

Perceptions of Conflict and Support in Romantic Relationships: The Role of Attachment Anxiety

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Guided by attachment theory, a 2-part study was conducted to test how perceptions of relationship-based conflict and support are associated with relationship satisfaction/closeness and future quality. Dating partners completed diaries for 14 days (Part 1) and then were videotaped while discussing a major problem that occurred during the diary study (Part 2). Part 1 reveals that more anxiously attached individuals perceived more conflict with their dating partners and reported a tendency for conflicts to escalate in severity. Perceptions of daily relationship-based conflicts negatively impacted the perceived satisfaction/closeness and relationship futures of highly anxious individuals, whereas perceptions of greater daily support had positive effects. Part 2 reveals that highly anxious individuals appeared more distressed and escalated the severity of conflicts (rated by observers) and reported feeling more distressed. The authors discuss the unique features of attachment anxiety and how changing perceptions of relationship satisfaction/closeness and stability could erode commitment over time.

Romantic relationships sometimes seem similar to roller coaster rides in which partners experience breathtaking emotional highs rapidly followed by heartbreaking lows. For many people, these countervailing moments of joy and despair are experienced infrequently and mainly in stressful situations. For some individuals, however, these roller coaster episodes occur on a regular basis during everyday interactions with their romantic partners. Recent research indicates that perceptions of daily relationship events strongly color how individuals construe their romantic partners' underlying motives and intentions and that these construals can have consequences for the future of their relationships (Fincham, 2001). For example, individuals tend to feel less positive about the future of their relationships if they believe that heated arguments might be harbingers of eventual rejection or relationship dissolution. Identifying how working models influence perceptions of daily relationship events and determining how these daily perceptions are related to immediate and long-term relationship judgments is critical to understanding how different people navigate through the ups and downs of daily relationship experiences.

Attachment theory offers one coherent theoretical framework capable of explaining both why certain people experience more

pronounced vacillations in daily perceptions of their romantic partners and relationships and how these perceptions affect the ways in which individuals view their partners and relationships on a daily basis. Bowlby (1973, 1980) claimed that the expectations anxiously attached people have about their romantic partners and relationships should influence how they judge the quality of those relationships. The present research tested whether individual differences in attachment anxiety are systematically associated with (a) perceptions of daily social interactions with romantic partners, (b) the impact that daily perceptions of conflict and support have on current and future evaluations of their relationships, and (c) the amount of distress experienced during and after discussing a conflict in the laboratory. Informed by attachment theory (Bowlby, 1973, 1980), Fraley and Shaver's (2000) model of attachment anxiety, Holmes and Rempel's (1989) model of dyadic trust, and the adult attachment research literature, we hypothesized that more anxiously attached individuals, compared with less anxious individuals, would perceive greater conflict and more conflict escalation in their romantic relationships on a daily basis, report feeling more hurt by perceived conflicts, and believe that conflicts portend more negative future consequences for their relationships. We also hypothesized that highly anxious individuals would weigh daily relationship events more heavily when judging the quality of their relationships. Specifically, on days when highly anxious persons perceive greater relationship conflict, they should report lower relationship quality and less positive views about the future of their relationships than less anxious individuals. However, on days when highly anxious individuals perceive more relationship support, they should report greater relationship quality and more positive views about the future of their relationships than less anxious individuals. A conceptually similar pattern of results should emerge for highly anxious individuals when they discuss

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relationship conflicts in the lab. More specifically, highly anxious individuals should appear more distressed and report greater distress than their less anxious counterparts.

Attachment Theory

According to Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1980), early interactions with significant others generate expectations and beliefs that guide social perceptions and behavior about what relationships and relationship partners will be like in adulthood. These beliefs, which constitute one major component of internal working models, are presumed to involve “if-then” propositions that specify the expected behaviors and actions of attachment figures in attachment-relevant situations (e.g., *if I am distressed, then I can count on my partner for support*). A considerable body of research has documented the various ways in which working models are associated with information processing in close relationships. This work has indicated that working models affect whether and how individuals selectively attend to and perceive their partners, how they make inferences and judgments about their partners’ actions, and how they preferentially remember certain behaviors enacted by their partners when regulating their emotions or behavior (for a review, see Collins & Allard, 2001).

Two orthogonal dimensions tap individual differences in adult attachment (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994; Simpson, Rholes, & Phillips, 1996). The first dimension, commonly labeled *avoidance*, reflects the degree to which individuals feel comfortable with closeness and emotional intimacy in relationships. People who score high on this dimension tend to be less invested in their relationships and yearn to remain psychologically and emotionally independent of their partners (Hazan & Shaver, 1994). The second dimension, typically termed *anxiety*, assesses the degree to which individuals worry and ruminate about being rejected or abandoned by their partners. Prototypically secure people score low on both attachment dimensions (i.e., secure individuals are both more comfortable with closeness and do not obsess about rejection or abandonment).

Fraley and Shaver (2000) have proposed a new model that outlines the major interpersonal functions purportedly served by each attachment dimension. They conjecture that the avoidance dimension primarily regulates attachment-relevant behavior, particularly in anxiety-provoking situations (e.g., seeking support vs. withdrawing from attachment figures in distressing settings). The anxiety dimension, on the other hand, is thought to reflect an appraisal-monitoring system that gauges the degree to which individuals are maintaining sufficient physical, psychological, or emotional closeness with their attachment figures.¹ Fraley and Shaver hypothesized that the appraisal-monitoring system should be sensitive to cues (inputs) that signify changes in the level of rejection and support from attachment figures (e.g., romantic partners). This should be particularly true for highly anxious individuals, whose appraisal-monitoring systems are thought to be set at lower thresholds and to be more easily triggered by relationship threats (see Simpson & Rholes, 1994). Given the greater importance of identifying potentially negative relationship events (Gaelick, Bodenhausen, & Wyer, 1985), however, highly anxious individuals should notice and place greater emphasis on cues of rejection than on cues of support. One of the primary outputs of the anxiety system should be the amount of felt security (Sroufe &

Waters, 1977), which can range from extreme anxiety, worry, and angst (when rejection is perceived as high and support as low) to extreme contentment, happiness, and security (when rejection is perceived as low and support as high).

Additional theoretical insights into the nature and functions of anxious attachment can be gleaned from Holmes and Rempel’s (1989) model of dyadic trust. Even though highly anxious individuals hope that they will be able to trust their romantic partners, they remain leery about whether they can trust them completely. Highly anxious people do, in fact, tend to report low-to-moderate levels of interpersonal trust in their romantic partners (see Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Simpson, Ickes, & Grich, 1999). Holmes and Rempel claimed that people who are uncertain about whether they can fully trust their partners should be more sensitive to, and more likely to perceive or infer, cues of possible rejection and acceptance. Because they are unsure of their partners’ long-term benevolent intentions, individuals who manifest moderate levels of trust should be motivated to “test” for signs of their partners’ positive regard and commitment. When these regular tests imply rejection, uncertain individuals should feel worse about their partners and relationships; when they imply acceptance, uncertain individuals should feel positive to the extent that their uncertainties are temporarily alleviated. Put another way, more significant meaning might be placed on daily events that could provide information about a perennial worry for these individuals: whether they are worthy of being loved. Thus, daily perceptions of relationship conflict and support should play a stronger role in governing the day-to-day relationship feelings and perceptions of highly anxious individuals. Given these theoretical considerations, we now turn to relevant research on attachment anxiety.²

¹ Fraley and Shaver (2000) described the avoidance and anxiety dimensions as fairly independent systems. Thus, in situations that activate the attachment system, one might expect to find statistical interactions between the two dimensions. Few interactions, however, are typically found in attachment research (e.g., Collins & Feeney, 2000; Simpson et al., 1996). One possible reason for this might be that the avoidance dimension regulates only a subset of attachment behaviors, perhaps those that involve moving closer to versus pulling away from attachment figures in stressful or taxing situations. Some studies have suggested that highly anxious individuals may also display certain attachment-relevant behaviors when confronted with situations that accentuate their deepest concerns—possible relationship loss (e.g., Simpson et al., 1996). Further clarification of which specific attachment behaviors the avoidance system regulates may, therefore, be needed.

² The avoidance dimension is believed to regulate attachment-relevant behavior, particularly in highly stressful situations (Fraley & Shaver, 2000). When confronted with events that might activate their attachment systems, highly avoidant individuals mitigate negative affect by either dismissing or dampening the importance of attachment issues or by using distraction techniques (Mikulincer & Florian, 1998). Given the defensive nature of their working models (Crittenden & Ainsworth, 1989), along with their tendency to resort to avoidant coping when attachment-relevant issues surface (Mikulincer & Florian, 1998), highly avoidant individuals should not perceive greater or expanded conflicts in their daily relationships. Moreover, because they place less importance on relationships as a source of their personal well-being (cf. Crittenden & Ainsworth, 1989), highly avoidant individuals should not base their judgments of current or future relationship quality on fleeting daily relationship events. For these reasons, we did not derive predictions for the avoidance attachment dimension.

Attachment Anxiety

A great deal of research has examined how the working models of highly anxious individuals shape and guide perceptions of romantic partners and relationships as well as the pivotal role that perceptions of relationship-based conflict and support assume in the lives of highly anxious people.

Working Models and Relationship Perceptions

Compared with less anxious persons, highly anxious individuals worry about being abandoned (Hazan & Shaver, 1987) and crave emotional support, closeness, and reassurance from their romantic partners (Collins & Read, 1990). These desires and worries motivate highly anxious persons to monitor their partners and relationships closely for signs of deficient or waning physical or emotional proximity (Cassidy & Berlin, 1994; Simpson et al., 1999). Indeed, attachment figures are more chronically accessible in the minds of highly anxious individuals than other people. When presented with lexical decision tasks, for example, highly anxious individuals respond faster to the names of their attachment figures, regardless of whether they have been primed with threatening versus non-threatening words (Mikulincer, Gillath, & Shaver, 2002). Highly anxious individuals also recognize proximity-related words more quickly across different prime conditions than do others, suggesting that their attachment-related thoughts and worries are chronically activated, even when objective threats are low (Mikulincer, Birnbaum, Woddiss, & Nachmias, 2000).

The working models of highly anxious individuals also bias the way in which they perceive their romantic partners and relationships. When asked to imagine their partners behaving negatively toward them (e.g., “your partner does not comfort you when you are feeling down”), highly anxious individuals make more negative attributions about their partners’ behavior (e.g., “my partner is rejecting my desire for closeness/intimacy”), believe that their partners are selfish and deliberately unresponsive to their needs, question their partners’ love, feel less secure about the relationship, and feel greater anger toward their partners than do less anxious individuals (Collins, 1996).

These results suggest that the hypervigilance of more anxiously attached individuals may intensify the monitoring and appraisal of relationship-threatening cues. This should lead these individuals to interpret information in a manner that confirms their negative expectations of attachment figures (Cassidy & Kobak, 1988; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002). These tendencies should make highly anxious individuals even more vulnerable to experiencing distress and concerns about the stability and future of their relationships. Indeed, when they are distressed, highly anxious individuals typically display emotion-focused coping strategies that increase their distress (Mikulincer & Florian, 1995, 1998), tendencies that could also lead them to view their partners and relationships in a less positive light.

Supporting this notion, several cross-sectional studies have shown that highly anxious persons experience more intense feelings and more variable highs and lows in their relationships than others (Collins & Read, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Pietromonaco & Carnelley, 1994). Compared with less anxious individuals, they also report greater distress, anxiety, and impulsiveness in their social interactions (Kobak & Sceery, 1988; Shaver & Brennan,

1992); experience stronger negative emotions in their romantic relationships (Simpson, 1990); and often are involved in stable but dissatisfying romantic relationships (Feeney, 1994; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994). Relatively little is known, however, about the day-to-day proximal factors that make the relationships of highly anxious individuals so tumultuous.

Perceptions of Conflict and Support

Bowlby (1973, 1980) claimed that two factors—perceptions of conflict and perceptions of support in relationships—should play overriding roles in how highly anxious individuals feel about their romantic partners and relationships. Although highly anxious individuals crave comfort and support from their partners, they tend to be unhappy with the amount of support available from significant others (Rholes, Simpson, Campbell, & Grich, 2001), and they mistrust support providers (Bartholomew, Cobb, & Poole, 1997; Kobak & Sceery, 1988; Wallace & Vaux, 1994). Moreover, during social interactions with their romantic partners, highly anxious individuals who are distressed perceive greater hurtful intent if their partners provide them with “ambiguous” support, and this experience leads them to remember their partners acting in a less supportive manner in a prior videotaped interaction than neutral observers rate their partners (Collins & Feeney, 2004). Conceptually similar results have been found during a chronically stressful life transition—becoming a parent. Prior to childbirth, highly anxious women not only perceive less available emotional support from their husbands than less anxious women do, they also perceive significantly less support than their husbands report providing (Rholes et al., 2001). However, when they believe that support is being offered, highly anxious individuals acknowledge it, and their romantic relationships do not experience declines in satisfaction across time (Rholes et al., 2001). Moreover, when giving support to their romantic partners, highly anxious individuals perceive that their interactions are less warm and less supportive, and they believe that their partners are less satisfied with the support they provide than their partners actually are (Collins & Feeney, 2000).

With regard to relationship-based conflicts, highly anxious people are cognizant of both the negative, relationship-damaging and the positive, intimacy-promoting opportunities that conflict may offer (Fishtein, Pietromonaco, & Feldman Barrett, 1999). When conflicts arise, highly anxious individuals typically use emotion-focused coping strategies to manage negative affect (Mikulincer & Florian, 1998; Pistole, 1989); display dominating or coercive behaviors (Feeney, Noller, & Callan, 1994; Levy & Davis, 1988); and exhibit greater hostility and more relationship-damaging behaviors, especially when dealing with major relationship threats, than less anxious individuals (Simpson et al., 1996). Ironically, the coercive and distrusting actions of highly anxious persons during conflicts may contribute to what they fear the most—eventual alienation of their partners and relationship loss (Feeney, 1999).

Diary Studies

Recent methodological advances now allow these theoretical ideas to be tested across time using daily diary procedures. To date, only a handful of adult attachment diary studies have been conducted, and just a few have assessed both partners in romantic

relationships. In addition, no studies to our knowledge have examined how daily relationship perceptions of conflict and support are associated with current and future assessments of relationship well-being.

Tidwell, Reis, and Shaver (1996) investigated links between adult attachment styles, daily patterns of social interaction, and emotional variability in social interactions involving same-sex peers, opposite-sex peers, mixed-sex peers, and larger groups for a period of 1 week. More anxiously attached individuals varied more than did either secure or avoidant persons in the amount of positive emotions and promotive interactions they reported, but not in the amount of negative emotions or intimacy. The social interactions investigated by Tidwell et al., however, did not specifically focus on those between participants and their romantic partners (i.e., persons who are more likely to be bona fide attachment figures).

In another week-long diary study, Pietromonaco and Feldman Barrett (1997) explored links between interaction quality, emotional reactions, and views of self and others for all social interactions that lasted 10 min or longer. Although highly preoccupied (anxious) individuals did not display more extreme emotional responses across different types of relationship partners (e.g., strangers, acquaintances, friends, romantic partners), they did report more positive emotions, greater satisfaction, and more positive views of others following high-conflict interactions. As mentioned earlier, high-conflict situations may provide highly anxious individuals with an opportunity to achieve two of their cherished goals—to gain their partners' undivided attention en route to promoting deeper intimacy and greater felt security (cf. Mikulincer, 1998a). As was the case in the Tidwell et al. (1996) study, it is notable that most of the interactions were not with romantic partners.

Bradford, Feeney, and Campbell (2002) examined interactions between romantic partners, focusing on their daily disclosures over a period of 7 days. More anxious individuals were less satisfied with the disclosures they had with their partners, and more anxious women perceived a more negative tone in their interactions. It is interesting to note that partners of more anxiously attached individuals disclosed less to them and perceived their disclosures as less intimate, more negative in tone, and less satisfying.³

Murray and her colleagues have recently used daily diary data to test a model of relational contingencies of self-esteem and perceived regard in married couples. Though not testing hypotheses derived from attachment theory, this research reveals how daily interactions with spouses relate to marital satisfaction in people who differ in how they believe their spouse perceives them. Murray, Bellavia, Rose, and Griffin (2003), for example, have found that people who feel less positively regarded by their spouses (i.e., more anxiously attached people) feel more hurt on days following relationship conflicts or when their partners behaved badly toward them, and they then behave badly toward their partners in response the next day. Those who feel more valued (i.e., more secure persons) react to hurt feelings by drawing even closer to their partners on days following perceived hurts. People who feel less positively regarded are also more likely to internalize rejection experiences, feeling even worse about themselves on days after they perceive their partners have acted negatively toward them. In contrast, those who feel more positively regarded compensate for self-doubts by inferring greater love and acceptance from their partners on days after perceptions of hurt (Murray, Griffin, Rose, & Bellavia, 2003). Although these intriguing results

hint at some of the proximal processes that might make the relationships of highly anxious individuals less emotionally stable, global self-esteem, perceived positive regard, and anxious attachment are conceptually distinct constructs that correlate only moderately.

The Present Research

In sum, we hypothesize that relative to less anxious individuals, highly anxious individuals ought to perceive greater daily conflict and greater conflict escalation in their relationships, even more than their romantic partners report and perceive. Moreover, if the anxiety dimension serves the functions proposed by Fraley and Shaver (2000) and implied by Holmes and Rempel (1989), daily perceptions of both heightened relationship conflict and support should be more strongly associated with daily assessments of current and future relationship quality among highly anxious persons. A two-part study was conducted to test these notions. The first part of the study involved having participants complete 14 days of diaries, and the second part involved videotaped conflict resolution interactions. Because of the complexity of the study, we present each part separately.

Part 1

In Part 1, both members of a large sample of dating couples completed background questionnaires and then answered daily diaries for 14 consecutive days. Each day, participants answered questions about the amount of conflict, support, and perceived quality of their dating relationship on that day. They also reported the most prominent conflict and supportive event that occurred each day (if one occurred). Three sets of hypotheses were tested.

Hypothesis 1: Perceptions of Relationship Conflict

Hypothesis Set 1 focuses on daily perceptions of relationship conflict across the diary period. To the extent that the appraisal-monitoring system is sensitive to detecting signs that attachment figures could be withdrawing (Fraley & Shaver, 2000), and highly anxious people tend to be uncertain about whether they can trust their partners (Holmes & Rempel, 1989), highly anxious individuals should perceive greater relationship conflict on a daily basis. Specifically, because highly anxious individuals engage in more emotion-focused coping (Mikulincer & Florian, 1998), perceive more mal-intent on the part of their partners in ambiguous situations (Collins, 1996), and display more dysfunctional behaviors when handling major relationship conflicts (Simpson et al., 1996), they should perceive more frequent and worse daily relationship

³ Feeney (2002) also reported diary data collected from both members of 193 married couples. The diaries consisted of a checklist of partners' positive and negative behaviors, and participants completed a total of two checklists (one on a weekday and one on a weekend). The results showed that more anxiously attached individuals reported more negative partner behaviors and were less satisfied when their partners enacted more negative behaviors. The diaries, however, were administered on only 2 days, and they did not assess how people responded to the behaviors of their partners or how perceptions of partners' behaviors were related to daily perceptions of the partner or the relationship.

conflicts than less anxious individuals. If their working models bias perceptions of daily conflict, more anxious people should perceive greater daily relationship-based conflict in their relationships than would be expected on the basis of their partner's perceptions of daily relationship-based conflict. Finally, highly anxious individuals should report that their daily conflicts are more likely to escalate or expand beyond the original source, and their dating partners should corroborate these perceptions.

Hypothesis 2: Perceptions of Conflict and Support in Relation to Assessments of Relationship Quality

Hypothesis Set 2 addresses predicted relations between perceptions of relationship conflict and support and assessments of relationship quality. According to Fraley and Shaver (2000) and Holmes and Rempel (1989), highly anxious people should rely more heavily on immediate cues of relationship conflict and support when making judgments about the daily relationship quality and future well-being of their relationships. Their partners should also be aware of these stronger contingencies, given their involvement with highly anxious persons. As a result, highly anxious individuals and their romantic partners should both perceive that relationship-based conflicts are likely to have more deleterious effects on the future of their relationships. By the same token, both might perceive that supportive behaviors ought to have more positive long-term effects on their relationships. Effects involving perceptions of support, however, may be weaker than those involving conflict because of the greater weight, impact, and diagnostic value of negative events in relationships.

Although highly anxious individuals tend to be involved in less satisfying relationships (see Feeney, 1999), their level of relationship quality should be moderated by perceptions of daily conflict and daily support in their relationships. Specifically, on days when highly anxious individuals perceive greater daily conflict, they should report less relationship quality; on days when they perceive greater support, they should report greater relationship quality.

Hypothesis 3: Perceptions of Conflict and Support in Relation to Perceptions of Partners' Relationship Quality

Hypothesis Set 3 focuses on what an individual believes about his or her partner's feelings regarding the relationship. In particular, individuals who are more anxious should be more reactive to conflict when evaluating whether or not they believe that their partner feels positive about the relationship. Highly anxious individuals are known to project their own relationship feelings, insecurities, and concerns onto their partners (Mikulincer & Horesh, 1999). Consequently, they should be more likely to infer that their partners reported lower relationship quality when they (i.e., highly anxious individuals) perceive heightened conflict in the relationship. They may also believe that their partners reported higher relationship quality when they perceive greater support in the relationship. Given the biasing effects of their working models (Collins & Allard, 2001), highly anxious individuals should also perceive their partners as reporting lower relationship quality than would be expected given their partner's reports of daily relationship quality.

Highly anxious individuals should also be less confident about the future of their relationships, especially if they perceive greater

relationship conflict in their daily interactions. The same basic pattern should be evident when highly anxious individuals perceive (infer) their partners' level of confidence about the future of the relationship. In general, highly anxious individuals should perceive (infer) that their partners hold a dimmer view about the future of the relationship than would be expected from their partners' daily reports of the future of the relationship.

Some of these predictions are conceptually similar to those of studies that have investigated self-esteem (e.g., Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000) and neuroticism (e.g., Karney & Bradbury, 1997). Both of these constructs, however, are theoretically distinct from and are not highly correlated with anxious attachment (see below). Thus, we expected that each of the hypothesized effects for anxious attachment would remain statistically significant once global self-esteem and neuroticism were statistically controlled. We also anticipated that neither global self-esteem nor neuroticism would statistically interact with any of the effects involving attachment anxiety.

Method

Participants

One hundred three dating couples (103 men and 103 women) at Texas A&M University participated in this study. On average, couples had been dating for 17.45 months ($SD = 13.87$). To ensure that they were involved in fairly well-established relationships, all couples had to have been dating for a minimum of 3 months in order to participate. The average age of participants was 19.63 years ($SD = 1.33$) for men and 18.90 years ($SD = 0.87$) for women. Partners who were enrolled in introductory psychology earned partial course credit. All participants received a coupon for a free ice cream and were enrolled in a lottery to win a free dinner for two at a local restaurant in return for their participation.

Procedure

Part 1 had two phases. In Phase 1, groups of up to 8 couples initially completed a pre-diary survey. The men and women were placed in separate rooms to complete questionnaires that assessed their adult attachment orientations and their perceptions of the quality of their current dating relationships. After completing these measures, participants were informed that the second phase of Part 1 would require them to complete diary questions about conflictual and supportive interactions involving their dating partner every day for 14 days. They were informed that they would return to the laboratory each Monday, Wednesday, and Friday to drop off completed diaries and to pick up new ones. Following the 14-day diary period, participants were told that they would be asked to return to the laboratory to engage in a videotaped discussion of the most serious unresolved conflict that had occurred during the diary period.

At this point, people were asked whether they wanted to participate in the diary study. Those who were not interested were given promised credit and excused.⁴ Part 1 was then described in more detail for those who

⁴ Out of 154 couples that attended an initial session, 51 couples opted not to participate in the remainder of the study. In the majority of cases, participants already had received credit for participating in other studies and were unable to use the credit offered for the diary portion of this study. Many couples were also unable to commit to a 2-week diary study because they did not anticipate interacting much because of travel or other commitments.

remained.⁵ Participants were instructed to complete one diary form at the end of each day regarding the amount of conflict, support, and perceived quality of their dating relationship on that day and then to report on the most prominent conflict and supportive event that occurred each day (if one occurred). *Conflictual interactions* were defined as ranging from minor disagreements to serious relationship issues. Participants were instructed that they should report an experience as conflictual if it seemed so to them, regardless of whether or not their partner interpreted the experience as conflictual. *Supportive events* were defined as any instance in which participants perceived that either they or their partner acted in a helpful or facilitating manner toward the other. Participants were told to separate from their partner before completing the diary questionnaire each evening and to seal each diary in an envelope provided by the experimenters (to ensure confidentiality).

At the end of the introductory session, the general instructions were reviewed again. Participants were asked to start completing their diaries that evening and were encouraged to contact the experimenters at any time if they had any questions. Participants reported no problems completing the daily diaries.

General Measures

The general background questionnaire, which was administered during the introductory session, asked participants to provide basic demographic information (i.e., gender, age, dating status, number of months dating). It also contained measures of adult attachment, perceptions of relationship quality, self-esteem, and a measure of neuroticism.

Adult Attachment Questionnaire. The 17-item Adult Attachment Questionnaire (AAQ; Simpson et al., 1996) assessed the avoidance and anxiety attachment dimensions (see also Brennan et al., 1998; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994).⁶ Participants responded to this measure according to how they felt about romantic partners in general, including (but not necessarily limited to) their current dating partner. Sample items from the avoidance scale are "I do not like people getting too close to me" and "I'm nervous whenever anyone gets too close to me." Sample items from the anxiety scale include "Others often are reluctant to get as close as I would like" and "I am confident that my partner(s) love me just as much as I love them" (reverse scored). All items were answered on 7-point scales (anchored 1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). There are 8 avoidance and 9 anxiety items on the AAQ, meaning that scores can range from 8 to 56 for avoidance ($M = 26.57$, $SD = 7.99$ for men; $M = 25.52$, $SD = 7.10$ for women), and from 9 to 63 for anxiety ($M = 26.49$, $SD = 8.34$ for men; $M = 26.43$, $SD = 8.35$ for women). The means on each AAQ dimension are comparable to other research using the AAQ (e.g., Rholes et al., 2001; Simpson et al., 1996). The anxiety ($\alpha = .74$ for men, $.76$ for women) and the avoidance ($\alpha = .77$ for men, $.69$ for women) dimensions were internally consistent.

Perceived relationship quality. Relationship quality was assessed by Fletcher, Simpson, and Thomas's (2000) Perceived Relationship Quality Components Scale (PRQC). This scale taps six interrelated components of perceived relationship quality: satisfaction, commitment, intimacy, trust, passion, and love. Each component is assessed by three questions. Fletcher et al. have confirmed that these components are correlated and tap a higher order relationship quality factor. Responses were made on 7-point scales, anchored 1 (*not at all*) and 7 (*extremely*). Responses to all 18 items were averaged to form a global index of relationship quality, with higher scores indicating greater perceived relationship quality ($\alpha = .92$ for men, $.89$ for women).

Global self-esteem. Rosenberg's (1965) 10-item measure ($\alpha = .86$ for men, $.91$ for women) assessed global self-esteem (e.g., "I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others"). Participants responded on 7-point scales (anchored 1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*).

Neuroticism. On 5-point scales, anchored 1 (*disagree strongly*) and 5 (*agree strongly*), participants reported their level of neuroticism on seven

items taken from the Big Five Inventory, a valid and commonly used measure that has high internal consistency (John & Srivastava, 1999). Higher scores indicate more neuroticism ($\alpha = .70$ for men, $.77$ for women).

Diary accuracy. At the conclusion of the diary study, participants reported how difficult it was for them to complete the diaries on a scale anchored 1 (*very easy*) and 7 (*very difficult*). Participants also reported how accurate their diary entries were on a scale from 1 (*not accurate*) to 7 (*very accurate*).

The Daily Diary

Each daily diary had three sections. The first section asked participants how satisfied they were with their relationship and how close they felt with their partners on that day, their perceptions of the future stability of the relationship on that day, their overall perceptions of conflict and support on that day, and how they believed their partner felt on these same measures on that day. The second section asked participants to think of the most notable conflict (if any) they had with their partner that day. Space was provided to write down the details of the conflict. Participants then responded to several questions about their perceptions of the conflict and the implications it had (if any) for their relationship. The third section asked participants to think of a supportive event (if any) that occurred in their relationship that day. Space was provided to list the details of the supportive experience. Following this, participants answered a series of questions about their perceptions of the supportive event. We describe the categories of events and feelings in greater detail below.

Daily relationship satisfaction/closeness. On 7-point scales (anchored 1 = *not at all*, 7 = *extremely*), participants were asked how satisfied they felt with their relationship and how close they felt to their partner on that day. Scores from each measure were averaged for each day to create a measure of daily relationship satisfaction/closeness (average $r = .95$ for men, $.96$ for women).

Perceptions of future of the relationship. Three questions asked about perceptions of the future happiness and stability of the relationship. Specifically, participants were asked about the degree to which they felt that their relationship would continue to develop positively, be strong and secure, and might be ending soon (reverse coded) on 7-point scales (anchored 1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). Scores from each measure were averaged for each day to create an index of daily perceptions of the future of the relationship (average across days: $\alpha = .98$ for men, $.99$ for women).

Overall perceptions of conflict and support. Each day, participants were also asked how often they had experienced (a) conflict or other negative events with their partner and (b) support or other positive events with their partner on 7-point scales (anchored 1 = *none*, 7 = *many*).

Perceptions of daily conflict. Participants then listed the details of the most serious conflict they had with their partner that day (if any) and then answered questions about their perceptions of it. In terms of the amount of conflict that occurred during the 14 days, both men ($M = 6.46$, $SD = 3.73$) and women ($M = 7.65$, $SD = 3.85$) reported conflicts occurring on

⁵ No couples dropped out of the study after beginning the diary portion. We used several methods to encourage people to remain in the study. First, students who were enrolled in introductory psychology earned enough credits to satisfy their course requirement. Second, as mentioned, ice cream and lottery incentives were used. Third, all participants signed a commitment form indicating their intention to participate in the complete study. Finally, they specified in writing when and where they would complete the diaries each day.

⁶ The AAQ and the more recently introduced Experiences in Close Relationships Scale (ECR; Brennan et al., 1998) share the same underlying two-factor structure. The chief differences between the two scales are that the AAQ is shorter than the ECR (18 vs. 36 items), and the AAQ contains items that inquire about only romantic partners in general.

approximately half of the days. All questions concerning conflicts were answered on 7-point scales (anchored 1 = *none*, 7 = *extremely*). These questions fell into four categories: (a) conflict escalation (“How much did the conflict expand beyond the original topic?”), (b) perceived hurtfulness of the conflict (“How hurt were you by this conflict?; How hurt was your partner during this conflict?”), (c) positive behaviors toward the partner (“How much did you compromise to try to resolve the conflict?; How fair were you to your partner during the conflict?; How much did you listen to your partner?”; averaged across days, $\alpha = .78$ for men, $.83$ for women), and (d) perceptions of long-term implications of the conflict for the stability of the relationship (“To what degree do you think that the conflict may have [negative] long-term consequences for the survival of your relationship?”).

Perceptions of daily support. Next, participants listed the details of the most supportive event experienced with their partner that day (if any) and then answered questions about their perceptions of it. Both men and women reported supportive events occurring on about 75% of these days ($M = 9.48$, $SD = 4.46$ for men; $M = 11.29$, $SD = 3.53$ for women). All questions were answered on 7-point scales (anchored 1 = *none*, 7 = *extremely*). These questions fell into two categories: (a) positive feelings during the supportive event (“To what degree was this a positive experience for you?; “How comforted were you by this experience?; and “How helped were you by this experience?” averaged across days; $\alpha s = .90$ for men and women) and (b) perceptions of long-term implications of the supportive event for the stability of the relationship (“To what degree do you think that this experience may have [positive] long-term consequences for the survival of your relationship?”).

Results

We first examined participants’ experiences of completing the diary records. Overall, people did not feel that completing the diaries was difficult, reporting a mean of 3.00 ($SD = 1.57$) on a 7-point scale (7 = *very difficult*). In addition, no participants indicated that their diary entries were low in accuracy, with the mean accuracy rating being 5.31 ($SD = 1.32$) on a 7-point scale (7 = *very accurate*). Finally, participants reported that completing the diary records did not interfere with their normal daily experiences ($M = 2.58$, $SD = 1.59$; 1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*).

Diary Data Analyses

The diary data were hierarchically nested. Each individual completed a questionnaire concerning his or her relationship and events associated with it each day for 14 consecutive days. Daily responses, therefore, were nested within person. In addition, because the data were generated by individuals involved with particular partners, individuals were also nested within dyads. A fairly complex pattern of interdependent data resulted from this three-level nested data structure because the day-to-day scores within individual are not independent of one another (e.g., an individual’s daily relationship satisfaction/closeness on Day 1 is related to her or his daily relationship satisfaction/closeness on Day 2), the day-to-day scores across individuals are not independent of one another (e.g., an individual’s daily relationship satisfaction/closeness on Day 1 is related to her or his partner’s daily relationship satisfaction/closeness on Day 1), and the individual-level scores are not independent of one another (e.g., an individual’s overall assessment of the quality of the relationship on the PRQC is related to her or his partner’s overall assessment on the PRQC). Given this complexity, we briefly overview our data analytic strategy. When discussing the different models used to test Hy-

pothesis Sets 1–3, we provide prototype equations to illustrate our approach more fully.

Multilevel modeling, also known as hierarchical linear modeling (HLM; Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002; Kenny, Kashy, & Bolger, 1998) has become the standard data analytic approach for diary data during the past decade (see Bolger, Davis, & Rafaeli, 2003). In many diary studies, individuals are independent from one another (i.e., the sample involves a group of unrelated individuals). This is not true of the present study.

For purposes of simplification, suppose that we had data from only women and that we wanted to test the hypothesis that individuals who are more anxious should be more sensitive or reactive to conflict when evaluating the quality of their relationships. Because this simplified example involves only women, the data structure involves only two levels: the person level and the diary or day level. Diary (or day, because diaries were completed only once per day) is the lower level unit of analysis, and person is the upper level unit of analysis. For this data structure, daily perceptions of conflict and relationship quality are lower level variables, whereas attachment anxiety is an upper level variable. In the simplest sense, estimation using HLM has two steps. In the first step, an analysis is computed for each upper level unit, which in the current case would be person. That is, an analysis would be computed for each person examining the relationship between perception of conflict and relationship quality across the 14-day period. In the second step, the results of the first step analyses are aggregated across the upper level units (the persons). Significance testing is typically conducted at the highest level in the data structure, which is the level at which there is independence. In this simplified example, this would be the person level.

This two-step analysis can be further specified as a series of Level 1 and Level 2 equations. The Level 1 equation denotes the relation between the lower level variables:

$$Y_{ij} = b_{0i} + b_{1i}X_{ij} + e_{ij},$$

where Y_{ij} is the relationship satisfaction/closeness for Woman i on Day j , and X_{ij} that woman’s relationship conflict on Day j . In this equation, b_{0i} represents the average relationship satisfaction/closeness for Woman i , and b_{1i} represents the coefficient for the relationship between conflict and relationship satisfaction/closeness for that woman (i). The Level 2 equations involve treating the slopes and intercepts from the first-step analyses as outcome variables in two regressions. For these Level 2 equations, the regression coefficients from the Level 1 equation are assumed to be a function of a person-level predictor variable Z :

$$b_{0i} = a_0 + a_1Z_i + d_i;$$

$$b_{1i} = c_0 + c_1Z_i + f_i.$$

There are two second-step regression equations in this example, the first of which treats the first-step intercepts as a function of the Z variable and the second of which treats the first-step regression coefficients as a function of Z . So in our example, the first Level 2 equation involves predicting the average relationship satisfaction/closeness as a function of the woman’s attachment anxiety, and the second Level 2 equation involves predicting the woman’s conflict–satisfaction/closeness relationship as a function of her attachment anxiety. Note that a small amount of algebra can be

used to combine these two sets of equations into the following single equation that shows the direct relationship between the woman's satisfaction/closeness on a particular day, the amount of conflict on that day, and the woman's attachment anxiety:

$$Y_{ij} = a_0 + c_0X_{ij} + a_1Z_i + c_1Z_iX_{ij} + f_iX_{ij} + d_i + e_{ij}.$$

The last three effects in the model are the random effects, with e_{ij} representing the unexplained variation in satisfaction/closeness for Woman i on Day j after accounting for conflict, d_i representing the unexplained variation in average satisfaction/closeness after accounting for attachment anxiety, and f_i representing the unexplained variation in the conflict–satisfaction/closeness relationship.

The present study goes beyond this simple example, because both individuals involved in a dyadic relationship reported on their daily conflicts and supportive interactions every day for 14 days. In addition, the two relationship partners are distinguishable with respect to the variable gender (i.e., the dyads are heterosexual dating couples). Thus, our data have a three-level nested structure with day as the lowest level (Level 1), individual as the middle level (Level 2), and dyad as the highest level (Level 3). In this data set, independence can only be assumed to exist from dyad to dyad.

The data analytic approach we took to examining these data were strongly influenced by the actor–partner interdependence model (Kashy & Kenny, 2000), which suggests that when individuals are involved in an interdependent relationship, their outcomes depend not only on their own characteristics and inputs but also on their partner's characteristics and inputs. As an example, consider how the perceptions of the amount of conflict that occurs over a 2-week period might be affected by attachment anxiety. According to the actor–partner interdependence model, the actor effect estimates the degree to which individuals higher in anxiety perceive more conflict. The partner effect estimates the degree to which individuals whose partners are higher in anxiety perceive greater conflict. Including partner effects in the model allows one to test for the mutual influence that might occur between individuals within a relationship and controls for variance in individuals' outcome scores that could be associated with their partners' predictor variable scores.

We tested the following models using the PROC MIXED procedure in SAS (Campbell & Kashy, 2002). Gender was effect coded (–1 for women, +1 for men), and all continuous predictor variables were centered on the grand mean. All significant and marginally significant effects that emerged in the analyses are reported.

Perceptions of Daily Conflict

Hypothesis Set 1 proposes that individuals who score higher in attachment anxiety should perceive greater relationship conflict on a daily basis and that their perceptions of the nature of conflict should differ from persons who score lower in anxiety. This set of hypotheses also suggests that the partners of anxious individuals should realize that anxious individuals perceive conflict in unique ways. This first set of hypotheses was tested using a model that included a diary-level outcome variable (e.g., the perceived amount of conflict that occurred on a particular day) and predictor variables measured at the individual level (e.g., attachment anxiety and avoidance). That is, there were no diary-level predictor variables. From the multiple-step analysis perspective, this analysis

involves very basic Level 1 models in which the outcome (conflict on Day k for Person j in Dyad i) is simply specified to be a function of an intercept and error, and so in essence, we are simply computing the person's average outcome over the 14 days:

$$Y_{ijk} = b_{0ij} + e_{ijk}.$$

The Level 2 model, then, suggests that a person's general perception of conflict (b_{0ij}) is a function of both that person's attachment anxiety (and avoidance) and the person's partner's attachment anxiety (and avoidance). Gender is also included in this model because the dyad members are distinguishable with respect to gender. The Level 2 model is then

$$\begin{aligned} b_{0ij} = & a_{0i} + a_{1i}(\text{actor anxiety}) + a_{2i}(\text{partner anxiety}) \\ & + a_{3i}(\text{actor avoidance}) + a_{4i}(\text{partner avoidance}) \\ & + a_{5i}(\text{gender}) + d_{ij}. \end{aligned}$$

Notice that the coefficients in this Level 2 model are subscripted for dyad. That is, a_{1i} suggests the actor effect of anxiety might vary from dyad to dyad. The final level of equations aggregates over dyads and can be used to incorporate dyad-level variables. In our analysis, we do not have any such variables, and so the final equations are simply aggregations (i.e., intercepts or grand means):

$$a_{0i} = c_0 + f_i;$$

$$a_{1i} = c_1;$$

$$a_{2i} = c_2;$$

$$a_{3i} = c_3;$$

$$a_{4i} = c_4;$$

$$a_{5i} = c_5.$$

Finally, note too that although there is a random effect for the intercept, meaning that there can be random variation from couple to couple in the amount of conflict reported, there is no random component for the other effects. This constraint is required because of the fact that each dyad involves only two individuals (see Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2005). A mathematical simplification of the three levels of equation into a single equation produces

$$\begin{aligned} Y_{ijk} = & c_0 + c_1(\text{actor anxiety}) + c_2(\text{partner anxiety}) \\ & + c_3(\text{actor avoidance}) + c_4(\text{partner avoidance}) \\ & + c_5(\text{gender}) + d_{ij} + e_{ijk} + f_i. \quad (1) \end{aligned}$$

Although we have included main effects for actor and partner as well as gender in the above example equation, interaction terms between gender and the actor and partner effects of anxiety and avoidance were originally entered into the models, but no gender interactions were found. Therefore, all of the results for the following models are presented pooled across gender. Main effects of gender indicating different mean levels on the dependent variables between men and women emerged in some models, however, and these differences are discussed in the text. Estimates of the degree to which the various individual level effects predicted daily reports

of conflict appear in Table 1, and parallel results predicting daily reports of support appear in Table 2.

Perceptions of overall conflict. We predicted that more anxiously attached individuals would perceive higher levels of overall conflict with their partners across the diary period. This prediction was supported. As reported in Table 1, the actor effect of anxious attachment predicted perceptions of overall conflict, with more anxiously attached individuals perceiving greater conflict on a daily basis. There was no evidence of a partner effect for anxious attachment, nor were there any significant effects for avoidant attachment.

More anxious individuals might perceive greater relationship conflict because they are actually experiencing more daily conflicts with their partners. To address this possibility, the above analyses were reconducted, this time treating the total number of conflicts reported during the diary period as the dependent variable. A main effect of gender emerged in this analysis, indicating that women reported more conflicts than men did. A marginally significant actor effect of anxious attachment also emerged, suggesting that more anxiously attached individuals tended to perceive (report) a greater number of conflicts during the diary period. No other significant effects emerged.

Another way to determine whether more anxious individuals perceive greater conflict in their relationships across time is to test whether their perception of daily conflict is greater than what would be expected on the basis of their partner's reports of daily conflict. This can be accomplished by examining both partners' perceptions of overall conflict each day across the diary period and then comparing the numbers of conflicts that each partner reported. Although partners tended to agree on the overall level of conflict in their relationships on a daily basis ($r = .45, p < .01$), and they reported a similar number of conflicts ($r = .67, p < .001$), these correlations are only moderate in magnitude. Perceptions of conflict, therefore, could reflect some perceptual bias as well as some reality. To explore this possibility, actor perceptions of overall conflict were regressed on partner perceptions of overall conflict, with the residuals computed and treated as a dependent variable in

a subsequent analysis. Similarly, the number of conflicts reported by actors was regressed on the number of conflicts reported by partners, with the residuals computed and treated as a dependent variable in a second analysis. A positive residual indicates that an individual perceived more conflict (or reported more conflicts) than should be expected on the basis of the amount of conflict his or her partner perceived or reported. We predicted that anxious attachment would be positively associated with these residual scores, suggesting that more anxious individuals perceived greater conflict than anticipated, given their partner's reports of the same events. Both the actor and partner effects of anxious attachment were entered as predictor variables in each analysis. In the analysis involving overall perceptions of conflict, the only effect that emerged was the predicted actor effect of anxious attachment, $b = .11, t(204) = 2.71, p < .01$. It confirmed that more anxiously attached individuals perceived greater overall conflict in their relationships than expected on the basis of their partners' reports of conflict. In the analysis involving the number of reported conflicts, a marginal actor effect of anxious attachment also emerged, $b = .39, t(201) = 1.83, p = .06$, which suggests that more anxiously attached individuals reported more conflicts than expected in light of the number of conflicts reported by their partners.

Conflict escalation. Did the daily conflicts experienced by highly anxious individuals and their partners escalate beyond the focal topic or issue? As reported in Table 1, when conflict escalation was the dependent measure, more anxiously attached individuals reported that their daily conflicts did escalate more beyond the original topic or issue. A marginal partner effect of anxious attachment also emerged, revealing that the partners of more anxiously attached individuals also reported (confirmed) that the conflicts expanded and escalated beyond the original topic or issue. As expected, no effects were found for attachment avoidance.

Hurtfulness of the conflict. There was also evidence that more anxiously attached individuals felt more hurt by conflicts in their relationship, given the significant actor effect of anxious attachment reported in Table 1. A main effect of gender also revealed

Table 1
Predicting Perceptions of Conflict During the Diary Period: Part 1

Measure	Amount of conflict	Number of conflicts	Conflict escalation	Hurtfulness of conflict for self	Hurtfulness of conflict for partner	Long-term consequences of conflict	Positive behavior during conflict
Intercept	1.99	7.06	2.03	2.50	2.34	2.06	4.52
Gender	-.07	-.57*	.09	-.21**	.08	.03	.10
Attachment anxiety							
Actor effect	.11*	.50†	.18**	.25**	.10	.20**	.04
Partner effect	.08	.17	.11†	.04	.17*	.13*	-.09
Attachment avoidance							
Actor effect	.07	.05	.06	.04	.12	.05	-.01
Partner effect	-.01	.37	-.05	.05	-.04	.01	-.03
Neuroticism							
Actor effect	.20**	.09	.16*	.23*	.07	.10	.06
Partner effect	.17**	.07	.17*	.15	.12	.19*	-.19*
Self-esteem							
Actor effect	-.11**	-.00	.14**	-.16**	-.18**	-.12*	.09
Partner effect	-.12**	-.03	-.14**	-.15*	-.12*	-.15**	.14**

Note. Values from the multilevel models can be interpreted as unstandardized regression coefficients. Separate models were conducted to estimate actor and partner effects for Neuroticism and self-esteem.

† $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 2
Predicting Perceptions of Supportive Events During the Diary Period: Part 1

Measure	Amount of perceived support	Number of supportive events	Positive experience of support	Long-term consequences of support
Intercept	4.13	10.38	5.52	3.70
Gender	-.36**	-.88**	-.31*	-.09
Attachment anxiety				
Actor effect	.08	.29	-.01	.26*
Partner effect	-.01	-.20	.07	.27*
Attachment avoidance				
Actor effect	-.01	.32	-.13*	.05
Partner effect	.03	.55†	-.06	-.09
Neuroticism				
Actor effect	-.01	-.01	-.02	.06
Partner effect	-.01	.05	-.01	-.05
Self-esteem				
Actor effect	.01	.09	.17**	.03
Partner effect	.00	-.06	.03	.00

Note. Values from the multilevel models can be interpreted as unstandardized regression coefficients. Separate models were conducted to estimate actor and partner effects for Neuroticism and self-esteem.

† $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

that women reported being more hurt by conflicts than did men. Notably, participants accurately believed or inferred that their more anxious partners felt more hurt by relationship conflicts, as indicated by the significant partner effect predicting hurtfulness of the conflict for the partner. No effects were found for attachment avoidance in either model.

Long-term consequences of conflict. Also as reported in Table 1, significant actor and partner effects involving attachment anxiety revealed that both highly anxious individuals and their partners thought that conflicts would have a more negative bearing on the future of their relationship. The emergence of both actor and partner effects suggests that perceived relationship conflicts have more pernicious effects on relationships in which at least one partner is highly anxious. Once again, no effects of avoidant attachment emerged.

Positive behavior during conflict. Finally, no significant effects were found for either attachment anxiety or avoidance in the model that tested how positively participants reported behaving toward their partners during relationship conflicts (see Table 1).

Perceptions of Daily Support

Individuals also provided information regarding the supportive interactions they had with their dating partners on a daily basis. Because the appraisal-monitoring system should be more sensitive to detecting relationship conflict than support, we were not certain whether significant effects for anxious attachment would emerge for daily perceptions of support. As was done for the measures of conflict, we predicted each of the three measures of support (overall amount, positive experience, long-term consequences) as a function of the person's gender, actor and partner effects for attachment, and actor and partner effects for avoidance.

Perceptions of overall support. As is clear from Table 2, there was no evidence that a person's attachment orientation or the person's partner's attachment orientation predicted the overall amount of perceived support on a day-to-day basis. A main effect of gender revealed that women perceived more overall support

than did men. In the model predicting the actual number of supportive events during the diary period, women also reported more supportive events. A marginal partner effect of avoidant attachment indicated that the partners of more avoidantly attached individuals also reported more supportive events.

Positive experience of support. Although no effects were found for anxious attachment in the model predicting positive experiences of support, an actor effect for avoidant attachment was found (see Table 2). It revealed that more avoidant individuals reported that daily supportive events in their relationship were a less positive experience for them. This outcome is consistent with previous research revealing that highly avoidant people dislike giving or receiving support (see Mikulincer & Florian, 1998).

Long-term consequences of support. As presented in Table 2, both actor and partner effects involving attachment anxiety emerged in the model predicting individuals' beliefs that supportive events would have more positive long-term consequences for the stability of their relationships. Specifically, more anxious individuals perceived that supportive events had more positive implications for the survival of their relationships, and their partners reported similar perceptions. No significant effects were found for avoidant attachment.

The Impact of Conflict on Relationship Quality

Hypothesis Set 2 posits that individuals who are more anxious should be more sensitive or reactive to conflict and perhaps support when evaluating the quality of their relationships. Hypothesis Set 3 similarly suggests that individuals who are more anxious should be more reactive to conflict when evaluating whether they think their partner feels satisfied with/close in the relationship. As we have seen, more anxiously attached individuals perceive and report greater conflict in their relationships, even more than would be expected on the basis of their partners' perceptions of conflict. We hypothesized that more anxious individuals who perceive greater conflict should also be less optimistic about the current state and the future of their relationships. To test these hypotheses,

the data analytic model was altered to include a lower level predictor variable: the individual's overall perception of conflict. Without going through the three levels of models, as we did above, a prototypical equation is

$$\begin{aligned}
 Y_{ijk} = & c_0 + c_1(\text{actor anxiety}) + c_2(\text{partner anxiety}) \\
 & + c_3(\text{actor avoidance}) + c_4(\text{partner avoidance}) \\
 & + c_5(\text{gender}) + c_6(\text{perceptions of daily conflict}) \\
 & + c_7(\text{actor anxiety} \times \text{perceptions of daily conflict}) \\
 & + c_8(\text{PRQC}) + h_{ij}(\text{perceptions of daily conflict}) \\
 & + d_{ij} + e_{ijk} + f_i. \tag{2}
 \end{aligned}$$

This model is very similar to the model presented in Equation 1, but it includes a few additional predictors. Individuals' perceptions of daily conflict, as well as the interaction between daily perceptions of conflict and the actor effect of attachment anxiety, are included as predictor variables. The interaction allows us to assess whether individuals who are higher in anxiety feel particularly negative about their relationship on days with higher levels of conflict. We also entered global perceptions of relationship quality (assessed by the PRQC before the diary period) as a covariate in each analysis because we wanted to assess fluctuations in perceptions of the quality and future of the relationship on a daily basis. An additional error term (h_{ij} * perceptions of daily conflict) that reflects how much the relation between daily perceived conflict

and the outcome variable varies across individuals is also added to the model (i.e., a random slope). The dependent variables were daily reports of satisfaction/closeness and perceptions of the future of the relationship from both the self and the partner. In each analysis, scores on the PRQC were positively associated with daily perceptions of both self and partner relationship satisfaction/closeness as well as with daily perceptions of the self and the partner's ratings of the relationship's future. Although interactions with gender were initially estimated, no gender interactions emerged. Therefore, they are not discussed further. The results of these analyses are displayed in Table 3.

Daily reports of own satisfaction/closeness. As shown in Table 3, in the model predicting daily reports of each participant's relationship satisfaction/closeness, a main effect of perceptions of overall conflict emerged. It revealed that on days when participants reported more overall conflict, they also reported lower relationship satisfaction/closeness. No main effect of attachment anxiety or avoidance was found, but the predicted interaction between perceptions of daily conflict and attachment anxiety did emerge. As displayed in Figure 1, this interaction indicated that even though all participants reported lower relationship satisfaction/closeness on days when they perceived greater conflict with their partners, this effect was more pronounced for highly anxious individuals.

Daily self-reports of the future of the relationship. As was true for relationship satisfaction/closeness, individuals who perceived greater daily conflict reported less optimistic relationship futures.

Table 3
Predicting Perceptions of Own and Partner's Perceived Relationship Satisfaction and Future of the Relationship During the Diary Period: Part 1

Measure	Daily reports		Daily perceptions	
	Own satisfaction–closeness	Future of relationship (self)	Partner's satisfaction–closeness	Future of relationship (partner)
Intercept	6.10	6.38	6.03	6.36
Gender	-.04	-.07†	-.03	-.03
PRQC	.65***	.59***	.56***	.49***
Attachment anxiety				
Actor effect	-.03	.02	-.05	-.07
Partner effect	.01	.02	.02	.01
Attachment avoidance				
Actor effect	.01	-.01	-.01	.03
Partner effect	.02	.02	.03	.02
Overall perceptions of conflict	-.30***	-.20***	-.33***	-.20***
Overall Perceptions of Conflict × Actor Effect of Anxious Attachment	-.05*	-.06**	-.04†	-.04*
Neuroticism				
Actor effect	-.01	-.00	-.01	-.01
Partner effect	.06	.05	-.05	.06
Overall Perceptions of Conflict × Actor Effect of Neuroticism	-.01	-.01	-.00	.01
Self-esteem				
Actor effect	.06†	.06	.11**	.09*
Partner effect	-.01	.02	.03	.02
Overall Perceptions of Conflict × Actor Effect of Self-esteem	.01	.03	.00	.02

Note. Values from the multilevel models can be interpreted as unstandardized regression coefficients. Separate models were conducted to estimate actor and partner effects for Neuroticism and self-esteem. PRQC = Perceived Relationship Quality Components Scale.
 † $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

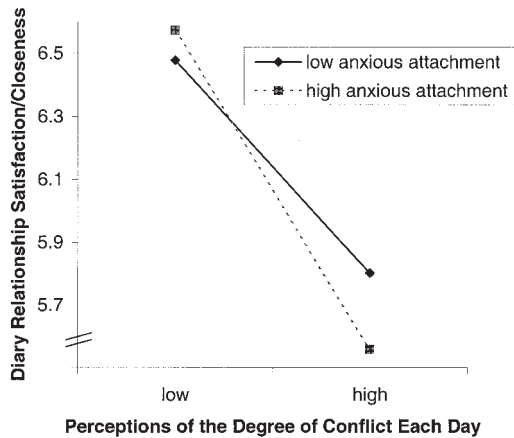


Figure 1. The interaction of individuals' anxious attachment and overall perceptions of conflict across the diary period predicting daily relationship satisfaction/closeness. Regression lines are plotted for individuals scoring 1 standard deviation above and below the sample means on anxious attachment and daily perceived conflict.

A marginal main effect of gender revealed that women were somewhat more optimistic about the future of their relationships than men were. No main effects involving the two attachment dimensions emerged, but there was a significant interaction between the actor effect of attachment anxiety and perceptions of overall daily conflict. As depicted in Figure 2, compared with less anxious persons, more anxious individuals were less optimistic about the future of their relationships on days when they perceived greater conflict with their partners.

Daily perceptions of partner's satisfaction/closeness. Hypothesis Set 3 suggests that more anxious individuals should be more reactive to conflict as revealed by their inferences about their partner's level of satisfaction/closeness. As reported in Table 3, no main effects of the two attachment dimensions emerged, but a marginally significant interaction involving perceptions of conflict

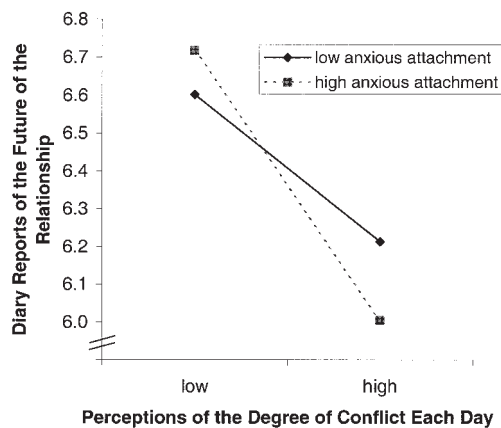


Figure 2. The interaction of individuals' anxious attachment and overall perceptions of conflict across the diary period predicting daily reports of the future stability of the relationship. Regression lines are plotted for individuals scoring 1 standard deviation above and below the sample means on anxious attachment and daily perceived conflict.

and the actor effect of attachment anxiety did. Paralleling earlier findings, it revealed that more anxious individuals perceived that their partners were less satisfied with/close in the relationship on days when their own perceptions of overall conflict were higher. In addition, participants who perceived greater overall conflict reported that their partners were less satisfied.

To ascertain whether more anxious individuals perceived that their partners were less satisfied than would be expected on the basis of their partner's daily reports of satisfaction/closeness, we partialled how satisfied individuals reported being on a daily basis from how satisfied their partners believed them to be each day. A negative residual would signify that individuals believed their partners were less satisfied than should be expected according to their partner's reported level of satisfaction/closeness. We predicted that more anxious individuals would view their partners as less satisfied than would be expected on the basis of their partner's reports. An analysis was conducted predicting the residual score with the actor and partner effects of anxious attachment. Supporting predictions, the only effect that emerged was the predicted actor effect of attachment anxiety, $b = -.08$, $t(195) = -2.03$, $p < .05$.

Daily partner perceptions of the future of the relationship. As reported in column 4 of Table 3, the next analysis examined how optimistic participants believed their partners were about the future of the relationship on a daily basis. Those who perceived greater overall conflict reported that their partners were less optimistic. As shown in Table 3, no main effects of the two attachment dimensions emerged, but a significant interaction involving perceptions of conflict and the actor effect of attachment anxiety did emerge (see Figure 3). It revealed that more anxious individuals thought their partners were less optimistic about the future of their relationship than were less anxious persons on days when their own (i.e., anxious individuals') perceptions of overall daily conflict were higher. Similar to the daily reports of satisfaction/closeness, a follow-up analysis was conducted to test whether more anxious

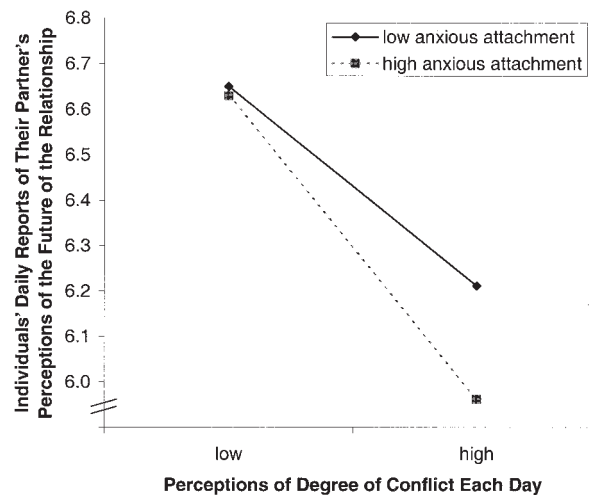


Figure 3. The interaction of individuals' anxious attachment and overall perceptions of conflict across the diary period predicting daily reports of their partner's perceptions of the future of the relationship. Regression lines are plotted for individuals scoring 1 standard deviation above and below the sample means on anxious attachment and daily perceived conflict.

individuals also perceived that their partners were less optimistic about the future of the relationship than should be expected on the basis of their partner's reports of relationship optimism. An actor effect of attachment anxiety was found, $b = -.09$, $t(196) = -2.19$, $p < .05$. As predicted, more anxiously attached individuals believed that their partners held a dimmer view about the future of the relationship than would be expected on the basis of their partner's actual views.

The Impact of Support on Relationship Quality

Additional models similar to those reported above were also tested, this time treating perceptions of overall support and the interaction of these perceptions with anxious attachment as predictor variables. The outcome variables once again were the measures of the person's own perceptions of relationship quality as well as the person's inferred relationship quality for the partner.

In all analyses, a main effect of overall perceptions of support emerged, indicating that on days when participants perceived greater overall support they (a) were more satisfied/close, $b = .18$, $t(194) = 11.59$, $p < .001$; (b) believed that their partners were more satisfied/close, $b = .18$, $t(196) = 10.93$, $p < .001$; (c) were more optimistic about the future of their relationship, $b = .09$, $t(197) = 7.52$, $p < .001$; and (d) believed that their partners were more optimistic about the future of the relationship, $b = .09$, $t(199) = 7.22$, $p < .001$. No main effects of either attachment dimension were found in these analyses. Additionally, only one marginally significant interaction between perceptions of overall support and the actor effect of anxious attachment was found in the models predicting daily reports of one's own satisfaction/closeness, $b = .03$, $t(187) = 1.69$, $p = .08$. It indicates that more anxiously attached individuals tended to be happier on days when they perceived greater support in their relationships.

Can Behaving Well During Conflict Mitigate the Effects of Conflict?

Given our predictions, we conducted exploratory analyses to determine whether behaving in a more positive, supportive manner toward one's partner during conflicts might have mitigated the negative effects of daily conflicts. Three models were tested that treated participants' perceptions of conflict across the diary period as dependent variables: whether conflicts expanded beyond the original topic, how hurt individuals felt by conflicts, and whether conflicts were perceived to have negative consequences for the future of the relationship. The predictor variables were gender, the actor and partner effects of the attachment dimensions (individual-level predictors), and how positively participants' partners reported behaving during each conflict (a diary-level predictor variable). The interaction between each participant's anxious attachment score and his or her partner's reports of how positively the participant behaved during the conflicts was also entered to test whether more versus less anxiously attached individuals were differentially comforted by their partner's level of positive behavior. Interactions involving gender were also entered, but no gender differences emerged, and the results are presented pooled across gender. No effects emerged in the model predicting reports of conflicts expanding beyond their original topic or issue. However,

a main effect did emerge predicting how hurt participants felt by conflict, $b = -.22$, $t(122) = -6.04$, $p < .01$. It revealed that participants felt less hurt when their partners reported behaving more positively toward them during conflicts. (A significant interaction involving anxious attachment was not found.)

A marginally significant main effect was also found in the model predicting participants' perceptions of the long-term consequences that conflicts might have for the future of their relationships, $b = -.07$, $t(124) = -1.94$, $p = .055$, which suggests that participants felt more comforted by their partner's positive behaviors during conflicts. Moreover, as shown in Figure 4, an interaction involving anxious attachment also emerged, $b = .08$, $t(127) = 2.01$, $p < .05$. More anxiously attached individuals perceived that conflicts would have more negative long-term consequences for the future of their relationships, regardless of how positively their partners behaved toward them. Less anxious individuals, by comparison, were more comforted by their partner's positive behaviors. No significant effects for avoidant attachment emerged in any of these analyses.

Alternative Explanations

Past research has shown that individuals who have lower self-esteem believe that negative relationship events are particularly detrimental to the stability of their relationships. Murray et al. (2000), for instance, found that low-self-esteem individuals underestimate how positively their partners view them, which leads these persons to harbor less benevolent perceptions of their partners and relationships. The connection between low self-esteem and poor relationship well-being is mediated by perceptions of heightened felt insecurity in the relationship. These results are conceptually similar to some of the present findings, which indicate that more anxiously attached individuals interpret conflicts as

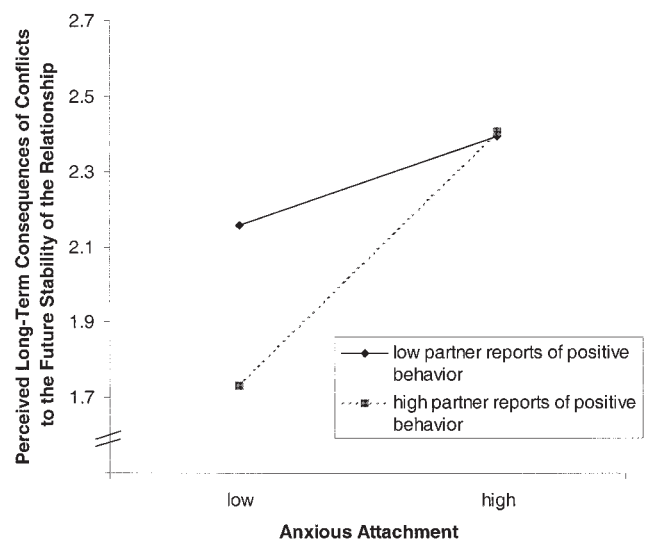


Figure 4. The interaction of individuals' anxious attachment and how positively their partners reported behaving during conflicts during the diary period predicting perceived long-term consequences of conflict on the future stability of the relationship. Regression lines are plotted for individuals scoring 1 standard deviation above and below the sample means on anxious attachment and partner-reported positive behavior during conflicts.

having more deleterious effects on their relationships than is true for less anxious individuals. This is not entirely surprising given that anxiously attached individuals tend to have lower self-esteem in the context of relationships (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Nevertheless, self-esteem and anxious attachment are distinct theoretical constructs. Low self-esteem, for example, is merely one feature among many that define anxious attachment, and anxious attachment reflects only one facet of self-esteem—relationship-specific feelings of self-worth. Accordingly, we wanted to determine whether the results reported above might be attributable to the lower global self-esteem of more anxiously attached individuals. In the present sample, anxious attachment and global self-esteem were correlated within men ($r = -.24, p < .05$) and women ($r = -.31, p < .01$), but these correlations are moderate in magnitude. When the models discussed above were run with the actor and partner effects of global self-esteem as predictors in place of scores on the two attachment dimensions, the results involving self-esteem were consistent with those involving anxious attachment (see Tables 1–3). One critical distinction, though, was that self-esteem did not interact with daily perceptions of conflict in the models that predicted satisfaction/closeness and the future stability of the relationship. According to attachment theory, global self-esteem should correlate with anxious attachment, but attachment anxiety should predict outcomes above and beyond global self-esteem. To test this, the analyses reported above were conducted again, this time controlling for each participant's global self-esteem (reported before the diary period). Further analyses were conducted to test for possible interactions between global self-esteem and all of the variables with which attachment anxiety interacted. All of the statistically significant effects reported above remained significant or marginally significant once global self-esteem was controlled.

More anxiously attached individuals also tend to have slightly more neuroticism (Shaver & Brennan, 1992). In the current sample, anxious attachment and neuroticism were positively correlated within both men ($r = .23, p < .05$) and women ($r = .35, p < .01$), yet these correlations are also moderate in size. Previous research has documented that more neurotic individuals typically experience increases in negative affect on encountering negative events in their relationships (Karney & Bradbury, 1997). When the models discussed above were run with the actor and partner effects of neuroticism as predictors in place of scores on the two attachment dimensions, the results for neuroticism were consistent with those for anxious attachment (see Tables 1–3). However, neuroticism did not interact with daily perceptions of conflict in the models that predicted satisfaction/closeness and the future stability of the relationship. The analyses reported above were then reconducted controlling for participants' scores on neuroticism (also reported before the diary period). All of the significant effects reported above remained significant or marginally significant once neuroticism was statistically controlled.

In sum, these discriminant validity results indicate that the current findings are not attributable to the variance that attachment anxiety shares with global self-esteem or neuroticism. Most likely, they reflect the impact of highly anxious individuals' attachment concerns, which revolve around unmet emotional needs and fears about loss or abandonment in relationships.

Summary of Part 1 Results

One set of findings centered on individuals' perceptions of conflict and support each day across the diary period. More anxiously attached individuals perceived greater relationship conflict each day, and they reported a larger number of conflicts across the entire diary period (though this latter effect was only marginally significant). They also perceived or reported more conflict than would be expected on the basis of their partner's perceptions or reports of the conflicts that occurred. Anxious attachment was not related to perceptions of daily support or the number of supportive events reported each day.

A second set of findings involved individuals' responses to conflictual and supportive events that occurred each day in their relationship. As a rule, more anxiously attached individuals felt that conflicts (a) escalated beyond their original topic (as did their partners), (b) were more hurtful to them (and their partners agreed), and (c) would have more negative long-term consequences for the future stability of their relationship (as did their partners). Although less anxious individuals believed that conflicts would not have negative long-term implications when their partners reported behaving in a positive, supportive manner, more anxious individuals were not assuaged by their partner's positive behavior during conflicts. They did, however, feel that supportive events, in the absence of conflict, would have more beneficial long-term implications for their relationships. The only significant effect for the avoidance attachment dimension revealed that more avoidant individuals reported that supportive events were a less positive experience for them.

A third set of findings dealt with links between anxious attachment and the amount of relationship conflict perceived each day in relation to perceptions of relationship quality and the future of the relationship. More anxiously attached individuals reported less satisfaction/closeness and less optimistic views about the future of their relationships on days when they perceived greater relationship conflict. They also felt that their partners were less satisfied/close and felt more pessimistic about the future of the relationship on days when they (individuals) perceived greater conflict. More anxiously attached individuals also believed that their partners were less satisfied/close and less optimistic about the future of the relationship than their partners actually reported being. One marginally significant interaction between anxious attachment and perceptions of support also emerged, suggesting that more anxiously attached individuals were more satisfied/close than their less anxious counterparts on days when they perceived greater support.

Part 2

Supporting attachment theory and Holmes and Rempel's (1989) model of dyadic trust, Part 1 confirms that more anxiously attached individuals react more negatively to relationship conflicts and perceive their relationships less positively on days when they perceive greater conflict. They also respond more positively to supportive events in their relationships. Although the diary results reported in Part 1 have many methodological benefits, they also have some limitations. Most notably, the diary data were based exclusively on self-reports of perceptions of conflict, support, and relationship quality. It is possible that these reports could have

been affected by how people felt they or their partners had behaved in similar situations in the past rather than by the actual behaviors displayed during the diary period. More convincing support for the results of the diary study would be marshaled if independent observers confirmed that more anxious individuals and their partners actually were more adversely affected by the discussion of a relationship conflict. In Part 2, therefore, we asked each couple to return to the lab to discuss and attempt to resolve the most major conflict they had experienced during the diary period. Each discussion was videotaped and subsequently rated on theoretically relevant dimensions by trained coders.

In Part 1, more anxiously attached individuals reported that daily relationship conflicts were more likely to escalate beyond the original topic or issue, they felt more hurt by conflicts, and they believed that conflicts would have more pernicious consequences for the future stability of their relationships. When trying to resolve a major conflict in the lab, therefore, we predicted that more anxiously attached individuals would (a) overreact or escalate the severity of the conflict being discussed (rated by observers), (b) appear more distressed during the discussion (rated by observers), and (c) report feeling more distressed after the discussion. Participants in Part 1 also reported that their more anxiously attached partners were affected more negatively by conflicts and that conflicts were more damaging to their relationships. Thus, we also predicted that the partners of anxiously attached individuals would be more distressed during the videotaped discussion (rated by observers) and would report feeling more distressed following the discussion.

Part 1 also reveals that despite the fact that more anxiously attached individuals responded more positively to supportive events in their relationships, they were not assuaged by their partner's positive behaviors during conflicts, whereas less anxious individuals were. Positive partner behaviors in Part 1, however, were assessed by partner self-reports, which may not have accurately reflected the partner's actual behavior during the conflicts. In Part 2, therefore, we had observers rate how positively each participant behaved toward her or his partner during the conflict discussion to test whether more anxiously attached individuals felt less distressed if their partner behaved in a more positive manner or if they felt distressed regardless of their partner's efforts to be conciliatory and sympathetic (as we found in Part 1).

Method

Participants

Ninety-eight of the 103 dating couples (98 men and 98 women) that took part in the diary study also participated in Part 2. Five couples who participated in the diary portion of the study decided not to participate in the videotaped conflict resolution portion but completed the questionnaires discussed below. These couples were given promised credit and then debriefed.

Procedures

Following the diary period, each couple returned to the lab to discuss and try to resolve the most serious unresolved conflict they experienced during the diary period. Before discussing the conflict, each individual was led to a separate room where he or she answered questions about the accuracy of his or her Part 1 diary responses. After completing these measures, partners

were reunited and positioned on opposite sides of a table. Each couple was given 5 min to choose a specific unresolved conflict to discuss. They were instructed to "choose the most serious or prominent conflict that occurred during the 14-day diary period that *was not* completely resolved." If a couple could not identify an unresolved conflict, they were asked to select a current conflict that was unresolved. After choosing a specific conflict issue, partners were informed that they had 7 min to discuss the conflict while being videotaped (with the prior consent of both partners) by a dual-camera, split-screen video system. Immediately following each discussion, both partners reported how distressed they felt. They were then thanked and fully debriefed.

Measures

Postvideotape distress measures. Immediately after the videotaped discussion, participants answered three questions (privately and in a different room than their partners) about how distressed they felt while discussing the conflict (i.e., the degree to which they felt upset, anxious, and stressed). Responses were made on 9-point scales (anchored 1 = *not at all*, 9 = *extremely*) and were averaged to create an index of self-perceived distress ($\alpha = .89$ for men, $.83$ for women).

Behavioral ratings. Ten trained raters then viewed each videotaped discussion (independently) and rated each partner's behavior on several theoretically relevant items using 7-point scales (anchored 1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). The items tapped three categories of behavior, each of which was related to the self-reported behaviors in Part 1. First, the degree to which each partner overreacted to and escalated the severity of the conflict was rated on a single item. The interrater reliability of this item was sufficient ($\alpha = .62$), so scores were averaged across raters. Higher scores indicate a greater tendency to overreact to and escalate the conflict.

Second, how distressed each partner appeared during the discussion was rated on five items (i.e., the degree to which each partner appeared upset, disappointed, unhappy, satisfied [reverse keyed], and positive [reverse keyed]). The interrater reliability for each item was sufficient (mean $\alpha = .74$, range = $.67-.82$). Therefore, scores for each item were averaged across raters, and these scores were averaged to create a general index of observed distress ($\alpha = .92$).

Third, how positively individuals behaved toward their partners during the discussion was rated on eight items. Specifically, ratings were made of the degree to which each person attempted to resolve the conflict, to be forgiving toward the partner, to listen to the partner, to provide positive comments to the partner, to accept responsibility for the conflict, to express anger toward the partner (reverse keyed), to criticize the partner (reverse keyed), and to derogate the partner (reverse keyed). The interrater reliability for each item was sufficient (mean $\alpha = .73$, range = $.43-.83$), so scores for each item were averaged across raters. These scores were then averaged to create a general index of positive behaviors expressed toward the partner ($\alpha = .92$).

Results

The model used to test the first set of hypotheses was used to test the hypotheses of this phase of the research. We first tested a model that treated how much each participant overreacted to and escalated the conflict (rated by observers) as the dependent variable. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 4. Consistent with Part 1, no interactions involving gender and either attachment dimension emerged. Thus, the results are presented pooled across gender. A main effect of gender emerged. It indicated that on average, women were rated as overreacting to and escalating the conflict more than men. An actor effect of anxious attachment revealed that more anxiously attached individuals were rated as overreacting and escalating the conflict more than less

Table 4
Predicting Observed Behaviors and Self-Reports of Distress: Part 2

Measure	Overreacting and escalating severity of conflict	Observed distress	Observed positive behavior toward partner	Self-reported distress
Intercept	1.67	3.75	4.53	3.24
Gender	-.10*	-.06*	.02	-.23**
Attachment anxiety				
Actor effect	.11*	.19**	-.05	.50***
Partner effect	-.02	.18**	-.03	.32**
Attachment avoidance				
Actor effect	-.02	.05	-.09	.14
Partner effect	-.01	-.02	-.01	-.05
Neuroticism				
Actor effect	.27**	.41**	-.19*	.59**
Partner effect	.11	.37**	-.20*	.40*
Self-esteem				
Actor effect	-.09*	.13*	-.15**	-.25*
Partner effect	-.13**	-.15**	.12*	-.20*

Note. Separate models were conducted to estimate actor and partner effects for Neuroticism and self-esteem.

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

anxious individuals. This result conceptually replicates the findings from Part 1, which show that both more anxiously attached individuals and their partners reported that conflicts escalated beyond the original topic or issue. No other actor or partner effects were found for this variable.

We next conducted a similar analysis, this time treating observer-rated distress as the outcome variable. As reported in Table 4, a main effect of gender revealed that on average, women were rated as appearing more distressed than men during the discussion. Both actor and partner effects of anxious attachment were also found, indicating that both more anxiously attached individuals and their partners were more visibly distressed. These results also conceptually replicate findings from Part 1, which reveal that more anxiously attached individuals reported feeling more hurt by conflicts and that both they and their partners believed that conflicts would have more negative long-term consequences for the future stability of their relationships. There were no significant effects for avoidance.

No significant effects were found in the analysis predicting how positively participants behaved toward their partners (rated by observers). However, a series of effects were found in the analysis predicting self-reported distress at the conclusion of the discussion. A main effect for gender indicated that women felt more distressed than men after the discussion, a finding that parallels the gender difference in the analysis involving observer-rated distress. Both actor and partner effects of anxious attachment also emerged. They indicated that both more anxious individuals as well as their partners felt more distressed following the discussion. These results also parallel the actor and partner effects of anxious attachment found in the analysis involving observer-rated distress during the discussion. No effects emerged for the avoidance dimension.

Positive Behaviors and Self-Reported Distress

In Part 1, less anxious individuals reported being more comforted by their partner's positive behaviors during daily conflicts, whereas more anxious individuals did not. To determine whether this same pattern emerged in Part 2, we tested a model that treated

individuals' self-reported distress following the discussion as the dependent variable. Actor and partner effects of attachment anxiety and avoidance, gender, and how positively individuals behaved toward their partners (rated by observers) were all entered as predictor variables. In addition, the interaction between how positively individuals behaved and the attachment anxiety scores of their partner was also entered. Similar to Part 1, no gender interactions were found. However, a main effect for ratings of positive behavior did emerge, $b = -.31$, $t(145) = -2.03$, $p < .05$, revealing that individuals felt less distressed when their partners behaved more positively toward them. Conceptually replicating the pattern of the interaction reported in Figure 4 from Part 1, how partners behaved during the discussions also interacted with individuals' (i.e., actors') attachment anxiety to predict actors' self-reported level of distress, $b = .23$, $t(159) = 2.01$, $p < .05$. As displayed in Figure 5, more anxious individuals reported feeling relatively greater distress, regardless of how their partners behaved toward them during the discussion. By comparison, less anxious individuals felt more distressed if their partners behaved less positively toward them (rated by observers) but less distressed if their partners behaved more positively.

Alternative Explanations

Table 4 presents results of models that included the actor and partner effects of both self-esteem and neuroticism in place of scores on the two attachment dimensions. Similar to Part 1, both self-esteem and neuroticism were related to the dependent variables in a manner consistent with anxious attachment. One key difference, however, was that how positively partners were rated as behaving during the discussion did not interact with actor's global self-esteem or neuroticism (both $F_s < 1.0$, *ns*). Also similar to Part 1, all but one of the significant effects in Part 2 remained significant when self-esteem and neuroticism were statistically controlled. The only effect that was no longer significant was the actor effect of anxious attachment predicting overreaction to and escalation of conflicts. The Part 2 findings, therefore, appear to be

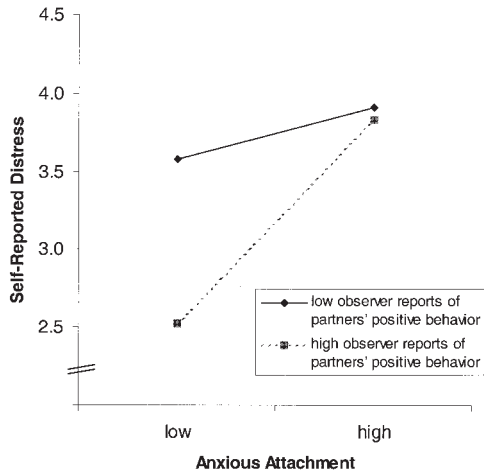


Figure 5. The interaction of individuals' anxious attachment and how positively their partners were observed to behave during the lab discussion predicting their self-reported distress. Regression lines are plotted for individuals scoring 1 standard deviation above and below the sample means on anxious attachment and observer-rated reports of the partner's positive behavior during the discussion.

specific to the unique attachment-related issues, concerns, and worries of highly anxious individuals.

Exploratory Analyses: Links Between the Diary and Videotape Portions of the Study

We next conducted a series of exploratory analyses to determine whether any of the dependent variables assessed in Part 1 of the study were associated with individuals' observed behavior or self-reported distress in Part 2. Several models were run that included the actor and partner effects of anxious and avoidant attachment as well as the actor and partner effects of the variables reported in Tables 1–3. For these analyses, an average score was calculated for each person across the diary period, and all of the predictor variables were grand mean centered. A total of five statistically significant effects emerged in the many models that were estimated, and these effects did not reveal a consistent pattern of results. Specifically, people were observed to overreact and escalate the severity of the conflict more if their partners reported greater overall conflict during the diary period, $b = .16$, $t(188) = 2.06$, $p < .05$; participants were observed to behave in a more positive manner toward their partner if they felt that supportive events were a more positive experience for them during the diary period, $b = .17$, $t(129) = 2.36$, $p < .05$, and if they reported being more satisfied/close during the diary period, $b = .20$, $t(186) = 2.35$, $p < .05$; and individuals reported being more distressed following the conflict discussion if they perceived more overall conflict during the diary period, $b = .42$, $t(186) = 2.45$, $p < .05$, and if their partners perceived more overall conflict during the diary period, $b = .37$, $t(186) = 2.11$, $p < .05$. No interactions with either attachment dimension were found.

General Discussion

This is one of the first studies to examine the appraisal-monitoring implications of attachment anxiety. According to Fra-

ley and Shaver (2000), the appraisal-monitoring system, which should gauge the degree to which individuals are maintaining sufficient physical, psychological, or emotional closeness with their attachment figures, ought to be calibrated with respect to an individual's past attachment experiences. Considering their history of having received unpredictable or deficient support, highly anxious individuals should have low thresholds for perceiving threats to proximity maintenance (Simpson & Rholes, 1994). In view of their working models, highly anxious individuals should also be hypervigilant to cues of possible rejection (Cassidy & Berlin, 1994) and should, at times, perceive relationship conflicts when none exist. Part 1 of this research confirms that during daily interactions with their romantic partners, more anxiously attached individuals do perceive greater conflict in their relationships, significantly more than even their partners perceive. They also believe that conflict is more detrimental to the current and the future quality of their relationships. Moreover, on days when they perceive greater relationship-based conflict, highly anxious individuals believe that their partners have a less rosy outlook on the relationship and its future, a view that is not necessarily shared by their partners. Part 2 reveals that when actually discussing a major relationship conflict, more anxiously attached individuals are more distressed (as rated by observers). They also report feeling more distressed, regardless of how positively their partners behave toward them (as rated by observers).

The present research also tested a novel tenet of Fraley and Shaver's (2000) conception of anxiety—that supportive events, which may signal that security goals are being met, should be perceived more positively by highly anxious than less anxious individuals. Supporting this prediction, on days during the diary period when more supportive events were perceived, highly anxious individuals believed that they foretold better future relationship outcomes. In addition, highly anxious individuals felt marginally more satisfied/close than less anxious persons on days when they perceived greater support. The more positive impact of supportive events on highly anxious individuals was not evident, however, when support occurred during relationship conflicts. Furthermore, even when their partners reported behaving more positively toward them (in Part 1) and were rated by observers as behaving more positively toward them (in Part 2), highly anxious individuals continued to feel more distressed relative to less anxious individuals. Less anxious individuals, in contrast, felt less distressed following conflicts if their partners reported (in Part 1) or were rated as (in Part 2) behaving more positively toward them. For highly anxious individuals, then, the benefits of supportive experiences are diminished if they occur in connection with events that might generate loss or rejection (i.e., relationship conflicts).

Viewed together, these results suggest that highly anxious individuals rely more heavily on daily perceptions of relationship events to assess the current and future quality of their relationships. This pattern of results is consistent with Holmes and Rempel's (1989) model of dyadic trust that suggests if a person is unsure of his or her partner's love and affection, he or she may be more likely to test hypotheses about whether the partner truly cares about him or her. In this way, more significant meaning should be placed on daily events that could cue rejection or abandonment. Moreover, if a person is uncertain of his or her partner's affection, positive behaviors should also be interpreted very positively, especially if they temporarily reduce uncertainty. This propensity

may be fueled by the fact that highly anxious individuals have a more tenuous and contingent sense of self-worth (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Crocker & Wolfe, 2001), one that is anchored on how positively their romantic partners currently view them and how well their relationships are currently functioning. This rather myopic, here-and-now focus on daily relationship events could explain why highly anxious individuals (along with their romantic partners) typically report such low levels of relationship satisfaction (Collins & Read, 1990; Simpson, 1990), such pronounced emotional swings over short time periods (Tidwell et al., 1996), and such strong beliefs that their relationships are constantly in flux (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). When individuals evaluate their relationships according to the vicissitudes of daily relationship events and experiences rather than with reference to long-term relationship goals and objectives, their relationships should feel more tumultuous (Kelley, 1983).

In some respects, a short-term focus on daily relationship events may be viewed as an adaptive response to a history of receiving unpredictable or insufficient support (Bowlby, 1973), an interpersonal history that should motivate highly anxious people to pay more attention to, place greater weight on, and make stronger inferences about the implications of daily relationship events. At another level, however, this focus is likely to be maladaptive, especially when it is enacted by highly anxious persons, whose working models should—and apparently do—slant their perceptions of their partners and relationships toward overestimating the prevalence and negative impact of potential relationship-threatening events. Indeed, the current findings suggest that these perceptual biases even extend to the inferences that highly anxious individuals make about how their partners perceive the same potentially threatening events.

In what follows, we discuss how the central findings of this research extend our understanding of attachment anxiety, including the perceptions and reactions of individuals who score low in attachment anxiety (i.e., more secure individuals). Following this, we discuss the ways in which the current results fit with other interpersonal theories and with the results of studies that have examined dependency regulation and rejection sensitivity processes. We conclude by highlighting the major contributions and drawbacks of the current research.

The Central Findings

Most of the findings revolved around the tendency for highly anxious individuals (as well as their dating partners) to perceive more and expanded relationship conflicts and for highly anxious persons to evaluate both the current and the future of their relationships less positively on days when relationship conflicts were perceived to be greater. Interpersonal conflicts are one principal activator of the attachment system (Kobak & Duemmler, 1994), particularly for highly anxious individuals (Simpson & Rholes, 1994). Relationship conflicts not only ignite worries about loss and abandonment in highly anxious individuals; they also trigger hypervigilance (Cassidy & Berlin, 1994), amplify emotion-focused coping (Mikulincer & Florian, 1998), and increase dysfunctional interaction behaviors (Simpson et al., 1996), all of which are likely to deepen and broaden relationship conflicts. Although a few of these processes have been observed in romantic relationships in cross-sectional self-report studies (e.g., Pistole, 1989) and lab-

based behavioral observation studies (e.g., Simpson et al., 1996), this is the first daily diary study to document the detrimental effects that perceptions of daily conflicts have on the relationship evaluations of highly anxious individuals.

Part 1 of this study confirms that more anxiously attached individuals perceive greater daily relationship conflict than do less anxious people, they perceive greater daily conflict than do their dating partners, and they (and their partners) report that daily conflicts are more likely to escalate beyond their original source. These findings are consistent with past self-report studies that have shown that when highly anxious individuals encounter negative relationship events, they feel more distressed and engage in behaviors that may instigate and perpetuate relationship conflicts (Collins, 1996). These results are also in accord with behavioral observation lab studies showing that highly anxious people enact more destructive and dysfunctional behaviors when they are trying to resolve major relationship-based problems (Simpson et al., 1996).

The most direct evidence for the biasing effects of anxious working models comes from the fact that highly anxious people perceive even more daily conflict than their romantic partners do. Either of two perceptual processes could be responsible for this outcome. First, highly anxious individuals might be unusually adept at accurately detecting negativity in relationships given their strong motivation to identify and avert loss and rejection. Second, their threshold for detecting negativity might be so low that they “overdetect” potential cues, resulting in a chronically negative perceptual bias. Although the current research was not designed to test between these different processes, some of the results in the diary portion of the study, in combination with other lines of research, suggest that the “negative bias” interpretation may be more plausible. In Part 1 of the study, highly anxious individuals reported greater relationship conflict than their partners did, even when their partners’ reports of daily conflict were statistically controlled. Furthermore, attachment scores within couples were not highly correlated, meaning that highly anxious people were not on average dating other highly insecure people (i.e., those who might also possess biased working models). In addition, other lines of research have confirmed that highly anxious individuals typically infer more relationship conflict than is warranted (Collins, 1996) and appraise normal life circumstances in more threatening terms (Mikulincer et al., 2000). Research on rejection sensitivity (a construct conceptually similar to attachment anxiety) has also found that more rejection-sensitive people perceive greater hostility and negativity in ambiguous yet benign interactions with opposite-sex strangers (Downey & Feldman, 1996). We suspect, therefore, that highly anxious persons may at times have “detected” daily relationship conflicts that did not exist.

Several of the most novel results involved statistical interactions with perceptions of conflict. In Part 1, for example, highly anxious individuals reported lower satisfaction/closeness (see Figure 1) and more negative views about the future of their relationship (see Figure 2) than did less anxious individuals on days when they perceived greater relationship conflict. As discussed above, this myopic focus on daily relationship events is likely to produce destabilizing effects on relationships across time. Kelley (1983) suggested that the stability of relationships (including their emotional stability) should depend on two variables: (a) the degree to which the benefits in a relationship typically exceed the costs and

(b) the variance of this difference. For relationships to be emotionally stable, the degree to which benefits outweigh costs must be small relative to the variability of the difference. In the case of highly anxious individuals, not only is the benefit-to-cost ratio likely to be lower, it also should be more variable if highly anxious people continually evaluate their relationships with reference to daily relationship events.

Highly anxious persons also presume that their partners are less satisfied/close and less optimistic on high-conflict days than is true of less anxious persons. On high-conflict days, highly anxious individuals may have projected their own pessimistic outlooks on to their partners. Various findings support this interpretation. When highly anxious people are upset, for example, they overestimate their similarity with others (Mikulincer, Orbach, & Iavnieli, 1998), an outcome that could be exacerbated by their diminished empathic abilities when distressed (Mikulincer et al., 2001).

Compared with less anxious people, highly anxious individuals also believed that relationship conflicts during the diary period would have more negative effects on their relationships, even when their partners reported behaving in a more positive and conciliatory fashion toward them during conflicts (see Figure 4). Paralleling this result, highly anxious individuals in the behavioral observation portion of the study reported greater distress when they discussed the most major unresolved conflict that surfaced during the diary period, even when their partners were rated by observers as behaving more positively toward them (see Figure 5). Thus, unlike less anxious individuals (who tend to be more securely attached), highly anxious persons are less likely to adjust their relationship evaluations in response to their partners' actions (which were partner-reported in Part 1 and observer-rated in Part 2). Several factors could account for these "noncontingent" partner behavior effects. Given the doubtful and self-protective nature of their working models, highly anxious individuals might simply be more inclined to deny, dismiss, or discount their partners' positive overtures, particularly in conflict situations where positive gestures (e.g., apologizing, showing remorse, adopting a conciliatory attitude) could be construed as not genuine. Highly anxious individuals also might become overwhelmed in conflict settings, reducing their capacity to monitor, notice, and give credit to their partners' positive actions (Main, 1991). Supporting this view, Mikulincer (1998b) has found that the negative emotion of anger tends to overwhelm the cognitive systems of highly anxious people, interfering with their ability to utilize resources that could help them contain negative feelings. Highly anxious individuals might also believe that acknowledging or giving too much "credit" for their partners' positive actions might set them up for major disappointments in the future.

Less anxious (i.e., more secure) persons, on the other hand, reacted to their partners' behavior in a more situationally contingent manner. On days when relationship conflict was higher and their partners behaved more positively, less anxious persons held more positive views about the present and future of their relationships. Main (1991) has hypothesized that securely attached people perceive and evaluate relationship-relevant events in a more open and flexible manner than do insecure persons, primarily because their working models do not distort attachment-relevant information. Analogous situationally contingent effects for adult security have been documented in other settings. Simpson, Rholes, Oriña, and Grich (2002), for example, found that more securely attached

women (assessed by the Adult Attachment Interview) are more likely to give their distressed male dating partners more comfort and support (rated by observers) if their partners request or appear to need it but provide less support if their partners do not request or need it.

During the diary part of the study, highly anxious individuals felt better about the future of their relationships on days when they perceived greater support. This finding corroborates a central tenet of Fraley and Shaver's (2000) model of attachment anxiety—that perceptions of greater conflict or greater support should both be more strongly associated with how highly anxious persons view and evaluate their relationships on a day-to-day basis. Fewer effects, however, were found for perceptions of support than for perceptions of conflict. This is understandable when one considers that negative relationship events usually have more important consequences for the well-being and longevity of relationships than do positive events (Fraley & Shaver, 2000; Gaelick et al., 1985). This principle should be especially salient to highly anxious people.

No systematic effects were anticipated for the avoidance attachment dimension, and only one significant effect emerged. It revealed that highly avoidant individuals in Part 1 perceived daily supportive events in their relationships as less positive experiences. This is consistent with several past studies, which have indicated that highly avoidant people do not like giving or receiving support, mainly because such actions limit their independence and sense of self-reliance (see Bowlby, 1973; Mikulincer & Florian, 1998).

Connections With Other Theoretical Models

According to Fraley and Shaver (2000), activation of the appraisal-monitoring system should generate feelings of distress and anxiety, which then launch perceptual and behavioral responses designed to reestablish felt security. Nevertheless, the current results can also be interpreted within the framework of other theoretical models. For example, in light of the severe costs of social rejection, Leary and Baumeister (2000) contended that humans may have an evolved internal regulatory system—a self-esteem sociometer—that is responsive to cues of rejection, alerts people to threats of rejection, and motivates them to behave in ways to minimize it. The current findings dovetail nicely with many aspects of this model. Indeed, we suspect that highly anxious individuals may have sociometers that are hypersensitive and overreactive to possible signs of rejection and its complement (acceptance), given that so much of their self-worth hinges on the adequate functioning of their relationships.

Our results also fit well with recent empirical studies of dependency regulation and rejection sensitivity processes in relationships. Low self-esteem individuals, many of whom should be anxiously attached (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994), are known to overinterpret relationship problems, often assuming that their partner's affection could be waning en route to experiencing low levels of relationship satisfaction (Murray, Rose, Bellavia, Holmes, & Kusche, 2002). Furthermore, people who feel less positively regarded by their romantic partners—many of whom should also be highly anxious—habitually read too much into relationship-threatening interactions, feel more hurt and worse about themselves on days following these interactions, and behave more

negatively toward their partners in response (Murray, Bellavia, et al., 2003; Murray, Griffin, et al., 2003). Similarly, high rejection-sensitive individuals, most of whom are also likely to be anxiously attached, have been shown to expect, perceive, and overreact to ambiguous cues of possible interpersonal rejection (Downey & Feldman, 1996), and they engage in conflict-resolution tactics that typically exacerbate relationship difficulties and undermine their relationships (Downey, Freitas, Michaelis, & Khouri, 1998). All three of these individual-difference variables—low self-esteem, low perceived regard from partners, and high rejection sensitivity—ought to share some variance with the anxious attachment dimension. Future research needs to clarify which facets of each measure are principally responsible for generating the effects reported in this study.

Although the current findings can be interpreted from the viewpoint of other models, it is important to highlight what makes attachment theory a novel and particularly powerful theoretical perspective. At base, attachment theory is a theory of the development of personality and social behavior across the life span (Bowlby, 1973). Unlike most theories, attachment theory seeks to explain the formation, development, and deterioration of emotional bonds at multiple levels of analysis, ranging from the evolutionary and cultural origins of certain interpersonal processes; to their possible phylogenetic development during evolutionary history; to their ontogenetic development across the life span of individuals; to the proximal factors that instigate, sustain, or terminate specific interpersonal processes (see Cassidy & Shaver, 1999). Being a life-span theory of personality, attachment theory focuses on how experiences—or perceptions of experiences—from past relationships affect what occurs in contemporary relationships. This tradition has led most adult attachment researchers to measure views about attachment figures (e.g., romantic partners) in general. On the other hand, studies of dependency regulation and rejection sensitivity, both of which trace their theoretical roots to a dyad-centered perspective, assess partner-specific or relationship-specific views. Although general and partner-specific measures of avoidance and anxiety are correlated (Simpson et al., 2002), the correlations are not extremely high. Moreover, people apparently possess working models that vary in their content (with reference to parents, romantic partners, and close friends) and in their generality (ranging from global and abstract to concrete and person specific; see Overall, Fletcher, & Friesen, 2003). In fact, general and partner-specific models independently predict attachment-relevant experiences in daily social interactions (Pierce & Lydon, 2001). Greater theoretical and empirical attention should be devoted to understanding when and how general versus partner-specific models of romantic partners and relationships jointly operate to impact relationship functioning and outcomes.

Caveats and Contributions

The current research should be interpreted with some caveats. Given the nonexperimental nature of this research, causal inferences cannot be made. We do not know, for instance, whether the working models of highly anxious individuals actually generated perceptions of greater daily relationship conflict or whether the statistical interactions between attachment anxiety and perceptions of conflict were the real source of changes in current and future assessments of relationship quality. Moreover, because relation-

ship quality was not measured across more than 2 weeks, we do not know whether the myopic focus displayed by highly anxious persons is responsible for destabilizing their relationships over time.

These caveats notwithstanding, the current research contributes to our understanding of why highly anxious people tend to have such tumultuous relationships. Not only does this research reveal that highly anxious individuals perceive greater and more extensive daily conflict in their romantic relationships; it also indicates that their working models may systematically bias their daily relationship perceptions and the inferences they make about the current and future well-being of their relationships in deleterious ways. By basing their judgments of relationship quality on amplified perceptions of daily relationship conflict and strife, highly anxious individuals may unwittingly create what they fear the most—the destabilization of their romantic relationships.

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