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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**

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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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