person rather through the use of a manual. Forty-eight male undergraduate participants were selected based on self-reported anxiety in dating situations, and having gone on no more than four dates in the past 12 months.

Participants were administered several tests pre- and post-treatment. These were the S-R Inventory of Anxiousness, the Interpersonal Anxiety Test, the Profile of Mood Scale, the Role-Played Dating Interactions, and a non-specified standardized behavioral assessment measure. They were also asked to report the number of dates they had been on in the previous week.

The participants were evenly divided into eight groups, using two groups for each condition. The conditions were: a behavioral rehearsal group, a behavioral rehearsal with assignments group, an attention-placebo group, and a waiting list-control group. Six individuals were assigned to each group. Groups met for six two hour-long sessions.

The behavioral rehearsal group focused on effective conversation skills, communicating interest in a potential date, discriminating between cues of interest vs. non-interest, where to go on dates, and when to initiate physical contact. The behavioral rehearsal group with assignments followed the same curriculum, with the addition of out of group assignments for in-vivo practice. The attention placebo group learned about standard deep muscle relaxation, graded dating situations on a hierarchy from most anxiety-producing to least anxiety-producing, and then were told they would be shown these anxiety-producing dating situations at a speed that precluded conscious perception practicing their relaxation techniques. They were encouraged to signal the instructor if they became anxious. In actuality, non-dating situations were flashed on the screen.

A conceptual problem in this study was the definition of what was considered problematic heterosocial anxiety. This study included participants as long as they reported even mild levels of anxiety in heterosocial interactions. While the improvement noted in the study appears valid, would individuals with more serious levels of heterosocial anxiety benefit from this program? In other words, it may be that individuals with severe heterosocial anxiety are in a separate classification, and require entirely different interventions. A methodological concern was that participants in the attention-placebo group processed dating situations that were anxiety provoking, resulting in positive or negative effects on their dating anxiety. These effects may have confounded the results of the study.

This study showed statistically significant increases in the social dating skill level and decreases in the anxiety level of the participants, but no statistically significant changes in their dating frequency. It is curious that skill can increase and anxiety decrease, but

dating frequency does not change. This finding suggests that there is another variable which influences dating frequency which was not addressed in this study. These results also suggest that it may be that skill level and anxiety level does not cause fluctuations in dating frequency.

Twentyman and McFall (1975) also considered deficient social skills to be the cause of minimal dating. In this study, 31 male undergraduate participants were selected based on reporting not more than one date in the past month, and scoring at least one standard deviation below the mean on a interpersonal anxiety measure the researchers developed specifically for this study (Survey of Heterosocial Interactions). A control group of 16 of the 31 participants was included.

After the initial selection process, all participants were given a battery of assessments to determine their subjective level of anxiety in dating situations. They were brought into a room, a pulse measurement device was attached, and they were then instructed to arrange pictures of women from least attractive to most attractive. They were then asked to call the woman they had identified as most attractive. Participants were given three prompts to do so; if they agreed to do so, they were stopped before they did it. Regardless of the whether they agreed or not, after three prompts the participants were asked to rate their level of anxiety. Next, participants were asked to role-play appropriate responses to typical heterosocial interactions the researchers provided to them. A women confederate in an adjoining room talked with the participant over an intercom system, playing the part of the potential date. These women were instructed to agree to any date the participant suggested, except for one randomly selected declination in order to make the experiment more realistic. Finally, the participants were asked to engage in a

conversation with a confederate. This conversation was terminated after five minutes, or immediately if the subject could not respond. If the participant appeared to be too anxious (based on pulse rate and independent observer evaluation) after this battery of tests, they were told the study was full. Otherwise, they were scheduled to begin the training portion of the study.

After the initial assessment and screening, participants participated in an intervention consisting of three sessions of behavior rehearsal, modeling, and coaching. In the first session of the treatment group, participants were educated on telephone skills, and role-played telephone interactions. In the second session, they were educated on face-to-face interaction skills and role-played face-to-face interactions. In the third session, information from sessions one and two were briefly reviewed, and then the subject was asked to describe several typically difficult situations and then role play these situations with a confederate.

Results of the study revealed that there was a statistically significant increase in skill and a statistically significant decrease in anxiety for participants who participated in these sessions. However, several methodological errors occurred in this study. First, the inter-rater reliability was low; self-rating and judges' ratings of subject's anxiety were inconsistent. Second, the hallmark for judging treatment efficacy has been whether or not dating increases post-treatment. The lack of measurement of dating activity prevents any conclusions being drawn about the efficacy of this social-skills treatment being effective in treating minimal dating. However, this intervention style does appear somewhat effective in reducing anxiety and increasing skill.

practice dating.

Some behavioral researchers have hypothesized that training needs to be context specific; namely, participants should practice dating in order to increase their dating efficacy. Rehm and Martson (1968) developed a program of self-directed treatment, essentially a form of systematic desensitization. Twenty-four male undergraduate participants were selected based on self-report of dating problems. They were selected based on a screening questionnaire (unspecified by researcher) and a brief interview to determine if they did indeed have dating problems. After selection, participants were administered several assessment measures: the Situation Test (to measure ability to respond adaptively in heterosocial interactions), A Situation Questionnaire (to rate level of discomfort in social situations), the Manifest Anxiety Scale; The Fear Survey Schedule Form III; and the Adjective Check List (to measure positive vs. negative self-concept). Participants were then randomly placed in one of three groups; a self-reinforcement (systematic desensitization) group, a nonspecific therapy control group, and a non-therapy control group.

Those individuals in the self-reinforcement (systematic desensitization) group were asked to hierarchically order 30 index cards with a typical heterosocial interaction typed on each one. They were then encouraged to engage in these interactions, starting with the least anxiety-provoking and gradually work up to the most anxiety provoking, and report the results to the researcher. Participants received no points if they avoided the situation, one point if they evaluated themselves as having performed minimally in the situation, two points for adequate performance, and three points for good or exceptional performance. Progress was evaluated by the total number points the participants' received. The nonspecific therapy control group received thirty minutes of weekly

therapy over a number of weeks (although the researchers do not report specifically how many sessions were utilized, it appears that there were five sessions).

After treatment, participants were re-administered the pre-treatment test battery. In addition, they were given the Posttherapy Questionnaire, consisting of part of the Barrett-Lennard Relationship Inventory, and some questions regarding the participants attitude towards the experiment, their progress, and how they evaluated their progress.

Results indicated that participants in the self-reinforcement group had a statistically significant decrease in their levels of anxiety in heterosocial interactions, and they also evaluated themselves less negatively than they had pre-treatment. They had a statistically significant decrease in fear of the opposite sex post-treatment. However, there was no statistically significant increase in dating frequency, based on a comparison of self-reported dating frequency pre- and post-treatment. This study appears useful in reducing the anxiety of minimal daters, but does not seem useful in increasing dating frequency.

Christensen et al. (1975) also designed an intervention based on practice dating. Thirty male and 30 female undergraduate students were selected based on having a low dating frequency, with a mean of 1.0 dates/month. They were randomly assigned to either a practice dating group, a practice dating group with feedback, or a delayed treatment (control) group. Participants were provided with the name and number of an opposite sex individual in the study, and instructed to contact the other person and arrange a practice date. They were required to go on a total of six practice dates with six different individuals. Participants in the 'feedback' group filled out a Dating Feedback Form in which they rated their date on two things they liked about the others' physical

appearance/dress, two things they liked about the others' behavior, and one thing they would change. These forms were given to the subject as feedback.

Following treatment, participants were administered several assessment measures; the Social Anxiety and Distress Scale, and a modified form of the S-R Inventory of Anxiousness (to measure anxiety in heterosexual interactions). They were also asked to report the number of dates they had been on in the two weeks post-treatment. They were also rated by two of their peers on their social anxiety and skill. They were also rated on their ability to respond to taped situations, as well as carry on a 10 minute conversation with a confederate. Results indicated that the practice dating procedure produced a statistically significant increase in dating frequency post-treatment, to approx. 1.6 dates/2 weeks (SD=1.8; range=1.34). The practice dating w/feedback procedure produced a statistically significant increase in dating frequency, as well, to approximately 2.4 dates/2 weeks (SD=3.06, range=1.66). The researchers also did a three month follow-up survey utilizing the Social Avoidance and Distress Scale and self-reports of dating frequency. Response to this mailed survey was poor. Those that did return the survey seemed to have maintained treatment gains. The researchers again administered the measures at 15 months. Again, the response rate was poor, with only 59% of the participants responding. Of those responding, treatment gains seemed to be maintained. Notwithstanding the poor survey return rate, Arkowitz et al. concluded that the practice dating procedure was an effective method of increasing dating frequency.

Several methodological concerns bring into question the validity of their conclusion. Participants (22%) reported post-treatment dates with fellow study participants. While this is a positive effect of the study, it is nonetheless suggestive that part of the increase in

dating was not due to decreases in anxiety or an increase in skills, but a result of date availability. This factor confounds any conclusions that are made about the efficacy of the study. Another concern was that the conclusion that dating frequency had increased group-wide at three-month follow-up was based on only a 38% response to the follow-up questionnaire. As the researchers acknowledge, this is a poor response rate, and decreases the validity of any conclusions based on this questionnaire (Christensen et al. 1975, p. 329). It could well be that only those who benefited from the program responded; it is unclear whether dating frequency actually increased group-wide. Also of concern was the data reported at 15-month follow-up. Again, the questionnaire return rate was low (59% of the original participants in the study), clouding any definitive conclusions based on this data as well as the researcher's contention that treatment gains were maintained. Another concern was the standard deviation in the number of dates that participants engaged in post-treatment. Approximately 16% of the participants engaged in no dates post-treatment, based on the statistical reporting. Thus, even if this treatment was helpful for some, it was not helpful for all. Because of the multiple methodological concerns noted in this study, it is difficult to determine to what extent this intervention was helpful.

studies comparing two behavioral interventions.

In an effort to determine the most important elements needed to increase minimal dating, some researchers have compared several interventions to each other. Bander et al.(1975) developed a skills training group (termed 're-education') with and without a systematic desensitization component. Bander et al. compared these interventions to a group process intervention, termed a 'microlab.' The skills training intervention focusing

on role-playing simulated social situations and brief educative presentations. One hundred male undergraduate students were selected based on self-reported high anxiety levels in social interactions, and dating inexperience. Participants were randomly assigned either to the reeducation group, the combined reeducation and desensitization group, the microlab, a nonspecific placebo group, and a minimal contact group. Prior to treatment, participants were administered the Biographical Data Questionnaire (dating history subscale and evaluation of heterosexual confidence), the Social Distress and Anxiety Scale, and the Situation Questionnaire.

After assessment, participants participated in the treatment program. The reeducation group focused on verbal and non-verbal communication, arranging dates, female dating preferences, and sexual norms. Homework was assigned, with the participants instructed to practice the skills they learned in group. Participants were also heavily encouraged to have a date before the end of the program.

The combined reeducation and systematic desensitization group consisted of an abbreviated version of the reeducation-only group format and a relaxation component. In addition to the skills training, participants arranged a series of anxiety-provoking situations listed on cards in hierarchical order and then practiced visualization and relaxation. Participants were given homework to practice their skills and relaxation, and were asked to have a date before the end of the program.

The microlab consisted of a four-hour intervention of single group and small group interactions. Participants first divided into dyads and small groups and discussed new ways of interacting with the opposite sex, with the direction of a facilitator. They then

joined with other groups and processed their issues regarding dating. Afterwards, they went back to their original dyads or small groups and processed what they had learned.

After treatment, participants again were administered the pre-treatment measures. Based on the results of these measures, all treatment groups produced a statistically significant decrease in the level of anxiety. Anxiety reduction was greatest for those in the reeducation group and the combined reeducation and systematic desensitization group. A statistically significant increase in skill was also noted in these two groups. Analysis of the systematic desensitization component showed that it had no added effect. The microlab was the least effective of the three experimental groups. Based on these results, the researchers concluded that a skills training approach was the most effective, and that relaxation or process groups were ineffective.

One methodological error that the researchers' acknowledge is the fact that the process group was one four hour session, while the skills group lasted for eight 90 minute sessions. Participants in the skills groups had the opportunity to think between sessions about what they had learned, and try new techniques out, while participants in the process group did not. Further, there was a significant difference in the amount of time afforded the two groups. Another methodological concern was that dating frequency was not recorded pre- or post-treatment. Thus, it is unclear whether the intervention actually resulted in higher dating frequencies. Further research needs to be completed which includes this measure in determining the efficacy of skills training program in increasing dating frequency.

Foster (1988) postulated that minimal dating was caused by deficient social skills. Sixty participants from the general population of San Francisco were selected for this

study. Participants had to test with high levels of anxiety in dating situations. They could have dated no more than three times in the past three months. Foster screened out several individuals she determined to be inappropriate due to low social skills and/or very high anxiety. A waiting-list control group of 18 individuals was included.

Foster designed a treatment program consisting of the presentation of psychoeducational material, and compared it to an intervention intended to improve social skills through practice dating. The participants in the psychoeducational group participated in a day-long workshop designed to re-train the person's cognitive appraisal of the dating situation. They were taught non-verbal skills (smiling, touching, eye contact, etc.), how to dress attractively, how to present oneself in an attractive manner, communication skills, relaxation procedures, and how to focus on another person.

Participants who participated in the practice dating intervention agreed to initiate practice dates by calling female volunteers. They were given no other instructions than to call to make the dates. They were required to keep track of their dates. Both the psychoeducational group and the practice dating group then attended a 'party' where they practiced initiating interactions with opposite sex individuals, some of who were confederates.

The participants were administered a number of measures pre- and post-treatment. These included the Social Avoidance and Distress Scale, the Survey of Heterosocial Interactions, the Social Interaction Self-Statement Test, and two measures designed by the researcher to assess party anxiety and general anxiety.

Based on the results of the post-treatment measures, the workshop attendees showed a non-statistically significant increase in heterosocial interactions. There was also a non-

statistically significant decrease in anxiety. There was a non-statistically significant decrease in negative self-statements. There was a statistically significant increase in heterosocial skill. Results for the practice-dating group were non-significant, and did not support practice dating as a valid method of treating minimal dating. There was no statistically significant increase in dating frequency.

There were a number of methodological concerns in this study that may have contributed to the non-significant changes in dating and anxiety. The selection criteria were vague, and somewhat subjective, reflecting a sampling bias. One subject was excluded because he showed signs of clinical depression, another sample bias. Several participants were selected out because, in the judgment of the researcher, they were too socially unskilled to benefit from the intervention; again, a sampling bias. In addition, participants were generally fairly socially skilled, based on the researchers' report of their scores on the Survey of Heterosocial Interactions (SHI). McGovern et al, (1975) considered scores around 88 to be the normal level of anxiety in heterosocial interactions, and scores of 70 and below to be problematic. Foster included participants with scores as high as 89. Also, Klaus et al., (1977) would consider the number of dates the individuals went on post-treatment (1/month,  $SD=2.33$ , no median reported) as still in the range of minimal dating. On an anecdotal note, however, it is interesting to note that five of the original 56 participants reported that they were in a relationship at post-treatment follow-up. Foster excluded these participants from the report of dating frequency, because these individuals had gone on multiple dates with one individual, which would have skewed the dating frequency mean. However, without a statistical measure for this finding, it is

difficult to determine if this number of individuals in a relationship is significant, or simply chance.

Curran and Gilbert (1975) designed a dating skills intervention which combined modeling of skills, behavioral rehearsal, and homework. They compared this to a systematic desensitization treatment group. Fifty male undergraduate participants were selected based on scoring in the top 33% of all surveyed on the Situation Questionnaire and the Fear Survey Schedule III. Participants were also administered a Dating History Questionnaire. A control group of 16 participants was included in the study.

In the dating skills treatment group, telephone skills and face-to-face interaction skills were presented at the beginning of the group session. These skills were then discussed and rehearsed with the facilitators. Homework was assigned, consisting of in-vivo practice of telephone and face-to-face interactions. In the systematic desensitization group, participants arranged cards with varying levels of dating interactions on a hierarchy from the most anxiety-provoking to the least anxiety-provoking. They were then taught progressive muscle relaxation. Progressively more anxiety provoking dating interactions were then processed while in a relaxed state.

Participants were administered the Fear Survey Schedule and the Situation Questionnaire post-treatment. Based on these measures, participants in the dating skills group showed a statistically significant increase in heterosocial skills. Participants in both groups showed a statistically significant decrease in anxiety following the treatment, and also at six-month follow-up. There was also a statistically significant increase in dating frequency. In the four month period following treatment, participants in the dating skills group dated an average of 3.2 times a month, while participants in the systematic

desensitization group dated an average of 2.3 times a month (no SD or median reported). While this is still below the 'normal' dating level set by Klaus et al. (1977), it is an improvement, and is above what is considered the level for minimal daters.

The methodological problems inherent in this study centered around the sampling bias. The selection criteria for participants was unusual in that several participants were included in the program who had dated extensively (>20 dates) in the semester prior to treatment. Also, approximately 15% of the participants had dated more than two times in the two months prior to treatment. The researchers did not report how many times they dated. Thus, it seems that the data was skewed by the inclusion of non-minimal daters in the study. Although the researchers utilized a statistical procedure (the Wilcoxon test) to account for this variation in pre-treatment dating frequencies in judging statistically significant improvement post-treatment, they still reported the mean dating level post-treatment without statistical adjustment. Thus, the mean may be skewed due to the possible inclusion of non-minimal daters who may have dated more during and after the study at elevated rates independent but of treatment effects. This inclusion of non-minimal daters brings into question what if the 'true' improvement for the skills group was 3.2 dates a month (i.e., perhaps several participants continued to date at high levels, while others increased only slightly during and after treatment). It is hard to determine if the increase in dating was sufficient enough to be attributed to the treatment by itself (Klaus et al., 1977).

Curran et al. (1976) conducted a follow-up to this study. Twenty-nine male undergraduate participants were selected based on their self-report of significant levels of anxiety, and a minimal dating history. Dating frequency of participants prior to treatment

ranged from none to multiple dates in the past two months (the researcher's did not place a limit on dating frequency). Participants were administered the Situation Questionnaire, the Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale, the Social Avoidance and Distress Scale, and the interpersonal items from the Fear Survey Schedule. Participants were taught how to give and receive compliments, nonverbal communication, how to assert themselves, how to communicate emotions, how to deal with periods of silence, how to plan and ask for a date, how to enhance physical attractiveness, and how to solve physical intimacy problems.

Following treatment, participants completed the same measures they had completed pre-treatment. As well, they were asked to report the number of dates they had gone on during the treatment. Participants who participated in the skills training program showed statistically significant increased levels of dating frequency during the study as well as decreased levels of anxiety. Participants went on an average of 1.43 dates a month for the two months of treatment, compared to .22 dates per month the two months prior to treatment (no SD or median reported). While this figure reflects an increase in dating frequency, it is still within the level of minimal dating offered by Klaus et al. (1977). Additionally, Curan et al. (1976) used the same procedures utilized in their 1975 study, which suggests the same methodological concerns apply. Therefore, no strong conclusions can be drawn from the very modest increase in dating frequency reported in this study, and the efficacy of this skills training program in increasing dating frequency is questionable.

### Cognitive-Behavioral Interventions

Some researchers have postulated that dating problems are best addressed through increasing the individual's insight into their thoughts concerning themselves and dating, and the effects these thoughts have on their dating success. Haemmerlie and Montgomery (1982) postulated that minimal dating was caused by the individuals' lack of confidence in dating situations due to overly negative self-evaluations. Twenty-six male undergraduate participants were selected based on scoring one standard deviation above the mean on the Situation Questionnaire (a measure that assesses level of anxiety in different social situations), and also having gone on no more than 2 dates in the past 3 months. A waiting-list control group was included.

They designed an intervention based on "'Real life', pleasant, prearranged social interactions with females." (Haemmerlie & Montgomery, 1982, p. 362). The participants attended two separate weekly sessions in which they had three-minute conversations with 6 different female confederates, for a total of 12 interactions over the two sessions. The female confederates were undergraduates who were instructed to "carry on a positive, friendly conversation... initiate conversation topics and make use of the personal pronoun "you" as much as naturally possible." (Haemmerlie & Montgomery, 1982, p. 364, 365).

Participants were administered several measures pre- and post-treatment. These measures were: the Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale, the Social Avoidance and Distress Scale, the Security-Insecurity Inventory, and the State Anxiety Inventory. Also recorded were the number of conversations initiated, and the number of personal statements the subject made in conversations. Analysis of the data from these assessments showed that

there was a statistically significant decrease in heterosocial anxiety. A statistically significant increase in heterosocial conversation skills was also noted. At six-month follow-up, the Situation Questionnaire (Rehm & Marsten, 1968) was again given, and participants filled out an information sheet asking for the number of dates they had been on in the past six months. The researchers found a statistically significant increase in dating activity during the measurement time.

This study was an intriguing one in that it did not require the direct involvement of a therapist; the researchers even suggest that the less a therapist was involved, the better the improvement in the subject. Participants gained confidence in their social skills simply by having positive interactions with female confederates who had been rated as highly attractive by their peers and who had been instructed to respond as positively as possible to the participants. Presumably, in this study participants were made to re-evaluate their evaluation of their heterosocial skills because of the positive interactions they had with highly attractive females. However, this biased interaction strategy is not a 'normal' way of being. One very basic therapeutic strategy, indeed the cornerstone of many therapist's way of being with clients, is to give unconditional positive regard. A conceptual error in this study was the fact that Hammerlie and Montgomery trained these confederates to be simple therapists, yet they claimed that no therapist interaction was needed. Perhaps, this study provides evidence that the most beneficial mode of therapy for individuals with minimal dating is fostering self-esteem by unconditional positive regard.

Another concern with this study was the finding that the participants did not improve to normal dating levels, which Klaus et al. (1977) have identified as 5.49 dates a month. The researchers reported that participants had an average of 6.8 dates in the six months

following treatment, or about 1.13 dates a month (no standard deviation or median was reported). Klaus et al. (1977) identifies this frequency as minimal dating. A methodological concern was that even the statistically significant increase in dating from .13 dates per month in the three months prior to treatment to the 1.13 dates per month at six months follow-up must be examined, because 39% of the original participants did not respond to the six-month follow-up questionnaire. The statistic of .13 dates per month in the three months prior to treatment is an average of all participants, and follow-up did not include the entire subject base. Overall, this study is hampered by a rather serious conceptual error and a very modest increase in dating frequency.

Grossman (1989) designed a program with a dating self-help manual. Forty-six male undergraduate students were included in this study. A delayed treatment control group of unspecified size was included, as well. Participants were accepted for the study if they did not identify themselves as severely depressed, had no medical condition which would be complicated by anxiety, identified themselves as anxious in heterosocial interactions, indicated an interest in participating in a self-help program, and were willing to initiate some dating interactions. Participants were categorized into the low-frequency dating group (if they dated three or less times a month in the past six months) or in the high-frequency dating group (if they dated more than three times a month in the past six months).

Participants were required to sign a form agreeing to follow the manual and go on at least four dates by the end of the study. This manual educated the client on basic concepts as: 1) who to ask, 2) how to read behavioral cues, 3) planning dates, and 4) handling rejection. The issue of how to deal with the anxiety provoked by the situation

was also addressed. They were taught through the manual to recognize and control their anxiety by: 1) breathing exercises, 2) improving their conversational skills, 3) staying focused, and 4) engaging in positive self-talk. Other than meeting for pre- and post-treatment assessment, participants had no contact with the researchers during the study.

Participants were administered several pre- and post-treatment measures, such as the Social Avoidance and Distress Scale, the Survey of Heterosexual Interactions (measures heterosexual avoidance in males), and a survey form asking them to report the number of dates they had been on. Treatment participants showed a statistically significant decrease in heterosocial anxiety in dating situations as a result of this intervention. Low-frequency daters who utilized the manual reported significantly more dates in the last month in comparison to the low frequency daters in the control group. They went on an average of three more dates in the month following the intervention, which reflected at least a temporary increase in dating frequency.

However, there were several major problems with this study. A conceptual concern was that the participants identified as low frequency daters were actually not seriously impaired in this area, because some were dating as much as three times a month. Klaus et al. (1977) identifies this frequency of dating as nearly normal, versus minimal dating. This conceptual error of including normal frequency daters brings into question whether the intervention targeted individuals with real impairments or just those who were looking for a way to increase their exposure to the opposite sex.

A methodological concern with this study was that participants had to agree to go on at least four dates by the end of the treatment. Participants with little confidence in their ability to have successful dating interactions may have selected themselves out in order to

avoid the anxiety generated by the request. Indeed, approximately 50% of the participants who initially indicated interest in this treatment program declined to participate once the method was described to them, lending support to the hypothesis of sampling bias. Given this bias, those individuals with the most problematic dating problems may have not been included in the study, bringing into question whether the results can be generalized to the minimal dating population.

Grossman suggests that self-help manuals are viable because they are less costly than a therapeutic intervention, and are available to individuals who do not want to (due to resistance) or cannot (due to lack of availability) go to therapy. However, Grossman's intervention was only effective with individuals with slight-to-moderate minimal dating issues, which suggests that those who have significant problems still need something more than a manual. As Grossman's study did show some increase in dating as a result of a manual, perhaps a skills manual could be considered an adjunct to a comprehensive treatment program, which included a therapeutic intervention.

#### Comparison of Behavioral and Cognitive-Behavioral Interventions

Martinson and Zerface (1970) designed an intervention based on practice dating, and compared this to a treatment group involving non-specific counseling. Twenty-four male undergraduate participants were selected based on not having dated for a month prior to the study, having identified themselves as fearful of dating situations, and having expressed motivation to change. No data was taken on their dating behavior prior to this one-month time interval. Participants were evenly distributed into either a counseling group, an arranged-interactions group, or a control group (eight in each group).

The treatment for the counseling group consisted of five planned counseling sessions in which participants were encouraged to discuss their concerns regarding dating problems. Five graduate students who identified themselves as 'eclectic' therapists volunteered to treat the participants. They were given no special training or instructions. The treatment for the arranged-interactions group consisted of five subject-arranged interactions with female volunteers outside of the laboratory. These interactions were not supervised or verified by any one other than the participants, who notified the researcher if they did not engage in their planned interaction for that particular week.

Participants were administered (pre- and post-treatment) the Willoughby Personality Schedule (measures neuroticism or general anxiety), and the Specific Fear Index (measures participants fear in specified situations). They were also asked to report if they were dating at three and eight weeks following the study. Results showed statistically significant decreases in anxiety post-treatment. The change in dating frequency appeared to be non-significant, although the method of reporting significance was unclear. Several methodological concerns are noteworthy in the counseling group. First, there was poor attendance; participants attended an average of 3.2 of the five required sessions. Secondly, dating frequency before the study was only collected for the month prior, which does not account for the possibility that participants had dated more in previous months before the study. This fact brings into doubt how severe the participants anxiety or minimal dating problem was. Closer attention to pre-treatment dating frequency and good statistical analysis of the results post-treatment would help to judge the efficacy of this treatment in increasing dating frequency. In addition, more focused, longer-term therapy with some selection criteria may help to increase the effectiveness of counseling

as a treatment for minimal dating. Based on the results of this study, however, no conclusions can be drawn about the efficacy of counseling as a treatment for minimal dating.

The researchers concluded that the arranged-interactions treatment was effective in increasing dating, but this conclusion was questionable. In addition to the concerns already mentioned, the intervention required the participants to do what they had already identified as a problem for them, without any assistance. This procedure hardly seems therapeutic. The study failed to provide any additional structure, namely, participants could have done things on their own if they had the ability or the confidence. As McGovern et al., (1975) noted, those with the more severe problems in this area are not amenable to this type of intervention, so it seems that those with genuine minimal dating problems would be unlikely to participate in this study. No definite conclusions about the efficacy of arranged-interactions as a treatment for minimal dating can be drawn from this study, due to the methodological concerns.

Glass et al. (1976) developed an intervention designed to increase heterosocial skills. Sixty-one male undergraduate participants were selected based on their desire to participate in a dating skills development program; no other criteria were used. Participants were randomly assigned to either a response-acquisition group, a cognitive self-statement modification group, a combined response-acquisition/cognitive-modification group, an enhanced response acquisition group, an enhanced cognitive self-statement modification group, or a waiting-list control group.

The response-acquisition group learned dating skills. Participants attended one 90-minute group in which an audio-tape presented an introduction to dating problems and

gave an example of how these would be addressed in treatment. They were then assigned to individual counselors, who conducted three to four 60-minute individual sessions by playing audio-tapes of contrived situations and their solutions, and then coaching the participants in appropriate responses. The cognitive self-statement modification group also listened to audio-tapes with their counselors, but these tapes presented coping self-statements which the participants then practiced with their counselors. The combined treatment group received both the response-acquisition material and the cognitive self-statement modification material. Participants in the enhanced groups simply were presented with more of the same material than the non-enhanced groups received.

Participants were administered several measures pretreatment. These included the Dating Behavior Assessment Test, and a phone-call assessment to see how well they interacted with a confederate on the telephone. Participants were followed-up in six months with questions about their interactions with women, including how often they did so, how competent they felt in these interactions, the degree to which they enjoyed these interactions, and how well they got to know these women in each interaction. As well, they were re-administered the pre-treatment assessments. Results indicated that participants in all treatment groups showed a statistically significant improvement in their heterosocial skill after treatment. The effect was greatest with the cognitive self-statement group. Participants in this group were more likely at the end of the study to agree to phone a female volunteer and have a conversation with her, showing the most overall transfer of training to non-experimental conditions. The skills treatment group did not show this strong transfer of training. Based on this result, Glass et al. (1976) concluded that there was no evidence that a skills training program was effective in

treatment of minimal dating, and that many individuals with minimal dating may need to have their cognitions challenged rather than their skills increased.

There were several methodological issues in this study. No pre- or post-treatment measures were included for dating frequency. Thus, it is difficult to know if the treatment increased dating frequency. As well, no pre- or post measures were included for level of anxiety, again making it hard to tell if the treatment affected levels of anxiety. However, this study did include measures of quality of interaction, which this writer considers important in treating minimal dating. Dating interactions may well be unsuccessful regardless of skill or confidence, if the individual does not know how to have quality interactions with the opposite sex. The fact that there was an increase in skill and willingness to initiate contact with the opposite sex indicates that modification of cognitions are an important facet in the treatment of minimal dating.

Gromally et al. (1981) designed a skills training program and compared this to a cognitive treatment group in their intervention for minimal dating. Sixty male undergraduate students were selected for inclusion in the study based on the criteria that they had dated two times or less a month in the past six months, were not dating exclusively, were not in counseling, and were dissatisfied with their current dating habits. A waiting-list control group was also included in the study. Prior to treatment, participants were administered the Social Avoidance and Distress Scale, the Survey of Heterosocial Interactions, the Irrational Beliefs Test, the Situational Expectancies Inventory, and a behavioral log of heterosocial interactions in the one week prior to treatment.

Participants in the skills training group analyzed their current skills in dating interactions, processed these skills with the group facilitator, and worked on improving them through practice and feedback. The cognitive treatment model was designed to counter irrational fears in the dating arena. Participants in the cognitive treatment group were told that the anxiety they felt in social situations were due to their cognitions about possible negative consequences of initiating dating contact with the opposite sex. They learned to re-evaluate their cognitions in dating situations. Both treatment groups received a total of nine 90-minute group sessions and two brief individual sessions.

Five months after treatment, participants were contacted by telephone and given a structured interview which assessed increases in dating behavior and satisfaction with dating. Results of the study showed that participants in both groups showed a statistically significant increase in their level of confidence in initiation of dating interactions. As well, there was a statistically significant decrease in their negative self-evaluations. There was a statistically significant increase in dating levels. However, participants' self-reported heterosocial skill did not increase significantly.

Some methodological concerns also raise questions about the validity of the results. The first concern is selection criteria where there were three participants who exceeded the criteria of no more than two dates in a month. The second issue was attrition, where 35% in the skills group and 37% in the cognition's group dropped out during the first stages of treatment. These individuals appeared to be the most severely inhibited, based on the researchers' report. And, finally, in the area of data analysis, the researchers conducted their evaluation of treatment maintenance over five months, but chose to include only the three best months in their analysis. This omission raises serious doubts

about any conclusions that were drawn about treatment maintenance, since nearly 40% of the surveyed period was not included in the statistical procedure. These methodological concerns make it difficult to draw conclusions about the efficacy of this skills training program.

### Summary

In summary, numerous interventions have been designed to treat minimal dating. They have included training manuals, educational groups, role-playing, behavioral rehearsal, anxiety reduction techniques, and cognitive re-training. As can be seen in the preceding review, many of the interventions designed to treat minimal dating have limited efficacy. The most consistently positive results were found with cognitive-behavioral interventions, although some well designed behavioral interventions showed promise, as well. Of those that have produced positive results, however, many have methodological errors that bring into question the veracity of the conclusions the researchers make. Disregarding the methodological limitations, most produce modest results, at best. Several researchers have attempted to alleviate this problem by developing multi-modal interventions, but have not had greater results.

It seems that researchers have identified some of the components of minimal dating. Interventions based on one or two identified components do seem to help some individuals. However, for many individuals, it seems the current interventions are not enough to help them to increase their dating to frequencies that are considered typical (Klaus et al, 1977). These poor results could be because these current interventions are only effective for some individuals and ineffective for others, or because those with the most serious issues find these interventions intimidating. These individuals seem to need

something more to help them through this problem. Unfortunately, no viable alternatives are available for these individuals.

Current conceptualizations and treatments, while helpful, do not always fully address the issues at hand. Researchers in the field of minimal dating have noted a need for a re-evaluation of current approaches to the problem (Galassi & Galsssi, 1979, Hope and Heimberg, 1990; Hansen et al., 1992), because of the lack of intervention results, and the narrowness of the approach to minimal dating. Arkowitz (1988) notes that dating problems can be a result of emotional and motivational factors, suggesting implicitly that lack of motivation and the role of emotional health be examined as possible contributors to minimal dating. Cutrona (1982) suggests that teaching an individual social skills is not enough, and the attitudes that impede social adjustment must also be addressed.

All of these points should be included in an enrichment of the current conceptualization of what causes minimal dating; an enrichment that includes an examination of core issues more closely. In other words, the current conceptualization needs to be enriched with an analysis of motivation and attitudes in an explanation of minimal dating.

Some researchers have postulated that a person's attachment style, developed in early childhood, affects the manner in which the individual interacts with others (Bowlby, 1982; Ainsworth, 1979). These researchers term these interactions 'Attachment' interactions, and the way in which the infant interacts with the caregiver 'Attachment style.' Attachment style is proposed to have a strong impact on future relationships. Attachment style can influence an individual's motivation to engage in dating activity, either making them overly focused on this activity, or making them abnormally detached

from this activity. According to proponents of the application of attachment theory to romantic relationships, emotional health can be affected by difficulty in romantic relationships (Shaver, Hazan, & Bradshaw, 1988; Bartholomew, 1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Following is an examination of attachment theory, attachment style, and how this relates to minimal dating.

### Attachment Theory

Attachment theory was developed by Bowlby (1969). In developing this theory, Bowlby drew from many sources within psychology, including ethology, psychoanalysis, and control systems theory (Feeny & Noller, 1996). He developed this theory based on his observation that the infant/caregiver relationship seemed important in the development of an emotionally healthy infant. Bowlby (1982) noticed in observing infants that they tended to maintain close proximity to their caregiver (typically, their mother) in the early stages of their development. This close proximity was especially evident under conditions of alarm, in which case the infant, if it was not already clinging to the caregiver, would immediately seek the caregiver's protection. The caregiver reciprocated this attachment by seeking out the infant when the distance between them became too great. Thus, there was a 'partnership' between the caregiver and the infant that was maintained for some time after birth. Bowlby (1982) hypothesized that this attachment behavior was a survival instinct, rather than a need gratification instinct as Freud had speculated in his secondary drive theory. This instinct was strongly reinforced. He states,

Proximity and affectionate interchange are appraised and felt as pleasurable by both whereas distance and expressions of rejection are appraised and felt as disagreeable or painful by both. (p. 242).

As Bowlby was developing his attachment theory, Ainsworth (1967) was also examining the importance of attachment in infants. She and her colleagues observed infants and their caregivers in Uganda. They catalogued the interactions between infant and caregiver, watching for attachment behaviors. They observed that infants showed a variety of attachment behaviors to their caregiver, such as announcing their displeasure when the caregiver left the room, expressing their delight when they came back, and showing a tendency to prefer their caregiver over any others for protection and soothing.

Ainsworth (1978) conducted a series of studies to confirm that her observations in Uganda applied to American children. Through a series of situations collectively labeled the 'strange situation', Ainsworth and her colleagues observed the reactions of multiple infants to their mother leaving the room, and her subsequent return. Ainsworth et al. (1978) noted that all infants did not react the same to these transitions. Some infants seemed unconcerned that their caregiver had left the room, continuing to play with the toys. Others discontinued their exploratory or play behavior and appeared acutely distressed.

The researchers monitored the reactions of the infants when the caregivers returned. Many infants made some sort of approach behavior, which included expression of delight to see her again, running up, greeting her, and then resuming their playing. Other infants ignored their caregiver when they returned, avoiding eye contact and proximity, and

actively resisting physical contact initiated by the caregiver. Others appeared ambivalent, vacillating between seeking and avoiding physical contact and proximity.

Based on these attachment behaviors, Ainsworth grouped the infants into three groups: Securely attached, Avoidant, and Anxious/ambivalent. The infants (66%) who seemed least distressed upon the caregiver leaving, and seemed happy to see her come back, but did not exhibit clinging behaviors were termed “securely attached”. Ainsworth noted that these infants tended to use their caregiver as a ‘secure base’ from which they ventured out to explore and play. She noted that securely attached infants had mothers who were attentive to them, and engaged in frequent social interaction with them.

Those infants (21%) who showed distress or anxiety when the caregiver left and ignored them when they returned were termed “avoidant”. Ainsworth and her colleagues noted that the caregivers of these infants tended to be often angry, irritable, compulsive and rigid. They rebuffed their infant’s desire for physical contact, and did not show the lively interaction of facial expressions noted in other infant/caregiver pairs.

Those infants (19%) who seemed ambivalent in their behaviors, were termed “anxious/ambivalent”. These infants appeared anxious and distressed when their caregiver left the room, perhaps because they were not confident that they would return. Yet, when the caregiver did return, these infants seemed ambivalent about seeking bodily contact. If the caregiver did not time their affections appropriately, coinciding with times they wanted to be picked up and when they did not, these infants showed avoidance behavior and an angry disposition. Ainsworth noted that a subgroup of these anxious/ambivalent infants seemed quite passive despite their unhappiness with the

situation. She postulated that this passivity resulted from mothers who did not respond to their infants in a predictable manner contingent on their needs.

Bowlby (1982) believed the infant developed a 'internal working model' or schema for attachment through repeated exposure to the same basic pattern of relating with their caregiver. He notes,

There is a sensitive phase in early life after which development of the capacity to make secure and discriminating attachments becomes progressively more difficult; or, put another way, ...the pattern in which a child's attachment behavior is organized tends to persist and as he grows older to be modified less and less easily and less and less completely by his current experience (pg. 367).

As Bowlby (1982) points out, these patterns of attachment behavior generalize to social and play behavior with adults and children.

Bowlby (1982) suggests that the patterns children learn early in childhood tend to stay with them, unless there is a significant change in their environment. These patterns may have important implications when the individual reaches dating age.

#### Adult Attachment:

##### A Cognitive-Behavioral Descriptive Application of Attachment Theory

This study draws from the writings of Bowlby and Ainsworth in its approach to developing an alternate conceptualization of minimal dating. However, rather than being based on a psychodynamic interpretation of the formulation and execution of attachment styles, this study proposes to utilize a more descriptive application of attachment theory. Essentially, rather than delve into the workings of the unconscious to understand the formation of a particular attachment style, this study instead has as its focus the

cognitions related to a particular attachment style. Specifically, the primary focus of this study is on the formulation of a *core belief* based on the infants' early interactions with the caregiver, and how this core belief influences the development of a particular attachment style.

According to Dr. J. Beck (1995), *core beliefs* are developed in early childhood based on the individual's interpretation of their interactions with the world, and other people. Individuals develop core beliefs about themselves, other people, and their world. Beck notes that *core beliefs* "...are global, rigid, and overgeneralized (p. 16)." These beliefs are so basic to the person's manner of thinking that they may not even be aware that they have them. Nonetheless, they influence how the person interprets the world, and thus their reactions to their environment.

*Core beliefs*, in turn, cause the person to develop *intermediate beliefs*. *Intermediate beliefs* consist of often unarticulated attitudes, rules, and assumptions (Beck, 1995). These attitudes, rules, and assumptions influence the manner in which the individual views and interprets their environment. This particular interpretation of their environment, in turn, leads to *automatic thoughts* that can influence the individual's emotions and motivation in any situation. For instance, an individual who has the *core belief* that they are worthless may have an *intermediate belief* that when another person shows them interest, they are merely attempting to be nice, rather than desiring a romantic liason, and thus their *automatic thought* is that there is no point to being friendly. Beck (1995) further postulated that the *automatic thought* was followed by an emotion, for instance in this case, depression or hopelessness as the hope of having a relationship is again dashed due to these cognitions.

A cognitive-behavioral description of the development of a particular attachment style, then, involves the child's interpretation of unresponsive or uncaring treatment by their primary caregiver as indicative of their relative unimportance or self-worth. From this, they develop the *core belief* that they are worthless, or unlovable. Alternatively, or in addition, the child may interpret their caregiver's indifference or inconsistency as an indication that others are untrustworthy, and may develop a *core belief* that others are not trustworthy or caring. Once formed, these beliefs apparently remain in use until such time as they are changed (Beck, 1995).

Essentially, then, a conceptualization of minimal dating informed by attachment theory and formulated with cognitive-behavioral theory as its backbone is that an individual develops *core beliefs* in which they view themselves as worthless and unworthy of love, and/or others as untrustworthy. Accordingly, they act in a manner consistent with these beliefs. It is here that this description of the formulation of *core beliefs* and resulting behaviors intersects with other researcher's description of adult attachment styles, in this case, specifically with regards to romantic relationships.

#### Current Research in Adult Attachment

A number of researchers have postulated that attachment behavior in childhood strongly influences attachment behavior in adult romantic relationships (Hazan and Shaver, 1987,1988; Weiss, 1982, 1986; Feeney and Noller, 1996, Simpson & Rholes, 1998). The basic premise of current adult attachment theories is that childhood interactions with the primary caregiver influences adult attachment style. Essentially, a child forms a core belief based on these interactions, and this belief, in turn, affects the nature of their adult interactions. Hazan and Shaver (1987) conducted two seminal

studies connecting adult romantic relationships and attachment behavior. One main goal of these studies was to determine if the characteristics of the infant-child attachment which caused differences in infant attachment styles could also determine the attachment styles of adults in romantic relationships. In these studies, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire on love styles. The first study included 620 male and female participants who responded to questionnaire placed in Denver newspaper. The second study included 108 male and female undergraduate participants from a local university, who filled out a modified version of the first questionnaire. Participants were asked to answer 95 Likert-style questions related to attachment behaviors. The questionnaire was divided into three parts. The first part had questions which focused on the participants' most important romantic relationship, assessing happiness in this relationship, level of trust, fear of closeness, degree of friendship, acceptance, emotional extremes, jealousy, obsessive preoccupation, sexual attraction, desire for union, desire for reciprocation, and the degree to which there had been love at first sight. The second portion inquired into length of this relationship, whether it was current or past, how many times the individual had been in love, and whether or not they had crushes before the age of 10. The final section inquired into attachment style and attachment history. Specifically, it assessed the individual's relationship with their mother and father, and the parents relationship with each other.

These questionnaires were based on Ainsworth's three categories of attachment; Secure, Avoidant, and Anxious/ambivalent. Hazan and Shaver (1987) used the following descriptions to operationalize the three categories:

***Secure*** – I find it relatively easy to get close to others and am comfortable depending on them and having them depend on me. I don't often worry about being abandoned or about someone getting too close to me.

***Avoidant*** – I am somewhat uncomfortable being close to others; I find it difficult to trust them completely, difficult to allow myself to depend on them. I am nervous when anyone gets too close, and often, love partners want me to be more intimate than I feel comfortable being.

***Anxious/Ambivalent*** – I find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like. I often worry that my partner doesn't really love me or won't want to stay with me. I want to merge completely with another person, and this desire sometimes scares people away (p.515).

Fifty-six percent in both studies showed a secure attachment style, 23% in one study and 25% in the other showed an avoidant attachment style, and 19% in one study and 20% in the other study showed an anxious/ambivalent attachment style. These figures closely match the original percentages of Ainsworth et al.'s study of attachment styles (66% securely attached, 21% Avoidant, and 19% Anxious/ambivalent).

Hazan and Shaver (1987) found many behavioral and cognitive similarities between infant/caregiver attachments and the experience of romantic love. They noted that both attachment and romantic love included a desire for closeness. They also noted that both included a sense of happiness and security when the caregiver/partner showed caring or a willingness to reciprocate. Both attachment and romantic love included anxiety over separation and happiness over reunion. Both include a desire to share experiences with the other. In both an attachment relationship and a romantic relationship, there is a sense

of connectedness with the other. Both the infant and the romantic partner feel a sense of being understood and a sense that the other is the 'ideal' person for them. The results of these studies were promising in supporting the hypothesis that adult romantic attachment styles are similar to infant/caregiver attachment styles (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

Since this is a correlational study, the results obtained are not proof that infant attachment style causes adult attachment style. Rather, there appears to be many similarities between infant and adult attachment style. This association suggests that infant attachment style may cause or heavily influence the development of an adult attachment style. In order to test this hypothesis, an empirical longitudinal study following infants to adulthood should be conducted. Until then, we can only view infant attachment style as similar to adult attachment style, but not necessarily related.

This study had a relative strength in its large sample size. However, as Shaver and Hazan note, this study had some weaknesses. First, the questionnaires only examined one relationship. This limitation makes it harder to conclude that the attachment style noted in this questionnaire is necessarily characteristic of the individual, or simply an aberration. They also note that their questionnaire was limited in its analysis of each sub-category; since it was a brief questionnaire, each subcategory had to be brief, and thus, some questions were not addressed. Finally, they note that this was a self-report measure, and as such, fraught with potential confounds. As they point out, people may be unable to say just how they feel in love relationship. They may not accurately remember their past love relationships. Malingering may occur in the interests of presenting the best possible face. These confounds were not controlled for. They also note that the correlation between infant and adult attachment styles was, while

statistically significant, not very strong, especially for older individuals (ages not reported). Another limitation of the first study was having the survey in a newspaper where selection bias can occur. The researchers partially corrected this in the second study, by randomly selecting college students. A random selection of the population as a whole would be ideal.

Notwithstanding the flaws in the study, there does seem to be some evidence that the attachment style learned in childhood remains in effect in adulthood, at least in some cases. Couched in cognitive-behavioral terms, the core beliefs that informed their particular attachment style in childhood remain in effect in adulthood, and continue to affect their interaction style. Kahn and Antonucci (1980) note that attachment relationships in infancy serve as a prototype for adult relationships. As mentioned before, Bowlby (1982) has also suggested the continuity of attachment style from infancy to adulthood. Thus, there is agreement within the attachment field about the continuity of infant attachment styles into adulthood. Without casual evidence, however, any conclusions must be considered theoretical in nature.

#### A Reformulated Theory of Adult Attachment Styles

More recently, researchers have suggested a four-category model of adult attachment (Bartholomew, 1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). This model is based on Bowlby's (1969, 1973) original conceptualization of attachment patterns reflecting working models of the self and the attachment figure. Bartholomew extends this conceptualization to a more general view of self and other. According to Bartholomew, the individual has either a positive or a negative view of self (worthy/unworthy; loveable/unlovable), and

either a positive or a negative view of others (trustworthy/untrustworthy; caring/uncaring). Essentially, these are core beliefs, as noted previously, based on early interactions with the primary caregiver. These two dimensions (view of self, view of others) can be graphed with a resulting four quadrants: Secure, Preoccupied, Dismissing, and Fearful (see figure 1)

Figure 1. Styles of adult attachment (Source: Bartholomew (1990))

		<b>Model of Self (Dependence)</b>	
		Positive (Low)	Negative (High)
<b>Model of Other (Avoidance)</b>	Positive(Low)		<b>Preoccupied</b> Preoccupied (Main) Ambivalent (Hazan) Overly dependent
	Negative(High)	<b>Dismissing</b> Denial of Attachment Dismissing (Main) Counter-dependent	<b>Fearful</b> Fear of Attachment Avoidant (Hazan) Socially avoidant

Bartholomew includes previous conceptualizations of attachment categories in this table, for comparison purposes. For example, the categories previously identified as anxious/ambivalent and avoidant (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Ainsworth, 1979) are now referred to as 'Preoccupied' and 'Fearful', respectively. Main's category previously identified as "dismissing" remain

The 'Secure' category is predicted to be associated with positive views of self and others. The person has core beliefs of themselves as trustworthy and caring.

These individuals have high self-esteem, and no serious interpersonal problems.

Bartolomew postulates that this attachment style is fostered by parenting that is warm and responsive.

The 'Preoccupied' category is predicated on a positive view of others, but a negative view of self. While the individual has a core belief that others are trustworthy and caring, these individuals do not feel worthy of other's trust and caring; they have a core belief that they are unlovable. Bartholomew (1990), notes that the result is an individual with an overly dependent attachment style, who seems preoccupied with gaining other's approval. This style seems to be a result of inconsistent and insensitive parenting. Specifically, parents may profess their devotion to the child while not following through with consistent, loving attention. The child comes to the conclusion that there must be something wrong with them that keeps their parents from loving them consistently, and forms the core belief that they are unlovable. It also suggests why they become preoccupied, as they try harder and focus more on seeking approval, hoping to engender consistent caring from their parents.

The 'Fearful' category is predicated on a negative view of self and others. The individual has a core belief that others are uncaring and untrustworthy, while they have another core belief that they are unworthy of love, and unlovable. On the one hand, they desire a relationship and intimacy. On the other hand, they experience others as uncaring. Rather than blame others, though, they tend to feel it is a personal defect that causes them not to be loved or cared for. Romantic interactions are distressful for these individuals, as they are hypersensitive to the reactions of others, and constantly fear rejection. Often, they will avoid romantic interactions to preclude the possibility of this painful rejection. Bartholomew (1990) states that in extreme cases, these individuals fit

the pattern of relating described for Avoidant Personality Disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 1994, Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition (DSM-IV)).

The 'Dismissing' category is predicated on individual having a core belief that they are loveable, but a related core belief that others are untrustworthy. Bartholomew postulates that this positive view of self is based on a distancing of oneself from potentially rejecting attachment figures and the development of a false sense of independence and self-adequacy. Individuals with this attachment style tend to downplay the importance of relationships, and instead put their energy into career and hobbies.

Bartholomew makes several key contributions to the field of attachment theory with the introduction of this four-group model. First is the importance of viewing adult attachment as based on views of self and others, as Bowlby (1969, 1973) originally highlighted for infants. Second is that Bartholomew notes that most individuals do not fit neatly into one of these categories; rather, their attachment style will be a composite of the four groups, with one or two groups playing a predominant role. For instance, an individual can have a combination of a Fearful and a Preoccupied attachment style, where they are overly dependent in romantic relationships, but tend to satisfy their dependency needs through a superficial means, such as sexual promiscuity. Or, an individual may have a combination of Dismissing and Fearful attachment styles, where they repress their need for attachment due to excessive fears of being hurt, but are still aware of their need for attachment.

In summary, attachment theory proposes that infants develop an attachment style based on the quality of their interactions with their primary caregiver (typically their

mother). The original attachment styles were defined by Ainsworth as ‘Secure’, ‘Avoidant’, and ‘Anxious/Ambivalent’. Securely attached infants seemed well-adjusted and easily soothed, and their interactions with their caregiver were positive and mostly happy. Insecurely attached infants (either avoidant or anxious/ambivalent) seemed to have difficulty maintaining a connection with their caregiver, and seemed to experience a great deal of distress in their interactions with them.

Expanding on these original three categories, Bartholomew and Horwitz (1991) developed a four-model theory of attachment styles; ‘Secure’, ‘Fearful’, ‘Preoccupied’, and ‘Dismissing’. The ‘Fearful’ category corresponds to Ainsworth’s ‘Avoidant’ category, the ‘Preoccupied’ category corresponds to Ainsworth’s ‘Anxious/Ambivalent’ category, and the ‘Dismissing’ category is a combination of Ainsworth’s ‘Secure’ and ‘Avoidant’ categories. These attachment styles are placed on a two axes model predicated on core beliefs that the individual sees themselves as either lovable, or unlovable, and either sees others as trustworthy, or untrustworthy.

Researchers have suggested, based on correlational research and theoretical speculation, that the attachment style developed in childhood may follow the individual into adulthood. This makes sense from a cognitive-behavioral viewpoint, as core beliefs that inform a particular attachment style would be expected to change only with insight and specific attention to them (Beck, 1995). As the individual begins to move towards establishing a romantic relationship, these attachment styles appear to affect their interactions with their romantic partner. Researchers have noted significant differences in relationship quality and longevity based on attachment style. According to Freeny and Noller (1996), internal working models of attachment influence how the individual

functions in relationships, or even their motivation to be in a relationship. The process of how these attachment styles affect relationship quality and duration will be examined in the following section.

### Styles of Attachment and the Impact on Relationships

As noted previously, the core beliefs that an individual develops in infancy will probably follow them into adulthood, unless challenged or replaced. These core beliefs will cause the person to perform in a characteristically predictable pattern when in a romantic interaction. These characteristic patterns have been termed ‘attachment styles,’ and have been explored to determine their impact on relationships. Following is a review of these findings. It should be noted that the proposed characteristics of individuals in interpersonal relationships in each category of attachment style are merely the author’s theoretical assumptions based on the studies reported. Empirical studies are needed to prove these assumptions.

#### Securely Attached Individuals

Simpson (1990) found that individuals with a secure attachment style reported high levels of trust, commitment, satisfaction, and interdependence. According to Feeny and Noller (1996), the securely attached individual has few self-doubts, high self-worth and receives high regard from others. They have positive views of others, seeing them as generally trustworthy and dependable. It is important for them to find a balance between closeness and autonomy, so they are in no hurry to become intensely intimate. In other words, they have healthy boundaries. They are able to modulate their negative emotions in a constructive way. Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) reported that securely attached

individuals were moderate in most categories, such as expressiveness, assertiveness, nurturance, exploitability, and competitiveness.

These individuals should have the least amount of problems in interpersonal relationships. They are likely to have close, rewarding relationships, especially with other securely-attached individuals. If they became involved with an insecurely-attached individual, there may be difficulties in the relationship where the securely-attached individual may be puzzled over the other's difficulties in forming a relationship.

#### Anxious/Ambivalent or Preoccupied Individuals

The anxious/ambivalent or preoccupied individual has a distinctively different profile than the securely attached individual. According to Feeny and Noller (1996), anxious/ambivalent individuals view others as complex and difficult to understand. They have strong needs for intimacy and reassurance. They value extreme closeness to their partner, at the expense of independence, and they fear rejection. They are manipulative in their expression of emotions. They tend not to be very assertive. According to Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991), preoccupied individuals (comparable to anxious/ambivalent) are extremely expressive and nurturing. They are somewhat gullible, yet tend to challenge others more than many people would. Contrary to anxious/ambivalent individuals, they tend to be assertive, perhaps in a defensive manner.

Individuals with this attachment style will probably have relationships in which they push for increasingly greater levels of intimacy early on in the relationship. They will probably appear intense and needy, pushing others away (Shaver et al., 1988). They may often worry about whether or not their partner loves them. They may often ask their partner how they feel, and obsess on any indication that their partner's feelings have

changed. They may utilize much of their time in the relationship preoccupied with concerns about their actions and the possible repercussions. They may require frequent reassurance and explanations from the other on their behaviors. They may appear controlling to their partner, as they are constantly trying to provoke emotional expression from them. Even so, they will probably be very committed to the relationship.

If they have a history of failed relationships, this individual will probably not make the connection between their controlling nature and obsessive worrying and the termination of the relationship. Rather, they are more likely to feel that they needed to behave in this manner to keep the relationship going as long as they did, and assume that the reason the relationship ended was because they were unlovable. These individuals may not learn to relax in relationships without some outside intervention. They may well become discouraged after a number of relationships in which they tried very hard, but never were able to maintain the relationship for long.

#### Avoidant or Fearful Individuals

According to Feeny and Noller (1996), the Avoidant individual is suspicious, and doesn't trust or depend on others. They are emotionally distant. They place little emphasis on social interactions, choosing independence above all. Relationships are placed secondary to career or other goals. They repress their negative emotions. Related to this profile, Bartholomew and Horowitz's (1991) fearful individual is low in expressiveness, assertiveness, nurturing qualities, and ability to challenge others. They are high in the areas of introversion, passivity, and gullibility. They are fairly cold and distant in interpersonal relationships.

Individuals with this primary profile will probably enter into relationships with a great deal of caution. They will tend to keep their innermost thoughts and feelings to themselves in an attempt to maintain emotional distance and to reduce their vulnerability. Their cautious nature could have the effect of making other's uncomfortable attempting a relationship with them, because they may interpret this cautiousness as meaning the individual is not 'emotionally available', and thus not able to validate the other's emotional states or share in emotional intimacy. Thus, individuals with this profile may find that they have few opportunities for romantic relationships, and may describe the few they have had as superficial and unsatisfying.

#### Dismissing Individuals

Bartholomew and Horowitz's (1991) fourth category, Dismissing, has no comparable category under Ainsworth's (1978) three category classification system, although it seems to be a combination of the Avoidant and Secure categories. These individuals are highly competitive. To individuals they do not know well, they can be very cold. After the individual has shown that they are committed to a long-term relationship, they can be fairly nurturing and expressive. In the beginnings of a new relationship, they can be fairly introverted and passive, yet as they develop trust in the other, they can also be fairly assertive. These individuals may be very guarded and may need a longer period of time than the securely attached individual to develop trust, because they are concerned about being exploited.

This individual uses denial to cope with their interpersonal problems. They ignore or dismiss their needs for interpersonal interactions, instead immersing themselves in career or hobbies. Although these individuals may ultimately want to be in a relationship, it will

probably be hard for them, because they place such strong defenses up against anyone getting close to them. Their major issue in forming a romantic relationship will probably be that they do not express their emotions enough early on, and tend to be too defensive. Although they have the capacity to be nurturing and expressive, many potential romantic partners may not be prepared to wait the necessary amount of time for these individuals to overcome their defensiveness.

In summary, then, core beliefs appear to influence the individual's attachment style, and hence their manner of relating to others. Having the core belief that one is unlovable, while others are trustworthy, influences the formation of a preoccupied attachment style. Having the core belief that others are untrustworthy, while the self is worthwhile, influences the development of a dismissing attachment style. Individuals who have the core belief that they are unlovable, as well as the core belief that others are not trustworthy, develop a fearful attachment style.

#### Implications of Attachment Style in the Development of Minimal Dating

Attachment style seems to be related to the degree of heterosocial incompetence. Many of the traits of the heterosocially incompetent individual mirror the traits of the insecurely attached individual. This correlation suggests that an individual's degree of success in dating will be affected by their attachment style. Individuals with insecure attachment styles seem to have unrealistic expectations of the relationship, negative views of themselves, negative views of others, and often have trouble trusting enough to allow others to get close. They will probably find relationships difficult, exhausting, and less rewarding than they expected. Because of these expectations, it may be that they

search for a partner less frequently than those with a secure attachment style. For individuals who have extreme difficulty in this area, it may not seem possible for them to engage in heterosocial interactions. If these individuals do not understand why it is that they have so much difficulty in this area, and if they have little or no expectations of having success in the future in heterosocial interactions, they may discontinue their attempts. This author believes that the probability of becoming a minimal dater is heavily influenced by the individuals' low expectation of success, and resulting learned helplessness. It may be that this learned helplessness develops from repeated failures, due to attachment issues and lack of insight into what causes their lack of success. In essence, these individuals may stop trying, because they expect to fail, and don't think they can do anything to change this expectation. In other words, they feel helpless.

It should be noted that this is one of many views on what influences the development of minimal dating. This enriched conceptualization is not intended to explain all cases of minimal dating. Rather, it is being proposed as another possible explanation to be added to current explanations. This enriched conceptualization probably will not apply to individuals who have no dating history, because they will not have had the history of failures which seems to be an integral part of this particular subset of minimal daters. To date, no research has been done in this area, to this researcher's knowledge, so this enriched conceptualization remains to be empirically validated.

Motivation is a strong predictor of a person's potential for action, and the individual who feels helpless may stop trying. This tendency of individuals to stop trying when they feel they have no control is such an important one that many researchers have studied this concept in great detail. In the following section, the literature on learned helplessness

will be reviewed, and used to explain how individuals with chronic problems in romantic relationships may discontinue dating, resulting in developing the profile of a minimal dater.

### Learned Helplessness

Overmier and Seligman (1967) developed the theory of learned helplessness after a series of experiments to examine the effect of uncontrollable shock on the subsequent behaviors of canine participants. The participants were placed in an apparatus that suspended them in a cage with electrodes attached to their feet. They were then subjected to repeated trials of severe but non-life-threatening shocks. They were not able to move out of this apparatus, forcing them to endure these shocks without recourse. Subsequently, they were placed in one side of a two compartment shuttle box. The side they were placed on had a floor that could be electrified. A barrier was placed between the compartments, but it was possible for the participants to jump over this barrier to the 'safety' of the other side (no shock). They were given a signal (lights dimming) that a shock was coming, and then shortly thereafter, if they did not jump, they were shocked. Remarkably, the researchers noted that participants who had experienced the inescapable shock prior to this portion of the experiment would not jump to safety. They seemed to find the shock aversive, as they ran frantically around the cage howling, urinating and defecating. Yet, they did not try to avoid the shock, and after several trials, they ceased their running and howling, and sat or laid in the cage, whining and passively taking the shock. Overmeir and Seligman (1968) termed this characteristic passivity 'Learned Helplessness.' They postulated that this phenomenon occurred as a result of being presented with an aversive stimuli that they had no control over. After repeatedly

attempting to generate a response that will help them to avoid the aversive stimuli without success, they stop trying. They learned that they are helpless.

Abramson, Seligman, and Teasdale (1978) reformulated the theory of learned helplessness to fit the human condition. They postulated that an individual could develop either personal helplessness, or universal helplessness. Personal helplessness was based on the belief that “the outcome is not contingent on any response in his repertoire”, coupled with the belief that others did have a contingent response (pg. 53). Universal helplessness was based on the belief that “the outcome is not contingent on a response in the repertoire of any relevant other, and “the outcome is not contingent on any response in his repertoire”(Seligman & Teasdale, 1978, p. 53).

Peterson, Maier, and Seligman (1993), outlined three criteria for learned helplessness to exist in people. First, learned helplessness is characterized by inappropriate passivity. Individuals with inappropriate passivity have the ability to cope through taking action, but for some reason they do not. Second, learned helplessness is preceded by an event which the individual is convinced was uncontrollable. Typically, they will experience this sense of uncontrollability numerous times before they develop learned helplessness. Third, learned helplessness results from how the person thinks about the events. In order to develop learned helplessness, they must generalize their ineffectiveness in one situation to all similar situations.

#### Minimal Dating as a Form of Learned Helplessness

The premise of this paper is that minimal dating may have, in some instances, an insecure attachment style as one of its key influences. This insecure attachment style may be the result of the person’s maladaptive core beliefs, in which they view themselves

as unlovable, and/or others as untrustworthy. Based on these core beliefs, the individual may interact with others in ways that become self-confirming prophecies. For instance, if the individual views themselves as unworthy, they will carry themselves in a manner that communicates their low view of their self-worth. They will not expect others to find them attractive, and will expect that they will be rejected due to their undesirability. Essentially, they will be modeling to others how they should be treated. If the individual views others as untrustworthy, they will expect that others will not treat them well, and will act this out in their interactions with others. For instance, they will avoid others or interpret ambiguous stimuli in a negative manner.

#### Anxiety and the Formulation of Learned Helplessness

Due to their particular pattern of interacting with others, or attachment style, the person re-confirms their core beliefs formed in early childhood regarding themselves and others. They now expect that relationships with others will be fraught with difficulty and failure. The individual may develop an intermediate belief that they will never be successful in relationships, based on their history. When considering approaching a potential partner, they may expect to be rejected, either because they do not feel desirable, or because they expect that others are not trustworthy. It is the fear of being rejected that seems to cause the anxiety. To this person, being rejected is a painful experience that is to be avoided at all costs. Without insight into the causes of their failures, individuals with an insecure attachment style may begin to see dating interactions as an exercise in masochism. Their automatic thought in such interactions may be that there is no point in trying, as they will only fail. They may generalize to future situations, believing that they will not be able to be successful in the future in

establishing a romantic relationship because of their repeated failures in the past (Peterson's criteria #3). They may not feel that they have any control over this situation, as they have undoubtedly tried many different solutions to their dilemma, with the same result. In essence, they may perceive their situation as uncontrollable (criteria #2). Since they feel that they have no control over their success in relationships, view dating interactions as painful, and believe that they will fail in the future, their motivation to engage in heterosocial interactions may gradually decline to the point of passivity (criteria #1). The minimal dater, then, may have a personal learned helplessness. Although they believe others can and do have successful dating interactions, based on their core beliefs, they do not anticipate being able to have successful interactions. Because they do not anticipate having dating success, they may attempt with decreasing frequency, to the point that they make few, if any, attempts to initiate contact with potential romantic partners. Once the individual has developed the passivity characteristic of the learned helpless condition, they fit the profile of the minimal dater.

Research in the field of interpersonal relationships seems to lend credence to this particular conceptualization. This passivity is noted in adults who believe they have no control over their needs for affection and closeness. Cutrona (1982) notes that college students who have chronic loneliness which they believe is beyond their control, "...are likely to become discouraged and cease efforts to improve their situation" (p. 295). Again, passivity is noted which helps to perpetuate the individual's interpersonal difficulties. Rubenstein and Shaver (1982) noted that "...Sad passivity...is a characteristic reaction to loneliness among those who are severely lonely" (p. 215). Those who seem to have severe difficulties in the interpersonal realm do not take action

to ameliorate their difficulties, but simply passively wait. Rubenstein and Shaver (1982) noted that such passivity is a form of self-pity with is highly correlated with social isolation and low self-esteem. Jones et al. (1981) notes that those who suffer persistent loneliness as a result of their interpersonal difficulties develop a sense of “hopeless resignation” (p. 28). Essentially, this is passivity by another label. The elements of passivity appear to consist of hopeless resignation, self-pity, a sense of discouragement, despair, sadness, and inaction.

The characteristic passivity of the individual with learned helplessness is similar to the passivity noted in infants with an insecure attachment to their caregiver. Ainsworth (1978) noted that some anxious/ambivalent infants showed this passivity in their interactions with their caregiver. Although they were unhappy with her leaving the room, they did not take action to prevent it, because the caregiver had failed to show that such protest would be heeded.

Bowlby noticed...when a human or primate infant is separated from its mother, the infant goes through a predictable series of emotional reactions. The first is **protest** (emphasis added), which involves crying, active searching and resistance to other’s soothing efforts. The second is **despair** (emphasis added), which is a state of passivity and obvious sadness...(Hazan, et al., 1988, p. 71).

Thus, as an apparent result of the mother’s non-contingent responding to their infants’ needs, the infant becomes passive. Infants stop trying to get their needs met, yet appear to suffer as a result of this passivity.

It appears that the passivity the infant develops due to their mother’s non-contingent responding is similar to the passivity noted in adults who do not feel they have control

over whether or not they get their needs for affection and closeness met. Many adults turn to romantic relationships to get their needs for affection and closeness. If they feel they cannot get these needs met for some reason they do not understand, they may develop the profile of the minimal dater.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODS

### Participant

The participant of this project was a heterosexual male, age 35, who was experiencing distress associated with his inability to date.

### Recruitment

The individual selected for the case study was recruited from the pool of the investigator's caseload at Professional Community Services in El Cajon. This subject originally began treatment with this therapist in late September, 1998, and treatment continued until mid-May, 1999. Informed consent for the material already presented, as well as future material to be utilized for this study, was obtained in late March, 1999. Since this was largely a historical case study, the information for the case study was gleaned from case notes of past sessions. The subject was induced to participate in this study by the opportunity to contribute to research, and to increase his insight into some causal influences of his dating issues. No financial incentives were offered.

#### Criteria for Inclusion and Exclusion

The participant selected for inclusion in this study was selected based on the following criteria. He was screened for:

#### Inclusion

- Intellectual functioning which would preclude his ability to benefit from therapy (based on researchers clinical interview and diagnostic impression)
- Degree of heterosocial distress (based on researchers clinical impression). This assessment was based on :
  - Client meeting minimal dating criteria (<5.49 dates a month, with dating being defined as interactions prior to the

development of a full-fledged, committed relationship (Hope & Hiemberg, 1990))

- Client frustrated with his difficulty in this area (based on statements he made in therapy)
- Client has had this problem for over one year (indicates it is a more chronic problem)

### Exclusion

- Psychosis (based on researchers clinical interview and diagnostic impression)
- Alcohol or drug abuse issues (based on researchers clinical interview)

### Assessment

The assessment was conducted via clinical interview and observation of the participant over a number of session. The selected participant was functioning adequately intellectually, and appeared able to gain insight into his issues. He was concerned about his inability to enter in or maintain relationships consistently. He did not present with substance abuse issues. He did seem to have an above normal level of heterosocial distress, describing an insecure attachment style in his adult love relationships. He was functioning adequately in other areas of his life. Although he was somewhat sad due to this issue; he was not suicidal or preoccupied with suicidal thoughts.

### Treatment

The selected participant attended 28 individual therapy sessions. Information on this case was be gleaned from case notes of previous sessions with the client. These case

notes was analyzed, with a focus on (a) evidence of an insecure attachment style, (b) the effects of this attachment style, (c) participants' understanding of the problem, and (d) his usual method of coping with minimal dating.

#### Protection of Human Participants

Ethical guidelines were followed as outlined by the Institutional Review Board of the California School of Professional Psychology, San Diego; the ethical code of the American Psychological Association; and the Board of Psychology, California, licensing laws. As per the APA's ethical guidelines (1992), several standards regarding ethical principles on research were followed for this clinical dissertation. The Institutional Review Board at the California School of Professional Psychology, San Diego, was appraised of the procedures and guidelines set forth in this study, and their approval was granted. The participant signed all consent forms. The participant was provided a copy of his informed consent which included the nature of the study, the limits of confidentiality, and information regarding the researcher.

#### Protection of Confidentiality

Information unique to the participant to be included in the final document was limited to his age, ethnicity, sex, marital status, and general career field. His name was changed. Confidentiality of the participant was protected in the same manner as is indicated in individual psychotherapy; under no circumstances was the participant discussed with any individuals other than the researcher's clinical supervisor, his supervision group, and his committee members.

#### Benefits and Risks of Treatment

The advantages the participant could enjoy once he has gained insight into his attachment processes and the way in which this style causes him frustration in the dating appear to outweigh the risk of temporary psychic discomfort. The psychic discomfort may have caused the participant to experience dysthymia, and may have caused increased social withdrawal. However, this condition is a common side-effect of psychotherapy, and is typically temporary, and warrants the risk for : 1) an increased awareness of the causes of his dating problems, 2) the ability to successfully maneuver through the dating process, and 3) an increased potential of becoming involved in a romantic relationship.

It was not anticipated that there were any undue risks other than those commonly associated with insight-oriented therapy, such as periods of frustration, dysthymia, and a temporary increase in distress associated with the problem. No aversive stimuli or deprivations were planned. Participant was not on psychotropic medication for the treatment of depression; if this did happen, medication would have been managed by the participant's psychiatrist. In this event, a release of information would have been signed by the participant so that the researcher could communicate with his psychiatrist, in order to facilitate treatment.

#### Course and Termination of Treatment

This researcher spent 28 sessions with the participant. The researcher opted not to disclose to the participant his DSM-IV diagnosis. This omission was determined based on the apparent ego strength of the participant, the potential adverse therapeutic impact of such a disclosure, and the result of consultation with the researcher's clinical supervisor. There was no need for a debriefing process separate from the termination process commonly associated with psychotherapy. At the end of the study, the participant was

given the option of continuing in therapy. Given his anger regarding the fact that therapy was being recommended to continue, due to his remaining issues and the court mandate, he did not elect to continue with this therapist. He was given the opportunity to have time to be debriefed on the research experience and to process termination, but did not choose this option, for the reason stated previously.

### Clinical Competency

In order to demonstrate clinical competency, a case study of therapy with the participant suspected of having minimal dating issues will be presented. This case study will consist of a write-up of therapy with this participant. The focus of this case study will be on attachment issues and the apparent effect of these issues on the participants' dating success. To further support the competency of the researcher, a video-tape will be presented of a session with the participant, and a transcript of this session will be provided.

### Discussion and Interpretation of Data

This research explores the influence of attachment style and learned helplessness on dating behavior. As well, this research attempts to demonstrate through a case study how attachment style can affect dating success and motivation. The foundational component of this study has been addressed by a comprehensive literature review of current minimal dating theories, a review of attachment theory and its application to romantic relationships, and a review of the theory of learned helplessness. The case presented in this study was analyzed to determine the subject's attachment style, and the way attachment manifest's itself in his dating relationships.

#### CHAPTER 4: CASE DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study is to hypothesize about the relationship between minimal dating and attachment style, framed in cognitive-behavioral terms, and then to relate this hypothesizing to a particular case. The case of Keith, a 35 year old divorced male, is an example of how attachment style causes difficulties in relationships. In Chapter four, the 28 sessions he participated in were described and analyzed to highlight material that

indicated his attachment issues. In this chapter, material relevant to his attachment style, and the manner in which this attachment style affected his relationships, will be examined.

### Attachment Theory Applied to Case Study

#### Formation of Attachment Style

Researchers (Bowlby, 1969, 1982; Ainsworth, 1967, 1974, 1978, 1979, 1985, 1989) hypothesized that attachment styles develop in early childhood, based on the interactions between the primary caregiver and the child. Bowlby (1982) speculated that infants develop mental representations of themselves, their attachment figures, and schemas for their relationships based on the interactions between themselves and their primary caregiver. As noted previously, several researchers (Shaver and Hazan, 1988; Weiss, 1982, 1986; Bartholomew, 1990; Feeney and Noller, 1996, Simpson & Rholes, 1998) have demonstrated how these schemas apply to romantic relationships. From a cognitive-behavioral viewpoint, the development of an insecure attachment style involves the person's formulation of a core belief that they are unlovable, and/or that others are untrustworthy, based on their interactions with their primary caregivers in early infancy. These core-beliefs follow the child into adulthood, unless challenged, and influence the development of a particular attachment style.

According to Bartholomew (1990), a person is considered to have a secure attachment style if they view others as trustworthy and caring, and view themselves as worthy of love. They are considered to have a dismissing attachment style if they view themselves as worthy of love, but view others as untrustworthy and uncaring. A person is considered to have a fearful attachment style if they view others as uncaring and untrustworthy, and

view themselves as unworthy of love. And finally, a person is considered to have a preoccupied attachment style if they view themselves as unworthy of love but view others as trustworthy and caring.

To determine Keith's attachment style, it is necessary to examine his interactions with his primary caregiver during his developmental years. In Keith's situation, his mother appears to be his primary caregiver, as he described himself as closest to his mother during his childhood. He had fond memories of the time they spent together, and described some of these interactions during his time with this therapist. For instance, he remembered his mother teaching him about math by using potatoes to help him count. Further, she was generally more sympathetic than his father, towards him. She listened to him when he told her about his troubles at school, and he felt that she cared for him. In summary, he generally viewed her in a positive manner, and may have initially developed a core belief that other's were trustworthy. Yet, she was present during many of the abusive incidents with his father. She did nothing to stop his father from abusing him, and even used the threat of abuse by the father as a way to control him. He remembers her saying "just wait until your father gets home"; he knew full well this meant that he would be abused. Thus, it seemed that Keith developed a view of his mother as loving, yet untrustworthy, as she permitted the abuse. This view of her, which was probably not fully conscious when he was younger, became more conscious when he was 15. At this age, she married another man who was abusive to him, as well as to her. Keith may have been able to rationalize in his mind how she could not have helped his biological father abusing him, but he probably had more difficulty understanding how his mother could care for him, and yet marry another man who was abusive to him. The major disruption

in his trust in her may have occurred when he told her about the abuse he was suffering from his stepfather, and she was not receptive, and instead defended her new husband. Based on his interactions with his mother, Keith developed a core belief that women were both loving, yet untrustworthy.

Keith's view of women was more positive than his view of men, however. He remembers that his father was quite abusive of him during his childhood. His father used a belt to discipline him, often having him pull down his pants, and sometimes leaving bruises. This abusive behavior severely damaged his relationship with his father, in that he resented him for abusing him, and generally felt angry and distant towards his father. Perhaps Keith became more aware of this rift around age 13, when he ran away from his father in defiance during one of these abusive incidents. Because of the abusiveness of his father, Keith probably formed a core belief that males were powerful, dangerous, controlling, untrustworthy, and uncaring.

Not only did Keith's abuse at home cause him to form his view of others, this abuse also helped to form his view of himself. Based on the abuse he endured, and the conflicted role his mother played in this abuse, Keith probably formed a core belief that he was unworthy of love and caring. Essentially, he came to expect that he would be treated poorly, and believed that this was a result of his generally low self-worth.

While he was being abused at home, Keith was also being abused at school, by his male peers. He remembered being bullied often; one year it happened on a daily basis. He would be chased around the playground, hit, jeered at, and generally made to feel badly about himself. These attacks must have confirmed what he was already learning at home; that he was unworthy of love and caring.

Thus, Keith's attachment style formed as a combination of preoccupied and fearful traits. His core beliefs of others was that they were not trustworthy. His core belief of himself was that he was not worthy of love, essentially that he was unlovable. Based on these beliefs, and the resulting attachment styles, it would be expected that Keith would have low motivation to enter into a romantic relationship, because of his view of women as untrustworthy, but might be somewhat drawn to a relationship by the prospect of being cared for and loved. Keith would have low motivation to form friendships with men, because of his view of them as uncaring and untrustworthy, as well as his apparent concerns that they might attempt to control him. Indeed, he appeared to have a fair amount of anger towards men for this reason, as noted in his displacement of anger and rage onto this therapist in session, as well as his anger towards his judge, both individuals whom he perceived as having control over him.

#### Keith's Attachment Style and His Relationships

The formation of Keith's attachment style had as its etiology the core beliefs he developed in his childhood, based on his interactions with his caregivers, as well as with his peers. As noted previously, Keith developed core beliefs that he was unlovable, and that others could not be trusted. This particular set of core beliefs has been associated with a fearful attachment style (Bartholomew & Kent, 1990). As noted previously, individuals with this particular attachment style will not approach potential dates for fear that they will be rejected. However, they yearn to be in a relationship. Keith's attachment style became quite evident during his high school years. Typically, this is the period of time in which dating becomes a prominent area of focus in the persons' life. For Keith, however, this was not the case. Although he saw women that he was

interested in dating during his adolescence, he did not approach them, because he was not sure he could trust them, and feared rejection. However, he wanted to date, as he was drawn to the prospect of being cared for. Thus, he went through high school unhappy with his social life, but unwilling to take the risk of asking a woman for a date. When he finally met a woman, it was through her efforts, not his. He and his future wife were both on a bus, and he noticed that she kept glancing at him. He glanced back, and they smiled at each other. She slipped him a note as she was getting off, telling him that she thought he was very handsome. Even with this strong indication of interest, he needed several weeks of consistent interest on her part before he finally asked her for a date. He was obviously very concerned that he would be rejected, and the fact that he was getting strong cues of interest did not allay these fears for some time. He was probably skeptical of her interest, and confused because it contradicted his core belief that he was unworthy.

Once they began dating, he began to feel ambivalent about the relationship. As he became more intimate with her and saw that she was an imperfect person, he probably began to question the worth of her attraction to him. He probably began to devalue her, and thus devalued her conviction that he was desirable. More than likely, he also devalued her. He needed new confirmation from another woman that he was desirable. He became ambivalent about being in the relationship, probably wanting to date other women to confirm his desirability. He expressed this ambivalence to her on numerous occasions. She was probably hurt and angered by his constant ambivalence, and ended the relationship in disgust. Once she ended the relationship, he realized that she was actually an attractive, desirable individual, and realized what he had lost. He probably felt lost, and worthless. This feeling of loss and devaluation was probably a very painful

reminder for him of his sense of worthlessness. At this point, he began to pursue her.

Keith's dogged pursuit was a curious switch from his former ambivalence. Keith pursued her obsessively, to the point that she placed a restraining order on him. The fact that she felt so strongly about preventing him from seeing her must have been hard for him, that someone who had once loved him was now rejecting him. In his mind, his partner violated his trust, just as his mother had. What he did not realize was that he forced this outcome through his ambivalence.

Keith's attachment style was very evident in the dynamics of this relationship. His fearful traits were evident in his reluctance to enter into the relationship, his avoidance of real intimacy, and his frequent thoughts about leaving. His preoccupied traits were evident in his continuing the relationship for fear of being alone, and highly evident in his dogged pursuit of her once she decided to leave.

Once Keith's relationship with his wife ended, he apparently transferred his attachment needs to his daughter. He probably realized that he could get much of his needs for love and caring met through his daughter, as she undoubtedly was quite enamored with him. He apparently formed an intense connection with her, to the point that his ex-wife began to be concerned that he was engaged in foul play with her. Apparently, after viewing his affections with their daughter on one occasion she made allegations that he "wet kissed" her. Keith lost unsupervised visitation rights to his daughter and was relegated to weekly two hour supervised visits. This change was upsetting to him, partially because he wanted to be part of her life, as her father. However, it was probably also upsetting to him because he had lost his source of unconditional love and affection. The intense sense of loss he must have felt would

explain why he was not satisfied with the court's progress in returning visitation rights to him, and felt he had to resort to TRO violations.

Around this time, Keith became involved with another woman, and his motivation to pursue visitation rights with his daughter apparently decreased. This decreased motivation serves to give credence to the hypothesis that his motivation to be with his daughter was at least partially influenced by his attachment needs. With an alternate source of attachment available, he was able to control his impulses to see his daughter against court orders, and thus did not violate any TRO's during this time.

Keith's attachment style in this relationship seemed more preoccupied than fearful. He quickly became intimate with this partner, consistent with a preoccupied attachment style (Hazan & Shaver, 1988). Further, he remained in the relationship for some time, despite being unhappy with it, probably because he did not feel himself worthy of a more satisfying relationship. Some fearful traits were evident in the manner in which he ended the relationship. He appeared to be more emotionally detached at the end of this relationship, not pursuing her after it was over, and not seeming to ruminate on the loss of a relationship.

During the course of his therapy with this therapist, Keith dated several individuals. He again demonstrated his combination of fearful and preoccupied attachment styles. With the first individual, he quickly became intensely interested in her, and described his anticipation of the date and the possibility of a long-term relationship. This response is consistent with Bartholomew and Kent's (1990) description of a preoccupied attachment style, where he shows an inclination to quickly merge with the other. However, he quickly became disenchanted with her. Keith felt that he had to compromise his tastes to

go on the date. He resented the fact that she prevented them from talking before the movie by arriving late. More importantly, she changed three separate things in their plans; she changed the movie they were going to see, she changed the time, and then she arrived late. These changes raised his anxiety level; he mentioned that he began to be concerned that she was going to not show up for the date. Her inconsistency probably activated his issues with trust in women. However, as evidence of his low self-worth, he did not mention any of this to her, for fear that she would devalue his concerns. He defensively decided that she was not for him, and did not pursue another date with her. Here is evidence for a fearful attachment style, where he is emotionally disengaged and avoidant of closeness.

His second attempt at a relationship came after several months in therapy. A woman at work had indicated interest, and he had followed up on her interest by asking her out. They began to see each other daily almost immediately. Keith quickly attached himself to her. They spent all of their time together. Further, he began to refer to them as a couple; he used the pronoun 'we' in session numerous times. His view of her was quite positive; he felt she was an attractive mate. Further, he compared himself to her, and found himself lacking: he didn't make enough money, and was in a position at work not in keeping with his age. Thus he had a positive view of her as a worthwhile individual, and a negative view of himself as unworthy and unlovable, suggesting that he had a preoccupied attachment style with her. Individuals with a preoccupied attachment style tend to move quickly towards commitment (Hazan & Shaver, 1988), perhaps because it helps to allay their fears that they will be abandoned. Keith was hypervigilant in the relationship. He noticed every detail that might suggest that there were problems in the

relationship. He also pointed out that she didn't like the same food as him, the same music, or the same movies. Keith worried when she told him that her father did not approve of their relationship.

He began to examine himself to determine what improvements he could make in himself to increase his desirability. For instance, he looked into getting into a more lucrative career. When he had problems performing sexually, he became worried that she would leave him for this reason, and went to the extreme of getting a prescription to help him maintain an erection. Alas, the relationship faltered nonetheless, as her interest waned. He attempted to maintain the relationship, calling her, trying to get her to talk, threatening to end the relationship. His manipulative actions were another characteristic of the individual with a preoccupied attachment style; their anxiety about being abandoned causes them to go to any extreme to maintain the relationship. Nonetheless, the relationship ended.

Keith's approach to this situation was more adaptive than in the past, in that he did not quickly sabotage the relationship, although he wanted to. It seemed that he had moved away from his fearful attachment style tendencies, and adopted the preoccupied attachment style of refusing to let go of the relationship despite clear evidence that it was time. This apparently was progress in thinking that other's could not be trusted (fearful style) to thinking that other's were worthy of effort (preoccupied style). Nonetheless, this relationship ended, undoubtedly further convincing him of the utility of a fearful attachment style.

### Formation of Learned Helplessness and Minimal Dating

One of the main premise's of this case study is that when an individual has repeated failures in dating relationships without insight into the causes of the failures, he develops a form of learned helplessness. Peterson, Maier, and Seligman (1993) outlined three criteria to determine if learned helplessness exists. First, the person must exhibit inappropriate passivity. Although he could achieve his goal if they tried, he no longer tries due to his cognition's that he will fail. Keith's dating activity certainly seems to be minimal. During his time with this therapist (nearly eight months), Keith dated two women. For several years before this time, he had had no dates. Keith mentioned that he had wanted to date, but was unable to approach any women for fear of rejection. This certainly seems to be inappropriately passive, as the only factor limiting his success was his thoughts.

Peterson's, et al (1993) second criteria was that learned helplessness must be preceded by an event which the individual is convinced is uncontrollable, typically because they have not been able to control this event many times in the past. Keith did not understand why he did not have success in dating. In general, he did not understand how to go about beginning a relationship. His few attempts were halting and crude. Because of his lack of understanding, Keith viewed dating as an enigma that he could not control. He mentioned having cognition's that the situation was 'hopeless', as well as feeling as if he was a 'buffoon' because he could not have success in dating. This appears to meet Peterson et al's (1993) criteria of perceived uncontrollability.

Peterson, et al (1993) give the third criteria as consisting of the individual's conviction that they will be equally ineffective in the future. In the dating arena, the

individual must generalize from one failure to assuming that they will always fail. Keith mentioned that he did not ask women for dates because he believed he would be rejected. He expressed hopelessness at being able to have success in dating women he was attracted to in the future, and he no longer put much effort into dating. Thus, it appeared at the start of Keith's work with this therapist that he had developed a minimal dating profile based on a case of learned helplessness due to his attachment style.

#### Keith's Attachment Style and His Relationship With This Therapist

As noted previously, Keith had a fairly negative view of relationships with males, and indeed, apparently had never had a close friendship with a male. The attitude he developed towards this therapist was consistent with his attachment style towards male figures. As noted previously, he viewed males as both uncaring, controlling, and untrustworthy. Thus, it was not much of a surprise when he formed a negative perception of this therapist.

#### Keith's View of This Therapist

Keith's viewed himself as a competitor with this therapist. In a session approximately half-way through our working relationship, he mentioned that this therapist was probably an accomplished dater. Further, he told this therapist that he was ashamed of his lack of prowess because it must look so bad in comparison to the skill of this therapist. It appeared that he was reacting to this therapist as he had to his peers during his adolescence. He had apparently viewed his peers as more accomplished than he in the dating arena. Keith had also developed mistrust of his peers, due to their poor treatment of him. Thus, his viewing this therapist as a competitor also indicated that he probably distrusted this therapist, and worried about being teased and hurt by this therapist.

Keith's manner of coping with such fears in the past had been to avoid associating with males, as in not developing any close male friendships. Thus, it would be expected that he would take the same approach with this therapist. Indeed, he did remain guarded and defensive, and never allowed himself to fully trust this therapist.

In a later session, Keith evidenced some tendency to view this therapist as a parent. He mentioned that he had trouble questioning this therapist, because he felt that if he questioned an authority figure, there would be repercussions. Those repercussions in the past had been that he would be beaten. From Keith's history, this therapist knew that he had reacted with defiance and rebellion with the last person he had seen as abusive, that being his father. Further, he had discussed his feelings about the judge who had prevented him from having unsupervised visitation with his daughter. He had been very angry at this person, and discussed ways of retaliating for the perceived injustice he felt had been served him. Thus, it seemed, in retrospect, that it was probably only a matter of time before he would begin to act defiant and rebellious towards this therapist. Indeed, he did do this. Keith became angry at this therapist because he felt controlled. He resented this therapist because he would not recommend that he be allowed to discontinue therapy. He subsequently discontinued therapy without warning, and refused to come again despite the impact he knew this would have on his court case.

#### This Therapist's Issues With Keith

This therapist had several issues with Keith. On the one hand, this therapist could relate to Keith's past, including the marginalization he endured as an adolescent, and his difficulties in dating, as he had been through a similar experience. Accordingly, this therapist's approach to Keith initially involved feelings of comradery and empathy. It

was difficult for this therapist to imagine that Keith did not see this, and instead viewed him as a competitor, and later as an authority figure. This disparity between what this therapist felt and what Keith saw was a source of consternation for this therapist.

Undaunted, this therapist continued to attempt to project the sense of empathy and comradery he felt. However, Keith continued to view this therapist as a competitor and an authority figure.

Towards the conclusion of treatment, Keith began to act more hostile towards this therapist. He openly belittled his need for therapy, and once again questioned the court's judgement in forcing him to get therapy. This therapist did not agree with his assessment of his needs, and confronted him regarding his opinion of his need for therapy. Keith also expressed anger that this therapist had not told him that therapy would last so long. In the end, this therapist did begin to fit the role that Keith had ascribed for him, that of an untrustworthy and controlling authority figure.

When he terminated suddenly, this therapist was upset at him for doing something that seemed so illogical and counterproductive. Being aware that his termination had a strong effect, this therapist processed the termination at some length with his supervisor prior to writing a letter to the court informing them of Keith's termination. In retrospect, it would have been helpful for this therapist to address Keith's comments regarding this therapist being the authority figure. There appeared to be a battle for control regarding the length of therapy, and this was not dealt with. It may have helped to give him a choice in terminating or not, and simply offered to write him a letter which would reflect what progress he had made to that point.

### Alternate Approaches To This Case, and Recommendations

While progress was made in therapy in regards to highlighting Keith's attachment style, and the possible roots in his childhood, there was much more work to be done in this area. With the more clear perspective afforded this therapist by hindsight and further analysis, it seems that a focus on several key issues could have increased his ability to benefit from therapy, and possibly remain until his treatment was completed.

J. Beck (1995), describes a cognitive-behavioral technique designed to identify core beliefs. The client is encouraged to chose a situation in with they felt emotional distress. First, they are asked to identify the emotions they felt in this situation. They are then helped to identify the *automatic thought(s)* that underlie this emotion, thoughts that they may not be completely conscious of, yet caused them to feel the way they did. From this thought, the client is encouraged to identify the more generalized, less conscious core thought, or *core belief*, that is causing the automatic thoughts experienced. From this, the client is encouraged to speculate on what the *intermediate belief* formed from the interaction between their *core belief's* and the resulting *automatic thoughts*. For instance, an individual who is criticized for their performance at a task might feel angry, identify an *automatic thought* that they are they have failed, and a *core belief* that they are worthless. From this, they might develop an *intermediate belief* that they will not be able to be successful, no matter how hard they try.

In hindsight, Keith's attachment style and related dating difficulties, his maladaptive approach to his daughter and ex-wife, and his rebelliousness towards the court seemed to be related to his *core belief* that he is worthless, as well as his *core belief* that other's could not be trusted. A particularly useful approach would have been to have him choose

situations in this area that were a source of consternation for him, and identify his emotions in these situations. From these emotions, *automatic thoughts* could be elicited. From this point, the possibility could be explored with him that he had the *core belief* that he was worthless, as well as the *core belief* that others could not be trusted. From this, it may have been possible to arrive at the *intermediate belief* that he was not desirable, and would be rejected in dating. From this point, it may have been possible to help him to see that his difficulty with interpersonal relationships, and particularly with dating relationships, was a result of his low self-worth.

With Keith's insight into the causes of his dating difficulties, as well as his difficulties in interpersonal relationships in general, it would be possible to motivate him to work on increasing his self-worth. In this regards, therapy could focus on helping him to contradict his negative *automatic thoughts* with more positive ones, and thus slowly increase his sense of self-worth. This, in turn, might have the effect of changing his attachment style, improving his success in interpersonal relationships, and decreasing his maladaptive dependency on his daughter. Certainly this is a simplified description of the manner of treating Keith, though does outline the basic aspects of his proposed therapy.

Keith terminated therapy prematurely, because he blamed this therapist for his frustration and anger. There is no doubt that he needs to continue in treatment. The main goals of further treatment should be to increase his insight into his impulsivity, challenge his *core belief* that he is worthless and unlovable, as well as his *core belief* that others are untrustworthy, and therefore increase his positive self-image. As Keith's self-worth increases, he will not need others to make him feel that he is worthwhile. As such, he will be less needy and dependent in these relationships. He should become much more

successful in relationships, as a result. Because of this, with his emotional needs being met in adult relationships, he may have a more adaptive relationship with his daughter.

Notwithstanding the fact that much of Keith's problems had at their core his low self-esteem and lack of trust of others, he also seemed to be a rather impulsive individual. Therefore, treatment should also continue to focus on this issue. Keith was able to identify the precursors to his impulsivity: anger, loneliness and depression. However, he did not acknowledge his responsibility for managing these emotions. He viewed his emotions as other people's fault. He blamed his ex-wife and the courts for making him angry, lonely, and depressed, by taking away his daughter. He believed that if others would stop making him angry, lonely, and depressed, he would not need to be impulsive. In order for Keith to gain more control over his impulsivity, he would need to take responsibility for his emotions, and his subsequent actions. Once he had completed this task, it would be possible for him to decide how he will handle each situation, and his impulsivity should decrease. The main block to his achieving this goal was his excessive denial. Apparently his *core belief* that he was unworthy and unlovable had made him quite vulnerable to criticism. The denial that he exhibited was probably a self-protective measure, designed to prevent further damage to his already bruised and fragile ego. Undoubtedly the work on his self-esteem already recommended would have been to go to great lengths to reinforce his fragile ego, thus helping him to feel more positively about himself, and more capable of engaging in introspection and growth.

#### Summary

This main purpose of this study was to suggest an alternative conceptualization for the etiology of minimal dating. Prior to this study, the primary conceptualization had been

that individuals developed minimal dating as a result of dating skills deficits, cognitive distortions regarding their abilities, anxiety regarding approaching potential partners, or unattractiveness. This study proposed that individuals develop dating problems due to having an insecure attachment style. The concept of attachment was originally developed by Bowlby (1969, 1982), and further delineated by Ainsworth (1967, 1974, 1978, 1979, 1985, 1989). Essentially, it was felt that individuals developed a particular attachment style based on their interactions with their primary caregiver, and this attachment style informed their relationships in later life. Several decades later, other researchers carried this hypothesis a step further, suggesting that these attachment styles were utilized in romantic relationships (Shaver and Hazan, 1988; Weiss, 1982, 1986; Feeney and Noller, 1996, Simpson & Rholes, 1998). Specifically, it was felt that an insecure attachment style affected the nature of the relationship with a romantic partner. Bartholomew (1990) further explained the types of attachment styles, and suggested that insecure attachment styles were predicated on ones view of self, as well as ones view of others. The three insecure attachment styles were the Preoccupied attachment style, the Fearful attachment style, and the Dismissing attachment style. Preoccupied and Dismissing individuals both had a positive view of others, but the Preoccupied individual had a negative view of themselves. The Fearful individual had negative views of themselves and others.

In this study, it was proposed that the early interactions with primary caregivers cause the formation of *core beliefs*, which in turn affect their image of themselves, and thus their expectations of their success in dating situations. Therefore, they develop an insecure attachment style. Individuals with an insecure attachment style, mostly those with a preoccupied or fearful attachment style, exhibit minimal dating because they have

repeated failures in relationships due to their attachment style. These repeated failures are felt to eventually cause the individual to have a form of learned helplessness (Abramson, et al., 1978; Peterson, et al., 1993). Essentially, they interpret their repeated failures as being the result of something out of their control, feel that they would experience failure every time they attempted to begin dating, and therefore make a choice to no longer try.

In this study, Keith, a 35 year-old divorced Caucasian male was studied in order to further elucidate the enriched conceptualization of minimal dating with an actual case of minimal dating. Keith did indeed show signs of minimal dating. An examination of his childhood revealed that due to the negative interactions between himself and his parents, he had formed a *core belief* of himself as unlovable, a *core belief* of females as loving and yet untrustworthy, and a *core belief* of males of uncaring and untrustworthy. From these *core beliefs*, it is speculated that Keith developed an attachment style comprised of preoccupied and fearful traits. Specifically, he avoided friendships with males due to his belief that they were untrustworthy and uncaring. Because he viewed females as potentially loving, he had some interest in a relationship with one, but had some trepidation due to his belief that they were untrustworthy.

In the relationships that he had with women, he acted based on the assumptions of his attachment style. In his first relationship, he avoided becoming overly intimate or dependent on his partner, which is a trait of a fearful attachment style. On the other hand, he attempted to keep the relationship together at all costs, which is a trait of a preoccupied attachment style. In subsequent relationships, he showed the same inclination to avoid real intimacy, while putting a great deal of energy into preserving the relationship. Nonetheless, the few relationships he had he viewed as failures, and his

motivation to be in a relationship declined to the point that he went through long periods of time with no dates, and showed little inclination to pursue a partner.

In therapy, Keith acted on his attachment beliefs that men would be untrustworthy and uncaring, and prevented himself from becoming too close or dependent on this therapist. He reacted to this therapist both as a competitor, and as an authority figure. He learned little about his attachment style, and generally resisted gaining insight into his issues. He ended therapy prematurely, convinced that this therapist was attempting to control him and prevent him from reaching his goal of regaining visitation rights to his daughter.

#### Recommendation for Further Research

This study was theoretical in design. As such, the results obtained in this study cannot be generalized to other, perhaps similar cases. In order for generalization to be permissible, an empirical study must be completed on this topic. One possible study would be to administer an attachment questionnaire to children to determine their attachment style, and then follow these children in a longitudinal study until adulthood, to determine if this attachment style remains the same. Further, another study would be to determine how strong the connection is between attachment style and success in dating. For instance, a study could be designed in which a group of individuals with a secure attachment style are compared to a group of individuals with a preoccupied attachment style, in their success in initiating a relationship, or perhaps in the longevity of the relationship, or even in the quality of the relationship. This author hypothesizes that individuals with a secure attachment style will have significantly greater success, will have relationships that last significantly longer, and will report greater satisfaction in relationships. Yet another study would be one comparing a dating skills intervention

with one designed based on the premise of this study. Certainly there is much to be learned in this area.

**Appendix A:**

**CONSENT AGREEMENT**

**A HISTORICAL CASE STUDY OF MINIMAL DATING AS IT RELATES TO  
ATTACHMENT STYLE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF LEARNED  
HELPLESSNESS**

You are being asked to participate in a research study. However, before you give consent to be a volunteer, we want you to read the following and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure that you understand what your participation will involve.

## **Investigator**

Jon M. Gransee, M.A.,  
Charlotte Houston, Ph.D.,

## **Purpose of Research**

1. The purpose of this study is to provide an alternate conceptualization of the cause of minimal dating. Minimal dating is defined as dating that is significantly below the number of dates the average individual goes on in a month. The method of study will be a literature review and synthesis of attachment theory and learned helplessness. The original difficulty in dating interactions (attachment theory) progresses to eventual minimal dating as the individual loses hope of being able to influence their success in dating (learned helplessness).

If these individuals learn what caused them to have repeated dating failure, it seems likely that their motivation to initiate change will increase, and they should be more likely to effect changes in how they approach and relate to the opposite sex. Other more basic concepts such as social skills training and self-presentation will still need to be addressed in treatment, but more properly as an adjunct to treatment. Learning refined skills will help them to develop a more positive sense of self as loveable, and a more positive view of others as trustworthy and caring.

2. Research in this area has typically focused on observable behaviors which may influence a dating individuals success. For instance, researchers have examined how an individual approaches a potential date, what they say, how they say it, how long they stay in the conversation, how they present themselves physically, and what type of statements they make to themselves about what they are doing. No researcher has examined how the individual's attachment style might influence their success. Thus, there are no interventions designed to increase awareness of attachment style and it's effects on dating success. In general, this area is poorly understood. This research study is intended to fill in this gap in the literature with a thoughtful examination of attachment style and the effects on dating success.

### **DURATION OF PARTICIPATION IN THE RESEARCH AND NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS TO PARTICIPATE**

You will be involved in this study for a period of up to four sessions. A total of one participant will be involved in this study.

### **PROCEDURES TO BE FOLLOWED DURING THE RESEARCH**

If you agree to participate in this research, you will first be given a detailed step by step process. You will be informed of any significant new findings developed during the course of the research.

### **EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURES**

The treatment and procedures are the kind that would be standard psychological practice. The experimental part is that we are collecting the information and analyzing it based on attachment theory.

### **RISKS**

The risk of harm anticipated in this experiment is not greater than that ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine psychological examinations or tests.

### **BENEFITS OF THE RESEARCH**

You may benefit from this research by having a greater understanding of your attachment style and it's effects on your dating success.

### **ALTERNATIVES TO THIS RESEARCH**

If you choose not to participate in this research, the alternative procedures/treatments available for you are:

1. Attending a dating skills group
2. Reading books on this subject

However, there is no clear evidence that other treatment programs will provide an increased chance of solving your problem. An additional alternative is no further therapy, which would probably result in continued worsening of your problem.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

You have a right to privacy, and all information identifying you will remain confidential, unless otherwise required by law. The results of this study along with the psychological measures mentioned may be published in scientific journals or be presented at psychological meetings as long as you are not identified and cannot be reasonably identified from it.

### **PSYCHOLOGICAL TREATMENT**

If you need psychological treatment or have a research-related problem while participating in this study, you must contact the researcher at 449-8703. Should you have any questions about the research or any additional concerns, please contact Jon Gransee at 449-8703 during normal business hours.

While you are a subject in this study, you must agree to follow the instructions of the research and to call your research investigator immediately if you become distressed or experience any unusual symptoms.

While enrolled in this study, you should not participate in any other research project. This is for your protection against any possible adverse effects caused by the interaction of multiple study interventions.

Are you currently involved in any research projects at this time?

\_\_\_\_\_ YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO

### **SUBJECT COST / COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION**

There will be no charge other than that which you currently pay for individual sessions. You will not be compensated in any way for your participation.

### **SUBJECT RIGHTS AND RESEARCH WITHDRAWAL**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw once the study has started. It may be necessary in the event of early withdrawal for you to follow specific procedures set by your therapist. In either case, you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

We have tried to explain all the important details about the study to you. If you have any questions that are not answered here, your study investigator will be happy to give you more information.

If you have any questions about your rights as a subject in a research study, please contact:

Karen Martin, IRB Coordinator

Institutional Review Board  
CSPP-SD  
(619) 623-2777 x351

This research has been reviewed by the California School of Professional Psychology Institutional Review Board for protection of the rights of human participants in research studies, in accordance with National Institute of Health/Food and Drug Administration regulations.

**SIGNATURE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

My signature below indicates that I have read the information and I have had a chance to ask questions to help me understand what my participation will involve. I agree to participate in the study until I decide otherwise. I acknowledge having received a copy of this agreement and a copy of the Subject's Bill of Rights. I have been told that by signing this consent form I am not giving up any of my legal rights.

SIGNATURE OF SUBJECT \_\_\_\_\_ AGE \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE OF  
WITNESS \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix B: Audio/Video-taping Consent Form****CALIFORNIA SCHOOL OF PROFESSIONAL PSYCHOLOGY****SAN DIEGO CAMPUS****CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN AUDIO/VIDEO-TAPE PROGRAMS**

It has been explained to me that as part of the psychotherapeutic program at Professional Community Services, audio/video-taping is frequently used for the purposes of enhancing psychotherapy and for educational purposes through discussions and written materials. I

understand that I have already agreed to being taped in session, and am now giving permission for these tapes to be utilized for the research project my therapist (Jon Gransee) is conducting. I have been advised that the tapes will be seen/heard only by other doctoral students and supervising faculty members who are associated with Professional Community Services and with the clinical psychology training program at CSPP-San Diego.

I hereby consent to participate in such programs, and for my audio tapes to be utilized for such purposes. I understand that such audio tapes and associated case notes will be held in strict confidence and will be used only for purposes of supervision and training. I further understand that such audio-tapes and any written transcripts from the tapes will be destroyed when they are no longer of value for my psychotherapy and/or staff educational purposes. Other written documents might not be destroyed. Such documents will not include my name and will not include any identifying information. Age, ethnicity, background and other information will be changed so that no one could know who the document refers to.

My signature indicates that I have read and agreed to the above:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Witness: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

This consent is valid for one year from the date of signature but is subject to revocation at any time upon written request.

Primary Therapist/Evaluator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Supervisor: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

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