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**EXAMINING ADOLESCENT BEHAVIORS IN SUPPORT AND CONFLICT
CONVERSATIONS WITH ROMANTIC PARTNERS**

A Thesis in

Human Development and Family Studies

by

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ABSTRACT

Adolescent romantic relationships are normative and developmentally important, with most having at least one romantic relationship by late adolescence. Experiences in romantic relationships are closely linked to adolescents' identity and socioemotional development, academic and career achievement, and daily functioning. There are many studies on conflict and behavioral continuity across different relationships (i.e., family, peer, and romantic), and most are guided by an attachment framework. However, observational data are rare, and less is known about adolescent support and the impact of interaction context on adolescent romantic behaviors. The present study examined how 100 heterosexual adolescent couples' behaviors (*constructive problem solving, self disclosure, verbal aggression, negativity, positive affect/humor, and affection*) differ between support and conflict conversations and what predicts behavioral variabilities (demographics, relationship duration, global romantic attachment, and conversation type and role). Adolescent couples in longer relationships engaged in more negative and fewer positive behaviors than couples in short ones. More romantically avoidantly attached adolescents engaged in less constructive discussion and open disclosure than less avoidant individuals. Overall, adolescents displayed less behavioral and emotional reactivity during support than in conflict conversations. Global romantic attachment and communication context were found to jointly impact adolescents' *verbal aggression, negativity, positive affect/humor, and affection*. In general, adolescent behaviors vary by their attachment, support or conflict communication, and their role. This has potential implications for future methodological design to study adolescent romantic behaviors and intervention implementation.

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Introduction

Romantic relationships are normative and developmentally salient during adolescence (Bouchey & Furman, 2003; Brown et al., 1999; Collins, 2003; Collins & Steinberg, 2007; Collins et al., 2009; Furman & Shaffer, 2003; Gómez-López et al., 2019; Rogers et al., 2018; Salerno et al., 2015). For many, the emergence of romantic relationships¹ marks a central step in adolescent social development (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009). Being a romantic partner is one of the few newfound normative roles an adolescent adopts after entering school years and increases in later developmental stages. Romantic relationships are believed to be important in shaping individual development during adolescence (Furman et al., 2007; Furman & Collins, 2007; Furman & Shaffer, 2003). Research on adolescent romantic relationships blossomed in the first decade of the 21st century, but literature soon faded because of logistical difficulties (Welsh & Shulman, 2008). Most existing literature was guided by an attachment framework and relied on participant self-report data. To fill the literary gap in adolescent romantic research, the present study employed a multimethod design to study two types of problem solving conversations among adolescent couples. Specifically, this study explored observed dyadic conversations of adolescents with their romantic partners in supportive and conflict interactions, along with self-report measures of their demographics, relationship length, and global romantic attachment.

Do adolescents behave consistently in different types of conversations with their romantic partners? If their behaviors vary, what predicts their behaviors? This study explored individual demographics, relationship duration, global romantic attachment, interaction scenarios (i.e., social support versus conflict resolution), and interaction roles

¹ The term romantic relationship describes relationships that involve romantic and/or sexual attraction.

(i.e., initiator of the conversation/*seeker* versus responder to the initiator/*helper*) as potential predictors. The initiator of a conversation decides the discussion topic. For instance, for a conflict resolution interaction, the *seeker* of the conversation chooses an issue about their relationship they would like to discuss, and the *helper* engages in the discussion as the couple tries to reach a resolution. Most importantly, applying a person-context approach (i.e., what a person does depends on both who they are and the situation they are in; Funder, 2008; Funder et al., 2012), the focal question is whether individual attachment and conversation context work jointly in influencing adolescent behaviors in couple conversations. For example, more romantically anxious adolescents may display more negative emotions and use less affection during conflict- than support-oriented conversations.

Adolescent Romantic Relationships

Involvement in romantic relationships increases notably during adolescence (Carver et al., 2003). Most adolescents have engaged in one romantic relationship as they reach late adolescence, and many report having had more than one relationship during their adolescence (Carver et al., 2003; Connolly & McIsaac, 2009). By 18 years of age, around four-fifths of adolescents reported having a romantic experience in the past 18 months (Carver et al., 2003).

The formation of romantic relationships is an important developmental task of adolescence and has significant implications in various domains of adolescent long-term developmental outcomes, such as adolescent identity formation (Collins, 2003; Connolly et al., 2014; Furman & Collins, 2007; Furman & Shaffer, 2003). As adolescents come to rely less on their parental figures, extrafamilial relationships, such as romantic

relationships, become a way for adolescents to navigate different aspects of their self-concepts, including individuation, global self-esteem, perceived romantic competence, and autonomy (Bouchey & Furman, 2003; Brown et al., 1999; Furman & Shaffer, 2003). For example, adolescents with positive experiences in romantic relationships tend to have more positive self-perceptions of themselves as romantic partners and more confidence in building successful relationships.

Adolescent romantic relationships also play an important role in socioemotional and interpersonal development (Brown et al., 1999; Bouchey & Furman, 2003). Interactions with potential romantic partners create opportunities for adolescents to develop their capacities to co-construct and cooperate in complex social relationships (Furman & Saffer, 2003). In addition, the presence of romantic relationships during adolescence often leads to overlapping two friend groups as an adolescent becomes part of their romantic partner's social network (Furman & Saffer, 2003). Consequently, increased peer interactions help promote adolescents' interpersonal skills (Furman & Saffer, 2003). Adolescents comprehend relational patterns through romantic relationships that influence the formation and development of existing and subsequent close relationships (Salerno et al., 2015). For instance, supportive romantic relationships positively affect an adolescent's emotional stability, which helps foster positive interactions with family members (Furman & Saffer, 2003).

Romantic relationships can have positive impacts on adolescents' well-being. However, they can equally elicit strong negative emotions from within (e.g., relationship conflict and dissolution) and outside (e.g., disagreement with parents over curfews and partner choices) the relationship, leading to negative developmental outcomes (Furman &

Shaffer, 2003; Furman et al., 2007; Gómez-López et al., 2019). For example, adolescents in romantic relationships often report more frequent mood swings, along with greater anxiety and depressive symptoms than their peers not in romantic relationships (Collins, 2003; Collins et al., 2009). In addition, those in poor-quality relationships are at higher risk for substance use (Collins, 2003; Collins et al., 2009). Being in a romantic relationship can positively or negatively affect an adolescent's academic and career achievement and planning (Furman et al., 2007). Aside from long-term developmental outcomes, romantic relationships simultaneously influence adolescents' day-to-day experiences. Daily romantic interactions such as disagreements and arguments predict fluctuations in adolescents' same-day emotions (Rogers et al., 2018).

In summary, a romantic relationship during adolescence entails numerous challenges and opportunities for growth and fulfills important socioemotional functions. Nevertheless, the developmental impact of each romantic relationship is dependent on that particular relationship, such as individual characteristics, specific interactions, and the context of the relationship (Collins, 2003; Collins et al., 2009; Furman & Shaffer, 2003).

Because romantic relationships occur within a wider social context, the majority of existing studies on adolescent romantic relationships were guided by the framework that peer and family relationships influence and help shape their romantic relationships (Boisvert & Poulin, 2016; Bouchev & Furman, 2003; Brown et al., 1999; Caron et al., 2012; Collins et al., 2009; Collins & Steinberg, 2007; Doyle et al., 2009; Furman, 2002; Shulman & Scharf, 2000). Consistent findings support the interconnected nature of intimate relationships in an adolescent's life. For instance, throughout early adolescence,

peer groups act as the main channel for romantic initiation (Connolly et al., 2014). Consequently, early romantic experiences highlight direct peer influence, whereas family influences become more dominant during middle and later adolescence (Connolly et al., 2014). Various familial aspects, including parenting, family socioeconomic status, and significant stressors on the family (e.g., divorce and death), can significantly impact an adolescent's relationship with their romantic partner (Gray & Steinberg, 1999; Jorgensen-Wells et al., 2021). For instance, observed and modeled parental behaviors are associated with less functional behaviors in adolescents' romantic relationships (Darling et al., 2008). Aversion and negative emotionality in family communications are associated with aggression and poor interpersonal interactions with romantic partners (Conger et al., 2000). Whereas a more positive family climate is associated with better interpersonal skills in romantic relationships, specifically, more nurturing parenting during adolescence predicts young adults' warmth and support toward romantic partners (Collins, 2003; Conger et al., 2000; Xia et al., 2018).

Although associations between family and peer experiences and romantic relationship patterns are evident (e.g., Collins et al., 2009), it is necessary to appreciate aspects of adolescent romantic relationships that set them apart from other close relationships. For example, young romantic relationships tend to be intensely emotionally charged but short-lived, and they encapsulate distinct patterns of interactions that differ from those in peer and family relationships (e.g., conflict and support; Tabares & Gottman, 2003). Independent assessments of the processes within romantic relationships would contribute to understanding adolescent outcomes (Collins, 2003).

Support and Conflict

There are large individual differences in adolescent romantic experiences, but support and conflict are integral parts of every romantic relationship (Collins, 2003; Connolly & McIsaac, 2009; Shulman, 2003; Tabares & Gottman, 2003).

Adolescents often consider their romantic partners among the most supportive and caring interpersonal connections (Furman & Shomaker, 2008; Shulman & Sharf, 2000). Adolescents in consolidated relationships reported that they derive more emotional support from their romantic partners than friends, and this perceived supportiveness of a romantic relationship increases with age (Collins et al., 2009; Connolly & McIsaac, 2009; Furman & Shomaker, 2008; Shulman, 2003). Adolescents in longer romantic relationships, tend to have higher levels of support and less frequent negative interactions overtime with adolescents learning from past relationships, and becoming more skilled at handling their relationship dynamics (Lantagne & Furman, 2017). Supportive relationship processes are associated with developing romantic autonomy (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009). Specifically, adolescents who have more supportive romantic partners are better at setting boundaries and maintaining self-identities independent from their romantic relationships (Shulman & Knafo, 1997). However, it remains unclear how romantic partners support each other in adolescent relationships, how they initiate supportive interactions, whether these interactions differ from one couple to the next, and how they differ (Tabares & Gottman, 2003). In short, the field's understanding of support behaviors in adolescent romantic relationships is still limited.

Compared to existing literature on romantic support, more considerable effort has been made to understand how adolescents respond to conflict in their romantic

relationships (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009; Shulman, 2003). This focus on conflict and conflict resolution is partially rooted in the literature on early adolescent romantic relationships, which typically references theories on adult relationships and marital dysfunction (Creasey et al., 1999; Darling et al., 2008; Shulman, 2003; Tabares & Gottman, 2003). Adolescents report more conflict with romantic partners compared to friends, along with romantic conflict increasing across adolescent years (Collins et al., 2009; Connolly & McIsaac, 2009). By late adolescence, many have recognized that conflict can be beneficial or detrimental to a relationship (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009). Some levels of conflict can be valuable and present opportunities for improving communication and understanding between romantic partners (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009). For instance, some studies have found that how adolescents handle conflict largely determines the trajectory of their romantic relationships (Creasey et al., 1999). Hence, it is important to understand how adolescents behave during romantic conflict to maximize the utility of conflict for adolescents. According to self-report, many adolescents prefer negotiation and compromise over coercion when managing conflict in romantic relationships (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009; Shulman, 2003). Such behaviors include active listening, disclosure of thoughts and feelings, and resolution proposition, which all behaviors increase with age (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009).

Other studies have examined how earlier experiences with family members and peers predict conflict behaviors during adolescents' interactions with their romantic partners (Darling et al., 2008; Linder & Collins, 2005; Shulman, 2003). Adolescents' deficiencies in conflict management skills (e.g., constructive communication and negative emotion regulation) in intimate relationships may be rooted in poor-quality

familial and peer experiences (Linder & Collins, 2005). Hostile and conflictual parent-child and peer interactions during late childhood/early adolescence are associated with greater risks of victimization in later romantic relationships, often persisting into adult intimate relationships (Linder & Collins, 2005). However, data outside self-report questionnaires is limited (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009).

Observational Methodology

Studies on adolescent romantic relationships and communication (e.g., support and conflict) typically rely on self-reports from one member of a couple. Self-report data provide insight into individual perspectives but contain self-report bias and often record only one partner's experiences. It is important to capture more than one perspective when studying romantic relationships due to the dynamic nature of relationships. For example, in a social study, for every couple, each member of the relationship has their own perspective, and the research has a third perspective (Furman & Rose, 2015). Different reporters can provide heterogeneous information about a relationship, and all are meaningful to incorporate in our understanding of the experiences. Observational studies are desirable but methodologically challenging (Collins, 2003; Welsh & Shulman, 2008). Unlike self-report measures, direct observations allow researchers to obtain multiple perspectives on adolescent romantic interactions and provide clear and specific information in an interpersonal context that cannot be obtained from self-report questionnaires alone (Haugen et al., 2008; Welsh & Shulman, 2008). In addition, independent observers outside the interaction can be unbiased evaluators of the dynamic interactions (Darling et al., 2008). Having multiple trained outside observers eliminates

common source variance from a single reporter and minimizes measurement error in the construct of interest (Darling et al., 2008).

Another importance of incorporating observation methods lies in the patterned differences between questionnaires and observational findings, which reflect biases in adolescents' perceptions of their relationships (Furman & Rose, 2015). For example, adolescents tend to idealize their romantic partners and report higher supportiveness than observed in their interactions (Furman & Shomaker, 2008).

Including observational data can provide a new understanding of adolescent romantic relationships and their developmental course (Welsh & Shulman, 2008). Hence, an approach that combines self-report measures and interaction observations would yield a multifaceted view of adolescent romantic relationships, echoing the importance of applying a multimethod, multi-perspective framework when studying adolescent romantic relationships (Galliher et al., 2004; Tabares & Gottman, 2003).

Attachment Theory

Attachment theory is one of the major theoretical frameworks used when studying adolescent romantic relationships (Collins et al., 2009; Connolly & McIsaac, 2009; Doyle et al., 2009; Furman & Collins, 2007; Furman & Wehner, 1999; Jorgensen-Wells et al., 2021). According to attachment theory, an ideal romantic relationship is characterized by secure attachment with mutual trust, and an ideal romantic partner provides a sense of safety and trustworthiness and can be relied upon as a secure base for exploration in life (Bowlby, 1969, 1973; Furman & Wehner, 1994; Hazen & Shaver, 1987; Jorgensen-Wells et al., 2021).

Attachment scholars suggest that attachment patterns are context-specific among young adults' relationships with parents, peers, and romantic partners (Brown et al., 1999; Collins et al., 1997). In addition, individual differences in romantic relationship experiences are largely due to past attachment history because their experiences develop into internal working models that are carried forward from childhood to future relationships (Brown et al., 1999; Brumbaugh & Fraley, 2006; Caron et al., 2012; Collins et al., 1997). In general, secure attachment has been associated with many desirable relationship outcomes, such as securely attached children showing more advanced socioemotional skills that support the development of empathy and intimacy, which are beneficial to all successful romantic relationships in adolescence (Collins et al., 1997; Miller & Hoicowitz, 2004). Attachment research also found that young adults often look at their representations of formal romantic partners for guidance when searching for subsequent relationships (Brumbaugh & Fraley, 2006). In contrast, insecurely attached individuals tend to re-create dysfunctional relationship dynamics that ultimately contribute to more negative romantic experiences (Brumbaugh & Fraley, 2006).

The links between attachment orientations and conflict behaviors, especially in adolescent romantic relationships, have a clear conceptual base (Creasey et al., 1999). Interpersonal conflicts activate attachment representations with more insecurely attached adolescents struggling to manage interactions with their romantic partners during conflict (Creasey et al., 1999; Connolly & McIsaac, 2009). For example, more ambivalent and avoidant adolescents generally display higher levels of negativity and maladaptive conflict management behaviors such as defensiveness and cross-complaining (Creasey et al., 1999). Nonetheless, the effectiveness of applying an attachment perspective when

studying adolescent romantic relationships depends on the nature of the relationship and the age of the adolescent (Brown et al., 1999). For example, compared to casual hook-ups, an attachment bond is more likely to develop in a more serious, intimate, and longer-term relationship, highlighting the importance of relational context.

Person-Context Interaction

Attachment literature often assumes that individual attachment is a stable personal characteristic and will manifest itself across situations through consistent individual behaviors under different circumstances in a romantic relationship. However, the person-context debate posits that personal and contextual dispositions interact to determine individual behaviors (Funder, 2008). People adjust their behaviors from one situation to another while maintaining individual differences (Funder et al., 2012). Therefore, when studying adolescents' behaviors in romantic relationships, it is crucial to look at both individual characteristics and the circumstances under which adolescents interact with their romantic partners. For example, a prototypical adolescent would likely behave differently when fighting with their romantic partner versus celebrating an anniversary.

The Present Study

The present study aims to fill several limitations in the existing adolescent romantic relationship literature: (1) existing literature principally relied on self-reports (Furman, 2002); (2) attachment theory has been a dominant framework, and individual characteristics such as demographics and attachment tend to be the focus of previous studies, whereas situational attributes and between-situation behavioral comparisons remain overlooked (Furman & Collins, 2007; Furman & Wehner, 1999); and (3) many studies only focused on one aspect of relationships, specifically conflict, and the field's

understanding of adolescent romantic relationships remains fragmented without studying multiple facets of relationships using multiple predictors to understand multiple consequences (Furman & Rose, 2015).

Thus, this study incorporates self-report questionnaires and observational data to examine six individual behavioral outcomes during both support- and conflict-oriented interactions: *constructive problem solving*, *self disclosure*, *verbal aggression*, *negativity*, *positive affect/humor*, and *affection* (selected from the System of Coding Interactions in Dyads [SCID]; Lindahl & Malik, 2001). In addition, guided by a person-context interaction framework (Funder, 2008), we examine both individual and contextual predictors. Individual predictors include demographics (i.e., binary sex assigned at birth and age), global romantic attachment orientation (i.e., an individual's overall romantic experiences), and relationship length in months. Situational predictors consist of two categories: interaction type (i.e., social support versus conflict resolution) and interaction roles (i.e., *seeker* versus *helper*).

It is worth mentioning that among the various internal working models adolescents form, global romantic attachment orientation is selected for two reasons. First, adolescence is when the attachment functions begin to transition from a family figure to a romantic partner (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009; Furman & Wehner, 1994). Second, previous research supports that attachment experiences are transferred from previous romantic relationships to the next and differ between adolescents' relationships with parents, peers, and romantic partners (Brumbaugh & Fraley, 2006; Caron et al., 2012; Doyle et al., 2009). Therefore, an adolescent's romantic attachment to their current

partner is likely to resemble their global romantic attachment but differ from their attachment to parental figures or peers.

In conclusion, the present paper explores social support and conflict resolution interactions between adolescent romantic couples with two major aims: (1) What predicts (i.e., individual demographics, relationship duration, global romantic attachment, and interaction context) the display of each behavioral outcome of interests (i.e., *constructive problem solving, self disclosure, verbal aggression, negativity, positive affect/humor, and affection*) during romantic interactions? (2) Does the adolescents' global romantic attachment and interaction context individually and/or jointly impact adolescent behaviors during interactions with a romantic partner? In other words, are there interaction effects between the person and the context in determining individual behaviors within romantic processes? Due to prior limited research, this study is predominantly an exploratory analysis, but several trends are expected.

Adolescents in longer relationships are predicted to engage in more constructive problem solving and self disclosure than couples in shorter relationships. Couples that have been together longer are expected to be more willing to and are better at open communication. Additionally, couples that frequently engage in poor problem solving tend to be at higher risk for relationship dissolution, leading to shorter relationships. Avoidant and anxious adolescents are expected to display more verbal aggression and negativity and less positive affect/humor and affection during conflict resolution than social support. This prediction is based on the more emotionally charged nature of conflict-oriented conversations than support-oriented ones.

Method

Sample

The present study used a subset of a larger multi-method observational study involving 103 adolescent romantic couples. Three couples were dropped: two who were identified as same-sex couples and one couple without complete observational data. Hence, this study sample comprised 100 heterosexual adolescent couples who completed at least one videotaped problem-solving conversation (200 adolescents, 100 females, and 100 males). Recruitment involved several methods, including direct approaches around towns, announcements in sites frequently visited by adolescents, direct phone solicitation of local juniors and seniors living within one hour of the laboratory site, and participant referrals. In addition, adolescent couples needed to have been romantically involved for at least four weeks to be eligible to participate. Couples were debriefed at the end of the laboratory visit. Adolescents were each paid \$35 for participation plus \$5 per couple for gas.

Procedure

Adolescent couples were scheduled for laboratory visits. Before data collection, informed consent was obtained. Adolescent participants under 18 years old also provided signed consent from a parent. Participants completed questionnaires and participated in four videotaped problem-solving conversations with their romantic partners. Only responses on their global romantic attachment were analyzed for this project. Each couple engaged in four videorecorded conversations interspersed with questionnaire administration. See Appendix A for visualized experiment choreography. Two conversations involved a 10-minute social support task, and the other two involved a 7-

minute conflict resolution task. Each partner chose the topic for one social support and one conflict resolution conversation. For social support, participants were asked to choose an important topic that was not a source of conflict in their current romantic relationship. For conflict resolution, participants are asked to choose a topic from a provided Partner Issue Checklist or an issue specific to their relationship that is not on the list, with the only requirement being that the topic of choice is causing problems in their romantic relationship.

There is no distinct difference in boyfriends' and girlfriends' topic selections. Common topics for social support interactions include family relationships, schoolwork, and college applications. Common topics for conflict resolution interactions include balancing between friendships and romantic relationships and future planning. The person choosing the topic is the *seeker*, and the person responding to them is the *helper*. The order of the initiating partner was randomly determined by coin flip.

For supportive interactions, at the beginning of each supportive conversation, research assistants told the couple who was the *seeker* to initiate the conversation and the chosen topic. The couple was then asked to both be involved in the discussion and try to use the full time. The same procedures applied for conflict resolution interactions, except the couple was asked to work towards a solution for a conflictual issue. Each couple was also reminded that they may not come up with a solution within the short time available for discussion. Data from all four conversations were analyzed for the current study.

Measures

Global Romantic Attachment

The Experiences in Close Relationship scale (ECR) was adopted from Brennan et al. (1998). The ECR scale contains 36 items measuring two dimensions of attachment: 18 items measuring attachment anxiety and 18 items measuring attachment avoidance (Brennan et al., 1998). Each item was rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Different from measuring romantic attachment to a specific romantic partner, participants were asked to report on their overall romantic experiences. See Appendix B for questionnaire instructions and example items.

Based on Brennan et al. (1998), items 3, 15, 19, 22, 25, 27, 29, 31, 33, and 35 were reversely coded before being computed into participants' global romantic attachment anxiety and avoidance. Attachment anxiety scores were computed by averaging participant responses to items 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18, 20, 22^R, 24, 26, 28, 30, 32, 34, and 36.² Example items include “I worry a lot about my relationships” and “When I’m not involved in a relationship, I feel somewhat anxious and insecure.” Higher scores indicated greater overall attachment-related anxiety in their romantic relationships.

Attachment avoidance scores were computed by averaging responses to items 1, 3^R, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15^R, 17, 19^R, 21, 23, 25^R, 27^R, 29^R, 31^R, 33^R, 35. Example items include “I prefer not to be too close to romantic partners” and “I don’t feel comfortable opening up to romantic partners.” Higher scores indicated greater overall attachment-related avoidance in their romantic relationships. Internal reliabilities were good for both subscales (α s = .89, anxiety; .89, avoidance).

² Note. ^R indicates reverse coded variables.

Observed Problem Solving Behaviors

Videorecorded conversations were coded using behaviors selected from the System of Coding Interactions in Dyads (SCID; Lindahl & Malik, 2001) plus behaviors specific to this study. The SCID assesses global behavioral aspects of couple functioning (Lindahl & Malik, 2001). For this study, six individual behaviors were rated on a scale from 1 (very low) to 5 (high) for each participant during each conversation: (1)

Constructive Problem Solving, referring to the demonstration of skills in objectively analyzing and addressing problems, including eliciting information, clarifying feelings, and proposing potential solutions; (2) ***Self Disclosure***, disclosure of personal information to romantic partners; (3) ***Verbal Aggression***, exhibitions of hostile and aggressive verbal behavior towards romantic partners with the intention to hurt or annoy; (4) ***Negativity***, or the display of negative emotion, including frustration, irritation, anger, and emotional defensiveness; (5) ***Positive Affect/Humor***, referring to the display of positive emotion, including happiness, joy, and humor); and (6) ***Affection***, including verbal and physical affection, including direct statements of love, complements, hugging, and kissing.

For observational coding, undergraduate coders and investigators were trained until reaching reliability to standard with an intraclass correlation (ICC) of larger than .90 for each code. Undergraduate coders and investigators attended training and joint coding sessions every 1 to 4 weeks throughout the project. Every conversation was reviewed by two trained raters. The average rating across two coders was used for each individual behavior. See Appendix C for behavior scoring instructions.

Plan of Analysis

All analyses were performed using R Statistical Software (v4.3.1; R Core Team, 2023). Patterns of missingness between variables were analyzed and visualized using packages *finalfit* (v1.0.7; Harrison et al., 2023) and *mice* (v3.16.0; van Buuren & Groothuis-Oudshoorn, 2011). Descriptive and reliability statistics were computed using packages *psych* (v2.3.9; Revelle, 2023) and *summarytools* (v1.0.1; Comtois, 2022). After data preparation and preliminary analysis, multilevel modeling (MLM) was used to assess the extent to which adolescent behaviors during romantic interaction varied depending on individual demographic characteristics (i.e., binary sex and age), relationship duration, global romantic attachment anxiety and avoidance, interaction type (i.e., social support versus conflict resolution), and interaction role (i.e., *helper* versus *seeker*). MLM was conducted using the package *lme4* (v1.1-35.1; Bates et al., 2015). Model summary and interaction effects visualizations were achieved using packages *modelsummary* (v1.4.3.9002; Arel-Bundock, 2022) and *effects* (v4.3-2; Fox & Weisberg, 2018).

Results

Missing Data

All participants reported their demographic information and global romantic attachment. Regarding observed behavioral outcomes, 11 out of 400 problem solving interactions and their respective observed behavior ratings are missing (2.75%). In this case, missing data will be unlikely to impact analysis results.

Descriptive Statistics

Demographics

The mean ages for the entire sample were 17.44 ($sd = 1.28$), male adolescents were 17.78 ($sd = 1.43$), and female adolescents were 17.11 ($sd = 1.01$). Eighty-eight point five percent of adolescents identify as White, .5% as African American/Black, 4.5% as Asian, 2.5% as Hispanic, and 4% as multi-ethnic. On average, the adolescent couples had dated for 12.51 months (range = 1-40 months, $sd = 9.32$ months) at the time of data collection. See Table 1 for a summary of sample demographics.

Global Romantic Attachment

For this sample of adolescents, the mean anxiety score was 3.30 ($sd = .99$), and the mean avoidance score was 2.21 ($sd = .82$). For MLM, z -score normalization was conducted for attachment anxiety and avoidance scores. Ninety-one out of the 100 couples in this study (91%) has at least one partner identified as having an insecure global romantic attachment, supporting the exploration of interaction effects between global romantic attachment and interaction context. Detailed descriptive statistics are shown in Table 2.

Observed Problem Solving Behaviors

The mean score for constructive problem solving was 2.65 ($sd = .98$), self disclosure was 1.90 ($sd = .89$), verbal aggression was 1.32 ($sd = .63$), negativity was 1.43 ($sd = .70$), positive affect/humor was 2.38 ($sd = .98$), and affection was 2.58 ($sd = 1.50$). Detailed descriptive statistics for observed problem solving behaviors are shown in Table 3.

Predicting Observed Behaviors

Separate models were computed for each behavioral outcome: (1) *constructive problem solving*, (2) *self disclosure*, (3) *verbal aggression*, (4) *negativity*, (5) *positive affect/humor*, and (6) *affection*. Complete MLM results are shown in Tables 4 to 9.

Constructive Problem Solving

From the unconditional means model, an ICC of .253 indicated that 25.3% of the total variance in constructive problem solving is attributable to between-person variation. The expected value of observed constructive problem solving behaviors for the prototypical person in a prototypical interaction is 1.833 (95% CI [.543, 3.122], $p < .01$). Adolescents with higher attachment avoidance tend to show less constructive problem solving. For every standard deviation increase in global romantic attachment avoidance, constructive problem solving decreases by .142 (95% CI [-.263, -.020], $p < .05$). A significant association was found between interaction type and constructive problem solving. Adolescents in conflict resolution interactions tend to display more constructive problem solving behaviors than those in social support interactions by .239 (95% CI [.073, .406], $p < .01$). No significant interaction effect is found between global romantic attachment and interaction context when predicting constructive problem solving.

Self Disclosure

From the unconditional means model, an ICC of .107 indicated that 10.7% of the total variance in self disclosure is attributable to between-person variation. Older adolescents tend to engage in more self disclosure. For every one-year increase in age, self disclosure increases by .103 (95% CI [.048, .158], $p < .001$). Adolescents with higher attachment avoidance tend to engage in lower levels of self disclosure behaviors. For every standard deviation increase in global romantic attachment avoidance, self disclosure decreases by .138 (95% CI [-.242, -.035], $p < .01$). Both interaction type and role are significant predictors of self disclosure behaviors. Adolescents in conflict resolution interactions tend to display higher self disclosure than those in social support interactions by .451 (95% CI [.293, .610], $p < .001$). Adolescents acting as *seekers* tend to display higher self disclosure than those acting as *helpers* by .685 (95% CI [.529, .840], $p < .001$).

Interaction effects were found between interaction type and role. Differences in the association between self disclosure and interaction type are moderated by the interaction role performed in the interaction (-.597, 95% CI [-.820, -.374], $p < .001$; see Figure 1). Overall, the *seeker* discloses more than the *helper* in a conversation. Adolescents acting as *seekers* disclose less during conflict resolution than social support interactions, whereas *helpers* disclose significantly more during conflict resolution interactions compared to social support.

Verbal Aggression

From the unconditional means model, an ICC of .258 indicated that 25.8% of the total variance in verbal aggression is attributable to between-person variation. The

expected value of observed verbal aggression for the prototypical person during a prototypical interaction is 1.407 (95% CI [.569, 2.244], $p < .01$). Adolescents in longer relationships tend to display higher levels of verbal aggression. For every one-month increase in relationship duration, verbal aggression increases by .009 (95% CI [.002, .015], $p < .01$). Adolescents in conflict resolution interactions tend to display higher levels of verbal aggression than those in social support interactions by .251 (95% CI [.146, .356], $p < .001$).

Interaction effects were found between global romantic attachment avoidance and interaction type. Differences in the association between verbal aggression and interaction type are moderated by global romantic attachment avoidance (.087, 95% CI [.013, .161], $p < .05$; see Figure 2). Adolescents with higher attachment avoidance showed more drastic increases in their verbal aggression, moving from social support to conflict resolution interactions than adolescents with lower attachment avoidance. The higher the global romantic attachment avoidance, the more marked the discrepancies in levels of observed verbal aggression across interaction types.

Negativity

From the unconditional means model, an ICC of .270 indicated that 27.0% of the total variance in negativity is attributable to between-person variation. Adolescents in longer relationships tend to show display higher levels of negativity, for every one-month increase in relationship duration, verbal aggression increases by .009 (95% CI [.002, .016], $p < .05$). Adolescents in conflict resolution interactions tend to display higher levels of negativity than those in social support interactions by .223 (95% CI [.107, .339], $p < .001$).

Interaction effects were found between global romantic attachment avoidance and interaction type. Differences in the association between negativity and interaction type are moderated by global romantic attachment avoidance (.107, 95% CI [.025, .188], $p < .05$; see Figure 3). Adolescents with higher attachment avoidance are less negative during social support interactions, but their negativity increases markedly during conflict interactions. Adolescents with lower attachment avoidance display higher levels of negativity in social support interactions but show a milder increase during conflict resolution interactions.

Positive Affect/Humor

From the unconditional means model, an ICC of .400 indicated that 40.0% of the total variance in positive affect and humor is attributable to between-person variation. The expected value of the observed use of positive affect and humor for the prototypical during a prototypical interaction is 2.989 (95% CI [1.570, 4.408], $p < .001$). Adolescents in longer relationships tend to display lower levels of positive affect or humor. For every one-month increase in relationship duration, verbal aggression decreases by .022 (95% CI [-.033, -.011], $p < .001$).

Interaction effects were found between global romantic attachment anxiety and interaction type. Differences in the association between the use of positive affect and humor and interaction type are moderated by global romantic attachment anxiety (-.134, 95% CI [-.244, -.025], $p < .05$; see Figure 4). Adolescents with higher and lower attachment anxiety show little difference in their display of positive affect/humor during social support interactions. However, adolescents with high attachment anxiety display less positive affect and use less humor during conflict resolution than social support.

Adolescents with low attachment anxiety show more positivity and use more humor when moving from social support to conflict resolution interactions.

Affection

From the unconditional means model, an ICC of .650 indicated that 65.0% of the total variance in affection is attributable to between-person variation. The expected value of observed affection for the prototypical during a prototypical interaction is 4.060 (95% CI [1.579, 6.541], $p < .001$). Adolescents in longer relationships tend to display lower levels of affection. For every one-month increase in relationship duration, affection decreases by .034 (95% CI [-.053, -.015], $p < .001$). Adolescents with higher attachment anxiety tend to show higher levels of affection. For every standard deviation increase in global romantic attachment anxiety, affection increases by .205 (95% CI [.010, .400], $p < .05$). Adolescents with higher attachment avoidance tend to show lower levels of affection. For every standard deviation increase in global romantic attachment avoidance, affection decreases by .252 (95% CI [-.447, -.058], $p < .05$). Adolescents in conflict resolution interactions tend to display higher levels of affection than those in social support interactions by .443 (95% CI [.273, .612], $p < .001$).

Interaction effects were found between global romantic attachment anxiety and interaction roles. Differences in the association between affection and interaction roles are moderated by global romantic attachment anxiety (-.209, 95% CI [-.329, -.088], $p < .001$; see Figure 5). When acting as *helpers*, adolescents with higher levels of attachment anxiety show more affection than adolescents with lower levels of attachment anxiety. When acting as *seekers*, adolescents with higher levels of attachment anxiety show less affection than adolescents with higher levels of attachment anxiety. In addition,

more romantically anxious adolescents are less affectionate as *seekers* than *helpers*, whereas less romantically anxious adolescents are more affectionate as *seekers*.

Discussion

The present study examined the extent to which individual characteristics, relationship duration, and contextual factors predict adolescent behaviors (i.e., *constructive problem solving, self disclosure, verbal aggression, negativity, positive affect/humor, and affection*) during interactions with their romantic partners among 100 adolescent heterosexual couples. Overall, adolescents were less emotional and reactive during supportive interactions. For individual predictors, analysis results revealed interesting trends for relationship duration, attachment avoidance, and interaction type (social support or conflict) in predicting adolescent behaviors. Most importantly, findings supported the overall hypothesis that individual global romantic attachment and conversation context jointly impact adolescent behaviors during romantic interactions.

Individual Predictors

Relationship Duration

Contrary to prior predictions, we found no significant association between relationship duration and constructive problem solving, nor for self disclosure. Globally, adolescents in longer relationships engage in more negative and fewer positive behaviors, which supports prior findings that adolescent couples show an increase in conflict as a relationship progresses (Collins et al., 2009; Connolly & McIsaac, 2009). Topics of discussion chosen by adolescents in this study offer a possible explanation. Common subjects include college applications, school decisions, and general future planning, representing some of the most significant developmental tasks during adolescence. These subjects can be stressful and often weigh heavier on the future of a relationship as the couple continues the relationship. Another possibility is that couples that have been

together longer may have already discussed the subject in previous conversations but failed to reach a resolution. Thus, when asked to have the same conversation again, adolescents may exhibit more hostility, frustration, and less positive emotions and affection. This association between relationship duration and adolescent behaviors helps to understand the relatively short-lasting nature of many relationships. As the initial excitement of a new romance fades, adolescents may become less motivated to contemplate their expressions during conversations to protect their partners' feelings.

Attachment

Global romantic attachment anxiety was not consistently related to adolescent behaviors in romantic interactions, except that more romantically anxious adolescents tend to be more affectionate during both types of romantic conversations. No significant differences are found between support and conflict conversations. Adolescents experiencing higher levels of relationship anxiety may actively display verbal or physical affection (e.g., "I hope we never break up" or sitting close together) when seeking reciprocation of affection or reassurance about the relationship from their romantic partners.

More romantically avoidant adolescents are less likely to engage in constructive discussion and open disclosure of their feelings or opinions that facilitate problem solving, confirming the nature of attachment avoidance. Avoidant adolescents tend to succeed in independence and autonomy but are threatened by openness and vulnerability (Bowlby, 1969, 1973). They feel incapable of trusting or using their romantic partners as a secure base (Bowlby, 1973). As a result, more romantically avoidant adolescents often wall off

their emotions and are reluctant to engage in self disclosure or constructive open communication.

Interaction Type

Interaction type is a significant predictor for five out of the six behavioral outcomes of interests (except for *positive affect/humor*). Compared to support conversations, adolescents in conflict resolution more frequently disclose personal information and use behaviors that facilitate a better understanding of the problem and developing potential solutions. Adolescents also display more aggressive verbal behaviors and negative emotions toward their partners while simultaneously showing more affection during conflict resolution than social support. In short, adolescents are more emotional and reactive in conflict-oriented conversations than in support-oriented ones.

It is logical for adolescent couples to be more emotionally invested and actively engaged in conflict conversations than during support because conflicts are inherently threatening. No distinct risks are involved in social support conversations, which are essentially two people working together to solve a problem outside the relationship. However, conflict resolution conversations in this study ask adolescent couples to discuss problems that come within the relationship (e.g., “I am unhappy with something that I want you to change” or “I am unhappy with some aspects of our relationship, and I want us to resolve it”). Furthermore, a common goal of social support conversations is to reduce the seeker’s emotional reactivity (e.g., sharing problems encountered at work and feeling calmer after the other person shows empathy and affection). In contrast, conflict involves emotional expressions or “to air emotions” (e.g., actively expressing anger or

hurt because the other person spends too much time with their friends and not enough with you).

Combined Effects of Multiple Predictors

Interaction effects between predictors were found for five (i.e., *verbal aggression*, *negativity*, *positive affect/humor*, and *affection*) out of the six behavioral outcomes of interests (except for *constructive problem solving*). Interaction effects between global romantic attachment and interaction context are found for *verbal aggression*, *negativity*, *positive affect/humor*, and *affection*. Critically, adolescent behaviors vary by what their global romantic attachment style was, what type of interaction they engaged in, and the roles they played.

Self Disclosure

The extent to which adolescents disclosed personal information to their romantic partners, such as sharing feelings and reasonings behind their behaviors, varied depending both on the type of interaction and the role they play. *Seekers* generally disclose more than *helpers*. *Seekers* disclose more during social support, whereas *helpers* disclose more during conflict resolution. Adolescents respond to the demand characteristics of their roles, which vary both by their selected role and the conversation scenario. In support situations, it would be more inappropriate for the *helper* to disclose too much because their primary role is to listen, evoke feelings of being heard and understood, and care for the *seeker*. However, in conflict, the *helper* is expected to respond to the needs of the *seeker*, including explaining their feelings, discussing their motivations, and equally participating in finding a solution. For example, if the *seeker* shares that they find the helper recently to be emotionally unavailable, the *helper* is then

expected to explain why they have been more distant, justify or defend their behaviors, and hopefully propose potential changes to become more emotionally available and present.

Verbal Aggression and Negativity

The extent to which adolescents display verbal aggression toward their romantic partners during conversations varies depending both on the type of interaction and their attachment avoidance. The more attachment-related avoidance adolescents experience in their romantic relationships, the more verbal aggression they display during conflict resolution. In addition, the extent to which adolescents display negative emotions toward their romantic partners during conversations depends upon the type of interaction and their attachment avoidance. During social support, more romantically avoidant adolescents are less negative, but they express markedly more negative emotions during conflict. Adolescents with lower attachment avoidance show no distinct changes in their levels of negativity across two types of conversations.

These findings are theoretically intuitive. Highly avoidant adults often expect unavailability from others and are more likely to devalue intimacy and become emotionally deactivated under relational stress (e.g., Creasey et al., 1999; Main et al., 1985). Hence, it is not surprising that romantically avoidant adolescents in this study were more disengaged in social support conversations and displayed high emotional defensiveness during conflict, evident by their frequent usage of verbal aggression and negativity (e.g., Bowlby, 1973; Main et al., 1985).

Positive Affect/Humor

The extent to which adolescents display positive emotions and use humor during conversations with their romantic partners depends upon both the type of interaction and their attachment avoidance. No marked difference exists between levels of positivity and humor displayed by more and less romantically anxious adolescents. However, more anxious adolescents become significantly less positive during conflict, whereas less anxious adolescents express more positive emotions and actively use humor. Conflict conversations inherently endanger a romantic relationship because they can potentially lead to relationship dissolution. Adolescents who are less romantically anxious and have healthier attachment representations tend to more frequently reassure their partners during conflict. These reassuring behaviors include displaying positive emotions through making jokes, using a positive tone of voice, and maintaining positive facial expressions such as smiles and looking attentive. The intention behind positive affect and humor is often to defuse the situation and maintain constructive communication. However, romantically anxious adolescents are more likely to be overwhelmed by emotions and relationship anxiety during conflict interactions. Hence, it becomes more difficult for them to engage in productive problem solving, maintain positivity, or use humor to de-escalate the situation.

Affection

How affectionate adolescents are toward their romantic partners during conversations varies depending on both their roles and attachment anxiety. More anxious adolescents show more affection as *helpers* than less anxious adolescents but become markedly less affectionate as *seekers*. Further analysis is needed to better understand this

trend. Still, a possible explanation is that adolescents who are less romantically anxious feel more secure about their relationships and do not feel the need to provide reassurance when acting as *helpers*. More anxiously attached adolescents desire more affection overall and expect more active displays of affection from their romantic partners as *seekers*.

Implications

Adolescent romantic relationships are developmentally important and a source of strong emotional experiences (Brown et al., 1999; Collins, 2003; Furman & Shaffer, 2003). For some adolescents, supportive and affectionate romantic experiences lay the groundwork for healthy future relationships (Brown et al., 1999). However, for others, dysfunctional romantic processes can be the foundation for toxic relational practices such as intimate partner violence and abuse (Tabares & Gottman, 2003). Consequently, an important goal of studying romantic relationships is to understand adolescent behaviors within couple interactions (Tabares & Gottman, 2003).

Supporting prior research, attachment styles have important associations with how adolescents behave and relate in romantic relationships (Creasey et al., 1999; Furman & Wehner, 1994; Jorgensen-Wells et al., 2021). More importantly, this study found that adolescents behave differently across support- and conflict-oriented conversations in romantic relationships. Behavioral differences between conflict- and support-oriented conversations evidence the importance of behavioral context and reject the generalization of conflict behaviors to other romantic interactions, such as support or neutral daily conversation. In other words, exploring both support and conflict is necessary for a comprehensive understanding of adolescent romantic relationships. Romantic support

processes are closely linked to the achievement of intimacy (Collins et al., 2009). Understanding individual differences in providing support is fundamental to assisting adolescents in becoming better communicators which aids in the development and maintenance of healthy romantic relationships. Subsequently, having a supportive romantic partner improves adolescent well-being and promotes various desirable developmental outcomes (Furman & Saffer, 2003). Moreover, understanding individual differences in conflict resolution is particularly important for adolescents in dysfunctional relationships. A better understanding of adolescents' conflict behaviors comes with more effective guidance to help adolescents comprehend constructive conflict resolution skills. Being able to productively resolve relational conflict is necessary for establishing long-term relationships.

This study is unique in examining adolescent romantic processes by demonstrating that adolescent behaviors vary depending upon both who they are (i.e., attachment) and what they are doing (i.e., context and role). It highlights the importance of attending to both target adolescents' personal and contextual dispositions when studying behaviors within romantic processes because attachment representations differ across situations. Different types of conversations activate different expressions of romantic attachment depending on the emotional intensity of the situation, the nature of the conversation (e.g., social support or conflict resolution), and its significance to the couple (Darling et al., 2008).

Adolescent romantic relationships are intimate, emotionally charged, and often complicated. Many adolescents do not possess the skills to adequately provide support and negotiate conflicts with their romantic partners (Tabares & Gottman, 2003).

Unfortunately, the field remains relatively uninformed on how to assist adolescents through this critical developmental period and facilitate healthy romantic relationships. Nonetheless, the present study contributes to the development of potential intervention and prevention programs for facilitating healthy adolescent romantic relationships through two channels: (1) by providing a better understanding of support and conflict behaviors in adolescent romantic relationships and (2) by building a clearer knowledge of how adolescent attachment and context jointly impact behaviors in daily romantic interactions.

In addition, this study has important methodological implications as it supports incorporating observational data when studying adolescent relationships. Indeed, an approach that combines self-reports and observational data in studying dyadic interactions presents a more complete picture of adolescent romantic processes (Tabares & Gottman, 2003). During recorded communications, adolescent couples can demonstrate dynamic interactions with contextual cues such as body language, facial expression, and vocal tones that are not apparent using survey questionnaires. For example, coders were asked to pay attention to body postures and facial expressions such as sitting up rigidly, tightly folding arms, frowning, and glaring when coding for *negativity*. In sum, the inclusion of observational data on adolescent romantic couples' interactions continues to provide new understandings of adolescent romantic relationships (Welsh & Shulman, 2008).

Limitations and Future Directions

The generalizability of the present study findings is limited in several aspects. First, this sample lacks heterogeneity because participants are heterosexual,

predominantly White, and geographically clustered. In addition, all study data was collected in the early 2000s, meaning that current findings may be limited in their time relevance. Careful consideration is warranted if applied to adolescent couples nowadays, as adolescents' definitions of romantic relationships and common channels of relationship development and maintenance have changed with time. For instance, technological development has made long-distance relationships more feasible and changed how adolescents communicate with their romantic partners (Vaterlaus et al., 2018). The complete integration of online communication into adolescent romantic relationships has led to decreased in-person communication between adolescent couples (Vaterlaus et al., 2018). Hence, future replications of the present study should use more heterogeneous and recent samples and look into novel forms of data such as text messages or online dating apps.

It is also important to explore whether these findings replicate themselves when exploring adolescents' communications with other important individuals in their lives, such as close peers and parental figures. This study is also limited in that it employed a cross-sectional design and did not look at the lag effect of couple interactions prior to participation or as the relationship progressed. Specifically, whether a couple was fighting or going through a honeymoon phase would likely impact their behaviors during recorded communications. Future longitudinal studies are desired to look at, for instance, how adolescents' behaviors during one conflict communication impact the next one.

In addition, the present study findings also warranted studying adolescent problem solving behaviors individually instead of clustering into categories because no consistent predictor patterns were found across observed behavioral outcomes. Studying

romantic behaviors individually makes realistic sense because the interaction itself and an adolescent's behaviors tend to vary depending on the other person in the conversation and the nature of the conversation (e.g., support vs. conflict).

Moreover, adolescent couples free-willingly chose the topics of discussion in this study. On the one hand, letting participants choose their own topics ensures conversation relevance. On the other hand, the seriousness of their conversation topics is a major source of variability as it ranges from getting an abortion to date night plans. In addition, some couples may choose a subject they had already discussed before, especially for support conversations, because a list of common relationship issues was provided for conflict conversations. As a result, they could treat the issue differently than they did if discussing the topic for the first time. This also helps to explain why adolescents overall were less emotional and reactive during social support interactions. Future studies are recommended to use predetermined discussion topics that have realistic relevance to adolescent lives to control these variations across couples and collect information on whether it has been discussed before the study.

This study was conducted using a variable-centered approach to look at individual behaviors under the assumption that study participants are from a uniform population and describe the relationship between variables (Bauer & Curran, 2004). A variable-centered approach cannot reveal changes at the individual level but infers from changes at the population level (Bauer & Curran, 2004). For example, this study found that high global romantic attachment anxiety is associated with lower positive affect during conflict conversations, but it is unlikely that all anxious adolescents will display less positivity during conflict. Hence, future studies using a person-centered approach would provide

greater insight into the association between attachment and contextual variability because it assumes that the study sample is clustered, for example, by the significance of the conversation topic (Bauer & Curran, 2004).

Figure 1

Interaction Role (Seeker & Helper) Moderating between Self Disclosure and Interaction Type (Support & Conflict)

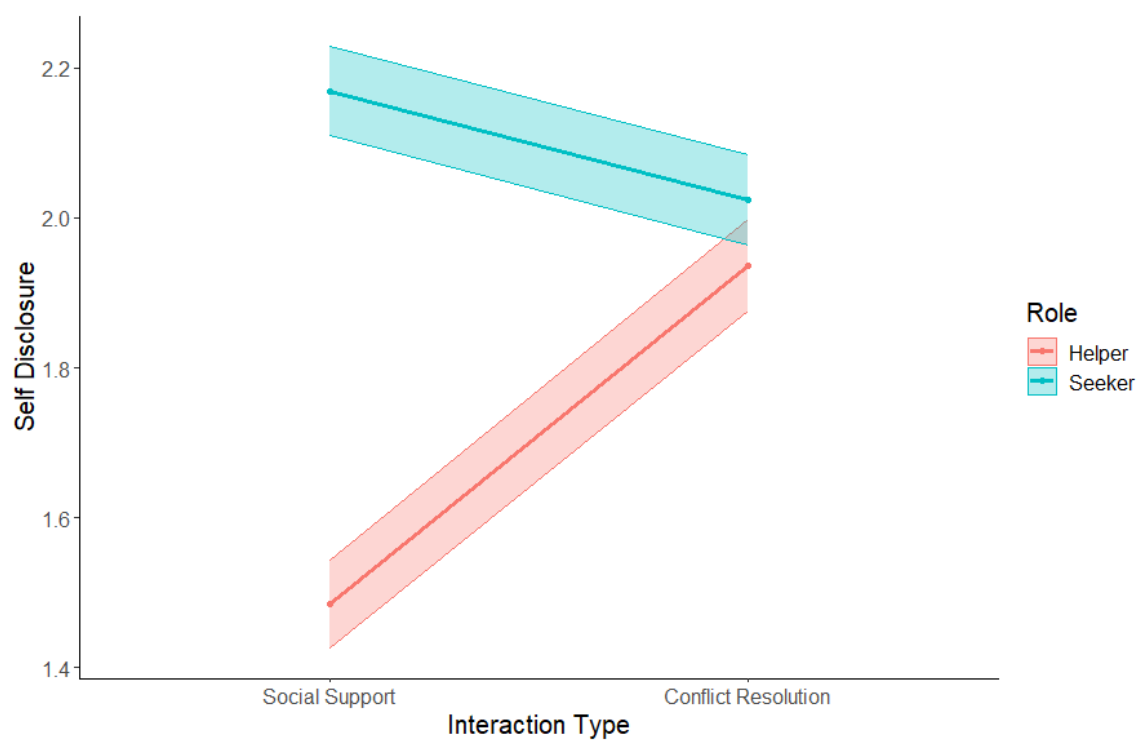


Figure 2

Attachment Avoidance Moderating between Verbal Aggression and Interaction Type

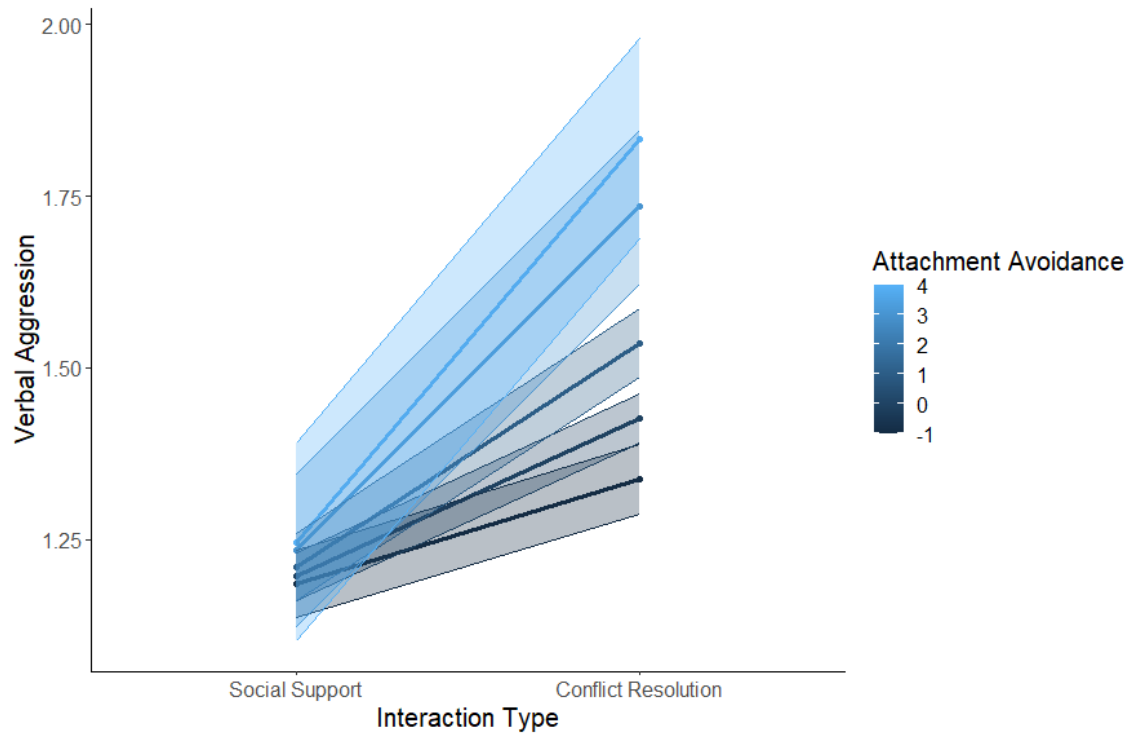


Figure 3

Attachment Avoidance Moderating between Negativity and Interaction Type

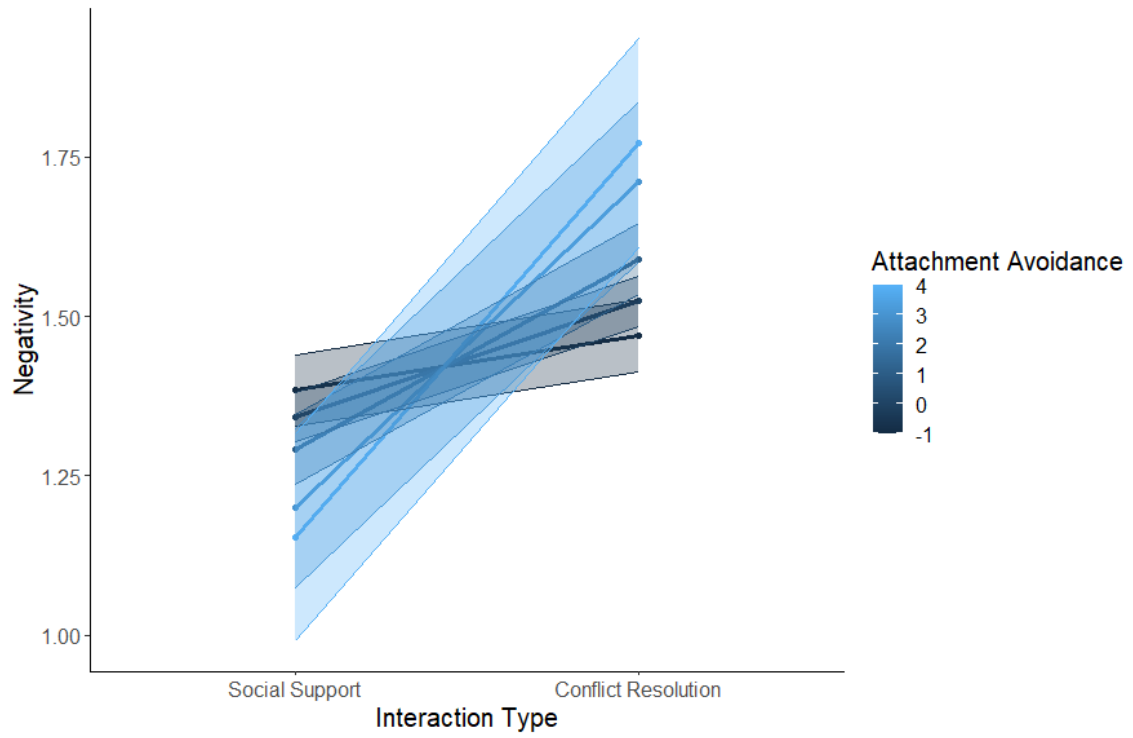


Figure 4

Attachment Anxiety Moderating between Positive Affect/Humor and Interaction Type

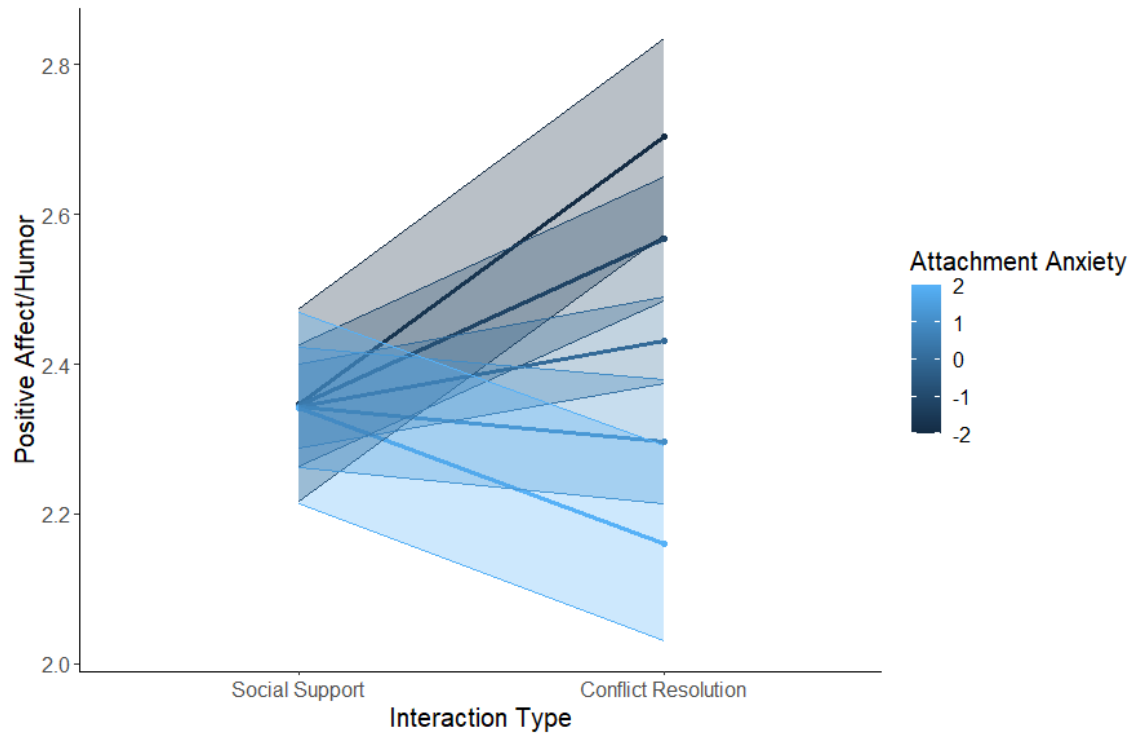


Figure 5
Attachment Anxiety Moderating between Affection and Interaction Role (Seeker & Helper)

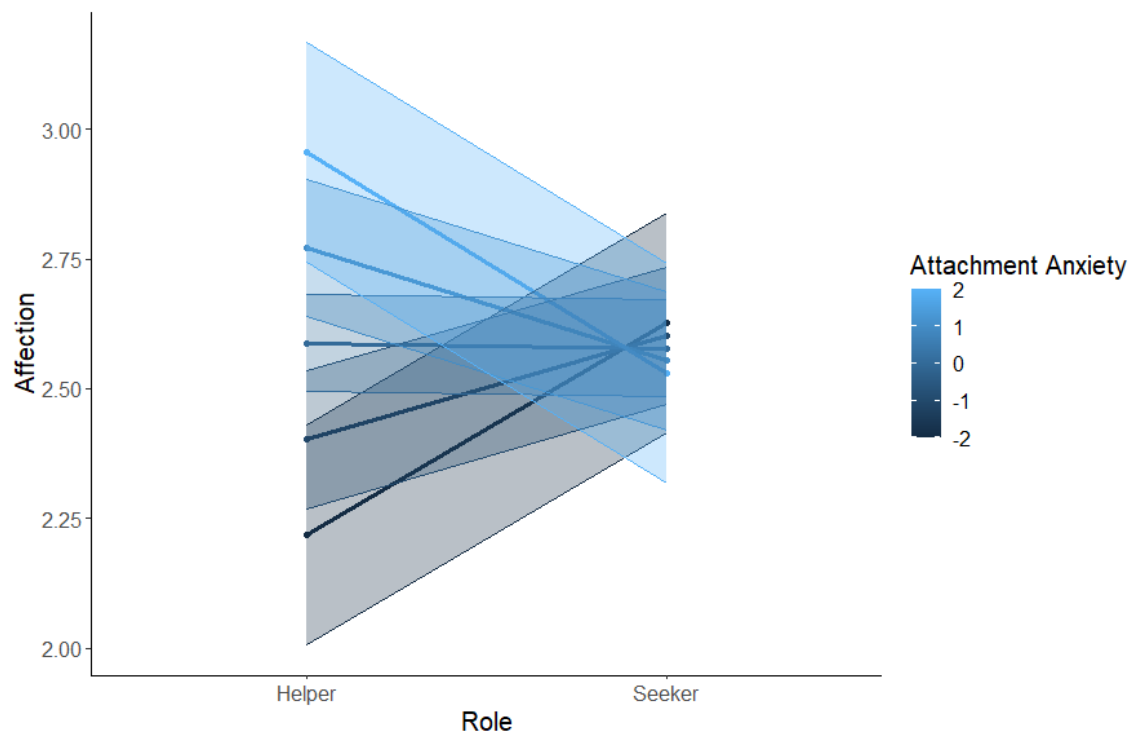


Table 1
Demographics

	<i>N</i>	%	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min	Max
Binary sex (female)	100	50.00				
Male	100	50.00				
Race/ethnicity						
White	177	88.50				
African American/Black	1	0.50				
Asian	9	4.50				
Hispanic	5	2.50				
Other	8	4.00				
Age						
Sample			17.44	1.28	14	24
Male			17.78	1.43	15	24
Female			17.11	1.01	14	20
Relationship duration (month)			12.51	9.32	1	40

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics for Global Romantic Attachment

	<i>N</i>	%	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min	Max
Anxiety			3.30	0.99	1.00	5.61
Anxiety*			0.00	1.00	-2.33	2.34
Avoidance			2.21	0.82	1.00	5.50
Avoidance*			0.00	1.00	-1.48	4.04

Note. * denotes standardized scores.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics for Observed Problem Solving Behaviors

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min	Max
Constructive problem solving	2.65	0.98	1.00	5.00
Self-disclosure	1.90	0.89	1.00	5.00
Verbal aggression	1.32	0.63	1.00	5.00
Negativity	1.43	0.70	1.00	5.00
Positive affect/humor	2.38	0.98	1.00	5.00
Affection	2.58	1.50	1.00	5.00

Table 4
Multilevel Modeling Results for Constructive Problem Solving

	Constructive Problem Solving	
	Baseline	Full
Fixed Effects		
(Intercept)	2.650*** [2.559, 2.740] 0.046	1.833** [0.543, 3.122] 0.657
Binary Sex (Female)		-0.054 [-0.242, 0.134] 0.096
Age		0.048 [-0.025, 0.121] 0.037
Relationship Duration		-0.007 [-0.017, 0.003] 0.005
Attachment Anxiety		0.056 [-0.066, 0.179] 0.062
Avoidance		-0.142* [-0.263, -0.020] 0.062
Interaction Type (Conflict Resolution)		0.239** [0.073, 0.406] 0.085
Role (Seeker)		-0.099 [-0.262, 0.065] 0.083
Interactions		
Attachment Anxiety * Interaction Type		-0.008 [-0.127, 0.112] 0.061
Attachment Anxiety * Role		-0.008 [-0.127, 0.110] 0.060
Attachment Avoidance * Interaction Type		-0.064 [-0.181, 0.053] 0.060
Attachment Avoidance * Role		0.044 [-0.073, 0.161] 0.060
Interaction Type * Role		0.146 [-0.088, 0.381] 0.119
Random Effects		
Std. Dev. (ID)	0.492	0.481
Std. Dev. (Residual)	0.847	0.831
Num. Obs.	778	778
R ²		
Marginal	0.000	0.057
Conditional	0.253	0.294
ICC	0.253	0.251
RMSE	0.78	0.76

Note. + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 5
Multilevel Modeling Results for Self Disclosure

	Self Disclosure	
	Baseline	Full
Fixed Effects		
(Intercept)	1.901*** [1.829, 1.973] 0.037	-0.320 [-1.295, 0.655] 0.497
Binary Sex (Female)		0.115 [-0.027, 0.257] 0.072
Age		0.103*** [0.048, 0.158] 0.028
Relationship Duration		-0.004 [-0.011, 0.004] 0.004
Attachment Anxiety		0.086 [-0.018, 0.190] 0.053
Avoidance		-0.138** [-0.242, -0.035] 0.053
Interaction Type (Conflict Resolution)		0.451*** [0.293, 0.610] 0.081
Role (Seeker)		0.685*** [0.529, 0.840] 0.079
Interactions		
Attachment Anxiety * Interaction Type		0.030 [-0.083, 0.143] 0.058
Attachment Anxiety * Role		0.060 [-0.053, 0.173] 0.058
Attachment Avoidance * Interaction Type		0.097+ [-0.015, 0.208] 0.057
Attachment Avoidance * Role		0.019 [-0.093, 0.130] 0.057
Interaction Type * Role		-0.597*** [-0.820, -0.374] 0.114
Random Effects		
Std. Dev. (ID)	0.291	0.268
Std. Dev. (Residual)	0.844	0.792
Num. Obs.	778	776
R ²		
Marginal	0.000	0.138
Conditional	0.107	0.226
ICC	0.107	0.103
RMSE	0.81	0.75

Note. + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 6
Multilevel Modeling Results for Verbal Aggression

	Verbal Aggression	
	Baseline	Full
Fixed Effects		
(Intercept)	1.315*** [1.256, 1.374] 0.030	1.407** [0.569, 2.244] 0.427
Binary Sex (Female)		-0.082 [-0.203, 0.040] 0.062
Age		-0.016 [-0.063, 0.032] 0.024
Relationship Duration		0.009** [0.002, 0.015] 0.003
Attachment Anxiety		0.039 [-0.039, 0.118] 0.040
Avoidance		-0.001 [-0.079, 0.078] 0.040
Interaction Type (Conflict Resolution)		0.251*** [0.146, 0.356] 0.054
Role (Seeker)		-0.009 [-0.113, 0.094] 0.053
Interactions		
Attachment Anxiety * Interaction Type		-0.039 [-0.115, 0.036] 0.038
Attachment Anxiety * Role		-0.034 [-0.110, 0.041] 0.038
Attachment Avoidance * Interaction Type		0.087* [0.013, 0.161] 0.038
Attachment Avoidance * Role		0.026 [-0.048, 0.100] 0.038
Interaction Type * Role		-0.022 [-0.170, 0.126] 0.076
Random Effects		
Std. Dev. (ID)	0.321	0.319
Std. Dev. (Residual)	0.545	0.526
Num. Obs.	778	778
R ²		
Marginal	0.000	0.068
Conditional	0.258	0.318
ICC	0.258	0.269
RMSE	0.50	0.48

Note. + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 7
Multilevel Modeling Results for Negativity

	Negativity	
	Baseline	Full
Fixed Effects		
(Intercept)	1.433*** [1.367, 1.499] 0.033	0.937+ [-0.009, 1.882] 0.482
Binary Sex (Female)		0.049 [-0.088, 0.187] 0.070
Age		0.015 [-0.039, 0.068] 0.027
Relationship Duration		0.009* [0.002, 0.016] 0.004
Attachment Anxiety		0.049 [-0.039, 0.137] 0.045
Avoidance		-0.037 [-0.124, 0.051] 0.045
Interaction Type (Conflict Resolution)		0.223*** [0.107, 0.339] 0.059
Role (Seeker)		0.025 [-0.089, 0.139] 0.058
Interactions		
Attachment Anxiety * Interaction Type		0.033 [-0.050, 0.116] 0.042
Attachment Anxiety * Role		-0.079+ [-0.162, 0.004] 0.042
Attachment Avoidance * Interaction Type		0.107* [0.025, 0.188] 0.042
Attachment Avoidance * Role		-0.019 [-0.101, 0.062] 0.042
Interaction Type * Role		-0.063 [-0.226, 0.101] 0.083
Random Effects		
Std. Dev. (ID)	0.362	0.365
Std. Dev. (Residual)	0.596	0.580
Num. Obs.	778	778
R ²		
Marginal	0.000	0.047
Conditional	0.270	0.318
ICC	0.270	0.284
RMSE	0.55	0.53

Note. + p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table 8
Multilevel Modeling Results for Positive Affect/Humor

	Positive Affect/Humor	
	Baseline	Full
Fixed Effects		
(Intercept)	2.384*** [2.282, 2.487] 0.052	2.989*** [1.570, 4.408] 0.723
Binary Sex (Female)		0.122 [-0.085, 0.329] 0.105
Age		-0.021 [-0.102, 0.059] 0.041
Relationship Duration		-0.022*** [-0.033, -0.011] 0.006
Attachment Anxiety		0.017 [-0.108, 0.142] 0.064
Avoidance		0.074 [-0.051, 0.199] 0.064
Interaction Type (Conflict Resolution)		0.011 [-0.141, 0.164] 0.078
Role (Seeker)		-0.117 [-0.267, 0.033] 0.076
Interactions		
Attachment Anxiety * Interaction Type		-0.134* [-0.244, -0.025] 0.056
Attachment Anxiety * Role		-0.037 [-0.145, 0.072] 0.055
Attachment Avoidance * Interaction Type		-0.099+ [-0.207, 0.008] 0.055
Attachment Avoidance * Role		0.047 [-0.060, 0.154] 0.055
Interaction Type * Role		0.154 [-0.060, 0.369] 0.109
Random Effects		
Std. Dev. (ID)	0.625	0.591
Std. Dev. (Residual)	0.766	0.761
Num. Obs.	778	778
R ²		
Marginal	0.000	0.067
Conditional	0.400	0.418
ICC	0.400	0.376
RMSE	0.69	0.68

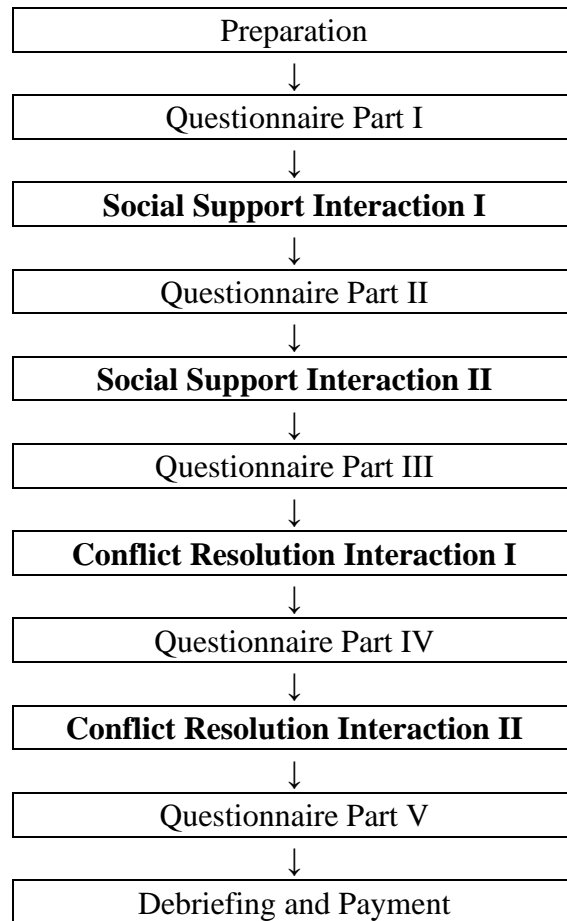
Note. + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 9
Multilevel Modeling Results for Affection

	Affection	
	Baseline	Full
Fixed Effects		
(Intercept)	2.579*** [2.399, 2.758] 0.091	4.060** [1.579, 6.541] 1.264
Binary Sex (Female)		-0.123 [-0.485, 0.240] 0.185
Age		-0.069 [-0.209, 0.072] 0.072
Relationship Duration		-0.034*** [-0.053, -0.015] 0.010
Attachment Anxiety		0.205* [0.010, 0.400] 0.099
Avoidance		-0.252* [-0.447, -0.058] 0.099
Interaction Type (Conflict Resolution)		0.443*** [0.273, 0.612] 0.086
Role (Seeker)		-0.035 [-0.201, 0.130] 0.084
Interactions		
Attachment Anxiety * Interaction Type		-0.041 [-0.163, 0.080] 0.062
Attachment Anxiety * Role		-0.209*** [-0.329, -0.088] 0.061
Attachment Avoidance * Interaction Type		0.012 [-0.106, 0.131] 0.061
Attachment Avoidance * Role		0.068 [-0.051, 0.186] 0.060
Interaction Type * Role		0.054 [-0.184, 0.292] 0.121
Random Effects		
Std. Dev. (ID)	1.208	1.169
Std. Dev. (Residual)	0.887	0.842
Num. Obs.	778	776
R ²		
Marginal	0.000	0.096
Conditional	0.650	0.691
ICC	0.650	0.658
RMSE	0.78	0.74

Note. + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Appendix A
Experiment Choreography



Appendix B

Experiences in Close Relationships (ECR) Scale for Global Romantic Attachment

Instruction: The following statements concern how you feel in romantic relationships. We are interested in **how you GENERALLY experience relationships, NOT just in what is happening in a current relationship**. Respond to each statement by indicating how much you agree or disagree with it. Circle one number to the right of the statement using the following rating scale:

	Disagree Strongly		Neutral/Mixed			Agree Strongly	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. I prefer not to show a partner how I feel deep down.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. I worry about being abandoned.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. I am very comfortable being close to romantic partners.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. I worry a lot about my relationships.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. Just when my partner starts to get close to me I find myself pulling away.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. I worry that romantic partners won't care about me as much as I care about them.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. I get uncomfortable when a romantic partner wants to be very close.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. I worry a fair amount about losing my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. I don't feel comfortable opening up to romantic partners.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. I often wish that my partner's feelings for me were as strong as my feelings for him/her.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. I want to get close to my partner, but I keep pulling back.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. I often want to merge completely with romantic partners, and this sometimes scares them away.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. I am nervous when partners get too close to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14. I worry about being alone.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15. I feel comfortable sharing my private thoughts and feelings with my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16. My desire to be very close sometimes scares people away.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17. I try to avoid getting too close to my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

18. I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19. I find it relatively easy to get close to my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20. Sometimes I feel that I force my partners to show more feeling, more commitment.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21. I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on romantic partners.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
22. I do not often worry about being abandoned.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
23. I prefer not to be too close to romantic partners.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
24. If I can't get my partner to show interest in me, I get upset or angry.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
25. I tell my partner just about everything.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
26. I find that my partner(s) don't want to get as close as I would like.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
27. I usually discuss my problems and concerns with my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
28. When I'm not involved in a relationship, I feel somewhat anxious and insecure.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
29. I feel comfortable depending on romantic partners.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
30. I get frustrated when my partner is not around as much as I would like.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
31. I don't mind asking romantic partners for comfort, advice, or help.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
32. I get frustrated if romantic partners are not available when I need them.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
33. It helps to turn to my romantic partner in times of need.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
34. When romantic partners disapprove of me, I feel really bad about myself.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
35. I turn to my partner for many things, including comfort and reassurance.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
36. I resent it when my partner spends time away from me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Appendix C

Verbal Aggression

This code assesses the degree individuals exhibit hostile and aggressive verbal behavior towards their partner. The central characteristic of aggression is that it is **intended to hurt or annoy** the person to whom it is addressed. This is a content code, although verbal content must be interpreted in the emotional context of the interaction.

Verbal aggression includes insults, put-downs, blaming statements, critical comments (directed at the other partner or that partner's friends or relatives), disgust, condescension, mockery, spiteful or hurtful comments, name-calling, and swearing (directed at the other partner).

Verbal aggression is primarily determined by what the person says, rather than how he or she says it. However, it is important to include tone of voice. For example, if a partner says to the other, "You are a silly person," in a joking way, it is not aggressive. If it is said in a condescending, derisive tone, it is.

NOTE: Threatening or controlling statements should not be coded here, but under Coerciveness and Attempts to Control and Influence.

- 1) Very Low: The individual **does not exhibit any verbal aggression** throughout the interaction.
- 2) Low: There are **one or two times** in the interaction when a partner makes verbally aggressive statements. These statements appear to be **mild in intensity** and **about the other person's behavior** (and a relatively minor behavior such as complaining, not putting clothes away, not completing chores, etc.) rather than his or her personality. With regard to tone of voice, a rating of 2 should be given if **the tone has a bit of a "bite" or "edge" to it, but is not overtly attacking**.
- 3) Moderate: There are **several instances** when the partner makes verbally aggressive statements. These statements are **mild in intensity**, and about the other person's behavior rather than his or her personality. **The difference between a rating of 2 and 3 is one of frequency**.
- 4) Moderately High: The partner's verbally aggressive behavior at times reaches **moderate intensity, though not more than one or two times**. Moderately intense verbal aggression includes insults, put-downs, blaming statements, and/or critical

comments about the other partner's character, rather than behavior. **The comment comes across as moderately attacking, disgusted, mocking, spiteful, and/or hostile** (though a fairly aggressive and cruel statement may be made without any overt change in tone of voice).

- 5) High: There are **three or more instances** in the interaction when the partner's verbally aggressive behavior is of **moderate to high intensity**, and aggressive statements are **directed at the other person's character**. The comment comes across as attacking, disgusted, mocking, spiteful, and/or hostile. **If a partner swears at the other, or if a partner name calls, the partner should automatically be given a rating of 5.**

Negativity

This code assesses the level of negative emotion displayed by one partner towards the other. Negative emotion includes frustration, irritation, anger, and emotional defensiveness. It rates the emotional tone of the interaction, not its content, and is thus different from the code for aggression. One can be very angry without being insulting or cruel.

Behavioral cues for negativity include tense, tight, and/or angry body postures and facial expressions (ex: sitting up rigidly, tightly folding arms, rapidly bouncing legs, tapping fingers, frowning, grimacing, glaring, etc.); tone of voice that is angry, cold, and/or annoyed, or speaking through clenched teeth or in a clipped manner, as if controlling impatience and frustration. Shaking heads, clucking tongues, and rolling eyes are all signs of negativity.

NOTE: Insults, put-downs, and critical or blaming comments, however, should be coded under Verbal Aggression, not Negativity. A highly conflictual and negative person may not be high at all on Verbal Aggression. It is likely, however, that an individual who is high on Verbal Aggression will also be high on this code. Statements with defensive *content* should be coded under Constructive Problem. Emotional defensiveness (which reflects negative emotions) should be coded here.

- 1) Very Low: The partner is observed to be negative/conflictual in behavior **no more than once**, and the **negativity is mild** in intensity.
- 2) Low: The partner is observed to be negative/conflictual in behavior **a few times**, and the negativity is **mild** in intensity. These behaviors are relatively **short-lived and fleeting**.
- 3) Moderate: The partner is observed to be negative/conflictual in behavior on **several occasions**, most of which are **mild** in intensity, though one or more times appears to be moderate in intensity; it may appear **somewhat difficult for the partner to “shake off” the negativity**.
- 4) Moderately High: The partner is observed to be negative/conflictual in behavior on **several to many occasions**. Typically **the negativity/conflict is of moderate to moderately high intensity**

- 5) High: The partner's **negativity/conflict is pervasive** throughout the interaction or is characteristic of his/her communication with the other partner. Behaviors are **of moderate to high intensity** (the partner has a clearly angry look on his/her face); the partner may appear defensive and angry most of the time.

Self Disclosure

The self-disclosure code assesses the extent to which the partner discloses personal information about themselves to their partner. For higher levels, this disclosure **must be significant or private information** whose disclosure makes the partner vulnerable. This is a behavioral code.

Disclosures can include an emotion he or she is feeling (I'm angry, anxious, nervous, pissed off, happy, worried, jealous, etc.) or provide an analysis for why he or she feels or acts a certain way. (ex: "It's hard for me to trust people because..." "I get clingy when...") **Self disclosure can often make a person vulnerable** in front of their partner, and it's a fairly sophisticated skill because one has to be self-aware and comfortable enough to make oneself vulnerable.

Levels 1-3 should be used for relatively commonplace disclosures, such as "I have low self-esteem" or "I get mad at my father.". **Levels 4 and 5 should reflect disclosure of a relatively serious or personal issue**, such as sexuality (e.g., "I have been really uncomfortable since we started making love"), personal relationships (e.g., "I am really worried what's going to happen to my parents now that my grandmother has died"), or emotions ("I felt completely helpless because I was really worried that you guys thought I was dead and I couldn't contact you."), or behaviors ("I stole money from the store last night.") Sometimes, statements that might be disclosures to a stranger would not be disclosures if the person was there and already knew them. For example, saying "I got drunk at the party" might be a disclosure if said by a teen to a parent, but not to the girlfriend who was with him.

Note: Not all statements that begin with "I feel" are self disclosures. A statement such as "I feel you are a jerk" is not self disclosure, but an example of verbal aggression. Likewise, a statement such as "I feel you don't listen to me" is not a self disclosure but rather a criticism of the partner's behavior. The statement "I don't care (where we go out to dinner)" is also not a self-disclosure. There may be instances where "I don't care..." would be considered a disclosure, but it would depend on the context.

- 1) Very Low: **No self disclosure** of emotion, belief, or behavior that is somewhat personal.
- 2) Low: **1-2 disclosures** of an emotion, belief, or behavior that is somewhat personal (could be the same emotion repeated or two different emotions.)

- 3) Moderate: **3-4 disclosures** of emotion, beliefs, or behaviors that are somewhat personal
- 4) Moderately High: **At least one disclosure of something personal or serious**
- 5) High: **At least 3** disclosures of something personal or serious or and extended discussion of one area of disclosure.

Positive Affect/Humor

This code reflects positive emotions: happiness, joy, and humor. This is an emotion code.

The positive qualities of the partner's tone of voice, facial expressions, and body language are assessed in this code. Positive affect may be expressed through behaviors such as laughter, smiling, or making jokes. A positive tone of voice can be happy, cheerful, excited, or satisfied. Positive facial expressions include smiling and looking relaxed and happy. Positive body language is suggested by relaxation and playful gestures.

NOTE: Affection, though often a sign of positive affect, is not coded here, but under its own code. Low ratings can reflect either negative or neutral emotions.

- 1) Very Low: The partner expresses **very little positive affect**. On rare occasions, the partner may be observed to have a positive tone of voice, facial expression, and/or body language. However, the partner's affective tone in general is **neutral, flat, or negative**.
- 2) Low: The partner has **some, low-level positive affect**, such as a positive tone of voice, facial expression, and/or body language. Though the partner's affective tone is flat or negative most of the time, **there are a few clear instances in which the partner becomes more positive**, and may smile or appear happy, relaxed, or cheerful.
- 3) Moderate: **The partner's affective tone is mixed**; the partner displays both positive and negative or flat affect. **About half the time, the partner is positive**, and may smile, laugh, make a joke, or sound happy, cheerful, satisfied, or excited.
- 4) Moderately High: **The partner's affective tone is generally positive**; clearly more than half the time, the partner is positive and may smile, laugh, make jokes, or sound happy, satisfied, cheerful, or excited. To achieve a code of 4, **the positive affect should be of at least moderate intensity** (for example, smiling broadly or laughing heartily on at least one occasion.)
- 5) High: **The partner's affective tone is positive most of the time**; the partner generally displays positive affect. The partner is observed to smile, laugh, make

jokes, or sound happy, satisfied, cheerful, or excited. **The positive affect should be of moderate to high intensity.**

Affection

This code assess both verbal affection (determined by the content and tone of each partner's statements to each other) and physical affection (determined by the frequency and affect of touch between partners). It is a behavioral and emotional code.

Verbal:

Compliments and pet names are considered verbal affection. (ex: "Oh sweetie," "You're really smart.") Also, direct statements, such as "I love you," or, "I hope we never breakup," are considered higher level affection. In order for any statement to be considered verbal affection, the tone must be clearly positive, without sarcasm or joking. Note: It is important to distinguish this code from Humor, as well as verbal aggression. Teasing of any kind, even if done with positive affect, is not verbal affection.

Physical:

Physical affection includes actions such as kissing, hugging, caressing, holding hands, etc. as well as less obvious touching (ex: leaning, touching with feet, sitting close together.) Horseplay or teasing of any kind is not included in this code.

- 1) Very Low: **no touching** or sitting far apart on the couch, **no affectionate statements**.
- 2) Low: **resting a hand** on other person's shoulder, leg, etc, sitting so that body parts touch in some way. Warmth in voice clearly indicating affection or love.
- 3) Moderate: **a warm pat or caress**; affectionate statements such as **compliments or pet names**.
- 4) Moderately high: **2-4 warm pats**, caresses, physical contact up to half of the conversation; or, a **direct statement of love or affection**.
- 5) High: **kissing, hugging, multiple caresses, sitting intertwined**, physical contact more than half of the conversation; or, a **direct statement with moderate to high physical affection or powerful affect**.

Constructive Problem Solving

This code assesses the degree to which partners exhibit skills in objectively analyzing and addressing problems. These skills include laying out the component of a problem, eliciting information from their partners', clarifying their own or their partner's feelings, and generating potential solutions. It is solely a content code.

Behaviors associated with constructive problem solving include clearly expressing one's own feelings or beliefs and eliciting those of the partner. The partner remains non-judgmental. Asking for information or for the partner to express feelings, paraphrasing or confirming partner statements, or laying out key dimensions of a problem are all examples. Clearly stating one's own feelings or beliefs, analyzing them, and generating potential solutions are also examples. Perspective taking is a constructive problem solving skill.

Emotional attunement, the degree to which partners are capable of "reading" each other's verbal and non-verbal signs of emotion, is symptomatic of constructive problem solving, in that it helps the partner clarify emotions and express themselves freely.

High ratings should reflect frequent use of behaviors that move understanding of the problem and potential solutions closer. Low ratings should reflect no forward movement. For example, repetitive restatement of the problem does not move the couple towards solution and therefore reflects low skills.

NOTE: It is important to distinguish between Constructive Problem Solving and the codes for Self Disclosure and Withdrawal. Specifically, nonverbal behavior such as eye contact and posture should be left to the withdrawal code. Likewise, disclosures of emotion, unlike opinions or thoughts that maybe emotionally charged, are coded separately.

- 1) Very Low: The partner either **communicates very little or has poor communication skills.** Very rarely does the partner validate or appear to understand the other's ideas or feelings. Only rarely does the partner verbally express his/her thoughts or feelings, and rarely does so in a constructive manner. In general, the partner's communication may be characterized by poor quality (i.e. no information conveyed), lack of attunement, communicates that undermine efforts to problem solve (e.g., communicating disrespect), and/or defensiveness.

- 2) Low: The partner exhibits **at least some evidence of problem solving skills, although these are of low quality**. For example, they may ask what the partner feels, but then disregard what they say or respond inappropriately. In general, the partner's communication is characterized by **some good and some weak skills**, though the communication is **not overly negative**, disrespectful, or destructive. The partner's communication **may be limited by some inability to respond appropriately in the face of the other's negative feelings, or some defensiveness**.
- 3) Moderate: The partner exhibits **some constructive communication skills and no negative or weak skills**.
- 4) Moderately High: **The partner generally exhibits constructive communication skills, and appears to be attuned to the other's emotional needs**. The partner is not defensive.
- 5) High: **Throughout the interaction, the partner's communication skills are constructive and tailored to meet the emotional needs of the other, in addition to being honest expressions of oneself**. The partner consistently verbally expresses his/her thoughts in a constructive or positive manner. The partner is not defensive.

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