

Conflict in Adult Close Relationships: An Attachment Perspective

Paula R. Pietromonaco and Dara Greenwood

University of Massachusetts

Lisa Feldman Barrett

Boston College

Chapter to appear in W. S. Rholes & J. A. Simpson (Eds.), Adult attachment: New directions and emerging issues. New York: Guilford Press, 2004.

## Conflict in Adult Close Relationships: An Attachment Perspective

Relationship researchers have focused on the frequency of conflict in couples' relationships and the manner in which couples engage in and try to resolve conflicts. Three generalizations arise from this work. First, conflict occurs regularly in most close relationships (Brehm, Miller, Perlman, & Campbell, 2002). Second, dealing with conflict, under some conditions, may facilitate the development and maintenance of intimacy and satisfaction in a relationship (Canary & Cupach, 1988; Fincham & Beach, 1999; Gottman, 1994; Holmes & Boon, 1990). Third, in unhappy marriages, conflict is associated with patterns of behavior (e.g., negative affect reciprocity, demand-withdraw) and thought that tend to escalate conflict and make it more difficult to negotiate a resolution (Bradbury & Fincham, 1990; Fincham & Beach, 1999). Whether conflict facilitates intimacy or exacerbates distress may depend on individual differences in the way in which people interpret and respond to conflict.

Attachment theory (e.g., Bowlby, 1973; Hazan & Shaver, 1987) provides a framework for understanding different responses to conflict. People are thought to differ in their working models of attachment, which include expectations, beliefs, and goals about the self in relation to others (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Collins & Read, 1994; Pietromonaco & Feldman Barrett, 2000). These working models are likely to shape people's thoughts, feelings, and behavior during conflict. For example, a person who expects close others to be generally responsive and available is likely to interpret and respond to conflict very differently from a person who expects close others to be rejecting and unavailable. Attachment theory may be able to inform the literature on

conflict in close relationships by suggesting how individuals might differ in how they construe conflict.

At the same time, the study of relationship conflict provides a useful context for testing important aspects of attachment theory. Conflict may be particularly likely to reveal attachment processes because (a) it may act as a stressor on the relationship and thereby activate the attachment system (Simpson, Rholes, & Phillips, 1996), (b) it challenges partners' abilities to regulate their emotions and behavior (Kobak & Duemmler, 1994), which are thought to be connected to attachment processes and (c) it may trigger behaviors (e.g., personal disclosures) that typically promote intimacy, thereby providing evidence relevant to different attachment goals such as achieving intimacy or maintaining self-reliance (Pietromonaco & Feldman Barrett, 1997).

In this chapter, we first discuss how conflict can be conceptualized within an attachment framework. Specifically, we propose that conflict may pose a threat to the attachment bond, but that it also may provide an opportunity for perceiving or experiencing greater intimacy. Furthermore, the degree to which people perceive conflict as a threat, opportunity, or both will depend on the content (e.g., expectations, beliefs, goals) of their working models of attachment. Next, we identify a set of predictions that follow from this framework, and evaluate extent to which empirical findings support these predictions; in particular, we attempt to integrate divergent findings in the empirical literature. Finally, we outline several critical issues that will need to be addressed in future work.

### The Significance of Conflict for Adult Attachment Processes

Since the goal of attachment behaviour is to maintain an affective bond, any situation that seems to be endangering the bond elicits action designed to preserve

it; and the greater the danger of loss appears to be the more intense and varied are the actions elicited to prevent it. (Bowlby, 1980, p. 42)

Once his attachment behaviour has become organized mainly on a goal-corrected basis, the relationship developing between a child and his mother becomes much more complex. Whilst true collaboration between the two then becomes possible, so also does intractable conflict... Since each partner has his own personal set-goals to attain, collaboration between them is possible only so long as one is prepared, when necessary, to relinquish, or at least adjust, his own set-goals to suit the other's. (Bowlby, 1969, pp. 354-355)

Although the original formulation of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1979, 1980) does not offer a detailed theoretical analysis of the link between conflict and attachment, these quotes suggest two important ways in which conflict might be tied to attachment processes. First, if individuals perceive conflict as a potential threat to an attachment bond, then conflict should activate attachment behavior (e.g., protest, proximity-seeking). Second, interactions involving conflict require relationship partners to attend to each other's goals and to adjust their behavior accordingly; this process offers an opportunity to enhance intimacy and communication because partners learn about each other's goals and feelings and because they may engage in collaborative strategies to try to resolve the conflict. Several researchers (Kobak & Duemmler, 1994; Pietromonaco & Feldman Barrett, 1997, 2000; Simpson, Rholes, & Phillips, 1996; Rholes, Simpson, & Stevens, 1998) have extended these two theoretical ideas.

#### Conflict as a threat to the attachment bond

According to Bowlby (1980), any situation that threatens an attachment bond will activate attachment behaviors (e.g., clinging, crying) that are designed to reestablish and maintain the bond. Such situations can include a range of threats, such as fears about physical harm, illness, failures at work, loss of a loved one, and interactions involving conflict (Kobak & Duemmler, 1994; Simpson & Rholes, 1994; Simpson, Rholes, &

Phillips, 1996). Individuals may experience interactions involving conflict as a threat to attachment security if such interactions raise questions about the partner's availability (e.g., evoke concerns about the partner leaving; Kobak & Duemmler, 1994; Simpson et al., 1996) or about the degree to which the partner is willing or able to listen, understand, and respond sensitively to their concerns. This point suggests that it is important to distinguish between conflicts about issues that are central to attachment (e.g., about the proximity and availability of the partner) and those that are less central to attachment (e.g., about finances). Conflicts that focus on attachment concerns are more likely to evoke threat, but if they can be resolved successfully, they also are likely to promote stronger attachment bonds. Determining whether a conflict evokes attachment concerns, however, may be a difficult task. Although some types of content (e.g., a conflict about finances) may be normatively less central to attachment concerns, some individuals (e.g., those with a preoccupied attachment style) may perceive such conflicts as a threat to the attachment bond. Thus, even issues that are normatively less central to attachment may evoke attachment concerns for some individuals.

Attachment Style Differences. Although conflict may be somewhat aversive for everyone, the degree to which conflict evokes an attachment relevant threat and the precise nature of the threat will vary depending on the content of working models of attachment. People who hold a secure attachment style, who expect their partners to be responsive and available and who therefore are not overly concerned with their partner's availability, may not perceive conflict as a threat to the relationship. As a consequence, securely attached individuals should be able to communicate openly during conflicts, and

they should be able to apply a variety of strategies to negotiate with their partner (Kobak & Duemmler, 1994; Simpson et al, 1996).

In contrast, people with either a preoccupied (anxious-ambivalent) or a dismissing avoidant attachment style are likely to experience conflict as a threat to the relationship, but for different reasons. For people with a preoccupied style, conflict may trigger concerns about being abandoned by the partner or about the partner's responsiveness to their needs, leading to hyperactivation of the attachment system (Kobak & Duemmler, 1994; Simpson et al., 1996). As a result, people with a preoccupied attachment style may respond to conflict by displaying intense emotions and excessively focusing on their own concerns, and they may have difficulty attending to the information conveyed by their partners. For people with a dismissing-avoidant style, conflict may pose a threat because it impinges on their preference for independence and self-reliance, a preference that may reflect a belief that others will be emotionally unavailable and unresponsive. During conflict, dismissing-avoidant individuals might be pressured to engage in behaviors that are connected to establishing emotional closeness such as revealing personal thoughts and feelings, a process that may threaten their need to maintain their independence. Thus, people with a dismissing-avoidant attachment style may respond to conflict by deactivating the attachment system, leading them to withdraw or downplay the significance of conflict (Kobak & Duemmler, 1994). Finally, people with a fearful-avoidant attachment style show aspects of both preoccupation with attachment and dismissing avoidance. Thus, they may experience conflict as a threat for both of the reasons outlined above.

This analysis points out that different attachment-related expectations and goals

may determine perceptions of threat and that the behaviors following from such perceptions depend on the nature of the threat perceived (e.g., a threat that the partner will become unavailable or a threat to self-reliance and to revealing one's inner thoughts and feelings).

#### Conflict as an opportunity for communication and intimacy

Although conflict is likely to be associated with negative feelings and, under some circumstances, to be perceived as a potential threat, conflict also may provide an opportunity for enhancing intimacy and for improving communication. First, disagreements allow partners to express personal thoughts and feelings, which may lead to greater feelings of intimacy. Theorists (Reis & Shaver, 1988; Reis & Patrick, 1996) focusing on adult close relationships have suggested that interactions in which partners disclose their thoughts and feelings, listen and respond to each other, and feel accepted and understood promote relationship intimacy, and empirical evidence (Laurenceau, Feldman Barrett, & Pietromonaco, 1998; Laurenceau, Rivera, Schaffer, & Pietromonaco, in press) supports this view. If interactions about a conflict include one or more of these components (e.g., disclosing feelings), then individuals might perceive the interaction as enhancing intimacy.

Second, disagreements may give partners a chance to learn and establish constructive strategies for adjusting to each other's needs and for resolving conflict. The literature on parent-child attachment relationships suggests that effective parents provide a model for constructive conflict resolution. As Bowlby (1979) points out, children can learn how to peacefully resolve conflicts if their parents behave in a gentle, non-punitive fashion when handling disputes with the child. Kobak and Duemmler (1994) have

elaborated this idea by proposing that, as children develop more complex language skills, conversations provide a context in which children learn to understand differences between their own perspectives and those of their partners (e.g., their parents). If parents respond in ways that promote harmonious interactions, these conversations may help children to learn constructive strategies (e.g., compromising, creating a mutually acceptable plan) for handling areas of disagreement (Kobak & Duemmler, 1994).

Processes similar to those observed between parents and children are thought to occur in adult romantic relationships (Kobak & Duemmler, 1994; Rholes et al., 1998; Simpson et al., 1996). In adult relationships, conversations about a conflict may promote security when (a) partners are able to maintain open communication despite differences, (b) partners learn new information about each other, and (c) partners are able to articulate their goals and feelings, and as a result, to consider revising them (see Kobak & Duemmler, 1994).

Attachment Style Differences. The ideas presented above suggest that attachment style differences might occur in perceptions of intimacy as well as in actual intimacy-promoting behaviors. We first discuss differences in perceptions of intimacy, and then turn to differences in behavior.

Just as perceptions of threat should vary as a function of individuals' attachment styles, perceptions of the intimacy-promoting aspects of conflict also should depend on individuals' underlying working models of attachment and their associated attachment goals. In particular, chronic goals to achieve intimacy and to maintain independence and self-reliance are likely to guide perceptions of interactions involving conflict, and the degree to which people hold each of these goals should differ as a function of attachment

style (Pietromonaco & Feldman Barrett, 1997, 2000). People with a secure attachment style desire both intimacy and independence, but they are able to balance these two goals and to show flexibility in applying them. Thus, their perceptions of conflict may be determined more by the nature of the interaction than by prior goals.

In contrast, people with a preoccupied attachment style appear to have an overriding goal to achieve intimacy that directs their perceptions and leads them to be sensitive to cues (e.g., personal disclosures) about their partner's responsiveness. During conflict, adults with a preoccupied style initially may interpret disclosures of thoughts and feelings by the partner as evidence of intimacy because the partner is responding to them rather than avoiding or ignoring them. Thus, although people with a preoccupied style may perceive conflict as threatening, they also may see it as an opportunity for becoming closer to their partner. In considering this hypothesis, two issues need to be addressed. First, this idea may appear to be inconsistent with some findings (e.g., Collins, 1996) indicating that preoccupied individuals view their partners as less responsive to their needs. However, preoccupied individuals are characterized by ambivalence in their views of others; although their global expectations about others tend to be negative (e.g., Collins & Read, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987), they also tend to idealize their partners and relationships (Feeney & Noller, 1991). This tendency to idealize their partner and to hope that he or she will be responsive may lead them to interpret a disclosure as responsiveness. We propose that this kind of interpretation occurs close in time to the event and therefore would be more likely to appear in their immediate, online responses; over time, however, these initially hopeful perceptions may become more negative (e.g., if no real change actually occurs in the relationship) and thus

would be reflected in their retrospective, global responses. Second, although we propose that both secure and preoccupied individuals have a goal to obtain intimacy, the two groups are likely to differ in how they attempt to achieve this goal (Pietromonaco & Feldman Barrett, 2000). Secure individuals may attempt to achieve intimacy through mutual sharing and open communication. In contrast, preoccupied individuals may attempt to achieve intimacy by obtaining self-regulatory assistance from their partners (Pietromonaco & Feldman Barrett, 2003), a process which may not lead to true intimacy in the relationship.

In contrast to preoccupied individuals, people with a dismissing-avoidant attachment style appear to hold an overriding goal to maintain independence, thereby protecting themselves from partners who are unresponsive and rejecting. Conflict generally will be aversive for those with a dismissing-avoidant attachment style, and they will attempt to withdraw from the situation. People with a fearful-avoidant style may hold goals to achieve intimacy and to maintain independence, and if both goals are activated at the same time, they may be caught in an approach-avoidance conflict, leading them to display patterns characteristic of both preoccupied and dismissing-avoidant individuals.

It is important to note that perceptions of conflict may or may not reflect the reality of the situation. That is, a woman might feel closer to her partner after the two have talked about their differences, and if the partner actually feels closer to her as well, the woman's feelings are an accurate reflection of reality. However, it also is possible that she will interpret an interaction in which she and her partner disclosed as evidence of closeness while her partner resents being pressured to reveal his inner feelings and

actually feels more distant, a dynamic which may serve to increase, rather than decrease, the impact of conflict within the relationship. The extent to which such perceptions map onto reality are apt to depend on the quality of the behaviors enacted during conflict.

Attachment style also should be associated with behavioral differences in responses to conflict. We would expect behaviors that promote security (e.g., those involving open communication, negotiation) to be most common in interactions involving at least one secure partner. Repeated interactions in which partners listen and respond to each other's needs and concerns should form the basis for the development and maintenance of intimacy in the relationship (e.g., Reis & Shaver, 1988). Thus, in the long-term, the relationships of secure individuals should be characterized by greater intimacy and satisfaction than those of insecure individuals. Indeed, this pattern has been repeatedly found in empirical work (for a review, see Mikulincer, Florian, Cowan, & Cowan, 2002).

#### Theoretical Predictions and Empirical Evidence

A number of theoretical predictions follow from the above analysis, but only some have received empirical attention. Indeed, two key theoretical assumptions have not yet been tested, but they form the basis for other predictions that have been tested. The first assumption is that people with an insecure attachment style (i.e., anxious-ambivalent or avoidant) are more likely to perceive conflict as a threat than those with a secure style. The second assumption is that people with different attachment styles are guided by different goals (e.g., goals for achieving intimacy or maintaining self-reliance) during conflict. The predictions that have been addressed in the empirical literature seem to follow from these assumptions. In the next sections, we review and evaluate the

findings relevant to these predictions. Table 1 summarizes the methods and main findings of the studies considered here.

Prediction 1: People with insecure attachment styles will show less constructive behavior during conflict than those with a secure style. In particular, people high in anxious-ambivalence will use maladaptive approach tactics (e.g., coercion) whereas those high in avoidance will use withdrawal tactics.

Although difficulty handling conflict might follow from perceiving conflict as a threat, these studies do not provide direct evidence for this proposition. The first sections of Table 1 present studies that are relevant to this prediction – studies using participants’ retrospective self-reports of their typical behavioral strategies during conflict, and studies directly assessing behavior during conflict.

Self-reported conflict strategies. Consistent with Prediction 1, people who evidence greater attachment security on either categorical or multi-item self-report measures report using more constructive strategies, whereas those who evidence attachment insecurity (i.e., either higher anxious-ambivalence, avoidance, or both) report using less constructive strategies (Carnelley, Pietromonaco, & Jaffe, 1994; Creasey & Hesson-McInnis, 2001; Creasey, Kershaw, & Boston, 1999; Feeney, 1994; Levy & Davis, 1988; O’Connell Corcoran & Mallinckrodt, 2000; Pistole, 1989). People high in either form of insecure attachment report poorer conflict management skills, including greater difficulty understanding the partner’s perspective, behaving in a way that escalates the conflict (e.g., attacking the partner, using coercion), withdrawing, and using fewer positive tactics such as validation or maintaining a focus on the topic (Creasey & Hesson-McInnis, 2001; Creasey, Kershaw, & Boston, 1999; Feeney, 1994). These

patterns of self-reported conflict tactics appear to generalize across samples of students (e.g., Creasey et al., 1999; Pistole, 1989), married women (Carnelley et al., 1994, Study 2), married couples (Feeney, 1994), and individual parents (O'Connell Corcoran & Mallinckrodt, 2000).

Many of the findings (Creasey et al., 1999; Creasey & Hesson-McInnis, 2001; O'Connell Corcoran & Mallinckrodt, 2000) show similarities in the self-reported conflict tactics of those high in anxious-ambivalence or avoidance; for example, people high in either anxious-ambivalence or avoidance report strategies related to conflict escalation and conflict avoidance or withdrawal. The exception is that anxious-ambivalence is associated with being more willing to oblige the partner (O'Connell Corcoran & Mallinckrodt, 2000; Pistole, 1989), whereas avoidance is not. Thus, self-report studies consistently support the idea that insecure attachment is associated with poorer conflict resolution skills, but in general, the strategies associated with anxious-ambivalence are similar to those for avoidance.

Self-reports of conflict strategies, like self-reports in general, are limited because people must calculate in some way how they typically behave during conflict. People may not always be aware of their behavioral patterns, and their reports may not accurately reflect what they actually do. For example, self-reports may be biased by how participants feel at the moment, by their most salient recent experience, or by a desire to appear socially competent (see Ross, 1989; Schacter, 1996).

Observations of behavior during interactions: Effects of own attachment style.  
Studies in which partners' behaviors are observed and coded address this limitation of self-report studies, and thereby better test whether behavior during conflict varies as a

function of attachment style. The first study (Kobak & Hazan, 1991) to demonstrate a link between romantic attachment (assessed using a Marital Q-sort) and conflict found that wives who were more secure (i.e., who were able to rely on their partner and/or who viewed their partner as psychologically available) were less likely to show rejection when discussing a disagreement in their relationship. Furthermore, husbands who were more secure (i.e., who viewed their partners as psychologically available) were less likely to show rejection and more likely to provide support/validation during the discussion. Similarly, in a study (Kobak, Cole, Ferenz-Gillies, & Fleming, 1993) of mother-teen dyads, more secure teens displayed more constructive strategies (e.g., expressed less dysfunctional anger) when discussing a conflict with their mother, and teens who relied on an avoidance strategy (i.e., who were characterized as “deactivating the attachment system”) engaged in less constructive behaviors, although the nature of the behaviors differed for males and females. Thus, these studies suggest that security is associated with more constructive behaviors during conflict in both romantic relationships and parent-child relationships.

Studies (Bouthillier, Julien, Dube, Belanger, & Hamelin, 2002; Simpson, Rholes, & Phillips, 1996) using self-reported adult attachment style have examined whether anxious-ambivalence and avoidance predict unique sets of behaviors during conflict. One study (Simpson et al., 1996) examined the link between attachment scores on a self-report measure of adult attachment (AAQ; Simpson, Rholes, & Nelligan, 1992) and dating couple members' behavior during a discussion in which they tried to resolve either a major or minor problem in their relationship. Observer ratings of behavior in the interaction indicated that more anxious-ambivalent women who discussed a major

problem evidenced greater stress and anxiety and poorer quality (e.g., showed less synchrony, less at ease with each other) discussions. Men who showed greater attachment avoidance displayed less warmth and support, especially when discussing a major problem. In addition, across both major and minor problems, observers rated the discussions of men who showed greater avoidance as lower in quality. (Anxious-ambivalent men showed patterns similar to those of avoidant men, but the findings did not reach conventional levels of significance.)

Another study (Bouthillier et al., 2002) used the same self-report measure (AAQ) as in the Simpson et al. (1996), but did not replicate the pattern of results. As in the Simpson et al. (1996) study, couples engaged in an interaction in which they tried to resolve a major problem in their relationship, and observers coded a variety of communication behaviors (e.g., assertiveness, support-validation, withdrawal, conflict, problem-solving, negative escalation, synchrony). In contrast to Simpson et al.'s (1996) findings, the self-report measure of attachment was not associated with any of the communication behaviors. The difference in findings between the two studies could be accounted for by multiple differences between the samples. The samples in the Bouthillier et al. study versus the Simpson et al. study, respectively, differed in relationship status (married/cohabiting vs. dating), age ( $M = 44$  vs.  $M = 19$ ), size (40 couples vs. 123 couples), and culture (French-Canadian vs. U.S.).

However, Bouthillier et al. did find that attachment style based on childhood relationships with parents, assessed using the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI; e.g., Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985; for a full description, see Hesse, 1999), predicted some differences in behavior. Husbands who received an AAI classification of preoccupied or

dismissing evidenced less supportive behaviors and self-disclosure, and more withdrawal than those classified as secure . Wives classified as dismissing or preoccupied showed less supportive behaviors than those classified as secure. (AAI classifications were not associated with scores on the self-report measure of romantic attachment.)

Three additional studies (Cohn, Silver, Cowan, Cowan, & Pearson, 1992; Creasey, 2002; Paley et al., 1999) have demonstrated that attachment assessed via the AAI predicts behavior during conflict. Similar to the Bouthillier et al. (2002) study, an investigation (Creasey, 2002) of dating couples showed that preoccupied and dismissing men and women displayed more negative behavior when discussing a conflict than did those who were secure. In addition, preoccupied and dismissing women showed less positive behavior than did secure women across both a waiting room and conflict interactions, but men's positive behavior did not differ by attachment style.

Similarly, a study (Paley et al., 1999) of married men and women found that wives classified as preoccupied showed less positive affect than those classified as either continuous secure (individuals who provide coherent reports of mainly positive childhood experiences) or earned secure (individuals experienced adversity in childhood, but who provide coherent and thoughtful reports of their experiences). Furthermore, wives classified as dismissing showed withdrawal more than wives classified as either form of secure. Husbands' attachment style, however, was not significantly associated with their own behavior.

In other work (Cohn, Silver, Cowan, Cowan, & Pearson, 1992), however, it was husbands classified as insecure, in comparison with those classified as secure, who showed more conflict and fewer positive exchanges when interacting with their wife and

child on a challenging task, and who evidenced poorer functioning (e.g., clearer communication, more respect, less blaming and hostility) in interactions at home. Wives' AAI's scores, however, were not associated with their own behavior.

Overall, behavioral observation studies have found that securely attached individuals display more constructive behavior during conflict than do insecurely attached individuals. These studies have relied primarily on the AAI to assess attachment, and only two studies (Bouthillier et al., 2002; Simpson et al., 1996) have examined behavior using self-report measures of romantic attachment. We might expect assessments of attachment based specifically on romantic relationships to be a more precise predictor of behavior during conflict with a romantic partner than assessments based on the caregiver-child relationship. The single study including both measures found effects for the AAI but not for the self-report measure of romantic attachment. Unfortunately, the two measures differ not only in focus (i.e., caregiver-child relationship vs. romantic relationship), but also in method (i.e., interview vs. self-report). In general, the interview and self-report measures of attachment are not highly correlated, especially when they focus on different domains (e.g., a parent-child relationship vs. a romantic relationship), and findings from studies using the interview method do not necessarily match those of studies using a self-report method (e.g., Bartholomew & Shaver, 1998; Crowell, Fraley, & Shaver, 1999).

Summary. Both self-report and behavioral observation studies generally support the prediction that securely attached individuals behave more constructively during conflict than do insecurely attached individuals, and these more constructive interactions may facilitate the development of intimacy. The idea that people with a preoccupied

attachment style will show different behavior patterns from those with a dismissing attachment style received little support. Although a few findings (e.g., Paley et al., 1999; Simpson et al., 1996) suggest that anxious-ambivalence and avoidance may trigger somewhat different patterns of behavior, these patterns were not consistent across studies. In addition, men and women do not always show similar or equally strong patterns, suggesting that gender may moderate the way in which attachment behavior is manifested during conflict. One possibility is that behaviors that are more closely linked to gender role stereotypes are most likely to show differences during conflict. For example, one study (Simpson et al., 1996) found that more avoidant men showed less warmth and support when discussing a major problem, and these behaviors are more consistent with stereotypically masculine behavior. In contrast, more anxious women showed greater stress and anxiety, which is more consistent with stereotypically feminine behavior. Similarly, other work (Creasey, 2002; Paley et al., 1999) suggests that secure women show differences that are consistent with the stereotype that women must appear agreeable or pleasant, even during conflict; in both of these studies, secure women (but not secure men) expressed more positive affect or positive behavior during conflict than did insecure women. Although gender differences appear in only a subset of studies, it seems reasonable to assume that the precise behaviors that vary as a function of attachment during conflict may depend, in part, on the fit between the behavior and gender role expectations.

Prediction 2: People high in anxious-ambivalence will show more negative emotion during conflict than those who are high in avoidance or security.

This prediction follows from the assumption that people with an anxious-ambivalent attachment style perceive conflict as a threat, leading to hyperactivation of the attachment system; as a result, they will be more likely to show emotional distress (Kobak et al, 1993; see also Mikulincer & Shaver, in press).

Several studies (Creasey & Hesson-McInnis, 2001; Feeney, 1994; Simpson et al., 1996) have found that people higher in anxious-ambivalence report experiencing more negative emotion during conflict. One study (Simpson et al., 1996) found that men and women higher in anxious-ambivalence reported more distress after discussing either a minor or major relationship conflict. Other work has indicated that people higher in anxious-ambivalence report that they generally experience more post-conflict distress (Feeney, 1994) or more negative emotions and difficulty coping with negative emotions during arguments (Creasey & Hesson-McInnis, 2001).

These findings are open to several interpretations. People high in anxious-ambivalence may show more negative emotion during conflict because (a) they wish to convey their distress to their partner, (b) they actually feel more distress, or (c) they are simply more willing to report negative feelings in general. People higher in anxious-ambivalence generally appear more willing to report distress, particularly when they provide global, memory-based reports of their experiences (e.g., Collins & Read, 1990; Pietromonaco & Carnelley, 1994; Pietromonaco & Feldman Barrett, 1997). It is interesting that, in the one study (Pietromonaco & Feldman Barrett, 1997) in which anxious-ambivalence was not associated with reports of greater negative emotion, participants provided reports of their emotion immediately following social interactions, thereby reducing the likelihood that memory played a role in their responses; instead, the

immediate reports of dismissing-avoidant individuals evidenced more negative emotion following high conflict interactions than did those of secure individuals.

It may be that people high in avoidance will show sensitivity to threat on measures that require less conscious, reflective processing. People high in avoidance are thought to deal with the threat posed by conflict by shutting down the attachment system. Because this process is likely to occur below conscious awareness, their efforts to regulate emotions may not be evident in their self-reports, but they may be revealed by more covert measures (e.g., behavioral or physiological measures). The scant evidence from behavioral measures of emotional expression during conflict is mixed. For example, some work (Simpson et al., 1996) has found that people high in anxious-ambivalence display more anger and hostility during conflict, and other work (Kobak et al., 1993) indicates that individuals with more avoidant strategies evidence more dysfunctional anger during conflict. Still other work (Creasey, 2002) found that both preoccupied and dismissing avoidant individuals expressed more negative emotion than secure individuals. No studies have examined the link between physiological reactivity and attachment during conflict, but some work (Dozier & Kobak, 1992; Feeney & Kirkpatrick, 1996; Mikulincer, 1998) suggests that avoidance may be associated with greater physiological reactivity under some circumstances (for an exception, see Fraley & Shaver, 1997).

Summary. Self-report evidence is consistent with the prediction: People characterized by an anxious-ambivalent attachment style report more negative emotion during conflict than those characterized by a secure or dismissing-avoidant style. It is not clear, however, whether this evidence reflects a greater willingness on the part of

anxious-ambivalent individuals to report distress or whether they actually experience greater distress. The few studies using measures other than retrospective self-reports do not reveal a consistent pattern; findings variously indicate that anxious-ambivalence, avoidance, or both are associated with greater negative emotion. Overall, this hypothesis needs to be examined more fully in studies using both self-report and more covert measures of emotion. Research has yet to adequately answer the key theoretical question underlying this prediction: Is attachment associated with differences in the need to regulate emotion in the face of conflict and in the strategies (e.g., deactivation or hyperactivation) people use?

Prediction 3: People high in anxious-ambivalence will hold less negative (or even more positive) perceptions about their partner and relationship following conflict than those high in avoidance or security.

This prediction follows from the idea that, for people high in anxious-ambivalence, conflict activates their goal to achieve intimacy, and therefore they will focus on cues that suggest that they have obtained intimacy and responsiveness from a partner. Three studies (Fishtein, Pietromonaco, & Feldman Barrett, 1999; Pietromonaco & Feldman Barrett, 1997; Simpson et al., 1996) provide evidence relevant to this prediction about perceptions of conflict. One study (Pietromonaco & Feldman Barrett, 1997) relied on an event-contingent daily diary method (Reis & Wheeler, 1991) to examine perceptions and feelings following everyday interactions. The advantage of this method is that participants report on their thoughts and feelings immediately after an interaction occurs, making their self-reports less subject to the usual memory biases associated with global retrospective self-reports. Participants, who had been preselected

on the basis of the attachment prototype choices (i.e., secure, preoccupied, fearful-avoidant, dismissing-avoidant; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991), recorded their responses to the majority of their social interactions for 1 week. We found that people with a preoccupied attachment style held more positive (or less negative) perceptions of high conflict interactions (i.e., those rated as 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale). When rating their high conflict interactions, preoccupied individuals reported feeling greater intimacy and satisfaction than did either secure or dismissing-avoidant individuals, and reported greater self-disclosure than did those in any of the other attachment groups. Furthermore, preoccupied individuals also evidenced more positive perceptions of their partners; following high conflict interactions; they reported higher esteem for their partners than did secure or fearful-avoidant individuals, and they perceived their partners as disclosing more and as experiencing more positive emotion than did either secure or dismissing-avoidant individuals. Further analyses examining the associations between the full range of conflict ratings (i.e., from low to high) and perceptions of the quality of the interaction and of the partner indicated that preoccupied individuals generally reported more positive or less negative perceptions of the interaction and/or partner as conflict increased, and did so to a greater extent than individuals in other attachment groups.

Overall, this study suggests that, despite their difficulties with managing conflict and negative emotions, under some conditions, preoccupied individuals may view conflict as an opportunity to reveal themselves, to learn about their partners, and ultimately to achieve greater intimacy. It is important to note, however, that this study examined perceptions of interactions across a range interaction partners (e.g., romantic

partners, friends, strangers) and, unlike much of the other research, it did not focus exclusively on romantic relationships.

Another study (Fishtein, Pietromonaco, & Feldman Barrett, 1999) provides further evidence that conflict in romantic relationships might be connected to both positive and negative feelings for preoccupied individuals. Although this study did not examine responses to a specific conflict, it did investigate how people involved in high versus low conflict romantic relationships think about and organize information about their relationship. In this study, college men and women were preselected on the basis of their attachment prototype choice (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991), and all were involved in a stable romantic relationship. Participants completed a relationship complexity task, a modified version of Linville's (1985) self-complexity task, in which they selected positive (e.g., accepting, close, mature) and negative (e.g., controlling, uncomfortable, dull) descriptors from a deck of 100 cards and organized them into as many or as few groups needed to describe their romantic relationship. Relationship complexity is defined as the degree to which people describe a relationship using many distinct, nonoverlapping attributes. We were particularly interested in the degree to which people showed complexity in describing the positive attributes and the negative attributes of their relationship, and therefore we examined both positive and negative complexity. Participants also completed the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976), which provided information about the degree of conflict in their relationship.

We predicted that preoccupied individuals, who desire a high degree of intimacy and responsiveness, would hold more complex knowledge about the positive aspects of their relationship, when the relationship was high in conflict. We also anticipated that

preoccupied individuals as well as individuals with other attachment styles would hold more complex knowledge about the negative aspects of their relationships when they were high in conflict. The results indicated that, as relationship conflict increased, people with a preoccupied attachment style showed greater positive relationship complexity, whereas people with other attachment styles showed less positive relationship complexity. Furthermore, greater conflict was associated with greater negative relationship complexity, and this was true for people of all attachment styles. These findings suggest that people with a preoccupied attachment style may attend not only to the negative aspects of conflict, but also may see the more positive, potentially intimacy-promoting aspects of conflict.

Although the findings of these two studies are consistent with Prediction 3, it is noteworthy that another study (Simpson et al., 1996) in which couples discussed and tried to resolve either a minor or major relationship conflict yielded findings in the direction opposite to the prediction. Men and women who were higher in anxious-ambivalence reported (a) more distress when discussing either a minor or major problem, and (b) less positive perceptions of their partner/relationship when they explicitly compared their feelings after the discussion with their feelings before the discussion (e.g., reported on the degree to which they perceived change in the amount of love or commitment felt toward the partner or relationship), but only in the major problem condition.

The methods and measures used in the three studies described in this section varied considerably. For example, the task used in the Simpson et al. (1996) study may have been particularly threatening for people high in anxious-ambivalence because they were (a) asked to try to resolve a conflict, and (b) asked to “tell the other what it is about

his or her attitudes, habits, or behaviors that bothers you,” increasing the likelihood that anxious-ambivalent individuals received feedback that threatened their fragile self-views. In contrast, the event-contingent diary study (Pietromonaco & Feldman Barrett, 1997) examined interactions that participants designated as high in conflict (4-5 on a 5-point scale), did not specify a particular structure for the conflict, and examined interactions across a range of partners (e.g., romantic and non-romantic). The other study (Fishtein et al., 1999) focused on the general level of conflict in the romantic relationship rather than conflict in a particular interaction. In addition, the dependent measures differed greatly across the three studies.

It will be important for future work to examine this question using methods and measures that are more comparable across studies. The current findings suggest that, under some conditions, people who are anxious-ambivalent may view conflict as both a threat and as an opportunity for intimacy, but attention to the intimacy-promoting aspects may be limited by the magnitude of the threat and the degree to which it evokes negative feelings about the self. Future investigations that manipulate the magnitude and focus of the threat will help to address this issue.

Summary. This prediction has not received much empirical attention, and the evidence is mixed. Furthermore, the three studies providing relevant evidence differ greatly in their methods, making it difficult to compare the findings. Nevertheless, these studies raise the possibility that people with an anxious-ambivalent attachment style may perceive both positive and negative sides of conflict.

#### Moderating Effect of the Relational Context

##### Partner and Couple Effects

Although the predictions following from attachment theory focus on the link between a person's attachment style and his or her own perceptions and behavior, attachment behavior occurs in the context of a relationship in which two partners each bring their own attachment histories. Attachment relationships have been conceptualized as goal-corrected partnerships in which partners attend to and adjust to the goals and needs of the other (Bowlby, 1969), but few theoretical statements specify how one partner's attachment style might contribute to the other partner's behavior (i.e., partner effects), or how the match between two partners' attachment styles might shape behavior during conflict (i.e., couple effects).

Although attachment theorists have not developed clear predictions about the influence of one partner's attachment style on the other partner's perceptions or behavior, or about the joint effects of couple members' attachment styles, two expectations seem reasonable. First, when both partners are secure, they should be better able to handle conflict than when one or two partners have an insecure style. Second, individuals in relationships in which at least one partner is secure will be better able to handle conflict than those in which both partners are insecure.

In line with the first expectation, couples including two secure partners evidence the most constructive conflict styles. In a self-report questionnaire study (Senchak & Leonard, 1992), newly married couples in which both partners were secure reported less withdrawal and verbal aggression during conflict than couples including two insecure partners or an insecure wife with a secure husband; couples with a secure wife and an insecure husband did not differ from any of the other couple types. In addition, behavioral observation studies (Bouthillier et al., 2002; Cohn et al., 1992) have shown

that couples including two secure partners (assessed using the AAI) generally communicate better during conflict than couples with two insecure partners.

In line with the second expectation, couples including only one secure partner appear to resolve conflict better than those including two insecure partners. Four studies (Cohn et al., 1992; Creasey, 2002; Kobak & Hazan, 1999; Paley et al., 1999) have demonstrated that couples including one secure partner, especially when the secure partner was the husband, show more constructive behavior during conflict than those including two insecure partners. One study (Cohn et al., 1992) found that couples including a secure husband and an insecure wife evidenced less conflict and better functioning than those including two insecure partners, but this study did not include a comparison group with a secure wife and insecure husband.

Two additional studies (Kobak & Hazan, 1999; Paley et al., 1999), however, suggest that husband's attachment security contributes to wives' behavior during conflict, whereas wives' attachment security does not show a similar effect on husbands' behavior. For example, wives of continuously secure husbands evidenced more positive and less negative affect than those with dismissing husbands, and they showed more positive affect than wives of earned secure husbands; wives' attachment, however, did not predict husbands' behavior (Paley et al., 1999). Similarly, other work (Kobak & Hazan, 1999) has found that the more the husband viewed his wife as psychologically available (i.e., the more the husband showed secure attachment), the less his wife displayed rejection and the more she provided support/validation during a problem-solving task. As in the Paley et al. study, wives' attachment scores (on reliance and seeing the partner as psychologically available) were not associated with husbands'

behaviors. One additional study (Creasey, 2002) also found that couples with a secure man displayed less negative behavior when discussing a conflict than those with an insecure man, however, couples including a secure woman also showed more positive behavior in both a waiting room (warm-up) interaction and when discussing a conflict. In addition, the two studies (Creasey, 2002; Paley et al., 1999) that tested for interactions between partners' attachment styles did not find any significant joint effects.

Overall, studies examining partner and couple effects suggest three patterns. First, couples including two secure partners show the most constructive conflict resolution styles. Second, couples including one secure partner are generally more adept at dealing with conflict than those with two insecure partners. Third, the way in which couples' handle conflict may depend more on the husband's attachment security than on the wives' attachment security. This pattern parallels many studies (see Maushart, 2002) suggesting that husbands' perceptions are better predictors of marital satisfaction than wives' perceptions, and it further highlights the importance of taking into account gender (or gender roles) when evaluating attachment patterns. It is important to note that some studies (Kobak & Hazan, 1991; Rholes, Simpson, Campbell, & Grich, 2001) have found that wives' attachment better predicted behavior in interactions involving support-giving and receiving. These findings suggest that the context of the interaction may influence the degree to which the attachment style of the husband or wife contributes to the quality of the interaction.

#### Level of Conflict in the Relationship

Theoretical perspectives on attachment and conflict do not necessarily predict differences in the amount or intensity of conflict, but this question is important because

any differences in perceptions, emotions, and behavior might follow from differences in the frequency or intensity of conflict. Although people with a secure attachment style generally are more satisfied in their relationships than those with an insecure attachment style (e.g., Carnelley et al., 1994; Cohn et al., 1992; Collins & Read, 1990; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994), they do not necessarily experience less conflict in their relationships than those with an insecure attachment style. In retrospective self-report studies, women who were less comfortable with closeness (Collins & Read, 1990, Study 3) or who endorsed either an anxious-ambivalent or avoidant style (Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994) reported more conflict in their relationships, but men did not show significant associations between their own style and reported conflict in either study. In both studies, however, men's reports of conflict were associated with their partner's attachment style; specifically, men paired with an anxious-ambivalent partner reported more conflict.

In contrast to retrospective self-report studies, event-contingent diary studies in which participants report on conflict on an interaction by interaction basis have not found attachment differences in perceived degree of conflict (Pietromonaco & Feldman Barrett, 1997; Tidwell, Reis, & Shaver, 1996) or in the number of interactions rated as high in conflict (Pietromonaco & Feldman Barrett, 1997).

In addition, two studies (Collins & Read, 1990; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994) found that men's reports of conflict were associated with their partner's attachment style; men reported more conflict when they were paired with a woman who evidenced anxious-ambivalence. One of these studies (Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994) also found a similar partner effect for women; that is, women paired with an anxious-ambivalent man also reported more conflict than those paired with either an avoidant or secure man.

Overall, these studies suggest that the association between attachment style and amount of conflict is not straightforward. Men and women do not show the same patterns in retrospective self-report studies, and immediate perceptions of conflict intensity appear to be unrelated to attachment style. Furthermore, one partner's attachment style contributes to the other person's perceptions of conflict, suggesting that it will be important for future work to examine the relationship context (i.e., the partner's characteristics, interactions between both partners' characteristics) in which perceptions of conflict arise.

#### Considerations for Future Research and Conclusions

Several basic assumptions about the link between attachment and conflict have yet to be directly tested. The first untested assumption is that attachment style predicts whether conflict is perceived as a threat. Many studies have shown that people who evidence insecure attachment are more likely to have difficulty handling conflict, but these problems may arise because conflict represents a threat or for other equally plausible reasons. For example, people who are insecurely attached may show less constructive behavior during conflict because they have poorer social skills than those who are securely attached rather than because they perceive conflict as a threat. In addition, in examining the assumption that conflict evokes a threat for some people, it will be useful to move beyond defining conflict in broad terms (i.e., as an area of major disagreement) and to take into account the focus of the disagreement. Some people may perceive a threat when the conflict focuses on intimacy and partner availability, but they may not do so when the conflict focuses on another issue (e.g., how to spend money). Distinguishing among different areas of conflict may reveal the conditions under which

people high in anxious-ambivalence versus those high in avoidance perceive conflict as a threat.

Furthermore, although threat is likely to be important in activating the attachment system (e.g., Bowlby, 1980; Simpson & Rholes, 1994), it is not clear whether a threat that originates within an attachment relationship (e.g., from conflict) differs from threats that originate outside of the relationship (e.g., threat from a physical, nonhuman source). For threats arising outside of the relationship, an attachment figure may serve as a safe haven who is not associated with the cause of the distress. For threats arising within the relationship (e.g., a conflict with a romantic partner), the attachment figure may be perceived both as the source of the threat and as a potential safe haven, presenting an approach-avoidance dilemma. To our knowledge, no studies have compared responses to these two classes of threat, but we would expect attachment style differences to be more pronounced when threat arises from within the relationship. A related issue is whether threat arising from conflict between relationship partners activates not only the attachment system, but also the caregiving system; partners must deal with their own fears by using the other as a secure base, but at the same time, they also need to be able to serve as a secure base for their partner. Research on attachment differences in support seeking and caregiving (e.g., Carnelley, Pietromonaco, & Jaffe, 1996; Collins & Feeney, 2000; Feeney & Collins, 2001; Kobak & Hazan, 1991; Simpson et al., 1992) can inform further work on attachment and conflict because good conflict resolution skills may require the ability to balance between using a partner as a secure base (i.e., seeking support) and serving as a secure base (i.e., giving support) for the partner.

The second untested assumption is that people with different attachment styles are guided by different goals during conflict; specifically, people high in anxious-ambivalence seek to achieve intimacy during conflict interactions, whereas those high in avoidance seek to remain self-reliant. Our own work suggests that anxious-ambivalence (preoccupation) is associated with perceiving not only the negative side of conflict but also its potential to promote intimacy, but whether this pattern results from differences in interpersonal goals during conflict remains to be determined.

In addition to testing these basic assumptions, several other issues need to be addressed. First, it will be important to assess whether perceptions during conflict accurately reflect the reality of the situation; for example, if a person with a preoccupied attachment style experiences greater intimacy after conflict, does that person's partner also report greater intimacy, or does the partner feel less intimacy? Studies examining both partners' perceptions after conflict will help to address this issue. Second, the long-term effects of conflict on perceptions of intimacy and communication need to be explored. It may be that preoccupied individuals show less negative perceptions in the short run, but, over time, it may be secure individuals who show less negative perceptions. Furthermore, research along these lines might help to resolve the puzzling findings of some longitudinal studies (see Fincham & Beach, 1999) that have shown that negative conflict behavior predicts enhanced marital satisfaction over time. Perhaps couples with two (or at least one) secure partners accrue benefits over time from conflict, whereas other couples do not.

Third, an attachment perspective on conflict needs to integrate ideas about partner and couple effects. The few studies examining both partners' attachment security suggest

that behavior during conflict is improved by the presence of at least one secure partner, and this is especially true when the secure partner is the husband. These findings highlight the importance of the examining attachment within the context of the partnership in addition to considering it as an individual difference variable (see Pietromonaco & Feldman Barrett, 2000).

Fourth, attachment effects associated with conflict need to be considered within the context of gender. Husbands' attachment security appears to dictate the quality of interactions during conflict, a pattern that is consistent with other work showing that men's outcomes better predict the status of the marriage (see Maushart, 2002). The process underlying these patterns remains to be determined, but it is possible that men are more likely to dominate the interaction and thereby set the tone, or that women, who tend to hold more relational, interdependent self-views (e.g., Cross & Madson, 1997), are more likely to attend to the partner's behavioral cues and to modulate their own behavior accordingly. Thus, a theoretical framework for understanding the connection between attachment and conflict will need to specify when gender-related differences might occur.

Fifth, future investigations may benefit from examining each partner's perceptions and behavior over the time frame of the conflict. Behaviors that occur at the beginning of the conflict may not be the same as those toward the end. For example, people with a preoccupied attachment style might begin with constructive tactics, but if their needs are not met, they might engage in coercion or attack as the conflict progresses.

Overall, attachment theory provides a framework for understanding how people will think, feel, and behave during conflict. In particular, it suggests that people's

working models will shape their perceptions of threat and their goals during conflict, resulting in distinct response profiles. The empirical work so far supports the idea that attachment security (or insecurity) contributes to how people respond to conflict in a general way, but as our review has points out, several key assumptions of an attachment perspective on conflict remain to be tested, and the role of contextual variables (e.g., the relationship as a whole, gender roles) needs to be integrated into the theoretical account. It is clear that conflict situations provide a unique context in which to test critical predictions following from attachment theory. A closer examination of these predictions offers the potential to enrich knowledge about attachment processes in general in close relationships and to organize diverse findings about relationship conflict within an overarching theoretical framework.

## References

- Arellano, C., & Markman, H. (1995). The managing affect and differences scale (MADS): A self-report measure assessing conflict management in couples. Journal of Family Psychology, *9*, 319-334.
- Bartholomew, K., & Horowitz, L. M. (1991). Attachment styles among young adults: A test of a four-category model. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, *61*, 226-244.
- Bartholomew, K., & Shaver, P. R. (1998). Methods of assessing adult attachment: Do they converge? In J. A. Simpson & W. S. Rholes (Eds.) Attachment theory and close relationships (pp. 25-45). New York: The Guilford Press.
- Bouthillier, D., Julien, D., Dube, M., Belanger, I., & Hamelin, M. (2002). Predictive validity of adult attachment measures in relation to emotion regulation behaviors in marital interactions. Journal of Adult Development, *9*, 291-305.
- Bowlby, J. (1969). Attachment and loss: Vol. 1. Attachment. NY: Basic.
- Bowlby, J. (1973). Attachment and loss: Vol. 2. Separation: Anxiety and anger. NY: Basic.
- Bowlby, J. (1979). The making and breaking of affectional bonds. London: Tavistock.
- Bowlby, J. (1980). Attachment and loss: Vol. 3: Loss: Sadness and depression. New York: Basic Books.
- Brehm, S. S., Miller, R. S., Perlman, D., & Campbell, S. M. (2002). Intimate relationships. Boston: McGraw-Hill.

Bradbury, T. N., & Fincham, F. D. (1990). Attributions in marriage: Review and critique. Psychological Bulletin, *3*, 3-33.

Canary, D. J., & Cupach, W. R. (1988). Relational and episodic characteristics associated with conflict tactics. Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, *5*, 305-325.

Carnelley, K. B., Pietromonaco, P. R., & Jaffe, K. (1994). Depression, working models of others, and relationship functioning. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, *66*, 127-140.

Carnelley, K. B., Pietromonaco, P. R., & Jaffe, K. (1996). Attachment, caregiving, and relationship functioning in couples: Effects of self and partner. Personal Relationships, *3*, 257-278.

Christensen, A., & Sullaway, M. (1984). Communication Patterns Questionnaire. Unpublished manuscript, University of California, Los Angeles.

Cohn, D. A., Silver, D. H., Cowan, C. P., Cowan, P. A., & Pearson, J. (1992). Working models of childhood attachment and couple relationships. Journal of Family Issues, *13*, 432-449.

Collins, N. L. (1996). Working models of attachment: Implications for explanation, emotion, and behavior. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, *17*, 810-832.

Collins, N. L., & Feeney, B. C. (2000). A safe haven: An attachment theory perspective on support seeking and caregiving in intimate relationships. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, *78*, 1053-1073.

Collins, N., & Read, S. J. (1990). Adult attachment, working models, and relationship quality in dating couples. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, *58*, 644-663.

Collins, N. L., & Read, S. J. (1994) Cognitive representations of attachment: The structure and function of working models. In K. Bartholomew & D. Perlman (Eds), Attachment processes in adulthood (pp. 53-90). London: Jessica Kingsley.

Creasey, G. (2002). Associations between working models of attachment and conflict management behavior in romantic couples. Journal of Counseling Psychology, *49*, 365-375.

Creasey, G., & Hesson-McInnis, M. (2001). Affective responses, cognitive appraisals, and conflict tactics in late adolescent romantic relationships: Associations with attachment orientations. Journal of Counseling Psychology, *48*, 85-96.

Creasey, G., Kershaw, K., & Boston, A. (1999). Conflict management with friends and romantic partners: The role of attachment and negative mood regulation expectancies. Journal of Youth and Adolescence, *28*, 523-543.

Cross, S. E. & Madson, L. (1997). Models of the self: Self-construals and gender. Psychological Bulletin, *122*, 5-37.

Crowell, J. A., Fraley, R. C., & Shaver, P. R. (1999). In J. Cassidy & P. R. Shaver (Eds.), Measurement of individual differences in adolescent and adult attachment. Handbook of attachment: Theory, research, and clinical applications (pp.434-465). New York: Guilford Press.

Dozier, M., & Kobak, R. R. (1992). Psychophysiology in attachment interviews: Converging evidence for deactivating strategies. Child Development, *63*, 1473-1480.

Feeney, B. C., & Collins, N. L. (2001). Predictors of caregiving in adult intimate relationships: An attachment theoretical perspective. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, *80*, 972-994.

Feeney, B. C., & Kirkpatrick, L. A. (1996). Effects of adult attachment and presence of romantic partners on physiological responses to stress. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, *70*, 255-270.

Feeney, J. A. (1994). Attachment style, communication patterns, and satisfaction across the life cycle of marriage. Personal Relationships, *1*, 333-348.

Feeney, J. A., & Noller, P. (1991). Attachment style and verbal descriptions of romantic partners. Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, *8*, 187-215.

Feeney, J. A., Noller, P., & Hanrahan, M. (1994). Assessing adult attachment: Developments in the conceptualization of security and insecurity. In M. B. Sperling & W. H. Berman (Eds.), Attachment in adults: Clinical and developmental perspectives (pp. 128-152). New York: Guilford Press.

Fincham, F. D., & Beach, S. R. (1999). Marital conflict: Implications for working with couples. Annual Review of Psychology, *50*, 47-77.

Fishtein, J., Pietromonaco, P. R., & Feldman Barrett, L. (1999). The contribution of attachment style and relationship conflict to the complexity of relationship knowledge. Social Cognition, *17*, 228-244.

Fraley, R. C., & Shaver, P. R. (1997). Adult attachment and the suppression of unwanted thoughts. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, *73*, 1080-1091.

George, C., Kaplan, N., & Main, M. (1996). Adult Attachment Interview Protocol (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Unpublished manuscript. University of California at Berkeley.

- Gottman, J. M. (1994). Why marriages succeed or fail. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Gottman, J. M. (1996). What predicts divorce: The measures. Unpublished coding manuals. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Griffin, D. W., & Bartholomew, K. (1994). The metaphysics of measurement: The case of adult attachment. (In K. Bartholomew & D. Perlman (Eds.), Advances in personal relationships: Vol. 5. Attachment processes in adulthood (pp. 17-52). London: Jessica Kingsley.
- Hazan, C., & Shaver, P. R. (1987). Romantic love conceptualized as an attachment process. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 52, 511-524.
- Hesse, E. (1999). The Adult Attachment Interview: Historical and current perspectives. In J. Cassidy & P. R. Shaver (Eds.), Handbook of attachment: Theory, research, and clinical applications (pp.395-433). New York: Guilford Press.
- Holmes, J. G., & Boon, S. D. (1990). Developments in the field of close relationships: creating foundations for intervention strategies. Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 16, 23-41.
- Julien, D., Markman, H. J., & Lindhal, K. M. (1989). A comparison of a global and a microanalytic coding system: Implications for future trends in studying interactions. Behavioral Assessment, 11, 81-100.
- Kirkpatrick, L. A., & Davis, K. E. (1994). Attachment style, gender, and relationship stability: A longitudinal analysis. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 66, 502-512.

- Kobak, R. R., Cole, H. E., Ferenz-Gillies, R., & Fleming, W. S. (1993). Attachment and emotion regulation during mother-teen problem solving: A control theory analysis. Child Development, *64*, 231-245.
- Kobak, R. R., & Duemmler, S. (1994). Attachment and conversation: Toward a discourse analysis of adolescent and adult security. In K. Bartholomew & D. Perlman (Eds.), Attachment processes in adulthood (pp. 121-149). London: Jessica Kingsley.
- Kobak, R. R., & Hazan, C. (1991). Attachment in marriage: Effects of security and accuracy of working models. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, *60*, 861-869.
- Laurenceau, J. P., Feldman Barrett, L., & Pietromonaco, P. R. (1998). Intimacy as an interpersonal process: The importance of self-disclosure, partner disclosure, and perceived partner responsiveness in interpersonal exchanges. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, *74*, 1238-1251.
- Laurenceau, J. P., Rivera, L. M., Schaffer, A. R., & Pietromonaco, P. R. (in press). Intimacy as an Interpersonal Process: Current Status and Future Directions. In D. Mashek & A. Aron (Eds.) Handbook of Closeness and Intimacy. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Levinger, G., & Pietromonaco, P. (1989). Conflict Style Inventory. Unpublished scale. University of Massachusetts, Amherst.
- Levy, M. B., & Davis, K. (1988). Lovestyles and attachment styles compared; Their relations to each other and to various relationship characteristics. Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, *5*, 439-471.

Linville, P. W. (1985). Self-complexity and affective extremity: Don't put all your eggs in one cognitive basket. Social Cognition, 3, 94-120.

Main, M., Kaplan, K., & Cassidy, J. (1985). Security in infancy, childhood, and adulthood: A move to the level of representation. Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development, 50(1-2, Serial No. 209).

Margolin, G. (1980). The Conflict Inventory. Unpublished manuscript.

Maushart, S. (2002). Wifework: What marriage really means for women. New York: Bloomsbury.

Mikulincer, M. (1998). Adult attachment style and individual differences in functional versus dysfunctional experiences of anger. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 74, 513-524.

Mikulincer, M., Florian, V., Cowan, P. A., & Cowan, C. P. (2002). Attachment security in couple relationships: A systematic model and its implications for family dynamics. Family Process, 41, 405-434.

Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R. (in press). The attachment behavioral system in adulthood: Activation, Psychodynamics, and interpersonal processes. In M. Zanna (Ed.), Advances in Experimental Social Psychology.

O'Connell Corcoran, K., & Mallinckrodt, B. (2000). Adult attachment, self-efficacy, perspective taking, and conflict resolution. Journal of Counseling and Development, 78, 473-483.

Paley, B., Cox, M. J., Burchinal, M. R., & Payne, C. C. (1999). Attachment and marital functioning: Comparison of spouses with continuous-secure, earned-secure,

dismissing, and preoccupied attachment stances. Journal of Family Psychology, 13, 580-597.

Pietromonaco, P. R., & Carnelley, K. B. (1994). Gender and working models of attachment: Consequences for perceptions of self and romantic relationships. Personal Relationships, 1, 63-82.

Pietromonaco, P. R., & Feldman Barrett, L. (1997). Working models of attachment and daily social interactions. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 73, 1409-1423.

Pietromonaco, P. R., & Feldman Barrett, L. (2000). The internal working models concept: What do we really know about the self in relation to others? Review of General Psychology, 4, 155-175.

Pietromonaco, P. R., & Feldman Barrett, L. (2003). What can you do for me?: Attachment style and motives underlying esteem for partners. Manuscript submitted for publication.

Pistole, M. C. (1989). Attachment in adult romantic relationships: Style of conflict resolution and relationship satisfaction. Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 6, 505-510.

Rahim, M. A. (1983). A measure of styles of handling interpersonal conflict. Academy of Management Journal, 26, 368-376.

Rahim, M. A. (1990). The Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory—II. Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press.

Reis, H. T., & Patrick, B. C. (1996). Attachment and intimacy: Component processes. In E. T. Higgins & A. W. Kruglanski (Eds.), Social psychology: Handbook of basic principles (pp. 523-563). NY: The Guilford Press.

Reis, H. T., & Shaver, P. (1988). Intimacy as an interpersonal process. In S. W. Duck (Ed.), Handbook of personal relationships (pp. 367-389). Chichester, England: Wiley.

Reis, H. T., & Wheeler, L. (1991). Studying social interaction with the Rochester Interaction Record. In M. P. Zanna (Ed.), Advances in experimental social psychology (Vol. 24, pp. 269-318). San Diego: Academic Press.

Rholes, W. S., Simpson, J. A., Campbell, L., & Grich, J. (2001). Adult attachment and the transition to parenthood. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 81, 421-435.

Rholes, W. S., Simpson, J. A., & Stevens, J. G. (1998). Attachment orientations, social support, and conflict resolution in close relationships. In J. A. Simpson & W. S. Rholes (Eds.) Attachment theory and close relationships (pp. 166-188). New York: The Guilford Press.

Ross, M. (1989). Relation of implicit theories to the construction of personal histories. Psychological Review, 96, 341-357.

Schacter, D. L. (1996). Searching for memory: the brain, the mind, and the past. NY: Basic.

Senchak, M., & Leonard, K. E. (1992). Attachment styles and marital adjustment among newlywed couples. Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 9, 51-64.

Simpson, J. A., & Rholes, W. S. (1994). Stress and secure base relationships in adulthood. In K. Bartholomew & D. Perlman (Eds.), Attachment processes in adulthood (pp. 181-204). London: Jessica Kingsley.

Simpson, J. A., Rholes, W. S., & Nelligan, J. S. (1992). Support seeking and support giving within couples in an anxiety-provoking situation: the role of attachment styles. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, *62*, 434-446.

Simpson, J. A., Rholes, W. S., & Phillips, D. (1996). Conflict in close relationships: An attachment perspective. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, *71*, 899-914.

Spanier, G. B. (1976). Measuring dyadic adjustment: New scales for assessing the quality of marriage and similar dyads. Journal of Marriage and the Family, *38*, 15-28.

Tidwell, M. O., Reis, H. T., & Shaver, P. R. (1996). Attachment, attractiveness, and social interaction: A diary study. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, *71*, 729-745.

Table 1  
Studies of Attachment Style and Conflict

Study	Participants	Attachment Measure	Task	Conflict Measure	Main Findings
<b><u>Retrospective self-report studies of conflict strategies</u></b>					
Levy & Davis, 1988,	n=234 (Study 2)	H & S (continuous ratings for each prototype )	Questionnaire	Conflict/ ambivalence; ROCI	Ax & Av associated w/>conflict. Ax & Av associated w/< compromising & < integrating. Ax associated w/> dominating. S associated with > compromising & > integrating.
Pistole, 1989	Students M & F (n=137)	H & S (categorical)	Questionnaire	ROCI Assessed own use of conflict styles (e.g., compromising, obliging, integrating)	S > Ax & Av on integrating S > Ax on compromising Ax > Av on obliging
Senchak & Leonard, 1992	Newlywed couples n=322 pairs	H & S (categorical)	Questionnaire	MCI Assessed frequency of partner's problem- solving, withdrawal, verbal aggression during conflict	Couple effects: S-S < I-I & S(husband)-I(wife) on withdrawal & verbal aggression. S(wife)-I(husband) did not differ from other groups.
Carnelley et al., 1994 Study 1	College F in dating relationships n=163	Multi-item: Anxiety & Avoidance (continuous)	Questionnaire	CSQ Assessed own degree of compromising, collaborating, accommodating, avoiding, demanding	Av associated w/<constructive conflict style. Ax n.s.

Study 2	Married F (recovering from clinical depression & nondepressed) n=48	“	“	“	“
Feeney, 1994	Married couples n=361 pairs	H & S Revised to statements; 2 factors= Comfort with Closeness & Anxiety Over Relationships (continuous)	Questionnaire	CPQ Assessed own & partner's strategies of mutuality, coercion, destructive process, postconflict distress	Comfort associated w/ > mutuality & < coercion, < destructive, & < distress. Ax associated with < mutuality & > coercion, > destructive, & > distress.
Creasey, Kershaw, & Boston, 1999	College women n=140	RSQ (continuous)	Questionnaire	MADS Assessed positive (e.g., affection, validation) & negative (e.g., escalation, withdrawal) communication strategies	Ax & Av associated w/ poorer conflict management skills & > negative escalation & > withdrawal in romantic relationship.
O'Connell Corcoran & Mallinckrodt, 2000	Parents n=124 (94 F)	ASQ (continuous)	Questionnaire	ROCI-II Assessed own style (i.e., compromising, integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding) in an important love relationship	More confidence in attachments associated with > integration & > compromising, & < avoiding. More discomfort w/closeness associated w/> avoiding, < integration & < compromising.
Creasey & Hesson- McInnis, 2001	Students in romantic dating relationship n=357 (273 F)	RSQ (continuous)	Questionnaire	MADS	More Ax w/> negative emotions, > difficulty coping w/negative emotions. More Ax or more Av w/ > difficulty inhibiting behavior, < positive tactics, > escalation, > withdrawal.

**Behavioral Interaction Studies**

Kobak & Hazan, 1991	Married couples n=40 pairs	Marital Q sort (continuous)	Discussed & tried to resolve major disagreement	Coded behavior for rejection and support/validation	Wives who were more able to rely on their partner and/or who viewed partner as more available showed < rejection. Husbands who viewed partner as more available show < rejection and > support/validation. Partner effects for husband only: The more he saw wife as available, the less she showed rejection, and the more she showed support/validation.
Kobak et al., 1993, Study 2	Teens & their mothers n=48 pairs	Q-sort: secure-anxious; hyperactivation-deactivation (continuous)	Discussed & tried to resolve a major disagreement	Coded behavior for support/validation, dysfunctional anger, assertiveness, avoidance of problem-solving	More secure male teens showed < less avoidant problem-solving. Males with a deactivating strategy (i.e., > dismissing) showed > dysfunctional anger. More secure females showed < dysfunctional anger. Mothers of female teens with a deactivating strategy (i.e., > dismissing) showed > dominance in the interaction.
Cohn et al., 1992	Married couples w/a preschool child n=27 pairs	AAI (categorical)	Couple w/child interaction in lab & natural interactions at home	Interviewer ratings of observed conflict, positive interaction, marital functioning	Couple effects: S-S > I-I positive interactions S-S < I-I in conflict S(husband)-I(wife) < I-I in conflict S-S = S(husband)-I(wife) in conflict
Simpson et al., 1996	Dating couples n=123 pairs	AAQ (continuous)	Discussed & tried to resolve a major <u>or</u> minor problem	Self-reported distress & perceptions of change in the partner/relationship from before to after conflict; coded behavior (e.g., stress, warmth, support, synchrony)	Men & women who were more ax reported more distress in both conditions. Men & women for major problem only: More ax reported less positive perception of change. More av men showed less warmth & support, especially in major problem condition. More ax women showed more stress/anxiety, especially in major problem condition.

Paley, Cox, Burchinal, & Payne, 1999	Married couples prior to birth of 1 <sup>st</sup> child n=138 pairs	AAI (categorical)	Discussed & tried to resolve major conflict	Coded behavior (positive & negative affect; withdrawal)	Wives: P < S (continuous or earned) positive affect D > S (continuous or earned) withdrawal Husbands: n.s. Partner effects: Wives w/D husbands less positive affect, more negative affect than those w/cont. S husbands. Wives of earned S husbands less positive affect than wives of cont. S husbands.
Bouthillier, Julien, Dube, Belanger, & Hamelin, 2002	Cohabiting French-Canadian couples (78% married) n=40 pairs	AAQ (translated, continuous) & AAI (categorical)	Discussed and tried to resolve most salient marital problem	Coded behavior (IDCS) (e.g., conflict, withdrawal, support/validation, synchrony, escalation)	Men: S > P & D support, self-disclosure. Women: S > P & D support Couple effect: S > I synchrony S < I dominance
Creasey, 2002	Student couples n=145 pairs	AAI (categorical)	Discussed top 2 problems & tried to resolve also waiting room conversation	Coded behavior (SPAFF) -- negative emotional expression (e.g., contempt, belligerence) & positive emotional expression (e.g., validation, affection)	Men, conflict condition: S < P & D for negative behavior. P=D for negative behavior. Women: S > P & D positive behavior, both conditions. S < P & D negative behavior, conflict condition. P = D. Partner effects: Couple w/S woman > couple w/I woman, positive behavior, both conditions. Couple w/insecure man > couple w/secure man negative behavior, conflict condition.

**Daily Diary Studies & Cognitive Study**

Tidwell et al., 1996	Students M & F n=125	H & S (categorical)	Rochester Interaction Record (RIR)	Perceived conflict in daily social interactions	n.s.
Pietromonaco & Feldman Barrett, 1997	Students M & F n=70	B & H (categorical)	RIR	Number & intensity of conflict interactions;  Perceptions of partner & quality of interaction	n.s.  For high conflict interactions, P < S & D in negative perceptions

					of partner & interaction & own emotions. (This pattern was not found for lower conflict interactions.)
Fishtein et al., 1999	Students involved in a dating relationship n=145 (72 M)	B & H (categorical)	Relationship Complexity Task	DAS conflict items	At higher levels of relationship conflict, Ps showed > positive complexity than S, D, or F. Individuals from all groups showed > negative complexity at higher levels of conflict.
<b><u>Retrospective Self-Report Studies of Conflict Frequency or Intensity</u></b>					
Collins & Read, 1990 (Study 3)	Dating couples	Multi-item: Close, Anxiety, Depend (continuous)	Questionnaire	Frequency, severity of conflict	Women: Comfort w/closeness associated w/< conflict. Men: n.s. Partner effect: Women w/partner who is comfortable w/closeness report < conflict. Men w/more Ax partner report > conflict.
Kirkpatrick & Davis, (1994)	Dating couples n=354 pairs	H & S (categorical)	Questionnaire	Conflict/ ambivalence	Women: Ax & Av > S Men: n.s. Partner effect: W & M w/Ax partners > W & M w/S or Av partners

Note. M=male F=female Ax=anxious-ambivalent or anxious-ambivalence Av=Avoidant or Avoidance I=insecure S=secure P=preoccupied F=fearful-avoidant D=Dismissing-avoidant

**Attachment measures:** AAI=Adult Attachment Interview (George, Kaplan, & Main, 1996), 3 categories (secure, preoccupied, and avoidant) and an additional designation of unresolved/disorganized; ASQ=Attachment Style Questionnaire (Feeney, Noller, & Hanrahan, 1994), 5 subscales (Confidence in Attachment; Discomfort with Closeness; Relationships as Secondary to Achievement; Need for Approval; Preoccupation with Relationships); AAQ=Simpson, Rholes, & Nelligan, 1992, 2 dimensions (anxiety and avoidance); B & H=Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991, 4 categories, (secure, preoccupied, fearful-avoidant, dismissing-avoidant); H & S=Hazan & Shaver, 1987, 3 categories (secure, anxious-ambivalent, avoidant); RSQ=Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994, 2 dimensions (avoidance, anxious-ambivalence)

**Conflict Measures:** CSQ=Conflict Style Questionnaire (Levinger & Pietromonaco, 1989); CPQ=Communication Patterns Questionnaire, Christensen & Sullaway, 1984; DAS=Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976); IDCS=Interactional Dimensions Coding System (Julien et al, 1989); MADS=Managing Affect and Differences Scale (Arellano & Markman, 1995); MCI=Margolin Conflict Inventory (Margolin, 1980); ROCI=Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory (Rahim, 1983); ROCI-II=Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory II (Rahim, 1990); SPAFF=Specific Affect Coding System (Gottman, 1996)