

AN EXAMINATION OF RELATIONSHIP QUALITY FROM AN ATTACHMENT
PERSPECTIVE: EMPATHY AND RELATIONSHIP PERFECTIONISM
AS MEDIATING FACTORS

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationships between attachment style, empathy, relationship perfectionism, and relationship quality among a sample of adults currently in a romantic relationship. Based on previous research and conceptual reasoning, it was hypothesized that both attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance would be negatively related to constructive conflict resolution and relationship satisfaction, that empathy would be positively related to constructive conflict resolution and relationship satisfaction, and that relationship perfectionism would be negatively related to constructive conflict resolution and relationship satisfaction. In addition, this study examined the hypothesized mediation effects that both empathy and relationship perfectionism would serve as partial mediators in the relationships between attachment and relationship quality variables of constructive conflict resolution and satisfaction. Because attachment styles are activated during times of distress and conflict (Pietromonaco, Greenwood, & Barrett, 2004), the present study used three different priming conditions (i.e., discomfort related to attachment partner, neutral discomfort, and no discomfort) to activate attachment systems

of randomly assigned participants. It was hypothesized that when attachment style was primed, the mediating effects would be greater in magnitude. Using online and paper-and-pencil classroom methods, 556 participants who were currently in a romantic relationship for at least one month were recruited from 23 U.S. states. Results revealed that higher levels of avoidant and anxious attachment led to poor conflict resolution strategies and poorer relationship satisfaction, and that relationship perfectionism served as a mediator for both of these relationships. Clinical implications, study limitations, and future research are discussed.

APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the School of Education have examined a dissertation titled “An Examination of Relationship Quality from an Attachment Perspective: Empathy and Relationship Perfectionism as Mediating Factors,” presented by Barbara Elizabeth Fritts, a candidate for the Doctor of Philosophy, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the course of their lives nearly all people will at one time be in a serious committed relationship (Bjorksten & Stewart, 1984), making romantic relationships a topic that pertains to almost every adult. Just as people experience psychological problems on an individual level, romantic relationships are also vulnerable to challenges. In fact, relationship difficulties are one of the most common problems for which people seek counseling (Veroff, Kulka, & Douvan, 1981), and consequently, the concept of relationship quality has received a great deal of attention in psychological literature.

In early theoretical work on relationship quality, Orden and Bradburn (1968) suggested that dimensions of relationship tension (or conflict) and relationship satisfaction are two primary constructs that interact to produce overall relationship happiness. Since then researchers have measured relationship quality using a number of indicators, including conflict, distress, communication and satisfaction (Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000; Furman & Buhrmester, 1992; Hendrick, 1988; Spanier, 1976). The terms relationship quality, distress, satisfaction, and adjustment have all been used interchangeably to refer to a person's global evaluations of a committed relationship (Spanier & Lewis, 1980). Although decades have passed since Orden and Bradburn's (1968) original definition of relationship happiness, the abundance of terms for relationship quality that dominate the literature today can still theoretically be boiled down to essentially two dimensions: those that involves positive aspects (e.g. satisfaction, adjustment) and those that capture negative aspects (e.g. tension, distress, and conflict). Many would argue, however, that conflict in and of itself is not negative (Crum, 1987), but rather it is how conflict is managed within the relationship that

will determine its overall valence, and in turn its contribution to relationship quality (Cahn, 1992; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Pietromonaco, Greenwood, & Barrett, 2004). Indeed, one characteristic of unhappy couples is that they engage in negative patterns of reciprocity with one another (Gottman, 1998). Therefore, a global evaluation of relationship quality may be conceived as of being comprised of level of relationship satisfaction as well as the ability to manage conflict within the relationship. In other words, relationship satisfaction and conflict resolution styles are two important components in the larger construct of relationship quality.

Because the nature of attachment theory is focused on interpersonal relatedness, it is a useful framework for which to understand both relationship satisfaction and conflict resolution. According to the theory, attachment systems are believed to influence people's beliefs and expectations not only about themselves but also about significant others, and a person's developed attachment has direct impact on how s/he might respond to conflict within a relationship, (Pietromonaco, Greenwood, & Barrett, 2004). However, while the relationship between attachment theory and romantic relationship quality has established in previous literature (Karney & Bradbury, 1995), it appears that the more fine-grained, special mechanisms through which attachment affects relationship factors remains unclear. Thus, this study will use an attachment framework to examine conflict resolution and relationship satisfaction as components of the latent construct relationship quality, while also examining two factors identified from relevant literature—perfectionism and empathy—that may mediate these relationships. In addition to the correlational study of mediating factors, an experimental component will be included to examine whether activating the attachment system prior to answering questions about conflict resolution and relationship satisfaction will cause these mediating relationships to have an even greater effect.

The following section will include a brief overview of literature on attachment, perfectionism, and empathy as they have been associated with relationship quality. It will also provide rationale for perfectionism and empathy as mediators within the relationships between attachment and relationship quality. Finally, research questions and hypotheses of the present research project as well as the experimental components of the study will be outlined.

Attachment Theory

Attachment is an internal working model for an individual's mental representations of the self, others, and the world (Bowlby, 1980). According to attachment theory, people develop different attachment styles based on their perception of the availability and responsiveness of their primary caregivers (attachment figures) during their childhood (Weinfield, Sroufe, Egeland, & Carlson, 1999). If the caregiver consistently responds to the infant's needs, the infant gradually develops secure attachment; and if the caregiver responds inconsistently or not at all to the infant's needs, the infant is likely to feel insecure about the availability of his/her attachment figure (Bowlby, 1973).

Cotemporary attachment researchers conceptualize adult attachment based on a model with two orthogonal dimensions: *Anxiety* and *Avoidance* (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998). Individuals who are high on the anxiety dimension are believed to possess a negative internal working model of self, which is a result of internalizing their attachment figure's unavailability and interpreting it as rejection, causing them to view themselves as unworthy of care. They crave intimacy and approval, yet fear rejection and abandonment (Bowlby, 1980). Individuals high on the avoidance dimension, on the other hand, have likely developed negative internal models of others. Through their experiences with relationships

they have learned that people cannot be counted on, causing them to demonstrate excessive desires to rely on themselves. Individuals who are low on both anxiety and avoidance dimensions are said to be securely attached. They are likely to possess positive internal models of self and others, which lead them to believe that they are worthy of care and that others can be counted on to provide support when needed.

Attachment and Relationship Quality

Although attachment is a construct which has its origins in early childhood relationships with caregivers, early attachment has been conceptualized as having an enduring effect on adult relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Adult attachment has been shown to be a consistent predictor of factors in adult romantic relationships such as quality of committed relationships (Alexandrov, Cowan, & Cowan, 2005; Collins & Read, 1990), satisfaction (Alexandrov, Cowan, & Cowan, 2005; Brassard, Lussier, & Shaver, 2009; Collins & Read, 1990; Horne & Biss, 2009; Madey & Rogers, 2009; Simpson, 1990; Tucker & Anders, 1999) and conflict resolution (Kobak & Hazan, 1991; Marchand, 2004; Shi, 1999). Within an attachment framework, relationship satisfaction stems from the extent to which an individual's basic needs of comfort, care, and sexual gratification are met (Hazan & Shaver, 1994). Trust and optimism regarding the partner's ability and motivation to meet those needs will impact conflict resolution strategies, which in turn will impact the resolution of the conflict (Barlow, 1998) and overall relationship satisfaction (Crowley, 2006; Kobak & Hazan, 1991). It has been suggested that a common theme of attachment research is that secure attachment is optimal for the maintenance of relationships, as well as the management of relationship conflict and stress (Lopez & Brennan, 2000).

Two theoretical ideas describing the links between attachment systems and conflict have been advanced by researchers. First, the attachment system is activated during times of distress (Bowlby, 1980), particularly during moments when the individual questions the availability of their attachment figures to provide security and when the attachment bond itself is questioned (Pietromonaco, Greenwood, & Barrett, 2004). Conflict, which could ultimately result in the relationship's demise, threatens the security of the relationship for the insecurely attached individual. Therefore it is within these distressful conflict-ridden moments that attachment behaviors are most likely to be observed (Kobak & Duemmler, 1994). The experience of conflict as a threat to relationship security will likely be different depending on the attachment style of the individual (Pietromonaco, Greenwood, & Barrett, 2004). Second, the interactions between romantic partners involving conflict provide an opportunity for partners to attend to each other's goals and amend their behavior accordingly, so that they may engage in collaborative strategies to successfully resolve the conflict. Successfully working through conflicts may promote intimacy and communication, resulting in stronger attachment bonds (Pietromonaco, Greenwood, & Barrett, 2004).

Attachment and ELVN typology. Attachment orientations have been found to influence conflict resolution strategies in numerous studies (Barlow, 1998; Kobak & Hazan, 1991; Senchak & Leonard, 1992; Crowley, 2006; Gaines et al., 1997; Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1995). Rusbult and Zembrodt's (1983) four category typology for problem solving in close relationships may be particularly useful for applying an attachment framework to conflict resolution strategies. Rusbult and Zembrodt's (1983) typology includes the following types of responses that individuals who are experiencing conflict in a relationship may engage in: *Exit* (e.g. taking steps to end the relationship, moving out, getting

a divorce,), *Neglect* (e.g. avoiding the problem or one's partner, giving the silent treatment, allowing the relationship to fall apart), *Voice* (e.g. talking about the problem, using compromise, taking active steps to address the problem), and *Loyalty* (e.g. waiting for things to improve with little active intervention, accepting minor problems without addressing them, ignoring partners' faults, supporting partner in the face of criticism). The four types of responses differ from one another along dimensions of Constructive vs. Destructive Responses as well as Active vs. Passive responses. The constructive/destructive dimension refers to the effect that the response has had on the relationship itself, rather than the effect on the individual. Exit and neglect are both destructive responses since they both will have a negative impact on the relationship, whereas loyalty and voice are categorized as constructive responses. The active/passive dimension refers to the impact of the response on conflict itself rather than the nature of the behavior. Exit and voice are both active responses whereas loyalty and neglect are passive responses.

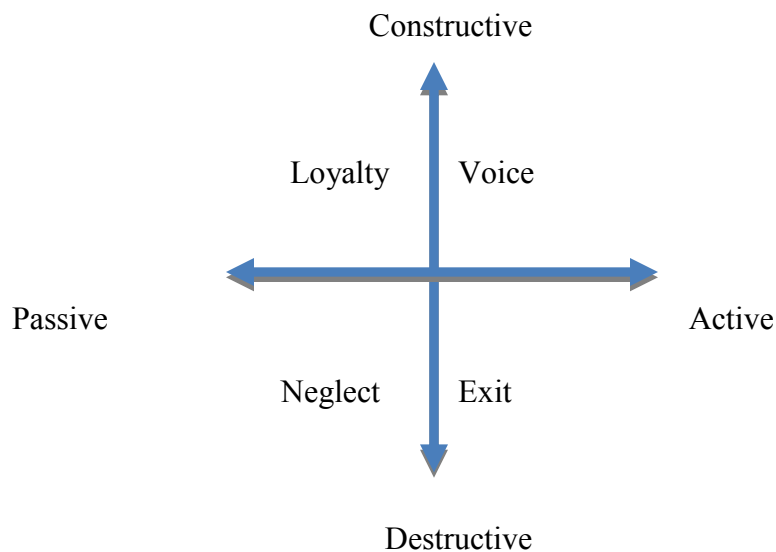


Figure 1. ELVN Typology

Following a partner's potentially destructive behavior, an individual's ability to inhibit a destructive response (e.g., exit or neglect) and engage in a constructive response requires one to set aside his or her own self-focused goals and instead respond in a way that is more pro-relationship (Rusbult, Yovetich, & Verette, 1996). According to attachment theory, an individual's perception of a destructive act committed by a partner, such as the partner saying something rude or speaking in a cold, harsh manner, as threatening to the security of the relationship is likely to be affected by the individual's attachment style. Indeed, some empirical research has found constructive conflict resolution to be predicted by attachment (Crowley, 2006; Gaines et al., 1997; Gaines & Hendeson, 2002; Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1995) and relationship satisfaction (Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991).

Although the constructive vs. destructive dimension of Rusbult and Zembrodt's (1983) typology has received much research attention, studies that examined the impact of attachment on the active vs. passive dimension are sparse. Given what we know about attachment systems, a number of different predictions could be made regarding attachment style and active vs. passive responses. For example, avoidantly attached individuals, who may believe that romantic partners will ultimately leave, may be more likely to engage in neglect behaviors because they involve passively waiting for the relationship to deteriorate. On the other hand, it could be argued that avoidantly attached individuals may also engage in active exit behaviors, hoping to leave their partners before they themselves are abandoned. For attachment anxiety, the most logical prediction would be loyalty behaviors, stemming from a desire to keep the relationship going without addressing conflict directly. Open communication about conflict, as is done with voice behaviors, is less likely to be observed

from anxiously attached individuals out of fear that these interactions may ultimately result in more conflict and the end of the relationship.

For the purposes of this study, we are most interested in the constructive vs. destructive dimension and, consistent with previous research using this typology, will define constructive conflict resolution as the following: when faced with a destructive act by a partner, the act of inhibiting destructive responses (exit and neglect) and instead engaging in constructive responses (voice and loyalty). In order to contribute to the dearth of research on the active vs. passive dimension, however, we will examine this dimension as a research question.

Influences of developed adult attachment on one's behavior are believed to contain both cognitive and affective components (Collins & Read, 1994) and differences in attachment goals lead to differences in both cognitive and emotional appraisals of events. For an anxious person, the goal is to avoid rejection, whereas for an avoidant person, the goal is to maintain autonomy. Cognitively, people will possess an attentional bias that is consistent with these goals, while affectively people are likely to respond with positive or negative emotions to an event based on whether it promotes or inhibits their goals (Collins & Read 1994). Thus, attachment differences impact how a person thinks and feels about their relationship, particularly during distressing events in a relationship, and these appraisals in turn impact behavior, such as how one responds to conflict.

Perfectionism, which also impacts cognitive appraisals of interpersonal events regarding expectations for oneself and for others, is a construct which may play an integral role in further explaining the cognitive influence of attachment systems on relationship quality. Similarly, empathy is an affective construct that may be one mechanism through

which attachment differences influence relationship quality. Both of these constructs have been shown to be predictive of relationship quality.

Perfectionism and Relationship Quality

Like attachment, dimensions of perfectionism are believed to be relatively stable personality traits that can impact a person's interpersonal functioning. Perfectionism has been defined as a multidimensional construct (Hewitt & Flett, 1991; Frost, Marten, Lahart, & Rosenblate, 1990; Stairs, 2009) and cognitive elements such as irrational or "black and white" thinking, high standards, and concerns about mistakes have all been suggested to be integral components of perfectionism (Burns, 1980; Frost, Marten, Lahart, & Rosenblate, 1990; Stairs, 2009). Some of the dimensions of perfectionism are characterized by an interpersonal rather than intrapersonal component. These include *other-oriented perfectionism*, which refers to the tendency to impose perfectionist standards upon others, and *socially-prescribed perfectionism* which refers to the belief that others impose high standards and strictly evaluate one's own performance (Hewitt & Flett, 1991; Stairs, 2009). These interpersonal dimensions of perfectionism have been correlated with relationship beliefs about communication, destructive relationship responses, dyadic adjustment, obsessive preoccupation, emotional dependence on dating partner (Flett, Hewitt, Shapiro, & Rayman, 2001), sexual satisfaction (Habke, Hewitt, & Flett, 1999), problematic interpersonal styles (Hill, Zrull, & Turlington, 1997), and little confidence in problem solving ability (Flett, Russo, & Hewitt, 1994).

Some researchers have expanded upon the idea of imposing perfectionist standards on to others and coined terms such as *relationship perfectionism*. (Wiebe & McCabe, 2002; Shea, Slaney, & Rice, 2006). Relationship perfectionism can be defined as high standards or

expectations for a relationship (Wiebe & McCabe, 2002). Shea, Slaney, and Rice (2006) suggest that a defining feature of the maladaptive aspect of relationship perfectionism (also known as dyadic perfectionism) is the perceived cognitive appraisal that an individual's high standards for a relationship or partner are not shared or upheld by the individual's partner. The high expectations held by individuals who are relationship perfectionists can be viewed as irrational and unrealistic, with the expectation that people should act the way you want them to all the time (Wiebe & McCabe, 2002) and the feeling that even a partner's best efforts are never good enough (Shea et al., 2006). Relationship perfectionism has been correlated with dysphoria, hostile interpersonal behaviors (Wiebe & McCabe, 2002), relationship satisfaction, adult attachment, (Shea et al., 2006), and relationship distress (Lopez, Fonz-Scheyd, Morúa, & Chaliman, 2006). Although relationship perfectionism has not been studied as a predictor of conflict resolution, the fact that it is correlated with relationship distress and hostile interpersonal behaviors is indicative that it is likely to negatively impact conflict resolution strategies. Furthermore, research has shown that endorsement of irrational beliefs for one's relationship is related to destructive problem solving techniques (Bushman, 1998; Metts & Cupach, 1990) As shown by previous research, clearly the high expectations that are held by individuals possessing relationship perfectionism are likely to affect factors such as satisfaction and conflict resolution.

Empathy and Relationship Quality

While the high expectations of relationship perfectionists may explain some of the irrational cognitions that impact relationship quality, empathy may be a useful factor to examine when considering affective factors that may impact relationship quality. Empathy was first defined by Carl Rogers as perceiving the internal experience of another as if s/he

were that person, “without ever losing the ‘as if’ condition” (Rogers, 1959, p. 210). Gladstein (1983) argued that empathy involves two distinct components: the ability to intellectually take on the role or perspective of another person, a term he called *cognitive empathy*, and the ability to respond to another person’s emotion with the same emotion, a term he called *affective empathy*. Other researchers have argued, however, that these two components of empathy cannot be separated because they inevitably influence one another (Bower, 1983; Isen, 1984). Davis (1983) proposed a multidimensional approach to empathy and developed the *Interpersonal Reactivity Index*, which includes four separate dimensions. The dimension designed to tap into an individual’s spontaneous tendency to adopt the viewpoint of others is perspective-taking (PT), whereas empathic concern (EC) measures the degree to which an individual feels sympathy, compassion and concern for others. The fantasy dimension (FS) measures an individual’s ability to imagine the feelings of fictional figures in books, movies or plays and personal distress (PD) measures the tendency to have feelings of unease or discomfort in reaction to the distressing emotions of others in tense or crisis situations. FS is not applicable to this study because the focus is on interactions with romantic partners. PD is not relevant because it essentially measures reactions to crises, and the focus of this study is more on the ability to cope with non-crisis relationship conflicts. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, empathy will be assessed using only the empathic concern and perspective taking components.

It has been argued that having a more accurate idea of how another is feeling will influence a person’s ability to modify his/her behavior in social situations in order to have more successful interactions (Feffer & Suchotliff, 1966), particularly in situations requiring conflict resolution (Corcoran & Mallinckrodt, 2000). Indeed, researchers have theorized

empathy as a key factor in the maintenance of existing relationships (Hansson et. al, 1984) and demonstrated accurate understanding to be associated with adjustment in committed relationships (Sillars & Scott, 1983). Perspective taking has been shown to be predictive of partner adjustment in committed relationships (Long & Andrews, 1990), relationship satisfaction (Franzoi, Davis, & Young, 1985) and more positive social functioning (Davis, 1983). Perspective taking and empathic concern empathy have been found to be associated with positive behaviors in relationships such as warmth, good communication, open discussion about conflict, a positive outlook, and even-temper, which in turn influence partner perceptions and partner satisfaction (Davis & Oathout, 1987; Knudson, Sommers, & Golding, 1980).

Being more in tune with one's partner's thoughts and feelings may greatly influence the conflict resolution strategies one uses and overall relationship satisfaction. In fact, researchers have proposed that the process of constructive conflict resolution is preceded by a *transformation of motivation*, which requires that immediate and primitive self-centered motives be replaced by more thoughtful concerns for the long-term well-being of the relationship, the long-term couple dynamic, the partner's interests, and adherence to broader social norms, such as agreeing to support one another even through difficult times (Rusbult, Yovetich, & Verette, 1996). The shift in motivation that includes considerations for the partner's interests would theoretically include an ability to empathize with the partner's experience of the conflict situation (Rusbult et al., 1996). Research has shown that individuals who demonstrate higher empathy and perspective taking are more likely to engage in the transformation of motivation process, which allows them to engage in pro-relationship behaviors such as constructive conflict resolution, and are better adjusted in their

romantic relationships (Davis & Oathout, 1987; Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991).

Mediating Effects

While both relationship perfectionism and empathy are correlated with relationship quality on their own, it is hypothesized that they act as mediators for the relationships between attachment and relationship quality variables. Few studies have examined the hypothesized links, but the following sections describe both available research findings and conceptual reasoning for perfectionism and empathy as viable mediators.

Perfectionism as a Mediator

Hamachek (1978), one of the earliest perfectionism theorists, suggested that maladaptive perfectionism is preceded by early care giving environments of either non-approval or inconsistent approval, which is very similar to the environments that have been linked to the development of avoidant and anxious attachments (Ainsworth, Bleahar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). Hamachek (1978) describes conditional positive approval as a situation in which parents only show love and approval when the child has met certain conditions, such as completing schoolwork or having an external success. Under these conditions, children learn that there are conditions to one's self-worth and that love and support will only be obtained when certain conditions are met. Striving for perfectionism may be learned by anxiously attached individuals at a young age as a means of trying to gain love and acceptance from early attachment figures, who have been inconsistent or conditional in their providing of acceptance (Wei, Mallinckrodt, Russell, & Abraham, 2004). For avoidant children on the other hand, striving to attain perfection may be a defense against rejection

from others' (Wei et al., 2004) and an attempt to reassure their positive working models of self, even though they have been wounded by unresponsive attachment figures.

Common roots in childhood development underscore the defining features of irrational beliefs regarding the self and others that perfectionism and attachment share. The negative internal working models characteristic of insecure attachment lead these individuals to endorse rigid, unrealistic rules concerning self-worth, such as “My value as a person depends on what others think of me” and “I should never make the same mistake twice” (Flett, Hewitt, Blankstein, & Gray, 1998; Swallow & Kupier, 1988; Roberts, Gotlib, & Kassel, 1996), which are similar to the rigid, unrealistic rules associated with self-worth that are endorsed by perfectionistic individuals (Slaney, Rice, Mobley, Trippi, & Ashby, 2001). Secure individuals, on the other hand, do not endorse rigid rules for maintaining self-worth and possess a more balanced self-concept (Brennan & Morris, 1997), as do individuals who score lower on dimensions of perfectionism (Flett, et al., 1998).

Indeed, secure attachment is related to positivity about the self, optimism in relationships (Pietromonaco & Carnelley, 1994) and positive relationship expectations (Carnelley & Rowe, 2007). Insecure attachment has been linked with suppression of negative emotions in romantic relationships (Feeney, 1995), which can be construed as insecure individuals holding unrealistic relationship beliefs that negative emotions should not be exchanged between romantic partners. Individuals with high relationship perfectionism impose irrational beliefs on to their romantic partners (e.g. “I expect the best from my significant other”, “I am hardly ever satisfied with my significant other’s performance”, Shea, Slaney, & Rice, 2006) and thus likely hold irrational beliefs about the success of their relationship as well.

The common thread of irrational beliefs between attachment and perfectionism likely extends into their influence on relationship quality. Irrational relationship beliefs are negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction and constructive problem solving (Epstein & Eidelson, 1981; Metts & Cupach, 1990). Thus, with the motivation of achieving attachment goals, such as avoiding rejection and maintaining autonomy, anxious and avoidant individuals, whom previous research has shown hold irrational beliefs about themselves, may similarly hold unrealistically high expectations for their relationships and for their romantic partner's behavior. These unrealistic standards for the partner and relationship will inevitably be unmet and in turn lead to lower relationship satisfaction for these individuals. Likewise, the unrealistic standards may lead to more biased cognitive appraisals of conflict situations and make it more difficult for individuals to set aside their own relationship motives and engage in constructive conflict resolution strategies. Perfectionism has been identified as a mediator between attachment and other maladaptive outcomes such as depression (Wei, Mallinckrodt, Russell, & Abraham, 2004). Based on aforementioned conceptual arguments, it is plausible that relationship perfectionism may be a mediating factor that helps to explain the cognitive mechanisms in the relationship between attachment style and relationship quality.

Empathy as a Mediator

While perfectionism may explain the cognitive component that mediates the relationship between attachment and relationship quality, empathy may be a useful factor to examine when considering the affective impact of attachment style on relationship quality. Empathy requires that an individual step outside of his/her own perspective and imagine the perspective of another. Similar to attachment and perfectionism, empathy has been theorized

to have roots in early development (Zahn-Waxler & Robinson, 1995). According to Hoffman (1982), empathy development first begins around age 2, when the child begins to differentiate between self and other, and other-oriented action patterns of sympathetic concern evolves from self-oriented distress. Research on contagious crying in infants has supported that idea that personal distress in response to the distress of others contributes to the underpinnings of empathy (Geangu, Benga, Stahl, & Striano, 2010). In addition, research on maternal responsiveness (a precursor for secure attachment) in infancy has been shown to influence empathic response in toddlers (Spinrad & Stifter, 2006).

Since Hoffman (1982) claims that empathy requires an individual's personal distress to evolve into other-oriented concern and insecure attachment is characterized by negative perceptions of either the self or others, the development of attachment based internal working models in childhood may influence the development of empathic response as well. The aversion to emotional closeness with others that avoidant individuals tend to possess would likely hinder their ability and motivation to take on the emotional perspective of a romantic partner. Anxious individuals, on the other hand, may be more interested in speculating about their partners' perspectives because they desire the emotional closeness this behavior might promote. It is likely, however, that anxious individuals may have difficulty leaving their own desire for emotional closeness out of their assessment of their partners' thoughts and feelings. In other words, although the desire to be empathic with partners may be present in anxious individuals, their ability to step out of their own perspective and accurately perceive their partners' experiences may be hindered by their insecurity and fear of abandonment. Indeed, poor accuracy in perceiving a partner's feelings has been shown to be a mediator between anxious attachment and lower relationship satisfaction (Tucker & Anders, 1999).

A few studies have examined the attachment and empathy relationship and found negative relationships between anxiety and avoidance dimensions and empathy dimensions of perspective taking and empathic concern (Bekendam, 1997; Corcoran & Mallinckrodt, 2000; Joireman, Needham, & Cummings, 2001). Evidence has been found for low perspective taking as a mediator between attachment avoidance and more adaptive forms of conflict resolution (Corcoran & Mallinckrodt, 2000). In addition, perspective taking has been found to be a mediator between secure attachment and relationship satisfaction (Osland, 2001).

People with high attachment anxiety or avoidance are both at risk for difficulties with empathy because the inherent relationship goals pursued by these individuals are self-focused and empathy requires that a person focus on the experience of another. Additionally, the activation of attachment systems is affect-laden and results in emotional arousal. This emotional arousal restricts cognitive resources and information processing, causing people to resort to emotional responses that are schema consistent with their beliefs about others, whether those beliefs are that others will inevitably leave or that others are inconsistent with providing love and acceptance. Individuals who fear rejection are primarily motivated to obtain acceptance and when the attachment system is activated, emotional responses are highly reactive to any indication that they will be abandoned. Similarly, individuals who fear intimacy are primarily motivated to maintain autonomy and their emotional responses will be reactive to efforts by their partners to get closer. In these self-focused, emotionally arousing moments, imagining the emotional experience of a partner is unlikely for insecurely attached individuals, as they probably do not have the emotional or cognitive resources available to do so. This makes the transformation of motivation process required for constructive conflict

resolution unlikely as well. With poor conflict resolution, insecurely attached individuals are less likely to feel that their relationship needs of comfort and care are being met, and are less likely to trust that their partners can meet those needs, ultimately resulting in lowered relationship satisfaction.

Findings from previous research provide some preliminary support for the mediator role played by empathy on attachment and relationship quality. For instance, empathy has been demonstrated to be a viable mediator between attachment and conflict resolution (Corcoran & Mallinckrodt, 2000). In addition, empathic accuracy and perspective taking have been shown to mediate attachment and relationship satisfaction (Osland, 2001; Tucker & Anders, 1999). Given these findings and the above conceptual reasoning, empathy will be examined in this study as a potential mediator between adult attachment styles and relationship quality elements of conflict resolution and satisfaction.

The Present Study

The present study will attempt to better understand the mediating factors involved in the links between attachment style and the relationship quality factors of conflict resolution and relationship satisfaction by using a correlational design. In addition, because attachment styles are activated during times of distress and conflict (Pietromonaco, Greenwood, & Barrett, 2004), the present study will use three levels of priming conditions to activate attachment styles of randomly assigned participants. The experimental nature of this study is unique for attachment research, as most available attachment research uses questionnaires and correlational designs, merely assuming the existence of an attachment effect. This study has the potential to substantially contribute to the existing literature in this area by experimentally activating the attachment system and drawing comparisons among subgroups

with different priming conditions about the strength of these mediating relationships. Specifically, the present study will utilize a between-groups experimental design and will randomly assign individuals to one of three conditions: (a) discomfort related to romantic relationships, (b) neutral discomfort, or (c) no discomfort. Given that attachment systems are activated specifically when the relationship with the attachment figure is threatened, it is presumed that when attachment systems are primed it will have the most salient effect on conflict resolution and relationship satisfaction. .

Hypotheses and Research Questions

Based on the literature reviewed above, the following hypotheses will be examined:

1. Upon determining that negative relationships exist between attachment anxiety and avoidance and the relationship quality variables, and that empathy is positively related to the relationship quality variables, empathy will serve as a partial mediator in the relationship between attachment and relationship quality variables of constructive conflict resolution and satisfaction.
2. When attachment style is primed, the mediating effects of empathy on attachment and relationship quality will be greater in magnitude than when attachment style is not primed.
3. Upon determining that a negative relationship exists between relationship perfectionism and the relationship quality variables, relationship perfectionism will serve as a partial mediator in the relationship between attachment and constructive conflict resolution as well as for the relationship between attachment and satisfaction.

4. When attachment style is primed, the mediating effects of relationship perfectionism on attachment and relationship quality variables will be greater in magnitude than when attachment style is not primed.

In addition to the hypotheses, the following research question was examined:

What is the relationship between attachment dimensions and the active vs. passive dimension of the exit-voice-loyalty-neglect typology?

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will first provide a brief review of studies examining components of relationship quality. Literature related to the development of attachment theory and the implication of the adult attachment perspective on relationship quality, indicated by relationship satisfaction and conflict resolution, will then be discussed. Following this, early conceptualizations of perfectionism will be reviewed, highlighting the irrational nature of perfectionism, as well as conceptualizations of the interpersonal and relationship aspects of perfectionism. Literature supporting the relationships between relationship perfectionism, irrational relationship beliefs, and relationship quality will be provided. The relationship between empathy and relationship quality will be reviewed, followed by a section describing empirical support for the relationship perfectionism and empathy as mediators for attachment and relationship quality.

Relationship Quality

Indicators of Relationship Quality

Orden and Bradburn (1968) were pioneers for relationship quality research. They created lists of items indicating either examples of things couples often argue about or pleasurable activities couples often engage in and asked a total of 1,738 married people to endorse items if these items fit with their own experiences with their spouse during the past week. Cluster analyses revealed three indexes: marriage sociability (relationship the married couple has with other people and social activities), marriage companionship (the personal relationship between husband and wife), and tension (tensions within the relationship). Marriage sociability and companionship were both considered satisfaction indices. Mostly

low, negative correlations between the two satisfaction indices and the tension index was evidence that these batteries were measuring constructs that exist on separate dimensions, rather than opposite ends of a single continuum. Furthermore, the satisfaction indices were positively correlated with self report of overall marriage happiness while the tension indices were negatively correlated with marriage happiness. Of the satisfaction indices, companionship was more strongly correlated to happiness than sociability, indicating that the bond between the two partners may be more important for overall happiness than couple sociability. Orden and Bradburn (1968) concluded that overall marriage happiness was a function of the balance between the orthogonal dimensions of satisfactions and tensions within a marriage. Altogether, this study supports the idea that relationship quality is comprised of two separate dimensions of satisfaction and tension.

Consistent with the idea that relationship quality is multi-dimensional, Spanier and Lewis (1980) reviewed all of available marital quality research at that time and defined relationship quality as the subjective evaluation of a relationship as evidenced by reports on various contributing dimensions. They comment that high relationship quality has typically been characterized by sufficient communication, high satisfaction, high levels of relationship happiness, and good adjustment. The authors cite research from the decade that has evaluated relationship quality by examining satisfaction (e.g. Burke & Weir, 1976), happiness (e.g. Kolb & Straus, 1974), and adjustment (e.g. Edmonds et al., 1976). This review is support for the current study's conceptualization of relationship quality including a satisfaction component.

Fletcher, Simpson, and Thomas (2000) conducted a series of studies to examine hypothesized underlying factor structures of relationship quality using the following

constructs: satisfaction, commitment, trust, closeness, passion, and love. In study 1, two hundred undergraduate students in committed heterosexual relationships (127 women; mean age = 23.30 years) with a mean relationship length of 25.2 months filled out six previously developed self-report measures which were well established in literature, one for each identified construct, each containing 7-point Likert-type items. They also filled out the Perceived Relationship Quality Components (PRQC) Inventory, a self-report scale designed for this study that contained three items for each of the six identified constructs. Separate confirmatory factor analyses were run for the data from the previously developed scales and for the PRQC and results revealed that the best model fit for both sets of data included the six constructs loading on one second order factor (global perceived relationship quality) while also forming semi-independent, lower-level factors. In an effort to test the generalizability of this structure with a sample of participants who were in less established romantic relationships, the authors conducted a second study. Study 2 was comprised of 100 college students (65 women, 35 men; mean age = 20.90 years) who had been dating their current heterosexual partner for 4 weeks or less (mean length of relationship = 3.15 weeks). Multiple sample confirmatory factor analyses indicated excellent replication of the results from study 1 to study 2, indicating that across early dating relationships as well as in established romantic relationships, the model with six factors loading on to one second-order factor of perceived relationship quality was superior to that in which relationship quality was hypothesized to have one general factor. These results support the notion that relationship quality is not a unidimensional construct. The authors noted that the components used as indicators of relationship quality were not exhaustive and that other evaluative components, such as conflict, might also be used as indicators of relationship quality. This study supports

the notion that relationship quality must be measured using multiple indicators and that conflict, which is one indicator proposed for the current study, is an appropriate indicator.

Measurement of Relationship Quality

Several scales that have purported to measure relationship quality have been used in the literature and many of them follow the idea that relationship quality includes both satisfaction or happiness components as well as conflict or tension components. For instance, Spanier (1976), in his mission to develop a scale that would measure relationship quality of both married and non-married couples, defined dyadic adjustment as a process which is determined by positive factors such as dyadic cohesion, satisfaction and consensus on matters of importance to couple functioning, as well as negative factors including troublesome differences within the couple, tensions between partners and individual anxiety. The results of Spanier's factor analysis of all items derived from all of the scales which had been published at that time to measure components of relationship adjustment came out with 32 items comprised of four subscales: dyadic satisfaction, dyadic cohesion, dyadic consensus, and affectional expression. Consistent with Orden and Bradburn's (1968) view of relationship happiness as a combination of tension and satisfaction, the items on Spanier's Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) assess relationship quality by asking respondents to comment on the extent of their disagreements and arguments with their mates as well as the extent of positive interactions they have. Higher scores on the DAS subscales reflect less disagreement and more positive interactions.

Hendrick (1988), like Spanier (1976) sought to develop a scale that would assess romantic relationships in general rather than limiting the scope of assessment to married couples only. The Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) was administered to 125

undergraduates who reported themselves to be “in love”. The results of the principal components analysis extracted one factor which accounted for 46% of the variance, and intercorrelations between items were in the moderate range. In a second study, the RAS and the DAS were then both administered to 57 dating couples and the factor structure of the RAS was confirmed. The RAS was highly positively correlated with the DAS ($r = .80$). Correlations between partners’ scores on the RAS were significant and positive for all items. In addition, when 30 couples were contacted at the end of the semester, discriminant analysis showed that the RAS correctly assigned 91% of the couples who were still together and 86% of the couples who were broken up. Consistent with other scales discussed, items on the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) measure both positive and negative perceptions and attitudes about the respondent’s romantic relationship (sample items include “How well does your partner meet your needs?” and “How many problems are there in your relationship?”), which is support for the current study’s measurement of relationship quality using both positive and negative indicators.

Furman and Bahurmeister (1992) assessed perceptions of relationships with significant others among students in grade school ($n=107$), middle school ($n=119$), high school ($n=112$), and college ($n=216$). The Network of Relationships Inventory (NRI) was used to assess seven relationship qualities including: (a) reliable alliance, (b) enhancement of worth, (c) affection, (d) companionship, (e) instrumental help, (f) intimacy, and (g) nurturance of the other. In addition, the qualities of conflict, punishment, and relative power were also measured. Participants rated these qualities in their relationships among significant others (e.g. romantic partner, mother, closest friend, etc.) on 5-point Likert type items. The NRI qualities were combined and measured as a supportiveness composite, while conflict

and punishment were combined to form a conflict composite and power was measured independently. This study supports the practice of measuring relationship quality using positive factors such as companionship and intimacy as well as negative factors, such as conflict.

Although relationship quality research has focused on satisfaction as well as conflict as two integral components of overall relationship quality, research suggests that it is not the mere presence of conflict that impacts quality. Rather it is how conflict is managed within the relationship that will determine its overall impact on relationship quality. The following two reviews will address this claim.

Conflict Management and Relationship Quality

In an effort to go beyond traditional cross-sectional methodology and explore how marriages develop, succeed, or fail, Karney and Bradbury (1995) used meta-analysis techniques to examine 115 longitudinal studies on marriage, drawn from an estimated 68 independent samples. The majority of the samples include primarily Caucasian participants and only 57% of the samples include data from both spouses. Of the 112 studies reporting final sample size, 33% had 100 participants or less and 30% had samples greater than 500. Close to 200 variables, including satisfaction and conflict behavior were included in the sampled studies. For the purposes of the study, authors aggregated the behavioral variables in to broad factors of positive behaviors, negative behaviors, positive reciprocity and negative reciprocity and did not explicitly define these categories. Results indicated that in general, positive behavior was a predictor of positive relationship outcomes whereas negative behavior predicted negative relationship outcomes, particularly lower satisfaction. Based on the findings of the meta-analysis, authors propose a path model for romantic relationship

quality that implicates enduring vulnerabilities (e.g. backgrounds and traits, such as attachment systems), stressful events, and adaptive processes (e.g. how couples problem solve and deal with conflict) as predictors of relationship quality. They postulate that enduring vulnerabilities impact both adaptive processes and stressful events, and that adaptive processes and stressful events impact one another. This path model, which is based on empirical findings, strengthens the idea that the conflict resolution behaviors themselves, not the conflict, is what ultimately impacts relationship quality. In sum, this meta-analysis lends support for the current study in three ways. First, it supports the idea that differences in how a couple manages conflict affect satisfaction and other relationship outcomes. Second, it discusses the impact of enduring vulnerabilities, such as attachment, on the processes used to resolve conflict. Finally, it highlights the importance of conducting research that focuses on indirect effects as well as that which links variables from different theories.

Gottman (1998), in an article discussing the current state of romantic relationship research, similarly argues that how couples manage conflict will differentiate distressed couples from satisfied ones. In discussing the patterns of negative affect reciprocity that have been supported in research on relationship quality (e.g. Gottman, 1979; Vincent et al., 1979), he pointed out that focusing on negative affect characterizes conflict resolution attempts for distressed couples. When couples make attempts to repair an argument that is going poorly (e.g. “Stop interrupting me” or “We’re getting off track”), these attempts are often delivered with negative affect. For satisfied couples, attention is given more to content and the attempt at repair itself, whereas for distressed couples, attention is drawn more to the negative affect itself. Thus, for distressed couples, the partner is more likely to respond to negative affect with reciprocated negative affect, making conflict resolution more of a negative experience.

Gottman's argument supports the idea that it is the manner in which conflict is addressed in a relationship that will determine its impact on overall relationship quality.

In summary, the above review of literature on relationship quality demonstrates that relationship quality is a construct that has multiple indicators, including satisfaction and conflict resolution. It is also apparent that the specific strategies that couples use to manage conflict are important for determining overall relationship quality.

Attachment Theory

Attachment theory's focus on interpersonal relatedness makes it a useful framework for which to understand both relationship satisfaction and conflict resolution. The key elements of attachment theory and a summary of relevant research will be given in the following section.

Attachment theory began with the work of John Bowlby (1969), who proposed that the early relationship between an infant and his/her primary care giver (attachment figure; often the mother) forms an internal working model for the child, which serves as a prototype for the child's future relationships. The nature of internal working models is based on the availability of the attachment figure during times of distress. If the child expresses distress and the primary care giver consistently provides comfort and protection in a timely manner, then the child develops an internal working model of *security*. If, on the other hand, the care giver ignores the child completely during times of distress, or provides inconsistent responses, the child develops insecure internal working models. The child learns that comfort and protection cannot be counted on and is less likely to feel comfortable to explore his/her environment.

Consistent with the internal working models of self and others, cotemporary attachment researchers conceptualize adult attachment based on a model with two orthogonal dimensions: *Anxiety* and *Avoidance* (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998). An individual who experiences inconsistent care from the attachment figure may perceive this as rejection by the attachment figure and develop a negative internal view of self, believing that he/she is unworthy of care and unacceptable in the eyes of the attachment figure. Individuals who possess a negative view of self are said to be high on the *Anxiety* dimension of Brennan et al.'s two dimensional model of adult attachment. Anxious individuals tend to view themselves as unworthy of care, crave intimacy and approval from others, and yet fear rejection and abandonment (Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006). Experiences of a lack of care from attachment figures may cause individuals to perceive attachment figures as untrustworthy and unreliable, causing them to develop a negative view of other people. Individuals who possess a negative view of others are said to be high on the *Avoidance* dimension. They learn that people cannot be counted on and consequently demonstrate excessive desires to rely on themselves (Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006).

Some attachment researchers (e.g., Bartholomew, 1990) have postulated four distinct adult attachment styles: *Secure*, *Preoccupied*, *Dismissing*, and *Fearful*. Individuals who are high on the anxiety dimension but low on the avoidant dimension, those who possess a negative internal working model of self and positive working model of other, are categorized as Preoccupied. Dismissing individuals are high on the avoidant dimension but low on the anxiety dimension, meaning that they have developed a negative view of others and a positive view of self. Individuals who are high on both the anxiety dimension and avoidant dimension are categorized as Fearful. Secure individuals are low on both the anxiety and

avoidant dimensions. They tend to believe they are worthy (positive view of self) and that others can be counted on to provide care (positive view of others).

Hazan and Shaver (1987) extended the work of early researchers on infant attachment and examined the empirical basis of the attachment framework within the context of adult romantic relationships. Two studies, using 620 (mean age 36) and 108 (mean age 18) participants respectively, examined whether respondents of the three different attachment styles would experience love relationships differently and whether respondents' relationship beliefs would vary according to attachment styles. Findings of this study indicated that secure participants reported romantic relationships characterized by happiness, trust, and an ability to accept and support their partners. Avoidant respondents, on the other hand, reported fear of intimacy, experiences of emotional highs and lows and jealousy, whereas anxious respondents characterized love as involving obsession, a desire for union and reciprocation, extreme sexual attraction and jealousy, and emotional highs and lows. Secure individuals generally indicated that feelings wax and wane in relationships and that some romantic love never fades. Avoidant individuals indicated cynical relationship beliefs, such that romantic love seldom lasts and that it is rare to find a person to really fall in love with, whereas anxious individuals reported that it is easy to fall in love, though they rarely find what they would call real love. Anxious individuals also reported more self-doubts, feelings of being misunderstood, and feeling like others are not willing to commit in relationships. Taken together, these findings show that each adult attachment style is associated with different affective experiences of love, as well as different beliefs and expectations about the self and others, clearly displaying both affective and cognitive components to attachment style, which is consistent with the current study's conceptualization of attachment. Hazan and Shaver's

research expands the application of attachment theory to adult romantic relationship.

However, limitations of this study include that it assessed attachment using categorical model and that it did not explicitly examine the cognitive and affective components of internal working models on relationship quality, both of which will be addressed in the current study. The following two sections will describe empirical support for the impact of attachment style on relationship satisfaction and conflict resolution.

Attachment and Relationship Satisfaction

Collins and Read (1990) examined the relationships among attachment style, partner matching, and perceived relationship quality, including satisfaction. In this study, participants were 71 undergraduate heterosexual dating couples with a mean age of 22 and an average relationship length of 17 months. Relationship quality was measured using a variety of components, including communication, trust, satisfaction, and perceived conflict.

Correlational analyses revealed that participants tended to choose partners who were matched with their own attachment dimensions. In addition, participants who were more comfortable with closeness (i.e., secure attachment), reported higher satisfaction, perceived less conflict in the relationship, and reported better communication whereas anxious participants trusted partners less, perceived more communication problems, and viewed themselves as less responsive listeners. In sum, these results are indicative that more secure attachment orientations in romantic relationships tend to predict greater satisfaction and lower degrees of conflict, which is consistent with the current study's hypotheses. One limitation of this study, however, is its small sample size. The current study will utilize a much larger sample that will increase generalizability of results.

Simpson (1990) examined whether attachment styles in romantic relationships affected levels of satisfaction and types of emotions experienced in the relationship. The sample consisted of 144 heterosexual dating couples (mean age 18.7-19.4 years) with a mean length of relationship of 13.5 months. Results showed that higher secure attachment was associated with higher satisfaction, whereas higher avoidance and higher anxiety were correlated with lower satisfaction. Higher scores on security also were associated with experiencing more positive and less negative emotion, whereas higher scores on both anxious and avoidant attachment were correlated with more negative and less positive emotion. This study indicates clear associations between secure attachment and positive relationship outcomes such as increased satisfaction and experiences of more positive emotions. The correlational nature of the study, however, limits understanding of the specific mechanisms embedded in these relationships, and a regression/mediation analysis, as proposed by the current study, would provide more information about how these variables interact.

Alexandrov, Cowan and Cowan (2005) examined whether continuous dimensions of attachment security explain variance in observed and self-reported relationship quality above and beyond that which is explained by categorical measures of secure attachment in couple relationships. The sample included 73 couples (mean age 36-38 years) with 12 years as the average length of relationship. Results revealed that overall, continuous attachment accounted for significant variance in relationship satisfaction, observed and reported couple conflict, and observed positive and negative emotion during problem solving, above and beyond categorical measures. In support of the current study's hypotheses, these findings show that satisfaction, as well as behaviors involved in resolving conflict, are affected by the attachment style of each individual in the relationship. In addition, this study highlights the

importance of continuous measures of attachment, which the current study will utilize. One limitation of this study, however, is that it did not examine the mechanisms through which attachment styles may impact relationship quality, a gap that the current study will attempt to fill.

Madey and Rogers (2009) examined associations between attachment, passion, intimacy, and commitment on relationship satisfaction among a sample of 55 undergraduates. Findings showed that greater attachment insecurity was negatively correlated with intimacy, passion, commitment, and relationship satisfaction. Secure attachment was found to independently predict relationship satisfaction even after controlling for passion. These findings reinforce the link between attachment and relationship satisfaction that will be further investigated in the current study. Specific dimensions of attachment avoidance and anxiety were not explored, however, and the current study will use a more sophisticated measure of attachment.

Horne and Biss (2009) explored the mediating role of attachment in the link between equality discrepancy and relationship satisfaction among women in same-sex relationships. The sample consisted of 70 cohabitating lesbian couples (mean relationship length=3.94 years). Results showed that anxious and avoidant attachment significantly predicted decreased relationship satisfaction above and beyond that which was accounted for by equality discrepancy, and that attachment variables fully mediated this relationship. The results of this study are further support for the negative impact of insecure attachment on relationship satisfaction. The current study will take this finding a step further by examining possible mediators within this relationship.

Brassard, Lussier, and Shaver (2009) examined the effects of attachment and perceived conflict on relationship satisfaction among 274 French-Canadian heterosexual couples. Results showed that anxious and avoidant attachment were positively associated with perceived conflict and negatively associated with relationship satisfaction. Avoidant attachment was found to directly predict relationship satisfaction even after perceived conflict was considered, and attachment anxiety predicted relationship satisfaction via perceived conflict. The results of this study reinforce the empirical link between attachment and relationship satisfaction, but the current study will expand on these findings by examining additional mediating factors.

Attachment and Conflict Resolution

Attachment and exit-voice-loyalty-neglect typology. There is a growing body of research that has examined the effect of attachment on a specific theory of conflict resolution, the Exit-Voice-Loyalty-Neglect (EVLN) typology, which originated with the work of Rusbult and Zembrodt (1983). In an effort to derive a comprehensive typology of responses to dissatisfaction in romantic relationships, the authors conducted two studies using a two-phase data collection method. Study 1 utilized 50 undergraduates in phase 1 to generate essays in response to a prompt that required them to think of a time when they became dissatisfied with a romantic relationship. Two hundred more undergraduates were then used in phase 2 to rank order these essays according to specific study criteria. Study 2 utilized a community sample for phase 1 ($n = 18$, mean age 36.5 years) and two undergraduate samples ($n = 84$; $n = 116$) for phases 2 and 3. Phase 1 participants were again asked to respond to a prompt regarding dissatisfaction in a romantic relationship, whereas the participants in phases 2 and 3 ranked and judged the responses from phase 1 according to

study criteria. The results of the multidimensional scaling analysis were substantiated across both studies and revealed four clusters of responses along two dimensions (Constructive vs. Destructive and Active vs. Passive). The constructive/destructive dimension refers to the effect that the response has had on the relationship itself, rather than the effect on the individual. The active/passive dimension refers to the impact of the response on conflict itself rather than the nature of the behavior. Based on the interactions of these two dimensions, four types of responses were identified and they included: *Exit* (e.g. taking steps to end the relationship, moving out, getting a divorce,), *Neglect* (e.g. avoiding the problem or one's partner, giving the silent treatment, allowing the relationship to fall apart), *Voice* (e.g. talking about the problem, using compromise, taking active steps to address the problem), and *Loyalty* (e.g. waiting for things to improve with little active intervention, accepting minor problems without addressing them, ignoring partners' faults, supporting partner in the face of criticism). In sum, this landmark study established initial empirical support for the exit-voice-loyalty-neglect typology of responses to dissatisfaction in romantic relationships.

Attachment research that examined the EVLN typology has focused primarily on the constructive vs. destructive dimension of this model, specifically in situations when participants are asked to respond to a destructive act by a partner. The ability to inhibit a destructive response and instead respond in a constructive manner is known as *accommodation* (Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991), but for the purposes of this study will be defined as constructive conflict resolution. The following sections will give more detailed explanations of the research on attachment and constructive conflict resolution. Due to the lack of research on the active vs. passive dimension, no further empirical support

between this dimension and attachment variables is available. This dimension will purely be examined in an exploratory manner, using a research question.

Scharfe and Bartholomew (1995) examined the influences of relationship satisfaction and attachment on conflict resolution style as measured by the EVLN typology. Sixty-four couples (mean relationship length = 47 months) completed questionnaires at two time points, separated by eight months. Relationship satisfaction was found to predict the use of more constructive responses (voice) and less destructive responses (exit and neglect). Attachment security was also positively related to constructive responses and negatively related to destructive responses. As predicted, there was a negative relationship between dismissing attachment and voice. Furthermore, fearful attachment had a direct relationship with destructive responses (neglect and exit) and an inverse relationship with the constructive response of voice. Finally, there was a negative relationship between preoccupation and neglect. In running a hierarchical regression and controlling for the effects of attachment on conflict resolution, authors determined that attachment contributes to variance in conflict resolution above and beyond that which is accounted for by satisfaction. These results demonstrate the importance of attachment in ELVN conflict resolution behaviors, but the sample was relatively small and this limits generalizability of findings. The current study will utilize a much larger sample.

Gaines et al., (1997), in a similar study, examined the influence of an individual's attachment style on reactions to a partner's destructive behavior using the EVLN typology as a framework to analyze reactions. Four separate studies using the same procedure and materials were conducted and contained the following samples: 131 undergraduates (mean age = 19.5 years) who were involved in romantic relationships (mean length of relationship =

22 months); 84 undergraduates (mean age = 20.59 years); 57 couples (mean age = 20.5 years); and 93 married couples (mean age = 32.32 years, mean length of marriage = 24.21 months). Across the four studies, trends in the results showed that securely attached respondents exhibited greater tendencies for voice responses and lower tendencies for both exit and neglect responses. For both the anxious and avoidant respondents, there were positive correlations with exit and neglect. For the avoidant respondents, there was also a negative correlation with voice responses. This study reinforces the link between secure attachment and constructive conflict resolution and did so using samples of undergraduates as well as community samples of married individuals. However, the design was correlational and the current study will utilize an experimental design to highlight the effect primed attachment might have on these relationships.

Barlow (1998) explored the relationship between innate traits, such as attachment, and responses to dissatisfaction in relationships. Using 142 romantic couples, results showed that attachment security was positively correlated with constructive responses (voice and loyalty behaviors) and negatively correlated with destructive responses (exit and neglect behaviors). For avoidant attachment, the opposite was found, with negative correlations for constructive responses and positive correlations with destructive responses. Anxious individuals showed positive relations with destructive responses and a negative relationship with the voice response. These findings demonstrate the relations between secure attachment and constructive conflict resolution. This relationship fits within attachment framework, such that the extent to which an individual's attachment needs and goals are met has a profound influence on satisfaction and an individual's approach to conflict. Similar to limitations in

other studies, this study also failed to examine possible mediators in the attachment conflict resolution relationship.

Crowley (2006) examined attachment style and conflict resolution strategy, measuring both of the constructive conflict resolution and the demand-withdraw behavior measure, which is considered a more negative or destructive way to approach conflict. Results revealed that both anxious and avoidant attachments were associated with lower levels of constructive conflict resolution but higher levels of destructive conflict resolution. In addition, higher levels of both anxious and avoidant attachment were correlated with less relationship satisfaction. This study shows a clear link between attachment style and the constructive conflict resolution that will be examined in the current study, but it does not examine possible mediators that may be responsible for these relationships.

Attachment and other measures of conflict resolution. Several other adult attachment researchers have examined the relationships between attachment and various types of conflict resolution behaviors without using the EVLN typology yet landed with similar conclusions. For instance, Kobak and Hazan (1991) examined whether attachment security would be linked to constructive emotion regulation during couple problem-solving tasks and the effect of attachment security on relationship adjustment. Forty couples with a mean relationship length of seven years filled out self-report measures of attachment and relationship adjustment and also engaged in video-taped problem-solving task. Findings showed that participants who were securely attached engaged in less rejecting and more supportive statements during problem solving. Attachment security was also associated with greater relationship adjustment ratings for both partners. This is further evidence of the role

attachment plays in relationship quality. One drawback of this study was its small sample size, a limitation the current study will remedy.

Shi (1999) used attachment theory as a framework for which to examine individual differences in conflict resolution behaviors. Using 448 undergraduate college students in questionnaire based data collection, the results showed that more securely attached respondents indicated using more positive conflict resolution behaviors and also reported greater relationship satisfaction. This study is another example of how secure attachment has a positive impact on conflict resolution behaviors and relationship satisfaction, but it does not examine mechanisms through which these relationships exist, a gap the current study will address.

Gaines and Henderson (2002) examined the influence of paired attachment style on conflict resolution in same sex couples with sample of 115 couples, including 61 gay male couples (mean age 35.2 -34.5 years, mean relationship length of 85.9 months) and 54 lesbian couples (mean age 35.6 – 36.2 years, mean relationship length 56.2 months). Couples that consisted of two secure partners were less likely to engage in destructive responses than couples where either one or both partners were insecurely attached. However, these securely paired couples were actually not significantly more likely to use constructive responses than were the couples consisting of one insecurely attached partner. This study supports the premise of the current research, which postulates that securely attached adults are less likely to use destructive conflict resolution strategies. However, the authors used the three paragraph categorical measure of attachment (Hazan & Shaver, 1987), which, due to its simplicity, may be limited in terms of reliability and validity. The current study will use a more complex measure of attachment with well-established psychometric properties.

Marchand (2004) examined the relationships of attachment, conflict resolution behaviors, and relationship satisfaction with a sample of 64 married couples. Results revealed that higher anxiety and avoidant attachment styles were associated with lower relationship satisfaction as well as with using more attacking and less compromising conflict resolution behaviors. Thus, less secure attachment is again shown to be associated with poorer relationship quality. One limitation of this study is that attachment style was not primed prior to participants answering questions regarding their conflict resolution styles. Using a prime to activate attachment styles, as proposed in the current study, may illuminate a more pronounced effect of attachment on self-reported conflict resolution.

The above studies demonstrate the important role that attachment plays in predicting relationship satisfaction and conflict resolution behavior and their findings consistently show that greater attachment security is linked with higher rating on relationship satisfaction and more constructive responses when faced with a destructive act by a romantic partner. Thus, it can be concluded that attachment as an important predictor for relationship quality has been established in literature. However, more work is needed to uncover the mechanisms through which attachment variables affect the outcomes of relationship quality.

One viable path to explore further is how adult attachment might manifest its influences via particular mediators. For example, influences of developed adult attachment on one's behavior are believed to contain both cognitive and affective components, which have reciprocal impact on one another (Collins & Read, 1994). Differences in attachment goals lead to differences in both cognitive and emotional appraisals of events. For a person with high attachment anxiety, the goal is to avoid rejection, whereas for an avoidantly attached person, the goal is to maintain autonomy. Cognitively, people will possess an

attentional bias that is consistent with these goals, meaning that they are more likely to remember attachment related experiences in ways that are consistent with their existing working models. Affectively, people are likely to respond with positive or negative emotions to an event based on whether it promotes or inhibits their goals (Collins & Read 1994). Emotional reactions will result in emotional arousal, which restricts cognitive and attentional resources and causes people to respond in over-learned, schema consistent ways (Collins & Read 1994). Thus, attachment differences impact how a person thinks and feels about their relationship, particularly in relation to distressing events in a relationship, and these appraisals in turn impact behavior, such as how one responds to conflict, as well as their perceived relationship satisfaction.

Perfectionism and Relationship Quality

Perfectionism, which also impacts cognitive appraisals of interpersonal events regarding expectations for oneself and for others, is a construct which may play an integral role in further explaining the cognitive influence of attachment systems on relationship quality. Similarly, empathy is an affective construct that may be one mechanism through which attachment differences influence relationship quality. Both of these constructs have been shown to be predictive of relationship quality variables.

Multidimensional Nature of Perfectionism

Burns (1980) was the first psychologist who attempted to measure perfectionism. In a seminal article in *Psychology Today*, Burns published the first perfectionism scale. The scale's 10 items reflected themes including shame, high expectations, "should" statements, fear of mistakes, and a belief that one must be perfect for others. All of the items represented irrational thoughts, and Burns identified dichotomous, "all or nothing" thinking as a hallmark

of perfectionists. Burns made a distinction between “a healthy pursuit of excellence” (p.34) and people who “strain compulsively and unremittingly toward impossible goals and measure their own worth entirely in terms of productivity and accomplishment” (p.34). This conceptualization of perfectionism includes irrational cognitions and conditional self-worth that is contingent on external achievements or approval from others. These components are consistent in much of the literature of perfectionism, as the studies below will highlight.

Frost, Marten, Lahart, and Rosenblate (1990), used factor analytic techniques and correlational analyses across four studies to explore the factor structure and construct validity of their theorized Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale. The samples were comprised of 232, 178, 72 and 106 female undergraduates. Data supported a reliable six-factor solution and the result was the Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (FMPS), comprised of the following subscales: Concern over Mistakes (the tendency to overreact to mistakes and perceive them as failure), Personal Standards (setting high standards and self-evaluating performance based on attainment of those standards), Doubts about Actions (feeling that projects or tasks are not completed adequately), Parental Expectations (feeling that one’s parents have set very high goals), Parental Criticism (feeling that one’s parents have been overly critical), and Organization (tendency to prefer order and organization). The overall perfectionism score obtained was highly correlated with the Burns perfectionism scale. This landmark study reinforces the multidimensional and irrational nature of perfectionism, but failed to examine the interpersonal nature, as the current study will.

Hewitt and Flett (1991), with a nearly identical goal, also conducted a series of studies to explore the multidimensional nature of perfectionism, using a different theory. The four studies included samples of 156 undergraduates; 1, 106 undergraduates, 263 psychiatric

patients; 104, 93, and 45 undergraduates; and 91 undergraduates. Results for the Hewitt-Flett Multidimensional Scale (HFMPs) supported a reliable three factor structure with three factors defined by authors as: Self-Oriented Perfectionism (SOP), which refers to the tendency to set high standards, strictly evaluate behavior, and strive for perfection for oneself, Other-Oriented Perfectionism (OOP), which refers to the tendency to impose perfectionistic standards upon others, and Socially-Prescribed Perfectionism (SPP) which refers to the belief that others impose high standards and strictly evaluate one's own performance. Self-Oriented perfectionism was found to be related to self-related constructs such as self-blame, high standards, and entitlement. Other-Oriented perfectionism was related to interpersonal constructs such as other-blame, authoritarianism, and dominance. Socially Prescribed perfectionism was related to other-blame, fear of negative evaluation, and approval from others. All scales were related to self-criticism. The results of this second landmark study in perfectionism provide further evidence that perfectionism is indeed multidimensional, with intrapersonal and interpersonal components. The current study will expand on these findings by examining how the interpersonal component of perfectionism may impact relationship quality.

Slaney, Rice, Mobley, Trippi, and Ashby (2001) sought to revise their original scale of individual perfectionism, the Almost Perfect Scale (APS). Participants responded to revised and rewritten items of the APS and to two major existing scales of perfectionism (e.g. HFMPs and FMPS), as well as measures of depression, self-esteem, worry, and social desirability. Using data from 806 college students, factor analyses supported a three-factor solution for the Almost Perfect Scale-Revised (APS-R), comprised of the following subscales: Discrepancy (feeling that one is not living up to expectations for oneself), High

Standards (possessing high standards for oneself) and Order (possessing a need for organization and order). The APS-R correlated in expected directions with other perfectionism scales and it was determined that the Discrepancy subscale represented the maladaptive or negative aspect of perfectionism, due to its correlations with negative indicators of adjustment such as low self-esteem and depression. Items such as “I am not satisfied even when I know I have done my best” and “I hardly ever feel that what I have done is good enough” characterize the Discrepancy subscale and highlight the rigid, unrealistic rules associated with self-worth that are held by perfectionists.

Stairs (2009) analyzed fifteen existing perfectionism scales in order to extract a common underlying factor structure that would encompass the multidimensional nature of perfectionism. Six hundred eighty-seven undergraduates were included in analyses and the data supported nine separate subscales which included: Order (preference for organization), Satisfaction (tendency to feel positive affect after accomplishing something), Details and Checking (tendency to check work to make sure there are no mistakes), Perfectionism toward Others (having high standards for others), and High standards (high standards for oneself), Black and White thinking about Tasks and Activities (tendency to not engage in tasks if one cannot do them perfectly), Perceived Pressure from Others (belief that others have high expectations for oneself), Dissatisfaction (belief that one is not meeting one’s standards), and Reactivity to Mistakes (tendency to react with negative affect when one has not done something perfectly). This study reinforces the irrational and interpersonal nature of perfectionism, but does not examine how these aspects may impact romantic relationship quality, as the current study will.

Interpersonal Dimensions of Perfectionism

Some researchers have focused specifically on the interpersonal nature of perfectionism, expanding on the ideas presented by Flett and Hewitt (1991). Flett, Russo, and Hewitt (1994) examined relations between perfectionism and coping as measured by constructive thinking. The sample consisted of 77 college students and results revealed that Socially Prescribed perfectionism was negatively associated with stereotypical thinking, positive emotional coping, and overall constructive thinking, while positively associated with categorical thinking, distrust of others, and superstitious thinking. More specifically, individuals with high scores in this scale reported the tendency to over-generalize negative outcomes and cognitively dwell on negative outcomes. These findings demonstrate that interpersonal perfectionism is associated with maladaptive irrational thinking and coping response, both of which are likely to negatively impact how an individual approaches conflict resolution and overall relationship satisfaction. This study did not, however, examine these findings within the context of relationships, which the current study will.

Hill, Zrull, and Turlington (1997) examined the association between perfectionism and interpersonal dynamics. Three hundred fifty-seven undergraduates filled out self-report measures of perfectionism, interpersonal characteristics and interpersonal problems. Other-Oriented perfectionism was associated with arrogant, dominant, and vindictive characteristics, whereas Socially Prescribed perfectionism was associated with arrogant and socially distant characteristics, as well as interpersonal maladjustment and distress. These findings reinforce the maladaptive effect interpersonal aspects of perfectionism may have on interpersonal relationships. Although this study did not examine relationship quality, characteristics found to be associated with Socially Prescribed perfectionism and Other-

oriented perfectionism are likely to have a negative impact on relationship quality. The current study will help fill that gap.

Few studies have examined the associations between interpersonal perfectionism and indicators of relationship quality. The following two studies will highlight how interpersonal perfectionism is associated with satisfaction and conflict resolution.

Habke, Hewitt, and Flett, (1999) examined associations between perfectionism and sexual satisfaction among 74 married or cohabitating couples (mean relationship length = 26.7 months). Other-Oriented and Socially Prescribed perfectionism were both negatively correlated with sexual satisfaction, and sexual satisfaction was positively correlated with relationship adjustment. The results of this study demonstrate the negative role that interpersonal aspects of perfectionism play in satisfaction of romantic relationships. The sample was small, however, and the current study will utilize a much larger sample.

Flett, Hewitt, Shapiro and Rayman (2001) examined perfectionism, relationship beliefs and behaviors among samples of 69 and 91 college students involved in dating relationships. Results revealed that Other-Oriented Perfectionism was associated with stronger relationship beliefs pertaining to attitudes about intimacy, and that Socially Prescribed Perfectionism was associated with the ELVN destructive problem solving responses of exit and neglect. Socially High perfectionist cognition was associated with self-conscious anxiety and obsessive preoccupations with one's partner. Finally, an individual's need to appear perfect to others was associated with emotional dependency, obsessive preoccupation, emotional dependency on partner, and low dyadic adjustment. This study highlights the maladaptive impact the interpersonal and cognitive aspects of perfectionism may have on romantic relationships, particularly on the type of conflict resolution strategies

that will be assessed in the current study. It also demonstrates correlations of interpersonal aspects of perfectionism with behaviors associated with insecure attachment (e.g. obsessive preoccupation, emotional dependency). The current study will expand on this idea but will include a measure of perfectionism that is more focused specifically on the perfectionism in romantic relationships.

Relationship Perfectionism

Wiebe and McCabe (2002) developed a measure, called Relationship Perfectionism Scale (RPS), to specifically tap the relationship aspects of perfectionism and examined the impact of relationship perfectionism on the maintenance of depression and aversive interpersonal behaviors. Hewitt and Flett's (1991) Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (HFMPs) was used as a model for development of the RPS. Factor analysis using 469 university students (mean age =24.6) resulted in a 14-item measure which taps rigid extreme, expectations and standards for oneself (Self-Directed Relationship Perfectionism) and for others (Other Directed Relationship Perfectionism) in close relationships. A second study utilized 55 female university students, half of whom were dysphoric and half of whom had no history of depression. A female friend of each participant filled out an instrument designed to measure interpersonal experiences with the participant. The subscales of the Relationship Perfectionism scale were correlated in expected directions with the HFMPs subscales, but did not overlap with them, suggesting that the RPS taps constructs that are distinct from the HFMPs. In addition, Other Directed Relationship Perfectionism was found to mediate the relationship between hostile interpersonal behavior and dysphoria, whereas Self-Directed Relationship Perfectionism did not. These results support the idea that high standards and expectations for others in relationships may lead to destructive interpersonal

behavior. The current study will expand on this idea by actually measuring the impact of relationship perfectionism on conflict styles and relationship satisfaction.

With efforts similar to that of Weibe and McCabe (2002), Shea, Slaney, and Rice (2006) also developed a scale to specifically measure perfectionism in relationships, a concept they called dyadic perfectionism. The items of the Almost Perfect Scale-Revised (Slaney, Rice, Mobley, Trippi, & Ashby, 1996) were revised to reflect expectations for a partner rather than expectations for the self and the resulting scale was entitled the Dyadic Almost Perfect Scale (DAPS). The purpose of this study was to test the psychometric properties of the DAPS and explore its relationships with relationship satisfaction and adult attachment. The first study utilized 398 university students and the data yielded a three-factor structure: Discrepancy (feeling like one's partner does not live up to one's expectations), High Standards (possessing high standards for one's partner) and Order (expecting one's partner to be neat and organized). High Standards positively predicted relationship satisfaction whereas Discrepancy negatively predicted relationship satisfaction and accounted for 26% of the variance in that construct. Study 2 utilized 280 undergraduates and results showed that attachment anxiety and avoidance were positively related to Discrepancy. Avoidance, however, was negatively associated with High Standards. This study showed that feeling like one's partner does not live up to one's expectations (Discrepancy) is positively related with both anxiety and avoidance, and negatively related to relationship satisfaction. These findings are in line with the current study's hypothesized relationships, but one limitation of these findings is that they did not conduct a mediation analysis to further explore attachment, relationship satisfaction, and unmet standards for relationships. The current study will fill that gap.

Relationship perfectionism and relationship quality. Lopez, Fonz-Scheyd, Morúa, and Chaliman (2006) explored the impact of dyadic perfectionism on relationship distress over a period of three months, above and beyond that predicted by adult attachment. One hundred sixteen undergraduates who were currently involved in a dating relationship (mean relationship length = 22 months) filled out self-report measures at time 1 and then at time 2, 11-12 weeks later. Dyadic perfectionism scores demonstrated adequate stability over the time interval, demonstrating that this trait is relatively stable. Both anxious and avoidant attachment scores were positively associated with the Discrepancy subscale of the DAPS. Anxiety, avoidance, and Discrepancy were all negatively related to relationship satisfaction but positively related to negative relationship events (e.g. getting into an argument, someone threatened to leave). Anxious and avoidant attachment styles and dyadic perfectionism uniquely predicted variance in relationship distress at time 2, with dyadic perfectionism adding unique variance above and beyond the contribution of attachment styles. This study highlights the positive correlation between insecure attachment and dyadic perfectionism and demonstrates their combined effects on relationship quality, which is consistent with the hypothesized relationships of the current study. The current study, however, will also explore the affective component of attachment on relationship quality by examining empathy.

The above studies examined the impact of relational aspects of perfectionism, and a conclusion drawn from the findings appears to be that it is not simply having high standards for a partner that results in poorer relationship satisfaction, but rather the perception that the partner is not meeting one's expectations that leads to negative outcomes. This would implicate having irrational or unrealistically high expectations for a romantic partner, or for the relationship itself, which cannot realistically be met, as one main contributor to negative

relationship quality. The following studies have examined the effects of specific irrational relationship beliefs for a relationship on relationship quality.

Epstein and Eidelson (1981) examined unrealistic beliefs about the self and relationships in 47 clinical couples as predictors for overall relationship satisfaction. Results showed that high expectations of self and need for approval were both negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction, whereas unrealistic relationship beliefs that partners cannot change, disagreement is destructive, and that partners should be able to “read each others’ minds” were all negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction. These results support the current hypotheses that irrational beliefs about one’s relationship will result in lower relationship satisfaction. Additionally, the relationship between unrealistic relationship beliefs and pessimistic views about the relationship enhances support for the idea that these beliefs may also lead to destructive conflict responses such as exiting the relationship or neglecting to work successfully through problems.

Metts and Cupach (1990) examined the association between dysfunctional relationship beliefs, problem-solving strategies and overall relationship satisfaction. Three hundred twenty-two college students who had been in a romantic relationship for at least one month participated in this study. Dysfunctional relationship beliefs were positively correlated with the ELVN destructive conflict styles of exit and neglect and negatively correlated with the constructive conflict style of voice. In particular, participants who endorsed the beliefs “disagreement is destructive” and “people cannot change” were more likely to respond with exit and neglect and to avoid using voice responses. Relationship satisfaction was negatively related to both dysfunctional beliefs and destructive conflict styles. In accordance with the

current study, this study also supports the link between irrational relationship beliefs, conflict resolution, and satisfaction.

In a similar study, Bushman (1998) examined associations between dysfunctional relationship beliefs, problem solving strategies, and satisfaction in relationships among one hundred fifty couples that had been in their relationship for at least six months. Findings showed that three dysfunctional beliefs (“disagreement is destructive”, “people cannot change”, and “mind reading is expected”) were related to ELVN destructive conflict techniques. Satisfaction was also negatively correlated with destructive conflict techniques. This study clearly demonstrates a link between irrational relationship beliefs and conflict resolution, which is in support of the current study’s aims. This study did not, however, examine the role that attachment may play in this process.

The above studies highlight clear negative effects of having unrealistically high expectations for a partner and irrational relationship beliefs on relationship quality. The belief that a partner is not meeting one’s expectations was also clearly positively linked with insecure attachment as well as destructive conflict resolution and lower relationship satisfaction. Thus, previous literature provides adequate support for the prerequisite conditions of the hypothesized relationship of adult attachment as a predictor of relationship quality, with unrealistic expectations for a partner and the relationship itself as mediators. The following section will review literature that will support the link between attachment, empathy, and relationship quality.

Empathy and Relationship Quality

Empathy was first defined by Carl Rogers as perceiving the internal experience of another as if he were that person, “without ever losing the ‘as if’ condition” (Rogers, 1959, p.

210). For example, a person can sense the pleasure of another and can perceive the cause of this feeling, but always must recognize that the experience is “*as if* I were pleased”. Without this recognition Rogers said that the state would no longer be empathic but one of identification.

Although many researchers have attempted to measure empathy as either a cognitive or affective state, Davis (1983) proposed a multidimensional approach and developed the *Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI)*, a measure of empathy that contains both cognitive and affective components. The IRI includes four separate dimensions. The dimension designed to tap into an individual’s cognitive empathy is perspective-taking (PT), which is the spontaneous tendency to adopt the viewpoint of others. The remaining three tap emotional empathy and are: fantasy (FS), imagining the feelings of fictional figures in books, movies or plays; empathic concern (EC), feeling sympathy, compassion and concern for others; and personal distress (PD), which is having feelings of unease or discomfort in reaction to the distressing emotions of others in tense or crisis situations. The convergent and discriminant validity of the IRI was demonstrated in a study with sample of 1354 undergraduate students. Findings of this study indicated that perspective-taking empathy was related to higher social competence and unselfish sensitivity to others, whereas Fantasy was essentially unrelated to social functioning. Empathic concern was positively related to selfless concern for others and emotional reactivity, but negatively related to dysfunctional interpersonal styles of boastfulness and egoism. Finally, personal distress was associated with higher levels of social dysfunction, lower levels of social competence and heightened emotional vulnerability (Davis, 1983). This study supports the multidimensional view of empathy and highlights EC

and PT as the two types of empathy most related to constructs that would lead to better social functioning.

Indeed, several studies have found perspective taking behaviors and empathic concern to be associated with interpersonal outcome variables. Feffer and Suchotliff (1966) examined the impact of “decentering” (defined as considering one’s behavior simultaneously from a different point of view) and interpersonal behavior. They theorized that an individual’s ability to decenter would facilitate modification of one’s own behavior in order to have a more successful interaction. Thirty-six undergraduate students were paired into dyads based on their ability to decenter and were evaluated on their ability to complete a task requiring cooperative social interaction. Higher scores on the social cooperation task were indeed correlated with higher decentering. This study is evidence that the ability to imagine the perspective of another person may facilitate cooperative social interaction, which is in line with the current study’s hypothesized relationships between empathy and constructive conflict resolution. The current study will, however, use a more direct measure of empathy and will specifically measure its impact on self-reported conflict resolution, rather than social cooperation. The following studies will provide support for the link between empathy and conflict resolution behavior.

Empathy and Conflict Resolution

Knudson, Sommers, and Golding (1980) examined partners’ perceptions of each others’ thoughts and feelings during simulated conflict and simulated decision-making interactions. Thirty-three couples (mean length of marriage =3.6 years) role-played a recent conflict as well as a recent decision-making interaction. Using videotaped recordings of the interactions, each partner was interviewed individually about their perceptions of the

interaction, and independent raters coded and categorized their responses as either avoiding or engaging the issue. Results showed that couples who were more accurate at perceiving each other's perceptions were more likely show engagement of the issue whereas those who avoided the issue were also those who did not have as much insight into each other's perceptions. The results of this study show that more perspective taking was associated with couple engagement during conflict resolution while less perspective taking was associated with avoidance during conflict resolution. These findings support the current study's hypotheses, which predict perspective taking to be positively related to constructive conflict resolution behaviors that include engaging in the issue (e.g. ELVN voice), rather than avoidant tactics (e.g. ELVN exit or neglect). The current study, however, will use a much larger sample and will also measure satisfaction in the relationship.

Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, and Lipkus (1991) examined ELVN constructive conflict resolution and its relations with partner perspective taking and empathic concern across three studies. A total of 498 undergraduates were surveyed, with a mean relationship length of 16 months. Results showed that self-reported constructive conflict resolution was positively associated with partner perspective taking, whereas self-reported destructive conflict resolution was negatively related to the empathy variable. The direct effects of perspective taking accounted for significant amounts of variance in conflict resolution. The authors also examined the relationship between constructive conflict resolution and couple distress level and findings indicated that couple distress was negatively related to constructive conflict resolution. In sum, these results demonstrate the role perspective taking plays in the predicting constructive conflict resolution and reiterate the notion that constructive conflict resolution is important for better relationship quality.

Empathy and Relationship Satisfaction

Other researchers have examined the link between empathy and overall relationship satisfaction. Franzoi, Davis, and Young (1985) examined the impact of perspective taking and self-disclosure on relationship satisfaction, using 131 college student heterosexual couples. Results showed that even when self-disclosure and length of the relationship were held constant, perspective taking positively predicted both male and female satisfaction. Follow-up analyses on the effect of these variables on conflict resolution showed that perspective taking was positively related to the use of a mutual, give-and-take approach to conflict resolution. As expected, this mutual approach to conflict was positively related to relationship satisfaction. These results show that perspective taking has a unique effect on relationship satisfaction, above and beyond the effects of other relationship variables, and that perspective taking is predictive of more constructive conflict styles, all of which are in line with the current study's rationale. This study, however, used only one item to measure conflict resolution whereas the present study will use a well-validated scale.

Davis and Oathout (1987) tested a model of romantic relationship satisfaction in which three types of empathy (EC, PT, and PD) were expected to predict specific relationship behaviors (e.g. good communication, warmth, positive outlook, even temper) and partner perceptions of those behaviors, which would ultimately predict a partner's relationship satisfaction. The sample included 264 heterosexual student couples, with relationship length ranging from 6 months or less to over 24 months. The results of the path analysis showed a number of significant paths from empathy variables to self-reported relationship behaviors and partner perceptions in the expected directions. The model explained 34-36% of the variance in relationship satisfaction, with EC exerting the biggest

influence on explained variance. This study highlights the positive influence EC and PT empathy may have on behaviors in romantic relationships and reinforces the predictive link the current study has proposed between empathy and relationship satisfaction. In addition, behaviors such as warmth and good communication are much more likely to result in more constructive conflict resolution techniques.

Long and Andrews (1990) examined the influence of perspective taking on relationship adjustment (Spanier, 1976). One hundred fifty-nine couples (mean length of marriage = 23.8 years), responded to the PT subscale of the IRI and also responded to the Self Dyadic Perspective Taking scale (SDPT) and the Other Dyadic Perspective Taking scale (ODPT). The SDPT contained items of the PT, which were revised to specifically measure perspective taking with a romantic partner, whereas the ODPT contained items that were designed to assess respondents' perceptions of the perspective taking ability of their partners. Results showed that PT, SDPT, and ODPT all explained a significant amount of variance in relationship adjustment. However, researchers pointed out that the proportion of variance in relationship adjustment explained by perspective taking is small and that more research is needed to uncover additional personality variables that may be contributing to this variance. This study demonstrates a clear link between perspective taking empathy and relationship quality, which is consistent with the aims of the current study. In addition, the current study will attempt to fill the gap in the literature mentioned by the authors by examining attachment and relationship perfectionism as additional predictors of relationship quality.

The previous two sections reviewed empirical links between relationship perfectionism and relationship quality as well as empathy and relationship quality. The following sections will demonstrate empirical and conceptual support for relationship

perfectionism and empathy as mediators in the relationship between attachment and relationship quality.

Mediating Effects

Baron and Kenny's (1986) pre-requisite conditions for examining a mediating effect require a significant relationship between the predictor and the outcome variable, a significant relationship between the mediator and the outcome variable, and finally a significant relationship between the predictor and the mediator. The previous sections have covered the first two of these conditions, with establishing the links between attachment and relationship quality variables as well as links between the proposed mediators, relationship perfectionism and empathy, and relationship quality. The following section will outline empirical and conceptual support for the links between attachment and the proposed mediators of relationship perfectionism and empathy, fulfilling the last pre-requisite condition for examining mediating effects.

Attachment and Perfectionism

Early perfectionism researchers (Hamachek, 1978) proposed that maladaptive perfectionism is preceded by early care giving environments of either non-approval or inconsistent approval, which is very similar to the environments that have been linked to the development of avoidant and anxious attachments (Ainsworth, Bleahar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). Hamachek (1978) describes conditional positive approval as a situation in which parents only show love and approval when the child has met certain conditions, such as completing schoolwork or having an external success. Under these conditions, children learn that there are conditions to one's self-worth and that love and support will only be obtained when certain conditions are met.

Roberts, Gotlib, and Kassel (1996) examined the dysfunctional attitudes about the self and low self-esteem as mediators in the relationship between attachment and symptoms of depression. Dysfunctional attitudes about the self were conceptualized as reflecting maladaptive contingencies of self-worth, such as “I’m nothing if a person I care about doesn’t love me”. Researchers theorized that depressive symptoms in insecure adults may be the result of failure to meet contingencies of self-worth, followed by low self-esteem. Samples from three separate studies were comprised of college students ($n = 152, 218, 121$) and results revealed greater secure attachment was associated with fewer dysfunctional attitudes, increased self-esteem, and fewer depressive symptoms. Dysfunctional attitudes and low self-esteem nearly fully mediated the relationship between attachment and non-clinical depression. This study highlights the current study’s postulations that attachment is related to rigid contingencies for self-worth. The current study, however, will take these findings a step further and examine whether these unrealistic contingencies of self-worth lead insecurely attached people to place unrealistic contingencies on their romantic partners and their relationships.

Brennan and Morris (1997) examined the relationship between attachment style, self-esteem, and patterns of feedback-seeking from romantic partners. The sample was comprised of 1,407 college students, two-thirds of whom were in a relationship at the time. Results showed anxious and fearful avoidant attachment were both negatively correlated with self-liking and self-competence. Analyses also revealed that secure attachment was best predicted by high self-liking, but dismissing avoidant attachment was best predicted by high self-competence. These findings illustrate the idea that positive self-concept in avoidant individuals is more dependent on external self-accomplishments rather than on internal

positive self-appraisal. This is consistent with the current study's suppositions that secure attachment is associated with positive self-views while insecure attachment is associated with unrealistic views of self-worth, some of which are contingent of external accomplishments, similar to those held by perfectionists. In addition, the secure group reported greater tendency to seek positive feedback from partners than their insecure counterparts. This is consistent with the current study's argument that attachment styles influence cognitions in relationships and a tendency to disconfirm or confirm existing ideas about self and others. The current study will expand on these ideas by examining the link between attachment style and rigid, unrealistic views for one's partner and one's relationship.

Wei, Mallinckrodt, Russell, and Abraham (2004), following the same conceptual reasoning as Roberts, Gotlib, and Kassel (1996) examined maladaptive perfectionism as a mediator in the relationship between attachment and depressive mood. Three hundred ten undergraduate college students completed self-report measures of attachment, depression, hopelessness, and perfectionism. Results showed that 36% of the variance in maladaptive perfectionism was explained by attachment anxiety and avoidance and 49% of the variance in depressive mood was explained by attachment anxiety and maladaptive perfectionism. Overall, maladaptive perfectionism partially mediated the relationship between anxiety and depressed mood and fully mediated the relationship between attachment avoidance and depressed mood. These findings are in support of the current study's aims because they provide evidence that perfectionist attitudes are related to insecure attachment and that perfectionism explains the impact of attachment on a negative outcome. The current study will attempt to expand on the mediating function of perfectionism for attachment in relation

to other negative outcomes, such as poor relationship satisfaction and destructive conflict resolution.

Attachment, Relationship Perfectionism, and Relationship Quality

Research findings suggest that the common thread between attachment and perfectionism likely extends into the expectations and beliefs people hold about romantic relationships. For instance, Pietromonaco and Carnelley (1994) examined the relations between attachment style and individual perceptions and responses to romantic relationships. The sample was comprised of 227 undergraduates (mean age = 20.3 years). Participants filled out attachment measures and also responded to one of three hypothetical relationship scenarios. Each scenario characterized a partner who demonstrated secure, anxious or avoidant attachment behaviors. Findings revealed that secure attachment was associated with higher self-esteem and also more optimism about relationships than both anxious and avoidant attachment groups. The majority of participants reported that the relationship scenario with the secure partner was most likely to result in marriage, as compared to the relationship scenarios depicting insecure partners. All participants, regardless of attachment style, perceived that conflict would be more likely with the insecure relationship scenarios. This study supports the current study's hypotheses in that it demonstrates the link between secure attachment and healthy expectations about relationships. These findings also strengthen the link between insecure attachment in relationships and expectations about levels of conflict. The present study will take these findings a step further by examining the direct impact of attachment on expectations about relationships and partner, and further exploring how these relations might impact conflict resolution style.

Feeney (1995) examined the relationship between emotional control (defined as hiding and smothering one's feelings) and attachment among 72 couples in a university setting. Couples filled out measures of attachment, emotional control and perceptions of partner emotional control. Findings showed that insecure couples (both partners were insecurely attached) self-reported and perceived greater emotional control in partners than did other couples, whereas secure couples self-reported the least amount of emotional control. Individual attachment anxiety was positively correlated with control of anger, whereas more secure individual attachment was associated with less overall emotional control. Both anxiety and avoidance were associated with perceptions that partners would like respondents to control anger and sadness. Taken together, these findings show the irrational belief that negative emotions should not be exchanged between romantic partners is more likely to be held by insecurely attached individuals than securely attached people. This supports the current study's aims of showing that insecure attachment is predictive of irrational beliefs about relationships. Although findings were informative, this study did not directly measure the relationship between attachment and irrational relationship beliefs, which is a gap the current study will fill.

Carnelley and Rowe (2007) examined the effects of priming attachment security on relationship expectations and views of the self, and in particular investigated whether repeated priming of security may result in more long-term effects on these outcomes. Sixty-four undergraduates (mean age=21.18 years) were randomly assigned to a condition which primed attachment security or one in which they were given a neutral prime. Participants filled out outcome measures at Time 1, received either secure attachment primes or control primes at Times 2, 3, and 4, and finally filled out the outcome measures again at Time 5.

Results revealed that the primed secure group reported significantly more positive relationship expectations and more positive self-views at Time 5, whereas there was no change in relationship expectations or self-views of the control group at Time 5. In addition, the secure prime condition showed significant decreases in attachment anxiety at time 5 and showed a significant linear trend toward more attachment security. Taken together, these results highlight the influence of attachment security on positive relationship expectations and are in line with the current study's hypotheses regarding the link between adult attachment and expectations of one's relationship. This study did not, however, examine the conflict resolution that may also be affected by relationship expectations, which is a gap that the current study will attempt to fill.

In sum, the above studies describe both conceptual and empirical links between attachment and perfectionist beliefs about self and about romantic relationships, via common roots in irrational beliefs. There is also support for perfectionism as a mediator between insecure attachment and negative outcomes.

Attachment and Empathy

Empathy requires that an individual step outside of his/her own perspective and imagine the perspective of another. Theorists have speculated that this process begins early in development, similar to that of attachment and perfectionism (Zahn-Waxler & Robinson, 1995). Geangu, Benga, Stahl, and Striano (2010) investigated the presence of emotional sharing (identified as a precursor to empathy) as measured by the contagious cry phenomenon beyond the first few days of birth. A sample of 121 full term male and female infants ranging in age from one month to 9 months were exposed to a recording of a 3-month-old infant crying and their emotional reactions were measured. All infants, regardless

of age or sex, cried longer and with significantly more intensity during the cry stimulus condition than during the silent baseline. Similarly, all infants, regardless of age or sex, expressed more anger on their faces during the cry stimulus condition. Authors concluded that the presence of similar emotional reactions among infants of all ages shows that contagious cry reactions occur above and beyond any developmental differences between infants on emotion regulation or an increasingly better ability to differentiate between the self and others. Thus, even if the older infants knew the crying was not their own, it created an emotional reaction that could be construed as the beginning stages of empathy.

Spinrad and Stifter (2006), using a longitudinal study design, investigated maternal responsiveness as predictors of toddler empathic response. In a sample of 98 infant-mother pairs, maternal responsiveness was measured when the infants were 10 months old and toddler empathic response was measured at 18 months of age. Empathic response was measured toward three “individuals”: a stranger, a crying baby doll, and the toddler’s mother. Findings showed that maternal responsivity was positively related to concerned attention by the toddler in both the stranger and mother empathy conditions, while maternal responsivity was negatively related to personal distress in the mother and baby doll conditions. Since Hoffman (1982) claims that empathy requires an individual’s personal distress to evolve into other-oriented concern, these findings have implications in terms of a common developmental link between healthy attachment and empathy. Infants who received more responsiveness from mothers, which is a precursor for secure attachment, demonstrated empathic response. In contrast, infants who received less maternal responsiveness, a precursor for insecure attachment, demonstrated more personal distress, which would suggest that these infants are not transferring their emotional reactions into concern for others.

In terms of attachment and empathy in adulthood, the aversion to emotional closeness with others that avoidant individuals tend to possess would likely hinder their ability and motivation to take on the emotional perspective of a romantic partner. Anxious individuals, on the other hand, may be more interested in speculating about their partners' perspectives because they desire the emotional closeness this behavior might promote. It is likely, however, that anxious individuals may have difficulty leaving their own desire for emotional closeness out of their assessment of their partners' thoughts and feelings. In other words, although the desire to be empathic with partners may be present in anxious individuals, their ability to step out of their own perspective and accurately perceive their partners' experiences may be hindered by their insecurity and fear of abandonment. The following sections will review the empirical support for this conceptual reasoning.

Bekendam (1997) examined the relationships between attachment, affect regulation, alexithymia, and empathy among 167 male parolees who were in group treatment for impulse disorders. Results indicated that low levels of both anxiety and avoidance (secure attachment) were positively correlated with empathic concern and perspective taking but negatively correlated with personal distress. This study highlights the direct relationship between attachment style and EC and PT empathy, providing support for the current study's hypothesized relationships. The current study will examine these relationships among a sample of individuals in relationships and will explore their effects on relationship quality.

Using Davis's IRI, Joireman, Needham, and Cummings (2001) studied the relationships between attachment constructs and PT, EC, and PD in two studies, consisting of 134 and 261 college students, respectively. The results from both studies consistently indicated that more trust and comfort with closeness (secure attachment) was associated with

greater empathic concern and perspective taking. These findings support the current study's hypothesis that less secure attachment (anxiety and avoidance) will likely have an inverse relationship with empathic concern and perspective taking. The current study will take it a step further and examine these relationships within the larger relationship between attachment and relationship quality.

While the above studies are evidence of the link between attachment and empathy, the following studies will show that this link may also mediate the links between attachment and indicators of relationship quality.

Attachment, Empathy, and Relationship Satisfaction

Tucker and Anders (1999) examined attachment style, accuracy of romantic partners' perceptions, and relationship satisfaction among 61 undergraduate heterosexual dating couples. Participants each filled out a series of self-report instruments with their own experiences and perceptions in mind, and were then told to fill out the instruments the way they thought their partners would answer the questions. As expected, both anxious and avoidant attachment were associated with lower relationship satisfaction. Anxious attachment was associated with less accurate perceiving of partner's love, faith, and dependability, whereas avoidant attachment was associated with a greater tendency to underestimate a partner's faith. Mediation analyses showed that less accurate perception of partner's love mediated the link between anxious attachment and lower relationship satisfaction. These findings support the current study's hypothesized mediating relationship between attachment, empathy, and relationship satisfaction. However, the sample was small and only perspective taking empathy was examined. The current study will examine both perspective taking and empathic concern empathy with a much larger sample.

Osland (2001) explored empathy as a possible mediator in the link between attachment and relationship satisfaction among 602 participants. Results revealed that secure attachment positively predicted relationship satisfaction and that this relationship was enhanced when self-dyadic perspective taking was high. Self-dyadic perspective taking also partially mediated the effects of attachment on relationship satisfaction. This study is further support for the current study's hypothesis of empathy as a mediator between attachment and relationship quality. The current study will not only examine relationship satisfaction as an indicator of relationship quality, but will examine conflict resolution as well.

Attachment, Empathy, and Conflict Resolution

Corcoran and Mallinckrodt (2000) examined the relationship between adult attachment and conflict resolution, while exploring perspective taking as a mediating variable among a sample of 124 college students. Secure attachment was associated with mutual approaches to conflict, avoidant attachment was associated with a dominating approach to conflict, and anxious attachments were associated with an obliging conflict style. Perspective taking was strongly positively correlated with secure attachment and negatively associated with avoidant types of attachment. Perspective taking mediated the negative relationship between avoidance and more adaptive approaches to conflict style (e.g., mutual and integrating). The relationship between avoidance and dominating conflict style was strongly mediated by lack of perspective taking. These results are in line with the current study's aims of demonstrating that the relationship between secure attachment and constructive forms of conflict style may be mediated by perspective taking, whereas insecure attachment may be related to more destructive forms of conflict resolution via a lack of perspective taking. This study may have lacked power, however, due to the small sample size they used to conduct a

structural equation modeling analysis, and this could be one reason no significant relationships emerged for anxious attachment variables. The current study will enhance power by using a much larger sample.

The above studies are evidence that secure attachment is generally associated with greater EC and PT empathy, and that empathy is a viable mediator in the relationship between attachment and relationship satisfaction as well as between attachment and conflict resolution.

The Present Study

This study used an experimental design to examine the relationship between attachment and relationship quality, with empathy and relationship perfectionism as mediators. Based on the attachment perspective and relevant literature discussed in previous sections, the following hypotheses and research question were advanced:

1. Upon determining that negative relationships exist between attachment anxiety and avoidance and the relationship quality variables, and that empathy is positively related to the relationship quality variables, empathy will serve as a partial mediator in the relationship between attachment and relationship quality variables of constructive conflict resolution and satisfaction.
2. When attachment style is primed, the mediating effects of empathy on attachment and relationship quality will be greater in magnitude than when attachment style is not primed.
3. Upon determining that a negative relationship exists between relationship perfectionism and the relationship quality variables, relationship perfectionism will

- serve as a partial mediator in the relationship between attachment and constructive conflict resolution as well as for the relationship between attachment and satisfaction.
4. When attachment style is primed, the mediating effects of relationship perfectionism on attachment and relationship quality variables will be greater in magnitude than when attachment style is not primed.

Research Question. What is the relationship between attachment dimensions and the active vs. passive dimension of the exit-voice-loyalty-neglect typology?

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Participants

All demographic data is presented in Table 1. The final sample was $N = 549$, comprised of 75.9% female ($n = 415$) and 24.1% male ($n = 132$). No participants identified as transgender and two participants did not answer this item. The ages of participants ranged from 18-71 years old, with a mean age of 30.56 ($SD = 11.42$) and a mode of 25.00 years old. In terms of sexual orientation, 370 participants identified as heterosexual females (67.4%), 125 identified as heterosexual males (22.8%), 27 identified as bisexual (4.9%), 18 identified as lesbian (3.3%), 7 identified as gay (1.3%), 1 identified as queer/questioning (.2%), and 1 participant did not indicate sexual orientation (.2%). Several participants marked more than one answer for sexual orientation; if a participant indicated both same and opposite sex attractions, sexual orientation was coded as bisexual. Collapsing the sexual minority participants into an LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, questioning) category, the sample is 9.6% sexual minority. In terms of ethnicity, 449 participants identified as White (81.8%), 25 identified as Black/African-American (4.6%), 23 identified as Asian/Pacific Islander (4.2%), 21 identified as Latino/a/Hispanic (3.8%), 20 identified as Biracial (3.3%), 5 identified as Middle Eastern (.9%), 2 identified as Native American (.4%), and 1 participant marked "Other" (.2%). Three participants did not reply to the ethnicity item. Of those in the biracial category who specifically indicated more than one ethnicity/race, $n = 6$ Latino/a/White, $n = 5$ Native American/White, $n = 1$ Latino/a/Native American, $n = 5$ Caucasian/White/Asian, and $n = 1$ Black/White.

In the level of education category, the sample was highly educated, with 153 participants indicating some college (27.9%), 144 indicating a college degree (26.2%), 134 indicating a graduate degree (24.5%), 103 indicating some graduate school (18.8%), 10 indicating a high school degree (1.8%), 1 indicating some high school (.2%), and 1 answering “Other” (.2%). The participant that marked “Other” reported being “currently in school.” In terms of relationship status, the sample was largely bimodal, with 257 participants indicating that they were in a dating relationship (46.8%) and 240 indicating that they were married/partnered (43.7%). Forty-eight participants indicated that they were engaged (8.7%) and 1 participant indicated “Other” (.2%). The mean amount of time in the current relationship is 85.18 months ($SD = 106.25$) (7.09 years), mode = 15.00 months (1.25 years). Time in the relationship ranged from 1 month to 47.6 years. Seventy-three participants did not answer the item for amount of time in current relationship. The mean number of past relationships was 4.62 ($SD = 4.87$), mode = 3, with a range of 0-50 past relationships. For participants that indicated a range of past relationships, the average of the two numbers was used. Some participants indicated a short answer that was not able to be coded (e.g. “several”, “too many to count”) and some indicated that they only included “serious” relationships.

In terms of geographic regions, participants indicated the state where they were currently filling out the survey; 23 U.S. states were represented in the sample. These results were somewhat multi-modal, with 310 participants in Missouri (56.5%), 89 in New York (16.2%), and 55 in Kansas (10.0%). Participants indicated being in the following other states, in ascending order: Massachusetts ($n = 13$), California ($n = 12$), Texas ($n = 9$), Arkansas ($n = 7$), Florida ($n = 7$), North Carolina ($n = 6$), Illinois ($n = 4$), Oklahoma ($n = 4$),

Pennsylvania ($n = 4$), Nevada ($n = 3$), Maryland ($n = 3$), Virginia ($n = 2$), Washington ($n = 2$), Wyoming ($n = 2$), Nebraska ($n = 2$), New Jersey ($n = 2$); presence in each of the following states was indicated by 1 participant: Colorado, Connecticut, Washington DC, Delaware, Idaho, Michigan, Mississippi, New Mexico, and South Dakota. One participant indicated “U.S.” as his/her current state. In terms of professional status, the sample was comprised mostly of students, with $n = 207$ undergraduate students (37.7%), $n = 162$ graduate students (29.5%), and 188 non-students (34.2%). Participants were also asked to indicate how they found out about the survey. Recruitment methods included academic listserv $n = 110$ (20.0%), heard from a friend $n = 129$ (23.5%), in-person recruitment by the researcher $n = 147$ (26.8%), and social network $n = 66$ (12.0%). Forty-seven participants indicated “Other” for this item; this category was comprised of participants who indicated more than one method of recruitment and those who indicated that they heard from a teacher. Fifty participants did not answer this item.

Table 1

Demographic Statistics

Categorical Variables (Total $N=549$)

Gender

Female	$n = 415$ (75.9%)
Male	$n = 132$ (24.1%)

Table continues

Categorical Variables (Total N=549)

Sexual orientation

Heterosexual female	<i>n</i> = 370 (67.4%)
Heterosexual male	<i>n</i> = 125 (22.8%)
Bisexual	<i>n</i> = 27 (4.9%)
Lesbian	<i>n</i> = 18 (3.3%)
Gay	<i>n</i> = 7 (1.3%)
Queer/Questioning	<i>n</i> = 1 (.2%)

Ethnicity

White	<i>n</i> = 449 (81.8%)
Black/African American	<i>n</i> = 25 (4.6%)
Asian/Pacific Islander	<i>n</i> = 23 (4.2%)
Latino/Hispanic	<i>n</i> = 21 (3.8%)
Middle Eastern	<i>n</i> = 5 (.9%)
Other	<i>n</i> = 1 (.2%)
Native American	<i>n</i> = 2 (.4%)
Biracial	<i>n</i> = 20 (3.3%)

Latino/White	<i>n</i> = 6
Native American/White	<i>n</i> = 5
Latino/Native American	<i>n</i> = 1
White/Asian	<i>n</i> = 5
Black/White	<i>n</i> = 1

Table continues

Categorical Variables (Total N=549)

Level of Education

Some college	$n = 153$ (27.9%)
College degree	$n = 144$ (26.2%)
Graduate degree	$n = 134$ (24.5%)
Some graduate school	$n = 103$ (18.8%)
High school diploma	$n = 10$ (1.8%)
Some high school	$n = 1$ (.2%)
"Currently in school"	$n = 1$ (.2%)

Relationship status

Dating	$n = 257$ (46.8%)
Married/partnered	$n = 240$ (43.7%)
Engaged	$n = 48$ (8.7%)
Other	$n = 1$ (.2%)

Professional Status

Undergraduate students	$n = 207$ (37.7%)
Graduate students	$n = 162$ (29.5%)
Non-students	$n = 188$ (34.2%)

Table continues

Categorical Variables (N=549)

Recruitment method

Listserv	<i>n</i> = 110 (20.0%)
Friend	<i>n</i> = 129 (23.5%)
In-person by researcher	<i>n</i> = 147 (26.8%)
Social network	<i>n</i> = 66 (12.0%)
"Other"	<i>n</i> = 47 (8.56%)

Continuous Variables

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Mode	Range
Age (in years)	30.6	11.4	25.0	18-71
Time in current relationship	85.2 mos.	106.3 mos.	15 mos.	1 mo. - 47.6 yrs.
Number of past relationships	4.6	4.9	3	0-50

The criteria for participation in this study included being over 18 years of age and being in a romantic relationship for at least one month. The one month criterion was used by other researchers in several previous studies. For instance, Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, and Lipkus (1991) used this criterion for participants in their pioneer study that first tested the theory of constructive conflict resolution, upon which the measure of this construct that will be used in this study is based. In addition, Tucker and Anders (1999), in a study of empathy as a mediator between attachment and relationship satisfaction, also implemented one month in a relationship as the criterion for their participants recruitment.

The target population is people over the age of 18 in romantic relationships in the United States. To reach the required sample size, participants were recruited via the paper-and-pencil method in UMKC classrooms and also through email and social networking websites. Detailed information regarding the recruitment will be presented in a later section. Given that most relationship quality studies are limited to Caucasian, heterosexual participants (Karney & Bradbury, 1995), special effort was made to recruit those who are non-Caucasian as well as those who are in same-sex relationships in order to increase the representativeness of the sample. Specifically, special effort was made to recruit through UMKC offices serving specific minority groups, such as the African-American History and Culture House and the LGBTQIA Office. In order to avoid flooding the sample with traditional age students (aged 18-22 years) who may have limited experience in romantic relationships, a special effort was made to recruit UMKC faculty, staff, graduate students and non-traditional age students. All participants were treated in accordance with the “Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct” (American Psychological Association, 1992).

Measures

Attachment

Experiences in Close Relationships Scale. The Experiences in Close Relationships Scale (ECRS, Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998) was used to measure adult attachment. The ECRS was developed from responses of over 1,000 undergraduate students to over 300 items extrapolated from then most commonly used adult attachment self-report measures. The scale measures two orthogonal dimensions of attachment *Anxiety* and *Avoidance*, with each subscale containing 18 items. The Anxiety subscale taps fears of being abandoned, whereas

the Avoidance subscale taps fears of intimacy. An example of an item from the Anxiety subscale is “*My desire to be very close sometimes scares people away.*” An example of an item from the Avoidance subscale is “*Just when my partner starts to get close to me I find myself pulling away.*” Participants were instructed to rate their response based on how they experience romantic relationships in general, using a fully-anchored, 7-point Likert scale (1 = *disagree strongly*, 2 = *disagree somewhat*, 3 = *disagree slightly*, 4 = *neutral/mixed*, 5 = *agree slightly*, 6 = *agree somewhat*, 7 = *agree strongly*). Brennan et al. reported internal reliability (coefficient alpha) of .91 for the Anxiety subscale and .94 for Avoidance. The authors provided evidence for convergent and divergent validity by providing significant correlations with a variety of other measures of attachment, measures of preferences about sexual behavior, and touch scales in the expected directions. Lopez and Fonz-Scheyd (2008), in an ethnically diverse sample of undergraduates (32% White; 20% Black; 21% Asian; 19% Hispanic, 3% Multiracial, 2% Native American) reported internal reliability coefficients of .91 for Anxiety and .90 for Avoidance subscales. In the current study, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .91$ for Anxiety and $\alpha = .92$ for Avoidance.

Empathy

Interpersonal Reactivity Index. The Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI, Davis, 1980) consists of four separate empathy subscales but only two of them (i.e., PT and EC), each containing 7 items, were used for this study. The perspective taking (PT) scale assesses the tendency of the respondent to adopt the psychological perspective of others and the empathic concern (EC) subscale assesses the respondent’s tendency to experience feelings of warmth, compassion and concern for others. A sample item from the PT subscale is, “*I sometimes try to understand my friends better by imagining how things look from their*

perspective.” An example from the EC scale is, “*I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than I.*” Participants were instructed to rate their responses from 0 (“Does not describe me well”) to 4 (“Describes me very well”).

Davis (1980) reported internal reliabilities of subscales as ranging from .75 to .78 for PT with .70 to .72 for EC, and test-retest reliabilities ranging from .62 to .71. Davis (1983) investigated the discriminant validities of the subscales by comparing each subscale to measures of social competence, self-esteem, emotionality, and sensitivity to others. The PT subscale was positively related to better social functioning and higher self-esteem, and less closely related to emotionality than were the other three subscales. The EC subscale was less related to social functioning, but strongly associated with a concern for and an emotional sensitivity to other peoples’ thoughts, feelings, and experiences. The EC subscale was also highly positively correlated with the Mehrabian and Epstein (Mehrabian & Epstein, 1972) emotional empathy scale, yielding correlations between the .55 and .65 range. Taken together, the author concluded that these subscales are valid measures for the intended constructs. Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, and Lipkus (1991), in a sample of 498 undergraduates (mean age = 19 years) reported reliability coefficients of .84 and .76 for the EC and PT subscales, respectively. In the current study, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .77$ for EC and $\alpha = .79$ for PT.

Relationship Perfectionism

This construct was assessed by one subscale from the Dyadic Almost Perfect Scale (DAPS, Shea, Slaney, & Rice, 2006) and two subscales from the Relationship Beliefs Inventory (RBI, Eidelson & Epstein, 1982).

Dyadic Almost Perfect Scale. The DAPS is a 26-item measure of relationship perfectionism that was developed using undergraduates ($n = 389$) from Mid-Atlantic and Midwest universities, ranging in age from 17 to 47 (mean age = 20 years, $SD = 3.41$) and 18 to 38 years (mean age = 26 years, $SD = 6.28$ years), respectively. The sample was approximately 90% European-American. Two hundred twenty-three participants were currently in a relationship (mean length = 33.56 months, median = 24 months, mode = 7 months). Of those who were not currently in a relationship, 155 answered questions by referring to a past relationship (mean length of past relationships = 14 months). The DAPS consists of three subscales, Discrepancy (feeling like one's partner does not live up to one's expectations), High Standards (possessing high standards for one's partner) and Order (expecting one's partner to be neat and organized). Only the Discrepancy subscale (16 items) was considered with this study given its positive correlations with anxiety ($r = .37$) and avoidance ($r = .42$). An example item from the Discrepancy subscale is "*My partner's best never seems to be good enough for me.*" Participants were instructed to rate their responses using a fully-anchored, 7-point Likert scale (1 = *disagree strongly*, 2 = *disagree somewhat*, 3 = *disagree slightly*, 4 = *neutral/mixed*, 5 = *agree slightly*, 6 = *agree somewhat*, 7 = *agree strongly*).

Shea, Slaney, and Rice reported Discrepancy subscale reliability coefficients of .93 and .94 for two samples of undergraduates. Lopez, Fonz-Scheyd, Morúa, and Chaliman (2006), in an ethnically diverse sample of undergraduates (31% White; 21% Black; 28% Asian; 17% Hispanic, 3% Multiracial) reported an internal reliability coefficient of .93 for Discrepancy. As evidence of construct validity, Discrepancy on the DAPS is moderately correlated ($r = .30$) with the Discrepancy subscale of the Almost Perfect Scale (APS), which

measures feeling like one is not living up to personal expectations for oneself. DAPS Discrepancy is also correlated ($r = .23$) with Other-Oriented perfectionism, which is the concept of having unrealistic expectations for significant others. Support for external criterion validity exists with Discrepancy predicting low relationship satisfaction ($r = .24 - .47$) (Shea, Slaney, & Rice, 2006). In the current study, Cronbach's $\alpha = .94$.

Due to the fact that there was no psychometric data available on the DAPS for a non-college student population, a principal component analysis was run to confirm the unidimensionality of this scale. The extraction of one factor explained 54.64% of the variance and the scree plot was strongly suggestive of a 1 factor solution with a steep drop-off from eigenvalue 1 (8.7240) and eigenvalue 2 (1.045). In the component matrix, all items contained values $> .50$. With these results, it was concluded that the unidimensionality of the DAPS for a non-college student population was acceptable.

Relationship Beliefs Inventory. The Relationship Beliefs Inventory (RBI, Eidelson & Epstein, 1982) is 40-item instrument that measures unrealistic beliefs about intimate relationships. It contains five subscales: Disagreement Is Destructive (D), Mindreading Is Expected (M), People Cannot Change (C), Sexual Perfectionism (S), and the Sexes are Different (MF). Given their positive correlations with destructive conflict resolution (Bushman, 1998; Metts & Cupach, 1990), only the first two scales were included in this study. An example of an item from Disagreement is Destructive is "*When my partner and I disagree, I feel like our relationship is falling apart.*" An example item from the Mindreading Is Expected subscale is "*A partner should know what you are thinking or feeling without you having to tell.*" Participants were asked to respond to the statements on a

Likert scale of 0 (“I *strongly* believe that item is false”) to 5 (“I *strongly* believe that item is true”).

Epstein and Eidelson (1981) reported reliability coefficients of .86 and .83 for D and M in a sample of 47 heterosexual couples (mean relationship length = 7 years) who were in couples counseling. Eidelson and Epstein (1982) reported reliability coefficients of .81 and .75 for D and M, respectively, using a sample of 100 couples (48 clinical and 52 nonclinical). Metts and Cupach (1990), in a sample 322 college students who were in dating relationships, reported reliability coefficients of .76 for D and .64 for M. The mean age of the sample was 32 years. As evidence of construct validity, the D and M subscales have significant positive relationships ($r = .45$) with subscales on an irrational belief measure that taps irrational beliefs about self and are both negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction ($r = -.27, -.22$, respectively) and marital adjustment ($r = -.57$ and $-.24$, respectively) (Epstein & Eidelson, 1981; Eidelson & Epstein, 1982).

In the present study, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .68$ for D and $.72$ for M. For the sake of improving internal consistency and for maintaining parsimony in analyses, it was useful to consider combining the items of the D and M subscales into one measure. A principal component analysis was run to ensure the underlying structure of these 12 items was suitable to be used as one factor. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy = $.825$, which is considered acceptable (Field, 2005). The initial extraction explained 30.94% of the variance with one factor. Factors 2 and 3 explained an additional 11.29% and 8.49% of the variance, but the scree plot was consistent with a 1 factor solution. Running the principal component analysis a second time, with a 1 factor extraction, 30.59% of the variance was explained. Upon examining the component matrix, the component values ranged from .498

to .679, except those that were associated with reversed items (three items). The loading values for the reversed items ranged from .342 to .373. The principal component analysis with a 1 factor extraction was re-run, excluding the three reversed items. In examining the eigenvalues for the factor analysis of D and M, the scree plot was supportive of a 1 factor solution with a steep drop-off from eigenvalue 1 (3.388) and eigenvalue 2 (1.131). With this new 9 item, 1 factor solution, 37.65% of the variance was explained. Within the component matrix, the lowest value was .556. The scree plot was again supportive of a 1 factor solution and Cronbach's $\alpha = .79$. Based on the results of these analyses, it was determined that the 9-item RBI-DM scale may be used as one factor. All subsequent analyses using this variable were based on 9 item version of the scale and the new scale will be referred to as RBI-DM, indicating that it is only measuring irrational relationship beliefs associated with mindreading and believing that disagreement is destructive.

Relationship Satisfaction

Relationship Assessment Scale. The Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS, Hendrick, 1988) is a widely used 7-item unidimensional instrument of relationship satisfaction. An example of an item of the RAS is "*In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?*" Participants were instructed to respond to the items on a 1 (low satisfaction) to 5 (high satisfaction) Likert scale. In samples of 125 undergraduates and 57 dating couples, evidence of convergent and divergent validity was demonstrated with the RAS having positive correlations with investment in a relationship ($r = .45$), commitment ($r = .55$), self-disclosure to lover ($r = .41$), passionate love ($r = .60, .50$), and altruistic love ($r = .36, .21$), while exhibiting negative correlations with game-playing love ($r = -.30, -.53$). Showing evidence of construct validity, it was also highly positively correlated ($r = .80$) with

the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS), another widely used measure of relationship adjustment. Hendrick (1988) reported an internal reliability coefficient of .86. Metts and Cupach (1990), using a sample of 322 undergraduates who had been dating at least 1 month reported internal reliability of .88. In the present study, Cronbach's $\alpha = .81$.

Conflict Resolution

Constructive Conflict Resolution Scale. The constructive conflict resolution scale (Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991) is a 16-item self-report instrument designed to measure the degree to which an individual will respond to a destructive behavior exhibited by a romantic partner with a constructive response. The instrument contains four indices that measure the type of response an individual might have when a partner commits an act that is rude or inconsiderate. These indices are combined in random order with the four types of possible responses: *Exit*, an active, destructive response (e.g. "When my partner says something really mean, I threaten to leave him/her."); *Neglect*, a passive, destructive response (e.g. "When my partner does something thoughtless, I avoid dealing with the situation."); *Voice* an active, constructive response (e.g. "When my partner is rude to me, I try to resolve the situation and improve conditions."), and *Loyalty*, a passive, constructive response (e.g. "When my partner behaves in an unpleasant manner, I forgive my partner and forget about it."). Participants were instructed to rate their responses on a scale from 0 (*I never do this*) to 8 (*I constantly do this*). Summing up voice and loyalty indices and reverse scoring the exit and neglect indices yielded a total score of constructive conflict resolution. For exploratory purposes of answering the research question advanced by this study, the same principle used by Rusbult et al., (1991) to create the constructive conflict resolution scale was applied to obtain a measure of total active conflict resolution. This was done by

summing voice and exit indices and reverse scoring the loyalty and neglect indices. This scale will be referred to as Active.

Rusbult et al., (1991) demonstrated convergent and discriminant validity of the indices by showing that the structured measure of constructive reactions was positively correlated with an open-ended measure of constructive reactions ($r = .63$) and that a structured measure of destructive reactions was positively correlated with an open-ended measure of destructive reactions ($r = .46$), in three samples totaling 498 undergraduates. Similarly, the open-ended measure of destructive reactions was negatively correlated with both measures of constructive reactions ($r = -.80, -.33$), as was the structured measure of destructive reactions ($r = -.48, -.20$). Reliability coefficients for the constructive indices (voice plus loyalty) were $r = .80, .75$, and $.78$. For destructive indices (exit plus neglect) these alphas were $.92, .91$, and $.92$. As further evidence of construct validity, among a sample of 47 dating couples, Rusbult et al. also reported that greater constructive conflict resolution behavior was associated with reduced self-report of destructive reactions and with enhanced self-report tendencies of constructive reactions. Crowley (2006) reported an internal reliability coefficient of $.83$ for total constructive conflict resolution in a sample of 207 married heterosexual individuals and Kumashiro, Finkel, and Rusbult (2002) reported internal reliability of $.78$ for their sample of 79 married heterosexual individuals (mean age = 34 years). For the present study, Cronbach's $\alpha = .76$ for Constructive Conflict Resolution and $.47$ for Active.

Demographics

A brief demographic questionnaire asked participants to indicate their gender, race/ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, number of months in current romantic relationship, number of past relationships and time spent in those relationships, marital status, and level of

education. Since some recruitment was done via email and social networking websites, participants were also instructed to indicate their current location (U.S. state), in order to track how many participants outside of the local Kansas City, MO area are included, and to test for any possible differences among participants due to this difference in location. Participants were asked if they were UMKC students and were asked to specify whether they were at the undergraduate or graduate level. Participants were also asked through which method they heard about the study.

Procedure

Recruitment

Participants were recruited using three methods: email, social networking sites, and traditional pencil-and-paper classroom methods. Appropriate classroom instructors at UMKC were contacted to obtain permission to administer the study in their classes. The first page of the study described the purpose of the study as investigating the processes underlying the quality of romantic relationships. It contained an informed consent document that described any risks or benefits of participating in the study, and the contact information for the UMKC Counseling Center in the event that participants experienced any unintended distress as a result of their participation. Also included was a sentence asking participants to seek counseling at another venue, if the UMKC Counseling Center was not an available resource for them. Participants were assured that their participation was completely voluntary and anonymous and that they may withdraw their consent at any time. The consent form also informed participants that as compensation for participation, they may enter into a raffle to win one of fifteen \$20 gift cards to Amazon.com.

Participants were also recruited via email, by contacting appropriate administrators for various academic programs at UMKC or other professional organizations and obtaining permission to post the invitation email onto their listservs. The invitation email was identical to the first page of the paper-and-pencil version of the study. The email included a link to a website that was created to host the on-line surveys. Volunteers clicked on the link, which took them to the first page of the site, which contained another copy of the informed consent, followed by a button that took participants to the first page of the study.

Snowball sampling was also utilized by posting the link on the social networking site, Facebook. The link was accompanied by a description of the study's purpose. When participants clicked on the link they were taken to the same first page of the study as the participants recruited via email.

Randomization

In order to generate the three separate conditions of (a) discomfort related to romantic relationships, (b) neutral discomfort, or (c) no discomfort, participants were randomly assigned to receive one of three priming conditions. For the paper-and-pencil participants, this occurred by having the three versions of the surveys shuffled into a stack, and distributed throughout the room. For the email and Facebook recruited participants, the link that participants clicked on included random link generator coding that randomly sent participants to one of three study sites representing the three priming conditions.

Discomfort related to romantic relationships. In this condition, participants were asked to first fill out the ECRS, IRI, RBI-DM, and DAPS. These measures were counterbalanced across conditions in order to control for order or sequencing effects. This was to ensure that participants who received the DAPS first, for example, would not differ

systematically from those who filled it out last. In order to address this, within each condition there were three different versions of the survey, differing in the order that the measures were presented. Participants received a version of the survey at random, using the same methods described above in the Randomization section. Following these measures, participants were given the following instructions:

“Recall a recent conflict that you had with your romantic partner that did not get resolved. Please write down 2-3 sentences describing this event.”

“Recall with as much detail as you can remember, any feelings and emotions you had, as well as what you were thinking during the conflict. Remember the tones of voice you and your partner used, what you said, and any physical reactions you can remember (for example, if your heart rate increased, your palms got sweaty, etc.) Please write 3-4 sentences describing this experience as specifically as you can.”

In order to ensure that this prime had the intended effect, especially in cases where participants provided only a minimal written response, the validity check item shown below was also included:

Overall my experience with this event was (a) positive, (b) neutral, (c) negative. This item was used for purposes of determining whether the participant was primed with discomfort in a relationship.

This procedure is similar to the one employed by Cox et al., (2008), who also asked participants to write about their emotions following a stimulus intended to prime for attachment, and by Carnelly and Rowe (2007) who asked participants to write as part of a prime for attachment security. Similarly, in an attachment study conducted by Sutin and Gillath (2009), participants were asked to generate sentences following instructions to think about either a positive or negative experience in a romantic relationship.

Following the priming stimulus, participants filled out the RAS and the constructive conflict resolution measure, which were counterbalanced across conditions in order to control for ordering or sequencing effects. Lastly, participants were given the demographics form. After this, participants were thanked for their participation. In the online version of the study, participants were given the option of clicking on a link that would take them to the raffle page. Participants were asked to provide their names and contact information for entry into the raffle. In the paper-and-pencil version, participants were verbally thanked for their participation in the study and were given the option of writing their names and contact information on a separate sheet of paper for entry into the raffle. All participants were assured that their raffle contact information was in no way linked to their responses on the study questionnaires.

Neutral discomfort. In this condition, the research protocol was identical to the one described above with the only exception of the priming condition. Participants were asked to first fill out the ECRS, IRI, RBI-DM, and DAPS. Following these measures, participants were given the following instructions:

“Recall your most recent visit to a dentist. Please write down 2-3 sentences describing this event.”

“Recall with as much detail as you can remember, any feelings and emotions you had, as well as what you were thinking during the visit. Remember the tones of voice you and your dentist used, what you said, and any physical reactions you can remember (for example, if your heart rate increased, your palms got sweaty, etc.) Please write 3-4 sentences describing this experience as specifically as you can.”

The following validity check item was also included: Overall my experience with this event was (a) positive, (b) neutral, (c) negative. This item was used for purposes of

determining whether the participant was primed with discomfort unrelated to a romantic relationship.

This procedure was employed by Cox et al., (2008) for the control group in a study examining the predictive effects of attachment on terror management. Researchers asked participants to write about a dental visit experience as an aversive experience parallel to priming mortality salience.

Following the priming stimulus, participants filled out the RAS and the constructive conflict resolution measure, which were counterbalanced across conditions in order to control for ordering or sequencing effects. Lastly, participants were given the demographics form.

No discomfort. In this condition, the research protocol was identical to the one described above with the only exception of the priming condition which is described below. Participants were asked to first fill out the ECRS, IRI, RBI-DM, and DAPS. Following these measures, participants were given the following instructions:

“Recall a recent dinner or lunch at a restaurant that you had with an acquaintance or co-worker. Please write down 2-3 sentences describing the event.”

“Recall with as much detail as you can remember, any feelings and emotions you had, as well as what you were thinking during the dinner. Remember the tones of voice you and your acquaintance used, what you said, and any physical reactions you can remember (for example, if your heart rate increased, your palms got sweaty, etc.) Please write 3-4 sentences describing this experience as specifically as you can.”

The following validity check item was also included: Overall my experience with this event was (a) positive, (b) neutral, (c) negative. This item was used for purposes of ensuring that the participant was not primed with discomfort.

This procedure is similar to the one employed by Carnelly and Rowe (2007) who asked participants to write about their last visit to the grocery store or about their route to

work in order to generate a comparison group for a group that had been primed with secure attachment.

Following the priming stimulus, participants filled out the RAS and the constructive conflict resolution measure, which were counterbalanced across conditions in order to control for ordering or sequencing effects. Lastly, participants were given the demographics form.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Preliminary Analyses

Data collection

Initial data collection yielded a total of 785 participants, of which 114 were obtained via paper and pencil recruitment and 672 were obtained via online recruitment. Fifteen of the paper and pencil surveys were immediately rejected from inclusion due to being ineligible for study inclusion or failure to complete large portions of the survey. Upon further inspection, another 13 were rejected due to incorrect answers on validity checks or failure to adequately complete the prime items on the survey. Within the online sample, 17 participants failed the validity checks, 33 did not adequately fill out the prime items, and 152 were either ineligible or failed to complete large portions of the survey. Of the participants who chose not to fill out the prime, 28 were from Condition 1, which asked participants to answer a question intended to elicit discomfort related to romantic relationships. In Conditions 2 and 3, which asked participants to answer a question intended to elicit neutral discomfort and no discomfort, the primes were skipped by 5 and 8 participants, respectively. Judging from this large discrepancy, it was determined that the choice of whether or not to fill out the prime was clearly influenced by the condition that participants were in, and so it was decided to not include any participant who skipped the priming items. After rejecting these participants, the final sample of paper and pencil data combined with online data was comprised of 556 participants, which is the equivalent of retaining 70.8% of the original sample. In Condition 1, 82 out of 258 participants were rejected, leaving 176 participants, with an attrition rate of 31.7%. In Condition 2, 77 out of 262 participants were rejected,

leaving 185 participants, with an attrition rate of 29.4%. In Condition 3, 56 out of 244 participants were rejected, leaving 188 participants, with an attrition rate of 22.9%. A chi square was run to examine whether there were differences in the number of participants who were rejected based on the experimental condition. This test was significant, $X^2(6) = 28.01$, $p < .001$. However, given the large sample size and the fact that many participants were rejected due to reasons unrelated to experimental condition, such as not meeting study inclusion criteria or missing data prior to reaching the experimental prompt, analyses were continued as planned.

Assumptions

A test of the assumptions of linearity, multicollinearity and homoscedasticity proved to be satisfactory. Multivariate normality was examined and seven cases were excluded listwise due to Mahalanobis distance exceeding the critical chi square value, reducing the sample size to 549. Upon checking for univariate normality, it was discovered that Constructive Conflict Resolution (CCRS) had a kurtosis of 19.00, while Discrepancy had a kurtosis of 12.38 and a skewness of 8.81. A square root transformation improved all variables and it was decided that the transformed variables would be used for the main analyses.

Power analysis

According to Cohen (1992), when a α value is set for .01 with an expected power of .80, in order to obtain a medium effect size in multiple regression analyses with three independent variables consisting of six total levels, a minimum of 134 participants is needed. This study utilized an experimental design consisting of three groups, which increased the minimum number of participants to 402, with roughly 134 needed for each group. Data

collection yielded samples of $n = 176$ (Condition 1), $n = 185$ (Condition 2), $n = 188$ (Condition 3) and exceeded these minimum requirements.

Internal validity checks

In order to ensure that there were no main effects of the demographic variables on the dependent variables, a MANOVA was run with obtained categorical demographic variables on the two dependent variables, constructive conflict resolution (CCRS) and satisfaction. Many of the relevant categorical demographic variables contained highly unequal cells, with females outnumbering males almost 3:1, heterosexual females outnumbering heterosexual males 3:1, heterosexual participants outnumbering sexual minorities 9:1, and with Whites outnumbering racial minorities roughly 8:2. In addition, the final data set was comprised of 84.5% online formats and 15.5% paper-and-pencil. Due to these inequalities, the aforementioned variables were excluded from the analysis, as an assumption of MANOVA is equal cell sizes (Field, 1995). The relationship status variable also contained unequal groups and so the dating and engaged categories were collapsed to create a two-level variable: married/partnered vs. dating/engaged. The education variable, also unequal, was collapsed into groups of: no college degree, college degree, some graduate school, and graduate degree. Any participants whose responses could not be clearly categorized into level of education (e.g. "Currently in school"), were not included in this analysis. The final set of factors in this analysis included education and relationship status. Using Pillai's Trace as the indicator for multivariate significance, none of the included categorical demographic variables emerged as having a significant multivariate effect on any of the dependent variables; relationship status $F(2) = 2.29, p = .102, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .009$, level of education $F(6) = 1.01, p = .417, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .006$. However, the observed power for this analysis was only .405 for level of education and

.465 for relationship status. Without an observed power of $< .80$, there is not enough evidence to conclude that these variables had a significant effect.

In order to ensure there were no effects due to the order of the scales or due to recruitment method on independent variables or mediators, a MANOVA was run with version of survey completed and recruitment method as factors and with anxiety, avoidance, PT, EC, RBI-DM and discrepancy as dependent variables. Version referred to which of the four versions of the survey a participant received. In order to create equal groups for the recruitment method variable, “social networking” and “other” were collapsed to make one category comprised of people who were recruited via a social network and via other means. Using Pillai’s Trace as the indicator for multivariate significance, recruitment method emerged as having a significant multivariate effect, $F(24) = 1.64, p = .027, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .027$. An examination of the individual tests of between subject effects revealed that recruitment method had a significant main effect on PT, $F(3) = 1.28, p = .006, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .026$. There were no significant multivariate effects of version, $F(24) = 1.17, p = .259, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .020$, nor were there any significant interaction effects of version x recruitment, $F(72) = .834, p = .839, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .016$.

In order to ensure that randomization was successful and the three experimental groups were equal, a series of ANOVAs were run with the grouping variable (i.e., Condition) on the following demographic variables: age, length of relationship, and number of past relationships. None of these relationships were significant: Age $F(2) = 1.33, p = .266, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .005$, Length of relationship $F(2) = .806, p = .447, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .003$, Number of past relationships $F(2) = .379, p = .684, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .001$. A MANOVA with Condition as the factor and the two attachment variables as dependent variable was also run, in order to ensure

that the groups were not systematically different in terms of attachment style. Using Pillai's Trace as the indicator for multivariate significance, Condition did not have a significant multivariate effect, $F(4) = .826$, $p = .509$, partial $\eta^2 = .003$. Finally, two chi square tests (displayed in Table 2) were run in order to test the distribution of the categorical variables gender and relationship status (married/partnered vs. non-married/partnered). Neither gender, $X^2(2) = 1.49$, $p = .475$, nor relationship status, $X^2(2) = 1.299$, $p = .522$, were significant. Taken together we can conclude that randomization was successful and the three experimental groups are not statistically different from one another on these variables.

Table 2

Chi Square Tests of Between Group Differences by Condition

	Condition 1	Condition 2	Condition 3	TOTAL
Married/partnered	83	75	82	240
Unmarried/partnered	93	107	106	306
TOTAL	176	182	188	546

$X^2(2) = 1.229$, $p = .522$

	Condition 1	Condition 2	Condition 3	TOTAL
Female	138	139	138	415
Male	37	45	50	132
TOTAL	175	184	188	547

$X^2(2) = 1.488$, $p = .475$

Main Analyses

Examining the Conditions for the Main Effect

Examining Path C. Due to the high volume of analyses in this section and the risk of inflated Type 1 error, alpha was set at .01 for all analyses described below. Hypothesis 1 proposed that upon determining that negative relationships exist between attachment (anxiety and avoidance) and the relationship quality variables (constructive conflict resolution and relationship satisfaction), and that empathy is positively related to the relationship quality variables, empathy will serve as a partial mediator in the relationship between attachment and relationship quality variables of and satisfaction. Hypothesis 3 proposed that upon determining that negative relationships exist between attachment and the relationship quality variables, and that relationship perfectionism is negatively related to the relationship quality variables, relationship perfectionism will serve as a partial mediator in the relationship between attachment and relationship quality variables of constructive conflict resolution and satisfaction. To examine the proposed mediated relationships in hypotheses 1 and 3, I began with Step 1 of the Baron and Kenny (1986) regression approach. This step involves examining path c, which is the path from the predictor to the dependent variable without considering the mediator (Figures 1 and 2).

To examine path c of these models, a bivariate correlation matrix of all measured variables, using the entire data set of $N = 549$, and a correlation matrix for each condition, were obtained. Results (displayed in Table3) revealed that when considering the entire data set as a whole, anxiety and avoidance were both significantly negatively correlated with constructive conflict resolution ($r = -.315, p < .001, r = -.397, p < .001$) and relationship satisfaction ($r = -.338, p < .001, r = -.516, p < .001$), respectively.

Table 3

Means, Standard Deviations and Bivariate Correlations of Avoidance, Anxiety, EC, PT, RBI-DM, Satisfaction, CCRS^a, and Discrepancy^a (N=549)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Avoidance	-							
2. Anxiety	.369***	-						
3. EC	-.105*	.055	-					
4. PT	-.100*	-.123**	.410***	-				
5. RBI-DM	.238***	.478***	-.074	-.180***	-			
6. Satisfact.	-.516***	-.338***	.055	.048	-.277***	-		
7. CCRS ^a	-.397***	-.315***	.135**	.257***	-.365***	.429***	-	
8. Discrep. ^a	.430***	.409***	-.072	-.136***	.384***	-.586***	-.465***	-
<i>Mean</i>	2.35	3.2	4.05	3.8	2.02	4.16	2.49	1.41
<i>SD</i>	.914	1.072	.554	.56	.562	.669	.19	.296

Note . EC = Empathic Concern, PT = Perspective Taking, RBI-DM = Irrational relationship beliefs associated with disagreement and mindreading, Satisfact. = Satisfaction, CCRS = Constructive Conflict Resolution, Discrep. = Discrepancy.

^aIn order to more closely approximate normality, Discrepancy and CCRS were transformed with \sqrt{X}
 $*p < .05$. $**p < .01$. $***p < .001$.

The bivariate correlation matrix for Condition 1 (displayed in Table 4) revealed similar findings with regards to path c, showing that anxiety and avoidance were both significantly negatively correlated with constructive conflict resolution ($r = -.346, p < .001, r = -.428, p < .001$) and relationship satisfaction ($r = -.484, p < .001, r = -.592, p < .001$), respectively.

Table 4

Condition 1 Means, Standard Deviations and Bivariate Correlations of Avoidance, Anxiety, EC, PT, RBI-DM, Satisfaction, CCRS^a, and Discrepancy^a (N=176)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Avoidance	-							
2. Anxiety	.496***	-						
3. EC	-.128	.055	-					
4. PT	-.172*	-.146	.379***	-				
5. RBI-DM	.349***	.466***	-.075	-.206**	-			
6. Satisfaction	-.592***	-.484***	.083	.149*	-.397***	-		
7. CCRS ^a	-.428***	-.346***	.03	.233**	-.358***	.425***	-	
8. Discrepancy ^a	.478***	.444***	-.077	.230**	.468***	-.628***	-.480***	-
<i>Mean</i>	2.42	3.27	4.07	3.82	2.02	4.16	2.48	1.44
<i>SD</i>	.976	1.12	.583	.543	.591	.672	.203	.31

Note . EC = Empathic Concern, PT = Perspective Taking, RBI-DM = Irrational relationship beliefs associated with disagreement and mindreading, CCRS = Constructive Conflict Resolution

^aIn order to more closely approximate normality, Discrepancy and CCRS were transformed with \sqrt{X}

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

Similarly, the bivariate correlation matrix for Condition 2 (displayed in Table 5) showed that anxiety and avoidance were both significantly negatively correlated with constructive conflict resolution ($r = -.297, p < .001, r = -.473, p < .001$) and relationship satisfaction ($r = -.309, p < .001, r = -.509, p < .001$), respectively.

Table 5
Condition 2 Means, Standard Deviations and Bivariate Correlations of Avoidance, Anxiety, EC, PT, RBI-DM, Satisfaction, CCRS^a and Discrepancy^a (N=185)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Avoidance	-							
2. Anxiety	.366***	-						
3. EC	-.112	-.008	-					
4. PT	-.115	-.179*	.386***	-				
5. RBI-DM	.282***	.451***	-.057	-.145*	-			
6. Satisfac.	-.509***	-.309***	.129	.037	-.243**	-		
7. CCRS ^a	-.473***	-.297***	.192**	.315***	-.406***	.478***	-	
8. Discrep. ^a	.452***	.405***	-.084	-.062	.344***	-.608***	-.487***	-
<i>Mean</i>	2.31	3.11	4.03	3.75	1.99	4.23	2.49	1.39
<i>SD</i>	.913	1.08	.517	.568	.533	.664	.20	.258

Note. EC = Empathic Concern, PT = Perspective Taking, RBI-DM = Irrational relationship beliefs associated with disagreement and mindreading,

Satisfac.= Satisfaction, CCRS = Constructive Conflict Resolution , Discrep.=Discrepancy

^aIn order to more closely approximate normality, Discrepancy and CCRS were transformed with \sqrt{X}

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

Finally, the bivariate matrix for Condition 3 (displayed in Table 6) was consistent with the findings of Conditions 1 and 2, showing that that anxiety and avoidance were both significantly negatively correlated with constructive conflict resolution ($r = -.301, p < .001, r = -.258, p < .001$) and relationship satisfaction ($r = -.213, p < .01, r = -.452, p < .001$), respectively.

Table 6

Condition 3 Means, Standard Deviations and Bivariate Correlations of Avoidance, Anxiety, EC, PT, RBI-DM, Satisfaction, CCRS^a, and Discrepancy^a (N=188)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Avoidance	-							
2. Anxiety	.216**	-						
3. EC	-.077	.108	-					
4. PT	-.015	-.059	.460***	-				
5. RBI-DM	.213**	.520***	-.092	-.202**	-			
6. Satisfact.	-.452***	-.213**	-.030	-.016	-.185*	-		
7. CCRS ^a	-.258***	-.301***	.200**	.217**	-.342***	.393***	-	
8. Discrep. ^a	.348***	.369***	-.064	-.131	.335***	-.525***	-.430***	-
Mean	2.31	3.23	4.07	3.86	2.06	4.11	2.5	1.42
SD	.853	1.02	.564	.567	.564	.67	.167	.293

Note. EC = Empathic Concern, PT = Perspective Taking, RBI-DM = Irrational relationship beliefs associated with disagreement and mindreading,

Satisfac.= Satisfaction, CCRS = Constructive Conflict Resolution, Discrep.=Discrepancy

^aIn order to more closely approximate normality, Discrepancy and CCRS were transformed with \sqrt{X}
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

To further examine these hypotheses, I ran two separate multiple regression analyses, for each condition, with anxiety and avoidance entered together as predictor variables and one of the two dependent variables as the criterion variable.

Within Condition 1, with anxiety and avoidance as predictors and *constructive conflict resolution* as the criterion variable, the model was significant, $F(2) = 22.58$, $p < .001$ with an adjusted R^2 value of .198, which indicated that attachment explained approximately 19.8% of the variance in self-reported constructive conflict resolution behavior. The beta weights indicated that avoidance ($\beta = -.341$, $p < .001$) was a significant predictor, but anxiety ($\beta = -.177$, $p = .025$) was not significant at the .01 level (same in all sequential analyses) in the model. With anxiety and avoidance as predictors and *satisfaction* as the criterion variable, the model was significant $F(2) = 56.813$, $p < .001$ with an adjusted R^2 value of .391, which

indicated that attachment explained approximately 39.1% of the variance in relationship satisfaction. The beta weights indicated that avoidance ($\beta = -.466, p < .001$) and anxiety ($\beta = -.252, p < .001$) were both significant predictors in the model.

Within Condition 2, with anxiety and avoidance as predictors and *constructive conflict resolution* as the criterion variable, the model was significant, $F(2) = 28.46, p < .001$ with an adjusted R^2 value of .232, which indicated that attachment explained approximately 23.2% of the variance in self-reported constructive conflict resolution behavior. The beta weights indicated that avoidance ($\beta = -.421, p < .001$) was a significant predictor, however anxiety ($\beta = -.139, p = .049$) was not significant in the model. With anxiety and avoidance as predictors and satisfaction as the criterion variable, the model was significant, $F(2) = 34.018, p < .001$, with an adjusted R^2 value of .267, which indicated that attachment explained approximately 26.7% of the variance in relationship satisfaction. The beta weights indicated that avoidance ($\beta = -.457, p < .001$) was a significant predictor while anxiety ($\beta = -.138, p = .046$) was not significant in the model.

Within Condition 3, with anxiety and avoidance as predictors and *constructive conflict resolution* as the criterion variable, the model was significant, $F(2) = 12.52, p < .001$ with an adjusted R^2 value of .111, which indicated that attachment explained approximately 11.1% of the variance in self-reported constructive conflict resolution behavior. The beta weights indicated that avoidance ($\beta = -.207, p = .004$) and anxiety ($\beta = -.237, p = .001$) were both significant predictors in the model. With anxiety and avoidance as predictors and *satisfaction* as the criterion variable, the model was significant, $F(2) = 25.41, p < .001$ with an adjusted R^2 value of .210, which indicated that attachment explained approximately 21.0% of the variance in relationship satisfaction. The beta weights indicated that avoidance

($\beta = -.425, p < .001$) was a significant predictor in the model. However, anxiety ($\beta = -.122, p = .070$) was not significant in predicting relationship satisfaction in Condition 3.

These results partially support path c of hypotheses 1 and 3. These regression analysis findings are presented in Tables 7 and 8 separated by the two criterion variables and organized by the three conditions. It appears that for self-reported constructive conflict resolution behavior, avoidance is a significant predictor across conditions, while anxiety is only a significant predictor in Condition 3 (at the .01 level). For relationship satisfaction, avoidance is again a significant predictor across conditions, while anxiety is only significant in Condition 1. These findings will be explored in more detail in later sections, but seem to provide some preliminary support for Hypothesis 2.

Table 7

Results of Testing Path C for Hypotheses 1 and 3 on CCRS^a

Condition	IV	B	SE	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>R</i> ²	Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
1											
	Avoidance	-.071	.016	-.341	-4.369	<.001	.207	.198	22.58	2	<.001
	Anxiety	-.032	.014	-.177	-2.267	.025					
2											
	Avoidance	-.092	.015	-.421	-6.005	<.001	.240	.232	28.46	2	<.001
	Anxiety	-.026	.013	-.139	-1.984	.049					
3											
	Avoidance	-.040	.014	-.207	-2.92	.004	.120	.111	12.52	2	<.001
	Anxiety	-.039	.012	-.237	-3.337	.001					

Note. CCRS = Constructive Conflict Resolution, IV = independent variable

^aIn order to more closely approximate normality, CCRS was transformed with \sqrt{X}

Table 8

Results of Testing Path C for Hypotheses 1 and 3 on Satisfaction

Condition	IV ^b	B	SE	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>R</i> ²	<i>Adjusted R</i> ²	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
	1										
	Avoidance	-.320	.047	-.466	-6.826	<.001	.398	.391	56.81	2	<.001
	Anxiety	-.151	.041	-.252	-3.689	<.001					
	2										
	Avoidance	-.333	.050	-.457	-6.665	<.001	.275	.267	34.02	2	<.001
	Anxiety	-.085	.042	-.138	-2.01	.046					
	3										
	Avoidance	-.334	.053	-.425	-6.337	<.001	.218	.210	25.41	2	<.001
	Anxiety	-.082	.045	-.122	-1.822	.070					

^bIndependent variable

Examining Path A, Hypothesis 1. The second step of Baron and Kenny's regression approach to mediation involves running a regression to show that the predictor is related to the mediator (path a) (displayed in Figures 1 and 2). With alpha set at .01, the bivariate correlations from the entire data set of $N = 549$ (Table 3) revealed that avoidance was not significantly related to EC ($r = -.105, p = .014$) or PT ($r = .100, p = .019$). Anxiety was significantly positively correlated with PT ($r = -.123, p = .004$) but not EC ($r = .055, p = .201$). In Condition 1 the correlation matrix (Table 4) showed that avoidance was not significantly related to EC ($r = -.128, p = .090$) or PT ($r = -.172, p = .023$), Inconsistent with the findings from the entire data set, anxiety was not significantly related to EC ($r = .055, p = .466$) or PT ($r = -.146, p = .054$). Condition 2 was consistent with Condition 1, with the correlation matrix (Table 5) showing no significant relationships between avoidance and EC ($r = -.112, p = .129$) or PT ($r = -.115, p = .118$), as well as no significant relationships between anxiety and EC ($r = -.008, p = .912$) or PT ($r = -.179, p = .015$). Similarly, the correlation matrix for Condition 3 (Table 6) showed no significant relationships between avoidance and EC ($r = -.077, p = .296$) or PT ($r = -.015, p = .843$), as well as no significant relationships between anxiety and EC ($r = .108, p = .140$) or PT ($r = -.059, p = .423$). Preliminary findings showed that recruitment method had a significant effect on PT, and so it is possible that the lack of significant correlations between attachment and PT in each condition was due to this effect. In order to examine this further, I ran three regressions with attachment predicting PT, one for each condition, with recruitment method entered in step 1 (Tables 9, 10 and 11). Although avoidance was not significantly correlated with PT in the full data set correlation matrix, I left it in the regression model because my hypotheses are examining the impact of attachment as a whole on relationship quality. For this reason the attachment variables will

not be separated in any of the analyses. With an insignificant correlation between EC and anxiety, and no preliminary findings to suggest that this was influenced by another variable, it was unnecessary to continue examining EC for mediation.

In Condition 1, with recruitment entered as a covariate in step 1, anxiety and avoidance entered as predictor variables in step 2, and PT as the criterion variable, the full model was not significant at step 1 $F(1) = .244, p = .622$ or at step 2 $F(3) = .617, p = .415$. This included an adjusted R^2 value of $-.008$. In Condition 2, with recruitment entered as a covariate in step 1, anxiety and avoidance entered as predictor variables in step 2, and PT as the criterion variable, the full model was not significant at step 1 $F(1) = .172, p = .679$ or at step 2 $F(3) = 2.293, p = .080$. This included an adjusted R^2 value of $.021$.

In Condition 3, with recruitment entered as a covariate in step 1, anxiety and avoidance entered as predictor variables in step 2, and PT as the criterion variable, the full model was not significant at step 1 $F(1) = .703, p = .403$ or at step 2 $F(3) = .446, p = .720$. This included an adjusted R^2 value of $-.009$. These regression findings are presented in Tables 9, 10, and 11, separated by condition. Taken altogether, these results are not supportive of Hypothesis 1, which expected significant positive relationships between attachment and empathy variables. These results also exclude PT and EC from being viable mediators in the relationship between attachment and the criterion variables of relationship satisfaction and constructive conflict resolution. There is no need to examine Path B of this model, which would examine the relationship between empathy and the criterion variables.

Table 9

Condition 1 results of testing Path A for Hypothesis 1 on PT.

	IV ^b	B	SE	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	ΔR^2	Adjusted R^2	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Step 1										
	Recruitment	.016	.033	.043	.494	.622		-.006	.244 ^c	.622
Step 2										
	Recruitment	.023	.034	.060	.660	.511	.014	-.008	.671 ^d	.415
	Avoidance	-.045	.054	-.084	-.836	.405				
	Anxiety	-.025	.050	-.053	-.513	.609				

Note: PT = Perspective Taking

^bIndependent variable

^c*df*=1

^d*df*=3

Table 10

Condition 2 results of testing Path A for Hypothesis 1 on PT.

	IV ^b	B	SE	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	ΔR^2	Adjusted R^2	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Step 1										
	Recruitment	-.012	.029	-.031	-.414	.679		-.005	.172 ^c	.679
Step 2										
	Recruitment	-.012	.029	-.031	-.421	.674	.036	.021	2.293 ^d	.080
	Avoidance	-.042	.049	-.068	-.856	.393				
	Anxiety	-.081	.041	-.154	-1.951	.053				

Note: PT= Perspective Taking

^bIndependent variable

^c*df*=1

^d*df*=3

Table 11

Condition 3 results of testing Path A for Hypothesis 1 on PT.

	IV ^b	B	SE	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	ΔR^2	Adjusted R^2	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Step 1										
	Recruitment	-.026	.031	-.062	-.839	.403		-.002	.703 ^c	.403
Step 2										
	Recruitment	-.027	.031	-.065	-.863	.389	.004	-.009	.446 ^d	.720
	Avoidance	-.004	.050	-.005	-.071	.943				
	Anxiety	-.033	.043	-.058	-.764	.446				

Note: PT = Perspective Taking

^bIndependent variable

^c*df*=1

^d*df*=3

Examining Path A, Hypothesis 3. The bivariate correlations from the entire data set of $N = 549$ (Table 3) revealed that avoidance was significantly positively related to both RBI-DM ($r = .283, p < .001$) and discrepancy ($r = .430, p < .001$). Similarly, anxiety was significantly positively correlated with RBI-DM ($r = .478, p < .001$) and discrepancy ($r = .409, p < .001$). The bivariate matrices by condition are consistent with the findings for the entire data set. In Condition 1 (Table 4), both avoidance and anxiety are significantly positively related to RBI-DM ($r = .349, p < .001$; $r = .466, p < .001$) and discrepancy ($r = .478, p < .001$; $r = .444, p < .001$), respectively. Similarly, in Condition 2 (Table 5), both avoidance and anxiety are significantly positively related to RBI-DM ($r = .282, p < .001$; $r = .451, p < .001$) and discrepancy ($r = .452, p < .001$; $r = .405, p < .001$), respectively. Finally, in Condition 3 (Table 6) both avoidance and anxiety are significantly positively related to RBI-DM ($r = .213, p < .001$; $r = .520, p < .001$) and discrepancy ($r = .348, p < .001$; $r = .369, p < .001$), respectively.

To examine these relationships further, I ran three regressions with attachment predicting discrepancy, one for each condition, and three more regressions in each condition with attachment predicting RBI-DM. Altogether this totaled six regressions.

Within Condition 1, with anxiety and avoidance as predictors and *discrepancy* as the criterion variable, the model was significant, $F(2) = 34.539, p < .001$ with an adjusted R^2 value of .277, which indicated that attachment explained approximately 27.7% of the variance in discrepancy between expectations for a partner and perceived partner behavior. The beta weights indicated that both avoidance ($\beta = .342, p < .001$) and anxiety ($\beta = .274, p < .001$) were significant predictors in the model. With anxiety and avoidance as predictors and *RBI-DM* as the criterion variable, the model was significant, $F(2) = 26.607, p < .001$ with an

adjusted R^2 value of .226, which indicated that attachment explained approximately 22.6% of the variance in irrational relationship beliefs. The beta weights indicated that avoidance ($\beta = .156, p = .043$) was not significant while anxiety ($\beta = .388, p < .001$) was a significant predictor in the model.

Within Condition 2, with anxiety and avoidance as predictors and *discrepancy* as the criterion variable, the model was significant $F(2) = 33.776, p < .001$ with an adjusted R^2 value of .263, indicating that attachment explained approximately 26.3% of the variance in discrepancy between expectations for a partner and perceived partner behavior. The beta weights indicated that both avoidance ($\beta = .351, p < .001$) and anxiety ($\beta = .277, p < .001$) were significant in the model. With anxiety and avoidance as predictors and *RBI-DM* as the criterion variable, the model was significant $F(2) = 25.501, p < .001$ with an adjusted R^2 value of .210, which indicated that attachment explained approximately 21.0% of the variance in irrational relationship beliefs. The beta weights indicated that avoidance ($\beta = .135, p = .056$) was not significant, while anxiety ($\beta = .401, p < .001$) was a significant predictor in the model.

Within Condition 3, with anxiety and avoidance as predictors and *discrepancy* as the criterion variable, the model was significant, $F(2) = 23.437, p < .001$ with an adjusted R^2 value of .196, which indicated that attachment explained approximately 19.6% of the variance in discrepancy between expectations for a partner and perceived partner behavior. The beta weights indicated that both avoidance ($\beta = .283, p < .001$) and anxiety ($\beta = .297, p < .001$) were significant in the model. With anxiety and avoidance as predictors and *RBI-DM* as the criterion variable, the model was significant, $F(2) = 32.747, p < .001$ with an adjusted R^2 value of .256, which indicated that attachment explained approximately 25.6% of the

variance in irrational relationship beliefs. The beta weights indicated that avoidance ($\beta = .110, p = .093$) is not significant, while anxiety ($\beta = .478, p < .001$) is a significant predictor in the model.

These results separated by mediators and organized by conditions, are presented in Table 12 and 13 and provide support to Hypothesis 3 and path A (Figures 1 and 2) for discrepancy, showing that both attachment variables have a significant relationship with discrepancy in Conditions 1, 2, and 3. The results also support path A for RBI-DM, but only with anxiety. Avoidance did not have a significant relationship with RBI-DM in any of the conditions.

Table 12

Results of Testing Path A for Hypothesis 3 on Discrepancy^a

IV ^b	B	SE	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>R</i> ²	<i>Adjusted R</i> ²	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Condition 1										
Avoidance	.109	.024	.342	4.624	<.001	.285	.277	34.539	2	<.001
Anxiety	.076	.021	.274	3.703	<.001					
Condition 2										
Avoidance	.110	.021	.351	5.154	<.001	.271	.263	33.776	2	<.001
Anxiety	.073	.018	.277	4.072	<.001					
Condition 3										
Avoidance	.096	.023	.283	4.172	<.001	.205	.196	23.437	2	<.001
Anxiety	.086	.020	.297	4.384	<.001					

^aIn order to more closely approximate normality, Discrepancy was transformed with \sqrt{X} ^bIndependent variable

Table 13

Results of Testing Path A for Hypothesis 3 on RBI-DM

	IV ^b	B	SE	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>R</i> ²	<i>Adjusted R</i> ²	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Condition 1											
	Avoidance	.095	.046	.156	2.042	.043	.235	.226	26.607	2	<.001
	Anxiety	.205	.041	.388	5.069	<.001					
Condition 2											
	Avoidance	.079	.041	.135	1.92	.056	.219	.21	25.501	2	<.001
	Anxiety	.198	.035	.401	5.699	<.001					
Condition 3											
	Avoidance	.071	.042	.11	1.688	.093	.264	.256	32.747	2	<.001
	Anxiety	.265	.036	.478	7.364	<.001					

Note. RBI-DM = Irrational relationship beliefs associated with disagreement and mindreading.

^bIndependent variable

Examining Path B, Hypothesis 3. In order to examine path B for Hypothesis 3, which stated that relationship perfectionism will be negatively related to constructive conflict resolution and relationship satisfaction, I first referred to the bivariate correlations I ran using the entire data set of $N = 549$ and specifically examined the correlations between discrepancy, RBI-DM, constructive conflict resolution and relationship satisfaction (Table 3). Results revealed that as expected, discrepancy and RBI-DM were both significantly negatively correlated with constructive conflict resolution ($r = -.465, p < .001, r = -.365, p < .001$) and relationship satisfaction ($r = -.586, p < .001, r = -.277, p < .001$), respectively. In Condition 1 (Table 4), discrepancy and RBI-DM were both significantly negatively correlated with constructive conflict resolution ($r = -.480, p < .001, r = -.358, p < .001$) and relationship satisfaction ($r = -.628, p < .001, r = -.397, p < .001$), respectively. In Condition 2 (Table 5), discrepancy and RBI-DM were both significantly negatively correlated with constructive conflict resolution ($r = -.487, p < .001, r = -.406, p < .001$) and relationship satisfaction ($r = -.608, p < .001, r = -.243, p = .001$), respectively. In Condition 3 (Table 6), discrepancy was significantly negatively correlated with both constructive conflict resolution ($r = -.430, p < .001$) and satisfaction ($r = -.525, p < .001$). However, although RBI-DM was significantly negatively related to constructive conflict resolution ($r = -.342, p < .001$), RBI-DM was not significantly related to relationship satisfaction ($r = -.185, p = .011$)

To further examine these hypotheses, I ran two separate regression analyses for each experimental condition (Tables 14 and 15), with both discrepancy and RBI-DM as predictor variables and one of the relationship quality variables as the criterion variable. Although RBI-DM was not significantly correlated with satisfaction in Condition 3, this variable was

still included as a predictor in that model so that comparisons could be made between conditions.

Within Condition 1, with discrepancy and RBI-DM as predictors and *constructive conflict resolution* as the criterion variable, the model was significant, $F(2) = 29.31, p < .001$ with an adjusted R^2 value of .244, which indicated that relationship perfectionism explained approximately 22.4% of the variance in self-reported constructive conflict resolution behavior. The beta weights indicated that discrepancy ($\beta = -.400, p < .001$) was a significant predictor, while RBI-DM ($\beta = -.171, p = .023$) was not a significant predictor in the model. With discrepancy and RBI-DM as predictors and *relationship satisfaction* as the criterion variable, the model was significant, $F(2) = 59.13, p < .001$ with an adjusted R^2 value of .401, which indicated that relationship perfectionism explained approximately 40.1% of the variance in self-reported relationship satisfaction. The beta weights again indicated that discrepancy ($\beta = -.567, p < .001$) was a significant predictor, while RBI-DM ($\beta = -.129, p = .054$) was not a significant predictor.

Within Condition 2, with discrepancy and RBI-DM as predictors and *constructive conflict resolution* as the criterion variable, the model was significant, $F(2) = 39.190, p < .001$ with an adjusted R^2 value of .296, which indicated that relationship perfectionism explained approximately 29.6% of the variance in self-reported constructive conflict resolution behavior. The beta weights indicated that discrepancy ($\beta = -.395, p < .001$) and RBI-DM ($\beta = -.274, p < .001$) were both significant predictors in the model. With discrepancy and RBI-DM as predictors and *relationship satisfaction* as the criterion variable, the model was significant, $F(2) = 52.771, p < .001$ with an adjusted R^2 value of .364, which indicated that relationship perfectionism explained approximately 36.4% of the variance in self-

reported relationship satisfaction. The beta weights indicated that discrepancy ($\beta = -.593, p < .001$) was a significant predictor, while RBI-DM ($\beta = -.044, p = .487$) was again not a significant predictor.

Within Condition 3, with discrepancy and RBI-DM as predictors and *constructive conflict resolution* as the criterion variable, the model was significant, $p < .001$. $F(2) = 27.33$ and adjusted $R^2 = .221$, indicating that relationship perfectionism explained approximately 22.1% of the variance in self-reported constructive conflict resolution behavior. The beta weights indicated that discrepancy ($\beta = -.355, p < .001$) and RBI-DM ($\beta = -.233, p = .001$) were both significant predictors in the model. With discrepancy and RBI-DM as predictors and *relationship satisfaction* as the criterion variable, the model was significant, $F(2) = 34.861, p < .001$ with an adjusted R^2 value of .268, which indicated that relationship perfectionism explained approximately 26.8% of the variance in self-reported relationship satisfaction. The beta weights indicated that Discrepancy ($\beta = -.522, p < .001$) was a significant predictor, while once again RBI-DM ($\beta = -.010, p = .881$) was not a significant predictor.

In re-running the regressions with only RBI-DM predicting relationship satisfaction, higher levels of irrational relationship beliefs associated with mindreading and disagreements significantly predicted lower relationship satisfaction in Conditions 1 and 2, but not in Condition 3. In Condition 1 the full model was significant $F(1) = 32.28, p < .001$ with an adjusted R^2 value of .152 and $\beta = -.397$. In Condition 2 the full model was significant, $F(1) = 11.27, p = .001$ with an adjusted R^2 value of .054 and $\beta = -.243$. Consistent with correlation matrices, in Condition 3 the full regression model was not significant, $F(1) = 6.59, p = .011$ with an adjusted R^2 value of .029 and $\beta = -.185$. These results are consistent with the idea that

discrepancy is having a suppressive effect on RBI-DM when predicting relationship satisfaction in Conditions 1 and 2.

These results are partially supportive of Hypothesis 3. While the bivariate relationships in the correlation tables indicated that indeed negative relationships exist between relationship perfectionism variables and the criterion variables, the results of the regression analyses show that with both discrepancy and RBI-DM in the models, discrepancy is likely suppressing the effects of RBI-DM in relationship satisfaction. RBI-DM was not significant in Condition 1 as a predictor of constructive conflict resolution and although it was significant in Conditions 2 and 3, discrepancy was still a stronger predictor. In relationship satisfaction, RBI-DM is not significant in any condition. The results are displayed below in tables 14 and 15.

Table 14

Results of Testing Path B for Hypothesis 3 on CCRS^a

Condition	IV ^b	B	SE	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>R</i> ²	Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
	1										
	Discrepancy ^a	-.262	.049	-.40	-5.377	<.001	.253	.244	29.306	2	<.001
	RBI-DM	-.059	.026	-.171	-2.297	.023					
	2										
	Discrepancy ^a	-.277	.046	-.395	-5.991	<.001	.303	.296	39.19	2	<.001
	RBI-DM	-.103	.025	-.274	-4.145	<.001					
	3										
	Discrepancy ^a	-.202	.039	-.355	-5.175	<.001	.229	.221	27.326	2	<.001
	RBI-DM	-.066	.020	-.223	-3.243	.001					

Note. CCRS = Constructive Conflict resolution, RBI-DM = Irrational relationship beliefs associated with disagreement and mindreading.

^aIn order to more closely approximate normality, Discrepancy and CCRS were transformed with \sqrt{X}

^bIndependent variable

Table 15

Results of Testing Path B for Hypothesis 3 on Satisfaction

Condition	IV ^b	B	SE	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>R</i> ²	<i>Adjusted R</i> ²	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
	1										
	Discrepancy ^a	-1.229	.144	-.567	-8.521	<.001	.407	.401	59.131	2	<.001
	RBI-DM	-.146	.075	-.129	-1.939	.054					
	2										
	Discrepancy ^a	-1.375	.146	-.593	-9.422	<.001	.371	.364	52.771	2	<.001
	RBI-DM	-.055	.078	-.044	-.697	.478					
	3										
	Discrepancy ^a	-1.189	.152	-.522	-7.811	<.001	.276	.268	34.861	2	<.001
	RBI-DM	-.012	.079	-.010	-.150	.881					

Note . RBI-DM = Irrational relationship beliefs associated with disagreement and mindreading.

^aIn order to more closely approximate normality, Discrepancy was transformed with \sqrt{X}

^bIndependent variable

Examinations of Mediation Analyses

Baron and Kenny (1986) stated Paths A, B, and C (Figures 1 and 2) all need to be significant before one can examine the mediator effect. Results described in the previous section revealed no significant correlations between attachment and empathy variables. It can therefore be concluded that the relationships between attachment, empathy, and relationship quality in this sample do not meet the conditions for mediation. In terms of the relationship perfectionism variables, however, several relationships met the pre-requisite conditions for mediation. The following analyses will use step 4 of Baron and Kenny's (1986) regression approach to mediation to further examine Hypothesis 3.

Attachment, discrepancy, constructive conflict resolution. In Conditions 1, 2, and 3, the relationships between avoidance, discrepancy, and constructive conflict resolution met the conditions for possible mediation and so the following section examines the mediating effects of discrepancy on the relationship between avoidance and accommodation. The mediating effect of discrepancy on anxiety will only be examined in Condition 3 because anxiety did not meet the conditions for mediation in Conditions 1 and 2. It was decided that both attachment variables were to be included in the regression model whenever a potential mediation relationship was examined. This decision was based on two reasons: (1) anxiety is part of the larger construct of attachment and (2) valid comparisons can be only made between conditions if the models contain the same variables.

In Condition 1 with avoidance and anxiety entered as step 1 and discrepancy entered as step 2, the full model is significant at both step 1 , $F(2) = 22.580, p < .001$, and step 2

$F(3) = 23.035, p < .001$. Adjusted $R^2 = .274$ at step 2, which indicated that with attachment variables and discrepancy in the model, 27.4% of the variance in self-reported constructive conflict resolution behavior was explained. In step 1 avoidance was a significant predictor, ($\beta = -.341, p < .001$). In step 2 the strength of avoidance decreased but remained significant ($\beta = -.226, p = .004$) and discrepancy was also significant ($\beta = -.334, p < .001$). To examine whether the relationship between avoidance and constructive conflict resolution is significantly mediated by discrepancy, I calculated the Sobel statistic, which involves dividing the mediating effect by its standard error to obtain a z score. According to Baron and Kenny (1986), if $z > 1.96$, then the mediated effect is significant. In this case, the absolute value of $z = 3.15, SE = .008, p = .002$, with an unstandardized mediation coefficient of $-.024$. Since avoidance was still significant in step 2, these results show that in Condition 1, with anxiety controlled, discrepancy is a significant partial mediator in the relationship between attachment avoidance and self-reported constructive conflict resolution behavior.

In Condition 2 with avoidance and anxiety entered as step 1 and discrepancy entered as step 2, the full model is significant at step 1 and at step 2 $F(2) = 28.456, p < .001$ at step 1 and $F(3) = 27.799, p < .001$ at step 2. Adjusted $R^2 = .306$ at step 2, which indicated that with both attachment variables and discrepancy in the model, 30.6% of the variance in self-reported constructive conflict resolution behavior was explained. In step 1 avoidance was a significant predictor, ($\beta = -.421, p < .001$). In step 2 the strength of avoidance decreased but remained significant ($\beta = -.303, p < .001$) and discrepancy was also significant ($\beta = -.326, p < .001$). The Sobel statistic revealed that $z = 3.400, SE = .007, p = .001$, with an unstandardized mediation coefficient of $-.025$. Since avoidance was still significant in step 2, these results show that in Condition 2, with anxiety controlled, discrepancy is a significant

partial mediator in the relationship between attachment and self-reported constructive conflict resolution behavior, and that it is specifically mediating avoidance.

In Condition 3 with avoidance and anxiety entered as step 1 and discrepancy entered as step 2, the full model is significant at step 1 and at step 2, $F(2) = 12.418, p < .001$ at step 1 and $F(3) = 15.679, p < .001$ at step 2. Adjusted $R^2 = .193$ at step 2, which indicated that with both avoidance and discrepancy in the model, 19.3% of the variance in self-reported constructive conflict resolution behavior was explained. In step 1 avoidance was a significant predictor ($\beta = -.207, p = .004$), as was anxiety ($\beta = -.236, p = .001$). In step 2 the strength of avoidance decreased and was no longer significant ($\beta = -.114, p = .109$), and the same was true for anxiety, ($\beta = -.138, p = .054$). Discrepancy was also significant ($\beta = -.329, p < .001$). For the mediating effect of discrepancy on avoidance, the Sobel statistic revealed that $z = 3.045, SE = .006, p = .002$, with an unstandardized mediation coefficient of $-.017$. For the mediating effect of discrepancy on anxiety, the Sobel statistic revealed that $z = 3.039, SE = .005, p = .002$, with an unstandardized mediation coefficient of $-.016$. Since neither avoidance nor anxiety were significant in step 2, these results show that in Condition 3, discrepancy is a significant full mediator in the relationship between attachment and self-reported constructive conflict resolution behavior, fully mediating both anxiety and avoidance.

In sum, these results support Hypothesis 3 and show that across conditions, discrepancy is a significant mediator in the relationship between attachment and self-reported constructive conflict resolution behavior. These results are displayed below in tables 16, 17, and 18. The mediation model is displayed in Figure 1.

Table 16

Condition 1 Test of Indirect Effect of Discrepancy^a on Attachment and CCRS^a

	IV ^b	B	SE	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	ΔR^2	Adjusted R^2	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Step 1										
	Avoidance	-.071	.016	-.341	-4.369	<.001	.207	.198	22.580 ^c	<.001
	Anxiety	-.032	.014	-.177	-2.267	.025				
Step 2										
	Avoidance	-.047	.016	-.226	-2.88	.004	.080	.274	23.035 ^d	<.001
	Anxiety	-.016	.014	-.085	-1.106	.270				
	Discrepancy ^a	-.219	.050	-.334	-4.381	<.001				

Note. CCRS = Constructive Conflict Resolution

^aIn order to more closely approximate normality, Discrepancy and CCRS were transformed with \sqrt{X}

^bIndependent variable

^c*df*=2

^d*df*=3

Table 17

Condition 2 Test of Indirect Effect of Discrepancy^a on Attachment and CCRS^a

	IV ^b	B	SE	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	ΔR^2	Adjusted R^2	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Step 1										
	Avoidance	-.092	.015	-.421	-6.005	<.001	.240	.232	28.456 ^c	<.001
	Anxiety	-.026	.013	-.139	-1.984	.049				
Step 2										
	Avoidance	-.066	.016	-.303	-4.246	<.001	.078	.306	27.799 ^d	<.001
	Anxiety	-.010	.013	-.052	-.751	.454				
	Discrepancy ^a	-.228	.051	-.326	-4.513	<.001				

Note . CCRS = Constructive Conflict Resolution

^aIn order to more closely approximate normality, Discrepancy and CCRS were transformed with \sqrt{X}

^bIndependent variable

^c*df*=2

^d*df*=3

Table 18

Condition 3 Test of Indirect Effect of Discrepancy^a on Attachment and CCRS^a

	IV ^b	B	SE	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	ΔR^2	Adjusted R^2	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Step 1										
Avoidance		-.040	.014	-.207	-2.91	.004	.120	.110	12.418 ^c	<.001
Anxiety		-.039	.012	-.236	-3.311	.001				
Step 2										
Avoidance		-.022	.014	-.114	-1.609	.109	.086	.193	15.679 ^d	<.001
Anxiety		-.023	.012	-.138	-1.936	.054				
Discrepancy ^a		-.187	.042	-.329	-4.433	<.001				

Note . CCRS = Constructive Conflict Resolution

^aIn order to more closely approximate normality, Discrepancy and CCRS were transformed with \sqrt{X}

^bIndependent variable

^c*df*=2

^d*df*=3

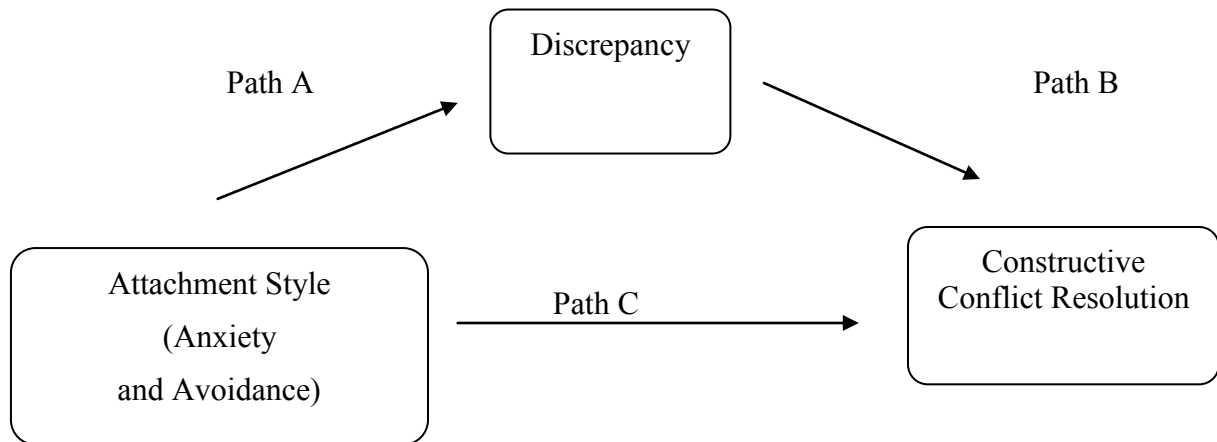


Figure 2. Mediation Model Demonstrating Indirect Effect of Discrepancy on Attachment and Constructive Conflict Resolution.

Attachment, discrepancy, and satisfaction. In Conditions 1, 2, and 3, the relationships between avoidance, discrepancy, and satisfaction met the conditions for mediation and so the following section examines the mediating effects of discrepancy on the relationship between avoidance and satisfaction. The mediating effect of discrepancy on anxiety will only be examined in Condition 1 because anxiety did not meet the Conditions for mediation in Conditions 2 and 3. Consistent with previous analyses, however, both attachment variables were included in the model in all three conditions.

In Condition 1 with both attachment variables entered as step 1 and discrepancy entered as step 2, the full model is significant at step 1 and at step 2 $F(2) = 56.813, p < .001$ at step 1 and $F(3) = 61.121, p < .001$ at step 2. Adjusted $R^2 = .509$ at step 2, which indicated that with avoidance, anxiety and discrepancy in the model, 50.9% of the variance in relationship satisfaction was explained. In step 1 avoidance was a significant predictor ($\beta = -.466, p < .001$) as was anxiety ($\beta = -.252, p < .001$). In step 2 the strength of avoidance decreased but remained significant ($\beta = -.323, p < .001$), whereas anxiety was no longer significant ($\beta = -.143, p = .026$). Discrepancy was also significant in step 2, ($\beta = -.409, p < .001$). The Sobel statistic for the mediation effect of discrepancy on avoidance and satisfaction revealed that $z = 3.708, SE = .080, p < .001$, with an unstandardized mediation effect of $-.096$. Since avoidance was still significant in step 2, the results show that discrepancy is partially mediating avoidance. For anxiety, $z = 3.193, SE = .066, p = .001$, with an unstandardized mediation effect of $-.067$. Since anxiety was no longer significant in step 2, the results show that discrepancy is fully mediating anxiety. Taken together, these results show that in Condition 1, discrepancy mediates the relationship between attachment

and relationship satisfaction, specifically serving as a partial mediator for avoidance and a full mediator for anxiety.

In Condition 2, with both attachment variables entered as step 1 and discrepancy entered as step 2, the full model is significant at step 1 and at step 2, $F(2) = 34.018, p < .001$ step 1 and $F(3) = 46.258, p < .001$ at step 2. Adjusted $R^2 = .429$ at step 2, which indicated that with avoidance and discrepancy in the model, 42.9% of the variance in self-reported relationship satisfaction was explained. In step 1 avoidance was a significant predictor ($\beta = -.457, p < .001$). In step 2 the strength of avoidance decreased but remained significant ($\beta = -.291, p < .001$) and discrepancy was significant, ($\beta = -.471, p < .001$). The Sobel statistic revealed that $z = 4.324, SE = .028, p < .001$, with an unstandardized mediation coefficient of $-.120$. Since avoidance was still significant in step 2, the results show that in Condition 2, with anxiety controlled, discrepancy is a significant partial mediator in the relationship between attachment and satisfaction, and that it is specifically mediating avoidance.

In Condition 3, with both attachment variables entered as step 1 and discrepancy entered as step 2, the full model is significant at step 1 and at step 2, $F(2) = 25.277, p < .001$ step 1 and $F(3) = 33.388, p < .001$ at step 2. Adjusted $R^2 = .347$ at step 2, which indicated that with avoidance, anxiety and discrepancy in the model, 34.7% of the variance in satisfaction was explained. In step 1 avoidance was a significant predictor ($\beta = -.425, p < .001$). In step 2 the strength of avoidance decreased but remained significant ($\beta = -.307, p < .001$) and discrepancy was significant, ($\beta = -.418, p < .001$). The Sobel statistic revealed that $z = 3.472, SE = .026, p < .001$, with an unstandardized mediation coefficient of $-.092$. Since avoidance was still significant in step 2, the results show that in Condition 3, with anxiety

controlled, discrepancy is a significant partial mediator in the relationship between attachment and satisfaction, and that it is specifically mediating avoidance.

In sum, these results are supportive of Hypothesis 3, showing that across conditions, discrepancy is a significant mediator between attachment and relationship satisfaction. The results are displayed in tables 19, 20, and 21. The mediation model is shown in Figure 2.

Table 19

Condition 1 Test of Indirect Effect of Discrepancy^a on Attachment and Satisfaction

	IV ^b	B	SE	β	t	p	ΔR^2	Adjusted R ²	F	p
Step 1										
Avoidance		-.320	.047	-.466	-6.826	<.001	.398	.391	56.813 ^c	<.001
Anxiety		-.151	.041	-.252	-3.689	<.001				
Step 2										
Avoidance		-.222	.045	-.323	-4.96	<.001	0.12	.509	61.121 ^d	<.001
Anxiety		-.086	.038	-.143	-2.25	.026				
Discrep. ^a		-.887	.136	-.409	-6.511	<.001				

Note . Discrep. = Discrepancy

^aIn order to more closely approximate normality, Discrepancy was transformed with \sqrt{X}

^bIndependent variable

^cdf=2

^ddf=3

Table 20

Condition 2 Test of Indirect Effect of Discrepancy^a on Attachment and Satisfaction

	IV ^b	B	SE	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	ΔR^2	Adjusted R^2	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Step 1										
	Avoidance	-.333	.05	-.457	-6.67	<.001	.275	.267	34.018 ^c	<.001
	Anxiety	-.085	.042	-.138	-2.01	.046				
Step 2										
	Avoidance	-.212	.047	-.291	-4.49	<.001	.163	.429	46.258 ^d	<.001
	Anxiety	-.007	.039	-.011	-.177	.860				
	Discrepancy ^a	-1.093	.152	-.471	-1.79	<.001				

^aIn order to more closely approximate normality, Discrepancy was transformed with \sqrt{X}

^bIndependent variable

^c*df*=2

^d*df*=3

Table 21

Condition 3 Test of Indirect Effect of Discrepancy^a on Attachment and Satisfaction

	IV ^b	B	SE	β	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>	ΔR^2	Adjusted R^2	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Step 1										
	Avoidance	-.334	.053	-.425	-6.31	<.001	.218	.210	25.277 ^c	<.001
	Anxiety	-.082	.045	-.122	-1.817	.071				
Step 2										
	Avoidance	-.241	.050	-.307	-4.786	<.001	.139	.347	33.388 ^d	<.001
	Anxiety	.001	.043	.002	.030	.976				
	Discrepancy ^a	-.963	.154	-.418	-6.245	<.001				

^aIn order to more closely approximate normality, Discrepancy was transformed with \sqrt{X}

^bIndependent variable

^c*df*=2

^d*df*=3

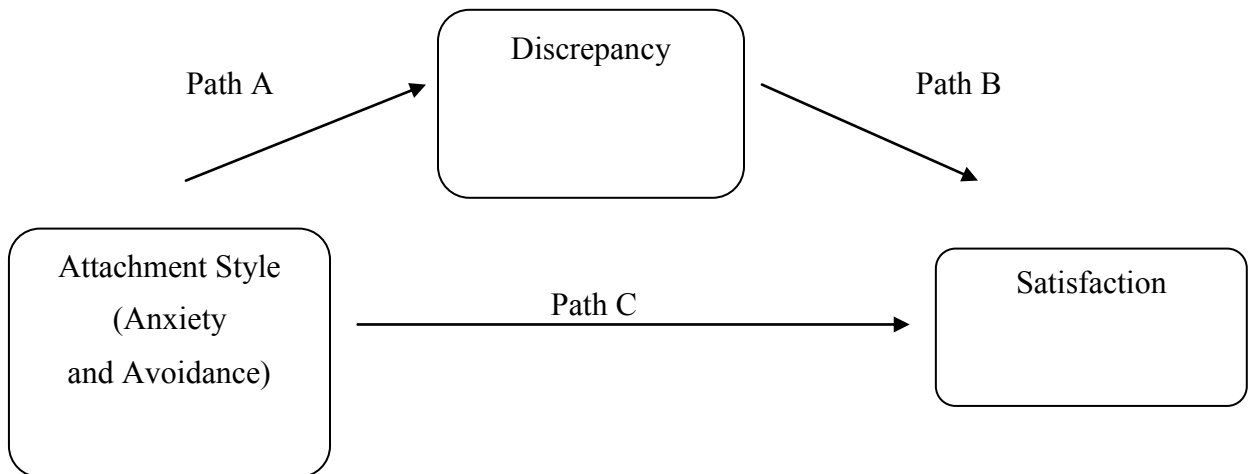


Figure 3. Mediation Model Demonstrating Indirect Effect of Discrepancy on Attachment and Satisfaction.

Examination of Priming Effects

Hypothesis 2 proposed that when attachment style is primed, the mediating effects of empathy on attachment and relationship quality will be greater in magnitude than when attachment style is not primed. Hypothesis 4 proposes that when attachment style is primed, the mediating effects of relationship perfectionism on attachment and relationship quality variables will be greater in magnitude than when attachment style is not primed. The support of Hypothesis 2 depended on Hypothesis 1, and therefore with findings that are unresponsive to Hypothesis 1, Hypothesis 2 cannot be examined further. With support for Hypothesis 3, Hypothesis 4 may be examined.

The results of the above analyses revealed that two of the hypothesized mediation models were significant across Conditions 1, 2, and 3. The following section will examine whether the strength of these mediated effects is moderated by experimental condition. According to Hypothesis 3, it is predicted that the strongest mediated effects will occur in Condition 1. In order to compare mediated effects, I examined the p values for the Sobel statistics calculated across condition (Tables 22 and 23).

For the mediation model which examined attachment, discrepancy, and constructive conflict resolution, Hypothesis 4 does not appear to be supported. For the avoidance variable, the unstandardized mediation coefficients are -.024 (Condition 1), -.025 (Condition 2), and -.017 (Condition 3). This does not indicate that there is any meaningful difference between the strength of the mediating effects in the experimental Conditions. In addition, avoidance is partially mediated in Conditions 1 and 2, while both avoidance and anxiety are fully mediated in Condition 3. Given Hypothesis 4, this is the opposite of what was anticipated.

For the mediation model which examined attachment, discrepancy, and satisfaction, Hypothesis 4 may be partially supported. For the avoidance variable, the unstandardized mediation coefficients are -.096 (Condition 1), -.120 (Condition 2), and -.092 (Condition 3). This does not indicate that there is any meaningful difference between the strength of the mediating effects in the experimental conditions. In addition, avoidance is partially mediated in all three conditions, which is another indicator that the mediating effect of discrepancy on this variable does not change between conditions. The anxiety variable was fully mediated by discrepancy in Condition 1, but this mediated effect did not exist in Conditions 2 and 3. This may provide some support for Hypothesis 4.

Table 22

Comparing Mediation Model Attachment, Discrepancy^a, and CCRS^a across conditions

Condition	IV ^b	<i>z</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	Type of mediation	Unstandardized mediation coefficient
1	Avoidance	3.15	.008	.002	partial	-.024
	Anxiety				-	
2	Avoidance	3.40	.007	.001	partial	-.025
	Anxiety				-	
3	Avoidance	3.05	.006	.002	full	-.017
	Anxiety	3.04	.005	.002	full	-.016

Note .CCRS = Constructive Conflict Resolution

^aIn order to more closely approximate normality, Discrepancy and CCRS were transformed with \sqrt{X}

^bIndependent variable

Table 23

Comparing Mediation Model Attachment, Discrepancy, Satisfaction across conditions

Condition	IV ^b	<i>z</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	Type of mediation	Unstandardized mediation coefficient
1	Avoidance	3.71	.080	<.001	partial	-.096
	Anxiety	3.19	.066	.001	full	-.067
2	Avoidance	4.32	.028	<.001	partial	-.120
	Anxiety				-	
3	Avoidance	3.47	.026	<.001	partial	-.092
	Anxiety				-	

Note .CCRS = Constructive Conflict Resolution

^aIn order to more closely approximate normality, Discrepancy was transformed with \sqrt{X}

^bIndependent variable

Post-Hoc Analyses

The results of comparing the mediated effects across conditions were inconsistent with what was anticipated. In order to examine a possible cause for these findings, several post-hoc analyses were conducted.

Match Variable

Over the course of filling out the study survey, participants answered two open response items that were intended to prime them into one of the three conditions. Participants were also asked to indicate whether their answers to these items were describing positive, negative, or neutral experiences, and were given the opportunity to provide further explanation for this in an “Additional Comments” item. These items were included as an additional validity check, to be sure that the prime elicited the intended reaction. In order to

analyze the validity items quantitatively, a “match” variable was created in which answers to these validity items were analyzed and coded as either matching with the intended response (coded as a “1”) or mismatching (coded as a “2”). For example, responses in Condition 1, which was intended to prime discomfort related to the romantic relationship, were given a 1 if the experience was rated as negative, and were given a 2 if the experience was rated as positive or neutral. Similarly, responses in Condition 2, which was intended to prime general discomfort, were given a 1 if the experience was rated as negative, and were given a 2 if the experience was rated as positive or neutral. Responses in Condition 3, which was not intended to elicit any discomfort, were given a 1 if the experience was rated as positive or neutral, and were given a 2 if the experience was rated as negative.

There were some participants who did not answer the validity check items, and so in these cases the researcher analyzed the open-ended responses themselves in order to determine a code of match or mismatch. A chi-square analysis was run in order to determine whether there were significant differences based on condition between participants who answered this validity item as those that did not. The results of this test were significant, $X(6) = 218.69$. In Condition 1, 6 out of 176 (3.4%) participants did not answer this question, while in Condition 2, 30 out of 185 (16.2%) did not answer this question and in Condition 3, 11 out of 188 (5.9%) did not answer this question.

After all of the responses had been coded, a frequency analysis of the responses to the validity check revealed an overall positivity bias, with 55.6% of participants assessing their described experience as positive. Another 22.7% assessed their experience as neutral, with only 19.8% assessing their experience as negative. In breaking down the results by condition, the percentages of matched participants in each condition included the following:

Condition 1 = 82 out of 176 (46.6%); Condition 2 = 35 out of 185 (18.9%); Condition 3 = 183 out of 188 (97.3%). In Condition 3, 85.1% of the responses were positive and 12.2% of the responses were neutral. A chi square analysis was run to determine if there are significant differences between participants who “matched” with the expected response and those who did not, based on condition. The results of this test were significant $X^2(4) = 241.49$. These results suggest that the prompts may not have effectively elicited the intended responses in Conditions 1 and 2.

Comparisons between matched and non-matched participants. The above analyses indicate that the total sample ($n = 547$) is comprised of participants who were effectively primed with anticipated responses, as well as those who were not. The following analyses explored possible differences between the analyses done with the larger samples and those done using only participants who were presumably effectively primed. A bivariate correlation matrix ($n = 300$) of all measured variables was produced and revealed a pattern similar to that shown by the correlation matrix for the entire sample (Table 3). These results are displayed below in Table 24. A comparison between the tables shows that the relationships between variables are virtually unchanged when unmatched participants are dropped from the analysis. Most variables were correlated with nearly all other variables at the same level of significance as the total sample, with slightly stronger or weaker r values. One exception to this was attachment correlations with empathy, which for avoidance are no longer significant, but which were not significant at the .01 level in the original sample to begin with. In the larger sample, anxiety did have a significant relationship with PT at the .01 level, and this was no longer the case in the matched sample. The relationship between EC and CCRS weakened in significance in the matched sample. Upon comparing the differences

among means and standard deviations between the matched group and the original sample, it was determined that differences were negligible, with the largest difference existing between the means of RBI-DM ($M = 2.02$ for original data set; $M = 2.10$ for matched data set).

Table 24

Matched Group, Means, Standard Deviations and Bivariate Correlations of Avoidance, Anxiety, EC, PT, RBI-DM, Satisfaction, CCRS^a, and Discrepancy^a (N=300)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Avoidance	-							
2. Anxiety	.307***	-						
3. EC	-.097	.103	-					
4. PT	-.075	-.112	.464***	-				
5. RBI-DM	.221***	.505***	-.064	-.208***	-			
6. Satisfact.	-.530***	-.303***	-.003	.059	-.249***	-		
7. CCRS ^a	-.340***	-.278***	.118*	.249***	-.331***	.419***	-	
8. Discrep ^a	.431***	.405***	-.021	-.169**	.386***	-.581***	-.460***	-
<i>Mean</i>	2.42	3.33	4.08	3.84	2.1	4.06	2.48	1.44
<i>SD</i>	.928	1.083	.562	.562	.589	.697	.199	.306

Note. RBI-DM = Irrational relationship beliefs associated with disagreement and mindreading., CCRS = Constructive Conflict Resolution
Satisfact. = Satisfaction; Discrep. = Discrepancy, PT = Perspective
Taking, EC = Empathic Concern

^aIn order to more closely approximate normality, Discrepancy and CCRS were transformed with \sqrt{X}
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

In addition to comparing the matched sample to the original sample, it is also useful to compare differences separated by condition. However, with the sample size of Condition 3 virtually identical to that of the original sample, this comparison did not seem worthwhile. Within the same vein, with the matched sample of Condition 2 participants reduced to 35, this was not considered to be enough power to conduct reliable correlations, and so this comparison did not seem worthwhile. On the other hand, with the Condition 1 matched sample consisting of 82 participants, it seemed useful to compare correlations between

variables for Condition 1 in the matched sample with correlations for the total sample. Prior to running these correlations, the sample of 82 was checked for assumptions. All assumptions of multiple regression were met, with the exception of normality. Kurtosis was violated by CCRS ($z = 9.846$) and EC ($z = 3.619$), while skewness was violated by Discrepancy ($z = 2.575$), CCRS ($z = 3.24$), EC ($z = 3.04$) and Satisfaction ($z = 3.26$). Square root and log transformations were tried for each variable, without success at improving these values and so the original variables were retained.

The results comparing the correlations between variables for Condition 1 in the matched sample with correlations for the total sample are displayed below in Table 25.

A comparison between the Table 25 and Table 4 revealed some differences. For avoidance, although the strength of the r values in the matched group decreased in each correlation, they mostly stay at the same levels of significance as those found with the large sample. One exception to this was the relationship between avoidance and RBI-DM, which was significant at .001 in entire Condition 1 sample, and significant at .05 in the Condition 1 matched group sample. For anxiety, the strength of the r values in the matched group was again mostly consistent with those in the entire Condition 1 sample, with mostly the same levels of significance between variables. One exception to this was the relationship between anxiety and constructive conflict resolution, which was no longer significant in the matched group. Another difference is with PT, which is no longer significantly related to RBI-DM or constructive conflict resolution in the matched group.

Table 25
 Matched Group, Condition 1 Means, Standard Deviations and Bivariate Correlations of Avoidance,
 Anxiety, EC, PT, RBI-DM, Satisfact, CCRS^a, and Discrepancy^a (N=82)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Avoidance	-							
2. Anxiety	.391***	-						
3. EC	-.201	.048	-					
4. PT	-.167	-.148	.458***	-				
5. RBI-DM	.238*	.435***	-.030	-.215	-			
6. Satisfact.	-.533***	-.489***	.055	.147	-.357**	-		
7. CCRS ^a	-.337***	-.212	-.022	.208	-.288**	.346**	-	
8. Discrep ^a	.459***	.453***	.013	.299**	.458***	-.647***	-.424***	-
Mean	2.73	3.57	4.12	3.84	2.12	3.9	2.44	1.52
SD	1.02	1.16	.594	.515	.648	.718	.241	.331

Note . EC = Empathic Concern, PT = Perspective Taking, RBI-DM = Irrational relationship beliefs associated with disagreement and mindreading,

CCRS= Constructive Conflict Resolution; Satisfact.=Satisfaction; and Discrep.=Discrepancy, PT = Perspective Taking, EC= Empathic Concern

^aIn order to more closely approximate normality, Discrepancy and CCRS were transformed with \sqrt{X}

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

Given that both PT and Anxiety were no longer significantly correlated with CCRS in the Condition 1 matched group sample, it seemed worthwhile to further investigate differences between the matched participants and unmatched participants on the dependent variables. A MANOVA which used the Match variable as a factor with Satisfaction and CCRS as criterion variables was run. Using Pillai's Trace as the indicator for multivariate significance, Match had a significant multivariate effect, $F(2) = 13.59, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .136$. Follow-up ANOVAs showed that Match was a significant factor for Satisfaction, $F(1) = 26.60, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .133$, as well as for CCRS, $F(1) = 7.69, p = .006$, partial $\eta^2 = .043$.

It also seemed important to investigate differences between matched and unmatched variables on the attachment variables. A MANOVA which used the Match variable as a factor with avoidance and anxiety as criterion variables was run. Using Pillai's Trace as the indicator for multivariate significance, Match had a significant multivariate effect, $F(2) = 9.76, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .101$. Follow-up ANOVAs showed that Match was a significant factor for avoidance, $F(1) = 15.87, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .084$, as well as for anxiety, $F(1) = 12.53, p = .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .067$.

The above analyses indicate that matched participants in Condition 1 were significantly different from non-matched participants on the two dependent variables and also on the attachment variables. When compared to the entire group of Condition 1 participants, both matched and unmatched, matched participants scored lower on relationship quality variables and higher on avoidant and anxious attachment. Given these differences, it seemed worthwhile to re-examine the mediation models found using the entire sample of

Condition 1 participants, using only the 82 matched participants in Condition 1. Given the small sample size, alpha was set at .05 for the following analyses.

Mediation models with matched only participants. The mediation models which examined the mediation effects of discrepancy on attachment and constructive conflict resolution met the prerequisite conditions for mediation as described in the following analyses (Tables 26, 27, 28). In examining step 1 of these prerequisites, the regression model with anxiety and avoidance as predictors of constructive conflict resolution was significant, $F(2) = 5.43, p = .006$, adjusted $R^2 = .099$, with avoidance ($\beta = -.300, p = .011$) as a significant predictor and anxiety as a non-significant predictor ($\beta = -.095, p = .412$). Step 2, which involved a regression model with anxiety and avoidance predicting discrepancy was significant, $F(2) = 16.82, p < .001$, adjusted $R^2 = .281$. Both anxiety ($\beta = .323, p = .002$) and avoidance ($\beta = .332, p = .002$) were significant predictors. Step 3, which involved a regression model with discrepancy predicting constructive conflict resolution was significant, $F(1) = 17.50, p < .001$, adjusted $R^2 = .169$. Discrepancy was a significant predictor ($\beta = -.424, p < .001$). These results are displayed in the tables below.

Table 26

Condition Imatched sample, attachment variables predicting CCRS^a (n=82)

IV ^b	B	SE	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Adjusted R ²	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Avoidance	-.071	.027	-0.3	-2.615	.011	.099	5.43	.006
Anxiety	-.02	.024	-.095	-.825	.412			

df=2

Table 27

Condition Imatched sample, attachment variables predicting Discrepancy^a (n=82)

IV ^b	B	SE	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Adjusted R ²	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Avoidance	.208	.033	.332	3.247	.002	.281	16.82	<.001
Anxiety	.092	.029	.323	3.154	.002			

df=2

Table 28

Condition Imatched sample, Discrepancy^a predicting CCRS^a (n=82)

IV ^b	B	SE	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Adjusted R ²	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Discrepancy ^a	-.309	.074	-.424	-4.183	.001	.169	17.5	.001

df=1

Note. CCRS = Constructive Conflict Resolution

^aIn order to more closely approximate normality, Discrepancy and CCRS were transformed with \sqrt{X}

^bIndependent variable

The full regression model, with avoidance and anxiety entered in step 1 and discrepancy entered in step 2, predicting constructive conflict resolution was significant at step 2, $F(3) = 6.72, p < .001$. Adjusted $R^2 = .175$ at step 2, which indicated that with attachment variables and discrepancy in the model, 17.5% of the variance in self-reported relationship constructive conflict resolution was explained. In step 1 avoidance was a significant predictor, ($\beta = -.300, p = .011$), though anxiety was not significant ($\beta = -.095, p = .412$). In step 2 the strength of avoidance decreased and was no longer significant ($\beta = -.184, p = .118$), and anxiety was still not significant ($\beta = .017, p = .881$). Discrepancy was significant at step 2 ($\beta = -.347, p = .005$).

Table 29

Condition 1 matched sample, Test of Indirect Effect of Discrepancy^a on Attachment and CCRS^a (n=82)

	IV ^b	B	SE	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	ΔR^2	Adjusted R^2	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Step 1										
	Avoidance	-.071	.027	-.300	-2.615	.011	.121	.099	5.433 ^c	<.001
	Anxiety	-.020	.024	-.095	-.825	.412				
Step 2										
	Avoidance	-.044	.028	-.184	-1.579	.118	.084	.175	6.718 ^d	<.001
	Anxiety	.004	.024	.017	.150	.881				
	Discrepancy ^a	-.253	.088	-.347	-2.879	.005				

Note. CCRS = Constructive Conflict Resolution.

^aIn order to more closely approximate normality, Discrepancy and CCRS were transformed with \sqrt{X}

^bIndependent variable

^c*df*=2

^d*df*=3

The Sobel statistic for the mediated effect of discrepancy on avoidance and constructive conflict resolution is $z = 0.341$, $SE = .020$, $p = .733$, with an unstandardized mediation coefficient of $-.052$. Although it had appeared that discrepancy was fully mediating the relationship between avoidance and constructive conflict resolution is Condition 1 for the matched sample, the Sobel statistic reveals that this effect is not significant. The Table 30 below displays the comparison of mediated effects for this model, between the full sample of Condition 1 participants and matched Condition 1 participants. The table shows that while the mediated effect was significant at .01 in full sample, this effect is not significant in the matched sample.

Table 30

Comparing Condition 1 Mediation Model Attachment, Discrepancy^a, CCRS^a between matched (n=82) and full sample (n=176)

Sample	IV ^b	Z	SE	p	Type of mediation	Unstandardized mediation coefficient
Matched	Avoidance	.034	.020	.733	full (ns)	-.052
Full	Avoidance	-.315	.008	.002	partial	-.024

Note: CCRS = Constructive Conflict Resolution

^aIn order to more closely approximate normality, Discrepancy and CCRS were transformed with \sqrt{X}

^bIndependent variable

The mediation model which examined the mediation effects of discrepancy on attachment and relationship satisfaction did meet the requisite conditions for mediation, as described in the following analyses (Tables 31 and 32). In examining step 1 of these prerequisites, the regression model with anxiety and avoidance as predictors of satisfaction was significant, $F(2) = 23.45, p < .001$, adjusted $R^2 = .359$. Both anxiety ($\beta = -.328, p = .001$) and avoidance ($\beta = -.403, p < .001$) were found to be significant predictors for satisfaction. Step 2, was demonstrated in the above analyses and shown to meet the conditions for mediation. Step 3, which involved a regression model with discrepancy predicting satisfaction was significant, $F(1) = 56.95, p < .001$, adjusted $R^2 = .412$. Discrepancy was a significant predictor ($\beta = -.647, p < .001$). These results are displayed in the tables below.

Table 31

Condition 1 matched sample, attachment variables predicting Satisfaction (n=82)

IV ^b	B	SE	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Avoidance	-.284	.069	-.403	-4.133	<.001	.359	23.45	<.001
Anxiety	-.203	.060	-.328	-3.368	.001			

df=2

Table 32

Condition 1 matched sample, Discrepancy^a predicting Satisfaction (n = 82)

IV ^b	B	SE	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Discrepancy ^a	-1.402	.186	-0.647	-7.547	.001	.412	56.95	.001

df=1

^aIn order to more closely approximate normality, Discrepancy was transformed with \sqrt{X} ^bIndependent variable

The full regression model, with avoidance and anxiety entered in step 1 and discrepancy entered in step 2, predicting satisfaction was significant at step 2, $F(3) = 27.13$, $p < .001$. Adjusted $R^2 = .495$ at step 2, which indicated that with attachment variables and discrepancy in the model, 49.5% of the variance in self-reported relationship satisfaction was explained. In step 1 avoidance was a significant predictor, ($\beta = -.403$, $p < .001$) as was anxiety ($\beta = -.328$, $p = .001$). In step 2 the strength of avoidance decreased but remained significant ($\beta = -.250$, $p = .009$), while anxiety was no longer significant ($\beta = -.189$, $p = .042$). Discrepancy was significant at step 2 ($\beta = -.445$, $p < .001$). These results are displayed below in Table 33.

Table 33

Condition 1 matched sample, Test of Indirect Effect of Discrepancy^a on Attachment and Satisfaction (n=82)

	IV ^b	B	SE	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	ΔR^2	Adjusted R^2	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>
Step 1										
	Avoidance	-.284	.069	-.403	-4.13	<.001	.375	.359	23.45 ^c	<.001
	Anxiety	-.203	.060	-.328	-3.37	.001				
Step 2										
	Avoidance	-.176	.065	-.250	-2.701	.009	.138	.495	27.13 ^d	<.001
	Anxiety	-.117	.056	-.189	-2.066	.042				
	Discrepancy ^a	-.964	.206	-.445	-4.683	<.001				

^aIn order to more closely approximate normality, Discrepancy was transformed with \sqrt{X}

^bIndependent variable

^c*df*=2

^d*df*=3

The Sobel statistic for the mediated effect of discrepancy on avoidance and satisfaction is $z = 2.68$, $SE = .040$, $p = .007$, with an unstandardized mediation coefficient of $-.200$. Since avoidance was still significant in step 2, these results show that in Condition 1, discrepancy is a significant partial mediator in the relationship between attachment avoidance and self-reported relationship satisfaction. The Sobel statistic for the mediated effect of discrepancy on anxiety and satisfaction is $z = 2.63$, $SE = .034$, $p = .009$, with an unstandardized mediation coefficient of $-.088$. Since anxiety was no longer significant in step 2, these results show that in Condition 1, discrepancy is a significant full mediator in the relationship between attachment anxiety and self-reported relationship satisfaction. The

Table 34 below displays the comparison of mediated effects for this model, between the full sample of Condition 1 participants and matched Condition 1 participants. The table shows that both mediation effects are significant at the .01 level, and the types of mediation are consistent, although the strength of the effect is larger in the full sample.

Table 34

Comparing Condition 1 Mediation Model Attachment, Discrepancy^a, Satisfaction between matched (n=82) and full sample (n=176)

Sample	IV ^b	<i>z</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	Type of mediation	Unstandardized mediation coefficient
Matched	Avoidance	2.68	.040	.007	partial	-.200
	Anxiety	2.63	.034	.009	full	-.088
Full	Avoidance	3.71	.080	.001	partial	-.096
	Anxiety	3.19	.066	.001	full	-.067

^aIn order to more closely approximate normality, Discrepancy was transformed with \sqrt{X}

^bIndependent variable

Another follow-up test that is of interest is testing the mediating effects of RBI-DM on the relationship between attachment and satisfaction, as well as its effects on the relationship between attachment and constructive conflict resolution. This mediation model did not meet the prerequisite conditions for mediation using the full sample for Condition 1, but it is important to investigate whether this model may be significant using only the matched participants in Condition 1. Upon regressing RBI-DM on anxiety and avoidance, the full regression model was significant, $F(2) = 9.53, p < .001$, adjusted $R^2 = .174$. Avoidance ($\beta = .081, p = .464$) was not significant, while anxiety ($\beta = .403, p = .001$) was a significant

predictor in the model. Upon regressing satisfaction on RBI-DM, the full regression model was significant, $F(1) = 11.57, p = .001$, adjusted $R^2 = .117$. RBI-DM was a significant predictor ($\beta = -.357, p = .001$). These results are displayed below (Tables 35 and 36).

Table 35

Condition 1 matched sample, attachment variables predicting RBI-DM (n=82)

IV ^b	B	SE	β	t	p	Adjusted R ²	F	p
Avoidance	0.051	0.07	0.081	0.735	0.464	0.174	9.53	<.001
Anxiety	0.225	0.061	0.403	3.673	<.001			

df=2

Table 36

Condition 1 matched sample, RBI-DM predicting Satisfaction (n =82)

IV ^b	B	SE	β	t	p	Adjusted R ²	F	p
RBI-DM	-0.394	0.116	-0.357	-3.402	0.001	0.117	11.57	0.001

df=1

Note. RBI-DM = Irrational relationship beliefs associated with disagreement and mindreading.

^bIndependent variable

Due to the fact that avoidance was not a significant predictor for RBI-DM, and anxiety was not a significant predictor for constructive conflict resolution, the mediation model for attachment, RBI-DM, and constructive conflict resolution does not meet the prerequisite conditions for mediation. However, with all of the prerequisite conditions for mediation met for the mediation model of attachment on satisfaction mediated by RBI-DM, this model was examined. Anxiety and avoidance were entered in a regression model in step 1, with RBI-DM entered in step 2, predicting satisfaction. The full model was significant at step 2, $F(3) = 16.61, p < .001$, adjusted $R^2 = .369$. Anxiety was a significant predictor in step 1 ($\beta = -.328, p = .001$). In step 2, anxiety was a significant predictor at the .05 level ($\beta =$

-.268, $p = .013$) but RBI-DM was not ($\beta = -.147, p = .142$). With the link between mediator and dependent variable being non-significant, this mediation model is not significant. These results are displayed in Table 37.

However, the fact that RBI-DM lost predictive power after being entered in the regression with attachment variables suggests that attachment may be a full mediator between RBI-DM and relationship satisfaction. To be sure that these variables met the conditions for mediation, anxiety was regressed on RBI-DM and indeed, the model was significant $F(1) = 18.63, p < .001$, adjusted $R^2 = .179$ (Table 38). RBI-DM was a significant predictor ($\beta = .435, p < .001$). The Sobel statistic for this mediated effect is $z = 2.39, SE = .059, p = .017$, with an unstandardized mediation coefficient of $-.128$. This is an unexpected finding which will be discussed further in the next chapter. These results are displayed below in Tables 37 and 38.

Table 37

Condition Imatched sample, Test of Indirect Effect of RBI-DM on Attachment and Satisfaction (n=82)

	IV ^b	B	SE	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	ΔR^2	Adjusted R^2	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Step 1										
	Avoidance	-.284	.069	-.403	-4.13	<.001	.375	.359	23.45 ^c	<.001
	Anxiety	-.203	.060	-.328	-3.37	.001				
Step 2										
	Avoidance	-.276	.068	-.392	-4.042	<.001	.017	.369	16.61 ^d	<.001
	Anxiety	-.165	.065	-.268	-2.556	.013				
	RBI-DM	-.162	.109	-.147	-1.485	.142				

Note . RBI-DM = Irrational relationship beliefs associated with disagreement and mindreading.

^bIndependent variable

^c*df*=2

^d*df*=3

Table 38

Condition 1 matched sample, RBI-DM predicting Anxiety (n=82)

IV ^b	B	SE	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
RBI-DM	.778	.180	.435	-4.32	<.001	.179	18.63	<.001

Note . RBI-DM = Irrational relationship beliefs associated with disagreement and mindreading,

^bIndependent variable

^c*df*=2

^d*df*=3

Research Question

The research question was posed in order to explore the relationship between the active conflict resolution scale as measured by the CCRS and attachment variables. However, the internal reliability analysis of the active conflict resolution scale revealed a Cronbach's alpha of .47 for this data set, which is not acceptable internal reliability. Due to this finding, any further analyses with this scale would not be considered valid, and the research question is not able to be explored. Further interpretation of the low internal reliability will be provided in chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Main Hypotheses

Relationship quality is a concept that has been studied extensively in psychological literature (Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000; Furman & Buhrmester, 1992; Hendrick, 1988; Orden & Bradburn, 1968; Spanier, 1976). Relationship satisfaction and conflict resolution styles are two important components in the larger construct of relationship quality that have been examined in the present study. Adult attachment is a construct that has also been examined extensively within the romantic relationship literature. Although there is an abundance of research demonstrating the impact of adult attachment styles on relationship quality, the more fine-grained mechanisms by which these relationships exist have not been well-studied. The present study examined these gaps in the research by examining the potential mediating effects of empathy and relationship perfectionism on attachment and relationship quality. In addition, because attachment styles are activated during times of distress and conflict (Pietromonaco, Greenwood, & Barrett, 2004), the present study used three levels of priming conditions to activate attachment styles of randomly assigned participants with the hypothesis that the activated attachment state would result in greater mediation effects.

This chapter will begin by providing theoretical interpretation from an attachment perspective for the findings presented in chapter 4. The link between attachment and relationship quality variables will be discussed, followed by a discussion of the hypothesized mediators for these relationships, relationship perfectionism and empathy. The hypothesized moderating effect of activating attachment style will also be discussed, along with an

interpretation of the post-hoc analyses, followed by a discussion of study clinical implications, limitations and future research.

Attachment and Relationship Quality

A main focus of this study was the direct relationship between attachment and relationship quality variables of relationship satisfaction and constructive conflict resolution. This relationship formed the basis for Hypotheses 1 and 3, both of which predicted possible mediators for this relationship, empathy and relationship perfectionism, respectively. As expected, both anxiety and avoidance were significantly negatively related to constructive conflict resolution and relationship satisfaction, in all experimental conditions. This is consistent with previous research on attachment and constructive conflict resolution, as well as attachment and relationship satisfaction (Alexandrov, Cowan, & Cowan, 2005; Collins & Read, 1990; Crowley, 2006; Gaines et al., 1997; Gaines & Hendeson, 2002; Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1995; Simpson, 1990). A series of regressions for each dependent variable, one for each condition, revealed slightly different results.

With constructive conflict resolution as the dependent variable, attachment significantly predicted constructive conflict resolution in Conditions 1, 2, and 3. However, while avoidance was a significant predictor in all three conditions, anxiety was only significant in Condition 3. Given significant correlations between anxiety and constructive conflict resolution in all three conditions, the regression findings suggest that avoidance was having a suppressive effect on anxiety with regards to their impact on constructive conflict resolution. This may be evidence that attachment avoidance has a stronger negative relationship with constructive conflict resolution than attachment anxiety. Indeed, Gaines et al., (1997) found that while both anxiety and avoidance were positively related with exit and

neglect conflict resolution behaviors (e.g. moving out, allowing relationship to fall apart), it was only avoidance that was negatively related to voice conflict resolution behaviors (e.g. talking out the problem).

This makes sense from an attachment perspective, as individuals who are higher in anxious attachment may actually be more likely to engage in any behavior that might initiate closeness, for deep inside they are afraid to lose their partners after a conflict. This is not to say that anxious individuals are necessarily more likely to be skilled at voice responses, but they may be less likely to avoid them, because they are opportunities to connect with a partner and prevent abandonment. Indeed, a primary characteristic of anxious individuals is the tendency to move toward romantic partners, whereas for avoidant individuals the tendency is to move away from romantic partners. According to attachment theory, individuals who are high in attachment avoidance are more likely to move away from behaviors which promote intimacy, because they have learned that intimacy and connection from partners cannot be counted on. Engaging in a voice type of response may include self-disclosing and exposing vulnerability, actions which avoidant individuals have learned will only cause pain and disappointment. Although this study did not analyze participant responses on the individual subscales of the Constructive Conflict Resolution Scale (CCRS), it is possible higher negative correlations with voice behaviors may be one explanation for the apparent stronger overall negative relationship of avoidance with constructive conflict resolution, when compared with anxiety.

Another possible statistical explanation is that the negative relationship between avoidance and constructive conflict resolution actually weakened in Condition 3, making the effect of anxiety more visible in the regression equation. Indeed, this is reflected in an

examination of tables 3, 4, and 5, in which the relationship between avoidance and CCRS is $r = -.428$ in Condition 1, $r = -.473$ in Condition 2, and $r = -.258$ in Condition 3. This is a striking drop from Conditions 1 and 2 to Condition 3. Although many participants in Conditions 1 and 2 still rated their described experiences as positive or neutral, it is possible that enough participants were negatively primed ($n = 82$ in Condition 1 and $n = 35$ in Condition 2) to increase the strength of the overall negative relationship between attachment avoidance and CCRS in Conditions 1 and 2. Without these negative influences in Condition 3, the strength of the relationship between avoidance and CCRS diminished and anxiety emerged as significant in the model.

It is interesting that the negative prompt in Condition 2, which is not intended to prime attachment style, may have also influenced avoidant individuals' responses on the CCRS. It may be that even more general negative thoughts and feelings, not necessarily those associated in a relationship context, can activate attachment in avoidant individuals and influence their reported approach to conflict. This pattern does not seem to be true for anxious individuals, as correlations between anxiety and CCRS were highest in Condition 1 ($r = -.346$) and relatively the same in Condition 2 ($r = .297$) and Condition 3 ($r = .301$). This conclusion is of course tenuous, as there were only 35 participants in Condition 2 who reported having a negative experience, and we can assume that an even smaller number of those participants scored in the higher range on avoidant attachment.

Overall, these results seem to indicate that higher levels of avoidant attachment predict lower levels of self-reported constructive conflict resolution behavior, and that the effect of avoidant attachment may be stronger when participants are primed with negative thoughts and/or feelings. The results also indicate that higher levels of anxious attachment

are correlated with lower levels of self-reported constructive conflict resolution behavior, and that this relationship may be weaker than the relationship between avoidance and constructive conflict resolution behavior.

With relationship satisfaction as the dependent variable, attachment significantly predicted satisfaction in Conditions 1, 2, and 3. However, while avoidance was a significant predictor in all three conditions, anxiety was only significant in Condition 1. Similar to the relationships with attachment and constructive conflict resolution when both avoidance and anxiety are included in a model predicting satisfaction, avoidance may have a suppressive effect on anxiety in regards to their impact on relationship satisfaction. This may be evidence that attachment avoidance has a stronger negative relationship with relationship satisfaction than attachment anxiety. Indeed, the correlation coefficients for avoidance and satisfaction are $r = -.592$, $r = -.509$, $r = -.452$ respectively for Conditions 1, 2, and 3, whereas the correlation coefficients for anxiety and satisfaction are $r = -.484$, $r = -.309$, and $r = -.213$, respectively for Conditions 1, 2 and 3.

The fact that anxiety did emerge as a significant predictor in Condition 1, in spite of the relatively large correlation between avoidance and satisfaction, may be evidence that the experimental prime was effective in activating attachment style in at least some of the participants in Condition 1. The results showed that 46.6% of participants in Condition 1 rated their experience as negative, and given that the prompt asked participants to describe an unresolved conflict with their romantic partner, it could be reasonably assumed that attachment styles were activated in these participants. In Conditions 2 and 3, participants did not experience a prompt that would activate attachment style. In fact, the number of participants who rated their responses as negative in Conditions 2 and 3 were only 18.9% and

2.7%, respectively. It is possible that the priming of attachment style in Condition 1 and not in the other condition was enough to strengthen the relationship between anxiety and satisfaction in that condition. Avoidance, on the other hand, seemed to be relatively robust to the variability created due to differences in prompts in the various conditions, though, consistent with the relationship between anxiety and satisfaction, the largest beta weight for avoidance was in Condition 1, suggesting that the priming of attachment style may have had some effect in the strength of that relationship. The relationship between avoidance and satisfaction was $r > -.450$ in all three conditions.

The fact that avoidance emerged as a significant predictor in all three conditions, regardless of experimental prompt, suggests that the relationship between attachment avoidance and relationship satisfaction is more robust than the relationship between attachment anxiety and relationship satisfaction. Indeed, in a study exploring adult attachment, conflict resolution, and relationship satisfaction, Shi (2003) found a larger beta weight for avoidance ($\beta = -.60$) than anxiety ($\beta = -.21$) when predicting relationship satisfaction. One possible explanation for a strong correlation between avoidance and relationship satisfaction is the finding in the present study that avoidance also has a strong negative correlation with constructive conflict resolution. In other words, higher constructive conflict resolution may be related to higher relationship satisfaction. In Condition 1 the correlation between CCRS and satisfaction is $r = .425$, in Condition 2 it is $r = .478$, and in Condition 3 it is $r = .393$. If avoidant individuals tend to engage in less constructive conflict resolution behaviors, this may in turn influence less relationship satisfaction. The connection between conflict resolution and relationship satisfaction has been proposed in previous research. Clymer, Ray, Trapper, and Pierce (2006) found verbal aggression as a means of

conflict resolution to predict lower relationship satisfaction; avoidant attachment was also found to predict lower level of relationship satisfaction.

It makes sense that the group which does a poorer job of resolving conflict would also be the group with lower levels of relationship satisfaction and this finding has been supported many times in research on romantic relationships. Rusbult et al., (1991) found that relationship satisfaction is positively associated with voice responses and negatively associated with exit and neglect. Gottman (1998) has found that a characteristic of unhappy couples is that they engage in patterns of negative reciprocity, which is when the negative behavior of one partner is met with further negative reactions by the other. The CCRS used in this study is a measure of just that, the ability of a person to engage in a constructive response following a destructive action by his/her partner. If avoidant individuals, due to a fear of rejection and internalized mistrust of others, are less likely to be able to inhibit a tendency to engage in an exit or neglect type of response, then it follows that they are often engaging in these negative patterns of reciprocity with their partners. These negative patterns of conflict resolution may likely reinforce avoidant individuals' already present beliefs about the untrustworthiness of partners to provide security and support during times of distress, thereby reducing overall relationship satisfaction.

Attachment and Empathy

Hypothesis 1 predicted that anxiety and avoidant attachment would both be negatively correlated with PT and EC empathy. The correlations for the full data set showed that, contrary to predictions, avoidance was not significantly related to EC or PT. Anxiety was significantly related only to PT. When bivariate correlations were examined by condition, none of the attachment variables were related to any of the empathy variables.

Restricted range is a possible explanation for the fact that attachment was not significantly related to EC. The scale for items on the EC subscale ranged from 1-5, with 5 indicating higher levels of empathic concern. In all three experimental conditions, the mean score for EC items was > 4.0 , with an average standard deviation of approximately .50. This is suggestive of a ceiling effect, meaning that the participants tended to all self-report higher levels of empathic concern, reducing the variability in this variable. Restricted range limits the possibility of correlation with another variable (Field, 2005). This same phenomenon may also explain the limited correlation of attachment with PT. The mean score for PT items was > 3.7 , with an average standard deviation of approximately .50. Similar to scores for EC, participants tended to all report higher levels of perspective taking, reducing the variability in this variable and limiting the possibility of correlation with the attachment variables. While PT was also shown to be significantly influenced by recruitment method, even after controlling for this variable, none of the regressions (separated by condition) with attachment predicting PT were significant. This lends further support for the possibility that restricted range played a significant role in the lack of correlational findings between attachment and PT.

Collectively, the findings showed that due to insignificant relationships with attachment variables, neither PT nor EC met the conditions for mediation. Therefore, the results are not supportive of Hypothesis 1. This is inconsistent with a body of literature that has shown EC and PT to have negative relationships with insecure attachment (Bekendam, 1997; Joireman, Needham, & Cummings, 2001) and also inconsistent with theoretical suppositions. For example, adult secure attachment has been linked to enhanced social competence (Kenny & Donaldson, 1991), which has been defined as the skills needed to

recruit and maintain satisfying and supportive relationships and trait-like dispositions that govern the use of these skills (Mallinckrodt, 2002). Given this definition, empathy could be conceptualized as a social competence skill and one would expect that a significant relationship would exist between attachment and empathy.

In addition to the statistical phenomena of restricted range for PT and EC scores as described in the previous sections, the insignificant findings in the current study may perhaps indicate that the PT and EC subscales of the IRI are not sensitive enough to detect differences in empathy levels among the participants in this study. For example, previous research has suggested that females tend to report higher levels of empathy than males (Britton & Fuendeling, 2005; Trusty, Ng, & Watts, 2005) and in the current study, 75.9% of participants identified as female. It is possible that the disproportionate number of female participants could have obscured the true variability that might occur in PT and EC in the general population, making correlations between empathy and attachment that may otherwise exist, difficult to detect. Another possibility is that insecurely attached individuals actually have lower empathy for romantic partners than they do for people with whom they are engaged in more casual relationships. It could be that using a scale that specifically taps empathy for romantic partners, rather than a general empathy scale such as the IRI, would be a more appropriate and sensitive measure for examining the link between empathy and attachment in romantic relationships.

Attachment and Relationship Perfectionism

Hypothesis 3 predicted that anxious and avoidant attachment would both be negatively correlated with relationship perfectionism variables of irrational relationship beliefs associated with mindreading and disagreements (RBI-DM) and the tendency to

perceive a discrepancy between perceived partner behavior and expectations of partner behavior (Discrepancy). As expected, bivariate correlations between attachment and relationship perfectionism variables were all significant, and this was true for both the full data set correlation matrix for the individual correlation matrices for each condition. A series of regressions for each dependent variable, one for each condition, revealed slightly different results.

Both avoidance and anxiety significantly predicted discrepancy in Conditions 1, 2, and 3. These regression findings and the above correlational findings are consistent with predictions and with previous research showing that higher levels of attachment avoidance and anxiety predict higher levels of perceived discrepancy between partner behavior and expectations for partner behavior (Weibe & McCabe, 2002). For the RBI-DM variable, higher levels of attachment anxiety predicted higher levels of irrational relationship beliefs associated with mindreading and disagreements in Conditions 1, 2, and 3, while avoidance was not a significant predictor of irrational relationship beliefs associated with mindreading and disagreements in any condition. This is unexpected, given that insecure attachment has been shown to be positively related to irrational relationship beliefs and that secure attachment has been shown to be associated with healthy expectations about relationships (Carnelley & Rowe, 2007; Feeney, 1995; Pietromonoco & Carnelley, 1994).

One reason for these findings is that the strength of anxiety as a predictor is suppressing any predictive effect avoidance may have in the model. This is evident in an examination of the beta weights which show that in Condition 1 (anxiety $\beta = .388$, avoidance $\beta = .156$), Condition 2 (anxiety $\beta = .401$, avoidance $\beta = .135$) and in Condition 3 (anxiety $\beta = .478$, avoidance $\beta = .110$). Overall, these findings are indicative that anxiety may have a

stronger relationship with irrational relationship beliefs associated with mindreading and disagreements than avoidance. This is consistent with attachment theory, which proposes that anxiously attached individuals tend to have negative internal working models of themselves, but positive internal working models of others (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). Conversely, more avoidant individuals tend to have a positive internal working model of themselves, but a negative internal working model of others. The working model for others has implications for an expectation of availability, such that anxious individuals will be more likely to believe that if they try hard enough romantic partners may respond to their call and become available to provide support during times of distress, whereas avoidant individuals are likely to be skeptical of romantic partners' availability.

It follows then, that anxious individuals are more likely to have irrational expectations for their relationships, and would be more likely to endorse items referring to a partner's ability to sense their needs (e.g. "I get very upset if my partner does not recognize how I am feeling and I have to tell him/her"; "I expect my partner to sense all of my moods"). The negative internal working model of self for anxiously attached individuals also influences beliefs that they are not worthy of love of and therefore could very easily be rejected by romantic partners. This may influence a tendency to endorse items referring to an expectation that disagreements with romantic partners are unacceptable and dangerous (e.g. "When my partner and I disagree, I feel like our relationship is falling apart"; "If your partner expresses disagreement with your ideas, she/he probably does not think very highly of you"). Avoidant individuals, on the other hand, already have a belief that significant others are not likely to live up to their expectations, and so expectations for romantic relationships are not as likely to be irrational.

Relationship Perfectionism and Relationship Quality

Hypothesis 3 predicted that relationship perfectionism variables would have a negative relationship with relationship quality variables of constructive conflict resolution and relationship satisfaction. As expected, bivariate correlations for the full data set showed that perceived discrepancy between partner behavior and expectations of partner behavior, as well as irrational relationship beliefs, were both significantly negatively associated with both constructive conflict resolution and relationship satisfaction. This is consistent with expectations and with previous research (Bushman, 1998; Lopez, Fonz-Scheyd, Morúa, & Chaliman, 2006; Metts & Cupach, 1990; Shea, Slaney, & Rice, 2006). Upon examining correlation matrices for individual conditions, both discrepancy and RBI-DM were significantly negatively associated with constructive conflict resolution and relationship satisfaction in Conditions 1 and 2. In Condition 3, however, discrepancy and RBI-DM were both significantly correlated with constructive conflict resolution, but only discrepancy was significantly correlated with relationship satisfaction. The correlation between RBI-DM and relationship satisfaction was marginally significant ($r = -.185$, $p = .011$) in Condition 3.

The lack of a significant correlation between irrational relationship beliefs associated with mindreading and disagreements and relationship satisfaction in Condition 3 is unexpected and inconsistent with the results in Conditions 1 and 2. It is likely that the priming prompt in Condition 3 influenced participants' responses on the relationship satisfaction measure so that this correlation between these types of irrational relationship beliefs and relationship satisfaction was weakened. The intention of the Condition 3 prompt was to give participants a neutral experience of writing about a recent event that could be compared to participants in Conditions 1 and 2, who were writing about negative events.

However, results showed that 85.1% of participants rated their described event as positive, and it is possible that the act of writing about a positive experience with a friend or co-worker unintentionally primed these participants in a positive direction and when it came to responding to items about their romantic relationships, they were more likely to respond from that positive mindset and report greater satisfaction.

The subsequent regressions with discrepancy and RBI-DM predicting constructive conflict resolution showed that discrepancy and RBI-DM were both significant predictors in Conditions 2 and 3, but in Condition 1 only discrepancy was significant in predicting constructive conflict resolution. These results indicate that higher levels of perceived discrepancy between partner behavior and expectations for partner behavior predicts lower levels of self-reported constructive conflict resolution behavior. As for irrational relationship beliefs, it is difficult to explain the non-significant finding for Condition 1, especially when participants in Condition 1 were expected to have experienced activated attachment styles which was believed would strengthen the relationship between irrational relationship beliefs associated with mindreading and disagreements and constructive conflict resolution behavior. One possible explanation for this non-significant finding in Condition 1 is the fact that out of all the conditions, Condition 1 is the most heterogeneous in terms of experiences reported on the experimental prompt. Condition 3 is comprised largely of positive experiences (85.1%) with a small amount of neutral (12.2%) and negligible amount of negative experiences (2.7%). Condition 2 is also comprised mostly of positive (57.3%), with relatively equal amounts of neutral (23.8%) and negative experiences (18.9%). Condition 1, on the other hand is more heterogeneous than the other two groups, with 46.6% of the participants describing their experiences as negative, 38.1% describing them as neutral, and 15.9%

describing them as positive. This amount of variability in responses increases the error terms in the regressions and may obscure a true effect of RBI-DM as a predictor of constructive conflict resolution.

The regressions with discrepancy and RBI-DM predicting relationship satisfaction showed a much neater pattern, with higher levels of perceived discrepancy between partner behavior and expectations for partner behavior significantly predicting lower levels of relationship satisfaction in all three conditions, and irrational relationship beliefs associated with mindreading and disagreements emerging as a non-significant predictor in all three conditions. It is likely that, at least in Conditions 1 and 2, this is another example of a suppressive effect, with discrepancy suppressing any true predictive power of these types of irrational relationship beliefs on relationship satisfaction. An examination of the beta weights is consistent with this, with Condition 1 (discrepancy, $\beta = -.567$; RBI-DM, $\beta = -.129$), Condition 2 (discrepancy, $\beta = -.593$; RBI-DM, $\beta = -.044$) and in Condition 3 (discrepancy, $\beta = -.522$; RBI-DM, $\beta = -.010$). In re-running the regressions with only RBI-DM predicting relationship satisfaction, higher levels of irrational relationship beliefs associated with mindreading and disagreements significantly predicted lower relationship satisfaction in Conditions 1 and 2, indicating that RBI-DM does have predictive power for relationship satisfaction, but it is less so than that of discrepancy.

Considering the constructs of discrepancy and irrational relationship beliefs, it follows logically that discrepancy may have a stronger impact on relationship satisfaction. The items in the DAPS seem to directly tap a person's level of satisfaction with his/her partner's performance in the relationship, with several items using a derivation of satisfaction (e.g. "I usually feel pretty satisfied with what my significant other does", "I am not satisfied,

even when I know my significant other has done his/her best”). Even the items that do not include satisfaction seem to implicitly tap into this construct (e.g. “My significant other does measure up to my expectations”). In this way, the discrepancy scale seems to measure a person’s level of satisfaction with their partner, whereas the relationship assessment scale seems to measure level of satisfaction with the relationship as a whole, and it follows that these two would be highly correlated. In scale development for the DAPS, Shea, Slaney and Rice (2006) found the DAPS Discrepancy scale to be highly predictive of the RAS for women, but less so for men. This is consistent with the findings of the current study, which was comprised mostly of women participants. The RBI-DM, on the other hand, measures irrational expectations about the relationship, but does not measure whether or not the person believes their relationship is meeting these standards. In this way, it is less a satisfaction measure and more a measure of faulty thought processes that could very likely lead to less satisfaction in a relationship. It makes sense that when both are included in the model, discrepancy would have a stronger effect and even wash out the effects of RBI-DM, which is potentially what has happened in the current study.

Overall, these results are supportive of the idea that higher levels of perceived discrepancy between partner behavior and expectations for partner predict lower relationship satisfaction and lower constructive conflict resolution. These relationships appear to be stronger and more robust to differential priming conditions than the effects possessing irrational beliefs about one’s romantic relationship have on relationship quality variables.

Examinations of Mediation Analyses

Attachment, discrepancy, and constructive conflict resolution. Hypothesis 3 predicted that higher levels of anxiety and avoidance would predict lower levels of

relationship quality and that these relationships would be mediated by relationship perfectionism variables. The mediating effect of discrepancy on the relationship between attachment and constructive conflict resolution was examined and findings indicate that in Conditions 1 and 2, discrepancy was a significant partial mediator, while in Condition 3, discrepancy was a full mediator.

The fact that both anxiety and avoidance are fully mediated in Condition 3, but only avoidance is partially mediated in Conditions 1 and 2, is contrary to expectations. It would be expected that in the conditions where some type of discomfort was primed, particularly when that discomfort was related to romantic relationships, this would result in stronger relationships between the independent and dependent variables. A possible explanation of the unexpected findings is that when participants experience discomfort, the impact of attachment on constructive conflict resolution has less to do with perfectionist expectations placed upon the partner, and more to do with other mediating or moderating factors. For example, in Conditions 1 and 2, discomfort was primed and along with feelings of discomfort, participants most likely experienced negative emotions. Differences in the ability to regulate negative emotion would be one factor that would also impact conflict resolution strategies. The ability to regulate emotions could arguably be related to how vulnerable a person is to falling in the trap of expecting perfection from a partner in all domains as a necessary precursor to the partner's level of availability. A hallmark of perfectionism is "all-or-nothing thinking" (Burns, 1980; Chang, 2006; Flett, Hewitt, Blankstein, & Gray, 1998), reducing the possibilities for how to think about oneself down to two possibilities: perfection or failure. The discrepancy items of the DAPS extrapolate on this idea and apply it to all-or-nothing thinking about a partner, expecting perfection from the

partner as the only acceptable standard, with everything else viewed as failure. Proponents of cognitive therapy have argued that all-or-nothing thinking is an example of a cognitive distortion, a thinking error that represents rigid and inflexible thinking, and that cognitive distortions influence emotions and unhealthy behaviors (Beck, 1995). Following this line of reasoning, possessing emotion regulation strategies may serve to moderate the negative effects of discrepancy on constructive conflict resolution. Individual differences in emotion regulation may have impacted responses in Conditions 1 and 2, rendering the effects of discrepancy less impactful on responses for self-reported constructive conflict resolution. In Condition 3, without the element of priming for negative experience, the ability to regulate negative emotion is not nearly as much of a factor, and instead participants may have relied more on perfectionistic expectations of their partners, as predicted by their respective insecure attachment styles.

Another explanation for these differential findings via condition may be the fact that true scores were obscured by self-report. Whenever self-report is measured in place of or without behavior, error variance is increased because other factors such as social desirability and poor insight into one's own behavior can reduce the accuracy of reporting. If conflict resolution behavior were measured along with self-report, a more complete picture of these mediating relationships would be obtained and it is possible that the observed differences between conditions would no longer occur.

Taken together these results are supportive of Hypothesis 3. They indicate that higher levels of attachment avoidance predict lower levels of self-reported constructive conflict resolution behavior, and this process is happening in part via higher levels of relationship perfectionism.

Attachment, discrepancy, relationship satisfaction. The mediating effect of discrepancy on attachment and relationship satisfaction was examined in Conditions 1, 2, and 3 and in all s, discrepancy served as a partial mediator for avoidance on relationship satisfaction. This is consistent with theoretical underpinnings for attachment avoidance and discrepancy. As stated above, individuals with high attachment avoidance tend to have a positive working model of self and negative working model of others. These individuals are likely to be highly attuned to any indication that romantic partners are not meeting expectations, because these expectations already exist in their schema of other people, which is that they cannot be trusted to be available for support and comfort during times of distress. Cognitive therapy proposes that “healthy individuals” are able to incorporate new information into their schemas and subsequently alter belief systems, whereas unhealthy individuals are unable to do so, instead relying on schema-consistent information when processing information (Beck, 1995). Due to their internal negative view of others, avoidant individuals may be more vulnerable to subscribing to rigid negative schemas of others, paying attention only to the information that would lead to the conclusion that their partners are not meeting expectations, paying little attention to information that is contrary to that. This attentional bias filters memories as well, leaving avoidant individuals with overall feelings that their romantic partners are not living up to expectations, leading to lower overall relationship satisfaction.

In Condition 1, discrepancy served as full mediator for anxiety on relationship satisfaction. Anxious individuals, by nature, have a positive working model of others and a negative view of themselves, therefore the processes by which discrepancy mediates anxiety and relationship satisfaction likely are different than those for avoidant individuals. Although

anxious individuals have a positive view of others, the negative view of themselves impacts fears that romantic partners will leave them because they are not worthy of love. This pattern of thinking leaves anxious individuals highly vigilant to any behavior by a romantic partner that would indicate rejection or unavailability. Thus, in order for an anxious individual to feel satisfied in a relationship, a romantic partner must meet very high and perhaps unrealistic expectations. These expectations are likely beyond what would be expected from a securely attached individual, because a securely attached person would likely be more resistant to any perceived discrepancy between expectations for partner and partner behavior. Securely attached individuals may attribute a perceived discrepancy between expectations for a partner and partner behavior to something much more benign than the possibility that the partner is going to abandon them, such as the partner is having a bad day, tired, etc. Furthermore, the expectations for partner behavior may be more realistic to begin with, with securely attached persons able to accept normal human flaws as not necessarily indicative of a partner's level of commitment or availability.

Taken together, these results support Hypothesis 3 and indicate that higher levels of avoidance predict lower levels of relationship satisfaction and are due in part to increased perfectionist expectations placed upon the partner. Although the degree to which individuals were primed with attachment in Condition 1 is somewhat ambiguous, if we consider that Condition 1 was effective in priming attachment anxiety in some individuals, these findings indicate that when attachment styles are activated, high levels of anxiety predict lower levels of relationship satisfaction, and this can be fully explained by high levels of perfectionist expectations placed upon the partner.

Examination of the Priming Effects

Hypotheses 2 and 4 both tested the predicted experimental effect of randomly assigning participants to different conditions where they were differentially primed to experience either (1) discomfort related to romantic relationships, (2) neutral discomfort, and (3) no discomfort and specifically predicted that the mediating effects would be strongest in Condition 1. While there were insufficient conditions to test Hypothesis 2, Hypothesis 4 was tested for both mediation models. It was determined that there were no significant differences among conditions between the size of the mediating effects of discrepancy on attachment and constructive conflict resolution. For the mediation of attachment by discrepancy on relationship satisfaction, there were no observed differences in effect size for the mediating effects, but the fact that anxiety was fully mediated in Condition 1 and did not even meet the conditions for mediation in Conditions 2 and 3 may be evidence in support of Hypothesis 4.

It is possible that the prompt in Condition 1 was successful in priming anxious attachment in anxiously attached participants, and this activation of attachment style is what is responsible for the fact that anxiety was fully mediated in Condition 1. In Conditions 2 and 3, anxiety did not even directly predict relationship satisfaction, and this is perhaps due to the fact that those conditions did not activate anxious attachment. If this is true of the population, then it may be that anxious individuals will more likely report feeling dissatisfied with their relationships when their attachment systems are activated. This fits with attachment theory, which postulates that the internal working models of anxious attachment, including fear of rejection and poor self-worth will be activated during times of distress, when the pressure is placed on a romantic partner to be available and meet the emotional needs of the anxiously attached person. If an anxiously attached person is not feeling distressed, the attachment

system is less likely to impact satisfaction and self-reported satisfaction may not look particularly lower than that of a secure person.

It was expected that a similar pattern would have been observed for avoidance and relationship satisfaction, and for the attachment, discrepancy, constructive conflict resolution model but the findings did not support the expectations. One viable explanation as to why there was no effect of condition in these cases is that participants were not adequately primed with the intended effects of discomfort related to romantic relationships (Condition 1), neutral discomfort (Condition 2) and no discomfort (Condition 3). As results from the post-hoc analysis revealed, the majority of participants rated their experience as positive, regardless of condition. In Condition 1, less than half of the participants reported that their experience matched the intended prime, while only 18.9% of participants in Condition 2 reported that their experience matched the intended prime. These results suggest that the prompts may not have effectively elicited the intended responses in Conditions 1 and 2, which is a likely explanation for the lack of significant differences in mediation effect across conditions.

Based on previous research, it was expected that writing about the dentist would elicit discomfort, as would writing about a recent, unresolved conflict in a relationship (Carnelly & Rowe, 2007; Cox et al., 2008; Sutin & Gillath, 2009). Most participants, regardless of condition, tended to rate their experiences as positive. For the dentist participants, it could be that this is legitimately not as negative an experience as common anecdotal evidence would assume. It could also be that in this non-clinical sample, most people did not like to cast their experiences in a negative light. For the participants who were asked to write about a recent conflict that remained unresolved, since we were using non-

clinical couples, it could have been that many people did not feel that their recent conflicts were unresolved. Indeed, many participants wrote about a conflict that seemed to have some kind of resolution (e.g. "...He did admit he needed to do more and I said I would try not to complain about his work when he does something. I cried quite a bit but it was civil for the most part.") and subsequently rated it positive or neutral. Many others put down answers like "Sorry, we resolve everything". In some cases, even when the qualitative response seemed negative (e.g. "My heart rate increased, I got a little irritated, I felt sad") the participant would then rate the overall experience as positive or neutral. In this non-clinical sample, it could also be that most people did not want to think about or share about their relationship in a negative light. The apparent positivity bias in this sample is consistent with memory research, which is supportive of both mood and consistency biases in autobiographical and episodic memory (Trenholm & Jensen, 2007). The consistency bias postulates that people tend to believe that their current attitudes and beliefs are the ones they have always had, where the mood bias refers to current mood state impacting the valence of memories. If participants in this sample currently believe and feel that their relationships are healthy, they may have been biased to report them as healthy, therefore reducing any cognitive dissonance they might feel by reporting a negative experience. It may even be that their positivity bias in memories of conflict serves as a protective factor in these relationships, as the mean score for relationship satisfaction was between 4.1 and 4.2, with 5 being the highest possible score. This indicates that overall, the participants in this sample were in non-distressed relationships. It may be that trying to prime a non-clinical sample with an unresolved conflict experience in their romantic relationships is difficult unless the priming is done so behaviorally by inducing conflict.

Post Hoc Analyses

A series of analyses comparing findings using the original sample ($n = 547$) with the sample of only participants whose responses to the prompts matched what was intended ($n = 300$) revealed some differences, although most results were similar between these two samples. In comparing the samples as a whole, the only correlations that were affected were those involving empathy variables. Since it was previously stated that empathy variables may have been impacted by restricted range, it makes sense that a reduced sample size would reduce power enough to attenuate any relationships with empathy variables.

In comparing Condition 1 correlations between the original sample ($n = 174$) and the smaller sample ($n = 82$) containing only participants who “matched” the anticipated response to the prompt, two notable differences are an attenuated relationship between avoidance and RBI-DM (now only significant at .05) and a no longer significant relationship between anxiety and constructive conflict resolution. It is difficult to determine whether these relationships have been reduced to non-significant due lower power from a smaller sample or whether it is due to the fact that this sample contains only participants whose attachment systems have been activated. The relationship between anxiety and constructive conflict resolution is more vulnerable to this effect since participants responded to items from the CCRS after being primed with attachment style. If this is the case, however, it is counterintuitive to think that having a more “pure” group of participants who we are more confident were primed with activated attachment would decrease a relationship with constructive conflict resolution compared to a group of mixed participants where we aren’t sure about levels of attachment activation in over half of them.

However, a MANOVA investigating whether participants' membership in the matched or unmatched group discriminated between levels of satisfaction and constructive conflict resolution showed that indeed, matched participants reported lower levels of both relationship quality variables. Another MANOVA showed that matched participants reported higher levels of both anxious and avoidant attachment. It is consistent with attachment theory that matched participants, who are reporting higher levels of anxiety and avoidance are also reporting poorer relationship quality. The more pressing question, however, is why matched participants had significantly higher levels of insecure attachment than those whose responses to the prime did not fit the anticipated response. One possible explanation to this finding is the fact that participants who are higher in anxious and avoidant attachment are more often experiencing conflicts with their partners as unresolved and are assessing these as negative experiences as compared to participants who are lower in anxiety and avoidant attachment styles. It may be that a protective factor of having lower levels of anxiety and avoidance is a "positivity bias" when it comes to recalling thoughts and feelings about conflicts in romantic relationships. Many unmatched participants answered the prompt by either denying unresolved conflicts or putting a positive spin on them (e.g. "I let my frustration build up and finally burst into tears...this was a positive experience because there was good communication going on"). While it may not be true that unmatched participants are actually experiencing less conflict, it could be that their memories and recollections of these events are more positive.

Several mediation models using only matched participants in Condition 1 were re-examined. The mediation model of attachment, discrepancy, and constructive conflict resolution showed that, similar to the full sample, discrepancy mediated the relationship

between avoidance and constructive conflict resolution. However, in the matched only sample, avoidance was fully rather than partially mediated, and more importantly, this relationship was not statistically significant. The fact that the same mediating relationship was observed, but without significance, lends credence to the fact that this relationship does exist but may be more difficult to detect with less power in the smaller sample size. It may have been anticipated that with a group of participants who are assumed to be “effectively” primed with attachment style and who scored higher on anxious and avoidant attachment, that this mediating relationship would be even stronger. Perhaps this is the reason for the trend toward full mediation rather than partial mediation. However, the lack of power and hence lack of statistical significance makes it difficult to draw these conclusions.

The mediation model of attachment, discrepancy, and relationship satisfaction, ran with the smaller matched Condition 1 sample revealed the same results as the larger Condition 1 sample. Anxiety was fully mediated by discrepancy and avoidance was partially mediated. The fact that these effects were smaller but still significant in the matched only sample lends credence to their robustness. Again, although it might be expected that the more “pure” sample of participants who were primed with attachment would yield stronger results, the smaller sample size likely attenuated these relationships.

The mediation model of attachment, RBI-DM and relationship satisfaction was not significant for the matched Condition 1 sample, and this was consistent with what was found in the larger Condition 1 sample. However, there was an unexpected finding. Although anxiety is intended as the independent variable and RBI-DM is intended as the mediator in this analysis, the results showed that the opposite occurred: anxiety fully mediated the relationship between RBI-DM and relationship satisfaction. This is not consistent with

attachment theory, as attachment is considered to be a stable trait that is theorized to develop in childhood, long before abstract ideas about romantic relationships are developed. However, it is possible that the prompt which asked participants to recall and write about a recent unresolved conflict triggered irrational relationship beliefs, which in turn triggered attachment systems. In other words, attachment styles were primed via irrational relationship beliefs, and this in turn led to participants reporting lower relationship satisfaction. It is likely that the relationship between attachment, irrational relationship beliefs associated with mindreading and disagreements and satisfaction is more complex than first hypothesized and future research might expand upon these initial unexpected findings.

Research Question

Examining the active scale of the CCRS, a 16-item measure developed by Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus (1991), was an exploratory venture that was undertaken in order to contribute to the dearth of research on this dimension of the Exit- Loyalty-Voice-Neglect typology. However, low internal reliability for the active scale precluded the research question from being explored.

The low internal reliability for this scale is likely explained by examining the items themselves. For the purposes of this study, the active scale was comprised of the Exit and Voice subscales, each of which contains four items. An example of an item from the Exit scale is “When my partner does something thoughtless, I do things to drive my partner away”, whereas an example of a Voice item is “When my partner does something thoughtless, I try to patch things up and solve the problem”. A respondent who strongly endorses the latter of these items is quite unlikely to also strongly endorse the former item. They are both active responses, but they are fundamentally different in terms of intentions for

the relationship. Combining the Voice and Loyalty subscales in order to create the constructive conflict resolution scale, on the other hand, is useful because these two scales share the same fundamental quality of having good intentions for the relationship. It is for this fundamental difference that combining the Exit and Voice subscales does not seem clinically or psychometrically useful. The low internal reliability of .47 found in this study is not considered acceptable for social science research and combining these subscales is not recommended for future studies unless further steps are taken to improve reliability.

Clinical Implications

The results of this study show that higher levels of anxiety and avoidance both are related to lower levels of constructive conflict resolution and relationship satisfaction. The negative relationship with constructive conflict resolution and relationship satisfaction may be stronger for avoidant individuals, and this may be especially true when they are primed with negative thoughts and feelings. Clinical interventions may include helping avoidant individuals to increase the awareness level of their tendencies to engage in a destructive response (exit or neglect) following a negative behavior by their partners. Clinicians may ask individuals to keep a record of the behavioral chain of events which occur during conflicts in order to provide insight into how one negative behavior leads to another. Examples of alternative responses to negative actions, such as voice responses, may be introduced and practiced in a therapeutic setting.

These interventions would be appropriate for anxious individuals as well, though anxious individuals may also need special attention around what constitutes a healthy voice response. Given that previous research has not shown anxious individuals to have a negative relationship to self-reported voice behaviors, they may believe they are engaging in healthy

voice behaviors but in actuality may not always be doing so in a constructive manner, which leads to the negative overall relationship with CCRS. For example, motivated by a desire to maintain closeness and fear of rejection, anxious individuals' use of voice responses may be characterized by negative affect, blaming, name-calling, or aggressive tones of voice.

Psychoeducation may need to be provided around what "fair fighting" and healthy communication ought to look like, including things like using a calm tone of voice and using "I" statements rather than blaming the other person.

The results of the mediation analyses show that the negative impact of avoidant attachment on conflict resolution strategies and satisfaction may be in part due to perfectionist expectations placed upon one's partner. Clinical interventions may include challenging some of these perhaps unrealistic partner expectations, and challenging the perceived discrepancy between expectations for partner and partner's actual behavior. One principle that might be examined is schema bias, which asserts that schema consistent information is more readily remembered than schema inconsistent information (Trenholm & Jensen, 2007). Clinicians may employ cognitive-behavioral interventions such as encouraging clients to take note each time their partner meets expectations, thereby promoting the memory of schema inconsistent behavior by one's partner. Other cognitive interventions may include examining whether expectations for one's partner fall under categories of cognitive distortions, and discussing ways to increase flexibility of partner expectations. In this way, avoidant individuals may begin to break down their negative internal working model of others, specifically for romantic others, and perhaps begin to experience a corrective experience. Emotion regulation strategies may also be employed, as

this may be a moderating factor for avoidant individuals' vulnerability to the black and white thinking patterns associated with relationship perfectionism.

The mediation analyses also showed that the negative impact of attachment anxiety on constructive conflict resolution strategies and relationship satisfaction could be explained by a perceived discrepancy between partner behavior and expectations for partner behavior. Clinical interventions may look similar to those for avoidant individuals, albeit with a slightly different focus on cognitive distortions. Cognitive therapy for anxious individuals may involve examining a core belief that perceived discrepancy between partner behavior and expectations for partner behavior are indicative of a partner's impending rejection. Anxious individuals may be encouraged to practice paying attention to all of the moments that are indicative of a partner's devotion. Emotion regulation strategies are also suggested for work with anxious clients, in order to reduce vulnerability to attachment-related cognitive distortions.

The results of the research question indicated that avoidant individuals are more likely to engage in passive responses rather than active responses. A possible clinical intervention would be educating avoidant individuals on strategies for effectively using a voice response. Although loyalty, a passive response, is considered constructive (Rusbult, Zembrodt, & Gunn, 1982) and may be effective under circumstances where both parties need a "break" from the interaction, a voice response is where communication and problem-solving will most likely occur.

Limitations

There are several limitations that must be taken into consideration when drawing conclusions about this study. One limitation is that the sample is comprised mostly of

educated, heterosexual white females between the ages of 25 and 30 years old, who are either undergraduate or graduate students and are in dating or partnered/married relationships. Although extra efforts were made to recruit a more diverse sample, these results are most generalizable to these demographics and may not be generalizable to males, transgender individuals, people of color, sexual minorities, people in their early twenties or younger, people in their mid-thirties and older, people without higher education or who are not currently students. According to Rosenthal and Rosnaw (2009) research volunteers tend to be more educated, higher social class, more intelligent, more sociable, more unconventional, less authoritarian, less conforming, more extroverted, and more altruistic. This study certainly has the risk of that sampling bias. Another sampling bias is that these participants do not represent a clinical sample and so these results are not necessarily generalizable to individuals who are in couples counseling.

Another limitation is that out of 785 original participants, only 556 were retained in the sample, yielding a 29% attrition rate. This attrition rate is slightly less than other online studies, whose attrition rates have been between 30 and 37%. (Andersson et al., 2005; McCabe & Price, 2009; Richard & Alvarenga, 2002). These participants were rejected for a variety of reasons, including failure to complete large portions of the survey, ineligibility, or failure to accurately answer the validity checks. Unfortunately, because the demographic questionnaire was located at the end of the survey, there is no demographic information available to compare those who did not complete the surveys to those who did. In addition to this, unequal cell sized prevented testing of the impact of most demographic variables on the dependent variables. Furthermore, in a test of whether relationship status or education level had a significant effect on the dependent variables, the observed power was too low to draw

any conclusions about whether these variables had an effect. Another limitation is that this study relied on solely self-report measures, and thus was subject to not only mono-method bias but mono-operation bias (Shaddish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002). Particularly with the measurement of constructive conflict resolution as a dependent variable, participants were asked to self-report on their own conflict resolution behavior, and there is always a risk that there will be a discrepancy between participants' self-report and their true behavior. One limitation with the post-hoc analyses is that several variables violated normality and were not able to be successfully transformed. This could have been a reason for some of the null findings.

Another limitation of this study is that although participants were required to be in a romantic relationship in order to be eligible for the study, this study examined the relationships among attachment, perfectionistic thinking, and relationship quality variables on an individual level. Because participants were not monitored to ensure that only one member of the couple was a participant, it was possible that the assumption of independence may have been violated. When individuals from the same relationships both completed the survey, these participants' responses could have been tied to their partner's responses on the survey items. The potential violation of this assumption of independence may have been another reason for unexpected null findings in this study. A final limitation is the method of analysis for examining the mediation models. While the multiple regression method as proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986) is sufficient for examining the proposed relationships in this study, a more comprehensive approach would have been to use path analysis, which would take into account the moderate correlation between attachment variables and would allow for examination of other mediators simultaneously.

Future Research

With problematic priming in this study, the question of whether activated attachment styles impact the mediating models of attachment, relationship perfectionism, and relationship quality remains unanswered. Future research may attempt to explore this question further by improving priming, such as activating attachment styles using more rigorous methods, perhaps in a more controlled setting. Priming for general discomfort may also be done in a more controlled setting, rather than relying on the assumption that most people are uncomfortable at the dentist.

Despite the fact that previous research found empathy and perspective taking to be correlated with attachment, this study did not find these variables to be significantly correlated. Future research should continue to examine the possibility of empathy serving as a mediator in the relationship between attachment and relationship quality. Another measurement of empathy that might be more applicable to research on relationship quality is partner perspective taking, which measures the tendency to adopt a partner's point of view, trying to think and feel as the partner would (Arriaga & Rusbult, 1998).

Future research might examine other moderators that might influence differences in these mediating relationships. For example, longitudinal research may explore whether patterns of mediation increase or decrease over time, the longer a couple is in a relationship. Since the majority of this sample is heterosexual, it would also be useful to know whether these mediating relationships would also be true for same-sex couples. Future research may also use other methods of measuring conflict resolution, such as having couples actually resolve a conflict in a lab setting. In addition to this, one would expect that patterns of negative behavior would be even more pronounced among couples who are currently in

couples counseling. It would be interesting to examine if there are truly differences in the mediating power of relationship perfectionism on attachment and relationship quality, between clinical couples and non-clinical couples. It would also be useful to examine the current variables using path analysis and explore whether the current models of mediation are in fact the best models, or whether there may be an even better fit to these phenomena. Indeed, in the post-hoc analyses for the current study, anxiety was found to mediate RBI-DM. In addition, studies have found that conflict resolution impacts relationship satisfaction, but satisfaction has also been found to predict constructive conflict resolution (e.g. Marchand, 2004; Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1995). Using a path analysis model would also take into account the moderate correlation between attachment variables, and would allow anxiety and avoidance to be examined within the same model, without the risk of one variable suppressing the other. In addition, it would be useful to investigate additional mediators, as in most cases discrepancy only partially mediated the relationship between attachment and relationship quality variables. It might even be plausible that attachment variables could serve as the mediator between relationship perfectionism and relationship quality.

Conclusions

This study showed that higher levels of avoidant attachment lead to poorer conflict resolution and poor relationship satisfaction, and that these relationships are partially mediated by perfectionist expectations placed on one's partner. Specifically, the idea that one's partner is not living up to expectations tends to lead to poor relationship quality. Avoidant individuals may also be more likely to use passive constructive conflict resolution strategies than active ones. Higher levels of anxiety led to poorer conflict resolution behavior

and poorer relationship satisfaction, and this was fully mediated by perfectionist expectations placed on one's partner, but only under certain conditions. Additional analyses indicate that irrational relationship beliefs associated with mindreading and disagreements may trigger anxious attachment and this may lead to lower relationship satisfaction. Neither empathic concern nor perspective-taking empathy were found to be predicted by attachment. These results are most applicable to non-clinical married/partnered or dating people who are white, female, educated, heterosexual, and between the ages of 25 and 30 years old.

APPENDIX

Measures

ECRS (Attachment) (36 items)

- | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| disagree | disagree | disagree | neutral/ | agree | agree | agree |
| strongly | somewhat | slightly | mixed | slightly | somewhat | strongly |
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. (R)
 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. (R)
 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.(R)
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. (R)
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. (R)
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. (R)
28. When I'm not involved in a relationship, I feel somewhat anxious and insecure.
29. I feel comfortable depending on romantic partners. (R)
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. (R)
32. I get frustrated if romantic partners are not available when I need them.
33. It helps to turn to my romantic partner in times of need. (R)
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. (R)
36. I resent it when my partner spends time away from me.

RBI-DM (Relationship Perfectionism) (12 items)

(1 = I strongly believe that item is false, 5 = I strongly believe that item is true)

1 2 3 4 5

1. If your partner expresses disagreement with your ideas, she/he probably does not think very highly of you
2. I expect my partner to sense all my moods
3. I cannot accept it when my partner disagrees with me
4. If I have to tell my partner that something is important to me, it does not mean that she/he is insensitive to me **(item dropped for analyses)**
5. I take it as a personal insult when my partner disagrees with an important idea of mine
6. I get very upset if my partner does not recognize how I am feeling and I have to tell him/her
7. I like it when my partner presents different views from mine **(item dropped for analyses)**
8. A partner should know what you are thinking or feeling without you having to tell.
9. When my partner and I disagree, I feel like our relationship is falling apart.
10. People who love each other know exactly what each other's thoughts are without a word ever being said.
11. I do not doubt my partner's feelings for me when we argue. **(item dropped for analyses)**
12. If you have to ask your partner for something, it means that he or she was not "tuned in" to your needs.

Dyadic Almost Perfect Scale (Relationship Perfectionism) (Discrepancy = 16 items)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
disagree	disagree	disagree	neutral/	agree	agree	agree
strongly	somewhat	slightly	mixed	slightly	somewhat	strongly

1. I often feel disappointed after my partner completes a task because I know she/he could have done better.
2. My significant other can generally meet the standards that I have set for him/her. (R)
3. My significant other rarely lives up to my standards.
4. My partner's best rarely seems to be enough for me.
5. I am rarely satisfied with my partner's accomplishments.
6. I often feel frustrated because my significant other does not meet the goals I have for him/her.
7. I have trouble with my partner leaving things complete.
8. My partner's best never seems to be good enough for me.
9. My significant other often does not measure up to my expectations.
10. I usually feel like what my partner has done is good enough. (R)
11. I am hardly ever satisfied with my partner's performance.
12. My significant other is seldom able to meet my standards for performance.
13. I usually feel pretty satisfied with what my significant other does. (R)
14. My partner's performance rarely measures up to my standards.
15. I am not satisfied, even when I know my significant other has done his/her best.
16. I can get pretty upset when my partner doesn't do as well as I think he/she should.

IRI (Empathy) (14 items)

(0 = Does not describe me well, 4 = describes me very well)

0 1 2 3 4

1. I sometimes find it difficult to see things from the "other guy's" point of view. (R)
2. I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me.
3. I try to look at everybody's side of a disagreement before I make a decision.
4. Sometimes I don't feel very sorry for other people when they are having problems. (R)
5. I sometimes try to understand my friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective.
6. When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective towards them.
7. If I'm sure I'm right about something, I don't waste much time listening to other people's arguments. (R)
8. Other people's misfortunes do not usually disturb me a great deal. (R)
9. I believe that there are two sides to every question and try to look at them both.
10. When I see someone being treated unfairly, I sometimes don't feel very much pity for them. (R)
11. When I'm upset at someone, I usually try to "put myself in his shoes" for a while.
12. I am often quite touched by things that I see happen.
13. Before criticizing somebody, I try to imagine how I would feel if I were in their place.
14. I would describe myself as a pretty soft-hearted person.

RAS (Relationship Satisfaction) (7 items)

(1 = low satisfaction, 5 = high satisfaction)

1 2 3 4 5

1. How well does your partner meet your needs?
2. In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?
3. How good is your relationship compared to most?
4. How often do you wish you hadn't gotten into this relationship?
5. To what extent has your relationship met your original expectations?
6. How much do you love your partner?
7. How many problems are there in your relationship?

CCRS (Constructive Conflict Resolution) (16 items)

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Never		Seldom		Sometimes		Frequently		Constantly
Do This		Do This		Do This		Do This		Do This

Response

- _____ 1) When my partner says something really mean, I threaten to leave him/her.
- _____ 2) When my partner is rude to me, I try to resolve the situation and improve conditions.
- _____ 3) When my partner behaves in an unpleasant manner, I forgive my partner and forget about it.
- _____ 4) When my partner does something thoughtless, I avoid dealing with the situation.

- _____ 5) When my partner is rude to me, I feel so angry I want to walk right out the door.
- _____ 6) When my partner behaves in an unpleasant manner, I calmly discuss things with him/her.
- _____ 7) When my partner does something thoughtless, I patiently wait for things to improve.
- _____ 8) When my partner says something really mean, I sulk and don't confront the issue.
- _____ 9) When my partner behaves in an unpleasant manner, I do something equally unpleasant in return.
- _____ 10) When my partner does something thoughtless, I try to patch things up and solve the problem.
- _____ 11) When my partner says something really mean, I hang in there and wait for his/her mood to change -- these times pass.
- _____ 12) When my partner is rude to me, I ignore the whole thing.
- _____ 13) When my partner does something thoughtless, I do things to drive my partner away.
- _____ 14) When my partner behaves in an unpleasant manner, I spend less time with him/her.
- _____ 15) When my partner says something really mean, I talk to my partner about what's going on, trying to work out a solution.
- _____ 16) When my partner is rude to me, I give him/her the benefit of the doubt and forget about it.

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