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**Attachment and Conflict in Close Relationships:  
The association of attachment with conflict resolution styles,  
conflict beliefs, communication accuracy and  
relationship satisfaction**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
in Psychology  
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New Zealand.

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## Abstract

The present research aims to obtain a more complete view of couple relationships. In particular, it investigated the manner in which attachment styles (and more specifically the combination of attachment styles to one's partner and one's primary caregiver, such as the mother) are related to conflict beliefs, conflict resolution styles, relationship satisfaction and communication accuracy. Two studies were conducted to explore these relationships. In *Study 1* individuals in couples relationships ( $N = 83$ ) were asked to participate in an online questionnaire regarding primary caregiver and partner attachment, conflict resolution, and conflict beliefs. *Study 2* saw the recruitment of twenty-two couples from public advertisements. Couples were asked to participate in a ten minute videotaped discussion around a major disagreement. The discussion exercise and accompanying self-report questionnaires indicated each couple's communication accuracy. Trained post-graduate raters also coded the observable conflict styles of the couples on a scale developed for the purpose of this research. These were compared with self-reported conflict resolution styles. Couples were also asked to complete questionnaires individually to identify their parent and partner attachment styles, relationship satisfaction, conflict resolution styles and conflict beliefs. Qualitative questions around attachment and conflict resolution provided a more in-depth perspective of more and less securely attached individuals' relationships. Results from both studies indicated that there is some difference between ongoing influence from current models of primary caregiver attachment and the influence from current models of partner attachment on relationship variables. Relationship satisfaction and conflict beliefs were influenced by specific attachment to the partner. Conversely, conflict resolution styles, in particular positive problem solving, withdrawal and compliance, were heavily influenced by more general current conceptualizations of primary caregiver attachment. Additional results regarding quantitative and qualitative findings, including gender differences are discussed in the thesis. Finally, limitations regarding both studies are noted, and suggestions for future research are made.

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## Introduction: Attachment and Conflict in Couples

From out of all the many particulars comes oneness;  
And out of the oneness comes all the many particulars  
Heraclitus

Most people strive to have successful intimate relationships, yet for centuries the exact manner in which to accomplish this has remained an enigma. Technological advances in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have made it possible for researchers to study intimate relationships in greater detail, and the explosion of knowledge has meant that a great deal more is known now about the inner workings of intimate relationships than previously. However, due to the complexity of the topic, it seems that researchers are only beginning to scratch the surface. The present research aims to contribute to the growing literature on coupledness, which can be defined as two relational partners who are committed to each other and their relationship in a primary way and intimately share emotions, activities and/or time (Cline, 1999).

Described as the very essence of human existence (Hendrick & Hendrick, 2000), close relationships greatly contribute to individual psychological, interpersonal, physical and emotional well-being. Nonetheless, when conflict arises it threatens the very heart of the relationship, to the extent that couples sometimes have to reconsider their commitment to each other. This study focuses on attachment and conflict in couple relationships. Attachment refers to the development of an emotional bond between people (Reber, 1995), such as the relationship between an infant and his/her primary caregiver (e.g., mother). From an attachment perspective conflict creates a dilemma: the person, who is generally sought out when the individual is distressed, now becomes a source of threat. In this sense conflict situations also present the ideal opportunity to study attachment styles that become more pronounced as a result of the threatening situation. Based on previous research (e.g., Crowell, Treboux, & Waters, 2002; Cozzarelli, Hoekstra, & Bylsma, 2000; Le Poire et al, 1997; Pierce & Lydon, 2001) the present investigation proposes that parent and partner attachment models, as well as the interaction of parent and partner attachment models, will impact differentially on relationship-related constructs, such as conflict beliefs, conflict resolution styles, relationship satisfaction and communication accuracy.

Currently research on conflict in close relationships appears to dominate the scene in marital research (Bradbury, Rogge, & Lawrence, 2001). Although unanimously disliked, conflict functions as an opportunity to resolve differences between relational partners. However, if a couple is not able to thwart negativity and conflict spiralling to an unmanageable level, physical violence could be the unfortunate result of a conflict situation (Wilson & Daly, 2001). In the conflict context, communication is of vital importance, and miscommunication can contribute to poor conflict management, which results in conflicts remaining unresolved. Communication accuracy refers to whether a message sent by a sender is perceived by the receiver to have the same emotional meaning as that intended by the sender (Noller, 1984). Communicating in a competent manner, effectively and appropriately, and communicating accurately contributes to relational partners understanding each other more intimately, and thus not only enhances intimacy, but also contributes to couples being able to manage their conflict more proficiently (e.g., Canary & Spitzberg, 1987; 1989; 1990).

Communication accuracy, conflict resolution and attachment influences are influenced by the repair, enhancement and maintenance that couples apply in their close relationships. In this sense couple therapy can be of great use to distressed couples who need to repair their relationships (Brehm, Miller, Perlman, & Campbell, 2002). Preventing relational decay before it starts happening is another more recent development in the relational field, and preventative programs can help couples enhance their intimate relationships (Silliman & Schumm, 2000). Maintaining a close relationship, also known as “minding” the close relationship, can be hard, but rewarding work, as many happy couples can attest to (Harvey & Omarzu, 1997; 1999). Positive cognitive attributions appear to be very influential in helping couples maintain a stable and happy relationship (e.g., Karney & Coombs, 2000).

The present research aims to integrate various relational concepts that comprise intimate relationships into a more coherent whole. The concepts derived from the literature are viewed contextually through a range of conceptual lenses in order to enable a broader picture to be envisioned. Each topic is introduced and variables are viewed systematically in the context of previously introduced variables to the point where the Conflict Resolution chapter looks at Conflict and Attachment; and Conflict and Communication. Relevant topics such as the current nature of intimate

relationships, relationship satisfaction, domestic violence, gender differences, and repairing, enhancing and maintaining relationships are discussed. Most social researchers can attest to the vast amount of information available on intimate relationships. An attempt was made to encapsulate the scientific knowledge available on intimate relationships. However, the wealth of information available has meant that only information considered of most relevance to the present research has been incorporated.

Following on from Part I, the literature review, Study 1 is presented in Part II. An Internet survey tested the degree to which conflict beliefs, conflict resolution styles and relationship satisfaction are different for different attachment styles in couple relationships. Based on the literature 10 hypotheses are presented and tested with a sample of 83 individual participants in committed couple relationships. Results for the hypotheses are presented and discussed. The limitations of the study are also noted before a synopsis of the study is presented.

Part III focuses on Study 2 which firstly aimed to test the same 10 hypotheses of Study 1 in a dyadic context (22 couples). It also obtains additional information regarding attachment, relationship satisfaction, conflict beliefs, conflict resolution styles, and communication accuracy by utilizing a multi-method approach. Based on the literature 19 hypotheses, including 6 hypotheses on gender differences, are presented and discussed. Raters' analyses of the couple's videotaped communication exercise is also presented and discussed. Furthermore, qualitative data are explored with Thematic Analysis and key themes illustrating the differences between 'more'- and 'less securely attached' participants with regards to the 6 qualitative questions are shown. Finally, following a discussion of the quantitative and qualitative data and limitations of this study, a synopsis of the findings are presented.

Part IV explores the differences and similarities between the findings presented in Study 1 (Internet Survey) and Study 2 (Couples Study). Following a comparison of the studies, and a presentation of a simple model of relationships among the variables, limitations common to both studies are noted. Several suggestions for future research are discussed before an overall conclusion draws to a close the findings from this project.

## PART I

### Chapter 1: The Nature of Relationships

Nowadays love is a matter of chance, matrimony a matter of money,  
and divorce a matter of course.

Helen Rowland (1875-1950), American Journalist

Intimate relationships have been central to the evolution and development of human beings. The current developmental phase of *Homo sapiens* was reached approximately 150,000 to 200,000 years ago (Fletcher, 2002) and it is in the context of intimate relationships that the species is propagated and human genes are carried over to the next generation. Individuals live their lives in the context of relationships: People are conceived in relationships, born into relationships, grow up in relationships and continue to form relationships throughout their lives as they grow older. The pervasive influence of relationships can be seen in everyday life as the topic of relationships creep into many conversations, can be heard in music lyrics and are broadcasted daily in the media. The importance of relationships and relationship relevant information are also reflected in the daily messages individuals are bombarded with through television, newspapers, magazines, and movies. Human beings are curious about relationships and laypeople and researchers alike are interested in what exactly contributes to making a relationship meaningful. Myths and half-truths about relationships have been around for centuries, but more recently scientific study, in particular psychological research, has been able to support or discount some of these myths and help people to understand the complexities of relationships.

On this journey through life, some relationships influence individuals more than others, but intimate relationships in particular, such as between couples, have a pervasive influence. Since intimate relationships are so central to human existence, it is small wonder that the last three decades have delivered a burgeoning amount of psychological research, on what Berscheid and Peplau (1983) call “perhaps the last major frontier in the study of mankind” (p. 19). This has been due largely to advances in research technology and design, but also to the creative thinking of an ever-increasing number of scholars and researchers in this field. For example, Gottman and

Notarius (2000) noted that during the 1990s marital researchers have increasingly made use of observational research and sequential analysis to study patterns of interactions in couples, often in an attempt to distinguish satisfied from dissatisfied couples. Utilizing this methodology it has been found that dissatisfied couples often reciprocate negative affect in their relationships (Gottman, 1994). In comparison, the decades leading up to the 1980s saw researchers often making use of self-report questionnaires, which are quick and easy to administer, but do not allow the in-depth information gathering that can be gained from using an observational research process (Gottman, Murray, Swanson, Tyson, & Swanson, 2002).

As human beings there is a strong need to belong and according to relational theorists (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) normal functioning is heavily influenced by the quality and quantity of close relationships. Relationships can also fulfil a variety of human needs, for example, physiological needs, in particular sexual needs; safety and security needs; belongingness and love needs, cognitive needs and self-actualization needs (Maslow, 1968; 1970). Social and emotional support in close relationships has been found to contribute significantly to health and personal well-being, though no explicit physiological process connecting social support and health has been found (Seeman, 1996). Studies show that social support predicts overall health status and buffers during stressful situations (e.g., Charles & Mavandadi, 2004; Ryff & Singer, 2001). Relationship satisfaction and spousal confidence have also been shown to be protective factors in patient survival (e.g., Rohrbaugh, Shoham & Coyne, 2006; Rohrbaugh, Shoham, Coyne, Cranford, Sonnega, & Nicklas, 2004). Research has also indicated that separation and divorce have a pervasively negative influence on the mental and physical health of both partners (Gottman et al, 2002). For example, when couples do break up there is an increased risk of psychopathology, physical illness and immunosuppression (Burman & Margolin, 1992).

Compared to other relationships, intimate relationships are unique in a number of ways: Partners have extensive personal knowledge of each other; partners feel affection for each other; partners are interdependent – they need and influence each other; there is a high level of mutuality - partners consider themselves a couple instead of two separate individuals; partners trust each other; and lastly, partners are committed to their relationships to the extent that they spend a lot of time and energy

in ensuring that the relationship continues indefinitely (Brehm, Miller, Perlman, & Campbell, 2002). It is presumed that the most satisfying and meaningful intimate relationships would include all of these features. However, before relationships get to this stage, interpersonal attraction has to draw people together.

In support of the adage 'birds of a feather, flock together', recent research established a strong dyadic similarity for satisfied couples on a range of personality items as measured by the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI-2), such as sensation-seeking, financial worry and self-confidence (Han, Weed, & Butcher, 2003). The research also found that couples who were less satisfied with their relationships and who were receiving counselling for their relational problems, demonstrated less dyadic similarity than satisfied couples (Han et al., 2003).

The premise underlying research on the similarity between partners is based on homogamy theory, which views relationship satisfaction as a function of the couple's similarities. From an evolutionary perspective relational partners are often similar to one another as a consequence of assortative mating, where individuals select partners similar to themselves in some regard (Watson, Hubbard, & Wiese, 2000). Another study also indicated that attitude similarity toward marital and family topics is related to relationship satisfaction (Sano, 2002). Apart from similarity between partners, a number of key factors that are important when choosing a mate have been identified and include: proximity, familiarity, physical attractiveness and reciprocity (Brehm et al., 2002).

Once a relationship has been established, committing to a relationship in a formal manner, such as through marriage, is a ritualistic phenomenon that occurs in all known cultures. According to Fletcher (2002) duties and expectations for both partners exist as a result of these commitments. Whether intentional or unintentional, economics and politics are sometimes at the heart of these unions. For example, some arranged marriages provide wealth or status for the family. However, even in unions that are not arranged by the parents of the couple, financial gain (e.g., through the pooling of resources) and standing in the community can be enhanced as an outcome of formal commitments, although financial loss and a lowered status is, of course, also feasible. Previous research also indicates the link between economics and the success

of marriage. In particular it has been found that individuals with higher education and good economic prospects are more likely to become married and remain married (e.g., Carlson, McLanahan, & England, 2004; Sweeney, 2002).

Most commitments are monogamous, rather than polygamous. In fact, even though 84 percent of all known cultures permit polygyny (one man marrying more than one woman, as opposed to polyandry – one woman marrying more than one man), it has been approximated that only about 5 to 10 percent of these men have more than one wife. This is possibly due to the considerable number of resources that a man would have to make available to care for many wives and children, as well as jealousy among wives (Fletcher, 2002).

In New Zealand, recent years have seen a slight drop in the number of marriages that take place in a given year (Pink, 2006). The number of marriages registered in the year 2005 was 20,500 of which one third were remarriages for one or both partners. These recent figures are considerably lower than the peak of 27,200 in 1971. The marriage rate has remained steady during 2001 and 2002 at 14.7 per 1,000 for non-married adults over the age of 16, but has dropped to 13.2 in 2005. However, in comparison to 1971 where 45.5 per 1,000 individuals over 16 married, these figures are quite low. According to Pink, a number of factors have contributed to the low marriage rate. These include amongst others the increase of cohabiting or *de facto* unions and an increasing number of New Zealanders choosing to remain single. Furthermore, the tendency to get married later in life seems to be persisting. In 2005 the median age for first marriage for men was 30.1 years and for women was 28.1 years. These figures and a general trend towards delayed marriage are similar to statistics reported in other Western countries (Fletcher, 2002; Pink).

In modern times, an increasing number of couples choose to cohabit. Some couples choose this as an alternative to marriage, whereas others choose to experiment with a committed relationship prior to exchanging vows. According to Sessler (2004) many cohabiters choose to move in together for financial reasons, and also for convenience and housing needs. In particular, recent research indicates that many cohabiters seem to be of the opinion that their financial status needs to improve before they get married (Smock, Manning, & Porter, 2005). Smock (2000) states that cohabitation has

gone from being a rare occurrence in the 1960s to commonplace today. Currently most young adults are more than likely to experience cohabitation prior to marriage (Bumpass & Lu, 2000). In New Zealand in 2001 males and females under the age of 25 cohabiting outnumbered married couples in the same age group, and it is estimated that in the 15-44 year age group one in three partnerships in New Zealand cohabitate (Pink, 2006). These cohabiting or de facto relationships are similar to marital relationships, although some researchers tend to view cohabiting relationships as less complete institutions than marital relationships (e.g., Brines & Joyner, 1999; Nock, 1995). For instance, it has been noted that marital relationships, in general, are based on greater commitment and greater mutual dependence between partners (Wu & Schimmele, 2005). Recent research indicates that cohabiting couples experience similar levels of relationship satisfaction to their married counterparts (Brown, 2003). However, Brown's research (2000) shows that when cohabiting partners reported no plans to get married, they were, in fact, less likely to get married and also more likely to separate. Individuals who had prior marital experiences have also been shown to be less likely to marry their cohabiting partners (Bumpass, Sweet, & Cherlin, 1991).

Recent research emphasises that there are considerable differences between the cohabiting relationships of older versus younger couples. King and Scott (2005) found that despite the fact that fewer cohabiting older adults report plans to marry (a factor usually associated with a decline in relationship satisfaction) they enjoy greater relationship satisfaction and relationship stability compared to younger adults. Wu and Balakrishnan (1995) also report that age potentially has a negative impact on union dissolution for cohabiting couples. They posit that younger couples often enter into cohabitation more quickly, and with both partners not knowing each other very well the risk increases that the couple will be poorly matched and eventually separate (Wu & Balakrishnan). Brown (2003) found that for partners who had already previously cohabited there is a negative connection with the quality and stability of subsequent unions. However, couples' expectations regarding their relational future have been shown to be most influential when shared by both partners (Waller & McLanahan, 2005).

Many individuals choose to make more than one commitment to different relational partners during their lives. Repartnering might follow the dissolution of a

cohabitation, divorce or widowhood, and research indicates that the nature of the second union (i.e., marriage or cohabitation) is influenced by the first union type and the exit status (Wu & Schimmele, 2005). For example, former cohabitators would favour serial cohabitation, and previously married individuals (without premarital cohabitation) would favour tying the knot again. In New Zealand the proportion of marriages that constitute remarriages were 36% in 2005 (Pink, 2006).

In some cases remarriage could create a stepfamily household. However, Maccoby and Mnookin (1992) note that the residential status of many stepchildren seems to be unstable as children move between parental households, and as a result these new commitments might only occasionally lead to a stepfamily household. In the past remarriages have frequently occurred following the death of a partner. However, according to McClintic-Pann and Crosbie-Burnett (2005) nearly all remarriages today follow divorces. In 2005 approximately 90% of individuals remarrying in New Zealand were previously divorced (Pink, 2006). Serial remarriages are also becoming more common and remarriages tend to end in divorce faster than first marriages (Coleman, Ganong, & Fine, 2000). Previous research has established that remarried individuals are more likely than individuals in first marriages to divorce (Cherlin, 1992). Interestingly though, Martin and Bumpass (1989) noted that the 49% divorce rate for remarriages in the United States is only slightly higher than the 47% divorce rate for first marriages.

Remarkable changes during the last century have paved the way for the manner in which many people currently consider relationships. Currently individuals' couple relationships are influenced by extraordinary expectations, such as mutual love, passion, friendship, financial collaboration and domestic cooperation (Jenkins, 2003). People choose whether they want to become married or not, even if they have a baby on the way, whereas marriage was the norm for many previous generations. Even for those who do marry, many people these days would not consider it a serious life-long commitment (Myers, 2000), and remarriage seems to be a very realistic option to many people. Expectations of positive and pleasurable aspects of relationships abound, and with the current focus on personal fulfilment and happiness, many individuals are not willing to trudge through the muddy waters of relational problems (Myers). Brehm et al. (2002) suggest that these changes might be due to the subtle

influences of a culture's sex ratio. This is simply described as the number of men for every 100 women. In cultures where there are high sex ratios (more men than women) people tend to support traditional roles for men and women: Women stay at home raising children, while men are the primary providers. People tend to be more sexually conservative and divorce is discouraged. In comparison, cultures with low sex ratios (more women than men) are more permissive, and women are encouraged to support themselves and delay marriage. Unmarried motherhood also seems to be more acceptable in cultures with low sex ratios. Low sex ratio cultures also encourage couples to divorce when dissatisfaction occurs in their relationships.

In summary, relationships, in particular intimate relationships, are central to human existence. Intimate relationships are unique in that partners view themselves as a couple, they invest a lot of time and energy into their commitment, they feel affection for each other, and are interdependent (Brehm et al., 2002). Over time individuals have developed, and continue to develop, various ways of connecting (e.g., dating, cohabitation, repartnering and marriage), maintaining and disconnecting (e.g., divorce) intimate relationships and they attach various meanings to these commitments (e.g., level of commitment). Research also indicates that the choices that people make in terms of type of commitment affect potential future commitments. For example, former cohabiters tend to favour serial cohabitation (Wu & Schimmele, 2005).

Over recent years around the world, and in New Zealand, there has been a shift in how individuals construct relationships, with more people cohabiting prior to marriage (which is often delayed until the late twenties), more children born out of wedlock, greater frequency of divorce and consequentially greater frequency of repartnering. Modern times see a focus on personal happiness, and many believe that this can be found in the context of an intimate relationship, as can be illustrated by the vast majority of people still professing a desire to marry at some point (Smock et al., 2005). However, on a broader level, individuals might not always realise the influence of culture and cultural variations, such as sex ratios, which in particular appear to influence the manner in which men and women situate themselves in relational contexts. Recent changes in research design and technology have enabled researchers to begin utilizing observational research procedures more regularly and this has

greatly contributed to a deeper understanding of intimate relationships (Gottman & Notarius, 2000).

In the following section the focus turns to factors contributing to satisfaction in a relationship and how this affects the longevity or dissolution of the relationship. The trajectory of change in relationship satisfaction is also discussed.

## Chapter 2: Relationship Satisfaction - Happy and Unhappy Couples

Love is an ocean, love is a boat  
In troubled waters it keeps us afloat  
Our true destination is not marked on any chart  
We're navigating for the shores of the heart  
*The Voyage* – Johnny Duhan

### *The Trajectory of Relationship Satisfaction*

The first published study on marriage was by psychologist Lewis M. Terman and his colleagues (Terman, Bottenweiser, Ferguson, Johnson, & Wilson, 1938), and ever since Terman raised the question, other marital researchers have been wondering what makes some marriages happy but others miserable. Relationship satisfaction is particularly important as it gives an indication of a couple's intimacy level and also because it can be linked with other key factors such as psychological well-being and relationship dissolution (Bumpass, 2002). Relationship satisfaction has also been linked with physiological health (e.g., Rohrbaugh, Shoham, & Coyne, 2006). For example, in recent study relationship satisfaction was identified as a protective factor in patients with congestive heart failure over an eight-year period (Rohrbaugh et al., 2006).

The start of a relationship, also known as the honeymoon period, is often characterized by couples experiencing newness, ambiguity and excitement, and for some couples their relationships continue to be a source of joy even when familiarity and predictability set in (Levinger, 1983). Relationship satisfaction is one of the most researched phenomena in marital and relationship research. Social learning theory, exchange theory and interdependence theory all suggest that relationship satisfaction is a function of the degree to which partners behave in a manner that is pleasing to each other (Huston & Vangelisti, 1991). It follows then that it can be expected that dissatisfied couples will behave in ways that are congruent with their level of satisfaction.

Relationship satisfaction is, however, not a static phenomenon, and in tracking the trajectory of change, recent longitudinal research has found that relationship satisfaction decreases fairly rapidly over the first four years of marriage, after which it stabilizes up to the eighth year of marriage, where it again decreases fairly rapidly

(Kurdek, 1999). This is in line with the commonly known “honeymoon is over” effect and the “seven year itch” (Kovacs, 1983) effect and it corresponds to the fourth and eighth year decline in relationship satisfaction, respectively. Quite often couples dissolve their relationship when it reaches these low points. In New Zealand, divorce statistics appear to reflect this trend, with couples married for five to nine years accounting for a quarter of all divorces, and couples married for ten to fourteen years accounting for almost 20 percent of all divorces (Pink, 2005). These statistics are in line with international marital dissolution trends, if one considers that New Zealand Family Courts only grant a dissolution order after a couple has been separated for two years. In 2005 10,000 divorces were granted in New Zealand, and the divorce rate (number of divorces per 1,000 marriages) decreased slightly 13.2 in 2004 to 12.4 in 2005 (Pink, 2006). This is analogous to Australian (13.1 in 2001) and United Kingdom (14.0 in 2003) divorce rate figures (Pink, 2005). According to Schoen and Standish (2001) recent marriages in the United States have a 44% chance of ending in divorce, while in New Zealand approximately a third of couples who married in 1980 would be divorced prior to their 25 year anniversary (Pink, 2006).

Although relationship satisfaction might decrease in the early stages of the marriage, there is some evidence that suggests that it may improve in later life. This explains the U-shaped pattern noticed in relationship satisfaction research across the lifespan (Glenn, 1991). However, researchers are still unclear at this point whether it is simply an age factor or whether there are cohort differences. Cohorts are distinguished from other cohorts based on the historical times that they were born into which influences their attitudes, experiences and opportunities as a group (King & Scott, 2005). Declines in relationship satisfaction across cohorts have been blamed on the many challenges currently facing younger couples; for example, work-family conflicts, premarital cohabitation and greater economic pressures (Amato, Johnson, Booth, & Rogers, 2003; Glenn, 1998; Rogers & Amato, 1997). This is also corroborated by the difficulty that many younger couples have in sustaining marital and cohabiting relationships. For example, King and Scott found that the oldest cohabiters in their study were significantly more satisfied with their relationships and they were less likely to consider separation than younger couples.

### *Relationship Satisfaction: Contributing Factors*

In the fairy tale, Cinderella and the Prince fall in love, get married, and live happily ever after. The current reality is that many couples' relationship satisfaction fall somewhere along a continuum ranging from very satisfied to very dissatisfied. This segment looks at factors contributing to couples' relationship satisfaction and relationship dissatisfaction, but firstly a note on 'supposed' gender differences in this context. Karney and Bradbury (1995) and in more recent longitudinal research, Kurdek (2005), indicate that there is very little evidence to suggest that, as was previously believed, men and women have different versions of relational processes (or as Bernard observed in 1972 a "his" and "her" version of the relationship). However, the factors accounting for variability in relationship satisfaction and stability are very similar for men and women (Kurdek). Psychological distress, lower relationship specific appraisals (i.e., love, liking, intrinsic motives and trust), lower partner interactions and relationship dissatisfaction have all been shown to increase the likelihood for divorce and decrease the likelihood of "living happily ever after".

In terms of the ever increasing phenomenon of interracial couples, it should be noted that research indicates that there are no differences between interracial and intraracial couples in terms of relationship satisfaction (Troy, Lewis-Smith, Laurenceau, & Gaines, 2006). However, a number of general qualities have been linked with relationship satisfaction. Cryder's qualitative research (1998) indicated that satisfied couples have strong couple identities, are continually interested in their partner over time, enjoy and expect to enjoy mutually satisfying activities, and express hope that their relationship will continue to improve with time. Lee (2000) found that Korean-American couples' marital satisfaction was particularly influenced by affection expressed to each other, sexual satisfaction, the presence of children, commitment, and shared activities. More recently Rusbult and her colleagues described the Michelangelo phenomenon which relates to the manner in which partners sculpt one another to become closer to their ideal self (Kumashiro, Rusbult, Wolf, & Estrada, 2006; Rusbult, 2006). The Michelangelo phenomenon not only has implications for individual well-being, but also for the well-being of the couple (Kumashiro et al., 2006). Makinen (2005) also recently found that satisfactorily resolving an attachment injury, such as a perceived abandonment in time of need or a violation of trust, contributes to dyadic satisfaction. Blurton's recent qualitative research (2005)

explored the relationship satisfaction of couples entering retirement and found that a number of factors emerged, including:

. . . active involvement, flexibility in time together and apart, continuation of a satisfying relationship, retirement satisfaction, financial security contributing to retirement satisfaction, attitude of optimism, religion as an outside resource, tolerance of one another, minimized conflict, positive relationships with children, action-oriented strategies, maintaining good health, common interests, similar life philosophies, sense of humor, successful communication, women perceiving men as helpful, men using former work in new ways, strong social support, couples working as a team, and planning for retirement (p. 4275).

A number of these factors, including time spent together, problem solving and affection, sexual satisfaction, coping with stress, work-family balance and domestic labour, helpfulness and support, communication, and cognitive attributions will now be explored more specifically in the context of recent research. Following that there will be a discussion of couples with asymmetric relationship satisfaction, as well as couples dissolving their relationships.

*1) Time spent together.*

Relationships exist in the context of time, and to maintain a satisfactory relationship one would expect both partners to invest in the relationship time-wise. Drawing on exchange theory Hill (1988) postulated that regular and enjoyable shared leisure time would draw relational partners together and prevent dissolution, and found this to be true, thus supporting the commonly heard notion that ‘couples that play together, stay together’. To this extent Brown (2000) also found that when both partners report that they spend little time together, the likelihood of them separating increases. Matthews, Wickrama and Conger (1996) furthermore found that couples experiencing their interactions together positively are more prone to marital stability. Sprecher, Felmlee, Orbuch and Willets (2002) in their research found that as a couple becomes closer the likelihood of them developing mutual friendships increases and this furthermore strengthens the relationships. Recent research by Waller and McLanahan (2005) also indicate that when couples report participation in shared activities their optimism

toward formalizing their union through marriage increases and more particularly they are almost twice as likely to stay together.

### *2) Problem solving and affection.*

Effective problem solving has been linked with relationship satisfaction in couples (e.g., Du Plessis, 2001; Kurdek, 1994). Previous research has also indicated that wives' understanding of husbands' conflict styles were related to relationship satisfaction, although this was not true for husbands (Acitelli, Douvan, & Veroff, 1993). In terms of the trajectory of change in relationship satisfaction Bradbury and Karney (2004) and also Johnson et al. (2005) recently indicated that, contrary to what was previously believed, the effect of problem solving skills alone does not appear to be crucial to relationship satisfaction. They found that over the first four years of marriage couples with poor problem solving skills achieved comparable relationship satisfaction levels to couples with good problem solving skills if they displayed positive emotions such as affection, humour and interest/curiosity in their partner (Bradbury & Karney; Johnson et al.), supporting the notion that an interaction effect appears to be at work.

### *3) Sexual satisfaction.*

Sexual satisfaction has been linked with relationship satisfaction in that individuals with greater relationship satisfaction also report greater sexual satisfaction in their relationships (Byers, 2005; Haavio-Mannila, & Kontula, 1997; Purnine & Carey, 1997). Researchers have also established that changes in relationship satisfaction are related to changes in sexual satisfaction (Byers; Sprecher, 2002). However, to date no causal relationship has been established between relationship satisfaction and sexual satisfaction and Byers suggest that communication might be linked to both increases and decreases in satisfaction. More specifically, her research indicated that over a period of 18 months poor communicators reported a decline in sexual and relationship satisfaction levels, whereas good communicators reported an increase in their sexual and relationship satisfaction, thus supporting the notion of a complex interplay of variables at work in determining the resulting relationship satisfaction.

#### *4) Coping with stress.*

Ongoing daily stressors and stressful life events have been shown to impact negatively on couples' relationship satisfaction (Story & Bradbury, 2004). Karney, Story and Bradbury (2005) assessed the marital satisfaction trajectories for newlywed couples over a four-year period in relation to stress. They found that marital satisfaction was lower among couples experiencing chronic stress. Relationship satisfaction also declined more rapidly among these couples. Furthermore, the effect of acute stress on relationship dissatisfaction increased significantly for couples who were already experiencing high chronic stress levels, thus emphasising the importance of contextual factors on relationship satisfaction.

One particular relationship event – the transition to parenthood – has frequently been touted as a crisis for couples and previous studies have shown an overall decline in relationship satisfaction following the birth of the first child (e.g., Belsky, Lange, & Rovine, 1985). Rather than the previously assumed direct connection between birth of child and the resulting decline in relationship satisfaction, recent research has indicated that there are also various other factors at work. Cox, Paley, Burchinal and Payne (1999) have shown that the patterns of change in relationship satisfaction are related to whether the pregnancy was planned, the gender of the child, depressive symptoms and the couple's problem solving behaviour. In particular, this study found that couples were particularly satisfied when at least one partner showed positive problem solving ability and that couples in which neither partner showed positive problem solving ability there was a greater decline in relationship satisfaction over time.

Coping with stress has been also been differentiated along gender lines. For example, men tend to have a preference for interpersonal distancing and problem-focussed strategies, whereas women tend to have a preference for emotion-focussed coping (Coyne & Smith, 1991; Gottlieb & Wagner, 1991). More recent research by Mickelson, Lyons, Sullivan and Coyne (2001) indicate that couples who tend to view stressors as affecting them as a couple rather than as individuals tend to focus more on dyadic coping strategies. Some stress management programs have been shown to be effective in reducing the impact of stressors on couples. One such program, the Couples Coping Enhancement Training (CCET) has been shown to result in higher

relationship satisfaction one year later for couples receiving the 18-hour program compared to the control group (Bodenmann, Charvoz, Cina, & Widmer, 2001).

*5) Work-family balance and domestic labour.*

Chronic stress between responsibilities at work and home – work-family balance - has been linked to a decline in relationship satisfaction. Matthews, Conger and Wickrama (1996) have linked this decline to a decrease in warm exchanges during interactions between partners, as well as an increase in psychological distress. Story (2005) in recent research using daily diaries found that individuals displayed greater withdrawal and anger toward their relational partners following days with heavy workloads or negative social interactions. Similarly, Schulz, Cowan, Pape-Cowan and Brennan (2004) have shown that negatively loaded workdays were associated with greater anger in women and greater withdrawal in men toward their relational partners.

The change in gender ideology and the amount of time that modern women spend at work and often away from the house has had a huge impact on how couples construe their relationships. In a study looking at the changes in gender ideology, Brewster and Padavic (2000) found that since 1977 attitudes about women's work roles have continued to shift to a less conservative view. For example, more people currently believe that working mothers can have a relationship with their children that are as warm as that between stay-at-home mothers and their children. Also, fewer people now believe that it is more important for a wife to help her husband than have a career of her own. Despite less conservative attitudes and greater female participation in the workforce, researchers have found that females still tend to shoulder the majority of the domestic labour tasks. Full time employed wives with full time employed husbands have been found to conduct a larger share of domestic labour in Germany, Britain and the United States (Gershuny, Bittman, & Brice 2005). However, the picture is more complicated than it appears. Although not reaching levels of equality, these researchers found that couples do seem to adapt to a wife's change to full time employment, with wives reducing their share of domestic work in the years following, and husbands slightly increasing their amount of domestic work. In a recent study (Essex & Hong, 2005) of 126 families comprised of older care-giving adults with an intellectually disabled adult child, division of labour became particularly salient for mothers. These researchers found that greater participation in domestic labour tasks

by fathers were related to relationship satisfaction for mothers. This also acted as a buffer to potential care-giving stress for mothers.

#### *6) Helpfulness and support.*

Previous research has indicated that there is a significant relationship between perceived helpfulness and support in close relationships and relationship satisfaction (e.g., Noor, 1999; Turner, 2003). Kurdek (2005) found that high levels of satisfaction with social support at the start of marriage were linked to high levels of relationship satisfaction. Baldwin, Ellis and Baldwin (1999) found that as role support decreased, relationship satisfaction also decreased in couples. Kurdek's research indicates that low average levels of social support were related to dissolution of the relationship for husbands, but not for wives. Pasch, Bradbury and Sullivan (1997) found that relationship satisfaction predicts the level of helpful behaviour during an interaction, as well as post-interaction appraisals about the support received. Recent research also indicates that positive perceptions of support seeking, and capitalization attempts, such as seeking others out to share positive events, contribute to relationship satisfaction (Logan & Cobb, 2006).

Carels and Baucom (1999) found a marked gender difference in the impact of perceived helpfulness in couples' relationships. They found that the immediate influence of partner support for women had a greater impact on their feelings of being supported, whereas men were more influenced by their overall evaluations of the relationship. Neff and Karney's research (2005) also indicate that for wives with more accurate specific perceptions of their partner, there were also more positive supportive behaviours and greater relationship satisfaction. In addition they found that in satisfied couples with wives displaying accurate specific perceptions of their partners, the couples were also less prone to divorce during the early stages of their relationships.

#### *7) Communication.*

For decades communication (or lack thereof) has been blamed for countless marital dissolutions and unhappy unions. The active listening model, also known as the validation model (e.g., Markman, Stanley, & Blumberg, 1994) and the mirroring model (Hendrix, 1998), has been *the* intervention of choice for relationship therapists

as they guide couples through their listener-speaker exchanges in an attempt to evoke empathy and understanding from partners for differing viewpoints. Contrary to what most marital therapists have been prescribing for decades, active listening does not seem to feature in most happily married couples' communication interactions (Gottman et al., 1998). Instead, Gottman and his fellow researchers found that there was a particular pattern predictive of divorce. It includes a "negative start-up by the wife, refusal of the husband to accept influence from his wife, wife's reciprocation of low intensity negativity in kind, and the absence of de-escalation of low intensity negativity by the husband" (p. 17). These researchers furthermore conclude that happier and more stable marriages often have a softened start-up on the part of the wife during communication, that the husband is influenced by his wife and he de-escalates low intensity negative affect, that the wife is prone to using humour in an attempt to soothe the husband, and that he in turn is prone to using positive affect and de-escalation in an attempt to soothe himself.

At the more distressed end of the scale, Jacobson and his fellow researchers (1994) found that both battering husbands and wives were angrier than distressed, but non-violent, couples. Popular belief subscribes to the idea that anger is destructive to relationships. Gottman and Krokoff (1989) however, propose that although anger is associated with a lesser degree of concurrent relationship satisfaction, couples might tolerate it in the short term, as it does appear to contribute to relationship satisfaction in the long run. In a study of 130 newlywed couples aimed at exploring marital processes Gottman et al. (1998) found that anger was not a destructive emotion in marriages. Rather, it has been identified that a particular set of processes, which Gottman (1994) termed the "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse", are for the most part predictive of unsatisfactory relationships and eventually separation and divorce. These include criticism, defensiveness, contempt and "stonewalling" (listener withdrawal). More recent research conveyed similar findings and has also added belligerence to the list of destructive behaviours, as it implies a challenging behaviour that tests the partner's power and authority (Gottman et al., 1998).

Another common interaction scenario that has been identified among distressed couples is the demand/withdraw pattern. Some researchers have suggested that the occurrence of this pattern may be an expression of conflict over closeness and

distance (Jacobsen, 1989). Further correlational research has indicated that an increased divergence in desired closeness/dependence is related to the demand/withdraw pattern (Christensen & Shenk, 1991). Kurdek's (1995) research furthermore distinguished along gender lines that the demand/withdraw pattern in distressed couples is generally linked to the wife being more demanding and the husband being more withdrawn. These gender differences can be explained in light of Gottman and Levenson's (1988) findings which suggest that compared to women, men experience higher levels of physiological arousal during conflict and their natural reaction is to withdraw from such an aversive experience.

#### *8) Cognitive attributions.*

A fundamental principle of cognitive psychology is that cognition paves the way for affect and behaviour (Beck, 1976). A large body of research aimed at examining the cognitive attributions that couples make in their relationship has been established, yet the lack of integration of cognitive and behavioural aspects in treatments has been blamed for poor results that marital therapists experience in their dealings with distressed couples (Johnson et al., 2001). In reviewing the literature, Bradbury and Fincham (1990) concur that distressed couples accentuate negative or problematic events in their relationships, but tend to make light of the positive and pleasurable aspects in their relationships. Further research (e.g., Fincham, Bradbury, Arias, Byrne, & Karney, 1997) attempting to determine whether a causal relationship exists between relationship satisfaction and attributions provided evidence that maladaptive assumptions do indeed contribute to a decline in relationship satisfaction over time. Coyne (2001) also found that the greater the discrepancy between perceptions of real and ideal love in the relationship, the greater the relationship dissatisfaction. Recent Australian research (Halford, Keefer, & Osgarby, 2002) also indicates that relationship satisfaction influences cognitions and it colours how people interpret past relationship events and behaviours. More specifically, relationship dissatisfaction is associated with a negative hindsight memory bias in distressed couples (Halford et al., 2002).

In a similar vein, research by Cram and Noreen (2000) indicated that distressed couples, in comparison to their non-distressed counterparts, viewed their partners' negative behaviours more negatively by making maladaptive causal and responsibility

attributions. Distressed couples also reported lower expectations around their ability to solve marital problems than non-distressed couples. Brehm et al. (2002) also suggest that unhappy couples continually make distress-maintaining attributions and that the longevity of these unhappy relationships is questionable. Distress-maintaining attributions imply that a partner's negative behaviour is viewed as deliberate and at the order of the day, whereas positive behaviour is viewed as accidental or the result of chance. By continually viewing their partners in a negative light, distressed couples are preventing themselves from experiencing greater relationship satisfaction.

Recent research by Cropley (2005) has demonstrated that the degree to which couples view themselves as a unit (also known as their "entitativity") influences the number of positive attributions individuals make about the partner's behaviour and also influences the nonverbal pleasantness, involvement, expressiveness and relaxedness toward the partner. According to Cropley this is based on the notion that in highly entitative couples the partner is perceived as the self and as a result cognitions and behaviours toward the partner will be comparable to those about and toward the self.

The degree to which individuals view their own relationship as superior to other people's relationships has also been linked to higher relationship satisfaction levels (e.g., Buunk, 2001; Buunk & Van Eijnden, 1997), as well as increased commitment (Rusbult, Yovetich, & Verette, 1996). Buunk (2001) also found that the tendency to view their relationship as superior was more evident in men than women and this suggests men are more competitive in this respect. Buunk and Oldersma (2000) suggest that these cognitive biases assist happy couples to remember positive events about their own relationships and negative information about other couples' relationships. Other researchers have found that a combination of a cognitive stance of global adoration of the partner, as well as an accurate recognition of the partner's specific qualities, increased relationship satisfaction and decreased the risk of dissolution (e.g., Karney & Coombs, 2000; Neff & Karney, 2005; Niehuis, 2006). Finally, Djikic and Oatley (2004) theorise that these positive illusions that couples have about one another could function as self-reflected compliments, in that way validating that the self is special enough to be loved by someone with such amazing qualities.

### *Asymmetric Relationship Satisfaction*

It is not always the case that both partners are equally satisfied or dissatisfied with their relationship. Asymmetric couples experience different levels of relationship satisfaction, and findings indicate that these couples express a lesser degree of positive emotions than satisfied couples (Clasen, 1999). Furthermore, these asymmetric couples employ problem solving behaviour less frequently than their satisfied counterparts. Results also indicate that although both asymmetric partners avoid relationship related communication, the more satisfied partner in the relationship will contribute more to communication avoidance. Glenn and Weaver (1981) assert that relationship satisfaction appears to add more to life satisfaction than any other area of functioning. It is thus small wonder that marital disruption weighs so heavily on the stressful life events scale (Holmes & Rahe, 1967), and relationship break-ups are one of the more stressful experiences in life. However, not all dissatisfied couples choose to end their union. A study by Wall (2000) on what keeps unhappy couples together revealed five domains that are crucial to long term stability. Dissatisfied but stable couples demonstrated:

- (1) an ability to survive early challenges in the marriage that bound them together as a couple;
- (2) a philosophy of marriage that emphasized the bigger picture, such as elevating the relationship over individuality, and for some, elevating their faith over the relationship;
- (3) a sense of reciprocity in most areas in the relationship such as an emphasis on the good things in the relationship and meeting each other's needs;
- (4) an ability to adjust to each other and their circumstances through growth and changing how they interacted as a couple; and
- (5) a generally positive attitude toward the limitations of each other by dealing effectively with shattered expectations (p. 4200).

For those couples who do choose to dissolve their commitments, researchers postulate that certain stable personal and dyadic factors exist at the time of committing to a relationship that can predict the dissolution of a relationship. Factors such as dysfunctional beliefs about relationships and low levels of interdependence between couples have been identified as predictors of divorce (Kurdek, 1993).

### *Dissolution*

As relationships persist some couples find themselves discontent with the state of affairs and are constantly in conflict or drifting apart. According to Levinger (1983) the downward spiral in a relationship is discernible when the couple experiences a drop in their interconnectedness, particularly in areas that involve mutual pleasure. This is often accompanied by an increased dissatisfaction with their partner and their relationship. From an attachment theory perspective, Sbarra and Law (2006) view the dissolution process as a process of becoming *unattached*. Relationship dissolution can result in emotional upheaval, with many people reporting sadness and anger following a break-up experience (Sbarra & Ferrer, 2006). Ongoing attachment to a former partner has short term and long term implications following dissolution. In an experiment examining the break-up of dating relationships, Sbarra and his colleagues found that it contributes to cardiovascular stress when these participants experience a loss-specific condition in an experiment (Sbarra & Law, 2006). Ongoing attachment to a former partner has also been linked to depression in a 12-year follow-up of divorced adults (Sbarra & Emery, 2005).

Many factors such as critical life events, jealousy, betrayal, boredom, conflict, differential personal growth rates, unrealistic expectations, substance dependence and psychological disorders can influence a couple's relationship satisfaction. Findings from the longitudinal Early Years of Marriage Project in the United States (1986 to the present day) also indicate that gender differences, frequency of conflict and low education are predictors of divorce (Orbuch, 2006). In addition, differences have also been noted with regards to the manner in which marital roles impact on different cultural groups, for instance as noted between African American and White American groups in this Early Years of Marriage Project (Orbuch & Veroff, 2002). For example, Orbuch (2006) reported that conflict has a different meaning for White and African American couples, with open disagreement related to longitudinal distress in White American couples, but not in African American couples.

Whereas two people are essential to start a relationship, it takes only one person to sever the ties that bind them together (Levinger, 1983). Although the dissolution of a relationship is a very personal process, a particular pattern common to most relationship break-ups has been identified by a number of researchers (Baxter, 1984;

Duck, 1982; Lee, 1984). A summary of these models (Brehm et al., 2002) indicates the following common ground: (1) discovery of the problem; (2) exposure (the discontented party reveals his/her unhappiness); (3) negotiation (which leads to a resolution about the future of the relationship); (4) transformation (changes in the frequency, nature and duration of interactions, and the manner in which the relationship is defined); and (5) grave-dressing (this refers to a process in which the relationship is put behind the person and it is associated with creating an acceptable story for the relationship from beginning to end). Relationships, however, do not end overnight and most couples contemplate separation for a lengthy period before they finally decide to leave an unsatisfactory relationship. For example, Stewart, Copeland, Chester, Malley, and Barenbaum (1997) showed that women spent the last five years of their relationship considering separation, and a study by Lee (1984) indicated that the length of time it took couples to move from the discovery phase to the transformation phase was 30 weeks.

Marital stability also appears to be influenced by intergenerational processes. Several researchers have indicated that the experience of parental divorce increases the likelihood that individuals will also divorce their partners, and conversely growing up with two biological parents increases the likelihood that individuals will remain married (e.g., Amato, 1996; Bumpass, Martin, & Sweet, 1991; Hatchett, Veroff, & Douvan, 1995; McLanahan & Bumpass, 1988). This does not imply that parents should be encouraged to remain married at all costs for the sake of the children. Recent longitudinal Australian research indicates that adolescents of divorced parents experienced no differences in behavioural/emotional adjustment, or in academic performance or social competence compared to adolescents from non-divorced couples (Ruschena, Prior, Sanson, & Smart, 2005). However, this and other research have demonstrated that parental divorce does influence the emotional bond between parents and children. In particular it is evident in parent-child attachment and parent-child conflict (e.g., Ruschena et al., 2005; Zill, Morrison, & Coiro, 1993).

Recent research has also demonstrated the longitudinal and intergenerational impact of divorce. Amato and Cheadle (2005) found that divorce in the first generation was associated with more marital conflict and weaker parental attachments in the third generation, and these results were mediated by family characteristics in the middle

generation such as more marital conflict and more divorce. The researchers note that these results should be interpreted with caution, because although not trivial, the outcomes were not large. On this note Coltrane and Adams (2003) warn people to not buy into (what some perceive to be) the 'divorce problem' (divorce depicted as a moral evil) and the symbolic use of the child as victim of the divorce, as they believe that these viewpoints are often generated to strengthen the interests of some family moralists. Rather than an idealistic divorce free world, Coltrane and Adams advise that support for individuals in marriages on an emotional and material level (e.g., community support, employment and gender equity), as well as divorce that minimizes the pain and discomfort for all parties involved, might be a more realistic stance. Other researchers have also indicated that it is not so much divorce per se, as the ongoing conflict between parents, which influence a child's functioning, self concept and attachment to the parents (e.g., Cabero, 2006).

#### *Relationship Satisfaction Summary*

Relationship satisfaction is a key indicator of couple intimacy (Bumpass, 2002) and has been studied extensively. Research indicates that it is high at the start of the relationship, but decreases over the first four years of marriage, and then decreases again rapidly after eight years of marriage (Kurdek, 1999). Research also indicates that for most couples relationship satisfaction increases in later years (Glenn, 1991) thus indicating a U-shaped pattern over time.

Many factors appear to influence the level of satisfaction that a couple experiences in their relationship, and this includes: A strong couple identity and entitativity (e.g., Cropley, 2005); continual interest in the partner, participation and mutual enjoyment of activities (e.g., Cryder, 1998), positive problem solving (e.g., Kurdek, 1994), positive emotional expression (e.g., Johnson et al., 2005), sexual satisfaction (e.g., Byers, 2005), the ability to cope with stress (e.g., Karney et al., 2005), maintaining a work-family balance (e.g., Story, 2005), shared domestic labour tasks (e.g., Essex & Hong, 2005), helpfulness and support (e.g., Turner, 2003), humour, de-escalation and positive affect during communication (Gottman et al., 2003), and positive attributions as well as an accurate recognition of specific qualities in the partner (Neff & Karney, 2005). Positive cognitive biases have also been implicated in increasing and maintaining relationship satisfaction (Buunk & Oldersma, 2000). Other theorists

suggest that these positive illusions which individuals have about their partners could function as self-reflected compliments, in that manner validating that the self is exceptional enough to be loved by someone with such amazing qualities (Djikic & Oatley, 2004).

In some couples the partners have different levels of relationship satisfaction and it appears that these asymmetric couples express less positive emotions than more satisfied couples (Clasen, 1999). Dissatisfied but stable couples tend to focus on the couple as a unit, as well as on the positive aspects of the relationship, and they furthermore have an ability to change and grow as a couple, which strengthens their relationship (Wall, 2000).

With the current Western focus on personal happiness, relationship dissatisfaction greatly contributes to the dissolution of the relationship. Many other factors contribute to couples dissolving a relationship such as critical life events, jealousy, betrayal, boredom, conflict, differential personal growth rates, unrealistic expectations, substance dependence and psychological disorders. Dissolution typically follows the following pattern: An individual typically goes through a process of discovering the problem and revealing his/her unhappiness, then there is negotiation, which if unresolved leads to dissolution, and finally there is a process of grave-dressing in which the relationship is viewed in the past tense and an acceptable story of the dissolution is created (Brehm et al., 2002). Research has revealed that divorce has implications beyond the immediate couple. For example, parental divorce increases the likelihood that offspring will divorce their partners (e.g., Amato, 1996). There also appears to be an effect on the parent-child bond as a result of divorce, although researchers caution that these effects are often smaller than it is made out in popular media (e.g., Amato & Cheadle, 2005), whilst other researchers indicate that it is not the divorce per se, but rather the ongoing interparental conflict, that influences children negatively.

This concludes the chapter on relationship satisfaction, although it will be touched on again in relevant further chapters. The following chapter will focus on the attachment process, first in general, then more specifically on adult attachment and lastly on couples' attachment.

## Chapter 3: Attachment

“When an individual is confident that an attachment figure will be available to him whenever he desires it, that person will be much less prone to either intense or chronic fear than will an individual who for any reason has no such confidence” (Bowlby, 1973, p. 235).

### *Introduction*

Attachment theory highlights the tendency for attachment styles to persist over time. Although the development of attachment beyond infancy has not been studied as intensively as infant attachment (Goldberg, 2000), it is believed that couple relationships are heavily influenced by the individual’s attachment history. Broadly speaking, attachment refers to the development of an emotional bond between people (Reber, 1995), such as the relationship between an infant and his/her primary caregiver, for example mother, or what has been termed a generalized representation of attachment (Treboux, Crowell, & Waters, 2004). Infants’ initial attachments to primary caregivers are formed by approximately seven months (Main, 1996) and these first relationships hold the key as to how people become who they are and it also greatly influences future well-being (Karen, 1998). According to Bowlby (1979) “attachment behaviour is held to characterize human beings from the cradle to the grave” (p. 129). Drawing on psychoanalysis and evolutionary theory, as well as research on human and nonhuman primates, attachment theory developed as a conceptual framework for explaining attachment behaviour.

Bowlby (1988) sees attachment behaviour as an individual’s attempt at attaining or maintaining proximity to some other individual who is perceived as more capable in dealing with the world, in particular when the individual feels threatened or unwell. An important theoretical anchor for attachment theory is the concept of the secure base. According to Bowlby (1988) the secure base is a key element in the concept of parenting and it refers to the provision of a secure base by both parents from which the child can venture out into the world and to which the child can return knowing with certainty that he/she will be “nourished physically and emotionally, comforted if distressed, reassured if frightened” (p. 11). Apart from providing a secure base, an attachment figure should also be a target for proximity maintenance and function as a safe haven in times of need (Ainsworth, 1991; Hazan & Shaver, 1994; Hazan & Zeifman, 1994).

An integral pattern of human behaviour, attachment is thought to have developed as a result of the interplay between inherent behaviour (such as crying, sucking and smiling) and learned behaviour (Bowlby, 1979) as a means of protecting the vulnerable infant (a combination, thus of nature and nurture - Levy & Orlans, 2003). This protective function of attachment in turn increases the probability that the infant will survive to the reproductive years. As such it has the function of enhancing species' survival.

Flowing from Harlow's studies in the late nineteen fifties on the effects that maternal deprivation has on rhesus monkeys (e.g., Harlow & Zimmerman, 1959), research on human infants soon revealed the importance of the secure base. Using the Strange Situation Test, an experiment in which the young child's emotional reaction is observed when placed in a range of strange and progressively more stressful situations, Ainsworth and her colleagues identified three main attachment patterns (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). Secure relationships are characterized by an infant's confidence that their primary caregiver will be available, helpful and comforting should a frightening situation arise (Bowlby, 1988). These caregivers are readily available, as well as sensitive and responsive to the child's needs. Infants who have an anxious-ambivalent relationship with their caregivers are unsure whether their caregivers will be responsive. Bowlby (1988) suggests that this pattern is promoted by a primary caregiver who is not consistently available, by separations and by threats of abandonment. As a result infants make conflicted and often ineffective attempts to receive support from caregivers (Simpson & Rholes, 1998). Infants who develop avoidant relationships with their caregivers have lost all confidence that the caregiver will be helpful, and as such do not seek support when they are distressed. Bowlby (1988) suggests that this pattern is the result of a caregiver constantly rebuffing his/her child when the child seeks comfort or protection. These infants attempt to cope internally by becoming emotionally self-sufficient.

Numerous studies (beyond the scope of this thesis) have been conducted on the pervasive influence of attachment on child development. For example Edelstein (1996) found in a longitudinal study that insecure attachment, anxiety and depression

adversely affect cognitive development, whereas secure attachment influences cognitive and social cognitive progress by encouraging exploration.

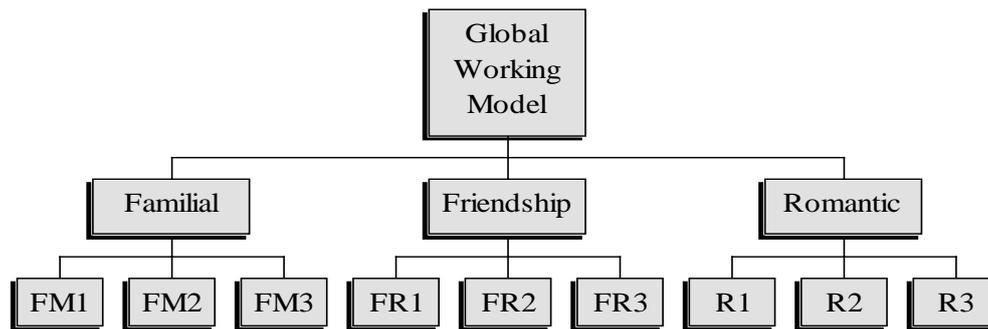
Incidentally, it can be noted that although the present research project focuses on the influence of attachment to the primary caregiver, secondary caregivers also have a significant influence on the resulting level of secure attachment in the child. Main and Weston (1981) found that children had varying grades of confidence and competence depending on whether they had a secure relationship with both parents (highest), only with one parent (medium) or with neither parent (lowest). In addition, Fox, Kimmerly, and Shafer (1991) in their meta-analysis of father and mother attachment studies, found that secure attachment in one parent was dependent on secure attachment in the other parent. This was also the case for insecure attachment, thus signalling there is often concordance in the manner that caregivers treat their child. Bowlby (1988) believes that these patterns persist for a number of reasons. For one, he suggests that parents often treat children in the same manner over time whether it has favourable or unfavourable responses. Also, he proposes that many of these patterns are self-perpetuating; for example, an anxious-ambivalent child who is whiny and clingy is more likely to elicit an unfavourable reaction from the caregiver. Bowlby believes that over time these patterns become internalized such that the child also displays these patterns in other new relationships. With regards to the stability of attachment patterns, a study (Waters, Merrick, Treboux, & Albersheim, 2000) monitoring 50 individuals over a period of 20 years found that attachment classifications were relatively stable over that period at 64%, although it was more stable (greater than 70%) for individuals without any major negative life events, and less stable for those (less than 50%) who had experienced a major negative life event, such as death of a parent or parental divorce.

### *Adult Attachment*

The study of adult attachment grew from Bowlby and Ainsworth's work which focused on the attachment system of infants and their primary caregivers. Over the last two decades the attention of attachment research has shifted to the application of attachment theory to adult intimate relationships, and in particular heterosexual relationships. However, it can be noted that comparable frequencies of attachment styles have been found in homosexual and heterosexual samples (Ridge & Feeney,

1998), as well as in various cultures (e.g., Wei, Russell, Mallinckrodt, & Zakalik, 2004). Numerous adult attachment researchers have shown the similarities in attachment patterns observed in childhood and adulthood (e.g., Collins & Read, 1990; Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). However, the adult attachment system, unlike the infant attachment system, is invariably bound to multiple attachment figures (e.g., family, friends, and romantic partners), which fulfil various attachment needs (Overall, Fletcher, & Friesen, 2003). Typically these attachment relationships are between peers, rather than between caregiver and infant as in the childhood attachment system (Weiss, 1982). However, as noted earlier with regards to attachment bonds, the adult attachment bond still includes four defining normative processes including proximity maintenance, separation distress, and viewing the attachment figure as safe haven and secure base (Collins & Feeney, 2004). Similar to infant attachment, internal working models are thought to regulate adult attachment behaviour, thoughts and emotions (Bowlby, 1988). Weiss furthermore distinguishes adult attachment from attachment in children by noting that unlike attachment in children, the adult attachment system is not as likely to overwhelm other behavioural systems, and that attachment in intimate adult relationships frequently include a sexual relationship.

Building on previous research (e.g., La Guardia, Ryan, Couchman, & Deci, 2000; Mikulincer & Arrad, 1999; Pierce & Lydon, 2001) Overall and her colleagues (Overall et al., 2003) researched the manner in which the adult attachment system is cognitively represented. They found that it consists of a multilevel network of attachment representations. More specifically they have distinguished between a global attachment style, general attachment representations within particular relationship domains, and working models of attachment with specific relationships (see Figure 1). This model is consistent with the notion that different relationship domains serve separate attachment purposes (Overall et al.).



*Figure 1.* Multilevel network of attachment representations. FM1-FM3 = family observed variables; FR1-FR3 = friendship observed variables; R1-R3 = romantic observed variables.

*Note.* From “Mapping the intimate relationship mind: Comparisons between three models of attachment representations,” by N.C. Overall, G.J.O. Fletcher and M.D. Friesen, 2003, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 29, p. 1481. Copyright 2003 by the Society for Personality and Social Psychology.

Along similar lines Treboux, Crowell, and Waters (2004) argue that attachment systems in adult relationships consist of two components: A generalized representation of attachment (with its origins in childhood attachment experiences with the primary caregiver), and a specific representation of attachment which emerges out of attachment experiences within the adult relationship. Their research indicates that more intact and complete attachment systems (both generalized and specific), increase the likelihood that the quality of attachment behaviour will be enhanced (Treboux et al., 2004).

Adult attachment theory and research has developed along two different research pathways - from a developmental psychology perspective and a social psychology perspective (Wampler, Shi, Nelson, & Kimball, 2003). The developmental focus has used the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI; George, Kaplan, & Main, 1985) to assess the attachment style of the individual. It is based on the individual’s current level of coherence when discussing early attachment relationships with parents in an interview situation (Wampler et al., 2003). For example, a secure individual will be able to discuss early attachment experiences with parents in a balanced and coherent manner without becoming overwhelmed, interrupting the discussion or becoming distant. The AAI is a well known clinical and research tool with extensive evidence for reliability and validity (Hesse, 1999), and distinguishes between secure, dismissing (avoidant),

or preoccupied (anxious) classifications, as well as a secondary unresolved classification for portions of the interview related to loss or trauma (Wampler et al.).

Hazan and Shaver's adult attachment theories and research (e.g., Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Shaver & Hazan, 1988; Shaver, Hazan, & Bradshaw, 1988) have also been influential on the attachment literature and developed from a social psychology perspective (Wampler et al., 2003). From this perspective the need for security, proximity and emotional support drive people to become involved in long-term romantic relationships (Hart, Shaver, & Goldenberg, 2005). Theoretically, Hazan and Shaver developed a typology analogous to Ainsworth's depictions of infant attachment (Ainsworth et al., 1978). They distinguished between self-reported secure, avoidant and anxious attachment descriptions for adult relationships based on their beliefs that early relationships have an impact on adult relationships, and that the process of being involved in an intimate adult relationship shares similarities with infant-caregiver attachment. Their research examined, amongst other notions, the prevalence of attachment styles in childhood and adult relationships, and found that the incidence of attachment styles reported in infant studies were similar to that found in adult relationships. These results have been replicated and extended by many researchers internationally (e.g., Brennan & Shaver, 1995; Feeney & Noller, 1990; Guerrero, 1996; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994; Le Poire et al., 1999). For example, in building on Hazan and Shaver's research, Collins and Read (1990) developed an 18-item scale, the Adult Attachment Scale, to measure adult attachment styles and found that variability in attachment style can be linked to different beliefs about self and others. They furthermore found evidence for the relationship between attachment styles and attachment history. Adults who reported a warm and non-rejecting relationship with their parents were more certain that they could depend on others and in general had positive self-images, whereas adults who recalled cold and inconsistent parents were more anxious about being abandoned and generally viewed themselves in a more negative light.

Theoretically, it is important to note here that as the infant develops, the concept of the secure base is extended beyond an external care-giving figure to an internal representation, or internal working model of attachment (IWM), which can be activated in times of distress (Clulow, 2001). Based on attachment theory Main,

Kaplan and Cassidy (1985) proposed that in a child's first few years he/she builds working models of his/her mother and father and the manner in which they treat and communicate with him/her, together with a compatible model of him/herself in interaction with them, it then becomes construed as cognitive structures in the mind of the child. For West and Sheldon-Keller (1994) the infant's attachment bond to the caregiver becomes "more than the sum of attachment/care-giving interactions" (p. 2), in that it includes expectations and behavioural patterns, as well as emotional content. Research in this regard (Mikulincer, Gillath, & Shaver, 2002) has found that threat-related contexts automatically trigger cognitive representations of attachment figures. Attachment orientations regulate people's behaviour in close relationships and also govern expectations and attributions of others' behaviour (Simpson & Rholes, 1998). To this extent these beliefs are presumed to incorporate "if-then" propositions (Campbell, Simpson, Boldry, & Kashy, 2005) that indicate expected behaviours of attachment figures during times of distress (e.g., *if I am distressed, then I can count on my attachment figure for support*). Infants develop expectations about their own self-worth in relation to their attachment figure's availability and responsiveness to them, and these internal working models are then carried forward into new relationships where they heavily influence the individual's expectations, perceptions and behaviour (Simpson & Rholes). Attachment theory also posits that working models can change as they accommodate and incorporate new interpersonal experiences, as in the case of the current relational partner (Bowlby, 1969/1982, 1980). West and Sheldon-Keller (1994) also support a more fluid notion of internal working models, and based upon Edelman's (1987) theorizing they suggest that:

There is no discrete model maintained in memory, but rather a potential to reclassify and recategorize past experiences in the light of current experiences ...working models are dynamic, associative, affective categories that have the potential to be rediscovered or reformed in new situations (p. 61).

In this regard attachment styles have been found to be stable, but also open to changes as a result of new experiences (Crowell, Treboux, & Waters, 2002; Pierce, Senécal, Gauthier, & Guay, 2006). Crowell et al. (2002) assessed 57 couples 3 months prior to, and 18 months into their marriage, and found that 78% of the sample had the same primary attachment classification. In particular secure attachment was found to be

very stable across the transition to marriage, whereas restricted access to new experiences were linked to remaining insecure. In addition, these researchers suggest that based on their findings insecurely attached adults can reconstruct or reconceptualise their childhood attachment experiences in new contexts; that is, through exposure to new ideas and new relationships away from their parents. Similar to Crowell et al., Pierce and her colleagues (2006) found that attachment classifications remained relatively stable across the change to parenthood.

In terms of the parental influence on attachment related experiences, Feeney and Cassidy (2003) examined reconstructive memory in a sample of adolescents. They found that over a 6 week period the adolescents' initial perceptions of conflict interactions with their parents shifted to the extent that it became more congruent with their attachment representations of their parents. This indicates the fluidity of memory as well as the manner in which attachment representations might assist in maintaining stability of relationship models over time.

Bartholomew (1990) extended previous work on attachment styles by describing IWM in terms of two dimensions: positivity of person's model of self and positivity of a person's model of others (see Figure 2).

	<i>Positive Model of Self</i>	<i>Negative Model of Self</i>
<i>Positive Model Of Others</i>	<p><i>Secures</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• comfortable with intimacy</li> <li>• confident and self-sufficient</li> <li>• holds positive expectations about relationships</li> </ul>	<p><i>Preoccupieds</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• craves excessive intimacy</li> <li>• lacks confidence</li> <li>• looks to relationships to fulfil dependency needs</li> </ul>
<i>Negative Model Of Others</i>	<p><i>Dismissives</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• uncomfortable with intimacy</li> <li>• compulsively self-reliant</li> <li>• view relationships as nonessential</li> </ul>	<p><i>Fearful avoidants</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• fears intimacy</li> <li>• lacks confidence</li> <li>• would like closer relationships but fears rejection</li> </ul>

*Figure 2.* Bartholomew's (1990) Four-Category Attachment Style System.  
*Note.* From "Avoidance of intimacy: An attachment perspective," by K. Bartholomew, 1990, *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 7, p. 147-178. Copyright 1990 by Sage Publications.

As an adjunct to previous research on adult attachment which distinguished between secure, avoidant and anxious attachment descriptions, Bartholomew (1990) described four categories that can be distinguished, based on an individual's view of self and others. These include secure, preoccupied, fearful and dismissing adult attachment styles. Empirical support that behaviourally validates these categories has been found (e.g., Guerrero, 1996). Bartholomew asserts that secure individuals would have a positive self-model and a positive model of others: they would have a high self-esteem and they would be at ease with intimate relationships. Preoccupied adults have a negative self model but a positive model of others. This leads them to fretfully seek the approval of others in a belief that if other people respond positively towards them, then they would be safe and secure. Cassidy and Kobak (1988) term these intense attempts hyperactivating strategies due to the vigilant attitude, as well as ongoing and insistent efforts that are made by the individual until such time as an attachment figure becomes available and security is achieved. Mikulincer et al. (2002) found that even in non-threatening contexts individuals with a preoccupied attachment disposition showed a heightened degree of accessibility to mental representations of attachment figures. Individuals with a fearful-avoidant attachment style are characterized by negative models of self and other. Similar to the preoccupied individuals, they are highly dependent on the approval of others, yet they stay away from intimate relationships to avoid the pain of rejection. Lastly, a dismissive attachment style (another type of avoidant style) is identified by the individual's positive model of self and negative model of others. According to Simpson and Rholes (1998) these adults maintain their high self-esteem through defensively rejecting the worth of intimate relationships (which they avoid because of negative expectations). Cassidy and Kobak (1988) term the strategies involved with these styles deactivating strategies, and presumably deactivating the attachment system would minimize the distress caused by an unavailable attachment figure. In this regard Mikulincer et al. found that avoidantly-attached individuals' accessibility to mental representations of attachment figures were inhibited in a threat-related context.

Fraley and Shaver (2000) have furthermore developed a new model that delineates the functions of attachment dimensions, in which they specify that the avoidance dimension is responsible for regulating attachment relevant behaviour (e.g., seeking support/withdrawing in distressing situations), whereas the anxiety dimension

regulates the appraisal monitoring system (e.g., measuring the degree of closeness – emotional, psychological and physical – to the attachment figure). In particular Fraley and Shaver argue that the activation of the appraisal monitoring system is expected to create feelings of distress and this would encourage the individual to initiate behavioural responses to re-establish feelings of felt security. To this extent researchers have found evidence supporting the appraisal monitoring system. For example, more anxiously attached individuals do perceive significantly more conflict in their relationships and are more distressed during discussions of a major conflict, than their less anxiously attached partners (Campbell et al., 2005). Researchers have furthermore found that internal working models (IWM) dealing with general views of self and others discriminated among the attachment styles much more clearly, than did items dealing explicitly with attitudes about romantic love. This suggests that attachment styles have a permeative effect on interpersonal relationships (Feeney & Noller, 1990).

More recently Hart, Shaver, and Goldenberg (2005) reported research that supports their security maintenance model - a model which implies that the defense mechanisms and functions of attachment, self-esteem and cultural belief systems (or worldviews) are substitutable. This is based on an integration of attachment theory and terror management theory. According to this model an attack on the processes that maintain security (i.e., attachment, self esteem and worldviews) result in an increased alternative defense mechanism. However, individual differences in attachment style do seem to moderate the strategies that people employ. For example, an avoidant attachment predisposition is related to a disproportionate reliance on individualistic defense mechanisms such as self-enhancement (Hart et al., 2005).

#### *Attachment in the Dyadic Context*

Based upon Bowlby and Weiss' theory and work, West and Sheldon-Keller (1994) propose the following definition of adult attachment: “dyadic relationships in which proximity to a special and preferred other is sought or maintained to achieve a sense of security” (p. 19). From an evolutionary perspective Shaver, Hazan, and Bradshaw (1988) surmise that the adult attachment system has been chosen by natural selection to assist pair bonding or monogamy, which also assists the survival of children. In their review of relevant literature, Fraley and Shaver (2000) conclude that pair

bonding is adaptive in at least three ways: It solves the problem of paternity certainty; it provides additional protection for immature progeny through two biological caregivers; and it gives human infants sufficient time to reach sexual maturity.

Patterns of interaction in infancy lead to generalized ways of behaving and these internal working models shape people's interactions with the social world. Internal working models of attachment (IWM) have a pervasive influence on many aspects of human functioning. For example, it has been found that adults categorised as having a dismissive attachment style experience a marked rise in skin conductance in reaction to queries on the subject of separation from and rejection by primary caregivers (Dozier & Kobak, 1992). In particular these IWM become more pronounced in the context of adult intimate relationships. A number of studies have found IWM to be related to one's own attachment history (Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Levy & Davis, 1988). It is furthermore believed that IWM influence partner matching by arranging behaviour and social perception according to the individuals' underlying attachment style.

According to the reinforcement effect in attachment theory, adults appear to select partners who confirm their attachment expectations (Collins & Read, 1990) and this is in line with Bowlby's view (1988) that individuals create their social environments in ways that confirm their IWM. Similarly, Sroufe and Fleeson (1986) suggested that in order to maintain internal congruity, people might seek to establish relationships that are similar to past relationships. To this extent, it has been found that individuals with secure attachment styles attract each other (Collins & Read; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994). IWM, however, also explain why the dissimilar attachment styles are attracted to one another (i.e., individuals with avoidant attachment styles are attracted to preoccupied individuals, and vice versa). The preoccupied adult is concerned with trustworthiness and commitment of his/her partner, and in contrast the avoidant adult is uncomfortable with commitment and intimacy. For these preoccupied-avoidant partnerships each person's IWM and expectations for relationships are confirmed by their partner's behaviour. Research findings have confirmed that these partnerships, in particular preoccupied women and avoidant men pairings, are as stable over time as secure-secure partnerships (Feeney & Noller, 1990; Kirkpatrick & Davis), dispelling the notion that certain pairings are "good" or "bad". The dynamics of IWM also

explains the dearth of preoccupied-preoccupied and avoidant-avoidant pairings, and empirical research has also confirmed that these pairings indeed seem to be occurring least (Brennan & Shaver, 1995), if at all (Collins & Read; Kirkpatrick & Davis).

Research with heterosexual couples has also pointed out the similarity between an individual's attachment style and the caregiving style of the individual's parents, in particular the opposite-sex parent (Collins & Read, 1990). This opposite-sex parent resemblance is particularly useful in trying to understand heterosexual relationships. The researchers have also shown that for men and women the descriptions of the opposite-sex parent are congruent with the partner's attachment dimensions. These findings suggest that the opposite-sex parent can be used as a model for beliefs and expectations about heterosexual relationships.

Attachment style has also been shown to be related to an individual's evaluation of his/her relationship. For example, adults with a secure attachment style describe higher levels of trust, intimacy, satisfaction and commitment in relationships, as opposed to adults with an avoidant attachment style who describe lower levels of these features (e.g., Collins & Read, 1990; Hammond & Fletcher, 1991). Gender appears to moderate these findings and Collins and Read's research showed that the best predictor of a woman's relationship satisfaction was the man's comfort level with closeness. Anxiety in women was related to greater dissatisfaction with relationships than for men. Correspondingly, Brennan and Shaver (1995) found that an individual's relationship satisfaction was mainly related to their partner's security and non-preoccupation with attachment, and vice versa.

Attachment styles colour the way we interact with and experience our world. For example, significant attachment style differences in self-esteem have been differentiated between secure and less secure adults. These findings propose that secure adults generally have a positive view of themselves and their interactions with others (Feeney & Noller, 1990). As for emotional experiences, Brennan and Shaver (1995) researched attachment and affect regulation strategies and their findings indicated that preoccupied and avoidant adults had a greater inclination than secure adults to be

(a) fantasizing about, and engaging in non-intimate sex with casual partners, a pattern of behaviour that may function to maintain emotional distance from romantic partners; (b) using alcohol to quell anxiety and tension; and (c) over- or underrating in response to anxiety (p. 268).

Along similar lines, Mikulincer and Orbach (1995) looked at how attachment styles are linked to the cognitive processing of emotional experiences, in particular the concept of repressive defensiveness. They found that secure individuals are able to repress negative affect and thoughts with little anxiety, and that as a result these individuals are able to retrieve negative emotional memories moderately fast. Conversely, preoccupied adults seem to be less able to repress negative emotions and thoughts and experience high levels of anxiety, and consequently these adults showed the shortest retrieval times for negative memories and also the highest emotional intensity linked to these memories. More recently Collins, Ford, Guichard, and Allard (2006) also found that preoccupied adults endorsed relationship-threatening attributions and intentions, and experienced emotional distress when faced with hypothetical partner transgressions. Finally, avoidant adults use high levels of repression and defensiveness as if to inhibit entrance into their unpleasant emotional memories, and needless to say these individuals display the longest retrieval time for negative emotional memories and the lowest affective responses to these memories (Mikulincer & Orbach). In recent findings Edelstein (2006) report that child sexual abuse victims who are avoidantly attached restrict the processing of potentially distressing information specifically during the encoding phase of memory.

These findings show the interesting links and parallels between interpersonal and intrapersonal areas of functioning as it applies to attachment theory. In terms of distress experienced in the intimate relationship, Johnson and Sims (2000) suggest that distress originates in the problematic manner in which couples deal with their attachment insecurities. The aim in couple therapy from an attachment perspective (e.g., Emotionally Focused Therapy) then is to assist the couple in creating a secure bond whilst breaking the cycle of attack and defend. In individual therapy the therapist applying attachment theory would aim to provide the appropriate conditions for the individual to explore his/her attachment models so that reconsideration and

reconstruction of attachment models can take place within the context of the new attachment experiences that the therapeutic setting provides (Bowlby, 1988).

In interpersonal dealings with the world, individuals use communication as a means of expressing themselves, and researchers have found ample support for the connection between verbal/nonverbal communication behaviour and attachment orientations. Attachment theory posits that individuals with positive models of others (secures and preoccupieds) will display communication styles exhibiting intimacy, whereas those with negative models of others (dismissives and fearful avoidants) will demonstrate communication behaviour reflecting avoidance and detachment (Guerrero, 1996). Since individuals create their social environments in ways that confirm their internal working models, attachment theory also predicts that attachment styles will reinforce these approach/avoidance behaviours (Bartholomew, 1993; Collins & Read, 1994). According to Guerrero “the degree of nonverbal involvement an individual displays can be thought of as falling along an approach or avoidance continuum” (p. 274). Attachment style differences in nonverbal communication have found empirical support in this research, which demonstrates that individuals with positive views of others (secures and preoccupieds) communicate facial and vocal pleasantness, as well as general interest, attentiveness and receptiveness. Furthermore, it was found that individuals with negative views of themselves (preoccupieds and fearful avoidants) display more vocal anxiety and less random movement, than other attachment dimensions.

In extending this research, Guerrero and Burgoon (1996) looked at whether an increase or decrease in involvement of one conversational partner would be reciprocated by the other partner based on their attachment style. Results indicated that regardless of attachment orientation partners reciprocate increased involvement, and compensate and reciprocate for decreased involvement behaviour. However, preoccupieds in this study were discriminated from the other attachment styles by their strong and consistent reciprocations of increased involvement behaviour and their constant compensatory behaviour when there was a decrease in involvement.

It can be surmised that approach and avoidance communication behaviour can be predicted by the attachment style of the individual (Guerrero, 1996; Guerrero &

Burgoon, 1996). However, more recently Le Poire et al. (1997) found that approach/avoidance behaviour was a function of dyadic interaction. In breaking from the more traditional vein which hold that attachments are individual constructs (Ainsworth, 1991), Le Poire, et al. (1997) suggest that the final attachment style that manifests in a dyadic relationship is the result of a parent by partner attachment interaction. Further, Le Poire et al. (1997) suggest that one's predisposed (self-reported) attachment style may be modified by one's partner, and their results indicate that partner attachment style may be more important in predicting the resulting attachment interaction than parental attachment style. Le Poire et al. hold that while individuals have a predisposition to a certain attachment style, the distinct interaction of two relational partners shape the resulting form of attachment and, correspondingly, also their communication behaviour (Le Poire et al., 1999). Recent research by Banske (2004) indicated that relationship satisfaction in a sample of married couples was predicted by the individual's own self-reported attachment, the partner's self-reported attachment as well as a combination of their attachment style. Banske's research also showed that secure attachment was moderately related to relationship satisfaction in both male and female partners. However, Pratt (2005) found that wives' models of their attachment to their romantic partners are related to the manner in which they perceive their relationship satisfaction, whereas this was not true for husbands. Pratt also found that husbands' current perspectives of their childhood attachments were related to the manner in which they expressed their emotions during a conflict discussion with their wives, whereas this was not true for wives.

In contrast to this dyadic interaction effect, Wampler and her colleagues' recent research questions the role of the partner's influence (Wampler et al., 2005). Their research utilizing the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) indicates that the individual's own behaviour with the partner is most strongly related to the individual's attachment style, not the partner's attachment style or behaviour. However, they did find that positive behaviour, for example, expression of positive affect (laughter, humor and affectionate touch), and the use of negotiation were influenced by dyadic attachment styles. These researchers furthermore did not find any evidence of "buffering" in their clinical sample – that is where a secure partner might have a positive impact on an insecure partner. Banske (2004) also found that

preoccupied attachment in husbands was related to relationship dissatisfaction for both partners and a secure wife did not seem to have a buffering effect. Along similar lines, Treboux et al. (2004) suggests that positive childhood experiences do not have an immunization effect, although it is more likely that a secure generalized representation increases your chances of having a secure specific conceptualisation of your romantic partner.

Le Poire et al.'s (1999) findings confirm that approach and avoidance behaviour in a relationship is the result of dyadic interaction and more specifically it was found that behavioural patterns in the form of nonverbal involvement, pleasantness and expressiveness are the result of dyadic attachment interactions. In confirming Guerrero and Burgoon's research (1996), these researchers also found evidence that reciprocal and compensatory behaviour are linked to specific attachment styles. As an extension of Guerrero and Burgoon's findings, Le Poire et al. found that "partners and parent by partner interactions elicited patterns of reciprocity and compensation" (p.308). Interestingly, gender-based patterns also became apparent, and generally speaking, women were more reciprocal in their behaviour, while men compensated more. Paley, Cox, Burchinal and Payne (1999) also found a gendered dyadic interaction effect which they believe may be related to the manner in which the two genders respond differently to attachment related behaviour. In their study of 138 couples they did not find any evidence to support an association between husbands' marital behaviour and their wives' attachment style. However, they did find support for the idea that wives' marital behaviour is influenced by their husbands' attachment style. For example, wives of secure-secure husbands (secure attachment to primary caregiver, and secure attachment to partner) were found to be more positive than wives of insecure or earned-secure husbands (insecure primary caregiver attachment, and current secure partner attachment). However, wives of earned-secure husbands did not differ in their expression of negative affect from other groups.

#### *Summary of Attachment Literature*

In parent-child relationships the parent characteristically provides care to the child. However, in adult romantic relationships the roles of care-giving and attachment are often intertwined and these roles are repeatedly interchanged over the span of a relationship (Fraley & Shaver, 2000). Ainsworth, in her research on parent-infant

relationships, distinguished between three types of attachment patterns: Secure, anxious-ambivalent and avoidant (Ainsworth et al., 1978) and these are thought to be relatively stable over time, but also open to changes through new experiences (Crowell et al., 2002). Hazan and Shaver (1987) developed analogous typologies based on self-report descriptions for adult intimate relationships from a social psychology perspective. Another line of research saw the development of the Adult Attachment Interview that distinguished between secure, dismissing, preoccupied and unresolved attachment classifications. One point of controversy has been the use of categorical descriptions of attachment styles, and in this regard Guerrero (1996) has argued that attachment categories are too basic and simplistic to encompass the richness of attachment styles. She states that a continuous measure might provide a more detailed picture of attachment.

Attachment theory, according to Campbell et al. (2005), seeks to explain how our perception of experiences with past key relationship figures influences our current relationships. Furthermore, key relational milestones (formation, development and deterioration of relationships) are at the centre of attachment processes and as such they are influenced by the evolutionary, cultural and individual functions and development of attachment processes (Cassidy & Shaver, 1999).

Various attachment styles have been found to be linked to specific behaviour in the context of the relationship. For example, secure and preoccupieds display communicative behaviour that exhibit intimacy, whereas avoidants' communicative behaviour is characterized by withdrawal and detachment (Guerrero, 1996). Some dyadic level interaction effects with respect to attachment have been identified in research, for example, positive affect and negotiation (e.g., Paley et al., 1999, Wampler et al., 2005). However, differences in results by researchers in terms of the dyadic nature of attachment configurations might be partially explained by the method in which the attachment data is gathered, that is, through self-report data or through interviews coded by independent raters.

The next chapter will focus on communication at an individual and couple level, and will also look at the relationship between attachment and communication in more detail.

## Chapter 4: Communication

If speaking is silver, then listening is gold.  
*Turkish Proverb*

### *Introduction*

Communication is the glue that holds society together. It is through this medium of communication, which includes verbal and nonverbal messages, that information, thoughts and emotions are shared. Verbal (from the Latin for *word*) messages are communicated through spoken language (Reber, 1995), whereas nonverbal messages include visual and auditory codes such as kinesics, physical appearance and vocalics, contact codes, such as haptics and proxemics, and place and time codes such as environment, artefacts and chronemics (Burgoon, Buller, & Woodall, 1996). It is estimated that upwards of 60% of the meaning of a message is communicated nonverbally (Birdwhistell, 1955; Phillipot, 1983). In the couple context communication paves the way through greater understanding to increased intimacy. The increased intimacy that communication brings to the couple can be rewarding in that a deep connection between two people is formed. Conversely, this closeness also increases the individual's vulnerability to hurtful interactions.

In the past researchers have linked communication skill deficits to dissatisfaction in couples (e.g., Holtzworth-Munroe & Jacobson, 1991), and while arguably, this could be the case, it is crucial to conceptually distinguish between communication skill, communication motivation and communication behaviour to avoid confusion. Whereas communication skill refers to the individual's ability to realize his/her communication goals, communication behaviour refers to the actual observed verbal and nonverbal behaviour that a speaker communicates (Burleson & Denton, 1997). Communication motivation refers to the individual's intentions during a communicative interaction, and although all these factors tie in to the communication process, it is also clear that they are separate constructs. The communication skills-deficit model involves teaching couples the deficient skills that they lack so that they can communicate more satisfactorily. However, Burleson and Denton found that communication skill levels did not vary as a function of the relationship distress that couples were experiencing. These researchers propose that motivational factors and the negative dispositions that dissatisfied couples feel toward each other more often mediate the communication outcome, than the particular skill level of the couple.

Another related construct, which is one focal point in this research project, is communication accuracy. Communication accuracy, and more specifically the decoding and encoding ability of relational partners, is a factor that has been identified as contributing to relationship satisfaction in a sizeable number of empirical studies (e.g., Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002; Noller, 1984, 1992). Communicating accurately requires that both the sender and receiver share a common code, such as language, so that there is mutual understanding of the message. More precisely, according to Van Buren (2002), “communication accuracy refers to whether a message sent by a sender is perceived by the receiver to have the same emotional meaning as that intended by the sender” (p. 21).

### *Communication and Attachment*

As noted in the attachment literature earlier, there is a growing consensus that the quality of an individual’s attachments in childhood is closely linked to communication patterns in adults’ intimate couple relationships (Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Levy & Davis, 198). Some research has been carried out examining family expressiveness and attachment, and findings suggest that mothers who were able to express themselves both positively and negatively were more likely to have securely attached children (Bell, 1998). A further interesting study on family expressiveness identified that mothers with securely attached children were more able to express themselves negatively, even though they reported experiencing, in general, a smaller percentage of negative rather than positive emotions (Izard, Haynes, Chisholm, & Baak, 1991). In comparison these researchers revealed that mothers of less securely attached children generally experienced a greater percentage of negative rather than positive emotions and these mothers suppressed their negative emotions and instead expressed positive emotions.

Individual attachment history with a primary caregiver prepares people for experiencing attachment in the context of an intimate relationship. Internal working models, also known as representational models of attachment, come to influence the communication sphere and our expectancies around relating to intimate partners. For example, in a recent study by Mongrain and Vetteuse (2003) on emotional ambivalence (“competing goals of wanting to show how one is feeling yet fearing the consequences of such self expression”, p. 545) which is analogous to Bartholomew’s

fearful-avoidant attachment style (1990), it was found that highly ambivalent women were less positive in their verbal statements, suppressed their negative feelings and constricted their nonverbal expressions. In return the researchers speculated that this behaviour would affect the women's relationships adversely, which would again confirm their internal working models and reinforce ambivalent patterns of behaviour.

### *Communication and the Individual*

Apart from the influence that attachment history has on communication accuracy, other differences occurring at the individual level have been theorized and researched. People's perceptual ability allows them to make sense of audible and visual cues during communication, and impairments at this level greatly compromise the quality of communication. The accuracy of a communication interaction is also influenced by other factors, such as the communicator's competence. Communicative competence includes the knowledge, motivation and skills of the communicator (Coker & Burgoon, 1987), and it is also influenced by the communicator's expectancies, attributions, goals and social networks (Wilson & Sabee, 2003). Even for those people who have access to a range of expressive behaviours, motivation and intention can influence whether they communicate or do not communicate a particular message. By communicating intentionally people present a certain perspective of themselves to the world and although they deliberately attempt to manage the impressions that others form of them, self-presentations are not necessarily deceptive, although they can be (DePaulo, 1992). In particular, presentation of self is essentially about putting forward a socially acceptable and positive demeanour, a view also favoured by the dramaturgic approach (Burgoon et al., 1996).

Another aspect of self-presentation and the desire to make favourable impressions on others, is behaviour matching or mirroring. This enhances similarity between interaction partners and has been linked to, amongst others, increased rapport (Schefflen, 1964), mutual liking (Cappella, 1993) and social identity (Meltzhoff & Moor, 1992; 1994). In a study by Vorauer and Miller (1997) it was found that self-esteem is one of the factors that influence sensitivity to behaviour matching. This might contribute to the phenomenon of pluralistic ignorance, in which people believe that others' feelings and attitudes are dissimilar from their own, when they are in fact similar. In this regard, Vorauer and Miller found evidence which supports the

differential encoding (or “illusion of transparency”) hypothesis. According to this hypothesis pluralistic ignorance takes place because individuals with low self-esteem are insensitive to how they engage in behaviour matching as a result of a private-public inconsistency between what they feel or think and how they appear. Hence, these researchers surmise that because they have limited self-knowledge with regards to matching their inner worlds and how they appear, they are unable to understand the attitudes and opinions that might influence others’ self-presentational behaviours. Low self-esteem can thus be seen as a factor contributing to a limited range of self-presentational skills. DePaulo (1992) suggests that when people are presenting themselves, there are a limited number of identities that they can claim persuasively and successfully based on the level and range of expressive cues (such as vocal range and facial features) that they have at their disposal. A number of studies have shown that individuals who are spontaneously expressive, in other words, individuals who possess the ability to express the inner emotions they are experiencing outwardly, are liked better than inexpressive people (e.g., Sabatelli & Rubin, 1986). Furthermore, expressive people often appear more attractive than inexpressive people (e.g., Friedman, Riggio, & Casella, 1988).

#### *Couple Communication and Communication Accuracy*

Communication accuracy becomes particularly important at the dyadic level, where its heightened occurrence can contribute to greater intimacy and relationship satisfaction. There are, however, many dyadic interaction factors that contribute to the accurate decoding and encoding of verbal and nonverbal information. One such a factor is conversational involvement, which can be defined as the extent to which individuals are engaged in the topic, the situation and the interpersonal relationship (Coker & Burgoon, 1987). According to Coker and Burgoon, people have a large range of behaviours that indicate degree of communicative involvement and their research showed that behaviours which distinguished high involvement from low involvement were “general kinesic/proxemics, attentiveness, forward lean, relaxed laughter, coordinated speech, fewer silences and latencies, and fewer object manipulations” (p. 463). More recent research in this area has looked at whether reciprocal or compensatory behaviour results when changes to the baseline level of involvement is made.

Le Poire and Burgoon (1994) devised an experiment in which participants were individually assigned to unfamiliar trained confederates that enacted an array of involvement behaviours from very high to very low. Following a change in the level of involvement they found that for high and low involvement levels, the participants on the whole reciprocated behaviour. The reward value of the confederates, who appeared as advanced medical students in these experiments, did not appear to motivate participants to compensate for these involvement violations, and the researchers infer that in this regard it might be that message valence has greater relevance in prompting individual behaviour than the communicator's psychological value. Andersen, Guerrero, Buller, and Jorgensen (1998) proposed that the level of connectedness a couple feels is influenced by the manner in which partners respond to one another's efforts to increase or decrease behavioural intimacy. In a more recent study of romantic partners (Guerrero, Jones, & Burgoon, 2000) a dominating pattern of reciprocating involvement behaviour was found when the other partner initiated involvement and intimacy changes. However, individuals in the low intimacy conditions did utilize verbal repair strategies, thereby showing that some degree of compensatory behaviour does occur in intimate relationships.

Facial expressions play a particularly important role in transferring meaning when individuals communicate in an intimate relationship. Darwin (1872) is classically cited as the first author to propose that facial expressions of emotions are innate and evolutionarily adaptive and he provided illustrations of humans and animals to support his theory. Although Darwin's research was largely observational, researchers have since found some evidence that supports his original theory (e.g., Ekman et al., 1987; Izard, 1971; Sackett, 1966.) Theoretically, two perspectives on the function of facial expressions can be distinguished: The emotional expression view; and the behavioural ecology view, akin to Darwin's view (Manstead, Fischer, & Jakobs, 1999). In short, the emotional expression outlook purports that facial expressions are associated with an emotion which communicate that particular emotion. On the other hand, the behavioural ecology perspective asserts that facial expressions are a display that is indicative of an individual's intentions, and as such it allows individuals to know each other's intentions, thereby increasing their odds of survival and thus enhancing evolutionary adaptation. Manstead and colleagues emphasise that these

two views are not mutually exclusive; rather empirical research appears to support the perspective that facial expressions serve both emotional and social functions.

In order to communicate accurately a receiver needs to recognize the sender's facial expression and attribute the same meaning to it that the sender intended. Research in the area of decoding facial expressions has shown that certain emotional displays (in particular the pleasant emotions such as happiness) are easier to decode, and that confusion often arises when there is a similarity between two facial expressions, such as the comparable eyebrow movement when people express anger and fear (Burgoon et al., 1996). Wiggers (1982) however, found that each facial expression contains one to three central cues that are vital for emotional interpretation, and that the remaining cues are superfluous although they may be used to emphasize the primary cues.

Interesting research by Tarter (1980) and more recently Tarter and Braun (1994), has shown that some facial expressions can be "heard". According to these researchers, this occurs as a result of constant and prominent changes in the upper vocal tract due to facial expressions such as smiling and frowning, and enables a receiver to understand it correctly.

Decoding facial expressions accurately seems to be a learned skill, and longitudinal research in this area indicates the gradual gaining of greater competency in discriminating between facial expressions, as children grow older (e.g., Matsumoto & Kishimoto, 1983). Recent research indicates that, in general, decoding of interpersonal behaviour is psychologically slightly easier to accomplish than encoding, although this also seems to be mediated by the interpersonal dimensions involved during the particular interaction (Adamopoulos, 2006). Various studies have also shown that gender appears to affect the accuracy of decoding, with women, in general, being able to more accurately interpret facial expressions (e.g., Carels & Baucom, 1989; Noller, 1986). However, social competence and involvement in an intimate relationship does seem to enhance the decoding accuracy for men and women (e.g., Custrini & Feldman, 1989; Zuckerman, DeFrank, Hall, Larrance, & Rosenthal, 1979).

Particular facial expressions have also been linked to a greater likelihood of separation in couples. Gottman's research (1991) which looked at predicting the

longitudinal course of marriages found that facial expressions such as wife's disgust, husband's fear and both husband and wife's miserable smiles (raising the lip corners without there being any eye involvement), were likely prognostics of a future divorce. If one looks at the nonverbal behaviour of couples during a communication interaction happy and unhappy couples can clearly be distinguished. Patterson (1991) posits that nonverbal behaviour such as gazing, body openness, distance, touching and body position signify the degree of union of couples during a communication interaction, and these types of behaviours would be evident in satisfied couples. As mentioned before, the reciprocal exchange of behaviour or the *quid pro quo* pattern that is often apparent in relationships can also help distinguish satisfied from dissatisfied couples.

Gottman (1994) researched the area of marital communication and found that partners' reciprocation of negative affect successfully discriminated satisfied from dissatisfied couples. This means that in dissatisfied couples negative behaviour of one partner is reciprocated by the other partner. For example, attack brings forth counterattack, and in dissatisfied couples, in particular, this could lead to continual negative escalation. In contrast to the reciprocity framework in which behaviour elicits similar behaviours, the studying of interactional synchrony utilizes the corresponding timings in behaviour changes for the interaction partners as the unit of analysis (Julien, Brault, Chartrand, & Begin, 2000).

Previous research on synchronous interactions between adults has found that greater positive rapport exists because of synchronized behaviour changes (Bernieri, 1988). Furthermore, it has also been linked to communication facilitation, level of involvement and interest, and more generally it appears to enable partners to develop secure bonds (Cappella, 1991). In more recent observational research on interactional synchrony (Julien et al., 2000) it was found that partners' synchronous changes in immediacy behaviours, such as gazing, body openness and touching, could distinguish satisfied from dissatisfied couples, and these researchers speculate that it might be due to the good listening ability and attuned engagement of the satisfied couples to the task. Furthermore, these researchers suggest that the interactions of satisfied couples are comparable to a gear system "in which a cogwheel transmits its movement smoothly to another cogwheel" (p. 89).

Decoding vocal expressions of emotion accurately contributes to heightened understanding during communication. Similar to facial expressions of emotion described above, vocal expressions of emotion are often confused with emotions with related features, such as nervousness and sadness (Burgoon et al., 1996). Various studies in this area (e.g., Horatcsu & Ekinici, 1992) have shown that the accuracy of decoding vocal expressions enhances with age, familiarity with the sender, and the intensity of the emotion expressed. For example, an intense emotion expressed vocally is interpreted more accurately.

Communicating accurately (a skill termed by Noller, 1984) implies that the receiver perceives the emotional meaning that the sender intended. It has long been acknowledged as a key element to healthy interpersonal interactions.

In recent research, which looked at the communication mismatches and verbal-nonverbal incongruences in couples, it was found that when senders were incongruent their verbal channel, rather than their nonverbal channel, had the biggest influence on the receiver (Van Buren, 2002). Utilizing a similar methodology to this current research project, Van Buren found that the sender's words correlated significantly with the influence on the receiver, whereas the sender's tone of voice and facial expressions did not.

These findings are in contrast with interpersonal theory, which suggests that emotional meaning is communicated primarily through the nonverbal channel. A shortcoming of Van Buren's study (2002) was that senders were not asked which channel they thought the receivers would react to when decoding the information. It has been suggested that those senders who are more aware of which channel, verbal or nonverbal, their receiving partner will respond to, will be more accurate in their communication, even though there might be incongruence between their verbal and nonverbal channels. Following this line of thought might explain Van Buren's finding that some couples were communicating incongruently (there was a mismatch between the sender's verbal and nonverbal behaviour) yet they still communicated accurately, probably through the sender's awareness of which channel the receiver is most likely to respond to. She goes on to suggest that based on her findings the verbal channel is

crucial to transmitting emotional meaning and that nonverbal behaviour might in the future best be researched and understood in the context of verbal behaviour.

Although it is generally believed that greater understanding of relational meaning is conducive to successful relationships, research relating to specific attachment styles has shown that greater accuracy in inferring the thoughts and feelings of one's partner could also be harmful to the relationship (Simpson, Ickes, & Grich, 1999). Using video recall a recent study by Waldinger and Schultz (2006) found that there are only weak to moderate correlations between a partner's self-reported intentions and the attribution about the partner's intentions. They also found that relationship satisfaction accounted for some of the discrepancy between intentions and attributions about intentions.

Simpson and his colleagues (1999) researched empathic accuracy in individuals with preoccupied attachment and found that these individuals were more empathically accurate than other more secure or avoidant individuals. They furthermore found that greater empathic accuracy about the cognitive and emotional content of one's relational partner during a threatening situation can be particularly harmful to preoccupied individuals. In particular these preoccupied individuals felt more threatened, more anxious and less confident than their secure or avoidant counterparts during the relationship threatening task (verbally rating an alternative dating partner in the presence of their partner). In addition to this, in a follow-up study four months later preoccupied men's relationships were more likely to have ended. Furthermore, they found that less preoccupied individuals tend to steer clear of, or dismiss, the negative implications of their partner's cognitions and emotions, in what is termed motivated inaccuracy (turning a blind eye to what the other is thinking and feeling), and thus maintain their relationship satisfaction and stability. This is in line with previous research that suggests that relationship satisfaction and stability are negatively correlated with empathic accuracy in relationship threatening situations (for a review, see Ickes & Simpson, 1997) - in particular for individuals with a preoccupied attachment style - but positively correlated with situations that are not threatening to relationships (e.g., Noller & Ruzzene, 1991).

This also ties in with the perceptual distortions that Weiss (1980) described as sentiment override, a process by which the overall positive or negative feelings that an

individual has about the partner and the relationship influences the perceptions of the message as either positive or negative. Weiss found that distressed couple's experiences were shaped by negative sentiment override, so that, for example, a wife might perceive her husband's message as negative whereas in fact observers rated it as neutral. The opposite was found in satisfied couples where a positive sentiment override was evident. More recent support for the sentiment override process and the manner in which it impacts on the momentary emotional experiences of couples, have also been illustrated through Waldinger and Schulz's research (2006) which utilizes video recall.

### *Summary of Communication Literature*

Effective communication can potentially pave the way to enhanced intimacy and understanding for couples. The literature (e.g., Burleson & Denton, 1997) distinguishes between communication skills (the ability to attain communication goals) and communication motivation (the individual's intentions during an interaction). Communication accuracy refers to the decoding and encoding ability of relational partners and has been linked to relationship satisfaction (e.g., Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002). Communicating accurately is also influenced by the communicator's competence (i.e., knowledge, motivation and skill) and conversational involvement (Coker & Burgoon, 1987). Horatcsu and Ekinci (1992) found that the accuracy of decoding vocal expressions enhances with age, familiarity with the sender, and the intensity of the emotion expressed (i.e., an intense emotion expressed vocally is interpreted more accurately). However, with respect to communication accuracy, Van Buren (2002) found that the sender's words correlated significantly with the impact on the receiver, whereas the sender's tone of voice and facial expressions were not that influential.

Attachment styles appear to have a pervasive influence on the manner in which people construct communicative behaviour in adult relationships (e.g., Feeney & Noller, 1990). For example, secures and preoccupieds display communicative behaviour that exhibit intimacy, whereas avoidants' communicative behaviour is characterized by withdrawal and detachment (Guerrero, 1996). However, research relating to specific attachment styles has shown that greater accuracy in inferring the thoughts and feelings of one's partner could also have detrimental effects on the relationship

(Simpson et al., 1999). In particular, a high degree of empathic accuracy in individuals with preoccupied attachment has been found to be harmful and these individuals tend to display less confidence and feel more threatened, than secure or avoidant individuals.

In the couple context, communication behaviour can be an indicator of relationship satisfaction. Patterson (1991) found that nonverbal behaviour such as gazing, body openness, distance, touching and body position are indicative of a couple's degree of closeness during a communication interaction, and these types of behaviours would be evident in satisfied couples.

In the following chapter factors contributing to conflict, conflict resolution strategies, the conflict resolution process and domestic violence is discussed, in relation to the couple context.

## Chapter 5: Conflict Resolution

The course of love never did run smooth  
*Midsummer Night's Dream* – William Shakespeare

### *Introduction*

Three intellectual giants heavily influence early social psychology's thought processes and writings on conflict and cast a competitive slant on human nature: Whereas Darwin emphasized survival of the fittest, Marx stressed the class struggle, and Freud focussed on the constant struggle between the id and the superego in the process of psychosexual development (Deutsch, 2000). Unfortunately, before views such as these lost favour (Deutsch) they were grossly misapplied to the relations between social groups and races to suit the imperialist policies of the time that favoured attitudes like: "Blessed are the strong for they shall prey upon the weak" (Banton, 1967, p. 48). However, according to Deutsch it was not long before the development and application of empirical methods, as well as Kurt Lewin's work on force fields, Deutsch's theorizing on cooperation and competition, and Von Neumann and Morgenstein's game theories, paved the way in shaping social psychology's study on conflict. This developed to an extent where today research on conflict in close relationships appears to dominate the scene in marital research (Bradbury, Rogge, & Lawrence, 2001). In saying that Roberts and Greenberg (2002) caution that:

Although a couple's ability to successfully resolve disagreements and conflicts is undoubtedly an important aspect of marital functioning, it is only one of the interactional tasks that couples confront in their daily lives. To fully understand the determinants of marital quality, we need to be able to describe not only how couples handle conflict, but also how they maintain intimate connection and positive regard for one another. It is our contention that relational harmony may depend on the successful enactment of positive behavioural interchanges in the context of intimate marital interactions (p. 119).

### *Couples in Conflict*

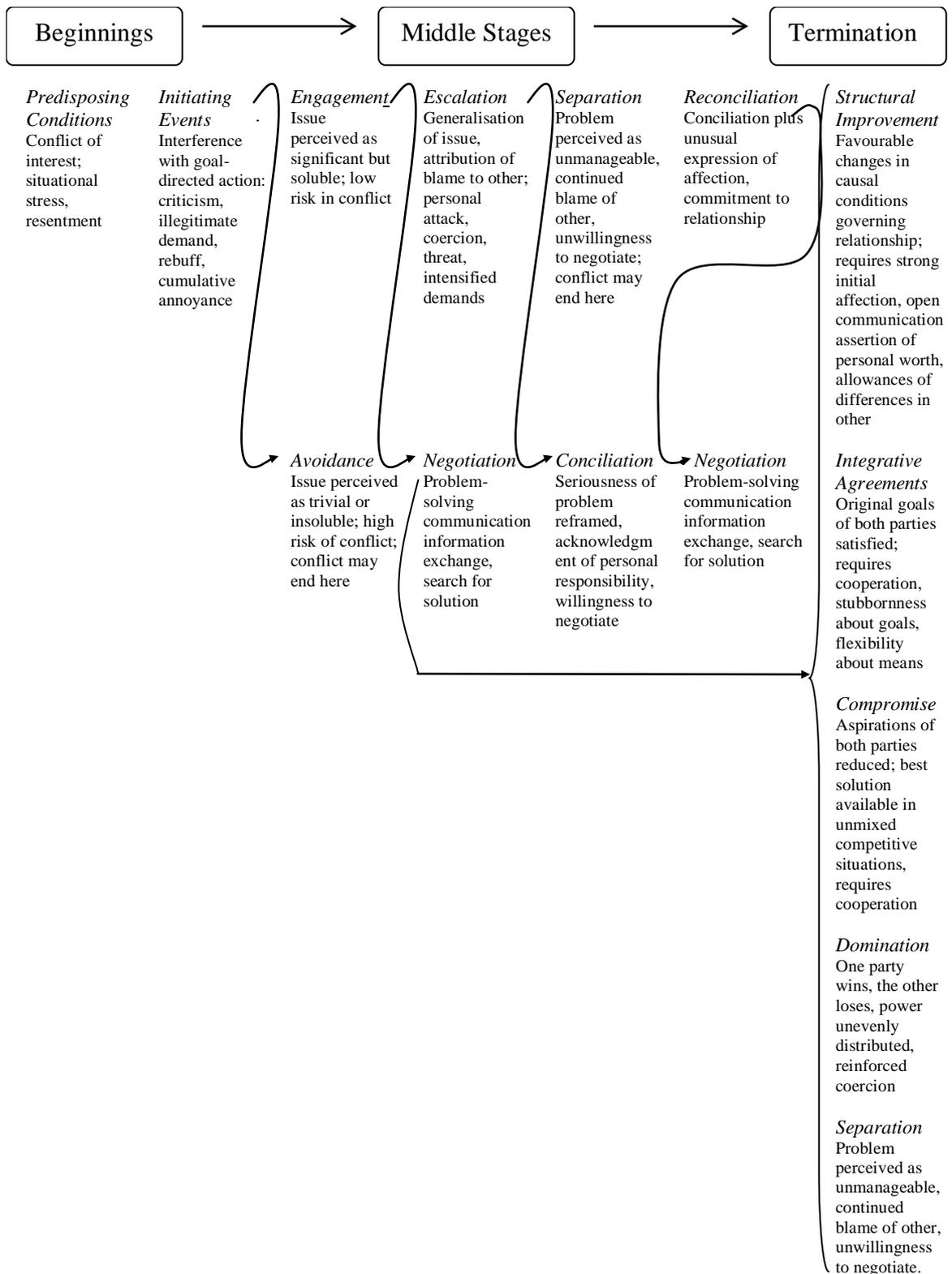
Conflict is believed to be essentially neither positive nor negative, but rather a foreseeable outcome of the natural process of growth and change (Crum, 1987).

Hample (2003) suggests that face-to-face arguments can have a variety of functions: as a means to obtain one's goals; establish dominance over the other person; display and define personal identity; and as a recreational activity. Conflict has been defined (Peterson, 1983) as "an interpersonal process that occurs whenever the actions of one person interfere with the actions of another" (p. 365), and more specifically marital conflicts are defined by Bradbury et al. (2001) as "social interactions in which spouses hold incompatible goals" (p. 59). Bradbury et al. furthermore express that in their view these goals need not be apparent, but that conflict occurs when one spouse pursues a goal, or communicates that they want to pursue a goal, and this impedes on the goals of the other partner. Peterson also suggests that, apart from conflicts of interest, situational stress and resentment on the part of either partner can act as predisposing conditions for conflict. Beach (2001) notes that one should view opposing goals as potential conflicts, rather than actual conflicts, due to the fact that couples often find means to interact cooperatively when faced with incompatible goals and interests.

Wilson and Daly (2001) suggest that human behaviour, such as conflict, has developed in the course of the evolutionary process through natural selection as it increases the probability of species survival, and more particularly, personal reproduction. They furthermore propose that monogamous reproduction in a species, such as that found in humans, enhances solidarity between couple members above and beyond any other relationship, including even relationships between closest blood kin. However, according to Wilson and Daly, the probability of conflict developing increases as the cohesion of an intimate couple is threatened by factors such as:

1. Temptations to abandon the present partner for another (exacerbated by sex differences in the lifespan trajectory of mate value).
2. Temptations to free-ride on the partner's investments in the couple's joint project (exacerbated by power asymmetries and by differential re-mating prospects or other opportunity asymmetries).
3. Nepotistic interests in distinct kindred (the in-law problem).
4. Dependent offspring of prior unions (the stepchild problem).
5. Covert extra-pair mating (the cuckoldry problem) (p. 5).

Peterson (1979) suggests that there are four types of conditions which frequently precipitate conflict in intimate relationships. These include criticism, illegitimate demand, rebuff and cumulative annoyance. Peterson (1983) furthermore proposes that conflict can follow a number of routes as it progresses through the beginning, middle and termination phases of a conflict interaction. These are summarised in Figure 3.



*Figure 3.* The possible courses of conflict from its beginnings, through its middle stages, to its termination.

*Note.* From "Conflict," by D.R. Peterson, 1983, In H.H. Kelley, E. Berscheid, A. Christensen, J.H. Harvey, T.L. Huston, G. Levinger, et al., (Eds.), *Close relationships*, pp. 360-396, San Francisco: Freeman. Copyright 1983 W.H. Freeman.

More recently, Christensen and Pasch (1993) identified seven sequences in marital conflict. These include (1) conflicts of interest, (2) stressful circumstances, (3) precipitating events, (4) engagement versus avoidance, (5) interaction scenario, (6) immediate outcome, and (7) return to normal. They furthermore propose that there are discrete differences in the conduct of distressed and non-distressed couples during these various phases in the conflict process. For example, distressed couples might typically display a mutual negative engagement pattern where partners attack, criticise and blame each other. In return, non-distressed couples (Christensen & Pasch) are more likely to display a mutual positive engagement pattern where partners take a “cooperative, pro-social stand in which they disclose their feelings and positions, seek areas of agreement, negotiate and compromise on possible solutions, and express trust in the other” (p. 11). For these distressed couples, conflict skill deficits are often blamed as the cause of their relational problems.

Marital therapies over the last few decades have afforded conflict a special status in its dealings with couples, where one of the important goals in behavioural marital therapy is to help couples address deficiencies in their conflict resolution skills. Christensen and Walczynski (1997) furthermore assert that “conflict is the most important proximal factor affecting satisfaction in the relationship and ultimately its course” (p. 250). Admittedly, some couples do lack the skills to resolve conflict satisfactorily. However, one should remember that it is not merely skill deficits that cause unsatisfactory outcomes, but rather the (often unspoken) intentions, goals and motives of the interactors (Burleson & Denton, 1997). Burleson and Denton furthermore suggest that one needs to compare conflict intentions with conflict results, rather than just relying on observed behaviour as an indication of skill. Recent couple’s research has also confirmed the importance of emotional content, rather than skill, in contributing to relationship satisfaction (Bradbury & Karney, 2004). In looking at the trajectory of change in relationship satisfaction over the first four years of marriage, they found that couples with poor problem solving skills had similar relationship satisfaction levels as couples with efficient problem solving skills, provided these couples displayed positive emotions such as affection, humour and interest/curiosity in their partner.

Various conflict beliefs act as moderating factors during conflict, and these cognitive elements can take various forms, such as relationship myths (i.e., “my partner must love and approve everything about me”). Prior beliefs about intimacy have been shown to affect behaviour such as conflict resolution in a relationship (Fletcher, Rosanowski, & Fitness, 1994). Previous research has also linked attachment, conflict beliefs and conflict styles, with securely attached individuals feeling less threat from conflict and reporting more effective conflict styles (Pistole & Arricale, 2003). However, this study of 188 college students found no differences between different attachment groups’ beliefs that conflict is beneficial.

Kayser and Himle (1994) identified specific intimacy related beliefs that are dysfunctional, irrational, perfectionist, and absolutistic that could increase the conflict that couples experience, and these include:

1. If I become close to someone, he (she) will leave me (abandonment).
2. If there is any conflict in the relationship, I cannot be intimate (all-or-nothing thinking).
3. I will lose all personal control and power in a relationship if I am intimate (risk-taking).
4. I am solely responsible for the lack of intimacy in my relationships (critical self-view).
5. In order to be intimate, I must do everything my partner wants (yielding of power).
6. If I am a good husband and father (support the family), or a good wife and mother (put my family’s needs before my own), I will get intimacy in return (paying a price for intimacy).
7. Before I can be intimate, I must have strong loving feelings toward my partner (predisposing conditions).
8. I cannot be intimate without having sex in the relationship (more common in men); or if I am intimate, I will be obligated to have sex in the relationship (more common in women) (equates intimacy with sexuality or the sex act) (p. 138).

Patterns of conflict beliefs have been shown to be related to marital satisfaction (Baucom, Epstein, Sayers, & Sher, 1989; Crohan, 1988), and more specifically

dysfunctional relationship beliefs have been shown to have a significant negative correlation with relationship satisfaction (Epstein & Eidelson, 1981; Metts & Cupach, 1990; Stackert & Bursik, 2003). More recently Bushman (1998), who researched specific conflict beliefs, found that destructive conflict behaviour was linked to two particular irrational beliefs in both men and women, namely “disagreement is destructive” and “people cannot change”. This is in line with Albert Ellis’ notion (1962) that emotional distress is often based on the acceptance of core irrational beliefs, that depart from logical and reality based assumptions, and that lead to self-defeating behaviour. Stackert and Bursik comment that although the origin of irrational beliefs remains unclear, it might develop in the context of the family system. In particular their research has identified that individuals with insecure attachment styles (preoccupied or avoidant attachment styles) would endorse significantly more irrational relationship beliefs than individuals with secure attachment styles. These researchers theorize that individuals with an insecure attachment style develop a vulnerable self-concept more prone to irrational relationship beliefs through the modelling of flawed familial interactions, or as a defence for coping with flawed interactions.

Kayser and Himle (1994) recommend assessing or detecting intimate beliefs with the aid of a cognitive therapist, and cognitive therapy tools, such as the Dysfunctional Thought Record, through which couples can unearth the dysfunctional beliefs that hamper their ability to be intimate and solve their problems constructively.

### *Conflict Resolution in Couples*

All couples’ relationships deal with conflict at some point in the relationship. However, according to Storaasli and Markman (1990), it is the couple’s ability to handle the conflict, as opposed to the conflict itself, which determines the quality of the relationship to a great extent. It is precisely because intimate relationships are characterised by a shared history and future, as well as strong emotional investments and intense affect, that solving conflicts in the intimate setting seem to matter so much to couples (Peterson, 1983). Greater investment of resources in relationships has also been linked to a stronger tendency to react to problems constructively (Rusbult, Johnson, & Morrow, 1986). Conversely, Waller and McLanahan (2005) found that in unmarried couples who report frequent arguments, the risk of

maintaining the relationship is 45% lower, and the likelihood of getting married is 62% lower.

Conflict resolution strategies are interpersonal behaviours used in the context of a relationship to resolve disagreements (Marchand, 2004). Following Peterson's (1983) earlier suggested possible courses of conflict (see Figure 3, p.59), we can see that once a conflict is initiated a couple can either engage in conflict, or choose to avoid it. Caughlin and Afifi (2004) found that the relationship between topic avoidance and relational dissatisfaction was mediated by the individual's motivation for avoiding the topic. When a couple engages in conflict, a cooperative conflict resolution process will result in the most favourable outcomes for both parties. A cooperative conflict resolution (Weitzman & Weitzman, 2000) consists of four phases which include "(1) diagnosing the conflict, (2) identifying alternative solutions, (3) evaluating and choosing a mutually acceptable solution, and (4) committing to the decision and implementing it" (p. 202). However, greater problem severity and a greater number of alternatives available to an individual might decrease the chances that he or she would attempt to find a resolution in this cooperative manner (Rusbult et al., 1986).

Effective conflict resolution in couples occurs when each individual collaborates in creating a solution that meets both partners' needs, and conflict resolution experts concur that a key building block to effective conflict resolution is a willingness to engage in mutual collaboration (e.g., Crum, 1987; Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 1991). Generally, two fundamental categories for conflict styles are distinguished and include conflict tactics that are integrative (those that work toward the other person and advances relational goals) and those that are distributive (those that work in opposition to the other person because people are focused on reaching their own goals with no consideration for their partner's goals) (Sillars, Coletti, Parry, & Rogers, 1982). Conflict styles are patterned responses to conflict that people repeatedly exhibit in their efforts to resolve their conflicts (Hocker & Wilmot, 1991). Effective conflict resolution styles, such as positive problem solving, can be defined as "any effort to develop a mutually acceptable solution to a conflict" (Rubin, Pruitt, & Kim, 1994, p. 168). Research to date has indicated that couples who manage their conflicts constructively, experience more relationship satisfaction than their counterparts who utilize ineffective conflict resolution styles (e.g., Billings, 1979; Du Plessis, 2001;

Kurdek, 1994). In particular, older cohabiting couples have been found to display fewer disagreements, argue less heatedly and also report greater relationship satisfaction than younger cohabiting couples (King & Scott, 2005).

Furthermore, it has been established that destructive conflict resolution, as well as each partner's perception of the other's conflict resolution style, can predict distress in the couple's relationship (Rusbult, Morrow, & Johnson, 1987). This finding not only highlights the influence that partners have on each other, as well as on the relationship, but also the importance of relationships in the dyadic context.

Conflictual patterns vary from relationship to relationship. Thus, while some relationships may have frequent, low intensity quarrels over many topics, others may be characterised by singular conflicts of a very high intensity (Peterson, 1983).

Couples also often have persistent unresolved conflicts in the same problem areas. Deutsch (1969) suggests that this manifest conflict is symptomatic of underlying themes, and that unless it is addressed directly, it will only be resolved temporarily.

Researchers have identified that areas involving power (i.e., communication styles, leisure time, friends and chores) and intimacy (i.e., levels of affection and sex) are key areas of disagreement for heterosexual and homosexual couples alike (Kurdek, 1994).

Research on husbands' and wives' conflict resolution styles, does, however, indicate that husbands' satisfaction with the relationship was more often determined by their wives' conflict resolution styles, than the contrary. For example, frequent conflict engagement on the part of the wife is related to husbands' increased dissatisfaction with the relationship (Kurdek, 1995). However, more recently Bradbury and Karney (2004) found that poor conflict resolution skills impact negatively on relationship satisfaction only when there are low levels of positive affect in the relationship.

Researchers have also found that wives' understanding of husbands' conflict styles predicted relationship satisfaction, although the reverse was not true for husbands (Acitelli, Douvan, & Veroff, 1993). According to Neff and Karney (2005) this could be because it is more important for women to accurately perceive their partner's specific qualities as this fosters a sense of prediction and control in the relationship for women, and this is particularly important if they are viewed as the ones responsible for relationship maintenance.

Another gender-specific spousal interaction that has been identified is the demand-withdraw pattern (also known as the pursuer-distancer pattern), in which the wife is generally the demanding party, whereas the husband tends to withdraw in response (Kurdek, 1995). This demand-withdraw pattern accounts for more variance in relationship satisfaction than any other conflict resolution style (e.g., Caughlin, 2002). Research suggests that it reflects the intensity and the amount of intimacy that people need in a relationship, with women generally desiring more intimacy, and men desiring greater separateness (e.g., Christensen, 1987; Jacobson, 1989). Gottman and Levenson's research (1988) seeks to explicate the demand-withdraw pattern on the physiological differences between men and women, with men, in contrast to women, experiencing higher levels of physiological arousal more rapidly during conflict (fight or flight symptoms) – and therefore greater desire to withdraw from the aversive physiological arousal. Sagrestano, Heavy and Christensen (1998) explain the gender differences in the demand-withdraw pattern from a social structural perspective in that “men's greater power in the social structure leads to different reactions to men's versus women's needs and desires for change” (p. 296). However, other researchers (e.g., Heavy et al., 1995; Klinetob & Smith, 1996) have found that the demand-withdraw pattern is reliant on whether it is the partner's issue under discussion, or one's own. More specifically these studies have indicated that the tendency to withdraw is greater for men and women when it is the partner's issue, thus echoing Burleson and Denton's (1997) argument that it is not so much communication skills deficits than motivation for change that influences communication behaviour, such as the demand-withdraw pattern.

Gottman's model of relational decay (1994) suggests that couples move toward divorce due to the negative conflict behaviour they display that systematically leads to negative beliefs about each other. In particular behaviours such as complaining/criticising, contempt, defensiveness and stonewalling (withdrawal) have been identified as corrosive to relationship satisfaction. Apart from aversive physiological arousal, recent research (Ward, Bergner, & Kahn, 2003) suggests that men tend to withdraw as a result of: “(a) their own personal characteristics, (b) their expectations for certain aversive behaviours by their partners in conflict situations, and (c) further and related expectations that, in their relationships, engaging in disagreements is more likely to prove destructive than constructive” (p. 1).

Sandy, Boardman, and Deutch (2000) conducted research on the effects of personality on conflict resolution behaviour and found that participants generally made use of four strategies for handling conflict: problem solving, contending, avoidance, and manipulation. Following the five-factor model of personality developed by Costa and McCrae (1985) (and more recently Costa, McCrae, & Dye, 1991), Sandy et al. (2000) found that dominant conflict resolution strategies were clustered around certain personality characteristics. For example, extroverted and conscientious participants tended to use positive problem solving strategies, whereas participants who showed a combination of high agreeableness, low conscientiousness, high neuroticism and low openness tended to use avoidance as a dominant conflict resolution style. From this it can be surmised that relatively stable individual differences in personality strongly affect behaviour in a conflict situation, to an extent where certain conflict resolution styles become the hallmark of individuals displaying particular personality traits.

Intimacy appears to lessen when intimate partners “respond in kind” to negative behaviours and statements of each other (Yovetich & Rusbult, 1994). Peterson (1983) remarks that the principle for reciprocity often seems to be at work when one considers conflict in the intimate setting. For example, anger frequently begets anger, whereas affection from one partner is usually followed by affection from the other person. Following this principle, one could easily see how a conflict situation might quickly escalate to an unmanageable level. In addition recent research has indicated that the degree to which people develop ownership of their arguments during conflict could severely hamper resolution, as any opposition to ‘their argument’ becomes an ego-threat (De Dreu & Van Knippenberg, 2005). However, Gottman and Silver (1999) note that some couples prevent this by making use of repair attempts, which they describe as any action or statement that prevents negativity spiralling out of control. Repair attempts, also known as couples’ secret weapon, and the success of repair attempts during conflict, is believed to be one of the primary factors which determines whether a relationship flourishes. Yovetich and Rusbult also suggest that partners should pause and regard the long-term implications of their actions on the relationship before acting, thereby taking into account the bigger picture. Their research has furthermore indicated that limited reaction time increases the probability that partners will reciprocate negative behaviour – a common occurrence among conflictual couples (Levenson & Gottman, 1983; Talmadge & Babbs, 1990).

### *Summary of conflict resolution in couples*

Conflict in a relationship potentially develops when the actions or goals of one person interfere with the other person's (Peterson, 1983), or when the cohesion of the relationship is threatened (Wilson & Daly, 2001). Situational stress, resentment, criticism, illegitimate demand, rebuff and cumulative annoyance can precipitate conflict (Peterson, 1979; 1983). Distinct differences in the manner that distressed and non-distressed couples handle their conflict have been found, for example, non-distressed couples cooperate, negotiate and compromise (Christensen & Pasch, 1993). Conflict outcomes are influenced by the couple's conflict resolution skills, their intentions and goals (Burlison & Denton, 1997), as well as their conflict beliefs (Fletcher et al., 1994), which have also been shown to be related to relationship satisfaction (e.g., Crohan, 1988). In this regard poor conflict resolution skills have been found to negatively influence relationship satisfaction only when there are low levels of positive affect in the relationship (Bradbury & Karney, 2004). Mutual collaboration to create a solution that meets both partner's needs, are integrative in nature, and have been linked to satisfactory relationships (e.g., Kurdek, 1994). A gender-specific demand-withdraw pattern (wife-demand, husband-withdraw) has been found in couples and physiological as well as social structure differences between the genders appear to influence it (Gottman & Levenson, 1988; Sagrestano et al., 1998). Conflict behaviour such as complaining, contempt, defensiveness and withdrawal have been found to particularly contribute to relationship dissatisfaction (Gottman, 1994). In addition, reciprocating negative behaviour has a detrimental effect on solving conflict, whereas couples attempting to make repairs during conflict have been found to curb the conflict from spiraling out of control (Gottman & Silver, 1999).

### *Physical Violence*

Anger blows out the lamp of the mind.  
Robert Ingersol

When a couple is not able to prevent negativity and conflict escalating to an unmanageable level, physical violence could be the unfortunate result. Researchers have determined that the severity of physical aggression appears to increase the risk for marital dissolution (Bradbury & Lawrence, 1999), but more specifically recent

research found that physical aggression appears to be a greater predictor of distressed relationships than couples' changes in relationship satisfaction. This furthermore challenges what was previously believed in terms of physical violence being an outgrowth of a distressed relationship (Lawrence, 2002).

Although some studies, to much controversy, have found that women are equal perpetrators of physical violence to men (e.g., Steinmetz, 1978; Straus, 1997; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980), men do have the potential to inflict more damage due to their physical size and strength. This also enables them to escape harm or protect themselves from harm more effectively (Straus et al., 1980). Women, however, do suffer more physical and psychological consequences at the hands of male abusers, including physical injury (Straus, 1986); divorce (Levinger, 1966); increased risk for homicide (Wilson & Daly, 2001); increased risk for suicide (Carmen, Reiker, & Mills, 1984); fear, terror and nightmares (Hilberman & Munson, 1977-1978); inability to trust (Carmen et al., 1984); low self-esteem (Cascardi & O'Leary, 1992); anxiety and suspiciousness (Walker, 1979); depression (Cascardi & O'Leary); helplessness (Walker, 1984); guilt, shame, feelings of inferiority, loneliness and pessimism (Ferraro & Johnson, 1983); low ego strength, shyness, introversion and tension (Star, Clark, Goetz, & O'Malia, 1979); and psychophysiological complaints such as fatigue, backache, headache, general restlessness and insomnia (Walker, 1979). The effect of witnessing domestic violence in childhood on adults has also been researched and people who have witnessed domestic violence (and/or those who have experienced child abuse) are less certain of the viability of their romantic relationships, in particular with respect to their levels of trust, respect and acceptance (Grau, 2001).

The exact prevalence of violence within intimate relationships remains unknown (possibly due to the sensitivity of the information and the associated underreporting of actual figures), and ranges from 12% (e.g., Straus & Gelles, 1990) to 57% (e.g., O'Leary et al., 1989). New Zealand findings are in line with recognised international numbers, which estimate that for one in six women (Avis, 1992; Kazantzis, Flett, Long, MacDonald, & Millar, 2000), conflict does escalate out of control with physical violence being the tragic result. However, it should be noted that recent research indicates that the manner in which surveys on domestic violence are framed have a greater impact on the self-report of violence than question framing itself (Regan,

2006). This finding has implications for the manner in which researchers construct and frame questions about domestic violence to obtain accurate results.

Physical violence falls under the broader domestic violence label. According to Darlow (1997) who reviewed the New Zealand Domestic Violence Act of 1995, domestic violence, from a criminology perspective, is described as violence against a person with whom that person is, or has been in a domestic relationship, and “violence” includes physical, sexual and psychological abuse. Berry (2003) suggests that physical violence includes behaviours such as “slapping, hitting, kicking, burning, punching, choking, shoving, beating, throwing things, locking out, restraining, and other acts designed to injure, hurt, endanger, or cause physical pain” (p. 3). Different types of violence are however differentiated, and in an analysis of the nature of violence, Johnson (1995) determined that acute, life-threatening behaviours vary noticeably from occasional hitting or pushing. The latter seldom escalate to adverse or life-threatening situations and are often instigated by both partners (Bradbury & Lawrence, 1999). On the other hand, Johnson suggests that severe battering stems from deep-seated “patriarchal traditions of men’s right to control ‘their’ women” (p. 286). This severe psychological and physical abuse includes coercion, intimidation and subordination, which Johnson refers to as “patriarchal terrorism” (p. 286). The escalating severity of this pattern of abuse is almost exclusive to male partners.

On the extreme end of battering is spousal homicide. Wilson and Daly (2001) have suggested that factors correlated with relational conflict – including poverty, a large age difference, the presence of children from previous relationships, and the wife’s age – are also associated with an increased risk for spousal homicide. Another elevated risk factor appears to be the marital status of the couple. Researchers around the globe have found that cohabiting couples are at greater risk of assaults than their marital counterparts (e.g., Anderson, 1997; Lupri, Grandin, & Brinkerhoff, 1994; Stets, 1991; Wilson, Johnson, & Daly, 1995). In a recent New Zealand study it was also determined that violence is more prevalent in *de facto* relationships than in dating couples who are not cohabiting (Magdol, Moffit, Caspi, & Silva, 1998). Conflict in the family of origin, stress, poor coping and conflict management skills, and anger during marital conflict also appear to be factors that predict the trajectory of physical

violence in the intimate relationship (Lawrence, 2002). Researchers have also found that in dating relationships partner demands, controlling behaviours and psychological abuse were associated with physical violence in men. On the other hand, partner withdrawal during conflict was associated with sexual coercion in both men and women (Katz, Carino, & Hilton, 2002).

Wilson and Daly (2001) have furthermore suggested that an extreme form of spousal violence, such as uxoricides (killing of wives), occur in the majority of cases based on the husband's conviction that his wife was unfaithful and/or by her decision to leave the relationship. This "jealousy" also implies proprietary entitlements on the part of the husband that seem to reflect a threat of "If you ever leave me, I'll find you and kill you". This potentially lethal threat is a powerful method of controlling a partner. From an evolutionary perspective Belsky (2001) suggests that this type of jealousy, that motivates violence in the intimate setting, appears to be an evolved mechanism for advancing and protecting male reproductive interests. Wilson and Daly also suggest that uxoricides could be understood as the abnormal consequences of human passions: "the dysfunctionally extreme manifestations of proprietary and violent inclinations whose lesser expressions are effective in coercive control" (p. 14).

#### *Summary of domestic violence.*

Domestic violence includes physical, sexual and psychological abuse (Darlow, 1997) and in extreme cases can lead to spousal homicide. Physical violence appears to predict relationship distress (Bradbury & Lawrence, 1999), and although men and women can be perpetrators, men potentially inflict greater damage due to their physical size and strength (Straus et al., 1980). New Zealand estimates of the prevalence of domestic violence are that one in six women experience domestic violence (Kazantzis et al., 2000), which echo international prevalence rates. Johnson (1995) argues that domestic violence stems from patriarchal traditions, whereas others suggest evolutionary origins (Belsky, 2001). Poverty, large age differences, presence of children from previous relationships, marital status, conflict in the family of origin, stress and coping abilities, jealousy and controlling behaviours, poor anger management and poor conflict management skills have been linked to a greater likelihood of physical violence (e.g., Lawrence, 2002; Magdol et al., 1998; Wilson et al., 1995).

### *Conflict Resolution and Attachment*

Individual attachment experiences, formed in childhood, have been shown to be related to the attachment styles we exhibit as adults (Collins & Read, 1990). Research has furthermore shown that individuals' self-reported attachment classifications are a significant predictor of their behavioural processes and outcomes, such as conflict resolution (e.g., Bippus & Rollin, 2003). More recent research found that the final attachment style that we manifest in an adult dyadic relationship is the result of a parent (or primary caregiver) by partner attachment interaction (Le Poire et al., 1997). As mentioned earlier, Le Poire and colleagues suggest that while individuals have a predisposition to a certain attachment style, the distinct interaction of two relational partners shape the resulting form of attachment. Our attachment styles are based on cognitive-affective schemas, or internal working models of attachment (IWM), and it greatly influences the way we interact with and experience our world, and, in particular, those people closest to us (Bowlby, 1973). Bretherton and Munholland (1999) conceptualise IWM as the adult's present mindset about his/her relationship with primary caregivers. They furthermore postulate that these IWM give adults a system of rules that regulate affect, thoughts and behaviour in social interactions with attachment figures.

Conflict situations present the ideal opportunity to study attachment, because, theoretically, individual variances in attachment styles would become more pronounced when security is tested, such as during a conflict interaction (Bowlby, 1988). Attachment and conflict management styles have a pervasive influence on our functioning and have been found to be predictive of anxiety, depression and academic problems in college students (Quinonez, 2002). Zinbarg (2002) also found that memories of perceived interparental conflict were related to college women's insecure attachment. Corcoran and Mallinckrodt's (2000) research on couples with children found strong empirical support that Bowlby's (1973) concepts of internal working models (IWM) of self and of others also form the foundation for differing approaches to conflict, such as Rahim's (1983) conflict styles model. Research on conflict styles typically study the characteristic or habitual manner in which an individual handles disputes (Blake & Mouton, 1964). From earlier work on organizational conflict, Rahim (1983) suggested five approaches to conflict including (a) dominating,

(b) avoiding, (c) obliging, (d) integrating, and (e) compromising. Similar to Bartholomew's (1990) four-category attachment style system (see Figure 1, p. 32) described earlier, these five styles can be mapped on two orthogonal dimensions of "concern for self" and "concern for other".

Along similar lines, but from a dyadic perspective and based on earlier observational research by Gottman and Krokoff (1989), Kurdek developed the Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory (1994), which encompassed four distinct problem solving styles. These include positive problem solving, conflict engagement, withdrawal and compliance. The "dominating" style described by Rahim (1983) emphasizes meeting one's own needs above those of others, and is analogous to Kurdek's "conflict engagement" style (e.g., "launching personal attacks"). According to Rahim the "obliging" style combines high concern for others with low concern for self to the extent where people displaying this style, comparable to Kurdek's "compliance" style (e.g., "giving in with little attempt to present my side of the issue"), tend to readily agree to the other party's demands. The "avoiding" style which Rahim describes shows a low concern for meeting self and other's needs and these individuals tend to avoid conflict, as is also evidenced in Kurdek's "withdrawal" style of conflict resolution (e.g., "withdrawing, acting distant and not interested"). Similar to Kurdek's "positive problem solving style" (e.g., "sitting down and discussing differences constructively"), Rahim found that individuals with an "integrating" style seek maximum resolution of needs, or true win-win solutions, and have a high concern for self and others. The fifth style of "compromising" can be placed at the junction of the two dimensions of concern for self and concern for other, and these individuals are eager to end conflict as soon as a minimally satisfactory solution for both parties can be found, even though more effort might produce an optimal and mutually beneficial solution.

In general, Kurdek (1994), and more recently Du Plessis (2001), found that couples who frequently used positive problem solving (e.g., negotiation and compromise), and infrequently used conflict engagement and withdrawal, report higher levels of relationship satisfaction. Evidence supporting the generalised application of our IWM has also been demonstrated in research on friendship relationships, for example, Bippus and Rollin (2003) found that secures were perceived by their friends to use

more integrating conflict behaviours, and these friends also reported greater relationship satisfaction. Comparable links have now been made between Rahim's model (1983) based on organisational structures, to Kurdek's dyadic research into conflict in intimate couple relationships and the four conflict resolution styles (positive problem solving, conflict engagement, withdrawal and compliance) and a summary of these suggested comparisons, together with attachment styles (adapted from Corcoran & Mallinckrodt, 2000) appear in figure 4 on dimensions of views of self/others.

	<i>Positive Model Of Self</i>	<i>Negative Model of Self</i>
<i>Positive Model of Others</i>	(A) Secures (B) Positive problem solving (C) Integrating	(A) Preoccupieds (B) Compliance (C) Obliging
<i>Negative Model of Others</i>	(A) Dismissives (B) Conflict engagement (C) Dominating	(A) Fearful avoidants (B) Withdrawal (C) Avoiding

Legend

A) Attachment style (Bartholomew, 1990)

B) Kurdek's (1994) conflict styles

C) Rahim (1983) conflict styles

**Figure 4.** Correspondence of Adult Attachment Styles with Conflict Styles

Note. From "Adult attachment, self-efficacy, perspective taking, and conflict resolution," by K. Corcoran and B. Mallinckrodt, 2000, *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 78, p. 473-484 Copyright 2000 by American Counselling Association.

Creasey (2002) also suggests that IWM underlie and guide affect and behaviour during conflict interactions with attachment figures, and this enables us to study the manifestations of IWM. Research to date (e.g., Cohn, Silver, Cowan, Cowan, & Pearson, 1992; Cowan, Cohn, Cowan, & Pearson, 1996; George, Kaplan, & Main, 1996) have indicated that IWM become apparent in conflict situations to the extent that men with insecure IWM display more negative affect and engage in conflict more frequently, than their secure IWM counterparts. These researchers also found that in conflict situations where both partners exhibited insecure IWM, interactions were also more strained. Individuals with insecure IWM also display greater amounts of

physiological stress (as measured with salivary cortisol levels) during conflict than individuals with secure IWM (Powers, Pietromonaco, Gunlicks, & Sayer, 2006). This same study also found that men with insecure partners display greater amounts of physiological distress during conflict, than men with secure partners. This lends support to Le Poire et al.'s notion (1997) that dyadic interaction greatly influences the resulting attachment style and the conflict behaviour displayed by partners.

In a study focusing on marital couples, researchers (Gallo & Smith, 2001) found that adult attachment styles predicted functioning at the dyadic level and evidence was also put forth which supports the notion that cognitive processes (comparable to IWM) mediate this process. In another study it was found that husbands and wives with secure IWM were less rejecting and more supportive of their partners than their insecure IWM counterparts (Gao, Crowell, Treboux, & Waters, 1997). Securely attached people also report less fighting and more effective arguing, whereas preoccupied individuals view conflict as an attachment threat and focus on re-establishing togetherness, which might in turn hamper effective problem solving (Pistole & Arricale, 2003). These researchers have also found that securely attached individuals reported less conflict avoidance than those with dismissing attachment styles. Along similar lines, Shi (2003) reported that secure individuals displayed more positive behaviour and higher relationship satisfaction than individuals who scored higher on anxiety and avoidance dimensions. Gender was also found to have a much smaller influence on these variables than the specific attachment dimensions (Shi).

Marchand (2004) in her study of 75 couples, however, found that husbands' attachment styles and depressive symptoms were significantly related to their relationship satisfaction, whereas only wives' attachment style was related to their relationship satisfaction. Marchand also found that, in particular, husbands' attachment and depressive symptoms were significantly related to attacking behaviours, whereas only wives' attachment styles were significantly related to attacking and compromising behaviours. This research provides support that husbands' depressive symptoms might impede their ability to solve conflict constructively, which consequentially affects their relationship satisfaction. Creasey's study (2002), of 145 young adult couples involved in romantic relationships, reiterates some of these findings, and also suggests gender differences. Young women, in

particular, with secure IWM were found to use more positive behaviour during discussions of conflict. Female attachment security also predicted the occurrence of joint couple positive behaviours, whereas male insecurity predicted the frequency of negative behaviours.

Other researchers have suggested that sex role orientations might moderate these gender differences as it relates to IWM and interactive behaviour situations, such as conflict discussions, (Feiring, 1999; Simpson, Rholes, & Phillips, 1996). Creasey's findings (2002) also suggest that although dismissing and preoccupied individuals have difficulties managing conflict, no particular conflict resolution styles emerged that were unique to this attachment category. Creasey furthermore suggests that although secure couples would occasionally use negative behaviours during conflict, their liberal use of positive behaviours enhances the positive emotional content of their discussions, and again, this is in line with Gottman's findings (1994) that the emotional content predicts distress and dissolution, in a similar vein to actual conflict resolution. However, in contrast to this, Beyder-Kamjou (2005) recently found in clinical couples that even though individuals were securely attached this did not prevent them from using psychologically abusive conflict resolution styles if their relationship tended to be highly conflictual.

More specifically, various conflict beliefs have been found to be related to specific attachment styles (e.g., Pistole & Arricale, 2003; Stackert & Bursik, 2003; Sümer & Cozzarelli, 2004). In terms of believing that arguing is beneficial, Pistole and Arricale found no differences among the various attachment styles of secure, preoccupied or avoidant individuals in their sample of 188 college students. However, securely attached individuals have been found to report less maladaptive attributions than insecurely attached individuals (Pistole & Arricale; Stackert & Bursik; Sümer & Cozzarelli). Secure individuals (secure parental and secure partner attachment) have also been found not to endorse avoidance of closeness, and are therefore somewhat concerned with closeness (Treboux, Crowell, & Waters, 2004). Pistole and Arricale also found that securely attached individuals were less likely to view arguing as threatening than were individuals with preoccupied or fearful attachment. This ties in with what Mikulincer and Horesh (1999) conclude to be a secure individual's positive self and other models, and in particular this may be related to the secure base that

these individuals have, which allow them to regulate emotional content without making maladaptive attributions. Preoccupied individuals, on the other hand, tend to devalue their models of self, yet highly value models of others, and this together with their hyper-vigilance around monitoring attachment-related threats, make them more prone to be concerned with closeness during conflict (Mikulincer & Horesh; Pistole & Arricale). Mikulincer and Horesh furthermore found that preoccupied individuals place a high importance on the self-other similarity and this tends to bias their impression formation, information retrieval (long-term) and schematic memory inferences. Avoidant individuals tend to view conflict as threatening (Pistole & Arricale) and this is consistent with the deactivating strategies they use to protect themselves by distancing from others. More specifically, Mikulincer and Horesh have found that avoidant individuals' tendency to view others as dissimilar from themselves are a result of a projection of unwanted traits onto others and this furthermore results in biases in impression formation and management, as well as biases in memory processing. These combined results confirm and give us a greater understanding into the pervasiveness of internal working models.

*Summary of conflict resolution and attachment.*

Attachment classifications are a significant predictor of behavioural processes and outcomes, such as conflict resolution (e.g., Bippus & Rollin, 2003). In particular securely attached individuals use integrating conflict behaviours (Bippus & Rollin). They are less rejecting and more supportive (Goa et al., 1997) and they generally argue less, but more effectively (Pistole & Arricale, 2003) than insecure couples. Securely attached people also have less conflict avoidance (Pistole & Arricale), more positive behaviour (Shi, 2003) and fewer maladaptive attributions than insecurely attached individuals (e.g., Pistole & Arricale). Preoccupied individuals tend to view conflict as an attachment threat and their focus is on re-establishing togetherness (Pistole & Arricale). However, Creasy (2003) found no particular conflict resolution style connected with preoccupied people. Avoidant individuals would also view conflict as threatening (Pistole & Arricale), but again no particular conflict resolution style has been linked to them (Creasy, 2003). Finally, insecure individuals, in general, have been found to engage in conflict more frequently and their interactions are also more strained (e.g., Cohn et al., 1992; Cowan et al., 1996; George et al., 1996).

## *Conflict Resolution and Communication*

What the heart thinks, the tongue speaks.  
*Romanian Proverb*

Conflict in close interpersonal relationships is inevitable and it is also a normative feature that occurs approximately twice a week in stable romantic relationships (Lloyd, 1987). Misunderstanding the meaning of a message communicated during conflict can greatly contribute to the mismanagement of conflict and decreases the probability that a satisfying outcome will be reached by the couple. As described earlier, communication accuracy refers to whether a message intended by the sender is the same message received by the listener. Given that upwards of 60% of the meaning of a message is communicated nonverbally (Birdwhistell, 1955; Philipott, 1983), nonverbal sending ability (also called nonverbal expressivity) and nonverbal receiving ability (also called nonverbal sensitivity) have been identified as important factors when analysing communication accuracy (Van Buren, 2002). The decoding and encoding ability of relational partners, and more specifically communication accuracy, is one of the aspects studied in this research project.

Communicating accurately contributes to healthy communication and previous research has indicated that distressed couples tend to perceive each other's messages more negatively than intended (Gottman, et al., 1976). More precisely distressed couples tend to make maladaptive causal attributions that emphasize the influence of negative relationship events and minimize the positive features of events and partners (Fincham, 2001). Happy couples, however, tend to view their partners more positively than their partners view themselves (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996). Kelly and Fincham (1998) suggest that these positive biases may be functional; not only is high relationship satisfaction maintained, but consistent interaction behaviours through reciprocity confirm the partner's perception.

Communication accuracy is a subcomponent of communicative competence. According to Wilson and Sabee (2003) communicative competence is difficult to describe exactly as it has been defined in widely divergent ways by the many researchers interested in the construct. Wiemann and Bradac (1989) identified the "structuralist" and "functionalist" schools of thought in defining competence. According to them, the structuralist school emphasises communicators' competence

in that they “succeed in making their intentions understood, in seeming coherent, in seeming communicatively usual, in eliciting communicatively relevant responses from others, in distinguishing random movement from purposeful action, etc.” (p. 265). Scholars from the functionalist school, however, look to identify skills and strategies that would increase the probability that a communicator would reach his/her communicative goals. Central to the functionalist school of thought on communicative competence is the notion of relative competence and the idea that communicators vary greatly in their success at accomplishing their communicative goals, whether that be impression management or acquiring another’s agreement.

The competence model of conflict (Canary & Spitzberg, 1987; 1989; 1990) distinguishes three dimensions of competent communication: effectiveness, relational appropriateness and situational appropriateness. According to the competence model, perception of self and partner’s conflict styles greatly determines competence (Papa & Canary, 1995). Canary and Spitzberg (1990) suggest that effectiveness is best assessed from the speaker’s viewpoint, because the speaker would know best whether his/her goals were met. Appropriateness, on the other hand, is best judged from the listener’s perspective.

Based on the work of Canary and Spitzberg (1989; 1990), McKinney, Kelly and Duran (1997) proceeded to study the relationship between conflict message styles and communicative competence. In their self-report study of 151 undergraduate students, McKinney et al. used Ross and DeWine’s (1988) conflict message styles (self-oriented, issue-oriented or other-oriented) and found that other-oriented and, in particular, issue-oriented conflict styles were associated with competent communication, whereas self-oriented conflict styles were negatively associated with competent communication. In this research the issue-oriented style resembles an integrative style, whereas the self-oriented style was similar to a distributive style (e.g., Sillars et al., 1982).

Using a simulated organizational decision-making task with 100 randomly paired dyads, Gross and Guerrero (2000) found general support for the competence model of conflict. Through making use of Rahim’s (1983) conflict styles (as discussed earlier in the Conflict Resolution and Attachment section), they found that an integrative

conflict style is generally perceived as the most appropriate and effective style. The dominating style and avoiding style was perceived as inappropriate and ineffective, whereas the obliging and compromising styles were perceived as neutral. Individuals assess interactions on a competence and satisfaction level, and according to Canary, Cupach, and Serpe (2001) these “evaluative processes [are] critical to understanding relational effects of conflict message approaches” (p. 96). In their longitudinal study on couples these researchers found that self-reported integrative behaviours (viewed as competent and satisfying) and distributive behaviours (viewed as incompetent and dissatisfying) affected partner’s evaluations of those behaviours. They also found that evaluations of conflict styles at Time 1 were mediated by the conflict styles and relationship satisfaction of couples, but these factors did not influence the relationship quality or conflict styles used at Time 2. Rather, it was found that conflict tactics at Time 2 were predicted by one’s own conflict styles at Time 1 (lending support to the notion that conflict styles are relatively stable over time) and the partner’s conflict styles at Time 2.

In following on from the notion that communicative competence is greatly determined by the extent that one accomplishes one’s communicative goals (e.g., Canary & Spitzberg, 1987; 1990; Parks, 1994), more recent research by Lakey and Canary (2002) focused on sensitivity to the partners’ goals during a communication interaction. It was found that actors’ perception of their own sensitivity to their partner’s goals influenced their choice of conflict style, to the extent that more sensitive people were more likely to use an integrative tactic (e.g., “I sought a mutually beneficial solution”) rather than a distributive conflict tactic (e.g., “I tried to intimidate him/her”). According to these researchers, integrative tactics “allow the person to work with the partner and to behave in ways that seem to support the partner” (p. 230). In return, the researchers note, the partner reciprocates by also using integrative tactics and this results in the conflict not only leading to a productive end, but it also contributes to both partners feeling supported by the other person. In another study on communicative competence, which focused on aggression, Olson’s (2002) qualitative analysis of the data indicated that individuals who resort to aggression in conflict situations were measuring the appropriateness and effectiveness of aggression against social conventions. For the most part aggressiveness was viewed negatively in that it showed that people were not able to communicate competently.

This is in line with previous research findings (e.g., Infante, Sabourin, Rudd, & Shannon, 1990; Sabourin & Stamp, 1995). However, this study (Olson) further found that some participants reported their use of aggressiveness during conflict as appropriate and most effective when it deviated from the relational partner's normal conflict style, in which case it helped them "clear the air; get their partner's attention; and reach a resolution sooner" (p. 185).

*Summary of conflict resolution and communication.*

During conflict, if individuals were to misunderstand the meaning of the message, it becomes more likely that a miscommunication will take place and less likely that a satisfactory outcome will be reached. Researchers found that distressed couples tend to view each other's messages more negatively than intended (Gottman et al., 1976) and they have a propensity to make maladaptive causal attributions that focus on negative aspects (Fincham, 2001). Competent communication relates to reaching communication goals and includes effectiveness, relational appropriateness and situational appropriateness (Canary & Spitzberg, 1990), as well as the degree to which people make themselves understood (Wieman & Bradac, 1989). Researchers have found that other-oriented and issue-oriented conflict styles were associated with competent communication (McKinney et al., 1997). Integrative conflict styles have also been found to be more appropriate and effective, whereas dominating and avoiding styles have been found to be inappropriate and ineffective (Gross & Guerrero, 2000). Obliging and compromising styles have also been found to be neutral. Finally, the individual's perception of their own sensitivity to their partner's communication goals has been found to influence the choice of conflict style, for example, sensitive people will be more likely to use an integrative style (Lakey & Canary, 2002).

The next chapter looks at factors contributing to gender differences in general, and then more specifically at gender differences in relation to the key concepts of the thesis.

## Chapter 6: Gender Differences

“Men and women are different. Not better or worse – but different”  
Pease, A., & Pease, B. (1999, p. 3).

### *Introduction*

Some critics view the study of gender differences as inherently sexist (e.g., Hare-Mustin & Marcek, 1994), and questions whether psychologists should study sex or gender differences at all (Hyde & Mezulis, 2001). Halpern (2000) however, argues that “it is the only way that we can empirically determine if common beliefs and stereotypes about males and females have any basis in fact” (p. 8). Still a hot topic today, gender differences have been the source of numerous studies with Spence (1993) estimating between 35,000 to 40,000 articles were published between 1967 and 1993 in social and behavioural science journals.

Social, cultural, parental, biological and evolutionary influences have all been implicated in shaping the differences between male and female brain development, and the nature versus nurture argument has raged particularly strongly with regards to research on gender differences. One point to note is that evolutionary influences do not necessarily imply a genetic determinism which pre-programs behaviour, but that human creativity – “the strategic use of novelty” (p. 400) - should also be taken into account as this is also particularly adaptive when one considers the advantages of unpredictable behaviour in a given situation (Miller, 2001).

From a biological perspective Lutchmaya, Baron-Cohen and Raggat (2002a, 2002b) found that toddlers with lower foetal testosterone (measured from amniotic fluid taken in the first trimester of pregnancy) at twelve- and twenty-four months had higher levels of eye contact and a larger vocabulary, than other toddlers with higher foetal testosterone. Various studies have shown that gender also appears to affect the accuracy of decoding communication, with women, in general, being able to more accurately interpret facial expressions (e.g., Carels & Baucom, 1989; Noller, 1986). A Darwinian view might argue that women evolved more advanced communication and language systems because their survival depended on a more empathetic and strategic use of language (Baron-Cohen, 2003). Baron-Cohen, Richler, Bisarya, Gurunathan, and Wheelwright (2003) found that women on average self-reported higher empathy

scores than men, whereas men were more prone to be drawn to systemizing (e.g., machines, mathematics, maps and sports statistics). Moreover, Baron-Cohen (2003) believes that language superiority in women may well be present because of their greater empathising abilities, whereas superior spatial ability in men may be the result of their strong systemizing skills. Tannen (1990) also found that in the workplace men talk to each other more often about topics involving systems, for example technology, cars and sports, whereas women more often discuss social themes, for example clothes, hairstyles, relationships and domestic concerns. Baron-Cohen suggests a number of evolutionary advantages that greater systemizing abilities (and less empathising abilities) in men would allow for, including its usefulness when using and making tools, hunting and tracking, trading, when wielding power and social dominance, tolerating solitude, aggression and in leadership situations. High empathising abilities (and low systemizing abilities) in women might however be adaptive from an evolutionary perspective with regards to developing social alliances, mothering, gossip (staying in the loop of social developments) and decoding the male partner's behaviour. In this respect, researchers have found that wives' understanding of husbands' conflict styles predicted relationship satisfaction, although the reverse was not true for husbands (Acitelli, Douvan, & Veroff, 1993). According to Neff and Karney (2005) this could be because it is more important for women to accurately perceive their partner's specific qualities as this fosters a sense of prediction and control in the relationship for women, and this is particularly important if they are viewed as the ones responsible for relationship maintenance. Miller (2001) argues that from an evolutionary perspective the motivational system in place for men to maintain a relationship decreases once a partner is secured, and he believes that this is the reason that men communicate less as the relationship progresses.

Continuing along the evolutionary path, Halpern (2000) summarizes a number of factors which theorists suggest have influenced gender differences in cognitive abilities. Firstly, there is the argument that differences exist between monogamous and polygynous species. In support of this evolutionary theory, Gaulin and his colleagues (Gaulin, 1995; Gaulin, Fitzgerald, & Wartell, 1990; Gaulin & Wartell, 1990) researched two types of rodents (polygynous and monogamous rodents) and found that polygynous male rodents have superior spatial skills. Greater spatial ability in men, they theorize, is attributable to their polygynous evolutionary past. These

superior spatial skills are adaptive because according to Gaulin and his colleagues it enhances hunting skills and mate finding (and therefore increases the likelihood of greater reproductive rates). However, some critics (e.g., Weisstein, 1972) have commented that using analogies from other species could be potentially flawed as the rules governing one species' development cannot be directly translated to humans.

Secondly, there is the argument for the hunter-gatherer hypothesis. Based on this proposition, males, over time, developed greater spatial skills in their roles as hunters whereas women developed more effective gathering skills. Silverman and Eals (1992) found some support for this notion in that men are more adept at tasks requiring spatial ability and women are more adept at tasks requiring memory for location. However, Halpern (2000) points out various anomalies in this generalisation which does not account for these differences. For example, cultures where women were more reliant on spatial skills such as weaving, or where they had to travel long distances to gather food.

Lastly, Halpern (2000) refers to the argument of biologically primary- (shaped by evolution) and secondary domains (found in modern day technologically advanced societies). Geary (1995; 1996) distinguishes between these two types of domains based on cognitive skills such as mathematical ability, and believes that there are no gender differences between biologically primary abilities such as counting. However, Geary suggests that there are gender differences between biologically secondary mathematical abilities (e.g., geometry), that becomes apparent as a result of the differences in spatial cognition. This argument has however been criticised by numerous academics (e.g., Casey, 1996; Stanley & Stumpf, 1996). For instance, Casey suggests that this theory does not account adequately for the major overlap between male and female mathematical abilities.

Gender is also construed as a social construction and Crawford, Chaffin and Fitton (1995) propose that "gender is what culture makes out of the 'raw material' of biological sex" (p. 341). Social and environmental factors play a major role in the development of gender differences, and this becomes more obvious when one considers cross-cultural differences in gender socialisation (e.g., Ferguson & Horwood, 1997). From a psychological perspective a variety of theories have been

devised to explain the development of gender differences including the psychoanalytic perspective (psychosexual stages), learning perspectives (stereotypical gender role behaviour is learned), cognitive theories (cognitive developmental stages) and social cognition theories (interaction of cognitive and social factors) (Halpern, 2000). Parents, peers, schooling and the media have all been implicated as contributing to shaping gender differences, although the exact manner in which this occurs is sometimes unclear, as evidenced by the (sometimes) contradictory findings in the literature. For example, some research has shown that parents respond differentially to male and female children from birth onwards (e.g., Rubin, Provenzano, & Luria, 1974). However, a meta-analytic study by Lytton and Romney (1991) concludes that parents do not engage in sex differentiation practices to the extent that some would like us to believe.

In contrast to the nature versus nurture argument, Halpern (2000) proposes the psychobiosocial perspective in an attempt to capture the complexity of gender differences in cognitive abilities. According to this model, cause and effect is circular in determining gender differences. For example, some determining variables are both social and biological. These include learning (which is mediated by both social and biological factors). Halpern cautions against the use of over-generalisations obtained from groups of men and women on gender differences when one is considering the individual, and she reiterates that there is considerable overlap between the cognitive abilities of men and women. Baron-Cohen (2003) also cautions that overall intellect is not more advanced in one gender or the other, but he does posit that there are differences between men and women which reflect specific strengths in certain domains.

This concludes a general background of factors contributing to gender differences, and attention now turns to looking at gender differences within the context of relationship specific variables.

#### *Gender Differences in Attachment*

Researchers have found that there are particular gender differences that can be found between men and women with regards to attachment, and this section focuses specifically on adult attachment. Le Poire and her colleagues (1997) developed the

Parent and Partner scale, which they utilized in their research on 104 committed heterosexual couples. In their study they found that male avoidant partner attachment was predicted by less securely attached female partners. In addition, they found that preoccupied females could be predicted by preoccupied partner attachment in males. Their research also indicated a correlation between avoidant partner attachment and role reversed parental attachment for both men and women. Barse (2004) researched 333 married couples, and found that wives' and husbands' secure attachment correlated moderately with their relationship satisfaction. Barse also found that preoccupied attachment in husbands was related to relationship dissatisfaction for both partners and a secure wife did not seem to have a buffering effect. However, Pratt (2005) found that wives' current attachment representations of their partners were related to their perceptions of relationship satisfaction, although this was not true for husbands. In addition, Barse found that the correlation between female and male partners' relationship satisfaction was strongly positive. Pratt also found that husbands' current perspectives of their childhood attachments were related to the manner in which they expressed their emotions during a conflict discussion with their wives, whereas this was not true for wives.

#### *Gender Differences: Communication*

Although many differences between men and women's communication have been explored in the literature, this section focuses on two specific areas – a gender specific communication pattern that is predictive of divorce, and the demand-withdraw pattern. Gottman and his fellow researchers (Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998) found that there was a particular pattern predictive of divorce. It includes factors such as a wife starting a conversation negatively; a husband refusing to be influenced by his wife; a wife reciprocating low level negativity; and a husband not being able to de-escalate low level negativity. These researchers furthermore conclude that the opposite contributes to happier and more stable marriages. These include softened start-up on the part of the wife during communication; that the husband is influenced by his wife and de-escalates low intensity negative affect; that the wife is prone to using humour in an attempt to soothe the husband; and that he in turn is prone to using positive affect and de-escalation in an attempt to soothe himself.

Another gender-specific spousal interaction that has been identified is the demand-withdraw pattern (also known as the pursuer-distancer pattern), in which the wife is generally the demanding party, whereas the husband tends to withdraw in response (Kurdek, 1995). This demand-withdraw pattern accounts for more variation in relationship satisfaction than any other conflict resolution style (e.g., Kurdek). Research suggests that the demand-withdraw pattern reflects the intensity and the amount of intimacy that people need in a relationship, with women generally desiring more intimacy, and men desiring greater separateness (e.g., Christensen, 1987; Jacobson, 1989). Gottman and Levenson's research (1988) seeks to explain the demand-withdraw pattern based on the physiological differences between men and women, with men, in contrast to women, experiencing higher levels of physiological arousal more quickly during conflict (fight or flight symptoms) – and therefore greater desire to withdraw from the aversive physiological arousal. Sagrestano, Heavy and Christensen (1998) explain the gender differences in the demand-withdraw pattern from a social structural perspective in that “men's greater power in the social structure leads to different reactions to men's versus women's needs and desires for change” (p. 296). However, researchers (e.g., Heavy et al., 1995; Klinetob & Smith, 1996) have found that the demand-withdraw pattern is reliant on whether it is the partner's issue under discussion or one's own. More specifically these studies have indicated that the tendency to withdraw is greater for men and women when it is the partner's issue, thus echoing Burleson and Denton's (1997) argument that it is not so much communication skills deficits, than motivation for change, that influences communication behaviour such as the demand-withdraw pattern.

#### *Gender Differences: Attachment and Communication*

Paley, Cox, Burchinal and Payne (1999) also found a gendered dyadic interaction effect in attachment which they believe may be related to the manner in which the two genders respond differently to attachment related behaviour. In their study of 138 married couples they did not find any evidence to support an association between husbands' marital behaviour and their wives' attachment style. However, they did find support for the idea that wives' marital behaviour is influenced by their husbands' attachment style. For example, wives of secure-secure husbands (secure primary caregiver attachment, and secure partner attachment) were found to be more positive than wives of insecure or earned-secure husbands (insecure primary caregiver

attachment, and current secure partner attachment). However, wives of earned-secure husbands did not differ in their expression of negative affect from other groups.

*Gender Differences: Attachment, Conflict Resolution Styles, and Conflict Beliefs*

Marchand (2004), in her research on marital couples, found that husbands' relationship satisfaction was significantly related to their attachment styles and depressive symptoms, whereas only wives' attachment style was related to their relationship satisfaction. Marchand furthermore found that these attachment and depressive symptoms in husbands were significantly related to their attacking behaviours during conflict; however, wives' attachment styles were related to attacking and compromising behaviours. This research supports the notion that husband's depressive symptoms might hamper their ability to solve conflict constructively, which in turn impacts on their relationship satisfaction. Creasey's study (2002), of 145 young adult couples involved in romantic relationships, reiterates some of these findings, and also suggests gender differences. Young women, in particular, with secure attachment were found to use more positive behaviour during discussions of conflict, and secure female attachment also predicted the occurrence of joint couple positive behaviours, whereas male insecurity predicted the frequency of negative behaviours. Other researchers have suggested that gender role orientations might moderate these differences as they relate to internal working models and interactive behaviour situations, such as conflict discussions (Feiring, 1999; Simpson et al., 1996).

Fichten and Wright (1983) found that both satisfied and distressed wives engaged in more negative behaviours than husbands. Marchand (2004) and Kurdek (1994) both found that husbands' positive problem solving was significantly correlated with their relationship satisfaction. Wives also had a significant correlation between positive problem solving and relationship satisfaction, but to a slightly lesser degree. Their research has also indicated a significantly negative correlation between conflict engagement and relationship satisfaction for men and women (Kurdek; Marchand). Carels and Baucom (1999) found a marked gender difference in the impact of perceived helpfulness in couples' relationships. They found that the immediate influence of partner support for women had a greater impact on their feelings of being supported, whereas men were more influenced by their overall evaluations of the

relationship. In 2003 Stackert and Bursik reported on their research of 118 male and female college students. In their study they found that women's belief that disagreements are destructive (comparable to Arguing is Threatening) was negatively related to relationship satisfaction. They furthermore could not find any significant relationships between conflict beliefs and relationship satisfaction for men.

#### *Summary of gender differences*

A variety of factors contributing to the development of gender differences were discussed in this section, ranging from biological and evolutionary influences (nature), as well as social influences (nurture), to Halpern's notion (2000) of a psycho-biosocial perspective which attempts to bridge the nature versus nurture argument. In addition gender differences were explored within the context of the relevant relationship variables, including attachment, communication, conflict resolution styles and conflict beliefs.

In looking at the literature on gender differences it would appear that the research scope, and by implication the research results, very much seems to be influenced by the individual researcher's belief in degree of gender differences that exist. Thus, by implication, beliefs (such as men and women are inherently different) might bias a researcher to finding these differences in their research. This could possibly be one reason that accounts for the variances in results found in the literature, with some research supporting greater gender differences, whereas other research denies gender differences. Popular literature (e.g., Pease & Pease, 1999) also contributes to, and exacerbates, the notion (possibly inherent) that men and women are very different. However, whether men and women are inherently different or not in their cognitive abilities, Halpern's statement (2000) that the only manner in which to empirically validate whether there are gender differences, is through research, would seem to be the only viable option, and thus the stance that is also taken by this research project.

In the next chapter the repair, enhancement and maintenance of close relationships is discussed.

## Chapter 7: The Repair, Enhancement and Maintenance of Close Relationships

Love has an infinite heart  
and cannot grow in a narrow mind.  
It is always sweeping on and on  
always living, growing and becoming.  
And those who have stopped changing and growing  
have stopped loving.

*Celebrating Love* – Mary Hathaway, 1993

### *Introduction*

Relationship satisfaction greatly contributes to life satisfaction (Glenn & Weaver, 1981) and so central are relationships to human existence that it is only natural to seek advice on how to repair relationships when problems become overwhelming and/or unbearable. There are many pathways to achieving satisfactory relationships and these days assistance for personal problems come in many guises: television shows, magazine articles, self-help books, workshops and retreats, and professional mental health practitioners. Informal networks such as friends, family, work-colleagues, neighbours and other well-meaning individuals also offer advice on repairing intimate relationships. Technology and the Internet have also increased the ease of access to mental health professionals and apart from face-to-face therapy many therapists these days offer online services such as email services, online therapy and telephone counselling services. These services have enabled people who were not comfortable with direct, face-to-face therapy to seek help on relational matters from the privacy of their own homes, thereby in effect making helping services available to more people.

Since the late 1920s professional marriage counsellors have been helping distressed couples (Broderick & Shrader, 1981). Spanning a variety of disciplines including marriage and family counselling, pastoral counselling, psychiatry, psychology, social work and sociology, couple therapy focuses on repairing the relationships of committed dyads (Brehm, Miller, Perlman, & Campbell, 2002). Preventative and enrichment programs on the other hand, are a more recent development in the relational field and focus on maintaining and enhancing couple relationships (Brehm et al., 2002). Some couples, however, have the skill (and inclination) to employ preventative techniques in their own relationships without seeking help or enhancement. Research on satisfied couples have indicated that these relational maintenance strategies include, amongst others, positivity (having a cheerful and

positive attitude), openness (self-disclosure and discussing relational issues in a frank and open manner), assurances (showing love, faithfulness, and emphasising commitment), networking (spending time with mutual acquaintances and friends), and sharing tasks (in particular household chores) (Stafford & Canary, 1991). Each of these approaches including the repair, maintenance and enhancement that contribute to the longevity of couple relationships will be discussed in turn.

### *Couple Therapy*

Fostering a successful intimate relationship in today's fast-moving world filled with escalating divorce rates has become an increasingly difficult task. When all else fails, and thus often as a last resort, distressed couples turn to couple therapists to assist in repairing their relationships. According to Haley (1963) the mere presence of a third person, the therapist, helps couples solve their problems and by handling each partner as equals, treating them justly and not taking sides, the therapist disarms the typical blaming tactics.

In their review of couple therapy approaches, Brehm and her colleagues (Brehm et al., 2002) distinguish between (a) Psychodynamic, (b) Rogerian, (c) Systems, (d) Behavioural and (e) Cognitive approaches to treating distressed couples. An elaborate overview of these approaches is beyond the scope of this thesis. Therefore, a summary of these approaches will suffice to elucidate key differences and developments in the couple therapy literature.

#### *(a) Psychodynamic approaches.*

Although initially strictly having an individual focus, modern day psychodynamic marital therapists are more accepting of conjoint sessions (Scharff, 1995). According to Brehm et al. (2002) psychodynamic couple therapists follow three fundamental principles:

1. In the way they choose a mate and the manner in which they interact in marriage, people are often acting out their unconscious conflicts.
2. Many unconscious conflicts stem from events that took place in a person's family of origin.
3. The major therapeutic goal is for clients to gain insight into their unconscious conflicts – to understand why they feel and act the way

they do, so that they may have the freedom to choose to feel and act differently (p. 441).

Scharff adds to this that it is the interactions between the couple and the therapist (in particular transference and countertransference) that is used to detect the developmental failures and skewed projective identifications (the hallmark of dissatisfied couples).

*(b) Rogerian approaches.*

The Rogerian (or client-centred) approach to therapy stresses helping clients to discover their true selves (Brehm et al., 2002). Based on the work of Carl Rogers, Guerney developed the Conjugal Relationship Enhancement program (1977) for couples, with the goal of increasing “warmth, acceptance, and empathy between partners” (Brehm et al., p. 441).

*(c) Systems approaches.*

Family systems approaches view the family as a system that is maintained by both the functional and dysfunctional behaviours of all its members. Considerable diversity is apparent in the practice and belief of systems theorists (Hoffman, 1981), but Brehm et al. (2002) suggest that family therapists who may work with couples have the following principles in common:

1. A focus on the individual’s differentiation from the family system – that is, on the need to learn how to be both separate and close in relationships.
2. An emphasis on the process of communication, as communication both reflects how the system operates and serves to stabilize its operation.
3. An emphasis on the structure of the relationship system: the roles people play, the coalitions they form, their places in the family intergenerational hierarchy.
4. The assumption that unhealthy people reflect unhealthy but stable relationship systems. Thus, a major goal of systems therapy is to destabilize the system so that healthier, more flexible relationships can develop (p. 443).

*(d) Behavioural approaches.*

Although initially an individual approach, Behavioural Marital Therapy (BMT) developed to suit the needs of distressed couples who were viewed as having a low level of positive reinforcing exchanges (Brehm et al., 2002). BMT thus has the goal of maximising the amount of positive reinforcement and minimizing the amount of negative punishment between relational partners. This occurs through the direct instructions of the therapist (for example, increasing the positive behaviours that each partner wants from the other), communication and problem solving skills training, and working on written contracts (for example “good faith” contracts or *quid pro quo* contingency contracts). In reviewing the various couple therapy approaches, some researchers are in agreement that behavioural marital therapy is an efficacious and specific treatment (Baucom, Shoham, Mueser, Daiuto, & Stickle, 1998; Chambless & Hollon, 1998). Behavioural couple’s therapy has also addressed specific problem areas in the past, such as Alcohol Behavioural Couples Therapy (ABCT), and researchers suggest that new populations could be incorporated with additional adaptations (Epstein & McCrady, 1998). In this regard, preliminary findings from a pilot study on including a couple therapy element to substance abusing women in an inpatient setting, indicated that couple therapy is a useful additive to treatment for these populations (Trepper, McCollum, & Dankoski, 2000).

More recently a study (Christensen et al., 2004) with one of the largest clinical couple populations to date was conducted: 134 seriously and chronically distressed couples attended either traditional behavioural couple therapy (TBCT) or integrative behavioural couple therapy (IBCT). IBCT builds on TBCT (traditional behavioural couple therapy, or what is also known as behavioural marital therapy) by including an emphasis on emotional acceptance. The outcome study measured the efficacy of TBCT in comparison with IBCT and results indicated that “TBCT couples improved more quickly early on in treatment than IBCT couples but tended to flatten out over the course of therapy, whereas IBCT couples made steady improvement over the course of therapy” (p. 188). According to the researchers these changes can be explained by noting that TBCT therapists, in general, focus initially on helping couples to advance the number of positive actions toward each other, which in turn boosts relationship satisfaction levels. As therapy progresses TBCT therapists address more problematic themes in the couple relationship and this might explain why

satisfaction levels plateau. On the other hand, IBCT directly start addressing problematic themes in the couple relationship and improvement rates thus occur at a steadier pace. Overall, post-treatment results indicate that clinically significant levels of improvement occur in both treatments: 59% of TBCT couples and 71% of IBCT couples, as measured by the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976), were reliably improved or recovered.

*(e) Emotion-Focused and Cognitive approaches.*

Ellis and Harper started applying rational-emotive therapy, and the idea that beliefs and expectations affect behaviour to marital problems in 1961. More recently Emotion-Focused Therapy (EFT) has been developed and it is described (Dessaulles, Johnson, & Denton, 2003) as an integration of “interactional/family systems approach (e.g., Fisch, Weakland, & Segal, 1983) with an affective/experiential approach (e.g., Perls, Hefferline, & Goodman, 1951; Rogers, 1951) that also draws upon attachment theory” (p. 348). Greenberg (2006) has recently reviewed the basic principles of EFT, including EFT’s focus on the personal meanings of emotional experiences, identifying maladaptive emotions, and the therapist being viewed as an emotion coach. The attachment theory base to EFT has been studied by several key researchers and practitioners in the field (e.g., Johnson & Whiffen, 1999; 2003). For example, EFT and attachment has been studied in relation to affect regulation, communication and conflict in couples. This link with attachment theory implies that findings from the current research project will also be relevant to EFT. With regards to its effectiveness EFT has been shown in a meta-analysis to result in statistically significant effect sizes comparable to Behavioral Marital Therapy (Johnson, Hunsley, Greenberg, & Schindler, 1999).

Emotive therapy is content-oriented (Weeks & Treat, 1992) and focuses on changing *what* the individual is thinking, whereas, cognitive therapy is process-oriented and focuses on changing *how* the individual is thinking. Cognitive factors commonly addressed in couple therapy include unrealistic expectations, causal attributions and irrational thoughts (Baucom & Epstein, 1990; Brehm et al., 2002). Cognitive approaches, as well as cognitive behavioural approaches to couple problems have become more frequently used toward the end of the twentieth century. More recently Epstein and Baucom (2002) enhanced their cognitive behavioural couple therapy

(CBCT) approach. This includes an emphasis on cognitions as well as behaviours and is based on empirical research. They have also written a comprehensive book on the subject. Their multilevel approach focuses attention on the “characteristics of the two people who have chosen to form a relationship, the interaction patterns that the couple develops to meet individual and relationship needs, and influences of the couple’s physical and interpersonal environment” (p. ix). It also involves a “developmental perspective on the inevitable adjustments a couple must make over time as the partners and their life circumstances change” (p. ix).

### *Efficacy of couple therapy approaches*

In reviewing the efficacy of various couple therapy approaches, including behavioural couple therapy, cognitive behavioural couple therapy, insight oriented couple therapy, emotion-focused therapy, integrative couple therapy and systemic approaches, Epstein and Baucom (2002) concluded that all these approaches are helpful to distressed couples and “there is little evidence that any single therapeutic approach is more efficacious in general for assisting distressed couples” (p. 288). Christensen and Heavy (1999) found that couples in couple therapy are twice as likely to improve as those in control conditions, and approximately 65 percent of distressed couples starting therapy will show improvement as a result of attending couple therapy. However, it is also clear from the findings that, for any given approach a sizeable number of couples do not improve (Epstein & Baucom). In attempting to predict couple therapy outcomes it is also evident that couples at the less distressed end of the scale are more likely than their severely distressed counterparts to benefit from couple therapy (Jacobson & Addis, 1993). These researchers have also indicated that older couples and couples who are prone to disengage themselves emotionally will find couple therapy a counterproductive exercise. However, in a more recent review of individual, group and couples therapies in the geriatric population, Kennedy and Tanenbaum (2000) found that when reconsidering the specific needs and abilities of older adults, such as cognitive and sensory impairment and realistic adjustment of treatment goals, psychotherapy can be successful with older adults.

Epstein and Baucom suggest that in terms of the efficacy of various couple treatments it might be likely that different couples will respond to different types of interventions; in other words, it is a matter of suitability. In terms of individual

factors, couples who rate themselves as collaboratively and actively participating in sessions and complying with homework were found to be a lot more satisfied with their relationships post-therapy (Holtzworth-Munroe, Jacobson, DeKlyen, & Whisman, 1989). Individual therapist variables such as skill-level, credibility, professionalism, warmth, empathy, boundary setting, time management, perceptiveness, maturity and flexibility are possibly some of the factors that affect process outcomes in couple treatment. In conclusion, marital therapy process research and its relationship to treatment outcome are still in the beginning phases of development (Alexander, Holtzworth-Munroe, & Jameson, 1994). Lebow (2000) suggests that although the efficacy of some therapy approaches has been determined, we have only yet begun the process of influencing therapist decision making from an evidence-based perspective. The lack of generating sufficient clinician-relevant information has been a major criticism toward couple and family therapy research in the past. However, Pinsof and Wynne (2000) suggest a learning model based on couple and family therapy/research. The value of this approach is that it is more likely to produce clinician relevant research and their learning process research model could be used as an alternative to efficacy and effectiveness research. Similarly, Johnson (2003) suggests that scientist-practitioners need to remind researchers of the clinical relevance of their efforts so that theory and practice can form a coherent whole. More findings in this area are eagerly awaited, so that the most effective treatments can be adhered to in the most effective fashion to the benefit of repairing distressed couple relationships.

#### *Preventative and Enhancing Approaches to Couple Relationships*

Premarital preparation programs began through clergy and community counselling services prior to World War II and by the 1960s it had developed into community skills training programs for couples (Silliman & Schumm, 2000). Historically speaking, the relationship enhancement and preventive approach is thus a relatively new development in the intimate relationship field. Generally, relationship interventions are said to fall along a continuum ranging from preventive skill-training programs to remedial therapies, like those discussed in the section on couple therapy (L'Abate & McHenry, 1983). Guerney (1977) was one of the first to discuss a psycho-educational perspective in his Relationship Enhancement (RE) approach. Marital enrichment programs were initially considered to be a "marital booster"

(Diskin, 1986). However, these lines have become more obscured as recent developments in the field have seen preventative and enrichment programs being beneficial to a range of couples including distressed and seriously distressed couples (DeMaria, 1998; Hawley & Olson, 1995). In particular research has indicated that “at risk” couples and couples who are dissatisfied with their relationships appear to benefit from marital enrichment and preventive programs more so than their lower-risk, satisfied counterparts (e.g., Halford, Sanders, & Behrens, 2001; Noval, Combs, Wiinamiki, Bufford, & Halter, 1996).

The aim of preventive and enhancement programs is to prevent divorce and enhance couple proficiency through skills training and education, and the last forty years has seen a great increase in the number of programs available to couples. Although an elaborate overview of these approaches is beyond the scope of this thesis, a summary of these approaches will suffice to elucidate key differences and developments in the literature.

*a) The Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP).*

This program was developed by Howard Markman and his colleagues at the University of Denver (Markman, Blumberg, & Stanley, 1989), and it is a group program in which couples are taught skills in handling conflict (e.g., the speaker-listener technique), dealing with core issues (e.g., commitment and forgiveness) and enhancement (e.g., friendship and fun) (Markman, Stanley, & Blumberg, 1994). According to Stahmann (2000) PREP interventions see couples being taught what ineffective communication is, as well as skills to improve their communication. This is based on the notion that it is the negative interactions, rather than the positive relationship aspects, that determine a couple’s satisfaction with the relationship. Derived from observational research on couples, PREP has been refined through longitudinal testing in the United States (Markman, Renick, Floyd, Stanley & Clements, 1993) and internationally (e.g., Halford et al., 2001; Markman & Hahlweg, 1993) with significant differences in couple communication and conflict management still maintained at 4 years post-intervention. Researchers have also indicated that the divorce and separation rates for couples who attended PREP in a 12 year longitudinal study were lower than their non-attending counterparts at 19% versus 28%, which provides evidence that skills gained are effective in lowering dissatisfaction in couples

longitudinally (Stanley, Markman, St. Peters, & Leber, 1995). Since its development the PREP program has been delivered in a variety of formats including Self-PREP (Self-regulatory PREP – covers areas similar to those covered by PREP with the added focus on self-regulation) (Halford et al., 2001), PREP-WK (a weekend version of PREP) (Schilling, Baucom, Burnett, Allen, & Ragland, 2003), and an abridged videotape/workbook version of the PREP program (Saiz, 2001).

*b) Relationship Enhancement (RE).*

One of the earliest programs was the Relationship Enhancement program (RE) developed by Bernard G. Guerney and colleagues (Guerney, 1977; Guerney et al., 1986) at Pennsylvania State University (Stahmann, 2000). According to Ginsberg (2000) RE integrates psychodynamic, behavioural, experiential and family systems viewpoints. Central to the RE approach is the belief that our personalities are heavily influenced by our relationships and as a result we build up interpersonal reflexes which are seen to elicit reciprocal responses from others, for example, positive actions elicit positive responses (Shannon & Guerney, 1973). Based on this research, a constructive relationship skills training programme was the logical conclusion for Guerney, and this became the basis for RE (Ginsberg). RE, then, is an education skills training program and key to the framework is the couple's ability to maintain an intimate connection that lets them experience a sense of security in which they can allow themselves to be 'safely vulnerable' with each other. According to Stahmann, RE is centred on enhancing nine relationship factors including caring, giving, understanding, honesty, openness, trust, sharing, compassion and harmony. Associated with these nine relationship factors are nine core skills. The reasoning behind RE is that as couples enhance these positive skill areas they will minimize negativity, and should it arise they will be able to cope better with conflict and distress in their relationship.

RE follows a non-diagnostic approach (Ginsberg, 2000) and as a result of its emphasis on learning relationship skills, it "makes no distinction between prevention and amelioration" (p. 278). This format allows it to be applied in couple/family therapy sessions or workshops for couples, families or organizations. Cavedo (1996) showed that a brief Relationship Enhancement intervention (two hours of reading and study, and one and a half hours of coached practice) enabled couples to have a significant

improvement in their problem solving discussions compared to a previous baseline. More recently Accordino and Guerney (2002) have shown the effectiveness of RE in that it not only improves participants ability to communicate efficiently, but moreover, RE leads to even greater improvement in highly distressed couples.

*c) Other relationship enhancement approaches.*

Hawley and Olson (1995) evaluated the effectiveness of three enrichment approaches (Learning to Live Together, Growing Together and Training in Marriage Enrichment) in comparison with a control group. Learning to Live Together (Bader & Rimmel, 1987) is an eight session program developed for couples in the transition phase to marriage, and research has indicated that it is effective in assisting couples to handle conflict non-destructively (Bader, Riddle, & Sinclair, 1981). Growing Together (Dyer & Dyer, 1990) is an eight-session program for newlywed couples that includes the completion of the PREPARE/ENRICHMENT assessment inventories from which the couples get feedback through the course of the program. Training in Marriage Enrichment, or TIME (Dinkmeyer & Carlson, 1984), is a ten-session general marriage enrichment program that focuses on encouragement, communication and conflict resolution skills. Previous research suggests that TIME has a positive effect on marriages in that post-completion treatment groups (in comparison with control groups) show significant differences in terms of relationship adjustment, satisfaction and communication (e.g., Mattson, Christensen, & England, 1990). In their study Hawley and Olson assigned couples to one of the four groups (Learning to Live Together, Growing Together, TIME or a control group) and the t-tests of change scores showed significant differences on individual variables (communication, personality issues, marital satisfaction, conflict resolution, family/friends, and financial management) and couple variables (personality issues, family/friends and financial management) after participation. When compared, none of the programs was found to be superior and yielded a small effect size of .21. However, Zimpher (1988) in a review of marital enrichment outcome research found a deferred rise in results after completion of enhancement programs. Hawley and Olson suggests that the insights gained in the programs might benefit couples at later more stressful phases of their relational development, which is in keeping with the preventative nature of the enrichment programs.

Another study on marital enrichment retreat programs compared an Adventure based marital enrichment experience with an Association for Couples in Marriage Enrichment (ACME) group and non-treatment control group (Hickman, Protinsky, & Singh, 1997). The ACME program (Michael & Michael, 1992) consists of an educational lesson followed by role-playing and skill practicing, whereas the Adventure group utilized activities as experiential metaphors for real-life couple problems (e.g., an obstacle course for conflict resolution) and this was followed by a debriefing and group processing activity. The Adventure group showed a treatment effect of .45, whereas the ACME group's effect size was .71 (approximating a large effect size – Cohen, 1988). Both the ACME and the Adventure groups showed a statistically significant improvement in intimacy and marital enrichment in comparison with the control group. Not only do various relationship enhancement programs show success, but these programs are also applicable to a wide range of populations. Research on the effectiveness of a cognitive behavioural marital enrichment program, the Traits of a Happy Couple (THC), found that between group differences for church and community groups were non-existent, thereby generalising the effectiveness of the program to the wider community (Noval, Combs, Winamaki, & Bufford, 1996).

More recently Carson (2003) addressed stress and coping as a function of couples' relationship quality and found that couples who attended an eight week manualized group relationship enhancement intervention (modelled on the mindfulness meditation-based stress-reduction program of Kabat-Zinn, 1990) were showing improvements in management of day-to-day relationship stress, relationship happiness and individual stress coping efficacy.

In another recent comparative study (Burchard, Yarhouse, Kilian, Worthington, Berry, & Canter, 2003) the Hope-Focussed enrichment program and the Forgiveness and Reconciliation through Experiencing Empathy (FREE) program were both found to make a significant difference to the life satisfaction of participants. According to the researchers the Hope-Focussed group “learned and practiced communication skills, ways to increase positive behaviours, and ways to build intimacy”, whereas the FREE group received “education and skills training on forgiveness which involves incurring empathy for the offender and releasing any tendencies toward revenge, so

that reconciliation might be sought, if desired” (p. 249). Although this was only a pilot study with a small sample size of 20 couples, the effectiveness of these enrichment programs improving overall life quality and satisfaction were found to be significantly different from the control group at one month follow-up, again attesting to not only the immediate impact of relationship enrichment programs, but also the preventative nature of the programs to potential problems the couple might experience in the future.

### *Maintaining a Relationship Long-term*

We've got this gift of love, but love is like a precious plant. You can't just accept it  
and leave it in the cupboard or just think it's going to get on by itself.  
You've got to keep watering it. You've got to really look after it and nurture it.  
John Lennon, December 30, 1969, MTV

A common expectation is that relationships and love will stand the test of time, a notion emphasised by the marital vows that people make, which might include the phrase “until death do us part”. But not only do people want their relationships to last, they also want their relationships to be happy. Most researchers have come to the conclusion that relationship satisfaction in couples is highest in the initial dating and pre-parental stages, or at least the first 10 years of marriage (Bradbury, Cohan, & Karney, 1998; Glenn, 1998; Teichner & Farden-Lyster, 1997). Hundreds of studies have researched the association between various psychological variables and the longitudinal trajectory of relationship satisfaction and stability in couples (e.g., Halford, 1999; Karney & Bradbury, 1995).

Acitelli (2001) suggests that the strategies that people use to maintain their relationship satisfaction depend on their gender, their marital status and whether there are currently relational problems. Melamed (1994) found that relationship status appears to influence partner's personality similarity over time, to the extent where similarity in dating couples decreased, whereas in cohabiting or marital couples it increased or remained the same. Memory bias has also been found to be a mechanism influencing satisfaction in long-term relationships (Karney & Coombs, 2000). Trust also predicts positive/favourable appraisals of negative incidents caused solely by the partner, a phenomenon known as the Enchanted April phenomenon (Wieselquist,

2001). Fowers, Lyons, and Montel (1996) also found that positive illusions about relationships (as opposed to optimism, pessimism and social desirability) were associated with relationship quality.

Russin (2003) recently confirmed the effect that Sternberg's (1986) three components of love (intimacy, passion, and commitment) have on the duration of relationships and her study found that intimacy remained stable across various relationship lengths. Passion was at first high in the short-term then lessened and levelled off during mid-term relationships, whereas it again improved over long-term relationships. Commitment on the other hand seemed to increase as the duration of relationship became longer. In this regard, Bui, Peplau, and Hill (1996) not only found that rewards and costs (as indicated by Rusbults' investment model, 1983) account for a significant amount of the variance in relationship satisfaction, but also that satisfaction, investments and the quality of available alternatives account for a lot of the variance in commitment that a person might feel toward the relationship. These researchers were further able to predict relationship duration over a 15-year period.

Halford (2001) discriminated four broad categories that impact on the relationship stability and satisfaction of couples, and this includes (1) the social and cultural context in which the couple exists; (2) major and minor life events, including normative transitions; (3) individual characteristics and life experiences that each individual brings into the relationship; and (4) the couples' own adaptive processes. In terms of major life events, increased stress in a relationship, for example, one partner being diagnosed HIV positive, can influence or test the stability of a relationship. A study in northern Thailand found that five factors influenced marital stability following HIV notification: duration of relationship; opinions from close and extended family members, in particular parents; economic constraints; the presence of children in the marriage; and fear of stigmatization and isolation from the community (Tangmunkongvorakul et al., 1999). This study's findings again indicate the importance of the social and cultural context, as well as the couple's own ability to cope with the presence of a major stressor.

Halford, Sanders, and Behrens (1994) suggest 'relationship self-regulation' to be a useful means of working toward a more satisfactory relationship, and propose that this

process include: self-appraisal, self-directed goal-setting, self implementation of change, and self-evaluation of change efforts. Various applications of these Australian researchers' theoretical understanding of self regulation in relationships have been developed, and include Self-PREP (Self Regulation Positive Relationship Education Program), Couple CARE (Couple Commitment And Relationship Enhancement Program), SRCT (Self Regulatory Couple Therapy) and the SRERS (Self-Regulation for Effective Relationships Scale) (Halford, Wilson, Lizzio, & Moore, 2002).

“Minding” the close relationship, is another similar concept that was recently developed by Harvey and Omarzu (1997; 1999), and it focuses on the “process by which a couple can maintain close, satisfying relationships over a long period of time” (1999, p. 2), such that a reciprocal and continual mindfulness in thought and behaviour occur throughout the span of the relationship. Firstly, Harvey and Omarzu's minding theory emphasises the importance of ‘wanting to know your partner’ – an attitude which they believe is conducive to openness and good communication. Minding theory further emphasises the importance of relationship enhancing attributions and cautions couples to be aware of the manner in which they construct meaning in their relationships.

Harvey and Omarzu (1999) surmise that making relationship enhancing attributions means attributing positive behaviours to disposition (it explains the event in terms of internal, personality-based factors), and negative behaviours to situations (which makes sense of events based on external, environmental factors). Respect, acceptance, reciprocity, and continuity over time, are the other components central to minding theory, and they emphasize that in a well-minded relationship most acts will involve these components and reflect a mindful attitude.

*Summary: Relationship Repair, Enhancement and Maintenance of Close Relationships*

Maintaining a satisfactory relationship long-term greatly contributes to life satisfaction. In the past distressed couples have sought the help of marriage counsellors. Although this is still the case today many marginally dissatisfied, and even happy couples, are seeking preventative and enrichment programs to enhance

their relationships. Couple therapy approaches include Psychodynamic, Rogerian, Systems, Behavioural, Emotion-Focussed and Cognitive approaches (Brehm et al., 2002). All these approaches are helpful to distressed couples and none appear to be particularly more efficient than the other (Epstein & Baucom, 2002). Research has indicated that couples in couple therapy are twice as likely to improve as those in control conditions, and approximately 65 percent of distressed couples starting therapy will show improvement as a result of attending couple therapy (Christensen & Heavy, 1999).

Research has also shown that distressed couples benefit more from enrichment programs than satisfied couples (e.g., Halford et al., 2001). Various relationship enhancement programs are distinguished these days, including Relationship Enhancement (RE) (Guernsey, 1977), the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) (Markman et al., 1989), and various others, for example, Learning to Live Together (Bader & Rempel, 1987), the ACME program (Association for Couples in Marriage Enrichment) (Hickman et al., 1997), and TIME (Training in Marriage Enrichment) (Dinkmeyer & Carlson, 1987). To evaluate the effectiveness of these programs researchers have begun to compare the programs with each other (e.g., Burchard et al., 2003; Carson, 2003; Hawley & Olson, 1995; Hickman et al., 1997) as well as with control groups, and in general the findings indicate that most of these programs have an immediate benefit to participating couples. One of the more researched programs, PREP, has found that there is a longitudinal influence of attending the program, such that after 12 years participants had lower divorce rates (19%) than controls (28%) (Stanley et al., 1995).

Some couples are able to maintain their own relationships long term by “minding” their relationship. Halford (2001) distinguished four broad categories that influence the relationship stability and satisfaction of couples, and this includes social and cultural contexts, major and minor life events, individual characteristics and experiences, as well as the couples’ own adaptive processes. Satisfied couples have been found to employ relational maintenance strategies such as positivity (having a cheerful and positive attitude), openness (self-disclosure and discussing relational issues in a frank and open manner), assurances (showing love and faithfulness, emphasising commitment), networking (spending time with mutual acquaintances and

friends), and sharing tasks (in particular household chores) (Stafford & Canary, 1991). A useful means of working toward a more satisfactory relationship also includes regulating or minding the relationship, and this includes self-appraisal, self-directed goal-setting, self implementation of change, and self-evaluation of change efforts, respect, acceptance, reciprocity and continuity over time (Halford et al., 1994; Harvey & Omarzu, 1999).

This brings to a conclusion the different topics covered in the literature review. In the next chapter a summary of the literature review is presented.

## Chapter 8: Literature Review Summary

“There is always some madness in love.  
But there is also always some reason in madness”  
*Thus Spake Zarathustra* - Friedrich Nietzsche, 1885

Couples – committed dyads – typically invest time and energy into their relationships, are interdependent and feel affection for each other (Brehm et al., 2002). Various levels of commitment are distinguished, including dating, cohabiting and marital relationships, and many of these commitments are a consequence of repartnering, which frequently follow divorce or dissolution of a relationship. With the current focus on personal satisfaction, relationship satisfaction has also become a prime factor influencing whether couples remain in a committed relationship or not. Relationship satisfaction, furthermore, is a key indicator to relationship researchers of a couple’s intimacy levels (Bumpass, 2002). It appears to follow a U-shaped pattern over time, with high relationship satisfaction at the start of the relationship, then a decline over the first four years of marriage, followed again by a rapid decline after eight years of marriage, and an increase in satisfaction over later years (Glenn, 1991; Kurdek, 1999). Researchers conclude that various factors appear to be influencing relationship satisfaction, including couple identity, continual interest in the partner, participation and enjoyment of mutual activities, positive problem solving, positive emotional expression, maintaining a work-family balance, shared domestic labour tasks, helpfulness and support, humour, de-escalation of negativity, positive attributions and an accurate recognition of specific qualities in the partner (e.g., Cropley, 2005; Cryder, 1998; Gottman et al., 2003; Kurdek, 1994; Neff & Karney, 2005; Story, 2005; Turner, 2003).

Patterson (1991) also found that satisfied couples would display specific positive nonverbal behaviour during communication, including gazing, body openness, and touching and body positions indicative of closeness. Communicating effectively would also contribute to enhanced closeness and greater understanding, as well as greater relationship satisfaction. Partners in the relationship might have different levels of relationship satisfaction and Clasen (1999) indicates that these asymmetric couples express less positive emotions than more satisfied couples. Couples in stable relationships, who are dissatisfied, are more adaptive in terms of coping with change.

They are also inclined to focus on their unity and the positive aspects of their relationship (Wall, 2000). In contrast, dissatisfied, but unstable, couples are more likely to dissolve their relationships. Factors such as critical life events, jealousy, betrayal, boredom, conflict, differential personal growth rates, unrealistic expectations, substance dependence and psychological disorders are more likely to increase the probability of dissolution. In 2005, 10,000 divorces were granted in New Zealand (Pink, 2006), and the divorce rate (number of divorces per 1,000 marriages) have decreased slightly from 13.2 in 2004 to 12.4 in 2005, which is comparable to Australian (13.1 in 2001) and United Kingdom (14.0 in 2003) divorce rates (Pink, 2005).

Attachment originates and develops through the interplay between nature (biology) and nurture (experience): The infant is naturally motivated to seek closeness, and the attachment figure instinctively protects, and through repetition specific attachment behaviours are learned (Levy & Orlans, 2003). Ainsworth's research on parent-infant relationships determined three types of attachment behavioural patterns: Secure, anxious-ambivalent (preoccupied), and avoidant (Ainsworth et al., 1978). This research has been carried forward to adult attachments in intimate relationships, and Hazan and Shaver (1987) developed comparable typologies for adults. Similar to the parent-infant relationship, the adult attachment bond includes four defining normative processes including proximity maintenance, separation distress, and viewing the attachment figure as a safe haven and secure base (Collins & Feeney, 2004).

Attachment styles are evident in behavioural repertoires, for example preoccupied and securely attached individuals exhibit communication behaviour that encourages intimacy, whereas avoidant individuals' behaviour are characterized by withdrawal and detachment (Guerrero, 1996). Securely attached individuals also indicate greater relationship satisfaction than either the anxious-ambivalent (preoccupied) or avoidant groups (Stackert & Bursik, 2005). At the dyadic level interaction effects have been identified for attachment, particularly with regard to positive affect and negotiation (Wampler et al., 2005). Some research also suggests that the final attachment style that couples experience are a result of parent by partner attachment interaction, and that an individual's predisposed attachment style can be altered by a partner's attachment style (Le Poire et al., 1997). In a number of dyads the positive effects of

secure attachment and the negative effects of insecure attachments have also been found to either be amplified or attenuated depending on the nature of the partner's attachment. For example, husband's preoccupied attachment was found to be linked with low relationship satisfaction for both partners, even with the presence of a secure wife (Banse, 2004).

Building on previous research (e.g., La Guardia, Ryan, Couchman, & Deci, 2000; Mikulincer & Arrad, 1999; Pierce & Lydon, 2001) Overall and her colleagues (Overall, Fletcher & Friesen, 2003) researched the manner in which the adult attachment system is cognitively represented. They found that it consists of a multilevel network of attachment representations, including global and specific attachment models (see Figure 1, p. 32). This model is consistent with the notion that different relationship domains serve separate attachment purposes. Cozzarelli et al. (2000) found that partner-specific attachment models are associated with relationship-specific variables, such as relationship satisfaction. Pierce and Lydon (2001) also suggest that global models of attachment would shape individual's general inclination toward positive or negative relationship-specific models with other attachment figures.

Human relationships form the basis of emotional well-being and healthy development, and attachments are at the heart of these relationships (Levy & Orlans, 2003). Conflict threatens the attachment bond and creates a predicament. The person, who the individual usually approach when he/she is upset, now becomes a threat. Attachment styles dictate to a large extent conflict resolution behaviour, and research indicates that securely attached people use integrating conflict behaviour, are less rejecting and more supportive, fight less and argue more effectively (e.g., Bippus & Rollin, 2003; Pistole & Arricale, 2003). The manner in which a couple deals with their conflict indicates their conflict beliefs and whether they believe that conflict is threatening, or a signal for readjustment of their relational bonds. Secures tend to make less maladaptive attributions, whereas preoccupied and avoidant individuals tend to view conflict as threatening (Pistole & Arricale). Research has also signified that couples who regularly use positive problem solving and occasionally employ conflict engagement and withdrawal experienced greater relationship satisfaction (e.g., Du Plessis, 2001; Kurdek, 1994).

Various factors can exacerbate conflict, including situational stress, resentment, criticism, illegitimate demand, rebuff and cumulative annoyance (Peterson, 1979; 1983). Conflict behaviour such as reciprocating negative behaviour, complaining, contempt, defensiveness and withdrawal has been found to be particularly detrimental to a relationship (Gottman, 1994; Gottman & Silver, 1999). Poor conflict resolution skills (previously blamed as the undoing of many relationships, and consequently the focus of many couple therapy programs) have recently been found to be detrimental to a relationship only when accompanied by low levels of positive affect (Bradbury & Karney, 2004). Poor conflict resolution is a factor that has been identified as potentially contributing to domestic violence. However, various other factors such as poverty, large age differences, marital status, presence of children from previous relationships, conflict in the family of origin, stress and coping abilities, jealousy and controlling behaviours, as well as poor anger management, have been linked to a higher likelihood of domestic violence (e.g., Lawrence, 2002; Magdol et al., 1998; Wilson et al., 1995).

Miscommunication increases the likelihood of conflict taking place and escalating, and decreases the likelihood that satisfactory outcome will be reached. Distressed couples tend to view their partner's messages more negatively than intended, and also tend to focus on negative aspects of their relational partner, or relational events (Fincham, 2001; Gottman et al., 1976). Communicating competently, effectively and appropriately contributes to relational partners understanding each other more intimately, and contributes to couples managing their conflict more proficiently. Integrating conflict styles are associated with competent communication, and are also viewed as more appropriate and effective than dominating or avoiding styles (Gross & Guerrero, 2000; McKinney et al, 1997). Communication accuracy indicates that the receiver attaches the same emotional meaning to the message that the sender intended (Van Buren, 2002). Communicating accurately, and in particular accurate decoding, has been associated with relationship satisfaction. Husbands, specifically, have been found to be more adept at decoding positive affect (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002). In terms of accuracy linked to specific communication channels, it has also been found that a sender's words correlate significantly with receiver impact, while a sender's facial expressions and tone of voice do not (Van Buren).

A variety of factors contribute to the development of gender differences seen in the literature on marital research, ranging from biological and evolutionary influences (nature), as well as social influences (nurture), to Halpern's notion (2000) of a psychobiosocial perspective which attempts to bridge the nature versus nurture argument. Research also indicates that, to a greater or lesser degree, gender differences are apparent in the context of relationships, and this is evident during communication (e.g., the demand-withdraw pattern) and in the manner that a couple is attached to one another (e.g., Le Poire et al., 1997). For example, Pratt (2005) found that wives' current attachment representations of their partners were related to their perceptions of relationship satisfaction, although this was not true for husbands. These differences are also apparent with regards to conflict resolution behaviour, and researchers have found that husbands' positive problem solving was significantly correlated to their own relationship satisfaction. Wives also had a significant correlation between positive problem solving and relationship satisfaction, but to a slightly lesser degree (Kurdek, 1994; Marchand, 2004). Although these differences might sometimes be slight, the continued research into this field does contribute to the empirical validation of gender differences that might exist and thereby enhances our understanding of the differences and similarities between men and women (Halpern).

With all the difficulties and expectations that couple relationships face such as gender differences, mutual love, passion, friendship, financial collaboration, domestic cooperation, communication, commitment, relationship maintenance, conflict management and work-life balance, it is a wonder that relationships still survive. However, there is some assistance available for couples experiencing difficulties, in the form of preventative and enhancement programs, or couple therapy approaches. These approaches have been found to have beneficial outcomes for the majority of the people participating in them, and particular gains can be made by distressed couples (Halford et al., 2001). Some couples also have the skills and abilities to maintain their own relationships long term and various strategies such as positivity, openness, assurances, networking, and sharing tasks, are characteristic of satisfied couples (Stafford & Canary, 1991). Respect, reciprocity and acceptance, as well as self-directed goal setting, and self-implementation of change also appear to influence the manner in which couples maintain their relationships long-term (Halford et al., 1994; Harvey & Omarzu, 1999).

This brings to a conclusion the review of relevant literature, and attention now turns to the research conducted in fulfilment of this thesis. Firstly, Study 1 in its entirety will be reviewed in Part II, after which attention turns to Study 2 in Part III. Part IV compares and summarizes the overlapping findings from both Study 1 and 2.

## PART II

The object of statistical science is to discover methods of condensing information concerning large groups of allied facts into brief and compendious expressions suitable for discussion.

*Inquiries into Human Faculty: Statistical Methods* - Francis Galton, 1883

### Study 1: Internet Survey

#### *Aim*

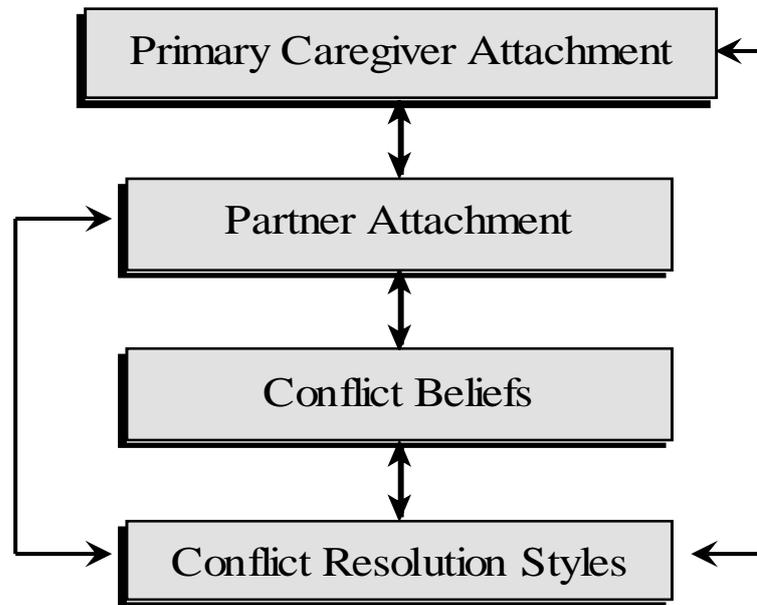
The aim of the first study was to test the degree to which conflict beliefs, conflict styles and relationship satisfaction are different for different attachment styles in couples' relationships.

#### *Contributions of the present study*

This study contributes to the literature on individuals in couple relationships, by verifying the findings from earlier related studies and extending/integrating the findings into a model of attachment. More particularly, the use of online self-report questionnaires attempts to reveal the manner in which attachment styles are related to cognitive processes, such as conflict beliefs, and communication behaviours, such as conflict resolution styles. In addition the focus on primary caregiver and partner attachment adds knowledge as to how these working models impact on current romantic relationships – a line of research that has previously been identified as being in need of development (Paley, Cox, Burchinal, & Payne, 1999).

#### *Hypotheses*

In general the literature indicates that internal working models of attachment have a pervasive influence on individual beliefs and behaviour, and these become particularly salient in the romantic relationship. Many of the hypotheses explored below are based on this notion, and are diagrammatically linked in the following manner (Figure 5):



*Figure 5.* Hypothesized influence of attachment representations on conflict beliefs and conflict resolution styles.

#### *Attachment Configurations and Relationship Satisfaction*

Treboux, Crowell and Waters (2004) found, in their longitudinal study of dating and engaged couples, that more secure-secure individuals (secure primary caregiver attachment, secure partner attachment) reported positive feelings about the relationship, had low levels of relationship conflict, and also had the highest quality (observed) secure base. They also found that individuals with a secure primary caregiver attachment and an insecure partner attachment reported more relationship dissatisfaction than individuals with an insecure primary caregiver and insecure partner attachment. Grich (2002) found that individuals with an insecure parental attachment and secure partner attachment, or what is termed ‘earned security’, would have relationship satisfaction scores comparable to secure-secure individuals. Treboux et al. (2004) however, found a mixed combination of results for individuals with earned security, in that some individuals were not regarding their relationships positively during periods of stress, whereas others who were not experiencing any relational stress viewed their relationship very favourably. Based upon these findings the following hypothesis attempts to distinguish between more and less secure attachments to the primary caregiver and romantic partner.

*Hypothesis 1.*

Individuals endorsing a ‘*more secure-more secure*’ attachment style combination (*more secure* primary caregiver and *more secure* partner attachment styles) are expected to have the highest relationship satisfaction compared to other primary caregiver and partner attachment combinations, that is, a ‘*more secure-less secure*’ attachment style (*more secure* primary caregiver, *less secure* partner attachment), a ‘*less secure-more secure*’ attachment style (*less secure* primary caregiver and *more secure* partner), and a ‘*less secure-less secure*’ attachment style (*less secure* primary caregiver attachment and *less secure* partner attachment).

*Partner Attachment and Relationship Satisfaction*

Cozzarelli, Hoekstra and Bylsma (2000) found that partner attachment is related to relationship-specific outcomes such as relationship satisfaction. Stackert and Bursik (2003) recently found that secure attachment to one’s partner meant that individuals indicated a higher level of relationship satisfaction than either the anxious-ambivalent (preoccupied) or avoidant group. These differences suggest the following relationship:

*Hypothesis 2.*

Secure partner attachment will be positively correlated with relationship satisfaction, whereas preoccupied or avoidant partner attachment will be negatively related to relationship satisfaction.

*Secure Primary Caregiver and Secure Partner Attachment*

In Treboux et al.’s recent study (2004) they found that a secure generalized presentation (which they define as the attachment to the primary caregiver) was likely to be associated with a somewhat greater likelihood of having a secure conceptualisation of the current relationship. In line with this, Owens and her colleagues (1995) found that secure attachment style with the primary caregiver correlated weakly (approximately .29) with a secure attachment style to the partner (Owens et al., 1995).

*Hypothesis 3.*

Secure partner attachment and secure primary caregiver attachment will have a weak to moderate positive correlation.

*Attachment and Conflict Beliefs*

In terms of believing that arguing is beneficial, Pistole and Arricale (2003) found no differences among the various attachment styles of secure, preoccupied or avoidant. However, securely attached individuals have been found to report less maladaptive attributions than insecurely attached individuals (Sümer & Cozzarelli, 2004), preoccupied individuals or avoidant individuals (Stackert & Bursik, 2003). These differences suggest the following relationships:

*Hypothesis 4.*

Correlations between the secure, preoccupied and avoidant styles of partner attachment and the belief that arguing is beneficial are expected to be positive and similar.

Individuals with a preoccupied or avoidant adult attachment style have been found to endorse more relationship specific irrational beliefs than those with a secure attachment to their partner (Stackert & Bursik, 2003). In their research Pistole and Arricale (2003) found that avoidantly attached individuals view arguing as threatening to their attachment. Pistole and Arricale furthermore found in their study that individuals with preoccupied attachment perceived conflict as an attachment threat and were also more concerned with closeness than secure or avoidant individuals. Further research has indicated that preoccupied individuals are expected to believe that conflict would have negative consequences for their relationships (Campbell et al., 2005). This is based on the notion that preoccupied individuals, having received inconsistent or deficient support from their primary caregivers, have developed low thresholds for perceiving threats to proximity maintenance, and would as a result be highly concerned with closeness (Campbell et al.; Simpson & Rholes, 1994). Stackert and Bursik furthermore found that, for women, beliefs that arguing is threatening was associated with relationship dissatisfaction.

*Hypotheses 5.*

5a) Secure partner attachment will be negatively associated with the belief that arguing is threatening to the relationship.

5b) Avoidant partner attachment will be positively associated with the belief that arguing is threatening to the relationship.

5c) Preoccupied partner attachment will be positively associated with the belief that arguing is a threat to the relationship.

*Hypothesis 6.*

Women's belief that arguing is threatening will be negatively associated with relationship satisfaction.

*Hypotheses 7.*

7a) Individuals with 'more secure-more secure' combinations of attachment styles (*more* secure primary caregiver attachment, and *more* secure partner attachment) are expected to believe more strongly than other attachment groups that arguing is beneficial.

7b) The '*less* secure-*less* secure group' are expected to believe more strongly than other groups that arguing is threatening.

*Attachment and Conflict Resolution Styles*

Happy couples have been found to have predispositions to productively manage their conflict, whereas distressed couples have been found to exhibit higher aggressiveness that lessens their ability to manage conflict constructively (Yelsma, 1981). Research has also indicated that couples who frequently used positive problem solving and infrequently used conflict engagement and withdrawal, reported high relationship satisfaction (Du Plessis, 2001; Kurdek, 1994). Previous research has indicated that adults with secure working models of attachment use more positive and less negative behaviour in romantic relationships when contrasted with insecure adults (Creasy, 2002). Securely attached individuals are, according to Pistole (1989), more prone to using an integrative conflict strategy, and as a result also report higher relationship satisfaction. Pistole also found that preoccupied individuals were more likely than the

avoidant group to oblige to their partner's wishes. In this respect she comments that: "Compromise could function as a way of dismissing distress by focusing on the environment, i.e. on goals, while simultaneously satisfying the attachment need to maintain contact" (p. 509). No particular conflict styles emerged for preoccupied individuals in Creasy's study (2002). However, Corcoran and Mallinckrodt (2000) suggests that preoccupied individuals would, in contrast to what one would naturally assume in favouring a compliant conflict style, be prone to avoiding conflict. In addition Bushman (1998), who researched specific conflict beliefs, found that destructive conflict behaviour was linked to two particular irrational beliefs in both men and women, namely "disagreement is destructive" and "people cannot change". This is in line with Albert Ellis' notion (1962) that emotional distress is often based on the acceptance of core irrational beliefs, that depart from logical and reality based assumptions, and that lead to self-defeating behaviour.

*Hypotheses 8.*

- 8a) Secure partner attachment will be positively correlated with utilizing positive problem solving styles most frequently in conflict situations.
- 8b) Preoccupied partner attachment will not be significantly correlated with any particular conflict resolution style.
- 8c) Avoidant partner attachment will be positively correlated with withdrawal.

*Hypotheses 9.*

- 9a) 'More secure-more secure' attachment style configurations (*more* secure primary caregiver attachment, and *more* secure partner attachment) are expected to apply positive problem solving more frequently in their conflict resolution, than other attachment configurations.
- 9b) Individuals with configurations of '*less* secure-*less* secure' attachment styles are expected to apply conflict engagement, withdrawal and compliance more frequently in their conflict resolution, than other attachment configurations.
- 9c) The belief that arguing is threatening is expected to be correlated with withdrawal, compliance and conflict engagement, whereas the belief that arguing is beneficial is expected to be linked to positive problem solving.

### *Intergenerational Effect of Divorce on Offspring*

Previous research has indicated that parental divorce has an intergenerational impact on the relationships of their children, to the extent where they are more prone to divorce (Amato, 1996), and display higher conflict rates, withdrawal and negative nonverbal behaviours (e.g., Levy, Wamboldt, & Fiese, 1997; Sanders, Halford, & Behrens, 1999).

#### *Hypothesis 10.*

Parental divorce will be positively related to withdrawal as a conflict resolution style.

## Method

### *Methodological considerations*

This study was presented to participants via the Internet. Krantz and Dalal (2000) report that there appears to be congruence between laboratory and Web-based results across a wide range of designs and variables. More recently, Fouladi, McCarthy and Moller (2002) conducted a study on emotional functioning and attachment in a sample of college students, and compared paper-and-pencil versions of the study with a web-based version. Despite subtle differences, they found mostly similarities between the two different modes of survey administration, and conclude that these results attest to the viability of using Internet surveys in particular for assessing attachment phenomena, but also more generally for assessing other psychological phenomena (Fouladi et al., 2002). An increasingly popular method of survey delivery (Peden & Flashinski, 2004), online surveys have become a new tool for data collection from participants, that according to Krantz and Dalal (2000) go “well beyond using introductory psychology students, phone and mail surveys, and the exhausting effort of soliciting subjects from the community” (p. 36). Previous research has indicated that means and range on Likert type responses were very similar for web-based and paper-and-pencil questionnaires (e.g., Kiesler & Sproull, 1986; Mehta & Sivadas, 1995; Smith & Leigh, 1997). In addition, faster response times and fewer expenses for web-based surveys have also been reported (Krantz & Dalal). Internet samples, in general, also allow for greater sample diversity and a greater number of respondents,

compared to other methods of data collection (Davis, Shaver, & Vernon, 2003; Weiss, 2005). All these factors together contributed to the decision to utilize this method of data collection.

### *Participants*

Eighty-three individual participants were recruited through advertisements in the local media (i.e., Auckland community newspapers) and through flyers on university notice boards, and were asked to participate in an online questionnaire. The study focussed on the responses of one partner to the questionnaire, thus presenting one partner's perspective of the relational process. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Participants were alerted to the fact that their participation constituted consent, and also constituted consent to publication of results, with the understanding that anonymity was to be preserved. Both married and cohabiting individuals were included in the study, as there appears to be no empirical evidence that proposes differences in the variables of interest to this study on the marital status of couples.

Of the 83 participants, 63 were female (see Table 1, p. 120) and the mean age for the sample was 36.5 ( $SD = 11.22$ ) years. At a minimum level participants were required to currently cohabit in a heterosexual relationship of at least 6 month duration, and the mean length of relationships was 129.5 months ( $SD = 124.75$ ), with the maximum being 496.6 months (approximately 41 years), as can be seen in Table 2 (p. 120). The majority of the participants were in marital relationships (65.1%), with the mean length of marital relationships totalling 105 months. Approximately half of the sample had children with their current partner (52%). The majority of the participants (63%) reported that their conflicts spiral out of control verbally, whilst the remainder reported that their conflict did not spiral out of control either verbally or physically (37%). Thus no participants reported physical abuse in the sample.

A small percentage of the sample grew up in single families (5%), whereas 28% indicated that their parents/primary caregivers were divorced or separated, leaving the majority of the participants to grow up in families with both parents or primary caregivers present (68%). Most participants indicated their mother as primary caregiver (87%), whereas some indicated their father (8%), or other, for example, nanny/governess. By dividing the 83 participants into three partner attachment styles according to the category in which they had the highest score, (1) Secure individuals

constituted 81% of the sample ( $n = 67$ ), (2) Preoccupied individuals constituted 18% of the sample ( $n = 15$ ), and (3) Avoidant participants constituted 1 % of the sample ( $n = 1$ ).

The majority of the sample was of New Zealand European descent (65%), with some Maori participants (4%), and other participants totalling 31% (e.g., Belgian, Sri Lankan, Indian, European, British, American, and South African). Full time employed participants totalled 54%, whereas 36% were not employed full time, or fell in another category (including retired, full time students, part time workers, unemployed or full time homemakers).

Table 1

*Demographic Data (categorical) – Study 1 (N = 83)*

Demographic variables	Frequency	%
Gender		
Female	63	75.9
Male	20	24.1
Marital status		
Married	54	65.1
Cohabiting	29	34.9
Children		
Children with current partner	43	51.8
No children with current partner	40	48.2
Primary caregiver		
Mother	72	86.7
Father	7	8.4
Other	4	4.8
Parents divorced/separated		
Parents not divorced/separated	56	67.5
Parents divorced/separated	23	27.7
Grew up in single parent family	4	4.8
Ethnicity		
New Zealand European	54	65.1
Maori	3	3.6
Other (e.g., European, Indian etc.)	26	31.3
Employment		
Employed full time	45	54.2
Not employed full time	30	36.1
(Missing data)	(8)	(9.6)

Table 2

*Demographic Data: Age and Months Lived Together (N = 83)*

Descriptives	Age	Months lived together
Mean	36.53	129.50
Standard deviation	11.22	124.75
Range	49.58	490.60
Minimum	20.00	6.00
Maximum	69.58	496.60

## *Measures*

### *a) Background Information Form.*

The researcher designed this questionnaire to assess the demographic variables of participants and to allow for proper description of the sample. Participants were questioned on their gender, age, ethnicity, duration of relationship, marital status, children, employment, primary caregiver, and whether their parents/primary caregivers were divorced or separated. The Background Information Questions can be found in Appendix 2.

### *b) Parent and Partner Attachment Scale.*

Participants completed a relationship attachment scale developed by Le Poire et al. (1997), which measures secure, preoccupied and dismissively avoidant attachment styles on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). The scale measures the individuals' current perspectives of childhood attachment (Parent Attachment Scale), as well as current perspectives of attachment to their romantic partner (Partner Attachment Scale). Secure partner attachment (12 items) included items such as (1) "I believe that my partner is capable of unconditional positive regard", and (2) "My partner is always there for me in times of crisis". The secure subscale had an internal consistency reliability coefficient of .88 (Cronbach's alpha). Preoccupied attachment (16 items) included items such as (1) "Much of my time is spent thinking about my partner", and (2) "I have repeated thoughts about what I have recently done with my partner". The preoccupied attachment subscale had an alpha reliability coefficient of .69. The dismissively avoidant style (4 items) included items such as (1) "I find my outside activities more stimulating than I find my relationship with my partner", and (2) "When I start feeling 'too close' to my partner, I spend a lot of time in activities outside my relationship". The dismissively avoidant subscale obtained an alpha reliability coefficient of .75. The parental subscale asks attachment-related questions about the primary caregiver, and includes a role reversal and secure primary caregiver attachment subscale. Role reversal was comprised of 17 items, including "S/he depended on me to make household decisions", and had an alpha value of .86. The secure attachment (primary caregiver) included 18 questions (e.g., "When s/he left me, I felt confident that s/he would return") and had an alpha reliability coefficient of .95. The Parent and Partner Attachment Scale can be found in Appendix 3.

*c) Conflict Resolution Style Inventory.*

The Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory (CRSI) is a 16-item self-report questionnaire that measures the participant's frequency (1 = never to 5 = always) of engaging in certain conflict resolution styles with their partner (Kurdek, 1994). The 16 items are divided into four categories of conflict resolution styles: Positive Problem Solving (CRSI-PPS), Conflict Engagement (CRSI-CENG), Withdrawal (CRSI-WDRL), and Compliance (CRSI-COMPL), and the scale is based on behavioural observations of conflict resolution by Gottman and Krokoff (1989). The CRSI scales have been linked to changes in relationship satisfaction (Gottman, 1994). The CRSI has good internal consistency, good concurrent-related and predictive criteria-related validity, and test-retest correlations spanning a 1-year period ranged from .46 to .83. (Kurdek). For the present study, alpha values ranged from .69 to .85. The CRSI can be found in Appendix 4. An additional question was added to the CRSI to gauge whether participants experienced their interactions getting out of control in a verbal and/or physical manner: "In what manner do you explode and get out of control? (Verbally/Physically)". This question was also used to test the incidence of physical abuse in the sample's relationships.

*d) Feelings about Conflict Scale.*

A questionnaire that was recently developed by Pistole and Arricale (2003) was used to explore attachment-related reactions to conflict. Participants were asked to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with 33 statements regarding their intimate relationships by using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). Pistole and Arricale conducted a factor analysis on the Feelings about Conflict scale and found that three factors accounted for 42.7 % of the variance. In the current study factor one, "Arguing is Threatening" (e.g., "During conflict, I often have to defend myself") yielded an internal consistency reliability of .93. Factor two, "Arguing is Beneficial", (e.g., "Our conflicts seem to bring us closer together"), had a reliability of .89. Factor three, "Concern with Closeness", (e.g., "During arguments, I am most concerned with re-establishing close feelings, even when I feel angry"), had a reliability of .48, and was excluded from all analyses. Pistole and Arricale furthermore found with post-hoc Scheffe tests that individuals who endorsed secure attachments reported significantly lower levels of beliefs that arguing is threatening,

than did those endorsing preoccupied or avoidant attachment. Fearfully attached persons were thus found to respond to the attachment threat by distancing themselves and this in turn supports their belief that arguing is threatening to the relationship. The Feelings about Conflict Scale can be found in Appendix 5.

*e) Relationship Satisfaction.*

A single question from the 3-item Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMSS) (Schumm et al., 1986) was used. The question “How satisfied are you with your relationship?” was rated by participants on a scale ranging from 1 (extremely dissatisfied) to 7 (extremely satisfied). Previous research (Schumm et al., 1985; Schumm et al., 1986) with the KMSS has shown the scale’s strong psychometric properties in terms of concurrent and criterion-related validity. The relationship satisfaction question was used in this study to assess the individual’s perceived overall level of relationship satisfaction and can be found in Appendix 6.

*Procedure*

Participants were given information related to the study and their participation prior to participating in the study, as can be seen in Appendix 1. Full ethics approval was obtained from the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, prior to the study being conducted. To participate, respondents were required to be involved in a committed, heterosexual relationship of 6 months, or longer. Participation involved one partner in an intimate relationship completing the questionnaire through an online survey hosting company ([www.studentresearcher.com](http://www.studentresearcher.com)). This provided a ‘snapshot’ view of the relevant relationship variables as experienced by one relational partner.

Various announcements in the local media, through advertisements and email mailing lists advertised the study. Participation was anonymous, and questionnaire responses did not include any identifying information. Participants were prompted to send the researcher a separate email if they wanted to receive a summary of the study’s results. The questionnaire took approximately 30 minutes to complete and upon completion participants were given a debriefing statement (deemed as courteous web-survey protocol - Mueller, Jacobson, & Schwarzer, 2000), and were thanked for their time and participation.

### *Data preparation and analysis*

Data analysis was determined by the hypotheses outlined above as well as the general aim of Study 1: To test whether, and to what degree, attachment styles have a pervasive influence on individuals in couple relationships, specifically in regard to their conflict beliefs, conflict styles and relationship satisfaction.

Data analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for Windows Version 13. Pearson product-moment correlations ( $r$ ), Spearman rank correlation coefficients ( $r_s$ ), and Kendall's rank correlation coefficient ( $\tau$ ) tested the significance of relationships between the variables of interest in the hypotheses, and, where appropriate, between-group differences were shown with Kruskal-Wallis and Mann-Whitney tests. Correlational analyses indicated the strength and direction of the linear relationships between the variables of interest (Howell, 2004).

Nonparametric tests were deemed appropriate where variables were not normally distributed, even after attempting transformation (Coakes, 2006; Dancey & Reedy, 2004). These include the Kruskal-Wallis one-way analysis of variance test (nonparametric variant of ANOVA), the Mann-Whitney test (comparing the central tendency of two independent samples), and Spearman's rho for nonparametric correlational analyses.

In following Treboux et al.'s (2004) methodology for analysing attachment related measures, attachment was used differently in various analyses to best demonstrate the resulting relationships and to compare it with the relevant literature. For correlational analyses attachment was used as a continuous variable, which allows for understanding which components of one's attachment relate to a specific factor (as argued by Collins & Read, 1990). For between group comparisons secure parental attachment was used as a dichotomous *more* secure-*less* secure classification, as was secure partner attachment. This was achieved by median split of secure primary caregiver attachment, and secure partner attachment. This dichotomous split is analogous to the manner in which Treboux et al. grouped participants either as secure or insecure on partner and parent attachment, and attempts to illustrate the differences within the largely secure sample between *more* and *less* securely attached individuals.

## Results

The results section sets out to look at the preliminary analyses of data, followed by the occurrence of attachment categories, as well as attachment configurations in the sample. Relevant analyses follows for each of the 10 hypotheses, which in turn leads to a summary of correlational relationships and further relevant analyses.

Prior to conducting inferential analyses the data were examined for assumptions of normality. To render a more complete data set 14 missing values were identified and replaced with linear trend at point values to keep the cases in the analysis. Twelve outliers were identified, and their influence was minimized by replacing their values with a value of three standard deviations from the mean (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). This rendered a complete sample of 83 participants. Shapiro Wilk's tests of normality in SPSS revealed that some variables (Avoidant Partner Attachment, Length of Relationship, Conflict Engagement, Withdrawal and Compliance) were not normally distributed, and logarithmic transformations were applied (Tabachnick & Fidell). Additional variables (Secure Partner Attachment, Secure Parent Attachment) remained not normally distributed even upon attempting to transform these variables. As assumptions and statistical conclusions based on lack of normality could be false (Howell, 2004), it was deemed appropriate to use nonparametric or distribution-free statistical tests, such as the Kruskal-Wallis and the Mann-Whitney test, as well as Spearman's rho, where these variables were concerned.

In total 41 participants were classed as more securely attached to their partners, whereas 42 participants were classed as less securely attached to their partners. Attachment to primary caregivers was the same: 41 participants were classed as more securely attached, whereas 42 were classed as having a less secure current conceptualisation of their attachment to their primary caregivers. This resulted in participants presenting with either more secure/less secure attachment to their primary caregivers and more secure/less secure attachment to their partners, and four attachment combinations (with the first word in each combination representing primary caregiver attachment, and the second, partner attachment): *more secure-more secure*, *less secure-more secure*, *more secure-less secure* and *less secure-less secure*.

### *Occurrence of Attachment Categories and Relationship Satisfaction in Sample*

By dividing the 83 participants in the current study into three partner attachment styles, according to the category in which they had the highest score, the present study resulted in (1) 80.7 % securely attached individuals ( $n = 67$ ), (2) 18.1% preoccupied individuals ( $n = 15$ ), and (3) 1.2% avoidantly attached individuals ( $n = 1$ ). All participants were satisfied with their romantic relationships (to varying degrees of satisfaction – slightly satisfied, satisfied or very satisfied).

### *Primary Caregiver and Partner Attachment Configurations*

Treboux et al. (2004) in their study on engaged and married couples found that the majority of the participants (41.9%) presented with insecure-insecure attachment configurations (insecure primary caregiver, and insecure partner attachments). In terms of proportions this was followed by the secure-secure group (26.8%), then the secure-insecure group (16.2%), and the smallest proportion was made up by the insecure-secure group (15.1%).

The majority of the participants in the present study endorsed a ‘less secure-less secure’ attachment style combination (33.7%), followed by a ‘more secure-more secure’ attachment style combination (31.3%), then a ‘more secure-less secure’ attachment style combination (18.1%) and lastly a ‘less secure-more secure’ attachment style combination (16.9%). The observed frequencies were not significantly different from the frequencies for a comparable sample (Treboux et al., 2004),  $\chi^2(3, N = 374) = 1.19, p < .05$ .

### *Hypotheses testing*

The following hypotheses were tested:

#### *Hypothesis 1.*

Individuals endorsing a ‘more secure-more secure’ attachment style combination (*more* secure primary caregiver and *more* secure partner attachment styles) are expected to have the highest relationship satisfaction compared to other primary caregiver and partner attachment combinations, that is, a ‘more secure-less secure’ attachment style (*more* secure primary

caregiver, *less* secure partner attachment), a '*less* secure-*more* secure' attachment style (*less* secure primary caregiver and *more* secure partner), and a '*less* secure-*less* secure' attachment style (*less* secure primary caregiver attachment and *less* secure partner attachment).

A Kruskal-Wallis test of the significance of the differences in mean ranks (Table 3) revealed that there were significant differences between the four attachment configuration groups ('*more* secure-*more* secure', '*less* secure-*more* secure', '*more* secure-*less* secure', '*less* secure-*less* secure') on relationship satisfaction  $\chi^2(3, N = 83) = 8.19, p < .05$ . No significant gender or lengths of relationship differences were found between the groups. Post-hoc Mann-Whitney tests showed that the '*less* secure-*more* secure group' ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 51.14$ ) was significantly more satisfied than the '*more* secure-*less* secure group' ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 33.60$ ),  $U = 61, z = -2.30, p < .05$ , and the '*less* secure-*less* secure group' ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 37.54$ ),  $U = 130, z = -2.09, p < .05$ . For effect sizes, the  $z$  scores revealed that the differences between the expected mean differences between the '*less* secure-*more* secure group' and the '*more* secure-*less* secure group', as well as between the '*less* secure-*more* secure group' and the '*less* secure-*less* secure group', were more than 2 standard deviations on relationship satisfaction.

Table 3

*Mean ranks of attachment style combinations (N = 83) on relationship satisfaction*

Variable	Attachment combination style	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Mean rank
Relationship satisfaction	More secure-more secure	26	6.69	.62	46.73
	Less secure-more secure	14	6.21	.80	51.14
	More secure-less secure	15	6.87	.35	33.60
	Less secure-less secure	28	6.42	.69	37.54

Table 4

*Correlation Table<sup>1</sup> for Partner Attachment, Primary Caregiver Attachment, Conflict Resolution Styles and Conflict Beliefs (N = 83)*

Variables	Gender ( $\tau$ )	Length of relationship	Relationship satisfaction	Secure partner attachment ( $r_s$ )	Preoccupied	
					partner attachment	Avoidant partner attachment
Gender ( $\tau$ )	-	-	-	-.07	-.20	.10
Length of relationship	-.03	-	-	-.09	-.05	.00
Relationship satisfaction	.00	-.08	-	.31**	-.12	-.20
Secure primary caregiver attachment ( $r_s$ )	-.07	-.14	-.13	.43**	.22*	-.15
Role-reversed primary caregiver attachment	.04	.11	-.05	-.41**	-.14	.14
Conflict resolution styles						
Positive problem solving	-.00	.03	.06	.37**	.18	-.52**
Conflict engagement	.04	-.02	-.16	-.24*	-.15	.52**
Withdrawal	.07	-.03	-.04	-.23*	-.19	.60**
Compliance	-.06	.23*	.03	-.31**	.13	.22*
Conflict beliefs						
Arguing is threatening	-.07	-.03	-.27*	-.70**	-.21	.54**
Arguing is beneficial	-.12	-.16	.06	.52**	.19	-.37**

*Note.*<sup>1</sup> Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients for all variables, except gender (Kendall's rank correlation coefficient,  $\tau$ ), secure partner attachment (Spearman rank correlation coefficient,  $r_s$ ) and secure primary caregiver attachment (Spearman rank correlation coefficient,  $r_s$ ). \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , 1-tailed with Bonferroni corrections.

In general, all of the 83 participants were slightly satisfied, satisfied or very satisfied with their relationships. Table 4 (p. 128) illustrates the correlational relationships between the relevant variables for the following hypotheses. The partner and primary caregiver attachment scales were used as continuous variables for the analyses below. Secure attachment to partner and primary caregiver were not normally distributed and therefore Spearman rank correlation coefficients ( $r_s$ ) were used.

*Hypothesis 2.*

Secure partner attachment will be positively correlated with relationship satisfaction, whereas preoccupied or avoidant partner attachment will be negatively related to relationship satisfaction.

A Spearman rank correlation coefficient indicated that secure attachment was positively correlated with relationship satisfaction ( $r_s = .31, p < .01$ ). Pearson product-moment correlations indicated that preoccupied attachment was slightly negatively associated with relationship satisfaction ( $r = -.12, ns$ ), and avoidant attachment was also negatively associated with relationship satisfaction ( $r = -.20, ns$ ).

*Hypothesis 3.*

Secure partner attachment and secure primary caregiver attachment will have a weak to moderate positive correlation.

A Spearman rank correlation coefficient indicated that there was a significant moderate positive correlation between secure partner attachment and secure primary caregiver attachment ( $r_s = .43, p < .01$ ).

*Hypothesis 4.*

Correlations between the secure, preoccupied and avoidant styles of partner attachment and the belief that arguing is beneficial are expected to be positive and similar.

As can be seen in Table 4, secure attachment was significantly associated with the belief that arguing is beneficial ( $r_s = .52, p < .01$ ), whereas preoccupied attachment

was not significantly associated with the belief that arguing is beneficial ( $r = .19, ns$ ). Avoidant attachment was negatively associated with the belief that arguing is beneficial ( $r = -.37, p < .01$ ). Thus, only secure attachment was significantly positively related to the belief that arguing is beneficial, whereas avoidant attachment was negatively associated with the belief that arguing is beneficial.

*Hypotheses 5.*

5a) Secure partner attachment will be negatively associated with the belief that arguing is threatening to the relationship.

5b) Avoidant partner attachment will be positively associated with the belief that arguing is threatening to the relationship.

5c) Preoccupied partner attachment will be positively associated with the belief that arguing is a threat to the relationship.

5a) As can be seen in Table 4 (p. 128), the Spearman rank correlation coefficient showed that there was a strong negative association between secure attachment and the belief that arguing is threatening to a relationship ( $r_s = -.70, p < .01$ ).

5b) The Pearson product-moment correlation (in Table 4, p. 128) indicated that avoidant attachment was positively associated with the belief that arguing is threatening ( $r = .54, p < .01$ ).

5c) Although not significant, the Pearson product-moment correlation showed that preoccupied attachment was negatively related to the belief that arguing is threatening to a relationship ( $r = -.21, ns$ ).

*Hypothesis 6.*

Women's belief that arguing is threatening will be negatively associated with relationship satisfaction.

Pearson product-moment correlations showed that the relationship between the belief that arguing is threatening and relationship satisfaction was significant for 63 women ( $r = -.30, p < .05$ ), but not for the 20 men ( $r = -.18, ns$ ).

*Hypotheses 7.*

7a) Individuals with ‘*more secure-more secure*’ combinations of attachment styles (*more secure* primary caregiver attachment, and *more secure* partner attachment) are expected to believe more strongly than other attachment groups that arguing is beneficial.

7b) The ‘*less secure-less secure* group’ are expected to believe more strongly than other groups that arguing is threatening.

7a) A Kruskal-Wallis test of the significance of the differences in mean ranks (Table 5, p. 132) revealed that there were significant differences between the four attachment combination groups (‘*more secure-more secure*’, ‘*less secure-more secure*’, ‘*more secure-less secure*’, ‘*less secure-less secure*’) on the belief that arguing is beneficial,  $\chi^2(3, N = 83) = 16.91, p < .01$ . No significant gender or length of relationship differences was found between the groups. Post-hoc Mann-Whitney tests showed that the ‘*more secure-more secure* group’ ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 55.87$ ) held the belief that arguing is beneficial significantly more strongly than the ‘*less secure-less secure* group’ ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 29.29$ ),  $U = 137.00, z = -3.94, p < .001$ , and the ‘*more secure-less secure* group’ ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 38.90$ ),  $U = 105.50, z = -2.44, p < .05$ . For effect sizes, the  $z$ -scores revealed that the differences between the expected mean differences between the ‘*less secure-more secure* group’ and the ‘*more secure-less secure* group’, as well as between the ‘*less secure-more secure* group’ and the ‘*less secure-less secure* group’, were more than 2 standard deviations for the belief that arguing is beneficial.

7b) A Kruskal-Wallis test of the significance of the differences in mean ranks (Table 5) revealed that there were significant differences between the four attachment combination groups on the belief that arguing is threatening,  $\chi^2(3, N = 83) = 38.97, p < .001$ . Post-hoc Mann-Whitney tests showed that the ‘*less secure-less secure* group’ ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 60.36$ ) held the belief that arguing is threatening significantly more than the ‘*less secure-more secure* group’ ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 24.00$ ),  $U = 32.00, z = -4.40, p < .001$ , and the ‘*more secure-more secure* group’ ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 25.71$ ),  $U = 72.00, z = -5.06, p < .001$ . Furthermore the Mann-Whitney tests showed that the ‘*more secure-less secure* group’ ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 52.77$ ) also held the belief that arguing is threatening significantly more than the ‘*more secure-more secure* group’ ( $M_{\text{rank}} =$

25.71),  $U = 57.50$ ,  $z = -3.73$ ,  $p < .001$ , and the 'less secure-more secure group' ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 24.00$ ),  $U = 23.00$ ,  $z = -3.59$ ,  $p < .001$ . For effect sizes, the  $z$  scores revealed that the differences between the expected mean differences between the 'less secure-less secure group' and the 'less secure-more secure group' as well as the 'more secure-more secure group' were more than 3.5 standard deviations for the belief that arguing is threatening. In addition the differences between the 'more secure-less secure group' and the 'more secure-more secure group', as well as the 'less secure-more secure group' were also more than 3.5 standard deviations for the belief that arguing is threatening.

Table 5

*Mean Ranks for Attachment Style Configurations on Conflict Beliefs (N = 83)*

Conflict beliefs	Attachment combination style	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Mean rank
Arguing is beneficial	More secure-more secure	26	5.27	1.07	55.87
	Less secure-more secure	14	4.30	.95	45.00
	More secure-less secure	15	4.66	.99	38.90
	Less secure-less secure	28	4.01	1.00	29.29
Arguing is threatening	More secure-more secure	26	2.68	.83	25.71
	Less secure-more secure	14	4.11	.99	24.00
	More secure-less secure	15	2.51	.90	52.77
	Less secure-less secure	28	4.41	1.03	60.36

From the results presented in 7(a) and 7(b) it became clear that current conceptualizations of partner attachment were particularly salient in the context of conflict beliefs. By re-combining the attachment configuration groups the mean rank differences became evident (see Table 6).

Table 6

*Mean Ranks for Regrouping of Attachment Configurations on Conflict Beliefs**(N = 83)*

Conflict beliefs	Attachment configurations	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Mean rank
Arguing is beneficial	More secure partner attachment (and more/less secure primary caregiver attachment)	40	2.63	.85	52.06
	Less secure partner attachment (and more/less secure primary caregiver attachment)	43	4.26	1.06	32.64
Arguing is threatening	More secure partner attachment (and more/less secure primary caregiver attachment)	40	5.07	1.08	25.11
	Less secure partner attachment (and more/less secure primary caregiver attachment)	43	4.11	.97	57.71

Additional post-hoc Mann-Whitney tests revealed that the ‘*more* secure partner attachment group’ ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 52.06$ ) held the belief that arguing is beneficial significantly more strongly than the ‘*less* secure partner attachment group’ ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 32.64$ ),  $U = 457.5$ ,  $z = -3.67$ ,  $p < .001$ . Furthermore, the ‘*less* secure partner attachment group’ ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 57.71$ ) held the belief that arguing is threatening significantly more strongly than the ‘*more* secure partner attachment group’ ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 25.11$ ),  $U = 184.5$ ,  $z = -6.16$ ,  $p < .001$ . For large effect sizes, the  $z$ -scores show that the expected mean differences between the two groups’ ranks and the actual mean differences were more than 3 standard deviations.

*Hypotheses 8.*

8a) Secure partner attachment will be positively correlated with utilizing positive problem solving styles most frequently in conflict situations.

8b) Preoccupied partner attachment will not be significantly correlated with any particular conflict resolution style.

8c) Avoidant partner attachment will be positively correlated with withdrawal.

8a) Spearman rank correlation coefficient indicated that there was a significant positive correlation between secure partner attachment and positive problem solving, as can be seen in Table 6 ( $r_s = .37$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

8b) No significant relationship between preoccupied partner attachment and any of the four conflict resolution styles, positive problem solving ( $r = .18, ns$ ), conflict engagement ( $r = -.15, ns$ ), withdrawal ( $r = -.19, ns$ ) or compliance ( $r = .13, ns$ ) were identified. Furthermore, no gender differences were identified between individuals endorsing various conflict resolution styles. However, compliance was positively correlated with length of relationship ( $r = .23, p < .05$ ).

8c) Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients indicated that there was a significant positive relationship between avoidant partner attachment and withdrawal ( $r = .60, p < .01$ ), as well as with conflict engagement ( $r = .52, p < .01$ ). In addition, it was found that avoidant partner attachment was positively correlated with compliance ( $r = .22, p < .05$ ) and negatively correlated with positive problem solving ( $r = -.52, p < .01$ ), as can be seen in Table 4 (p. 128).

#### *Hypotheses 9.*

9a) ‘More secure-more secure’ attachment style configurations (*more* secure primary caregiver attachment, and *more* secure partner attachment) are expected to apply positive problem solving more frequently in their conflict resolution, than other attachment configurations.

9b) Individuals with configurations of ‘less secure-less secure’ attachment styles are expected to apply conflict engagement, withdrawal and compliance more frequently in their conflict resolution, than other attachment configurations.

9c) The belief that arguing is threatening is expected to be correlated with withdrawal, compliance and conflict engagement, whereas the belief that arguing is beneficial is expected to be linked to positive problem solving.

9a) A Kruskal-Wallis test of significance of the differences in mean ranks (Table 7, p. 135) revealed that there were significant differences between the four attachment combination groups on positive problem solving as a conflict resolution style,  $\chi^2(3, N = 83) = 16.14, p < .01$ . In particular, post-hoc Mann-Whitney tests showed that the ‘more secure-more secure combination’ ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 55.02$ ) used positive problem solving significantly more frequently than the ‘less secure-less secure group’ ( $M_{\text{rank}} =$

29.09),  $U = 142.00$ ,  $z = -3.87$ ,  $p < .001$ . No significant gender or length of relationship differences were found between the groups.

9b) A Kruskal-Wallis test identified that only for compliance (not conflict engagement or withdrawal) were there significant differences between the four attachment combination groups,  $\chi^2(3, N = 83) = 16.78$ ,  $p < .01$ . Post-hoc Mann-Whitney tests showed that the ‘less secure-less secure group’ ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 55.59$ ) used compliance significantly more frequently than the ‘more secure-less secure group’ ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 29.47$ ),  $U = 75.00$ ,  $z = -3.50$ ,  $p < .001$ , as well as the ‘more secure-more secure group’ ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 33.33$ ),  $U = 184.50$ ,  $z = -3.14$ ,  $p < .01$ . The less secure-more secure group’ ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 44.36$ ) also used compliance significantly more than the ‘more secure-less secure group’ ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 29.47$ ),  $U = 55.00$ ,  $z = -2.24$ ,  $p < .05$ .

Table 7

*Mean Ranks for Attachment Style Configurations on Conflict Resolution Styles (N = 83)*

Conflict resolution styles	Attachment combination style	n	M	SD	Mean rank
Positive problem solving	More secure-more secure	26	4.30	.63	55.02
	Less secure-more secure	14	3.88	.97	40.36
	More secure-less secure	15	3.90	.72	45.07
	Less secure-less secure	28	3.45	.70	29.09
Conflict engagement	More secure-more secure	26	1.80	.52	41.23
	Less secure-more secure	14	1.80	.84	37.71
	More secure-less secure	15	1.63	.43	37.70
	Less secure-less secure	28	2.09	.94	47.16
Withdrawal	More secure-more secure	26	1.83	.63	34.13
	Less secure-more secure	14	1.96	.91	46.71
	More secure-less secure	15	2.00	.45	40.17
	Less secure-less secure	28	2.25	.87	47.93
Compliance	More secure-more secure	26	1.57	.59	33.33
	Less secure-more secure	14	1.41	.37	44.36
	More secure-less secure	15	1.73	.41	29.47
	Less secure-less secure	28	2.09	.60	55.59

From the results presented in 9(a) and 9(b) it became clear that current conceptualizations of attachment to the primary caregiver were particularly salient in the context of conflict resolution styles. By re-combining the attachment configuration groups the mean rank differences became evident (see Table 8).

Table 8

*Mean Ranks for Regrouping of Attachment Configurations on Conflict Resolution Styles (N = 83)*

Conflict resolution styles	Attachment configurations	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Mean rank
Positive problem solving	More secure primary caregiver attachment (and more/less secure partner attachment)	41	4.16	.77	51.38
	Less secure primary caregiver attachment (and more/less secure partner attachment)	42	3.58	.73	32.85
Compliance	More secure primary caregiver attachment (and more/less secure partner attachment)	41	1.51	.52	31.91
	Less secure primary caregiver attachment (and more/less secure partner attachment)	42	2.00	.56	51.85

Additional post-hoc Mann-Whitney tests revealed that the ‘*more* secure primary caregiver attachment group’ ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 51.38$ ) used positive problem solving significantly more frequently than the ‘*less* secure primary caregiver attachment group’ ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 32.85$ ),  $U = 476.5$ ,  $z = -3.53$ ,  $p < .001$ . However, the ‘*less* secure primary caregiver attachment group’ ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 51.85$ ) used compliance as a conflict resolution style significantly more frequently than the ‘*more* secure primary caregiver attachment group’ ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 31.91$ ),  $U = 447.5$ ,  $z = -3.80$ ,  $p < .001$ . Both effect sizes were large.

9c) Conflict engagement was positively correlated with a belief that arguing is threatening ( $r = .50$ ,  $p < .01$ ), as was withdrawal ( $r = .37$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and compliance ( $r = .34$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Positive problem solving was found to be positively correlated with a belief that arguing is beneficial ( $r = .37$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

*Hypothesis 10.*

Parental divorce will be positively related to withdrawal as a conflict resolution style.

In the sample, 32.5% of the participants came from homes in which their parents had divorced (or grew up in a single family), whereas 67.5% of the participants came from

homes in which their parents had not divorced. Kendall's rank correlation coefficient indicated no significant relationship between parental divorce and withdrawal ( $\tau = .06, ns$ ), or any other conflict resolution styles.

*Bringing it all together: Additional analysis*

The following diagrammatic representation (Figure 6) is a summary of the correlational relationships between attachment, conflict beliefs and conflict resolution styles. These correlational findings also support the hypothesized model of the relationship between the key variables (illustrated in Figure 5, p. 112).

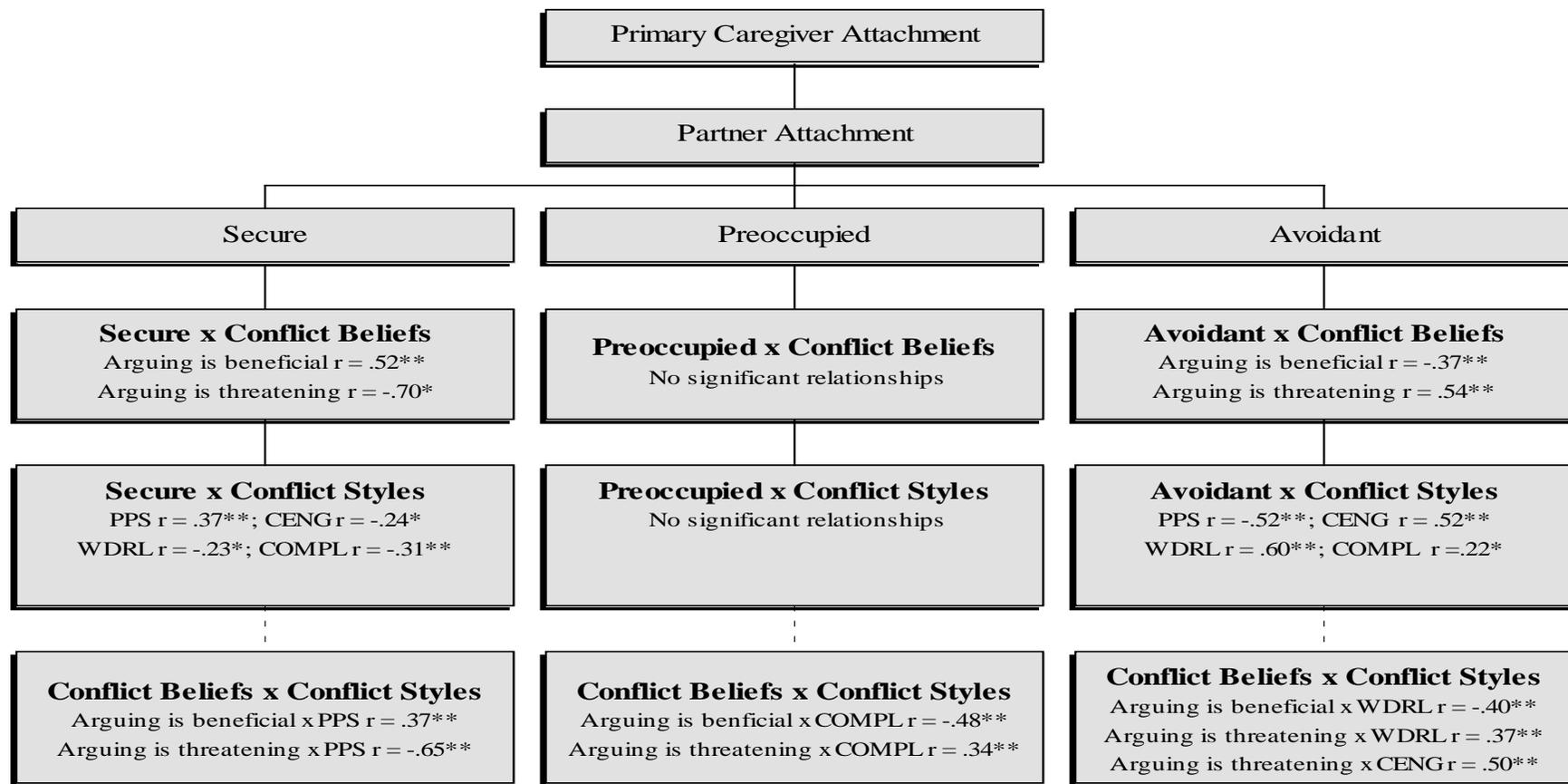


Figure 6. Diagrammatic representation of correlational relationships between variables

Note. Conflict styles: PPS = Positive Problem Solving, CENG = Conflict Engagement, WDRL = Withdrawal, COMPL = Compliance

*Primary Caregiver and Partner Attachment Configurations, Conflict Beliefs and Conflict Resolution Styles*

As illustrated in Figure 6 (p. 138) there is a clear relationship between particular conflict beliefs and the conflict resolution styles that the participants frequently use in their relationships. Positive problem solving is positively correlated with a belief that arguing is beneficial ( $r = .37, p < .01$ ), and negatively correlated with a belief that arguing is threatening ( $r = -.65, p < .01$ ). Conflict engagement is positively correlated with a belief that arguing is threatening ( $r = .50, p < .01$ ). Withdrawal is positively correlated with a belief that arguing is threatening ( $r = .37, p < .01$ ), and negatively correlated with a belief that arguing is beneficial ( $r = -.40, p < .01$ ). Finally, compliance is also positively correlated with a belief that arguing is threatening ( $r = .34, p < .01$ ), and negatively correlated with a belief that arguing is beneficial ( $r = -.48, p < .01$ ).

In following on from the relationships illustrated above, the following correlational relationships (see Table 9) are presented as a summary of each attachment configuration and the manner in which each group resolve conflict in relation to their conflict beliefs.

Table 9

*Pearson Product-Moment Correlation between Conflict Beliefs and Conflict Resolution Styles for the Different Parental and Partner Attachment Configurations*

Conflict beliefs	<i>n</i>	Conflict	Resolution	Styles	
		Positive problem solving	Conflict engagement	Withdrawal	Compliance
More secure-more secure	26				
Arguing is threatening		-.46*	.63 **	.58**	.17
Arguing is beneficial		.17	.10	-.11	-.51**
Less secure-more secure	14				
Arguing is threatening		-.62*	-.36	.30	-.08
Arguing is beneficial		-.07	-.10	-.27	-.31
More secure-less secure	15				
Arguing is threatening		-.80**	.63*	.47	.20
Arguing is beneficial		.51	-.17	-.57*	-.57*
Less secure-less secure	28				
Arguing is threatening		-.58**	.74**	.24	.51**
Arguing is beneficial		.24	-.09	-.47*	-.32

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

*More secure-more secure group.*

For the 'more secure-more secure group' ( $n = 26$ ) their belief that arguing is beneficial means that they will not comply during conflict ( $r = -.51, p < .01$ ). However, the more they believe that arguing is threatening the more they will engage in conflict ( $r = .63, p < .01$ ), or withdraw ( $r = .58, p < .01$ ) from conflict, thus protecting their secure attachment configurations (see Table 9).

*Less secure-more secure group.*

For the 'less secure-more secure group' ( $n = 14$ ) their belief that arguing is threatening means that they will not try to use positive problem solving styles ( $r = -.62, p < .05$ ) or engage their partner in conflict ( $r = -.36, ns$ ), but would to some extent withdraw from conflict ( $r = .30, ns$ ). However, if they believe that arguing is beneficial (see Table 9) it becomes less likely that they will withdraw from conflict ( $r = -.27, ns$ ).

*More secure-less secure group.*

For the 'more secure-less secure group' ( $n = 15$ ) their belief that arguing is beneficial means that they will not withdraw from conflict ( $r = -.57, p < .05$ ), nor will they comply with their partner's demands ( $r = -.57, p < .05$ ) during conflict (see Table 9). However, they will to some extent engage in positive problem solving behaviour ( $r = .51, ns$ ), thus indicating the immunization effect of a secure base. Should they believe that arguing is threatening they will engage in conflict ( $r = .63, p < .05$ ).

*Less secure-less secure group.*

For the 'less secure-less secure group' ( $n = 28$ ) their belief that arguing is threatening implies that they will engage in conflict ( $r = .74, p < .01$ ), but also comply with their partner's demands ( $r = .51, p < .05$ ). Should they believe that arguing is beneficial, they will not withdraw from conflict ( $r = -.47, p < .05$ ) (see Table 9).

## Discussion

*Occurrence of attachment categories in sample*

Pistole and Arricale's study (2003), which utilized Bartholomew and Horowitz's (1991) four-category model, revealed that in their sample of 188 university students, 45.7% endorsed secure attachment, 6.4% reported dismissing attachment, 17% reported preoccupied partner attachment and 30.9% reported a fearful attachment style toward their partner. Using Hazan and Shaver's (1987) single-item measure to classify individuals' attachment style, Pistole (1989) identified that 23% of 137 university students fell in the avoidant category, 18% in the anxious-ambivalent (preoccupied) category and 58% in the secure category, which is consistent with other studies (Hazan & Shaver; Kobak & Sceery, 1988). However, Banse (2004) in a recent study, where married couples self-selected their participation, found that 71.5% of wives and 73% of husbands endorsed secure attachment styles; 14.3% of husbands and 17.1% of wives were avoidantly attached; and 6.5% of husbands and 6.1% of wives endorsed preoccupied attachment styles. Senchak and Leonard (1992) in another community-based sample of newlywed couples in the U.S. found that 82% were securely attached, whereas 11% were avoidant and 6% had a preoccupied attachment to their partners. For the present study, the figures (secure: 80.7%; avoidant: 1.2%; and preoccupied: 18.1%) seem to be more consistent with the

proportions found with non-student samples in more recent surveys, thus supporting the generalisability of the findings. Participants in this study were self-selected Internet users, and were quite possibly inherently self-motivated (Bryman, 2004) as there was no incentive offered

#### *Attachment Configurations and Relationship Satisfaction*

Attachment styles are based on cognitive-affective schemas, or internal working models of attachment, and it greatly influences the way people interact with and experience their world, and, in particular, those people closest to them (Bowlby, 1973). Bretherton and Munholland (1999) conceptualise generalized attachment as the adult's present mindset about the relationship with his/her primary caregivers. They furthermore postulate that these internal working models give adults a system of rules that regulate affect, thoughts and behaviour in social interactions with attachment figures. Previous research (e.g., Crowell & Owens, 1996; Crowell et al., 2002; Furman, Simon, Shaffer, & Bouchey, 2002; Owens et al., 1995) has indicated that specific attachment representations to relational partners develop in the context of the adult relationship. Relationship satisfaction is an evaluation of the satisfaction with the current relationship, and it is therefore understandable that the current specific attachment to the relational partner has a significant influence on this evaluation.

Whereas previous research has found gender differences in terms of a link between attachment configurations and marital behaviour for wives, but not for husbands (Paley et al., 1999), the current study found no gender or length of relationship differences for attachment configurations.

The '*more secure-more secure group*' and the '*less secure-more secure group*' had similar relationship satisfaction levels (hypothesis 1), and this is comparable to Treboux et al.'s findings (2004). However, in the current study the '*less secure-more secure group*' had the highest relationship satisfaction. These results seem to indicate that people who have *less* secure current attachment models of their primary caregivers value their current secure relationship with their romantic partner slightly more, than people who had a *more* secure primary caregiver attachment, and this is associated with higher relationship satisfaction. Similar to Treboux et al. (2004), the '*more secure-less secure group*' had the lowest relationship satisfaction of all four

groups. Treboux et al. (2004) found that individuals with this attachment configuration were most likely to dissolve their relationships.

#### *Partner Attachment and Relationship Satisfaction*

Similar to previous studies (e.g., Banske, 2004; Collins & Read, 1990; Simpson, 1990; Stackert & Bursik, 2003) the current study has found weak to moderate correlations for the relation between partner attachment and relationship satisfaction (hypothesis 2). In particular it was found that secure partner attachment was positively correlated with relationship satisfaction, and slightly negatively (although not significantly) correlated with preoccupied and avoidant attachment. Again, as stated above, relationship satisfaction is an appraisal of the current relationship, and it is consequently reasonable that the current specific attachment to the relational partner has an important influence on this appraisal. This is also consistent with Cozzarelli, Hoekstra and Bylsma's findings (2000) that partner-specific models are related to relationship-specific outcomes such as relationship satisfaction.

#### *Secure Primary Caregiver and Secure Partner Attachment*

Similar to previous studies (e.g., Owens et al., 1995), the current study found that there was a moderate positive correlation between secure partner attachment and a secure primary caregiver attachment (hypothesis 3). A previous longitudinal study that monitored 50 individuals for 20 years found that there was 64% stability in attachment style classifications over time (Waters, Merrick, Treboux, & Albersheim, 2000). Crowell et al. (2002) have found that the secure classification is particularly stable during changes (e.g., marriage) and base this on the idea that once learned a secure attachment is particularly difficult to unlearn, even if the current partner is insecurely attached. Although relatively stable, attachment representations are influenced by new experiences, and young adults, in particular, can experience a reconceptualization when they are exposed to new experiences in a new setting away from their parents (Crowell et al., 2002). In addition, Levy, Blatt and Shaver (1998) suggested that "the cognitive and affective components of representations of self and others develop epigenetically and become increasingly accurate, articulated, and conceptually complex structures over time" (p. 409).

### *Attachment and Conflict Beliefs*

Attachment styles are based on cognitive-affective schemas, or internal working models of attachment, and it greatly influences the way people interact with and experience their world, and, in particular, those people closest to them (Bowlby, 1973). More specifically, various conflict beliefs have been found to be related to specific attachment styles (e.g., Pistole & Arricale, 2003; Stackert & Bursik, 2003; Sümer & Cozzarelli, 2004).

Although previous research has suggested that there would be no differences between attachment styles that arguing is beneficial (Pistole & Arricale, 2003), the current study (hypothesis 4) has found that secure partner attachment was significantly associated with the belief that arguing is beneficial. This is in line with secure individuals' positive models of self and other (Bartholomew, 1990). Furthermore Pistole and Arricale (2003) suggest that secure individuals might view arguing as beneficial as it allows them to identify and resolve their differences, which in turn would lead to an increase in closeness. However, contrary to what was indicated by previous literature (Pistole & Arricale) the current study found that preoccupied attachment was not significantly associated with the belief that arguing is beneficial, and avoidant attachment was negatively associated with the belief that arguing is beneficial. This is, again, in line with Bartholomew's four-category attachment model (1990), which suggest that avoidant attachment is associated with a negative self and other view, whereas, a preoccupied attachment is associated with a negative self and positive other view (see Figure 2, p. 35). Conflict to these insecurely attached individuals would thus be viewed as threatening, rather than as beneficial to the relationship.

Previous research has found that securely attached individuals were less concerned with closeness than those with preoccupied attachment to their partners (Pistole & Arricale, 2003). However, in the current study this could not be tested as the 'concern for closeness' subscale of the Feelings about Conflict scale was not deemed as a reliable measure.

Pistole and Arricale (2003) also found that securely attached individuals were less likely to view arguing as threatening than were individuals in preoccupied or fearfully

attached relationships (hypothesis 5a), and the current study found that there was a strong negative association between secure attachment and the belief that arguing is threatening to a relationship. Insecurely attached individuals have also been found to report maladaptive attributions (Sümer & Cozzarelli, 2004), such as the belief that arguing is threatening in avoidant (hypothesis 5b) and preoccupied (hypothesis 6c) individuals (Stackert & Bursik, 2003). The current study found that avoidant attachment was positively associated with the belief that arguing is threatening. However, in contrast to what was expected, there was a negative correlation between preoccupied attachment and the belief that arguing is threatening to a relationship.

Previous research (Stackert & Bursik, 2003) has indicated the presence of a gendered response pattern in terms of the belief that arguing is threatening (or as they termed it ‘disagreement is destructive’) in that it spells a decline in relationship satisfaction for women, but not for men. It was indeed found in the current study (hypothesis 6) that there was a significant negative association between the belief that arguing is threatening and relationship satisfaction for women, but not for men.

Attachment theory suggests that working models are influenced by social development, and this includes a revision and integration of attachment based on new information and experiences (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). In this manner an insecurely attached person can become increasingly secure by experiencing a relationship that disconfirms previous mental models. From the results presented for hypotheses 7, it is clear that one’s current specific working models of the romantic partner (rather than current models of primary caregiver attachment) have a significant influence on conflict beliefs and whether arguing is viewed as threatening or beneficial. These appraisal processes are thus specifically tied to the relational partner, and unique person-situation interactions. According to Stackert and Bursik (2003), “these relatively stable beliefs about relationships tend to be idiosyncratic constructions generated and revised through personal experience” (p. 1422).

It was found in the current study that the ‘*more secure-more secure group*’ (*more secure primary caregiver attachment, and more secure partner attachment*) had believed most strongly that arguing is beneficial (hypothesis 7a), whereas the ‘*less secure-less secure group*’ believed most strongly that arguing is threatening

(hypothesis 7b). Although some researchers have found no distinction between attachment categories on the belief that arguing is beneficial (Pistole & Arricale, 2003), other researchers have found that insecure attachment is linked with irrational beliefs, such as ‘arguing is threatening’ (e.g., Campbell et al., 2005; Stackert & Bursik, 2003). According to Stackert and Bursik individuals with an insecure partner attachment would have a more vulnerable self-concept, and this would lend itself to the development of irrational beliefs, such as ‘arguing is threatening’. Furthermore, they suspect that over time these negative beliefs might thwart the individual’s attempts to accomplish relational goals. In contrast, one would expect individuals with more secure partner attachments to continue believing that arguing is beneficial, as their beliefs would also assist their attempts to reach their relational goals, which in turn would again confirm their beliefs.

#### *Attachment and Conflict Resolution Styles*

Attachment classifications are a significant predictor of behavioural processes and outcomes, such as conflict resolution (Bippus & Rollin, 2003). Creasey (2002) also suggests that our attachment styles underlie and guide affect and behaviour during conflict interactions with attachment figures and this enables us to study the manifestations of attachment styles.

Previous research (e.g., Creasy, 2002; Pistole, 1989) has indicated that adults with secure partner attachment working models use positive and integrative strategies when solving conflict in their partner relationships, and the current study (hypothesis 8a) found that there was a significant positive correlation between secure partner attachment and positive problem solving.

Similar to Creasy’s study (2002) no significant relationship between preoccupied attachment and any of the four conflict resolution styles, positive problem solving, conflict engagement, withdrawal or compliance were identified (hypothesis 8b). Furthermore, no gender differences were identified between individuals endorsing various conflict resolution styles. However, compliance was positively correlated with length of relationship.

Avoidant attachment with its negative views of self and other (Bartholomew, 1990), and its fear of intimacy (Hazan & Shaver, 1987) is according to Pistole (1989) characterized by independence and emotional distance. Thus, it was expected that avoidant attachment would be positively correlated with withdrawal. Indeed, correlation coefficients indicated that there was a significant positive relationship between avoidant attachment and withdrawal (hypothesis 8c), as well as with conflict engagement. In addition, it was found that avoidant attachment was positively correlated with compliance and negatively correlated with positive problem solving.

It was furthermore found that when utilizing the attachment style configuration groups, differences between the attachment groups in terms of conflict resolution styles became apparent, but only for positive problem solving and compliance (not withdrawal or conflict engagement). There were significant differences between the four attachment combination groups on positive problem solving. In particular, post-hoc Mann-Whitney tests showed that the '*more secure-more secure* combination' used positive problem solving significantly more frequently than the '*less secure-less secure* group', which supports hypothesis 9a. No significant gender or length of relationship differences was found between the groups.

In addition there were significant differences between the attachment configuration groups on compliance (hypothesis 9b). Post-hoc Mann-Whitney tests showed that the '*less secure-less secure* group' used compliance significantly more frequently than the '*more secure-less secure* group', as well as the '*more secure-more secure* group', which supports hypothesis 9b. The '*less secure-more secure* group' also used compliance significantly more than the '*more secure-less secure* group'.

Furthermore, an 'immunization effect' was found to be present if there was a current conceptualisation of a *more secure* primary caregiver attachment, in that these individuals (rather than individuals with a *less secure* primary caregiver attachment) are able to frequently use positive problem solving, and infrequently use compliance in their current relationship. This is in line with what Crowell et al. (2002) refer to, as the stability of the secure base, which according to them once acquired is particularly difficult to unlearn or distort, even though a current insecure partner attachment might be present.

Unlike with conflict beliefs, the results from this present study indicate that conflict resolution styles are also associated with current models of primary caregiver attachments, again confirming the hypothesized model for the current study (Figure 5, p. 112). There also appears to be a consistent use of conflict resolution behaviour in the current relationship (in particular a positive problem solving style and a compliant style) that has been learned in the context of the relationship with the primary caregiver. This is consistent with the generalized nature of attachment representations (e.g., Treboux et al., 2004) that are based in the context of the attachment relationships with key figures, such as primary caregivers. These generalized attachment representations are thought to guide behaviour (Waters & Rodrigues, 2001), such as conflict resolution behaviour, in attachment-related contexts, and would become particularly salient in the context of conflict. Through interactions with the primary caregiver, the securely attached child learns that to maintain proximity they should during conflict (which is inherently threatening to the attachment system) regulate their emotions so that they can remain calm to listen, negotiate and compromise during conflict resolution (Mikulincer et al., 2002). This then increases the likelihood that they will continue to view the primary caregiver as a safe haven and a secure base from which they can explore their environment. In return their primary caregiver would also (more than likely) be securely attached and will be setting an example of this behaviour. In addition this also underlines previous findings which suggest that relationship variables such as conflict resolution styles are relatively stable over time (e.g., Crowell et al., 2002).

In contrast, according to Pistole and Arricale (2003) an expectation of malicious intent would contribute to viewing conflict as an attachment threat. The less securely attached child will be aware of the power differential between him/herself and the primary caregiver and will therefore comply with the caregiver's demands during conflict. Yet, they will also learn to comply, rather than withdraw or engage in conflict, because by obliging the primary caregiver's demands this would assist proximity maintenance at a time when proximity seeking is at its height, that is, during conflict (Mikulincer et al., 2002).

### *Intergenerational Effect of Divorce on Offspring*

In the current sample, 32.5% of the participants came from homes in which the parents had divorced (or grew up in a single family), whereas 67.5% of the participants came from homes in which the parents had not divorced. Although previous research has indicated that parental divorce has an intergenerational impact on the relationships of their children, to the extent where they display higher conflict rates, withdrawal and negative nonverbal behaviours (e.g., Levy, Wamboldt, & Fiese, 1997; Sanders et al., 1999), this current study found no evidence to support the notion that parental divorce would be related to withdrawal or any other conflict resolution style (hypothesis 10).

### *Primary Caregiver and Partner Attachment Configurations, Conflict Beliefs and Conflict Resolution Styles*

Data presented above (see Figure 6, p. 138; hypothesis 9c) illustrate that certain conflict resolution styles are linked with certain conflict beliefs. In general it was found that a positive problem solving style is linked to a belief that arguing is beneficial, whereas the more negative conflict resolution styles (conflict engagement, withdrawal and compliance) are linked to a belief that arguing is threatening.

Additional analysis (see Table 9, p. 140) also indicated that for the ‘*more secure-more secure*’ group their belief that arguing is beneficial means that they will not comply during conflict. But, the more they believe that arguing is threatening the more they will engage in conflict or possibly withdraw from conflict, in this manner protecting their secure attachment configurations. The ‘*less secure-more secure*’ group’s concern for closeness is very much tied up with their compliant and positive problem solving behaviour during conflict resolution. However, their concern for closeness also implies that they will not initiate or engage conflict.

The ‘*more secure-less secure*’ group’s belief that arguing is beneficial means that they will not withdraw from conflict, nor will they comply with their partner’s demands. However, they will to some extent engage in positive problem solving behaviour, thus indicating the immunization effect of a secure base. Should they believe that arguing is threatening they will engage in conflict. For the ‘*less secure-less secure*’ group their belief that arguing is threatening implies that they will engage in conflict, but also

comply with their partner's demands. Should they believe that arguing is beneficial, they will not withdraw from conflict.

### Limitations

The best may slip, and the most cautious fall;  
He's more than mortal that ne'er err'd at all.  
*The Poetical Works of John Pomfret - John Pomfret, 1779*

A number of limitations can be noted with regards to problematic constructs, methodology (Internet research and self-report), as well as sampling bias. These are discussed below.

As a result of participants self-selecting their participation only participants who were satisfied with their relationships chose to participate (to varying degrees of satisfaction: slightly satisfied, satisfied or very satisfied). This method of data collection, similar to other studies in which participants could choose whether they participated, or not, does seem to lend itself to individuals who are more satisfied with their relationships (e.g., Bpanse, 2004). There is thus some sampling bias, and the sample is not representative of the general population, although the findings possibly reflect the behaviours of individuals in long-term relationships that are satisfied with their relationships.

Borsboom (2005) suggests that even after a century of psychological research we are still not sure whether test scores actually measure constructs or whether they are mere summations of item responses. This argument has general implications for psychological measurement. In addition the manner in which primary caregiver and partner attachments were measured are not indicative of actual primary caregiver or partner behaviour, but are current representations of behaviour, which may or may not be similar to actual behaviour. Although attachment researchers believe that these representations are derived from actual behaviour, they are the individual's current interpretations of behaviour and the connection has not been demonstrated in an empirical sense (Levy et al., 1998). Attachment representations are not accessible to direct observation, and self-report is one potential manner of measuring attachment

representations. In addition it should be noted that people possess multiple attachment schemas (e.g., Mikulincer & Arad, 1999; Pierce & Lydon, 2001) and this research project only addressed current models of attachment to the primary caregiver and the romantic partner.

Attachment styles and other relationship variables, such as conflict resolution styles (e.g., Sandy et al., 2000) are relatively stable over time (e.g., Crowell et al., 2002), but new experiences could also potentially affect changes. The self-report questionnaires were administered once only, thus providing a snapshot view of current perspectives on attachments to partner and primary caregiver, as well as relationship satisfaction, conflict beliefs and conflict resolution styles. This did not allow for measurement of changes in these variables over time or for factors influencing changes longitudinally. The chosen methodology also does not account for dyadic interaction effects or the interplay of behaviours, which would inevitably shape relationships and relational outcomes: “for any couple, the nature of the attachment ... internal working model ... of each member of the couple both shapes and responds to the behaviours of the partner, in a complex interplay between overt behaviours and the meaning that each person ascribes to these behaviours” (Berman, Marcus, & Berman, 1994, p. 227).

In addition, as a result of using an Internet survey no observation of the participants was possible, the setting was not controlled, there might have been repeat or mischievous responding (Buchanan, 2000) and there might have been some task misunderstanding effects, although none were reported. Additional problems from Internet survey research might include: no probing opportunity; limited computer knowledge and level of Internet use; important differences in layout of questionnaire; and potential violations of privacy and issues of data security (e.g., Fouladi et al., 2002). Furthermore, by posting a survey online one is also restricted to online populations (Bryman, 2004). Generally, Internet survey populations are thought to be more motivated than postal survey respondents in that they might have to pay for their Internet connections, and possibly have their phone lines tied up (Bryman). The participants in this study also had to be particularly motivated to participate, as there were no other incentives offered. However, in comparing the findings from this study with results from a previous study (Treboux et al., 2004), which used interviews and observational data, the results are mostly very similar, for example, observed

frequencies of attachment configurations. This lends support to the idea that Internet surveys are a legitimate, cost-effective and time efficient data-gathering method.

### Synopsis

The results presented above support the notion that many individuals shift in their attachment orientations from secure to insecure or vice versa. This lends support to the idea that attachment orientations are flexible and open to the changing influences of current relationships (e.g., Crowell et al., 2002). This also echoes the notion that change is a core relationship process (Huston, Caughlin, Houts, Smith, & George, 2001; Karney & Bradbury, 1995, 1997; Kurdek, 2005).

From the present study it would seem that there is some difference between the ongoing influence from current models of primary caregiver attachment and the influence from current models of partner attachment on relationship variables, which supports the hypothesized model between the key variables illustrated in Figure 5 (p. 112). In this regard, relationship satisfaction and conflict beliefs are associated with the specific attachment to the partner. This is consistent with Cozzarelli et al.'s findings (2000) that partner-specific attachment models are more strongly associated with relationship-specific variables, such as relationship satisfaction, than general mental models. Conversely, conflict resolution styles, in particular positive problem solving and compliance, are associated with the more general current conceptualizations of the primary caregiver attachment. There also appears to be an immunization effect that makes it more likely that a current model of secure primary caregiver attachment would result in utilizing positive problem solving more frequently, and compliance infrequently. This is also consistent with the scriptlike nature of attachment representations (e.g., Crowell et al., 2002; Waters & Rodrigues, 2001).

In summary, the consistent use of conflict resolution behaviour, learned and integrated in the context of the parental attachment and carried forth to the current relationship, points to the durability and fixedness of certain behavioural patterns, as well as the important influence of attachments formed in childhood. In contrast conflict beliefs

appear to be more fluid in nature as these appraisal processes are more specifically tied to the nature of the current partner attachment. To an extent these findings also lend support to the notion of generalized versus specific levels of attachment (e.g., Crowell & Owens, 1996; Crowell et al., 2002; Overall et al., 2003). Specifically Overall et al. found that specific relationship models operate as a function of relationship domains (e.g., family, friends and partner), and these in turn operate as a function of a global working model (see Figure 1, p. 32). Pierce and Lydon (2001) have also found that global or generalized working models shape specific models over time. Furthermore, their research indicates that both global and specific relational models shape current relational experiences. Similar to Treboux et al. (2004), it shows the closely intertwined nature of general and specific attachment as it impacts on an individual's current relationship. Clarity in this regard also helps explain why individuals might resolve conflict in a manner that is inconsistent with their conflict beliefs, but consistent with their current conceptualisations of parental attachment.

Further research could track the development of changes in attachment configurations, as well as the influence it has on relationship related cognitions and functioning longitudinally. In addition, researching the dyadic interplay of these variables would greatly add to the understanding of their complexity. The present research project focussed solely on happy couples, and although there is a dearth of information specifically relating to couples in satisfactory relationships, a true community sample would lend itself to the full exploration of attachment configurations and relationship variables, which would greatly contribute to empirical knowledge on couples' relationships. In addition this could lead to the development of culturally relevant therapeutic strategies, as well as clinical applications, for instance dealing with attachment-related issues in a therapeutic setting. Further research into exploring these differences could in particular be relevant to clinicians when assessing problematic conflict beliefs and conflict behaviour in couples, so as to determine which internal working models – general or specific – are driving factors in these problematic behaviours or beliefs.

The attention now turns to Study 2, which focused on the examination of variables researched in Study 1, as well as some additional variables, for example, communication accuracy, in the context of a couples' study. Quantitative and

qualitative data in Study 2 lead to further discussions, which integrate the findings with results from Study 1.

## PART III

Statistics is the science, the art, the philosophy, and the technique  
of making inferences from the particular to the general.  
*Research Operations in Industry* - John W. Tukey

### Study 2: Couples Study

#### *Aim*

The general aim of Study 2 was to test the extent to which relevant relationships identified in Study 1 hold true for a dyadic sample. It was also designed to obtain additional information regarding attachment, relationship satisfaction and conflict resolution styles in the dyadic context. Utilizing a multi-method approach it was also hoped to gain a greater in-depth understanding of couples' attachment experiences.

#### *Contributions of the Present Study*

This study contributes to the literature on couple relationships by verifying the findings from earlier related studies, including *Study 1*, and extending/integrating the findings into a model of attachment. In contrast to many university-based samples, the current study utilises a community sample thus enhancing the probability that the results will be applicable to a wider range of people, in particular New Zealand couples. A range of data collection methods was utilised (self report – quantitative and qualitative; as well as observational data collection) and the use of various instruments is functional in that it attempts to tease apart the intricacies of personal relationships, as well as illustrate the multiple layers of interpersonal behaviour. In particular the current study focuses on looking at the links between attachment, relationship satisfaction, conflict resolution, and conflict beliefs in a dyadic sample, and, in addition, gender differences are explored.

#### *Hypotheses*

In general the literature indicates that internal working models of attachment have a pervasive influence on individual and couples' beliefs and behaviour. These become particularly salient in the partner relationship. Many of the hypotheses tested in Study 1 were again tested in the context of a dyadic sample, and the same hypothesized model for correlational relationships between the key variables is

proposed (see Figure 5, p. 112). It is expected that the results for this study in comparison to Study 1 will shed additional light on attachment bonds, as all the couples will be involved in a discussion based around a conflict as part of the procedure, which presumably will challenge their attachments. The first 10 hypotheses below (hypotheses 1-10) are identical to the hypotheses tested in Study 1 (Part II), after which additional hypotheses (hypotheses 11-13) are tested, and gender differences are explored (hypotheses 14-19). For the sake of brevity literature relevant to hypotheses 1-10 will not be repeated here, as it is already mentioned in Part II (Study 1).

*Hypothesis 1.*

Individuals endorsing a ‘*more secure-more secure*’ attachment style combination (*more* secure primary caregiver and *more* secure partner attachment styles) are expected to have the highest relationship satisfaction compared to other primary caregiver and partner attachment combinations, that is, a ‘*more secure-less secure*’ attachment style (*more* secure primary caregiver, *less* secure partner attachment), a ‘*less secure-more secure*’ attachment style (*less* secure primary caregiver and *more* secure partner), and a ‘*less secure-less secure*’ attachment style (*less* secure primary caregiver attachment and *less* secure partner attachment).

*Hypothesis 2.*

Secure partner attachment will be positively correlated with relationship satisfaction, whereas preoccupied or avoidant partner attachment will be negatively related to relationship satisfaction.

*Hypothesis 3.*

Partner security and primary caregiver security will have a weak to moderate positive correlation.

*Hypothesis 4.*

Correlations between the secure, preoccupied and avoidant styles of partner attachment and the belief that arguing is beneficial are expected to be positive and similar.

*Hypotheses 5.*

5a) Secure partner attachment will be negatively associated with the belief that arguing is threatening to the relationship.

5b) Avoidant partner attachment will be positively associated with the belief that arguing is threatening to the relationship.

5c) Preoccupied partner attachment will be positively associated with the belief that arguing is a threat to the relationship.

*Hypothesis 6.*

Women's belief that arguing is threatening will be negatively associated with relationship satisfaction.

*Hypotheses 7.*

7a) Individuals with 'more secure-more secure' combinations of attachment styles (*more* secure primary caregiver attachment, and *more* secure partner attachment) are expected to believe more strongly than other attachment groups that arguing is beneficial.

7b) The '*less* secure-*less* secure group' are expected to believe more strongly than other groups that arguing is threatening.

*Hypotheses 8.*

8a) Secure partner attachment will be positively correlated with utilizing positive problem solving styles most frequently in conflict situations.

8b) Preoccupied partner attachment will not be significantly correlated with any particular conflict resolution style.

8c) Avoidant partner attachment will be positively correlated with withdrawal.

*Hypotheses 9.*

9a) '*More* secure-*more* secure' attachment style configurations (*more* secure primary caregiver attachment, and *more* secure partner attachment) are expected to apply positive problem solving more frequently in their conflict resolution, than other attachment configurations.

9b) Individuals with configurations of '*less* secure-*less* secure' attachment styles are expected to apply conflict engagement, withdrawal and compliance

more frequently in their conflict resolution, than other attachment configurations.

9c) The belief that arguing is threatening is expected to be correlated with withdrawal, compliance and conflict engagement, whereas the belief that arguing is beneficial is expected to be linked to positive problem solving.

*Hypothesis 10.*

Parental divorce will be positively related to withdrawal as a conflict resolution style.

*Interaction between Primary Caregiver and Partner Attachment*

Le Poire et al. (1997), in their study on attachment as a function of parental and partner approach-avoidance tendencies using regression analysis, found that secure actors predicted secure partners and that insecure actors predicted insecure partners. The most secure female partners were predicted by security with the opposite sex parent and security of the partner. Therefore, it would be expected that an actor with a secure parental attachment would have a higher secure partner attachment score than an actor with an insecure parental attachment

*Hypothesis 11.*

11a) Secure partner attachment in the actor will be correlated with secure partner attachment in the partner.

11b) Individuals with secure parental attachments would have a higher secure partner attachment scores than individuals with insecure parental attachments.

*Communication Behaviour and Relationship Satisfaction*

Research has indicated that couples who frequently use positive problem solving and infrequently used conflict engagement and withdrawal reported greater relationship satisfaction (Du Plessis, 2001; Kurdek, 1994). Positive nonverbal behaviour has also been linked to higher relationship satisfaction in couples (Cropley, 2005).

*Hypothesis 12.*

Relationship satisfaction will be related to greater frequency of positive problem solving behaviour, and infrequent use of conflict engagement and withdrawal.

*Attachment, Communication Accuracy and Satisfaction with Partner Problem Solving*  
Koerner and Fitzpatrick (2002) in their research found that accuracy in nonverbal decoding was associated with the relationship satisfaction of the partner. To the present researcher's understanding no additional empirical research exists for the relationship between attachment, communication accuracy and satisfaction with partner problem solving, but in keeping with the literature on attachment, 13b can be predicted.

*Hypotheses 13.*

13a) Communication accuracy will be correlated with satisfaction with partner problem solving.

13b) Individuals with a more secure partner attachment will display a greater level of communication accuracy and satisfaction with partner problem solving ability, compared to individuals with a less secure partner attachment

*Gender Differences*

*Parent and Partner Attachment*

Le Poire et al. (1997) found that male avoidant partner attachment was predicted by less securely attached female partners. In addition Le Poire and her colleagues found that preoccupied females could be predicted by preoccupied partner attachment in males. Her research also indicated a correlation between avoidant partner attachment and role reversed parental attachment for both men and women.

*Hypotheses 14.*

14a) Male avoidant partner attachment would have a negative correlation with female secure partner attachment

14b) Preoccupied partner attachment in male and female partners will be positively correlated.

14c) Avoidant partner attachment and role-reversed parental attachment will be positively correlated.

*Attachment and Relationship Satisfaction*

Banse (2004) found that wives' and husbands' secure attachment correlated moderately with relationship satisfaction. However, Pratt (2005) found that wives' current attachment representations of their partners were related to their perceptions of relationship satisfaction, although this was not true for husbands. Banse also found that the correlation between female and male partners' relationship satisfaction was strongly positive.

*Hypotheses 15.*

15a) Relationship satisfaction scores in female partners will be correlated with secure partner attachment, but not in male partners.

15b) Male and female partners' relationship satisfaction scores will be strongly correlated.

*Attachment and Conflict Resolution Styles*

Previous research (e.g., Creasy, 2002) has indicated that in general secure partner attachment is related to more positive behavioural interactions. Creasy specifically found that women's attachment styles predicted more positive behaviours across interactions, whereas men's attachment styles predicted more negative behaviours.

*Hypothesis 16.*

Female secure partner attachment will be related to positive problem solving, whereas men's insecure partner attachment will be related to withdrawal, compliance and conflict engagement.

*Relationship Satisfaction and Conflict Resolution Styles*

Fichten and Wright (1983) found that both satisfied and distressed wives engaged in more negative behaviours than husbands. Marchand (2004) and Kurdek (1994) found that husbands' positive problem solving was significantly correlated with their relationship satisfaction. Wives also had a significant correlation between positive problem solving and relationship satisfaction, but to a slightly lesser degree. Their research has also indicated a significantly negative correlation between conflict engagement and relationship satisfaction for men and women.

*Hypotheses 17.*

17a) Women will self-report a greater frequency of withdrawal, compliance and conflict engagement than men, whether they were more or less satisfied with their relationships

17b) Male and female partners will both indicate a positive correlation between their positive problem solving and their relationship satisfaction, although the correlation will be slightly weaker for female partners.

17c) Conflict engagement will be negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction for both male and female partners.

*Relationship Satisfaction and Conflict Beliefs*

Stackert and Bursik (2003) found that women's belief that disagreements are destructive (comparable to Arguing is Threatening) was negatively related to relationship satisfaction. They furthermore could not find any significant relationships between conflict beliefs and relationship satisfaction for men.

*Hypotheses 18.*

18a) The belief that arguing is threatening will be negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction for women.

18b) No significant correlations between conflict beliefs and relationship satisfaction will be evident for male partners.

*Relationship Satisfaction and Communication Accuracy*

Koerner and Fitzpatrick (2002) found that communication accuracy was correlated with relationship satisfaction for both men and women.

*Hypothesis 19.*

Communication accuracy will be correlated with relationship satisfaction for both male and female partners.

*Qualitative Data*

Six open-ended research questions were generated. In each instance below some of the relevant literature indicates possible thematic areas which might emerge from the data.

*Question 1: Primary Caregiver Characteristics*

The literature indicates that secure relationships are characterized by an infants' confidence that their primary caregiver will be available, helpful and comforting should a frightening situation arise (Bowlby, 1988). These caregivers are described as readily available, as well as sensitive and responsive to the child's needs (Bowlby). More recent research also lists secure parental representations as characterised by differentiation, benevolence and non-punitiveness (Levy et al., 1998). However, the literature on infants who have anxious-ambivalent relationships with their caregivers would seem to indicate that they are unsure whether their caregivers will be responsive. Bowlby suggests that this pattern is promoted by a primary caregiver who is not consistently available, by separations and by threats of abandonment. Furthermore, infants who develop avoidant relationships with their caregivers have lost all confidence that the caregiver will be helpful, and as such do not seek support

when they are distressed. Bowlby suggests that this pattern is the result of a caregiver constantly rebuffing his/her child when the child seeks comfort or protection. These infants attempt to cope internally by becoming emotionally self-sufficient.

### *Emerging themes*

According to the literature securely attached individuals may characterize their primary caregivers as available, comforting, helpful, responsive and non-punitive. In contrast, insecurely attached individuals may characterize their primary caregivers as unavailable, uncaring, unhelpful, unresponsive and punitive.

### *Question 2: The Nature of Arguments between Parents*

Crum (1987) views conflict as neither negative nor positive, but rather as a foreseeable outcome to the natural process of growth and change. Some research has linked the quality of an individual's attachments in childhood to adult communication patterns (e.g., Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Levy & Davis, 1988). For instance, research carried out with regards to family expressiveness and attachment, suggest that mothers' who were able to communicate both positive and negative emotions, were more likely to have securely attached children (Bell, 1998), even though they might experience a smaller percentage of negative rather than positive emotions (Izard, Haynes, Chisholm, & Baak, 1991). However, mothers of less securely attached children generally experienced a greater percentage of negative rather than positive emotions but these mothers suppressed their negative emotions and instead communicated positive emotions (Izard et al., 1991).

Recent Australian research (Halford, Keefer, & Osgarby, 2002) also indicates that our relationship satisfaction influences our cognitions and it colours how we interpret past relationship events and behaviours. More specifically relationship dissatisfaction is associated with a negative hindsight memory bias in distressed couples (Halford et al., 2002). Zinbarg (2002) also found that memories of perceived interparental conflict were related to college women's insecure attachment. Adult children's recall of moderate to high parental conflict influence have also been found to be related to highly embedded negative attitudes toward marriage and divorce, and this also impacts negatively on the outcomes of their personal relationships (Riggio & Weiser,

2006). More recently Feeney (2006) found that adult children reported parental conflict behaviour more negatively than parents, in particular when there was anxiety around relationships for either children or parents. Similar to Riggio and Weiser, parental conflict behaviour was found to have associations with adult children's relationship satisfaction, thus illustrating the intergenerational impact of parental conflict (Feeney).

#### *Emerging themes*

As described in the literature both secure and insecure participants may report conflict between their parents. A secure primary caregiver attachment may be linked with the expression of both positive and negative emotions, whereas insecure primary caregiver attachment may be linked only to the theme of positive emotional expression. Recall of parental conflict may also be tainted by current relationship satisfaction, such that more satisfied participants may view their parental conflict more positively than less satisfied participants.

#### *Question 3: Partner Characteristics*

The adult attachment bond includes four defining behavioural indicators of attachment including proximity maintenance, separation distress, and viewing the attachment figure as safe haven and secure base (Collins & Feeney, 2004). Research has indicated that adults with a secure attachment style describe higher levels of trust, intimacy, satisfaction and commitment in relationships, as opposed to adults with an avoidant attachment style who describe lower levels of these features (e.g., Collins & Read, 1990; Hammond & Fletcher, 1991). In another study it was found that husbands and wives with secure attachment styles were less rejecting and more supportive of their partners than their insecurely attached counterparts (Gao et al., 1997).

#### *Emerging themes*

According to the literature, secure attachment may include proximity maintenance, separation distress, and viewing each other as a safe haven and a secure base. This may emerge through descriptions of having high levels of trust, intimacy, satisfaction and commitment, and describing partners as supportive (as well as having other characteristics that contribute to intimate, satisfied and committed relationships).

Insecurely attached participants may describe the opposite characteristics, as well as lower levels of trust, intimacy, commitment and satisfaction in their relationships.

#### *Question 4: Unhelpful Conflict Resolution Strategies*

Research has indicated that attachment styles become apparent in conflict situations to the extent where men with insecure attachment styles display more negative affect and engage in conflict more frequently, than their securely attached counterparts (e.g., Cohn et al., 1992; Cowan et al., 1996; George et al., 1996). The literature also identifies the demand-withdraw pattern as unhelpful when trying to solve conflict (Kurdek, 1995). In this demand-withdraw pattern women are generally the demanding party, whereas men tend to withdraw in response (Kurdek). The demand-withdraw pattern is said to account for more variance in relationship satisfaction than any other conflict resolution style and research suggests that it reflects the intensity and the amount of intimacy that people need in a relationship, with women generally desiring more intimacy, and men desiring greater separateness (e.g., Christensen, 1987; Jacobson, 1989). Engaging in conflict (especially a negative start-up) has also been linked to unsatisfactory relationships (e.g., Gottman et al., 1998; Kurdek, 1994). Negative conflict behaviours such as complaining/criticising, contempt, defensiveness and stonewalling (withdrawal) have also been identified as harmful to relationship satisfaction (Gottman, 1994).

#### *Emerging themes*

Both securely and insecurely attached participants may identify unhelpful conflict resolution strategies, although the insecure participants' strategies may be more negatively slanted, and their conflict might occur more frequently. Participants may comment on the demand-withdraw pattern, and additionally strategies such as complaining, criticising, contempt and defensiveness may be viewed as unhelpful.

#### *Question 5: Helpful Conflict Resolution Strategies*

The literature indicates that couples who frequently use a positive problem solving style (e.g., compromise and negotiation), and infrequently use withdrawal and conflict engagement, are more satisfied with their relationships (Kurdek, 1994). Pistole and

Arricale (2003) found that securely attached people report less fighting and more effective arguing, whereas preoccupied individuals view conflict as an attachment threat and focus on re-establishing togetherness, which might in turn hamper their problem solving ability. These researchers have also found that securely attached individuals reported less conflict avoidance than those with dismissing attachment styles (Pistole & Arricale). Shi (2003) furthermore reported that secure individuals displayed more positive behaviour and higher relationship satisfaction than individuals who scored higher on anxiety and avoidance dimensions. Creasey (2002) suggests that although secure couples would occasionally use negative behaviours during conflict, their liberal use of positive behaviours enhances the positive emotional content of their discussions.

### *Emerging themes*

Securely attached participants may use positive behaviours more frequently, than their insecure counterparts, and possibly have a wider range of helpful strategies. In general, positive problem solving behaviours such as compromise, negotiation and intent listening by both partners, may appear as themes.

### *Question 6: Conflict Resolution in Ideal Relationships*

Previous research has shown that ideal partner standards are based around three dimensions: warmth/trustworthiness, vitality/attractiveness, and status/resources (Fletcher, Simpson, Thomas, & Giles, 1999). Ideal relationships have been found to be based on two dimensions of intimacy/loyalty and passion (Fletcher et al., 1999). More recent research (Fletcher, Tither, O'Loughlin, Friesen, & Overall, 2004) indicates that individuals in long-term relationships would value the "warm and homely person as opposed to the cold and attractive person" (p. 670). Individuals who view their current relationships and partners as closely matching their ideal relationships and partners, have also been found to be more satisfied with their relationships (Fletcher et al., 1999). Securely attached couples' relationships have been found to be characterised by greater congruence between their actual and ideal relationships (Mickulincer & Erev, 1991). Levine (1995) theorised that the discrepancy between ideal and actual love is a natural function of any long-term relationship, and it requires the individual to constantly manage this "gap" by using a

range of defences (e.g., idealization, denial, and rationalization) which in turn might enhance relationship well-being. More recently Caughlin (2003) also noted with regards to ideal communication in family relationships, that unmet ideals (discrepancies between ideals and perceptions of communication behaviour) are associated with relationship dissatisfaction.

### *Emerging themes*

Conflict resolution styles which result in greater amounts of warmth and trustworthiness in the relationship may be held up as the ideal in long-term relationships. A greater congruence may emerge between a securely attached couple's ideal and real relationships as well as the manner in which they resolve conflict. Couples who report ideal conflict resolution styles close to their own may also be happier with their relationship. Insecurely attached participants may hold more unrealistic ideas of their ideal relationships and how their ideal couple might solve conflict.

## *Method*

### *Methodological Considerations*

A multi-strategy research approach employing quantitative and qualitative research methods was decided on. Utilizing multiple methods of data collection is becoming an increasingly popular research strategy. Harré and Crystal (2004) argue that when combining statistical analyses and semantic interpretations it could lead to a very powerful methodological approach, especially with regards to psychological phenomena. Bryman (2004) reviews arguments for and against combining quantitative and qualitative research methods. These include the notion that various research methods are epistemologically embedded (e.g., Hughes, 1990) and that these paradigms with their specific assumptions and methods are incompatible (e.g., Morgan, 1998). However, according to Bryman researchers who have a technical perspective on the argument recognize that various research methods are connected with separate epistemological assumptions, but view these research methods as compatible. Hammersley (1996, cited in Bryman) suggests that there are three multi-strategy research approaches, including triangulation (i.e., using quantitative findings

to confirm qualitative findings, or vice versa), facilitation (i.e., one research method is used to aid research using another research method), and complementarity (i.e., both research strategies are used to capture different angles of the researched phenomena).

Following Hammersley's (1996) classification of multi-strategy research it was decided to obtain a picture of complementarity with the two research approaches, so that different facets of the research questions could be fitted together. Despite arguments noted in the literature regarding separate epistemological commitments, and the separate research paradigms of quantitative and qualitative approaches (Bryman, 2004) it was felt that the addition of qualitative questions would dovetail neatly with the quantitative data and would add a depth of understanding to each particular couple's content. The strategic placement of qualitative questions toward the end of the research exercise also served a cathartic function, in that it allowed participants to voice more explicitly the thoughts and feelings that might have been triggered as a result of answering the preceding close-ended quantitative questions.

In addition to a multi-strategy approach, a multi-method research design was also utilized. More specifically, couples were asked to participate in a videotaped communication exercise (later analysed by raters) as well as complete self-report questionnaires. Quantitative self-report questionnaires were utilized in keeping with relevant literature, whereas the observational data gathered through videotaping was used to develop an observational scale of conflict resolution styles. The study chose not to look at longitudinal differences, and therefore the once-off data gathering procedure was deemed adequate for the purposes of the study.

To enable comparisons with Study 1 and to test gender differences, Study 2 makes use of correlational analyses. Although frequently used in marital/couples research to test gender differences (e.g., Banse, 2004; Creasy, 2002; Crowell et al., 2002; Johnson et al., 2005; Wampler et al., 2003) interpretation of the present findings should be treated with caution as it does not take into account dyadic interaction effects (e.g., Cook & Kenny, 2005; Griffin & Gonzalez, 1995).

### *Participants*

Twenty-two heterosexual couples were recruited through means of advertisements in the local media (i.e., Auckland community newspapers) and through flyers on university notice boards. The study focused on both relational partners' responses to a set of questionnaires and a videotaped communication exercise. At a follow-up debrief meeting all participants received \$20 compensation for their travel expenses. The participants' anonymity was preserved by the raters (who had limited access to participant information) and the researcher, all of whom signed confidentiality agreements.

Of the 44 participants (22 couples) the mean age for the sample was 42.07 ( $SD = 10.27$ ) years. At a minimum level participants were required to currently cohabit in a heterosexual relationship of at least 6 month duration, and the mean length of relationships were 161.09 months ( $SD = 138.50$ ), with the maximum being 496 months (approximately 41 years), as can be seen in Table 11 (p. 170). The majority of the participants (see Table 10, p. 170) were in marital relationships (77%), with the mean length of marital relationships totalling 124.5 months. Approximately half of the sample had children with their current partner or from a previous relationship (52%). A small percentage of the sample grew up in single families (2%), whereas 30% indicated that their parents/primary caregivers were divorced or separated, leaving the majority of the participants to grow up in families with both parents or primary caregivers present (61%). Most participants indicated their mother as primary caregiver (91%), whereas some indicated their mother and father (7%), or other, for example, nanny/governess. By dividing the 44 participants into three partner attachment styles according to the category in which they had the highest score, (1) Secure individuals constituted 95% of the sample ( $n = 42$ ), (2) Preoccupied individuals constituted 2% of the sample ( $n = 1$ ), and (3) Avoidant participants constituted 2% of the sample ( $n = 1$ ).

The majority of the sample was of New Zealand European descent (75%), with some Maori participants (9%), and other participants totalling 16% (e.g., Polynesian, Australian, German, and Singaporean Chinese). Full time employed participants totalled 52%, whereas 43% were not employed full time, or fell in another category

(including retired, full time students, part time workers, unemployed and full time homemakers).

Table 10

*Demographic Data (categorical) – Study 2 (N = 44)*

Demographic variables	Frequency	%
<b>Marital status</b>		
Married	34	77.3
Cohabiting	10	22.7
<b>Children</b>		
Children (from current/previous relationship)	23	52.3
No children	21	47.7
<b>Primary caregiver</b>		
Mother	40	90.9
Mother & Father	3	6.8
Other	1	2.3
<b>Parents divorced/separated</b>		
Parents not divorced/separated	27	61.4
Parents divorced/separated	13	29.5
Grew up in single parent family	1	2.3
(Missing data)	(3)	(6.8)
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
New Zealand European	33	75
Maori	4	9.1
Other (e.g., Polynesian, Australian, etc.)	7	15.9
<b>Employment</b>		
Employed full time	23	52.3
Not employed full time	19	43.2
(Missing data)	(2)	(4.5)

Table 11

*Demographic Data: Age and Months Lived Together (N = 44)*

Descriptives	Age	Months lived together
Mean	42.07	161.09
Standard deviation	10.27	138.50
Range	39.00	490.00
Minimum	25.00	6.00
Maximum	64.00	496.00

## *Measures*

This research project saw the development of a new measure, the Conflict Resolution Style Observer Rating Scale (CRS-ORS) and also set out to revalidate existing measures.

### *a) Background information form.*

The researcher designed this questionnaire to assess the demographic variables of participants and to allow for a proper description of the sample. Participants were questioned on their gender, age, ethnicity, duration of relationship, marital status, children, employment, primary caregiver, and whether their parents/primary caregivers were divorced or separated. The Background Information Form can be found in Appendix 9.

### *b) Parent and Partner Attachment Scale.*

Participants completed a relationship attachment scale developed by Le Poire et al. (1997), which measures secure, preoccupied and dismissively avoidant attachment styles on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). The scale measures the individuals' current perception of childhood attachment (Parent Attachment Scale), as well as their current perspectives of their attachment to their romantic partner (Partner Attachment Scale). Secure partner attachment (12 items) included items such as (1) "I believe that my partner is capable of unconditional positive regard", and (2) "My partner is always there for me in times of crisis". This subscale achieved an alpha reliability estimate of .83. Preoccupied attachment (9 items) included items such as (1) "Much of my time is spent thinking about my partner", and (2) "I have repeated thoughts about what I have recently done with my partner". The preoccupied attachment subscale had an alpha reliability coefficient of .71. The dismissively avoidant style (4 items) included items such as (1) "I find my outside activities more stimulating than I find my relationship with my partner", and (2) "When I start feeling "too close" to my partner, I spend a lot of time in activities outside my relationship". The dismissively avoidant subscale obtained an alpha reliability coefficient of .61. The parental subscale asks attachment-related questions about the primary caregiver, and includes a role reversal and secure primary caregiver attachment subscale. Role reversal was comprised of 17 items, including "S/he depended on me to make household decisions", and had an alpha value of .83. The

secure attachment (primary caregiver) included 18 questions (e.g., “When s/he left me, I felt confident that s/he would return”) and had an alpha reliability coefficient of .87. The Parent and Partner Attachment Scale can be found in Appendix 9.

*c) Conflict Resolution Style Inventory.*

The Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory (CRSI) is a 16-item self-report questionnaire that measures the participant’s frequency (1 = never to 5 = always) of engaging in certain conflict resolving styles with their partner (Kurdek, 1994). The 16 items are divided into four categories of conflict resolution styles: Positive Problem Solving (CRSI-PPS), Conflict Engagement (CRSI-CENG), Withdrawal (CRSI-WDRL), and Compliance (CRSI-COMPL), and the scale is based on behavioural observations of conflict resolution by Gottman and Krokoff (1989). The CRSI has been linked to changes in relationship satisfaction (Gottman, 1994), and has good internal consistency (Kurdek, 1994) with alpha values ranging from .68 to .89. Kurdek also indicated good concurrent-related and predictive criteria-related validity, and test-retest correlations spanning a 1-year period ranged from .46 to .83. The CRSI can be found in Appendix 9.

Raters also measured participants’ verbal and nonverbal behaviour in terms of their conflict resolution styles. An observational rating scale has been developed for the purposes of this research to accompany the Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory (CRSI). This scale was developed to verify self-reported conflict resolution styles through observational research. Raters used the Conflict Resolution Style Observer Rating Scale (CRS-ORS) to determine the conflict resolution style of each participant. These observer ratings were used to make correlations to the same self-reported conflict resolution styles of participants, thereby testing the use of this newly developed rating scale, and also confirming the occurrence of the self-reported conflict resolution styles. The Conflict Resolution Style Observer Rating Scale (CRS-ORS) and the coding sheet can be found in Appendix 10. The CRS-ORS is loosely based on some of the codes used in the Rapid Marital Interaction Coding System (RMICS), (Heyman, Brown, Feldbau, & O’Leary, 1999).

*d) Feelings about Conflict Scale.*

A questionnaire that was recently developed by Pistole and Arricale (2003) was used to explore attachment-related reactions to conflict. Participants were asked to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with 33 statements regarding their intimate relationships by using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). Pistole and Arricale conducted a factor analysis on the Feelings about Conflict scale and found that three factors accounted for 42.7 % of the variance. Factor one, “Arguing is Threatening”, for example, “During conflict, I often have to defend myself”, had a internal consistence reliability coefficient of .90. Factor two, “Arguing is Beneficial”, for example, “Our conflicts seem to bring us closer together”, had a reliability of .85. Factor three, “Concern with Closeness”, for example, “During arguments, I am most concerned with re-establishing close feelings, even when I feel angry”, had a reliability of .71. They furthermore found with Scheffe post-hoc tests that individuals who endorsed secure attachments reported significantly lower levels of “(a) Arguing Is Threatening, than did those endorsing preoccupied or fearful attachment and (b) Concern With Closeness, than did those endorsing preoccupied attachment” (p. 323). Preoccupied individuals were thus found to be more concerned with closeness when their relationships become challenged during conflict, whereas fearfully attached persons respond to the attachment threat by distancing, supporting the belief that arguing is threatening to the relationship (Pistole & Arricale). The Feelings About Conflict Scale can be found in Appendix 9.

*e) Dyadic Adjustment Scale.*

The well-known Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) developed by Spanier (1976) was used as measure of marital satisfaction and adjustment (see Appendix 9). The DAS is a self-report measure consisting of four subscales. Spanier demonstrated content, criterion and construct validity as well as reliability in his original research and many other researchers have gone on to use the DAS as an instrument of choice in measuring relationship satisfaction and adjustment (e.g., Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002; Wampler et al., 2003). The adjustment subscale consists of 15 items asking partners to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree (0 = always disagree to 5 = always agree) on everyday matters, such as demonstration of affection and leisure time interests. The satisfaction subscale consists of 9 items asking partners how often (0 = all of the time to 5 = never) events occur in their relationship (e.g., “How often

do you or your partner leave the house after a fight?” and “Do you confide in your partner?). The cohesion subscale consists of 5 items asking the partners to indicate how often (“never” to “more than once a day”) they engage in activities together (e.g., “Work together on a project” and “Have a stimulating exchange of ideas”). The affection subscale consists of 3 items asking partners to indicate how often they kiss their partner and whether they had disagreement around not showing love.

*f) Talk Table.*

In order to measure communication accuracy, a variation of Gottman et al.’s (1976) Talk Table was used. In the present study, the Talk Table was a pencil-and-paper self-report measure that allowed couples to indicate the accuracy of their encoding (emotional meaning intended) and decoding (emotional meaning received) ability during a conflictual discussion. Couples used a digital timer with an alarm to mark the passing of each minute for 12 minutes, the first two minutes being practice rounds. The Talk Table procedure ran for 12 minutes with each partner indicating after every minute (a) his/her intent for the previous minute, and (b) his/her partner’s communication intent during the previous minute. Partners chose “positive” if the emotional tone of the conversation was upbeat and satisfying, “negative” if the conversation was argumentative or upsetting, and “neutral” if there was not any particular emotion displayed. Couples were instructed to focus on each other’s overall behaviour. This variation of the Talk Table is based on Van Buren’s (2002) application, but it was extended to include other factors that might influence a couple’s interactional behaviour. For instance, couples were also asked to indicate through which dominant mode they perceived the partner’s communicational intent (voice, words or face and body). In addition couples were asked upon completion how satisfied they were with the discussion, and how satisfied they were with their own, as well as their partner’s, problem solving ability. The Talk Table procedure was also videotaped, although the raters only focussed on the conflict resolution styles exhibited during the conflict discussion. The Talk Table Form can be found in Appendix 9.

*g) Qualitative questions.*

Qualitative questions in this research project were deemed an appropriate way to gather additional, more in-depth information from participants, which would place the quantitative data and videotaped conflict resolution styles within an appropriate individual and dyadic context. The questions were placed toward the end of each couple's participation, the function of this being two-fold: to serve a cathartic role, thus allowing participants to express more fully information that might have been triggered by their participation in the videotaped exercise and by answering the quantitative questions; and secondly, to allow a greater depth of expression by the time they have participated in the other data gathering stages. The questions were developed specifically for the purposes of this research exercise by the researcher and her supervisors. The following questions were devised:

- 1) Please describe your relationship with your primary caregiver. Include as much detail as you can and be sure to include characteristics of your relationship (e.g., "We had a warm, loving relationship"), as well as qualities of your primary caregiver (e.g., "She drank heavily");
- 2) Please describe the nature of the arguments that took place between you parents/primary caregivers when you were a child (e.g., long cold silences);
- 3) Please describe your relationship with your current romantic partner. Include as much detail as you can and be sure to include characteristics of your relationship (e.g., "We have a caring and nurturing relationship") as well as qualities of your romantic partner (e.g., "He works long hours");
- 4) In your relationship with your current partner have you noticed any ways of sorting out problems and arguments that result in failure to reach a solution to a problem, or that makes a problem worse? Please give examples and comment;
- 5) In your current relationship are there any ways of sorting out problems and arguments that work really well? Please give examples and comment; and
- 6) Imagine your ideal relationship. How would the couple in your ideal relationship handle conflict?

The format in which the Qualitative Questions were presented can be found in Appendix 9.

## *Procedure*

### *1) Pilot study.*

Full ethics approval was obtained from the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (ALB Protocol 03/044), prior to the study and pilot study being carried out. To test the efficacy of the proposed procedure, a pilot study was conducted with the first three prospective couples that registered interest in the study. Participants were asked to verbally give feedback to the researcher with regards to the procedures, including their level of fatigue upon completion of the research exercise. All the participants indicated that they felt comfortable with the procedure, and they also communicated their satisfaction with the research experience during the follow-up feedback session. Subsequent to the pilot study only minimal changes were made to the proposed procedure, for example, the questionnaire order was slightly rearranged.

### *2) Study 2.*

Various announcements in the local media, through advertisements and flyers advertised the study (see Appendix 7 & 8). To participate, couples were required to be involved in a committed, heterosexual relationship of 6 months or longer. Prospective participants were able to register their interest at an answering service and were contacted and screened by the researcher via telephone. Following the screening procedure (e.g., checking on length of relationship and cohabitation status) and a brief overview of the proposed research, a meeting was set up for the participants. Participants reported to the research laboratory where the study was conducted. At this stage participants were informed in more detail of the proposed research and consent forms indicating their willingness to participate in the research were completed. Participants were also informed of the confidentiality of their participation and the possibility of withdrawing from the study at any time.

Following the introduction to the study, participants proceeded to complete the first 15 items of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) (see Appendix 9) to determine an area of major disagreement in their relationship that could be discussed in the videotaped interaction. Participants then engaged in a practice round which was

followed by a 10 minute discussion about a major disagreement in their relationship (for more detailed information on this procedure, see Appendix 9). This interaction was videotaped to enable further analysis of their conflict resolution styles by trained raters. Following this interaction, participants were separated to fill in questionnaires regarding their attachment dimensions, relationship satisfaction, conflict resolution styles and conflict beliefs, as well as the qualitative questions. The whole process took approximately two hours to complete. Immediately following this, each couple was thoroughly debriefed on their participation, which included:

- a) A detailed explanation of the purpose and aims of the research;
- b) Conversing with the participants to relieve any emotional anxiety that might have resulted from their participation;
- c) Scheduling an appointment where further information regarding their participation would be disseminated; and
- d) Informing participants that counselling services through Relationship Services (NZ) were available if they required additional support following participation.

Approximately one week on from the couple's participation a meeting was held with each couple to offer a more detailed and personalized outline of the couples' communication styles. General suggestions for improving their communication and enhancing conflict management were also included in this discussion. If they were interested, couples were also able to obtain a concise version of the research results upon completion of the study.

## Results

### *Quantitative Data Analysis*

#### *Data Analysis*

Quantitative data analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for Windows Version 13. Pearson product-moment correlations ( $r$ ), and Spearman rank correlation coefficients ( $r_s$ ), tested the significance of relationships between the variables of interest in the hypotheses, and, where appropriate, between-group differences were shown with Kruskal-Wallis and Mann-Whitney tests.

Pearson correlational analyses indicated the strength and direction of the linear relationships between the variables of interest (Howell, 2004). Although many studies in this field make use of parametric analyses (e.g., ANOVAS and regression analyses), some of the data in the study was analysed by less powerful nonparametric statistical tests (Coakes, 2006; Dancey & Reidy, 2004). This was necessitated by the small sample size, but also to allow for comparison with the hypotheses tested in Study 1 (see Part IV for comparison). Essentially, however, the data does point to significant relationships between the variables which might be explored with more conventional analyses in future studies.

Prior to conducting inferential analyses the data were examined for assumptions of normality. To render a more complete data set 21 missing values were identified and replaced with linear trend at point values to keep the cases in the analysis. Four outliers were identified, and their influence was minimized by replacing their values with a value of three standard deviations from the mean (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). This rendered a complete sample of 44 participants (22 couples). Shapiro Wilk's tests of normality in SPSS revealed that some variables (Avoidant Partner Attachment, Length of Relationship, Conflict Engagement, Compliance and Role-Reversed Parental Attachment) were not normally distributed, and logarithmic transformations were applied (Tabachnick & Fidell). Additional variables (Secure Partner Attachment, Secure Parent Attachment) remained not normally distributed even upon attempting to transform these variables. As assumptions and statistical conclusions based on lack of normality could be false (Howell, 2004), it was deemed appropriate to use nonparametric statistical tests where these variables were concerned. These include the Kruskal-Wallis one-way analysis of variance test (nonparametric variant of ANOVA) and the Mann-Whitney test (comparing the central tendency of two independent samples), as well as Spearman's rho for nonparametric correlational analyses (Coakes, 2006; Dancey & Reidy, 2004).

### Hypotheses Testing

The following hypotheses were tested:

#### *Hypothesis 1.*

Individuals endorsing a ‘*more secure-more secure*’ attachment style combination (*more secure* primary caregiver and *more secure* partner attachment styles) are expected to have the highest relationship satisfaction compared to other primary caregiver and partner attachment combinations, that is, a ‘*more secure-less secure*’ attachment style (*more secure* primary caregiver, *less secure* partner attachment), a ‘*less secure-more secure*’ attachment style (*less secure* primary caregiver and *more secure* partner), and a ‘*less secure-less secure*’ attachment style (*less secure* primary caregiver attachment and *less secure* partner attachment).

A Kruskal-Wallis test of the significance of the differences in mean ranks (see Table 12) revealed that there were significant differences between the four attachment configuration groups (‘*more secure-more secure*’, ‘*less secure-more secure*’, ‘*more secure-less secure*’, ‘*less secure-less secure*’) on relationship satisfaction  $\chi^2(3, N = 44) = 11.17, p < .05$ . No significant gender or length of relationship differences were found between the groups. Post-hoc Mann-Whitney tests showed that the ‘*more secure-more secure* group’ ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 30.91$ ) was significantly more satisfied than the ‘*more secure-less secure* group’ ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 18.83$ ),  $U = 32.00, z = -2.09, p < .05$ , and the ‘*less secure-less secure* group’ ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 13.11$ ),  $U = 10.00, z = -3.00, p < .01$ . For effect sizes, the  $z$  scores revealed that the differences in relationship satisfaction between the groups were more than 2 standard deviations from the means.

Table 12

*Mean ranks of attachment style combinations (N = 44) on relationship satisfaction*

Variable	Attachment combination style	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Mean rank	$\chi^2$
Relationship satisfaction	More secure-more secure	11	123.34	10.24	30.91 <sup>a</sup>	11.17*
	Less secure-more secure	12	110.23	13.36	18.83 <sup>b</sup>	
	More secure-less secure	12	117.80	11.23	25.50	
	Less secure-less secure	9	102.48	15.31	13.11 <sup>b</sup>	

*Note.* Means with different superscripts denote significant differences, \*  $p < .05$

Table 13

*Correlations<sup>1</sup> for Partner Attachment, Primary Caregiver Attachment, Conflict Resolution Styles and Conflict Beliefs (N = 44)*

Variables	Gender ( $\tau$ )	Length of relationship	Relationship satisfaction	Secure partner attachment ( $r_s$ )	Preoccupied partner attachment	Avoidant partner attachment
Gender ( $\tau$ )	-	-	-	.01	-.26*	.13
Length of relationship	.00	-	-	-.19	.18	.11
Relationship satisfaction	-.02	.01	-	.62**	.59**	-.51**
Secure primary caregiver attachment ( $r_s$ )	-.04	-.19	.21	.10	.20	-.09
Role-reversed primary caregiver attachment	-.19	.09	.06	-.17	.10	.18
Conflict resolution styles						
Positive problem solving	-.19	.09	.66**	.32*	.49**	-.27
Conflict engagement	.27*	-.18	-.45**	-.23	-.25	.24
Withdrawal	.01	-.21	-.39**	-.41**	-.26	.20
Compliance	-.03	-.00	-.08	-.18	-.08	.06
Conflict beliefs						
Arguing is threatening	.20	-.27	-.58**	-.66**	-.39**	.38*
Arguing is beneficial	-.07	.36*	.40**	.25	.54**	-.11

*Note.* <sup>1</sup>Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients for all variables, except Gender (Kendall's rank correlation coefficient,  $\tau$ ), Partner Secure Attachment (Spearman rank correlation coefficient,  $r_s$ ) and Primary Caregiver Secure Attachment (Spearman rank correlation coefficient,  $r_s$ ). \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , 1-tailed, with Bonferroni corrections

*Hypothesis 2.*

Secure partner attachment will be positively correlated with relationship satisfaction, whereas preoccupied or avoidant partner attachment will be negatively related to relationship satisfaction.

As can be seen in Table 13 (p. 180), a Spearman rank correlation coefficient indicated that secure attachment was positively correlated with relationship satisfaction ( $r_s = .62, p < .01$ ). Pearson product-moment correlations indicated that preoccupied attachment was positively associated with relationship satisfaction ( $r = .59, p < .01$ ), and avoidant attachment was negatively associated with relationship satisfaction ( $r = -.51, p < .01$ ).

*Hypothesis 3.*

Partner secure attachment and primary caregiver secure attachment will have a weak to moderate positive correlation.

A Spearman rank correlation coefficient (see Table 13) indicated that there was no significant correlation between a secure partner attachment and a secure primary caregiver attachment ( $r_s = .01, ns$ ).

*Hypothesis 4.*

Correlations between the secure, preoccupied and avoidant styles of partner attachment and the belief that arguing is beneficial are expected to be positive and similar.

As can be seen in Table 13, only preoccupied partner attachment was significantly positively related to the belief that arguing is beneficial ( $r = .54, p < .01$ ), whereas avoidant and secure partner attachment were not associated with the belief that arguing is beneficial ( $r = -.11, ns$ , and  $r_s = .25, ns$ , respectively). This relationship was particularly salient for men ( $r = .69, p < .01$ ), but not for women ( $r = .41, ns$ ).

*Hypotheses 5.*

5a) Secure partner attachment will be negatively associated with the belief that arguing is threatening to the relationship.

5b) Avoidant partner attachment will be positively associated with the belief that arguing is threatening to the relationship.

5c) Preoccupied partner attachment will be positively associated with the belief that arguing is a threat to the relationship.

5a) As can be seen in Table 13 (p. 180), the Spearman rank correlation coefficient showed that there was a strong negative association between secure attachment and the belief that arguing is threatening to a relationship ( $r_s = -.66, p < .01$ ). Additional Spearman rank correlation coefficients indicated that this was particularly true for women ( $r = -.72, p < .01$ ), but not for men ( $r = -.38, ns$ ).

5b) The Pearson product-moment correlation (see Table 13) indicated that avoidant attachment was positively associated with the belief that arguing is threatening ( $r = .38, p < .05$ ). Again, additional Pearson product-moment correlations indicated that this was particularly true for women ( $r = .55, p < .05$ ), but not for men ( $r = .14, ns$ ).

5c) Furthermore, the Pearson product-moment correlation showed that preoccupied attachment was negatively related to the belief that arguing is threatening to a relationship ( $r = -.39, p < .01$ ). Again, additional Pearson product-moment correlations indicated that this was particularly true for women ( $r = -.43, p < .05$ ), but not for men ( $r = -.23, ns$ ).

#### *Hypothesis 6.*

Women's belief that arguing is threatening will be negatively associated with relationship satisfaction.

Pearson product-moment correlations showed that the relationship between the belief that arguing is threatening and relationship satisfaction was significant for the 22 women ( $r = -.78, p < .01$ ), but not for the 22 men ( $r = -.33, ns$ ). However, additional Pearson product-moment correlations indicated that for men the belief that arguing is beneficial was positively associated with relationship satisfaction ( $r = .56, p < .01$ ), but not for women ( $r = .29, ns$ ).

*Hypotheses 7.*

7a) Individuals with ‘*more secure-more secure*’ combinations of attachment styles (*more secure* primary caregiver attachment, and *more secure* partner attachment) are expected to believe more strongly than other attachment groups that arguing is beneficial.

7b) The ‘*less secure-less secure* group’ are expected to believe more strongly than other groups that arguing is threatening.

7a) A Kruskal-Wallis test of the significance of the differences in mean ranks revealed that there were no significant differences between the four attachment combination groups (‘*more secure-more secure*’, ‘*less secure-more secure*’, ‘*more secure-less secure*’, ‘*less secure-less secure*’) on the belief that arguing is beneficial,  $\chi^2(3, N = 44) = 1.79, ns$ .

7b) A Kruskal-Wallis test of the significance of the differences in mean ranks (Table 14) revealed that there were significant differences between the four attachment combination groups on the belief that arguing is threatening,  $\chi^2(3, N = 44) = 16.88, p < .01$ . Post-hoc Mann-Whitney tests showed that the ‘*less secure-less secure* group’ ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 35.06$ ) held the belief that arguing is threatening significantly more than the ‘*more secure-more secure* group’ ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 13.14$ ),  $U = 4.50, z = -3.42, p < .001$ , and the ‘*more secure-less secure* group’ ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 18.04$ ),  $U = 10.50, z = -3.09, p < .01$ . Furthermore the Mann-Whitney tests showed that the ‘*less secure-more secure* group’ ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 26.13$ ) also held the belief that arguing is threatening significantly more than the ‘*more secure-more secure* group’ ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 13.14$ ),  $U = 29.00, z = -2.28, p < .05$ . For effect sizes, the  $z$  scores revealed that the differences in the belief that arguing is threatening between the groups were more than 2 standard deviations from the means.

Table 14

*Mean Ranks for Attachment Style Configurations on Conflict Beliefs*

Conflict beliefs	Attachment combination style	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Mean rank	$\chi^2$
Arguing is threatening	More secure-more secure	11	2.85	.63	13.14 <sup>b</sup>	16.88**
	Less secure-more secure	12	3.70	.79	26.13 <sup>ac</sup>	
	More secure-less secure	12	3.16	.61	18.04 <sup>bc</sup>	
	Less secure-less secure	9	4.23	.53	35.06 <sup>a</sup>	

*Note.* Means with different superscripts denote significant differences. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

From the results presented in 7(b) it became clear that current models of partner attachment were particularly salient in the context of conflict beliefs. By re-combining the attachment configuration groups the mean rank differences became evident (see Table 15).

Table 15

*Mean Ranks for Regrouping of Attachment Configurations on Conflict Beliefs*

Conflict beliefs	Attachment configurations	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Mean rank
Arguing is threatening	More secure partner attachment (and more/less secure primary caregiver attachment)	23	3.01	.63	15.70
	Less secure partner attachment (and more/less secure primary caregiver attachment)	21	3.93	.73	29.95

Additional post-hoc Mann-Whitney tests revealed that the ‘less secure partner attachment group’ ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 29.95$ ) held the belief that arguing is threatening significantly more strongly than the ‘more secure partner attachment group’ ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 15.70$ ),  $U = 85.00$ ,  $z = -3.68$ ,  $p < .001$ . For large effect sizes, the  $z$ -scores show that the expected mean differences between the two groups’ ranks and the actual mean differences were more than 3 standard deviations.

*Hypotheses 8.*

8a) Secure partner attachment will be positively correlated with utilizing positive problem solving styles most frequently in conflict situations.

8b) Preoccupied partner attachment will not be significantly correlated with any particular conflict resolution style.

8c) Avoidant partner attachment will be positively correlated with withdrawal.

8a) A Spearman rank correlation coefficient (Table 13, p. 180) indicated that there was a significant positive correlation between secure partner attachment and positive problem solving ( $r_s = .32$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Additional Spearman rank correlation coefficients indicated that for women in particular there was a moderate correlation between secure partner attachment and positive problem solving ( $r_s = .54$ ,  $p < .05$ ). For men there was a moderate negative correlation between secure attachment and withdrawal ( $r_s = -.51$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

8b) No significant relationships between preoccupied partner attachment and conflict engagement ( $r = -.25, ns$ ), withdrawal ( $r = -.26, ns$ ) or compliance ( $r = .08, ns$ ) were identified. However, preoccupied partner attachment did have a moderately positive correlation with positive problem solving ( $r = .49, p < .01$ ), in particular for women ( $r = .58, p < .01$ ). In addition, post-hoc Mann-Whitney tests revealed that there were distinct gender differences on conflict engagement with women ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 26.45$ ) engaging in conflict engagement significantly more frequently than men ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 18.55$ ),  $U = 155.00, z = -2.06, p < .05$ .

8c) As can be seen in Table 13 (p. 180), Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients indicated that the positive relationship between avoidant partner attachment and any of the four conflict resolution styles was not significant: withdrawal ( $r = .20, ns$ ), conflict engagement ( $r = .24, ns$ ), compliance ( $r = .06, ns$ ), and positive problem solving ( $r = -.27, ns$ ).

#### *Hypotheses 9.*

9a) 'More secure-more secure' attachment style configurations (*more* secure primary caregiver attachment, and *more* secure partner attachment) are expected to apply positive problem solving more frequently in their conflict resolution, than other attachment configurations.

9b) Individuals with configurations of 'less secure-less secure' attachment styles are expected to apply conflict engagement, withdrawal and compliance more frequently in their conflict resolution, than other attachment configurations.

9c) The belief that arguing is threatening is expected to be correlated with withdrawal, compliance and conflict engagement, whereas the belief that arguing is beneficial is expected to be linked to positive problem solving.

9a) A Kruskal-Wallis test of significance of the differences in mean ranks (see Table 16) revealed that there were no significant differences between the four attachment combination groups on positive problem solving as a conflict resolution style,  $\chi^2(3, N = 44) = 6.48, ns$ .

9b) A Kruskal-Wallis test identified that only for withdrawal (not conflict engagement or compliance) were there significant differences between the four attachment combination groups,  $\chi^2(3, N = 44) = 12.64, p < .01$ . Post-hoc Mann-Whitney tests showed that the ‘less secure-less secure group’ ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 34.22$ ) used withdrawal significantly more frequently than the ‘more secure-more secure group’ ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 14.09$ ),  $U = 7.5, z = -3.22, p < .01$ , and the ‘more secure-less secure group’ ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 20.67$ ),  $U = 26.00, z = -2.01, p < .05$ . The ‘less secure-less secure group’ ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 34.22$ ) also used withdrawal significantly more than the ‘less secure-more secure group’ ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 23.25$ ),  $U = 18.50, z = -2.54, p < .01$ .

Table 16

*Mean Ranks for Attachment Style Configurations on Conflict Resolution Styles*

Conflict resolution styles	Attachment combination style	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Mean rank	$\chi^2$
Positive problem solving	More secure-more secure	11	3.95	.71	26.18	6.48
	Less secure-more secure	12	3.71	.64	21.75	
	More secure-less secure	12	3.98	.48	26.50	
	Less secure-less secure	9	3.41	.38	13.67	
Conflict engagement	More secure-more secure	11	1.92	1.01	19.41	2.24
	Less secure-more secure	12	2.19	.65	25.79	
	More secure-less secure	12	1.85	.51	20.13	
	Less secure-less secure	9	2.23	.87	25.06	
Withdrawal	More secure-more secure	11	1.59	.62	14.09 <sup>b</sup>	12.64**
	Less secure-more secure	12	2.10	.73	23.25 <sup>b</sup>	
	More secure-less secure	12	1.92	.61	20.67 <sup>b</sup>	
	Less secure-less secure	9	2.72	.54	34.22 <sup>a</sup>	
Compliance	More secure-more secure	11	1.57	.54	19.82	1.77
	Less secure-more secure	12	1.75	.62	23.46	
	More secure-less secure	12	1.56	.36	20.83	
	Less secure-less secure	9	2.00	.83	26.72	

*Note.* Means with different superscripts denote significant differences. \*\*  $p < .01$

Table 17

*Mean Ranks for Regrouping of Attachment Configurations on Withdrawal*

Variable	Attachment configurations	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Mean rank
Withdrawal	More secure parent attachment (and more/less secure partner attachment)	23	1.86	.71	18.87
	Less secure parent attachment (and more/less secure partner attachment)	21	2.26	.70	26.48

Additional post-hoc Mann-Whitney tests revealed that the ‘*less secure parent* attachment group’ ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 26.48$ ) used withdrawal significantly more frequently than the ‘*more secure parent* attachment group’ ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 18.87$ ),  $U = 158.00$ ,  $z = -1.97$ ,  $p < .05$  (see Table 17). For large effect sizes, the  $z$ -scores show that the expected mean differences between the two groups’ ranks and the actual mean differences were approximately 2 standard deviations

9c) The belief that arguing is threatening showed a significant positive correlation with withdrawal ( $r = .51$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and conflict engagement ( $r = .60$ ,  $p < .01$ ), but not with compliance ( $r = .16$ ,  $ns$ ). The belief that arguing is beneficial was positively correlated with positive problem solving ( $r = .34$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

*Hypothesis 10.*

Parental divorce will be positively related to withdrawal as a conflict resolution style.

In the sample, 31.8% of the participants came from homes in which the parents had divorced (or where they grew up in a single family), whereas 61.4% of the participants came from homes in which the parents had not divorced (6.8% data missing). Kendall’s rank correlation coefficient indicated no significant relationship between parental divorce and withdrawal ( $\tau = -.03$ ,  $ns$ ), or any other conflict resolution styles.

In summary with regards to the first 10 hypothesis of Study 2 (as done in Study 1) the correlational relationships between partner attachment, conflict beliefs and conflict resolution styles are represented in Figure 7. These correlational findings also support the hypothesized model of the relationship between the key variables (illustrated in Figure 5, p. 112).

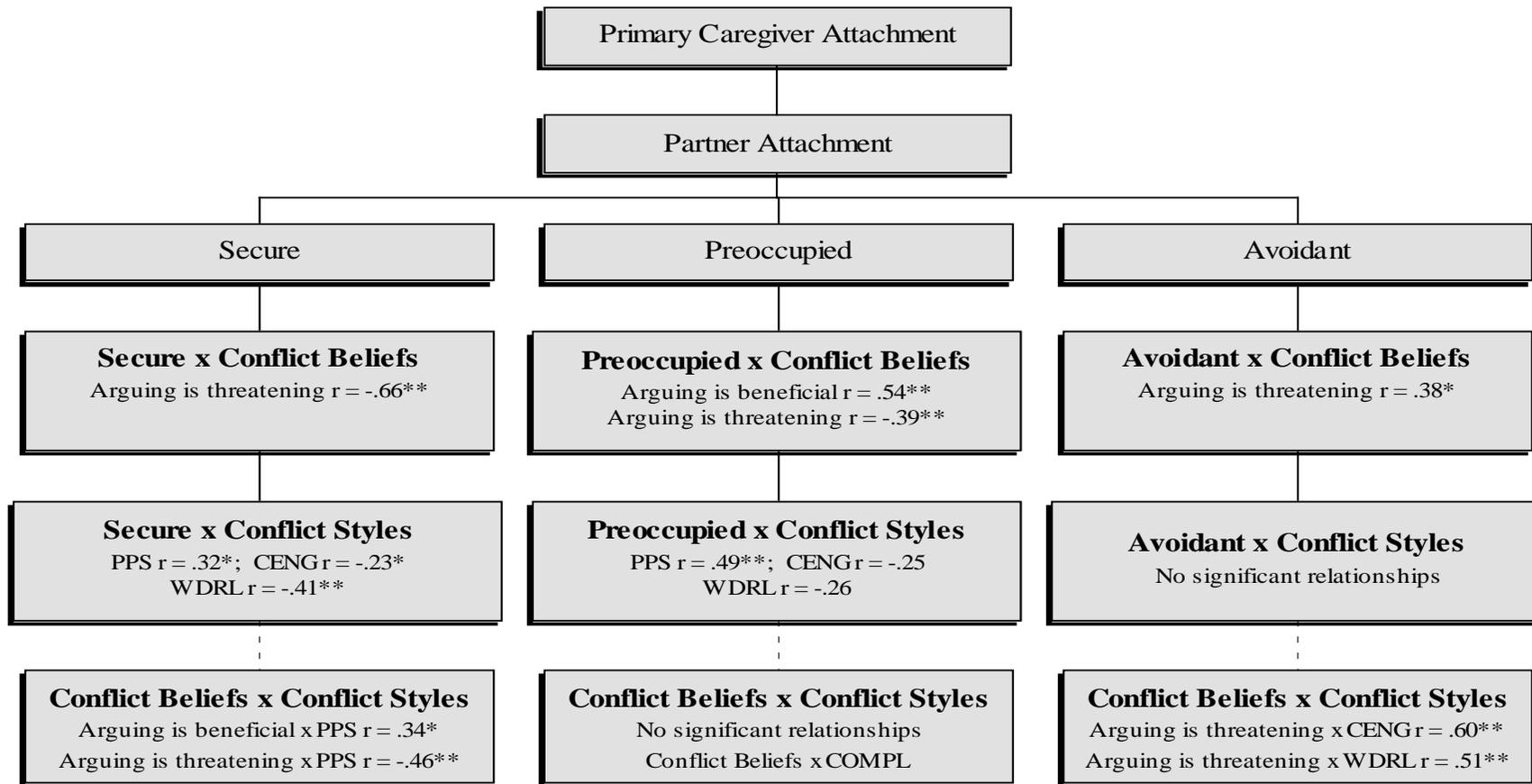


Figure 7. Diagrammatic representation of correlational relationships between variables  
 Note. Conflict styles: PPS = Positive Problem Solving, CENG = Conflict Engagement, WDRL = Withdrawal, COMPL = Compliance

*Hypothesis 11.*

11a) Secure partner attachment in the actor will be correlated with secure partner attachment in the partner.

11b) Individuals with secure parental attachments would have a higher secure partner attachment scores than individuals with insecure parental attachments.

11a) A Spearman rank correlation coefficient indicated that there was a moderate positive correlation between secure partner attachment in male and female partners ( $r_s = .58, p < .01$ ).

11b) A Kruskal-Wallis test of significance of the differences in mean ranks revealed that there were no significant differences between insecure parental attachment group ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 23.57$ ) and the secure parental attachment group ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 21.52$ ) in terms of partner security,  $\chi^2(1, N = 44) = 0.37, ns$ .

*Hypothesis 12.*

Relationship satisfaction will be related to greater frequency of positive problem solving behaviour, and infrequent use of conflict engagement and withdrawal

In terms of frequencies, the majority of the participants (59.2%) were satisfied with their relationships (slightly satisfied, satisfied or very satisfied), with 25% mixed (neither dissatisfied, nor satisfied), and 15.8% dissatisfied with their relationships. In addition the majority of participants (72.7%) reported that their conflict spiral out of control verbally, with 6.8% reporting that their conflicts explode and get out of control verbally and physically (20.5% of the sample reported that their conflicts do not get out of control either verbally or physically).

A median split of relationship satisfaction scores revealed two groups of relationship satisfaction (*more* and *less* satisfied) and the following results in terms of conflict resolution styles. Kruskal-Wallis tests of significance of the differences in mean ranks (see Table 18) revealed that there were significant differences between *more* and *less* satisfied and individuals with regards to the frequency in their conflict resolution

styles of withdrawal, conflict engagement and positive problem solving. In terms of withdrawal the *more* satisfied group ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 19.35$ ) report significantly less withdrawal than the *less* satisfied group ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 27.06$ ),  $\chi^2(1, N = 44) = 3.88, p < .05$ . With regards to conflict engagement the '*more* satisfied group' ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 19.25$ ) report significantly less conflict engagement than the '*less* satisfied group' ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 27.19$ ),  $\chi^2(1, N = 44) = 4.16, p < .05$ . However, with regards to positive problem solving the '*more* satisfied group' ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 29.40$ ) report significantly more positive problem solving than the '*less* satisfied group' ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 12.53$ ),  $\chi^2(1, N = 44) = 18.69, p < .001$ .

Table 18

*Mean Ranks for More and Less Satisfied groups on Conflict Resolution Styles (N = 44)*

Conflict resolution styles	Relationship			Mean		
	satisfaction	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	rank	$\chi^2$
Withdrawal	Less satisfied	18	2.33	.82	27.06	3.88*
	More satisfied	26	1.86	.59	19.35	
Compliance	Less satisfied	18	1.88	.68	25.67	1.90
	More satisfied	26	1.59	.51	20.31	
Conflict engagement	Less satisfied	18	2.29	.72	27.19	4.16*
	More satisfied	26	1.86	.75	19.25	
Positive problem solving	Less satisfied	18	3.33	.42	12.53	18.69***
	More satisfied	26	4.10	.49	29.40	

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

### *Hypotheses 13.*

13a) Communication accuracy will be correlated with satisfaction with partner problem solving.

13b) Individuals with a secure partner attachment will display a greater level of communication accuracy and satisfaction with partner problem solving ability, compared to individuals with an insecure partner attachment.

13a) A Pearson product-moment correlation indicated that communication accuracy was positively correlated with satisfaction with partner problem solving, although this relationship was not significant ( $r = .29, ns$ ).

13b) A Kruskal-Wallis test of significance of the differences in mean ranks (see Table 19) revealed that there were no significant differences between the ‘less secure partner attachment group’ ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 23.55$ ) and the ‘more secure partner attachment group’ ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 21.54$ ) in terms of communication accuracy,  $\chi^2(1, N = 44) = .27, ns$ . However, a Kruskal Wallis test did indicate that there were significant differences between the ‘more secure partner attachment group’ ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 26.09$ ) and the ‘less secure partner attachment group’ ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 18.57$ ), with the former being more satisfied with their partner’s problem solving ability,  $\chi^2(1, N = 44) = 3.97, p < .05$ .

Table 19

*Mean Ranks for More and Less Secure Partner Attachment groups on Communication Accuracy and Satisfaction with Partner Problem Solving*

Variables	Partner attachment	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Mean rank	$\chi^2$
Communication accuracy	Less Secure	21	5.86	3.02	23.55	0.27
	More Secure	23	5.61	2.37	21.54	
Satisfaction with partner problem solving	Less Secure	21	4.76	1.09	18.57	3.97*
	More Secure	23	5.52	1.31	26.09	

\*  $p < .05$

Additional post-hoc Kruskal Wallis tests also revealed that overall participants who viewed their partner’s communication as positive were more satisfied with their partner’s problem solving ability ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 26.61$ ) than individuals who viewed their partners as either negative ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 5.50$ ) or neutral ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 12.86$ ),  $\chi^2(2, N = 44) = 15.14, p < .01$ . In addition partner communication also had a marked influence on satisfaction with own problem solving, to the extent that individuals who viewed their partner’s problem solving as positive were more satisfied with their own problem solving ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 24.62$ ) than those individuals who viewed their partner’s communication intention as negative ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 8.13$ ) or neutral ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 20.71$ ),  $\chi^2(2, N = 44) = 6.92, p < .05$  (see Table 20). No significant differences were found between own communication intention (positive, negative or neutral) and satisfaction with own or partner problem solving.

Table 20

*Mean Ranks for Positive, Negative and Neutral Partner Communication Intention on Satisfaction with Partner and Own Problem Solving*

Variables	Partner communication intention		<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Mean rank	$\chi^2$
Satisfaction with partner problem solving	Positive		33	5.58	1.06	26.61	15.14**
	Negative		4	3.25	.96	5.50	
	Neutral		7	4.29	.76	12.86	
Satisfaction with own problem solving	Positive		33	5.21	.89	24.62	6.92*
	Negative		4	3.50	1.29	8.13	
	Neutral		7	4.86	.90	20.71	

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

### *Gender Differences*

Although some gender differences were found in this study, it should be noted that there were individual differences within the gender groupings (see Table 21). This has also previously been noted by Fletcher (2002) who states that “differences within genders in relationships are almost always much greater than the differences between genders” (p. 146). Thus, it should be made clear that these gender differences noted only describe tendencies for men and women in general and should not be treated as stereotypical male or female cognitions, emotions or behaviours (Fletcher, 2002).

Table 21

*Male (n = 22) and Female (n = 22) Means and Standard Deviations on Key Variables*

Variables	Men	Men	Women	Women
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Secure partner attachment	5.85	.78	5.81	.96
Preoccupied partner attachment	4.65	.57	4.30	.58
Avoidant partner attachment	2.13	.77	2.33	.73
Secure primary caregiver attachment	5.79	.89	5.63	1.12
Role-reversed primary caregiver attachment	2.76	.73	2.50	.89
Positive problem solving	3.90	.55	3.66	.63
Conflict engagement	1.79	.53	2.29	.88
Withdrawal	2.03	.70	2.08	.76
Compliance	1.69	.53	1.72	.67
Arguing is threatening	3.23	.75	3.67	.83
Arguing is beneficial	4.77	.73	4.62	.88
Relationship satisfaction	4.91	1.31	4.77	1.63

### *Hypotheses testing*

The following hypotheses on gender differences were tested:

#### *Hypotheses 14.*

14a) Male avoidant partner attachment would have a negative correlation with female secure partner attachment

14b) Preoccupied partner attachment in male and female partners will be positively correlated.

14c) Avoidant partner attachment and role-reversed parental attachment will be positively correlated.

14a) A Spearman rank correlation coefficient indicated that female secure partner attachment was negatively correlated with male avoidant partner attachment ( $r_s = -.52, p < .05$ ).

14b) A Pearson product-moment correlation indicated that preoccupied partner attachment was not significantly correlated between male and female partners ( $r = .07, ns$ ).

14c) Male avoidant partner attachment was significantly correlated with male role reversed parental attachment ( $r = .67, p < .01$ ), however this was not true for females ( $r = -.16, ns$ ).

#### *Hypotheses 15.*

15a) Relationship satisfaction scores in female partners will be correlated with secure partner attachment, but not in male partners.

15b) Male and female partners' relationship satisfaction scores will be strongly correlated.

15a) Spearman rank correlation coefficients indicated that female partners' relationship satisfaction had a significant correlation with their secure partner attachment ( $r_s = .86, p < .01$ ), whereas there was no significant correlation for male partners ( $r_s = .28, ns$ ).

15b) A Pearson product-moment correlation indicated that male and female partners' relationship satisfaction was significantly correlated ( $r = .64, p < .01$ ).

*Hypothesis 16.*

Female secure partner attachment will be related to positive problem solving, whereas men's insecure partner attachment will be related to withdrawal, compliance and conflict engagement.

A Spearman rank correlation coefficient indicated that female secure partner attachment was positively correlated with positive problem solving ( $r_s = .54, p < .05$ ), whereas men's insecure partner attachment was related to withdrawal ( $r_s = .51, p < .05$ ). No other significant relationships were noted for men on compliance and conflict engagement.

*Hypotheses 17.*

17a) Women will self-report a greater frequency of withdrawal, compliance and conflict engagement than men, whether they were more or less satisfied with their relationships

17b) Both male and female partners will indicate a positive correlation between their positive problem solving and their relationship satisfaction, although the correlation will be slightly weaker for female partners.

17c) Conflict engagement will be negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction for both male and female partners.

17a) Kruskal-Wallis tests of significance of the differences in mean ranks (Table 22) revealed that there were no significant differences for women and men with regards to the frequency in their withdrawal, compliance or conflict engagement in less or more satisfied groups.

Table 22

*Summary Table of Mean Ranks for Men and Women on Withdrawal, Compliance and Conflict Engagement in More or Less Satisfied Groups (N = 44)*

Variables	Gender	n	Mean rank (more satisfied)		Mean rank (less satisfied)		$\chi^2$
			n	$\chi^2$	n	$\chi^2$	
Withdrawal	Men	13	13.46	0.00	9	8.94	0.20
	Women	13	13.54		9	10.06	
Compliance	Men	13	14.27	0.27	9	9.11	0.10
	Women	13	12.73		9	9.89	
Conflict Engagement	Men	13	11.50	1.80	9	7.44	2.70
	Women	13	15.50		9	11.56	

17b) Pearson product-moment correlations indicated significant relationships between positive problem solving and relationship satisfaction for men ( $r = .80, p < .01$ ) and women ( $r = .57, p < .01$ ).

17c) A Pearson product-moment correlation indicated a negative correlation between conflict engagement and relationship satisfaction for women ( $r = -.49, p < .05$ ), but not for men ( $r = -.41, ns$ ). However, for men there was a negative correlation between relationship satisfaction and withdrawal ( $r = -.47, p < .05$ ).

*Hypotheses 18.*

18a) The belief that arguing is threatening will be negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction for women.

18b) No significant correlations between conflict beliefs and relationship satisfaction will be evident for male partners.

18a) A Pearson product-moment correlation indicated that for women the belief that arguing is threatening was significantly negatively correlated with their relationship satisfaction ( $r = -.78, p < .01$ ). In addition women's belief that arguing is threatening was also negatively correlated with men's relationship satisfaction ( $r = -.64, p < .01$ ).

18b) Pearson product-moment correlations showed that for men the belief that arguing is threatening was not significantly correlated with their relationship satisfaction. However, for men the belief that arguing is beneficial was positively correlated with relationship satisfaction ( $r = .56, p < .01$ ). This was not true for women ( $r = .29, ns$ ).

*Hypothesis 19.*

Communication accuracy will be correlated with relationship satisfaction for both male and female partners.

Pearson product-moment correlations showed no significant correlation between the communication accuracy and relationship satisfaction for male ( $r = -.14, ns$ ) and female partners ( $r = .18, ns$ ). However, male and female accuracy was moderately correlated ( $r = .43, p < .05$ ).

An additional post-hoc Mann-Whitney test (see Table 23) also revealed gender differences in terms of mode of communication, with ‘more securely attached female partners’ ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 30.45$ ) focusing more on their partner’s verbal communication (words), than ‘less securely attached male partners’ ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 16.55$ ),  $U = 24.50$ ,  $z = -2.16, p < .05$ . ‘More secure female partners’ also focused more on their partner’s verbal communication than ‘less securely attached females’ ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 18.91$ ),  $U = 28.00, z = -2.15, p < .05$ .

Table 23

*Mean Ranks for More Secure and Less Secure Partner Attachment groups on Frequency of Using Verbal Communication (N = 44)*

Variable	Partner attachment	n	Mean rank	$\chi^2$
Frequency of verbal communication	Female more secure	11	30.45 <sup>a</sup>	7.35*
	Female less secure	11	18.91 <sup>b</sup>	
	Male more secure	12	23.46	
	Male less secure	10	16.55 <sup>b</sup>	

*Note.* Means with different superscripts denote significant differences. \*  $p < .06$

## *Raters' Results*

### *Procedure*

Both raters were female postgraduate students, with Rater 1 being a student in clinical psychology programme, and Rater 2 being the researcher. Rater 1 received training in nonverbal communication, and the four codes utilized in the Conflict Resolution Style Observer Rating Scale (CRS-ORS): Positive Problem Solving, Conflict Engagement, Withdrawal and Compliance (Appendix 10). Rater 1 completed her ratings throughout the data gathering process. Due to Rater 2's involvement with the research project it was deemed more appropriate to rate the couple's conflict resolution styles after a lag in time (1 year). Rating consisted of watching 10 one-minute segments that were videotaped for each couple and rating males' and females' frequency of conflict resolution style use on a scale (1 = never to 5 = always).

### *Use of Intraclass Correlations Coefficients*

A global rating approach was used to observe and rate one-minute segments of interaction to assess the frequency of using various conflict resolution styles. Following Auerbach, Heft La Port, and Caputo's (2004) concern around the use of interrater reliability and that it "does not provide for the likelihood that the degree of agreement differs from what would be expected by chance" (p. 444), the more appropriate intraclass correlation (ICC) coefficient was used, and indicated agreement between the two raters' scores. According to Auerbach et al. (2004) the aim with the ICC coefficient is to have similar ratings between raters for the variability ascribed between the participants. These researchers also point out that one advantage of using ICC is that it is appropriate statistical test if one would want to generalise raters' findings to future similar raters. As this study saw the development of the observational rating scale it was deemed appropriate that ICC coefficients indicated the rater agreement, thus enabling the future use of the scale and comparisons with the current quantitative findings. SPSS 13 was used to obtain ICC coefficients, and averaged item ICC coefficients are reported below.

### *Results*

Significant ICC coefficients between the two raters' observations were reached on all of the observed conflict resolution styles for men and women, bar compliance in men (see Table 24). Self-reported conflict engagement in men was the only conflict

resolution style that was significantly related to the two raters' ratings, with Rater 1:  $r = .72, p < .01$ , and Rater 2:  $r = .57, p < .01$  (see Table 24).

Categorically, most men (95.5%) rated their dominant conflict resolution style as Positive Problem Solving and 4.5% rated themselves as Withdrawing during conflict. To a lesser degree women also self-reported their dominant conflict resolution style as Positive Problem Solving (77.3%), with 13.6% dominant in Conflict Engagement, and 9% dominant in Withdrawal.

Table 24

*Summary Table of Intraclass Correlations, Self-report of Conflict Resolution Styles, and Pearson Product Moment Correlations between Raters and Self-reported Conflict Resolution Styles for Males and Females (N = 44)*

Conflict resolution styles	ICC <sup>1</sup> (CRSI-ORS)	Rater 1 & self-report <sup>2</sup>	Rater 2 & self-report <sup>2</sup>
Male			
Positive Problem Solving	.41*	.13	.26
Conflict Engagement	.45**	.72**	.57**
Withdrawal	.58**	.42	.26
Compliance	.08	.16	.21
Female			
Positive Problem Solving	.62***	.23	.25
Conflict Engagement	.59**	.32	.38
Withdrawal	.36*	-.12	.31
Compliance	.60**	.04	.03

Note. <sup>1</sup> Intraclass Correlation Coefficient between raters; CRSI-ORS: Conflict Resolution Style Inventory – Observational Rating Scale; <sup>2</sup> Pearson product-moment correlations. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

## *Qualitative Data Analysis*

The qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subject's point of view, to unfold the meaning of people's experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations.

*Interviews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing* - Steinar Kvale, 1996

Previously acknowledged (Braun & Clarke, 2006) as an “accessible and theoretically flexible approach to qualitative data” (p. 77) thematic analysis is frequently used within psychology. Boyatzis (1998) views thematic analysis as a process that is utilized to encode qualitative data. More specifically, a theme is construed as a pattern found in the qualitative information that describes and organises the information, although it can also interpret parts of the data under investigation. To this extent thematic analysis was deemed an appropriate methodology to tease out core themes underlying participants' relationships with their primary caregivers, their intimate partners, as well as the strategies that they use to resolve (or not resolve) their conflict. Based on thematic analysis the coding process allowed for the development of core themes that provided additional information to the quantitative findings, thus placing it within a context. However, in parts the thematic analysis also emphasise the quantitative findings (see Discussion of Qualitative Data below). The coding process followed a three-step progression, and involved (a) developing concepts and categories to organize data into a framework of ideas, (b) comparing data instances, cases and categories for similarities and differences, and (c) unifying key themes. Following on from the emerging themes taken from the literature, four to five key themes became apparent for each of the six qualitative questions. Furthermore, some additional (sometimes contradictory) themes are also explored, which in parts give a more balanced perspective or illustrates the growth which people have undergone as a result of learning or significant events. The results section below is divided between *More* and *Less Secure Attachment* categories that are based on the self-report classifications of participants from the Parent and Partner Attachment Scale (Le Poire et al., 1997). Only the Secure Parent and Secure Partner subscales were used, and median split of these scales allow the use of *More* and *Less Secure* categories, the purpose being to indicate differences and similarities between the experiences of *more* and *less* securely attached participants (see Discussion of Qualitative Data). Excerpts from the raw data are used to illustrate each key theme, as well as the additional

themes. At this point also note that following the results section there is a summary of the key themes in Table 25 (p. 225).

For *Question 1* participants' self-reported attachment orientations to their primary caregivers revealed particular characteristics for each attachment orientation in the qualitative data.

*Question 1 – Characteristics of primary caregiver relationship*

Please describe your relationship with your primary caregiver. Include as much detail as you can and be sure to include characteristics of your relationship (e.g., “We had a warm, loving relationship”), as well as qualities of your primary caregiver (e.g., “She drank heavily”).

*More Secure Primary Caregiver Attachment*

As shown in Table 25 (p. 225) for participants who described their relationships with their primary caregivers as one of ‘*more secure attachment*’ the following key themes emerged.

*1. Close, caring, loving relationships*

‘*More securely attached*’ participants described their relationships with their primary caregivers as close, caring, loving and affectionate as is demonstrated by the following excerpt:

*“Always felt accepted, loved, well thought of – a warm, loving relationship.”*  
(New Zealand European female, 50).

*2. Parental interest and involvement*

Participants also described that their parents/primary caregivers were interested in their activities and involved in their lives, as can be seen in the following statement:

*“During my earlier years all I remember is that my mother loved me dearly, she encouraged me greatly in my schooling, sports and in particular church ... later in my teens my mother struggled with my rebellion and it strained our*

*relationship. Despite this, she always told me she loved me and always expressed an interest in what I was doing.” (Anglo-Saxon male, 31).*

### *3. Open communication*

Participants described their primary caregivers as open and responsive and many also indicated that their primary caregivers were treating them as equals or as a friend would during conversations. In particular there was a sense that primary caregivers were approachable to discuss issues and that participants knew they would be listened to, as can be seen in the following excerpt:

*“We talked out problems. We shared everything. She wasn’t just my Mum, she was my best friend also. She talked and confided in me, treated me as an equal, and I did the same to her.” (New Zealand European female, 43).*

### *4. Reliable, available and responsive primary caregivers*

There was a strong sense with participants who had ‘*more secure attachments*’ to their primary caregivers that they knew that their carers would be consistently available and responsive to their needs, as can be seen below:

*“My mum believed in me and she sacrificed to see that all I wanted to do was available to me. She would only ever work part time right up until I finished school so she could be at home for me in the afternoons.” (Maori female, 27).*

### *Additional themes*

#### *1. Negative primary caregiver characteristics*

By no means did all the participants who view their attachments to their primary caregivers as ‘*more secure*’ ascribe only positive characteristics to their relationships. Many individuals included less desirable traits thus giving a more balanced perspective of secure attachment, as can be seen below:

*“In arguments my mother would yell and always needs to win.” (New Zealand European female, 25).*

*“My mother suffered from depression and anxiety so at times she was overly emotional and dependent on me to be there for her emotionally.”* (New Zealand European female, 27).

## *2. Influence of significant events*

Some participants in the ‘more secure attachment’ category experienced significant events during their childhood such as divorce, death of a parent, teenage pregnancy, ongoing illness of a parent, and alcohol abuse by a parent. This affected their relationship with their primary caregivers in various ways. For some this has led to strained relationships, as can be seen in the following excerpt:

*“We have a complicated but loving relationship, she is critical of me, yet I know that I can rely on her ... She annoys me in many ways, cannot spend too much time together.”* (New Zealand European female, 46).

For others reconciliation has brought them closer to their primary caregiver/parents today, as can be seen in the following example:

*“My relationship faltered with both my parents when I became pregnant at 16 with my daughter...I have reconciled now with my mother and we have had many discussions on how they should have handled the situation ... my mother and I now get on very well and I love her dearly.”* (New Zealand European female, 54).

## *Less Secure Primary Caregiver Attachment*

For participants who described their attachments with their primary caregivers as ‘less secure’, the following key themes emerged as characteristic of their relationships, as also shown in Table 25 (p. 225).

### *1. Lack of caring relationship*

‘Less securely attached’ participants described their relationships with their primary caregivers as lacking, to varying degrees, in adequate emotional and physical care. The following example illustrates this point:

*“My mother married 3 times, and was very extravagant and self-centred. My childhood was very like Cinderella without the ugly stepsisters, just the overbearing, lazy torturous mother and her needs. All my stepfathers, like my mother, violently abused me and my older sister, we grew up as their slaves.”* (Maori female, 42).

## *2. Preoccupation with other activities*

Many participants who indicated ‘less secure attachments’ to their primary caregivers felt that their primary caregivers were too busy with other activities, be it work or other siblings, to spend an adequate amount of time with them. This is demonstrated in the following excerpts from participants:

*“They were very busy so often felt like they had no time for me, sometimes felt lonely or unloved.”* (New Zealand European female, 39).

*“Father was 110% dedicated to his job ... He’s dead now and I never knew the man.”* (New Zealand European male, 56).

## *3. Poor communication*

Participants with ‘less secure attachments’ to their primary caregivers described themes of power imbalances, trust issues, lack of understanding and lack of depth in their communications with their primary caregivers.

*“She didn’t discuss things with me, tended to make decisions for me which made me rebel against it.”* (New Zealand European female, 39).

*“... I often felt left out or shouted down (was the baby) ... I needed her to help me think things through. She was often in denial about situations. Didn’t feel guided through my teenage years – felt she was unaware.”* (New Zealand European female, 30)

#### 4. *Lack of bonding/connectedness*

Some participants who view their attachments to their primary caregivers as ‘less secure’ also described a lack of connectedness between them and their primary caregivers/family. The following example demonstrates this:

*“There was no Father/Son bonding at any stage of my life ...I spent most of my youth in boarding schools and have always considered my friends my family. Although I have 2 sisters and 1 brother, we rarely see each other or communicate.”* (New Zealand European male, 56).

#### *Additional themes*

##### 1. *Positive primary caregiver characteristics.*

Participants who view their attachments to their primary caregivers as ‘less secure’ also ascribed positive characteristics to their relationships, as can be seen below:

*“I always felt loved – but she is not demonstrative and I need to instigate any physical contact.”* (New Zealand European female, 32).

*“I knew I was an unplanned pregnancy growing up but I knew I was loved, and I loved my parents.”* (New Zealand European female, 39).

##### 2. *Influence of significant events*

Some participants who were ‘less securely attached’ to their primary caregivers experienced significant events during their childhood such as adoption, divorce, immigration, death of a parent, and alcohol abuse by a parent. This affected their relationship with their primary caregivers in various ways. For some this has led to strained relationships, as can be seen in the following excerpt:

*“ ... she lives in her own world of manipulation and emotional blackmail, but after 42 years of my life, her rein (sic) over me has come to an end. My children now have banded together and have, at point blank told her to stay away ...She was never a nice person.”* (Maori female, 42).

However for others closeness was regained over time, as shown in the following example:

*“ When I was young Mum was always at home and home life (6 children) was always warm and happy ...At 11 we migrated to NZ and Mum had to work ...Both Mum and Dad started to go to the pub and would often be drunk on weekends ...When my Dad died I was 21, and Mum relied on me to do most of the things. The drinking almost stopped and Mum became Mum again.”* (New Zealand European male, 40).

### 3. *Role-reversal*

For two participants the nature of the parenting was such that they felt that they had to take care of their caregivers. The following example clearly illustrates the role-reversed relationships:

*“My Dad was an alcoholic ...early teens was really for me spent ‘looking after’ both mum and a lot of the family. Dad with his sickness was hopeless and Mum was always distracted by both him and my younger sister. I must admit my role really as her ‘caregiver’ wasn’t one that worried me much of the time (although over the past 10 years has had a major influence on me!)”* (New Zealand European male, 45).

### *Question 2 – Nature of arguments between parents*

Please describe the nature of the arguments that took place between your parents/primary caregivers when you were a child (e.g., long cold silences).

For *Question 2* participants’ self-reported attachment orientations to their primary caregivers revealed particular characteristics for each attachment orientation (*more* and *less* secure) in the manner in which their parents argued (also summarised in Table 25, p. 225).

### *More Secure Primary Caregiver Attachment*

For participants who described their relationships with their primary caregivers as one of ‘*more* secure attachment’ a range of key themes emerged.

### 1. *Few arguments/Unable to recall arguments*

Many participants who were ‘*more* securely attached’ to their primary caregivers noted that there were few if any arguments between their primary caregivers. Some also had some difficulty actually recalling any arguments, as can be seen in the excerpt below:

*“To be honest I can not remember one argument my parents had. They are very loving people and apart from maybe different opinions on the odd occasion they don’t argue.”* (German male, 42).

### 2. *Loud and heated arguments*

Some participants who were ‘*more* securely attached’ to their primary caregivers indicated that the arguments between their parents were loud and heated, as can be seen in the excerpt below:

*“The arguments in our house were terrible – my Dad erupted, shouted – Mum sometimes would shout back and then long cold silences – I was always the Peace-maker!!”* (New Zealand European female, 50).

### 3. *Silences/Sulking*

Some ‘*more* securely attached’ participants indicated that silences or sulking were the result of an argument between their parents, as seen below:

*“The arguments in my house were rare but they usually stemmed from my mother standing up to Dad which he handled by sulking. Sulking is a bad habit in a child and worse in an adult. After a while the sulk act wore off on my Mother who chose to ignore it.”* (New Zealand European male, 37).

### 4. *Physical violence*

To the more extreme end of the scale it would appear that even in families where participants were ‘*more* securely attached’ to their primary caregiver, physical violence did rear its ugly head. Often it seems there was also some alcohol consumption on the part of the perpetrator, as seen in the following excerpt:

*“Dad was a heavy drinker and was physically abusive. He often hit her, but not in front of the kids (he admits to this now).”* (New Zealand European female, 27).

#### 5. *Arguments resolved quickly*

‘More securely attached’ participants also noted that any arguments between their parents were often resolved quickly and then forgotten. The following example demonstrates this key theme:

*“I only remember one argument between my parents. It was over my Mum purchasing a washing machine without my Dad’s prior knowledge ...It was hot, heated and over with in a matter of minutes and never raised again.”*  
(Maori female, 41).

#### *Less Secure Primary Caregiver Attachment*

For participants who described their relationships with their primary caregivers as one of ‘less secure attachment’ a range of key themes emerged that were similar to the secure attachment category above.

#### 1. *Few arguments/Unable to recall arguments*

A number of ‘less securely attached’ participants were either unable to recall arguments between their parents, or noted that only a few arguments took place between their parents. Several participants indicated that if there were any arguments this did not take place in front of the children. The following excerpt demonstrates this key theme:

*“I cannot recall seeing my parents ever having an argument in front of me...If they did argue it was done the English way – out of ear and eye’s shot of me.”*  
(New Zealand European male, 45).

#### 2. *Loud and heated arguments*

Some participants who were ‘less securely attached’ to their primary caregivers noted that there were some loud and heated arguments between their parents, as seen in the example below:

*“Yelling matches (occasionally) ...we were in Scotland in a campervan – furious row – Mum packed her suitcase and walked off – Dad drove after her – she had this jaunty little red hat on – (funny what you remember).”* (New Zealand European female, 32).

### 3. *Silences/Sulking*

Similar to the ‘*more* securely attached’ participants, ‘*less* securely attached’ participants indicated that silences and or sulking often seemed to be in response to an argument between their parents, as seen in the excerpt below:

*“Dad would fly off the handle. Mum wouldn’t say anything. She’d kind of sulk - then get over it.”* (New Zealand European female, 46).

### 4. *Physical violence*

Again similar to the ‘*more* securely attached’ participants, the ‘*less* securely attached’ participants were also able to identify physical violence in their parental arguments, as seen in the following excerpt:

*“Physical confrontation (occasionally), as well as heated arguments at least weekly. This was always followed by days of silences. Not much affection at that time!”* (New Zealand European male, 45).

### *Question 3 – Characteristics of partner relationship*

Please describe your relationship with your current romantic partner. Include as much detail as you can and be sure to included characteristics of your relationship (e.g., “We have a caring and nurturing relationship.”) as well as qualities of your romantic partner (e.g., “He works long hours.”).

For *Question 3* participants’ self-reported attachment orientations to their partners revealed particular characteristics for each attachment orientation in the qualitative data (also summarised in Table 25, p. 225).

### *More Secure Partner Attachment*

For participants who described their relationships with their partners as one of ‘*more secure attachment*’ the following key themes emerged.

#### *1. Caring, loving, and committed relationship*

Participants who are ‘*more securely attached*’ to their romantic partners described their relationships as warm, caring, nurturing and committed. There was also a sense of their relationship being loving, and many participants described a deep love for their partners. The following excerpt demonstrates the theme of a caring, loving and committed relationship:

*“He is warm and caring towards me and thinks of me before himself a lot. I knew when I first met him that he was the man I wanted in my life...He is a hard worker and we are both working to common goals, and I am looking forward to our future together.”* (New Zealand European female, 42).

#### *2. Attraction, affection and sex*

Many participants who are ‘*more securely attached*’ to their partners described being attracted to their partners, spending time together, showing affection and having an enjoyable sex life. The following excerpts demonstrate this theme:

*“We have an incredibly caring relationship, always cuddling, kissing and adoring each other.”* (New Zealand European female, 33).

*“I always did, and have never wavered, in my physical attraction to her. She still ‘presses my button’ after 13 years of a developing relationship”* (New Zealand European male, 56).

#### *3. Open communication*

‘*More securely attached*’ participants also noted their ‘open’ communications with their partners, listening well during communication, sharing a sense of humour and being mentally in tune with their partner, all of which was underscored by a sense of mutual respect. The following excerpt demonstrates the nature of ‘*more securely attached*’ individuals’ communication:

*“Our learning’s of managing and maintaining a partnership have been mainly due, I believe, to being solution-focussed together, having open communication and really listening to full contexts of what we offer one another.” (Maori female, 52).*

#### *4. Support and consideration*

Many participants also described their partner’s willingness to help and support them, as well as show consideration to their needs, as can be seen in the example below:

*“There is a lot of respect (both ways), a lot of support between us both. We are always kind to each other.” (New Zealand European female, 33).*

#### *5. Trust, integrity and honesty*

Many participants described trust, honesty and integrity as key to the success of their relationships. The following excerpt demonstrates this theme:

*“She has given me total honesty to the point of running our finances since we have been partners. She is loyal with 100% integrity and we believe in each other having their own interests, so loyalty and integrity are critical.” (New Zealand European male, 45).*

#### *Additional theme – Negative partner characteristics*

Although most participants who view their attachments to their partners as ‘more secure’ gave glowing reports of their partners, some also made less than positive assessments of their partners, thus giving a more balanced perspective. The following partner characteristics described in the excerpt demonstrates this point:

*“We are very different in most other respects and do not have many interests in common. This causes problems between us... She becomes very unhappy when she feels she is not getting enough of my time. I believe she is quite needy in many ways.” (New Zealand European male, 56).*

### *Less Secure Partner Attachment*

For those who are ‘less securely attached’ to their romantic partners, the following key themes emerged:

#### *1. Lack of closeness*

Many participants with ‘less secure partner attachments’ described a lack of intimacy, and romance, as well of a lack of attention from their partners in their relationships. Some also described behaviour that was threatening to closeness/intimacy such as flirtations with other individuals. The following excerpt demonstrates lack of closeness in these relationships:

*“I feel that I am not respected or ‘cherished’ by her and that I am more of a burden than a partner to her.”* (New Zealand European male, 39).

#### *2. Conflicting perspectives and frequent arguments*

Many participants who are ‘less securely attached’ indicated that they have differing perspectives in their relationships, which in some cases leads to feeling disconnected from each other, but also in many cases leads to frequent arguments. These frequent arguments tend to overall increase the amount of negativity felt in the relationship and towards each other. The following excerpt demonstrates this theme:

*“...arguments are a daily ‘norm’ ...When arguing we tend to get off track and become emotional...I think our main problem is not how we sort out our differences and arguments, but its just that there are so many – all the time about every little thing.”* (Dutch female, 32).

#### *3. Poor communication*

Some participants commented on their poor communication, which also ties in with the next key theme of conflicting perspectives and frequent arguments. The following example illustrates a lack of good communication:

*“...we have learnt that our different upbringings mean we communicate differently in types of strife. She tends to pull away whereas I tend to pull in.”* (Anglo-Saxon male, 31).

#### 4. *Overly controlling behaviour*

'Less securely attached' participants also described overly controlling behaviour (either on their own part or that of their partner) and the effect that this has on their relationship, as can be seen below:

*"I am very judgmental and want him to see and do things my way most of the time – I think I know best! He tries extremely hard to please me, although I think sometimes he is sick of it all. I worry that one day he'll just have had enough and will not be able to take my bossy and sometimes demeaning ways."* (Dutch female, 32).

#### 5. *Unbalanced give-and-take*

Some participants also described an unbalanced give-and-take in their relationships. In some of these inequitable relationships there also appears to be a sense of resentment toward the other partner. The following excerpt demonstrates this theme:

*"My darling is very laid back, so he works hard, but when work is finished, work is finished and it is time to relax. I normally 'keep going' after work, so sometimes there's a little tension there 'cos I feel like I should shoulder a fair bit of responsibility."* (Maori female, 27).

#### *Additional theme – Positive partner characteristics*

'Less securely attached' participants also ascribed positive characteristics to their partners, thus indicating the range of attachment related phenomena in the 'less secure' category. The following examples illustrate this point:

*"We are lovers, best friends and he means more to me than anyone in this world."* (New Zealand European female, 27).

*"lots of fun ... great gift giver ... great dad ... willing to use flexible hours to help me when I can't be in two places with kids."* (New Zealand European female, 38).

#### *Question 4 – Unhelpful conflict resolution strategies*

In your relationship with your current partner have you noticed any ways of sorting out problems and arguments that result in failure to reach a solution to a problem, or that makes a problem worse? Please give examples and comment.

For *Question 4* participants' self-reported attachment orientations to their partners revealed particular unhelpful conflict resolution styles for each attachment orientation (also summarised in Table 25, p. 225).

#### *More Secure Partner Attachment*

For participants who described their relationships with their partners as one of 'more secure attachment' the following key themes emerged in their conflict resolution.

##### *1. No unhelpful conflict resolution strategies*

A great number of participants who are 'more securely attached' to their partners indicated that they do not fail to reach solutions to their problems, or have not noticed any strategies that make problems worse.

*"No – we argue very constructively and always resolve issues. We have compatible values to start with which helps."* (New Zealand European female, 32).

##### *2. Withdrawal*

Participants who are 'more securely attached' to their partners also mentioned that withdrawing from the conversation, being unresponsive or even ignoring the problem does not help resolve issues or arguments. The following excerpt illustrates this key theme:

*"Also, I often feel rejected by her behaviour and can become withdrawn and unresponsive as a result. This is unproductive too because she interprets my silence as a negative thing."* (New Zealand European male, 56).

### 3. *Attacking and overly emotional behaviour*

'More securely attached' participants also indicated that attacking the other person verbally, as well as overly emotional behaviour (including anger and raised voices) during an argument does not help resolve the conflict, and can escalate the conflict. The following example illustrates this point:

*"[She] sometimes explodes verbally and emotionally and attacks me in a way that is unfair and unreasonable. I have to try very hard not to react to that because the situation will escalate very quickly into personal insults and this is the worst thing that can happen."* (New Zealand European male, 56).

### 4. *Blame and personal insults*

Blaming the other person and not taking personal responsibility tied together with personal insults are other unhelpful strategies which participants have identified which can also escalate conflicts. The following examples demonstrate this key theme:

*"Always a temptation to get 'personal' when a debate gets heated and criticise your partner instead of dealing with the issue."* (New Zealand European male, 56).

*"Saying things like ... its your problem...definitely made arguments worse."* (New Zealand European male, 53).

### 5. *Timing of argument*

Some participants in the 'more securely attached' category mentioned that sometimes the timing of an argument could have a detrimental effect on trying to reach a solution (e.g., time of day and tiredness). When one person is distracted and not giving the other their full attention this could also impact on the resolution process. The following example illustrates this issue of poor timing:

*"The only area we struggle with is addressing issues in the latter part of the day – particularly after dinner after a long day, we are both tired and effort to find a solution is not always there."* (New Zealand European male, 45).

*Additional theme – Learning more constructive strategies over time*

A number of participants indicated that although they are aware of some strategies that in the past had failed to resolve problems, this is not currently their situation. Over time they have learned strategies that are more effective at resolving conflict satisfactorily, as can be seen in the example below:

*“In our early days I used to get sulky and would withdraw. It didn’t help but we sorted that out years ago.”* (New Zealand European male, 43).

*Less Secure Partner Attachment*

With ‘less securely attached’ participants several key themes emerged in their conflict resolution as strategies that were not helpful or exacerbated their problems. It should be noted that as opposed to the ‘more securely attached’ participants (many of whom were not able to identify unhelpful strategies), most of the ‘less securely attached’ participants were able to identify some unhelpful conflict resolution strategies in their relationships. Although similar categories were identified it can be noted that in comparison with the ‘more securely attached’ participants, the ‘less securely attached’ participants’ descriptions overall had a more negative slant. The following key themes emerged as unhelpful strategies:

*1. Avoidance*

A number of participants who are ‘less securely attached’ to their partners identified that avoiding conflict, not discussing the issue or delaying the discussion in some way was not helpful when trying to resolve conflict. The following excerpt demonstrates this theme:

*“Just asking for a discussion to try and sort out an issue sets it up for failure as [he] instantly assumes I will be nagging or criticizing and then he is unwilling to even discuss the matter...in the event that the discussion is put off and off and off I get more and more frustrated and my behaviour deteriorates out of control – verbally.”* (New Zealand European female, 38).

## 2. *Withdrawal*

'Less securely attached' participants identified that once a conflict discussion was initiated withdrawing from it prematurely was unhelpful when trying to solve conflict. It can be noted that, in keeping with the literature, it was mostly females who identified this as a problem in their male partners. The following example illustrates this unhelpful strategy:

*“Things that make it worse for me is when my partner simply shuts down and stops listening to me – he just turns off as if I’m unimportant and shortly after leaves the room. That’s what makes the situation worse.”* (Maori female, 41).

## 3. *Attacking and overly emotional behaviour*

'Less securely attached' participants also deemed overly emotional behaviour such as anger and raised voices, as well as a pattern of attack and defence during confrontation, unhelpful. The following example demonstrates this key theme:

*“When [she] shouts or gets so angry I can’t listen to her without shutting off.”* (New Zealand European male, 56).

## 4. *Blame and personal insults*

A number of participants who are 'less securely attached' to their partners concluded that blame and personal insults were unhelpful during conflict, as it also frequently inflamed conflict so that the likelihood of reaching a solution was reduced. The following example indicates the theme of personal insults as an unhelpful strategy during conflict:

*“Insults, digs, personal attacks don’t work. Usually they lead us to arguing completely away from where it was we were meant to be arguing about (i.e., it becomes more about who can be the nastiest) and then nothing gets resolved and if a big issue it will just get bigger over time.”* (New Zealand European female, 27).

### 5. *Focus on 'winning' the argument*

Some 'less securely attached' participants also identified that if either partner was focussed on winning the argument, the likelihood of resolving the argument was greatly reduced, as can be seen in the following excerpt:

*“Wanting to win the argument is also only going to lead to failure. ‘Battle is lost before it’s begun’.”* (New Zealand European female, 27).

### *Additional theme – Behavioural patterns exacerbating problems*

Some 'less securely attached' individuals also identified some behavioural patterns in their relationships which are problematic to them solving their problems, or which cause conflict to spiral out of control. The following example illustrates these behavioural patterns:

*“Also the more I ask him to do something the more nagging I sound, and the worse I feel while he just gets annoyed because I’m repeating myself.”* (New Zealand European female, 28).

### *Question 5 – Helpful conflict resolution strategies*

In your current relationship are there any ways of sorting out problems and arguments that work really well? Please give examples and comment.

For *Question 5* participants' self-reported attachment orientations to their partners revealed helpful conflict resolution styles for each attachment orientation (see Table 25 for a summary, p. 225).

### *More Secure Partner Attachment*

For participants who described their relationships with their partners as one of 'more secure attachment' the following key themes emerged as helpful strategies.

### 1. *Calm discussions*

Most participants who are ‘*more* securely attached’ to their partners indicated that sitting down and discussing issues calmly was conducive to solving conflict, as can be seen in the following example:

*“We have a word that if things are getting too heated we say. If one of us says ‘biscuits’ then we stop talking – neither of us can continue the disagreement and we will come back when we have both calmed down and discuss the matter again.”* (New Zealand European female, 30).

### 2. *Timely discussions*

Several ‘*more* securely attached’ participants also mentioned the importance of timing when successfully trying to resolve conflict. The following example shows this key theme:

*“Timing is critical – not during PMT and certainly not late.”* (New Zealand European male, 45).

### 3. *Taking turns during discussions*

A number of participants also described that it is very useful for them to take turns during their discussions, in that way giving each person an opportunity to share their perspective. The following excerpt demonstrates this strategy:

*“The other technique is to each take 10 minutes to talk about how they feel without any comment or interruptions from the other. This often works really well in helping us expose what is really going on.”* (New Zealand European male, 56).

### 4. *Listening and trying to understand other’s perspective*

Participants who are ‘*more* securely attached’ to their partners also identified that it is important to the conflict resolution process to attempt to understand the other person’s perspective. The following example illustrates this key theme:

*“Listen to what the other person has to say and try to understand why they feel that way without taking personal objection before making any response.”*  
(New Zealand European female, 42).

#### *5. Third party involvement*

Some ‘*more* securely attached’ participants also indicated that in some instances it might be helpful to consult a third party, be that a friend or family. The following example demonstrates this key theme:

*“In some really important issues that may have a significant effect on things, a mutual friend acting as an arbitrator can often help steer the middle ground and keep things in perspective.”* (New Zealand European male, 56).

#### *Less Secure Partner Attachment*

A number of themes similar to the ‘*more* securely attached’ group emerged for the ‘*less* securely attached’ participants. They described the following helpful strategies when trying to resolve conflict:

##### *1. Calm discussions away from distractions*

Similar to the ‘*more* securely attached’ participants a number of participants who are ‘*less* securely attached’ to their partners indicated that having a calm discussion, often away from distractions, can be very helpful in resolving conflict. The following example shows this theme:

*“...we have begun meeting for coffee every Tuesday – just to spend some time together with no children and often we end up resolving minor stuff just through a chat...”* (New Zealand European female, 38).

##### *2. Taking responsibility for behaviour*

Some ‘*less* securely attached’ participants also felt that it was important that responsibility be taken for actions/words during a discussion, as can be seen in the following excerpt:

*“It’s generally best when we can both see when we’re at fault and concede on some issues.”* (New Zealand European female, 28).

### *3. Taking turns during discussions*

Again, similar to the ‘more securely attached’ participants, ‘less securely attached’ participants seemed to recognise the importance of turn-taking during discussions thus giving both partners an opportunity to share their side of the story. The following excerpt demonstrates this key theme:

*“We started having discussion sessions where one person would talk about events/feelings for 15 minutes while the other could only listen. We would then change and have a general discussion afterward. This worked great but we found we only did it in times of stress, rather than booking it in as a weekly/fortnightly appointment.”* (New Zealand European male, 40).

### *4. Listening and trying to understand other perspective*

Again, similar to the ‘more securely attached’ participants, ‘less securely attached’ participants recognized the importance of listening to each other, and attempting to understand each other’s perspective. The following excerpt demonstrates this theme:

*“Listening to each other. Considering each others feelings and needs.”* (New Zealand European female, 27).

### *5. Negotiate and compromise*

A number of participants also indicated that negotiating and compromising are helpful strategies when trying to resolve conflict, as can be seen in the excerpt below:

*“Coming to a compromise that we can both agree with (negotiating and compromising).”* (Maori female, 27).

For *Question 6* participants’ self-reported attachment orientations to their partners revealed the conflict resolution styles that they believe ideal couples would use for each attachment orientation (also summarised in Table 25, p. 225).

*Question 6 – Conflict resolution in ideal relationships*

Imagine your ideal relationship. How would the couple in your ideal relationship handle conflict?

*More Secure Partner Attachment*

A number of key themes emerged for individuals who are ‘*more* securely attached’ to their partners and how they believe couples in an ideal relationship would handle conflict.

*1. No conflict in ideal relationship*

Many ‘*more* securely attached’ individuals also indicated that ideal couples would have no conflict in their relationships, as can be seen in the example:

*“I think in an ideal relationship there wouldn’t be any conflict.”* (New Zealand European male, 36).

*2. Listening well to obtain deeper understanding*

Many participants indicated that individuals in an ideal relationship would both be good listeners who attempted to obtain a deeper understanding in their communications, as demonstrated by the following excerpt:

*“They would be very good listeners and would each listen carefully to what the other person was saying and meaning before reacting or responding.”* (New Zealand European male, 56).

*3. Calm and in-depth discussions*

‘*More* securely attached’ individuals commented that couples in an ideal relationship would have calm and in-depth discussions, as seen in the example:

*“By cool-headed, rational discussion with total and complete honesty regarding not only the main issue at hand, but also the surrounding side issues and nuances.”* (New Zealand European male, 56).

#### 4. *Openness and focus on problem solving*

For ‘*more* securely attached’ individuals, people in their ideal relationship would be open in their communication and utilize a problem solving approach, as demonstrated below:

*“Talk about it, try to understand how the other person feels. Take things at face value without looking for hidden meaning, being honest with each other. Put the other person first.”* (New Zealand European female, 42).

#### 5. *Utilising strategies similar to their own*

A number of ‘*more* securely attached’ individuals commented that ideal couples would solve conflict in a similar manner to themselves, as shown in the following excerpt:

*“Like us! Conflict is a fact of life but our understanding is we will work things through – we are committed to our marriage, even if at times we do argue.”*  
(New Zealand European female, 50).

#### *Less Secure Partner Attachment*

‘*Less* securely attached’ participants were able to identify a number of key themes that they believe would be characteristic of an ideal relationship and the manner in which an ideal couple solve conflict.

##### 1. *No conflict in ideal relationship*

Some ‘*less* securely attached’ participants, similar to some ‘*more* securely attached’ participants also indicated that couples in ideal relationships would not experience conflict. Some, however, questioned the ideal nature of relationships, as seen in the following example:

*“The ideal couple does not have conflict. But we are not ideal or perfect people, so we have to deal with disagreement in the best way we have learnt.”*  
(New Zealand European male, 56).

## 2. *Listening well to obtain deeper understanding*

Similar to the ‘*more* securely attached’ participants, ‘*less* securely attached’ participants also felt that couples in an ideal relationship would listen to each other in such a way as to obtain a deeper understanding. The following example demonstrates this key theme:

*“By being on the same wavelength and having a deeper understanding of each others feelings and emotional needs...Also by ‘listening – really listening’ not just hearing words and switching off.”* (New Zealand European female, 38).

## 3. *Calm and in-depth discussions*

Again, similar to the ‘*more* securely attached’ individuals, ‘*less* securely attached’ participants indicated that their ideal couples would have calm and in-depth discussions:

*“Talk calmly, honestly, openly without emotion. Consider the other side’s point of view rationally. Compromise where possible.”* (Anglo-Saxon male, 31).

## 4. *Finding mutually acceptable solutions*

A number of ‘*less* securely attached’ participants indicated that it was important to find solutions that are acceptable to both partners, as seen in the following excerpt:

*“By listening to each others’ viewpoint and not making it personal. Understanding that it’s a problem shared by both therefore a solution needs to be reached that benefits them both.”* (Maori female, 41).

## 5. *Resolving conflict before going to bed*

Many ‘*less* securely participants’ commented on the importance of resolving conflict before going to bed at night, as seen in the example below:

*“Never go to bed without resolving the conflict! Always finish with a hug and ‘I love you’.”* (Anglo-Saxon male, 31).

The following table (Table 25) summarises the key themes that emerged for *more* and *less* secure primary caregiver attachment, as well as for *more* and *less* secure partner attachment.

Table 25

*Summary Table of Key Themes which emerged from Qualitative Questions categorised by More and Less Secure Primary Caregiver Attachment, and More and Less Secure Partner Attachment (N = 44)*

More secure primary caregiver attachment	Less secure primary caregiver attachment
<b>Primary caregiver characteristics</b>	
1. Close, caring, loving relationships	1. Lack of caring relationship
2. Parental interest and involvement	2. Preoccupation with other activities
3. Open communication	3. Poor communication
4. Reliable, available and responsive caregivers	4. Lack of bonding/connectedness
<b>Nature of arguments between parents</b>	
1. Few arguments/Unable to recall arguments	1. Few arguments/Unable to recall arguments
2. Loud and heated arguments	2. Loud and heated arguments
3. Silences/sulking	3. Silences/sulking
4. Physical violence	4. Physical violence
5. Arguments resolved quickly	
More secure partner attachment	Less secure partner attachment
<b>Partner characteristics</b>	
1. Caring, loving and committed relationship	1. Lack of closeness
2. Attraction, affection and sex	2. Conflicting perspectives and frequent arguments
3. Open communication	3. Poor communication
4. Support and consideration	4. Overly controlling behaviour
5. Trust, integrity and honesty	5. Unbalanced give-and-take
<b>Unhelpful conflict resolution strategies</b>	
1. No unhelpful conflict resolution strategies	1. Avoidance
2. Withdrawal	2. Withdrawal
3. Attacking and overly emotional behaviour	3. Attacking and overly emotional behaviour
4. Blame and personal insults	4. Blame and personal insults
5. Timing of argument	5. Focus on 'winning' the argument
<b>Helpful conflict resolution strategies</b>	
1. Calm discussions	1. Calm discussions away from distractions
2. Timely discussions	2. Taking responsibility for behaviour
3. Taking turns during discussion	3. Taking turns during discussion
4. Listening and trying to understand other's perspective	4. Listening and trying to understand other's perspective
5. Third party involvement	5. Negotiate and compromise
<b>Conflict resolution in ideal relationships</b>	
1. No conflict in ideal relationship	1. No conflict in ideal relationship
2. Listening well to obtain deeper understanding	2. Listening well to obtain deeper understanding
3. Calm and in-depth discussions	3. Calm and in-depth discussions
4. Openness and focus on problem solving	4. Finding mutually acceptable solutions
5. Utilising strategies similar to own	5. Resolving conflict before going to bed

## Discussion

### *Discussion of Quantitative Results*

#### *Attachment Configurations and Relationship Satisfaction*

Similar to Treboux et al.'s findings (2004) it was found that individuals endorsing a 'more secure-more secure' attachment style combination (more secure primary caregiver attachment, more secure partner attachment) had the highest degree of relationship satisfaction (hypothesis 1). However, in contrast to Treboux et al.'s findings that the 'more secure-less secure group' have lower relationship satisfaction than the 'less secure-less secure group', the current study found that the 'more secure-less secure group' had the second highest level of relationship satisfaction (down from the 'more secure-more secure group'). Notice that in both groups with the highest levels of relationship satisfaction there was a current model of a 'more secure' primary caregiver attachment. This lends some support to the notion of an 'immunization effect', that is where a current model of a secure primary caregiver attachment protects the individual's perceptions of relationship functioning in the current relationship. This is in line with what Crowell et al. (2002) refer to as the stability of the secure base, which, according to them, once acquired is particularly difficult to unlearn or distort, even though a current insecure partner attachment might be present.

Whereas previous research has found gender differences in terms of a link between attachment configurations and marital behaviour for wives, but not for husbands (Paley et al., 1999), the current study found no gender or length of relationship differences for attachment configurations.

#### *Partner Attachment and Relationship Satisfaction*

Similar to Stackert and Bursik (2003) who linked relationship satisfaction with secure attachment, and relationship dissatisfaction with preoccupied and avoidant attachment, the current study found significant correlations to support these findings (hypothesis 2).

#### *Secure Primary Caregiver and Secure Partner Attachment*

In contrast to previous research (Owens et al., 1995; Treboux et al., 2004) which has found a correlation between secure primary caregiver attachment and secure partner

attachment, no significant relationship between secure partner attachment and secure primary caregiver attachment was found in the current study (hypothesis 3).

#### *Attachment and Conflict Beliefs*

In contrast to Pistole and Arricale's research findings (2003) that there were no differences between the attachment styles on the belief that arguing is beneficial, the current study found that only preoccupied partner attachment was significantly related to the belief that arguing is beneficial (hypothesis 4). Additional analyses revealed that this relationship was particularly salient for men, but not for women.

In general previous research (e.g., Campbell et al., 2005; Pistole & Arricale, 2003; Stackert & Bursik, 2003) has indicated that individuals with preoccupied or avoidant attachment styles tend to hold the belief that arguing is threatening to a relationship, in contrast to securely attached individuals. The current study's findings show that there was a strong negative correlation between secure partner attachment and the belief that arguing is threatening to the relationship (hypothesis 5a), in particular for women, but not men. Avoidant partner attachment was significantly associated with the belief that arguing is threatening (hypothesis 5b), and again this was particularly true for women, but not men. Finally, in contrast to the predicted research findings, preoccupied partner attachment was negatively related to the belief that arguing is threatening to the relationship (hypothesis 5c), and this was again particularly true for women, but not men. In short, the belief that arguing is threatening appears to be particularly influenced by the partner attachment style of women.

Following on from this, previous research has indicated that women's belief that arguing is threatening is negatively associated with relationship satisfaction (Stackert & Bursik, 2003), and support for this was found in the current study (hypothesis 6). However, additional analyses revealed that for men the belief that arguing is beneficial was positively associated with relationship satisfaction, whereas this was not true for women. In short, for women the belief that arguing is threatening appears to detract greatly from their relationship satisfaction, whereas for men the belief that arguing is beneficial appears to greatly add to their relationship satisfaction.

In keeping with Treboux et al's findings (2004) that '*more secure-more secure* attachment combinations would have the greatest secure base and a low level of conflict, it was expected that the '*more secure-more secure* group' would hold the belief that arguing is beneficial significantly more strongly than other attachment groups. However, Pistole and Arricale (2003) found no distinction between attachment categories on the belief that arguing is beneficial, and when looking at the combinations of primary caregiver and partner attachments in the current study there does not appear to be any distinction between the attachment combination groups on the belief that arguing is beneficial (hypothesis 7a). Insecure attachment, on the other hand has been linked to the belief that arguing is threatening (e.g., Campbell et al., 2005; Stackert & Bursik, 2003). Findings from the current study indicate that the '*less secure-less secure* group' hold the belief that arguing is threatening significantly more than the other groups, bar the '*less secure-more secure* group' (hypothesis 7b). This illustrates the ongoing influence of a current conceptualisation of a '*less secure* parental attachment' on current beliefs around conflict, in particular around the belief that arguing is threatening.

#### *Attachment and Conflict Resolution Styles*

Previous research (e.g., Creasy, 2002; Pistole, 1989) has indicated that adults with secure working models of attachment use more positive and less negative behaviour in romantic relationships when contrasted with insecure adults. In particular securely attached individuals have been found to use integrative conflict resolution styles (Creasy). In similar vein, the current study found a positive correlation between secure partner attachment and positive problem solving (hypothesis 8a), and this was particularly true for female partners. For male partners, on the other hand, there was a moderately negative correlation between secure attachment and the frequency with which they used withdrawal during conflict resolution.

Pistole (1989) found that preoccupied individuals were more likely than the avoidant group to oblige or comply with their partner's wishes. However, Creasey (2002) found no particular conflict resolution style was related to preoccupied attachment. In the current study preoccupied attachment was not related to conflict engagement, compliance or withdrawal. However, there was a moderately positive correlation between positive problem solving and preoccupied partner attachment (hypothesis

8b), in particular for women. As an aside, additional analyses also revealed that conflict engagement was more typical of women than their male counterparts.

Avoidant attachment with its fear of intimacy (Hazan & Shaver, 1987) is generally characterized by independence and emotional distance (Pistole, 1989). Creasy's findings (2002) that insecurely attached adults use more negative behaviour in their romantic relationships was not supported by the current study which found no significant relationship between avoidant attachment and withdrawal (hypothesis 8c) (or any other conflict resolution style).

Furthermore, it was found that when utilizing the attachment style configuration groups, differences between the attachment groups in terms of conflict resolution styles became apparent, but only for withdrawal (hypothesis 9b) (not positive problem solving (hypothesis 9a), conflict engagement, or compliance). In particular, post-hoc Mann-Whitney tests showed that the '*less secure-less secure* combination' used withdrawal significantly more frequently than the other attachment combination groups. Again an ongoing effect of the current conceptualization of attachment to the primary caregiver seems to be apparent, where individuals with conceptualizations of '*less secure*' primary caregiver attachments withdraw from conflict more frequently than individuals with a '*more secure*' conceptualization of primary caregiver attachments.

Various conflict beliefs act as moderating factors during conflict. Prior beliefs about intimacy have been shown to affect behaviour, such as conflict resolution, in a relationship (Fletcher, Rosanowski, & Fitness, 1994). Previous research has also linked attachment, conflict beliefs and conflict styles, with securely attached individuals feeling less of a threat from conflict and reporting more effective conflict styles (Pistole & Arricale, 2003). It was found (9c) that a belief that arguing is threatening was positively correlated with conflict engagement, as well as with withdrawal (the relationship with compliance was positive but non-significant). Finally, it was also found that positive problem solving was significantly positively correlated with a belief that arguing is beneficial.

### *Intergenerational Effect of Divorce on Offspring*

In the current sample, 31.8% of the participants came from homes in which the parents had divorced (or grew up in a single family), whereas 61.4% of the participants came from homes in which the parents had not divorced (6.8% data missing). Although previous research has indicated that parental divorce has an intergenerational impact on the relationships of their children, to the extent that they display higher conflict rates, withdrawal and negative nonverbal behaviours (e.g., Levy et al., 1997; Sanders et al., 1999), this current study found no evidence to support the notion that parental divorce is related to using withdrawal or any other conflict resolution style (hypothesis 10).

### *Interaction between Primary Caregiver and Partner Attachment*

Previous research (Le Poire et al., 1997) has shown that we tend to have compatible partner attachment orientations with our intimate partners. Support for this idea was found in the current study where there was a moderate positive correlation between secure partner attachment in male and female partners (hypothesis 11a). Le Poire and her colleagues also found that individuals with secure primary caregiver attachments also had higher secure partner attachments, as opposed to individuals with insecure primary caregiver attachments. However, no significant differences between ‘more secure’ and ‘less secure’ primary caregiver attachment groups, in terms of partner security, were detected (hypothesis 11b). Although it was possible that due to a small sample there was a lack of power to detect differences, the results would seem to indicate that a current conceptualisation of partner attachment is much more influential in the current romantic relationship in terms of attachment, than a current conceptualisation of parental attachment.

### *Communication Behaviour and Relationship Satisfaction*

Couples who frequently use positive problem solving (e.g., listening, negotiating and compromising behaviour), and infrequently use conflict engagement (e.g., attacking and criticising), withdrawal (e.g., not listening, acting disinterested) and compliance have been found to be satisfied with their relationships (Cropley, 2005; Du Plessis, 2001; Kurdek, 1994). In similar vein the current study found distinct differences between ‘more satisfied’ and ‘less satisfied’ groups (hypothesis 12), with the ‘more satisfied group’ frequently using positive problem solving, and infrequently using

conflict engagement and withdrawal. Although the '*less* satisfied group' used compliance more frequently than the '*more* satisfied group', these differences were not significant.

*Attachment, Communication Accuracy and Satisfaction with Partner Problem Solving*  
Koerner and Fitzpatrick (2002) found that communication accuracy was associated with satisfaction with partner problem solving. The current study found that although there was a positive correlation between communication accuracy and satisfaction with partner problem solving, this relationship was not significant (hypothesis 13a). Additional analyses revealed that '*more* securely attached' partners were not significantly more accurate in their communications than '*less* securely attached' partners. This appears to be in line with what some previous research has uncovered in terms of a less accurate assumption of their partner's communication (Simpson et al., 1999). These researchers found that more secure individuals tend to steer clear of, or dismiss the negative implications of their partner's cognitions and emotions, or what is termed *motivated inaccuracy* (turning a blind eye to what the other is thinking and feeling), and thus maintain their relationship satisfaction and stability. In addition it was found in the current study that '*more* securely attached' partners were significantly more satisfied with their partner's problem solving ability, than '*less* securely attached' partners (hypothesis 13b), and in this manner a motivated inaccuracy might contribute to their relationship satisfaction in general.

Although no significant results were found in relation to own communication intention, additional post-hoc tests did reveal that individuals who view their partner's communication as positive were more satisfied with their partner's problem solving ability, as well as their own problem solving ability. Furthermore, individuals who viewed their partner's communication intention as negative, also had a correspondingly low level of satisfaction with their partner's problem solving, as well as a low level of satisfaction with their own problem solving. This also ties in with the perceptual distortions that Weiss (1980) described as *sentiment override*, a process by which the overall positive or negative feelings that an individual has about the partner and the relationship influences the perceptions of the message as either positive or negative. Weiss found that distressed couples' experiences were shaped by negative sentiment override, so that for example a wife might perceive her husband's message

as negative whereas in fact observers rated it as neutral. The opposite was found in satisfied couples where a positive sentiment override was evident.

### *Gender Differences*

#### *Parent and Partner Attachment*

Previous research (e.g., Le Poire et al., 1997) has indicated a negative association between male avoidant partner attachment and female secure partner attachment and support for this was found in the current study (hypothesis 14a). Although Le Poire et al. found that preoccupied female attachment predicted preoccupied male attachment, correlational analysis revealed no significant relationship in the current study (hypothesis 14b). In addition Le Poire et al.'s research indicated a link between avoidant partner attachment and role reversed parental attachment. However, the current study only found support for this relationship between avoidant partner attachment and role reversed parental attachment in men, but not in women (hypothesis 14c).

#### *Attachment and Relationship Satisfaction*

Banse's research (2004) showed that secure attachment was moderately related to relationship satisfaction in both male and female partners. However, Pratt (2005) found that wives' current attachment representations of their partners were related to their perceptions of relationship satisfaction, although this was not true for husbands. In the current study the link was significant for female partners (hypothesis 15a), but not significant for men, thus supporting Pratt's findings. Banse also found that male and female partner's relationship satisfaction was strongly positively correlated, and the current study also found that male and female partner's relationship satisfaction is similar and comparable (hypothesis 15b).

#### *Attachment and Conflict Resolution Styles*

In general previous research (e.g., Creasy, 2002) has found that secure partner attachment was connected to a greater frequency of positive behavioural interactions. Specifically, Creasy found that women's attachment styles were more predictive of

positive behaviour during interactions, whereas men's attachment styles were more predictive of negative behaviours. Some correlational support for these notions were found in the current study (hypothesis 16), with women's secure partner attachment positively correlated with positive problem solving during conflict, whereas men's secure partner attachment was significantly negatively related to their frequency of withdrawal during conflict (however, not to compliance or conflict engagement).

#### *Relationship Satisfaction and Conflict Resolution Styles*

In contrast to Fichten and Wright's findings (1983) that both satisfied and dissatisfied wives engaged in more negative behaviours than their male counterparts, it was found that there were no significant differences for women and men with regards to their negative conflict resolution behaviours (e.g., withdrawal, compliance and conflict engagement) in *more or less* satisfied groups (hypothesis 17a). Previous research (e.g., Kurdek, 1994; Marchand, 2004) has indicated a link between positive problem solving and relationship satisfaction in women, but also particularly in men. Support for these research findings was found in the current study, with men, in particular, indicating a strong positive correlation between positive problem solving and relationship satisfaction (hypothesis 17b). In addition previous researchers (e.g., Kurdek; Marchand) have found a significantly negative correlation between conflict engagement and relationship satisfaction in men and women. However, the current study only found support for this negative correlation between conflict engagement and relationship satisfaction in women, but not in men (hypothesis 17c). Additional exploration revealed that for men there was however a negative correlation between satisfaction in their relationships and their frequency of withdrawal during conflict.

#### *Relationship Satisfaction and Conflict Beliefs*

Stackert and Bursik (2003) found that women's belief that arguing is threatening was negatively related to their relationship satisfaction, and strong support for this was also found in the current study (hypothesis 18a). In addition the current study also found that women's belief that arguing is threatening was also strongly negatively correlated with male partner's relationship satisfaction. Stackert and Bursik could not find any additional support for relationships between conflict beliefs and relationship satisfaction in male partners. Although the current study also found no significant

connection between the belief that arguing is threatening and relationship satisfaction for men, the belief that arguing is beneficial was positively correlated with relationship satisfaction in men (hypothesis 18b). This was, however, not significant in women. In short then, a gendered response to the influence of conflict beliefs becomes apparent: the belief that *arguing is threatening* in *women* is particularly pertinent for female (as well as male) relationship satisfaction. The belief that *arguing is beneficial* in *men* appears to have a significant influence on male partner's perception of relationship satisfaction.

#### *Relationship Satisfaction and Communication Accuracy*

Although Koerner and Fitzpatrick (2002) found that communication accuracy was correlated with relationship satisfaction in men and women, the current study found no support for this (hypothesis 19). Additional analyses did however reveal that male and female accuracy was moderately correlated. Further additional analyses also found gender differences in terms of mode of communication with securely attached female partners focusing more on their partner's verbal communication (i.e., words) than their insecurely attached male counterparts.

#### *Rating Observed Conflict Resolution Styles*

##### *Between raters*

Significant intraclass correlation coefficients were obtained between the two raters on all the observed conflict resolution styles for men and women, bar compliance in men. In this instance raters might have disagreed as to the interpretation of compliance and whether it was perceived as "giving in" or "agreeing", a problem that could potentially be overcome through more intensive training of raters. Although Rater 2 was possibly more influenced by being more familiar with the contextual information of each couple, this did not appear to affect the agreement rate between raters, as significant agreement was still reached.

##### *Self-reported conflict resolution styles and observed conflict resolution styles*

There was a lack of significant correlations between observed conflict resolution styles and the self-reported conflict resolution styles of participants, except for conflict engagement in men. Previous research (e.g., Horatcsu & Ekinici, 1992) has

shown that the accuracy of decoding vocal expressions enhances with age, familiarity with the sender, and the intensity of the emotion expressed (i.e., an intense emotion expressed vocally is interpreted more accurately). This last point in particular seems to be relevant when considering that both raters were able to establish with greater accuracy when males, in particular, were engaging or initiating conflict – presumably due to the more intense nature of the emotions expressed. In this regards, male participants might have indicated their aggressive behaviour more overtly than female participants, thus enabling both raters to identify this more accurately.

The lack of correlations could be due to a number of factors, including the limitations of global rating (see Limitations of the Study). In addition, participants' reflective self-perception of their own conflict resolution styles might be substantially different from their actual behaviour displayed during a conflict discussion in general, or even during this particular conflict discussion. A few other factors could have potentially influenced these outcomes, including participants' reactivity, which was influenced by the knowledge and awareness of the camera (some even making reference to it during their conversations). As a result participants were possibly presenting more positively (self-presentation). Additionally, a time limit of 1 minute per segment of conversation meant that often participants felt pressure to participate during that time. As a result it might have become difficult to withdraw from conversation when there was a pressure to participate brought on by the time limit. Additionally, it was potentially difficult to physically withdraw, as there was the constraint of the room and the additional knowledge that they were being filmed. The total time limit of 12 minutes in which to complete the discussion might have added additional pressures to reach a solution, which again meant that participants were acting more positively and pro-actively than they might in a more naturalistic setting. Although this was not stated as a goal of the exercise some participants inferred that they had to reach a solution by completion of the Talk Table exercise.

#### *Rater training, scale development and -use*

Further research in utilising the CRSI-ORS would need to be conducted to determine the feasibility of the scale. Although raters achieved significant intraclass correlation coefficients as a measure of agreement between the raters, additional training in observing participants might have been appropriate, in particular the use of video

examples to illustrate the subtle differences between conflict resolution styles. In addition it would seem sensible to observe participants in a more naturalistic setting, as self-presentation aspects and time constraints resulted in raters' judgements being very different from self-reported conflict resolution styles. However, it should be noted that recent research has illustrated that rater training, as such, does not necessarily improve the coding ability of raters. Waldinger, Schulz, Hauser, Allen and Crowell (2004) found comparable results between naïve and expert coders using Gottman's Specific Affects Coding System (SPAFF; Gottman, McCoy, Coan, & Collier, 1996). A more appropriate methodology might include video recall in which couples rate their own conflict resolution styles by replaying their videotaped interactions (e.g., Waldinger & Schulz, 2006).

### *Discussion of Qualitative Results*

#### *Question 1 – Primary Caregiver Characteristics*

Secure relationships are characterized by an infant's confidence that their primary caregiver will be available, helpful and comforting should a frightening situation arise (Bowlby, 1988). These caregivers are described as readily available, as well as sensitive and responsive to the child's needs. The qualitative data gathered (for a summary see Table 25, p. 225) also reflect these themes, insofar that individuals with 'more secure primary caregiver attachment' described their relationships with their primary caregivers as close, caring and loving. They also described their primary caregivers as showing interest and involvement, communicating openly and being reliable, available and responsive to their needs. Although individuals in the 'more secure primary caregiver attachment' group described their caregivers overall in a positive light, some also made comments as to the negative characteristics that featured in some of their relationships, thus presenting a more realistic approach (as it seems unlikely that all these caregivers were positive and loving at all times). These negative characteristics in securely attached relationships are seldom reported in the literature, although it does seem to reflect the continuum of different attachment experiences in a 'more secure attachment' categorisation. However, some participants may also be being more resilient to the influence of negative characteristics based on their overall leaning toward a 'more secure' categorisation. A few participants who are 'more securely attached' to their primary caregivers also indicated that significant

events influenced their relationships with their primary caregivers in different ways, some reporting ongoing strained relationships, whilst for others reconciliation has brought them even closer to their primary caregivers.

Although only a few participants in this study could be classified as avoidant or anxious-ambivalent, individuals in the '*less* secure primary caregiver attachment' category demonstrated characteristics that would appear to be leaning toward these categorisations. The literature on infants who have anxious-ambivalent relationships with their caregivers would seem to indicate that they are unsure whether their caregivers will be responsive. Bowlby (1988) suggests that this pattern is promoted by a primary caregiver who is not consistently available, by separations and by threats of abandonment. As a result infants make conflicted and often ineffective attempts to receive support from caregivers (Simpson & Rholes, 1998). Furthermore, infants who develop avoidant relationships with their caregivers have lost all confidence that the caregiver will be helpful, and as such do not seek support when they are distressed. Bowlby suggests that this pattern is the result of a caregiver constantly rebuffing his/her child when the child seeks comfort or protection. These infants attempt to cope internally by becoming emotionally self-sufficient.

The qualitative data gathered also reflect these themes, insofar that individuals with '*less* secure primary caregiver attachment' described a lack of caring or nurturing relationships with their primary caregivers, as well as a lack of bonding or connectedness. Their primary caregivers are also described as being preoccupied with other activities and communicating poorly with them. A few also reported providing care to their primary caregivers (role reversal). However, similar to the '*more* secure attachment' group, some participants in the '*less* secure attachment' group also ascribed positive characteristics to their primary caregivers, again indicating a more balanced and realistic perspective, as well as showcasing the range of attachment experiences that contribute to a '*less* secure' attachment classification. In addition individuals who are '*less* securely attached' also indicated that significant events (e.g., adoption, divorce, and death of a parent) influenced their relationships with their primary caregivers in various ways, some reporting ongoing strained relationships, whilst others have managed to resolve their past difficulties.

### *Question 2 – Nature of Arguments between Parents*

According to Crum (1987) conflict is viewed as neither negative nor positive, but rather as a foreseeable outcome to the natural process of growth and change. There is also a growing consensus that the quality of an individual's attachments in childhood is closely linked to communication patterns in adults' intimate couple relationships (e.g., Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Levy & Davis, 1988). For instance research examining family expressiveness and attachment, suggest that mothers who were able to communicate both positive and negative emotions, were more likely to have securely attached children (Bell, 1998), even though they might experience a smaller percentage of negative rather than positive emotions (Izard et al., 1991). However, mothers of less securely attached children generally experienced a greater percentage of negative rather than positive emotions, but these mothers suppressed their negative emotions and instead communicated positive emotions.

From the themes explored in the qualitative data, it would seem that both the '*more secure*' and '*less secure*' groups had similar experiences of their parents' arguments, although the '*more secure*' groups' parents were able to resolve their arguments faster. This being the only reported point of difference might indicate that conflict did not linger for long periods in the homes of '*more securely attached*' individuals. Research has indicated that it is the ongoing conflict between parents that impact negatively on children's self concept and attachment, rather than a significant event like divorce (e.g., Cabero, 2006).

Memory bias has also been found to be a mechanism influencing satisfaction in long-term relationships (Karney & Coombs, 2000). Fowers et al. (1996) found that positive illusions about relationships were associated with relationship quality, rather than optimism, pessimism or social desirability. Recent Australian research (Halford et al., 2002) also indicates that our relationship satisfaction influences our cognitions and it colours how we interpret past relationship events and behaviours. More specifically relationship dissatisfaction is associated with a negative hindsight memory bias in distressed couples. The opposite also seems to be at work in the current sample, with a number of *more* and *less* secure participants indicating that they recall few, if any, arguments between their parents. If dissatisfied couples have a negative hindsight memory bias, it might be reasonable to assume that mostly satisfied couples (as is the

case in this study) have a positive hindsight memory bias, which assists them in maintaining their current relationship satisfaction. Correspondingly their current relationship satisfaction might also be colouring their recall of inter-parental conflict.

Both the '*more* securely attached' and '*less* securely attached' participants indicated that physical violence did occur in their families of origin. Previous research (Grau, 2001) has also found that there were no differences in the distribution of adult attachment styles, nor the relationship satisfaction for adults who have, or have not, been witness to domestic violence in childhood. However, Grau did find that individuals who witnessed domestic violence in childhood or had themselves been a victim of child abuse were less satisfied with the viability of their relationships, particularly in relation to the level of trust, acceptance and respect.

### *Question 3 – Partner Characteristics*

Research has indicated that adults with a secure attachment style describe higher levels of trust, intimacy, satisfaction and commitment in relationships, as opposed to adults with an avoidant attachment style who describe lower levels of these features (e.g., Collins & Read, 1990; Hammond & Fletcher, 1991). In another study it was found that husbands and wives with secure attachment styles were less rejecting and more supportive of their partners than their insecurely attached counterparts (Gao et al., 1997). These results are echoed in the findings of the current study, with '*more* securely attached' participants indicating caring, loving and affectionate relationships, whilst '*less* secure' participants felt that there were frequent arguments and a lack of closeness in their relationships. In addition to poor communication between partners, '*less* securely attached' participants commented that either themselves, or their partners, exhibited some overly controlling behaviour in the relationships, and there was often an unbalanced give-and-take in the relationship. In contrast, the '*more* securely attached' individuals reported open communication in their relationships, as well as support and consideration for each other. For '*more* securely attached' individuals there was also a sense that their relationships were built on trust, integrity and honesty between the partners.

A moment should also be taken to comment on general partner characteristics, as well as the exceptions to this. The '*more* secure' participants clearly reported overall a

more positive perspective of their partners, and the reverse was true for the 'less secure' participants who reported a more negative perspective overall of their partners. However, to balance out the overly rosy pictures that were painted by the previous comments, it should be noted that individuals in the 'more secure' category also had less than flattering comments to make about their respective partners. The same also applied to the 'less secure' group where some participants also balanced out their overly negatively slanted comments with positive comments. This information fleshes out our picture of 'more-' and 'less secure' relationships showing the range of experiences as well as the variation within each categorisation.

#### *Question 4 – Unhelpful Conflict Resolution Strategies*

Research to date has indicated that couples who manage their conflicts constructively, experience more relationship satisfaction than their counterparts who utilize ineffective conflict resolution styles (e.g., Billings, 1979; Du Plessis, 2001; Kurdek, 1994). Although some overlap did occur between unhelpful conflict resolution strategies for the participants in the 'more -' and 'less secure' groups of this study, it can be noted that a number of participants in the 'more secure' category indicated that they had *no* unhelpful conflict resolution strategies. In other words, many of these participants felt that they only had helpful strategies which would no doubt assist them in solving their conflict constructively.

Further research (e.g., Cohn et al., 1992; Cowan et al., 1996; George et al., 1996) has indicated that attachment styles become apparent in conflict situations to the extent where men with insecure attachment styles display more negative affect and engage in conflict more frequently, than their securely attached counterparts. These researchers also found that in conflict situations where both partners exhibited insecure attachment styles, interactions were also more strained. Gross and Guerrero (2000) also found that the dominating style and avoiding style were perceived as inappropriate and ineffective when trying to solve conflict. Avoidance was also indicated by the 'less secure attachment' group as being an unhelpful strategy when they attempt to solve conflict.

Another gender-specific spousal interaction that has been identified in the literature on unhelpful conflict resolution strategies is the demand-withdraw pattern (also known as

the pursuer-distancer pattern), in which the wife is generally the demanding party, whereas the husband tends to withdraw in response (Kurdek, 1995). This demand-withdraw pattern is said to account for more variance in relationship satisfaction than any other conflict resolution style, and research suggests that it reflects the intensity and the amount of intimacy that people need in a relationship, with women generally desiring more intimacy, and men desiring greater separateness (e.g., Christensen, 1987; Jacobson, 1989). Both the '*more secure*' and the '*less secure*' groups indicated that withdrawal was an unhelpful conflict resolution strategy.

Gottman's more recent model of relational decay (1994) suggests that couples move toward divorce due to the negative conflict behaviour they display that systematically leads to negative beliefs about each other. In particular behaviours such as complaining/criticising, contempt, defensiveness and stonewalling (withdrawal) have been identified as corrosive to relationship satisfaction. It can be noted that both the '*more secure*' and the '*less secure*' groups identified attacking and overly emotional behaviour, as well as blame and personal insults as unhelpful strategies during conflict. In addition the '*more securely attached*' individuals reported that the timing of the argument can quite often hamper effective problem solving. For the '*less securely attached*' individuals a focus on 'winning' the argument also interfered with their conflict resolution abilities.

For this question it should be noted that participants were simply asked whether there were any conflict resolution strategies that result in failure to solve a problem or which makes a problem worse. Question 4 did not ask participants to indicate how frequently they use unhelpful conflict resolution strategies. However, from the quantitative data above it is evident that there is a clear negative correlation between secure attachment and the frequency of using negative problem solving styles (in particular withdrawal).

Although there was some overlap between the '*more securely attached*' and '*less securely attached*' groups in terms of what they perceived as unhelpful strategies, there was also an important point of difference: A number of '*more secure*' participants indicated that although being aware of some ineffective conflict resolution strategies, they had also learned constructive conflict resolution strategies

over time. In contrast some of the '*less secure*' participants indicated behavioural patterns that currently exacerbate their problems, or which cause their conflict to spiral out of control.

#### *Question 5 – Helpful Conflict Resolution Strategies*

Previous research has indicated that securely attached people report less fighting and more effective arguing, whereas preoccupied individuals view conflict as an attachment threat and focus on re-establishing togetherness, which might in turn hamper their problem solving ability (Pistole & Arricale, 2003). These researchers have also found that securely attached individuals reported less conflict avoidance than those with dismissing attachment styles. Along similar lines, Shi (2003) reported that secure individuals displayed more positive behaviour and higher relationship satisfaction than individuals who scored higher on anxiety and avoidance dimensions. Both the '*more -*' and the '*less secure*' groups were aware of helpful strategies. Similar to Question 4, Question 5 did not ask participants to indicate how frequently they use helpful conflict resolution strategies. However, from the quantitative data above it is evident that there is a clear connection between secure attachment and the frequency of using a positive problem solving style. All of the strategies described by the participants in this study as 'helpful' would fall under the broader heading of a positive problem solving style. Gross and Guerrero (2002) also found that an integrative conflict style is generally perceived as the most appropriate and effective style, whereas the obliging and compromising styles are seen as neutral.

In terms of strategies, both the '*more securely attached*' and the '*less securely attached*' groups were able to identify a number of helpful strategies. Both groups identified calm discussions as helpful, with the '*less securely attached*' group qualifying that the calm discussions should occur away from distractions. The '*more secure*' group again mentioned that discussions need to take place at an appropriate time. The '*less secure*' group commented that it was important for each individual to take responsibility for their own behaviour during the conflict resolution process. Both groups indicated the importance of taking turns during a discussion, as well as the importance of listening intently to each other whilst attempting to understand the other party's perspective. Some participants in the '*more securely attached*' group also saw the need for involving a third party if an impasse is reached. The '*less*

secure' group indicated the helpfulness of negotiating and compromising during conflict.

Creasey's study (2002), of 145 young adult couples involved in romantic relationships, reiterates some of these findings, and also suggests some additional gender differences. It was found that young women, in particular, with secure attachment styles were found to use more positive behaviour during discussions of conflict, and female attachment security also predicted the occurrence of joint couple positive behaviours, whereas male insecurity predicted the frequency of negative behaviours. Creasey furthermore suggests that although secure couples would occasionally use negative behaviours during conflict, their liberal use of positive behaviours enhances the positive emotional content of their discussions, and again, this is in line with the current study's quantitative findings which indicate the frequent use of a positive problem solving style during conflict in '*more secure*' individuals.

#### *Question 6 – Conflict Resolution in Ideal Relationships*

Recent years have seen our cultural obsession with ideal love and ideal relationships (Evans, 2003) develop into booming enterprises for dating agencies and reality television programmes, as they seek to exploit this phenomenon (Djicic & Oatley, 2004). For Question 6 participants were asked to imagine their ideal relationship, and then to imagine how the couple in their ideal relationship would handle conflict. Firstly, a number of participants in the '*more*' and '*less secure*' groups indicated that in an ideal relationship there would be no conflict, as both individuals would be in perfect harmony with each other. According to the literature this does not bode well for their relationships satisfaction, as most couples experience some degree of conflict. In terms of real and ideal love relationships, Coyne (2001) found that the greater the discrepancies between perceptions of actual and ideal love in the relationship, the lower the relationship satisfaction. Similarly, greater discrepancies between real and ideal partners/relationships would also contribute to relationship dissatisfaction (Fletcher, Simpson, Thomas, & Giles, 1999). The '*more secure*' group could however be closer to their own ideal couples, as many indicated that an ideal couple would utilize similar strategies to the strategies that they themselves use to solve conflict. To this extent Mickulincer and Erev (1991) found that securely attached couples' relationships were characterised by greater congruence between

their actual and ideal relationships. Greater congruence between real and ideal relationships has also been linked to relationship satisfaction (Fletcher et al., 1999). Levine (1995) theorised that the discrepancy between ideal and actual love is a natural function of any long-term relationship, and it requires the individual to constantly manage this “gap” by using a range of defences (e.g., idealization, denial, and rationalization) which in turn might either enhance relationship well-being (possibly the ‘*more secure*’ group) or destabilize the individual and the relationship (possibly the ‘*less secure group*’).

In terms of other conflict strategies, both groups indicated that couples in their ideal relationship would be great listeners, and in that manner they would obtain a deeper understanding of each other. Calm and in-depth discussions would also solve the problems in an ideal relationship for both groups. The ‘*more securely attached*’ group also commented that openness and a focus on problem solving would be helpful. The ‘*less securely attached*’ group indicated that finding mutually acceptable solutions would be paramount for their ideal couple, and then interestingly enough a number of participants indicated the importance of resolving their conflict amicably before going to bed, maybe reflecting their own need for having closure. All the conflict strategies noted by the ‘*more -*’ and ‘*less secure*’ groups emulate ideals of warmth and trustworthiness in long-term relationships. This, according to Fletcher and his colleagues, is evolutionary adaptive behaviour if one considers the time investment of both partners in the long-term relationship and potential offspring (parental investment theory) and the preference to have a long-term partner whose conflict resolution styles are going to facilitate warmth and trustworthiness (Fletcher, Tither, O’Loughlin, Friesen, & Overall, 2004).

## Limitations of the Study

### *Limitations of Quantitative Data Analysis*

Twenty two heterosexual, committed couples ( $N = 44$ ) participated in this research project. From a qualitative perspective, the number of participants provided adequate variability to allow for a thematic analysis of the data (Boyatzis, 1998). Quantitatively a number of the statistical tests used in this study compared two means. According to Hair, Anderson, Tatham and Black (1995) when comparing two means a sample size of 40 participants achieves an alpha level of .05 with an Effect Size of .598, which implies that a study of 44 participants would have a moderate effect size upwards of .60. Furthermore a significance level of .01 also implies a moderate Effect Size ( $ES = .35$ ) for a sample of 40 participants (Hair et al., 1995). However, results with a significance level set at lower than .01, or comparing more than two means, should be interpreted with caution due to the reduced probability of detecting statistical significance from these results.

To enable comparisons with Study 1 and to test gender differences, Study 2 makes use of correlational analyses. By correlating the data for the couples in Study 2, the assumption of independence of observations has been violated, so that the validity of the conclusions is weakened. Although frequently used in marital/couples research to test gender differences (e.g., Banse, 2004; Creasy, 2002; Crowell et al., 2002; Johnson et al., 2005; Wampler et al., 2003) interpretation of the present findings should be treated with caution. Not only, as a correlational study, are the results subject to all the inferential shortcomings associated with non-experimental designs, but the couples data used in this study are treated as individual data due to the small sample size (e.g., Griffin & Gonzalez, 1995). This research does not take into account the dependencies that could be produced by dyadic interaction (Griffin & Gonzalez), and future similar research, with larger sample sizes, could make use of dyadic analysis (e.g., Cook & Kenny, 2005).

As a result of participants self-selecting their participation, the majority of them (59.2%) were satisfied (slightly satisfied, satisfied or very satisfied) with their relationships, with 25% mixed (neither dissatisfied, nor satisfied), and 15.8% dissatisfied. The data collection methodology utilized is similar to other studies in

which participants may choose whether they participate, or not, so it does seem to lend itself to individuals who are more satisfied with their relationships (e.g., Banse, 2004). In comparison to other countries (e.g., US) however, New Zealand (Pink, 2006) does seem to have a lower divorce rate (which might imply that New Zealand couples in general are happier or less prone to divorce). Thus although there was sampling bias, the findings would seem to reflect the behaviours of New Zealand couples in long-term relationships who are, for the most part, satisfied with their relationships.

Primary caregiver and partner attachment variables in this study are not necessarily indicative of actual primary caregiver or partner behaviour, but are current representations of attachment, which may or may not be similar to actual attachment behaviour. Although these representations are believed to be derived from actual behaviour by the primary caregiver and partner, they are the individual's current interpretations of behaviour, and it should be noted that this association has not been demonstrated in an empirical sense (Levy et al., 1998). In addition, as is quite often the case in psychology, it is conceptually difficult to be sure that test scores accurately reflect actual constructs or whether they are merely the result of item response summations – an issue which speaks to the validity of the tests used (Borsboom, 2005). Attachment representations are not accessible to direct observation, and self-report is one potential manner of measuring attachment representations. In addition it should be noted that people possess multiple attachment schemas which are influenced by the various attachments they form to people in their lives (e.g., Mikulincer & Arad, 1999; Pierce & Lydon, 2001) and this research project only addressed current models of attachment to the primary caregiver and the romantic partner. Furthermore, the influence that other attachment representations might have on primary caregiver attachment and partner attachment were not studied in this research project, and these confounds make it unclear as to whether the attachment variables solely represent primary caregiver and partner attachment (e.g., Overall et al., 2003).

Attachment styles and other relationship variables, such as conflict resolution styles (e.g., Sandy et al., 2000) are relatively stable over time (e.g., Crowell et al., 2002), but new experiences could also potentially effect changes. The self-report questionnaires

were administered once only, thus providing a snapshot view of current perspectives on attachments to partner and primary caregiver, as well as relationship satisfaction, conflict beliefs and conflict resolution styles. This did not allow for measurement of changes in these variables over time or for factors influencing changes longitudinally. Ideally the inclusion of both partners in this study would have allowed for the analysis of dyadic interaction effects (Berman et al., 1994), were it not for the small sample size. Instead, the equally distributed frequencies of men and women, allowed for the study of gender differences, and comparisons to existing studies on gender differences.

The use of self-report data to measure most of the variables in the study could seem questionable in terms of the validity of the results. Firstly, however, an attempt was made to verify self-reported conflict resolution styles from observed conflict resolution styles in this study. In terms of the observational data there was a lack of overlap between observational and self-report conflict resolution styles. As discussed above (in the Results section) it could be argued that participants' self-perception of their conflict resolution styles could be considerably different from behaviour displayed during this particular conflict discussion. Participants' reactivity could also have influenced the observational results (knowledge and awareness of the camera), as well as their efforts to possibly present more positively than they normally are in natural settings (self-presentation). Secondly, however it should be noted that relationship research has shown that the effects of impression management do not impact significantly on self-report measures used in studies such as this one, thus supporting the use of self-report data as an effective data gathering tool (e.g., Hunsley, Vito, Pinsent, James, & Lefebvre, 1996).

The raters in this study rated conflict resolution styles in a global manner – after each minute the frequency of the observed conflict resolution styles were rated on a scale. Rating concepts in such a global manner, as opposed to micro-analytic coding, is less time consuming and gave a global indication of the frequency with which each individual used conflict resolution styles. However, Johnson and Bradbury (1999) caution that there are drawbacks to this method, including lower inter-observer agreement (due to the greater subjectivity of the technique) and inconsistent correlations compared with micro-analytic analysis of the same data. There is also the

likelihood that ratings might be influenced by raters' embedded theories of what constitutes satisfactory problem solving, and satisfactory relationships. Negative behaviours involving conflict are almost inevitably linked with relationship satisfaction. However, Cramer (2004) suggests that the study of relationship satisfaction might be better understood in the context of support rather than conflict, and this might be particularly relevant in a sample where the majority of the participants were satisfied with their relationships.

#### *Limitations of Qualitative Data Analysis*

Boyatzis (1998) identified the following obstacles to effective thematic analysis, which could potentially have influenced the results in this study: projection, sampling, mood and style. Projection is viewed as attributing the researcher's emotions, qualities, values or conceptualisations onto the participants, and is particularly problematic to avoid if there is ambiguous material present. Future studies could prevent or lessen the potential effect of projection by using several people to encode the information, thereby establishing consistent judgments. Adequate sampling minimizes the number of errors present in the data, so that the researcher can be sure that he/she is processing information that is not contaminated by other variables or unknown factors. For the most part the themes that emerged from the qualitative data were consistent with the literature, so that the researcher can be confident that for the most part, adequate sampling of the relevant factors was allowed for. Lastly, Boyatzis identifies mood and style as an obstacle to effective data analysis, and by this he implies that one's mood and cognitive style can influence one's ability to sense the themes. It can be noted that researcher did find the analysis of participants' attachments to their primary caregiver, as well as the stories that went with it (Question 1 and 2) more challenging than the other questions due to the nature of the answers, including references to physical abuse, addictions and conflict in the family. However, the researcher did pace herself when analyzing these themes, and allowed adequate debriefing with supervisors to lessen the emotional impact of the content.

## Synopsis

The use of quantitative and qualitative data in this study provided a wealth of information. Adopting a mixed-method approach has enabled a greater depth of understanding of the variables under discussion (Harré & Crystal, 2004). In parts the qualitative data underscored the quantitative findings, whereas in other parts it elaborated on themes relevant to the topic under discussion. The concluding comments presented below combine the study's findings and accompanying relevant literature under pertinent headings, and supports the hypothesized model of the relationship between the key variables (see Figure 5, p. 112).

### *Primary Caregiver and Partner Attachment*

*Parent attachment.* In keeping with attachment theory (e.g., Bowlby, 1988) and previous research (e.g., Simpson & Rholes, 1998) individuals with a 'more secure' primary caregiver attachment described their relationships with their primary caregivers as close, caring and loving. They also described their primary caregivers as showing interest and involvement, communicating openly and being reliable, available and responsive to their needs. In contrast, individuals with a 'less secure' primary caregiver attachment described a lack of caring or nurturing relationships with their primary caregivers, as well as a lack of bonding or connectedness. Their primary caregivers are also described as being preoccupied with other activities and communicating poorly with them. A few also reported providing care to their primary caregivers (role reversal).

*Partner attachment.* In keeping with the literature (e.g., Collins & Read, 1990; Gao et al., 1997; Hammond & Fletcher, 1991), participants who are 'more securely attached' to their partners indicated caring, loving and affectionate relationships, whilst 'less secure' participants felt that there were frequent arguments and a lack of closeness in their relationships. In addition to poor communication between partners, 'less securely attached' participants commented that either themselves, or their partners, exhibited some overly controlling behaviour in the relationships, and there was often an unbalanced give-and-take in the relationship. In contrast, the 'more securely attached' individuals reported open communication in their relationships, as well as support and consideration for each other. There was also a sense for 'more

securely attached' individuals that their relationships were built on trust, integrity and honesty between the partners.

Internal working models of attachment influence partner matching and arrange our social behaviour in such a way as to be congruent with our attachment styles (Collins & Read, 1990). According to the reinforcement effect in attachment theory, adults appear to select partners who confirm their attachment expectations (Collins & Read) and this is in line with Bowlby's view (1988) that individuals create their social environments in ways that confirm their internal working models. Similarly, Sroufe and Fleeson (1986) suggested that in order to maintain internal congruity, people might seek to establish relationships that are similar to past relationships. To this extent, it has been found that individuals with secure attachment styles attract each other (Collins & Read; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994). A moderate positive correlation between secure partner attachment in male and female partners was found in the current study.

Attachment theory, however, also explains why dissimilar attachment styles are attracted to one another (i.e., individuals with avoidant attachment styles are attracted to preoccupied individuals, and vice versa). Previous research (e.g., Le Poire et al., 1997) has indicated a negative association between male avoidant partner attachment and female secure partner attachment and support for this was found in the current study. Although these researchers found that preoccupied female attachment predicted preoccupied male attachment, correlational analysis revealed no significant relationship in the current study. In addition Le Poire et al.'s research indicated a link between avoidant partner attachment and role reversed parental attachment. However, the current study only found support for this relationship between avoidant partner attachment and role reversed parental attachment in men, but not in women.

A number of studies have found internal working models to be related to one's own attachment history (Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Levy & Davis, 1988). Treboux and colleagues (e.g., Crowell et al., 2002; Treboux et al., 2004) in particular found that secure primary caregiver attachment was also associated with secure partner attachment in marriage. However, no significant relationship between secure partner attachment and secure primary caregiver attachment was found in the

current study. In addition, no significant differences between ‘*more secure*’ and ‘*less secure*’ primary caregiver attachment groups, in terms of current partner security, were detected.

#### *Attachment and Relationship Satisfaction*

Similar to Treboux et al.’s findings (2004) it was found that individuals endorsing a ‘*more secure-more secure*’ attachment style combination (more secure primary caregiver attachment, more secure partner attachment) had the highest degree of relationship satisfaction. In addition, similar to Stackert and Bursik (2005) who linked relationship satisfaction with secure attachment, and relationship dissatisfaction with preoccupied and avoidant attachment, the current study found a significant positive correlation between secure partner attachment and relationship satisfaction, as well as a significant negative correlation between preoccupied/avoidant attachment and relationship satisfaction. More broadly speaking, this also echoes Cozzarelli et al.’s findings (2000) that partner-specific mental models are associated with relationship-specific variables such as relationship satisfaction. In terms of gender differences it was found that female partner’s relationship satisfaction had a significant correlation with secure partner attachment. However, this was not true for men (which supports Pratts’ (2005) findings). Banse (2004) also found that male and female partner’s relationship satisfaction was strongly positively correlated, and the current study also found that male and female partner’s relationship satisfaction is similar and comparable.

#### *Attachment and Conflict Resolution*

Attachment theory posits that individuals with positive models of others (secures and preoccupieds) will display communication styles exhibiting intimacy, whereas those with negative models of others (dismissives and fearful avoidants) will demonstrate communication behaviour reflecting avoidance and detachment (Guerrero, 1996). Since individuals create their social environments in ways that confirm their internal working models, attachment theory also predicts that attachment styles will reinforce these approach/avoidance behaviours (Bartholomew, 1993; Collins & Read, 1994). Previous research (e.g., Creasy, 2002; Pistole, 1989) has indicated that adults with secure working models of attachment use more positive and less negative behaviour in romantic relationships when contrasted with insecure adults. The current study

found a positive correlation between secure partner attachment and positive problem solving and this was particularly true for female partners. For male partners, on the other hand, there was a moderately negative correlation between secure attachment and the frequency with which they used withdrawal (however not compliance nor conflict engagement) during conflict resolution. In the current study preoccupied attachment was not related to conflict engagement, compliance or withdrawal. However, there was a moderately positive correlation between positive problem solving and preoccupied partner attachment, in particular for women. As an aside additional analyses also revealed that conflict engagement was more typical of women than their male counterparts.

This study found no significant relationship between avoidant attachment and withdrawal (or any other conflict resolution style). It was furthermore found that when utilizing the attachment style configuration groups, differences between the attachment groups in terms of conflict resolution styles became apparent, but only for withdrawal (not positive problem solving, conflict engagement, or compliance). In particular the '*less secure-less secure* combination' (*less secure* primary caregiver attachment and *less secure* partner attachment) used withdrawal significantly more frequently than the other attachment combination groups. Again an ongoing effect of the current conceptualization of attachment to the primary caregiver seems to be apparent, where individuals with conceptualizations of '*less secure*' primary caregiver attachments withdraw from conflict more frequently than individuals with a '*more secure*' conceptualization of primary caregiver attachments.

There was a lack of significant correlations between observed conflict resolution styles and the self-reported conflict resolution styles of participants, except for conflict engagement in men. Previous research (e.g., Horatcsu & Ekinici, 1992) has shown that the accuracy of decoding vocal expressions enhances with age, familiarity with the sender, and the intensity of the emotion expressed (i.e., an intense emotion expressed vocally is interpreted more accurately). This last point in particular seems to be relevant when considering that both raters were able to establish with greater accuracy when males, in particular, were engaging or initiating conflict – presumably due to the more intense nature of the emotions expressed. In this respect, male

participants might have indicated their aggressive behaviour more overtly than female participants, thus enabling both raters to identify this more accurately.

In addition, with regards to conflict resolution the following information is also summarised here: conflict strategies; information relevant to adult children's parents arguing; and information relevant to conflict strategies of adult children from divorced parents.

#### *1) Helpful strategies.*

Calm discussions away from distractions were seen as helpful by participants. The 'more secure' group again mentioned that discussions need to take place at an appropriate time. The 'less secure' group commented that it was important for each individual to take responsibility for their own behaviour during the conflict resolution process. Both groups indicated the importance of taking turns during a discussion, as well as the importance of listening intently to each other whilst attempting to understand the other party's perspective. Some participants in the 'more securely attached' group also saw the need for involving a third party if an impasse is reached. The 'less secure' group indicated the helpfulness of negotiating and compromising during conflict.

#### *2) Unhelpful strategies.*

Both the 'more secure' and the 'less secure' groups identified attacking and overly emotional behaviour, as well as blame and personal insults as unhelpful strategies during conflict. In addition the 'more securely attached' individuals reported that the timing of the argument can quite often hamper effective problem solving. For the 'less securely attached' individuals a focus on 'winning' the argument also interfered with their conflict resolution abilities. Both the 'more secure' and the 'less secure' groups indicated that withdrawal was an unhelpful conflict resolution strategy. Although there was some overlap between the 'more securely attached' and 'less securely attached' groups in terms of what they perceived as unhelpful strategies, there was also an important point of difference: A number of 'more secure' participants indicated that although being aware of some ineffective conflict resolution strategies, they had also learned constructive conflict resolution strategies over time. In contrast

some of the '*less secure*' participants indicated behavioural patterns that currently exacerbate their problems, or which cause their conflict to spiral out of control.

### 3) *Ideal couple conflict strategies.*

In terms of conflict strategies in ideal relationships, both groups indicated that couples in their ideal relationship would be great listeners, and this would result in them obtaining a deeper understanding of each other. Calm and in-depth discussions would also solve the problems in an ideal relationship for both the '*more*' and '*less secure*' groups. The '*more securely attached*' group also commented that openness and a focus on problem solving would be helpful. The '*less securely attached*' group indicated that finding mutually acceptable solutions would be paramount for their ideal couple, and then interestingly enough a number of participants indicated the importance of resolving their conflict amicably before going to bed, maybe reflecting their own need for having closure. These noted conflict strategies follow ideal partner standards such as warmth and trustworthiness (Fletcher et al., 1999). Warmth and trustworthiness in a relational partner is adaptive from an evolutionary perspective as it increases the likelihood that the relationship will be maintained long-term (Fletcher et al.). The discrepancies between perceived and ideal standards, and also between perceived and ideal conflict resolution styles, allows individuals to evaluate and make adjustments to their partners/relationships, as well as making causal attributions about their partners/relationships (Campbell, Simpson, Kashy, & Fletcher, 2001).

### 4) *Parents arguing.*

From the themes explored in the qualitative data, it would seem that both the '*more secure*' and '*less secure*' groups had similar experiences of their parents' arguments, although the '*more secure*' group's parents were able to resolve their arguments faster. A number of *more* and *less secure* participants indicated that they recall few, if any, arguments between their parents. Both the '*more securely attached*' and '*less securely attached*' participants indicated that physical violence did occur in their families of origin. Previous research (Grau, 2001) has also found that there were no differences in the distribution of adult attachment styles, nor the relationship satisfaction for adults who have or have not been witness to domestic violence in

childhood. However, Grau did find that individuals who witnessed domestic violence in childhood or had themselves been a victim of child abuse were less satisfied with the viability of their relationships, particularly in relation to the level of trust, acceptance and respect.

### *5) Divorce*

In the current sample, 31.8% of the participants came from homes in which the parents had divorced (or grew up in a single family), whereas 61.4% of the participants came from homes in which the parents had not divorced (6.8% data missing). Although previous research has indicated that parental divorce has an intergenerational impact on the relationships of their children, to the extent that they display higher conflict rates, withdrawal and negative nonverbal behaviours (e.g., Levy et al., 1997; Sanders et al., 1999), the current study found no evidence to support the notion that parental divorce is related to using withdrawal or any other conflict resolution style in adult romantic relationships.

### *Attachment and Conflict Beliefs*

Various conflict beliefs act as moderating factors during conflict. Prior beliefs about intimacy have been shown to affect behaviour, such as conflict resolution, in a relationship (Fletcher et al., 1994). Previous research has also linked attachment, conflict beliefs and conflict styles, with securely attached individuals feeling less of a threat from conflict and reporting more effective conflict styles (Pistole & Arricale, 2003). Pistole and Arricale's research findings report that there were no differences between the attachment styles on the belief that arguing is beneficial. However, the current study found that only preoccupied partner attachment was significantly related to the belief that arguing is beneficial. Additional analyses revealed that this relationship was particularly salient for men, but not for women. There was also a strong negative correlation between secure partner attachment and the belief that arguing is threatening to the relationship, in particular for women, but not men.

Stackert and Bursik have also (2003) identified that individuals with insecure attachment styles (preoccupied or avoidant attachment styles) would endorse significantly more irrational relationship beliefs than individuals with secure attachment styles. These researchers theorize that individuals with an insecure

attachment style develop a vulnerable self-concept more prone to irrational relationship beliefs through modelling of flawed familial interactions, or as a defence for coping with flawed interactions (Stackert & Bursik). In the current study avoidant partner attachment was significantly associated with the belief that arguing is threatening, and again this was particularly true for women, but not men. In contrast to the predicted research findings, preoccupied partner attachment was negatively related to the belief that arguing is threatening to the relationship, and this was again particularly true for women, but not men. In short, the belief that arguing is threatening appears to be particularly influenced by the partner attachment style of women.

In keeping with Treboux et al's findings (2004) that '*more secure-more secure* attachment combinations' would have the greatest secure base and a low level of conflict, it was expected that the '*more secure-more secure* group' would hold the belief that arguing is beneficial significantly more strongly than other attachment groups. However, as stated earlier Pistole and Arricale (2003) found no distinction between attachment categories on the belief that arguing is beneficial. When looking at the combinations of primary caregiver and partner attachments in the current study there does not appear to be any distinctions between the attachment combination groups on the belief that arguing is beneficial. Insecure attachment, on the other hand has been linked with the belief that arguing is threatening (e.g., Campbell et al., 2005; Stackert & Bursik, 2003). Findings from the current study indicate that the '*less secure-less secure* group' hold the belief that arguing is threatening significantly more than the other groups, bar the '*less secure-more secure* group'. This illustrates the ongoing influence of a current conceptualisation of a '*less secure partner attachment*' on current beliefs around conflict, in particular around the belief that arguing is threatening.

#### *Attachment and Communication Accuracy*

Although it is generally believed that greater understanding of relational meaning is conducive to successful relationships, research relating to specific attachment styles has shown that greater accuracy in inferring the thoughts and feelings of one's partner could also be harmful to the relationship (Simpson et al., 1999). They furthermore found that securely attached individuals tend to steer clear of, or dismiss the negative

implications of their partner's cognitions and emotions, or what is termed motivated inaccuracy (turning a blind eye to what the other is thinking and feeling), and thus maintain their relationship satisfaction and stability.

The current study found that although there was a positive correlation between communication accuracy and satisfaction with partner problem solving, this relationship was not significant. Additional analyses revealed that 'more securely attached' partners were not significantly more accurate in their communications than 'less securely attached' partners. In addition it was found in the current study that 'more securely attached' partners were significantly more satisfied with their partner's problem solving ability, than 'less securely attached' partners, and in this manner a motivated inaccuracy might contribute to their relationship satisfaction in general.

Although the current study found no significant results in relation to own communication intention, results did reveal that individuals who view their partner's communication as positive were more satisfied with their partner's problem solving ability, as well as their own problem solving ability. Furthermore, individuals who viewed their partner's communication intention as negative, also had a correspondingly low level of satisfaction with their partner's problem solving, as well as a low level of satisfaction with their own problem solving.

Although Koerner and Fitzpatrick (2002) found that communication accuracy was correlated with relationship satisfaction in men and women, the current study found no support for this. Additional analyses did however reveal that male and female accuracy was moderately correlated. Further analyses also found gender differences in terms of mode of communication with securely attached female partners focusing more on their partner's verbal communication (i.e., words) than their insecurely attached male counterparts.

#### *Relationship Satisfaction, Conflict Resolution Styles and Conflict Beliefs*

Research to date has indicated that couples who manage their conflicts constructively, experience more relationship satisfaction than their counterparts who utilize ineffective conflict resolution styles (e.g., Billings, 1979; Du Plessis, 2001; Kurdek, 1994). Distinct differences between 'more satisfied' and 'less satisfied' groups were

found, with the ‘*more* satisfied group’ frequently using positive problem solving, and infrequently using conflict engagement and withdrawal. Although the ‘*less* satisfied group’ used compliance more frequently than the ‘*more* satisfied group’, these differences were not significant.

Previous research has indicated that women’s belief that arguing is threatening is negatively associated with relationship satisfaction (Stackert & Bursik, 2005), and support for this was found in the current study. In addition the current study also found that women’s belief that arguing is threatening was also strongly negatively correlated with male partner’s relationship satisfaction. However, analyses revealed that for men the belief that arguing is beneficial was positively associated with relationship satisfaction, whereas this was not true for women. In short, for women the belief that arguing is threatening appears to detract greatly from their relationship satisfaction, whereas for men the belief that arguing is beneficial appears to greatly add to their relationship satisfaction.

Bushman (1998), who researched specific conflict beliefs, found that destructive conflict behaviour was linked to two particular irrational beliefs in both men and women, namely “disagreement is destructive” and “people cannot change”. The current study also found that the belief that arguing is threatening was correlated with withdrawal and conflict engagement, whereas the belief that arguing is beneficial was correlated with positive problem solving.

### *Summary*

In terms of the variables under discussion, these relationships can be summarised as follows:

Secure primary caregiver attachment is characterised by closeness, reliability and involvement, whereas less secure parental attachments are noted for their lack of bonding or connectedness. Similar characterisations were also echoed in terms of secure and less secure partner attachments. People also appear to attract others with similar attachment orientations (in particular secure partners attract each other); although no support was found in this study for the stability of the secure base (secure primary caregiver attachment and an ongoing secure partner attachment).

Furthermore, current secure partner attachment also does not seem to be associated with a *more* or *less* secure primary caregiver attachment.

Current secure parental and secure partner attachments were linked to relationship satisfaction, and relational partners were also found to have similar levels of relationship satisfaction. Secure partner attachment is also linked with positive problem solving, as well as a belief that arguing is beneficial. However, less secure partner attachment is linked to withdrawal during conflict, as well as the belief that arguing is threatening. Calm discussions, turn taking, listening, negotiating and compromising were all touted as helpful strategies during conflict resolution, whereas attacking, overly emotional behaviour, blame, personal insults and withdrawal were seen as unhelpful. Male and female communication accuracy is related; however communication accuracy does not seem to be linked to satisfaction with problem solving or relationship satisfaction. Partner attachment is also not connected with communication accuracy, although securely attached partners are more satisfied with their partner's problem solving. Viewing the partner's communication intention as positive also contributes to satisfaction with own and partner problem solving ability. Securely attached women were also found to focus on their partner's verbal communication.

Finally, in terms of the results, the variables under investigation suggest a complex interplay of factors contributing to attachment experiences, relationship satisfaction, conflict beliefs, conflict styles and communication accuracy, which in turn also seem to reflect the complexity of these variables in interpersonal relationships. As stated before, the gender differences noted should be interpreted with caution, as there is often a greater amount of variability within each gender (Fletcher, 2002), and these results should thus not be viewed as stereotypical male or female cognitions, emotions or behaviour. However, the gender differences and qualitative information adds even more intricacy and depth to the relationship between these variables, and reflects the multi-strategy research approach of complementarity (Hammersly, 1996 cited in Bryman, 2004) which was aimed at capturing different angles of the researched phenomena (reflected in detail in the Discussion above).

The next and final section, Part IV, focuses on the similarities and differences between Study 1 and Study 2.

## PART IV

### Discussion: Study 1 & 2

This chapter reviews the findings of both Study 1 (see Part II) and Study 2 (see Part III) in relation to each other. Following an overview of both studies, there will be a comparison of the results from Hypotheses 1 – 10 (common to both studies), a discussion of limitations, as well as suggestions for future research which flow from both these studies.

#### Study 1: Overview

An Internet survey of 83 individuals (63 women and 20 men) in couple relationships was conducted to test the relationship between the variables of interest: attachment (parental and partner), relationship satisfaction, conflict beliefs and conflict resolution styles. (For additional information regarding the demographics of this sample see Part II).

The majority of the hypotheses tested were in line with the current literature. However additional analyses also revealed interesting results which could lead to further research. Firstly, Study 1 found that there was a moderate positive correlation between secure partner attachment and a secure primary caregiver attachment. Furthermore, it was found that secure partner attachment was positively correlated with relationship satisfaction and slightly negatively (although not significantly) correlated with preoccupied and avoidant attachment. Secure partner attachment was also significantly associated with the belief that arguing is beneficial, whereas avoidant attachment was positively associated with the belief that arguing is threatening. In addition there was a significant positive correlation between secure partner attachment and positive problem solving, whereas avoidant attachment was positively correlated with withdrawal, conflict engagement and compliance.

Results also indicated that there appears to be a clear relationship between particular conflict beliefs and the conflict resolution styles that participants frequently use in their relationships. In this regard, positive problem solving was positively correlated with a belief that arguing is beneficial, whereas conflict engagement, withdrawal and compliance were positively correlated with a belief that arguing is threatening.

When using the attachment style configuration groups (primary caregiver/parent and partner attachment combinations), it was found that the ‘*more secure-more secure group*’ (*more secure primary caregiver attachment, and more secure partner attachment*) had believed most strongly that arguing is beneficial, whereas the ‘*less secure-less secure group*’ believed most strongly that arguing is threatening. Additional analysis indicates that romantic partner attachment is particularly influential in this equation, with the ‘*more secure partner attachment group*’ holding the belief that arguing is beneficial significantly more strongly than the ‘*less secure partner attachment group*’; and the ‘*less secure partner attachment group*’ holding the belief that arguing is threatening significantly more strongly than the ‘*more secure partner attachment group*’.

In addition, results indicated that when viewing the attachment style configuration groups in terms of conflict resolution styles, the following differences became obvious for positive problem solving and compliance. The ‘*more secure-more secure combination*’ (*more secure parental attachment and more secure partner attachment*) used positive problem solving significantly more frequently than the *less secure-less secure group*; and the ‘*less secure-less secure group*’ used compliance significantly more frequently than the other groups. Further analyses indicated that conflict resolution styles, and more specifically positive problem solving and compliance were related to parental attachment: The ‘*more secure primary caregiver attachment group*’ used positive problem solving significantly more frequently than the ‘*less secure primary caregiver attachment group*’. However, the ‘*less secure primary caregiver attachment group*’ used compliance as a conflict resolution style significantly more frequently than the ‘*more secure primary caregiver attachment group*’.

From this study it would seem that there is some difference between the ongoing influence from current models of primary caregiver attachment and the influence from current models of partner attachment on relationship variables. In this regard, relationship satisfaction and conflict beliefs were found to be associated with partner-specific attachment. However, conflict resolution styles were associated with partner attachment, conflict beliefs and primary caregiver attachment. In particular positive problem solving and compliance, were found to be associated with the more general

current conceptualizations of primary caregiver attachment, thus indicating the complex interplay of these variables in the context of relationships.

### Study 2: Overview

Twenty-two heterosexual couples were recruited through means of advertisements in the local media, and the study focused on both relational partners' responses to a set of questionnaires and a videotaped communication exercise. In particular Study 2 concentrated on looking at the links between attachment, relationship satisfaction, conflict resolution, and conflict beliefs in a dyadic sample. A range of data collection methods were utilised (self report – quantitative and qualitative; as well as observational data collection). However, for the purposes of comparison only results comparable to Study 1 (i.e., findings from Hypothesis 1-10) will be discussed in this overview. (For a more comprehensive reading of Study 2, including demographic distribution of the sample, additional findings related to gender differences, as well as qualitative findings, refer to Part III).

Again, most of the hypotheses tested were in line with the current literature, however additional analyses also revealed interesting results which could lead to further research. Firstly, no significant relationship between secure partner attachment and secure primary caregiver attachment was found in Study 2. Relationship satisfaction was found to be positively correlated with secure partner attachment, and relationship satisfaction was also negatively correlated with preoccupied and avoidant attachment. Study 2 also found distinct differences between '*more* satisfied' and '*less* satisfied' groups, with the '*more* satisfied group' indicating that they frequently use positive problem solving, and infrequently use conflict engagement and withdrawal.

In terms of conflict beliefs there were no differences between the attachment styles on the belief that arguing is beneficial, and it was found that only preoccupied partner attachment was significantly related to the belief that arguing is beneficial. Avoidant partner attachment was found to be significantly associated with the belief that arguing is threatening. With regards to conflict styles, there was a positive correlation between secure partner attachment and positive problem solving, as well as a moderately positive correlation between positive problem solving and preoccupied

partner attachment. Study 2 found no significant relationship between avoidant attachment and withdrawal.

When using the attachment style configuration groups (primary caregiver/parent and partner attachment combinations), it was found that there does not appear to be any distinctions between the attachment combination groups on the belief that arguing is beneficial. However, findings from the current study indicate that the '*less secure-less secure* group' hold the belief that arguing is threatening significantly more than the other groups, bar the '*less secure-more secure* group'. Additional analyses revealed that the '*less secure partner* attachment group' held the belief that arguing is threatening significantly more strongly than the '*more secure partner* attachment group', thus indicating the importance of partner attachment in relation to conflict beliefs.

Again, when utilizing the attachment style configuration groups, differences between the attachment groups in terms of conflict resolution styles became apparent, but only for withdrawal (not positive problem solving, conflict engagement, or compliance). In particular the '*less secure-less secure* combination' used withdrawal significantly more frequently than the other attachment combination groups. Additional analyses also indicated that the '*less secure parent* attachment group' used withdrawal significantly more frequently than the '*more secure parent* attachment group', thus indicating the importance of parental attachment with regards to problem solving behaviour.

From this study it would seem that there is some difference between the ongoing influence from current models of primary caregiver attachment and the influence from current models of partner attachment on relationship variables, thus confirming the hypothesized model of relationships between the variables (illustrated in Figure 5, p. 112). In this regard, relationship satisfaction and conflict beliefs (arguing is beneficial) were found to be associated with the specific attachment to the partner. Conversely, conflict resolution styles, in particular withdrawal, were found to be associated with the more general current conceptualizations of the primary caregiver attachment, but also with current conceptualizations of partner attachment and conflict beliefs.

## Results: A Comparison of Study 1 and Study 2

### *Attachment Configurations and Relationship Satisfaction*

Treboux et al. (2004) found, in their longitudinal study of dating and engaged couples, that a greater number of secure-secure individuals (secure primary caregiver attachment, secure partner attachment) reported positive feelings about the relationship, had low levels of relationship conflict, and also had the highest quality (observed) secure base. They also found that individuals with a secure primary caregiver attachment and an insecure partner attachment reported more relationship dissatisfaction than individuals with an insecure primary caregiver and insecure partner attachment. Grich (2002) found that individuals with an insecure parental attachment and secure partner attachment, or what is termed 'earned security', would have relationship satisfaction scores comparable to secure-secure individuals. Treboux et al. however, found a mixed combination of results for individuals with earned security, in that some individuals were not regarding their relationships positively when there is a period of stress, whereas others who were not experiencing any relational stress viewed their relationship very favourably. Based upon these findings the following hypothesis attempted to distinguish between more and less secure attachments to the primary caregiver and romantic partner.

#### *Hypothesis 1.*

Individuals endorsing a 'more secure-more secure' attachment style combination (*more* secure primary caregiver and *more* secure partner attachment styles) are expected to have the highest relationship satisfaction compared to other primary caregiver and partner attachment combinations, that is, a 'more secure-less secure' attachment style (*more* secure primary caregiver, *less* secure partner attachment), a 'less secure-more secure' attachment style (*less* secure primary caregiver and *more* secure partner), and a 'less secure-less secure' attachment style (*less* secure primary caregiver attachment and *less* secure partner attachment).

Both Study 1 and Study 2 found significant differences between the attachment configurations groups on relationship satisfaction. Both studies also found no significant gender or length of relationship differences. Study 1 found the 'less secure-

*more secure*' group had the highest relationship satisfaction, closely followed by the '*more secure-more secure*' group. Study 2 found the '*more secure-more secure*' group had the highest relationship satisfaction, closely followed by the '*more secure-less secure*' group'. In both studies the '*less secure-less secure*' group had a low degree of relationship satisfaction. Study 1 would seem to indicate that a current conceptualisation of secure partner attachment is more influential in determining relationship satisfaction. However, results from Study 2 would seem to indicate the importance of current conceptualizations of secure parental attachment with regards to relationship satisfaction.

Certainly, the literature (e.g., Crowell & Owens, 1996; Crowell et al., 2002; Cozzarelli et al., 2000; Furman et al., 2002; Owens et al., 1995) has indicated that specific attachment representations to relational partners develop in the context of the adult relationship. Relationship satisfaction is an evaluation of the satisfaction with the current relationship, and it is therefore understandable that the current specific attachment to the relational partner has a significant influence on this evaluation (Study 1). The ongoing influence of secure parental attachment (Study 2) lends some support to the notion of an 'immunization effect', that is where a current model of a secure primary caregiver attachment protects the individual's perceptions of relationship functioning in the current relationship. This is in line with what Crowell et al. (2002) refer to as the stability of the secure base, which, according to them, once acquired is particularly difficult to unlearn or distort, even though a current insecure partner attachment might be present. From the results of both studies, and previous research, it would seem that current conceptualizations of secure partner and parental attachment are related to greater relationship satisfaction, whereas less secure parental and partner attachment are related to less relationship satisfaction. This indicates the powerful ongoing influence of parental attachments, as well as current conceptualizations of attachment to the romantic partner, specifically with respect to evaluating relationship satisfaction. This also echoes Pierce and Lydon's findings (2001) which suggest that both generalized and specific working models contribute to relational experiences, and should therefore be included when researching attachment models.

### *Partner Attachment and Relationship Satisfaction*

Cozzarelli et al. (2000) found that partner attachment is related to relationship-specific outcomes such as relationship satisfaction. In following on from the findings above, Stackert and Bursik (2003) found that secure attachment to one's partner meant that individuals indicated a higher level of relationship satisfaction than either the anxious-ambivalent (preoccupied) or avoidant group. These differences suggest the following relationship.

#### *Hypothesis 2.*

Secure partner attachment will be positively correlated with relationship satisfaction, whereas preoccupied or avoidant partner attachment will be negatively related to relationship satisfaction.

Both Study 1 and Study 2 found that secure attachment was significantly positively correlated with relationship satisfaction. Study 2 found that preoccupied attachment was also positively correlated with relationship satisfaction, whereas Study 1 found a slight negative, but non-significant correlation. Both Study 1 and Study 2 found a negative correlation between avoidant attachment and relationship satisfaction, although this relationship was non-significant in Study 1.

In general, both studies' findings relating to secure partner attachment and avoidant attachment, are in line with previous research (e.g., Cozzarelli et al., 2000; Stackert & Bursik, 2003) which linked relationship satisfaction with secure attachment, and relationship dissatisfaction with avoidant attachment. Study 1 found a slight negative, but non-significant relationship between preoccupied attachment and relationship satisfaction, which is also in line with previous research (e.g., Stackert & Bursik). However, this was not replicated in Study 2, where preoccupied attachment, similar to secure attachment, was positively correlated with relationship satisfaction.

Incidentally, it can be noted that in Study 2 preoccupied attachment and secure attachment were significantly more correlated ( $r_s = .50, p < .01$ ), than in Study 1 ( $r_s = .28, p < .05$ ). To some extent these results would appear to be related to the problematic measure of preoccupied attachment. In this regard, additional partial correlations indicate that when controlling for secure attachment in Study 2, there is a smaller correlation between preoccupied attachment and relationship satisfaction

( $r = .39$ ,  $p = .009$ ,  $df = 41$ ) than before controlling for secure attachment ( $r = .59$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

### *Secure Primary Caregiver and Secure Partner Attachment*

In Treboux et al.'s recent study (2004) they found that a secure generalized presentation (which they define as the attachment to the primary caregiver) was likely to be associated with a somewhat greater likelihood of having a secure conceptualisation of the current relationship. In line with this, Owens and her colleagues (1995) found that secure attachment style with the primary caregiver correlated approximately 0.29 with a secure attachment style to the partner (Owens et al., 1995).

### *Hypothesis 3.*

Secure partner attachment and secure primary caregiver attachment will have a weak to moderate positive correlation.

Study 1 found a moderate positive correlation between a secure partner attachment and a secure primary caregiver attachment, whereas Study 2 found a weak positive but non-significant correlation. Results from Study 1 are similar to previous studies, (e.g., Owens et al., 1995). Crowell et al. (2002) have found that the secure classification is particularly stable during changes (e.g., marriage) and base this on the idea that once learned a secure attachment is particularly difficult to unlearn, even if the current partner is insecurely attached. However, the non-significant result in Study 2 would indicate that a number of participants changed their attachment classifications over time. This is also more likely as participants in Study 2 were older and had been in their relationships longer (a higher percentage were also married) than in Study 1. These participants thus had more opportunity over time to change their attachment classifications.

A previous longitudinal study that monitored 50 individuals for 20 years found that there was 64% stability in attachment style classifications over time (Waters, Merrick, Treboux, & Albersheim, 2000). Although relatively stable, attachment representations are influenced by new experiences, and young adults in particular can experience a

reconceptualization when they are exposed to new attachment experiences in a new setting away from their parents, for example marriage (Crowell et al., 2002). In addition, Levy et al. (1998) suggested that “the cognitive and affective components of representations of self and others develop epigenetically and become increasingly accurate, articulated, and conceptually complex structures over time” (p. 409).

### *Attachment and Conflict Beliefs*

#### *Arguing is beneficial.*

In terms of believing that arguing is beneficial, Pistole and Arricale (2003) found no differences among the various attachment styles of secure, preoccupied or avoidant. However, securely attached individuals have been found to report less maladaptive attributions than insecurely attached individuals (Sümer & Cozzarelli, 2004), preoccupied individuals or avoidant individuals (Stackert & Bursik, 2003). These differences suggested the following relationships.

#### *Hypothesis 4.*

Correlations between the secure, preoccupied and avoidant styles of partner attachment and the belief that arguing is beneficial are expected to be positive and similar.

Although previous research has suggested that there would be no differences between attachment styles and the belief that arguing is beneficial (Pistole & Arricale, 2003), Study 1 found that secure attachment was significantly associated with the belief that arguing is beneficial, whereas the relationship with preoccupied attachment was also positive but non-significant. Study 2 also found that preoccupied attachment was positively correlated with the belief that arguing is beneficial, while secure attachment was also positively related to the belief that arguing is beneficial, although this relationship was non-significant. Avoidant attachment was negatively associated with the belief that arguing is beneficial, in both studies, although non-significant in Study 2.

As stated before, previous research found no differences between the attachment styles and the belief that arguing is beneficial (Pistole & Arricale). However, other

studies have found that securely attached individuals report less maladaptive conflict beliefs (Sümer & Cozzarelli, 2004), and this is also in line with secure individuals' positive models of self and other (Bartholomew, 1990). Furthermore Pistole and Arricale suggest that secure individuals might view arguing as beneficial as it allows them to identify and resolve their differences, which in turn would lead to an increase in closeness. However, contrary to what was indicated by previous literature (Pistole & Arricale) preoccupied attachment was positively associated with the belief that arguing is beneficial, and avoidant attachment was negatively associated with the belief that arguing is beneficial. This is, again, in line with Bartholomew's (1990), four-category attachment model (see Figure 2, p. 35) which suggest that avoidant attachment is associated with a negative self and other view, whereas, a preoccupied attachment is associated with a negative self and positive other view. Conflict to these avoidantly attached individuals would thus be viewed as threatening, rather than as beneficial to the relationship. Both studies (particularly Study 2) found a positive correlation between preoccupied attachment and the belief that arguing is beneficial, and their positive views of others and their belief that arguing is beneficial would facilitate their need for closeness and satisfy their attachment needs.

#### *Arguing is threatening.*

Individuals with a preoccupied or avoidant adult attachment style have been found to endorse more relationship specific irrational beliefs than those with a secure attachment to their partner (Stackert & Bursik, 2003). In their research Pistole and Arricale (2003) found that avoidantly attached individuals view arguing as threatening to their attachment. They also found that individuals with preoccupied attachment perceived conflict as an attachment threat, and were also more concerned with closeness than secure or avoidant individuals. Further research has indicated that preoccupied individuals are expected to believe that conflict would have negative consequences for their relationships (Campbell et al., 2005). This is based on the notion that preoccupied individuals, having received inconsistent or deficient support from their primary caregiver, have developed low thresholds for perceiving threats to proximity maintenance, and would as a result be highly concerned with closeness (Campbell et al.; Simpson & Rholes, 1994). Stackert and Bursik furthermore found

that, for women, beliefs that arguing is threatening was associated with relationship dissatisfaction.

*Hypotheses 5.*

5a) Secure partner attachment will be negatively associated with the belief that arguing is threatening to the relationship.

5b) Avoidant partner attachment will be positively associated with the belief that arguing is threatening to the relationship.

5c) Preoccupied partner attachment will be positively associated with the belief that arguing is a threat to the relationship.

5a) Study 1 and Study 2 both found that there was a strong negative correlation between secure attachment and the belief that arguing is threatening to a relationship. This is in line with Pistole and Arricale (2003) findings that securely attached individuals were less likely to view arguing as threatening than were individuals in preoccupied or fearfully attached relationships. This is also in line with Bartholomew's (1990) explanation of secure individuals viewing themselves as well as others (their romantic partners) positively, and thus not viewing arguing as a threat to their relationships (see Figure 2, p. 35).

5b) Both studies also found that there was a positive correlation between avoidant attachment and the belief that arguing is threatening. This again is in line with previous research findings which report that insecurely attached individuals report maladaptive attributions (Sümer & Cozzarelli, 2004), such as the belief that arguing is threatening in avoidant individuals (Stackert & Bursik, 2003).

5c) Contradictory to previous findings, both studies found a negative correlation between preoccupied attachment and the belief that arguing is threatening (although this was non-significant in Study 1. When considering these findings against the backdrop of negative self, but positive other views (Bartholomew, 1990), it however makes sense that individuals with preoccupied attachment would be less inclined to view arguing is threatening, and more likely to view arguing as beneficial (see Hypothesis 4). Their positive view of the partner together with their belief that

arguing is beneficial (rather than threatening) would facilitate their ongoing attempts to maintain closeness to the partner.

*Hypothesis 6.*

Women's belief that arguing is threatening will be negatively associated with relationship satisfaction.

Previous research (Stackert & Bursik, 2003) has indicated the presence of a gendered response pattern in terms of the belief that arguing is threatening (or as they termed it 'disagreement is destructive') in that it spells a decline in relationship satisfaction for women, but not for men. Both Study 1 and Study 2 found that there was a significant negative relationship between the belief that arguing is threatening and relationship satisfaction for women, but not for the men. Thus, for women the belief that arguing is threatening appears to detract greatly from their relationship satisfaction. From an evolutionary perspective, it could be argued that a woman's ability to detect a 'threat', be that real or perceived, have adaptive advantages prompting her to take some preventative or evasive action. This would be particularly relevant when considering the greater physical power of men and the greater risk of physical harm that could result from physical violence especially in a conflict situation.

*Hypotheses 7.*

7a) Individuals with '*more secure-more secure*' combinations of attachment styles (*more secure* primary caregiver attachment, and *more secure* partner attachment) are expected to believe more strongly than other attachment groups that arguing is beneficial.

7b) The '*less secure-less secure* group' are expected to believe more strongly than other groups that arguing is threatening.

7a) In keeping with Treboux et al's findings (2004) that '*more secure-more secure* attachment combinations' would have the greatest secure base and a low level of conflict, it was expected that the '*more secure-more secure* group' would hold the belief that arguing is beneficial significantly more strongly than other attachment

groups. Study 1 found that there were significant differences between the four attachment combination groups (*more secure-more secure, less secure-more secure, more secure-less secure, less secure-less secure*) on the belief that arguing is beneficial, however no differences between the groups were found in Study 2. Previous research by Pistole and Arricale (2003) however found no distinction between attachment categories on the belief that arguing is beneficial, although they were using partner attachment categorisation only, and not the parent-partner attachment combinations used for these analyses. Study 1 found that the '*more secure-more secure* group' held the belief that arguing is beneficial significantly, more strongly (and with large effect sizes) than the '*less secure-less secure* group', and the '*more secure-less secure* group'.

From the results, the partner attachment was seen as particularly salient in its association with conflict beliefs, and additional analyses were conducted after reorganizing the groupings into '*more secure partner attachment*' (and *more* or *less* secure primary caregiver attachment) and '*less secure partner attachment*' (and *more* or *less* secure primary caregiver attachment). Study 1 only found that the '*more secure partner attachment* group' held the belief that arguing is beneficial significantly more strongly than the '*less secure partner attachment* group'. This also ties in with the significant positive correlation (Hypothesis 4) that was found in Study 1 between secure partner attachment and the belief that arguing is beneficial (which was also found to be positive, but non-significant in Study 2). Individuals with secure partner attachments and positive view of themselves and others (Bartholomew, 1990; also see Figure 2, p. 35) will continue to believe that arguing is beneficial, as their beliefs would assist their attempts to reach their relational goals, which in turn would again confirm their conflict beliefs.

7b) Study 1 and Study 2 found that there were significant differences between the four attachment combination groups on the belief that arguing is threatening. Both studies found that the '*less secure-less secure* group' held the belief that arguing is threatening significantly more strongly than the other groups. From the results it again appeared that the partner attachment was particularly salient in its association with conflict beliefs, and additional analyses were conducted that reorganised the groupings into '*more secure partner attachment*' (and *more-* or *less* secure primary

caregiver attachment) and ‘less secure partner attachment’ (and *more-* or *less* secure primary caregiver attachment). In both studies it was found that the ‘less secure partner attachment group’ held the belief that arguing is threatening significantly more strongly than the ‘more secure partner attachment group’. This illustrates the ongoing influence of a current conceptualisation of a ‘less secure partner attachment’ on current beliefs around conflict, in particular around the belief that arguing is threatening.

From the results it is clear that one’s current specific working models of the romantic partner (rather than current models of primary caregiver attachment) have a significant association with conflict beliefs and whether arguing is viewed as threatening or beneficial. These appraisal processes are thus specifically tied to the relational partner, and unique person-situation interactions. According to Stackert and Bursik (2003), “these relatively stable beliefs about relationships tend to be idiosyncratic constructions generated and revised through personal experience” (p. 1422).

#### *Attachment and Conflict Resolution Styles*

Happy couples have been found to have predispositions to productively manage their conflict, whereas distressed couples have been found to exhibit higher aggressiveness that lessen their ability to manage conflict constructively (Yelsma, 1981). Research has also indicated that couples who frequently used positive problem solving and infrequently used conflict engagement and withdrawal, reported high relationship satisfaction (Du Plessis, 2001; Kurdek, 1994). Previous research has indicated that adults with secure working models of attachment use more positive and less negative behaviour in romantic relationships when contrasted with insecure adults (Creasy, 2002). Securely attached individuals are, according to Pistole (1989), more prone to using an integrative conflict strategy, and as a result also report higher relationship satisfaction. Pistole also found that preoccupied individuals were more likely than the avoidant group to oblige to their partner’s wishes. In this respect she comments that: “Compromise could function as a way of dismissing distress by focusing on the environment, i.e. on goals, while simultaneously satisfying the attachment need to maintain contact” (p. 509). No particular conflict styles emerged for preoccupied individuals in Creasy’s study. However, Corcoran and Mallinckrodt (2000) suggests

that preoccupied individuals would, in contrast to what one would naturally assume in favouring a compliant conflict style, be prone to avoiding conflict. In addition Bushman (1998), who researched specific conflict beliefs, found that destructive conflict behaviour was linked to two particular irrational beliefs in both men and women, namely “disagreement is destructive” and “people cannot change”. This is in line with Albert Ellis’ notion (1962) that emotional distress is often based on the acceptance of core irrational beliefs, that depart from logical and reality based assumptions, and that lead to self-defeating behaviour. Based on these findings the following hypotheses were proposed.

*Hypotheses 8.*

8a) Secure partner attachment will be positively correlated with utilizing positive problem solving styles most frequently in conflict situations.

8b) Preoccupied partner attachment will not be significantly correlated with any particular conflict resolution style.

8c) Avoidant partner attachment will be positively correlated with withdrawal.

8a) Attachment classifications are a significant predictor of behavioural processes and outcomes, such as conflict resolution (Bippus & Rollin, 2003). Creasey (2002) also suggests that our attachment styles underlie and guide affect and behaviour during conflict interactions with attachment figures. Previous research (e.g., Creasy; Pistole, 1989) has indicated that adults with secure partner attachment working models use positive and integrative strategies when solving conflict in their relationships, and both current studies found that there was a significant positive correlation between secure partner attachment and positive problem solving.

8b) No significant relationship between preoccupied partner attachment and any of the conflict resolution styles of conflict engagement, withdrawal or compliance were identified in both studies. This is in line with Creasy’s study (2002) where no significant relationship between preoccupied attachment and any of the four conflict resolution styles, positive problem solving, conflict engagement, withdrawal or compliance were identified. However, preoccupied partner attachment did have a moderately positive correlation with positive problem solving only in Study 2. To

some extent these results would appear to again be related to the problematic measure of preoccupied attachment. In this regard, additional partial correlations indicate that when controlling for secure attachment in Study 2, there is a less significant difference between preoccupied attachment and positive problem solving ( $r = .32$ ,  $p = .035$ ,  $df = 41$ ) than before controlling for secure attachment ( $r = .49$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

8c) Avoidant attachment with its fear of intimacy (Hazan & Shaver, 1987) is generally characterized by independence and emotional distance (Pistole, 1989). Creasy's findings (2002) that insecurely attached adults use more negative behaviour in their romantic relationships was supported by Study 1 which found significant positive relationships between avoidant attachment and withdrawal, conflict engagement and compliance. Study 2 also identified positive relationships between avoidant partner attachment and withdrawal, conflict engagement and compliance, although none of these relationships were significant.

#### *Hypotheses 9.*

9a) 'More secure-more secure' attachment style configurations (*more* secure primary caregiver attachment, and *more* secure partner attachment) are expected to apply positive problem solving more frequently in their conflict resolution, than other attachment configurations.

9b) Individuals with configurations of '*less* secure-*less* secure' attachment styles are expected to apply conflict engagement, withdrawal and compliance more frequently in their conflict resolution, than other attachment configurations.

9c) The belief that arguing is threatening is expected to be correlated with withdrawal, compliance and conflict engagement, whereas the belief that arguing is beneficial is expected to be linked to positive problem solving.

9a) Previous research (e.g., Creasy, 2002; Pistole, 1989) has indicated that adults with secure partner attachment working models and a secure base use positive and integrative strategies when solving conflict in their partner relationships, and Study 1 also found that there were significant differences between the four attachment combination groups on positive problem solving as a conflict resolution style, in

particular the '*more secure-more secure combination*' used positive problem solving significantly more frequently than the '*less secure-less secure group*'. Study 2 found no significant differences between the attachment groups.

9b) Study 1 identified that only for compliance (not conflict engagement or withdrawal) were there significant differences between the four attachment combination groups, in particular the '*less secure-less secure group*' and the '*less secure-more secure group*' used compliance significantly more frequently than the other groups. From the results it appeared that the parent attachment was particularly salient in influencing the conflict style, and additional analyses were conducted that reorganized the groupings into '*more secure primary caregiver attachment*' (and '*more- or less secure partner attachment*') and '*less secure primary caregiver attachment*' (and '*more -or less secure partner attachment*'). The '*more secure primary caregiver attachment group*' used positive problem solving significantly more frequently than the '*less secure primary caregiver attachment group*'. However, the '*less secure primary caregiver attachment group*' used compliance as a conflict resolution style significantly more frequently than the '*more secure primary caregiver attachment group*'. This would appear to indicate an 'immunization effect', that is, if there was a current conceptualisation of a '*more secure primary caregiver attachment*', these individuals (rather than individuals with a '*less secure primary caregiver attachment*') were able to frequently use positive problem solving, and infrequently use compliance in their current relationship. This is in line with what Crowell et al. (2002) refer to, as the stability of the secure base, which according to them once acquired is particularly difficult to unlearn or distort, even though a current insecure partner attachment might be present.

Study 2 identified that only for withdrawal (not conflict engagement or compliance) were there significant differences between the four attachment combination groups; in particular the '*less secure-less secure group*' used withdrawal significantly more frequently than the other groups. Again, from the results it appeared that the primary caregiver attachment was particularly salient in its association with conflict styles, and additional analyses were conducted that reorganized the groupings into '*more secure primary caregiver attachment*' and '*less secure primary caregiver attachment*' (and '*more- or less secure partner attachment*'). Additional tests revealed that the '*less secure*

primary caregiver attachment group' used withdrawal significantly more frequently than the '*more* secure primary caregiver attachment group'. Again an ongoing effect of the current conceptualization of attachment to the parent/primary caregiver seems to be apparent, where individuals with conceptualizations of '*less* secure' primary caregiver attachments withdraw from conflict more frequently than individuals with a '*more* secure' conceptualization of primary caregiver attachments.

Unlike with conflict beliefs, the results from both these studies indicate that conflict resolution styles are more heavily influenced by current models of primary caregiver attachments. There appears to be a consistent use of conflict resolution behaviour in the current relationship (in particular a positive problem solving style and a compliant style in Study 1 and withdrawal in Study 2) that has been learned in the context of the relationship with the primary caregiver. This is consistent with the generalized nature of attachment representations (e.g., Treboux et al., 2004) that are based in the context of the attachment relationships with key figures, such as primary caregivers.

These generalized attachment representations are thought to guide behaviour (Waters & Rodrigues, 2001), such as conflict resolution behaviour, in attachment-related contexts, and would become particularly salient in the context of conflict. Through interactions with the primary caregiver, the securely attached child learns that to maintain proximity they should during conflict (which is inherently threatening to the attachment system) regulate their emotions so that they can remain calm to listen, negotiate and compromise during conflict resolution (Mikulincer et al., 2002). This then increases the likelihood that they will continue to view the primary caregiver as a safe haven and a secure base from which they can explore their environment. In return their primary caregiver would also (more than likely) be securely attached and will be setting an example of this behaviour. In contrast, according to Pistole and Arricale (2003) an expectation of malicious intent would contribute to viewing conflict as an attachment threat. The less securely attached child will be aware of the power differential between him/herself and the primary caregiver and will therefore comply with the caregiver's demands during conflict, unless these demands are too unreasonable in which case they will withdraw emotionally. Yet, they will also learn to comply or withdraw rather than engage in conflict, because by obliging the primary

caregiver's demands this would assist proximity maintenance at a time when proximity seeking is at its height, that is, during conflict (Mikulincer et al.).

9c) Various conflict beliefs can act as moderating factors on behaviour during conflict, and this was indicated by findings from both studies. The literature (e.g., Bushman, 1998; Fletcher et al., 1994; Pistole & Arricale, 2003) indicates that securely attached individuals feel less of a threat from conflict and report more effective conflict resolution styles, and it has also linked specific maladaptive conflict beliefs, such as believing that arguing is threatening with destructive conflict behaviour. Both studies found that a belief that arguing is threatening was positively correlated with conflict engagement, as well as with withdrawal, and compliance (positive but non-significant in Study 2). Both studies also found that positive problem solving was significantly positively correlated with a belief that arguing is beneficial.

#### *Intergenerational Effect of Divorce on Offspring*

Previous research has indicated that parental divorce has an intergenerational impact on the relationships of their children, to the extent where they are more prone to divorce (Amato, 1996), and display higher conflict rates, withdrawal and negative nonverbal behaviours (e.g., Levy et al., 1997; Sanders et al., 1999). These findings lead to the following hypothesis.

#### *Hypothesis 10.*

Parental divorce will be positively related to withdrawal as a conflict resolution style.

Both studies saw approximately similar numbers in terms of parental divorce (32%). Neither study indicated any influence on the frequency of using any particular conflict resolution style (positive problem solving, conflict engagement, withdrawal and compliance) as a result of divorced parental status, thus not supporting the notion that there is an intergenerational impact of divorce on the children of divorce.

## Limitations

As a result of participants self-selecting their participation in Study 1, only participants who were satisfied with their relationships chose to participate (to varying degrees of satisfaction: slightly satisfied, satisfied or very satisfied). This method of data collection does seem to lend itself to individuals who are more satisfied with their relationships, according to Banse (2004). There is thus some sampling bias in Study 1, and although the sample is not representative of the general population it is more likely to be representative of individuals in long-term relationships that are satisfied with their relationships. Study 2, in contrast, also depended on participants to self-select their participation, however the participants' relationship satisfaction in this study was more normally distributed (59.2% were satisfied, with 25% neither dissatisfied, nor satisfied, and 15.8% dissatisfied), which allows for greater generalisation to the general population.

To enable comparisons with Study 1 and to test gender differences, Study 2 makes use of correlational analyses. By correlating the data for the couples in Study 2, the assumption of independence of observations has been violated, so that the validity of the conclusions is weakened. Although frequently used in marital/couples research to test gender differences (e.g., Banse, 2004; Creasy, 2002; Crowell et al., 2002; Johnson et al., 2005; Wampler et al., 2003) interpretation of the present findings should be treated with caution. Not only, as a correlational study, are the results subject to all the inferential shortcomings associated with non-experimental designs, but the couples data used in this study are treated as individual data due to the small sample size (e.g., Griffin & Gonzalez, 1995). This research does not take into account the dependencies that could be produced by dyadic interaction (Griffin & Gonzalez), and future similar research, with larger sample sizes, could make use of dyadic analysis (e.g., Cook & Kenny, 2005).

Primary caregiver and partner attachment variables in the two studies are not automatically indicative of actual primary caregiver or partner behaviour, but are current representations of attachment, which may or may not be comparable to actual attachment behaviour. Although these depictions are believed to be derived from actual behaviour by the primary caregiver and partner, they are the individual's

current interpretations of behaviour, and it should be noted that this association has not been established in an empirical sense (Levy et al., 1998). Nor is it always clear when studying psychological constructs that one is accurately measuring psychological constructs, and not merely measuring random summations of item responses, an issue which talks to the validity of psychological tests in general (Borsboom, 2005). Attachment representations are not accessible to direct observation, and self-report is one possible method of quantifying attachment representations. Furthermore, it should be noted that people possess numerous attachment schemas which are shaped by the various attachments they form to people in their lives (e.g., Mikulincer & Arad, 1999; Pierce & Lydon, 2001) and this research project only addressed current models of attachment to the primary caregiver and the romantic partner. In addition, the influence that other attachment representations might have on primary caregiver attachment and partner attachment were not studied in this research project, and these confounds make it unclear as to whether the attachment variables solely represent primary caregiver and partner attachment (e.g., Overall et al., 2003).

Attachment styles and other relationship variables, such as conflict resolution styles are thought to be relatively stable over time, although new experiences could also potentially affect changes (Crowell et al., 2002). The self-report questionnaires in Study 1 and Study 2 were administered once only, thus providing an immediate impression of current relationship variables. This methodology did not allow for measurement of changes in these variables over time, or for factors influencing changes longitudinally. The chosen methodology in Study 1, which only surveyed one partner in the relationship also does not account for dyadic interaction effects or the interplay of behaviours, which would inevitably shape relationships and relational outcomes. Ideally the inclusion of both partners in Study 2 would have allowed for the analysis of dyadic interaction effects (Berman et al., 1994), were it not for the small sample size. Instead, the equally distributed frequencies of men and women, allowed for the study of gender differences. However, again it should be noted that by examining gender differences, the research does not attempt to advocate that these gender differences are indicative of stereotypical male or female behaviours, as there is also a great degree of variability within each gender (Fletcher, 2002).

The use of self-report data to measure most of the variables in the study could seem questionable in terms of the validity of the results. In relation to Study 1 a number of limitations relating the specific use of internet surveys were noted in Part II. To improve some of these shortcomings, an attempt was made to verify self-reported conflict resolution styles from observed conflict resolution styles in Study 2, although the difficulties encountered in doing so added to the limitations of Study 2 (see Limitations in Part III).

Finally, although researching couples provides important information about couples it should be noted that by researching only individuals in couple relationships it necessarily excludes other key indicators of the variables under consideration, which might arguably be found in the couple's social environment, for example, among family and friends (Arriaga, Goodfriend, & Lohmann, 2004). In addition the impact that the couple's social environment might have on their close relationship, and vice versa, was also not examined. Couples relationships do not exist in a vacuum, and Arriaga et al. suggest that social and physical environments could potentially play a very powerful role in the development of couple's relationships.

### Suggestions for Future Research

The small sample sizes (in particular in Study 2), and a sample that was heavily slanted toward a greater degree of relationship satisfaction in Study 1, rendered it unfeasible to conduct more conventional statistical analyses, such as regression analyses, in particular as both studies were conducted to compare some of the core hypotheses discussed in Part IV. In addition, although the original focus of this research project was going to involve a clinical sample, insufficient numbers of clinical participants were available for this project. This might be a problem peculiar to New Zealand couples who, it is believed, are more reserved about their relationships, and in particular would not want their relationship dissatisfaction highlighted in a research project. Although some significant findings were reported in this project, future studies would ideally include a large number of distressed couples, which would also allow for more conventional data analyses and greater comparison to international research findings. In addition, this could lead to the development of culturally relevant therapeutic strategies, as well as clinical applications, for instance

dealing with attachment-related issues in a therapeutic setting. Further research into exploring these differences could be particularly relevant to clinicians when assessing problematic conflict beliefs and conflict behaviour in couples in order to determine which internal working models – general or specific – are driving factors in these problematic behaviours or beliefs. This would be particularly relevant to Emotion-Focused Therapy (EFT) which utilizes attachment theory as a base to understanding distressed couples.

Both studies utilized the same measures, however some inconsistencies regarding the results across both studies (for example preoccupied partner attachment) would seem to indicate some reliability problems inherent to the Partner Attachment Scale.

Although this scale has previously been used in several studies, this might point to problems peculiar to scale, the sample, or cultural and language differences. Through additional research the reliability and validity of this scale could be improved, or otherwise more reliable measures in particular in relation to attachment would have to be used.

Future studies could also utilize more observational data as a confirmation of self-report data. In relation to conflict resolution styles in particular, it would be useful to have participants rate their own videotaped conflict behaviour following the communication exercise through video recall (e.g., Waldinger & Schulz, 2006). This would provide valuable information as to their own observational skills, and might be a more accurate rating device than independent expert raters. Recent research has also compared naïve and expert coders' results for rating couple interactions and overall found comparable results (Waldinger, Schulz, Hauser, Allen, & Crowell, 2004). In terms of cost-effectiveness this suggests the likely use of naïve raters when identifying emotion-relevant behaviour. Alternative methodology could also include hand-held computer assisted diaries (which could measure constructs several times a day over a period of time – e.g., Wilhelm & Perrez, 2004), online daily diaries (Campa, 2006), daily telephone interviews (e.g., Waldinger, Kuo, Schulz, & Vaillant, 2006), and activation of internal working models of attachment through subliminal priming using computer experimental methodology (e.g., Massar & Buunk, 2006)

Participants were asked to self-report on their current conceptualisations of their attachment to their primary caregiver. Future research could also include the influence of the secondary caregiver, and might look at same-sex versus opposite-sex parent influences. In addition, as these current conceptualisations are memory-based, a future study comparing the conceptualisations of primary caregivers and their adult children could be an interesting avenue, specifically with regards to memory biases over time. Since both projects only assessed participants once, future research could track the development of changes in attachment configurations, as well as the influence it has on relationship related cognitions and functioning longitudinally. In addition, research that tests the impact of attachment figures in the couples' social environment on their relationship, and vice versa would not only place the couple in a more realistic social network context, but could also make clear exactly how these key relationships shape each other (e.g., Arriaga et al., 2004).

No cultural variations on the variables of interest were found in either study. However, due to the predominantly New Zealand European (*Pakeha*) cultural group's representation in both studies, there was a scant likelihood that cultural differences would have become apparent. Longitudinal North American research from the Early Years of Marriage Project have noted particular cultural differences with regards to marital roles, and the manner in which this impacts on a number of variables (for example conflict management) between African American and White American groups (e.g., Orbuch, 2006; Orbuch & Veroff, 2002). Future studies could compare New Zealand cultural groups to note whether these differences are also germane to New Zealand cultures. Cultural differences between New Zealand and other international cultures could also be studied. The rising number of interracial couples could also present novel research findings with regards to the manner in which relationships are formed, managed and maintained, although recent research has found no differences between interracial and intraracial couples with regards to relationship satisfaction, reported conflict or attachment styles (Troy et al., 2006). In following through from the aforementioned Early Years of Marriage Project, it should also be noted that further longitudinal research in this field is crucial to understanding committed relationships and the variables that impact on them.

Finally, structural equation modelling to test individual models and compare the efficacy of models, could also be considered. Already some progress in this area has been made (e.g., Overall et al., 2003) and it becomes particularly relevant as researchers attempt to ‘map the relational mind’. However, specificity as to the manner in which internal working models impact on specific romantic relationship variables such as conflict resolution, still need further development and model testing. This area of development is particularly relevant to couples clinicians who apply these conceptual models to understanding and assisting distressed couples.

## Conclusion

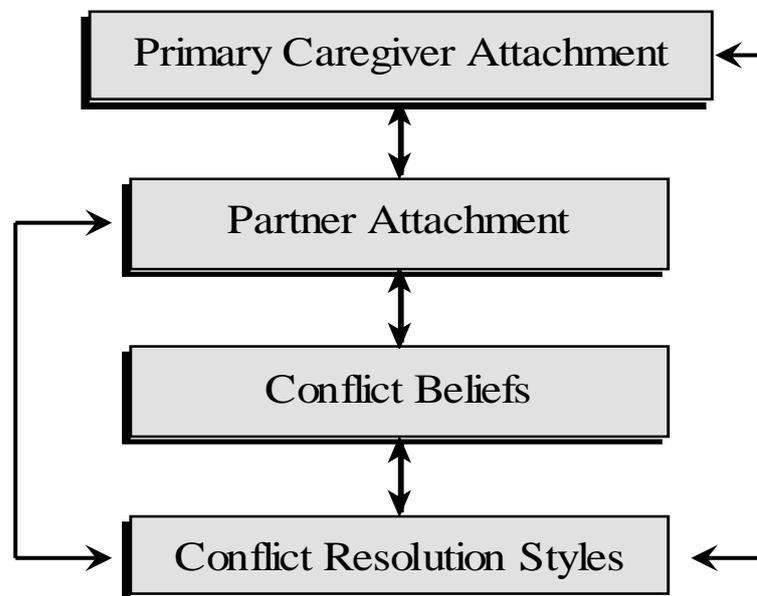
Reasoning draws a conclusion...  
Roger Bacon (1214 – 1294)

From the two studies conducted for the purposes of this project it would seem that there are some clear differences between the ongoing influence from current models of partner attachment, and the influence from current models of primary caregiver attachment on relationship variables. In this regard, relationship satisfaction and conflict beliefs are influenced by the specific attachment to the partner. For example, less secure partner attachment is linked to the belief that arguing is threatening. Secure partner attachment is also associated with a belief that arguing is beneficial. This is in line with Cozzarelli et al.'s findings (2000) which suggest that partner-specific attachment models are more strongly associated with relationship-specific outcomes. Thus, conflict beliefs and relationship satisfaction appear to be more fluid in nature, as these appraisal processes are specifically tied to the nature of the current partner attachment.

The picture for conflict resolution styles, however, is slightly more complicated, as partner attachment, primary caregiver attachment and conflict beliefs are all associated with conflict resolution behaviour. Thus, in line with previous research (Creasy, 2002; Pistole, 1989) secure partner attachment was associated with positive problem solving, whereas avoidant partner attachment was associated with withdrawal, conflict engagement and compliance. Positive problem solving was also associated with the conflict belief that arguing is beneficial, whereas negative conflict styles (e.g., withdrawal, compliance and conflict engagement) were associated with the belief that arguing is threatening. In addition, conflict resolution styles, in particular positive problem solving, withdrawal and compliance, are associated with the more general current conceptualization of primary caregiver attachment. There also appears to be an immunization effect that makes it more likely that a current model of secure primary caregiver attachment would result in utilizing positive problem solving more frequently, and compliance and withdrawal infrequently in the context of the current relationship. The consistent use of conflict resolution behaviour learned and integrated in the context of parental attachment and displayed in the

current relationship, points to the resilience of certain behavioural patterns, as well as the importance of attachments formed in childhood. This is also consistent with the script-like nature of attachment representations (e.g., Crowell et al., 2002; Waters, & Rodrigues, 2001). In addition, this also underlines previous findings which suggest that relationship variables, such as conflict resolution styles, are relatively stable over time (e.g., Crowell et al., 2002).

Overall, results from both studies indicate that these conflict resolution styles seem to be more strongly linked with general/global models of attachment (Cozzarelli et al., 2000). Although they were tested only in the context of the current relationship, these conflict resolution styles would quite possibly remain consistent in relation to other attachment figures. Pierce and Lydon (2001) also suggest that these global models of attachment would shape individuals' general inclination toward positive or negative relationship-specific models with other attachment figures. Thus, in the same manner that relationships between the key variables were hypothesized for Study 1 and 2, the following model visually summarizes the correlational findings from this research project (Figure 8):



*Figure 8.* Model of correlational relationships between primary caregiver attachment, partner attachment, conflict beliefs and conflict resolution styles.

The results from both these current studies also lend support to the notion of global and specific levels of attachment, as measured by primary caregiver and partner attachment (e.g., Crowell & Owens, 1996; Crowell et al., 2002; Overall et al., 2003). Although not specifically tested, some support for Overall et al.'s attachment model (see Figure 1, p. 32), which differentiates specific relational models as a function of a global model, can be gleaned from the results. However, these research findings also indicate the closely intertwined nature of general and specific attachment as it impacts on an individual's current relationship - in particular on conflict behaviour. Furthermore, it echoes the importance of including both general and specific measures of attachment (Pierce & Lydon, 2001) to determine the manner in which these models contribute to relational experiences. Understanding the manner in which these variables relate to one another is also directly relevant to couples therapists, in particular for Emotion-Focused therapists who use attachment theory as a guide to understanding couples' relational interactions (e.g., Johnson & Whiffen, 1999). Future similar research specifically with a clinically distressed group of couples would be particularly informative, not only to clinicians, but also to the general understanding of how these variables present in different populations.

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## Appendix 1

### *Introduction to Internet Survey*

#### **Close Relationships and Communication Styles**

You are invited to participate in a study looking at communication in close relationships. To participate you should currently be in a committed, heterosexual relationship of 6 months, or longer. In particular this study will focus on how our attachment to each other influences our communication styles. Some questions in the questionnaire relate to your current relationship, whereas others relate to your relationship with your primary caregiver (e.g., mother). Please follow the instructions closely.

Your participation will involve the completion of an online questionnaire, which will take about 30 minutes of your time. Your responses are submitted to a database that only the researcher has access to and are completely anonymous. Participation in this study could make you more aware of your own relationship and this could allow previously hidden problems or concerns in the relationship to surface. However, by participating in this study your relationship could also improve for the better by making it possible to have a more open and satisfied relationship.

This study is part of a PhD project by Karin du Plessis of Massey University, New Zealand, under supervision of Dr. Dave Clarke and Ms. Cheryl Woolley. Should you have any questions regarding this survey, you can contact Karin at: Karin.Du\_Plessis.1@uni.massey.ac.nz. The project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (ALB Protocol No. 03/044).

Only the researcher will have access to this information and your anonymity will be preserved in the write-up and publication of this research. By submitting the questionnaire it is understood that you have consented to participate in the research, and that you consent to publication of the research results with the understanding that anonymity will be preserved.

Karin du Plessis  
PhD Student  
Psychology Department  
Massey University  
Albany

Appendix 2

*Background Information Form – Internet Survey*

**1. What is your gender?**

(Male, Female)

**2. What is your age?**

\_\_\_\_\_

**3. How long have you and your partner lived together as a couple?**

\_\_\_\_\_

**4. Are you and your partner married?**

(Yes/No)

**5. If "Yes" to Question 4, how long have you been married?**

\_\_\_\_\_

**6. Do you and your partner have any children?**

(Yes/No)

**7. Are your parents/primary caregivers divorced or separated?**

(Yes/No/I grew up in a single-parent family)

**8. What is your employment status?**

(Employed full-time, Employed part-time, Self-employed, Full-time homemaker, Unemployed, In school full-time, Retired, Other, please specify)

\_\_\_\_\_

**9. What is your present/previous occupation?**

\_\_\_\_\_

**10. To which ethnic or cultural groups do you belong?**

(New Zealand European, Maori, Polynesian, Other, Other, please specify)

\_\_\_\_\_

### Appendix 3

#### *Parent and Partner Attachment Scale – Internet Survey*

The following questions relate to **your partner**. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements.

**11. Much of my time is spent thinking about my partner.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**12. I am highly involved with activities outside my relationship with my partner.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**13. I believe that my partner is capable of unconditional positive regard for me.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**14. The majority of my time is spent with my partner.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**15. I value my partner's opinions more than I value my own.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**16. I find my outside activities more stimulating than I find my relationship with my partner.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**17. I think about what my partner needs, before I think of my own needs.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**18. When I am not with my partner, I cannot keep myself from thinking about what he/she is doing.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**19. My partner is the most important person in my life.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**20. I like having "a life" outside of the relationship with my partner.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**21. I often feel out of control of my behaviour with my partner.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**22. I very much dislike being controlled by my partner.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**23. I have repeated thoughts about what I have recently done with my partner.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**24. I am able to maintain control of my relationship with my partner.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**25. If my partner feels highly positive toward me, then I feel highly positive about myself.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**26. When I start feeling "too close" to my partner, I spend a lot of time in activities outside of the relationship.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**27. If my partner is angry with me, I cannot rest until I do something to make the situation "better".**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**28. I am afraid that I will lose my identity in my relationship with my partner.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**29. My partner makes me feel good about myself.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**30. I do not want to be "eaten up" by the needs of my partner.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**31. My partner is always there for me in times of crisis.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**32. I rarely feel ignored by my partner.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**33. When my partner is around, I never feel alone.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**34. I can not rely on my partner.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**35. My partner rarely lets me down.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**36. My partner is emotionally available.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**37. There is always something more important in my partner's life than me.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**38. When my partner leaves me, I feel confident that he/she will return.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**39. My partner is not very comforting.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**40. I feel loved by my partner.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**41. My partner rarely takes time out to listen to me.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**42. My partner cares about what I think or how I feel.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

The following questions relate to **your primary caregiver**. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements.

**43. My primary caregiver when I was growing up was my ...**

Mother, Father, Other, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

**44. S/he (my primary caregiver) demanded little of my attention.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**45. S/he (my primary caregiver) relied on me for a great deal of emotional support.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**46. S/he was mature.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**47. S/he depended on me to make household decisions.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**48. S/he expected me to spend most of my free time with her/him.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**49. S/he did not seek my approval.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**50. My evaluation had a significant effect on her/him.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**51. I typically took care of her/him.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**52. S/he relied on me for things she/he would not trust others to do for her/him.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**53. I depended on her/him more than s/he depended on me.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**54. I never felt like I could fulfill all her/his needs.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**55. I felt emotionally drained by her/him.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**56. S/he rarely comforted me.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**57. S/he could not make her/his own decisions.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**58. S/he resents my close relationships with other people.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**59. I fulfilled more of her/his needs than s/he fulfilled of mine.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**60. S/he was self-absorbed.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**61. S/he was always there for me in times of crisis.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**62. S/he was never there for me.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**63. I rarely felt ignored by her/him.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**64. S/he frequently left me alone.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**65. When s/he was around, I never felt alone.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**66. I could not rely on her/him.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**67. S/he rarely let me down.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**68. S/he was distant/cold.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**69. S/he was emotionally available.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**70. There was always something more important in her/his life than me.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**71. When s/he left me, I felt confident that s/he would return.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**72. I never felt wanted by her/him.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**73. I rarely felt that I was a burden to her/him.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**74. S/he was not very comforting.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**75. I felt loved by her/him**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**76. S/he rarely took time out to listen to me.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**77. S/he cared about what I thought or how I felt.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**78. S/he never knew how I felt.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

## Appendix 4

### *Conflict Resolution Style Inventory – Internet Survey*

Rate how frequently you use each of the following styles to deal with arguments or disagreements with your partner.

**79. Launching personal attacks...**

Never, Occasionally, Some of the time, Often, Always

**80. Focussing on the problem at hand...**

Never, Occasionally, Some of the time, Often, Always

**81. Remaining silent for long periods of time...**

Never, Occasionally, Some of the time, Often, Always

**82. Not being willing to stick up for myself...**

Never, Occasionally, Some of the time, Often, Always

**83. Exploding and getting out of control...**

Never, Occasionally, Some of the time, Often, Always

**84. In what manner do you explode and get out of control?**

Verbally, Physically

**85. Sitting down and discussing differences constructively...**

Never, Occasionally, Some of the time, Often, Always

**86. Reaching a limit, “shutting down”, and refusing to talk any further...**

Never, Occasionally, Some of the time, Often, Always

**87. Being too willing to agree with your partner...**

Never, Occasionally, Some of the time, Often, Always

**88. Getting carried away and saying things that are not meant...**

Never, Occasionally, Some of the time, Often, Always

**89. Finding alternatives that are acceptable to each of us...**

Never, Occasionally, Some of the time, Often, Always

**90. Tuning the other person out...**

Never, Occasionally, Some of the time, Often, Always

**91. Not defending my position...**

Never, Occasionally, Some of the time, Often, Always

**92. Throwing insults and digs...**

Never, Occasionally, Some of the time, Often, Always

**93. Negotiating and compromising...**

Never, Occasionally, Some of the time, Often, Always

**94. Withdrawing, acting distant and not interested...**

Never, Occasionally, Some of the time, Often, Always

**95. Giving in with little attempt to present my side of the issue...**

Never, Occasionally, Some of the time, Often, Always

## Appendix 5

### *Feelings about Conflict Scale – Internet Survey*

Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about your intimate relationship with your partner.

**96. I often feel unfairly attacked in disagreements.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**97. It's hard to feel safe when we have a disagreement.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**98. During arguments, I often feel misunderstood or unheard.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**99. It makes me anxious when we have disagreements.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**100. I feel like my partner's not available when we have an argument.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**101. It's hard to be responsive to my partner's needs when we disagree.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**102. When my partner complains, I often realize that I also have a set of complaints.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**103. During conflict I often have to defend myself.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**104. My most important goal is to stop the disagreements.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**105. I sometimes feel abandoned when we disagree.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**106. My goal during conflict is to maintain the relationship.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**107. During arguments I can see glaring faults in my partner.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**108. I prefer to win our arguments.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**109. During a disagreement, I feel separated from my partner rather than feeling our usual closeness.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**110. Its ok with me that my partner wins most arguments.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**111. During arguments, I am most concerned with re-establishing close feelings, even when I feel angry.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**112. During arguments, I often feel rejected or betrayed.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**113. Our conflicts seem to bring us closer together.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**114. Sometimes an argument can let me know that my partner cares for me.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**115. There are times, during an argument, that I feel superior to my partner.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**116. After an argument I understand myself better.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**117. Usually we stop arguing but I don't think we get much resolved.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**118. Arguing often does some harm to the relationship.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**119. I feel more caring for my partner after we argue.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**120. After I disagreement, I feel more committed to the relationship.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**121. I feel more secure after we argue.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**122. Because of arguing, resentments build up and I harbor bad feelings about my partner.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**123. Our relationship is strengthened by reconciling our differences.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**124. Compromise and mutually satisfying solutions to problems lead to more closeness.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**125. I understand my partner better after a disagreement.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**126. It's better to argue about safe topics.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**127. Arguments make me feel the relationship is threatened.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

**128. During a hot argument, I keep thinking of ways to retaliate.**

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

## Appendix 6

### Relationship Satisfaction Question – Internet Survey

#### **129. How satisfied are you with your relationship?**

Very Satisfied, Satisfied, Slightly Satisfied, Not Sure, Slightly Dissatisfied, Dissatisfied, Very Dissatisfied

*Advertisement (Flyer): Couples Study*

# Couples



- Have you been living together for at least 6 months?
- Are you heterosexual and fluent in English?

Massey University student, Karin du Plessis, invites you to participate in **groundbreaking couples research** on communication in couples. Participation involves filling out questionnaires and a videotaped discussion on communication. You will be provided with \$20 to cover travel costs as well as personalized feedback on your communication styles and tips for improving your relationship. **This valuable study will help us and you learn more about intimate relationships!**

For more information or to register your interest, record you and your partner's names and contact numbers on:



**(09) 414 0800 ext. xxxx**

## Appendix 8

*Advertisement (Article in newspaper): Couples Study*

### Couple relationships and communication

Massey University Ph.D. student, Karin du Plessis

Most of us strive to have successful intimate relationships, yet for centuries the exact manner in which to accomplish this has remained an enigma. Technological advances in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have made it possible for researchers to study intimate relationships in greater detail, and the explosion of knowledge has meant that now, more than ever, we know a great deal more about the inner workings of intimate relationships. However, due to the complexity of the topic, it seems that we are only beginning to scratch the surface. To contribute to this growing literature, Massey University doctoral student, Karin du Plessis, is researching the manner in which couples communicate. Karin believes that her research will help demystify the secrets to successful relationships by specifically looking at how a wide range of couples communicate.

For this study heterosexual couples who are in committed intimate relationships and living together for longer than 6 months are sought to participate. Learning more about yourself, your partner and your relationship are the benefits of participating, and as such previous participants place a high value on the personalized feedback they obtain on their relationship in the research process. Participation totals approximately 2 hours and participants will be remunerated \$20 for their travel costs. The groundbreaking research is conducted throughout the year at Massey University in a safe and comfortable setting. Approximately 10 couples are still needed for the research. For more information or if you and your partner are interested in participating, contact Karin at xx xxx xxxx.

## Appendix 9

### *Questionnaires: Study 2*

#### *Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Part 1)*

Instructions: Most people have disagreements in their relationships. Please indicate below the appropriate extent of the agreement or disagreement between you and your partner on each item on the following list.

- 5 = ALWAYS AGREE
- 4 = ALMOST ALWAYS AGREE
- 3 = OCCASIONALLY DISAGREE
- 2 = FREQUENTLY DISAGREE
- 1 = ALMOST ALWAYS DISAGREE
- 0 = ALWAYS DISAGREE

- \_\_\_ 1. Handling family finances
- \_\_\_ 2. Matters of recreation
- \_\_\_ 3. Religious matters
- \_\_\_ 4. Demonstration of affection
- \_\_\_ 5. Friends
- \_\_\_ 6. Sex relations
- \_\_\_ 7. Conventionality (correct or proper behaviour)
- \_\_\_ 8. Philosophy of life
- \_\_\_ 9. Ways of dealing with in-laws
- \_\_\_ 10. Aims, goals, and things believed important
- \_\_\_ 11. Amount of time spent together
- \_\_\_ 12. Making major decisions
- \_\_\_ 13. Household tasks
- \_\_\_ 14. Leisure time interests
- \_\_\_ 15. Career decisions

*Talk Table Form*

*Together with your partner please select a topic that the two of you have had a disagreement on and which you are both willing to discuss now. Please write the topic below.*

Topic:

---

Gender: *(Circle one)*

Male

Female

*Answer all these questions on your own.*

1. How big a problem is this disagreement for you?  
*(Circle one)*

- 0 = Not a problem at all
- 1 = A little bit of a problem
- 2 = Moderately problematic
- 3 = Quite a bit of a problem
- 4 = Extremely problematic

For these next two questions choose “positive”, if you expect the overall emotional tone of the discussion to be upbeat and satisfying, “negative”, if you expect the discussion to be argumentative and upsetting, or “neutral”, if you don’t expect any particular emotion to be displayed.

2. What are your overall expectations for this discussion?  
*(Mark one option with X)*

- Positive
- Negative
- Neutral

3. In this discussion I intend to come across as...  
*(Mark one option with X)*

- Positive
- Negative
- Neutral

Push the start button on the timer, and then please start engaging in a discussion about your selected topic with your partner NOW.



Turn the page over when the beeping starts.

Instructions: For the following questions choose “positive” if the emotional tone of the conversation was upbeat and satisfying, “negative” if the conversation was argumentative or upsetting, and “neutral” if there wasn’t any particular emotion displayed. Focus on the *overall behaviour* of yourself or your partner.

First Segment – Practice round

1. During the past minute I intended to communicate in the following manner:  
(Mark one option with X)

- Positive
- Negative
- Neutral

2.1 During the past minute my partner came across as...

- Positive
- Negative
- Neutral

2.2 Which aspect of your partner’s behaviour during the past minute helped you make your decision in 2.1 above?

- Face and body
- Voice
- Words

*Once you have both completed these questions, press the start button on the timer and then please resume your discussion.*



Second Segment – Practice round

1. During the past minute I intended to communicate in the following manner:

- Positive
- Negative
- Neutral

2.1 During the past minute my partner came across as...

- Positive
- Negative
- Neutral

2.2 Which aspect of your partner’s behaviour during the past minute helped you make your decision in 2.1 above?

- Face and body
- Voice
- Words

*Once you have both completed these questions, press the start button on the timer and then please resume your discussion.*



Third Segment:

1. During the past minute I intended to communicate in the following manner:

- Positive
- Negative
- Neutral

2.1 During the past minute my partner came across as...

- Positive
- Negative
- Neutral

2.2 Which aspect of your partner's behaviour during the past minute helped you make your decision in 2.1 above?

- Face and body
- Voice
- Words

*Once you have both completed these questions, press the start button on the timer and then please resume your discussion.*



Fourth Segment:

1. During the past minute I intended to communicate in the following manner:

- Positive
- Negative
- Neutral

2.1 During the past minute my partner came across as...

- Positive
- Negative
- Neutral

2.2 Which aspect of your partner's behaviour during the past minute helped you make your decision in 2.1 above?

- Face and body
- Voice
- Words

*Once you have both completed these questions, press the start button on the timer and then please resume your discussion.*



Fifth Segment:

1. During the past minute I intended to communicate in the following manner:

- Positive
- Negative
- Neutral

2.1 During the past minute my partner came across as...

- Positive
- Negative
- Neutral

2.2 Which aspect of your partner's behaviour during the past minute helped you make your decision in 2.1 above?

- Face and body
- Voice
- Words

*Once you have both completed these questions, press the start button on the timer and then please resume your discussion.*



Sixth Segment:

1. During the past minute I intended to communicate in the following manner:

- Positive
- Negative
- Neutral

2.1 During the past minute my partner came across as...

- Positive
- Negative
- Neutral

2.2 Which aspect of your partner's behaviour during the past minute helped you make your decision in 2.1 above?

- Face and body
- Voice
- Words

*Once you have both completed these questions, press the start button on the timer and then please resume your discussion.*



Seventh Segment:

1. During the past minute I intended to communicate in the following manner:

- Positive
- Negative
- Neutral

2.1 During the past minute my partner came across as...

- Positive
- Negative
- Neutral

2.2 Which aspect of your partner's behaviour during the past minute helped you make your decision in 2.1 above?

- Face and body
- Voice
- Words

*Once you have both completed these questions, press the start button on the timer and then please resume your discussion.*



Eighth Segment:

1. During the past minute I intended to communicate in the following manner:

- Positive
- Negative
- Neutral

2.1 During the past minute my partner came across as...

- Positive
- Negative
- Neutral

2.2 Which aspect of your partner's behaviour during the past minute helped you make your decision in 2.1 above?

- Face and body
- Voice
- Words

*Once you have both completed these questions, press the start button on the timer and then please resume your discussion.*



Ninth Segment:

1. During the past minute I intended to communicate in the following manner:

- Positive
- Negative
- Neutral

2.1 During the past minute my partner came across as...

- Positive
- Negative
- Neutral

2.2 Which aspect of your partner's behaviour during the past minute helped you make your decision in 2.1 above?

- Face and body
- Voice
- Words

*Once you have both completed these questions, press the start button on the timer and then please resume your discussion.*



Tenth Segment:

1. During the past minute I intended to communicate in the following manner:

- Positive
- Negative
- Neutral

2.1 During the past minute my partner came across as...

- Positive
- Negative
- Neutral

2.2 Which aspect of your partner's behaviour during the past minute helped you make your decision in 2.1 above?

- Face and body
- Voice
- Words

*Once you have both completed these questions, press the start button on the timer and then please resume your discussion.*



Eleventh Segment:

1. During the past minute I intended to communicate in the following manner:

- Positive
- Negative
- Neutral

2.1 During the past minute my partner came across as...

- Positive
- Negative
- Neutral

2.2 Which aspect of your partner's behaviour during the past minute helped you make your decision in 2.1 above?

- Face and body
- Voice
- Words

*Once you have both completed these questions, press the start button on the timer and then please resume your discussion.*



Twelfth Segment:

1. During the past minute I intended to communicate in the following manner:

- Positive
- Negative
- Neutral

2.1 During the past minute my partner came across as...

- Positive
- Negative
- Neutral

2.2 Which aspect of your partner's behaviour during the past minute helped you make your decision in 2.1 above?

- Face and body
- Voice
- Words

Please turn over

*Now answer the following questions on your own.*

1. Overall in this discussion, I intended to communicate in the following manner:

- Positive
- Negative
- Neutral

2. Overall in this discussion, I experienced my partners' communication as:

- Positive
- Negative
- Neutral

3. Using the following scale please rate you and your partner's involvement during this discussion.

- 0 = Not involved at all
- 1 = Slightly involved
- 2 = Fairly involved
- 3 = Very involved
- 4 = Extremely involved

What was your level of involvement during the discussion?

What was your partner's level of involvement during the discussion?

4. Using the following scale, please indicate your response to the questions:

- 1 = Extremely dissatisfied
- 2 = Very dissatisfied
- 3 = Somewhat dissatisfied
- 4 = Mixed
- 5 = Somewhat satisfied
- 6 = Very satisfied
- 7 = Extremely satisfied

How satisfied are you with the discussion that took place?

How satisfied are you with your own problem solving ability during the discussion?

How satisfied are you with your partner's problem solving ability during the discussion?

How satisfied are you with the outcome of the discussion?

*Thank you for your participation in this exercise.*

*Background Information Questions*

Instructions: We need some general information about you and your partner. Please circle the response that best describes you, and where indicated please fill in the information requested.

- What is your gender?
  1. Male
  2. Female
  
- What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_years.
  
- To which ethnic or cultural group(s) do you belong
  1. NZ European
  2. Maori
  3. Polynesian
  4. Other \_\_\_\_\_
  
- How many years have you and your partner lived together as a couple?  
\_\_\_\_\_years\_\_\_\_\_months.
  
- Are you and your partner married?
  1. NO
  2. YES (if yes, how long? \_\_\_\_\_years\_\_\_\_\_months).
  
- Do you and your partner have any children?
  1. NO
  2. YES (if yes, how many?\_\_\_\_\_).
  
- Are your parents/primary caregivers divorced or separated?
  1. No
  2. Yes (if yes, how long? \_\_\_\_\_years)
  3. I grew up in a single-parent family.
  
- What is your employment status? (Circle one only)
  1. Employed full-time
  2. Employed part-time
  3. Self-employed
  4. Full-time homemaker
  5. Unemployed
  6. In school full-time
  7. Retired
  8. Other \_\_\_\_\_
  
- If employed, what is your present occupation? (please specify)  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
- If unemployed, what was your previous occupation? (please specify)  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Parent and Partner Attachment Scale*

Instructions: This set of questions concerns you in your relationship to your partner. Using the scale below, please answer all the questions as honestly as possible.

- 1 = STRONGLY DISAGREE
- 2 = DISAGREE
- 3 = MODERATELY DISAGREE
- 4 = NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- 5 = MODERATELY AGREE
- 6 = AGREE
- 7 = STRONGLY AGREE

- \_\_\_ 1. Much of my time is spent thinking about my partner.
- \_\_\_ 2. I am highly involved with activities outside my relationship with my partner.
- \_\_\_ 3. I believe that my partner is capable of unconditional positive regard for me.
  
- \_\_\_ 4. The majority of my time is spent with my partner.
- \_\_\_ 5. I value my partner's opinions more than I value my own.
- \_\_\_ 6. I find my outside activities more stimulating than I find my relationship with my partner.
- \_\_\_ 7. I think about what my partner needs, before I think of my own needs.
- \_\_\_ 8. When I am not with my partner, I cannot keep myself from thinking about what he/she is doing.
- \_\_\_ 9. My partner is the most important person in my life.
- \_\_\_ 10. I like having "a life" outside of the relationship with my partner.
- \_\_\_ 11. I often feel out of control of my behaviour with my partner.
- \_\_\_ 12. I very much dislike being controlled by my partner.
- \_\_\_ 13. I have repeated thoughts about what I have recently done with my partner.
  
- \_\_\_ 14. I am able to maintain control of my relationship with my partner.
- \_\_\_ 15. If my partner feels highly positive toward me, then I feel highly positive about myself.
- \_\_\_ 16. When I start feeling "too close" to my partner, I spend a lot of time in activities outside of the relationship.
- \_\_\_ 17. If my partner is angry with me, I cannot rest until I do something to make the situation "better".
- \_\_\_ 18. I am afraid that I will lose my identity in my relationship with my partner.
- \_\_\_ 19. My partner makes me feel good about myself.
- \_\_\_ 20. I do not want to be "eaten up" by the needs of my partner.
- \_\_\_ 21. My partner is always there for me in times of crisis.
- \_\_\_ 22. I rarely feel ignored by my partner.
- \_\_\_ 23. When my partner is around, I never feel alone.
- \_\_\_ 24. I can not rely on my partner.
- \_\_\_ 25. My partner rarely lets me down.
- \_\_\_ 26. My partner is emotionally available.
- \_\_\_ 27. There is always something more important in my partner's life than me.
- \_\_\_ 28. When my partner leaves me, I feel confident that he/she will return.
- \_\_\_ 29. My partner is not very comforting.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 30. I feel loved by my partner.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 31. My partner rarely takes time out to listen to me.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 32. My partner cares about what I think or how I feel.

My primary caregiver when I was growing up was:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Mother
- \_\_\_\_\_ Father
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

This next set of questions concerns you in relationship to the **primary caregiver** you had when you were a child. Please think about **your primary caregiver** (named above) as you complete the following questions. Using the scale below, please answer all the questions as honestly as possible.

- 1 = STRONGLY DISAGREE
- 2 = DISAGREE
- 3 = MODERATELY DISAGREE
- 4 = NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- 5 = MODERATELY AGREE
- 6 = AGREE
- 7 = STRONGLY AGREE

- \_\_\_\_\_ 33. S/he demanded little of my attention.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 34. S/he relied on me for a great deal of emotional support.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 35. S/he was mature.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 36. S/he depended on me to make household decisions.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 37. S/he expected me to spend most of my free time with her/him.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 38. S/he did not seek my approval.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 39. My evaluation had a significant effect on her/him.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 40. I typically took care of her/him.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 41. S/he relied on me for things she/he would not trust others to do for her/him.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 42. I depended on her/him more than s/he depended on me.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 43. I never felt like I could fulfill all her/his needs.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 44. I felt emotionally drained by her/him.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 45. S/he rarely comforted me.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 46. S/he could not make her/his own decisions.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 47. S/he resents my close relationships with other people.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 48. I fulfilled more of her/his needs than s/he fulfilled of mine.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 49. S/he was self-absorbed.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 50. S/he was always there for me in times of crisis.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 51. S/he was never there for me.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 52. I rarely felt ignored by her/him.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 53. S/he frequently left me alone.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 54. When s/he was around, I never felt alone.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 55. I could not rely on her/him.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 56. S/he rarely let me down.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 57. S/he was distant/cold.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 58. S/he was emotionally available

- 1 = STRONGLY DISAGREE
- 2 = DISAGREE
- 3 = MODERATELY DISAGREE
- 4 = NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- 5 = MODERATELY AGREE
- 6 = AGREE
- 7 = STRONGLY AGREE

- \_\_\_ 59. There was always something more important in her/his life than me.
- \_\_\_ 60. When s/he left me, I felt confident that s/he would return.
- \_\_\_ 61. I never felt wanted by her/him.
- \_\_\_ 62. I rarely felt that I was a burden to her/him.
- \_\_\_ 63. S/he was not very comforting.
- \_\_\_ 64. I felt loved by her/him.
- \_\_\_ 65. S/he rarely took time out to listen to me.
- \_\_\_ 66. S/he cared about what I thought or how I felt.
- \_\_\_ 67. S/he never knew how I felt.

*Conflict Resolution Inventory*

- Instructions: Using the scale below, rate how frequently you use each of the following styles to deal with arguments or disagreements with your partner.
  - 1 = NEVER
  - 2 = OCCASIONALLY
  - 3 = SOME OF THE TIME
  - 4 = OFTEN
  - 5 = ALWAYS
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ Launching personal attacks.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Focussing on the problem at hand.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Remaining silent for long periods of time.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Not being willing to stick up for myself.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Exploding and getting out of control
  - Please circle:      VERBAL                      PHYSICAL
- \_\_\_\_\_ Sitting down and discussing differences constructively.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Reaching a limit, “shutting down”, and refusing to talk any further.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Being too willing to agree with your partner
- \_\_\_\_\_ Getting carried away and saying things that are not meant.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Finding alternatives that are acceptable to each of us.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Tuning the other person out.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Not defending my position.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Throwing insults and digs.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Negotiating and compromising.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Withdrawing, acting distant and not interested.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Giving in with little attempt to present my side of the issue.

*Feelings About Conflict Scale*

Instructions: For the next set of questions use the scale below to indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about your intimate relationship with your partner.

- 1 = STRONGLY DISAGREE
- 2 = DISAGREE
- 3 = MODERATELY DISAGREE
- 4 = NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- 5 = MODERATELY AGREE
- 6 = AGREE
- 7 = STRONGLY AGREE

- \_\_\_ 1. I often feel unfairly attacked in disagreements.
- \_\_\_ 2. It's hard to feel safe when we have a disagreement.
- \_\_\_ 3. During arguments, I often feel misunderstood or unheard.
- \_\_\_ 4. It makes me anxious when we have disagreements.
- \_\_\_ 5. I feel like my partner's not available when we have an argument.
- \_\_\_ 6. It's hard to be responsive to my partner's needs when we disagree.
- \_\_\_ 7. When my partner complains, I often realize that I also have a set of complaints.
- \_\_\_ 8. During conflict I often have to defend myself.
- \_\_\_ 9. My most important goal is to stop the disagreements.
- \_\_\_ 10. I sometimes feel abandoned when we disagree.
- \_\_\_ 11. My goal during conflict is to maintain the relationship.
- \_\_\_ 12. During arguments I can see glaring faults in my partner.
- \_\_\_ 13. I prefer to win our arguments
- \_\_\_ 14. During a disagreement, I feel separated from my partner rather than feeling our usual closeness.
- \_\_\_ 15. Its ok with me that my partner wins most arguments.
- \_\_\_ 16. During arguments, I am most concerned with reestablishing close feelings, even when I feel angry.
- \_\_\_ 17. During arguments, I often feel rejected or betrayed.
- \_\_\_ 18. Our conflicts seem to bring us closer together.
- \_\_\_ 19. Sometimes an argument can let me know that my partner cares for me.
- \_\_\_ 20. There are times, during an argument, that I feel superior to my partner.
- \_\_\_ 21. After an argument I understand myself better.
- \_\_\_ 22. Usually we stop arguing but I don't think we get much resolved.
- \_\_\_ 23. Arguing often does some harm to the relationship.
- \_\_\_ 24. I feel more caring for my partner after we argue.
- \_\_\_ 25. After a disagreement, I feel more committed to the relationship.
- \_\_\_ 26. I feel more secure after we argue.
- \_\_\_ 27. Because of arguing, resentments build up and I harbor bad feelings about my partner
- \_\_\_ 28. Our relationship is strengthened by reconciling our differences.
- \_\_\_ 29. Compromise and mutually satisfying solutions to problems lead to more closeness.
- \_\_\_ 30. I understand my partner better after a disagreement.
- \_\_\_ 31. It's better to argue about safe topics.
- \_\_\_ 32. Arguments make me feel the relationship is threatened.
- \_\_\_ 33. During a hot argument, I keep thinking of ways to retaliate.

*Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Part 2)*

Instructions: Using the scale below, please indicate below approximately how often the following items occur between you and your partner.

- 1 = ALL OF THE TIME
- 2 = MOST OF THE TIME
- 3 = MORE OFTEN THAN NOT
- 4 = OCCASIONALLY
- 5 = RARELY
- 6 = NEVER

- \_\_\_ 1. How often do you discuss or have you considered divorce, separation, or terminating your relationship?
- \_\_\_ 2. How often do you or your partner leave the house after a fight?
- \_\_\_ 3. In general, how often do you think things between you and your partner are going well?
- \_\_\_ 4. Do you confide in your partner?
- \_\_\_ 5. Do you ever regret that you married? (or *lived together*)
- \_\_\_ 6. How often do you and your partner quarrel?
- \_\_\_ 7. How often do you and your partner “get on each other’s nerves?”

8. Do you kiss your partner?

- |           |           |              |        |       |
|-----------|-----------|--------------|--------|-------|
|           | Almost    |              |        |       |
| Every day | every day | Occasionally | Rarely | Never |
| 4         | 3         | 2            | 1      | 0     |

9. Do you and your partner engage in outside interests together?

- |        |         |         |          |         |
|--------|---------|---------|----------|---------|
| All of | Most of | Some of | Very few | None of |
| them   | them    | them    | them     | them    |
| 4      | 3       | 2       | 1        | 0       |

How often would you say the following events occur between you and your partner?

- 1 = Never
- 2 = Less than once a month
- 3 = Once or twice a month
- 4 = Once a day
- 5 = More often

- \_\_\_ 10. Have a stimulating exchange of ideas
- \_\_\_ 11. Laugh together
- \_\_\_ 12. Calmly discuss something
- \_\_\_ 13. Work together on a project

There are some things about which couples sometimes agree and sometimes disagree. Indicate if either item below caused differences of opinions or problems in your relationship during the past few weeks. (Circle yes or no)

Yes No 14. Being too tired for sex  
Yes No 15. Not showing love

16. The numbers on the following line represent different degrees of happiness in your relationship. The middle point, "happy", represents the degree of happiness in most relationships. Please circle the number that best describes the degree of happiness, all things considered, of your relationship.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Extremely unhappy	Fairly unhappy	A little unhappy	Happy	Very happy	Extremely happy	Perfect

17. Please circle the number of *one* of the following statements that best describes how you feel about the future of your relationship.

- 5 I want desperately for my relationship to succeed, and *would go to almost any length* to see that it does.
- 4 I want very much for my relationship to succeed, and *will do all that I can* to see that it does.
- 3 I want very much for my relationship to succeed, and *will do my fair share* to see that it does.
- 2 It would be nice if my relationship succeeded, but *I can't do much more than I'm doing now* to make it succeed.
- 1 It would be nice if it succeeded, but *I refuse to do any more than I am doing now* to keep the relationship going.
- 0 My relationship can never succeed, and *there is no more that I can do* to keep the relationship going.







## Appendix 10

### *Conflict Resolution Style Observer Rating Scale (CRS-ORS)*

#### *Instructions to Raters*

##### Introduction:

The Conflict Resolution Style Observer Rating Scale (CRS-ORS) has been developed for the purposes of this research as an adjunct to the Conflict Resolution Style Inventory (CRSI), which is completed by participants as a self-report measure. The CRS-ORS allows observers to code the behaviour of couples during a conflictual discussion into four codes, which encompasses a number of verbal and nonverbal behaviours characteristic of that particular style: Positive Problem Solving (PPS), Conflict Engagement (CENG), Withdrawal (WDRL) and Compliance (COMPL). The following scale is used to indicate on the four different codes how frequently each particular conflict resolution style was occurring, by circling the appropriate number on the scale:

- 1 = NONE OF THE TIME**
- 2 = OCCASIONALLY**
- 3 = SOME OF THE TIME**
- 4 = OFTEN**
- 5 = MOST OF THE TIME**

During the conflictual discussion, one minute units are used as the coding unit.

The talk table procedure runs for 10 minutes, added to which there are 2 minutes of initial practice rounds - the practice rounds are not coded.

Listener backchanneling (verbal or nonverbal behaviour that indicates that the person is listening, i.e. head nods and encouraging sounds) is not coded directly.

If the partner emits more than one code during a speaker turn, then he/she receives the code for the most frequent behaviour displayed during the speaker turn.

Important: Focus on the verbal and nonverbal behaviour of each individual, and try to pay no attention to the content of their discussion.

Please use the space under notes to clarify any particular conflict resolution styles exhibited by the couple, as well as any extra information on their conflict resolution and communication.

Feel free to add more notes on the back of the page.

## CRS-ORS Codes

### **1. Positive Problem Solving (PS)**

Positive problem solving is characterized by:

- Being focussed on the problem at hand
- Offering constructive solutions to the problem
- Questions – verbal inquiries towards partner
- Agreement – verbal/nonverbal accord
- Sitting close together, touching each other
- Maintaining frequent eye contact
- Attentive listening e.g. head nods
- Smiling or otherwise demonstrating affection
- Relaxed comfortable body positions
- Steady tone of voice
- Humor
- Negotiating
- Compromising
- Finding alternatives that are acceptable to both partners
- Raised voices –not overly antagonistic or mean spirited

### **2. Conflict Engagement (CE)**

Conflict engagement is characterized by:

- Hostility
- Launching personal attacks
- Critical statements, accusations
- Disgust or contempt
- Threats and anger
- Devaluing partner by insults, mocking or belittling
- Tense body
- Tense fists/grips chair (or body)/pounds chair (or body or air)
- Talking through clenched teeth
- Raised voice/shouting
- Complaining
- Sour look
- Negative or hostile tone of voice
- Rolling eyes dramatically
- Sighing deeply (intended as criticism)
- Exaggerated gasps

### **3. Withdrawal (WD)**

Withdrawal is characterized by:

- Pulling back from the interaction
- Remaining silent for long periods of time
- Appearing passive, disinterested, detached, avoidant
- Closed-off body language (e.g., folded arms, body and head turned away)
- Moves body away from partner
- Failure to respond to partner
- Muscular tenseness/rigidity
- Facial and verbal indications of holding back emotions
- Nonverbal expression that listener is not listening (e.g., no eye contact, direct but glazed eye contact, turning away from speaker)
- Decrease in listener backchannel behaviours
- Fidgeting or body movements that indicate uneasiness

### **4. Compliance (COM)**

Compliance is characterized by:

- Not sticking up for oneself
- Not defending position
- Willingness to agree with most of partner's suggestions
- Avoiding getting into an argument
- Self-complaints
- Whining tone of voice ("oh poor me" message behind whine)
- Low activity rate
- Accepts responsibility for accusations
- Agreement with partner – verbal and nonverbal signs of accord
- Decreased eye contact
- Neutral statements – non-emotional tone of voice

CRS-ORS Coding Sheet

PS	Positive Problem Solving
CE	Conflict Engagement
WD	Withdrawal
COM	Compliance

# CRS-ORS Coding Sheet

Couple#:	_____
Coder:	_____
Date:	_____

1 = NONE OF THE TIME  
 2 = OCCASIONALLY  
 3 = SOME OF THE TIME  
 4 = OFTEN  
 5 = MOST OF THE TIME

1. *Male:*

PS \_\_\_\_\_  
 1      2      3      4      5

CE \_\_\_\_\_  
 1      2      3      4      5

WD \_\_\_\_\_  
 1      2      3      4      5

COM \_\_\_\_\_  
 1      2      3      4      5

*Female:*

PS \_\_\_\_\_  
 1      2      3      4      5

CE \_\_\_\_\_  
 1      2      3      4      5

WD \_\_\_\_\_  
 1      2      3      4      5

COM \_\_\_\_\_  
 1      2      3      4      5

2. *Male:*

PS \_\_\_\_\_  
 1      2      3      4      5

CE \_\_\_\_\_  
 1      2      3      4      5

WD \_\_\_\_\_  
 1      2      3      4      5

COM \_\_\_\_\_  
 1      2      3      4      5

*Female:*

PS \_\_\_\_\_  
 1      2      3      4      5

CE \_\_\_\_\_  
 1      2      3      4      5

WD \_\_\_\_\_  
 1      2      3      4      5

COM \_\_\_\_\_  
 1      2      3      4      5

3. *Male:*

PS \_\_\_\_\_  
 1      2      3      4      5

CE \_\_\_\_\_  
 1      2      3      4      5

WD \_\_\_\_\_  
 1      2      3      4      5

COM \_\_\_\_\_  
 1      2      3      4      5

*Female:*

PS \_\_\_\_\_  
 1      2      3      4      5

CE \_\_\_\_\_  
 1      2      3      4      5

WD \_\_\_\_\_  
 1      2      3      4      5

COM \_\_\_\_\_  
 1      2      3      4      5

4. *Male:*

PS \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

WD \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

*Female:*

PS \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

WD \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

CE \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

COM \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

CE \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

COM \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

---

5. *Male:*

PS \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

WD \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

*Female:*

PS \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

WD \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

CE \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

COM \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

CE \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

COM \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

---

6. *Male:*

PS \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

WD \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

*Female:*

PS \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

WD \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

CE \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

COM \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

CE \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

COM \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

---

7. *Male:*

PS \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

WD \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

*Female:*

PS \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

WD \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

CE \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

COM \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

CE \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

COM \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

---

8. *Male:*

PS \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

CE \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

WD \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

COM \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

*Female:*

PS \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

CE \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

WD \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

COM \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

9. *Male:*

PS \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

CE \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

WD \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

COM \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

*Female:*

PS \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

CE \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

WD \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

COM \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

10. *Male:*

PS \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

CE \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

WD \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

COM \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

*Female:*

PS \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

CE \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

WD \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

COM \_\_\_\_\_  
1      2      3      4      5

*Male:*

PS = (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9) (10) = \_\_\_\_\_/10 = \_\_\_\_

CE = (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9) (10) = \_\_\_\_\_/10 = \_\_\_\_

WD = (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9) (10) = \_\_\_\_\_/10 = \_\_\_\_

COM = (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9) (10) = \_\_\_\_\_/10 = \_\_\_\_

*Female:*

PS = (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9) (10) = \_\_\_\_\_/10 = \_\_\_\_

CE = (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9) (10) = \_\_\_\_\_/10 = \_\_\_\_

WD = (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9) (10) = \_\_\_\_\_/10 = \_\_\_\_

COM = (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9) (10) = \_\_\_\_\_/10 = \_\_\_\_

Notes:

Male:

---

---

---

Female:

---

---

---

Couple:

---

---

---

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