

**ADULT ATTACHMENT, CONFLICT STYLE,  
AND RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION:  
A COMPREHENSIVE MODEL**

by

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of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Communication

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to create a comprehensive model integrating adult attachment style, conflict style, and relationship satisfaction. The research sought to determine if adult attachment acted as a predictor of conflict style and if attachment style, mediated by conflict style, influenced relationship satisfaction.

Three hundred and twenty one undergraduate students in romantic relationships ( $n = 321$ ) completed questionnaires measuring attachment style, relational conflict style, and relationship satisfaction. Results indicated that highly avoidant individuals are more likely to engage in hostile relational conflict with their partners and feel significantly less satisfaction from their adult romantic relationships than their non-avoidant counterparts. Data also suggested that avoidance and hostility may be more influential on relationship satisfaction levels than anxiety and validation.

The model in the current study compliments romantic conflict research by offering a predictor for conflict styles in dating relationships and illustrating the influence of both attachment style and conflict style on romantic relationship satisfaction.

## Chapter 1

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### Significance of Studying Dating Relationship Satisfaction

Dating is a serious relationship in which individuals have strong romantic feelings for a person they are exclusively seeing (Tracy, Shaver, Albino & Cooper, 2003) and is a form of behavior that nearly every individual will experience. Dating relationships in adolescence or early adulthood can be salient contributions “to the individual’s socialization into the adult roles of the society” (Skipper & Nass, 1966, p.412). Thus, it is not surprising that many individuals cite dating satisfaction or dissatisfaction as a major contributor to their mood or emotional well-being (Chung, Farmer, Grant, Newton, Payne, Perry, Saunders, Smith, & Stone, 2003).

University counseling centers report that a major reason that students seek counseling services is because of difficulties with romantic partners (Creasey, Kershaw, & Boston, 1999). The negative emotions associated with these complaints may “trigger strong stress responses, self-esteem problems, academic difficulties and violence” within the relationship (Creasey & Hesson-McInnus, 2001, p.85).

Creasey and Hesson-McInnus (2001) argue that while some may find late adolescent dating relationships “fleeting or trivial, about 30% of these couples find

themselves married within five years” (p. 85). For those relationships that do fail, there is possibility that corrosive conflict behaviors that are used by youth in current romantic partnerships may negatively influence the development and success of their future relationships. Thus, analyzing this stage of social development could help to understand and “potentially alter problematic modes of interaction,” before they remain deeply embedded within an individual’s behavioral repertoire (Creasey & Hesson-McInnus, 2001, p.86).

Current research clearly recognizes the importance of studying dating relationships (e.g. Chung et al., 2003; Creasey & Hesson-McInnus, 2001). As the following sections explain, extensive research analyzes individual differences affecting dating relationship satisfaction. For example, attachment theory (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bowlby, 1969) asserts that the initial relationship an infant has with a caregiver influences future intimate associations. Other research focuses on relational factors, such as how a couple maneuvers through conflict (Creasey & Hesson-McInnus, 2001), to predict and understand what leads to satisfaction in dating relationships. What is missing, however, is a comprehensive theoretical model that accounts for both individual- and relational-level predictors on relationship satisfaction. The study reported below sought to analyze the relationship among individual factors, relational factors, and relationship satisfaction in dating couples.

A review of the literature analyzing both individual- difference predictors, such as attachment style, and relational predictors, such as communication styles, helps to illustrate the need for a comprehensive model of dating relationships. The following

sections review literature that explains how attachment styles influence how individuals approach conflict in intimate relationships (Creasey & Hesson-McInnus, 2001), how attachment styles influence relationship satisfaction (Tucker & Anders, 1999), and how communication styles during conflict episodes affect relationship satisfaction (Gottman, 1994a).

### Individual Difference Predictors of Satisfaction: Attachment Styles

Attachment theorists propose that an infant's initial relationship with his or her caregiver affects how that individual will approach future relationships (Bowlby, 1969). Bowlby (1969) argued that when infants are separated from their primary caregiver for substantial lengths of time, they experience a series of emotional reactions that manifest themselves in three different ways: protest, despair, and detachment. Ainsworth et al. (1978) established three primary patterns of attachment based on these emotional reactions: avoidant individuals (characteristic of infants who, when distressed, show signs of detachment), secure individuals (characteristic of infants who, when distressed, turn to the caregiver for support) and anxious/ambivalent individuals (characteristic of infants who, when distressed, exhibit signs of protest towards the caregiver and appear angry and distraught).

Researchers suggest that these early attachment patterns remain influential in an individual's life well past infancy (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1969; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Hazan and Shaver (1987) argue that the initial bond one develops during infancy can have great bearing on one's attachment style in *adult* romantic relationships.

Research suggests that there are two underlying dimensions, avoidance and anxiety, that can be used to describe adult attachment style (Ainsworth et al, 1978; Bartholomew, 1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Brennan et al., 1998). Avoidance refers to the extent to which individuals attempt to remain autonomous from their romantic partner in terms of emotional intimacy (Ainsworth et al, 1978). Anxiety is the extent to which individuals worry about the availability or supportiveness of their partner during times of need.

Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) propose four different adult attachment patterns based on an individual's level of avoidance and anxiety. The first style, *secure*, refers to a sense of worthiness as well as a perception of others being generally responsive and accepting. Secure individuals experience low anxiety and low avoidance, indicating comfort with intimacy and autonomy. Simpson (1990) found that those who exhibit a secure attachment style are more likely than insecure people to report trust in partners, higher levels of interdependence, commitment and overall relationship satisfaction. Additionally, research by Creasey and Hesson-McInnus (2001), suggests that college students with secure adult attachment orientations report more satisfaction, greater sensitivity regarding romantic partner's needs, longer relationship length and more stability in their dating relationships than insecure students.

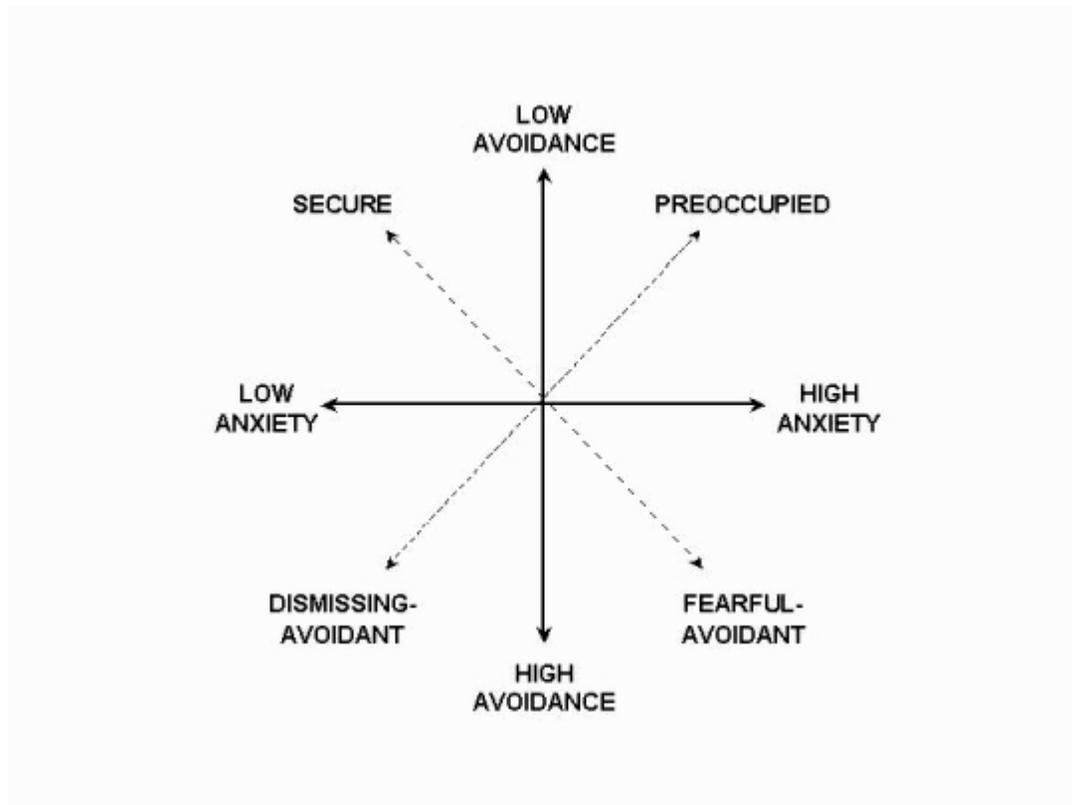


Figure 1. Two dimensional model of adult attachment (Fraley & Shaver, 2004)

The remaining three styles, preoccupied, fearful-avoidant, and dismissive avoidant, are insecure styles of attachment. The first insecure style, *preoccupied*, includes individuals who report low avoidance and high anxiety and view themselves as being unworthy of love. Preoccupied people tend to base their self-worth on whether significant people in their lives accept them (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). The *fearful-avoidant* style refers to both a feeling of unworthiness as well as a distrust of intimacy. Experiencing high anxiety and avoidance, fearful-avoidant individuals feel that by avoiding intimacy with others, they are protected from the rejection they anticipate in

close relationships (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Finally, the *dismissive-avoidant style* describes a self-love combined with negative perception of others' trustworthiness and responsiveness (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Dismissive- avoidant people are described as having high avoidance and low anxiety in adult romantic relationships.

According to Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991), dismissive-avoidant individuals “protect themselves against disappointment by avoiding close relationships and maintaining a sense of independence and invulnerability” (p. 230). Those exhibiting any of the three insecure styles are likely to report feeling distrust in their partners, low levels of interdependence, problems with commitment and an overall low level of relationship satisfaction (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Simpson, 1990).

In sum, attachment style is an individual difference variable that predicts satisfaction in romantic relationships: secure attachment has a positive association with relationship satisfaction while insecure attachment is negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction (Banse, 2004; Carnelly, Pietromonaco, & Jaffe, 1996; Creasey & Hesson-McInnus, 2001; Simpson, 1990). What is missing from attachment research, however, is an analysis of potential *mediators* between an individual's attachment style and the relational level variable of satisfaction in romantic partnerships. It is vital to analyze mediators between attachment styles and relationship satisfaction in order to understand why some adult attachment orientations experience satisfaction and others do not. If it is understood which behaviors inherent to each attachment style influence satisfaction levels, researchers may be able to alter problematic modes of interaction so that it is possible for all attachment styles to experience fulfilling relationships. One

potential mediator is relational conflict style, the behaviors couples use when maneuvering through conflict.

A small number of studies have explored how attachment orientation influences conflict negotiation strategies. According to Kobak and Hazan (1991), secure individuals manifest their emotions during conflict more constructively than non-secure individuals. Additionally, securely attached teenagers remain more engaged and show less avoidance during the debate as well as display fewer spouts of dysfunctional anger compared to their non-secure counterparts (Kobak, Cole, Ferenz-Gillies, Fleming, & Gamble, 1993). Attachment style, an internal model of relationships, affects the expectations that an individual has of intimate relationships and, therefore, would influence the interactive behaviors that individual brings into the relationship

As the following section will demonstrate, substantial research analyzes the effects of interactive factors on relationship satisfaction. More specifically, a couple's conflict style correlates with the satisfaction of romantic partnerships (Gottman, 1994b). The model proposed in the current study acknowledges the direct effect of attachment styles on relationship satisfaction as well as hypothesizes an indirect effect of attachment on satisfaction that is mediated by relational conflict style.

The following paragraphs will introduce conflict style as a mediator of relationship satisfaction and introduce Gottman's (1994a, 1994b) theory on how a couple's interactive behaviors can influence satisfaction.

## Relational Level Predictors of Satisfaction: Conflict Styles

Gottman (1994a, 1994b, 1998) argued that the relational style a couple employs, especially while handling conflict, can be a strong indicator of the length of their marriage as well as their feelings of satisfaction in that marriage. According to Gottman (1994a), based on the domains of health, physiology, behavior, affect, marital satisfaction, and the risk for marital dissolution, there are two kinds of marital types: regulated and nonregulated. Regulated couples, which will be discussed below in detail, are those who utilize more positive communication behaviors than negative. Married couples are characterized into these two styles based on partner's perceptions of the relationship behavior towards each other. Relationship satisfaction was found to highly correlate with these conflict styles (Gottman, 1994a, 1994b).

Despite Gottman's (1994a, 1994b, 1998) focus on marital research, his relational conflict typology can extend to dating relationships. Gottman found that the categorization of a couple stemmed not from what the partners argued over, but rather *how* they interacted when they argued. Concomitantly, Holman and Jarvis (2003) conducted a study sampling both married and unmarried couples to explore Gottman's couple-conflict styles with survey data. Their findings in both samples paralleled Gottman's four distinct categories of conflict styles (Holman & Jarvis, 2003). Now that application of marital conflict theory on dating relationships is supported empirically, the next few paragraphs will introduce the specifics of Gottman's theory on relational conflict styles.

Marriages have what Gottman (1994a, 1994b) calls a marital ecology. The ecology is determined by the ratio of positive to negative interactions between the spouses. Negative behaviors range from attacking a partner's behavior to showing a marked increase in hopelessness or grief (Shapiro & Gottman, 2004). One of the major negative behaviors is contempt, defined as intentionally disrespecting or insulting each other, which can be communicated both nonverbally and verbally (Gottman, 1994a, 1994b; Shapiro & Gottman, 2004). If partners show contempt, they are exhibiting a cold quality that is often intended to show superiority and sarcasm (Shapiro & Gottman, 2004). Domineering, being defensive, and stonewalling (total lack of engagement in conversations with partners) are all behaviors couples might employ when interacting negatively (Gottman, 1994a, 1994b; Shapiro & Gottman, 2004).

Conversely, positive interactions are relayed with much more warmth than negative interactions. Individuals using positive behaviors often reflect interest in the interaction by asking for elaboration or showing genuine concern (Shapiro & Gottman, 2004). Positive interactions usually include affection, shared humor, and surprise or joy. Additionally, a clear indicator of a positive interaction is a behavior called validation (Gottman, 1994a, 1994b; Shapiro & Gottman, 2004). Shapiro and Gottman (2004) define validation as involving "acceptance and openness to one's partner's views and feelings that communicates respect, even if they disagree" (p.198). Validation is identified through behaviors such as maintaining eye contact during conversations (Shapiro & Gottman, 2004) and by paraphrasing or completing each other's sentences. When one

partner validates another, the message being sent is that, despite their disagreement, they value each other's emotions and opinions (Gottman, 1994b; Holmes & Jarvis, 2003).

Gottman (1994b) found that the stability of a marriage can be maintained if there are five positive interactions for every one negative interaction. If couples do not stabilize this equilibrium, the marital ecology is disrupted and partners will feel frustrated or irritated and begin to quarrel excessively.

One of the main reasons that five positive interactions have to occur for each negative interaction is because negativity can easily become a state that is absorbing and difficult for couples to escape from (Gottman, 1998). When negativity takes over and the ratio is violated, distress in the relationship becomes apparent and the perception of well-being is lost. The longer the negative episode, the more likely a partner feels personally attacked or out of touch with the other partner. Further, the negative aspects of the relationship start a cascade which includes partners perceiving their relationships as severely dysfunctional and arranging parallel lifestyles rather than ones that intersect (Gottman, 1998).

Regulated and nonregulated couples differ greatly when it comes to positivity and negativity (Gottman, 1994a; 1998; Shapiro & Gottman, 2004). As Gottman states, "Nonregulated couples, those for whom the balance between positive and negative affective behaviors fails to increasingly favor positive affective behaviors over time, have marriages that appear, in many ways, to be much more dysfunctional than those of regulated couples" (1994a, p.106). There are two types of nonregulated couples, hostile-engaged and hostile-detached, as well as three types of regulated couples, avoidant,

validating, and volatile (Gottman, 1994a; 1994b; 1998; Shapiro & Gottman, 2004). The following paragraphs will define each style in regard to the maintenance of the positive to negative ratio discussed earlier.

Regulated couples, or those that utilize more positive communication behaviors than negative, generally exhibit three kinds of conflict styles: volatile, validating and avoiding (Gottman, 1994a, 1994b). According to Gottman, *volatile* couples have relationships that are highly emotional with extreme levels of both negative and positive affect. However, the magic ratio of five to one still exists because, for the many negative moments that occur, five times as many positive moments take place.

Individuals in volatile relationships see themselves as equals and believe that a relationship should highlight and strengthen individuality (Gottman, 1994a, 1994b). There is great honesty in volatile relationships, about both positive and negative emotions, and the marriage remains passionate and exciting throughout its course (Gottman, 1994b). Volatile couples exhibit active engagement in conflict and are rarely passive and withdrawn. Rather than discuss the issue rationally and hear each other's views, the volatile couple spends most of their time in a heated attempt to persuade each other to change their viewpoint. According to Gottman (1994b), volatile couples have eruptions when they disagree, but the remaining aspects of their marriage are warm and loving. In essence, the intense negative emotions are balanced by the extremely positive feelings. The volatile couple knows how to have dramatic battles, but they also know the value of passionate, loving reconciliations. The feature that most clearly distinguishes

hostile from non-hostile couples is that the non-hostiles do not inflict emotional pain on one another (Gottman, 1994a, 1994b).

Despite the occasional negativity present in volatile relationships, couples with this style often have high relationship satisfaction. One possible reason for high satisfaction is that volatile couples are relatively competitive with each other, as opposed to cooperative, and their conflict episodes include greater frequencies of negative affect and attempts to persuade their significant other to relent (Gottman, 1994a, 1994b; Holman & Jarvis, 2003). However, observing the dialogue of a volatile couple's conflict interaction will show that, along with the increased levels of negativity comes five times as much expression of positive affect and no malicious intent to criticize each other's character. Therefore, according to Gottman (1994a, 1994b), volatile couples are able to maintain a marital ecology that keeps partners satisfied in the relationship.

A second regulated conflict style is the validating style (Gottman, 1994a, 1994b). These couples, even in the middle of a disagreement, behave in a way that shows that each other's opinions and emotions are valid. Even when engaged in heated and passionate debates over highly valued topics, validators remain calm and display ease. The presence of mutual respect eliminates numerous problems that can afflict a relationship (Gottman, 1994b). In addition, validators usually engage in a conference type discussion rather than an all out verbal battle. The pattern present within the validating style is relatively simple: each party listens fully to the other's complaint while showing support and concern, followed by a phase of attempting to persuade one's partner of the rightness of one's position. Persuasive attempts are good natured and

absent of invalidation of each other's views and, therefore, the positive affect outnumbered the negative affect (Gottman, 1994a, 1994b). Most importantly, and similar to the volatile conflict style, this style of interaction does not include hostility or the intent to emotionally injure the partner.

Most often, the couples engaging in the validating style end arguments understanding each other better than before the conflict (Gottman, 1994b). Fitzpatrick and Winke (1979) described a conflict style similar to Gottman's validating style where couples are most often good friends and value the pluralistic nature of their marriage rather than the individual aspects. The validation tends to be highly satisfying for a couple because they know, through the interactive behaviors between them, how highly they value each other (Gottman, 1994a, 1994b).

The third regulated conflict style, according to Gottman's research (1994a, 1994b), is *avoidant*. Avoidant couples are conflict minimizers and they commonly agree to disagree. The conflict, then, becomes unresolved. The avoidant couple will introduce the conflict and present their sides, but they minimize attempts to persuade or convince each other. Avoiders reaffirm the love and happiness they have in a marriage and agree that those positives overwhelm the majority of issues they do not see eye to eye on. Similar to the other non-hostile styles, the avoidance conflict style does not habitually utilize hostility and the "marital ecology" remains appropriately balanced (Gottman, 1994a, 1994b).

All three of the regulated styles of communication are constructive in the sense that relational partners are able to maintain the appropriate balance of five positive

moments together for every negative moment (Gottman 1994a, 1994b). Gottman (1994a) suggested that the regulated conflict styles represent “the range of adaptations that exist to balance or regulate positive and negative behaviors in a marriage” (p.181). The following section will introduce the non-regulated styles, hostile and hostile/ detached, and explain how destructive behaviors lead to instability and dissatisfaction within a marriage.

Hostile couples usually exhibit a great deal of direct engagement in conflict episodes (Gottman, 1994a). Additionally, hostile partnerships include defensiveness by both partners. For example, Gottman reported that one person will utilize defensiveness, contempt, or personal criticism. Very often, arguments contain statements such as, “you always” or “you never” and evolve into interactions that contain judging and blaming that intentionally personally attack a partner’s behavior or character. Hostile detached couples exhibit emotional detachment and lack of involvement with each other. The hostile/detached couple will get into brief interactions of attack and defensiveness. Over time, Gottman argues that a hostile conflict style erodes the marital ecology and leads to a downward spiral and the four horsemen. The following paragraphs will discuss these phases in greater detail.

Gottman (1994b) reported that hostile marriages end in a very specific fashion, “this downward spiral includes a distinct cascade of interactions, emotions, and attitudes that, step by step, brought these couples close to separation, divorce or an unhappy, lonely life together” (p.71). Couples will face behaviors representing, what Gottman calls, the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse when cascading towards dissolution. The

sabotaging behaviors, from least to most disastrous, are criticism, contempt, defensiveness and stonewalling (Gottman, 1994a, 1994b). The following is a review of the negativity prevalent in these destructive behaviors to illustrate how destructive conflict styles lead to dissatisfaction and the eventual dissolution of a relationship.

The first destructive behavior of the Four Horsemen is criticism. Criticism is using blame to attack the character rather than the behavior of someone (Gottman, 1994b). The reason that this behavior is so much more destructive than just complaining, which is a statement of some negativity, is that criticism attacks a global characteristic or behavior rather than an isolated act.

Once a couple has reached the criticism phase of destructive conflict, the dangers of contempt come within reach. Contempt introduces the intention to emotionally demoralize a partner and is the basis for invalidating communication (Gottman, 1994b). Contemptuous behaviors attack a partner's sense of self and cause the escalation of negative emotion. Contempt includes insults, mockery and hostile humor.

When one partner feels as though he or she has been personally attacked, he or she feels the need to defend. Defensiveness, however, only escalates the argument and comes in the form of excuse making, denying responsibility, and cross-complaining (meeting one complaint immediately with another complaint). Defensiveness, although not usually meant to intentionally sabotage a relationship, is one of the most deconstructive conflict behaviors one can engage in (Gottman, 1994b) because it creates a competitive environment rather than the feeling of a partnership.

The fourth and final horseman is stonewalling. Stonewalling is a conversational behavior one uses in an attempt to isolate himself or herself from the interaction (Gottman, 1994b). The stonewaller's message to his or her spouse is "I am withdrawing, disengaging from any meaningful interaction with you" (Gottman, 1994b, p.95). Stonewallers remove themselves entirely from the conversation. Although stonewalling on occasion is somewhat inevitable (as it can be used to calm tempers, sort ideas, etc.), more serious problems arise when it becomes habitual and follows the downward spiral with the four other destructive stages.

Gottman (1994b) suggested that the reason The Four Horsemen are so deadly to a marriage is not necessarily the initial negativity, but rather the cycle of negativity that continues thereafter. Negative messages interfere with the hostile couple's communication and turns into a form of mutual psychological abuse. The dissatisfaction that results from this cascade is a direct result of the imbalance of the magic ratio (Gottman, 1994a, 1994b).

Past research on relationship satisfaction in marriages and dating relationships consistently suggests that individuals in validating, avoidant, and volatile relational styles, respectively, have greater relationship satisfaction than hostile couples (Gottman, 1994a; 1994b; Holman & Jarvis, 2003). Relationship satisfaction is directly influenced by relational conflict style because of the differences in positive and negative communication utilized by conflict styles. Couples reporting an overwhelming amount of validation in their relationships had the highest levels of satisfaction, the highest

amount of positive communication, and the least amount of negative communication compared to non-validating couples (Holman & Jarvis, 2003).

Holman and Jarvis (2003) found that, when it comes to relationship satisfaction in both married and unmarried couples, hostile couples consistently reported the least relationship satisfaction, the highest criticism, contempt, and flooding, and the lowest level of soothing of all of the conflict styles (i.e. hostile, volatile, avoidant, validating). On the other end of the spectrum, validating individuals reported the highest relationship satisfaction, the highest soothing, and lowest criticism, contempt, and flooding, compared to other conflict styles. Consequently, the current study focused on validation and hostility exclusively because they are the most extreme in terms of negativity and positivity. Once support is found to predict the two most distinct relational styles, the scope can be broadened to predict the less distinct styles such as volatility and avoidance.

Thus far, this section has explained how a couple's communication during conflict influences their level of relationship satisfaction (Gottman, 1994a, 1994b; Holman & Jarvis, 2003). Ultimately, the limitation of Gottman's (1994a; 1994b; 1998) research is that it does not offer insight into what variables *predict* conflict style. Predictive ability is important because healthier conflict styles lead to more relationship fulfillment and, if couples can learn how to communicate effectively, they have a greater chance of experiencing a satisfying partnership. One of the main focuses of the current study is to advance the literature in romantic communication and to identify potential predictors of relational conflict style. Additionally, research on attachment theory (Brennan & Shaver, 1995; Collins & Read, 1990; Simpson, 1990; Stackert &

Bursik, 2003) suggests a direct effect of attachment style on relational satisfaction while ignoring potential mediators. Attachment literature has not fully considered how interpersonal exchanges might mediate the influence of attachment style on relational satisfaction. When considered together, attachment theory and Gottman’s work on conflict styles offer useful components for building a more comprehensive model of distal individual-level and proximal relational-level predictors of relational satisfaction.

### Hypotheses and Research Questions

The theory presented below and tested in the current study predicts that the effects of individual-level adult attachment styles on relational satisfaction are mediated by relational-level conflict styles. Figure 2, below, illustrates the relationships hypothesized in this section.

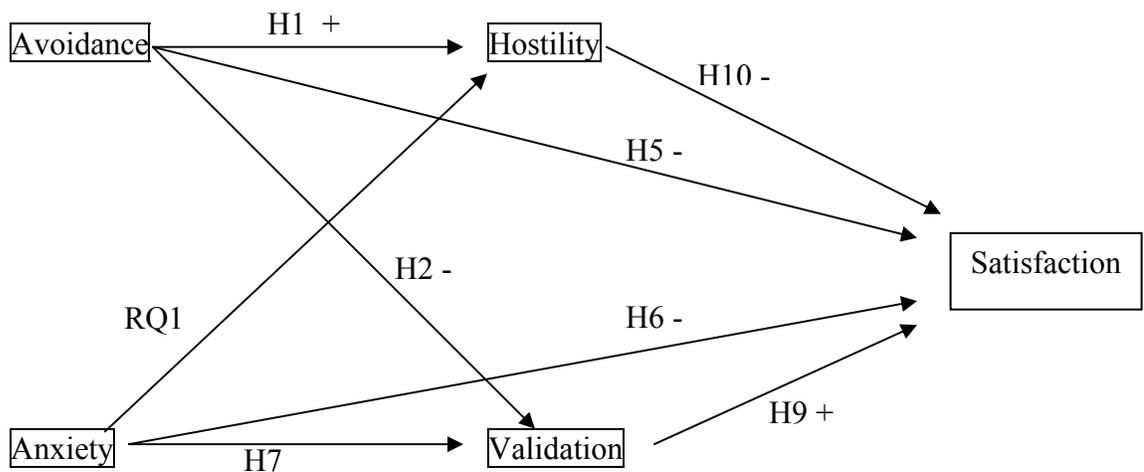


Figure 2. Model of attachment style, conflict style and relationship satisfaction.

First, according to Bartholomew and Horowitz's (1991) two dimensional view of individual differences in adult attachment (see Figure 1), highly avoidant individuals have a greater tendency to elude intimacy, show discomfort with emotional closeness, and seek a high level of self-sufficiency than non-avoidant individuals (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Additionally, avoidant individuals tend to find ways, physically or emotionally, to disengage themselves from the confines of a relationship. As previously discussed, couples with hostile relational styles usually begin the downward spiral toward relationship dissolution (Gottman 1994a, 1994b). The final phase of hostile relationships' "downward spiral" is stonewalling. Stonewalling is a behavior one uses, as a form of withdrawal, to disengage or isolate oneself from the interaction. When an individual stonewalls, it is a sign of disengagement and avoidance of the situation at hand (Shapiro & Gottman, 2004). Therefore, individuals with high avoidance may be more likely to engage in hostile relationships as opposed to non-avoidant individuals. The current study sought to test the following hypothesis:

*H1: Avoidance is a direct positive predictor of the hostile relational style.*

Additionally, avoidant individuals (i.e. fearful and dismissive) often view others as unreliable and untrustworthy (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) and will most likely not engage in validating behaviors. Validating behaviors include being engaged and active in the conversation, not avoiding or blocking the interaction out, and considering the emotions and opinions of others (Gottman, 1994a; 1994b; Shapiro & Gottman, 2004). Avoidant individuals often do not deem their partners as reliable or trustworthy and,

consequently, will most likely not make an effort to make them feel as though they are valued and respected. Therefore, the following hypothesis was offered:

*H2: Avoidance is a direct negative predictor of the validating relational style.*

More specifically, highly avoidant individuals (i.e. dismissive, fearful) should be more likely than those who are less avoidant (i.e. secure, preoccupied) to report hostile relational conflict. As stated before, many avoidant individuals do not have a positive view of their partners; they perceive their partners as having low levels of dependability and trustworthiness (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Therefore, their actions towards their partners will most likely be hostile, reflecting negative feelings. Additionally, secure and preoccupied individuals may be more likely to report validating relational conflict styles than individuals with fearful and dismissive attachment orientations.

When one utilizes validating behaviors, the partner is often feeling valued and respected. Secure and preoccupied individuals have a positive view of their significant other and, therefore, their behaviors towards them will most likely reflect validating behaviors more prominently than fearful and dismissive individuals, whose perception of their partner is more negative (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). The following predictions were offered:

*H3: Dismissive and fearful individuals will report more hostile conflict than secure and preoccupied individuals.*

*H4: Secure and preoccupied individuals will report more validating conflict than fearful and dismissive individuals.*

The model offered in this study also proposes how attachment orientation directly influences relationship satisfaction. Previous attachment studies (Brennan & Shaver, 1995; Collins & Read, 1990; Simpson, 1990; Stackert & Bursik, 2003) suggest that securely attached participants consistently report higher levels of relationship satisfaction than insecurely attached individuals. Individuals enter adult romantic relationships with expectations based on past experiences. An insecure adult who experienced unsatisfying and unfulfilled relationships in infancy would anticipate similar outcomes of adult relationships. Similarly, infants who experience secure and safe relationships could presumably enter adult partnerships expecting a similar environment (Stackert & Bursik, 2003). Because high avoidance and high anxiety are both characteristics of insecure relationships, the current study sought to test the following hypotheses:

*H5: Avoidance is a direct negative predictor of relationship satisfaction.*

*H6: Anxiety is a direct negative predictor of relationship satisfaction.*

Adult attachment is also determined by the level of anxiety an individual has about his or her relationship. Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) found that individuals with anxious attachment orientations usually have higher levels of personal insecurity than those with non-anxious attachment styles. Anxious adults often view significant others as being worthy of being loved while viewing themselves as unlovable. Anxious individuals report a preoccupation with the relationship, feelings of jealousy, fear of abandonment, and fear of rejection (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998). Anxiety, therefore, should influence individuals to validate their partners in an effort to preserve the relationship that they are preoccupied with maintaining. Accordingly, anxious

individuals will most likely strive for validating relationships rich with respect. There is not much empirical support to suggest how anxiety will influence hostility however the model seeks to analyze the relationship between the two variables. Therefore, the following prediction and research question were offered:

*H7: Anxiety will have a positive influence on validation.*

*RQ1: How will anxiety influence the hostile relational style?*

Further, low-avoidance individuals (i.e. secure and preoccupied) will most likely have more satisfying relationships. Individuals with low avoidance are described as being less hostile (Simpson, 1990), more likely to idealize their partner, and less likely to avoid intimacy than individuals high on avoidance. Gottman (1994a, 1994b) reported that validation leads to relationship satisfaction and hostility leads to the dissolution of relationships. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is also offered:

*H8: Secure and preoccupied individuals will report higher relationship satisfaction than fearful and dismissive individuals.*

Gottman (1994a, 1994b) found that relational conflict style has a direct influence on satisfaction. Regulated styles (i.e. validating, avoidant, and volatile) utilize conversational behaviors that show partners they value each other. Hostile conflict styles employ behaviors that bring negativity into relationships. Therefore, the following hypotheses are posited:

*H9: Validating relational style is a direct positive predictor of relationship satisfaction.*

*H10: Hostile relational style is a direct negative predictor of relationship satisfaction.*

There are also potential indirect effects from avoidance and anxiety to relationship satisfaction. The current study sought to determine if adult attachment orientations, mediated by conflict style, predicted dating relationship satisfaction. Research by Hazan and Shaver (1987) and Creasey and Hesson-McInnus (2001) found that adult attachment styles influence the overall satisfaction within a romantic relationship. Brennan and colleagues (1998) report that characteristics such as avoidance of intimacy, discomfort with closeness, and self-reliance represent avoidance and preoccupation, jealousy, and fear of abandonment and rejection are good indicators of anxiety. Therefore, based on what Gottman (1994a, 1994b) found about hostile and non-hostile relationships, highly avoidant people should engage in hostile relational behaviors and highly anxious individuals should utilize validating relational behaviors. To date, indirect effects, such as those noted above, have yet to be tested. Therefore, the current study posited the following hypotheses:

*H11: Hostility mediates the relationship between avoidance and relationship satisfaction.*

*H12: Validation mediates the relationship between anxiety and relationship satisfaction.*

Past research has focused attention on attachment style and relationship satisfaction (e.g. Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Simpson, 1990) and relational conflict style as predictors of relationship satisfaction (Gottman, 1994a, 1994b). Despite the

direct effect hypotheses suggesting the negative relationship between avoidance and validation and anxiety and hostility, the possibility that some individuals may indeed, utilize a conflict style that does not logically correspond with their attachment style is still present. While there is not enough support to suggest what *type* of effect these specific attachment styles will have on specific conflict styles, there is enough support to suspect some potential influence. If avoidant individuals report high relationship satisfaction, it would be particularly helpful to know if validation was a mediator (and the same for anxiety and hostility). The current study sought to test the following non-directional hypotheses:

*H13: Validation mediates the relationship between avoidance and relationship satisfaction.*

*H14: Hostility mediates the relationship between anxiety and relationship satisfaction.*

The current study explored both individual- and relational-level predictors of dating relationship satisfaction. As the previous sections explained, extensive research analyzes individual differences affecting dating relationship satisfaction, such as the attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969; Ainsworth et al., 1978). Other research focuses on relational factors, such as how a couple maneuvers through conflict (Creasey & Hesson-McInnus, 2001) to predict and understand what leads to satisfaction in dating relationships. Additionally, although previous work (e.g. Gottman, 1994a, 1994b; Simpson, 1990) focused on marriage, the proposed study seeks to develop a detailed

model for dating relationships. The next chapter describes the methods used to address these hypotheses and research questions.

## Chapter 2

### **METHOD**

#### Participants

Participants were 321 undergraduate students (138 males and 183 females) ranging in age from 18 to 28 years old ( $M=19.8$ ;  $Median=20$ ;  $SD=1.90$ ). The length of their most significant relationships ranged from 4 months to 96 months ( $M=19.1$ ;  $Median=14$ ;  $SD=14.7$ ). Approximately half of the participants were recruited from undergraduate communication courses where they received extra credit for their participation. Most participants received extra credit for bringing an additional research participant from outside the class.

#### Measures

##### *Adult Attachment Style*

The Multiple-Item Measure of Adult Romantic Attachment (MIMARA, Brennan et al., 1998) is a combination of measures (e.g. Hazan and Shaver, 1987, 1990; Bartholomew and Horowitz, 1991; Sperling and colleagues, 1992; Latty-Mann & Davis, 1996) created to encourage researchers to use a common measure to assess adult romantic attachment (Brennan et al., 1998). The MIMARA is a 36 item scale consisting of two 18-item subscales measuring individual's levels of avoidance and anxiety regarding their adult romantic relationships. Avoidance of intimacy, discomfort with

closeness, and self-reliance questions are used to measure avoidance while preoccupation, jealousy, fear of abandonment, and fear of rejection are questions representing anxiety (Brennan et al., 1998).

In the current study, the MIMARA exhibited high internal consistency (e.g.  $\alpha = .94$  for avoidance and  $\alpha = .91$  for anxiety, Brennan et al., 1998). In the study by Brennan and colleagues, the avoidance subscale highly correlated with numerous other scales assessing avoidance and discomfort with closeness and the anxiety scale correlated highly with other scales measuring feelings of jealousy, anxiety and rejection (Brennan et al., 1998).

Given previous literature (Brennan et. al, 1998) utilizing the MIMARA, the scale items were expected to tap two dimensions, avoidance and anxiety. However, an exploratory principal-axis factor analysis with a varimax rotation on the current data set revealed six factors accounting for 51.6% of variance in participants' scores. The eigenvalues and percentages of total variance accounted for by each factor appear in Table 1.

Although a two-factor solution was expected, given the previous literature, the current data suggested a more complicated factor structure. Factor 1 included statements reflecting a combination of both anxiety (e.g., "I am nervous when my partners get too close to me," "Just when my partner starts to get close to me I pull away", "I prefer not to be close to a partner") and avoidance (e.g., "I don't feel comfortable opening up to romantic partners," "I prefer not to show a partner how I feel deep down," "I get uncomfortable when a romantic partner wants to be very close). Items loading on Factor

2 included statements pertaining to anxiety (e.g., “I worry about being abandoned,” “I worry a lot about my relationships,” “When I’m not in a relationship, I feel somewhat anxious and insecure”). The items that loaded on Factor 3 reflected social support or comforting (e.g., “I tell my partner just about everything,” “I don’t mind asking romantic partners for comfort, advice or help,” “I turn to my partner for many things, including reassurance”). Factor 4 included statements about dependency (e.g., “I often want to merge completely and this sometimes scares them away,” “I often wish that my partners feelings for me were as strong as my feelings for him/her”). Factor 5 included statements illustrating anxiety regarding abandonment (e.g. “I get frustrated when my partner is not around as much as I would like,” “I resent it when my partner spends time away from me”). Factor 6 had no high loading factors.

The six factor solution reported above was inconsistent with the expected two-dimensional structure (i.e. anxiety and avoidance) of the MIMARA reported by Brennan, and colleagues (1998). To create a measure that better distinguished between relational anxiety and avoidance, MIMARA items most likely to produce a two factor solution of avoidance and anxiety were retained and the remaining items were removed. Five avoidance items and five anxiety items remained (see Table 2). Next, the reduced set of items were submitted to a second exploratory principle-axis factor analysis with varimax rotation. As expected, the reduced set of items produced a two factor solution (avoidance and anxiety) accounting for 65.3% of the variance. Eigenvalues, percentage of total variance, and reliability of each factor appear in Table 2. Rather than using the original

MIMARA, the subset of 10-items (presented in Table 2) were used to operationalize attachment style in the current study.

### *Conflict Style*

The Relationship Evaluation (RELATE) questionnaire (Holman, Busby, Doxey, Loyer-Carlson, & Klein, 1997) is a revised version of the Preparation for Marriage (PREP-M) questionnaire (Holman, Busby, & Larson, 1989) intended to operationalize relational conflict style. RELATE gathers information about relationship satisfaction, relationship stability, and conflict style from premarital couples or individuals in serious dating relationships.

Holman and Jarvis (2003) assert that self-report measures can validly operationalize the four couple-conflict types identified in Gottman's behavioral-observational research. According to Holman & Jarvis (2003), the conflict style scenarios in RELATE accurately reflect Gottman's description of the conflict styles (1994a, 1994b), giving the measure good face validity. The RELATE presents participants with four paragraph-length descriptions of each of the four conflict styles and asks participants to rate how well each description represents the way conflict is handled in the participants' relationship.

A serious limitation of the RELATE measure is that it employs a single-item measure to assess participants' relational conflict styles. To address this limitation, the current study employed a revised version of the RELATE that utilized a multiple-item scale to assess relational conflict style. The paragraph representing each conflict style

was broken down into four or five individual statements and displayed in mixed-order (see Appendix B). The participants, based on how they and their partner handled conflict, marked each individual statement as *Never*, *Rarely*, *Sometimes*, *Often*, or *Very Often*. Dimensionality of the new multiple-item measure was tested using an exploratory principal-axis factor analysis with a varimax rotation. The analysis produced a four factor solution with 53% variance explained. The eigenvalues, percentages of total variance, and Chronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficients are presented in Table 3. Although the analysis identified four unique factors, the items loading on each of the factors were a blend of Gottman's four conflict styles (1994a, 1994b). Thus, the items did not validly operationalize the theoretical constructs.

For example, the first factor was a mixture of validating, avoidant, and volatile styles. However, the three highest loading items were validating ("When we are in an argument, we let each other know the other's emotions are valued," "When we are having conflict, we let each other know the other's opinions are valued," and "When fighting, we spend a lot of time trying to find a compromise"). The item loading fourth on the first factor, categorized as avoidant by Gottman (1994b) and Holman and Jarvis (2003) ("Even when discussing a hot topic, we display a lot of self-control and are calm") was followed closely by a volatile item ("When we have heated arguments, they end with laughing and affection"). The three highest loading items make theoretical sense (i.e. they represent validation). The other items in Factor 1, describe behaviors that can arguably cross into the validating group. For example, the item intended to be avoidant is engaging ("When discussing a hot topic...") and describes validating behaviors ("We

display a lot of self-control and are calm”). The item intended to tap volatility is also engaging (“When we have heated arguments”) as well as constructive (“they end with laughing and affection”). Consequently, the five items that loaded on Factor 1 are mostly engaging, or suggesting that the partners are invested enough in the relationship to argue. Some couples, according to Gottman (1994a; 1994b) are either discouraged with the relationship so they do not even put forth the energy to try to come to an understanding or they find it more comfortable to avoid conflict and keep the harmony.

The second factor was the more theoretically difficult to interpret. Volatile items (i.e., “Our conflicts are intense, but our making up is more intense,” “We have volcanic arguments, but they are just a small part of a warm and loving relationship”) loaded closely together, however the highest loading item was avoidant (“In our relationship, conflict is minimized”). The hostile items (“When we argue, there are a lot of insults exchanged,” “We go back and forth between ignoring and attacking each other”) are destructive and, although volatile behavior can sometimes turn hostile, both volatile statements incorporate a positive phrase about the relationship. Factor 2, therefore, was inconsistent with Gottman’s typology (1994b) and Holman and Jarvis’s (2003) RELATE instrument.

Factor 3 included two items that were both intended to measure the avoidant style. Finally, Factor 4 included two items that were not designed to measure the same conflict style, however both reflect behaviors that can arguably be considered either volatile or validating (“Our passionate fights actually lead to a better relationship,” “Sometimes I enjoy a good fight with my partner”) which may explain why they loaded together.

Given that the 17-item scale reported above was new, the next step was to try to clarify its factor structure by removing items that loaded poorly or that were theoretically inconsistent with the factors they loaded on. Thus, items that cross-loaded, did not load highly on any factor, or that did not make theoretical sense, were omitted from the second analysis. To determine if a clear three-factor solution representing the constructive styles could be produced, only those items designed to measure the three positive styles (avoidant, volatile, and validating) were included in the analysis. Hostility was omitted from the analysis at this step to see if the constructive behaviors could successfully be categorized into three distinct styles.

A second principal-axis factor analysis with varimax rotation produced another four factor solution that explained 58% of the variance. The eigenvalues, percentages of total variance, and Chronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficients for the factors appear in Table 4. As with the first factor analysis, the factor structure in the second analysis was not theoretically meaningful.

In the second factor analysis, Factor 1 included three validating items (i.e. When we are in an argument, we let each other know the other's emotions are valued), one avoidant item (i.e. "Even when discussing a hot topic, we display a lot of self-control and are calm"), and one volatile item (i.e. "When we have heated arguments, they end with laughing and affection.") and accounted for 23.6% of variance. Factor 2 included one avoidant item (i.e. "In our relationship, conflict is minimized.") and two volatile items (i.e. "Our conflicts are intense, but our making up is even more intense.") accounting for 16% of the variance. Factor 3 had one volatile (i.e. "Our passionate fights actually lead

to a better relationship.”) and one validating item (i.e. “Sometimes I enjoy a good argument with my partner.”) representing 11% of variance. Factor 4 had two avoidant items (i.e. “We don’t think much is gained from getting openly angry.”) accounting for 8% of the variance.

The results from the second factor analysis indicated that the revised measure did not validly operationalize the constructive conflict styles. Therefore, another revised scale was created in order to isolate constructive and destructive conflict styles. Any item not intended to measure hostile or validating conflict styles was excluded and the remaining items were submitted to an exploratory principal-axis factor analysis with a varimax rotation. A two-factor solution was expected with three items loading on each factor. As expected, the analysis revealed a two-factor solution that accounted for 63% of the variance in participants’ responses. Results from this factor analysis yielded a meaningful factor structure that differentiates hostile from validating conflict styles. These factors were renamed “hostile” and “validating” and the eigenvalues, percentage of variance accounted for by factor and Chronbach’s  $\alpha$  for both subscales are reported in Table 5. Items that loaded on the hostile factor included contemptuous behaviors and flooding (i.e., “When we argue, there are a lot of insults exchanged,” “We go back and forth between attacking and ignoring each other”). The validating factor contained items describing validating behaviors that make a partner feel valued and respected (i.e., “When we are in an argument, we let each other know the other’s emotions are valued,” “When fighting, we spend a lot of time trying to find a compromise”).

These final six items, three representing validation and three representing hostility, were used to test the conflict style hypotheses (see Table 5). As mentioned earlier, validation and hostility are the two most extreme styles, in terms of positivity and negativity (Holman & Jarvis, 2003), and were also the most distinct categories in the above factor analyses. Perhaps future studies will be better able to operationalize all four styles and an instrument will be created to can better distinguish between the two middle styles (avoidance and volatility).

### *Relationship Satisfaction*

The Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) is a seven-item measure of romantic relationship satisfaction (Hendrick, Dicke & Hendrick, 1998). The RAS measures general satisfaction, how well a partner meets one's needs, how well the relationship compares to others, and one's regrets about the relationship (Hendrick, 1988; Hendrick, et al., 1998). Participants answered questions about relationships on a scale ranging from one to five (five being most satisfied).

Previous studies found that the RAS had high internal consistency (i.e.  $\alpha = .86$ ; Fischer & Corcoran, 1994) and adequate validity (Doohan & Manusov, 2004; Shi, 2004; Fisher & Corcoran, 1994; Hendrick et al., 1998). In the current study,  $\alpha = .85$ , mean = 3.7, and standard deviation = .48. RAS was chosen because it is brief in comparison with other relational satisfaction scales and measures general relationship satisfaction rather than marriages (Hendrick, 1988; Hendrick et al., 1998; Doohan & Manusov, 2004).

**Table 1***Factor Analysis of MIMARA 1*

Question	1	2	3	4	5	6
I am nervous when partners get too close to me.	.803	.160	.123	.106	.071	-.018
Just when my partner starts to get close to me I pull away.	.780	.134	.110	.036	-.061	-.118
I want to get close to my partner, but I keep pulling back.	.777	.175	.172	.106	.019	-.086
I try to avoid getting close to my partners.	.701	.099	.243	.188	-.079	.128
I get uncomfortable when a romantic partner wants to be very close.	.700	.038	.212	.012	.015	.043
I prefer not to be too close to a partner.	.619	-.057	.279	.089	-.011	.089
I don't feel comfortable opening up to romantic partners.	.581	.123	.410	-.008	.103	.315

**Table 1 continued**

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Question	1	2	3	4	5	6
I am comfortable being close to my romantic partners.	.546	.018	.222	-.064	.030	.002
I prefer not to show a partner how I feel deep down.	.501	.018	.316	-.039	.028	.382
I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on romantic partner.	.465	.019	.191	.071	.021	-.207
I find it relatively easy to get close to my partner.	.436	.118	.385	-.050	-.011	.042
I feel comfortable depending on romantic partners.	.333	.028	.308	-.005	-.141	-.258
I worry about being abandoned.	.091	.767	-.062	.054	.108	.085
I do not often worry about being abandoned.	-.058	.750	.113	.076	.020	.011
I worry about being alone.	.064	.715	-.106	.175	.025	.067
I worry a fair amount about losing my partner.	.139	.659	.039	.152	.166	-.164

**Table 1 continued**

---

Question	1	2	3	4	5	6
I need a lot of reassurance						
that I am loved by my	.107	.552	-.101	.241	.276	-.111
partner.						
I worry that romantic						
partners won't care about me	.269	.514	.074	.390	.141	-.009
as much as I care about them.						
I worry a lot about my						
relationships.	.138	.492	-.060	.234	.112	-.089
When I'm not involved in a						
relationship, I feel somewhat	-.036	.453	-.023	.206	.231	.223
anxious and insecure.						
When romantic partners						
disapprove of me, I feel	.068	.408	-.086	.047	.286	.092
really bad about myself.						
I don't mind asking romantic						
partners for comfort, advice	.246	.021	.751	.070	-.034	-.089
or help.						

**Table 1 continued**

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Question	1	2	3	4	5	6
I tell my partner just about everything.	-.288	.007	-.703	-.046	.040	-.158
I usually discuss my problems and concerns with my partners.	.368	-.083	.659	.077	-.034	.062
I turn to my partner for many things, including comfort	.306	-.161	.635	.041	-.151	-.064
I feel comfortable sharing my private thoughts and feelings with my partner.	.306	.023	.521	-.079	.076	.220
My desire to be very close sometimes scares people away.	.009	.253	.018	.717	.029	.014
I often want to merge completely and this sometimes scares them away.	-.030	.216	.049	.695	.101	.063
I find that my partners don't want to get as close as I would like.	.198	.273	.174	.571	.314	-.084

**Table 1 continued**

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Question	1	2	3	4	5	6
I often wish that my partners feelings for me were as strong as my feelings for him/her.	.294	.369	.137	.442	.105	-.032
Sometimes I feel that I force my partner to show more feelings and commitment.	.025	.335	-.049	.400	.316	-.134
I get frustrated when my partner is not around as much as I would like.	-.112	.273	-.260	.100	.603	.113
If I can't get my partner to show interest in me, I get hurt or angry.	-.073	-.310	.088	-.244	-.517	.010
I resent it when my partner spends time away from me.	-.029	.321	.074	.125	.445	-.014

**Table 2***Factor Analysis and Reliability of MIMARA 2*

	AVOIDANCE	ANXIETY
Eigenvalue	4.02	2.52
Percentage of Variance Accounted for by Factor	40.19%	25.22%
Chronbach's $\alpha$ for subscale	.890	.847
Mean	2.89	3.96
Standard Deviation	1.34	1.35
I am nervous when partners get too close to me.	.840	.155
I want to get close to my partner, but I keep pulling back.	.814	.148
Just when my partner starts to get close to me I pull away.	.811	.090
I try to avoid getting close to my partners.	.724	.099
I get uncomfortable when a romantic partner wants to be very close.	.715	.017
I worry about being abandoned.	.105	.786

**Table 2 continued**

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	AVOIDANCE	ANXIETY
I do not often worry about being abandoned.	<i>-.013</i>	<i>.733</i>
I worry about being alone.	<i>.079</i>	<i>.713</i>
I worry a fair amount about losing my partner.	<i>.168</i>	<i>.679</i>
I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by my partner.	<i>.111</i>	<i>.624</i>

**Table 3***Factor Analysis and Reliability for Conflict 1*

	1	2	3	4
Eigenvalue	4.28	2.16	1.56	1.11
Percentage of Variance				
Accounted for by Factor	25.18%	12.72%	9.17%	6.54%
Chronbach's $\alpha$ for subscale	.715	.788	.470	.526
When we are in an argument, we let each other know the other's emotions are valued.	.717	-.120	-.119	-.041
When we are having conflict, we let each know the other's opinions are valued.	.702	-.020	-.106	.049
When fighting, we spend a lot of time trying to find a compromise.	.483	-.115	-.016	-.047
Even when discussing a hot topic, we display a lot of self- control and are calm.	.450	-.438	-.041	-.090

**Table 3 continued**

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	1	2	3	4
When we have heated arguments, they end with laughing and affection.	<i>.439</i>	<i>-.084</i>	<i>-.238</i>	<i>.345</i>
We don't really listen to what the other is saying.	<i>-.396</i>	<i>.250</i>	<i>.382</i>	<i>-.054</i>
We think it is better to "agree to disagree" rather than prolong the argument.	<i>.353</i>	<i>-.096</i>	<i>.109</i>	<i>.067</i>
In our relationship, conflict is minimized.	<i>-.250</i>	<i>.669</i>	<i>-.002</i>	<i>-.041</i>
Our conflicts are intense, but our making up is even more intense.	<i>.075</i>	<i>.660</i>	<i>-.034</i>	<i>.135</i>
We have volcanic arguments, but they are just a small part of a warm and loving relationship.	<i>-.132</i>	<i>.611</i>	<i>.132</i>	<i>.286</i>
When we argue, a lot of insults are exchanged.	<i>-.320</i>	<i>.534</i>	<i>.296</i>	<i>.148</i>

**Table 3 continued**

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	1	2	3	4
We go back and forth between attacking and ignoring each other.	-.402	.512	.343	.189
We think continuing to talk about disagreements seems to make matters worse.	-.122	.017	.686	-.036
We don't think much is gained from getting openly angry.	.218	-.097	.423	-.133
We don't look at each other very much when arguing.	-.054	.127	.293	-.004
Our passionate fights actually lead to a better relationship.	.168	.151	-.139	.610
Sometimes I enjoy a good argument with my partner.	-.107	.169	.011	.572

**Table 4***Factor Analysis and Reliability of Conflict 2*

	1	2	3	4
Eigenvalues	3.07	2.09	1.37	1.10
Percentage of Variance Accounted for by Factor	23.6%	16.07%	10.53%	8.45%
Chronbach's $\alpha$ for subscale	.715	.691	.526	.470
When we are in an argument, we let each other know the other's emotions are valued.	.726	-.101	-.041	-.078
When we are having conflict, we let each know the other's opinions are valued.	.714	-.018	.042	-.068
When fighting, we spend a lot of time trying to find a compromise.	.499	-.095	-.041	.058
Even when discussing a hot topic, we display a lot of self-control and are calm.	.474	-.453	-.117	-.047
When we have heated arguments, they end with laughing and affection.	.451	-.080	.344	-.186

**Table 4 continued**

	1	2	3	4
We think it is better to "agree to disagree" rather than prolong the argument.	.346	-.089	.064	.114
In our relationship, conflict is minimized	-.266	.676	-.034	-.058
Our conflicts are intense, but our making up is even more intense.	.060	.671	.158	-.044
We have volcanic arguments, but they are just a small part of a warm and loving relationship.	-.162	.581	.294	.087
Our passionate fights actually lead to a better relationship.	.161	.149	.645	-.090
Sometimes I enjoy a good argument with my partner.	-.100	.149	.540	-.050
We think continuing to talk about disagreements seems to make matters worse.	-.179	.046	-.029	.659
We don't think much is gained from getting openly angry.	.181	-.055	-.124	.521

**Table 5***Factor Analysis and Reliability of Conflict 3*

	HOSTILITY	VALIDATION
Eigenvalue	2.77	1.05
Percentage of Variance		
Accounted for by Factor	46.21%	17.45%
Chronbach's $\alpha$ for subscale	.684	.729
Mean		
Standard Deviation		
When we argue, there are a lot of insults exchanged.	.789	-.154
We go back and forth between attacking and ignoring each other.	.719	-.255
We don't really listen to what the other is saying	.442	-.317
When we are having conflict, we let each know the other's opinions are valued	-.118	.836

**Table 5 continued**

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	HOSTILITY	VALIDATION
When we are in an argument, we let each other know the other's emotions are valued	-.322	.637
When fighting, we spend a lot of time trying to find a compromise	-.201	.397

## Chapter 3

### **RESULTS**

The current study sought to analyze the relationship between attachment style, conflict style, and relationship satisfaction in dating relationships. The following chapter reports results of analyses designed to test the hypotheses and answer the research questions presented in Chapter 1.

#### Direct Effects

##### *Predicting Hostility*

H1 predicted avoidance as a direct positive predictor of the hostile relational style while RQ1 tested the direct influence of anxiety on hostility. To explore these relationships, a multiple regression procedure was performed with hostile relational style as the dependent variable and both anxiety and avoidance entered simultaneously as independent variables. The model accounted for 3.6% of the variance in hostile relational style scores,  $R^2 = .036$ ,  $F(2, 318) = 5.96$ ,  $p < .01$ . Avoidance was a significant predictor of the hostile relational style,  $\beta = .19$ ,  $t = 3.43$ ,  $p < .001$  (all  $\beta$  weights are standardized), supporting H1. Anxiety, however, was not a predictor of the validating relational style therefore not supporting RQ1,  $\beta = -.02$ ,  $t = -.34$ ,  $p = .73$ .

### *Predicting Validation*

H2 posited that avoidance negatively predicted the validating relational style and H7 predicted the relationship between anxiety and validation. A multiple regression procedure was performed with validating relational style as the dependent variable and both avoidance and anxiety scores entered simultaneously as independent variables. The model accounted for 2.6% of the variance in reporting validating relational styles,  $R^2 = .026$ ,  $F(2, 318) = 4.23$ ,  $p < .05$ . Avoidance was a significant negative predictor of the validating relational style,  $\beta = -.16$ ,  $t = -2.88$ ,  $p < .05$ , supporting H2. With regard to H7, the regression procedure indicated that anxiety was not a significant predictor of validation,  $\beta = .06$ ,  $t = 1.03$ ,  $p = .30$ .

### *Path analysis*

Path analysis is an extension of the regression model. It is designed to test the fit of the correlation matrix against two or more causal variables (Baron & Kenny, 1986). The model in the current study hypothesized conflict style as a mediator. A mediator is a process variable that explains the association between an input variable (i.e. attachment style) and an output variable (i.e. relationship satisfaction). A path analysis allows the examination of the direct effect of attachment style on relationship satisfaction as well as the indirect effect of attachment styles on relationship satisfaction that is mediated by conflict style (see Figure 3). The current study conducted the path analysis utilizing a series of regressions with each predictor entered at different steps.

Hypothesis 5 predicted avoidance would have a negative, direct influence on relationship satisfaction while Hypothesis 6 posited anxiety to have a direct, positive influence on relationship satisfaction. Additionally, Hypothesis 9 predicted that the validating relational style would have a positive, direct influence on relationship satisfaction. Hypothesis 10 asserted that the hostile relational style will have a negative, direct influence on relationship satisfaction.

A multiple hierarchical regression procedure was employed with relationship satisfaction entered as the dependent variable and both avoidance and anxiety entered simultaneously on the first step as predictors (see Figure 3). The second step, which takes into account effects from the first step, incorporated the hostile and validating relational styles were entered as predictors (see Table 6 for results).

The first step accounted for 12.3% of the variance in reporting relationship satisfaction,  $R^2 = .12$ ,  $F(2, 318) = 22.27$ ,  $p < .000$ . Avoidance was a significant negative predictor of relationship satisfaction  $\beta = -.33$ ,  $t = -6.13$ ,  $p < .000$ , supporting H5. Anxiety was not a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction and, thus, H6 was not supported,  $\beta = -.07$ ,  $t = -1.24$ ,  $p = .22$ .

The second step significantly accounted for 24.2% of the variance  $R^2 = .24$ ,  $F(2, 316) = 24.92$ ,  $p < .000$ . This step indicated that avoidance,  $\beta = -.26$ ,  $t = -5.02$ ,  $p < .000$ , and anxiety,  $\beta = -.08$ ,  $t = -1.53$ ,  $p = .13$ , together accounted for 12.3% of the variance and that anxiety was not a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction. However, when the influence of hostility,  $\beta = -.31$ ,  $t = -5.67$ ,  $p < .000$ , and validation,  $\beta = .07$ ,  $t = 1.32$ ,  $p = .19$ , were included on the second step, 24.4% of the variance was accounted for and

avoidance and hostility were significant predictors of relationship satisfaction. Thus, H10 was supported and H9 was not.

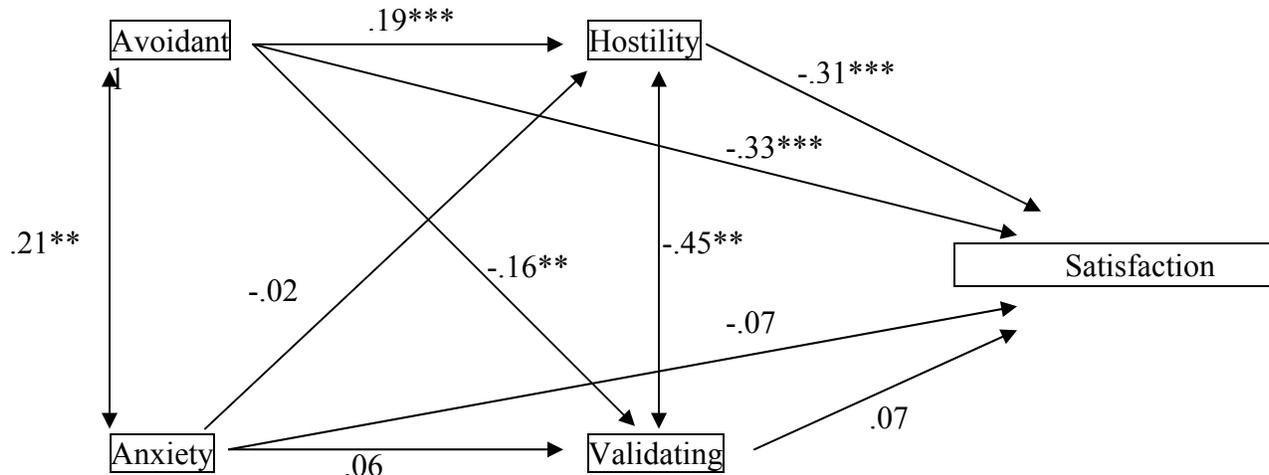


Figure 3. Path Analysis of Direct and Indirect Effects

\*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

### MANOVA

Hypothesis 3 posited that fearful and dismissive individuals would report more hostile relationships than secure and preoccupied individuals. In addition, Hypothesis 4 predicted that secure and preoccupied individuals would report more validating relationships than fearful and dismissive individuals. Hypothesis 8 asserted that secure and preoccupied individuals will report higher satisfaction in their relationships than fearful and dismissive individuals.

H3, H4, and H8 were tested with a one-way MANOVA procedure. Attachment style was entered as an independent variable and hostility, validation, and relationship satisfaction were entered as dependent variables. Results from the omnibus test indicated that attachment style was a significant predictor of the linear combination of relationship satisfaction, hostility, and validation,  $\lambda = .87$ ,  $F(9, 767) = 4.91$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .04$ .

The MANOVA also demonstrated significant between-subject effects for attachment style on each of the dependent variables. Specifically, adult attachment orientations differed on hostility  $F(3, 317) = 3.09$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\omega^2 = .02$ ; validation  $F(3, 317) = 1.44$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\omega^2 = .02$ ; and relationship satisfaction  $F(3, 317) = 13.36$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\omega^2 = .10$ .

Post hoc tests decompose the main effects to show where the differences are between groups. A post hoc Tukey LSD procedure indicated that there were group mean differences as well. As predicted in H3, fearful and dismissive individuals reported more hostile conflict than secure and preoccupied individuals (see Table 7 for group mean comparisons). H4 showed marginally more validation being reported by secure and preoccupied individuals than fearful and dismissive (see Table 8 for group mean comparisons). With regard to H8, as predicted, secure and preoccupied individuals reported more relationship satisfaction than those individuals that are dismissive and fearful (see Table 9 for group mean comparisons).

#### Indirect Effect Hypothesis

H11 predicted that avoidance has an indirect negative influence on satisfaction mediated by the hostile relational style. H11 was tested with a distribution of product

coefficients (*P*) test founded by Mackinnon, Lockwood, and Hoffman (1998). Monte Carlo analyses of various indirect effects tests indicates that the distribution of product coefficients test does a better job of maintaining an accurate Type I error rate and has greater statistical power than other procedures available (Mackinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West, & Sheets, 1998; also see Holbert & Stephenson, 2003). The data from the current study supported the hypothesized negative indirect effect of avoidance on relationship satisfaction, mediated by hostility (H11),  $P = -19.40$ .

H12 predicted anxiety to be an indirect, positive influence on relationship satisfaction mediated by the validating relational style. H13 posited that avoidance was an indirect influence on relationship satisfaction mediated by validation and H14 predicted anxiety to be an indirect influence on relationship satisfaction mediated by hostility. In all three cases, the direct effects between attachment style and conflict style were not significant and, therefore, the indirect effect was not computed.

**Table 6***Hierarchical Regression Equation Predicting Relationship Satisfaction*

Step	Variables Entered	$\beta$	$t$	$R^2$ Change	$F$ Change	$df$	$R^2$ Total	$F$ Total	$df$
1	Avoidance	-.33	-6.13***	.123	22.27	2, 32***	.123	22.27	2, 32**
	Anxiety	-.07	-1.24						
2	Hostile	.31	-5.67***	.120	24.92	2, 32**	.242	25.27	4, 32**
	Validating	.07	1.32						
	Avoidance	-.26	-5.01***						
	Anxiety	-.08	1.53						

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

**Table 7**

*MANOVA Results for Attachment Orientations on Hostile Relational Style (H3)*

Attachment Style	Mean
Dismissive	2.37 <sup>AB</sup>
Fearful	2.38 <sup>B</sup>
Secure	2.16 <sup>AB</sup>
Preoccupied	2.03 <sup>A</sup>

*Note. Items with same superscript are not significantly different  
 $p < .05$*

**Table 8**

*MANOVA results for Attachment Orientations on Validating Relational Style (H4)*

Attachment Style	Mean
Dismissive	3.27 <sup>B</sup>
Fearful	3.34 <sup>B</sup>
Secure	3.51 <sup>AB</sup>
preoccupied	3.58 <sup>A</sup>

*Note. Items with same superscript are not significantly different  
 $p < .05$*

**Table 9**

*MANOVA results for Attachment Orientations on Relationship Satisfaction (H9)*

Attachment	Mean
Dismissive	3.46 <sup>B</sup>
Fearful	3.50 <sup>B</sup>
Secure	3.73 <sup>A</sup>
Preoccupied	3.84 <sup>A</sup>

*Note. Items with same superscript are not significantly different  
 $p < .05$*

## Chapter 4

### **DISCUSSION**

Satisfaction within romantic relationships is a salient contributor to the moods and emotional well-being of individuals (Creasey & Hesson-McInnus, 2001). Attachment theorists argue that the perceptions and expectations an individual has when entering an adult romance are often shaped by intimate past experiences with a primary caregiver. (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1969). As an internal model of relationships, attachment orientation influences the interactive conflict behaviors that individuals utilize in the relationship (Kobak et al., 1993; Kobak & Hazan, 1991). Therefore, an individual's attachment orientation often influences the fulfillment and satisfaction one expects, and feels, from adult romantic partnerships.

On a relational-level, Gottman's research (1994a, 1994b, 1998) has identified the interactive behaviors couples utilize and how those behaviors influence the satisfaction felt by the partners. If couples validate each other they are sending positive messages that result in a partnership filled with love and respect. When couples consistently send hostile messages to each other, the communication is filled with negativity that often results in relationship dissatisfaction.

What both the attachment theory and Gottman's theory are missing is the *combination* of individual-level and relational-level variables that can be integrated to

understand relationship satisfaction on a more comprehensive level. Such an integration would improve the current literature by providing a more parsimonious theory for predicting relational satisfaction.

The model proposed and tested in the current study represents an important first step toward an integration of attachment and conflict literatures. The current results are particularly noteworthy for two reasons. First, they support the integrated model of relational satisfaction proposed in the first chapter. Second, and more specifically, the results suggest that avoidant attachment and relational hostility are the most salient predictors of relational satisfaction among dating partners. The following paragraphs will discuss these findings and explain their theoretical meaning

### Direct Effects

#### *Avoidance*

Consistent with the results of previous attachment studies (e.g. Brennan & Shaver, 1995; Collins & Reed, 1990; Simpson, 1990; Stackert & Bursik, 2003), the current results suggest that an individual with an avoidant attachment style is more likely than less avoidant people to experience relational dissatisfaction (H5). Perhaps one of the reasons attachment was a direct predictor is because they already have a negative view of relationships in regard to trust and intimacy (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). For instance, Simpson (1990) found that highly avoidant people reported their relationships

were less interdependent and committed- both characteristics which may directly influence perceptions of relationship satisfaction.

In addition, as posited in H1, avoidance directly predicted levels of relational hostility. Attachment theory suggests that avoidant individuals eschew intimacy and disengage from partners – both of which are characteristics Gottman uses to describe people in hostile relationships. This finding is particularly important because, for the first time, data supports a specific predictor of hostility. By isolating those factors that contribute to destructive conflict styles, researchers stand to gain greater ability to predict relational dissolution and perhaps better understand how to prevent it.

The data from the current study also supported the prediction made in H2 that an individual's level of avoidance is negatively associated with the extent to which he or she participates in a validating relationship. A logical explanation for this finding is that validation, as mentioned before, is a style of communicating that shows partners' respect and high regard for each other while avoidance is a disengaging behavior void of couple intimacy or cohesiveness. The following paragraphs will discuss the effect of anxious attachment on conflict styles and relationship satisfaction.

### *Anxiety*

Previous attachment studies (Brennan & Shaver, 1995; Collins & Reed, 1990; Simpson, 1990; Stackert & Bursik, 2003), suggest that individuals with anxious attachment usually find themselves dissatisfied with romantic relationships. However, the data from the current study were not consistent with previous findings. Although

adults who experienced an unsatisfying relationship during infancy will most likely expect similar, negative experiences in adulthood, the current finding suggests that anxiety may have less of an impact than avoidance on relationship satisfaction (H6). Perhaps the current findings were due to a basic difference between avoidance and anxiety – one is a behavior while the other is a feeling. In other words, avoidance towards relationships is a behavioral orientation – it refers to the lack of engagement, emotionally and physically, of an individual. Anxiety, however, is more of an affective state – it refers to the emotional feelings an individual experiences as a result of being involved in a relationship. It is likely that avoidant behaviors have a more salient impact on relational outcomes than one's feelings of anxiety because behaviors are part of the overt communication between the couple. In a study on romantic dissolution, Davis, Shaver, and Vernon (2003) found that individuals with anxious attachment responded with emotional distress and cognitive preoccupation with the loss, both of which are emotional feelings rather than behavioral manifestations. Additionally, Sharpsteen & Kirkpatrick (1997) found, in situations evoking jealousy, anxious couples feel despair but are unlikely to confront their partners about their emotions. Perhaps these findings, along with those of the current study, suggest that anxious responses are more internal whereas avoidance responses are detectable through behaviors. The analysis reported earlier also assessed the associations between attachment style and conflict style. However, the current results indicate anxiety was not a significant predictor of either conflict style (RQ1, H7).

### *Hostility*

Gottman (1994a, 1994b) indicates that hostility (e.g. name-calling, character attacks, and stonewalling) has a direct, negative influence on satisfaction. The data from the current study supported H10 and reinforced Gottman's theory that the communicative behaviors couples employ correlate with the satisfaction of their relationship.

### *Validation*

Previous research on constructive conflict styles suggest that validating couples employ conversational behaviors that value and respect each other (Gottman, 1994a, 1994b, 1998). Further, Gottman suggests that validation is a direct, positive predictor of relationship satisfaction. The data from the current study failed to support the hypothesis that validation leads to relationship satisfaction (H9). One explanation for the lack of support is that validation may, indeed, be beneficial to the partnership, however it may not be *necessary* to be satisfied with the relationship. Hostility may be more influential when it comes to dissatisfaction because it literally poisons the relationship with negativity. In other words, validation, while not critical to its maintenance, can enrich a partnership, but hostility is powerful enough to dissolve it. Gottman's research on the three constructive conflict styles actually suggests that avoidance, volatility, or validation sustain relationships- all three styles which are very distinct from one another. The model in the current study, which focuses only on validation and hostility, may actually reinforce Gottman's findings, suggesting that hostility does, indeed, lead to dissatisfaction, and any form or combination of the constructive conflict styles leads to

the some level of satisfaction within the relationship. A couple may utilize validation when together, but if they only see each other five days out of the month, they may not have *high* levels of relationship satisfaction. Whereas if the couple is hostile, no matter how frequently they interact, they will most likely be dissatisfied with the relationship.

Overall, the model offered in the current study made, and supported, several direct effect predictions. With regard to avoidance, the data supported a direct, positive effect on hostility and a direct, negative effect on relationship satisfaction. The data failed to support the hypothesis predicting a direct effect on validation. With regard to anxiety, the hypotheses positing a direct influence on hostility, validation, and relationship satisfaction were not supported. When it came to conflict styles, the current data supported a direct effect on relationship satisfaction by hostility, but not by validation. The following section will discuss the model's indirect effects.

### Indirect Effects

The integrated model offered in the current study expands conflict and attachment literature by allowing for the explication and assessment of indirect effects. Previously untested, these indirect effects on relationship satisfaction allow for the study of not only the relationship between conflict style and relationship satisfaction, but also of how adult attachment style influences satisfaction mediated by conflict style. The following paragraphs will discuss the indirect effects found in the current model.

### *Indirect Effects of Avoidance on Relationship Satisfaction*

The model in the current study predicted that avoidance would have an indirect, negative influence on relationship satisfaction mediated by hostility (H11). The current data suggests there is a strong, positive relationship between avoidance and relationship satisfaction mediated by hostility. According to Baron and Kenny (1986), mediators represent properties of the process that transforms the predictor. As mentioned earlier, behaviors such as avoidance of intimacy, discomfort with closeness, and self-reliance represent the avoidant attachment style (Brennan et. al, 1998) and Gottman (1998) finds that these behaviors are also characteristics of couples engaging in hostility. Thus, the findings of the current study regarding this indirect effect make logical sense despite the fact that, to date, it has yet to be tested. With regard to the current study's model, this finding is of particular interest because it demonstrates that avoidant individuals have a strong chance of having a hostile romantic relationship. Thus, this finding compliments Gottman's (1994a, 1998) research because it now offers a clear predictor of hostility.

Results also revealed that validation does not appear to mediate the association between avoidance and satisfaction (H13). A logical explanation for this finding is that if individuals are utilizing avoidant behaviors, they are most likely not engaging in a validating relationship. The prediction was initially made based on the possibility that some avoidant individuals may take part in a validating relationship, however the data did not support this prediction.

### *Indirect Effects of Anxiety on Relationship Satisfaction*

The data from the current study did not support the direct effects of anxiety on conflict styles or relationship satisfaction and, thus, indirect effect hypotheses could not be tested (H12, H14). As discussed earlier, anxiety is an emotional feeling an individual experiences as a result of being involved in a relationship. Avoidance is usually manifested through actions such as disengagement, emotionally and physically, from an individual. The behavioral aspect, avoidance, may be more influential than the affective state, anxiety, when it comes to influencing relationship satisfaction (Davis et al., 2003; Sharpsteen & Kirkpatrick, 1997).

### Methodological Limitations

The current study sought to explicate and test a new model of communication and relationship satisfaction. Although the current study found a number of interesting and newsworthy results, it is important to qualify these findings with a discussion of the study's limitations.

One of the methodological limitations dealt with in this study was creating a scale to measure Gottman's conflict styles. Although the measure employed in the current study is promising (i.e. demonstrated good reliability and validity), much work remains to be done. More specific questions regarding each style and behavior, will help to distinguish between styles and capture the dynamic of each relational conflict style.

Another potential source of error occurred during the data collection. Some students were offered additional extra credit if they brought a friend with them to the lab.

On some occasions, it appeared that the friend the student brought was, in fact, their romantic partner. Filling out the questionnaire within close proximity to their partners may have caused some participants to respond differently than they would have if their partner was not there with them. More specifically, the responses regarding relationship satisfaction and conflict style, both relational level variables, may have been subject to socially desirable effects.

In addition, self-report questionnaires analyzing beliefs or attitudes may be problematic because participants may be reporting what they believe to be the socially desirable answer rather than their truthful response. In the current study, many of the questions asked for feedback such as how the couple argues or how satisfied they are with their relationships. However, the instrument used in the current study utilized forced choice responses as well as anonymity, both of which reduce the chance of socially desirable answers (Bornstein, Rossner, Hill, & Stepanian, 1994). Further, extensive research suggests that self report tools are not only the most common style of data collection, but also widely accepted as valid when designed properly (Harrison, McLaughlin, & Coalter, 1996).

Finally, funding and time constraints kept the current study from having the couple, rather than the individual, be the unit of analysis. If the both individuals could be interviewed or surveyed from each couple, the relational level variables could possibly be more accurate. It would be interesting to examine whether or not both partners reported the same satisfaction levels and conflict styles. Instead, the current study had to rely on one partner reporting the dynamic for the entire relationship. Although the limitations

noted here suggest that the current findings require some qualification, the study yielded rich material that informs the extant literature and suggests new and interesting directions for future research.

### Suggestions for Future Research

What was missing from the literature on romantic conflict was a comprehensive model that incorporated conflict styles, predictors of those conflict styles, and relationships satisfaction. As researchers continue to explore how interpersonal phenomena influence relationship satisfaction, they should begin to identify other predictors of relational conflict styles such as cognitive complexity, interparental conflict, or social support. Researchers might want to inquire as to what other factors fit into the equation and, more importantly, what individuals can do to change negative perceptions they may have about intimacy so that they can work towards constructive, satisfying romantic relationships.

Additionally, the current model offers a strong foundation for research into avoidance and hostility and their dominant influence on relationship satisfaction. What became increasingly clear as the current study progressed was that the negative aspects of communication impacted relationship satisfaction much more than the positive aspects. Future researchers can expand on the detrimental effects of avoidance and hostility in not only romantic partnerships, but in any salient relationship.

## Practical Implications

The findings of the current study suggest some practical implications in the counseling field. Attachment orientation is the direct result of children's relationships with their primary caregiver and is a trait that one cannot control. Conflict style, however, is an interactive behavior that couples can attempt to positively manipulate. Due to the current study's identification of avoidance as a predictor of conflict style, counselors can now screen couples for avoidance to determine if either partner's expectation of the relationship, based on their attachment orientation, could be causing interactive problems for the couple when maneuvering through conflict episodes. Screening for attachment orientation can also be used to determine realistic expectations for individuals when educating them on constructive conflict behaviors. In other words, secure individuals will most likely have a much easier time utilizing validation in relational conflict than insecure individuals.

## Conclusion

The purpose of the current study was to examine conflict styles, predictors of those established conflict styles, and how those two variables influence relationship satisfaction. The proposal stemmed from theories on relational conflict and satisfaction as well as interest in how current and past relationships influence perceptions of and behavior towards future significant relationships. A thorough literature review of primary interpersonal communication theories, as well as attachment theory, conflict styles, and the emotional and physiological effects romantic relationships have on

individuals, led to the primary suggestion of the current study: an individual's adult attachment orientation will influence his or her relational conflict style and, additionally, his or her satisfaction level in dating relationships.

Tests of the hypotheses and research questions offered in Chapter 1 supported many of the predicted outcomes. The overriding theme of the model, however, was that highly avoidant individuals are more likely to engage in hostile relational conflict with their partners and feel significantly less satisfaction from their adult romantic relationships than non-avoidant individuals.

The current study expanded on existing conflict research by offering a predictor for conflict styles in dating relationships and creating a comprehensive model illustrating the influence of both attachment style and conflict style on romantic relationship satisfaction.

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## APPENDIX A

### MIMARA

#### *Experiences in Close Relationships*

Instructions: The following statements concern how you feel in romantic relationships. We are interested in how you generally experienced relationships, not just in what is happening in a current relationship. Respond to each statement by indicating how much you agree or disagree with it. Write the number in the space provided, using the following rating scale:

Disagree strongly		Neutral/mixed				Agree Strongly
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

- \_\_\_ 1. I prefer not to show a partner how I feel deep down.
- \_\_\_ 2. I worry about being abandoned.
- \_\_\_ 3. I am very comfortable being close to romantic partners.
- \_\_\_ 4. I worry a lot about my relationships.
- \_\_\_ 5. Just when my partner starts to get close to me I find myself pulling away.
- \_\_\_ 6. I worry that romantic partners won't care about me as much as I care about them.
- \_\_\_ 7. I get uncomfortable when a romantic partner wants to be very close.
- \_\_\_ 8. I worry a fair amount about losing my partner.
- \_\_\_ 9. I don't feel comfortable opening up to romantic partners.
- \_\_\_ 10. I often wish that my partner's feelings for me were as strong as my feelings for him/her.
- \_\_\_ 11. I want to get close to my partner, but I keep pulling back.
- \_\_\_ 12. I often want to merge completely with romantic partners, and this sometimes scares them away.
- \_\_\_ 13. I am nervous when partners get too close to me.
- \_\_\_ 14. I worry about being alone.
- \_\_\_ 15. I feel comfortable sharing my private thoughts and feelings with my partner.
- \_\_\_ 16. My desire to be very close sometimes scares people away.
- \_\_\_ 17. I try to avoid getting too close to my partner.
- \_\_\_ 18. I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by my partner.
- \_\_\_ 19. I find it relatively easy to get close to my partner.
- \_\_\_ 20. Sometimes I feel that I force my partners to show more feeling, more commitment.
- \_\_\_ 21. I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on romantic partners.
- \_\_\_ 22. I do not often worry about being abandoned.

- \_\_\_ 23. I prefer not to be too close to romantic partners.
- \_\_\_ 24. If I can't get my partner to show interest in me, I get upset or angry.
- \_\_\_ 25. I tell my partner just about everything,
- \_\_\_ 26. I find that my partner(s) don't want to get as close as I would like.
- \_\_\_ 27. I usually discuss my problems and concerns with my partner.
- \_\_\_ 28. When I'm not involved in a relationship, I feel somewhat anxious and insecure.
- \_\_\_ 29. I feel comfortable depending on romantic partners.
- \_\_\_ 30. I get frustrated when my partner is not around as much as I would like.
- \_\_\_ 31. I don't mind asking romantic partners for comfort, advice or help.
- \_\_\_ 32. I get frustrated when my partner is not around as much as I would like.
- \_\_\_ 33. It helps to turn to my romantic partner in times of need.
- \_\_\_ 34. When romantic partners disapprove of me, I feel really bad about myself.
- \_\_\_ 35. I turn to my partner for many things, including comfort and reassurance.
- \_\_\_ 36. I resent it when my partner spends time away from me.

## APPENDIX B

### Romantic Conflict Style Scale

Below are descriptions of how people in four different types of relationships handle conflict. We would like you to see which type most clearly describes how you and your partner deal with conflict in your relationship. Respond to each statement by writing the number in the space provided, using the following scale:

1= Never      2=Rarely      3= Sometimes      4= Often      5= Very Often

- \_\_\_ In our relationship, conflicts may be fought on a grand scale, and that is okay, since our making up is even grander
- \_\_\_ We think it is better to “agree to disagree” rather than end up in a discussion that will result in a deadlock
- \_\_\_ In our relationship, when we are having conflict, we let each other know the other’s opinions are valued and their emotions valid, even if we disagree with each other
- \_\_\_ We argue often and hotly. There are a lot of insults back and forth, name calling, put-downs, and sarcasm
- \_\_\_ We have volcanic arguments, but they are just a small part of a warm and loving relationship
- \_\_\_ Even when discussing a hot topic, we display a lot of self-control and are calm.
- \_\_\_ We don’t really listen to what the other is saying, nor do we look at each other very much
- \_\_\_ Although we argue, we are still able to resolve our differences. In fact, our passion and zest for fighting actually lead to a better relationship, with a lot of making up, laughing, and affection
- \_\_\_ Sometimes I enjoy a good argument with my partner
- \_\_\_ In our relationship, conflict is minimized

- \_\_\_ When fighting, we spend a lot of time validating each other as well as trying to persuade our partner, or trying to find a compromise
  
- \_\_\_ One or the other of us can be quite detached and emotionally uninvolved, even though there may be brief episodes of attack and defensiveness
  
- \_\_\_ We don't think much is to be gained from getting openly angry with each other. In fact, a lot of talking about disagreements seems to make matters worse
  
- \_\_\_ The feeling of togetherness is very central to our relationship
  
- \_\_\_ We feel that if you just relax about problems, they will have a way of working themselves out
  
- \_\_\_ There are clearly more negatives than positives in our relationship

## APPENDIX C

### Relationship Assessment Scale

1. How well does your partner meet your needs?

A	B	C	D	E
Poorly		Average		Extremely Well

2. In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?

A	B	C	D	E
Unsatisfied		Average		Extremely Satisfied

3. How good is your relationship compared to most?

A	B	C	D	E
Poor		Average		Excellent

4. How often do you wish you hadn't gotten in this relationship?

A	B	C	D	E
Never		Average		Very often

5. To what extent has your relationship met your original expectations?

A	B	C	D	E
Hardly at all		Average		Completely

6. How much do you love your partner?

A	B	C	D	E
Not much		Average		Very much

7. How many problems are there in your relationship?

A	B	C	D	E
Very few		Average		Very man

## APPENDIX D

### CONSENT FORM

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION

#### ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP STUDY ADULT PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Please note that you **must be 18yrs old or older** to participate in this study. Your participation in this study is **voluntary**. If you wish to withdraw at any time, you may do so. If you are participating to earn class credit for COMM330, you may choose to complete an alternative assignment if you choose not to do this study. The alternative assignment involves you spending the same amount of time you would spend participating in this study (**about 30 minutes**). For further information about the alternative assignment, please see your professor. When you have completed this form and the survey, return both to me. Do not attach this consent form to your survey. Your name should be left OFF of the survey to ensure anonymity.

#### PURPOSE:

This study is designed to assess people's thoughts and feelings about themselves and their romantic relationships. You will be asked questions about your romantic relationships as well as questions involving information about you and attitudes and opinions about yourself and others.

I will be happy to answer any questions that you have concerning the study. If you have any questions during or after your participation, please send an email to: [ksteuber@udel.edu](mailto:ksteuber@udel.edu) or [caplan@udel.edu](mailto:caplan@udel.edu).

The results of this study will contribute to our scientific knowledge, but will probably have no benefits or risks to you as a participant. The entire study should take about 30 minutes to complete.

#### CONFIDENTIALITY:

**All information that you provide will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous. Your name will not be attached to your responses in any way.** Results from this study will be presented as statistical summaries, but no information will be presented about individual respondents. You may discontinue participation at any time prior to the completion of the project.

If you have questions about this research, please contact the Principal Investigator or the Advisor to the study, listed below. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, please contact the Acting Vice Provost for Research, listed below.

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**I am 18 years old or older**, have read the above information, and give my consent to voluntarily participate in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date