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Attachment avoidance predicts limited and selective sharing of personal events in close relationships

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Abstract

Communicating personal experiences is crucial for fostering close relationships, but people can be reluctant to self-disclose. The current research assessed the extent to which relationship-specific (RS) and global attachment avoidance limit self-disclosure of personal events in close relationships. Critically, we also identified the types of personal events that people will selectively share in relationships characterized by higher attachment avoidance. Participants ($N = 609$ in the aggregated sample) reported whether they shared up to four positive and four negative events that happened to them recently with up to eight close network-members. We found that a one scale-point increase in RS or global attachment avoidance (7-point scales) predicted a 68% decrease or a 28% decrease in the odds of sharing, respectively. Nevertheless, people in more avoidant relationships did share personal events selectively: they uniquely prioritized sharing positive events, events that conveyed personal competence, and events that avoided vulnerability. Our findings shed light on the

Statement of Relevance: Self-disclosure is a prerequisite for deriving benefits from social support and is an integral aspect of cultivating relational intimacy. This study identified the contexts in which people in more avoidant relationships, characterized by their emotional distancing and excessive self-reliance, are willing to self-disclose. The selective sharing strategy we identified has implications for how people can obtain social support and foster deep emotional connections in diverse relationships.

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underlying factors contributing to the low likelihood of sharing personal experiences in more avoidant relationships and offer insights for future intervention work.

KEYWORDS

adult attachment, attachment avoidance, competence, self-disclosure, vulnerability

If you received an exciting job offer, who (if anyone) would you tell? In the event of an upsetting job loss, who (if anyone) would you confide in? Sharing positive and negative personal events is common and provides personal and relational benefits (e.g., Gable et al., 2012). For instance, sharing personal "wins" provides an opportunity for capitalization (the amplification of positive experiences; Gable et al., 2012), whereas sharing personal disappointments provides an opportunity for social support receipt (the buffering of negative experiences; Collins & Feeney, 2000). Sharing personal experiences is also a precondition for developing and maintaining closeness and it, therefore, contributes to a relationship's quality and persistence (Laurenceau et al., 2005). Although personal sharing is a critical component of successful relationships, people vary in their willingness to share personal events in general and in their willingness to share in particular relationships (e.g., Carr & Wilder, 2016). Attachment avoidance, a form of attachment insecurity characterized by emotional distancing and excessive self-reliance, is one critical factor that interrupts sharing and, therefore, prevents capitalization and support receipt (e.g., Collins & Feeney, 2000; Simpson et al., 1992). The current work examines how attachment avoidance is related to sharing personal events and when (for what types of events) attachment avoidance predicts sharing decisions to a greater or lesser extent. This investigation can help to explain why attachment avoidance impedes sharing and can inform acceptable avenues for increasing sharing amid high attachment avoidance.

1 | BRIEF OVERVIEW OF ATTACHMENT ORIENTATION

Individual differences in attachment shape perceptions and behaviors in close relationships, including familial relationships, romantic relationships, and friendships. *Global* or trait attachment orientation refers to a person's overall beliefs, expectations, and behavioral patterns across these intimate relationships, whereas *relationship-specific* (RS) attachment describes a person's attachment orientation toward one specific attachment figure (e.g., a romantic partner, a mother; Dugan et al., 2022; Overall et al., 2003). Though both global and RS attachment are important predictors of relationship behaviors and experiences, RS attachment more precisely predicts relationship outcomes in one specific relationship or relationship domain (e.g., romantic relationships; Cozzarelli et al., 2000; Klohnen et al., 2005).

Both global and RS attachment orientation are defined by two attachment dimensions—attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety (Fraley et al., 2011). Attachment avoidance (the focus of the current investigation) is characterized by discomfort with closeness, low trust in others, emotional distancing, and ardent independence and self-reliance (Fraley & Shaver, 2000; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Attachment anxiety is instead characterized by excessive

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dependence, a negative self-view, chronic worries about being abandoned, and hyperactivating strategies to maintain connections (Fraley & Shaver, 2000; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016).

Based on these two dimensions, individuals (in the case of global attachment) or particular relationships (in the case of RS attachment) can be classified into four styles or profiles: avoidant attachment, anxious attachment, secure attachment, and fearful attachment (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). The avoidant and anxious attachment profiles represent people (or specific relationships) that are characterized by high levels of one form of attachment insecurity and low or absent levels of the other form of insecurity, resulting in cognitive and behavioral patterns in line with the dimension definitions described above. The secure attachment profile instead describes people (or specific relationships) with low attachment avoidance and anxiety: those who generally or in a particular relationship believe themselves to be deserving of love, expect others to be available and responsive, and are able to connect with and depend on others (Bowlby, 1973; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Finally, the fearful attachment profile describes people (or specific relationships) with high levels of both insecure attachment dimensions. It is characterized by a strong desire for closeness and a simultaneous fear of rejection, resulting in contradictory proximity-seeking and distancing strategies (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Simpson & Rholes, 2002).

2 | ATTACHMENT AVOIDANCE AND SELECTIVE SHARING OF PERSONAL EVENTS

It is unsurprising that attachment avoidance is the dimension consistently associated with personal self-disclosure since attachment avoidance, by definition, describes a relational strategy of emotional distancing and self-reliance (Fraley et al., 2011; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). According to the revelation risk model (RRM; T. Afifi & Steuber, 2009), people make decisions about whether to disclose based on the perceived risks of disclosure; attachment avoidance may also amplify the perceived risks of sharing because of expectations of others' unresponsiveness. Indeed, people with high global attachment avoidance and those classified as avoidantly attached report less self-disclosure on dispositional measures and in daily life, and they demonstrate less self-disclosure in laboratory interactions (e.g., Bradford et al., 2002; Collins & Feeney, 2000; Mikulincer & Nachshon, 1991; Stanton et al., 2017; Tan et al., 2012). Relationships become and remain close precisely because a person shares something personal and perceives a responsive reaction (Laurenceau et al., 2005; Reis & Shaver, 1988). And yet, attachment avoidance does not entirely prevent people from forming and maintaining close relationships, suggesting that people high in attachment avoidance (or in avoidant relationships) may use a selective sharing strategy that allows them to balance the risks and rewards of sharing. That is, attachment avoidance may motivate people to focus their personal self-disclosures on specific types of personal events that are less risky or most advantageous to meet their goals.

We posit that people with higher attachment avoidance (globally or in specific relationships) will prioritize sharing positive events and avoid sharing negative events that they experience. Attachment avoidance is a secondary hypo-activating strategy involving self-reliance and down-regulating any tendency toward support-seeking (Simpson et al., 1992; Vogel & Wei, 2005). Because sharing negative events may be functionally equivalent to seeking support for those events, attachment avoidance may motivate people to selectively keep negative experiences to themselves. Alternatively, sharing positive events conveys no expectation of support-receipt, so

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people with higher avoidance (or in more avoidant relationships) may be more comfortable with positive event disclosures.

Relatedly, people with higher avoidance (or in more avoidant relationships) may decline to share negative events to avoid displaying vulnerability. According to Brown (2012), people feel vulnerable if an act is accompanied with uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure. Because sharing a negative event is akin to soliciting support and can leave someone emotionally-exposed, it carries the risk that one will not receive support, will receive unresponsive support, or will even be ridiculed (Gable et al., 2012). Although all people likely avoid self-disclosures that make them feel vulnerable due to concerns of being seen as dependent or powerless or to prevent the possibility of revealing information that could be used against them (Bruk et al., 2018; Lee, 1997), this concern may particularly resonate with those who have higher levels of attachment avoidance (globally or in specific relationships). Attachment avoidance includes negative mental representations (e.g., others are critical, rejecting, and uncaring) which may make people especially reluctant to expose vulnerability.

People with higher avoidance (or in more avoidant relationships) may also selectively share positive events because positive events (e.g., successes and achievements) often convey personal competence. Although all people are motivated to see themselves as competent and to demonstrate their competence to others as a means of impression management, for example, to be seen as more trustworthy (Deci & Ryan, 2000), attachment avoidance requires maintaining a particularly competent self-image. Competence is crucial for individuals who seek self-reliance and avoid depending on others because it enables them to believe that they can manage challenges and difficulties independently (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016).

3 | CURRENT RESEARCH

The current research investigated whether attachment avoidance predicts not only sharing fewer personal events but also predicts sharing personal events selectively and strategically. Participants recalled recent positive and negative events they experienced and indicated whether they shared each event with close others in their social networks. We expected to replicate previous findings showing that greater attachment avoidance predicts a lower likelihood of sharing personal events overall (H1). Because RS attachment predicts relationship outcomes in one specific relationship more precisely than global attachment does (e.g., Cozzarelli et al., 2000; Klohnen et al., 2005), we measured both RS and global attachment and expected that links between RS attachment avoidance and the likelihood of sharing personal events in a specific relationships may be particularly robust.

Additionally, we made the novel prediction that the tendency for people to share less in relationships with greater RS avoidance (or if they have higher global avoidance) is especially pronounced for negative events compared to positive events (H2). In other words, we expected attachment avoidance to motivate people to selectively share positive events. Although previous research has demonstrated links between attachment avoidance and disclosure (e.g., Bradford et al., 2002; Vogel & Wei, 2005), prior research has not assessed how these associations may differ across the types of personal experiences that could be shared. We expected that attachment avoidance may motivate people to focus their self-disclosures on specific types of personal events that are less risky or most advantageous to meet their goals. However, we did not expect that a relative preference for sharing positive events would lead to a very high likelihood of disclosing positive experiences because people with high attachment avoidance (or in avoidant

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relationships) still tend not to perceive the responses to positive disclosure as responsive (Gosnell & Gable, 2013).

Furthermore, we theorized that avoidance may motivate greater sharing of positive events because these events, on average (though not always), will be less vulnerable and convey more competence than negative events. To understand the sharing patterns associated with attachment avoidance more fully, we directly tested the additional novel hypotheses that people—particularly those with high attachment avoidance or in more avoidant relationships—selectively refrain from sharing events that make them feel vulnerable (H3) and selectively share events that convey personal competence (H4).

Although our hypotheses focused on links between attachment avoidance and sharing, we also considered how attachment anxiety might influence the predicted associations. The rationale for our hypotheses is based on the hypo-activating (self-reliant, emotionally distancing) strategy that characterizes attachment avoidance. Accordingly, the hypothesized links between attachment avoidance and sharing might be most pronounced when attachment anxiety is low and only this one strategy is being employed. In other words, sharing may be particularly limited and selective for relationships (or for people) matching the avoidant profile (high attachment avoidance, low attachment anxiety). Consistent with this idea, one previous study that considered both attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety in concert provided initial evidence that men who match the avoidant attachment profile exhibit particularly low levels of self-disclosure (Bradford et al., 2002). In the same study, fearfully attached men were found to disclose more than avoidantly attached men, which suggests that a more complicated sharing pattern may emerge in relationships (or for people) who employ contradictory distancing and proximity-seeking strategies.

4 | METHOD

Pre-registration forms are available on OSF: https://osf.io/nw59v; https://osf.io/fuv39.

4.1 | Participants

We recruited two samples (one undergraduate student sample, one online sample) so that we could replicate our findings. Sample 1 was recruited from a private university in the United States, where participants completed the study for partial course credit in an Introductory Psychology course. In total, 288 participants completed the study during the Spring 2022 semester. Excluding participants who did not give permission to use their data ($N = 50$) and those who did not pass the attention check ($N = 93$), our final sample included 145 participants.[1] Approximately half of the analyzed sample identified as cisgender women (56.4%), and the majority were White (63.1%). Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 28 ($M = 18.97$, SD = 1.38). See Table 1 for detailed participant characteristics.

Sample 2 was recruited from the online research participation platform, Prolific.com. We collected the first half of the online sample ($N = 275$; hereafter, referred to as Sample 2a) in December 2022. We did not restrict participation by location, resulting in all participants residing outside the United States. The second half of the online sample ($N = 250$; Sample 2b) was collected exclusively from the US in February 2023. After excluding participants who failed the attention checks, Sample 2a consists of 231 participants located outside the United States, and

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TABLE 1 Participant characteristics.

Characteristics	Sample 1 *N*	Sample 2a *N*	Sample 2b *N*	Combined *N*
Gender				
Cisgender man	55	103	106	264
Cisgender woman	84	104	115	303
Transgender	2	2	1	5
Genderqueer, gender non-conforming, nonbinary, enby, agender, or two-spirit	3	9	9	21
None of the above	1	12	3	16
Missing	2	2	0	4
Race				
White	99	147	184	430
Black/African American	16	57	22	95
Asian	26	2	25	53
American Indian or Native Hawaiian	5	0	5	10
None of the above	8	31	9	48
Missing	2	0	0	2
Ethnicity				
Not Hispanic	120	188	203	511
Hispanic	22	42	29	93
Missing	3	1	1	5
Sexual orientation				
Straight	113	179	178	470
Lesbian, gay, or same-gender loving	4	13	12	29
Bisexual or pansexual	23	32	37	92
Queer	2	3	7	12
Sexually fluid	2	1	0	3
Unsure/questioning	3	6	1	10
Asexual	0	3	10	13
None of the above	0	1	0	1
Missing	2	0	0	2
Characteristics	*M* (SD)	*M* (SD)	*M* (SD)	*M* (SD)
Age (years)	18.97 (1.38)	26.85 (7.03)	37.11 (13.25)	28.93 (11.71)

Note: Participants could select more than one response.

Sample 2b consists of 233 participants located in the United States. As shown in Table 1, most of the participants in samples 2a and 2b identified as White (62.0% and 75.1%, respectively), and nearly half of these participants identified as cisgender women (44.4% and 47.5%, respectively).

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Participants in the samples 2a and 2b reported an average age of 26.85 years ($SD = 7.03$), and 37.11 years ($SD = 13.25$), respectively.

4.2 | Procedure and measures

All participants completed a 30-minute Qualtrics survey approved by the IRB. Slight differences between the surveys completed by Sample 1 and Sample 2 are described below. Descriptive statistics, reliability estimates, and zero-order correlations for primary measures are presented in Table 2.

4.2.1 | Personal network mapping

Participants first saw a bullseye image with a dot in the center representing the self and three concentric circles of increasing diameter around the dot (Antonucci et al., 2004; Rowe & Carnelley, 2005). Participants identified the three people who played the most important roles in their life (people we classified as *attachment figures*) and wrote their names in the inner circle. Next, participants selected up to five additional people that were less close but still very important (people we classified as additional *close others*) and wrote their names in the middle circle. Almost all participants (97.5%) listed three attachment figures, and participants listed an average of 4.76 other close others ($SD = 0.73$). A definition for the outer circle was provided, but participants were not asked to identify additional network-members.

4.2.2 | Events experienced

Next, participants identified positive events (e.g., successes, good news) and negative events (e.g., failures, losses) that happened to them recently ("in the past week" for Sample 1; "in the past month" for Sample 2).[2] They were given space to list up to four positive and four negative events. If participants had experienced more than four events in a category, they were instructed to list the four most important events. Participants reported an average of 3.68 positive events ($SD = 0.64$) and 3.41 negative events ($SD = 0.88$) in Sample 1 and slightly fewer positive events ($M = 3.13$; $SD = 0.97$) and negative events ($M = 2.93$; $SD = 1.05$) in Sample 2. The events participants generated varied but were commonly related to relationships and socializing (e.g., attended a family gathering, had a conflict), their possessions (e.g., bought or lost something), their careers or schoolwork (e.g., passed a test, performed poorly on an assignment), or their health (e.g., successfully lost weight, got injured).

For each event, participants also rated how *impactful* the event was (1 = *It was not that impactful* to 5 = *It was extremely impactful*) and how *competent* the event makes them seem (1 = *Not at all competent* to 7 = *Extremely competent*).

4.2.3 | Sharing behavior

Next, participants indicated whether they shared each event with their network-members. For each event they described, they saw a list of their network-members and indicated whether they

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TABLE 2 Reliability estimates, descriptive statistics, and zero-order correlations for primary measures across samples.

Variable	*N*	α	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. RS attachment anxiety	1823	0.86	2.16	1.45							
2. RS attachment avoidance	1823	0.88	2.90	1.45	0.27						
3. Global attachment anxiety	607	0.93	3.58	1.86	0.44	0.18					
4. Global attachment avoidance	607	0.88	3.61	1.42	0.21	0.43	0.36				
5. Event valence	3839	-	0.50	0.50	−0.02	−0.01	−0.02	−0.02			
6. Event impact	3839	-	3.43	1.19	0.07	−0.03	0.05	−0.01	0.12		
7. Competence-conveyed by event	3839	-	4.31	1.72	−0.01	−0.07	−0.05	−0.09	0.62	0.18	
8. Vulnerability of sharing	11,496	-	2.20	1.94	0.17	0.10	0.17	0.09	−0.27	0.18	−0.22

Note: Relationship-specific (RS) attachment measures were completed for each attachment figure listed (up to three times per participant). Each participant completed the global attachment measure once. Event valence was dummy coded (negative = 0, positive = 1). Participants completed the impact and competence-conveyed measures for each event listed (up to eight times per participant). The vulnerability of sharing measure was completed for each event and attachment figure pairing (up to 24 times per participant). Correlations between attachment variables are based on a relationship-specific level dataset so there are approximately three rows of data for each participant, and correlations including other variables are based on a sharing-level dataset (with only attachment figures included), so there are approximately 24 rows of data for each participant. Accordingly, we do not provide significance tests for these correlations.

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shared the event with each person. They could respond "yes", "no", or "I don't know." We excluded "I don't know" responses (1.8% of all responses) from analyses.

4.2.4 | Vulnerability

For each event participants listed, they were also asked how much sharing the event with each of their three attachment figures would make them feel *vulnerable* (e.g., weak, open to emotional hurt). Participants were asked to consider how vulnerable they *would* feel sharing this event with a particular attachment figure whether or not they actually did share it (1 = *Not at all* to 7 = *Very much*). Due to time constraints, we did not ask this question about their additional close others.

4.2.5 | Attachment orientation

Participants then completed the Experiences in Close Relationships–Relationship Structures scale (ECR-RS; Fraley et al., 2011), a measure designed to assess attachment tendencies in multiple relationship contexts. We asked participants to answer the ECR-RS questions four times–once with regard to each of the attachment figures they listed in their inner circle (three unique RS attachments) and once with regard to their general feeling in emotionally intimate relationships, such as those with family members, friends, and romantic partners (global attachment orientation). Participants completed the relationship-specific items before the global items. Four ECR-RS items assessed *attachment anxiety* (e.g., "I am afraid that this person [others] may abandon me"),[3] and six items measured *attachment avoidance* (e.g., "I talk things over with this person [others]"). Participants were instructed to rate each item on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The items for attachment anxiety and avoidance were averaged separately within each of the RS and global domains. Accordingly, each participant had a separate RS attachment anxiety and RS attachment avoidance score for each of their attachment figures, in addition to global attachment anxiety and global attachment avoidance scores.

4.2.6 | Demographics

Finally, participants completed a brief measure assessing their personal demographics. They were also given the opportunity to delete their data for no penalty before they were debriefed about the purpose of the study. In both samples, participants also answered additional questions that are beyond the scope of the current investigation (see OSM for full materials).

4.3 | Data analytic strategy

To test our hypotheses, we needed to estimate the likelihood of events being shared as a function of specific relationship characteristics (RS attachment avoidance and anxiety), participant characteristics (global attachment avoidance and anxiety), and/or characteristics of the events themselves (e.g., the valence of the event). Therefore, we first reformatted the data to a long format so that each row of data represented one sharing opportunity. In this reformatted dataset, each participant could have up to 64 rows of data, resulting from the combinations of whether

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they shared each of 8 possible events (4 positive and 4 negative events) with each of 8 possible targets (3 attachment figures, 5 additional close others).

To account for the nested structure of these data, we used mixed-effect models. Both the events that participants could share and the targets that participants could share with are nested within participant. Therefore, we modeled random intercepts of participant, event within participant, and target within participant, allowing each participant to have a unique likelihood of sharing overall, a unique likelihood of sharing each event, and a unique likelihood of sharing with a particular target. Because the outcome is dichotomous (shared versus not shared), we fit binomial generalized linear mixed models using the glmer function with a binomial link function in R (see OSM for example syntax and list of R packages used).

We report the results of models that included fixed effects for attachment dimensions (centered), event valence (dummy coded so that negative events = 0, positive events = 1), vulnerability (centered), competence (centered), and their interactions, as relevant to the specific hypotheses. In RS attachment models, we used RS attachment and relevant variables to predict sharing with each of the 3 attachment figures; in global attachment models, we used global attachment and relevant variables to predict sharing with each of the 8 possible targets.

Although our hypotheses focused on attachment avoidance, we accounted for attachment anxiety in our analyses as well. We first tested the moderating role of attachment anxiety. If we found an interaction with attachment anxiety, we then tested effects at four attachment profiles: secure attachment (−1 *SD* attachment avoidance, −1 *SD* attachment anxiety), avoidant attachment (+1 *SD* attachment avoidance, −1 *SD* attachment anxiety), anxious attachment (−1 *SD* attachment avoidance, +1 *SD* attachment anxiety), and fearful attachment (+1 *SD* attachment avoidance, +1 *SD* attachment anxiety); if we did not observe an interaction with attachment anxiety, we included it as a covariate. To make the Results section more concise, we only report the results from the combined sample in the main text. However, we tested all hypotheses in each subsample (i.e., Sample 1, Sample 2a, and Sample 2b) to examine if the findings were replicable (see OSM), and we comment on the consistency of findings in the main text. Consistent with our preregistration, we conducted supplemental analyses controlling for the impact of the event. Greater impact predicted a greater likelihood of sharing events, and our findings remained consistent controlling for impact (see OSM).[4]

5 | RESULTS

5.1 | H1: Odds of sharing predicted by attachment avoidance

We first tested links between attachment avoidance (RS and global) and the likelihood of sharing personal events with network-members. In both the RS and global models, we observed no interactions between attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety ($b_{RS} = 0.01$, $p = .638$; $b_{global} = 0.03$, $p = .234$).

5.1.1 | RS attachment

Consistent with H1, greater RS attachment avoidance predicted lower log odds of sharing personal events in all three sub-samples and in the combined sample (see Table 3 and Supplemental Table 1 in the OSM). In the combined sample, a one scale-point increase in RS attachment avoidance was associated with a 68% decrease in the odds of sharing with that attachment

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TABLE 3 Main effects models of attachment predicting odds of sharing in the combined sample.

	b	Odds ratio	Change in odds
RS attachment model			
RS attachment avoidance	−1.15***	0.32	68% decrease/unit
RS attachment anxiety	0.38***	1.46	46% increase/unit
Global attachment model			
Global attachment avoidance	−0.33***	0.72	28% decrease/unit
Global attachment anxiety	0.07	1.07	No sig. change/unit

Note: Odds >1 indicates increased probability; odds <1 indicates decreased probability. Change in odds represents the increase or decrease in the odds of sharing associated with a one-unit increase on the 7-point attachment response scale.
***$p < .001$.

figure. Greater RS attachment anxiety was instead related to higher log odds of sharing in all samples and in the combined sample. In the combined sample, a one scale-point increase in RS attachment anxiety was associated with a 46% increase in the odds of sharing with that attachment figure.

5.1.2 | Global attachment

Analyses with global attachment produced similar findings. Consistent with H1, greater global attachment avoidance predicted lower log odds of sharing personal events in all three individual samples and the combined sample (see Table 3 and Supplemental Table 1). In the combined sample, a one scale-point increase in global attachment avoidance was associated with a 28% decrease in the odds of sharing events with all network-members. We observed no significant association between global attachment anxiety and the likelihood of sharing personal events in the combined sample or in sub-samples 1 or 2a. In sample 2b only, global attachment anxiety predicted greater log odds of sharing (see Supplemental Table 1).[5]

5.2 | H2: Odds of sharing predicted by attachment avoidance and event valence

We hypothesized that the negative association between attachment avoidance (both RS and global) and personal event sharing would be especially pronounced for negative events compared to positive events (H2). Before testing the hypothesized interaction, we first assessed main effects of attachment and event valence in main effects only models. In addition to the main effects of RS and global attachment described previously, people were more likely to share positive than negative events with attachment figures ($b = 1.22$, $p < .001$) and with network-members generally ($b = 0.87$, $p < .001$; see Supplemental Table 2).

5.2.1 | RS attachment

We observed the predicted two-way interaction between RS attachment avoidance and event valence in the combined sample, but this result was qualified by a three-way interaction with

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TABLE 4 Attachment and event valence predicting log odds of sharing in the combined sample.

	RS attachment models	Global attachment models
Attachment avoidance × event valence + attachment anxiety	*b* (*SE*)	*b* (*SE*)
Attachment avoidance	−1.23*** (0.07)	−0.37*** (0.07)
Attachment anxiety	0.39*** (0.05)	0.07 (0.04)
Event valence	1.21*** (0.13)	0.87*** (0.08)
Attachment avoidance × event valence	0.14* (0.06)	0.10† (0.06)
Attachment avoidance × event valence × attachment anxiety	*b* (*SE*)	*b* (*SE*)
Attachment avoidance	−1.24*** (0.07)	−0.37*** (0.07)
Attachment anxiety	0.36*** (0.06)	0.06 (0.05)
Event valence	1.27*** (0.13)	0.80*** (0.09)
Attachment avoidance × event valence	0.15* (0.07)	0.11† (0.06)
Attachment avoidance × attachment anxiety	0.05 (0.03)	−0.00 (0.03)
Attachment anxiety × event valence	0.07 (0.07)	0.01 (0.05)
Attachment avoidance × event valence × attachment anxiety	−0.08* (0.04)	0.07* (0.03)

Note: RS attachment models include RS attachment anxiety and RS attachment avoidance; global attachment models include global attachment avoidance and global attachment anxiety.
†$p < .10$;
*$p < .05$; ***$p < .001$.

RS attachment anxiety (see Table 4 and Figure 1). Comparable three-way interactions were also observed in sub-samples 1 and 2b, and the expected 2-way interaction was observed in sub-sample 2a (see Supplemental Table 3).

To test whether the link between event valence and sharing is particularly strong for people in avoidant relationships, we assessed whether there was a significant difference in the likelihood of sharing positive vs. negative events at each of the four RS attachment profiles.[6] Simple effects tests were significant at each RS attachment profile suggesting that people shared significantly more positive than negative events in all cases (all *p*s < .01). However, the size of the difference varied across attachment profiles demonstrating that event valence had a greater impact on sharing in relationships with greater attachment avoidance. Specifically, people shared an estimated 36% of positive and 10% of negative events in avoidant relationships (high RS avoidance, low RS anxiety), and they shared an estimated 63% of positive and 29% of negative events in fearful relationships (high RS avoidance, high RS anxiety). These differences are much more pronounced than the differences between positive and negative events shared in relationships with lower attachment avoidance. Specifically, people shared an estimated 98% of positive and 92% of negative events in anxious relationships (low RS avoidance, high RS anxiety) and they shared an estimated 92% of positive and 84% of negative events in secure relationships (low RS avoidance, low RS anxiety). Collectively, these results support H2 by showing a particularly low likelihood of sharing negative events (i.e., a selective willingness to share

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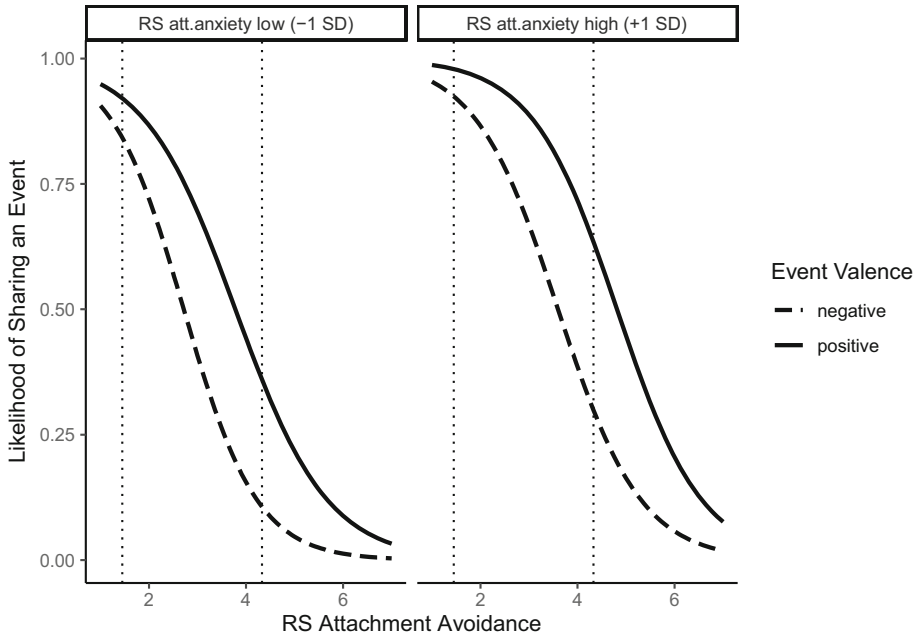


FIGURE 1 Likelihood of sharing as a function of RS attachment and event valence.
Note: Two vertical lines were added to depict low (−1 *SD*) and high (+1 *SD*) RS attachment avoidance in each panel. Thus, from left to right, the vertical lines represent secure, avoidant, anxious, and fearful attachment relationships.

positive events) in relationships with higher RS attachment avoidance, especially when attachment anxiety is low and relationships match the avoidant profile.

5.2.2 | Global attachment

While we did not observe a two-way interaction between global attachment avoidance and event valence predicting the likelihood of sharing in the combined sample, we did find a three-way interaction with global attachment anxiety (see Table 4 and Figure 2). This three-way interaction was only observed in sub-sample 2a (see Supplemental Table 4).

To test whether the link between event valence and sharing is particularly strong for people with high avoidance, we assessed whether there was a significant difference in the likelihood of sharing positive versus negative events at each of the four global attachment profiles.[7] Consistent with the results using RS attachment, there was a significant effect of event valence at all four global attachment profiles (all $ps < .05$). However, contrary to our hypothesis, event valence showed its greatest effect for the fearful profile rather than for the avoidant profile. Specifically, avoidantly attached people (high avoidance, low anxiety) shared an estimated 29% of positive and 16% of negative events whereas fearful attached people (high avoidance, high anxiety) shared an estimated 43% of positive and 19% of negative events. Anxiously attached people (low avoidance, high anxiety) shared an estimated 52% of positive and 41% of negative events. Lastly, securely attached people (low avoidance, low anxiety) shared an estimated 55% of positive and 35% of negative events. Although people who match the avoidant profile did selectively

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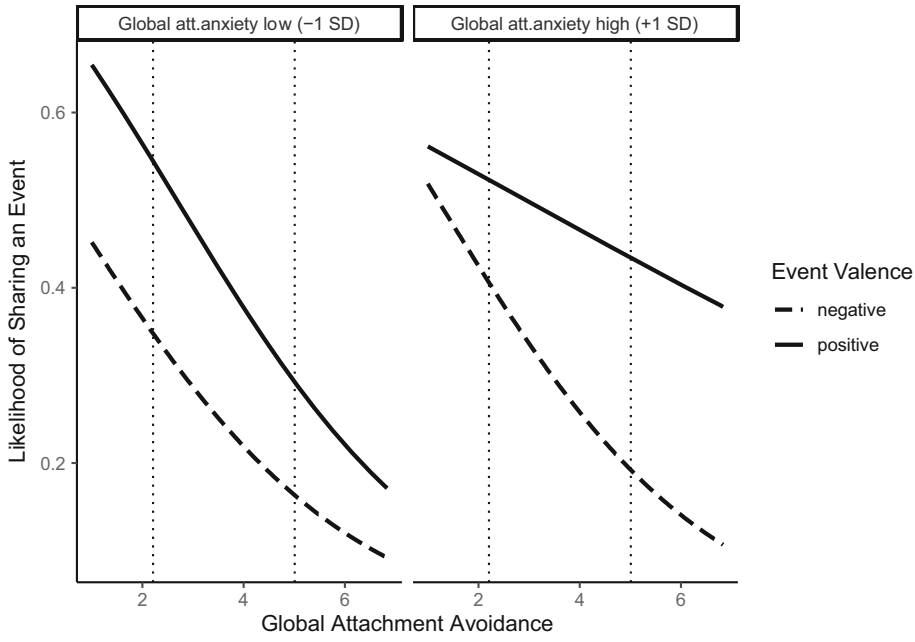


FIGURE 2 Likelihood of sharing as a function of global attachment and event valence.
Note: Two vertical lines were added to depict low (−1 *SD*) and high (+1 *SD*) global attachment avoidance in each panel. Thus, from left to right, the vertical lines represent secure, avoidant, anxious, and fearful attachment.

share positive events, that pattern was observed even more strongly for other global attachment profiles. Therefore, our support for H2 was limited to the model with RS attachment.

5.3 | H3: Odds of sharing predicted by attachment avoidance and vulnerability

We expected that greater perceived vulnerability of sharing an event in a particular relationship would predict people being less likely to share the event in that relationship, and we predicted that this association would be particularly strong for relationships or people with high attachment avoidance. We were only able to predict sharing within the three closest relationships because we only assessed perceived vulnerability of sharing events in these relationships. The results of main effects only models suggested that—consistent with H3—greater perceived vulnerability was associated with lower log odds of sharing in the combined sample while controlling for RS attachment ($b = -0.13$, $p < .001$) or global attachment ($b = -0.15$, $p < .001$; see Supplemental Table 7).

5.3.1 | RS attachment

Consistent with H3, we observed a two-way interaction between RS attachment avoidance and vulnerability to predict sharing in the combined sample (see Table 5 and Figure 3). As expected, we found that the link between perceived vulnerability and sharing is particularly strong (and

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TABLE 5 Attachment and perceived vulnerability predicting log odds of sharing in the combined sample.

	RS attachment models	Global attachment models
Attachment avoidance × vulnerability + attachment anxiety	*b* (*SE*)	*b* (*SE*)
Attachment avoidance	−1.13*** (0.06)	−0.42*** (0.08)
Attachment anxiety	0.40*** (0.05)	0.02 (0.06)
Vulnerability	−0.13*** (0.03)	−0.15*** (0.03)
Attachment avoidance × vulnerability	−0.04* (0.02)	−0.03 (0.02)
Attachment avoidance × vulnerability × attachment anxiety	*b* (*SE*)	*b* (*SE*)
Attachment avoidance	−1.15*** (0.06)	−0.40*** (0.08)
Attachment anxiety	0.38*** (0.06)	0.02 (0.06)
Vulnerability	−0.14*** (0.03)	−0.13*** (0.03)
Attachment avoidance × vulnerability	−0.06** (0.02)	−0.02 (0.02)
Attachment avoidance × attachment anxiety	0.02 (0.03)	0.05 (0.04)
Attachment anxiety × vulnerability	0.04* (0.02)	−0.01 (0.02)
Attachment avoidance × vulnerability × attachment anxiety	0.01 (0.01)	−0.02 (0.01)

Note: RS attachment models include RS attachment anxiety and RS attachment avoidance; global attachment models include global attachment avoidance and global attachment anxiety.
*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

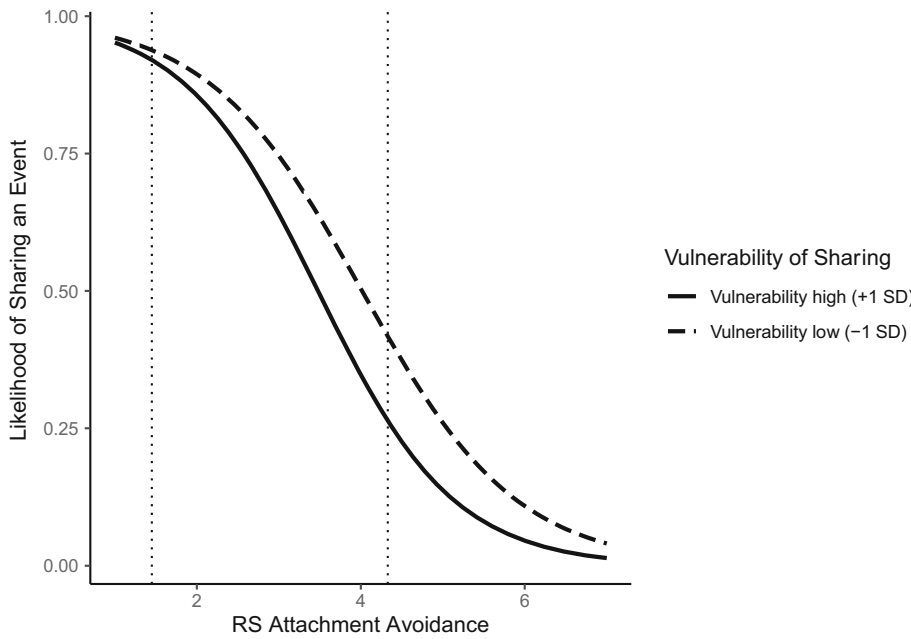


FIGURE 3 Likelihood of sharing as a function of RS attachment avoidance and the vulnerability of sharing a particular event with a particular attachment figure.
Note: Two vertical lines were added to depict low (−1 *SD*) and high (+1 *SD*) RS attachment avoidance.

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in fact, only evidence) in relationships characterized by high attachment avoidance ($b_{\text{high avoidance}} = -0.18$, $p < .01$; $b_{\text{low avoidance}} = -0.07$, $p = .10$).[8] People shared an estimated 41% of low vulnerable (−1 *SD*) and 26% of high vulnerable (+1 *SD*) events in relationships with high attachment avoidance, and they shared an estimated 94% of low vulnerable and 92% of high vulnerable events in relationships with low attachment avoidance. There was no three-way interaction between vulnerability, RS attachment avoidance, and RS attachment anxiety in the combined sample (see Table 5), and neither the two- or three-way interactions were significant in any of the sub-samples (see Supplemental Table 8). Thus, consistent with H3, greater perceived vulnerability predicted a lower likelihood of sharing an event, particularly in relationships characterized by high attachment avoidance.

5.3.2 | Global attachment

We also tested whether global attachment avoidance moderated the link between perceived vulnerability and sharing. We observed no significant interaction between vulnerability and global attachment dimensions in the combined sample (see Table 5). The three-way interaction was only observed in sub-sample 1 (see Supplemental Table 9). Accordingly, H3 was supported in the RS attachment model but not in the global attachment model.

5.4 | H4: Odds of sharing predicted by attachment avoidance and competence

We predicted that greater competence conveyed by an event would predict people being more likely to share the event, and we predicted that this link would be amplified by high attachment avoidance. The results of main effects only models suggested that greater competence was indeed associated with higher log odds of sharing in the combined sample while controlling for RS attachment ($b = 0.36$, $p < .001$) or global attachment ($b = 0.24$, $p < .001$; see Supplemental Table 12).

5.4.1 | RS attachment

There was no significant two-way interaction between RS attachment avoidance and competence conveyed by the event in the combined sample, but we observed a significant three-way interaction with RS attachment anxiety (see Table 6 and Figure 4). This three-way interaction was only observed in sub-sample 2b (see Supplemental Table 13). To test whether the link between competence and sharing is particularly strong for people in avoidant relationships, we decomposed the interaction at the four attachment profiles.[9] Greater competence was consistently associated with a higher likelihood of sharing (all *p*s < .01), and the preference for sharing events that convey competence was particularly pronounced in relationships characterized by higher RS attachment avoidance. People shared an estimated 12% of low competent (−1 *SD*) and 34% of high competent (+1 *SD*) events in avoidant relationships, and they shared an estimated 31% of low competent and 62% of high competent events in fearful relationships. These differences are much more pronounced than the differences between high and low competent

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TABLE 6 Attachment and competence predicting log odds of sharing in the combined sample.

Attachment avoidance × competence + attachment anxiety	RS attachment models *b* (*SE*)	Global attachment models *b* (*SE*)
Attachment avoidance	−1.15*** (0.06)	−0.30*** (0.06)
Attachment anxiety	0.39*** (0.05)	0.07 (0.04)
Competence	0.36*** (0.04)	0.24*** (0.03)
Attachment avoidance × competence	0.00 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)
Attachment avoidance × competence × attachment anxiety	*b* (*SE*)	*b* (*SE*)
Attachment avoidance	−1.16*** (0.06)	−0.29*** (0.06)
Attachment anxiety	0.39*** (0.06)	0.07† (0.04)
Competence	0.38*** (0.04)	0.20*** (0.03)
Attachment avoidance × competence	0.00 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)
Attachment avoidance × attachment anxiety	0.01 (0.03)	0.03 (0.03)
Attachment anxiety × competence	0.03† (0.02)	0.02 (0.01)
Attachment avoidance × competence × attachment anxiety	−0.02* (0.01)	0.04*** (0.01)

Note: RS attachment models include RS attachment anxiety and RS attachment avoidance; global attachment models include global attachment avoidance and global attachment anxiety.
†$p < .10$;
*$p < .05$; ***$p < .001$.

events shared in relationships with lower attachment avoidance. Specifically, people shared an estimated 91% of low competent and 98% of high competent events in anxious relationships, and they shared an estimated 83% of low competent and 93% of high competent events in secure relationships. Thus, these results suggest that people are generally more likely to share events that make them seem more competent especially in relationships characterized by high RS attachment avoidance.

5.4.2 | Global attachment

Consistent with the RS models, we did not observe a two-way interaction between competence-conveyed and global attachment avoidance but instead observed a significant three-way interaction with global attachment anxiety (see Table 6 and Figure 5). This three-way interaction was only observed in sub-sample 2a (see Supplemental Table 14). To test whether the link between competence and sharing is particularly strong for people with high avoidance, we decomposed the interaction at the four attachment profiles.[10] Greater competence only predicted increases in the odds of sharing for fearful and secure profiles ($ps < .01$). Fearful attached people shared an estimated 20% of low competent and 45% of high competent events, and securely attached people shared an estimated 34% of low competent and 53% of high competent events. Avoidantly attached people shared an estimated 20% of low competent and 25% of high competent events, and anxiously attached people shared an estimated 42% of low competent and 51%

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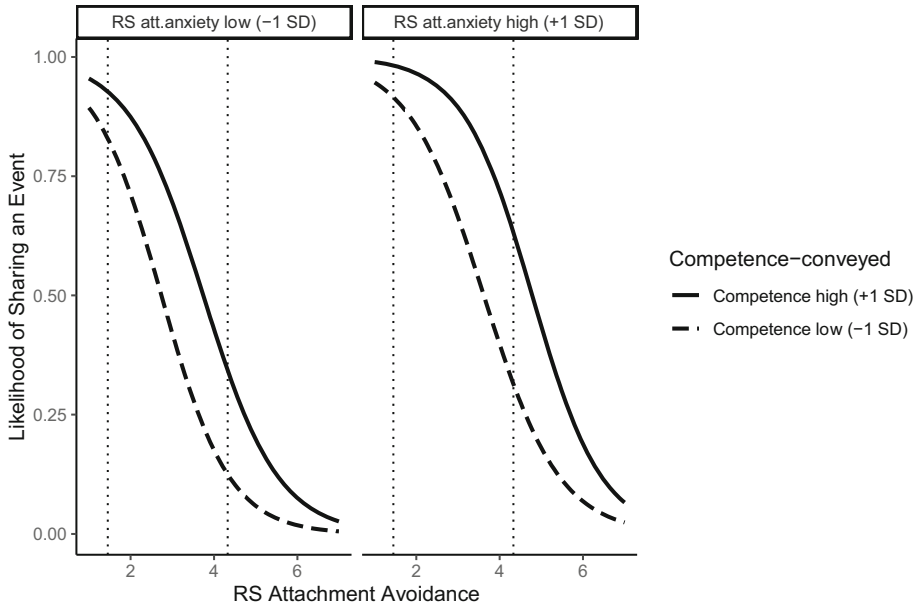


FIGURE 4 Likelihood of sharing as a function of RS attachment and the competence-conveyed by the event. *Note:* Two vertical lines were added to depict low (−1 *SD*) and high (+1 *SD*) RS attachment avoidance in each panel. Thus, from left to right, the vertical lines represent secure, avoidant, anxious, and fearful attachment relationships.

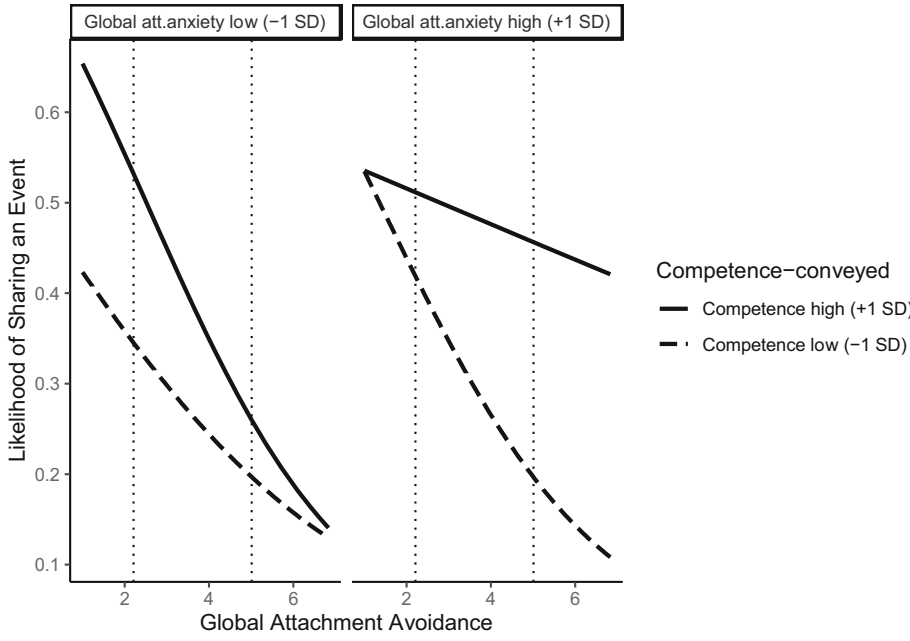


FIGURE 5 Likelihood of sharing as a function of global attachment and the competence-conveyed by the event. *Note:* Two vertical lines were added to depict low (−1 *SD*) and high (+1 *SD*) global attachment avoidance in each panel. Thus, from left to right, the vertical lines represent secure, avoidant, anxious, and fearful attachment.

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of high competent events. Thus, competence showed its greatest effect for the fearful profile rather than for the avoidant profile. H4 was supported in the RS attachment model but not in the global attachment model.

6 | DISCUSSION

Sharing personal experiences is a vital step in cultivating close relationships (Laurenceau et al., 2005; Reis & Shaver, 1988) and it is a key prerequisite to beneficial capitalization and social support exchanges (Collins & Feeney, 2000; Gable et al., 2012). This study investigated the extent to which attachment avoidance predicts a lower likelihood of sharing and explored several factors that might moderate this reticence to share. In other words, we assessed whether attachment avoidance produces not only less sharing but selective and strategic sharing.

We first replicated past work by providing strong and consistent evidence that attachment avoidance (both in specific relationships [RS] and globally) predicts a lower likelihood of sharing personal events with close others (e.g., Bradford et al., 2002; Stanton et al., 2017). Each scale-point increase in RS attachment avoidance corresponds to a 68% decrease in the odds of sharing with a specific attachment figure, and each scale-point increase in global attachment avoidance corresponds to a 28% decrease in the odds of sharing with any network-member in general. Exploratory analyses also showed that higher RS (but not global) attachment anxiety predicts a higher likelihood of sharing.

Of particular importance are the novel findings showing when (in what contexts) attachment avoidance hinders sharing. A selective sharing strategy was observed when attachment was measured in specific relationships (RS) but not when attachment was measured globally. Consistent with the hypothesized selective sharing strategy, people were particularly unlikely to share personal events in relationships with higher RS attachment avoidance (a) when the personal events were negative (losses, failure) compared to positive (wins, successes), (b) when sharing the events made them feel particularly vulnerable, and (c) when the events conveyed lower competence. As expected, positive events were rated as conveying greater competence and less vulnerability, on average, than negative events (competence: $M_{pos} = 5.34$, $M_{neg} = 3.21$; vulnerability: $M_{pos} = 1.70$, $M_{neg} = 2.74$, 7-point scales). Therefore, people in relationships characterized by higher attachment avoidance tended to selectively share events that highlight their competence and avoid showcasing vulnerability, which often led them toward sharing positive experiences.

The selective sharing strategy associated with higher RS attachment avoidance was quite robust. In relationships with high attachment avoidance, people were 1.5 times as likely to share events they rated as low in vulnerability than events they rated as high in vulnerability. Perceived vulnerability did not predict the likelihood of sharing in relationships with low attachment avoidance, indicating that strategically sharing less vulnerability-laden events is a strategy employed as RS avoidance increases. In avoidant relationships (high attachment avoidance, low attachment anxiety), the likelihood of sharing positive events or events conveying high competence was also approximately three times greater than that of sharing negative events or events conveying low competence. These sharing preferences were stronger than the preferences for sharing positive events and events showing competence in secure, anxious, and fearful relationships (a twofold rather than threefold increase over negative events and events demonstrating lower competence). The greater impact of event valence and competence on sharing in avoidant relationships (the interactive effect of both attachment dimensions) suggests that the link between RS attachment avoidance and sharing is most pronounced when only the hypo-activating (self-reliant, emotionally distancing) strategy is being employed.

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However, this pattern of selective sharing did not hold when attachment was measured at the global level. In fact, the greatest effects of event valence and competence were observed within the fearful attached profile rather than the avoidant profile, and greater perceived vulnerability did not predict sharing more strongly for people with high (vs. low) global attachment avoidance. These different results for RS and global attachment may be due to the higher predictive accuracy of RS attachment for one specific relationship (Cozzarelli et al., 2000; Klohnen et al., 2005). Alternatively, attachment tendencies may exhibit a stronger impact within people's closest relationships (i.e., attachment relationships), the relationships for which we measured RS attachment. People may have fewer opportunities to share their experiences with people in their "middle circle" than people in their "inner circle", adding more noise to the global attachment models.

There is abundant research focusing on the benefits of capitalization and social support interactions, but the process of sharing (the behavior that initiates these interactions) has been relatively understudied. The current research adds to the literature by providing evidence that higher attachment avoidance prompts selective disclosure of personal events. These novel findings have important practical implications for interventions aimed at increasing capitalization and social support interactions and for interventions aimed at reducing attachment avoidance. Specifically, practitioners working to improve relationships characterized by higher attachment avoidance can initially encourage people to share positive personal events (often those that show their competence and limit vulnerability). When interaction partners demonstrate responsiveness in these "lower-risk" interactions, they may scaffold greater and more vulnerable self-disclosures within the relationship. In the long-run, enhanced self-disclosure provides more opportunities for responsiveness and for the RS attachment avoidance to shift toward security. Providing responsive support to negative events disclosed is particularly difficult (Gable et al., 2012), so taking advantage of the opportunities of positive sharing to build security for people in avoidant relationships may be advantageous.

The present study had several strengths worth noting. First, assessing whether participants shared specific events within particular relationships is a more precise approach to measuring sharing than assessing overall inclination to share, and it is a more authentic alternative to laboratory discussions. Second, most of the findings from the combined sample were replicated in the sub-samples, underscoring their robustness. Finally, the inclusion of relatively diverse samples enhances the generalizability of the results.

Of course, this work also had limitations. Critically, the correlational design of this work precludes causal conclusions; future research could supplement these findings by experimentally manipulating aspects of events participants experience to determine which aspects predict sharing in various attachment relationships when other variables are held constant. Additionally, it is worth noting that the relationships and people we characterized as high in attachment avoidance had only moderate levels of RS and global attachment avoidance (4.35 and 5.03 on 7-point scales), which hinders our confidence in generalizing conclusions to the very insecure population. However, observing the differences at moderate levels suggest potentially even stronger effects among people with higher attachment avoidance.

Although we built upon past attachment research to demonstrate that RS attachment avoidance predicts not only less sharing but more strategic sharing, it is also important to note that there are many additional theoretical perspectives and many other predictors of self-disclosure we could consider. For instance, the Theory of Motivated Information Management posits that people share to manage the uncertainty associated with an issue (e.g., W. A. Afifi & Weiner, 2004). Additionally, the strongest predictors of sharing behavior in these data were event

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valence and event impact, demonstrating that a preference for sharing positive and impactful events outweighed attachment-related sharing preferences (see Supplemental Table 17 for relative strength of predictors). This may also be the reason why the effect sizes of the predicted interactions were relatively small.

In conclusion, the current research demonstrates that although people in more avoidant relationships are less willing to disclose than people with less RS attachment avoidance, the extent of their reticence varies. In avoidant relationships, people reported greater sharing of (i.e., being less unwilling to share) positive events, events that convey personal competence, and events that avoid vulnerability. These findings provide greater nuance about how attachment avoidance shapes self-disclosure and offer insights into how interventions to increase self-disclosure in avoidant relationships may be most acceptable and enable people to derive its benefits.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

There is no known conflict of interest to disclose.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author (bkjakubi@syr.edu) upon reasonable request.

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ENDNOTES

[1] We added the data deletion and attention check measure to identify and exclude participants taking the study less seriously.

[2] We changed the timeframe because we assumed undergraduate students might experience positive and negative events more frequently (e.g., failing exams, being asked on a date) than older adults whose lives are more routine.

[3] One additional item, "I worry a lot about my relationship with this person [relationships]" was included to assess RS and global attachment anxiety.

[4] In response to reviewer feedback, we assessed models with gender included as a covariate (only cisgender man vs. cisgender woman, given small sizes of other groups). Gender did not predict sharing, and results were unchanged with gender included as a covariate.

[5] We conducted additional exploratory models testing main effects of global or RS attachment, event valence, event impact, competence-conveyed, and perceived vulnerability (see Supplemental Table 17).

[6] Results of interactions for H2, H3, and H4 using the other decomposition approach are provided in the OSM.

[7] Results of interactions for H2, H3, and H4 using the other decomposition approach are provided in the OSM.

[8] Results of interactions for H2, H3, and H4 using the other decomposition approach are provided in the OSM.

[9] Results of interactions for H2, H3, and H4 using the other decomposition approach are provided in the OSM.

[10] Results of interactions for H2, H3, and H4 using the other decomposition approach are provided in the OSM.

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