**Attachment Anxiety: Unselective, Unpopular and Unattractive**

Post-Doctoral Fellow, Columbia University
M. Joy McClure

A large body of literature has detailed the ways in which attachment anxiety is detrimental to the development and maintenance of ongoing relationships. However, much less attention has been paid to how it affects relationship initiation. The present research examined the behaviour and outcomes associated with attachment anxiety during initial interactions in the field and in the lab.

Using a speed-dating paradigm, I found that attachment anxiety was associated with relationship initiation behaviour—namely, being unselective— and outcomes—being unpopular with potential partners. This combination resulted in more anxious speed-daters having more “false alarms” in the parlance of signal detection theory; essentially, anxiety led to maximizing the experience of rejection. Following on these findings, I discovered that although more anxiously
attached people were not any less attractive as rated by research assistant observers on the night of the speed-dating event, they were less attractive to the potential partners met during speed-dated. Contrary to the general tendency for people to become more attractive as we become more familiar with them, which we replicated, anxiety predicted a decline in attractiveness. I was able to replicate this finding in a laboratory study in which participants were videotaped interacting with an attractive, friendly, ostensibly single preferred-sex confederate and rated for attractiveness repeatedly by observers. Overall, this research suggests that attachment anxiety undermines relationship initiation opportunities.