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PROBLEM-SOLVING BEHAVIORS

IN COLLEGE RELATIONSHIPS

A Thesis

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University Honors

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University of Northern Iowa

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This Study by: Bethanie Frattini-Scott

Titled: Problem-Solving Behaviors in College Relationships

Has been approved as meeting the thesis requirement for the Designation University Honors

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Abstract

This study examined the individual characteristics that affect one's willingness and ability to resolve problems in romantic relationships and one's decision to seek support from a romantic partner. One hundred twenty-six college students in romantic relationships completed measures of attachment style, relationship efficacy, partner attributions, and relationship satisfaction, and responded to hypothetical scenarios assessing their problem-solving and support-seeking behaviors. Participants reporting higher attachment ambivalence were more perceptive than others to threats to their relationships and exhibited a greater effort to reduce conflict, although they reported lower levels of confidence in their problem-solving abilities. People reporting higher avoidance anticipated placing greater demands on their partners to resolve problems. Participants reporting greater attachment security exhibited higher confidence in resolving conflict and greater relationship satisfaction. Relationship efficacy mediated the relationship between partner attributions and relationship satisfaction. Results have implications for understanding the roles of attachment style, relationship efficacy, and partner attributions in conflict resolution, as well as for understanding how couples seek support when problem solving. Implications for couple's therapists are also discussed, particularly for understanding how differences in conceptions of relationships may result in differences in conflict and support-seeking behaviors, and for understanding that there may not be one ideal conflict style for couples.

Problem-Solving Behaviors in College Relationships

Interpersonal conflict and problems are encountered in any intimate relationship. Conflict allows partners to communicate their needs to each other and, when conflict resolution is successful, reinforces intimacy and feelings of partnership for couples. Factors such as how problems are approached, who takes responsibility, and how partners attempt to resolve them may separate relationships that thrive from those that dissolve (Corcoran & Mallinkrodt, 2000; Gottman, 1993; Lloyd & Cate, 1985). Another factor in successful relationships is the amount of support partners seek and receive from one another. Social support is often sought as a means of coping with stress and conflict, and is available from family, romantic partners, close friends, and professionals such as counselors who offer support and guidance. Individual characteristics such as how people approach love, form bonds with others, and handle conflict within their interpersonal relationships affect how people resolve problems within romantic relationships, who they turn to for support in resolving conflict, and under what conditions.

One framework for understanding how love is viewed and approached, as well as how support is sought and received within relationships, is attachment theory. Attachment theory examines how the bonds formed between an infant and caregiver during the first few years of life determine the extent to which people consider themselves worthy of love and support, and the extent to which they believe that others can provide the love and support they need (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bowlby, 1969). These beliefs and behaviors exhibited in parent-child relationships can manifest themselves decades later within adult relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Simpson, 1990). Qualities of security, avoidance, and ambivalence developed within infant-caregiver attachments are activated during times of distress (Collins & Feeney, 2000); thus, they have implications for support seeking and problem solving within adult relationships.

This study evaluated how attachment constructs of security, avoidance, and ambivalence, as well as relationship efficacy (confidence in resolving conflict in relationships; Fincham, Harold, & Gano-Phillips, 2000) and partner attributions (perceived causes of a partner's behavior; Fincham & Bradbury, 1992) influence problem-solving behaviors within adult romantic relationships. The present

study also examined social support-seeking behaviors as a means of solving interpersonal problems, as well as how perceptions of events as threatening or non-threatening to a relationship affect problem-solving and support-seeking behaviors. Finally, this study assessed the effects of attachment and conflict-resolution behaviors on relationship satisfaction.

Attachment Theory

Attachment theory, as formulated by psychologist John Bowlby (1969), explains that infants form attachments with their caregivers (most often the parents) that characterize how people develop impressions of themselves, others, and relationships in general. These impressions, frequently termed "working models," develop within the infant's first years of life within the context of the infant-caregiver relationship. Ainsworth extended Bowlby's theory through her research with the "strange situation assessment" in which infants were observed in situations where they were briefly separated from the mother. Ainsworth theorized that three distinct patterns exist in infant-caregiver attachments (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Ainsworth, 1979). These patterns became known as secure, avoidant-insecure, and ambivalent-insecure styles of attachment. Each style is comprised of models of the self and of others. A secure attachment style consists of a working model of others as trustworthy and the self as worthy of love and support. An avoidant attachment style depicts others as being untrustworthy and unable to provide love and support. An ambivalent (also known as anxious-ambivalent) attachment style depicts others as capable of providing love and support, but considers the self to be unworthy. Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) proposed a fourth style, a fearful attachment, in which a person feels both unworthy of love and support and believes that others are not capable of providing it. However, because the fearful style exemplifies characteristics of both avoidant and anxious-ambivalent styles and was found to exist primarily in children who were abused early in life, and because this study focused on attachment qualities rather than distinct styles, this study will focus on the dimensions of security, avoidance, and ambivalence that comprise these attachment styles.

When a caregiver, particularly the mother, is consistently warm and responsive to the infant's needs, especially when the infant is sick, injured or distressed, the infant develops the impression that the

caregiver can be trusted to provide for his needs and that he is worthy of love and attention from the caregiver. The infant will typically seek proximity to the caregiver, demonstrate some distress at separation, become excited when she returns, and use the caregiver as a "secure base" from which to explore his surroundings (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1973). If he becomes distressed or scared, he will most likely seek comfort from the caregiver, thus using her as a "safe haven." This pattern exemplifies a secure attachment in which an infant feels worthy of love and support and believes that others can provide it. This impression translates into a working model that the infant uses to characterize people in general (in this case, as trustworthy and reliable), and that may influence his attitudes about others throughout childhood and even adulthood (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

There are two infant-caregiver attachment patterns that are classified as insecure. A caregiver who consistently does not meet the needs of the infant in a warm and caring manner, or who is slow to respond to her needs, is likely to cultivate a working model with the infant that characterizes people as untrustworthy and unreliable. The infant typically does not demonstrate great distress at being separated from the caregiver, and may seem not to notice or care when the caregiver returns. This pattern of behavior is classified as an avoidant attachment. An infant with an avoidant attachment style may believe that she is worthy of love and attention, but that others cannot be trusted to provide it, and over time will attempt to become self-sufficient in meeting her own needs.

The other insecure attachment pattern is an ambivalent or anxious/ambivalent attachment. In this case, the caregiver is inconsistent with his responses to the infant's needs; he may at times act warm and caring, and at other times act cold and unresponsive. An infant in this type of attachment develops a sense that the caregiver is capable of providing love and support, but that she may not be worthy of it. Infants who receive inconsistent care often develop anxiety from not being able to predict the caregiver's responses. Infants demonstrating an ambivalent attachment style will become distressed when separated from the caregiver, but will often reject the caregiver when he returns. These infants develop a working model of others as being able to provide love and support, but of also being capable of withdrawing that love at any time, and they may develop a fear of emotional abandonment.

Attachment theory has been adapted to explain the attachments that adults form with each other in intimate relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Simpson, 1990). Attachment styles are susceptible to change throughout childhood if child-parent relationships change or new relationships create working models of the self and other that override the existing model; however, styles are thought to remain generally stable throughout adulthood (Bowlby, 1969). Although some research on adult relationships utilizes the distinct attachment styles theorized by Bowlby (e.g., Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991), others have found classifying people into categories to be too constricting (e.g., Carver, 1997). For that reason, this study will focus on dimensions underlying attachment styles, particularly security, avoidance, and ambivalence.

Security in attachment refers to a person's comfort with closeness and intimacy and belief that forming an attachment with another is positive and beneficial to one's life. People exhibiting security in their attachments view their relationships as happy, friendly, and interdependent, demonstrate trust and commitment within these relationships (Pistole, Clark, & Tubbs, 1995), and are comfortable with self-disclosure (Collins & Read, 1990; Simpson, 1990). Avoidance is characterized by discomfort with closeness and intimacy. People exhibiting high avoidance in attachments are generally introverted (Carver, 1997) and demonstrate low levels of commitment and trust within their relationships (Pistole et al., 1995; Simpson, 1990). Ambivalence refers to one's desires to merge with another person and worries of abandonment by a romantic partner. Those reporting high ambivalence tend to be preoccupied with relationships and with achieving closeness to a romantic partner; once that closeness has been achieved, they often preoccupy themselves with maintaining proximity to the partner (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Simpson, 1990). These people report high emotional reactivity (Searle & Meara, 1999), and within romantic relationships they may be characterized as moody and often become jealous easily (Collins, 1996; Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

Although people can be classified into styles of attachment, levels of security, avoidance and ambivalence alone can help explain different attitudes and behaviors in romantic relationships (Carver, 1997; Collins & Read, 1990). Attachment qualities can combine in different ways (Collins & Read). For

example, some people may show security and ambivalence in their attachments, with strong beliefs that relationships are necessary and beneficial; these beliefs may reinforce the desire to merge with another person but may cause them to become clingy and insecure when potential problems arise within the relationship.

As people approach adulthood, attachments once held with parents typically transfer to others and develop into adult attachments with close friends or romantic partners (which are sometimes referred to as pair-bonds; Fraley & Davis, 1997). Young adults will often continue to use the parents as a "secure base" from which to explore new relationships, and in the process of forming new attachments with peers, will seek proximity to them and transfer to them the role of "safe haven" (Fraley & Davis, 1997). Although infant- parent and adult attachments are strongly related and share similar characteristics, in a parent-child relationship the child is dependent upon the caregiver, whereas adult attachments are reciprocal: Both partners give and receive care, acting as each others' haven of support (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

The attachment system is generally activated during times of distress, allowing partners to seek support from each other as a safe haven. Thus, attachment theory has been widely studied in the context of conflict resolution and problem solving in interpersonal relationships, as conflict is considered by many to be highly distressing. Differences in how people view and approach conflict in relationships are largely due to differences in attachment styles. Securely attached individuals are likely to view conflict and arguing as non-threatening to the relationship (Pistole & Arricale, 2003), engage in conflict-related discussions, and self-disclose to their partners (Collins & Read, 1990; Simpson, Rholes, & Phillips, 1996). They are also likely to use mutual problem-solving skills in conflict situations (Corcoran & Mallinckrodt, 2000; Pistole, 1989), and to display little contempt and few domineering behaviors toward their partners, even when the partner is displaying highly negative behavior (Creasey & Ladd, 2005). People reporting either high attachment avoidance or ambivalence (or both) control their negative emotions during conflict (Feeney, 1995). Attachment avoidance is associated with minimal use of mutual conflict resolution behaviors (Shi, 2003). People reporting high attachment ambivalence typically report high anxiety and stress when discussing problems with their partners (Simpson et al, 1996).

Attributions

Partner attributions in a relationship are defined as the causes or excuses one makes for his romantic partner's role in an event, which can be regarded as either positive or negative. Positive attributions result when a partner's positive behavior is seen as being caused by her personality or moral standards rather than by external forces (e.g., she complimented me because she is a nice person, not because she received a promotion). Similarly, positive attributions can result when negative partner behavior is considered to be caused by external forces rather than personality or a moral deficiency (e.g., he yelled at me because his job is causing him stress, not because he has anger issues). Conversely, negative attributions result from attributing negative behavior to aspects of a partner's personality or character (e.g., she left dirty dishes in the sink because she is a slob, not because she has had a hectic day). Generally, people using positive partner attributions place the cause for the partner's negative behavior on external circumstances and attribute positive behavior to internal characteristics. Conversely, those using negative attributions place blame for negative behavior on the partner's character and assume positive behavior is caused by the external environment.

Previous research has linked partner attributions to the perceiver's behavior toward the partner and to her satisfaction with the relationship (Doherty, 1982; Fincham & Bradbury, 1992). Specifically, blaming the partner for the negative behavior, viewing the behavior as unchanging, and emphasizing its impact on the relationship have been associated with low relationship satisfaction. There is also evidence of a reciprocal relationship between positive attributions and relationship satisfaction, suggesting that satisfaction with the relationship can alter the perceiver's attributions (Fincham et al., 2000). Distressed couples are more likely than non-distressed couples to use negative attributions to account for their partners' behavior, which often leads to conflict escalation and increased aggression between partners (Fincham, Beach, & Nelson, 1987).

Relationship Efficacy

Self-efficacy is defined as a person's ability to produce desired outcomes in life (Bandura, 2001). The concept of self-efficacy is broad enough to encompass most human experiences; thus, since the

emergence of this concept, researchers have divided self-efficacy into components covering the various situations in which self-efficacy is commonly displayed. One such component is social self-efficacy, which refers to one's confidence in controlling outcomes in social situations. Relationship efficacy refers to social self-efficacy within the context of close relationships, and more specifically defines a person's ability to resolve interpersonal problems and conflict and to achieve desired outcomes in problem-solving situations (Doherty, 1981; Lopez & Lent, 1991).

Relationship efficacy seems to mediate the effects of attributions on relationship satisfaction (Fincham et al, 2000). In other words, people who perceive negative partner behavior to be character-based, intentional, and damaging to the relationship report feeling less confident in their ability to resolve future problems, and report less satisfaction with their relationships. However, these findings concern relationship attributions (perceived causes for events that impact the relationship), whereas the present study is concerned with partner attributions (perceived causes for partner behavior). The amount of research covering the effects of relationship efficacy on partner attributions is limited; hence, the present study assessed this relationship and its impact on problem-solving behaviors.

Social Support

Attachment theory has powerful implications for how people seek social support during times of distress, largely because that is when the attachment system is most likely to be activated (Collins & Read, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Evidence that social support is ingrained in attachment processes can be found in the relationship between support-seeking and caregiving behaviors. People who seek support from partners when distressed elicit a caregiving response, and in turn perceive support from the partner. Perceived support is linked with more effective outcomes in interactions, and increases the chances that partners will continue to draw support from each other when it is needed (Collins & Feeney, 2000). Social support reduces many of the negative effects of stress and improves psychological health, and people who utilize social support from close others tend to cope with negative life events more effectively than those lacking support or neglecting to utilize existing support (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Thoits, 1986).

Perceptions of general social support differ from perceptions of social support from specific relationships (e.g., romantic relationships), such that perceptions of general social support represent people's working models of others and perceptions of social support from specific relationships reflect those relationships' dynamics and experiences and represent the extent to which support is considered to be available (Pierce, Sarason, & Sarason, 1991). Thus, this study focuses on perceptions of social support from within the current romantic relationship to better examine the characteristics of that relationship rather than an individual's working models of others, which is assessed by the attachment measures.

Conflict Resolution

Conflict in romantic relationships is inevitable, and can be beneficial when it serves as a way for partners to voice their grievances and attempt to meet their needs within the relationship. The amount of conflict in a relationship does not contribute to that relationship's success as much as how conflict is perceived and responded to (Gottman, 1993). Couples who approach problems in their relationship with the goal of meeting each others' needs (referred to as mutual conflict behaviors), rather than focusing on win-win solutions, typically report greater satisfaction within their relationships than couples who exhibit more ineffective problem-solving behaviors (Shi, 2003). When problem solving, couples typically determine the cause of the problem and determine whether or not they are able to effectively resolve it. Partner attributions and relationship efficacy contribute to each of these processes, respectively, and when individuals perceive problems to be caused by situational factors rather than personal faults, and believe that they are able to resolve them, they generally demonstrate effective conflict resolution behaviors and report satisfaction with the relationship (Fincham & Bradbury, 1987; Fincham et al., 2000).

Within the present study, the terms conflict resolution and problem solving are used interchangeably. Problem solving is operationally defined in this study as the attempts by one partner to resolve specific problems that pose a threat to his security and satisfaction within the relationship (not to be confused with solving a personal problem, such as one encountered at work, unless the problem directly impacts the relationship). Problem-solving behaviors are classified into five categories, based on the five conflict styles proposed by Rahim (1983): Obliging, dominating, avoiding, compromising, and

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integrating. Each conflict style is comprised of two dimensions: Concern for oneself and concern for another (the partner). People with an obliging conflict style display little concern for themselves and high concern for their partner, typically neglecting their own needs to meet the needs of the partner. People with a dominating style display high concern for themselves and low concern for the partner; individuals displaying this style frequently put their own needs above the needs of others. People with an avoidant style display low concern for themselves and the partner by averting conflict. Compromising and integrating are both mutual conflict styles. People with a compromising style display moderate concern for themselves and the partner; they tend to negotiate problems and may sacrifice some needs to meet others, or may meet their partner "halfway." People with an integrating style display high concern for themselves and the partner and may invest a lot of time and energy into developing solutions that meet both partners' needs and maximize each others' gains.

Security in attachment and social self-efficacy are associated with mutual conflict resolution behaviors (Corcoran & Mallinckrodt, 2000). Mutual problem-solving behaviors are considered beneficial to the relationship and to the well-being of partners for a variety of reasons. Mutuality demonstrates a capacity on the part of relationship partners to empathize with each other's viewpoints and listen to and engage each other in problem-solving discussions. Couples displaying mutuality are persistent in their problem solving and are likely to reach an agreement or compromise (Corcoran & Mallinckrodt, 2000; Shi, 2003). The ability to empathize, listen, and resolve problems are behaviors that increase a couple's satisfaction with the relationship and with each other.

People who exhibit avoidant qualities in their attachments with others have a tendency to avoid conflict and discussions of relationship problems when possible; when they do engage in problem-solving, they are the least likely to demonstrate obliging behaviors, which focus on the partner's needs (Shi, 2003). People with high attachment avoidance find it difficult to show vulnerability and trust others, which results in a closing of communication channels in conflict discussions, and they generally attempt to solve problems by themselves rather than seek help and support from their partners.

Ambivalence in attachment is associated with obliging conflict styles, which result from people's

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willingness to neglect or postpone their own needs in order to meet the needs of the partner (Shi, 2003). They also frequently display dominating behaviors, which may reassure them of having control over the relationship, and may in turn decrease their fears of abandonment (Creasey & Ladd, 2005; Shi, 2003), although this speculation is thus far unsupported. With evidence suggesting that insecurity in attachment relates to ineffective conflict resolution skills, it is important to assess other factors that could impact problem- solving and support-seeking behaviors and potentially make them more effective.

The Present Study

The purpose of the present study was to assess the associations between relationship efficacy, partner attributions, conflict resolution, and social support-seeking behaviors within the attachment theory context. Various studies in past decades have proposed that certain characteristics and behaviors exhibited within adult romantic relationships (e.g., comfort with intimacy, interdependence, jealousy) originated from early attachments formed with parents; thus attachment theory has laid the groundwork for research on deep-rooted personality constructs and belief systems that manifest themselves in adulthood. This study was aimed at determining how the attachment system manifests itself in a sample of young adults transitioning from the parent-child relationship into forming attachments with romantic partners.

Furthermore, this study was aimed at identifying how attachment and other characteristics influence one's perception of hypothetical scenarios to be either threatening or non-threatening to the relationship, as well as one's preference for certain problem-solving and support-seeking behaviors when the attachment system is thought to be activated. Whereas there are numerous studies assessing the relationship between attachment and conflict resolution (e.g., Pistole, 1989; Shi, 2003), many assess general conflict styles, and little is known about people's beliefs in their abilities to adapt their conflict-resolution behaviors or the conditions that may influence people to adapt their problem-solving skills. Therefore, another purpose of this study was to examine problem-solving behaviors across multiple scenarios. Additionally, because no one event can be assumed to be equally threatening to everyone's relationships, this study allowed participants to rate for themselves the extent to which an event posed a potential threat to the security and satisfaction within their current romantic relationship, and took into

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account how these individual perceptions influenced problem-solving and support-seeking behaviors.

People who exhibit high security in attachment, but low avoidance and ambivalence (i.e., have a secure attachment), tend to have high standards for themselves and for others, to display greater levels of confidence and trust in their relationships, and feel as though they can depend on others for support (Collins & Read, 1990). Thus, I hypothesized that people reporting higher attachment security would:

1. Perceive higher relationship efficacy;

2. Report positive partner attributions;

3. Anticipate using mutual problem-solving behaviors (compromising and integrating);

4. Report higher relationship satisfaction; and

5. Seek support from the partner (cooperate) to resolve problems when such problems are perceived as threatening to the relationship.

Avoidance in attachment is defined as discomfort with closeness and intimacy, low levels of self-disclosure, and a tendency to be introverted (Bartholomew, 1990; Carver, 1997; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). It is expected that such people would experience discomfort with conflict and with the self-disclosure and trust required to talk openly about relationship problems and would display minimal confidence in their abilities to resolve interpersonal problems. Thus, I hypothesized that people reporting higher attachment avoidance would:

1. Report lower levels of relationship efficacy;

2. Report negative partner attributions;

3. Perceive events as minimally threatening to the relationship;

4. Respond to problems which are perceived as threatening with avoiding and/or dominating behaviors;

5. Report lower relationship satisfaction; and

6. Expect to resolve conflict and problems without support from the partner or from others.

Ambivalence in attachment is characterized by both a desire to become close to others and worry about being abandoned. People reporting high ambivalence can be highly persistent in attempting to

resolve conflict within relationships, but frequently employ ineffective problem-solving behaviors (Campbell, Simpson, Boldry, & Kashy, 2005; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Simpson, Rholes, & Philips, 1996). Thus, I hypothesized that people reporting higher attachment ambivalence would:

1. Perceive negative events to be more threatening to their relationships;

2. Report negative partner attributions; and

3. Report lower relationship satisfaction.

Relationship efficacy is expected to moderate the effects of ambivalence on problem-solving and support-seeking behaviors. People displaying lower relationship efficacy should anticipate using obliging and dominating problem-solving behaviors, and expect to place demands on the partner to resolve problems or seek help outside the relationship. People displaying higher efficacy should anticipate compromising and cooperating with the partner to resolve problems.

Additionally, relationship efficacy was expected to mediate the relationship between partner attributions and relationship satisfaction; people who consider negative partner behavior to be minimally impacting to the relationship, unintentional, and not caused by personality flaws will perceive themselves as capable of resolving conflict, and thus will report higher relationship satisfaction. Both compromising and cooperating behaviors were expected to mediate the relationship between relationship efficacy and relationship satisfaction, with higher levels of efficacy causing people to be more willing to work with their partners to resolve conflict and to report higher relationship satisfaction.

Method

Participants

One hundred twenty-six college students (34% male; mean age = 18.52, $SD = .73$) who were in romantic relationships at the time of this study were recruited through the Psychology Study Participant Manager (PSPM), where a script describing the study was posted, in exchange for credit in their psychology courses. Ninety-six percent of participants were Caucasian, 1.6 percent were Hispanic/Latino, 1.6 percent were Asian, and .8 percent were African American. Fifty-five percent of participants reported being in a long-distance relationship. The mean duration of relationships was 1.44 ($SD = 1.66$) years.

Measures

      Demographics. A demographics questionnaire obtained information about participants' gender, age, ethnicity, relationship status and duration, and perceived available social support (Appendix A).

      Attachment. Participants completed the fourteen-item *Measure of Attachment Qualities* (*MAQ;* Carver, 1997; Appendix B). Items on the scale measured the four attachment constructs of security, avoidance, ambivalence-merger, and ambivalence-worry. For this study, the ambivalence-merger and ambivalence-worry subscales were combined into one scale of ambivalence because the Cronbach's alpha score obtained for the combined scale was significantly higher than for each subscale. Participants rated the extent to which they agreed with items (e.g., "I have trouble getting others to be as close as I want them to be") on a seven-point Likert scale, with higher scores being indicative of a particular attachment dimension. Cronbach's alpha scores for security, avoidance, ambivalence-merger, and ambivalence-worry for this study were .74, .76, .64, and .74, respectively, compared to .72, .76, .73, and .69 for the original *MAQ* (Carver, 1997). In this study, the combined ambivalence scale had a Cronbach's alpha of .78.

      Attributions. A fourteen-item portion of the *Relationship Attribution Measure* (*RAM*; Fincham & Bradbury, 1992; Appendix D) measured the extent to which participants use negative partner attributions to explain their partners' negative behavior. The original *RAM* included four scenarios, but this study used two of these scenarios for brevity and because the questions underlying each scenario assessed the same factors (e.g., blame, intention). Participants responded to two hypothetical events ("your partner criticizes something you say" and "your partner begins to spend less time with you"), which assessed the perceived causes for negative partner behavior and its anticipated impact on the relationship. Participants rated the extent to which they agreed with items on a seven-point Likert scale (e.g., "my partner criticized me on purpose rather than unintentionally"), with higher scores indicative of more negative partner attributions. Cronbach's alpha of .83 was obtained across both stimulus events. In the original study (Fincham & Bradbury, 1992), each separate dimension of partner attribution produced alpha scores greater than .70.

      Relationship efficacy. The seven-item *Relationship Efficacy Measure* (Fincham et al, 2000; Appendix C) evaluated the extent to which individuals believe they can resolve problems and

interpersonal conflict within their romantic relationships. Participants responded to items on a seven-point Likert scale (e.g., "I have little control over the conflicts that occur between my partner and I"), ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7), with higher scores indicating greater relationship efficacy. Cronbach's alpha for the present study was .82, compared to scores of .87 and .90 obtained by Fincham, Harold, and Gano-Phillips (2000) for men and women, respectively.

Problem solving and support seeking. Six hypothetical scenarios were created by the author to assess participants' predicted problem-solving behaviors within their current relationship (Appendix E). Participants first rated on a seven-point Likert scale the extent to which they considered each scenario to pose a threat to their security and/or satisfaction in the romantic relationship if the scenario were to occur. The six hypothetical scenarios were chosen to represent events that would likely be a) considered stressful and/or threatening to the participants and their relationship; and b) reflect problems that could likely occur at a later time in an individual's life (i.e., those events that commonly occur between married couples). This study allowed participants to choose which of the scenarios would pose a threat to their relationships, which was expected to provide a more accurate depiction of how they would respond in a stress-inducing event (e.g., an argument with the partner) than if scenarios were assumed to be universally distressing. Events that are considered threatening to an individual would likely activate the attachment system, and would provide a sense of how attachment qualities impact problem-solving and support-seeking behaviors in this study. All participants responded to scenarios in the same order.

After rating their perceived level of threat for the scenario, participants wrote a brief response stating how they would attempt to resolve the scenario, the threat the scenario would pose to the security and/or satisfaction in the relationship, and any conflict the scenario may potentially create between them and their partners. Individual responses were coded by the principal investigator and thirty-eight percent of the responses were randomly selected to be coded again by student coders to assess inter-rater reliability. The responses coded by the principal investigator were analyzed. Responses were coded according to the extent to which they characterized one or more of the five conflict styles (obliging, avoiding, dominating, compromising, and integrating; Appendix G). Primary conflict styles (those most

strongly representing the response) were given a code of two, secondary styles (those seen in the response but not as the primary style) were given a code of one, and all others (those not at all representative of the response) were given a code of zero. Coders selected the conflict styles according to the level of concern for self and concern for the partner indicated by the response. Inter-rater reliability for the principal investigator's and student coders' coded responses ranged between fifty-two and one hundred percent on agreement on whether a conflict style was present for a response either as the primary or secondary style, with the highest inter-rater reliability percentage obtained for avoiding and integrating behaviors.

Finally, participants rated the extent to which their responses were characteristic of four support-seeking behaviors comprised of levels of self-sufficiency in problem-solving and support-seeking from the partner. They rated their responses on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = *does not reflect my response,* 7 = *strongly reflects my response*). The four support-seeking behaviors developed by the author were: Actively attempting to resolve the issue by oneself (high self-sufficiency, low support-seeking from the partner), convincing the partner to try to resolve the issue (low self, high partner), turning to the partner for help to resolve the issue together (high self and partner), and seeking help and/or support outside the relationship (low self-sufficiency and partner support).

Relationship satisfaction. The satisfaction subscale of the *Investment Model Scale* (Rusbult, 1980; Appendix F) is a five-item scale rating self-reported satisfaction with the present relationship. Participants responded to items on a seven-point Likert scale, rating the extent to which they agreed with each statement (e.g., "our relationship does a good job of fulfilling my needs for intimacy, companionship, etc."). Internal consistency was high, producing a Cronbach's alpha of .88. No Cronbach's alpha was reported in the original study (Rusbult, 1980).

Procedure

Participants completed a series of questionnaires in a classroom setting while thinking about their current romantic relationship. These questionnaires included measures of attachment (*Measure of Attachment Qualities;* Carver, 1997), relationship efficacy (the *Relationship Efficacy Measure;* Fincham et al 2000), partner attributions (the *Relationship Attribution Measure;* Fincham & Bradbury, 1992), and

relationship satisfaction (subscale of the *Investment Model Scale,* Rusbult, 1980). Participants also

responded to hypothetical scenarios to assess their problem-solving and support-seeking behaviors. All

participants completed the measures in the order listed above. Upon completing the study, participants

received credit toward their psychology course.

Results

Data were analyzed primarily by examining bivariate correlations among attachment qualities,

relationship efficacy, partner attributions, perceived threat, problem-solving and support-seeking

behaviors, and relationship satisfaction (Table 1). For problem-solving and support-seeking behaviors,

correlations were calculated using only the average ratings for scenarios that participants perceived as

posing a significant threat to the relationship (a score of four was considered the midpoint on the seven-

point scale, so scores of four and higher were analyzed). The infidelity scenario (kissing another person)

was rated the most threatening, with 94% of participants rating it as at least moderately threatening.

Following were the scenarios concerning intimacy (84%), a personal problem (66%), marriage (57%),

sharing a purchase (57%), and transferring schools (51%). One hundred twenty-three of the one hundred

twenty-six total participants in this study reported at least one of the scenarios to be threatening.

People who reported higher attachment security generally reported lower attachment avoidance.

Security was not associated with attachment ambivalence. People who reported higher ambivalence

tended to also report higher avoidance (Table 1).

Participants who reported higher security were expected to report higher relationship efficacy,

more positive partner attributions and mutual problem-solving behaviors, greater support-seeking from

the romantic partner, and higher relationship satisfaction. People reporting higher security were also

expected to anticipate cooperating with their partners to resolve problems when they perceived these

problems to be threatening to the relationship. Participants reporting higher security did report higher

relationship satisfaction. Higher security was also associated with longer romantic relationships (Table 1).

No association was found between attachment security and relationship efficacy, nor between security

Table 1: Bivariate Correlations (n's = 117–126)

	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1. Security	−.50**	.00	**.14**	**−.03**	.06	−.01	.12	.00	**−.04**	**.00**	−.06	−.04	**.08**	.09	.20*	**.25****
2. Avoidance		.18*	**−.15**	**.00**	**.09**	**.09**	−.12	.00	.02	−.09	**−.01**	.23*	−.07	−.08	−.18*	**−.18***
3. Ambivalence			−.39**	**.32****	**.20***	.20*	.12	−.13	−.04	.05	.23**	.15	.01	.01	−.18*	**−.16**
4. Relationship efficacy				−.52**	−.19*	−.22*	.05	.01	.06	−.14	−.19*	−.15	.07	.04	.02	.54**
5. Negative attributions					.24**	.09	−.02	.12	−.14	.05	.19*	.13	−.25**	−.01	−.01	−.25**
6. Perceived threat						−.09	.07	.10	.06	−.17	.09	.46**	.16	.26**	−.09	−.16
7. Avoiding							−.05	−.05	−.22*	−.04	.10	−.01	−.05	.00	−.07	−.11
8. Obliging								−.26**	−.20*	−.09	.05	−.04	−.05	−.10	−.02	.21*
9. Dominating									−.55**	−.30**	−.03	.14	−.30**	−.01	−.09	−.10
10. Compromising										−.07	.02	−.08	.26**	.07	.08	−.01
11. Integrating											.01	−.07	.12	.04	.20*	−.18*
12. Solve problems by oneself												.08	.21*	.11	−.23**	.03
13. Convince partner to solve problems													.03	.02	.00	−.13
14. Cooperating with the partner to solve problems														.24**	.04	.19*
15. Seek help outside the relationship															.08	−.03
16. Duration of the relationship																.00
17. Relationship satisfaction																

*Significant at $p<.05$, **Significant at $p<.01$

and partner attributions. Security was not correlated with mutual problem-solving behaviors or cooperating with the partner on threatening scenarios (Table 1).

To account for the possibility that people who reported higher attachment security may have also reported ambivalence in their attachments and that ambivalence may confound these relationships, partial correlations were computed, controlling for ambivalence. Partial correlations obtained between security and relationship efficacy, partner attributions, perceived threat, and compromising, integrating, and cooperating behaviors were .16, -.09, .03, -.03, -.01, and .10, respectively. None of these correlations were significant when controlling for ambivalence. Linear regression analyses, using techniques suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986) and centering the variables, were also conducted to determine whether ambivalence moderated any of these relationships (Table 2). It was expected that if this moderation existed, participants who reported higher security and lower ambivalence would report higher efficacy, more positive partner attributions, and more compromising, integrating, and cooperating behaviors. Neither main effects nor interaction effects were significant for these moderations; thus, ambivalence did not moderate these relationships.

Table 2: Multiple Regression Analyses (n's = 116-126)

	Efficacy	Attributions	Compromising	Integrating	Cooperating
			Dependent Variables		
Security[o]	.14	-.02	-.03	.01	.08
Ambivalence[o]	-.39	.32	-.04	.05	.01
R^2	.17	.10	<.01	<.01	.01
Interaction[o]	-.04	-.01	.05	-.14	.14
ΔR^2	<.01	<.01	<.01	.01	.02

[o]Standardized Beta

Avoidance in attachment was predicted to relate to low levels of relationship efficacy, negative partner attributions, low levels of perceived threat, avoiding and dominating problem-solving behaviors, and low relationship satisfaction. Avoidance was also expected to correlate with anticipated attempts to resolve problems by oneself rather than seeking help from the partner or from others. This study did not find a significant relationship between avoidance and efficacy, attributions, or perceived threat. People

reporting higher avoidance anticipated placing greater demands on their partners to resolve problems. However, people who reported high avoidance did not report avoiding or dominating problem-solving behaviors, nor did they expect to resolve problems alone. People who were more avoidant in their attachments had shorter romantic relationships and reported lower relationship satisfaction (Table 1).

Ambivalence was expected to result in greater perception of threats to one's relationship. People reporting higher ambivalence were also expected to report more negative partner attributions and lower relationship satisfaction. People who reported higher ambivalence did perceive events to be more threatening to the relationship. They also reported lower efficacy, negative partner attributions, shorter romantic relationships, and lower relationship satisfaction (Table 1).

It was also predicted that relationship efficacy would moderate the relationship between ambivalence and problem-solving and support-seeking behaviors; those reporting high efficacy were expected to anticipate compromising and cooperating with their partners, and those reporting low efficacy were expected to anticipate using obliging and dominating problem-solving behaviors. Multiple regression analyses were used to test whether efficacy moderated the relationship between ambivalence and compromising, cooperating, obliging, and dominating behaviors (Table 3). Neither main effects nor interaction effects were significant for these moderations; thus, efficacy did not moderate any of these relationships.
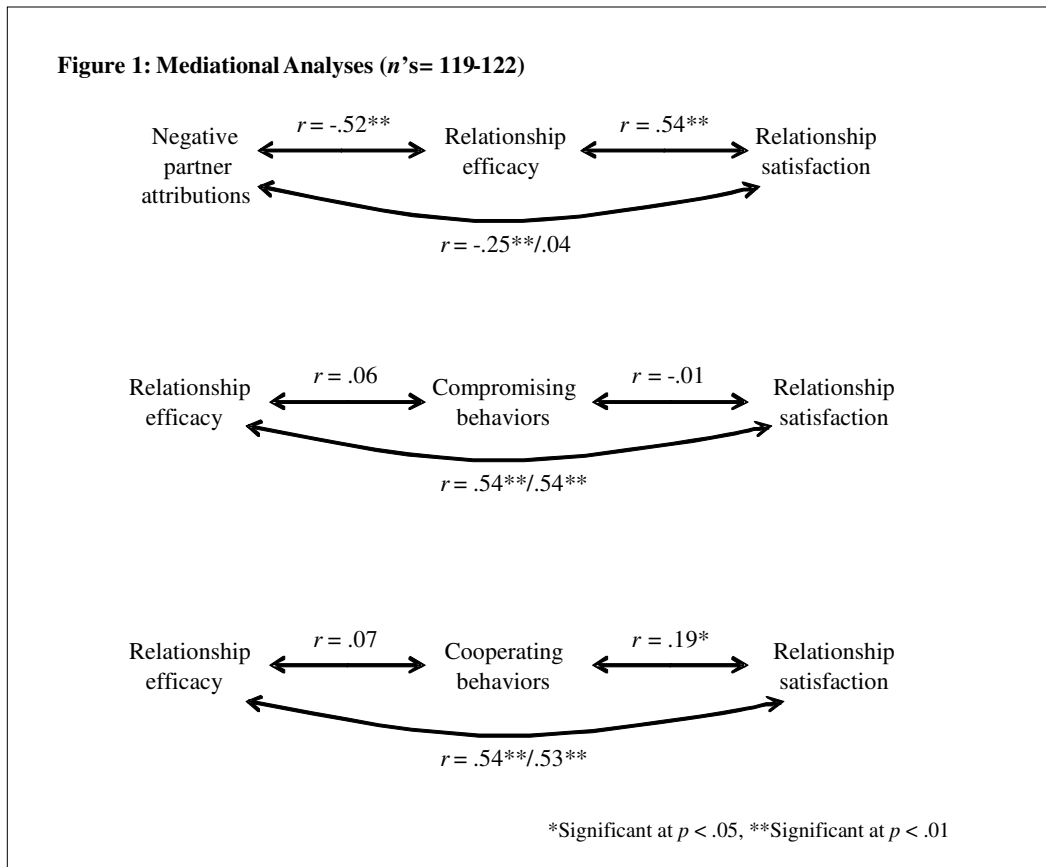
Table 3: Multiple Regression Analyses (n's = 116-126)			
	Dependent Variables		
	Compromising	Cooperating	Dominating/Obliging
Ambivalence[o]	<.01	.04	-.11
Efficacy[o]	.07	.09	-.05
R^2	.01	.01	.01
Interaction[o]	.08	.09	.06
ΔR^2	<.01	<.01	<.01
[o]Standardized Beta			

Relationship efficacy was expected to mediate the relationship between partner attributions and relationship satisfaction. This mediation was tested using partial correlations while controlling for

efficacy (Figure 1). Negative partner attributions were associated with low relationship efficacy, and efficacy was significantly correlated with relationship satisfaction. Negative partner attributions were also related to low relationship satisfaction; however, this correlation was not significant after controlling for efficacy. Thus, efficacy did mediate this relationship.

Figure 1: Mediational Analyses (n's= 119-122)

Negative partner attributions $\xrightarrow{r = -.52**}$ Relationship efficacy $\xrightarrow{r = .54**}$ Relationship satisfaction

$r = -.25**/.04$

Relationship efficacy $\xrightarrow{r = .06}$ Compromising behaviors $\xrightarrow{r = -.01}$ Relationship satisfaction

$r = .54**/.54**$

Relationship efficacy $\xrightarrow{r = .07}$ Cooperating behaviors $\xrightarrow{r = .19*}$ Relationship satisfaction

$r = .54**/.53**$

*Significant at $p < .05$, **Significant at $p < .01$

Compromising and cooperating behaviors were expected to mediate the relationship between efficacy and relationship satisfaction (Figure 1). Efficacy was not significantly related to compromising or cooperating behaviors, and compromising behaviors were not associated with relationship satisfaction. Because these correlations are not significant, neither compromising nor cooperating behaviors mediated the relationship between efficacy and relationship satisfaction.

Differences between groups

Independent t-tests were computed to determine if there were any gender differences or differences

between participants who reported being in a long-distance relationship and those who did not. Men were more likely to anticipate solving problems alone (M = 4.17, SD = 1.12) than were women (M = 3.66, SD = 1.34). Women were more likely to anticipate cooperating with their partners (M = 4.78, SD = 1.23) than were men (M = 4.32, SD = .98). No significant differences were found between the participants who were in a long-distance relationship and those who were not (p's > .05).

Discussion

This study found that attachment qualities were significantly related to relationship efficacy, partner attributions, problem-solving and support-seeking behaviors, and relationship satisfaction among college students. People who reported higher relationship efficacy reported more positive partner attributions and perceived negative events to be less threatening to their relationships. When confronting a problem, those who reported higher efficacy were less likely to anticipate avoiding problems or solving them alone, and they reported higher satisfaction with their relationships. People who made more negative partner attributions perceived events as highly threatening to their relationships, preferred to resolve problems alone, and reported lower relationship satisfaction. Overall, the more threatening people found negative events to be to the security and satisfaction in their relationships, the more likely they were to anticipate relying on their partners or sources outside the relationship to resolve the problem.

People who reported higher attachment security generally reported less attachment avoidance; they were more likely to be comfortable with intimacy and closeness within their romantic relationships. Those who reported higher security also had more enduring romantic relationships and reported greater satisfaction within those relationships. According to past research, people reporting greater attachment security also report greater relationship satisfaction and tend to have romantic relationship that endure longer than others' (Hazen & Shaver, 1987). People who display high attachment security tend to form attachments with friends and romantic partners more quickly than those displaying more insecure attachment qualities (Fraley & Davis, 1997).

Because attachments with others can serve as a buffer against stress and as a "safe haven" one can turn to for support and help in resolving problems, the willingness and ability to form adult

attachments, reach out to others for support (which requires trust and the ability to disclose vulnerabilities), and maintain close relationships is a benefit to one's health and happiness (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Thoits, 1986). Because the maintenance of romantic relationships is contingent upon the ability of partners to meet their needs within the relationship, the ability to effectively resolve conflict in a manner that generates win-win solutions would be favored in any relationship in which the partners are committed to staying together.

Attachment plays an important role in conflict resolution and support-seeking during times of distress, when problems arise that threaten people's security and satisfaction within their romantic relationships. Past research found that people who are more secure in their attachments tend to cope with problems in their relationships better and with greater confidence and exhibit more positive attributions for negative partner behavior than those who are more insecure (Collins & Read, 1990; Simpson, 1990). However, results of this study were not consistent with these findings. People who reported higher security did not report higher relationship efficacy, more positive partner attributions, or more mutual problem- solving behaviors (compromising and integrating). It might be possible that participants who reported high security in their attachments also reported high ambivalence (it is unlikely that they also reported avoidance because security and avoidance were strongly negatively correlated), and therefore ambivalence confounded these data. However, results indicated that ambivalence did not moderate the relationship between security and efficacy, attributions, or mutual problem-solving behaviors. Even when controlling for ambivalence, no significant correlation was found between these variables.

In this study, people who reported higher attachment avoidance tended to also display higher ambivalence and lower security; thus, they were more likely to be uncomfortable with closeness and intimacy and to experience anxiety within their relationships. People who reported higher avoidance had relationships that were shorter in duration and reported lower relationship satisfaction. When an event was considered to be threatening, people who reported higher avoidance were more likely to anticipate convincing their partners to resolve the conflict. People who reported higher avoidance did not anticipate using more avoiding problem-solving behaviors or to expect to solve problems alone.

Although conflict is an essential component of any close relationship, people who exhibit avoidance in their attachments with others attempt to avoid conflict discussions and avoid seeking help from others. When they do engage in problem-solving, they are less likely than their securely- or ambivalently-attached counterparts to achieve win-win solutions (Shi, 2003). This study supports previous findings, adding that attachment avoidance may not always be exhibited by walking away from conflict altogether. One possible reason why people who reported higher avoidance did not use more avoiding behaviors may be that people who may otherwise avoid conflict and problem-solving situations in their relationships were not given the option to avoid responding to such situations in this study. However, although avoidant behaviors (e.g., walking away) were not demonstrated, the significant relationship between avoidance and anticipating placing demands on the partner to resolve problems may indicate a preference for allowing the partner to resolve problems and conflict, and thus itself may be an avoiding response. Understanding the conditions under which a person demonstrating attachment avoidance may have to exhibit problem-solving and support-seeking behaviors (i.e., when the issue at stake is important enough to do so, or when under pressure from the partner) has implications for understanding how conflict resolution skills can be taught and adapted to these individuals. Avoidance is associated with relationship instability, dissatisfaction, and dissolution, and the importance of effective problem-solving skills is stressed particularly for these individuals because they can potentially prevent these consequences (Simpson et al, 1996).

People who reported higher attachment ambivalence also reported lower relationship efficacy and more negative partner attributions, and they perceived negative events to be more threatening to their relationships. People reporting high ambivalence were more likely to anticipate resolving problems that arise in the relationship by themselves or may foresee themselves avoiding problems altogether. Low reported relationship efficacy and negative partner attributions may cause people to believe that neither they nor their partners are capable of effectively resolving the conflict that arises in their relationships. Those reporting higher ambivalence also had relationships that were shorter in duration and reported that those relationships were less satisfying.

This study suggests that ambivalence in attachment is an indicator that interpersonal problems will be perceived as highly threatening to romantic relationships and that people who report high ambivalence will expend efforts to resolve these problems. These results suggest that people who exhibit ambivalence in attachment worry about the state of their relationship and about being abandoned by their partners. They also suggest that these people may be highly aware of potential current and future threats to their relationships, and thus may be willing to attempt to resolve these threats. However, consistent with previous findings (Lopez, Murua, & Rice, 2007), people reporting high attachment ambivalence demonstrated low confidence in their ability to effectively resolve their problems. People displaying ambivalent attachments often find themselves caught in a vicious cycle in which ineffective problem-solving behaviors lead to increased distress and decreased satisfaction, which frequently lead to increased conflict (Simpson et al, 1996).

Relationship efficacy was associated with positive partner attributions, suggesting that people who feel confident about their problem-solving abilities within their relationships also believe that their partners' negative behavior is not intentional or severely damaging to the relationship. However, it is important to note that this is not a causal relationship; efficacy may impact one's partner perceptions, or positive perceptions of one's partner may make a person more confident in his or her problem-solving abilities. People who reported more negative partner attributions were more likely to perceive problems as threatening to the relationship and to anticipate resolving problems alone when they arise. They were less likely to cooperate with their partners to resolve problems. This finding suggests that people who believe that their partners act negatively because of a personality or character deficit or that such negatively is damaging to the relationship tend to display a preference for solving problems alone rather than working them out with the partner when the stakes are high. Results may be indicative of lack of trust in a romantic partner's intentions or ability to offer support; however, this study did not incorporate measures of trust and thus such speculations are inconclusive.

People who reported higher relationship efficacy perceived negative events to be less threatening to the security and satisfaction within their relationships. It may be that, although participants perceived

the events to be potentially troublesome, they also felt as though they had the skills necessary to resolve the problem, and thus did not consider the problem to be threatening. Those reporting higher efficacy were less likely to anticipate trying to resolve problems alone or to avoid problems within the relationship. Higher relationship efficacy was also associated with higher relationship satisfaction. Regardless of reported efficacy, the more people perceived a negative event to be threatening to their relationships, the more likely they were to rely on their partners to resolve the problem or seek help outside the relationship.

Limitations and directions for research

Whereas attachment theory provides a model for understanding individual differences in beliefs and behaviors concerning adult intimate relationships, it is crucial to note that not every romantic relationship is an attachment relationship. This distinction is especially important in research with young adults, who may still be at the beginning stages of transferring attachments from their parents to a partner, and whose attachment styles more closely reflect that of their earlier child-caregiver attachment than the present adult attachment (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). For young adults it takes, on average, two years to develop an attachment with a romantic partner (Fraley & Davis, 1997). The mean duration of relationships in the present study was 1.44 years; thus it can be assumed that many of the participants reported on relationships that were not yet attachments. However, attachment qualities inherent in individuals manifest themselves in all stages of relationships, from one's beliefs about love to finding a romantic partner to committing to an intimate relationship with that partner (Carver, 1997; Simpson, 1990). Furthermore, although participants in this study most likely have not formed attachments with romantic partners, being in a romantic relationship indicates that they are at least in the process of transferring their attachments from parents to their partners. They may still exhibit behaviors indicative of attachment, namely seeking proximity to and support from the partner (Fraley & Davis, 1997).

Although the present study sought to distinguish between participants who are in committed relationships from those who were casually dating, it remains unclear the extent to which partners must perceive being committed in a relationship to qualify it as an attachment relationship. A few things can be

done in future research to increase the likelihood that participants will report on attachment relationships. First, an older sample of participants could be used to make it more likely that they are involved in longer, more stable relationships. Second, the study could require that participants be in a relationship for a set amount of time. The present study only required participants to be in a romantic relationship at the time the study was done, but it did not require the relationship to be of any particular length of time.

Whereas the present study offers an alternative approach to assessing the impact of attachment theory on problem-solving and support-seeking behaviors, particularly by viewing problem-solving behaviors as adaptable and dependent upon perceived threat and by viewing support-seeking within the context of a romantic partner, certain limitations should be noted. Because this study used hypothetical scenarios to assess participant's anticipated behaviors, results may not be indicative of actual behaviors in a conflict resolution scenario. Furthermore, many studies on conflict resolution assess skills in both partners as they interact with each other (e.g., listening, expressing empathy). Whereas isolating one person's behaviors may have advantages in understanding personality traits and preferences, conflict resolution never occurs in a vacuum, and thus external factors, most notably the partner's behavior and responses, play a central role in problem-solving situations.

Because the present study assessed the problem-solving and support-seeking behaviors of individuals rather than both partners in a relationship, these data cannot sufficiently explain the dynamics of the relationship as a whole. Whereas participants in this study may consider a particular hypothetical situation (e.g., the decline of intimacy in the relationship) as non-threatening to their security and satisfaction within the relationship, their romantic partners may perceive such a situation differently. In such cases, a potential conflict scenario may arise because what one partner perceives as problematic becomes an issue for both people involved in the relationship. Therefore, participants' behaviors should be assessed for cases in which their partners perceive the event as threatening and participants are aware of their partners' perceptions. Future research should be directed at assessing the anticipated problem-solving and support-seeking behaviors of both partners who are in a romantic relationship together to more accurately assess how these behaviors impact the relationship, and to determine areas of agreement

and disagreement between partners in how problems should be managed.

The present study also evaluated problem-solving skills as adaptable behaviors rather than as stable personality traits. This study has potential implications for understanding the conditions in which a person utilizes one problem-solving behavior or skill over another. For example, a person's investment in the relationship, stake in the current problem, and priority of the problem as it compares to other problems and events in the person's life may in part determine the factors influencing one's problem-solving behaviors. However, although participants in this study had the option of adapting their behaviors to the scenarios, this was done primarily to differentiate between scenarios which were perceived as threatening and those which were not. This study did not assess whether participants actually used a variety of behaviors (e.g., compromising in one threatening situation while avoiding another) across scenarios that were all perceived as threatening. Furthermore, without assessing participants' general conflict styles, it cannot be determined whether people deviated from or changed their conflict styles in reaction to different types of threat. Future research may need to include the original measure (Shi, 2003) or a comparable measure to check behaviors across multiple scenarios to a general, preferred conflict style.

Results of the present study do not particularly support coding responses to individual scenarios over assessing conflict resolution styles, largely because inter-rater reliability for coding such responses was considerably low. Results may be due to how the conflict styles were operationally defined and differences in raters' perceptions of concern for self and concern for others. In the present study, the integrating conflict style had the highest inter-rater reliability, yet agreement across all scenarios was that an integrating behavior was not present. This underrepresentation likely occured because the compromising and integrating behaviors are so similar and coders had difficulty distinguishing between moderate and high concern for self and other. For future research it may be worthwhile to create a coding system that more clearly operationally defines these constructs (which may have aided in increasing inter-rater reliability for this study) and utilizes fewer categories for coding responses. Additionally, more enhanced training and a test-run would likely increase inter-rater reliability in the future, and using only the scores given by trained coders instead of those given by the principal investigator may increase the

validity of this measure. Finally, future research could compare coded responses to conflict styles (general tendencies) to determine if and under what circumstances people deviate from their typical problem-solving styles.

Another important limitation of the present study is that a large number of analyses were used to test the large number of hypotheses. Although several seemingly significant results were obtained, using so many analyses greatly increases the likelihood of obtaining results by chance, and it is possible that some of the effects are not as large as they appear. Such effects, although statistically significant for this sample, may not be meaningful in practical application.

Implications

Interpersonal conflict, however inevitable, provides valuable insight into individual differences not only in how relationships and problems are perceived, but in how such problems are approached and managed. Belief systems about love and the role of conflict, distribution of responsibility concerning relationship problems, problem-solving behaviors and tactics, and the use of existing social support resources, particularly from one's romantic partner, may separate healthy, thriving relationships from those in which partners are dissatisfied and which are at risk for dissolution. Attachment theory provides a framework for understanding such differences in how individuals manage relationships and interpersonal conflict. Understanding how people attempt to resolve problems in their intimate relationships and the consequences of both effective and ineffective problem-solving behaviors has implications for people to learn how to resolve conflict throughout the lifespan and for professionals who seek to increase people's awareness of conflict and ability to effectively control it.

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Appendix A: Demographics Questionnaire

Please circle or fill in the appropriate response.

1. Gender: Male   Female

2. Age: _____ years

3. Classification: Freshman   Sophomore   Junior   Senior

   Graduate Student   Other: _____

4. GPA: _____

5. Ethnicity: White/Caucasian   Black/African American

   Hispanic/Latino   Asian

   Other _____

6. Relationship status: Single   Casually Dating   Seriously Dating

   Engaged   Cohabitating   Married

7. Duration of current relationship: _____ years, _____ months

8. Do you consider this relationship to be a long-distance relationship?   Yes   No

9. Sexual orientation: Heterosexual   Homosexual   Bisexual

   Other _____

10. Gender of current romantic partner (significant other):   Male   Female

11. Age of current romantic partner (significant other): _____

12. If you have a serious crisis, how many people do you know who you could count on for support? _____

Appendix B: Measure of Attachment Qualities (Carver, 1997)

Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements, using the rating scale below:

	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
1. When I'm close to someone, it gives me a sense of comfort about life in general.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. I often worry that my partner doesn't really love me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. I have trouble getting others to be as close as I want them to be.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. I find it easy to be close to others.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. I often worry my partner will not want to stay with me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. Others want me to be more intimate than I feel comfortable being. `	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. It feels relaxing and good to be close to someone.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. I am very comfortable being close to others.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. I don't worry about others abandoning me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. My desire to merge sometimes scares people away.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. I prefer not to be too close to others.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. I find others are reluctant to get as close as I would like.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. I get uncomfortable when someone wants to be very close.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14. Being close to someone gives me a source of strength for other activities.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Appendix C: Relationship Efficacy Measure (Fincham, Harold, & Gano-Phillips, 2000)

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements concerning the disagreements and conflicts that arise between you and your significant other.

	Strongly Disagree						*Strongly Agree*
1. I have little control over the conflicts that occur between my partner and I.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. There is no way I can solve some of the problems in my relationship.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. When I put my mind to it I can resolve just about any disagreement that comes up between my partner and I.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. I often feel helpless in dealing with the problems that come up in my relationship.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. Sometimes I feel that I have no say over issues that cause conflict between us.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. I am able to do the things needed to settle our conflicts.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. There is little I can do to revolve many of the important conflicts between my partner and I.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Appendix D: Relationship Attribution Measure (Fincham & Bradbury, 1992)

This questionnaire describes several things that your partner **might** do. Imagine your partner performing each behavior and then read the statements that follow it. Please circle the number that indicates how much you **agree** or **disagree** with each statement, using the rating scale below:

Your partner criticizes something you say

Strongly Disagree   *Strongly Agree*

1. My partner's behavior was due to something about him/her (e.g., the type of person he/she is, his/her mood).   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

2. My partner's behavior was due to something about me (e.g., the type of person I am, the mood I was in).   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

3. The reason my partner criticized me is <u>not</u> likely to change.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

4. The reason my partner criticized me is something that affects other areas of our relationship.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

5. My partner criticized me on purpose rather than unintentionally.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

6. My partner's behavior was motivated by selfish rather than <u>un</u>selfish concerns.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

7. My partner deserves to be blamed for criticizing me.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Your partner begins to spend less time with you

1. My partner's behavior was due to something about him/her (e.g., the type of person he/she is, his/her mood).   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

2. My partner's behavior was due to something about me (e.g., the type of person I am, the mood I was in).   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

3. The reason my partner is beginning to spend less time with me is <u>not</u> likely to change.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

4. The reason my partner is beginning to spend less time with me is something that affects other areas of our relationship.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

5. My partner is beginning to spend less time with me on purpose rather than unintentionally.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

6. My partner's behavior was motivated by selfish rather than <u>un</u>selfish concerns.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

7. My partner deserves to be blamed for beginning to spend less time with me.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Appendix E: Problem-Solving and Support-Seeking Assessment

Please imagine the following hypothetical scenario involving your current romantic partner (significant other). Then indicate how severe a threat you think the scenario would pose to your security and satisfaction within your current romantic relationship.

Scenario: A trusted friend informs you that he/she saw your significant other kissing another woman/man.

	Not a Threat					*Extreme Threat*	
How strong of a threat do you consider this scenario to be to your security/satisfaction in your relationship?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Please write a brief response to the above scenario, focusing on how you would attempt to resolve the threat that the scenario poses to your security and satisfaction within your romantic relationship. How would you attempt to handle any conflicts this scenario causes between you and your significant other?

Please indicate the extent to which you think your response to the above hypothetical scenario would reflect each of the following methods of resolving the threat to, and conflict in, your romantic relationship (1 = does not reflect your response, 7 = strongly reflects your response).

	Does Not Reflect					*Strongly Reflects*	
Actively attempting to resolve the issue yourself.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Convincing your partner to try to resolve the issue.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Turning to your partner for help to resolve the issue together.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Seeking help and/or support outside the relationship. (i.e., friends, family).	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Please imagine the following hypothetical scenario involving your current romantic partner (significant other). Then indicate how severe a threat you think the scenario would pose to your security and satisfaction within your current romantic relationship.

Scenario: Your significant other informs you, out of the blue, that he/she has decided to transfer to another college beginning this spring semester, and asks you to transfer with him/her.

	Not a Threat					*Extreme Threat*
How strong of a threat do you consider this scenario to be to your security/satisfaction in your relationship?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Please write a brief response to the above scenario, focusing on how you would attempt to resolve the threat that the scenario poses to your security and satisfaction within your romantic relationship. How would you attempt to handle any conflicts this scenario causes between you and your significant other?

Please indicate the extent to which you think your response to the above hypothetical scenario would reflect each of the following methods of resolving the threat to, and conflict in, your romantic relationship (1 = does not reflect your response, 7 = strongly reflects your response).

	Does Not Reflect					*Strongly Reflects*
Actively attempting to resolve the issue yourself.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Convincing your partner to try to resolve the issue.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Turning to your partner for help to resolve the issue together.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Seeking help and/or support outside the relationship. (i.e., friends, family).	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Please imagine the following hypothetical scenario involving your current romantic partner (significant other). Then indicate how severe a threat you think the scenario would pose to your security and satisfaction within your current romantic relationship.

Scenario: Six months ago, you and your partner went in together to purchase a very expensive item, with the intention of equally sharing the payments until it is paid for completely. Your partner, however, has missed the last two payments, leaving you to cover his/her share of the expense. Your partner tells you that he/she doesn't anticipate being able to make the payment next month as well.

	Not a *Threat*						*Extreme* *Threat*
How strong of a threat do you consider this scenario to be to your security/satisfaction in your relationship?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Please write a brief response to the above scenario, focusing on how you would attempt to resolve the threat that the scenario poses to your security and satisfaction within your romantic relationship. How would you attempt to handle any conflicts this scenario causes between you and your significant other?

Please indicate the extent to which you think your response to the above hypothetical scenario would reflect each of the following methods of resolving the threat to, and conflict in, your romantic relationship (1 = does not reflect your response, 7 = strongly reflects your response).

	Does Not *Reflect*						*Strongly* *Reflects*
Actively attempting to resolve the issue yourself.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Convincing your partner to try to resolve the issue.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Turning to your partner for help to resolve the issue together.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Seeking help and/or support outside the relationship. (i.e., friends, family).	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Please imagine the following hypothetical scenario involving your current romantic partner (significant other). Then indicate how severe a threat you think the scenario would pose to your security and satisfaction within your current romantic relationship.

Scenario: During the last month your significant other has been dealing with a personal problem that you know about. During this time, he/she has been far more withdrawn than usual and refuses to discuss this problem with you.

	Not a Threat					*Extreme Threat*
How strong of a threat do you consider this scenario to be to your security/satisfaction in your relationship?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Please write a brief response to the above scenario, focusing on how you would attempt to resolve the threat that the scenario poses to your security and satisfaction within your romantic relationship. How would you attempt to handle any conflicts this scenario causes between you and your significant other?

Please indicate the extent to which you think your response to the above hypothetical scenario would reflect each of the following methods of resolving the threat to, and conflict in, your romantic relationship (1 = does not reflect your response, 7 = strongly reflects your response).

	Does Not Reflect					*Strongly Reflects*
Actively attempting to resolve the issue yourself.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Convincing your partner to try to resolve the issue.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Turning to your partner for help to resolve the issue together.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Seeking help and/or support outside the relationship. (i.e., friends, family).	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Please imagine the following hypothetical scenario involving your current romantic partner (significant other). Then indicate how severe a threat you think the scenario would pose to your security and satisfaction within your current romantic relationship.

Scenario: You and your significant other have been discussing plans to get married, and the two of you have decided to marry shortly after you graduate from college. One day your significant other tells you that he/she changed his/her mind and doesn't want to get married for at least two years after you graduate.

	Not a Threat					*Extreme Threat*
How strong of a threat do you consider this scenario to be to your security/satisfaction in your relationship?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Please write a brief response to the above scenario, focusing on how you would attempt to resolve the threat that the scenario poses to your security and satisfaction within your romantic relationship. How would you attempt to handle any conflicts this scenario causes between you and your significant other?

Please indicate the extent to which you think your response to the above hypothetical scenario would reflect each of the following methods of resolving the threat to, and conflict in, your romantic relationship (1 = does not reflect your response, 7 = strongly reflects your response).

	Does Not Reflect					*Strongly Reflects*
Actively attempting to resolve the issue yourself.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Convincing your partner to try to resolve the issue.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Turning to your partner for help to resolve the issue together.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Seeking help and/or support outside the relationship. (i.e., friends, family).	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Please imagine the following hypothetical scenario involving your current romantic partner (significant other). Then indicate how severe a threat you think the scenario would pose to your security and satisfaction within your current romantic relationship.

Scenario: During the last month you have noticed that your significant other has acted much less affectionate toward you than usual (less kissing and physical intimacy, etc.)

	Not a Threat						*Extreme Threat*
How strong of a threat do you consider this scenario to be to your security/satisfaction in your relationship?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Please write a brief response to the above scenario, focusing on how you would attempt to resolve the threat that the scenario poses to your security and satisfaction within your romantic relationship. How would you attempt to handle any conflicts this scenario causes between you and your significant other?

Please indicate the extent to which you think your response to the above hypothetical scenario would reflect each of the following methods of resolving the threat to, and conflict in, your romantic relationship (1 = does not reflect your response, 7 = strongly reflects your response).

	Does Not Reflect						*Strongly Reflects*
Actively attempting to resolve the issue yourself.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Convincing your partner to try to resolve the issue.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Turning to your partner for help to resolve the issue together.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Seeking help and/or support outside the relationship. (i.e., friends, family).	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Appendix F: Satisfaction Subscale of the Investment Model Scale (Rusbult, 1980)

Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements regarding your current romantic relationship.

	Strongly Disagree					*Strongly Agree*	
1. I feel satisfied with our relationship.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. Our relationship is much better than others' relationships.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. Our relationship is close to ideal.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. My relationship makes me very happy.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. Our relationship does a good job of fulfilling my needs for intimacy, companionship, etc.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Appendix G: Coding Instructions for Problem-Solving Assessment

Please read over the descriptions of each of the conflict styles: Obliging, avoiding, dominating, compromising and integrating. Also read the sample list of behaviors that could be included under each style.

To code the responses, first write the participant number (found in the upper right corner of the questionnaire) in the upper left-hand box of the coding chart. Please read each participant's response to the hypothetical scenario (participants responded to six different scenarios). Indicate which of the five conflict styles the response best describes by placing a checkmark in the corresponding box. If a response is indicative of more than one conflict style, place a checkmark under every appropriate category and circle the checkmark for the conflict style that is most characteristic of that response.

If you are uncertain about how to categorize a response into a conflict style, refer to the reading or sample list, or include any comments or questions in the area below each coding chart.

Thank you for your help with this study.

Problem-Solving/Conflict Resolution Styles

Below are some examples of behaviors that may be indicative of a particular conflict resolution style. Keep in mind that these are only a few possible examples, and that in some cases a behavior may be characteristic of more than one conflict style. When determining which conflict style a behavior best describes, focus on the level of concern the participant displays for him/herself and for his or her partner (the extent to which the participant anticipates solving the problem in such a way that benefits him/herself and/or the partner).

Obliging: Low concern for self, high concern for the partner
- Giving into the partner's needs/demands (or anticipated needs/demands of the partner)
- Suggesting a solution to the problem that benefits the partner at the expense of the participant
- Emphasizing the partner's needs over one's own when problem-solving

Avoiding: Low concern for self, low concern for the partner
- Walking away or attempting to walk away from the problem (withdrawal)
- Distracting him/herself from the problem
- Assuming that the partner should/will solve the problem (no intended action on part of the participant)

Dominating: High concern for self, low concern for the partner
- Demanding that the partner change or sacrifice in some way to solve the problem
- Solving the problem in such a way that benefits him/herself but not the partner
- Emphasizing his/her own needs over the partner's needs when problem-solving

Compromising: Moderate concern for self, moderate concern for the partner
- Negotiation, or attempting to meet the partner "half-way"
- Sacrificing some potential benefit and assuming the partner will do the same in order to find a solution that works for both people
- Talking with the partner to find common ground

Integrating: High concern for self, high concern for the partner
- Attempting to maximize benefits for him/herself and the partner when problem-solving
- Willingness to spend the time and resources needed to find a solution that benefits both the participant and his/her partner
- Talking with the partner to determine both of their needs and how to meet those needs when problem-solving