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Anxious Attachment, Silencing of the Self, and Relationship Satisfaction

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Introduction
Defining Anxious Attachment
• Anxiously attached individuals are constantly troubled and concerned about the reliability and accountability of their romantic partner (Joel, Macdonald, & Shimotomai, 2011).

Defining Silencing of the Self
• In order to maintain a relationship without arguments, individuals have been found to stop expressing and forgetting their feelings of dissatisfaction (Whiffen, Foot, & Thompson, 2007).

Associations between Anxious Attachment, Silencing of the Self, and Relationship Satisfaction
• Several studies have indicated anxious attachment is responsible for low felt security, which occurs when these individuals are insecure about losing acceptance from their partner (Joel, Macdonald, & Shimotomai, 2011; Shaver, Schachner, & Mikulincer, 2005; Tucker & Anders, 1999).
• In fact, as a product of their high anxiety levels, anxiously attached individuals are more prone to emotional highs and lows, which can predict greater conflict severity and relationship dissatisfaction (Campbell, Simpson, Boldry, & Kashy, 2005).
• Individuals can strive to create stability in their relationship resulting in silencing of the self, which actually produces negative effects on relationship satisfaction (Jack & Dill, 1992).
• Women strive to feel stable in their relationships, and have been found to suppress any feelings that may negatively affect their relationship (Jack & Dill, 1992).
• One explanation as to why men may silence themselves is that they may not know how to communicate their emotions in a relationship (Gratch & Bassett, 1992; Doyle, 1983; Goldberg, 1976; O’Neil, 1982; Rabinowitz & Cochran, 1994).
• Research shows that anxious attachment and silencing of the self are strongly related (Dixon, Goodnight, Ridings, & Gordon, 2011).

Current Study
• Based on previous research, we hypothesized that Silencing of the Self mediates the relationship between Anxious Attachment and Relationship Satisfaction.
• More specifically, we predicted that higher levels of Anxious Attachment lead to increased Silencing of the Self, resulting in lower Relationship Satisfaction.

Participants/Procedures
• Participants were college students (N = 209) from a private, midwestern university. Our sample includes 99 females and 110 males. Participants ranged in age from 18-51 years old (M = 19.32, SD = 2.49), were primarily Caucasian (85%). They completed self-report questionnaires that measured Anxious Attachment, Silencing of the Self, Relationship Satisfaction.

Results
• The results of our study proved to be consistent with our hypothesis.
• We discovered that anxious attachment is indirectly linked to relationship satisfaction through silencing of the self.
• The bootstrapping method was used in the meditational model shown below

Discussion/Limitations/Future Directions
• From these results we can conclude that higher levels of anxious attachment lead to increased silencing of the self, ultimately producing lower levels of relationship satisfaction.
• Some clinical implications of this study include: assisting marriage and family counselors in understanding how they can help their clients improve their relationships by decreasing high levels of silencing of the self.
• Although this study produced significant results, our population is limited because we only used college-age participants. Had we incorporated married couples into our study, we might have produced greater links between the constructs.
• Some limitations of our study include that all measures were self-report. Additionally, because of the restricted demographic characteristics of the sample, the results cannot be generalized to a wider population.
• Another limitation of our study is this is a cross-sectional study. As opposed to a longitudinal study which measures participants over time, this study was conducted at one time in our participant’s lives.

Measures
1. Brief Biographical Data Form. This form asks for basic demographic information necessary to provide a description of the study’s sample (e.g., current age, education level, race.)
2. Experiences in Close Relationships Revised (ECR-R; Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000). This 36 item scale was used to measure attachment anxiety and avoidance, that participants experience toward their romantic partner.
3. The Silencing of the Self Scale (Jack & Dill, 1992). This is a scale which is designed to measure the degree of intimacy between romantic partners. The scale is divided into four independent factors: silencing of the self, externalized self-perception, care as self-sacrifice, and divided self. Cronbach’s alpha for this sample was .80
4. The Relationship Assessment Scale (Hendrick, 1998). This seven item scale measures the amount of satisfaction participants experience in their romantic relationship. In this study participants are measured on a 5 point likert scale with separate verbal labels for each item. In this scale higher scores indicate greater relationship satisfaction. Cronbach’s alpha for this sample was .73