

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: ATTACHMENT STYLE AS A MODERATOR OF THE
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEVEL OF PERCEIVED
CONFLICT AND CONSTRUCTIVE AND
PSYCHOLOGICALLY ABUSIVE BEHAVIOR IN
CLINIC COUPLES

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This study examined a potential moderating effect of attachment styles of members of clinical couples on the relationship between their level of perceived conflict and use of forms of psychologically abusive versus constructive conflict management behavior toward each other. Data from one hundred seventy seven couples who had sought therapy at the Family Service Center at the University of Maryland, College Park were used. Each client had completed a set of assessment questionnaires prior to beginning couple therapy at the clinic, and all data previously had been entered into a database. The subset of assessment measures utilized for this study included questionnaires assessing attachment styles, forms of psychological abuse, physical abuse,

and relationship adjustment. It was hypothesized that when individuals experience conflict in their intimate relationships and their working models of attachment are activated, they will use degrees of constructive or psychologically abusive conflict management behavior based on the type of attachment style that they exhibit. It was postulated that, in general, if individuals perceive their relationship to be higher in level of conflict, they would use more psychologically abusive conflict resolution behavior than if they perceive their relationship to be lower in conflict. Results supported this hypothesis. It was also proposed that individuals perceiving their relationship to be lower in level of conflict would utilize more constructive conflict resolution behavior than individuals perceiving a higher level of conflict in their intimate relationships. Results did not support this hypothesis. In addition, individuals with secure attachment styles who perceive their relationship to be higher in conflict were expected to use more constructive conflict management skills than insecure individuals, whereas insecure individuals were expected to use more psychologically abusive behavior. The results indicated an interaction between the level of perceived conflict and the level of attachment insecurity for individuals' use of psychologically abusive conflict resolution behaviors, but not for individuals' use of constructive conflict resolution behaviors. Contrary to the hypothesis, it was found that securely attached individuals in higher conflict relationships utilized more psychologically abusive conflict resolution behavior than their insecure counterparts. However, consistent with the prediction, no significant differences were found in secure and insecure individuals' use of psychologically abusive

conflict resolution behaviors in lower conflict relationships. Moreover, regarding specific types of insecure attachment, it was expected that if perceived level of conflict between the partners is relatively high: (a) individuals reporting a dismissive-avoidant attachment style would use more of the hostile withdrawal types of psychological abuse as compared with individuals reporting other forms of insecure attachment, (b) individuals with the fearful-avoidant attachment style would use more of the denigration type of psychological abuse as compared to individuals reporting other forms of insecure attachment, and (c) individuals with the preoccupied attachment style would use more of the restrictive engulfment and domination-intimidation types of psychological abuse as compared to individuals with other forms of insecure attachment. The results did not support these hypotheses. As predicted, there were no differences in the use of psychologically abusive or constructive behavior among individuals with secure attachment and the various types of insecure attachment who perceived their relationship to have a lower level of conflict. Furthermore, gender and racial (Caucasians versus African-Americans) differences in the distribution of attachment styles in members of these clinical couples were examined, and no significant results were observed. In addition, gender differences in the relationship between attachment styles and use of constructive and psychologically abusive conflict resolution behaviors in high versus low-conflict relationships were examined in an exploratory fashion. The results indicated no significant gender differences in individuals' use of constructive or psychologically abusive conflict resolution behaviors based on the level of conflict that they perceived in

their relationship. Finally, the distribution of couple pairings by partners' attachment styles was explored, and the most common pairings were found to be both partners secure, both partners fearful-avoidant, and a secure male matched with a fearful female. Overall, the findings indicate that attachment styles are a variable that those who study and treat abuse within couple relationships should take into account. Implications of the study's findings for therapeutic interventions with psychologically abusive partners with various attachment patterns and suggestions for future research are discussed.

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DEDICATION

To My Wonderful Family

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Attachment Style as a Moderator of the Relationship Between Level of Perceived Conflict and Constructive and Psychologically Abusive Behavior in Clinic Couples

Chapter I: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

For many years, domestic abuse was seen as a rare problem, not widespread in American communities. It was hidden in the privacy of couples' homes, and there was a lack of knowledge about the prevalence, causes, and consequences of this problem (Gelles, 2000). However, we now know that partner abuse is widespread throughout the United States, as well as other countries around the world (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1990). In the past three decades, domestic violence and abuse by intimate partners has become a topic of national concern and a very important social problem that has received professional, public, and policy attention (Gelles, 2000). This problem can affect every aspect of individuals' lives and can be found in every stratum of American society (Babcock, Waltz, Jacobson, & Gottman, 1993; Dobash & Dobash, 1979). Physical abuse by an intimate partner affects large numbers of individuals, occurring in 28 to 33 percent of married couples and among 50 percent of dating couples (Hansen, Harway, & Cervantes, 1991; Koss, 1990). Domestic abuse is reported to be one of the most underestimated and under-reported crimes in the United States (Haj-Yahia, 2000). Physical abuse has received a considerable amount of attention in the past few decades and has been found to cause both physical and psychological damage to the individuals involved (Browne, 1993). Although most of the research on domestic violence has

focused on physical forms of abuse, clinical work with abused individuals and recent research studies that have examined the nature and effects of abuse on the well-being of adults have indicated that psychological abuse is just as common, if not more common, as physical abuse, and has effects that are at least as harmful (Bruhn, 1998; Tolman, 1999). Psychologically abusive behaviors create fear of the partner, damage the victim's self-esteem, increase dependency on the abuser, and cause damage to the victim's overall well-being (Murphy & Hoover, 2001). Psychologically abusive behaviors may take on many different forms, ranging from mildly coercive behaviors that occur rarely, to more pervasive patterns of one person's domination and intimidation over another person in an intimate relationship (Graham, Rawlings, & Rimini, 1988; Murphy & Hoover, 2001; Romero, 1985). Even though a number of researchers have noted the importance of examining psychological abuse in intimate relationships, to date non-physical forms of abuse still have received much less attention than physical forms of abuse; thus, less knowledge is available about the causes and consequences of non-physical abuse (Straus & Sweet, 1992; Vissing, Straus, Gelles, & Harrop, 1991). Hence, it is very important to study various forms of psychological abuse in greater detail.

For the purposes of this study, psychological abuse will be defined in terms of the four general types identified by Murphy and Cascardi (1999): *dominance/intimidation* (more overt types of abuse, such as intense threats to hurt the partner or the partner's property, intense verbal aggression, actual destruction of the partner's belongings, and other behaviors that are used to intimidate and control the partner), *restrictive engulfment*

(closely monitoring and controlling the partner's actions, finances, and interactions with individuals outside the relationship, and making the partner feel guilty for not spending time together), *hostile withdrawal* (withdrawing and stonewalling during conflict, withholding emotions from the partner, being unresponsive and vindictively cold during interactions with the partner), and *denigration* (attacking the partner's self esteem by making humiliating and degrading comments) (Hoover & Murphy, 2001; Murphy & Cascardi, 1999).

Researchers have examined multiple factors hypothesized to be associated with abuse in intimate relationships, including a variety of characteristics of the individuals involved in abusive relationships (Ponzetti, Cate, & Koval, 1982). Some of the factors most consistently and strongly associated with abuse in recent research studies are: individuals' past experiences as recipients of abusive parental behaviors, exposure to parents' marital violence, low socioeconomic status, substance abuse, low levels of self-esteem and assertiveness, poor interpersonal relationships and low satisfaction, and the individuals' own marital conflict (Feldman & Ridley, 1995, 2000; Hotelling & Sugarman, 1986).

Few topics have received as much attention in the field of relationship research as conflict management in intimate relationships. A great deal of literature reports multiple significant relationships between the quality of one's intimate couple interaction and one's emotional and physical well-being (Cutrona & Russell, 1987; Heavy, Christensen, & Malamuth, 1995; Kemp & Neimeyer, 1999; Pfaller, Keselica, & Gersfein, 1998;

Roberts, 2000). Because the ways in which couples resolve their areas of conflicting needs, preferences, and goals can be tied to the partners' psychological well-being, relationship satisfaction, and overall quality of life, conflict management between partners remains a top priority of researchers interested in intimate relationships (Canary, 2000; Shi, 2003). Researchers have found that in most cases, marital conflict or lack of consensus between the partners and marital dissatisfaction are among the common precursors to acts of domestic violence and abuse (Gelles, 1994; Leonard & Blane, 1992; Rounsaville, 1978). Goode (1971) reported that as satisfaction with marriage declines, the sense of anger and frustration grows, which in turn increases the potential for conflict and eventually abuse and violence in the relationship. In turn, abuse within a relationship likely contributes to declining satisfaction. Consequently, couple and family therapists are particularly interested in the topic of conflict management because there is a strong relationship between conflict management and marital satisfaction in couples (Heavey et al, 1995; Roberts, 2000; Shi, 2003). Therapists commonly assess couples' styles of managing conflict and work to improve partners' negative conflict management tactics.

Interpersonal conflict or lack of relationship consensus is a normal and inevitable part of intimate relationships (Feldman & Ridley, 2000; Kelley, 1983; Kowalski, 1997; Marshall et al., 2000), and even the most well-adjusted couples experience some conflict in their relationships (Feldman & Ridley, 2000). In the process of everyday interactions, couples are required to make important decisions and find solutions to various problems. In an ideal world, partners would agree on all of the solutions to the problems they face;

however, more often than not, members of a couple tend to have different perspectives, opinions, ideas, interpretations, and possible solutions to those problems (Feldman & Ridley, 2000). Whether and how individuals deal with these differences affects their intimate relationships. If partners are able to resolve their conflicts effectively, their relationship will be strengthened, leading to deeper intimacy and trust (Feldman & Ridley, 2000). Conflict, in such relationships, is productive and can be used as “a means to an end.” Such couples are able to experience constructive problem solving and decision-making, learn to understand and respect each other’s perspective and opinions, and improve cohesiveness between the partners (Feldman & Ridley, 2000).

On the other hand, conflict can become a destructive source in intimate relationships if partners avoid dealing with it or if ineffective conflict management skills are employed. If conflict is avoided or managed poorly, negative consequences occur. Couples who lack effective conflict management skills and experience ongoing conflict in their relationships may become aggressive and may respond to conflict with various forms of physical and psychological abuse (Marshall et al., 2000).

Research shows that abusive couples exhibit deficits in their ability to reach agreement on important issues, and their overall relationship satisfaction is lower than that of non-abusive couples (Dutton, 1995; Gerlock, 2001). In therapeutic work with distressed couples, therapists strive to provide their clients with positive conflict management skills in order to reduce marital distress (Fowers, 1998). In particular, various cognitive-behavioral interventions have been developed in order to help clients

master successful communication, problem solving, and conflict-management skills necessary for relationship improvement, based on the assumption that discordant couples have poor conflict resolution abilities and lack communication skills necessary for successful conflict management (Bradbury & Karney, 1993; Epstein & Baucom, 2002; Epstein, Baucom, & Rankin, 1993; Fowers, 1998; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Shi, 2003; Thomas, Fletcher, & Lange, 1997).

Although cognitive-behavioral approaches to working with distressed couples have been successful, it has been found that the methods are more effective with highly motivated and less distressed or discordant couples (Nichols & Schwartz, 1998; Shi, 2003). When working with more challenging distressed couples, therapists have wondered what interferes with these couples reaching consensus on issues of disagreement, and what factors separate those couples who deal with conflict successfully from those who resort to abusive behavior in conflictual situations. Even though relationship conflict has been found consistently to predict occurrences of physical and psychological abuse in couple relationships (Byrne & Arias, 1997; Hotaling & Sugarman, 1986, 1990), not all discordant partners employ abusive patterns with each other. Thus, it is important to identify factors that influence individuals' use of abusive versus non-abusive methods of conflict resolution within their intimate relationships.

One of the factors that may affect differences in couples' abusive versus non-abusive conflict resolution processes and outcomes is the partners' attachment styles. Researchers have found a relationship between a person's attachment style and his or her

relationship satisfaction and conflict resolution patterns (Corcoran & Mallinckrodt, 2000; Feeney, 1999; Shi, 2003). Thus, an attachment theory perspective may provide an explanation for the use of different conflict resolution styles and may explain why some individuals are able to resolve disagreements successfully, whereas others may not be as successful and may resort to various forms of abuse in relationships in which consensus between partners is low.

Attachment is a concept that has increasingly been recognized by theorists and researchers as an influential factor in intimate interactions between two people in a relationship (Bookwala, 2002; Kemp & Neimeyer, 1999). Attachment theory, which originally was applied primarily to understanding parent-child relationships and children's personality development, has become a major theoretical perspective in the study of adults' intimate couple relationships (Johnson, 1986; Simpson, Rholes, & Phillips, 1996). Numerous researchers have explored the relationship between adult attachment styles and various aspects of intimate interactions and have suggested that this concept, which is rooted in Bowlby's (1969, 1973) attachment theory, could be used as a theoretical framework to explain the occurrence of aggression in intimate relationships (Bookwala, 2002; Collins & Read, 1990; Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Levy & Davis, 1988; Mauricio & Gormley, 2001; Simpson, 1990).

Attachment is the ability of an individual to form a strong emotional bond with others (Bowlby, 1977). According to this theoretical perspective, attachment bonds between infants and their adult caretakers are essential for the infants' physical survival.

In this model, individuals are born with an innate attachment behavioral system, which is activated when an individual is in distress (Bowlby, 1973, 1980, 1982). Thus, when individuals find themselves in an uncomfortable situation (i.e., circumstances in which they perceive that their well-being is threatened), an anxiety response is activated, and they tend to seek protection and comfort from the individual with whom they feel most secure. For children, their primary caregiver takes on that role (Bowlby, 1982). In order for children to develop attachment security, caregivers need to be available and responsive to them. However, not all individuals receive adequate care-giving during childhood; thus, not all children develop internalized conceptions of secure attachment (commonly referred to as *working models* by attachment theorists) that they carry into adulthood (Bowlby, 1980, 1982).

Adult attachment researchers define four attachment styles - secure, dismissing-avoidant, preoccupied (anxious-ambivalent), and fearful-avoidant (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). *Secure* adults typically have positive views of self (as lovable) and others (as nurturing and reliable), and as a result they are comfortable in their close relationships and are capable of maintaining both a comfortable level of closeness and distance (Bookwala, 2002; Feeney & Collins, 2001). *Dismissing-avoidant* individuals, on the other hand, have a positive view of self (as lovable), but a negative view of others (as unavailable or unreliable for meeting one's needs), which makes them feel more comfortable when they are independent and self-sufficient; thus, too much closeness and dependency in intimate

relationships makes them tense and uncomfortable (Bookwala, 2002). Furthermore, *preoccupied* individuals have a negative view of self (as unlovable and thus in danger of being rejected by their partner) and a positive view of others (as nurturing to individuals who they find attractive and deserving). They are needy of their partners, require close contact in their intimate relationships, and quickly feel insecure when the significant other is unavailable (Bookwala, 2002). Finally, *fearful-avoidant* individuals have a negative view of both self (as unlovable) and others (as unavailable and unreliable for meeting one's needs), experiencing fear of relationships, mistrust, and discomfort with close proximity to significant others. However, because their underlying need for social interactions is fairly significant, they seem to be caught in a bind - they need their close relationships, but they are desperately afraid of them (Bookwala, 2002).

Thus, these attachment styles include individuals' cognitions about whether or not they are worthy of care and affection, and if other people around them are dependable and responsive (Feeney & Collins, 2001). Kobak and Sceery (1988) further postulated that different attachment patterns provide individuals with rules for them to follow when they encounter potentially stressful or negative situations. Three types of potentially stressful situations have been proposed to most commonly activate attachment responses – those that are fear-provoking, challenging, or conflictual (Kobak & Duemmler, 1994). Most research on attachment styles has concentrated on individuals' responses to fear-inducing situations, whereas not as much attention has been focused on responses to conflictual situations (Simpson et al., 1996). Hence, there is a potential link between

individuals' attachment styles and the ways that they deal with conflict within their couple relationships that needs to be explored more extensively.

The proposed study will examine how individuals with different attachment styles behave when involved in conflictual situations with their intimate partners. Bowlby (1988) proposed that anger or aggression may be seen as a manifestation of frustration experienced by an individual with one of the insecure attachment patterns, who feels abandoned by his or her partner in some way. The insecure individual may use aggression in an instrumental manner, to prevent the partner from either separating further (in the case of the preoccupied individual) or from moving too close (in the case of the dismissing-avoidant individual). In addition, it has been suggested that venting of anger could be an example of unhealthy expression of strong feelings of attachment and caring (Bookwala, 2002; Mayseless, 1991). Mayseless (1991) also suggested that if one of the partners feels that the stability of the relationship is threatened by the other partner, then the person may use anger or aggression to avoid the uncomfortable feeling of having one's life seem out of control. In particular, Mayseless (1991) found two attachment styles that are most likely to be associated with an individual inflicting aggression against a partner in a threatening situation – the anxious-ambivalent or preoccupied style and the fearful-avoidant style. Other empirical studies have also found support for this association between insecure attachment patterns and aggression in intimate relationships (Bookwala, 2002; Bookwala & Zdaniuk, 1998; Dutton, Saunders, Starzomski, & Bartholomew, 1994; Roberts & Noller, 1998).

Although, a review of the literature indicates that a number of researchers previously have found significant relationships between attachment styles and domestic abuse, prior studies have not investigated the possibility that attachment styles may affect the *type* of abuse that takes place within intimate relationships. Most studies looking at the relationship between attachment styles and abuse, examined abuse as an act of physical aggression only; however, as noted earlier abuse can be exhibited in numerous ways, including various forms of psychological abuse. Thus, research on attachment and abuse should address not only physical forms of abuse, but rather varying forms of abusive behaviors. There is a need for research investigating the relationship between the four attachment styles and different forms of psychological abuse (e.g., restrictive engulfment, denigration, hostile withdrawal, and domination/intimidation). The possibility that certain attachment styles of individuals involved in intimate relationships are associated with abusive versus non-abusive tactics that discordant partners use in their relationships is not only important from a theoretical perspective, but, it also has major practical implications for clinicians working with couples. Addressing attachment styles in couple therapy may contribute to couples' understanding of their own interactions and may decrease their use of abusive behaviors when they experience lack of consensus in their relationships (Mayseless, 1991; Pistole & Tarrant, 1993). It has been suggested that family therapists can help couples talk about their attachment patterns and examine how these affect their intimate interactions (Byng-Hall, 1991a). Therapists can also provide partners with a secure environment in which they can reconnect with one another and

their childhood experiences that shaped the attachment styles that influence their current interactions (Byng-Hall, 1991a). The main goal of couple and family therapy from an attachment perspective would be not only to change abusive behaviors that partners employ in conflictual situations, but also to help individuals develop more secure attachments within their couple relationships (Byng-Hall, 1986, 1991a; Johnson, 1986; Johnson & Greenberg, 1995; Johnson & Whiffen, 2003). Thus, research that identifies more specifically the relationships between various attachment styles and partners' abusive and non-abusive behavior in conflictual situations will contribute to clinicians' knowledge of targets for assessment and therapeutic intervention with distressed couples. This research on the psychological abuse of couples is needed because it can have a number of important implications. By looking at partners' attachment patterns, researchers and clinicians may be able to recognize and explain more effectively the processes of development of violence in intimate relationships. By examining the correlation between attachment styles and various forms of psychological abuse, individuals at higher risk for physical abuse may be identified and treated with greater success.

Purpose of the Study

The present study investigates attachment styles as factors that may influence the ability that some couples have to deal with a low level of consensus in their intimate relationships successfully, in contrast to other couples who tend to engage in abusive behaviors in response to a lack of consensus in their relationships. In particular, four

attachment patterns - secure, dismissing-avoidant, preoccupied, and fearful-avoidant - are examined as they are expected to have different associations with various forms of psychological abuse and constructive approaches to conflict resolution.

It is proposed that individuals deal with conflict in their relationships based on the degree of the attachment style that they exhibit. Hence, the purpose of this study is to investigate whether or not there are connections among the four attachment styles and four types of psychological abuse (i.e., hostile withdrawal, restrictive engulfment, denigration, and domination-intimidation) that are commonly used by members of discordant couples when the level of consensus between the partners' needs and preferences is low. Securely attached individuals are expected to be capable of dealing with conflict successfully; thus, they should use effective conflict resolution skills and resort to relatively low levels of any forms of psychological abuse. On the other hand, individuals with insecure attachment patterns are expected to be more likely to engage in various forms of psychological abuse, based on the type of insecure attachment pattern that they exhibit. In particular, individuals exhibiting a high degree of dismissing-avoidant attachment style are expected to use more hostile withdrawal tactics when they experience conflict or lack of consensus in their intimate relationships. Individuals with a high degree of fearful-avoidant attachment style are expected to use more denigration tactics in dealing with conflict or lack of consensus within their intimate relationships. Finally, individuals with a high degree of preoccupied attachment style are expected to engage in more of the restrictive engulfment and domination-intimidation types of

psychologically abusive behavior when they experience conflict or a lack of consensus in their relationships (Mayseless, 1991).

Based on the existing literature, very few studies have examined various forms of psychological abuse, and there is a lack of information on possible links between variation in attachment styles and variation in forms of psychological abuse in discordant couple relationships. This study will consider therapeutic implications of the findings for working with couples from a theoretical model that combines family systems and attachment theory perspectives. Clinicians working with discordant abusive couples will be able to utilize knowledge from this study in their efforts to create effective interventions for such dyads. Assessment and identification of factors such as attachment styles that are associated with different forms of psychological abuse can help clinicians identify couples that may be at risk for abuse, as well as design interventions that directly treat such underlying risk factors in addition to focusing on controlling ongoing abusive acts themselves.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Abuse in Intimate Relationships

Domestic abuse is a major social problem within intimate relationships in the United States and all around the world (Mahoney, Williams, & West, 1999). Research indicates that half of all of the women living in this country experience some kind of abuse from their intimate partner and one-third of those women are battered repeatedly every year (Wilson, 1997). Based on the report by the Surgeon General (USDHHS, 2001), we know that assault by an intimate partner is a leading cause of injuries among women, greater than injuries caused by automobile accidents, muggings, and cancer deaths combined. Estimates regarding the number of women who are abused range widely (Wiehle, 1998). Recent statistics from a nationally representative sample show that 52% of women had been assaulted at least once in their lifetime (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). It is estimated that approximately 11 to 14 percent of married women in the United States experience some sort of physical violence from their intimate partners each year (Schafer, Caetano, & Clark, 1998; Straus & Gelles, 1990). In the past decade, violence against women has received attention and awareness from many different sources. Congress passed the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) in 1994, allowing greater legal protection for women against their abusers and encouraging greater penalties for abusers. To be able to understand and explain the phenomenon of abuse, it is important to define what is considered abuse.

A review of the literature on the subject of domestic abuse reveals that although there are many definitions of abuse that occur in the context of intimate relationships, no clear agreement exists among researchers in the field of domestic violence on how broad or narrow the definition of domestic abuse should be (Gelles, 2000). Many people see domestic abuse as a husband's physical assault against his wife. However, abuse has many different forms and could be exhibited as any form of physically, sexually, and psychologically abusive behaviors directed by one partner against the other partner, regardless of gender (Gelles, 2000). Physical abuse is the most obvious form of abuse, because it is the most visible and may lead to deadly consequences. Some physically abusive behaviors include slapping, kicking, shoving, pushing, punching, stabbing, and shooting, among many others (Gordon, 1998). Sexual abuse can be defined as any unwanted sexual encounter, which may include any of the following behaviors: unwanted touching, excessive jealousy, using sexually derogatory names, forced sexual activity, painful or degrading acts during sexual activity, and exploitation of individuals through pornography or prostitution (Gordon, 1998).

Psychological Abuse

Emotional or psychological abuse is often much more subtle than physical or sexual abuse, commonly resulting in its going unnoticed by its victims and not being as widely recognized as physical abuse by society in general (Gordon, 1998). Although psychological abuse does not leave bruises and visible marks, it is very damaging to many areas of its victims' emotional and physical well-being (Gordon, 1998).

Psychological abuse is rather difficult to define and assess (Gelles, 2000). Multiple researchers have attempted to come up with a definition; hence, several definitions of psychological abuse are available. For example, it has been defined as “any use of words, voice, action, or lack of action meant to control, hurt, or demean another person” (Wilson, 1997, p. 10), or “verbal and nonverbal acts which symbolically hurt the other, or the use of threats that hurt the other” (Straus, 1979, p. 77). Chang (1995) defined it as “any non-physical behavior that controls through the use of fear, humiliation, and verbal assault” (p. 133). Emotionally or psychologically abusive relationships involve “repeated hurtful exchanges with a disregard for the partner’s feelings” (Wilson, 1997, p. 10). Loring (1994) defined psychological abuse as “an ongoing process in which one individual systematically diminishes and destroys the inner self of another, constantly belittling the essential ideas, feelings, perceptions, and personality characteristics of the victim” (p. 1). Psychological abuse may consist of either coercive or aversive behaviors that usually emotionally hurt or threaten another individual (Murphy & Cascardi, 1999). This type of abuse may include intimidation, isolation, verbal abuse, intense criticism, insults, threats of bodily harm (to the victim, children, or abuser) and brainwashing, restraint from activities and restricting the field of movement, denial of resources and preventing the victim from obtaining employment, as well as taking all financial freedom and information away from the victim (Gordon, 1998). Various forms of psychological abuse have some common effects, which include

producing fear, eliciting the recipient's dependency, and damaging the victim's self-concept (Murphy & Cascardi, 1999).

Relationships in which physical abuse is present almost inevitably exhibit some forms of psychological abuse as well (Tolman, 1999). It has been shown that physical and psychological abuse often go hand-in-hand in intimate relationships, and it has been found that psychological abuse is a precursor to physical violence in many relationships (Follingstad et al., 1990; Murphy & O'Leary, 1989). Although some emotionally abusive relationships may not involve physical or sexual abuse, it has been reported that most physically abusive relationships involve some sort of psychological or sexual abuse (Murphy & O'Leary, 1989).

Clinicians and researchers are paying increased attention to psychological abuse within relationships (Follingstad et al., 1990; Loring, 1994; O'Leary & Maiuro, 2001; Tolman, 1989). A major reason for this is a realization that psychological abuse is as detrimental, or even more detrimental than physical abuse to its victims (Sackett & Saunders, 2001). O'Leary and Maiuro (2001) deem psychological abuse as a "variable deserving critical attention" (p. 1). They further state that it is crucial to examine this variable in detail because it has been relatively neglected by the researchers in comparison to physical abuse. Although researchers may not pay as much attention to psychological abuse, it is well known that it has major negative effects on victims' health and overall well-being (O'Leary & Maiuro, 2001). It has been found to be detrimental to individuals' self-esteem (Aguilar & Nightingale, 1994; Ferraro, 1979). Women

experiencing psychological abuse in their intimate relationships reported major health problems, including higher frequencies of serious chronic illness and visits to the doctor, higher use of therapeutic services and psychotropic medication, even when the effects of physical abuse were statistically removed or adjusted for (Coker, Smith, Bethee, King, & McKeown, 2000; Marshall, 1996).

In one study, 72 percent of abused women reported that psychological abuse had a more severe impact than physical abuse (Follingstad et al., 1990). Areas, Street, and Brody (1996) found that psychological abuse was a significant predictor of depression and problem drinking in their sample of married women. In 1993, the Commonwealth Fund National Health Survey found that 7% of American women (3.9 million) who were married or living with someone as part of a couple were physically abused, whereas 37% (20.7 million) were verbally or emotionally abused by a spouse or partner. In a survey of 234 women with a history of physical abuse, 229 (98%) reported emotional abuse as well; 174 (74%) had received death threats; 21 (90%) were ridiculed; 170 (73%) experienced excessive jealousy and possessiveness by their partner; 133 (57%) were threatened with changes to the marriage (i.e., divorce or abandonment); 184 (79%) were restricted (isolation from social or financial support); and 137 (59%) had property (sentimental or personal objects) damaged. Of these six types of emotional abuse, 101 (45%) of the sample rated ridicule the worst, and 159 (72%) of the battered women reported that the emotional abuse had a more severe impact on them than the physical abuse. Of the 229 women who suffered emotional abuse, 54 percent (123) could use the

emotional abuse to predict subsequent physical abuse from their partners (Follingstad et al., 1990).

Another study of abused women found that nearly half of the women in a sample were forbidden by their abusers to have personal friends or to have such friends in the home (Loring, 1994). Another study found that 30% of the 420 abused women studied had actually been physically imprisoned by their abusers. These women reported having been locked in closets, locked in or physically confined to their homes, and tied to furniture (Ewing, 1987). Many times battered women also are financially isolated by their partners. Walker (1984) found that 34% of the 435 battered women she studied had no access to checking accounts, 51 percent had no access to charge accounts, and 27 percent had no access to cash. Some battered women who are employed outside of the home are even denied access to their earned financial resources by their partners (McCue, 1995).

Definition of Psychological Abuse

O'Leary and Maurio (2001) note that definitions of psychological abuse can focus on different aspects of the subjective experience and behavior of the perpetrator, the effects that abuse has on the victims, and the areas of a victim's life-functioning that are affected. For the purposes of this study, psychological abuse will be assessed as a multifactorial construct based on the areas of the recipient's functioning that the perpetrator's actions target. In particular, Murphy and Cascardi (1999) identified a 4-factor model of psychological abuse by conducting a systematic review of the literature on psychological

abuse in marital and dating relationships and identifying common forms of psychological abuse. As described earlier, the forms of psychological abuse that they identified included domination/intimidation, restrictive engulfment, denigration, and hostile withdrawal (Murphy & Cascardi, 1999).

Dominance/intimidation is identified as threats to physically hurt, disfigure, or kill the partner; property violence; intense verbal aggression; and coercive threats to divorce or take away the children. This type of psychological abuse serves a function of producing fear or submission through the display of verbal aggression (Murphy & Hoover, 2001).

Restrictive engulfment or restricting the partner's personal territory and freedom involves "tracking, monitoring, and controlling the partner's activities and social contacts, along with efforts to squelch perceived threats to the relationship" (Murphy & Hoover, 2001, p. 41). It may involve isolation from friends and family, stalking or checking on whereabouts, invading diary or telephone records, preventing the partner from working or going to school or doing things on their own, controlling partners' money, exit blocking, interfering with partner's use of telephone, taking car keys, complaining that the partner spends too much time with friends, asking the partner where he or she had been or acting in a suspicious manner, getting angry that the partner went somewhere without letting the other person know, and trying to make the partner feel guilty for not spending more time together (Murphy & Hoover, 2001). These behaviors serve the function of isolating the partner and restricting activities and social contacts in

order to increase partner's dependency on and availability to the abuser (Murphy & Hoover, 2001).

Denigration is defined as using humiliation and degradation, including verbal abuse in front of others, insults, name-calling, put-downs, and criticism of the person's abilities to make someone feel less competent, less adequate, or even less human - serves the function of controlling the partner and reducing his or her self-esteem. Typically, the abuser appears to be acting to subjugate the partner by undermining his or her belief that he or she is worthy of attention and respect (Murphy & Hoover, 2001). Individuals who use these types of behaviors were found to be vindictive, domineering, and compulsively self-reliant; yet their need for maintaining their intimate relationships was very high and they did not want to let go of their partners (Murphy & Hoover, 2001).

Hostile withdrawal includes withdrawing or withholding of positive and supportive behaviors that are generally expected within intimate relationships, including avoiding the partner during conflict and "withholding emotional availability or contact with the partner in a cold or punitive fashion" (Murphy & Hoover, 2001, p. 41).

Withdrawal may be complete, such as leaving the relationship for an extended period of time without any explanation; or it can be partial, in which the perpetrator stays with the partner but gives the partner the "silent treatment," ignoring the partner, or showing insensitivity to the partner's needs (Tolman, 1999). Murphy and Hoover (2001) proposed that such conflict-avoidance tactics may serve a protective function for those individuals who are uncomfortable with getting too close to their attachment figure; the individual

uses distance as a barrier to getting hurt (Murphy, Myer, & O'Leary, 1994). These tactics focus on punishing the partner and increasing the partner's anxiety and insecurity about the relationship (Murphy & Hoover, 2001).

Conflict in Intimate Relationships

Leonard and Senchak (1996) suggest that relationship aggression and domestic abuse arise in a context of verbally aggressive or coercive conflict used by partners involved in intimate relationships. Multiple empirical studies have reported a connection between domestic abuse or aggression and conflict in intimate couple relationships (Burman, Margolin, & John, 1993; Cordova, Jacobson, Gottman, Rushe, & Cox, 1993; Gryl, Stith, & Bird, 1991; Jacobson, Gottman, Waltz, Rushe, Babcock, & Holtzworth-Munroe, 1994; Margolin, John, & Gleberman, 1988; Murphy & O'Leary, 1989). For example, violent dating partners report using more confrontational tactics, and they experience more negative emotions when they have to deal with unresolved conflicts within their intimate relationships than their non-violent counterparts (Gryl et al., 1991). Cordova et al. (1993) reported that abusive couples in their sample tended to use more destructive conflict-resolution behaviors, such as avoidance, demand-withdraw, and lack of cooperation, than either distressed non-abusive or non-distressed couples when they had to deal with unresolved conflict or arguments.

Ideally, intimate relationships are supportive and loving, providing each member of the couple with a protective and safe environment. However, when two individuals with different expectations, goals, preferences, and beliefs about the world and their

relationship interact with one another over time, it is to be expected that their relationship will encounter some degree of disagreement, lack of consensus on some issues, and potentially conflict between them. Intimate relationships present multiple opportunities for differences of needs and opinions between partners, and thus potential for conflict (Canary & Messman, 2000).

Among the problems presented most often by couples seeking therapy is conflict, along with the anger expression associated with it. The content of the issues may vary within a couple and among couples, but the underlying problems with conflict and anger are relatively constant and common (Buss, 1991). The ways that couples interact regarding their conflicts is one of the most important variables that has been found to predict the future success of couples' relationships (Buss, 1991; Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Corcoran & Mallinckrodt, 2000; Cox & Brooks-Gunn, 1999; Ridley, Wilhelm, & Surra, 2001). Researchers have focused on the ways in which couples tend to deal with their areas of conflict in order to identify targets for treatments intended to reduce couples' relationship distress and risk of dissolution (Christensen & Pasch, 1993; Christensen & Shenk, 1991; Fowers, 1998; Gottman, 1993, 1994; Weiss & Heyman, 1990).

Because conflict is frequently accompanied by anger and hostility, it often has been considered as something negative that members of a couple should avoid (Buss, 1991). It is rather rare that differences between the partners are viewed as positive, rather than as an indicator of a dysfunctional or less than satisfying relationship (Buss, 1991).

However, empirical studies with clinical and non-clinical couples found that happily married couples may actually report slightly more open expression of conflict than unhappily married couples (Pistole & Arricale, 2003). Researchers have found conflict to be an inevitable part of a relationship. It contributes positively to creating stable and satisfying relationships if resolved successfully and effectively (Duck, 1988; Peterson, 1983; Pistole & Arricale, 2003; Wood & Duck, 1995). Empirical studies indicate that couples who engage openly in conflict report greater marital satisfaction than couples who tend to avoid conflict and withdraw in the face of their low level of consensus on issues (Christensen & Pasch, 1993; Gottman, 1991, 1994). Conflict provides important opportunities through which partners can learn more about each other and themselves, potentially using that knowledge to better meet each person's needs within the relationship (Raush, Barry, Hertel, & Swain, 1974). It has been found that although conflict might be upsetting in the short term, in the long term it can be highly beneficial, if the couple engages in problem solving and resolves their differences in mutually acceptable ways (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989; Notarius, Benson, Sloane, Vanzetti, & Hornyak, 1989). Simpson, Rholes, and Phillips (1996) postulated that, "disagreements between partners test their skills at maintaining cooperative relationships, their ability to make joint plans, and to work toward mutual, long-term goals" (p. 891). They suggested that conflict between partners promotes development of a successful relationship. When partners engage in conflict resolution, they have a chance to evaluate their relationship, re-examine their feelings and beliefs about the partner and the relationship. They have an

opportunity to see another perspective on the issue, and to learn some degree of flexibility and accommodation (Simpson et al., 1996).

However, members of many couples have never learned how to deal with conflict and anger in a helpful, even intimacy-enhancing way (Weeks & Hof, 1994). They have learned instead to use a variety of less than helpful and even abusive strategies to attempt to resolve conflict, including avoidance, disregard, denial, withdrawal, compliance, scapegoating, attacking, or deflecting the current situation by creating a new conflict or focusing on an old one (Weeks & Hof, 1994). Individuals who tend to avoid conflict or do not know how to deal with it successfully can harm their relationships irreparably (Markman, 1991). In contrast, individuals who have learned and have been able to deal with conflict successfully have been found to be able to move through the feelings of anger to experience a sense of mastery in being able to compromise and negotiate an agreement that benefits both partners, allowing each of them to understand and take into account the other's point of view (Knudson, Sommers, & Colding, 1980; Weeks & Hof, 1994).

Based on empirical research and clinical practice, it is well known that some partners are capable of dealing with their differences constructively, yet there are other individuals who resort to abuse and violence as a way of dealing with relationship conflict. Researchers have noticed that individuals tend to use the same conflict resolution styles in various settings and circumstances (Corcoran & Mallinckrodt, 2000; Hocker & Wilmot, 1991; Rahim, 1983). Researchers concluded that this consistency in

responses to conflict may constitute general styles, or individuals' general orientation to intimate relationships (Corcoran & Mallinckrodt, 2000).

Rahim (1983) proposed that ways in which people deal with conflict can be based on two dimensions - 'concern for self' and 'concern for others'. The first dimension assesses the degree to which a person expresses concern for his or her own needs; while the second dimension assesses the degree to which a person expresses concern for the needs of others (Rahim, 1983). Each dimension varies on a scale from low to high (Rahim, 1983). Based on the combination of these two dimensions, Rahim (1983) proposed five conflict resolution styles - dominating, avoiding, obliging, integrating, and compromising (Rahim, 1983). People who use domination in conflict resolution emphasize their own needs over the needs of others (Rahim, 1983). People who oblige during conflict combine high concern for others with low concern for self and usually give in to the demands of the other person involved in a conflict (Rahim, 1983). Persons who avoid conflict show low concern for self and others because they do not even try to figure out how to resolve the conflict (Rahim, 1983). In contrast, those who are able to use integrative and compromising styles of conflict resolution have high regard for both self and others, because they try to find a resolution that works for both parties. The difference between the two relatively positive styles (i.e., integrative and compromising) is that individuals using an integrative style strive to maximize gains or benefits for both parties and look for the best win-win solution, whereas individuals using a compromising

style of conflict resolution tend to settle for a minimally satisfactory solution for both parties to avoid further conflict (Rahim, 1983) (see Figure 1).

		Concern for Self	
		High	Low
Concern for Others	High	Compromising	Obliging
	Low	Dominating	Avoiding

Integrating

Figure 1: The Styles of Handling Interpersonal Conflict (Rahim, 1983).

Based on the similarity of this two-dimensional model of conflict styles involving dimensions of concern for self and others and the two dimensions of working models in the theory of attachment styles, it has been suggested that attachment theory may be a useful framework for studying and understanding interactions within discordant intimate relationships (Gallo & Smith, 2001; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Hazan & Shaver, 1990; Rholes, Simpson, & Stevens, 1998). Growing empirical evidence supports this connection between conflict management patterns and attachment styles (Cohn, Silver, Cowan, Cowan, & Pearson, 1992; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Kobak, Cole, Ferenz-Gillies, & Fleming, 1993; Kobak & Hazan, 1991; Simpson, Rholes, & Phillips, 1996). Researchers have found a connection between individuals' attachment styles and their problem-solving behavior during conflict. Studies looking at a three-category model of attachment (secure attachment and two forms of insecure attachment) found that securely attached individuals were more likely than insecurely attached individuals to employ integrative and compromising styles of conflict resolution during problem-solving tasks (Levy & Davis, 1988; Pistole, 1989; Van Leeuwen, 1992). On the other hand, insecurely

attached individuals (especially those who expect their attachment figures to be consistently unresponsive to their needs) were found to express dysfunctional anger during the problem-solving process (Kobak et al., 1993). Avoidant individuals were observed to exhibit a lack of support and warmth during problem solving tasks (Kobak et al., 1993).

The present study investigated the degree to which individuals' attachment styles, which involve patterns that they have developed for coping with conflict and other threats to the bond between partners, are associated with the use of constructive versus psychologically abusive methods of dealing with low consensus in intimate couple relationships. In order to examine the role of attachment styles in adult interactions, it is important to provide a theoretical framework explaining the concepts and formation of attachment in infants and children.

Theoretical Rationale

In the past decade, attachment theory has been used in a number of studies as a theoretical background for studying and understanding intimate relationships, and abuse within these relationships (Carden, 1994; Collins, 1996; Gallo & Smith, 2001; Scott & Cordova, 2002; Shaver & Hazan, 1988; Simpson, 1990; Ognibene & Collins, 1998). It has been found that attachment patterns that individuals exhibit in their interactions with intimate partners predict the nature and quality of their close relationships (Ognibene & Collins, 1998; Shaver & Hazan, 1993). Furthermore, different attachment styles were found to play an important role in the way that individuals deal with threatening or

challenging life experiences, including anxiety provoking conflictual situations between the partners (Ognibene & Collins, 1998). Attachment patterns underlie the use of various coping strategies that individuals employ in dealing with conflict provoking circumstances, and determine whether conflict resolution will be successful or unsuccessful, involving possible instances of negative behavior that may be abusive (Ognibene & Collins, 1998). Thus, it is important to understand how individuals' working models of attachment are associated with their conflict coping strategies, because these strategies may have very important implications for psychological and physical well-being of individuals, as well as the success of their intimate relationships (Ognibene & Collins, 1998).

Attachment Theory

Attachment theory places importance on formation of specific and long-lasting relationships for individuals and explains why disruptions or conflicts in these relationships can result in psychological, psycho-somatic, and psycho-social problems in daily functioning and everyday interactions between and among individuals (Fraley, 2002). These attachment relationships are necessary for individuals throughout their lives, and attachment theory proposes that an individual's personality is shaped by these relationships during childhood (Cassidy & Shaver, 1999; Fraley, 2002).

The theory of attachment was originally developed by John Bowlby, a British psychoanalyst, who noticed that some infants experience extreme distress when separated from their parents (Fraley, 2002). Bowlby (1969) observed that infants separated from

their parents commonly would go to extraordinary lengths (e.g., crying, clinging, frantically searching) in an attempt to either prevent separation from their parents or to reestablish proximity to a missing parent. He further noted that such expressions are common to a wide variety of species of mammals and speculated that these behaviors may serve an evolutionary survival function (Fraley, 2002).

Bowlby's theory is rooted in an ethological perspective and suggests that these attachment behaviors, such as crying and searching for a caregiver, are adaptive responses to separation from a primary attachment figure (i.e., someone who provides support, protection, and care) (Fraley, 2002). Because human infants cannot feed or protect themselves, they are dependent on the care and protection of adults (Fraley, 2002). Bowlby (1969) proposed that, over the course of evolutionary history, infants who were able to maintain proximity to an attachment figure (i.e., by looking cute or by expressing attachment behaviors) would be more likely to survive. Bowlby (1969) further postulated that the mechanism of natural selection is responsible for regulation of an infant's proximity-seeking behaviors to an attachment figure. This mechanism was termed by Bowlby an "attachment behavioral system." Thus, according to Bowlby (1982), infants' behaviors are regulated through their attachment behavioral system by their innate need for safety, security, and survival, which ensures that infants seek proximity to their caregiver. When children are in distress, sick, or scared, their attachment systems will be activated, prompting them to seek comfort and protection from an attachment figure (Bowlby, 1982; Bretherton, 1985; Collins & Feeney, 2000).

Although Bowlby believed that this mechanism of proximity seeking is normative for human children, he noticed that there are individual differences in the way that children react to the availability and responsiveness of the attachment figure, and children respond differently to particular threats that they perceive (Fraley, 2002). In order to understand these individual differences, Bowlby and his colleague Mary Ainsworth began studying infant-parent interactions. Ainsworth and her colleagues (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bell & Ainsworth, 1972) developed a laboratory technique called the “Strange Situation” for studying infant-parent attachments. The Strange Situation is a behavioral assessment procedure designed to assess the quality of mother-child attachment. In this task, 12-month-old infants were brought into a laboratory and systematically observed while separated and reunited with their mothers. On the basis of information about children’s reactions to an unfamiliar environment, an unfamiliar person (the experimenter), and separation/reunification with the mother, collected through observations of the children, Ainsworth and her colleagues were able to determine the quality and organization of attachment within the mother-child dyad.

Ainsworth et al. (1978) identified three major attachment patterns based on infants' behavior during their reunion with the mother after the brief separation. Infants who were termed “secure” explored their environment actively in their mothers’ presence and used the mother as a "secure base" for their adventures. They were upset when separated from the mother and sought bodily contact and comfort when reunited with her (Ainsworth et al, 1978). In the Strange Situation task, about 60% of children

participating in the experiment behaved in a way that was considered as "normative" (i.e., secure) by Bowlby (Fraley, 2002). About 20% of the children participating in the study were rather uncomfortable when their mothers left the room and became extremely distressed. When their mothers had returned, they were not able to be comforted easily, and even though the children sought contact with their mothers, they seemed to want to "punish" the mothers for leaving and showed anger and resistance upon the mothers' return (Ainsworth et al., 1978). These infants were termed "anxious-ambivalent." Finally, about 20% of children, labeled as "avoidant," did not appear to be distressed when their mothers left the room, and when the mothers had returned they did not seem to seek contact with them and instead focused their attention on an object or a toy rather than on the parent (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Ainsworth and her colleagues also found sets of parental behaviors that corresponded to the infants' attachment styles: the secure infants' mothers were sensitive and responsive; the anxious infants' mothers were inconsistent, unpredictable, and intrusive; the avoidant infants' mothers were rejecting (Ainsworth et al., 1978).

According to Bowlby (1973) and Ainsworth et al. (1978), children internalize the experiences that they have with their primary caregivers during infancy, childhood, and adolescence, developing "internal working models." These internal working models are cognitive schemas or "mental models" of both self and others, which influence individuals' patterns of support/proximity seeking and support giving in their adult intimate relationships (Simpson, Rholes, & Nelligan, 1992). These working models have

two important features: “(a) whether or not the attachment figure is judged to be a sort of person who generally responds to calls for support and protection; and (b) whether or not the self is judged to be a sort of person toward whom anyone, and the attachment figure in particular, is likely to respond in a helpful way” (Bowlby, 1973, p. 204). Children whose primary caregivers are consistently responsive and available to them should develop a secure attachment style, which is a belief that others are trustworthy and reliable, and that the self is valuable and worthy of love and support (Ognibene & Collins, 1998). However, if primary caregivers are inconsistently responsive, or consistently unresponsive, children are more likely to develop insecure attachment patterns. Some individuals with insecure attachment patterns may believe that they are not valuable and are unlovable and others are unreliable and not trustworthy; whereas other insecure individuals may see the self as valuable and lovable, but others as unreliable and untrustworthy; and finally, insecure individuals may see others as trustworthy and reliable, but the self as not valuable or lovable (Ognibene & Collins, 1998).

According to attachment theory and with support from empirical studies, throughout childhood and into adulthood individuals develop and maintain their internal working models, which lead to relatively stable (trait-like) individual differences in attachment styles (Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985). Bowlby (1969) proposed that those early relationships are extremely important in determining a child’s personality and future worldview. Although Bowlby’s (1979) primary focus was to understand the

nature of the infant-caregiver relationship, he believed that attachment characterized human experiences from "the cradle to the grave" (p. 129). He postulated that individuals' attachment styles with their parents are the prototypes for their future relationships with their intimate partners (Bowlby, 1979). Research on adult attachment is guided by an assumption that the same mechanism that is responsible for attachment bond formation in parent-child relationships is also responsible for the formation of close intimate relationships between adults (Fraley, 2002). It is presumed that attachment is a relatively stable and enduring trait-like personal characteristic, which determines the way in which we form our intimate relationships throughout our life (Bowlby, 1988). Researchers have found significant continuity of attachment styles throughout the life cycle (Hamilton, 2000; Waters, Merrick, Treboux, Crowell, & Albersheim, 2000). Studies support the idea that attachment security is stable from infancy throughout adulthood and that change in attachment security is generally associated with some major life-altering events and major changes in family environment, such as a death of a significant other or divorce (Hamilton, 2000; Waters et al., 2000; Waters, Hamilton, & Weinfield, 2000).

Attachment Theory and Adult Intimate Relationships

Understanding of importance of attachment in adult life has grown greatly in the past decade. Recently, a growing number of researchers have been exploring how different attachment styles influence adult intimate relationships (Collins & Read, 1990; Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Levy & Davis, 1988; Simpson, 1990;

Simpson, Rholes, & Nelligan, 1992). For the purposes of the present study adult intimate relationships are defined as the relationships between two non-biologically related individuals, who are “together for the purposes of courtship and affection,” including dating, co-habiting, engaged, and married heterosexual partners (Canary & Messman, 2001, p. 262). In this study, conflict between only heterosexual couples will be examined. Most of the literature available in the field has been focused on such unions, and samples of clinic couples that are available for studies such as the one to be used in the current study are predominantly heterosexual, limiting the potential for collecting an adequate sized sample for statistical analysis of same-sex couples.

Empirical evidence from multiple studies supports Bowlby’s position that affectional bonds that individuals develop throughout the life-span depend on the attachment patterns that they attained in childhood (Hamilton, 2000; Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985; Ognibene & Collins, 1998; Shaver & Hazan, 1993; Vaughn, Egeland, Sroufe, & Waters, 1979; Waters & Cummings, 2000; Waters et al., 2000). As children grow and develop, they use their attachment figures as “secure bases” throughout life (Ainsworth, 1991; Byng-Hall, 1995a). As they grow older, most individuals take on more of the responsibility for managing their attachment relationships and eventually new attachment relationships are formed as individuals establish intimate bonds other than those that they have established with their parents and/or caregivers (Byng-Hall, 1995b; Weiss, 1982).

Hazan and Shaver (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Shaver & Hazan, 1988; Shaver, Hazan, & Bradshaw, 1988) have played a major role in the development of the attachment theory approach to adult intimate relationships. They were two of the first researchers to explore Bowlby's ideas in the context of romantic relationships, and they applied Ainsworth's three-category system of attachment styles to the study of adult romantic relationships by translating the system into an adult romantic attachment questionnaire. Their measure asks respondents to read three paragraphs:

- A. I am somewhat uncomfortable being close to others; I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on them. I am nervous when anyone gets too close, and often, others want me to be more intimate than I feel comfortable being.
- B. I find it relatively easy to get close to others and I am comfortable depending on them and having them depend on me. I don't worry about being abandoned or about someone getting too close to me.
- C. I find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like. I often worry that my partner doesn't really love me or won't want to stay with me. I want to get very close to my partner, and this sometimes scares people away.

The respondent also is asked to indicate which paragraph characterizes him or her best, in terms of the way that they feel, think, and behave in their intimate relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Hazan and Shaver proposed that if adult romantic relationships

are attachment relationships and are based on the attachment behavior system, then individual differences that were observed by Ainsworth and her colleagues in infants should be observed in interactions between adults in their close relationships. Thus, they suggested that adults could also be separated into three categories according to their attachment style. Based on the self-descriptions of their sample, they separated adults into secure, anxious-resistant, and avoidant subgroups. Avoidant adults appeared to be uninterested and uncaring about their close relationships, and they preferred not to be too dependent on other people or to have others be too dependent on them (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Secure adults were viewed as able to trust their partners to be available to them; they were able to seek support from their partners, and be comfortable with having others depend on them (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Finally, anxious-resistant adults worried that others may not love them completely, and they were easily frustrated or angered when their attachment needs were unmet (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Based on this three-category model, Hazan and Shaver (1987) found that the distribution of adults' attachment style categories was similar to that observed among infants. In other words, about 60% of adults classified themselves as secure, about 20% described themselves as avoidant, and about 20% described themselves as anxious-resistant (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

To further broaden the conceptualization and study of attachment, Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) developed a four-pattern model of adult attachment, based on Bowlby's (1973) claim that attachment patterns reflect working models that are

combinations of the person's concept of the self and his or her concept of the attachment figure. Four attachment patterns were defined in terms of positive/negative assessment of self and positive/negative assessment of others. This four-category model identified the degree to which individuals have internalized a sense of self-worth, and their expectations of the availability and supportiveness of others (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Diehl, Elnick, Bourbeau, & Labouvie-Vief, 1998; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). Thus, if individuals have positive perceptions of self, they are more likely to feel self-confident and comfortable in close relationships. Individuals with negative perceptions of self are dependent on others for approval in order to maintain a sense of self-worth, which creates anxiety within close relationships (Bartholomew, Henderson, & Dutton, 2001). Further, if individuals have a positive perception of others, they expect them to be available and supportive; thus, they are capable of trusting and seeking support from their intimate partners and are not fearful of closeness in their relationships. On the other hand, individuals with negative perceptions of others tend to withdraw when they feel that their partners get too close and need to maintain a "safe" distance from their partners, particularly when they feel threatened (Bartholomew et al., 2001).

Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) distinguished four patterns of attachment: secure (positive self - positive others), dismissing (positive self - negative others), preoccupied (negative self - positive others), and fearful (negative self - negative others) (see Figure 2).

		Model of Self	
		Positive	Negative
Model of Others	Positive	SECURE (comfortable with intimacy and autonomy)	PREOCCUPIED (overly dependent)
	Negative	DISMISSING (denial of attachment)	FEARFUL/AVOIDANT (fear of attachment)

Figure 2. Four-Category Model of Adult Attachment (Bartholomew et al., 1991).

Secure Attachment Pattern

Individuals who receive consistent and responsive care-giving are expected to develop a secure attachment pattern. They develop a positive view of both self and others (Bartholomew et al., 2001). Secure individuals tend to be comfortable with intimacy, are confident that they are valued by others, and are able to rely on others for support (Collins & Feeney, 2000). Overall, secure adults tend to be more satisfied and comfortable in their relationships than insecure adults (Pistole & Arricale, 2003). Their relationships are characterized by greater longevity, trust, commitment, and interdependence (Feeney, Noller, & Callan, 1994), and they are more likely to use romantic partners as a secure base from which to explore the world (Fraley & Davis, 1997). Secure individuals are not threatened by closeness and are comfortable with autonomy within their intimate relationships (Pistole & Arricale, 2003). They expect their partners to be available to them, and are able to establish close intimate bonds without losing their sense of self, while maintaining high levels of self-esteem. Because they feel secure that they can rely on their partner, they are comfortable whenever they or

the partner desires some autonomy; the independent behavior is not a threat to the relationship. Their close relationships are characterized by being “safe havens and secure bases” for each partner (Bartholomew et al., 2001).

Preoccupied Attachment Pattern (Anxious-Ambivalent)

According to attachment theory, individuals who experienced inconsistent and insensitive care-giving early in life tend to develop a preoccupied pattern of attachment, characterized by a negative view of the self and a positive view of others as caregivers (Bartholomew et al., 2001). They have been found to have an amplified desire for closeness and dependence, but their concern about rejection is also heightened (Collins & Feeney, 2000). The individuals with this type of attachment believe that they are not worthy of being loved and cared for. They believe that they are to be blamed for the lack of support that they receive from their intimate partners. Preoccupied individuals tend to experience an intense need for approval in their close relationships (Morris, 1982). They are highly dependent on their intimate partners, demand attention, and become distressed if the partner is not readily available (Bartholomew, 1994; Bookwala, 2002). They feel helpless in their relationships, depending on their partners but experiencing an inability to elicit the degree of caring from the partner that they need (Hindy & Schwartz, 1984). When involved in close intimate relationships, they tend to be “jealous and possessive, never satisfied with their partner or their intimate relationship, and caught in a love-hate situation without being able to separate from their partner on their own initiative” (Mayseless, 1991, p. 25). They tend to cling to their partners and be hyper-vigilant and

overly concerned with the quality of their relationships (Pistole & Arricale, 2003). They would like “total” closeness, but do not believe that they will either receive or deserve it (Mayseless, 1991). Individuals with a preoccupied attachment style are not able to trust their partners to be available to them, because they do not expect consistent responsiveness and usually have rather unrealistic demands for support from their partners (Bartholomew, 1994). They are overly sensitive to partners’ responses to them and are likely to interpret any disagreement from their partners as an indication that the partners desire separation and are rejecting them (Pistole & Arricale, 2003). Individuals with a preoccupied insecure attachment style have been found to become anxious, fearful, clinging, angry, and aggressive when they believe that their partners are not sufficiently responsive or available to them (Bartholomew, 1994; Mayseless, 1991).

Fearful-Avoidant Attachment Pattern

Individuals exhibiting the fearful-avoidant attachment pattern have been found by researchers to have received uncaring and unavailable care-giving from their parents. They have concluded both that they are not lovable and that their significant others are not reliable sources of support and nurturance (Bartholomew et al., 2001). They desire intimacy and acceptance by others and are very sensitive to social approval; however, they are typically distrustful and uncomfortable with their intimate relationships and tend to avoid closeness because of their fear of rejection (Bartholomew, 1994; Bartholomew et al., 2001; Bookwala, 2002; Collins & Feeney, 2000; Collins & Read, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Ward, Hudson, & Marshall, 1996). Because they desire closeness, they

establish intimate relationships but keep their partners at a distance because they fear being rejected (Collins & Feeney, 2000; Ward et al., 1996). When they feel anxious or fearful, instead of seeking closeness, they maintain a relatively comfortable distance in their close relationships, while making efforts to ensure that their partners are not able to separate from them (Bartholomew et al., 2001; Collins & Feeney, 2000).

Dismissing-Avoidant Attachment Pattern

Adults with a dismissing-avoidant attachment pattern are hypothesized to have a history of rejecting or unresponsive attachment figures but still have developed a relatively positive view of self (Bartholomew et al., 2001). Dismissing individuals are suspicious about their intimate relationships and value independence, achievement, self-reliance, and self-sufficiency (Bookwala, 2002). They do not trust others to get close to them and tend to “rebuff attempts to get close to them” and “have enough ego strength to repress their longing, loneliness, and anger while making it on their own” (Mayseless, 1991, p. 25). They distance themselves from their partners, who they view in negative terms, as unlikely sources of nurturance, and whose needs they often minimize (Pistole & Arricale, 2003). They see their close relationships as relatively unimportant (Collins & Feeney, 2000). These individuals protect themselves against disappointment by avoiding close relationships and, in contrast to fearful-avoidant individuals, by maintaining a sense of independence and invulnerability based on their positive views of self (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). They tend to relate to others in instrumental terms - “gains and losses, giving and taking, rather than warm love and care” (Cassidy & Kobak, 1988;

Mayseless, 1991, p. 25). They feel a need to be in control of their relationships, and if they feel that they are losing control, they tend to be hostile in their interactions with the other person in order to create distance (Ward et al., 1996). However, their hostility is often of a passive-aggressive nature (Mayseless, 1991), exerting control through blocking the other person's goals rather than behaving in directly aggressive ways that might drive the other person away permanently. They have been found to be cool, critical, have rigid ideas and expectations, and are perceived by others as lonely and hostile (Mayseless, 1991).

These prototypical attachment behaviors stemming from different working models of attachment predict various emotional responses and interactions between partners involved in intimate relationships (Collins & Feeney, 2000; Fuendeling, 1998; Pistole & Arricale, 2003; Searle & Meara, 1999). Kobak and Sceery (1988) found that these different attachment styles guide individuals' responses to distressing situations. It has been suggested that individuals often perceive conflictual situations between partners as stressful and threatening to either the self or the relationship (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Baxter & Wilmot, 1985). This threat may interfere with the security that the individual feels within the relationship and activate the person's internal working models of attachment, creating stress (Pistole & Arricale, 2003). Thus, when individuals find themselves involved in stressful or conflictual situations with their attachment figure, these activated working models may lead them to raise questions about the partners' availability and commitment to the relationship (Simpson, Rholes, & Phillips, 1996).

These various working models of attachment are believed to have great influence on how individuals process information that they receive from their partners and how they deal with differences or disagreements that they encounter in their intimate relationships. An instance of conflict takes on a broader attachment-related meaning for the individual, resulting in particular responses that the person typically uses to cope with his or her attachment needs (Simpson et al., 1996).

Attachment and Abuse in Intimate Relationships

Attachment theory provides a framework from which to understand relationship problems between intimate partners, including various forms of abuse in discordant couples (Bookwala & Zdaniuk, 1998). In his work on attachment, Bowlby (1973, 1979) first observed that there is an association between anger and attachment. In particular, this association was the strongest for adults with insecure attachment styles. Bowlby (1979) noticed that adults identified as anxious-ambivalent and avoidant tended to experience “unconscious resentment” for their unavailable caregivers, and he further stated that this resentment seemed to stay with them throughout their adulthood and became directed away from their original caregivers onto someone who is usually weaker, such as a spouse or a child (p. 138).

In accord with Bowlby’s observations, other researchers were also able to make a connection between insecure attachment and a higher predisposition to anger in insecure children and adults and came to a conclusion that, in general, highly ambivalent and highly avoidant individuals appear to display more dysfunctional anger (termed “the

anger of despair” by Bowlby (1973)) than secure individuals (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Collins & Read, 1990; Kobak & Hazan, 1991; Kobak & Sceery, 1988; Mikulincer, 1998; Rholes, Simpson, & Orina, 1999; Simpson, 1990; Simpson, Rholes, & Phillips, 1996). Researchers found that avoidant adults tend to be perceived as more hostile, and both avoidant and anxious-ambivalent adults experience greater negative affect in their intimate relationships (Kobak & Sceery, 1988; Simpson et al., 1996). In stressful or anxiety/anger provoking situations, highly ambivalent individuals were found to express greater difficulty controlling their anger (more overt anger) and used fewer constructive behaviors than other insecure and secure individuals (Mikulincer, 1998). Avoidant individuals were found to show greater hostility (more covert anger) and were less aware of the degree of their psychological arousal than ambivalent or secure individuals (Mikulincer, 1998).

Ognibene and Collins (1998) speculated that insecure individuals are less capable of dealing with conflict in their intimate relationships, in part, due to their beliefs about self and others, as well as their feeling of lack of control over their environment. The perpetrators of abuse, based on this model, are not capable of maintaining constructive relationships with their partners when conflict arises, because of the deficiencies in their attachments to significant others that may result in their feelings of anger, anxiety, and grief (Wiehe, 1998). For example, dismissing-avoidant individuals, who are afraid of closeness, may use abusive tactics to distance from their partners when they experience anxiety and feel that their partners are getting closer than they can tolerate (Pistole &

Tarrant, 1993). Researchers found that due to an activation of their attachment styles when they feel anxiety, dismissing-avoidant individuals are more likely than secure individuals to withdraw from a partner, or to even leave an unsatisfying relationship (Bartholomew et al., 2001). Thus, it can be hypothesized that such individuals will employ hostile withdrawal tactics when involved in dissatisfying or discordant intimate relationships. In contrast, individuals whose attachment style emphasizes seeking closeness, specifically fearful-avoidant and preoccupied individuals, have been found to feel threatened by discord and the possibility that their relationship will terminate. Such individuals have been found to have intimate relationships characterized by high degrees of jealousy, possessiveness, and conflict (Mayseless, 1991). In conflictual situations, they tend to use abusive tactics to force connection and at least a temporary sense of security with their partners (Pistole & Tarrant, 1993).

Preoccupied individuals are especially prone to abusiveness, because of their excessive needs for support and reassurance from their partners. They become frustrated easily when their needs are not met and when they do not feel supported by their partners, such as in situations in which partners have disagreements (Bartholomew et al., 2001). Preoccupied individuals are often torn between their need for approval and their fear of rejection from those whose approval they need; thus, they tend to be demanding and potentially aggressive when their attachment needs are not met or when they experience discomfort with the partner or the relationship (Bartholomew et al., 2001). Thus, it is expected that such individuals will use more restrictive engulfment and

domination/intimidation tactics when they feel insecure in their intimate relationships (Mayseless, 1991).

Finally, when fearful-avoidant individuals experience anxiety in their intimate relationships, instead of using direct forms of aggression or confronting the partner, they may avoid direct conflict or confrontation, and instead use more passive-aggressive tactics, such as denigration of their partners, in order to decrease the partners' levels of self-esteem, and to make their partners feel less competent, less adequate, or even less human. When such individuals employ psychologically abusive behaviors to influence partner's self-image, they feel better about their own self-image, which has been found to lower their level of anxiety, thus, decreasing negative feelings that they experience about self (Bartholomew et al., 2001).

In terms of receiving abuse, secure individuals have been found to avoid staying in abusive relationships (Bartholomew et al., 2001). They do not tolerate aggression from their intimate partners, because of their high sense of self-worth and self-esteem (Bartholomew et al., 2001). Further, it has been found that individuals with a dismissing-avoidant attachment style also are not likely to tolerate abuse from their partners, because of their insufficient investment in the relationship (Bartholomew et al., 2001). On the other hand, preoccupied and fearfully-avoidant individuals are the ones who are more likely to stay in an abusive relationship because of their need for closeness and low regard for self (Bartholomew et al., 2001). Thus, an attachment perspective allows us to explore the processes that might be involved both in perpetration and the receipt of abuse,

and in staying versus leaving in the abusive relationships (Bartholomew et al., 2001). In addition, Babcock, Jacobson, and Gottman (1992) found that abusive husbands were less secure, more anxious/ambivalent, and reported more care-seeking, relationship anxiety, and anger than non-distressed/nonviolent and happily married husbands. Finally, Holtzworth-Munroe and Hutchinson (1993), using a four-category measure of attachment, found that in general, abusive husbands were less securely attached to their wives, trusted their wives less, and were more preoccupied with romantic relationships than their nonviolent counterparts.

Overall, researchers have found that abusive men are more likely to be classified as having fearful, preoccupied, or dismissing attachment styles, and less likely to be classified as secure when compared to non-abusive males (Dutton et al., 1994; Holtzworth-Munroe, Stuart, & Hutchinson, 1997). Research on relationship abuse and attachment further suggests that abusive individuals tend to lack self-confidence, as well as confidence in their partners' accessibility, display intense separation anxiety, respond to threats of abandonment by the partner with intense distress, may have "impaired secure base behavior," remain highly invested and dependent on their partners despite marital discord, and are unable to direct their attention toward the other social interactions outside the intimate relationship (i.e., friendships, extended family, co-workers) and outside activities necessary for healthy adult functioning (Babcock et al., 1992; Bartholomew, 1991; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1990; Bernard & Bernard, 1984; Dutton & Browning, 1988; Elbow, 1977; Follingstad, Rutledge, Berg, Hause, & Polek, 1990;

Ganley, 1981; Gayford, 1975; Goldstein & Rosenbaum, 1985; Gondolf & Hanneken, 1987; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Hilberman & Manson, 1977; Holtzworth-Munroe & Anglin, 1991; Holtzworth-Munroe & Hutchinson, 1993; Holtzworth-Munroe & Hutchinson, 1993; Holtzworth-Munroe, Hutchinson, Jacobson, Fehrenbach, & Fruzeti, 1992; Murphy & Cascardi, 1993; Murphy, Meyer, & O'Leary, 1994; Rounsaville, 1978; Saunders, 1986; Sonkin, Martin, & Walker, 1985; Tolman, 1989; Walker, 1984; West, Sheldon, & Reiffer, 1987).

When abusive partners were compared with non-abusive partners, researchers found that in the presence of marital conflict, abusers were more likely than non-abusers to attribute their partners' negative responses to the partners' having negative affect and ill-will toward them (Holtzworth-Munroe & Hutchinson, 1993). Furthermore, partners participating in a domestic violence program, when presented with vignettes of possible marital conflicts, were more likely to attribute negative intentions to their partners, suggesting that they lacked positive expectations regarding relationships in general, independent of interactions with their actual partners (Holtzworth-Munroe & Hutchinson, 1993).

In addition, research samples of couples provide evidence that abusive partners experience a high level of jealousy toward their partners (Bernard & Bernard, 1984; Gayford, 1975; Hilberman & Manson, 1977; Rounsaville, 1978). Dutton and Browning (1988) found that when abusive husbands were presented with a videotape of marital conflict in which it was implied that the male was abandoned by his female partner, they

were particularly angered by the scenario. The abusive husbands also rated this experience as most relevant to their own relationships, as compared to a videotaped scenario in which couples had a conflict that was not related to the issue of distance versus closeness in the relationship. In similar studies, Holtzworth-Munroe and Anglin (1991) and Holtzworth-Munroe and Hutchinson (1993) found that when abusive individuals were presented with hypothetical conflicts with their partners that involved issues of rejection, jealousy, and put-downs, they made particularly negative attributions for their partners' behaviors.

Abusive males were found to be narrowly focused on relationships with their wives, paying little attention to other people and activities in life, reporting a need for more support and nurturance from their wives (Holtzworth-Munroe & Hutchinson, 1993). This strong emotional investment in the relationship has been linked in empirical research investigations to high levels of hostility and verbal abuse that insecure individuals direct toward their partners (Sonkin, Martin, & Walker, 1985; Tolman, 1989). Abusive individuals also have been found to be unable to use their couple relationship as a secure base from which to comfortably explore the outside world by developing friendships and social contacts. Individuals with an "impaired secure base" tend to remain socially isolated, alienated, and involved with only few individuals (Bernard & Bernard, 1984). They tend to feel socially inadequate and experience high levels of anxiety in their interpersonal relationships (Gondolf & Hannken, 1987). Instead of developing outside interests and maintaining a balance between proximity and closeness, they develop an

intense focus on their partners, which can reach such extremes as stalking (Walker, 1984) or obsession (Dutton & Browning, 1988). In addition, partners who lack a secure attachment base were found to engage in a wide variety of coercive and controlling behaviors toward their partners (Murphy & Cascardi, 1993; Tolman, 1989). Clinical samples of insecure husbands, for example, exhibited strong efforts to control their wives, and they had a very difficult time tolerating their partners' autonomous behavior (Elbow, 1977; Ganley, 1981; Gondolf & Hanneken, 1987; Stets, 1988). Researchers proposed that these husbands resorted to various forms of psychological and physical abuse in order to decrease their anxiety regarding discord in their intimate relationships. Examples of psychologically abusive behaviors used by these men were tracking, monitoring, controlling and limiting partners' independent activities, imposing restrictions on the partner such as isolation from friends and family, and denying the partner access to economic resources (Follingstad, Rutledge, Berg, Hause, & Polek, 1990; Sonkin, Martin, & Walker, 1985; Walker, 1984).

From an attachment perspective, it has been proposed that such psychologically abusive behaviors, which focus on blocking the partner's autonomy, stem from the abuser's separation anxiety and fear of abandonment by the partner. Thus, insecure attachment is postulated to lie at the core of psychological abuse, as well as physical abuse, within intimate relationships. Although studies described above have made the connection between emotional insecurity and abuse, none of them have investigated the relationship between different forms of attachment insecurity and forms of psychological

abuse. Currently, most empirical studies on the effectiveness of treatment programs for abusive individuals and couples focus on anger management and physical violence prevention (O'Leary & Neidig, 1993). Although physical safety of the victims is of the utmost importance and the original goal of treatment should be on reducing or eliminating physical violence, psychological abuse often remains unaddressed in such programs and thus largely remains untreated (Gondolf & Russell, 1986; Tolman & Bhosley, 1991). However, most physically abusive relationships usually also include psychological abuse (Follingstad et al., 1990; Walker, 1984). Furthermore, psychological abuse has been found to be a precursor to physical violence and has been shown to have devastating long-lasting consequences (Follingstad et al., 1990). Thus, it is important to increase attention to psychological abuse in intimate relationships, investigating risk factors for its occurrence and designing interventions to reduce it.

Summary of Links Between Attachment Patterns and Forms of Psychological Abuse in Response to Relationship Conflict

Past research on conflict within intimate relationships has determined that individuals tend to use relatively consistent tactics in dealing with relational differences between partners across time and situations (Corcoran & Mallinckrodt, 2000; Rahim, 1983). It has been suggested that due to this relative consistency, conflict-resolution styles may be related to the individuals' underlying general orientation to close relationships (Corcoran & Mallinckrodt, 2000). Rahim (1983) proposed that these beliefs about close relationships are based on individuals' perceptions of the self and others

rooted in their attachment styles. Growing evidence suggests that attachment does influence conflict resolution styles of individuals (Corcoran & Mallinckrodt, 2000; Nordling, 1992). Thus, individuals' attachment styles may determine their style of conflict resolution within their adult relationships, possibly leading to or avoiding abusive behaviors as tactics used in resolving disagreements (Rholes, Simpson, & Stevens, 1998). Although conflict between partners has been a topic of interest for many researchers over the past decade, only a few studies have looked at how adults with different attachment styles deal with situations in which they may feel threatened by disagreements or conflict with their partners (Kobak & Duemmler, 1994; Pistole, 1989; Simpson, Rholes, & Phillips, 1996).

According to Kobak and Duemmler (1994), strong conflict within intimate relationships increases individuals' needs for support from intimate partners or attachment figures, activating their internal working models of attachment. If internal working models of attachment are activated during conflict, then it seems that they would be relevant to individuals' responses to conflict (Pistole & Arricale, 2003). It has been suggested that attachment behaviors should be observed most clearly during stressful or conflictual situations (Kobak & Duemmler, 1994).

Secure Individuals

Individuals exhibiting a secure attachment pattern should be less threatened by conflict than insecure individuals, due to their ability to assess the situation in terms of their own self-worth, accessibility of the partner, trust in the relationship, and lower level

of emotional reactivity toward the threat (Gaines, Reis, Summers, Result, Cox, & Wexler, 1997; Pistole, Clark, & Tubbs, 1995). It has been found that individuals exhibiting a secure attachment style tend to use more effective or constructive conflict resolution strategies than individuals exhibiting insecure attachment styles (Corcoran & Mallinckrodt, 2000; Kobak, Cole, Ferenz-Gilles, Fleming, & Gamble, 1993; Kobak & Hazan, 1991; Pistole, 1989; Pistole & Arricale, 2003). Constructive conflict resolution strategies include direct and open communication (Collins & Read, 1990), self-disclosure (Mikulincer & Nachshon, 1991; Pistole, 1993), and mutual discussion and understanding in which individuals recognize their partners' perspectives in conflict (Simpson et al., 1996). Secure individuals using constructive conflict resolution skills were also found to work toward a goal of relationship change by using integrative problem-solving tactics, by exhibiting flexibility about sharing information about themselves and being open to the information shared with them by their partners (Mikulincer & Nachshon, 1991). Securely attached individuals tend to have better emotional regulation, lower levels of dysfunctional anger, and lack of issue avoidance when compared with insecurely attached individuals (Canary, Cunningham, & Cody, 1988; Simpson et al., 1996). They also tend to "agree to disagree" about an issue when involved in a conflict with another individual (Gottman, 1994). Studies on attachment and conflict-resolution have found that a secure adult attachment style is associated with higher relationship satisfaction and successful (i.e., integrating and compromising) conflict resolution styles (Corcoran & Mallinckrodt, 2000; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Levy & Davis, 1988; Pistole, 1989; Van Leeuwen, 1992),

rather than withdrawal and verbal aggression that is more common in insecurely attached individuals (Creasy, Kershaw & Boston, 1999; Senchak & Leonard, 1992). It has been also found that secure individuals are more likely than insecure individuals to perceive conflict as enhancing or beneficial to their relationship, because it helps partners recognize their differences, resolve conflict, and increase closeness (Feeney et al., 1994; Pistole & Arricale, 2003). Hence, when secure individuals find themselves in conflictual situations, they are expected to be able to deal with conflict successfully, employing constructive conflict-resolution styles, without turning to psychologically abusive methods of conflict resolution. On the other hand, it has been found that adults with insecure attachment patterns have difficulty managing conflict within their intimate relationships effectively, and tend to use less than effective or non-constructive conflict-resolution tactics, including various forms of psychological abuse (Creasey, 2002; Crowell, Fraley, & Shaver, 1999; Lopez & Brennan, 2000).

Avoidant (Dismissive and Fearful) Individuals

Couples in which at least one person has a negative view of self or the partner tend to be less trusting and perceive more threat in a situation where there is some lack of consensus between the partners (Gaines et al., 1997; Pistole & Arricale, 2003). Avoidant (dismissive and fearful) individuals tend to “cut off” from their emotions and “shut down” when in distress (Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985). While in conflict, they expect their partners to be unavailable and unsupportive, which causes them to divert their attention away from the conflict and their partners, resulting in less anxiety for the

individual, less warmth and support for the partner, and less positive and constructive conflict resolution strategies (Simpson et al, 1996). Because dismissing-avoidant individuals' reactions to conflict include lack of emotional expressiveness and coolness towards the partner (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Pistole & Arricale, 2003), they are more likely to withdraw from the partner to achieve an adequate level of control within the relationship, and to avoid the pain of rejection and discomfort of a conflictual situation (Main & Weston, 1982; Pistole & Arricale, 2003). Fearful-avoidant individuals, whose investment in the relationship is somewhat higher than that of dismissing-avoidant individuals, might perceive conflict as threatening and may have a concern with establishing closeness, although much less than that of preoccupied individuals (Pistole & Arricale, 2003). Thereby, the fearfully attached individuals may engage in conflict rather than try to avoid it through hostile withdrawal (Pistole & Arricale, 2003). However, they may use psychologically abusive behaviors, which diminish the partner's self-worth and self-esteem, such as calling their partner a loser, ugly, worthless, and so on in order to make the partner feel less competent and secure. By diminishing the partner's self-esteem, fearful individuals reduce their fear of rejection and perception of the self as unworthy, in their attempt to elicit accessibility from the partner, and make sure that their partner will not reject or abandon them (Main & Weston, 1982; Pistole & Arricale, 2003).

Preoccupied Individuals

Individuals exhibiting a preoccupied (or anxious-ambivalent) attachment style are extremely sensitive about the availability of their intimate partners (Collins & Read, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Main et al., 1985; Simpson et al., 1985). They have a positive view of the partner but a negative view of the self; thus, they believe that they are not worthy of their partners' attention. Their internal working models, which are filled with various thoughts, feelings, memories, and beliefs about the unpredictability of past attachment figures, are easily activated during conflict, generating anxiety, anger, and hostility (Bretherton, 1995; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Main, et al., 1985; Simpson & Rholes, 1994; Simpson et al., 1996). According to Bowlby (1973), this anxiety, anger, and hostility serve to express the individuals' need for comfort or support from the partner. When preoccupied individuals are involved in conflictual situations, they tend to experience anger, have greater stress and anxiety while discussing problems (Pistole & Arricale, 2003; Simpson et al., 1996), and engage in more negative interactions leading to poor conflict resolution (Simpson et al., 1996). They perceive conflict as threatening to their attachment working models and have a strong need to reestablish the connection or closeness with the partner (Pistole & Arricale 2003). Preoccupied adults tend to exercise pressure on their partners and dominate their partner during conflict in their efforts to get closer or prevent the partner from further separation (Corcoran & Mallinckrodt, 2000; Shi, 2003). They are especially high on proximity-seeking and separation-protest behaviors (Murphy, Hartman, Muccion, & Douchis, 1995). Thus, when such individuals

experience conflict within their intimate relationships, they become angry and may resort to psychologically abusive behaviors that are intended to keep their partners close to them and not let them develop distance (Mayseless, 1991).

In summary, based on the literature, the following hypotheses are proposed in the present study regarding the attachment style as a moderator of the relationship between level of perceived conflict and constructive versus psychologically abusive behavior in clinic couples. The following connections were proposed: dismissive-avoidant partners are expected to use hostile withdrawal tactics of psychological abuse; fearful-avoidant partners are expected to use denigration tactics of psychological abuse; and preoccupied individuals are expected to use domination/intimidation and restrictive engulfment forms of psychological abuse.

Gender and Race Differences in Attachment Styles and in the Implications of Attachment Styles

Gender differences may play an important role in understanding the effect of attachment on the use of psychologically abusive conflict management tactics in intimate relationships. When gender differences are considered, two questions come to mind. First is a general question of whether or not there are differences between males and females in the type of attachment styles that they have developed. Second, if there are differences between genders on the types of attachment styles that they identify themselves with most, what are the implications that those differences in attachment

styles have for the use of different psychologically abusive behaviors by males and females based on each partner's perception of the level of conflict in the relationship?

Original studies on infant attachment showed no difference in attachment styles of boys and girls (Ainsworth et al., 1978). In addition to studies on infants, early studies on adult attachment and the majority of current studies failed to find significant differences in attachment styles of males and females (Brennan & Shaver, 1995; Carnelley & Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Men and women undergoing similar life experiences, in terms of physical and emotional availability of their caregivers, were found to be equally likely to be secure or insecure when a three-dimensional model of attachment was employed (Brannan et al., 1991; Feeney & Noller, 1990, 1992; Feeney et al., 1993; Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

However, limited findings from studies using a four-category model of adult attachment found that males are more likely than females to endorse the dismissive-avoidant attachment style, and females are more likely than males to endorse the fearful-avoidant attachment style (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Brennan et al., 1991; Feeney & Noller, 1996; Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1994). Furthermore, research findings suggest that males are less likely than females to place a high priority on intimate couple relationships, in contrast to men's greater focus on achievement in jobs, etc. (Feeney & Noller, 1996; Feeney, Noller, & Hanrahan, 1994). This gender difference may account for men's tendency to exhibit more of the dismissing and less of the anxious attachment style than do women (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Feeney & Noller, 1996; Scharfe

& Bartholomew, 1994). The differences in dismissing and fearful forms of attachment between males and females seem to fit with common knowledge and beliefs about differences in values and motives between men and women, as well as differences in approaches to close relationships. Men tend to be seen as less emotionally involved, less willing to be connected, and more uncomfortable with emotional closeness in their intimate relationships than their female counterparts (Bem, 1993; Feeney, 1994). Men have been found to be more likely than women to seek emotional distance and less willing to express emotions (Brody & Hall, 1993). Men have also been found to be less likely than women to seek emotional support when coping with a stressful situation (Tamres, Janicki, & Helgeson, 2002; Taylor et al., 2000). Women, on the other hand, have been observed to complain of men's lack of desire for closeness (Buss, 1989), and tend to be attracted to those men who are less dismissive (Collins & Read, 1990; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994; Simpson, 1990).

However, when it comes to preoccupied attachment or secure attachment, minimal or no gender differences have been observed (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Collins & Read, 1990; Feeney & Noller, 1996; Feeney, Noller, & Callan, 1994; Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1994). Females have been found to report less discomfort with closeness than males, and greater confidence in self and others (Feeney & Noller, 1996; Feeney, Noller, & Hanrahan, 1994). Females' greater comfort with intimacy and stronger need for close intimate relationships, as well as males' need for independence and less closeness in intimate relationships has been attributed to our cultural socialization of

females as more nurturing and relationship-oriented and males as more autonomous and self-reliant (Feeney & Noller, 1996).

Nevertheless, it would be rather premature to generalize the results from the predominantly Caucasian American samples (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Brennan et al., 1991; Feeney & Noller, 1996; Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1994; Tamres, Janicki, & Helgeson, 2002; Taylor et al., 2000) and assume that these conclusions would apply to males and females from all racial, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds. Very little research examining cultural and racial differences in attachment styles of males and females is available. Recent studies on attachment found that dismissive attachment styles vary widely across non-Western cultures (Schmitt, Alcalay, Allensworth, Allik, Ault et al., 2003). These researchers have observed that in some cultures the distributions of women's and men's attachment styles appear to be similar, whereas in other cultures gender differences in attachment styles are more pronounced (Schmitt et al., 2003). It has been proposed that gender differences in attachment styles across cultures may be associated with several sociocultural characteristics, such as mortality, resources, and rates of childbirth (Schmitt et al., 2003). However, very little information is available on attachment style gender differences in different cultures, and virtually no information has been collected about such gender differences among different racial groups living in the United States. Because racial composition of the sample utilized in this study is varied and prior findings on gender differences have been inconsistent, gender and racial differences in attachment styles and their implications for partners' use of

psychologically abusive and constructive conflict management behavior were considered to be of a great interest, and they were examined in an exploratory fashion.

Even though African-American and Caucasian racial groups reside in the same country, sociocultural characteristics vary between these two groups. These differences provide the basis for some differences in attachment style preferences for males and females and for impacts that such differences may have on the ways that African American and Caucasian couples deal with conflict.

Attachment Patterns and Partner Selection

When examining attachment within couple relationships, two questions have been raised by researchers that seem to be significant: “Is there a ‘pair matching’ in terms of particular match-ups of attachment characteristics of members of couples?” and “Is relationship functioning predicted by the combination of the attachment styles of both partners involved in the relationship” (Feeney, Noller, & Roberts, 2000). The following are some of the results that have been found by researchers attempting to answer these questions.

The question “Who chooses whom and why?” has been a major topic of research on couple relationships in researchers’ efforts to understand the choices that people make in selecting a life partner (Chappell & Davis, 1998). When individuals select their partners, it is expected that they would look for someone who is attentive, warm, and sensitive (Baldwin, Keelan, Fehr, Enns, & Koh-Rangarajoo, 1996; Chappell & Davis, 1998; Frazier, Byer, Fischer, Wright, & DeBord, 1996; Miller & Fishkin, 1997; Zeifman

& Hazan, 1997). However, all of these characteristics describe a partner with a secure attachment pattern who is seeking a similarly secure partner, but from our knowledge of the distribution of attachment styles in the general population this certainly is not always the case. Researchers have examined three broad categories of couples - secure (in which both partners see themselves as securely attached), insecure (in which both partners see themselves as insecurely attached), and mixed or secure/insecure (in which one partner sees himself/herself securely attached, while the other partner sees himself/herself insecurely attached).

Researchers have found that partners who were comfortable with closeness were more likely to find partners who were also comfortable with closeness, and partners who were comfortable with depending on their partners were more likely to select partners who are comfortable with having others depend on them and comfortable with depending on others. Those individuals who were secure and comfortable with closeness and able to depend on others chose partners who were not afraid of closeness and were comfortable with depending on others. (Collins & Read, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Nordling, 1992). Furthermore, researchers found that partners with secure attachment styles were not only likely to prefer to be with each other, but also were about 80% more likely to end up with each other (Collins & Read, 1990; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994; Senchak & Leonard, 1992).

When examining pairing patterns of insecurely attached individuals, both Collins and Read (1990) and Kirkpatrick and Davis (1994) found a trend for partners with

different insecurities to be attracted to one another. In particular, there was a trend toward a dismissing-avoidant/preoccupied pattern of pairing - 25% of preoccupied males were paired with a dismissive-avoidant female partner, and 42% of preoccupied females were paired with dismissive-avoidant males (Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994). Another interesting finding was that it was very rare to find couples who were involved in relationships with avoidant-avoidant or preoccupied-preoccupied attachment style pairings (Brennan & Shaver, 1990; Nordling, 1992). However, in their study of attachment in couple relationships Bartholomew, Henderson, & Dutton (2001) observed some couples that consisted of two preoccupied individuals. They found that these couples had extremely violent, conflictual, and mutually abusive relationships (Bartholomew, Henderson, & Dutton, 2001).

Attachment Styles, Couple Pairings, and Patterns of Interaction

Studies that have been conducted examining patterns of interaction of couples with different attachment styles have concluded that attachment styles of each partner involved in the intimate relationship affects the way in which couples deal with conflict in their intimate relationships (Levy & Davis, 1987; Pistole, 1988). In particular, it has been observed that if two secure individuals are involved in an intimate relationship, they seem to be much more comfortable than their insecure counterparts to approach each other and use constructive rather than ineffective or psychologically abusive methods of conflict resolution when they encounter disagreement within their intimate relationships (Kobak & Sceery, 1988).

Senchak and Leonard (1992), in their study of newlywed couples, found that secure couples showed better adjustment than insecure couples, in terms of self-reports of intimacy, relationship functioning, and partners' responses to conflict. Couples in which both partners exhibit secure attachment patterns were found to be able to allow each other to be dependent on each other, to seek support from each other, and to provide support and nurturance to each other. Partners in such relationships show respect and appreciation for one another's thoughts and feelings. Neither one of the partners is afraid to express a need for comfort and contact (Fisher & Crandell, 2000). It has also been suggested that there is not only a balance between the partners' needs and desires, but there is also a symmetry within the relationship system, which allows the partners to be aware of the experiences that each one of them encounters while moving back and forth from the position of being dependent on the partner to having the partner depend on them (Fisher & Crandell, 2000). Thus, when such couples experience conflict in their intimate relationship, it can be assumed that they would use more of the constructive conflict management behaviors rather than resorting to psychologically abusive ones.

On the other hand, as it has been suggested earlier, abusive behavior in a relationship develops from partners' frustrated attachment needs and is used to regain proximity to or to increase distance from the attachment figure (Haslem & Erdman, 2003). A couple consisting of two partners with different attachment styles and associated strategies for relationship maintenance may experience significant difficulty in resolving their conflicts due to their different styles of conflict resolution, possibly

leading to abusive behavior. For example, one partner in a couple who has an avoidant attachment pattern may use abusive behavior to increase distance from the partner, while his or her partner with a preoccupied attachment style may use abuse to assert power and to prevent the other person from separating further (Mayseless, 1991). Hence, both persons' attachment styles need to be considered in relation to one another in order to understand the couple's abusive interaction pattern (Bartholomew, Henderson, & Dutton, 2001).

In their study of couples with various combinations of attachment styles, Fisher and Crandell (2000) observed three combinations of insecurely attached couples: dismissing-dismissing, preoccupied-preoccupied, and dismissing-preoccupied. Although there were numerous differences in the way these types of couples interact with one another, the researchers found that they were similar in their inflexibility and in the lack of the type of bi-directional attachment that was common in secure couples (Fisher & Crandell, 2000).

Insecure couples' relationships, in contrast to secure couples' relationships, tend to be asymmetrical and rigid, with only one of the partners in the position of giving support or seeking support (or dependency or being depended upon) (Fisher & Crandell, 2000). Insecurely attached partners tend to pay little attention to the experiences of the other person, and what effect these subjective experiences have on each partner involved in the relationship (Fisher & Crandell, 2000).

Specifically, dismissing-dismissing couples take a position of “I am not dependent on you” and “You are not dependent on me” (Fisher & Crandell, 2000, p. 22). It was found that if both partners maintain this position, conflict in such a relationship will be avoided and both partners will withdraw from each other when either one of them experiences any anxiety about the partner or the relationship (Fisher & Crandell, 2000). However, when the level of tension builds up, members of this type of couple were characterized by episodes of anger and resentment toward each other, sometimes in seemingly unprovoked situations, and their relationships had a high rate of dissolution (Fisher & Crandell, 2000). In contrast to this pattern of withdrawal, members of preoccupied-preoccupied couples experience feelings of unceasing deprivation of their needs and desires, and a strong belief that their partner will never be able to satisfy their needs for comfort and support (Fisher & Crandell, 2000). Both partners in such relationships are constantly seeking attention and emotional contact from one another, yet still feel unsatisfied and angry about what they receive (Fisher & Crandell, 2000). A high level of open conflict and disagreement was found to be characteristic of this type of couple, because each partner, while demanding that the other satisfy his or her chronic dependency needs, at the same time rejects as inadequate any attempts that the other person makes to provide support as inadequate. Both partners in such couples tend to be psychologically abusive, with abuse often escalating into physical violence and the female often being physically harmed (Bartholomew et al., 2001).

Bartholomew and her colleagues (2001) observed another combination of abusive discordant couples - preoccupied-fearful. In preoccupied female-fearful male unions, although mutual abuse was witnessed, females were rated to be somewhat more abusive than their male partners (Bartholomew et al., 2001). In contrast, in couples including a fearful woman and a preoccupied man, the preoccupied male exerted control over his female partner while the female tried to accommodate to her partner's needs and desires (Bartholomew et al., 2001).

The final type of insecurely attached couple that is observed most commonly by researchers in clinical samples is the dismissing-avoidant/preoccupied type (Fisher & Crandell, 2000). This type of couple tends to be characterized by a very specific pattern of interaction, which has been described as the demand-withdraw pattern (Christensen, 1987; 1988; Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Christensen & Shenk, 1991; Greenberg & Johnson, 1986; Wile, 1981) or the pursuer-distancer pattern (Fogarty, 1976). In such relationships, usually the person with the preoccupied attachment style tends to be very dissatisfied with the relationship and presses the other person for more intimacy and support, while the partner with the dismissing attachment style sees the relationship as generally satisfactory other than the problem of the preoccupied partner's discontent and constant pressure to provide more intimacy and closeness (Fisher & Crandell, 2000). As the preoccupied person intensifies his or her appeals for support and intimacy, the defenses of the dismissing individual escalate, contributing to discord and possible abuse within such relationships (Fisher & Crandell, 2000).

Secure-secure and insecure-insecure pairings involve matches between partners, but what happens when a secure individual is involved in a relationship with an insecure individual? It has been suggested that by associating with a secure partner, insecure individuals will be able to cope better with their insecurity and engage in more balanced and healthy interactions. In other words, such a relationship can provide insecure individuals with a sense of security, a comfortable base from which to develop more stable relationships (Fisher & Crandell, 2000). On the other hand, it is also possible that an insecurely attached individual may reduce the attachment security of the secure partner negatively, unbalancing the couple system and creating conflict and tension within the relationship (Fisher & Crandell, 2000).

Relatively little research is available on the experiences of such “mixed” attachment couples. Senchak and Leonard (1992) found that mixed couples were generally similar to insecure couples, regardless of the gender of the insecure partner, leading them to conclude that “insecure attachment seems to carry more weight” in influencing relationship quality (p. 61). Furthermore, researchers have found that both secure and mixed couples exhibited a lower level of conflict and a higher level of overall functioning than insecure couples (Cohn, Silver, Cowan, Cowan, & Pearson, 1992). Finally, a study by Summer (2000) found that mixed attachment style couples seemed to be closer to secure couples on most measures of interpersonal schemas (e.g., an individual’s broad beliefs about the potential that a partner will meet his or her needs) but closer to insecure couples on the level of hostility that partners experience towards one

another. In addition, mixed couples were found to be closer to secure couples on measures of interpersonal schemas when the female partner identified herself as secure, which led the researcher to a conclusion that female security buffered the negative effect of male insecurity (Summer, 2000). However, when dyads in which the male partner assessed himself as secure were examined, a reverse gender pattern was found to be more common; specifically, secure males tend to buffer the negative effects of insecurity for females (Cohn et al., 1992).

Based on the literature review provided above, an individual's sense of security or insecurity can be expressed very differently in a close intimate relationship based on his or her partner's level of security or insecurity (Feeney, 2003). Thus, the quality and style of the relationship should be influenced by the particular combination of the two partners' internal working models (Fisher & Crandell, 2000). According to the systems perspective, partners "mutually influence one another and create a whole which is greater than the sum of its parts" (Feeney, 2003, p. 141). Such a systemic view emphasizes the impact that each partner has on the thoughts, feelings, and actions of the other partner. Attachment theory can be integrated with systems theory by examining the effects that partners' characteristics have on the other person. This perspective identifies the unique nature of various combinations of attachment styles (Feeney, 2003). Based on a systems perspective, it is clear that the attitudes and behavior of each partner provide a context for the emotions, perceptions, and behavior of the other partner, creating a pattern of mutual influence on the functioning of the relationship. Given the limited amount of prior

research on forms of abuse likely to occur in couples with mixed attachment style pairings, there is a need for research that focuses on this relationship. The present study begins to address this gap in knowledge by exploring the distribution of couple attachment pairings; however, due to an insufficient number of couples in some of the pairing groups, it is impossible to make specific comparisons among the forms of psychological abuse that couples with different combinations of attachment styles utilize. However, this would be an important topic for further research.

Objective of the Study

The major objective of this study was to identify whether or not the attachment styles of individuals may have a moderating effect on their use of forms of psychologically abusive behaviors toward their partners when the members of the couple are experiencing conflict. Growing awareness of the high prevalence and negative effects of psychological abuse in couple relationships requires more extensive knowledge of the risk factors contributing to psychological abuse in intimate relationships. This knowledge can contribute to the development of more effective prevention and treatment programs for discordant couples.

Hypotheses

Based on the literature review and the purpose of this study, the following hypotheses were tested:

- H₁: Individuals who perceive a higher level of conflict in their intimate couple relationships will utilize more psychologically abusive conflict resolution behavior than those individuals who perceive a lower level of conflict in their relationships.
- H₂: Individuals who perceive a higher level of conflict in their intimate couple relationships will utilize less constructive conflict resolution behavior than those individuals who perceive a lower level of conflict in their relationships.
- H₃: Individuals who identify themselves as having a secure attachment style will be less likely to utilize psychologically abusive behavior than their insecure counterparts if they perceive a higher level of conflict in their intimate relationship, whereas there will be no difference in the amount of psychologically abusive conflict management behavior utilized by secure versus insecure individuals if they perceive a lower level of conflict in their relationship.
- H₄: Individuals who identify themselves as having a secure attachment style will be more likely to utilize constructive conflict resolution behavior than their insecure counterparts if they perceive a higher level of conflict in their intimate relationships, whereas there will be no difference in the amount of constructive

conflict management behavior utilized by secure versus insecure individuals if they perceive a lower level of conflict in their relationship.

Furthermore, it was hypothesized that there will be an interaction between type of insecure attachment and level of perceived conflict in predicting the type of psychologically abusive behaviors that individuals use in their intimate relationships.

Specifically:

H₅: It is expected that individuals who identify themselves as dismissing-avoidant will use more hostile withdrawal psychological abusive conflict management behavior if they perceive their relationship to be higher in level of conflict than individuals identifying themselves as fearful-avoidant or preoccupied, whereas there will be no difference in use of hostile withdrawal conflict management behavior used by three types of insecurely attached individuals when they perceive their relationship to be lower in level of conflict.

H₆: It is expected that individuals who identify themselves as preoccupied will use more of the restrictive engulfment and domination-intimidation types of psychologically abusive conflict management behavior if they perceive their relationship to be higher in level of conflict than individuals who identify themselves as fearful-avoidant or dismissive-avoidant, whereas there will be no difference in use of restrictive engulfment and domination-intimidation behavior used by three types of insecurely attached individuals when they perceive their relationship to be lower in level of conflict.

H₇: It is expected that individuals who identify themselves as fearful-avoidant will use more of the denigration types of psychologically abusive conflict management behavior if they perceive their relationship to be higher in level of conflict than individuals who identify themselves as fearful-avoidant or dismissive-avoidant, whereas there will be no difference in use of denigration behavior used by three types of insecurely attached individuals when they perceive their relationship to be lower in level of conflict.

Research Questions

1. Do male and female members of clinic couples differ in the types of attachment styles that they report?
2. Are there gender differences in the impacts that attachment styles have on the use of psychologically abusive and constructive conflict management behaviors of individuals in clinic couples based on the level of perceived conflict their intimate couple relationships?
3. Do African-American individuals in clinic couples differ from Caucasian individuals in clinic couples in the types of attachment styles that they report?
4. What are the percentages of types of attachment style pairings in clinic couples?

Chapter III: Method

Subjects

Participants for this study were 177 couples who sought couple therapy at the Family Service Center (FSC) at the University of Maryland, College Park and were qualified to participate in the study based on the following inclusion/exclusion criterion: partners needed to be over 18 years of age, English speaking, non-court ordered, and intending to attend joint couple therapy sessions.

The FSC is an outpatient clinic staffed by graduate students working toward obtaining their master's degree in Marriage and Family Therapy. The FSC serves approximately 500 couples and families per year, primarily from the communities surrounding the University of Maryland (Prince Georges, Montgomery, and Howard Counties in Maryland). Every couple, meeting the inclusion/exclusion criterion described above, that initiated therapy at the FSC over the period of 4.5 years from September, 1999 to May, 2004 was included in the study. Couples sought therapy voluntarily and the problems that they presented included marital conflict, domestic violence, parenting problems, stepfamily relationship problems, substance abuse problems, and family-of-origin concerns, among others. Every client who initiates therapy at the FSC is asked to complete a set of assessment questionnaires prior to receiving any therapeutic services.

Client couples at the FSC have diverse ethnic, racial, socioeconomic, educational, age, and religious characteristics. Statistics for demographic variables for the sample are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Demographic Variables

Variable	<u>N</u>	Missing Data	Range		Mean	<u>SD</u>
			Min	Max		
Age (Year)						
Males	177	0	19	82	33.36	9.20
Females	173	4	19	65	31.65	8.60
Years Together (years)						
Males	124	53	0	40	6.46	7.09
Females	123	54	0	40	6.81	7.33
Personal Yearly Income (\$)						
Males	170	7	0	150,000	31,719	24,579
Females	168	9	0	90,000	24,586	19,415

Variable	<u>N</u>	Missing Data	Percent
Race (individuals)			
Males	176	1	99.4
Caucasian	78		44.1
African-American	72		40.7
Hispanic	12		6.8
Asian/Pacific Islander	4		2.3
Native American	1		0.6
Other	9		4.5
Females	173	4	97.7
Caucasian	74		41.8
African-American	71		40.1
Hispanic	14		7.9
Asian/Pacific Islander	5		2.8
Native American	0		0
Other	9		5.1

Variable	<u>N</u>	Missing Data	Percent
Relationship Status			
Males	177	0	100
currently married, living together	97		54.8
currently married, separated	14		7.9
living together, not married	31		17.5
separated	1		0.6
dating, not living together	34		19.2
Females	177	0	98.3
currently married, living together	94		53.1
currently married, separated	16		9.0
living together, not married	29		16.4
separated	1		0.6
dating, not living together	34		19.2
Level of Education			
Males	177	0	100
some high school	12		6.8
high school diploma	24		13.6
some college	53		29.9
associate's degree	13		7.3
bachelor's degree	30		16.9
some graduate education	11		6.2
master's degree	18		10.2
doctorate degree	4		2.3
trade school	12		6.8
Females	174	3	98.3
some high school	9		5.1
high school diploma	16		9.0
some college	47		26.6
associate's degree	17		9.6
bachelor's degree	24		13.6
some graduate education	21		11.9
master's degree	32		18.1
doctorate degree	0		0
trade school	8		4.5

Variable	<u>N</u>	Missing Data	Percent
Occupation			
Males	173	4	97.7
clerical sales, bookkeeper, secretary	19		10.7
executive, large business owner	3		1.7
homemaker	3		1.7
owner, manager of small business	19		10.7
professional – Associate’s/Bachelor’s	41		23.2
professional – Master’s or Doctorate	19		10.7
skilled worker/craftsmen	33		18.6
service worker	9		5.1
semi-skilled worker	9		5.1
unskilled worker	3		1.7
student	15		8.5
Females	172	5	97.2
clerical sales, bookkeeper, secretary	38		21.5
homemaker	16		9.0
owner, manager of small business	8		4.5
professional – Associate’s/Bachelor’s	48		27.1
professional – Master’s or Doctorate	26		14.7
skilled worker/craftsmen	1		0.6
service worker	10		5.6
unskilled worker	3		1.7
student	22		12.4
Employment Status			
Males	176	1	99.4
employed full time	126		71.2
employed part-time	17		9.6
homemaker, not employed outside home	1		0.6
student	17		9.6
disabled, not employed	1		0.6
unemployed	12		6.8
retired	2		1.1
Females	173	4	97.7
employed full time	101		57.1
employed part-time	28		15.8
homemaker, not employed outside home	10		5.6
student	18		10.2
unemployed	14		7.9
retired	2		1.1

Measures

The set of self-report questionnaires completed by the couples whose data were used in the present study was taken from the standard set of instruments that are completed before therapy by all couples who attend the FSC. These measures have been used in previous studies on couple relationships, and in particular research on domestic abuse. They have been found to have good reliability and validity. A description of each measure follows.

Multidimensional Emotional Abuse Scale (MDEAS; Murphy & Hoover, 2001).

Psychological abuse was measured using the Multidimensional Emotional Abuse Scale (MDEAS) developed by Murphy and Hoover (2001) that is based on the idea that emotional abuse in dating relationships should be assessed as a multi-factorial construct, rather than a unidimensional one. The authors proposed that it is important to make distinctions among types of psychological abuse, rather than just assessing its severity (Murphy & Hoover, 2001). They designed a 4-category model of emotional abuse, including Dominance/Isolation (“threats, property violence, and intense display of verbal aggression, with an intent to produce fear or submission through the display of aggression”), Restrictive Engulfment (“behaviors intended to isolate, the partner and restrict the partner’s activities and social contacts, and intense displays of jealousy and possessiveness, in order to limit perceived threats to the relationships by increasing the partner’s dependency and availability”), Denigration (“humiliating and degrading behaviors intended to reduce, through direct attacks, the partner’s self-esteem”), and

Hostile Withdrawal (“tendency to withhold emotional contact and withdraw from the partner in a hostile fashion, with an intention to punish the partner and increase the partner’s anxiety or insecurity about the relationships”) (Murphy & Hoover, 2001, p. 32). These four categories have been drawn from previous research studies and were based on the investigators’ clinical experience with domestic abuse perpetrators, as well as through informal group discussions with undergraduate students (Marshall & Rose, 1987, 1990; Murphy & Cascardi, 1999).

Respondents are asked to report on a 6-point scale from never in the past 4 months, once, twice, 3-5 times, 6-10 times, 11-20 times, and 20+ times how often in the past four months they (“you” and “your partner”) each engaged in various activities when they experienced disagreements in their relationship. Also, the scale asked if special types of abuse were never used in the relationship. The MDEAS consists of a total of 28 items for the four seven-item subscales. The internal consistencies of the subscales for the reports of abusive behaviors by self and partner, respectively, were as follows: Restrictive Engulfment Scale (items 1 through 7) ($\alpha = .84$ and $\alpha = .85$); Denigration (items 8 through 14) ($\alpha = .83$ and $\alpha = .91$); Hostile Withdrawal (items 15 through 21) ($\alpha = .89$ and $\alpha = .92$); and Domination/Intimidation (items 22 through 28) ($\alpha = .83$ and $\alpha = .91$) (Murphy & Hoover, 2001). The internal consistencies of the subscales for the reports of abusive behaviors by self and partner for this sample, respectively, were as follows: Restrictive Engulfment Scale (items 1 through 7) ($\alpha = .78$ and $\alpha = .86$); Denigration (items 8 through 14) ($\alpha = .79$ and $\alpha = .83$); Hostile Withdrawal (items 15

through 21) ($\alpha = .76$ and $\alpha = .82$); and Domination/Intimidation (items 22 through 28) ($\alpha = .85$ and $\alpha = .88$).

All four forms of psychological abuse exhibit convergent validity with various interpersonal problems related to control, manipulation, and aggressiveness (Murphy & Hoover, 2001). All four scales have a significant correlation at the .01 level with a measure of physical aggression (ranging from .29 to .74). Two subscales in particular, Denigration ($r = .72$ and $r = .56$) and Domination/Intimidation ($r = .74$ and $r = .67$) are very strongly associated with physical relationship aggression committed by the partner and self, respectively. Restrictive Engulfment have a strong correlation with self-reported attachment insecurities, in particular with proximity seeking ($r = .34$ $p < .01$) and separation protest ($r = .52$ $p < .01$) (Murphy & Hoover, 2001).

Relationship Questionnaire (RQ; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991)

Attachment styles were measured using the Relationship Questionnaire (RQ), an adaptation of the attachment measure that was originally developed by Hazan and Shaver (1987). The original version of the measure consisted of a single-item assessing three attachment styles (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). The RQ consists of four brief paragraphs, each one describing one of the four attachment styles: secure, preoccupied, fearful, and dismissive. Respondents are asked to identify which of the four paragraphs, portraying combinations of positive versus negative models of self and others, best describes how they feel about their close relationships (Mauricio & Gormley, 2001). Thus, the two-dimensional model of attachment used in this measure includes four categories of

attachment: secure (positive model of self and positive model of others), preoccupied (positive model of other and negative model of self), dismissing (positive model of self and negative model of others), and fearful (negative models of self and others). The respondent is asked to indicate which one of four paragraphs, assessing these four categories of attachment, best describes him or her (Joly, 2001). The four paragraphs are presented in the copy of the RQ that appears in the Appendix C.

The Relationship Questionnaire has been used by a number of researchers studying adult attachment (Joly, 2001). Researchers have found this measure to be “useful for exploring the relevance of attachment theory for counseling-related phenomena” (Bradford & Lyddon, 1994, p. 218). Evidence of validity and reliability of this measure has been provided by several studies (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994; Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1994). As reported by Bartholomew & Horowitz (1991) and Griffin and Bartholomew (1994), this four-dimensional measure of attachment patterns has strong predictive validity for adjustment outcome and interpersonal functioning. This model of assessment of adult attachment was found to be moderately stable over an 8-month period (Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1994).

Griffin and Bartholomew (1994) reported the results of three studies designed to assess the validity of the RQ measure. For each of three studies they computed self and other working model scores from the four attachment pattern ratings on the Likert scales based on the following formulas: self model = (secure + dismissing) - (preoccupied +

fearful); other model = (secure + preoccupied) - (fearful + dismissing). They used five different methods of assessment, including self-reports, friend reports, romantic partner reports, trained judges ratings or peer attachment, and trained judges' ratings of the individual's family attachment. A multi-trait, multi-method matrix and confirmatory factor analysis were used to assess convergent validity (i.e., different measures of a given construct are highly related), and discriminant validity (measures of different constructs are independent of one another) of the self-and-other model dimensions underlying the RQ measure. The two attachment dimensions (self and other) showed both discriminant and convergent validity with interview ratings (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Bartholomew & Shaver, 1998; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). According to Griffin and Bartholomew (1994), results across all three studies show "strong support for the construct validity of the self- and other-model attachment dimensions" (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994, p. 442). To examine predictive validity of the measure, "individuals' self-report models converged with direct measures of the positivity of their interpersonal orientations" (p. 430). Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) concluded that RQ has high construct validity. They found that fearful and preoccupied individuals had significantly lower self-concept scores than secure or dismissing individuals, and secure and preoccupied individuals had higher sociability scores and reported fewer interpersonal problem than dismissing and fearful individuals (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991).

Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976)

The Dyadic Adjustment Scale was used in the present study to assess the degree of consensus of couple satisfaction/adjustment. The DAS has been found to be a reliable, valid, and relevant measure of overall couple relationship adjustment, that has been used by multiple researchers with samples of both clinical and non-clinical dating, cohabiting, engaged, and married couples (Spanier, 1976).

The Dyadic Adjustment Scale is a 32-item self-administered paper-and-pencil questionnaire assessing marital quality across four subscales: satisfaction, consensus, cohesion, and affectional expression. Spanier (1976) identified these subscales through factor analysis of a preliminary instrument, which included a large pool of items from existing scales that had been developed to assess marital adjustment. The DAS has a total score range of 0 - 151. A score equal to or greater than 97 has been established as a cutoff for differentiating distressed from non-distressed partners.

The DAS can be used in a variety of ways, including as an overall measure of adjustment of the couple, as well as for more limited assessment needs by using individual subscales (Spanier, 1976). If only selected subscales are used, reliability and validity of the measure are not jeopardized, because the subscales are significantly intercorrelated. Reliability for the entire 32-item scale has been found to be .96 and it is also very high for the subscales. For the Dyadic Consensus subscale the Cronbach alpha was found to be .90; Dyadic Satisfaction (.94), Dyadic Cohesion (.86), and Affectional Expression (.73) (Spanier, 1976).

For the purposes of this study, the Dyadic Consensus subscale (13 items) was utilized to assess the degree of disagreement between the partners. The item numbers are 1 - 3, 5, and 7 - 15. The Dyadic Consensus items include a 6-point response scale ranging from “always agree” to “always disagree”, with which the respondent indicates the degree of agreement between partners in the areas of handling family finances, matters of recreation, religious matters, demonstration of affection, friends, sex relations, conventionality (correct or proper behaviors), philosophy of life, ways of dealing with parents and in-laws, aims, goals, and things believed important, amount of time spent together, making major decisions, household tasks, leisure time interests and activities, and career decisions (Spanier, 1976). The internal consistency of the Dyadic Consensus subscale for this sample was $\alpha = .89$.

Numerous studies have supported the Dyadic Adjustment Scale as a valid measure of relationship functioning by finding correlations in the expected directions with other measures of relationship functioning and satisfaction, establishing high criterion-related, construct, and content validity (Carey, Spector, Lantinga, & Krauss, 1993; Heyman, Sayers, & Bellack, 1994; Hunsley & Pinsent, 1995; Sharpley & Cross, 1982; Spanier, 1985; Spanier, 1988).

Conflict Tactics Scale - Revised (CTS-2; Straus et al., 1996)

Originally, Straus (1979) developed a standardized scale to measure frequency and severity of family violence, which was called Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS). Over the years, the scale was revised and used by multiple researchers testing its validity,

reliability, and generalizability (Straus, 1990). The revised version of CTS, called the CTS2, allows for assessment of intimate partners' (dating, cohabiting, and marital) use of physical and psychological abuse within their relationships, as well as their use of constructive reasoning and behavior to deal with conflict (Straus et al., 1996). Both the CTS and CTS2 are based on theoretical underpinnings of conflict theory (Straus et al., 1996). Based on this theory, it is believed that conflict is a normal part of any relationship, in which violence and abuse may be used as one of the 'tactics' employed to deal with conflict (Joly, 2001).

The CTS2 consists of a total of five scales including: physical assault, psychological aggression, negotiation, injury, and sexual coercion. The negotiation subscale is used in the present study to assess partners' use of constructive behaviors when they are in conflict. It consists of six items, three that assess the behaviors that couples use to settle disagreements and three that assess the amount of positive affect during the couples' communication process (Straus et al., 1996). Respondents answer the items with an 8-point Likert type scale. The response categories range from zero to seven (Straus et al., 1996). The categories are as follows: category 0 (This has never happened), category 1 (Once in the past year), category 2 (Twice in the past year), category 3 (3 - 5 times in the past year), category 4 (6-10 times in the past year), category 5 (11-20 times in the past year), category 6 (More than 20 times in the past year), and category 7 (Not in the past year, but it did happen before).

The CTS2 is scored by computing the sum for the subscale scale items, using the following weighting (Straus et al., 1996): category 0 is 0, category 1 is 1, category 2 is 2, category 3 is 4, category 4 is 8, category 5 is 15, category 6 is 25, and category 7 is 0. Response Category 7 (“Not in the past year, but did happen before”) can be used in two ways: (1) to obtain scores for the previous year; (2) to determine whether abuse had ever occurred (it is scored 0 if respondents select Category 0, and 1 (‘yes’) if respondents select Category 1 through 7) (Straus et al., 1996).

Overall, there is evidence that the CTS2 is a reliable and valid measure (Joly, 2001). All CTS2 scales have good internal consistency coefficients ranging from .75 to .95 (Straus et al., 1996). For the purposes of this study, the inter-item correlations for the negotiation subscale range from .58 to .74 and the internal consistency is high ($\alpha = .86$) (Straus et al., 1996). Internal consistency for this negotiation scale for this sample was also high ($\alpha = .88$). Research by Straus et al (1996) revealed significant correlations among the CTS2 scales, with correlation coefficients ranging from .29 to .87. To provide evidence of construct validity, Straus et al. (1996) correlated the physical assault scale with the Social Integration (SI) scale derived from control theory. He found that physical assaults were associated with low social integration.

Procedures

The data for this study were drawn from the existing database of assessment information on couples who sought relationship therapy at the Family Service Center. Following a brief standard phone intake interview during which a FSC staff member

collects basic demographic information about all of the family members living in the caller's household, the presenting problem according to the caller, information about the individuals who are going to attend assessment and therapy sessions, and any current substance and physical abuse by family members, the couple is scheduled for an assessment session at the FSC. For all couple cases, a co-therapist team is assigned and the therapists contact the clients to schedule a first assessment session, which lasts one and a half to two hours on average. During this assessment, the couple completes a set of questionnaires. Partners complete their set of forms individually in two separate interview rooms in order to maintain security, comfort, confidentiality, and enhance candor. Therapists also conduct brief individual interviews with each member of the couple to further clarify the presenting problems and to assess the presence and severity of substance and physical abuse as identified by each partner for self and for the partner. Also, each partner's comfort level with working in therapy with the partner present is explored in order to prevent placing clients at risk for violence in the session as well as for later abuse outside the clinic. If both of the partners agree that there is no immediate danger and each feels safe in the presence of the other partner, partners sign a consent form for therapy, and agree on confidentiality of the information that they provide to the therapists, as well as are informed about the instances in which the confidentiality may be broken.

The assessment of each partner is conducted by two FSC therapists who become the couple's therapy team after the assessment is completed. All of the FSC therapists

are graduate students in the master's degree program in Marriage and Family Therapy (MFT) within the Department of Family Studies. All of the therapists working with couples receive extensive training in the assessment and treatment of distressed couples and families.

As part of the overall clinical and research data collection at the Family Service Center, the numeric values of partners' responses on the items of the DAS, RQ, and MDEAS were entered into a computer data file. The existing data on these measures, as well as demographic information that were collected from couples from September 1999 through May 2004 were used in the present study.

Chapter IV: Results

Analyses of variance were used to test the hypotheses of this study. In each ANOVA, subject gender was included as an independent variable in order to examine possible gender differences proposed in the research questions. For the purposes of this study, a significance level of $p < .05$ will be used to define a significant main effect or interaction effect, and a level between $p = .05$ and $p = .10$ will be considered to be a trend that is worth examining, given that this study is exploring a topic that has received little prior empirical investigation.

A 2 (gender) x 2 (attachment security) x 2 (level of conflict) analysis of variance (ANOVA) was computed for Hypotheses 1 and 3, comparing individuals' composite scores on the dependent variable of psychological abuse that individuals reported engaging in within their intimate couple relationships (the sum of the MDEAS Denigration, Hostile Withdrawal, Restrictive Engulfment, and Domination/Intimidation subscales) as a function of their attachment security as measured by the RQ and their perception of lower conflict versus higher conflict in their relationships as measured by the Dyadic Consensus subscale of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale. The results of this ANOVA are presented in Table 2. A similar 2 x 2 x 2 ANOVA was conducted for Hypotheses 2 and 4, with scores on the negotiation scale of the CTS-2 used to assess the dependent variable of constructive conflict resolution behaviors that individuals reported in their intimate relationships (see Table 3). In each ANOVA higher versus lower levels of perceived conflict in couple relationships were defined by a median split of the

individuals' scores on the measure of consensus (conducted separately for each gender). Individuals who rated their relationship as higher on consensus were considered to be lower on conflict, and individuals who rated their relationship as lower on consensus were considered to be higher on conflict. Whenever an ANOVA produced a significant interaction effect among any of the independent variables of gender, attachment security, and level of perceived relationship conflict, the pattern of differences among the cell means of the ANOVA was tested with independent two-tailed t-tests. It is acknowledged that these paired-comparison tests were not conservative, as they were chosen to maximize the probability of detecting small effects in this initial study of attachment and relationship conflict, and they may contribute to an over-estimation of the impact of the independent variables on partners' abusive behavior.

Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1 proposed that individuals who perceived a higher level of conflict in their intimate couple relationship would utilize more psychologically abusive conflict resolution behaviors than those individuals who perceived a lower level of conflict in their intimate couple relationship.

In the 2 (gender) x 2 (attachment security) x 2 (level of conflict) ANOVA comparing individuals' composite MDEAS scores for psychologically abusive behavior, the results for the main effect of perceived level of conflict indicated that there was a significant main effect, $F(1, 244) = 11.29, p = .001$ (see Table 2).

The means for the significant main effect of the perceived level of conflict on individuals' use of psychologically abusive conflict resolution behaviors indicated that individuals who perceived their relationship to be higher on the level of conflict ($\underline{M} = 34.78$) used more of the psychologically abusive conflict resolution behaviors than those individuals who perceived their relationship to be lower on the level of conflict ($\underline{M} = 26.78$) (see Table 3).

Caution should be used examining this significant main effect due to a significant interaction effect between level of conflict and attachment security ($\underline{F} (1, 244) = 7.93, p = .005$), which will be discussed in Hypothesis 3.

Table 2

Analysis of Variance for Individuals' Use of Psychologically Abusive Conflict Resolution Behaviors as a Function of Gender, Level of Conflict, and Self-Identified Attachment Security

Source	df	MS	F	p
Gender	1	1253.93	2.57	.111
Level of Conflict	1	5518.27	11.29	.001**
Attachment Security	1	445.30	.91	.341
Gender x Level of Conflict	1	384.19	.79	.376
Gender x Attachment Security	1	695.90	1.42	.234
Level of Conflict x Attachment Security	1	3873.48	7.93	.005**
Gender x Level of Conflict x Attachment Security	1	565.28	1.16	.283
Error	244	488.74		
Total	252			

* $p \leq .10$

** $p \leq .05$

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics for Individuals' Use of Psychologically Abusive Conflict Resolution Behaviors as a Function of Perceived Level of Conflict

Group	M	SD	n
Higher Level of Conflict	34.78	22.33	122
Lower Level of Conflict	26.78	22.45	130

Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 proposed that individuals who perceived a higher level of conflict in their intimate couple relationships would utilize less constructive conflict resolution behavior than those individuals who perceived a lower level of conflict in their intimate couple relationships.

In the 2 (gender) x 2 (attachment security) x 2 (level of conflict) ANOVA comparing individuals' CTS-2 negotiation scale scores assessing the amount of constructive conflict resolution behaviors that individuals reported using in their couple relationships, the results for the main effect of perceived level of conflict indicated that there was no significant effect (see Table 4). Thus, there was no difference observed in the amount of constructive conflict resolution behavior used by individuals based on their perceived level of relationship conflict. The means for main effect of the perceived level of conflict on individuals' use of constructive conflict resolution behaviors are presented in Table 5. There was a significant gender by level of conflict interaction, but this will be described later in the results bearing on gender differences.

Table 4

Analysis of Variance for Individuals' Use of Constructive Conflict Resolution Behaviors
as a Function of Gender, Level of Conflict, and Self-Identified Attachment Security

Source	df	MS	F	p
Gender	1	505.86	.429	.513
Level of Conflict	1	24.65	.021	.885
Attachment Security	1	85.19	.072	.788
Gender x Level of Conflict	1	3998.56	3.392	.067*
Gender x Attachment Security	1	164.86	.140	.709
Level of Conflict x Attachment Security	1	667.66	.566	.452
Gender x Level of Conflict x Attachment Security	1	11.94	.010	.920
Error	254	1178.74		
Total	262			

* $p < .10$

** $p < .05$

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics for Individuals' Use of Constructive Conflict Resolution Behaviors
as a Function of Perceived Level of Conflict

Group	M	SD	n
Higher Level of Conflict	48.16	35.22	130
Lower Level of Conflict	49.67	33.31	132

Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3 proposed that individuals who identified themselves as having a secure attachment style would be less likely to utilize psychologically abusive conflict resolution behaviors than their insecure counterparts if they perceived a higher level of conflict in their intimate relationships, whereas there would be no difference in the amount of psychologically abusive conflict resolution behavior utilized by secure versus insecure individuals if they perceived a lower level of conflict in their intimate couple relationships.

In the 2 (gender) x 2 (attachment security) x 2 (level of conflict) ANOVA for the dependent variable of individuals' composite MDEAS scores for psychological abuse, the results for the interaction effect for perceived level of conflict and attachment security indicated a significant effect, $F(1, 244) = 7.93, p = .005$ (see Table 2).

Pairs of mean scores of the individuals' use of psychologically abusive conflict resolution behaviors as a function of their perceived level of conflict and attachment security (see Table 6) were compared by using independent sample two-tailed t-tests. These post-hoc tests indicated that, contrary to the hypothesis, secure individuals ($M = 43.22$) used significantly *more* psychologically abusive conflict resolution behaviors than their insecure counterparts ($M = 31.78$) in the higher perceived conflict condition; $t(120) = 2.55, p = .012$. Furthermore, those secure individuals in higher conflict intimate relationships used significantly more psychologically abusive conflict resolution behaviors than secure individuals in lower conflict relationships ($M = 30.29$); $t(104) =$

4.15, $p < .001$. However, the difference between the secure ($M = 24.14$) and insecure ($M = 30.29$) individuals' use of psychologically abusive conflict resolution behavior in lower conflict relationships was not significant ($t(128) = 1.55$, $p = .122$); neither was the difference between psychological abuse reported by insecure individuals in the higher level of perceived conflict condition ($M = 31.78$) and insecure individuals in the lower perceived conflict condition ($M = 30.29$) ($t(144) = .392$, $p = .695$).

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics for Individuals' Use of Psychologically Abusive Conflict Resolution Behaviors as a Function of Perceived Level of Conflict and Attachment Security

Group	M	SD	n
Higher Level of Conflict			
Secure Individuals	43.22	26.26	32
Insecure Individuals	31.78	20.08	90
Lower Level of Conflict			
Secure Individuals	24.14	19.51	74
Insecure Individuals	30.29	26.60	56

Hypothesis 4

Hypothesis 4 proposed that individuals who identified themselves as having a secure attachment style would be more likely to utilize constructive conflict resolution behavior than their insecure counterparts when they perceived a higher level of conflict in their intimate couple relationships, whereas there would be no difference in the amount of constructive conflict resolution behavior utilized by secure versus insecure individuals when they perceived a lower level of relationship conflict.

In the 2 (gender) x 2 (attachment security) x 2 (level of conflict) ANOVA for individuals' negotiation scale scores (CTS2) used to assess the amount of constructive conflict resolution behavior, the test for the hypothesized interaction between perceived level of conflict and attachment security was not significant (see Table 4). Contrary to the prediction, there was no difference between secure and insecure individuals in their use of constructive conflict resolution behaviors when perceived relationship conflict was higher. On the other hand, according to the prediction, no difference was found for secure versus insecure individuals' use of constructive conflict resolution behaviors in a lower level of conflict relationships. The means for the non-significant interaction of the perceived level of conflict and attachment security on individuals' use of constructive conflict resolution behaviors are presented in Table 7.

Table 7

Descriptive Statistics for Individuals' Use of Constructive Conflict Resolution Behaviors
as a Function of Perceived Level of Conflict and Attachment Security

Group	M	SD	n
Higher Level of Conflict			
Secure Individuals	44.67	33.17	33
Insecure Individuals	49.35	35.98	97
Lower Level of Conflict			
Secure Individuals	49.81	34.14	75
Insecure Individuals	49.49	32.48	57

Hypothesis 5

Hypothesis 5 proposed that individuals who identified themselves as having a dismissing-avoidant form of insecure attachment would use more of the hostile withdrawal form of psychologically abusive conflict resolution behavior if they perceived their relationship to be higher in level of conflict than individuals identifying themselves as fearful-avoidant or preoccupied, whereas there would be no differences in the use of hostile withdrawal conflict resolution behavior exhibited by three types of insecurely attached individuals if they perceived their relationship to be lower in conflict.

A 2 (gender) x 2 (level of conflict) x 3 (attachment style) analysis of variance (ANOVA) was computed to test for mean differences in individuals' use of hostile withdrawal conflict resolution behaviors based on their perceived level of conflict in the relationship and their self-identified style of insecure attachment. The results of this ANOVA are presented in Table 8. The hypothesized two-way interaction effect of

perceived level of conflict and attachment style was not significant. Thus, contrary to the prediction there were no differences among the three types of insecurely attached individuals in their use of hostile withdrawal conflict resolution behaviors when perceived relationship conflict was higher. On the other hand, consistent with the prediction, there were no differences found in hostile withdrawal conflict resolution behavior exhibited by three types of insecurely attached individuals when they perceived their relationship to be lower in conflict. The means for the non-significant interaction of the perceived level of conflict and attachment security on individuals' use of hostile withdrawal conflict resolution behaviors are presented in Table 9. Caution should be used when examining this two-way interaction, because when gender differences were also taken into account, a trend toward a two-way interaction effect for gender and type of attachment insecurity ($F(2, 134) = 2.880, p = .060$), and a significant effect for a three-way interaction of level of conflict, gender, and type of attachment insecurity ($F(2, 134) = 3.122, p = .047$) were found for individuals' use of hostile withdrawal conflict resolution behaviors (see Table 8). These gender effect differences will be discussed in the description of the findings regarding Research Question 2 regarding gender.

Table 8

Analysis of Variance for Individuals' Use of Hostile Withdrawal Psychologically
Abusive Conflict Resolution Behaviors as a Function of Gender, Perceived Level of
Conflict, and Self-Identified Attachment Style

Source	<u>df</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>p</u>
Gender	1	7.87	.071	.791
Level of Conflict	1	2.27	.020	.887
Attachment Style	2	7.24	.065	.937
Gender x Level of Conflict	1	.401	.004	.952
Gender x Attachment Style	2	125.69	2.880	.060*
Level of Conflict x Attachment Style	2	321.01	1.128	.327
Gender x Level of Conflict x Attachment Style	2	348.08	3.122	.047**
Error	134	111.48		
Total	146			

* $p \leq .10$

** $p \leq .05$

Table 9

Descriptive Statistics for Individuals' Use of Hostile Withdrawal Conflict Resolution

Behaviors as a Function of Perceived Level of Conflict and Attachment Style

Group	M	SD	N
Higher Level of Conflict			
Fearful-Avoidant	16.24	9.07	46
Preoccupied	12.16	11.71	25
Dismissive-Avoidant	14.72	9.63	19
Lower Level of Conflict			
Fearful-Avoidant	14.32	10.37	34
Preoccupied	15.36	15.96	11
Dismissive-Avoidant	12.36	11.01	11

Hypothesis 6

Hypothesis 6 proposed that among individuals who perceived their relationship to be higher in level of conflict, those who identified themselves as having a preoccupied attachment style would use more of the restrictive engulfment and domination-intimidation psychologically abusive conflict resolution behaviors than individuals identifying themselves as fearful-avoidant or dismissing-avoidant, whereas there would be no differences in the use of restrictive engulfment and domination-intimidation conflict resolution behaviors exhibited by the three types of insecurely attached individuals if they perceived their relationship to be lower in conflict.

Two 2 (gender) x 2 (level of conflict) x 3 (attachment style) analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were computed to test for mean differences in individuals' use of restrictive engulfment (Table 10) and domination-intimidation (Table 12) conflict management

behaviors. The results of the ANOVA presented in Table 10 indicate that the hypothesized interaction of attachment style and the perceived level of conflict for insecure individuals' use of psychologically abusive restrictive engulfment conflict resolution behavior was not significant.

Table 10

Analysis of Variance for Individuals' Use of Restrictive Engulfment Psychologically Abusive Conflict Resolution Behaviors as a Function of Gender, Self-Identified Attachment Style, and Perceived Level of Conflict

Source	df	MS	F	p
Gender	1	73.17	1.280	.394
Level of Conflict	1	41.89	.733	.260
Attachment Style	2	139.58	2.442	.091*
Gender x Level of Conflict	1	4.31	.075	.784
Gender x Attachment Style	2	53.30	.932	.061*
Level of Conflict x Attachment Style	2	163.38	2.858	.396
Gender x Level of Conflict x Attachment Style	2	100.91	1.765	.175
Error	134	57.17		
Total	146			

* $p \leq .10$

** $p \leq .05$

Thus, contrary to the prediction, no relationship was found between a preoccupied attachment style and the use of restrictive engulfment in higher conflict relationships. However, consistent with the prediction, there were no differences found in the use of restrictive engulfment behaviors among the three types of insecurely attached individuals in lower conflict relationships.

The means for the interaction of the perceived level of conflict and attachment security on individuals' use of restrictive engulfment conflict resolution behaviors are presented in Table 11.

Table 11

Descriptive Statistics for Individuals' Use of Restrictive Engulfment Conflict Resolution Behaviors as a Function of Perceived Level of Conflict and Attachment Style

Group	M	SD	N
Higher Level of Conflict			
Fearful-Avoidant	7.22	7.98	46
Preoccupied	11.00	6.90	25
Dismissive-Avoidant	6.42	7.16	19
Lower Level of Conflict			
Fearful-Avoidant	8.82	8.38	34
Preoccupied	7.45	8.35	11
Dismissive-Avoidant	3.27	3.55	11

In addition, when the gender variable was introduced, a trend toward an interaction effect between gender and attachment style ($F(2, 134) = .932, p = .061$) (Table 10) was identified. Mean score comparisons for this gender effect are examined in the description of findings regarding Research Question 2.

The results of the ANOVA presented in Table 12 indicate that the hypothesized relationship for the interaction between attachment style and the perceived level of conflict for individuals' use of psychologically abusive domination-intimidation conflict resolution behavior was not significant. However, a trend toward this interaction effect was found; $F(2, 134) = 2.569, p = .080$.

Table 12

Analysis of Variance for Individuals' Use of Domination-Intimidation Psychologically Abusive Conflict Resolution Behaviors as a Function of Gender, Self-Identified Attachment Style, and Perceived Level of Conflict

Source	df	MS	F	p
Gender	1	50.80	1.350	.129
Level of Conflict	1	87.93	2.337	.247
Attachment Style	2	126.70	3.37	.037**
Gender x Level of Conflict	1	33.28	.885	.349
Gender x Attachment Style	2	96.67	2.57	.216
Level of Conflict x Attachment Style	2	58.23	1.55	.080*
Gender x Level of Conflict x Attachment Style	2	113.46	3.016	.052*
Error	134	37.62		
Total	146			

* $p \leq .10$

** $p \leq .05$

According to the predictions made, mean scores (Table 13) indicated that preoccupied individuals ($M = 4.48$) tended to use more of the domination-intimidation psychologically abusive conflict resolution behaviors than fearful-avoidant ($M = 4.41$)

and dismissive-avoidant ($\underline{M} = 2.42$) individuals in the higher level of perceived conflict condition. Independent sample two-tail t-tests were used to conduct post hoc comparisons of the mean scores for insecure individuals' use of domination-intimidation psychologically abusive conflict resolution behaviors, as a function of their level of perceived conflict and attachment security. These comparisons indicated that the differences observed among the mean scores for the three insecure groups in the high perceived conflict condition were insignificant. Thus, there are no significant differences in the way that preoccupied, fearful-avoidant, and dismissive-avoidant individuals utilize the domination-intimidation type of psychologically abusive behavior when they perceive higher conflict in their intimate relationships. However, contrary to the prediction, there were differences found among the three types of insecurely attached individuals in their use of domination-intimidation in lower level conflict relationships. The pattern of mean scores indicated that preoccupied ($\underline{M} = 7.58$) individuals in a lower level of perceived conflict tended to use more of the domination-intimidation type of conflict resolution behaviors than fearful-avoidant ($\underline{M} = 3.06$) and dismissive-avoidant ($\underline{M} = 4.18$) individuals. In spite of these differences, independent sample two-tailed t-tests that were used to conduct post hoc comparisons of the mean scores of individuals' use of psychologically abusive domination-intimidation behavior when perceived relationship conflict was low, as a function of their type of insecure attachment, indicated no significant differences between the use of domination-intimidation by fearful and dismissive avoidant, and preoccupied and dismissive avoidant individuals. Thus, as

predicted, individuals with various forms of insecure attachment who perceived a lower level of conflict in their relationships tended to use domination-intimidation behavior equally.

However, when the gender variable was taken into account, a trend toward an interaction effect for gender, perceived level of conflict, and attachment style ($F(2, 134) = 3.016, p = .052$) (Table 12) for individuals' use of psychologically abusive domination intimidation conflict resolution behaviors in their intimate couple relationships was found. Differences among cell means in the interaction among gender, perceived level of conflict, and attachment style for individuals' use of domination-intimidation are discussed in the description of the findings for Research Question 2.

Table 13

Descriptive Statistics for Individuals' Use of Domination-Intimidation Psychologically Abusive Conflict Resolution Behaviors as a Function of Perceived Level of Conflict and Attachment Security

Source	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Higher Level of Conflict		
Fearful-Avoidant	4.41	7.25
Preoccupied	4.48	7.22
Dismissive-Avoidant	2.42	2.63
Lower Level of Conflict		
Fearful-Avoidant	3.06	4.62
Preoccupied	7.58	11.58
Dismissive-Avoidant	4.18	4.81

Hypothesis 7

Hypothesis 7 proposed that individuals who identified themselves as fearful-avoidant would use more of the denigration type of psychologically abusive conflict resolution behavior if they perceived their relationship to be higher in level of conflict than individuals identifying themselves as fearful-avoidant or preoccupied, whereas there would be no differences in the use of denigration psychologically abusive conflict management behaviors exhibited by the three types of insecurely attached individuals if they perceived their relationship to be lower in conflict.

A 2 (gender) x 2 (level of conflict) x 3 (attachment style) analysis of variance (ANOVA) was computed to test for mean differences in individuals' use of denigration psychologically abusive conflict resolution behaviors based on their gender, perceived level of conflict, and their self-identified style of attachment. The results of the ANOVA presented in Table 14 indicate that the hypothesized interaction effect between attachment styles and conflict level in determining use of the denigration form of psychologically abusive behavior was not significant. The prediction that fearful-avoidant individuals in higher conflict relationships would use more of the denigration type of psychologically abusive conflict resolution behaviors than individuals identifying themselves as fearful-avoidant or preoccupied was not demonstrated. However, as predicted no differences in the amount of denigration used among the three types of insecurely attached individuals in lower conflict relationships were observed.

Table 14

Analysis of Variance for Individuals' Use of Denigration Psychologically Abusive
Conflict Resolution Behaviors as a Function Perceived Gender, Level of Conflict, and
Self-Identified Attachment Style

Source	<u>df</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>p</u>
Gender	1	.276	.008	.255
Level of Conflict	1	47.07	1.305	.930
Attachment Style	2	10.07	.279	.757
Gender x Level of Conflict	1	18.72	.519	.473
Gender x Attachment Style	2	48.37	1.341	.236
Level of Conflict x Attachment Style	2	52.654	1.459	.265
Gender x Level of Conflict x Attachment Style	2	31.67	.878	.418
Error	134	36.08		
Total	146			

* $p \leq .10$

** $p \leq .05$

The means for the interaction of the perceived level of conflict and attachment security on individuals' use of denigration conflict resolution behaviors are presented in Table 15.

Table 15

Descriptive Statistics for Individuals' Use of Denigration Psychologically Abusive
Conflict Resolution Behaviors as a Function of Perceived Level of Conflict and
Attachment Security

Source	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Higher Level of Conflict		
Fearful-Avoidant	4.41	7.25
Preoccupied	4.48	7.22
Dismissive-Avoidant	2.42	2.63
Lower Level of Conflict		
Fearful-Avoidant	3.06	4.62
Preoccupied	7.58	11.58
Dismissive-Avoidant	4.18	4.81

Research Question 1

This research question explored whether or not the males and females of clinic couples differ in the types of attachment style that they exhibit. The chi-square test for the distribution of attachment styles as a function of gender showed a significant difference in the distribution of attachment styles between males and females (Table 16).

Table 16

Chi-Square for Gender by Attachment Style

	Secure	Fearful	Preoccupied	Dismissive	Row Total
Males	77 47.0%	38 23.2%	27 16.5%	22 13.4%	164 100%
Females	53 34.0%	69 44.2%	21 13.5%	13 8.3%	156 100%
Column Total	130 40.6%	107 33.4%	48 15.0%	35 10.9%	320 100%

Note. χ^2 (3 df) = 16.29, $p < .001$

Results presented in Table 10 indicate that males tend to describe themselves as having secure, preoccupied, and dismissive attachment styles more than females; whereas females tend to report having a fearful attachment style more frequently than males.

Research Question 2

The second research question explored whether or not there were gender differences in the impacts that attachment styles have on the use of psychologically abusive conflict resolution behaviors that individuals in clinic couples use based on their perceived level of conflict in their intimate couple relationships.

To explore this research question, all of the results from the analyses of variance (ANOVAs) reported above for Hypotheses 1 through 7 were examined. The results of the ANOVAs for gender differences in the individuals' use of either psychologically abusive or constructive conflict resolution behaviors as a function of their perceived level of conflict and attachment security indicated no significant main effects by gender; however, there were two trends toward an interaction effect between gender and attachment style for individuals' use of restrictive engulfment ($F(2, 134) = 2.86, p = .061$) (Table 10) and hostile withdrawal ($F(2, 134) = 2.88, p = .060$) (Table 8) forms of psychologically abusive conflict resolution behaviors. A significant interaction effect was indicated for gender, level of conflict, and self-identified attachment style for individuals' use of hostile withdrawal behavior ($F(2, 134) = 3.12, p = .047$) (Table 8), and there was a trend toward an interaction among gender, level of conflict, and attachment style for individuals' use of domination-intimidation behavior ($F(2, 134) = 3.02, p = .052$) (Table 12). Finally, a trend toward an interaction effect for gender and perceived level of conflict for individuals' use of constructive conflict resolution behaviors was indicated ($F(1, 254) = 3.392, p = .067$) (Table 4).

Independent sample two-tailed t-tests conducted for pairwise comparisons of mean scores of the six cells in the significant interaction effect between gender and attachment style (the three types of insecure attachment) for individuals' use of restrictive engulfment conflict resolution behaviors ($F(2, 134) = 2.86, p = .061$) (Table 17) indicated that there was a trend toward a difference between preoccupied ($M = 9.43$) and

dismissive-avoidant ($\underline{M} = 4.31$) females' use of restrictive conflict resolution behaviors ($t(32) = 2.03, p = .051$). This difference did not hold true for males in this clinic sample. Furthermore, a trend toward a difference between fearful-avoidant ($\underline{M} = 9.32$) and dismissive-avoidant ($\underline{M} = 4.31$) females' use of restrictive engulfment was detected ($t(76) = 1.99, p = .051$). This difference did not hold true for their male counterparts. Thus, preoccupied and fearful-avoidant females in this sample tend to utilize more restrictive engulfment conflict resolution behaviors than dismissive-avoidant females; however, a lack of such a difference among attachment styles was detected for the males in this sample. Furthermore, a significant difference was detected in the way that preoccupied males and females utilize restrictive engulfment behaviors if they perceive their relationship to be lower on the conflict dimension. Preoccupied males ($\underline{M} = 11.33$) who perceive a lower level of conflict in their relationships use more restrictive engulfment conflict resolution behavior than preoccupied females ($\underline{M} = 3.83$) in similar relationships ($t(9) = 2.328, p = .045$).

Independent sample two-tailed t-tests conducted for pairwise comparisons of the mean scores of the six cells indicated a significant difference between fearful-avoidant ($\underline{M} = 6.59$) and preoccupied ($\underline{M} = 11.04$) males' use of restrictive engulfment conflict resolution behaviors ($t(89) = 2.316, p = .024$). Moreover, a significant difference was detected between preoccupied ($\underline{M} = 11.04$) and dismissive-avoidant ($\underline{M} = 5.20$) males' use of restrictive engulfment conflict resolution behaviors ($t(42) = 2.845, p = .007$), whereas this relationship did not hold true for the females in this clinic sample.

Table 17

Descriptive Statistics for Individuals' Use of Restrictive Engulfment Psychologically
Abusive Conflict Resolution Behaviors as a Function of Gender and Self-Identified
Attachment Style

Source	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Females		
Fearful-Avoidant	9.32	8.69
Preoccupied	9.43	7.89
Dismissive-Avoidant	4.31	6.91
Males		
Fearful-Avoidant	6.59	7.43
Preoccupied	11.04	7.16
Dismissive-Avoidant	5.20	6.30

Independent sample two-tailed t-tests conducted for pairwise comparisons of the mean scores of the six cells in the significant interaction effect between gender and attachment security for individuals' use of hostile withdrawal behaviors (Table 18) indicated no significant differences in the amount of hostile withdrawal conflict resolution behaviors reported by secure and insecure males and females in this clinic sample.

Table 18

Descriptive Statistics for Individuals' Use of Hostile Withdrawal Psychologically
Abusive Conflict Resolution Behaviors as a Function of Gender and Self-Identified
Attachment Style

Source	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Females		
Fearful-Avoidant	16.33	10.04
Preoccupied	14.43	20.33
Dismissive-Avoidant	16.92	10.23
Males		
Fearful-Avoidant	16.18	10.65
Preoccupied	17.08	14.03
Dismissive-Avoidant	12.81	9.65

Independent sample two-tailed t-tests were used for pairwise comparisons among the 12 mean scores (Table 19) in the significant interaction effect for gender, perceived level of conflict, and self-identified attachment style for individuals' use of hostile withdrawal conflict resolution behaviors ($F(2, 134) = 3.12, p = .047$) (Table 8). A trend toward a difference between fearful-avoidant and preoccupied females in lower conflict relationships in their use of hostile withdrawal conflict resolution behaviors was detected. Thus, females in this clinic sample who perceived their intimate relationships to be lower in the level of conflict utilized more hostile withdrawal conflict resolution behaviors if they identify themselves as fearful-avoidant ($M = 17.62$) as compared to their preoccupied counterparts ($M = 8.33$) ($t(30) = 1.788, p = .084$). On the other hand, no difference in the use of hostile withdrawal conflict resolution behaviors between the

fearful-avoidant and preoccupied groups of males in lower conflict relationships was identified. Thus, only females in this sample differ in their use of hostile withdrawal conflict resolution behaviors based on their self-identified style of attachment insecurity and level of perceived conflict.

Table 19

Descriptive Statistics for Individuals' Use of Hostile Withdrawal Psychologically Abusive Conflict Resolution Behaviors as a Function of Gender, Perceived Level of Conflict, and Self-Identified Attachment Style

Source	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Higher Level of Conflict		
Females		
Fearful-Avoidant	15.79	9.87
Preoccupied	12.00	10.14
Dismissive-Avoidant	15.13	10.69
Males		
Fearful-Avoidant	17.14	8.62
Preoccupied	14.25	13.40
Dismissive-Avoidant	13.91	9.29
Lower Level of Conflict		
Females		
Fearful-Avoidant	17.62	11.73
Preoccupied	8.33	10.01
Dismissive-Avoidant	19.00	9.54
Males		
Fearful-Avoidant	11.30	11.87
Preoccupied	22.50	16.99
Dismissive-Avoidant	9.88	11.01

Independent sample two-tailed t-test post hoc comparisons were conducted among the 12 cell means for the interaction effect for gender (female versus male), perceived level of conflict (higher versus lower), and attachment security (three types of

insecure attachment) for individuals' use of domination-intimidation conflict resolution behaviors (Table 20). These comparisons indicated a significant difference between males' and females' use of psychologically abusive domination-intimidation conflict resolution behaviors. Preoccupied males ($M = 11.33$) in a lower level of conflict relationship used significantly more of the domination-intimidation conflict resolution behaviors than their fearful-avoidant counterparts ($M = 1.80$) ($t(14) = 2.219$, $p = .044$); however, this difference did not hold true for females in this clinic sample.

Table 20

Descriptive Statistics for Individuals' Use of Domination-Intimidation Psychologically
Abusive Conflict Resolution Behaviors as a Function of Gender, Perceived Level of
Conflict, and Self-Identified Attachment Security

Source	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Higher Level of Conflict		
Females		
Fearful-Avoidant	4.43	7.39
Preoccupied	4.82	8.04
Dismissive-Avoidant	1.50	1.85
Males		
Fearful-Avoidant	4.52	7.24
Preoccupied	4.21	6.82
Dismissive-Avoidant	3.09	2.98
Lower Level of Conflict		
Females		
Fearful-Avoidant	3.54	5.16
Preoccupied	3.83	8.91
Dismissive-Avoidant	3.67	3.51
Males		
Fearful-Avoidant	1.80	2.57
Preoccupied	11.33	13.49
Dismissive-Avoidant	4.38	5.42

Independent sample two-tailed t-test post hoc mean score comparisons conducted for the interaction effect for gender and perceived level of conflict for individuals' use of constructive conflict resolution behaviors demonstrated significant differences in individuals' use of constructive conflict resolution behaviors (Table 21). These results indicated that in higher conflict intimate relationships, males ($\underline{M} = 53.65$) used more constructive conflict resolution behaviors than their female ($\underline{M} = 42.14$) counterparts (t

(138) = 1.994, $p = .048$); whereas no significant difference between male and female use of constructive conflict resolution behaviors in relationships with a lower level of conflict were observed.

Table 21

Descriptive Statistics for Individuals' Use of Constructive Conflict Resolution Behaviors as a Function of Gender and Perceived Level of Conflict

Source	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Higher Level of Conflict		
Females	42.14	31.73
Males	53.65	36.488
Lower Level of Conflict		
Females	51.99	32.48
Males	45.00	33.11

Research Question 3

Research question three explored whether or not there were differences among clinic couples between African-American and Caucasian individuals in the type of attachment styles that they exhibited. The chi-square test for the distribution of attachment styles as a function of gender and race showed no significant difference for either males or females in the distribution of attachment styles between African American and Caucasian clinic clients (see Table 22).

Table 22

Chi-Square for Race by Gender and Attachment Style

	Secure	Fearful	Preoccupied	Dismissive	Row Total
Females					
African-American	22 34.4%	30 46.9%	8 12.5%	4 6.3%	64 100%
Caucasian	22 31.9%	31 44.9%	12 17.4%	4 5.8%	69 100%
Males					
African-American	30 45.5%	15 22.7%	10 15.2%	11 16.7%	66 100%
Caucasian	36 49.3%	21 28.8%	7 9.6%	9 12.3%	73 100%
Column Total	110 100%	97 100%	37 100%	28 100%	272 100%

Note. χ^2 (3 df) = .629, p = .890 for females; χ^2 (3 df) = 1.927, p = .588 for males

Research Question 4

This research question examined the distribution of partners' attachment style pairings in clinic couples. In order to find the percentages of couple pairings in different combinations of attachment styles, each male partner was paired up with his female partner, and then each couple was assigned to one of the 16 possible combinations of attachment styles (4 types for males (African-American & Caucasian) by 4 types for females (African-American & Caucasian). Results presented in Table 23 indicate that there were three most prevalent combinations of couples, which included Secure/Secure (21.92%), Fearful/Fearful (15.75%), and Secure Male/Fearful Female (15.07%). Other combinations of couples ranged anywhere from 7.53% to 1.37% (Table 17). Only one

combination of partners, Avoidant/Avoidant, was not present in this clinic sample (0%), although several were very infrequent (less than 5%).

Table 23

Clinical Couples' Attachment Style Pairings

Females	<i>Secure</i>	<i>Fearful</i>	<i>Preoccupied</i>	<i>Dismissive</i>	Row Total
Males					
<i>Secure</i>	32 21.92%	22 15.07%	11 7.53%	8 5.48%	73 49.65%
<i>Fearful</i>	6 4.11%	23 15.75%	5 3.42%	2 1.37%	36 24.49%
<i>Preoccupied</i>	3 2.05%	9 6.16%	3 2.05%	4 2.74%	19 12.93%
<i>Dismissive</i>	10 6.85%	7 4.79%	2 1.37%	0 0%	19 12.93%
Column Total	51 34.69%	61 41.50%	21 14.29%	14 9.52%	147 100%

Chapter V: Discussion

Overview of Findings

This study examined a potential moderating effect of attachment styles of individuals involved in intimate dyads on the relationship between their level of perceived conflict and use of forms of psychologically abusive versus constructive conflict management behavior toward each other. It was hypothesized that when individuals experience conflict in their intimate relationships and their working models of attachment are activated, they will use degrees of constructive or psychologically abusive conflict resolution behaviors based on the type of attachment style that they report. The associations between attachment styles and couples' conflict management behaviors were complex, and this study's results have implications for research and practice.

It was postulated that, in general, individuals who perceived their relationship to be higher in conflict would use more of the psychologically abusive conflict resolution behaviors than individuals in lower conflict relationships. This prediction held true for this sample of clinic couples. This finding is consistent with a large body of prior research that found that members of couples who were distressed and/or had sought therapy for relationship conflicts exhibited a high level of negative behavior toward each other when discussing conflict topics (Epstein & Baucom, 2002).

It was further hypothesized that individuals perceiving a lower level of conflict in their intimate relationships would utilize more of the constructive conflict resolution behaviors than individuals perceiving a higher level of conflict in their intimate couple

relationships. However, results for this clinical sample did not support this connection. No difference in the use of constructive conflict resolution behaviors was found for those reporting a lower versus a higher level of conflict in their intimate relationship. This lack of a difference in the use of constructive conflict resolution behaviors by individuals in lower and higher conflict relationships might be explained by the nature of this study's sample. The subjects in this sample are all involved in distressed intimate relationships and have sought help for their distress; thus, regardless of their level of perceived conflict in their relationships, they may not be utilizing constructive conflict resolution behaviors in dealing with their lack of consensus as well as non-distressed or non-clinical couples would be expected to do, or they may not have needed to seek outside assistance. This finding also is consistent with prior research indicating that (a) negative and positive forms of couple communication are not highly correlated with each other and (b) negative behavior distinguishes distressed from non-distressed couples more than positive behavior does (Epstein & Baucom, 2002).

It was also suggested that individuals' level of attachment security or insecurity would further separate individuals who perceived higher versus lower relationship conflict in their use of either psychologically abusive or constructive conflict resolution behaviors. It was hypothesized that secure individuals perceiving their relationship to be higher in level of conflict would use more constructive conflict resolution behaviors and less psychologically abusive conflict resolution behaviors than insecure individuals, whereas the presence of lower perceived conflict, attachment styles would not be

associated with differences in conflict resolution behaviors. Results from this clinical sample provided support for the prediction that level of conflict influences individuals' use of psychologically abusive conflict resolution behaviors. When both attachment security and perceived level of conflict were taken into account, the results indicated that attachment style moderated the relationship between conflict level and individuals' use of conflict resolution behaviors. However, contrary to the prediction, secure individuals in this clinical sample used *more* psychologically abusive conflict resolution behaviors than their insecure counterparts in higher conflict relationships. Moreover, secure individuals who perceived the level of conflict in their relationships to be higher used *more* psychologically abusive conflict resolution behaviors than secure individuals in relationships with a lower level of perceived conflict. In addition, contrary to the prediction, no differences were found between secure and insecure individuals' use of constructive conflict resolution behaviors in higher conflict couple relationships, whereas, in accord with the prediction, there was no difference found between secure and insecure individuals' use of constructive conflict resolution behaviors in lower conflict intimate couple relationships.

The results of this study contradict the predictions made on the basis of literature review indicating that secure individuals should be more capable than insecure individuals in dealing with conflict in their intimate relationships without resorting to abusive behaviors and by utilizing more constructive conflict resolution behaviors (Kobak & Duemmler, 1994; Pistole, 1989; Pistole & Arricale, 2003; Simpson, Rholes, &

Phillips, 1996). The fact that there was no significant difference between secure and insecure individuals' use of constructive conflict resolution behaviors, and secure individuals used more of the psychologically abusive conflict resolution behaviors than their insecure counterparts, might be attributed to the fact that couples participating in this study are involved in distressed intimate relationships, because all of them sought help for relational problems. First, no difference between secure and insecure individuals' use of constructive conflict resolution behaviors may be attributed to the clinical nature of the sample and their, overall, lack of skills in problem-solving, effective communication, and constructive conflict resolution. Individuals who are capable of employing constructive conflict resolution skills when they experience lack of consensus in their intimate relationships should be able to resolve their differences effectively, and may need to resort to seeking professional help for their relationship problems. However, participants of this study have not been able to deal with their issues successfully, and had initiated contact with the therapist, thus, allowing for an assumption of their inability to use constructive conflict resolution behaviors effectively, regardless of their attachment security orientation. Second, distress in couple relationships may also influence the degree of security or insecurity that partners may exhibit. Depression and anxiety, which are prevalent in distressed relationships, may lead to loss of security and connection with the significant other (Johnson, 2003; Whisman, 1999). Hence, in the presence of psychological distress it is possible that differences between those individuals who identify themselves as secure or insecure in attachment may diminish, thus

contributing to the lack of a significant difference in the way that secure and insecure individuals in this sample utilize various conflict resolution skills. Third, the measure of attachment security used in this study may not have been assessing the attachment styles of individuals comprehensively. This one-item self-report measure may not adequately separate secure from insecure individuals, due to its lack of depth and comprehensive information about the way in which people interact with their partners in intimate couple relationships. Individuals in this clinical sample who had identified themselves as being completely comfortable in the relationship may have been attempting to present themselves as more adjusted than they really are in order to cover their insecurities. Thus, the results may not reflect the behaviors of secure and insecure individuals accurately. Finally, a lack of statistical power due to the large number of tests performed and the relatively small sample size could be responsible for such a lack of differences found between secure and insecure individuals in this sample.

In addition to the unexpected finding that there was no difference in the secure and insecure individuals' use of constructive conflict resolution behaviors, it was even more surprising to find that the secure individuals in this clinic sample utilized more of the psychologically abusive conflict resolution behaviors than their insecure counterparts. One explanation for this contradiction to the hypothesis that secure individuals would be less abusive could be the fact that some of the items on the MDEAS (the measure of psychological abuse employed in this study), such as "sulked or refused to talk about an issue, intentionally avoided the other person during a conflict or disagreement, changed

the subject on purpose when the other person was trying to discuss a problem, became so angry that was unable or unwilling to talk, acted cold or distant when angry,” to list a few, may be considered as very mild forms of abuse, commonly utilized by individuals in interactions with their significant others. Perhaps secure individuals are more comfortable than insecure ones expressing their unhappiness or anger through those relatively mild forms of negative behavior, because they have a general expectancy that their expressions of upset will not damage the overall quality of the relationship and may be more confident than their insecure counterparts that their partners can deal with these overt behaviors.

This study also examined the ways in which specific types of insecure attachment exhibited by the intimate partners may moderate the relationship between the perceived level of conflict and individuals’ use of one of the four types of psychologically abusive conflict resolution behaviors in their intimate relationships. Specifically, it was proposed that if the perceived level of conflict between the partners is relatively high, then individuals reporting a dismissive-avoidant attachment style would use more of the hostile withdrawal types of psychological abuse as compared with the individuals reporting other forms of insecure attachment. Contrary to the prediction, results for this clinic sample of couples indicated that both dismissive and fearful-avoidant (not just dismissive) individuals who perceived their intimate relationships to be higher on level of conflict have a tendency to resort to hostile withdrawal conflict resolution behaviors more than their preoccupied counterparts. This finding may be explained by the nature of these

two types of avoidant attachment. Both fearful-avoidant and dismissive-avoidant individuals are prone to either physically or psychologically seek distance from close intimate relationships, although dismissive individuals would be expected to do it to a greater degree than fearful-avoidant individuals, whereas their preoccupied counterparts tend to seek closeness and would be less likely to utilize hostile withdrawal tactics to achieve attachment security. Although these results did not support the predictions made, they may be explained in light of the nature of the insecure attachment. Because fearful-avoidant individuals are characterized by high levels of avoidance of intimacy and high levels of anxiety about abandonment, they usually manage their fears by avoiding intimacy in relationships; thus, results of this study confirm some previous findings that such individuals may have difficulty being close to their partners, may limit self-disclosure, and may hold their emotions inside themselves (Davila, 2003). Moreover, researchers have determined that fearful-avoidant individuals do not usually turn to their partners when upset and believe that their partners do not care about them; they are likely to be very sensitive and vulnerable, and they tend to behave in a passive manner (Davila, 2003; Davila & Bradbury, 2001). Thus, one can conclude that fearful-avoidant individuals would not be good communicators, and they could deal with conflict in the relationship by resorting to hostile withdrawal.

Another prediction made was that when the perceived level of conflict is higher, individuals with a fearful-avoidant attachment style would use more of the denigration type of psychological abuse than would individuals reporting that they are in the other

forms of insecure attachment, with no differences in the use of denigration expected among the three types of insecurely attached individuals in lower level conflict relationships. Results for this clinic sample indicated no differences in the use of denigration as a method of conflict resolution by fearful-avoidant individuals in either higher or lower level conflict relationships when compared to preoccupied and dismissive-avoidant individuals. These results may be explained by the nature of the denigration type of psychological abuse, which seems to be commonly used by *both* secure and insecure individuals in both higher and lower levels of relationship conflict in this clinic sample. Behaviors that are assessed by the denigration subscale of the MDEAS, such as criticizing the other person's appearance, calling the other person ugly, worthless, a loser, or stupid, belittling the other person in front of others, and implying that someone else would be a better partner, are commonly used by individuals involved in distressed couple relationships, whether or not the relationships are considered abusive and regardless of the attachment styles of the individuals involved in the relationship. Lower level denigration behaviors commonly are used by distressed partners who are not judged to be abusive, and in this clinical sample of couples who sought assistance for relationship problems, the overall level of distress was relatively high. Thus, the characteristics of this clinical sample may account for the lack of significant differences in the use of denigration among the three types of insecurely attached individuals.

Moreover, individuals with a preoccupied attachment style were expected to use more of the restrictive engulfment and domination-intimidation types of psychological

abuse in higher conflict relationships as compared to individuals with other forms of insecure attachment, whereas no differences in the use of restrictive engulfment and domination-intimidation were expected among the three types of insecurely attached individuals when the level of relationship conflict was lower. Results for this sample affirmed the prediction of no difference in the use of the restrictive engulfment and domination-intimidation psychologically abusive conflict resolution behaviors among the three types of insecurely attached individuals in lower level conflict relationships. On the other hand, there were also no significant differences found in the use of restrictive engulfment and domination intimidation among the three types of insecurely attached individuals in higher conflict relationships. However, after examining mean differences, a trend could be observed toward the somewhat greater use of the domination-intimidation and restrictive engulfment type of psychological abuse by preoccupied individuals than fearful or dismissive-avoidant individuals in both higher and lower conflict intimate relationships. These findings are consistent with previous research regarding the behaviors that are typical of preoccupied individuals, such as jealousy, dependency on the partner, anxiety about being rejected by or losing the partner (Levy & Davis, 1988; Shaver & Hazan, 1993, Simpson & Rholes, 1994). Thus, it can be concluded that preoccupied individuals would be more prone to using restrictive engulfment and domination-intimidation types of behaviors than other insecurely attached individuals in order to keep their partners close to them (Bartholomew, Henderson, & Dutton, 2001, Bookwala & Zdanuik, 1998; Senchak & Leonard, 1992).

Furthermore, gender and racial (Caucasian versus African-American) differences in attachment patterns, as well as gender differences in the use of constructive versus psychologically abusive conflict resolution behaviors based on different attachment styles were examined in an exploratory fashion. Results indicated that males in this clinic sample were more likely to report secure, preoccupied, and dismissive-avoidant attachment styles than females, whereas females more than males were likely to report a fearful-avoidant style of attachment. In addition, males associated themselves more frequently with a secure attachment orientation than with other attachment styles, and there were more fearful-avoidant females than females with any other attachment styles. These results support some of the previous research findings on the topic. In particular, in accord with findings by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991), males in this sample were more likely than females to exhibit a dismissive-avoidant attachment style, whereas females were more likely than males to exhibit a fearful-avoidant style of attachment. These differences may be explained by a common difference between males' and females' general approaches to intimate relationships, with males exhibiting a general tendency to seek more autonomy and females showing a tendency to seek close relationships (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Feeney & Noller, 1996; Feeney, Noller, & Hanrahan, 1994). On the other hand, previous research findings suggested no or minimal difference between genders on their identification with preoccupied and secure attachment styles (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Collins & Read, 1990; Feeney & Noller, 1996; Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1994), but subjects in the present clinical sample

differed on their incidence of secure males (47.0%) as opposed to females (34.0%), and varied somewhat on the distribution of preoccupied males (16.5%) and females (13.5%). The fact that the distribution of attachment styles for males and females in this sample differs from that of the other research samples can be partially explained by the clinical nature of this sample. This clinical sample may have characteristics that are not common to non-clinical or non-distressed couples, couples who are distressed, but are not seeking help, or individuals who are not currently involved in intimate relationships. One possible explanation for the gender difference in this clinical sample is that women still are at a relative disadvantage in terms of resources (jobs and income) in couple relationships, and when a relationship is sufficiently distressed that the couple has sought therapy, the female's level of security may be threatened more than the male's.

Moreover, when the possibility of a racial difference was examined, no significant difference was found between Caucasian and African-American individuals in the distribution of the attachment styles. Because very little research is available examining racial differences in attachment styles of males and females in intimate couple relationships, there is no available sample that would allow the results from this sample to be compared to the results from other samples.

In addition, when possible gender differences were examined in the moderating effect of attachment style on the relationship between the perceived level of conflict and individuals' use of either psychologically abusive or constructive conflict resolution behaviors, no significant differences among males and females in this clinical sample

were observed when pairwise t-test comparisons of means were conducted. No overall gender differences for individuals' use of psychologically abusive conflict resolution behaviors were observed. Males and females in this sample seemed to utilize similar conflict resolution behaviors in their intimate relationships based on the level of conflict they perceived and the attachment style that they exhibited. However, some differences in the patterns of findings within the sexes were observed. In particular, secure females in higher conflict relationships utilized more of the psychologically abusive conflict resolution behaviors than their insecure counterparts. No such difference was identified for males in higher conflict relationships. The fact that secure females in this sample were more likely to resort to psychologically abusive conflict resolution behaviors than their male counterparts when they perceived a higher level of conflict in the relationship may be attributed to the fact that women, in general, tend to be more expressive of emotions than men do (Searle & Meara, 1999), and have more confidence in the value of expressing of both positive and negative emotions (Searle & Meara, 1999). Thus, when women experience a lack of consensus in their intimate relationships they may be more motivated and able to express their feelings. However, because this is a clinical sample and both the men and the women in the sample may not possess strong constructive conflict resolution skills, women in this sample may resort to potentially abusive expression of emotions more so than men, who may avoid thinking about or expressing their emotional experiences.

Moreover, fearful-avoidant females in this clinic sample utilized more restrictive engulfment behavior than dismissive-avoidant females when they perceived a higher level of conflict in their relationships, whereas there was no difference in the fearful and dismissive-avoidant males' use of restrictive engulfment in higher level of conflict relationships. Furthermore, males who perceived a lower level of conflict in their couple relationships utilized more restrictive engulfment behavior than females in similar relationships.

The fact that fearful-avoidant females use more restrictive engulfment behaviors than dismissive-avoidant females when they experience their relationship to be conflictual may be explained by the differences between the two avoidant types of attachment. According to Leak and Parsons (2001), both fearful and dismissive styles of attachment are behaviorally avoidant but have different mechanisms that underlie the avoidance. Whereas fearful-avoidant attachment is based on the fear of rejection and loss of the attachment figure, dismissive-avoidant attachment is based on avoidance that is not associated with anxiety of losing one's partner. Bartholomew (1990) has argued that dismissive-avoidant individuals deny their needs for attachment, and when involved in stressful or conflictual situation their working models of attachment become de-activated. This de-activation of attachment needs is an automatic process and works largely outside the individual's awareness, protecting the individual by blocking his or her close involvement with other people (Bartholomew, 1990). Thus, when fearful-avoidant and dismissive-avoidant females experience conflict in their intimate relationships, fearful-

avoidant females are trying to hold on to their partner by resorting to restrictive engulfment tactics, whereas dismissive-avoidant females either withdraw or leave the relationship. This difference between fearful-avoidant and dismissive-avoidant behaviors was not found among the males in this sample. It is possible that because females tend to value intimate relationships more than their male counterparts (Collins & Read, 1990; Shi, 2003), fearful-avoidant females experience more anxiety about losing one's partner than fearful-avoidant males, especially if there is a perception of conflict in the relationships. Thus, when fearful-avoidant females perceive conflict in the relationships, they worry that their partner will not love them and will possibly leave them, thus, they try to keep the partner close-by employing restrictive engulfment behaviors. However, when fearful-avoidant males experience conflict in the relationships, they may be less anxious about losing the partner and more willing to give up on the relationship, thus, may have no need to resort to psychologically abusive forms of restrictive engulfment to hold on to the partner, behaviors that would be typical of the dismissive-avoidant individual.

However, it was also found that males who perceived a lower level of conflict in their couple relationships utilized more of restrictive engulfment behavior than females in similar relationships. One can presume that males who perceive their intimate relationships to be less conflictual may value such relationships more than if the relationship is conflictual or problematic, and may experience a greater fear of losing the partner in such relationships as opposed to highly conflictual relationships. Prior

research has indicated that males in general tend to avoid high levels of conflict with their partners (Epstein & Baucom, 2002) Thus, if both males and females value the relationship and are anxious about losing the partner, males, in general, have more capability to employ restrictive engulfment tactics than females, usually due to their physical strength and greater economic and social power. Consequently, it seems reasonable to assume that males in this clinic sample may be exhibiting restrictive engulfment behaviors more than females in relationships with a lower level of conflict.

Although gender was a factor that led to some differences in individuals' use of various conflict resolution techniques in their intimate relationships based on the level of conflict that they perceived and their self-identified attachment style, it seemed to have a rather minor effect overall. This finding supports a great deal of previous research that suggested gender to be an insignificant component in differentiating securely from insecurely attached individuals in the way that they deal with conflict in their intimate relationships (Brennan et al., 1991; Brennan & Shaver, 1995; Carnelley & Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Feeney & Noller, 1990, 1992; Feeney et al., 1993; Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

Finally, patterns of couple pairings in partners' attachment styles were examined. The most common combination of partners in this clinic sample was a union between a secure male and a secure female (21.92%), followed by a combination of a fearful male and a fearful female (15.75%), and a secure male and a fearful female (15.07%). These three combinations of couples were most prevalent in this clinic sample, with other

combinations being notably less frequent. The following other combinations of partners were seen in descending order - secure male/preoccupied female (7.53%), dismissive male/secure female (6.85%), preoccupied male/fearful female (6.16%), secure male/dismissive female (5.48%), dismissive male/fearful female (4.79%), fearful male/secure female (4.11%), fearful male/ preoccupied female (3.42%), preoccupied male/dismissive female (2.74%), preoccupied male/secure female (2.05%) & preoccupied male/preoccupied female (2.05%), dismissive male/preoccupied female (1.37%) & fearful male/dismissive female (1.37%), and dismissive male/dismissive female (0%).

In examining the distribution of couple attachment style pairings found in this study, the attachment style couple combinations seem to be consistent with previously reported patterns. The largest group of this sample consisted of secure male/secure female combination. According to previous research, secure individuals tend to prefer to be with other secure individuals, and about 80% are more likely to end up with each other (Collins & Read, 1990; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994; Senchak & Lenoark, 1992). Furthermore, it has been suggested by previous researchers that secure individuals are more capable of dealing with conflict and are more satisfied with their intimate relationships (Bartholomew, 1994). Thus, the question arises of why this clinical sample includes a majority of secure/secure dyads if they should be capable of dealing with their differences effectively. One explanation for this discrepancy could be that when secure individuals assess their relationship to be in distress they are more willing to admit that they may have a problem and to obtain professional help (which in the case of couple

therapy involves communicating directly with their partner) than other combinations of couples.

In addition to having more secure/secure dyads, this clinic sample consisted of very small numbers of preoccupied/preoccupied and none of the dismissive/dismissive couples. This is consistent with findings by other researchers who identified these combinations of couples to be very rare (Brennan & Shaver, 1990; Nordling, 1992). In particular, we seldom see a combination of dismissive/dismissive partners for two reasons. First, dismissive-avoidant individuals are not very comfortable with intimacy and close relationships; thus, one can hypothesize that they would not be seeking intimate relationships as often as securely attached individuals, or individuals with other insecure attachment styles. Second, it can be assumed that if dismissive-avoidant individuals do get involved in an intimate relationship, they would not stay long and would not attend therapy if problems in their relationship arose. They are more likely to separate at the first sign of trouble or discord in their intimate relationship (Fisher & Crandell, 2000).

Interestingly, the combination of partners that was second most frequent in this clinic sample consisted of two fearful-avoidant partners. No research is available on such couples. It seems that relationships involving two fearful partners would be highly conflictual, because both of the partners are uncomfortable with getting too close to the other person, yet they desire closeness. One can speculate that such relationships would be filled with mixed messages and miscommunication; thus, leading to conflict and possibly physical and psychological abuse. Nevertheless, the negative pattern in such

couples may be relatively stable, based on the individuals' desire for attachment.

Because the nature of this pairing of attachment styles, this analysis is completely exploratory and only descriptive information was collected about the frequencies of couple pairings based on the attachment style of each partner. This study was not able to collect enough data to allow a more comprehensive analysis of effects that various attachment style couple pairings may have on partners' use of either constructive or psychologically abusive conflict resolution behaviors.

The end-goal of this study was to find out whether or not knowledge of attachment styles of partners involved in intimate relationships would be a useful part of therapeutic work with distressed couples. It was proposed that by examining attachment styles and attachment-related couple interactions, therapists may more effectively understand issues that arise in clinic couple interactions, explain why individuals behave in certain ways, and find relationships that might be most at risk for relationship problems and psychological abuse. Hence, it was expected that attachment theory may be useful in helping therapists understand the types of behaviors utilized especially by distressed partners and possible reasons why individuals engage in such behaviors. By looking at various combinations of partners' attachment styles, therapists may be more able to design interventions that would be most effective with particular couples that are at risk for relational problems and abuse within their intimate relationships. Therefore, an important goal of this study for future clinical and research purposes was to bring attention to the influence of an individual's attachment style, specific types of behavior

may be exhibited, which influence ones interactions with their partner in an intimate relationship.

Furthermore, depending on the attachment style of each partner in the relationship, some combinations of partners may be more in need of intervention than others. Due to the nature of the sample in the current study, it was not possible to examine the effects of various combinations of couple attachment styles on the behaviors that are prevalent in those relationships, but this study has brought attention to this issue, and further research should be conducted examining differences in conflict behavior among the sixteen combinations of partners.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations. First, the sample of couples in this study was not large in relation to the number of variables examined and tests that were performed, thus jeopardizing the power of the analyses to detect group differences. Furthermore, due to an inadequate sample size, it was not possible to conduct comparisons of behavior within different kinds of intimate dyads (i.e., combinations of partners with different attachment styles). Only an exploratory analysis examining the frequencies of various attachment style combinations was conducted, and more empirical investigation of conflict resolution behaviors employed by individuals involved in relationships with various combinations of attachment styles is necessary to understand dynamics of those relationships and to provide clinicians with more effective interventions in their efforts to educate and assist partners in improving their couple relationships.

Second, attachment was measured with a single item, which was the subject's self-endorsement of the category of attachment style that seemed to best describe him or her. This one-item categorical measure of attachment does not provide a great deal of information about individuals' attachment styles and provides only the most basic understanding of individuals' functioning. Greater weight can be placed on results derived from multi-item dimensional measures because they demonstrate greater overall precision and validity in differentiating individuals on characteristics that are assumed to be dimensional (Brennan et al., 1998; Fraley & Waller, 1998). Furthermore, the measure used in this study also is subject to self-report bias. Many individuals may want to describe themselves as comfortable with intimate relationships due to the possible stigma associated with attachment insecurity. Thus, by asking individuals to rate their comfort or discomfort with intimate relationships with a single item question, this research may not allow for an accurate measure of attachment security in this sample. In addition, given the potential for bias in self-ratings of attachment styles, it may be advisable to have members of a couple rate each other's styles as well. Finally, self-report questionnaires could be supplemented by structured interviews to assess attachment styles. Thus, in order for this research to be strengthened, attachment should be assessed on multiple and continuous dimensions that take into account variation in a person's tendencies toward each type of attachment style, and it seems desirable that a combination of assessment methods, including both questionnaires and oral interviews assessing both one's own and the partner's perceptions of attachment, should be used to

gathering more comprehensive information about individuals' attachment styles.

Third, although theory and prior research suggest that attachment styles should play an important role in couples' responses to relationship conflicts, attachment is unlikely to be the only personality characteristic influencing how couples respond to conflict. For example, individuals who have relatively low impulse control (high emotional lability and limited control over behavior) and low self-esteem may respond with destructive rather than constructive behavior when faced with conflict in their couple relationships. Buss (1991) proposed that there are two ways in which personality could play a role in instigating conflict within intimate relationships. First, individuals may upset others directly by influencing how the individuals act toward others, or indirectly by eliciting actions from others that are upsetting to the self (Buss, 1991). Hence, personality characteristics beyond attachment styles may affect the quality of intimate interactions and the ability of the partners to use more constructive and less psychologically abusive conflict resolution behaviors to either de-escalate or resolve conflict. In particular, Buss (1991) identified two personality characteristics that tend to be especially prone to lead to conflict and abuse in intimate relationships: low agreeableness and low emotional stability. Women involved in relationships with men possessing these personality characteristics report denigration, restrictive-engulfment, and hostile-withdrawal types of behaviors to be common in their intimate relationships (Buss, 1991). In addition, men involved in relationships with women possessing low agreeableness and low emotional stability characteristics report that their wives upset

them by being denigrating, possessive and jealous, and overly dependent on them (Buss, 1991). Thus, although the present study investigated an important personality characteristic of attachment insecurity, it is possible that inclusion of other characteristics such as measures of agreeableness and emotional stability would have accounted for more variance in the dependent variables of abusive and constructive forms of behavior. In fact, it could be hypothesized that when an insecure individual perceives conflict in his or her relationship the tendency to approach life in an agreeable (generally positive, cooperative) manner and the ability to control one's emotional responses to the stress will affect the degree to which the person behaves constructively or not.

Fourth, the results of this study have limited generalizability. The present study's sample is a clinical sample and does not represent a cross-section of the general population of couples in the community. Even though this study's sample included individuals ranging in age and with diverse racial, educational, social class, and professional backgrounds, all of the subjects were involved in a distressed relationship, because they were all clinical couples and initiated therapy to improve their intimate couple relationship. Thus, findings of this study cannot be applied to non-distressed, non-clinical, and distressed but non-clinical populations. This sample group possesses some characteristics that are typical only of the individuals who consider their relationships in need of help and are willing to obtain help by attending couple therapy at a University family therapy clinic. Couples who are not distressed, or those who are distressed but do not believe that they may benefit from a therapeutic experience, or those

who seek help from a private therapy provider may have characteristics that differ greatly from those of current clinic sample. However, because no racial difference was found in the distribution of individuals' attachment styles, it appears that the results of this study could be applied to both African-American and Caucasian clinical populations equally.

Fifth, this clinical sample of couples did not allow for an examination of patterns of interaction among couples with various combinations of attachment styles. The prevalence rates of certain attachment style pairings were so low that analyses including those groups of couples were not possible.

Finally, there could be a limitation related to the way that conflict was conceptualized in this study. Each individual's perception of consensus or lack thereof was assessed, rather than directly measuring a level of conflict that is present in each relationship. Lack of consensus between partners may not necessarily indicate overt conflict in the relationship. According to Kobak and Duemmler (1994), strong conflict within intimate relationships increases individuals' need for support of an attachment figure, thus activating the individuals' attachment working models. They further suggest that attachment behaviors are observed most clearly during stressful or conflictual situations (Kobak & Duemmler, 1994). However, disagreements between partners are normal and do not necessarily indicate problems within the relationship, and may not lead to high levels of conflict in intimate relationships. Hence, if lack of consensus does not lead to overt conflict between partners, working models of attachment may not be activated, and thus individuals' attachment styles may not influence the way in which

they deal with disagreements in intimate relationships. Thus, in order to assess the moderating effect of attachment style on the relationship between perceived level of conflict and use of various types of conflict resolution behaviors, it would be necessary to use a measure that would assess the degree to which lack of consensus was actually a conflictual topic during a couple's interactions.

Clinical and Relational Implications

Couple distress is a major problem that has affected many intimate relationships in the United States and all around the world, leading to very high divorce rates and high prevalence of various forms of abuse between partners. Conflict is one of the major components of distress between intimate partners. Some degree of conflict is inevitable in close relationships (Feeney & Noller, 1996). Even though conflict is common in all kinds of relationships, some individuals and couples are more capable of dealing with conflict than others. An attachment perspective has helped partners, researchers, and clinicians alike understand one of the sources of this conflict, as well as explain individual differences in dealing with conflict in intimate couple interactions (Feeney & Noller, 1996), especially when the relationship is in distress or there is a lack of consensus between partners (Davila, 2003).

Identifying intimate couple relationships as attachment relationships has received a great deal of attention from researchers and clinicians alike (Feeney, 2003; Mikulincer, Florian, Cowan, & Cowan, 2002). It has been proposed by many researchers that in adult couple relationships partners take on roles of attachment figures for each other and that

attachment is a bi-directional process in which both partners' levels of security or insecurity influence the relationship's functioning (Fisher & Crandell, 2000; Mikulincer et al., 2002). Recent works on attachment and intimate relationships suggest that therapeutic work with clients would be greatly enhanced by helping clients understand and change their insecure attachment patterns (Anderson, Beach, & Kaslow, 1999). In the past decade, researchers have suggested that marital and family therapists should pay particular attention to issues of attachment while working with discordant couples (Pistole, 1989; Pistole & Watkins, 1995; Shi, 2003). By looking at abuse within intimate relationships from the attachment perspective, the goal is to understand the relational component of abuse and to develop effective therapeutic interventions for couples that experience abuse in their intimate relationships (Feeney, 2003).

However, caution should be employed when prototypical behaviors are expected of individuals based on their attachment styles or other personality characteristics. This study provided valuable information regarding the behavior of the individuals who identified themselves with one attachment style or another. Often the individuals in this study did not exhibit the exact types of behaviors that were expected of them based on their attachment styles. Those behaviors varied more according to the level of conflict that they perceived in the relationship. It is assumed that those behaviors also varied due to the other factors that were either not taken into account when the study was originally developed (such as, other personality characteristics of each partner), or were not assessed due to the limitations of the available data (such as the combination of

attachment styles of the two partners involved in the relationship, or other personality characteristics that may influence interactions between the partners). Therefore, it is important to recognize that even though individuals' attachment styles may exert some degree of consistent impact on their behavior in their intimate relationships, individuals can also express different levels of security in different circumstances, including different relationships. This recognition allows for an assumption that attachment security is not only a quality of an individual, but is also a characteristic that can be changed if one or both partners change. Hence, individuals can help each other in becoming more secure if they perceive each other as trustworthy, available, more capable of expressing distress and dealing with conflict effectively, and are committed to making the change and to maintaining their current relationship.

According to Johnson (1986), marital conflict stems from partners' perceptions of each other's unavailability, which in turn, compromises the capacity of the partners to use the relationship as a secure base from which to explore and within which to resolve conflicts effectively. She further suggests that those individuals with insecure attachment patterns experience high levels of anxiety in their intimate relationships, leading them to have conflictual and abusive relationships. Thus, couple therapy that utilizes an attachment perspective as a base may help partners understand their mutual needs for security and closeness, sources of their attraction to their partners, causes of and responses to conflict, and ways to function more effectively within the relationship and develop a sense of security with the partner (Bartholomew et al., 2001; Feeney et al.,

2000). The Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT) model developed by Susan Johnson (1996) and her colleagues, which blends experiential and systemic approaches to therapy and places emphasis on attachment theory, may be useful in working with abusive couples. This model does not attempt to change partners' negative behaviors, but instead strives to interrupt and break painful cycles of interactions that individuals find themselves stuck in due to their past experiences and the insecurities associated with them. This model allows couples to become aware of and understand their emotional connections or disconnects in their intimate relationships. EFT focuses on how individuals process their experiences, with particular attention on how they use emotions in their interactions and in their patterns of organization and negotiation of their intimate interactions (Johnson, 1996).

However, the present study's finding that perceived level of relationship conflict was a more consistent factor in individuals' use of psychologically abusive behavior than was attachment style also suggests that couple therapy for couples should include specific interventions for reducing negative behavior elicited by partners' conflicting needs and goals. The results of this study identified that individuals who perceived their relationships to be less conflictual (hence, more desirable) employed more of the negative behaviors geared toward keeping the partner in the relationship (such as restrictive engulfment and domination-intimidation). This use of negative behaviors can be explained by distressed individuals' lack of more constructive conflict resolution skills, but the more important factor here is their desire to maintain the relationship. Thus, the

importance of the desirability of the relationship, in terms of its costs and benefits, should be an important issue when working with distressed dyads in couple therapy. In designing interventions to improve partners' levels of security, the therapists may want to pay particular attention to the costs and benefits involved in each specific relationship and how each partner's behaviors contribute to either negative or positive interactions within the intimate dyad. Hence, it is proposed that therapists working with distressed couples should be developing treatment plans that are specific to each individual couple, based not only on each partner's attachment style related behaviors but also on specific changes in behavior needed to create a more secure (i.e., non-abusive) relationship within which the partners can develop more positive attachments.

Based on the combinations of couples that were detected in the current sample, the following observations can be made. When working with distressed couples, the therapist first needs to assess each spouse's level of attachment security, utilizing multiple measurement methods, which may include self-report paper-and-pencil multi-item questionnaires, as well as oral interviews examining family-of-origin and other relationship history of each individual. Once each member is comprehensively assessed and the therapist is aware of the combination of attachment styles and the current overall condition of the relationship, the therapist, together with the partners, can determine the behaviors within couple interactions that maintain insecurities within each partner. When those behaviors are pointed out, behavioral interventions would be conducted in order to increase security-building behaviors and to help each partner learn how to provide and

seek support from the intimate partner in order to develop a secure base and a more comfortable and trusting relationship. In addition to identifying behaviors that are contributing to a lack of felt security in the relationship, based on the results from this sample, individuals involved in distressed relationships need to learn constructive conflict resolution skills. Thus, an important component of working with distressed couples would be psychoeducation. However, in the frame of the Emotionally Focused Therapy this psychoeducation should be delivered in the context of partners providing and seeking support (Johnson & Wiffen, 2003). Finally, because most of the negative behaviors exhibited by the members of this clinic sample seemed to be associated with their fear of abandonment and losing the partner, interventions specifically targeting those fears may be necessary in therapeutic work with couples. When those fears are addressed and each partner is able to feel empathy for the other and is aware of one another's underlying insecurities, then partners will be more be able to feel comfortable with one another, will be less fearful about rejection and abandonment, and will begin learning ways of dealing with conflict in the relationship without resorting to negative or abusive behaviors (Johnson & Wiffen, 2003).

Implications for Further Research

Due to the nature of this sample, it is proposed that future research examine the differences between distressed and non-distressed or clinical and non-clinical couples in the way that attachment styles may influence their use of psychological abuse in intimate relationships. In addition, a larger sample size may allow for a more comprehensive

analysis of attachment style pairings. In the present study, with the four possible attachment styles for males and females in intimate relationships, 16 possible combinations of attachment pairings were possible. Because some of the combinations of couples did not occur as often as other combinations, couple level analysis on the moderating effect of attachment style on the relationship between level of conflict and use of various conflict resolution behaviors was not possible. Future research needs to employ either a larger sample of subjects or a more diverse population that would allow for comparable distribution of couples in each of the 16 pairing combinations by attachment style of each partner. If researchers were able to obtain a sample with comparable frequencies of couples in each combination of attachment style pairings, couple-level analyses could be conducted examining not only the contribution of each partner's attachment style in the dynamics of intimate couple interactions, but a combined effect of both partners' attachment styles on the way that they respond to conflict in their relationships. Of course, it is possible that some attachment style pairings (e.g., two highly avoidant individuals) are so unworkable that it will not be possible to find a sufficient number to include them in any study.

Future research should also utilize a more comprehensive measure of attachment style, including a multiple-item self-report measure in combination with an oral interview, to obtain a more accurate understanding of the dynamics that attachment style of each partner play in determining various aspects of relationship functioning in general, and conflict management in particular.

Although researchers agree that conflict involves some incompatibility and disagreement between people or lack of consensus, there is really no agreement among researchers on the definition and conceptualization of conflict. This conceptual ambiguity in definitions of conflict makes it somewhat difficult to understand the role of conflict in intimate couple interactions. In conducting further research on the effects of conflict on interactions among people, it would be important to assess various aspects of conflictual interactions, including frequency and seriousness of arguments in the relationship, attempts to change the partner and his or her behaviors, frequency of experiencing negative feelings, such as anger, aggression, resentment, and the extent to which these negative feelings are expressed in the relationship. Also, it seems important to examine individuals' beliefs about conflict, such as whether conflict should be avoided or confronted (Crohan, 1992; Fitzpartick, 1988) and whether or not disagreements are destructive to the relationship (Eidelson & Epstein, 1982). Moreover, individuals have rules about conflict, such as what behaviors are obligatory, prohibited, or preferred, that they carry over from their families of origin, as well as from other significant relationships, which seem to be crucial in the way that they would respond to disagreements or conflict with their intimate partners (Conary, Cupach, & Messman, 1995; Shimanoff, 1980). Thus, more comprehensive measures of conflict, including self-report and observational, should be used in the future research to improve quality and provide a deeper understanding of the effect that conflict has on interaction between partners in intimate relationships.

APPENDIX A: MDEAS

Multidimensional Emotional Abuse Scale

C. M. Murphy and S. A. Hoover, 2001

Gender: ____ Date of Birth: _____ Therapist Code: ____ Family Code: _____

No matter how well a couple gets along, there are times when they disagree, get annoyed with other person, want different things from each other, or just have spats or fights because they are in a bad mood, are tired, or for some other reason. Couples also have many different ways of trying to settle their differences. This is a list of things that might happen when you have differences. Please circle how many times you did each of these things IN THE PAST 4 MONTHS, and how many times your partner did them IN THE PAST 4 MONTHS. If you or your partner did not do one of these things in the past 4 months, but it happened before that, circle 7.

- | | | |
|---------------|------------------------|--|
| (1) Once | (4) 6-10 times | (7) Not in the past four months, but did happen before |
| (2) Twice | (5) 11-20 times | (0) This has never happened |
| (3) 3-5 times | (6) More than 20 times | |

Once	Twice	3-5	6-10	11-20	20+	Never	Never
						in past 4 mo.	in rel.
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0

How often in the last 4 months?

1. Asked the other person where s/he had been or who s/he was with in a suspicious manner.	You: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 Your partner: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
2. Secretly searched through the other person's belongings.	You: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 Your partner: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
3. Tried to stop the other person from seeing certain friends or family members.	You: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 Your partner: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
4. Complained that the other person spends too much time with friends.	You: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 Your partner: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
5. Got angry because the other person went somewhere without telling him/her.	You: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 Your partner: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
6. Tried to make the other person feel guilty for not spending enough time together.	You: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 Your partner: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
7. Checked up on the other person by asking friends where s/he was.	You: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 Your partner: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
8. Said or implied that the other person was stupid.	You: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 Your partner: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
9. Called the other person worthless.	You: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 Your partner: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
10. Called the other person ugly.	You: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 Your partner: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
11. Criticized the other person's appearance.	You: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 Your partner: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0

12. Called the other person a loser, failure, or similar term.	You: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 Your partner: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
13. Belittled the other person in front of other people.	You: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 Your partner: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
14. Said that someone else would be a better girlfriend or boyfriend.	You: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 Your partner: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
15. Became so angry that s/he was unable or unwilling to talk.	You: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 Your partner: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
16. Acted cold or distant when angry.	You: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 Your partner: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
17. Refused to have any discussion of a problem.	You: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 Your partner: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
18. Changed the subject on purpose when the other person was trying to discuss a problem.	You: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 Your partner: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
19. Refused to acknowledge a problem that the other felt was important.	You: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 Your partner: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
20. Sulked or refused to talk about an issue.	You: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 Your partner: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
21. Intentionally avoided the other person during a conflict or disagreement.	You: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 Your partner: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
22. Became angry enough to frighten the other person.	You: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 Your partner: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
23. Put her/his face right in front of the other person's face to make a point more forcefully.	You: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 Your partner: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
24. Threatened to hit the other person.	You: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 Your partner: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
25. Threatened to throw something at the other person.	You: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 Your partner: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
26. Threw, smashed, hit, or kicked something in front of the other person.	You: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 Your partner: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
27. Drove recklessly to frighten the other person.	You: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 Your partner: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
28. Stood or hovered over the other person during a conflict or disagreement.	You: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 Your partner: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0

.....

Note. The MDEAS is scored by computing the sum for the scale items, using the following weighting: 1 = 1, 2 = 2, 3 = 3, 4 = 4, 5 = 5, 6 = 6, 7 = 0, 0 = 0

APPENDIX B: DAS

Dyadic Adjustment Scale G. B. Spanier, 1976

Gender: _____ Date of Birth: _____ Therapist Code: _____ Family Code: _____

Most persons have disagreements in their relationship. Please indicate below the approximate extent of agreement or disagreement between you and your partner for each item on the following list. Place a checkmark (✓) to indicate your answer.

	Always Agree	Almost Always Agree	Occasionally Disagree	Frequently Disagree	Almost Always Disagree	Always Disagree
1. Handling family finances						
2. Matters of recreation						
3. Religious matters						
4. Demonstrations of affection						
5. Friends						
6. Sex relations						
7. Conventionality (correct or proper behavior)						
8. Philosophy of life						
9. Ways of dealing with parents and in-laws						
10. Aims, goals, and things believed important						
11. Amount of time spent Together						
12. Making major decisions						
13. Household tasks						
14. Leisure time interests and Activities						
15. Career decisions						
	All the time	Most of the time	More often than not	Occasionally	Rarely	Never

16. How often to you discuss or have you considered divorce, separation or terminating your relationship?						
17. How often do you or your partner leave the house after a fight?						
18. In general, how often do you think that things between you and your partner are going well?						
19. Do you confide in your partner?						
20. Do you ever regret that you married (or lived together)?						
21. How often do you or your partner quarrel?						
22. How often do you or your partner "get on each others' nerves"?						

HOW OFTEN WOULD YOU SAY THE FOLLOWING EVENTS OCCUR BETWEEN YOU AND YOUR MATE? CIRCLE YOUR ANSWER.

23. Do you kiss your partner?

EVERY DAY ALMOST EVERY DAY OCCASIONALLY RARELY NEVER

24. Do you and your partner engage in outside interests together?

ALL OF THEM MOST OF THEM SOME OF THEM VERY FEW OF THEM NONE OF THEM

25. Have a stimulating exchange of ideas?

NEVER LESS THAN ONCE OR TWICE ONCE OR TWICE ONCE A DAY MORE OFTEN
ONCE A MONTH A MONTH A WEEK

26. Laugh together?

NEVER LESS THAN ONCE OR TWICE ONCE OR TWICE ONCE A DAY MORE OFTEN
ONCE A MONTH A MONTH A WEEK

27. Calmly discuss something?

NEVER LESS THAN ONCE OR TWICE ONCE OR TWICE ONCE A DAY MORE OFTEN
ONCE A MONTH A MONTH A WEEK

28. Work together on a project?

NEVER LESS THAN ONCE OR TWICE ONCE OR TWICE ONCE A DAY MORE OFTEN
ONCE A MONTH A MONTH A WEEK

THESE ARE SOME THINGS ABOUT WHICH COUPLES SOMETIMES AGREE AND SOMETIMES DISAGREE. INDICATE IF EITHER ITEM BELOW CAUSES DIFFERENCES OF OPINION OR HAVE BEEN PROBLEMS IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP DURING THE PAST FEW WEEKS. CHECK “YES” OR “NO”.

29. Being too tired for sex. Yes ____ No ____

30. Not showing love. Yes ____ No ____

31. The dots on the following line represent different degree of happiness in your relationship. The middle point, “happy”, represents the degree of happiness of most relationships. Please circle the dot which best describes the degree of happiness, all things considered, in your relationship.

EXTREMELY FAIRLY A LITTLE HAPPY VERY EXTREMELY PERFECT
UNHAPPY UNHAPPY UNHAPPY HAPPY HAPPY

32. Which of the following statements best describes how you feel about the future of your relationship?

Check the statement that best applies to you.

___ 1. I want desperately for my relationship to succeed, and would go to almost any length to see that it does.

___ 2. I want very much for my relationship to succeed, and will do all I can that it does.

___ 3. I want very much for my relationship to succeed, and will do my fair share to see that it does.

___ 4. It would be nice if my relationship succeeded, but I can't do much more than I am doing to help it succeed.

___ 5. It would be nice if my relationship succeeded, but I refuse to do any more than I am doing now to keep the relationship going.

___ 6. My relationship can never succeed, and there is no more that I can do to keep the relationship going.

.....

Note. The DAS is scored by computing the sum for the scale items, using the following weighting:

Items 1 through 15:

5 = Always Agree; 4 = Almost Always Agree, 3 = Occasionally Disagree;
2 = Frequently Disagree, 1 = Almost Always Disagree; 0 = Always Disagree.

Items 16 & 17, and 20 through 22:

0 = All the Time; 1 = Most of the Time; 2 = More Often than Not;
3 = Occasionally; 4 = Rarely; 5 = Never.

Items 18 & 19:

5 = All the Time; 4 = Most of the Time; 3 = More Often than Not;
2 = Occasionally; 1 = Rarely; 0 = Never

Item 23: 4 = Every Day; 3 = Almost Every Day; 2 = Occasionally; 1 = Rarely, 0 = Never

Item 24: 4 = All; 3 = Most; 2 = Some; 1 = Very Few; 0 = None

Items 25 through 28: 0 = Never, 1 = Less than Once a Month; 2 = Once or Twice a Month; 3 = Once
or Twice a Week; 4 = Once a Day; 5 = More Often

Items 29 & 30: 0 = Yes; 1 = No

Item 31: 0 = Extremely Unhappy; 1 = Fairly Unhappy; 2 = A Little Unhappy; 3 = Happy

4 = Very Happy; 5 = Extremely Happy; 6 = Perfect

Item 32: 5 = 1; 4 = 2; 3 = 3; 4 = 2; 5 = 1, 6 = 0

Relationship Questionnaire
K. Bartholomew & L. M. Horowitz, 1991

1. The following are descriptions of four general relationship styles that people often report. Please circle the letter corresponding to the style that best describes you or is closest to the way you are in your relationships with PEOPLE IN GENERAL.

- [illegible]

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APPENDIX D: CTS2

Conflict Tactics Scale – Revised

M. A. Straus, S. L. Hamby, S. Boney-McCoy, & D. B. Sugarman, 1996

Gender: _____ Date of Birth: _____ Therapist Code: _____ Family Code: _____

No matter how well a couple gets along,, there are times when they disagree, get annoyed with the other person, want different things from each other, or just have spats or fights because they are in a bad mood, are tired, or for some other reason. Couples also have many different ways of trying to settle their differences. This is a list of things that might happen whey you have differences. Please circle how many times you did each of these things in the past 4 months, and how many times your partner did them in the past 4 months. If you or your partner did not do one of these things in the past 4 months, but it happened before that, circle, "7".

How often did it happen in the past 4 months?

1 = once 2 = twice 3 = 3-5 times 4 = 6-10 times 5 = 11-20 times 6 = more than 20 times

7 = not in the past 4 months, but it did happen before 0 = this has never happened

- | | | |
|-----|---|-----------------|
| 1. | I showed my partner I cared even though we disagreed | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 |
| 2. | My partner showed care for me even though we disagreed | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 |
| 3. | I explained my side of a disagreement to my partner | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 |
| 4. | My partner explained his or her side of a disagreement to me | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 |
| 5. | I insulted or swore at my partner. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 |
| 6. | My partner did this to me. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 |
| 7. | I threw something at my partner that could hurt | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 |
| 8. | My partner did this to me. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 |
| 9. | I twisted my partner's arm or hair. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 |
| 10. | My partner did this to me. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 |
| 11. | I had a sprain, bruise, or small cut because of a fight with my partner. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 |
| 12. | My partner had a sprain, bruise, or small cut because of a fight with me. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 |
| 13. | I showed respect for my partner's feelings about an issue. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 |

14.	My partner showed respect for my feelings about an issue.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
15.	I made my partner have sex without a condom.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
16.	My partner did this to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
17.	I pushed or shoved my partner.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
18.	My partner did this to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
19.	I used force (like hitting, holding down, or using a weapon) to make my partner have oral or anal sex.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
20.	My partner did this to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
21.	I used a knife or gun on my partner.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
22.	My partner did this to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
23.	I passed out from being hit on the head by my partner in a fight.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
24.	My partner passed out from being hit on the head in a fight with me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
25.	I called my partner fat or ugly.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
26.	My partner called me fat or ugly.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
27.	I punched or hit my partner with something that could hurt.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
28.	My partner did this to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
29.	I destroyed something belonging to my partner.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
30.	My partner did this to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
31.	I went to the doctor because of a fight with my partner.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
32.	My partner went to the doctor because of a fight with me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
33.	I choked my partner.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
34.	My partner did this to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
35.	I shouted or yelled at my partner.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
36.	My partner did this to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
37.	I slammed my partner against the wall.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
38.	My partner did this to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0

39.	I said I was sure we could work out a problem	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
40.	My partner was sure we could work it out.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
41.	I needed to see a doctor because of a fight with my partner, but I didn't.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
42.	My partner needed to see a doctor because of a fight with me, but didn't.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
43.	I beat up my partner.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
44.	My partner did this to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
45.	I grabbed my partner.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
46.	My partner did this to me.	
	I used force (like hitting, holding down, or using a weapon) to make my partner have sex.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
47.	My partner did this to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
48.	I stomped out of the room or house or yard during a disagreement.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
49.	My partner did this to me.	
50.	I insisted on sex when my partner did not want to (but did not use physical force).	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
51.	My partner did this to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
52.	I slapped my partner.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
53.	My partner did this to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
54.	I had a broken bone from a fight with my partner.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
55.	My partner had a broken bone from a fight with me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
56.	I used threats to make my partner have oral or anal sex.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
57.	My partner did this to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
58.	I suggested a compromise to a disagreement.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
59.	My partner did this to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
60.	I burned or scalded my partner on purpose.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
61.	My partner did this to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
62.	I insisted my partner have oral or anal sex (but did not use physical force).	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0

63.	My partner did this to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
64.	I accused my partner of being a lousy lover.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
65.	My partner accused me of this.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
66.	I did something to spite my partner.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
67.	My partner did this to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
68.	I threatened to hit or throw something at my partner.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
69.	My partner did this to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
70.	I felt physical pain that still hurt the next day because of a fight with my partner.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
71.	My partner still felt physical pain the next day because of a fight we had.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
72.	I kicked my partner.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
73.	My partner did this to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
74.	I used threats to make my partner have sex.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
75.	My partner did this to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
76.	I agreed to try a solution to a disagreement my partner suggested.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
77.	My partner agreed to try a solution I suggested.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0

Note. The CTS2 is scored by computing the sum for the subscale scale items, using the following weighting:

Category: 0 = 0 1 = 1, 2 = 2, 3 = 4, 4 = 8, 5 = 15, 6 = 25, 7 = 0.

****Response Category 7** (“Not in the past year, but did happen before”) can be used in two ways: (1) to obtain scores for the previous year; (2) to determine whether abuse had ever occurred (it is scored 0 if respondents select Category 0, and 1 (‘yes’) if respondents select Category 1 through 7).

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