

We Need to Talk: A Dyadic Perspective on Conflict Management and its Association with Adult Romantic Attachment, Relationship Satisfaction, and Psychological Partner Aggression

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To the memory of my dear godmother,
a strong woman who will forever inspire me

Summary

Given the nature of couple conflict, couples are frequently tasked with mutually working towards a solution to a given problem. Effective conflict management is a key relationship resource that maintains closeness and cohesiveness (Epstein & Baucom, 2002; Overall & Simpson, 2013), whereas ineffective conflict management is generally associated with impaired relationship functioning (Gottman & Notarius, 2000; Overall & Fletcher, 2010). The overarching goal of the present thesis therefore consisted of further advancing the field's understanding of conflict management as an interpersonal process in heterosexual couple relationships. This goal was addressed through two novel and complementary studies. The sample for both studies consisted of 179 community-based heterosexual adult couples involved in a long-term romantic relationship. During the testing session, participants completed a questionnaire package and discussed a topic of disagreement for 15 minutes. These interactions were then coded for both positive and negative conflict management behaviours.

Both studies modeled these conflict management behaviours alongside crucial variables involved in couple conflict. The first study examined the ways in which partners' adult romantic attachment orientations interact to predict their conflict management behaviours. As hypothesized, the results provide preliminary evidence that, in some cases, men's and women's conflict management depends on the interaction between their own and their partner's adult romantic attachment orientation, more so than a sole individual's attachment. The second study examined whether effective conflict management moderates the negative association between relationship satisfaction and men's and women's use of psychological partner aggression. Contrary to hypotheses, the results suggest that, in predicting these aggressive acts, relationship satisfaction and conflict management make fairly independent contributions.

These findings are based on strong theoretical frameworks as well as a number of methodological strengths, including the observational coding of positive and negative conflict management behaviours and the implementation of sophisticated dyadic data analyses. Furthermore, by filling gaps in the existing literature, these findings offer several theoretical, empirical, and clinical implications for the field of couple conflict. As individual and collective bodies of work, the studies of the present thesis provide invaluable evidence in support of the complex and interdependent nature of couple relationships. Such findings are highly relevant to couple researchers and clinicians alike, both of whom endeavour to understand and improve couple relationship functioning.

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Content of Thesis and Contribution of Authors

The present thesis consists of four sections: a general introduction, two major studies, and a general discussion. The general introduction presents the topic of the thesis, defines the study variables, reviews relevant theoretical and empirical contexts, and specifies the main objectives of the thesis. Each study is comprised of a single, comprehensive study, which has been adapted into manuscript format. The first study is entitled *It Takes Two: Examination of Male and Female Conflict Management Behaviours as a Function of Adult Romantic Attachment Pairings in Couples*. This is followed by the presentation of the second study, entitled *Understanding the Association between Relationship Satisfaction and Psychological Partner Aggression: Does the Way Couples Manage Conflict Matter?* Finally, the general discussion presents a summary and integration of the findings, and outlines the implications and directions for future research. All study materials (i.e., consent form, self-report measures) are included as appendices.

Thesis author, Jamie Lyn Flesch, will appear as the primary author of both study manuscripts. The thesis author participated in key aspects of the thesis project, including the literature review and conceptualization of the thesis, primary behavioural coding, data analysis, and writing the thesis document itself. The development and implementation of study methods and procedures, selection of validated measures, formulation of the research ethics request, participant recruitment and compensation, as well as secondary behavioural coding were completed through the tireless efforts of the University of Ottawa's Couple Research Laboratory. As thesis supervisor and principal study investigator, Dr. Marie-France Lafontaine will appear as the second author of both study manuscripts. Dr. Lafontaine served the invaluable role of overseeing the project and consulting throughout each step of the thesis.

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General Introduction

General Introduction

Interpersonal relationships are a central and significant component of people's lives (Berscheid, 1999). In fact, individuals become defined by their relationships with others because of the various titles and roles they assume within these relationships (e.g., friend, mother, neighbour, caretaker, etc.). Most research in this area, however, is concerned with close, intimate, and interdependent relationships (Orbuch & Sprecher, 2003). In other words, it is the intimate relationship between romantic partners that generates most research questions within the context of relationship science. This may be due in part to the fact that, throughout their lives, almost everyone becomes involved in a couple relationship; by the age of 18, already more than 70% of adolescents report having had a romantic relationship (Carver, Joyner, & Udry, 2003; Halford, 2001). In addition, couple relationships are associated with numerous benefits that have many empirical and practical implications. Well-adjusted couple relationships have positive effects on physical health, sleep quality, and longevity, as well as mental well-being and life satisfaction (see Loving & Slatcher, 2013, for a review). Humans are also highly motivated to maintain (and perhaps, by extension, understand) close relationships (Lydon & Quinn, 2013). A loving dynamic characterized by passion, support, intimacy, acceptance, trust, and respect satisfies a number of important relational motives and needs (Arriaga, 2013; Fehr, 2013), and therefore entices couple researchers to discern the variables, models, and theories that promote healthy relationships.

As advantageous and rewarding as couple relationships may be, their very vulnerable and interdependent nature also makes them potential sources of threat (Kelley et al., 2003). Because intimate partners interact with each other regarding many important issues, it is inevitable that challenges and conflict will occur to at least some degree in every relationship (Campbell,

Butzer, & Wong, 2008; Whiffen, 2009). Even the happiest couples experience conflict and periods of tension, anger, or anxiety (Gottman, 2011; McNulty & Karney, 2001). How partners respond to and manage conflict is crucially important to the maintenance of their relationship (Gottman, 1993; Rusbult & Buunk, 1993); among other effects, positive conflict management promotes a sense of collaboration and cohesiveness, whereas negative conflict management can damage a partner's self-esteem (Epstein & Baucom, 2002). Issues of couple conflict and relationship functioning are therefore highly relevant areas of inquiry. Accordingly, the present thesis sought to further advance the field's understanding of conflict management as an interpersonal process in heterosexual couple relationships. This goal was addressed through two separate yet complementary studies. Study 1 examined the ways in which partners' adult romantic attachment orientations interact to predict conflict management. Study 2 examined whether conflict management moderates the negative association between relationship satisfaction and psychological partner aggression.

As a general introduction to these themes, the variables of interest will be reviewed, starting with the conceptualization and importance of conflict management in couple research. An emphasis will be placed on the operational definition offered by the observational coding system used in both studies. Subsequently, in relation to Study 1, an overview of adult romantic attachment, as well as its theoretical and empirical links with conflict management, will be presented. As a preface to Study 2, the conceptualizations of psychological partner aggression and relationship satisfaction will then be presented, followed by the moderating role of conflict management expected from theoretical and empirical findings. Finally, in light of these considerations, the objectives and strengths of both studies will be delineated.

Conflict Management in Couple Relationships

The Nature of Couple Conflict

Interpersonal conflict is the interaction between people holding opposing or incompatible interests, views, opinions, or goals (Bell & Blakeney, 1977; Bradbury, Rogge, & Lawrence, 2001). The pairing of individuals into the interdependent dyad known as a couple relationship inevitably results in some degree of conflict due to the many individual, couple, environmental, and sociocultural factors at play (Epstein & Baucom, 2002). As a result, there are many variables that affect the etiology of couple conflict. At the individual level, partners may need to resolve their differences related to conflicting motives, contrasting personality characteristics, or preferences about day-to-day life (Epstein & Baucom, 2002). In addition, partners bring enduring individual and unique characteristics to a relationship that can correlate with couple conflict; for example, gender, attachment, psychopathology, or unresolved family-of-origin or relationship experiences (Bradbury, 1995; Epstein & Baucom, 2002; Halford, 2001). At the couple level, partners frequently engage in a number of micro and macro level interaction patterns that can affect couple conflict; these include, for instance, affection, role functioning, mutual support, behaviour exchange, and, notably, communication, conflict management, and aggression (Bradbury, 1995; Halford, 2001). Over time, couples must also cope with transitioning through the stages of relationship and family development (Epstein & Baucom, 2002); the transition to parenthood is often cited as particularly challenging (e.g., Cowan & Cowan, 2000). Moreover, a couple's ever-changing environment can be a potential source of conflict. Environmental demands include work problems, financial problems, major health problems, parenting issues, extended family relationships, etc. (Bradbury, 1995; Epstein & Baucom, 2002; Halford, 2001). Finally, couple relationships occur within a sociocultural context

that holds certain expectations for and beliefs about these relationships (Halford, 2001). As such, the appropriateness of and response to couple conflict can vary between and within cultures and other dimensions of diversity. Boss (1988) further nuanced these four factors by suggesting six dimensions for classifying the demands that affect relationship functioning (e.g., internal-external, chronic-acute, cumulative-isolated, etc.), which illustrate the complex nature of couple conflict.

In any case, the experience of couple conflict has both advantages and disadvantages. On one hand, it can provide an opportunity to define roles, improve communication, and strengthen interconnections (Hartup, 1992). Conflict can also prevent stagnation and stimulate interest and curiosity. It is the medium through which problems can be aired, and solutions discovered (Steil & Hoffman, 2006). Being an effective problem-solver, in and of itself, also has benefits, such as enhancing one's power in the relationship and increasing one's sense of self-efficacy (Margolin, Talovic, Fernandez, & Onorato, 1983). On the other hand, if not handled properly, couple conflict can provoke relationship perturbation, cause psychological injury, and decrease trust (Feldman, 1982; Hartup, 1992). In some cases, conflict can escalate into intimate partner aggression or lead to the dissolution of the relationship (Hartup, 1992; Kline, Pleasant, Whitton, & Markman, 2006). It is of great practical importance, therefore, to elucidate the factors that inform effective conflict management and the conditions associated with conflict escalation.

The Conceptualization of Conflict Management

Communication is the central process by which people construct and maintain interpersonal and couple relationships. The terms *communication* and *relationship* are therefore inextricably linked through the verbal and non-verbal behaviours used by individuals within the context of intimate relationships (Sillars & Vangelisti, 2006). Baucom and Epstein (1990)

astutely observed that, in general, partners communicate with each other for one of two reasons, either to discuss their thoughts and feelings or to reach a decision/resolve a conflict. In the case of the latter, when mutually working towards a solution to a given problem, partners engage in a particular type of communication behaviour called conflict management (Bélanger, Marcaurelle, Lazaridès, Crevier, & Lafontaine, 2017).

In addition to numerous self-report measures, many objective methods have been developed to assess couple conflict and conflict management in the context of dyadic interactions; these include basic analogue approaches, physiological assessment, and observational coding systems (see Rathus & Feindler, 2004, for a review). The *Global Couple Interaction Coding System* (GCICS; Bélanger, Dulude, Sabourin, & Wright, 1993), used in both studies of the present thesis, is a macroanalytic coding system fundamentally and conceptually based on the strengths of other well-established observational coding systems (e.g., Julien, Markman, & Lindhal, 1989; Krokoff, Gottman, & Hass, 1989; Markman & Notarius, 1987; Weiss & Tolman, 1990). Technically, its temporal method of sampling units of observation allows for a relatively economical procedure. It also has the theoretical strength of accounting for the broad continuum of both positive and negative conflict management behaviours, including their verbal and non-verbal counterparts, all of which are rated according to frequency, intensity, and duration. This conceptualization is reflected in more recent work reporting that conflict management behaviours vary in terms of both valence (i.e., positive versus negative impact) and intensity (i.e., weak versus strong impact; Arriaga, 2013; Woodin, 2011). In fact, dual-process models and research findings support the importance of both positive and negative behaviour in relationship maintenance (Canary & Wahba, 2006; Epstein & Baucom, 2002).

Although counterintuitive, some positive behaviours can be rather maladaptive and some negative behaviours adaptive (Canary & Wahba, 2006), especially when taking into account degree of directness. For instance, the positive indirect behaviour of holding back negative reactions could actually reduce closeness and relationship satisfaction, whereas the negative direct behaviour of expressing anger and irritation could lead to more change and improvement (Overall & Simpson, 2013). Nevertheless, there is a consistent pattern of research findings on conflict management behaviours. Positive conflict management is generally associated with increased relationship satisfaction and partner openness to change, whereas negative conflict management is generally associated with decreased relationship satisfaction, partner resistance to change, and a higher probability of relationship dissolution (Gottman & Notarius, 2000; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Overall & Fletcher, 2010; Weiss & Heyman, 1997). In addition, the ability to engage in positive conflict management is perhaps more important to relationship satisfaction than negative conflict management (Baucom & Kerig, 2004). The best representation of conflict management therefore includes the simultaneous and complementary observation of both positive and negative behaviours, which are operationalized by the GCICS in the following manner.

Positive conflict management. Effective conflict management is a key resource that communicates care and respect, maintains closeness and cohesiveness, cushions regulatory feedback, facilitates mutual responsiveness, and therefore strengthens a relationship (Epstein & Baucom, 2002; Overall & Simpson, 2013; Simpson, 2007). The GCICS includes two positive conflict management dimensions: support/validation and problem solving.

Support and validation. Partners can provide support and validation in the role of both speaker and listener. Verbal support and validation behaviours include: expressing warmth and

sympathy; making neutral or positive attributions; summarizing, accepting, accrediting, and incorporating a partner's ideas; and encouraging, complimenting, and minimizing a partner's self-deprecation. Non-verbal support and validation behaviours include: good eye contact; a relaxed and partner-oriented posture; and attentiveness and responsiveness expressed through nods, frowns, smiles, or laughter. Women are somewhat more likely than men to engage in intimacy as a high-intensity conflict management behaviour (Woodin, 2011), perhaps because they are generally more affiliative and expressive than men (Acitelli, Rogers, & Knee, 1999; Sagrestano, Heavy, & Christensen, 2006). Support and validation communicate attention to and support of each other's needs, concerns, and goals (Clark & Lemay, 2010; Reis & Clark, 2013). When a partner responds in such a way, the other feels understood, validated, and cared for, and therefore safe in turning towards their partner in distressing situations (Reis & Clark, 2013). In short, support and validation reflect the belief that partners are valued and appreciated, and that they can count on each other in times of need, such as conflict situations (Reis & Clark, 2013).

Problem solving. Effective verbal problem-solving behaviours include: recognizing the existence of the problem, describing the problem in a neutral or positive way, staying on topic, and remaining oriented towards problem solving; committing oneself to implement adopted solutions; negotiating and compromising; and making plans that target problem solving. As with the support and validation dimension, non-verbal problem-solving behaviours include: good eye contact; a relaxed and partner-oriented posture; and attentiveness and responsiveness expressed through nods, frowns, smiles, or laughter. Men are somewhat more likely than women to engage in problem solving as a low-intensity conflict management behaviour (Woodin, 2011), perhaps because they are usually more comfortable negotiating conflict from a rational, logical, and unemotional perspective (Ickes, 1993; Kelley et al., 1978). Effective problem solving requires a

great deal of collaboration and coordination of efforts (Epstein & Baucom, 2002). Needless to say, there is a fair amount of skill involved in clearly expressing dissatisfaction, providing a direct course of action, and implementing a solution that balances the needs and preferences of both partners (Epstein & Baucom, 2002; Overall & Simpson, 2013). As a result, if a partner is particularly unskilled in problem solving, then he or she may resort to maladaptive forms of conflict management (Epstein & Baucom, 2002).

Negative conflict management. While most people experience couple conflict as extremely stressful (Halford, 2001), maladaptive conflict management can exacerbate this distress even further (Epstein & Baucom, 2002) and render a couple vulnerable to the negative effects of conflict (Wile, 1993). In a way, therefore, negative conflict management maintains relationship problems by reducing partners' understanding of each other and potentially leaving issues unresolved (Halford, 2001). In addition, particularly malevolent forms of negative conflict management can convey disregard and damage a partner's self-esteem (Epstein & Baucom, 2002; Overall & Fletcher, 2010). Although some partners may be unaware of the negative impact of their behaviours, others may intentionally engage in negative conflict management because they did not learn more adaptive strategies, they successfully achieved behaviour change, or they actually aimed to create distance in their relationship (Burlison & Denton, 1997; Epstein & Baucom, 2002; Halford, 2001). In addition, they may be responding in kind to their partner's negative behaviour through a process of negative reciprocity (Cordova, Jacobson, Gottman, Rushe, & Cox, 1993). Regardless of partners' intentions, negative conflict management is negatively related to both concurrent (e.g., Weiss & Heyman, 1997) and longitudinal relationship adjustment (e.g., Karney & Bradbury, 1995). The GCICS includes three negative conflict management dimensions: withdrawal/avoidance, dominance, and criticism/attack.

Withdrawal and avoidance. Withdrawal and avoidance constitute a purposeful lack of engagement in an interaction (Woodin, 2011) and can be seen in a number of behaviours. Verbal withdrawal and avoidance behaviours include: responding with silence or monosyllables, as well as a reduction in or absence of affirmative behaviours, openness, and contribution to the discussion. In contrast to positive non-verbal behaviours, non-verbal withdrawal and avoidance behaviours include: avoiding eye contact; orienting one's posture away from the partner; and putting obstacles between each other (e.g., crossing arms, covering face or body with hands, playing with fingers, etc.). Such non-verbal behaviours can serve to regulate boundaries or connectedness between partners (Epstein & Baucom, 2002). It has been hypothesized that individuals are motivated to withdraw from couple conflict in an attempt to either exert control or avoid distress. In the first case, withdrawal can serve the controlling function of blocking a partner's attempts to discuss and resolve problems, and therefore maintain the status quo in the relationship (Christensen & Heavy, 1990; Julien, Arellano, & Turgeon, 1997; Noller & Feeney, 2002). Withdrawal can also serve the (short-term) protective function of avoiding negatively arousing situations, including the distress associated with couple conflict and rejection by a significant other (Mehrabian, 1994). Men experience particularly high levels of physiological arousal during couple conflict interactions, which can drive them to withdraw from such negatively arousing situations in order to return to homeostasis (Gottman & Levenson, 1992; Gottman, 1994). In contrast, women are more likely than men to actively engage in conflict interactions regardless of their level of activation (Levenson, Carstensen, & Gottman, 1994). Over time, withdrawal and reciprocal withdrawal can lead to misunderstandings, hostility, and unexpressed frustration, and can consequently increase the likelihood of intimate partner aggression (Burman, Margolin, & John, 1993; Margolin, 1988a, 1988b; Noller & Roberts, 2002).

Dominance. Dominance is characterized by asymmetry in and control of an interaction. Verbal dominance behaviours include: directing the conversation, talking more than the other, and interrupting or cutting off the partner; giving orders, instructions, and advice; successfully changing the partner's opinion; and resisting suggestions and changing one's own opinion. Similarly, non-verbal dominance behaviours include: taking the hands-on-hips pose; pointing the finger while talking; and speaking loudly in an attempt to intimidate. Men are somewhat more likely than women to engage in dominance as a high-intensity conflict management behaviour, perhaps because, according to social role theory, traditional gender norms are more advantageous for men than for women, whereby the former are motivated to maintain the status quo by dominantly resisting women's requests for change (Christensen & Heavy, 1990; Eagly, Wood, & Diekmann, 2000; Jacobson, 1990; Noller, 1993). Dominance as a form of power or control plays a big role in decision making and conflict resolution, leading some to assert that many couple conflicts are essentially a power struggle, with the most powerful partner ultimately exerting the most influence (Noller & Feeney, 2002). Paradoxically, those who are the most dominant over others may be the ones who, in reality, feel most powerless (Blunt Bugental & Lewis, 1999). As opposed to egalitarian relationships represented by shared control, dominant patterns of interaction are associated with increased relationship dissatisfaction, couple conflict, and intimate partner aggression (Baucom et al., 1996; Gray-Little, Baucom, & Hamby, 1996).

Criticism and attack. Criticising and attacking verbal behaviours are characterized by tension, hostility, and negative affect. Such behaviours include: making critical or sarcastic comments, blaming the partner or family, or putting down the partner; attributing negative feelings, attitudes, or motives to the partner, or rejecting the partner's interpretations; menacing or attacking the partner; and negative reciprocity. Accordingly, non-verbal criticising and

attacking behaviours include: speaking loudly or yelling; using a hostile or bitter tone; maintaining a hostile countenance; and using menacing gestures. Women are somewhat more likely than men to engage in hostility as a high-intensity conflict management behaviour (Woodin, 2011), perhaps in a maladaptive attempt to be heard and assert their needs. Criticism is a particularly malicious form of conflict management in that it not only immediately violates norms of civility, but it is all the more painful symbolically when it comes from a significant other (Arriaga, 2013). Criticism also communicates a strong desire for a partner to change their attitude or behaviour in some way, which implies dissatisfaction and lower regard (Overall & Simpson, 2013). Gottman (1999) even included criticism, alongside contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling, as one of the “Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse” due to its robust association with relationship dissatisfaction and dissolution. Whereas successful conflict resolution depends on mutual change efforts (Overall & Simpson, 2013), attempts to change a partner are associated with lower improvement success and lower relationship quality (Hira & Overall, 2011).

Expanding Conflict Management Research

Despite the relatively short research history of couple conflict (Holmes & Murray, 1996), it has been shown that conflict management is associated with a variety of constructs. In fact, the sheer necessity of effective conflict management for successful couple relationships has generated a large number of research questions and hypotheses, the findings of which point to the complexity of relationship maintenance in general and conflict management in particular. Key variables have emerged as particularly relevant to conflict management and will therefore be investigated alongside conflict management in the current thesis: adult romantic attachment, psychological partner aggression, and relationship satisfaction. Building upon the impressive body of work that is couple research, these variables offer important and unexplored research

avenues. Comprehensively elucidating the factors that inform effective conflict management and the conditions associated with conflict escalation is therefore not only of theoretical, empirical, and practical importance, but it also embodies the field of couple research's common and enduring goal: understanding and improving couple relationship functioning (Fitzpatrick & Winke, 1979).

Adult Romantic Attachment

Attachment Theory

John Bowlby's attachment theory is one of the most comprehensive frameworks for studying interpersonal relationships and most relationship-level variables (Hazan & Shaver, 1987, 1994; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2013). According to Bowlby (1969/1982, 1988), the attachment behavioural system evolved as an innate interpersonal regulatory device that serves to protect humans. Its primary attachment strategy consists of proximity seeking when in need of protection or support (Gillath, Karantzas, & Fraley, 2016). Proximity-seeking thoughts and behaviours are automatically activated by environment- or attachment-related threats, a process that has been empirically supported by priming methods (e.g., Baldwin, Carrel, & Lopez, 1990). For instance, if an infant is separated from a protective attachment figure, such as a caregiver, the infant's attachment system is automatically triggered and manifested as behaviours related to restoring proximity, such crying or reaching out (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). The attachment system is also highly adaptive. If bids for proximity are successful and the attachment figure is responsive, then protection and felt security are attained and the attachment system is deactivated (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). In turn, repeated successful emotion regulation attempts provide a model or "script" for dealing with similar situations in the future; one learns that, in times of need, distress can be alleviated by seeking proximity to an available and responsive figure

(Waters & Waters, 2006). Finally, the attachment system is goal-oriented towards achieving proximity and, by default, protection. Based on internal working models, or mental representations, of the self and others formed through memorable interactions, individuals can evaluate the effectiveness of their proximity-seeking attempts and make necessary corrections (Bowlby, 1988; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2011). The activation of these working models can also serve as a symbolic source of security independently of actual proximity-seeking behaviour (Gillath et al., 2016).

As this description suggests, an individual's felt sense of security depends to a large extent on the availability and responsiveness of others. When an attachment figure appropriately responds to proximity-seeking attempts, this primary attachment strategy is reinforced as a successful method of deactivating the attachment system. However, when an attachment figure is inadequately responsive, proximity seeking is evaluated as ineffective and a secondary attachment strategy is adopted in its place (Gillath et al., 2016). Main (1990) identified two secondary attachment strategies. First, when an attachment figure is unpredictable in their responsiveness, the attachment system is hyperactivated in order to demand their attention and support (Cassidy & Kobak, 1988; Main, 1990). Hyperactivation strategies, which Bowlby (1969/1982) likened to protest, consist of persistent and energetic proximity-seeking behaviours (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Alternatively, when an attachment figure is rather unavailable or distant, the attachment system is deactivated in order to avoid the frustration and distress associated with futile proximity seeking (Cassidy & Kobak, 1988; Main, 1990). Deactivation strategies, which Bowlby (1969/1982) likened to compulsive self-reliance, consist of suppressing signs of vulnerability and attempting to deal with threats alone (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). It therefore appears that interactions with significant others greatly impact the attachment system.

The Conceptualization of Adult Romantic Attachment

Hazan and Shaver (1987) were the first to generalize the tenets of attachment theory from infant-caregiver dyads to intimate partners. In couple relationships, attachment is experienced as the bond between and the responsiveness of intimate partners—a dynamic fueled by the unspoken question, *Are you there for me?* (Johnson, 2008). Adult romantic attachment is conceptualized as regions in a continuous two-dimensional space of attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998). These attachment dimensions reflect the proximity-seeking outcomes, proximity-seeking scripts, and internal working models gained through significant attachment experiences. When individuals experience proximity seeking as a reliable and effective attachment strategy, they develop positive expectations about their partners' responsiveness and their own capacity for emotion regulation, and are thus said to have a secure attachment (i.e., low levels of attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2011, 2016). Such expectations are immensely advantageous for relationship functioning; secure adult romantic attachment is consistently associated with relationship satisfaction, adjustment, and stability (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016).

In contrast, individuals with high levels of attachment anxiety and/or avoidance are said to have an insecure attachment (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2011). The anxiety dimension reflects the worry that a partner will be unresponsive or rejecting in times of need, and self-doubt about one's own emotion regulation abilities (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2013). People high in attachment anxiety are hypervigilant to attachment-related threat, whereby even the most inconsequential relationship issue can activate their attachment system (Pietromonaco & Barrett, 1997). As a result of their experience with unpredictable attachment figures, people high in attachment anxiety respond to distress with hyperactivation strategies, such as heightened emotional displays

or coercion (Cassidy & Kobak, 1988; Feeney, 2016; Main, 1990). The avoidance dimension, on the other hand, reflects distrust in a partner's good will and the determination to maintain independence and distance (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2013). When people high in attachment avoidance experience attachment-related threat, their experience with unavailable or punitive attachment figures results in deactivation strategies, such as minimizing emotional displays or withholding intimate disclosure (Cassidy & Kobak, 1988; Feeney, 2016; Main, 1990). That is not to say that people high in attachment avoidance are less attached to their significant other compared to people high in attachment anxiety; these dimensions reflect differences in quality of attachment rather than strength of attachment (Main, 1999; Hazan, Campa, & Gur-Yaish, 2006).

As a final point, adult romantic attachment orientations are not evenly distributed between individuals. Men tend to show higher attachment avoidance and women tend to show higher attachment anxiety (Del Giudice, 2011), which may be a result of socialization. The socialization approach to gender differences suggests that boys and girls grow up in different social worlds and thus develop different gender identities that dictate their goals and behaviours; boys are encouraged to be independent and inexpressive, whereas girls are encouraged to be affiliative and expressive (Acitelli et al., 1999; Sagrestano et al., 2006). As a result, men tend to develop a greater sense of separateness or independence from others, which is associated with attachment avoidance. On the other hand, women tend to develop and define their identities in terms of the attachments they form, which is associated with attachment anxiety (Chodorow, 1978; Eldridge & Christensen, 2002; Mondor, McDuff, Lussier, & Wright, 2011).

Adult Romantic Attachment and Conflict Management

The features of adult romantic attachment make it a particularly fitting framework for studying couple conflict. Given the nature of couple conflict (described above), couples

inevitably experience the distress and attachment-related threat of opposition, which activates the attachment system and the search for interpersonal regulation (Banse & Imhoff, 2013).

Attachment strategies then affect the way partners experience and manage conflict (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2011). As per Shaver and Mikulincer's model of the dynamics of the attachment system in adulthood, secure individuals generally engage in more effective conflict management behaviours compared to their insecure counterparts (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002). This association between adult romantic attachment and conflict management has been well-established at the empirical level as well (see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016, for a review).

A wealth of research indicates that secure adult romantic attachment is conducive to positive conflict management. In a protective sense, secure attachment is associated with lower levels of perceived couple conflict (Brassard, Lussier, & Shaver, 2009) and less threatening appraisals of couple conflict (Creasey & Hesson-McInnis, 2001). When conflict does occur, adaptive working models and a felt sense of security allow secure partners to remain problem-focused (Lussier, Sabourin, & Turgeon, 1997) and feel confident in their conflict management abilities (Corcoran & Mallinckrodt, 2000). Attachment security is also related to both verbal and non-verbal positive conflict management behaviours (e.g., Campbell, Simpson, Boldry, & Kashy, 2005; Feeney, 1994; Mehta, Cowan, & Cowan, 2009; Simpson, Rholes, & Phillips, 1996). In short, by reducing the frequency and severity of couple conflict, and by helping partners to engage in more positive conflict management, attachment security promotes harmonious relationship maintenance and functioning (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2013).

In direct contrast with attachment security, attachment insecurity is associated with more threatening appraisals of couple conflict, more conflictual interactions between partners, and less

effective conflict management behaviours (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2011, 2013). In fact, attachment insecurity and its secondary attachment strategies undermine effective conflict management altogether (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2013). Spurred on by hyperactivation strategies, people high in attachment anxiety experience such intense distress during couple conflict that problem-focused strategies seem impossible (Simpson & Rholes, 2004). Rather, they amplify the severity of their distress by assuming an egocentric and fearful stance, as well as by dominating the interaction in an attempt to get their needs met. Alternatively, they may aim to avoid rejection by simply giving in to a partner's demands (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2011). In contrast, the conflict management behaviours of those high in attachment avoidance are driven by deactivation strategies and reflect the related desire to withdraw from conflict or avoid interacting with their partner (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2011). They may therefore experience difficulty in recognizing the severity of the problem, responding sensitively or affectionately to their partner, and expressing their own concerns and feelings (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2013). If escape is not possible, then they are likely to attempt to dominate their partner in an effort to regain control (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2011). In either case, attachment insecurity can weigh heavily on one's partner and the relationship itself (Overall & Simpson, 2013). The intricacies of conflict management are therefore best exemplified by actor-partner interactions.

Adult Romantic Attachment Pairings

Beginning in the family of origin, interpersonal experiences shape individuals' attachment dimensions and, by extension, their relational cognitions, behaviours, and affect (Epstein & Baucom, 2002). For instance, from an individualistic perspective, one person's attachment anxiety may be associated with a particular set of conflict management behaviours, whereas another's attachment avoidance may be associated with an entirely different set of

conflict management behaviours. In couple relationships, partners profoundly and pervasively affect each other as well (Arriaga, 2013), such that one partner's attachment orientation may predict the other's conflict management behaviours.

Consistent with interdependence theory (Kelley, 1979; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), the pairing of or interaction between each partner's attachment orientations may also predict their conflict management behaviours. Adult romantic attachment is a unique dispositional characteristic that partners bring into couple relationships. As a result, two partners may vary considerably in terms of what they need from the relationship and how they subjectively experience interpersonal interactions (Epstein & Baucom, 2002). Adult romantic attachment pairings capture the unique interplay between both partners' attachment orientations (Beck, Pietromonaco, DeBuse, Powers, & Sayer, 2013; Feeney, 2016). As of yet, however, few studies have examined couple conflict management as a function of adult romantic attachment pairings. First, Senchak and Leonard (1992) found that pairings consisting of two securely attached partners reported significantly less frequent negative conflict management than pairings in which at least one partner had an insecure attachment. Similarly, Domingue and Mollen (2009) showed that pairings consisting of two securely attached partners reported the most mutually constructive communication, whereas pairings in which both partners had an insecure attachment reported the most demand-withdraw and mutual avoidance-withholding communication. Finally, Feeney (2003), who distinguished between different forms of attachment insecurity, found that pairings consisting of two anxiously attached partners were related to increased avoidance behaviours in women.

Although these studies suggest that conflict management does indeed vary as a function of adult romantic attachment pairings, there is so little theoretical and empirical guidance for this

model that several prominent couple researchers have stressed the need for dyadic perspectives on relationship theories and models in general (e.g., Simpson & Campbell, 2013) and on attachment theory in particular (e.g., Overall & Simpson, 2013; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2006). Other researchers have called for a dyadic perspective on attachment and couple conflict that also considers the context of gender (e.g., Pietromonaco, Greenwood, & Barrett, 2004). Adult romantic attachment pairings, and their association with conflict management behaviours, therefore consist of a particularly promising avenue of research. Similar to how attachment pairings can specify conditions associated with effective conflict management, there may also be different conditions associated with the escalation of conflict into aggression.

Psychological Partner Aggression

Intimate partner aggression, also known as intimate partner violence, is a substantial social issue that adversely impacts both individuals and couple relationships (Lafontaine & Lussier, 2005; O’Leary, Smith Slep, & O’Leary, 2007). As a general definition, intimate partner aggression encompasses the verbal and non-verbal behaviours used to impose one’s will on another person by inflicting physical and/or psychological pain and thus violating socially acceptable standards of interaction (Cahn, 1996). Intimate partner aggression can take one of several forms, such as physical aggression, psychological aggression, or sexual coercion. Unlike its well-defined counterparts, however, psychological partner aggression is often underestimated in its severity and role in couple conflict escalation.

There is wide variety in the way this construct has been studied and labelled (Dailey, Lee, & Spitzberg, 2007). For the purpose of this thesis, psychological partner aggression consists of verbal and symbolic acts intended to cause psychological distress or fear, which may assume the form of verbal attacks, insults, threats, or other loud, aggressive displays, destroying the partner’s

property, monitoring the partner's activities, and stonewalling (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996). Perhaps because perpetrators tend to minimize the negative impact of such behaviours (Leary, Springer, Negel, Ansell, & Evans, 1998), psychological partner aggression is relatively frequent. Results from the General Social Survey (Burczycka, 2016) indicated that 13% of Canadian men and women had experienced some form of psychological or financial partner abuse during their lifetime. Other studies estimate that between 51% and 80% of North Americans were involved in at least one incident of psychological partner aggression in the previous year (Jose & O'Leary, 2009; Lafontaine, Brassard, & Lussier, 2006; Lafontaine & Lussier, 2005). In addition, these behaviours can be quite harmful. Intimate partner aggression is associated with a number of adverse outcomes, including poor physical health, depressive symptoms, substance abuse, and injury (Coker et al., 2002), whereby psychological partner aggression in and of itself can be just as damaging as physical aggression (Basile, Arias, Desai, & Thompson, 2004). Finally, psychological partner aggression is a risk factor for physical partner aggression (Cahn, 1996; Dailey et al., 2007; Sabourin, 1996); although psychological aggression does not always lead to physical aggression, physical aggression is almost always accompanied by psychological aggression (Roloff, 1996; Stets, 1990; Straus & Sweet, 1992; Wood, 2006).

Given the frequency, severity, and potentiality of psychological partner aggression, several theories (see Finkel & Eckhardt, 2013, for a review) have been put forth in an attempt to explain the nature of aggression and thus inform prevention and intervention strategies. Social learning theory, for instance, suggests that aggressive behaviour is acquired through basic principles of learning. Cognitive-behavioural approaches, on the other hand, explain intimate partner aggression by identifying aggression-related cognitive processes. Personality approaches

focus on perpetrators' stable individual characteristics, and clinical approaches focus on psychological disorders associated with increased tendencies towards aggression. Sociocultural models, espousing gender-related differences in power, explain intimate partner aggression as perpetrators' attempt to induce fear or assert dominance. In addition to reviewing these approaches in greater detail, Finkel and Eckhardt (2013) offer their own comprehensive framework for conceptualizing intimate partner aggression. I³ theory (pronounced "I-cubed theory") postulates that intimate partner aggression is associated with a combination of strong instigating and impelling forces, and weak inhibiting forces. In other words, normal urges to aggress (impellance) triggered by discrete situational events (instigation) and failure to counteract these urges (inhibition) render a person susceptible to perpetrating intimate partner aggression. Alternatively, communication approaches conceptualize intimate partner aggression as one of many communication behaviours (Rogers, Castleton, & Lloyd, 1996). That is to say, as much as any other process of interpersonal communication, intimate partner aggression can be used to regulate daily interactions, attain a specific goal, and increase one's sense of control (Cahn, 1996; Epstein & Baucom, 2002; Infante, Chandler, & Rudd, 1989; Roloff, 1996). This communication perspective therefore lends itself quite nicely to the conceptualization of both conflict management (described above) and psychological partner aggression as related yet distinct (i.e., qualitatively different; Ro & Lawrence, 2007) communicative processes.

Conflict Management and Psychological Partner Aggression

On one hand, conflict management represents the communicative process that couples engage in when mutually working towards a solution to a disagreement (Bélanger et al., 2017). All conflict management behaviours, whether positive or negative, are generally experienced as non-coercive and non-aggressive. On the other hand, psychological partner aggression consists

of a coercive communicative process that can occur in any given context. Although there is some conceptual overlap between negative conflict management and psychologically aggressive acts that are relatively low in intensity (e.g., verbal attacks or insults), psychological partner aggression as a whole spans a continuum of increasingly intense forceful behaviours. It is intended to denigrate a partner's self-esteem, cause psychological distress or fear, as well as humiliate, control, and exploit a partner (Jory, 2004; Maiuro, 2001; Straus et al., 1996). As such, psychological partner aggression is often situated within the "dark side" of interpersonal communication (Cahn, 1996; Lloyd, 1991), with some researchers referring to it simply as "communicative aggression" (Dailey et al., 2007). There is both theoretical and empirical support that conflict management is associated with psychological partner aggression.

As gleaned from the literature, the communication perspective on couple conflict and its potential for escalation is based on four key assumptions. First, successful conflict resolution requires a great deal of skill; effective conflict management is conducive to resolving conflict in a way that is beneficial to both parties, whereas ineffective handling of conflictual interactions can escalate into intimate partner aggression (Marshall, Jones, & Feinberg, 2011; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2011). In other words, if a person is particularly unskilled at conflict management, he or she may feel inadequate to confront the situation in any other way than aggression (Epstein & Baucom, 2002; Lloyd, 1991; Sabourin, 1996). The second assumption is that the escalation of conflict management into intimate partner aggression is incited by the instrumental goal of control (Cahn, 1996; Lloyd & Emery, 1994). Aggressive partners are likely to perceive couple conflict as a competitive battle; if a person is unable to get his or her way through conflict management, he or she may escalate the intensity of their behaviour (Eckhardt, 2011; Roloff, 1996; Sabourin, 1996). The third assumption is that conflict escalation is an interpersonal

process that is also fueled by negative reciprocity, whereby partners match aversive behaviour with aversive behaviour (Cordova et al., 1993). Reciprocity is particularly strong for negative processes, and a person may therefore retaliate against negative conflict management by escalating their use of coercive behaviours (Noller & Feeney, 2002). Finally, intimate partner aggression itself can escalate in intensity from psychological partner aggression to physical partner aggression in a similar fashion (O’Leary, Malone, & Tyree, 1994; Stets, 1990). As a whole, these assumptions clearly illustrate the complex association between conflict management and intimate partner aggression, and pinpoint psychological partner aggression as a particularly relevant outcome variable in the study of couple conflict as an escalating interpersonal process.

The majority of research linking conflict management and intimate partner aggression has focused primarily on physical partner aggression (see Finkel & Eckhardt, 2013, for a review). The findings clearly indicate that partners in relationships that contain physical partner aggression exhibit a slew of maladaptive behaviours during couple conflict, including negative reciprocity (Gottman, 1994), demand-withdraw interactions (Babcock, Waltz, Jacobson, & Gottman, 1993), few positive conflict management behaviours (Cahn, 1996), and poor conflict resolution (Feldman & Ridley, 2000). From a dyadic (and perhaps provocative) perspective, there is also evidence that an individual’s negative conflict management (e.g., hostility) is associated with his or her partner’s use of physical aggression (i.e., the hostile individual’s victimization; Murphy & Eckhardt, 2005). As of yet, however, psychological partner aggression has not been examined to this effect as thoroughly. Nevertheless, the few available studies (e.g., Babcock et al., 1993; Fincham & Beach, 2002; Fournier, Brassard, & Shaver, 2011) do indeed support the association between conflict management and psychological partner aggression.

There is therefore a clear empirical need to intentionally examine these constructs and how they relate to each other as communicative processes. Not only would such an investigation deepen the field's understanding of couple conflict, but it would also identify conflict management as a key point of intervention in couple conflict escalation. While informative in and of itself, in the broader context of relationship maintenance and functioning, a comprehensive examination of couple conflict must also take into account the central variable of couple research: relationship satisfaction.

Relationship Satisfaction

Given the central status of relationship satisfaction to relationship functioning and longevity, this construct has dominated the field of couple research (Fehr, 2013). There is a long and productive research history on relationship satisfaction and its correlates, resulting in major findings about the behavioural, cognitive, and affective variables that are characteristic of happy couples (Fincham & Beach, 2006). For instance, it is now recognized that the emergence of relationship dissatisfaction, like couple conflict, occurs at multiple individual, couple, and contextual levels (Sbarra & Beck, 2013). It is also acknowledged that the benefits attributed to couple relationships depend to a large extent on relationship satisfaction; whereas relationship satisfaction promotes overall well-being, relationship distress and dissolution are associated with increased mental health problems and adverse physical health outcomes (see Sbarra & Beck, 2013, for a review).

By definition, relationship satisfaction is an indicator of relational quality that focuses on how intimate partners feel about their relationship (Fincham & Beach, 2006). More specifically, it reflects perceived relationship quality and closeness, as well as the extent to which individuals are committed to and happy in their relationship (Sabourin, Valois, & Lussier, 2005). Although

women are usually more attuned to relationship problems than men (Amato & Rogers, 1997), relationship satisfaction is strongly correlated between partners (Halford, 2001). If couples are fortunate enough to experience their relationship in a positive way, it seems quite natural that the interactions between partners would follow suit. In like manner, if partners are dissatisfied with their relationship, the interactions between them could assume a rather negative quality.

Relationship Satisfaction and Psychological Partner Aggression: Conflict Management as a Moderator

Satisfied couples are consistently distinguished from dissatisfied couples on the basis of communication behaviours (Fincham & Beach, 2006). In other words, relationship dissatisfaction can lead to an increase in many negative communication behaviours, one of which is intimate partner aggression (Gotlib & Beach, 1995; Sabourin, 1996). A large body of research has investigated the association between relationship satisfaction and intimate partner aggression. Langhinrichsen-Rohling (2005) highlights the finding that intimate partner aggression typically evolves *out of* relationship dissatisfaction, likening dissatisfied relationships to breeding grounds for aggression. It has also been suggested that dyadic adjustment (of which relationship satisfaction is a proxy) may actually be one of the strongest predictors of combined physical and psychological partner aggression for both men and women (O’Leary et al., 2007). In regards to psychological partner aggression, decreased relationship satisfaction has been consistently associated with this particular form of partner aggression in cross-sectional (e.g., Lafontaine et al., 2006; Taft et al., 2006), mediational (e.g., Fournier et al., 2011; Sotskova, Woodin, & Gou, 2015), and longitudinal (Kim, Laurent, Capaldi, & Feingold, 2008; Schumacher & Leonard, 2005; Yoon & Lawrence, 2013) studies. Although the way in which partners perceive the quality of their relationship seems to be a powerful predictor of their use of

psychological partner aggression, relationship dissatisfaction does not always result in psychological partner aggression. It appears that relationship dissatisfaction is therefore a necessary but not sufficient condition for psychological partner aggression. Clearly, there is another factor at play.

The interaction between relationship satisfaction and conflict management. Despite much research on the relevance of relationship satisfaction as a predictor of psychological partner aggression, little is known about the factors that influence this association. Among the factors that are likely to modify the way relationship satisfaction is associated with psychological partner aggression, conflict management is particularly relevant because, as discussed, this communicative process plays a central role in conflict escalation; whereas positive conflict management is conducive to conflict resolution, negative conflict management is associated with psychological partner aggression (e.g., Fournier et al., 2011). Similarly, most aggressive incidents may begin with couple conflict, but most disagreements do not result in aggression (Noller & Roberts, 2002; Stets & Henderson, 1991). In addition, cross-lagged longitudinal analyses indicate that satisfaction-to-communication effects and communication-to-satisfaction effects are fairly inconsistent and similar in magnitude (Lavner, Karney, & Bradbury, 2016). In the absence of a clear causal relationship between these variables, relationship satisfaction and conflict management may have interrelated predictive value. In sum, it is possible that relationship satisfaction and conflict management interact to predict psychological partner aggression. Effective conflict management (i.e., high positive conflict management and low negative conflict management) may serve to buffer or moderate the negative association between relationship satisfaction and psychological partner aggression by promoting conflict resolution over conflict escalation.

Only a handful of studies have examined relationship satisfaction, conflict management, and intimate partner aggression in an integrative manner. Of these, the majority has used factorial designs combining different levels of physical partner aggression and relationship satisfaction to predict a variety of communicative processes, including conflict management. Results suggest that when physical aggression is accompanied by relationship distress, couple interactions are characterized by negative communicative processes (Noller & Roberts, 2002), negative day-to-day interactions (Lloyd, 1996), unsupportive and competitive messages (Rogers et al., 1996), demand-withdraw communication patterns (Babcock et al., 1993; Holtzworth-Munroe, Smutzler, & Stuart, 1998), negative affective communication (Burman et al., 1993), negative reciprocity (Cordova et al., 1993), as well as hostility and poor problem solving (Margolin, Burman, & John, 1989). In addition to suggesting potential interactions, these findings also point to conflict management as the crucial point of intervention in couple conflict escalation; if distressed and aggressive couples are marked by maladaptive communication, then communication-based interventions could be used to alter this pattern. In fact, key factors that appear to mitigate the cross-sectional adverse impact of couple conflict include adaptive communicative processes such as repair attempts, daily positive interactions, and effective conflict management (Epstein & Baucom, 2002; Gottman, 1999; Lavner et al., 2016).

In light of the course of couple conflict, whereby psychological partner aggression evolves out of relationship dissatisfaction and is escalated by ineffective conflict management, it is likely that relationship satisfaction and conflict management interact to predict psychological partner aggression. In support of this interaction, Fournier et al. (2011) successfully modelled relationship satisfaction and communication patterns as two mediators of the association between adult romantic attachment and psychological partner aggression, thus identifying relationship

satisfaction and communication behaviours as integral predictors of psychological partner aggression. As of yet, however, it remains to be seen exactly how these two variables interact. If skillful conflict management does indeed attenuate the effect of relationship dissatisfaction on psychological partner aggression, this will no doubt advance the field's understanding of the ways in which key relationship-level variables interact to predict the escalation of couple conflict into psychological partner aggression.

The Current Studies

Within the broad scope of relationship maintenance, both studies of the thesis are grounded in the objective of investigating the course of couple conflict by elucidating the factors that inform effective conflict management and the conditions associated with conflict escalation. As such, Study 1 aims to examine positive and negative conflict management behaviours as a function of adult romantic attachment pairings. This study extends previous research in this area by grouping attachment pairings by attachment anxiety and avoidance, as well as by gender. This reflects the findings that (a) couple conflict triggers different fears and responses in people with high attachment anxiety compared to those with high attachment avoidance (Peitromonaco et al., 2004; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2006), and (b) there are gender differences in both adult romantic attachment (e.g., Del Giudice, 2011) and conflict management (e.g., Woodin, 2011), as well as in the association between adult romantic attachment pairings and relational outcomes (e.g., Beck et al., 2013). Relying on observational dyadic data, this is the first study to examine the ways in which men's and women's adult romantic attachment orientations interact to predict observed positive and negative conflict management behaviours in couples.

Study 2 aims to examine the ways in which relationship satisfaction interacts with conflict management to predict psychological partner aggression. Like Study 1, this study

extends previous research in this area in important ways. First, it highlights psychological partner aggression as a critical form of intimate partner aggression. Relatively fewer studies have focused on psychological partner aggression over physical aggression, even though the former is both prevalent and harmful. Psychological partner aggression is also a particularly relevant outcome variable in the study of couple conflict as an escalating interpersonal process given the course of couple conflict. Secondly, given comparable rates of psychological aggression in both partners (Burczycka, 2016), this study considers both men's and women's use of psychological partner aggression. Third, this study acknowledges the complex nature of couple conflict escalation by investigating psychological partner aggression through a moderation model. Also relying on observational dyadic data, this is the first study to examine the ways in which conflict management behaviours moderate the negative association between relationship satisfaction and psychological partner aggression.

There are also strengths shared across both studies. First, the observational coding system utilized in both studies measures positive and negative conflict management behaviours concurrently, complying with multiple lines of research stressing the importance of doing so (Kline et al., 2006). Secondly, because couple relationships are necessarily interpersonal (Bartholomew & Allison, 2006; Berscheid, 1999), both studies consider the contribution of each partner and therefore comply with the need to adopt a dyadic perspective on relationship processes. The analysis of dyadic data sampled from couple conflict interactions, a relationally diagnostic context, is crucial to testing different relationship theories and models (Simpson & Campbell, 2013). Finally, both studies utilize a strong research method that includes advanced statistical analyses and a large sample size. On account of these strengths and innovative elements, these studies are expected to enrich models of couple conflict and promote a greater

understanding of the factors associated with effective conflict management and conflict escalation. In turn, this will undoubtedly inform prevention and intervention programs. The implications of each study will be discussed in greater detail throughout the thesis.

Study 1¹

It Takes Two: Examination of Male and Female Conflict Management Behaviours as a Function of Adult Romantic Attachment Pairings in Couples

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Abstract

From an interdependence perspective, there is increasing evidence that conflict management may vary as a function of adult romantic attachment pairings. This study therefore sought to examine the ways in which intimate partners' attachment orientations interact to predict observed positive and negative conflict management behaviours. One hundred seventy-nine community-based couples involved in a stable heterosexual relationship completed a questionnaire package and participated in a 15-minute conflict discussion. Structural and dyadic aspects of the model were tested using the actor-partner interdependence model (APIM). Three significant actor-partner interaction effects were identified in support of this dyadic perspective, two of which predicted an increase in men's negative conflict management and one of which predicted a decrease in women's positive conflict management.

Keywords: romantic attachment, interaction effects, conflict management, couple relationship, dyadic data analysis

It Takes Two: Examination of Male and Female Conflict Management Behaviours
as a Function of Adult Romantic Attachment Pairings in Couples

Regardless of relationship satisfaction, couples experience varying levels of conflict over the course of their relationship (Gottman, 2011). It is now recognized that couples are distinguished not by the presence or absence of conflict, but by the way they respond to and resolve instances of disagreement (Gottman, 1993; Prager, 1991; Whiffen, 2009). Conflict management is a communication strategy that partners employ when working towards a solution to a problem in their relationship (Bélanger, Marcaurelle, Lazaridès, Crevier, & Lafontaine, 2017), whereby their ability to manage conflict greatly influences the maintenance of long-term relationships (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). How partners manage conflict can be influenced by many factors, a crucial one of which is adult romantic attachment. Indeed, attachment theory as a whole provides a solid framework for understanding different responses to conflict (see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016, for a review). Although much research has examined the actor and partner effects between individuals' romantic attachment and various relationship-level variables, including conflict management, considerably less research has examined the interplay between both partners' romantic attachment in terms of actor-partner interactions (Beck, Pietromonaco, DeBuse, Powers, & Sayer, 2013). As such, the present study seeks to examine conflict management behaviours as a function of adult romantic attachment pairings in heterosexual couples.

Adult Romantic Attachment Theory

The attachment behavioural system was first formulated by Bowlby (1969/1982) in an attempt to explain the dynamics that facilitate physical or psychological proximity between infants and their caregivers (Fraley & Roisman, 2015). This set goal of the attachment system

(i.e., proximity seeking) helps to ensure the infant's safety by eliciting caregivers' ingrained response to provide protection. For example, when an attachment figure is perceived as nearby and responsive, the infant is generally at ease since the goals of protection and felt security are fulfilled. However, in times of distress (i.e., when there is a perceived threat to the relationship or one's well-being due to danger, injury, or demoralization; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016), the infant attempts to seek comfort from his or her caregiver and, in turn, their caregiver will either satisfy their needs or fail to provide comfort. Depending on the responsiveness of caregivers over repeated interactions, the infant develops internal working models that represent those interactions and, by extension, the self, others, and relationships in general (Fraley & Roisman, 2015; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016).

In adulthood, individuals involved in a couple relationship often consider their respective partner to be a significant attachment figure. Hazan and Shaver (1987) first suggested utilizing Bowlby's (1969/1982) attachment theory and Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall's (1978) attachment research as a framework for studying romantic love in adult relationships. Thereafter, other researchers conceptualized adult romantic attachment as regions in a continuous two-dimensional space of attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998). These attachment dimensions reflect internal working models of relationships, or underlying feelings, expectations, and beliefs about others' availability and one's self-worth (Bowlby, 1973). Such working models influence the emotion regulation strategies employed when stressful situations are encountered (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). When individuals experience proximity seeking as a reliable and effective emotion regulation strategy, they develop positive expectations about their partner's availability and their own capacity for emotion regulation, and thus are said to have a secure attachment orientation

(i.e., low levels of both attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2011, 2016). Attachment security, with its positive expectations about others and the self, promotes relationship quality in a number of ways. For instance, relatively secure individuals tend to have higher self-esteem, describe themselves and their partners more positively, and generally feel safer and more protected in their relationships. In addition, attachment security is conducive to relationship-enhancing perceptions and cognitions, commitment and investment, and support provision (see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2013, for a review). As a result, when faced with stressful situations, relatively secure individuals are more likely to remain problem-focused (Lussier, Sabourin, & Turgeon, 1997) and, by definition, hold more optimistic expectations about their partner's availability and the effectiveness of their own coping strategies (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2013).

In contrast, people with high levels of attachment anxiety and/or attachment avoidance are said to have an insecure attachment orientation (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2011). As a result of unsuccessful experiences with proximity seeking, individuals with an insecure attachment orientation resort to secondary attachment strategies, which involve either the hyperactivation or deactivation of the attachment system (Main, 1990). High levels of attachment anxiety and the tendency to use hyperactivating strategies are thought to be an indication of past experiences with an unpredictable attachment figure, in which persistent and energetic proximity seeking was considered necessary in order to obtain attention, love, and support (Cassidy & Kobak, 1988). With respect to couple relationships, attachment anxiety reflects a worry that one's partner will not be available in times of need and that one will be rejected or abandoned by their partner. In addition, anxiously attached individuals tend to perceive themselves as unable to regulate difficult emotions and distress without the aid and support of their partner (Mikulincer & Shaver,

2011). Rather than achieving a greater sense of security with their partner, this internal working model and the accompanying hyperactivating strategies can lead to further relational conflicts and emotional distress (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016).

On the other hand, high levels of attachment avoidance and the tendency to use deactivating strategies seem to develop in disapproving and punitive relationships, particularly in response to expressions of emotional vulnerability (Cassidy & Kobak, 1988). Given the frustration and distress caused by the attachment figure's unavailability, deactivating strategies are used to suppress signs of vulnerability and block proximity seeking altogether. In regard to couple relationships, attachment avoidance reflects distrust in a partner's goodwill and the penchant for maintaining emotional independence and emotional distance. In addition, avoidantly attached individuals tend to have an instinctive determination to independently regulate difficult emotions and distress (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2011). Akin to the undesirable effects of using hyperactivating strategies, deactivating strategies yield only short-term benefits, and are likely harmful to the self, partner, and relationship over time.

Although romantic attachment can be conceptualized in many other ways (e.g., in terms of four attachment styles or categories, as per Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991), adult romantic attachment will be conceptualized along this continuum of attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance in the current study. Several taxonomic analyses (e.g., Fraley & Waller, 1998) suggest that attachment is indeed best modeled with dimensions (i.e., as continuous variables) rather than categories (i.e., as categorical variables; Fraley, 2012). This structure is also generally supported by factor-analytic methods (e.g., Feeney, Noller, & Callan, 1994). It is expected that these two dimensions will be helpful in further understanding the association between adult romantic attachment pairings and conflict management behaviours in both men and women.

Adult Romantic Attachment and Conflict Management

Individual adult romantic attachment and conflict management. Given that the attachment behavioural system was designed as an interpersonal regulatory device, adult romantic attachment can serve as an organizational scheme through which conflict management can be better understood (Harvey & Wenzel, 2006; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2011). Indeed, theory supports the notion that adult romantic attachment not only affects the way a person perceives and experiences conflict, but also the way he or she handles it (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2011). In other words, conflict management is an interpersonal process that seems to be influenced by one's attachment orientation. For example, given that people with a secure attachment are often confident in their own ability to self-regulate their emotions, and expect their partners to be responsive and readily available during times of need, they should therefore be able to apply positive conflict management strategies, such as support and problem solving. In contrast, people with an insecure attachment are likely to experience couple conflict as a threat because of their respective maladaptive internal working models of the self, others, and relationships. More specifically, for people high in attachment anxiety, conflict triggers their fear of being unworthy in their partner's eyes, leading to the hyperactivation of the attachment system and the use of ineffective conflict management strategies that can cause conflict escalation. For people high in attachment avoidance, conflict bears on their discomfort with closeness and emotional intimacy, leading to the deactivation of the attachment system and the use of conflict management strategies that leave the conflict unresolved (Pietromonaco, Greenwood, & Barret, 2004; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2006).

In support of this theoretical perspective, Mikulincer and Shaver (2016) provide excellent summaries of the research linking adult romantic attachment to conflict management. In general,

research shows that relatively secure individuals apply effective conflict management strategies, whereas relatively insecure individuals are characterized by a hindered ability to employ effective conflict management strategies. During conflict, insecurely attached adults less frequently express affection and compromise; more frequently use coercive strategies, maladaptive demand-withdraw behaviour, and attacks; and experience more post-conflict distress (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Therefore, instead of using positive conflict management behaviours, individuals high in attachment anxiety tend to dominate the interaction or accede submissively to a partner's demands, whereas individuals high in attachment avoidance tend to escape or, if escape is not possible, attempt to dominate their partner (see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2011, 2013, 2016, for reviews). These findings have been replicated within dating and marital relationships in several correlational studies using self-report measures (e.g., Feeney, 1994; Feeney et al., 1994; Heene, Buysse, & Van Oost, 2005; Roberts & Noller, 1998) and observational coding systems (e.g., Campbell, Simpson, Boldry, & Kashy, 2005; Feeney, 1998; Kobak & Hazan, 1991; Lafontaine, Bélanger, & Gagnon, 2009; Simpson, Rholes, & Phillips, 1996) of conflict management.

Although these associations between adult romantic attachment and conflict management are generally seen in both men and women, a subset of studies suggests that gender may play a moderating role, as men and women do not always show similar or equally strong patterns (Pietromonaco et al., 2004). In addition, empirical findings point to gender differences in both romantic attachment and conflict management behaviours. For example, Del Giudice's (2011) meta-analysis indicated that men showed higher attachment avoidance and lower attachment anxiety than women. This finding may reflect the development of differing gender identities. More specifically, through the process of socialization and enforcement of heteronormative

values, men tend to develop a greater sense of separateness or independence from others, which is associated with attachment avoidance, whereas women often develop and define their identities in terms of the attachments they form, which is associated with attachment anxiety (Chodorow, 1978; Eldridge & Christensen, 2002; Mondor, McDuff, Lussier, & Wright, 2011). Furthermore, it has been shown that couple conflict interactions can cause men to experience particularly high levels of physiological arousal, which is thought to drive them to withdraw or negotiate conflict from a rational, logical, and unemotional perspective in order to preserve homeostasis (Epstein & Baucom, 2002; Gottman, 1994; Gottman & Levenson, 1992). On the other hand, women can more easily disclose their emotional reactions to problems and actively engage in conflict management regardless of their level of physiological arousal (Buunk, Schaap, & Prevoo, 1990; Ickes, 1993; Kelley et al., 1978; Levenson, Carstensen, & Gottman, 1994). These findings are reflected in Woodin's (2011) meta-analysis, which indicated that women displayed more high-intensity conflict management behaviours (e.g., hostility, distress, intimacy), whereas men displayed more low-intensity behaviours (e.g., withdrawal, problem solving).

Dyadic adult romantic attachment and conflict management. Given that each partner brings their own attachment histories to the relationship, the attachment behavioural system is also affected at the partner level (i.e., one's romantic attachment orientation contributes to their partner's behaviour; Pietromonaco et al., 2004). For example, Rholes, Kohn, and Simpson (2014) utilized the actor-partner interdependence model (APIM; Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006) to analyze couples' reports of conflict management in terms of their own and their partner's romantic attachment orientation. At the actor level, their results showed that both anxiously attached individuals and avoidantly attached individuals had less effective conflict resolution

styles. At the dyadic level, their results showed that higher partner attachment anxiety and avoidance were associated with less effective conflict management strategies in both men and women. In addition, they found several main effects for gender in regard to perceptions of partners' conflict management and perceptions of one's own conflict management towards the partner. For example, men reported less collaboration and stalemate conflict management strategies, but more avoidance.

Several other studies found gender effects in the association between adult attachment orientations (i.e., working models of childhood attachment as opposed to adult romantic attachment) and conflict management. First of all, Cohn, Silver, Cowan, Cowan, and Pearson (1992) found that couples including a securely attached husband evidenced more positive and fewer negative conflict management behaviours. Second, Paley, Cox, Burchinal, and Payne (1999) showed that husbands' attachment security was positively associated with wives' observed positive conflict management behaviours; however, wives' attachment orientation did not predict husbands' conflict management behaviours. Finally, Creasey (2002) found that men's secure attachment orientation predicted less negative conflict management behaviours in the relationship; however, he also found that women's secure attachment orientation predicted more positive conflict management behaviours in the relationship. These findings suggest that it is of paramount importance that gender effects are examined when evaluating attachment patterns in association with relational outcomes (Pietromonaco et al., 2004), such as conflict management.

Another way to investigate adult romantic attachment at the dyadic level is through attachment pairings (see Feeney, 2016, for a review of the research on attachment pairings). This approach allows for the investigation of actor-partner interaction effects by examining how the combination of both partners' adult romantic attachment orientation jointly influences their

relationship outcomes (Beck et al., 2013). Such an interdependent framework suggests that conflict management not only depends on one's own and their partner's romantic attachment, but also on the interaction between them. As of yet, it is not common practice to model couple-related data dependency, resulting in a largely untapped area of couple research. In fact, according to Wickham and Knee's (2012) survey on the typical implementation of dyadic analyses, only 21% of research articles reported testing actor-partner interactions. As such, there is no formal theory that speaks to the dyadic nature of adult romantic attachment in terms of interaction effects in general and, more specifically, in conflict management. That said, there are two works of note (i.e., Pietromonaco et al., 2004; Wickham & Knee, 2012) that have taken a theoretical approach in an attempt to better understand the interaction between partners' attachment orientations. Wickham and Knee (2012) broadly suggested that interdependence theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978), given its powerful and flexible framework for understanding dyadic interaction, could easily be combined with other theoretical perspectives, such as attachment theory. More specifically, they stated that relational outcomes should indeed be related to one's own attachment, the attachment of their partner, as well as the "unique combination" (Wickham & Knee, 2012, p. 376) of both partners' attachment. Secondly, Pietromonaco et al. (2004) have put forth two expectations about adult attachment styles and conflict management, both of which stem from previous research findings. The first expectation is that couples in which both partners are securely attached should be better able to handle conflict compared to couples in which one or both partners have an insecure attachment style. The second expectation is that couples in which at least one partner has a secure attachment style should be better able to handle conflict compared to couples in which both partners are insecurely attached.

Two studies in particular (i.e., Domingue & Mollen, 2009; Senchak & Leonard, 1992) illustrate these theoretical assumptions in the context of conflict management. Senchak and Leonard (1992) were some of the first to examine relationship outcomes, namely partner's behavioural responses to couple conflict, as a function of both partners' romantic attachment. In their study, newlywed couples were classified into one of four groups based on each member's romantic attachment: secure-secure, secure woman-insecure man, secure man-insecure woman, and insecure-insecure. Results indicated that couples in which both partners were securely attached reported significantly less frequent negative conflict management by their partners than couples in which one or both partners were insecurely attached. In other words, couples including two securely attached partners engaged in the most constructive conflict management. The only identified gender effect in the association between couple type and partner's conflict management behaviour indicated that insecure men paired with secure women reported less frequent problem solving by their partners than the secure women in these couples.

In a similar study, Domingue and Mollen (2009) examined how the combination of both partners' attachment security and insecurity related to self-reported conflict communication patterns (i.e., demand-withdraw communication patterns) in heterosexual and same-sex couples. Their results indicated that couples in which both partners were securely attached reported the most mutually constructive communication, whereas couples in which both partners were insecurely attached reported the most demand-withdraw, mutual avoidance, and withholding communication. It was also shown that couples in which one or both partners were insecurely attached did not differ across any of the communication subscales. Unfortunately, these couple types did not take the gender of the participants into account, and thus are unable to provide any information on potential gender effects.

Although these theoretical perspectives and empirical findings provide excellent guidelines for understanding the interaction between secure and insecure pairings, there have not been any specific expectations provided in regard to the two dimensions of insecure romantic attachment, namely attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance, or how these dimensions may interact with gender. As mentioned above, these two attachment patterns entail different relationship motivations and emotion regulation strategies (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2006), and thus may require specific expectations of their own (see Li & Chan, 2012). Expanding on Pietromonaco et al.'s (2004) expectations and Wickham and Knee's (2012) support of interdependence theory, different combinations of insecurely attached partners may influence the way they handle conflict. This idea is reflected in the tenets of emotionally focused couple therapy (EFT) and its negative interaction cycles (Johnson, 2004). Theoretically, the combination of a partner high in attachment anxiety and another high in attachment avoidance may be especially volatile in conflict because while the anxiously attached partner's attachment system is hyperactivated from fear of abandonment, the avoidantly attached partner's attachment system is deactivated to avoid intimacy, resulting in two opposing conflict management approaches (Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2006). This pairing is similar to EFT's pursue-withdraw interactive cycle. Couples in which both partners have high attachment anxiety may also respond differently to conflict than couples in which both partners have high attachment avoidance. First, in couples with two partners high in attachment anxiety, although both partners are pushed to turn towards their partner for support, each partner's hyperactivated state may both heighten the other's anxiety and hinder their responsiveness to the other's needs, thus resulting in conflict escalation (Beck et al., 2013; Feeney, 2003). This pairing is similar to EFT's attack-attack interactive cycle. In contrast, in couples with two partners high in attachment

avoidance, both partners' attachment systems become deactivated, and both are motivated to maintain emotional independence and distance, thus leaving the conflict unresolved (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2006). This pairing is similar to EFT's withdraw-withdraw interactive cycle.

In heterosexual couple relationships, attachment pairings can also be subdivided by gender. Feeney (1994, 2003, 2016) has long speculated that interaction effects of partners' attachment orientations reflect both attachment and gender role effects. For instance, in a reanalysis of three previous studies (i.e., Feeney, 1998; Feeney & Hohaus, 2001; Feeney et al., 1994), Feeney (2003) used hierarchical regression analyses to test the interaction between men's and women's attachment orientations (operationalized as two dimensions of anxiety over relationships and comfort with closeness) and various relational outcomes. Her interpretation of this reanalysis extends on current expectations for attachment pairings by distinguishing between different forms of attachment insecurity and accounting for potential gender effects. These important points about the couple system include the following: (a) the relational behaviours and evaluations of women seem to be more sensitive to interaction effects than those of men; (b) women may show more sensitivity to their partner's concerns than men, which shapes the relationship; (c) the pairing of two anxiously attached partners may be particularly relevant to women's maladaptive conflict behaviours; and (d) the pairing of an avoidantly attached partner with an anxiously attached partner seems to have adverse implications for the general emotional climate of the relationship, whereby both gender-concordant (i.e., avoidantly attached men and anxiously attached women) and gender-discordant (i.e., anxiously attached men and avoidantly attached women) pairings are associated with negative outcomes.

More recently, Beck et al. (2013) showed that couples' romantic attachment jointly contributed to their observer-rated care-seeking behaviours while discussing relationship

conflicts, the forms of which led them to speculate that these patterns vary with gender role norms. For example, they found that avoidantly attached men had more difficulty seeking care from their partner when she was high in attachment anxiety than when she was low in anxiety, whereas avoidantly attached women had more difficulty seeking care from their partner when he was low in attachment anxiety than when he was high in attachment anxiety. Contrary to Feeney's (2003) observation, this finding suggests that the gender-discordant pairing of anxiously attached men and avoidantly attached women may be beneficial to women. Similarly, Donarelli, Kivlighan, Allegra, and Lo Coco (2016) examined the influence of attachment pairings on perceived infertility stress. Over and above actor and partner effects, they found that avoidantly attached men experienced increased distress when their partner was high in attachment anxiety, which may again reflect gender role norms. Finally, regarding the pairing of two avoidantly attached partners, Laurent and Powers (2007) found that this combination predicted increases in women's cortisol response patterns, which was attributed to women's sense of responsibility for managing couple conflict.

As a whole, these empirical findings suggest that although the association between adult romantic attachment and conflict management has been well-established at the individual level, there is both a theoretical and empirical need for work examining the interplay between both partners' attachment orientations. Even with the theoretical and empirical considerations described thus far, relatively little is known about the complex interdependent dynamic between the attachment behavioural system and the process of conflict management. As it stands, there are no records of previous research that has explicitly examined the ways in which men's and women's adult romantic attachment orientations interact to predict each other's conflict management, a key communicative process for relationship maintenance.

The Current Study

The present study was designed to elaborate on attachment theory by examining how the unique interplay between both partners' romantic attachment anxiety and avoidance is linked to their conflict management behaviours, with a particular emphasis on gender effects. In other words, the goal of the present study is to examine positive and negative conflict management behaviours as a function of adult romantic attachment pairings in heterosexual couples. The assumption that conflict management behaviours will vary as a function of joint attachment was theoretically derived from attachment theory, and empirically derived from findings on adult romantic attachment and conflict management, as previously discussed.

In addition to its theoretical and empirical value, this research question espouses essential features of modern couple research, such as the utilization of a dyadic research design and dyadic data analyses, the investigation of gender effects, and the direct observation of conflict management behaviours. There is great value in studying each partner's behaviour within the couple system, especially in terms of joint attachment (Bartholomew & Allison, 2006; Berscheid, 1999; Pietromonaco et al., 2004). The few dyadic studies that have examined actor-partner interaction effects provide increasing evidence that both partners' romantic attachment orientations interact with each other (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2006); however, only two of these studies have used some form of conflict management as an outcome. In addition to this need for an attachment perspective on conflict management that incorporates actor-partner interaction effects, several researchers have called for further consideration of gender effects within the relationship context in general (e.g., Beck et al., 2013; Pietromonaco et al., 2004), and within the romantic attachment field in particular (Del Giudice, 2011).

Accordingly, the present research will investigate how romantic attachment processes in couple relationships shape men's and women's observed positive and negative conflict management behaviours. In an attempt to emphasize the interdependence of relationship partners, there will be a particular focus on the interplay between partners' romantic attachment orientations, whereby the focus of inquiry is the nature of the attachment pairings rather than their similarity. Specifically, this study will examine the extent to which individuals' own adult romantic attachment orientation, their partner's attachment orientation, and the interaction between both partners' attachment orientations predict men's and women's observed positive and negative conflict management behaviours. Finally, this study will explicitly examine insecure romantic attachment and conflict management behaviours in light of gender effects. The hypothesized model therefore consists of four predictor variables (i.e., men's and women's romantic attachment anxiety and avoidance) and four actor-partner interactions or pairings combining each partner's gender (i.e., male or female) and insecure romantic attachment orientation (i.e., anxiety or avoidance), with men's and women's positive and negative conflict management behaviours as the four outcome variables. The four attachment pairings are as follows: men's anxiety by women's avoidance, men's avoidance by women's anxiety, men's anxiety by women's anxiety, and men's avoidance by women's avoidance. The two other attachment pairings of men's anxiety by men's avoidance and women's anxiety by women's avoidance were excluded from the model because they do not represent meaningful male-female dynamics of heterosexual relationships. This study will accordingly utilize a cross-sectional correlational research design based on the actor-partner interdependence model (APIM; Kenny et al., 2006). This design is justified given that it allows for the examination of actor and partner effects (Kenny, 1996), as well as actor-partner interaction effects (Kenny et al., 2006).

Hypotheses

In line with the theory and evidence presented above, the hypotheses will focus on the predicted actor, partner, and actor-partner interaction effects of adult romantic attachment (i.e., combinations of attachment anxiety and avoidance within couples) on positive and negative conflict management behaviours. Given the large number of variables, levels, and combinations, the following hypotheses are presented in a way that is both meaningful and manageable in terms of the study's objective. First of all, it is hypothesized that men's and women's adult romantic attachment will be related to their own (i.e., actor effect) conflict management, whereby attachment anxiety and avoidance will be positively associated with negative conflict management and negatively associated with positive conflict management. Similarly, it is hypothesized that men's and women's adult romantic attachment will be related to their partner's (i.e., partner effect) conflict management, whereby attachment anxiety and avoidance will be positively associated with partner's negative conflict management and negatively associated with partner's positive conflict management.

Third, and most importantly, it is hypothesized that one's adult romantic attachment will interact with that of their partner's to predict each other's conflict management. Four additional hypotheses have been put forth to this effect, and formulated to capture what is currently known about men's and women's romantic attachment and conflict management. It is important to note that an exploratory approach was adopted to formulate the following hypotheses given the lack of previous research in this area. The first of these four hypotheses theorizes that men high in attachment anxiety paired with women high in attachment avoidance will be associated with less effective conflict management behaviours in men, but more effective conflict management behaviours in women. Second, it is hypothesized that men high in attachment avoidance paired

with women high in attachment anxiety will be associated with less effective conflict management behaviours in both men and women. Third, it is hypothesized that men high in attachment anxiety paired with women high in attachment anxiety will be associated with more effective conflict management behaviours in men, but less effective conflict management behaviours in women. Finally, it is hypothesized that men high in attachment avoidance paired with women high in attachment avoidance will be associated with more effective conflict management behaviours in men, but less effective conflict management behaviours in women.

Method

Participants

The final sample consisted of 179 Canadian heterosexual couples ($N = 358$ individuals). Participants were recruited from a community between June 2005 and May 2009 through various social events and gatherings, advertisements, and brochures touting a large study on relationship functioning. Eligibility criteria were as follows: (a) at least 18 years of age, (b) involved in a heterosexual romantic relationship with their partner for at least 12 months, and (c) cohabiting with their partner for at least 6 months. These criteria were established in an attempt to recruit close couples in a stable relationship from the general community. The mean age of male participants was 32.32 years ($SD = 11.33$) and the mean age of female participants was 29.87 years ($SD = 10.14$). On average, couples had been together for 5.98 years ($SD = 7.91$) and had been cohabiting for 4.34 years ($SD = 7.61$). Only 14.6% of couples reported having at least one child with their current partner. The majority of the sample (83.8%) self-identified as being of European descent, while 4.7% of participants self-identified as Asian, 3.1% as Black, 2% as Latino or Hispanic, 1.1% as Middle-Eastern, and 0.8% as First Nations. A small number of participants (4.2%) self-identified as having another racial or ethnic background not listed here

(i.e., Jewish, Russian, Icelandic, German, Italian, West Indian, Turkish, Filipino, Polish, or mixed descent), and one participant did not report their racial or ethnic background. In addition, the majority of the sample had reached university-level education (60.1%), followed by college- (20.4%), high school- (18.7%), and primary school-level education (0.6%); one participant did not report their education level. Finally, participants' mean annual gross income was 37,379 Canadian dollars ($SD = 24,632$).

Procedure

This study was part of a larger three-year longitudinal study that consisted of three participation time points, which were each separated by a 12-month period. Participants from the present study included only those who participated in the first time point. The procedures performed in these studies, including the present study, were approved by a Research Ethics Board at an Eastern Canadian university. Prior to participating in the study, couples were informed about the purpose of the study, the procedures, the contractual obligation to ensure confidentiality, and possible ethical issues. Consent to engage in the conflict discussion was also obtained from both partners, as this procedure was implemented to ensure that both partners felt comfortable engaging in such a discussion with each other. Participants were also provided with a consent form detailing the contact information of the researchers involved in the study and the Protocol Officer for Research in Ethics from the university. During the 2.5-hour testing session, which took place at a laboratory located on a university campus, participants first completed a questionnaire package independently in a room with divided workspaces. The questionnaire package included a measure of adult romantic attachment (see description in the Measures section), among several others. The order of questionnaires was counterbalanced to control for the potential effect of previously administered measures, which were not part of the present

study. Partners were then reunited and instructed to identify a topic of disagreement (i.e., a recurrent argument that was important in their relationship). If necessary, participants were provided with a list of potential topics of disagreement from the *Potential Problem Checklist* (Patterson, 1976), which listed 16 different topics that can be a source of conflict for some couples (e.g., financial planning, religion, sexuality, hobbies). Once partners agreed on a topic, they were asked to aim for a solution to their problem and were left alone to discuss the topic for 15 minutes. These interactions were video recorded and scored using the *Global Couple Interaction Coding System* (GCICS; Bélanger, Dulude, Sabourin, & Wright, 1993) described in the Measures section. As an incentive, each couple was compensated 40 Canadian dollars for their participation.

Measures

Demographic information. Using a standard sociodemographic questionnaire, participants provided personal demographic information (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity) and relationship-related information (e.g., length of relationship, length of cohabitation, marital status, number of children).

Adult romantic attachment. The *Experiences in Close Relationships-12* (ECR-12; Lafontaine et al., 2015) scale is a widely used measure of adult romantic attachment (i.e., general attachment patterns in romantic relationships). Akin to the original ECR (Brennan et al., 1998), the ECR-12 conceptualizes adult romantic attachment along a continuum of attachment anxiety and avoidance, whereby attachment anxiety is defined as worries or fears about being rejected or abandoned by one's romantic partner and attachment avoidance is defined as discomfort with closeness and emotional intimacy in romantic relationships. Accordingly, the ECR-12 is comprised of two subscales: attachment anxiety (e.g., "I worry about being abandoned") and

attachment avoidance (e.g., “I don’t feel comfortable opening up to romantic partners”). Both subscales are comprised of 6 items, which are rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Disagree Strongly*) to 7 (*Agree Strongly*), with higher scores indicating higher attachment anxiety or avoidance. Those with higher levels of attachment anxiety and/or attachment avoidance are described as having an insecure romantic attachment orientation, whereas those with lower levels of both attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance are described as having a secure romantic attachment orientation. Lafontaine et al. (2015) reported alpha coefficients ranging from .78 to .87 for the anxiety subscale and .74 to .83 for the avoidance subscale across English, French-Canadian, same-sex, and clinical couple samples. They also demonstrated convergent and predictive validity of the ECR-12. Subscale reliability for the present study indicated similar results, with alpha coefficients of .84 for the anxiety subscale and .79 for the avoidance subscale.

Conflict management behaviours. The *Global Couple Interaction Coding System* (GCICS; Bélanger et al., 1993) is a macroanalytic marital coding system that measures couples’ problem-solving interactions according to both global positive and negative conflict management behaviours. Positive conflict management is measured along two dimensions: support/validation (i.e., ability to list, validate, or reinforce the partner’s statements) and problem solving (i.e., ability to recognize a problem and find appropriate solutions). Negative conflict management is measured along three dimensions: withdrawal/avoidance (i.e., tendency to avoid discussion), dominance (i.e., non-symmetrical control of the discussion), and criticism/attack (i.e., tendency to criticize, blame, or disparage the partner, including the use of nonverbal hostility, negative mind-reading, threats, and negative reciprocity). Each of the five dimensions takes into account positive and negative affective content, as well as verbal and non-verbal behaviours. As opposed

to microanalytic coding systems, which use very small and detailed units of observation, this macroanalytic coding system uses a time sampling method to define its units of observation. Therefore, the total interaction sequence is divided into three segments of equal duration in order to capture the exchange as a whole. According to Bélanger et al. (1993), the psychometric properties of the GCICS are adequate. Inter-rater agreement on all five of the system's dimensions is acceptable (Pearson correlation coefficients range between .36 and .90) and partners' behaviours fluctuate little over time. In addition, each negative conflict management dimension is inversely associated with the positive conflict management dimensions for both men and women. No alpha coefficients for subscale reliability were provided. Criterion-related validity was established by correlating both total positive and negative conflict management scores with the external criterion of dyadic adjustment, whereby an increase in positive communication should be associated with an increase in dyadic adjustment, and an increase in negative communication should be associated with a decrease in dyadic adjustment. This hypothesis was supported in women only.

For this study, couples' 15-minute discussions were coded by two graduate students and three undergraduate students in psychology (i.e., one primary rater and four secondary raters) who received training with this instrument. A single 15-minute discussion required approximately 40 minutes to code. In order to avoid bias, for half of the cases, men's behaviours were coded first, and women's behaviours were coded first for the other half. The discussions were divided into three 5-minute segments. For each of the target behaviours (i.e., items related to support/validation, problem solving, withdrawal/avoidance, dominance, and criticism/attack), each partner was given a score on a 9-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (*Not displayed*) to 9 (*Strongly displayed*) according to the frequency, intensity, and duration of the behaviours

displayed during each of the three segments. The scores for the three segments were then averaged to yield the score for that dimension. Inter-rater agreement was calculated with average measures intraclass correlation coefficients (i.e., the average rating for k judges) using the dimension scores of a quarter of randomly selected discussions (Berk, 1979; Heyman, Lorber, Eddy, & West, 2014; McGraw & Wong, 1996). In accordance with Bland and Altman's (1986) limits of agreement, and in an attempt to improve inter-rater agreement, fixed biases between the primary rater and the secondary raters were adjusted using the mean difference. Following these adjustments, the inter-rater agreements were .74 for support/validation, .68 for problem-solving behaviours, .72 for withdrawal/avoidance, .74 for dominance, and .75 for criticism/attack, with an average of .73. These values are comparable to those obtained by Bélanger, Sabourin, and El-Baalbaki (2012) as well as Lafontaine, Bélanger, and Gagnon (2009). Although there is some variability in the interpretation of intraclass correlation coefficients (ICC), a minimum reliability coefficient of .70 is considered sufficient for a measure used for research purposes (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Bech and Clemmesen (1983) further suggest that an ICC between .41 and .60 represents moderate agreement, an ICC between .61 and .80 indicates substantial agreement, and an ICC of .81 or above signifies near-perfect agreement between coders. The average of the scores given by the primary coder and one of the secondary coders made up the final score, when applicable.

Finally, the scoring strategy of averaging the respective subscale dimensions into two global conflict management variables (i.e., positive and negative conflict management) was used to reduce the complexity of the model and therefore facilitate its interpretability. Positive conflict management behaviours consisted of the support/validation and problem solving dimensions, $r = .42$, $p < .01$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .58$. Negative conflict management behaviours consisted of the

dominance and criticism/attack dimensions, $r = .58, p < .01$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .73$. The withdrawal/avoidance dimension was excluded from this global score due to its low correlation with dominance, $r = -.03, p > .05$, and criticism, $r = .24, p < .01$, and to its detrimental impact on reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .50$). In addition, the withdrawal/avoidance dimension was not included as a separate construct because these behaviours were observed at a low rate (i.e., at least half of cases were coded as zero) and were not significantly correlated with the predictor variables.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Assumptions were evaluated and preliminary analyses were conducted with SPSS version 21. Data were first evaluated for problematic missing values, normality, and outliers. There was no missing data. Normality assumptions were not met across the study variables, which included positively-skewed distributions for attachment avoidance and negative conflict management. Six univariate outliers were identified using standardized values and two multivariate outliers were identified using a test of Mahalanobis distance. In accordance with Tabachnick and Fidell's (2007) recommendation against data transformations, all outliers were included as legitimate cases sampled from the intended population, and non-normal distributions were addressed through alternative methods. Robust standard errors, such as those generated from Mplus' maximum likelihood estimation, are allegedly robust against non-normality (Kline, 2015; Muthén & Muthén, 2011).

Descriptive Analyses

The means, standard deviations, and Pearson correlation coefficients for all study variables can be found in Table 1.1, presented separately for men and women in order to

represent the nonindependence of the data. Means and standard deviations appeared plausible. There were a number of significant correlations between the study variables. Female attachment avoidance was positively associated with both male attachment avoidance and female attachment anxiety. Male attachment avoidance was negatively associated with male positive conflict management, whereas female attachment anxiety was positively associated with female negative conflict management. In support of the nonindependence of the dyad members through voluntary linkage, male positive conflict management was positively associated with female positive conflict management, and male negative conflict management was positively associated with female negative conflict management. In addition, male positive conflict management was negatively associated with male negative conflict management. Finally, female positive conflict management was also negatively associated with male and female negative conflict management.

Dyad members could be clearly distinguished from one another by gender, which is a theoretically defensible defining characteristic of heterosexual couple relationships (Fitzpatrick, Gareau, Lafontaine, & Gaudreau, 2016). On account of this, four separate one-way between subjects analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted to compare the effects of gender on attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, positive conflict management, and negative conflict management. There were significant effects of gender on attachment anxiety, $F(1, 356) = 15.85$, $p < .001$, $d = -0.42$, and negative conflict management, $F(1, 356) = 4.02$, $p < .05$, $d = 0.25$. However, there were no significant effects of gender on attachment avoidance, $F(1, 356) = 1.64$, $p > .05$, or positive conflict management, $F(1, 356) = 1.88$, $p > .05$.

Principal Analyses

The main analytic strategy consisted of an actor-partner interdependence model (APIM; Kenny et al., 2006) using structural equation modeling (SEM) to examine the actor, partner, and

actor-partner interaction effects between adult romantic attachment and conflict management. SEM is the method of choice for analyzing the APIM with distinguishable dyads due in part to its ability to treat the dyad as the unit of analysis (Kenny et al., 2006; Kenny & Ledermann, 2010). In couple research, it is particularly important to take into account this mutual influence (Kenny & Cook, 1999). Significant actor-partner interactions were then plotted and examined by simple slopes analyses, the latter of which used the range of both individual predictor variables from one standard deviation below and above the mean (Aiken & West, 1991). Participants “low” in attachment anxiety represented 19.83% (i.e., 45 men, 26 women) of the sample and those “low” in attachment avoidance represented 17.04% (i.e., 22 men, 39 women). Similarly, participants “high” in attachment anxiety represented 19.55% (i.e., 23 men, 47 women) of the sample and those “high” in attachment avoidance represented 13.97% (i.e., 22 men, 28 women).

As previously mentioned, the hypothesized model consisted of four independent variables (i.e., both men’s and women’s attachment anxiety and avoidance) and four actor-partner interactions or pairings combining each partner’s gender (i.e., male or female) and adult romantic attachment (i.e., anxiety or avoidance), with men’s and women’s positive and negative conflict management behaviours as the four dependent variables. In addition, covariances were specified between all of the independent variables, and correlations were specified between all disturbances to allow for the nonindependence in the data (Kenny et al., 2006). Finally, all of the independent variables were centered around the grand mean across both men and women to reduce multicollinearity and increase the interpretability of the effects (Cook & Kenny, 2005; Kenny et al., 2006).

The hypothesized model was estimated using the maximum-likelihood method with robust standard errors (MLR) available in Mplus version 6.12 (Muthén & Muthén, 2011). As a

first step, only the actor and partner effects (i.e., the main effects) were included in the model (Cook & Kenny, 2005). The unstandardized regression coefficients and their respective test statistics for this model are presented in the first four rows of Table 1.2. The actor effects consisted of the direct effect of one's romantic attachment orientation on their own conflict management behaviours. Consistent with the correlations in Table 1.1, there was one clear actor effect in the negative association between women's attachment anxiety and their positive conflict management, $b = -0.09$, $\beta = -0.22$, $p < .01$. In addition, there were two marginally significant actor effects. Men's attachment avoidance was negatively associated with their positive conflict management, $b = -0.08$, $\beta = -0.13$, $p = .08$, and women's attachment anxiety was positively associated with their negative conflict management, $b = 0.08$, $\beta = 0.13$, $p = .09$. The partner effects consisted of the direct effect of one's romantic attachment orientation on their partner's conflict management behaviours. There were no significant partner effects.

As a second step, the four actor-partner interaction terms were included as independent variables within a new model that included all the actor and partner effects. The unstandardized regression coefficients and their respective test statistics for this model are presented in the last four rows of Table 1.2. This saturated model, which included a total of 90 free parameters, yielded two significant actor-partner interaction effects and three marginally significant effects. In an attempt to diverge from a just-identified model towards a parsimonious one, model-trimming was implemented as a third step using the meaningfulness criterion of constraining the actor-partner interaction paths with a standardized regression coefficient less than .05 to zero (Wuensch, 2016). This data-driven approach was consistent with the exploratory nature of the hypotheses. As a result, six of the 16 actor-partner interactions were trimmed, three of which predicted men's positive conflict management, one of which predicted men's negative conflict

management, another of which predicted women's positive conflict management, and a final one that predicted women's negative conflict management. The unstandardized regression coefficients and their respective test statistics for this final model are presented in Table 1.3, and its accompanying path diagram is shown in Figure 1.1. Overall, several fit indexes showed good model fit: $\chi^2(6) = 0.15, p > .05$, CFI = 1, RMSEA = 0, SRMR = .003.

With regard to actor-partner interaction effects, there were two significant interactions predicting men's negative conflict management behaviours. First, there was a significant interaction between men's attachment avoidance and women's attachment anxiety, $b = -0.08, \beta = -0.16, p < .05$, the form of which is depicted in Figure 1.2. The simple slope test for women's low attachment anxiety was significant, $b = 0.18, t = 2.12, p < .05$: when women's attachment anxiety was low, increasing levels of men's attachment avoidance were associated with more negative conflict management in men. The simple slope test for women's high attachment anxiety was not significant, $b = -0.04, t = -0.70, p > .05$. Second, there was a significant interaction between men's attachment avoidance and women's attachment avoidance, $b = 0.16, \beta = 0.19, p < .05$, the form of which is depicted in Figure 1.3. The simple slope test for women's high attachment avoidance was significant, $b = 0.25, t = 3.31, p < .01$: when women's attachment avoidance was high, increasing levels of men's attachment avoidance were associated with more negative conflict management in men. The simple slope test for women's low attachment avoidance was not significant, $b = -0.09, t = -1.05, p > .05$.

There was also a significant interaction between men's attachment anxiety and women's attachment avoidance predicting women's positive conflict management behaviours, $b = -0.06, \beta = -0.15, p < .05$, the form of which is depicted in Figure 1.4. The simple slope test for men's high attachment anxiety was significant, $b = -0.10, t = -2.03, p < .05$: when men's attachment anxiety

was high, increasing levels of women's attachment avoidance were associated with less positive conflict management in women. The simple slope test for men's low attachment anxiety was not significant, $b = 0.05$, $t = 0.82$, $p > .05$.

Finally, there were two marginally significant interactions predicting women's negative conflict management behaviours. With p values falling between 0.05 and 0.15, these interactions were further examined on an exploratory basis. First, there was a marginally significant interaction between men's attachment anxiety and women's attachment avoidance, $b = 0.08$, $\beta = 0.12$, $p = .08$; however, simple slope tests for men's high, $b = 0.08$, $t = 1.03$, $p > .05$, and low, $b = -0.11$, $t = -1.43$, $p > .05$, attachment anxiety was not significant. Second, there was a marginally significant interaction between men's attachment avoidance and women's attachment avoidance, $b = 0.11$, $\beta = 0.11$, $p = .14$, but simple slope tests for men's high, $b = 0.12$, $t = 1.27$, $p > .05$, and low, $b = -0.09$, $t = -1.03$, $p > .05$, attachment avoidance were not significant. The predictor variables included in the final model accounted for 3% of the variance in men's positive conflict management, 7% of the variance in men's negative conflict management, 9% of the variance in women's positive conflict management, and 5% of the variance in women's negative conflict management.

Discussion

A substantive body of work supports the associations between an individual's adult romantic attachment orientation and both their own and their partner's conflict management (see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016, for a review), yet little research has examined the ways in which the attachment orientations of individuals and their partners interact to predict each other's conflict management behaviours. As such, the objective of the current study was to examine positive and negative conflict management behaviours as a function of adult romantic attachment pairings in

heterosexual couples. More specifically, the main goal was to elucidate the ways in which individuals' own attachment orientation, their partner's attachment orientation, and the interactions between both partners' attachment orientations predict their observed positive and negative conflict management behaviours. This research question was theoretically derived from attachment theory, and empirically derived from findings on adult romantic attachment and conflict management, as previously discussed. In addition, this research question was formulated in response to the clear need for an attachment perspective on conflict management that incorporates both actor-partner interaction effects and a priori hypotheses about gender effects.

The current study advances the literature in several important ways. First, the sparsity of significant actor and partner effects compared to interaction effects suggests that the sole reliance on the former for understanding couple relationships could be misleading. For instance, the one actor effect observed in the negative association between women's attachment anxiety and their use of support/validation and problem-solving behaviours, though informative from an individualistic perspective, did not manifest itself when the partner's attachment orientation was jointly considered. In addition, rather than precluding interpersonal effects, the lack of other actor effects and the complete absence of partner effects suggest that the interaction between partners' adult romantic attachment orientations is more effective in predicting conflict management behaviours than a sole individual's attachment orientation. In other words, this sample showed interaction effects suggestive of a more indirect or conditional influence of adult romantic attachment on conflict management (Laurent & Powers, 2007).

Second, in a general sense, the presence of significant actor-partner interaction effects supports the interdependent nature of attachment theory and its derivable expectation that an individual's attachment orientation has differential effects on outcomes depending on their

partner's attachment orientation (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2006). The present study therefore extends attachment theory by specifying conditions under which partners' adult romantic attachment orientations may interact to predict important individual and relationship outcomes (Beck et al., 2013). More specifically, it provides a comprehensive examination of the unique interplay between intimate partners' adult romantic attachment orientations and their conflict management behaviours. Although the form of these interactions differed from expectations, three significant actor-partner interaction effects were identified in support of this dyadic perspective, two of which predicted an increase in negative conflict management and one of which predicted a decrease in positive conflict management. In contrast, no attachment pairings predicted decreases in negative conflict management or increases in positive conflict management, suggesting that attachment pairings are particularly meaningful predictors of less effective conflict management behaviours, as opposed to more effective conflict management behaviours, in men and women. Alternatively, this finding could reflect the structure of the ECR scales, which have been deemed by some as an inadequate measure of attachment security due to its inability to capture the full extent of Bartholomew and Horowitz's (1991) four-category model of attachment (Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016; Scharfe, 2016). The ECR scales' inability to fully assess attachment security could hinder the full extent of interaction effects, given that this particular form of adult romantic attachment is associated with effective conflict management (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Perhaps a measure of adult romantic attachment that more explicitly assesses attachment security (e.g., *Trent Relationship Scales Questionnaire*; Scharfe, 2016) could offer more information about effective conflict management. Furthermore, contrary to Feeney's (2003) observation that the relational behaviours of women seem to be more sensitive to interaction effects than those of men, the

current study showed that men's and women's conflict management was predicted to a similar extent by attachment pairings. Finally, the direction of the association between attachment pairings and conflict management varied by gender; attachment pairings predicted an increase in men's negative conflict management, but a decrease in women's positive conflict management. This finding will be further nuanced in relation to men's and women's adult romantic attachment in the coming paragraphs. The hypothesis that men's positive conflict management and women's negative conflict management would vary as a function of adult romantic attachment pairings was not supported.

The present study's method of grouping attachment pairings on the basis of attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance also addresses interaction effects more fully by distinguishing between the different dimensions of attachment insecurity. This approach acknowledges that these two attachment patterns entail different relationship motivations and emotion regulation strategies (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2006), and correlate differently with relational outcomes (Li & Chan, 2012). In this case, anxious-avoidant pairings and avoidant-avoidant pairings predicted variations in conflict management behaviours in their own specific ways, but anxious-anxious pairings were not associated with conflict management behaviours. This finding supports previous research on the volatile nature of anxious-avoidant pairings (e.g., Beck et al., 2013; Donarelli et al., 2016; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994), but contradicts research showing that the pairing of two partners high in attachment anxiety may be particularly relevant to conflict behaviours (e.g., Feeney, 2003). The absence of a significant anxious-anxious pairing in the current study could reflect a compensatory feedback loop such that partners high in attachment anxiety may perceive each other's hyperactivation strategies as soothing forms of partner attention and mutual disclosure (Pietromonaco & Barrett, 1997).

In addition, the present study suggests that any expectations about attachment pairings should also be subdivided by gender, which is a theoretically defensible defining characteristic of heterosexual couple relationships (Fitzpatrick et al., 2016). For instance, although anxious-avoidant pairings were associated with conflict management, it is important to note whether these pairings consisted of men high in attachment anxiety and women high in attachment avoidance or vice versa. In the first case, men high in attachment avoidance used more negative conflict management behaviours when their partner was low in attachment anxiety. In contrast, women high in attachment avoidance used fewer positive conflict management behaviours when their partner was high in attachment anxiety. The form of this particular attachment pairing and its association with conflict management therefore varied based on which of the partners was more anxiously or avoidantly attached. These findings also lend support to Feeney's (2003) observation that both gender-concordant and gender-discordant pairings are associated with negative outcomes, which is, in this case, less effective conflict management.

The nature of the three significant actor-partner interaction effects also suggests that gender and insecure attachment interact in meaningful ways. In each case, the form of the effect varied from what was expected, but can nevertheless be interpreted from an attachment perspective. First, there were two attachment pairings that predicted men's negative conflict management behaviours. More specifically, men high in attachment avoidance used more dominance and criticism/attack behaviours when paired with either a partner low in attachment anxiety or high in attachment avoidance. Within each of these interpersonal contexts, it is possible that men high in attachment avoidance are better able to engage with, as opposed to withdraw from, a partner low in attachment anxiety or high in attachment avoidance because their need for emotional independence is more likely respected and their level of physiological

arousal is more likely tolerable. Beck et al. (2013) identified a similar pattern in regard to care-seeking behaviours; men high in attachment avoidance more constructively expressed their need for their partner's responsiveness when their partner was low in attachment anxiety compared to when she was high in attachment anxiety. A crucial caveat associated with attachment avoidance is a hindered ability to engage in effective conflict management and a tendency to engage in withdrawal or dominance behaviours (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2011, 2016). Given that the withdrawal/avoidance dimension was excluded from the current study's measure of negative conflict management, it appears that the conflict management behaviours of men high in attachment avoidance were marked by more dominance and criticism/attack when their partner was low in attachment anxiety or high in attachment avoidance. Alternatively, from the men's perspective, it is possible that their attempts to problem-solve or provide support to their partner (i.e., utilize more effective conflict management behaviours) are hindered by the perception that their partner's low attachment anxiety or high attachment avoidance reflects an unwillingness or inability to engage. Given that women tend to function as "relational firefighters" due to their inclination to identify relational problems and actively engage in conflict management (Canary & Wahba, 2006; Gottman, 1994; Sprecher, 1992; Steil & Hoffman, 2006), low attachment anxiety and high attachment avoidance in women could be characterized by gender-discordant attachment strategies. Frustrated by this perceived disengagement, men high in attachment avoidance may resort to negative conflict management behaviours aimed at gaining control of the situation (i.e., dominance) and disparaging their partner's relational distancing (i.e., criticism/attack). These two actor-partner interactions were clearly the most meaningful to men's negative conflict management as neither of the other two interactions (i.e., male attachment

anxiety by female attachment anxiety and male attachment anxiety by female attachment avoidance) were significant predictors.

In addition, one attachment pairing predicted women's positive conflict management behaviours. More specifically, women high in attachment avoidance used fewer support/validation and problem-solving behaviours when paired with a partner high in attachment anxiety. Rather than reflecting women's relational identities as affiliative and relationship-orientated individuals (Eldridge & Christensen, 2002; Sagrestano, Heavey, & Christensen, 2006), this particular interaction is consistent with previous findings that insecure individuals are characterized by a hindered ability to employ effective conflict management strategies (Mikilincer & Shaver, 2016). In addition, at the dyadic level, this finding supports previous research suggesting that avoidantly attached individuals are less responsive when paired with an anxiously attached partner (Shallcross, Howland, Bemis, Simpson, & Frazier, 2011) and that avoidantly attached women can experience caring for an anxiously attached partner as particularly burdensome (Feeney, 2003), both of which could translate to fewer support/validation and problem-solving behaviours. Finally, this finding points to the possibility that the nature of adult romantic attachment orientations can, in some cases, take precedence over observed gender differences in socialization and relational identity.

If such interdependent processes occur in a sample of community couples, there may be similar or even additional interaction effects in clinical couples, who experience attachment-related threats as particularly distressing. From a clinical standpoint, the present study informs therapeutic approaches to couple conflict. In a general sense, conflict management behaviours can be conceptualized as an interpersonal process that depends on the unique contribution of each partner's adult romantic attachment orientation. With this study's findings in mind,

clinicians can apply this knowledge to interventions aimed at improving conflict management by targeting individuals' relational schemas or working models, such as attachment-related memories, beliefs and attitudes, goals and needs, and plans and strategies (Collins, Guichard, Ford, & Feeney, 2004). The present study is particularly relevant to emotionally focused couple therapy (EFT), a theoretical orientation to couple therapy grounded in attachment theory. EFT integrates intrapersonal experiences with an interpersonal focus on partners' interactional patterns and cycles, and aims to reorganize these interactions in order to create a secure attachment bond between partners (Johnson, 2004). As previously discussed, the nature of these interactional patterns map onto the attachment pairings examined in the present study. The present study's findings can therefore inform the conditions that may be especially problematic for conflict management. More specifically, it appears that pairings consisting of a man high in attachment avoidance and a woman either low in attachment anxiety or high in attachment avoidance is particularly detrimental to men's conflict management, and that pairings consisting of a woman high in attachment avoidance and a man high in attachment anxiety is particularly detrimental to women's use of support/validation and problem-solving behaviours. These findings indirectly support one of EFT's core assumptions that individuals must first experience their partners as a source of security and protection before issues can be resolved (Johnson, 2004). In addition, it appears that simply identifying a couple's interactional pattern without taking into account which partner assumes which role could be misleading. As discussed, anxious-avoidant pairings (likened to EFT's pursue-withdraw interactive cycle) had different associations with conflict management depending on which partner was high in attachment anxiety and which was high in attachment avoidance. Such a consideration could be crucial to successful treatment outcomes.

Limitations and Future Directions

Despite the numerous theoretical and methodological strengths of this study, some limitations should be considered when interpreting the results. First, although the finding that attachment pairings shape conflict management behaviours could be theoretically sound, the correlational and cross-sectional design of the current study precludes causal inferences. In other words, the directionality of this association remains unclear because a causal relationship between these variables has not yet been established. Put differently, while it is quite possible that attachment pairings influence conflict management, there is the possibility that partners' conflict management behaviours could also influence their own and each other's attachment orientations over time. Addressing this research question with a longitudinal design would provide valuable insight into the nature of this association. Another limitation stems from the characteristics of the current sample, which is relatively homogenous in its racial or ethnic background (i.e., predominantly of European decent) and level of education (i.e., predominantly post-secondary education). As the present sample was solely comprised of heterosexual community-based couples, there is an opportunity for future studies to test the replicability of these findings with different populations to determine whether they can be generalized to a diversity of couple types (e.g., lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer identified couples), clinical couples, or couples of various cultural backgrounds. Third, the possibility remains that confounding factors (e.g., relationship length, relationship satisfaction, emotional content of the discussion topic) could have been at play, given that they were not taken into account. Future research could examine these effects while controlling for such variables, and could further nuance this association by considering potential mediators, including relational attributions,

expectations, and standards (Epstein & Baucom, 2002); selective attention (Banse & Imhoff, 2013); and self and partner regulation processes (Overall & Simpson, 2013).

Furthermore, although the sample size of the current study respects the minimum recommendation of 80 to 100 couples for an APIM using SEM analyses (Ledermann & Kenny, 2017), the presence of marginally significant interaction effects suggests that a larger sample size may yield a greater number of effects (i.e., potential Type II error) and that the effects identified herein are robust (i.e., no Type I error). In addition, the form of the interaction effects could vary according to different measures of adult romantic attachment and conflict management. As previously mentioned, a measure of adult romantic attachment that more explicitly assesses attachment security (e.g., *Trent Relationship Scales Questionnaire*; Scharfe, 2016) could offer different information about effective conflict management. In addition, a proper measure of withdrawal, which is conceptually different than the approach-oriented conflict management behaviours of dominance and criticism/attack, would further nuance the use of maladaptive conflict management behaviours. Such a distinction would be particularly relevant to attachment avoidance given its association with withdrawal behaviours (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). If the withdrawal/avoidance dimension had been included as a separate construct, theory and research on insecure attachment orientations (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016) and negative interaction cycles (Johnson, 2004) suggest that men's and women's attachment avoidance would be positively associated with their own (i.e., actor effect) withdrawal behaviours and positively associated with their partner's (i.e., partner effect) withdrawal behaviours, particularly if their partner is high in attachment avoidance (i.e., actor-partner interaction effect).

Given that the use of attachment pairings as the product of both partners' adult romantic attachment led to the discovery of some rather interesting findings, it would not be without

warrant that further exploration in this particular trajectory be conducted. For example, an alternative operationalization, such as the similarity of both partners' adult romantic attachment orientation (i.e., an absolute difference score or a profile correlation; Luo et al., 2008), could be informative for conflict management in its own right. Another direction that future studies in this field could focus on would be to examine the interpersonal dynamics of relationships within the broader context of attachment theory and research. For instance, it is possible that individuals' attachment orientations interact within other relationship types (e.g., platonic, familial). Recent research suggests that individuals have specific attachment representations of relationship domains nested within a more general model of attachment (Cassidy & Shaver, 2016; Gillath, Karantzas, & Fraley, 2016), which could manifest themselves differently depending on the context and therefore influence the conflict management behaviours used in these relationships.

Conclusion

Adult romantic attachment is a particularly fitting theoretical framework from which to study conflict management. Not only can couple conflict threaten the bond between partners, but conflict management depends on several attachment-related processes, such as working models and affect regulation (Feeney, 2016; Pietromonaco et al., 2004). Given the interdependent nature of couple relationships, attachment and its association with conflict management can most fully be understood from a dyadic perspective. The current study shows that conflict management does indeed vary as a function of adult romantic attachment pairings, particularly in the prediction of men's negative conflict management and women's positive conflict management. The current study also supports the investigation of attachment pairings that distinguish between different forms of attachment insecurity and gender. Combined with the previous research completed to this effect (e.g., Domingue & Mollen, 2009; Senchak & Leonard, 1992), the current

study contributes to the small yet promising body of work on attachment pairings. Just as the combination of partners' attachment orientations can predict each other's conflict management behaviours, attachment pairings have also been linked to several other individual and relational outcomes, including relationship satisfaction (e.g., Feeney, 2003); disclosure patterns (e.g., Bradford, Feeney, & Campbell, 2002); responsiveness (e.g., Beck, Pietromonaco, DeVito, Powers, & Boyle, 2014); self-reported intrusive behaviours (e.g., Lavy, Mikulincer, & Shaver, 2013); intimate partner aggression (e.g., Allison, Bartholomew, Mayseless, & Dutton, 2008); as well as physiological responses to distress, care-seeking, and caregiving behaviours (e.g., Beck et al., 2013).

Given that so many cognitive, emotional, and behavioural responses are shaped by attachment (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016), adult romantic attachment pairings offer a sophisticated method of fleshing out attachment theory and couple relationship functioning, and elicit much speculation on the future directions of this field of study. For instance, applied in this context, the work of Kenny and Ledermann (2010) and Wickham and Knee (2012) could further nuance these effects by testing different dyadic patterns in the actor-partner interdependence model. In addition, the investigation into the provenance and development of attachment pairings themselves has only just begun. While it remains unclear whether attachment pairings reflect a process of partner selection or stem from interpersonal processes (Feeney, 2016), the mystery clearly has some researchers (e.g., Holmes & Johnson, 2009; Strauss, Morry, & Kito, 2012) eager to put their best foot forward in the search for answers. As it stands, attachment pairings offer a particularly promising avenue of research given the assertion that, in couple relationships, it truly does take two to tango.

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Table 1.1

Summary of Intercorrelations, Means, and Standard Deviations for Scores of Adult Romantic Attachment and Conflict Management

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Male attachment anxiety	-							
2. Male attachment avoidance	.04	-						
3. Male positive conflict management	-.01	-.15*	-					
4. Male negative conflict management	-.03	.06	-.31**	-				
5. Female attachment anxiety	.10	.15	-.07	-.03	-			
6. Female attachment avoidance	.10	.21**	-.08	.07	.17*	-		
7. Female positive conflict management	-.05	-.01	.57**	-.23**	-.23**	-.10	-	
8. Female negative conflict management	-.01	-.06	-.14	.43**	.11	.01	-.29**	-
<i>M</i>	2.95	2.41	1.60	0.92	3.52	2.28	1.68	1.08
<i>SD</i>	1.30	0.94	0.53	0.68	1.39	1.06	0.54	0.84

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

Table 1.2

Actor, Partner, and Actor-Partner Interaction Effects in the Association between Adult Romantic Attachment and Conflict Management

APIM parameters	Male positive conflict management			Male negative conflict management			Female positive conflict management			Female negative conflict management		
	<i>b</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>p</i>
Step 1: Actor and partner effects												
Male attachment anxiety	0.00	0.06	.96	-0.02	-0.51	.61	-0.01	-0.03	.75	-0.01	-0.15	.88
Male attachment avoidance	-0.08	-1.76	.08	0.04	0.71	.48	0.02	0.51	.61	-0.07	-1.03	.30
Female attachment anxiety	-0.02	-0.66	.51	-0.02	-0.63	.53	-0.09	-2.90	.004	0.08	1.69	.09
Female attachment avoidance	-0.02	-0.58	.56	0.05	0.90	.37	-0.04	-0.88	.38	0.01	0.09	.93
Step 2: Actor-partner interaction effects												
Male anxiety X Female anxiety	-0.01	-0.29	.78	0.00	0.10	.92	0.02	0.68	.50	-0.01	-0.19	.85
Male anxiety X Female avoidance	0.01	0.17	.86	0.03	0.79	.43	-0.05	-1.65	.10	0.08	1.73	.08
Male avoidance X Female anxiety	0.03	0.83	.41	-0.08	-2.06	.04	0.00	0.03	.98	-0.04	-0.89	.37
Male avoidance X Female avoidance	0.00	-0.01	.99	0.16	2.46	.01	-0.04	-0.83	.41	0.12	1.58	.11

Note. Significant and marginally significant *p* values are italicized for quick reference.

Table 1.3

Final Actor-Partner Interaction Effects in the Association between Adult Romantic Attachment and Conflict Management Following Model-Trimming

APIM parameters	Male positive conflict management			Male negative conflict management			Female positive conflict management			Female negative conflict management		
	<i>b</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>p</i>
Step 3: Final actor-partner interaction effects												
Male anxiety X Female anxiety	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.02	0.94	.35	-	-	-
Male anxiety X Female avoidance	-	-	-	0.03	0.99	.32	-0.06	-2.03	.04	0.08	1.73	.08
Male avoidance X Female anxiety	0.03	0.92	.36	-0.08	-2.16	.03	-	-	-	-0.04	-0.89	.37
Male avoidance X Female avoidance	-	-	-	0.16	3.03	<.01	-0.04	-1.12	.26	0.11	1.47	.14

Note. Significant and marginally significant *p* values are italicized for quick reference. Trimmed paths are identified by a dash.

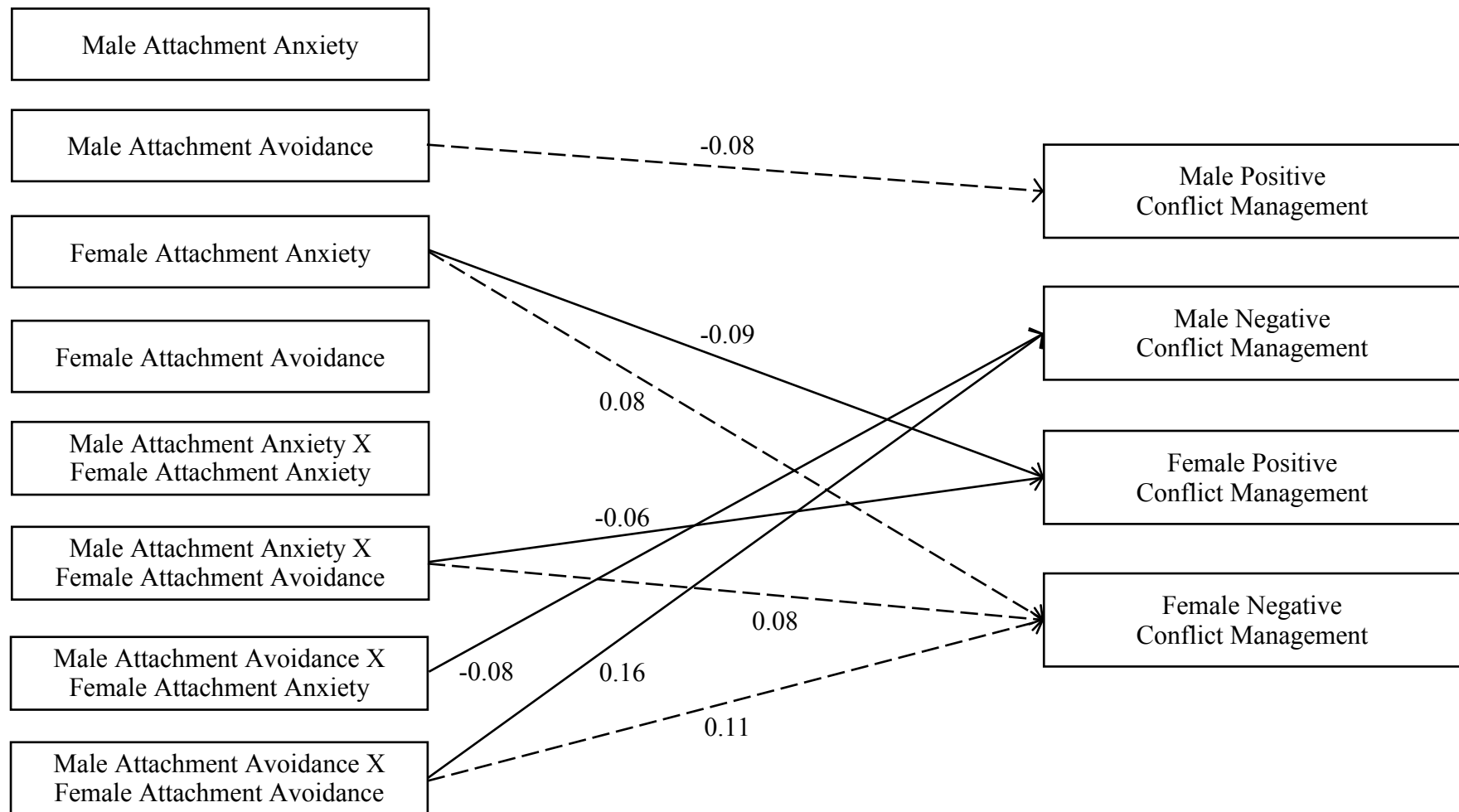


Figure 1.1. Structural equation model of the final actor-partner interdependence model predicting conflict management behaviours based on adult romantic attachment. Along with unstandardized estimates, statistically significant effects are represented by a solid line and marginally significant effects by a long dash. For clarity's sake, the covariances specified between all of the independent variables and the correlations specified between all of the disturbances are not illustrated.

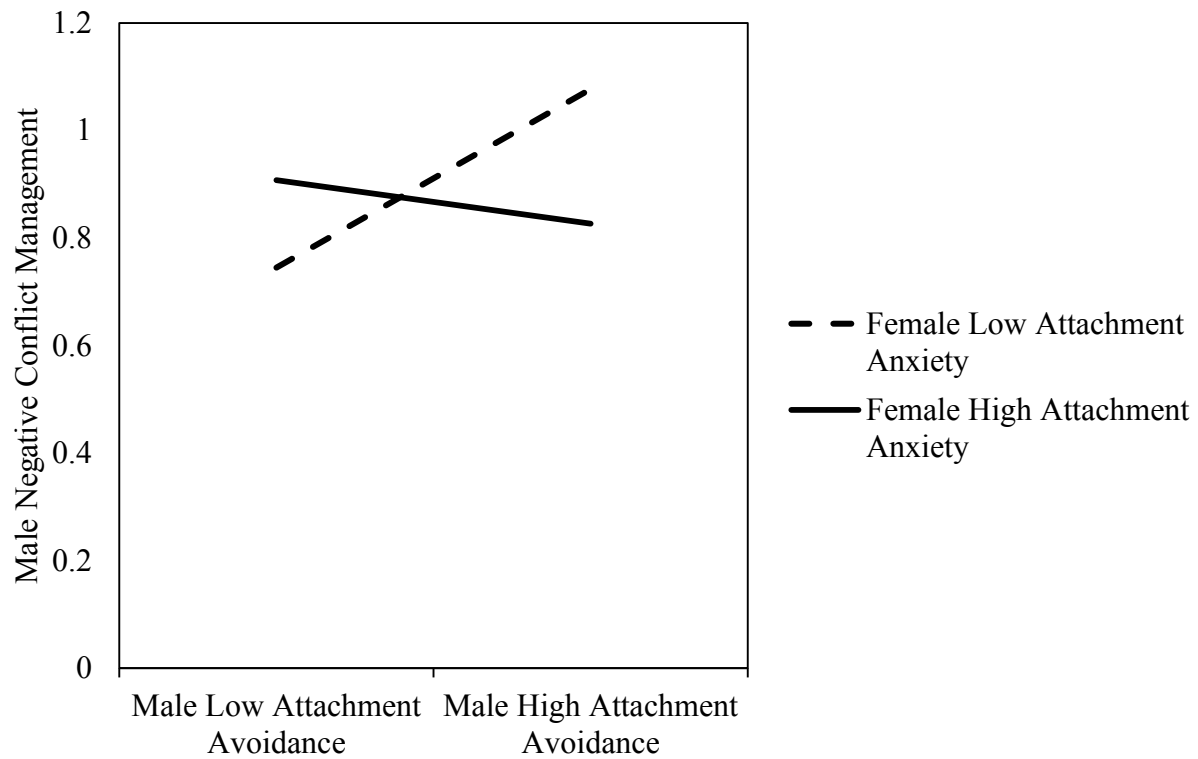


Figure 1.2. Actor-partner interaction between male attachment avoidance and female attachment anxiety predicting male negative conflict management. Regression lines are plotted for participants scoring one standard deviation below and above the centered mean of male attachment avoidance and female attachment anxiety.

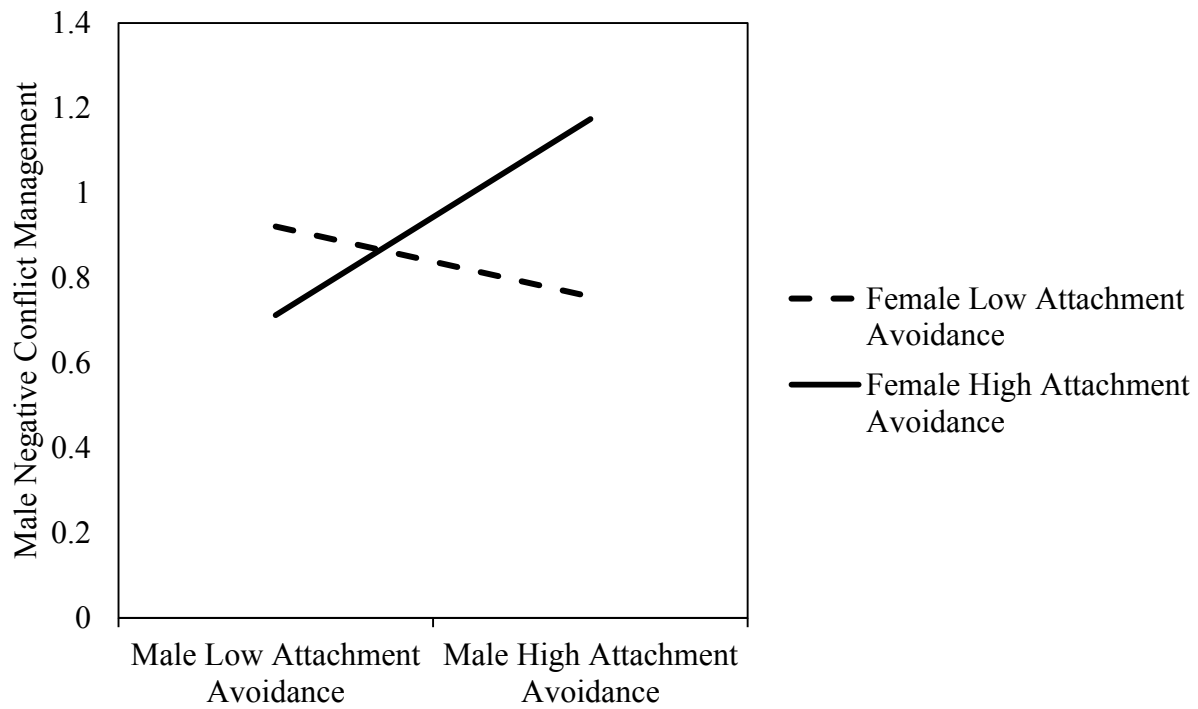


Figure 1.3. Actor-partner interaction between male and female attachment avoidance predicting male negative conflict management. Regression lines are plotted for participants scoring one standard deviation below and above the centered mean of male attachment avoidance and female attachment avoidance.

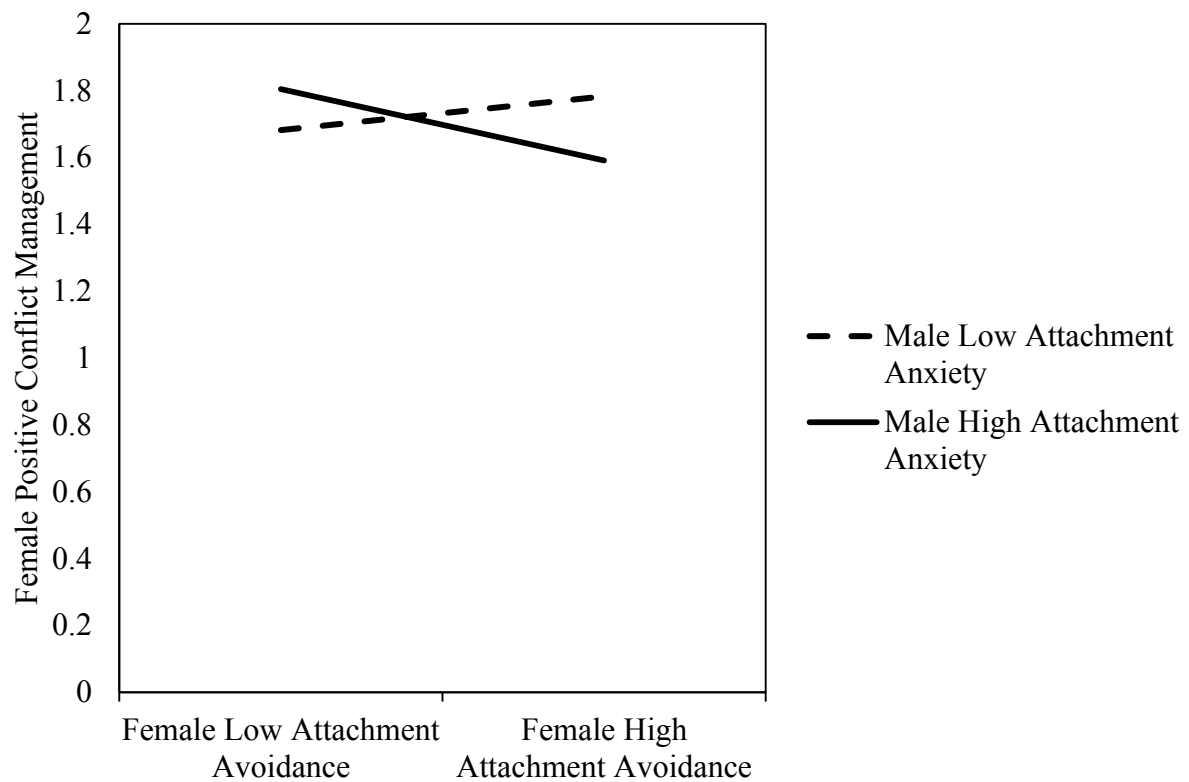


Figure 1.4. Actor-partner interaction between male attachment anxiety and female attachment avoidance predicting female positive conflict management. Regression lines are plotted for participants scoring one standard deviation below and above the centered mean of female attachment avoidance and male attachment anxiety.

Study 2¹

Understanding the Association between Relationship Satisfaction and Psychological Partner

Aggression: Does the Way Couples Manage Conflict Matter?

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Abstract

Relationship satisfaction and conflict management are significant risk factors for psychological partner aggression perpetration that may in fact operate together. This study therefore sought to examine whether conflict management moderates the negative association between relationship satisfaction and psychological partner aggression. One hundred seventy-nine community-based couples involved in a stable heterosexual relationship completed a questionnaire package and participated in a 15-minute conflict discussion. Structural and dyadic aspects of the model were tested using the actor-partner interdependence moderation model (APIMoM). Although the results suggest that relationship satisfaction and conflict management may be best conceptualized as independent predictors of psychological partner aggression, the presence of several significant partner effects and one significant interaction effect refines our understanding of the interdependent nature of psychological partner aggression.

Keywords: relationship satisfaction, conflict management, psychological partner aggression, couple relationship, dyadic data analysis

Understanding the Association between Relationship Satisfaction and Psychological Partner Aggression: Does the Way Couples Manage Conflict Matter?

Low relationship satisfaction has consistently been identified as a risk factor for psychological partner aggression perpetration (Capaldi, Knoble, Shortt, & Kim, 2012). However, given that relationship dissatisfaction does not necessarily result in aggression, relationship quality is only part of the equation. The ways in which intimate partners manage conflict may clarify the association between these two variables. Not only can couple conflict escalate into intimate partner aggression if not managed properly (Marshall, Jones, & Feinberg, 2011; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2011), but it may also interact with relationship satisfaction to contribute to psychological partner aggression. As such, this study examined whether conflict management moderates the negative association between relationship satisfaction and psychological partner aggression.

Psychological Partner Aggression

Intimate partner aggression spans a continuum of aggressive acts that vary in type, form, frequency, intensity, and directionality. For instance, intimate terrorism is characterized by frequent and severe aggressive attempts by the perpetrator to dominate the relationship and take complete control of his or her partner. In contrast, situational couple violence occurs as a result of escalating couple conflict and ranges from isolated incidents to chronic aggressive episodes on the part of either partner (Johnson, 2006). In the context of non-clinical community couple relationships, psychological partner aggression is typically conceptualized as situational couple violence. Psychological partner aggression consists of verbal and symbolic acts intended to cause psychological distress or fear, such as verbal attacks, insults, threats, or other loud, aggressive displays, as well as destroying a partner's property, monitoring a partner's activities, or

stonewalling (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996). Without question, this particular form of partner aggression is a serious social issue and public health problem because of its prevalence, adverse impacts, and association with physical partner aggression. Results from the General Social Survey (Burczycka, 2016) indicated that 13% of Canadian men and women had experienced some form of psychological or financial partner abuse during their lifetime. In addition, results from the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (Breiding et al., 2014) indicated that an estimated 46.5% of American men and 47.1% of American women experienced at least one act of psychological partner aggression during their lifetime. Furthermore, research studies have estimated that between 51% and 80% of North Americans were involved in at least one incident of psychological partner aggression in the previous year (Jose & O'Leary, 2009; Lafontaine, Brassard, & Lussier, 2006; Lafontaine & Lussier, 2005). In community samples, men and women generally report similar frequencies of psychological partner abuse perpetration (see Rogers & Follingstad, 2011, for a review).

These aggressive acts can have serious consequences for relationships and the partners themselves. For instance, intimate partner aggression undermines the foundation of couple relationships by jeopardizing partners' sense of security, safety, trust, and intimacy (Epstein, Werlinich, & LaTaillade, 2015). Intimate partner aggression perpetration is also associated with mental health problems, such as alcohol use (Stuart et al., 2006), illicit drug use, and depressive symptoms (Stith, Smith, Penn, Ward, & Tritt, 2004), as well as excessively dramatic, emotional, and/or erratic personality traits (Hamberger & Hastings, 1991; Murphy, Meyer, & O'Leary, 1993). The negative effects of intimate partner aggression on victims can vary depending on their intensity, frequency, and subjective experience (Kelly, 2004), as well as on pre-existing risk factors (e.g., problematic relationship schemas and response styles; Rogers & Follingstad, 2014).

Nevertheless, several studies have consistently identified a number of issues associated with psychological partner aggression victimization. For instance, female victims of psychological partner aggression endorsed reduced self-efficacy, self-esteem, problem-solving confidence, and relationship intimacy, in addition to increased symptoms of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress, and somatization (Baldry, 2003; Follingstad, 2009; Katz, Arias, & Beach, 2000; McKibbin, 1998; Orava, McLeod, & Sharpe, 1996; Sackett & Saunders, 2001). In other cases, even after controlling for physical partner aggression victimization, women's psychological partner aggression victimization was independently predictive of illegal drug use, negative health perceptions, and cognitive impairment (Straight, Harper, & Arias, 2003). Male victims have also reported higher levels of depression and anxiety (Simonelli & Ingram, 1998). Furthermore, although particularly egregious acts of physical partner aggression are undoubtedly deleterious in their own right, psychological partner aggression has been shown to have a potentially more adverse impact than physical aggression (Aguilar & Nightingale, 1994; Christian-Herman, O'Leary, & Avery-Leaf, 2001; Follingstad, Rutledge, Berg, Hause, & Polek, 1990; Lawrence, Yoon, Langer, & Ro, 2009; Sackett & Saunders, 2001). Finally, psychological partner aggression appears to be a key predictor of physical partner aggression, such that physical aggression is almost always preceded by psychological aggression (Capaldi & Crosby, 1997; Epstein et al., 2015; O'Leary, Malone, & Tyree, 1994; O'Leary, Slep, & O'Leary, 2007; White, Merrill, & Koss, 2001). Taken together, these findings have lead researchers to conceptualize psychological partner aggression as a critical form of intimate partner aggression (e.g., Langanrichsen-Rohling, 2005; O'Leary, 1999). In order to refine assessment, prevention, and intervention strategies for aggressive relationships, it is therefore essential to better understand the factors and conditions associated with psychological partner aggression.

Relationship Satisfaction and Psychological Partner Aggression

As gleaned from the literature, relationship satisfaction is one of the most frequently examined relational risk factors for intimate partner aggression (e.g., Capaldi et al., 2012; Kim, Laurent, Capaldi, & Feingold, 2008; Schumacher & Leonard, 2005; Yoon & Lawrence, 2013). In fact, the dyadic relationship perspective on intimate partner aggression identifies relational quality as a key construct of intimate partner aggression perpetration (Riggs & O’Leary, 1996). By definition, relationship satisfaction is an indicator of relational quality that focuses on how intimate partners feel about their relationship (Fincham & Beach, 2006). More specifically, it reflects perceived relationship quality and closeness, as well as the extent to which individuals are committed to and happy in their relationship (Sabourin, Valois, & Lussier, 2005). In theory, positive relationship evaluations should promote comparably positive communication behaviours towards a partner, whereas negative relationship evaluations may trigger harsher and more aggressive communication behaviours (Sotskova, Woodin, & Gou, 2015). Put differently, relationship dissatisfaction can lead to an increase in many negative communication behaviours, one of which is intimate partner aggression (Gotlib & Beach, 1995; Sabourin, 1996).

A large body of research has linked low relationship satisfaction with intimate partner aggression, with some suggesting that relationship dissatisfaction poses a significant risk for intimate partner aggression perpetration (e.g., Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2005; Lawrence & Bradbury, 2007; O’Leary et al., 2007; O’Leary, Tintle, & Bromet, 2014; Stith, Green, Smith, & Ward, 2008; Stith et al., 2004). Concerning psychological partner aggression, low relationship satisfaction has also been consistently associated with the use of this particular form of partner aggression in cross-sectional (e.g., Lafontaine et al., 2006; Taft et al., 2006), mediational (e.g., Falconier & Epstein, 2010; Fournier, Brassard, & Shaver, 2011; Sotskova et al., 2015), and

longitudinal (Kim et al., 2008; Schumacher & Leonard, 2005; Yoon & Lawrence, 2013) studies. Of note, both Schumacher and Leonard (2005) and Yoon and Lawrence (2013) found that low relationship satisfaction predicted subsequent psychological partner aggression perpetration.

Within an interdependent framework of dyadic data analysis, partner effects capture the interpersonal nature of a relationship (Cook & Snyder, 2005; Kenny & Cook, 1999). In predicting psychological partner aggression perpetration from partner characteristics, partner effects reflect risk factors for victimization to some extent. Although this perspective has been criticized by some (e.g., feminist scholars and victims' advocates; see Eckhardt, 2011, for a review), other researchers have supported intimate partner aggression as a mutual process. For instance, previous research has demonstrated that aggression in one partner is associated with a number of individual and relational variables in the other partner, including adult romantic attachment (e.g., Bartholomew & Allison, 2006; Bonache, Gonzalez-Mendez, & Krahé, 2017; Godbout, Dutton, Lussier, & Sabourin, 2009; Péroquin, Lafontaine, & Brassard, 2011), hostility (e.g., Murphy & Eckhardt, 2005), depression (e.g., Stith et al., 2004), as well as resistance and defiance (e.g., Roloff, 1996). Although little to no empirical evidence is available in regard to the potential partner effects for the study variables in question, there is one case of a negative association between women's relationship satisfaction and men's subsequent psychological partner aggression (Kim et al., 2008).

Taken together, these findings suggest that individuals' perception of the quality of their relationship plays an important role in the use of aggressive behaviours, whereby relationship dissatisfaction could predispose individuals to engage in psychologically aggressive behaviours (Sotskova et al., 2015). However, not all individuals who experience relationship dissatisfaction engage in psychological partner aggression. Thus, in an attempt to specify some of the conditions

under which psychological partner aggression might occur, it is important to identify moderators of the association between relationship satisfaction and psychological partner aggression (Byrne & Arias, 1997). Furthermore, the ways in which intimate partners manage couple conflict may be particularly relevant to this research question.

The Role of Conflict Management

Intimate partners inevitably experience some degree of conflict due to the many individual, couple, environmental, and sociocultural factors that influence their relationship (Epstein & Baucom, 2002). In the context of couple relationships, conflict management is a communication behaviour that consists of mutually working towards a solution to a disagreement (Bélanger, Marcaurelle, Lazaridès, Crevier, & Lafontaine, 2017). Positive conflict management (e.g., validation, support, and problem solving) is a key resource that communicates care and respect and therefore strengthens a relationship (Bélanger, Dulude, Sabourin, & Wright, 1993; Overall & Simpson, 2013; Simpson, 2007). On the other hand, negative conflict management (e.g., withdrawal, dominance, and criticism) can maintain and/or exacerbate relational conflicts by reducing partners' understanding of each other and potentially leaving issues unresolved (Bélanger et al., 1993; Halford, 2001).

Conflict management and psychological partner aggression. Just as psychological partner aggression can evolve out of relationship dissatisfaction, it can also arise as a function of couple conflict (Johnson, 2006). More specifically, couple conflict can escalate into intimate partner aggression if not managed properly (Marshall et al., 2011; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2011). Communication approaches to intimate partner aggression, which focus on the psychological factors that affect individual perpetrators (Bartholomew, Cobb, & Dutton, 2015), offer several theoretical explanations for the escalation of maladaptive conflict management into intimate

partner aggression. To begin with, it has been suggested that intimate partner aggression results from deficiencies in communication skills (e.g., Halford, Hahlweg, & Dunne, 1990; Holtzworth-Munroe, Smutzler, & Bates, 1997; Infante, Sabourin, Rudd, & Shannon, 1990; Lloyd, 1991; O'Donohue & Crouch, 1996; Sabourin, 1996). Though not without its critics (e.g., Burleson & Denton, 1997; Whitchurch & Pace, 1993), this skills-deficit model alleges that individuals with ineffective communication or conflict management skills resort to, or feel more adequate confronting the situation with, aggressive conflict tactics, thus intensifying the conflict (Epstein & Baucom, 2002; Feldman & Ridley, 2000; Mayer, 2000). This idea is also reflected in comprehensive models of intimate partner aggression. For instance, Dutton's (1985) application of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) nested ecological theory to intimate partner aggression identified couple conflict as a relationship-level factor associated with such aggression. In addition, Finkel's (2008) I³ theory (pronounced "I-cubed theory") identified poor communication as a relational impelling risk factor for intimate partner aggression (Slotter & Finkel, 2011).

A second explanation from communication approaches for intimate partner aggression suggests that the escalation of conflict management into aggression is incited by the instrumental goal of control (Cahn, 1996; Lloyd & Emery, 1994). Aggressive partners are likely to perceive couple conflict as a competitive battle (Eckhardt, 2011), and thus may intensify their behaviour if they are unable to get their way, are unable to achieve a desired goal, or experience conflict management difficulties (Johnson, 2006; Roloff, 1996; Sabourin, 1996). A final explanation suggests that conflict escalation is an interpersonal process fueled by negative reciprocity, whereby an individual may retaliate against negative conflict management by escalating their use of coercive behaviours (Noller & Feeney, 2002). To extrapolate Burleson and Denton's (1997) conceptualization of maladaptive communication to intimate partner aggression, the latter may

reflect the perpetrator's purposeful motivation to communicate in a way that would have an intentionally negative impact. In contrast, the use of effective conflict management behaviours could impede negative reciprocity and ultimately prevent couple conflict from escalating into intimate partner aggression.

In addition to the theoretical perspectives linking these two variables, empirical evidence supports the association between conflict management and psychological partner aggression. Some of the major correlates of intimate partner aggression perpetration (either in the form of physical aggression or a combination of physical and psychological aggression) include poor communication or problem-solving skills (Anglin & Holtzworth-Munroe, 1997; Cahn & Lloyd, 1996; Leonard & Roberts, 1998), negative reciprocity (Gottman, 1994; Sabourin, 1995; Winstok & Eisikovits, 2008), demand-withdraw interactions (Babcock, Waltz, Jacobson, & Gottman, 1993; Eldridge & Christensen, 2002), low verbal IQ (Lussier, Farrington, & Moffitt, 2009), and low positive or constructive communication (Berns, Jacobson, & Gottman, 1999; Felman & Ridley, 2000). In addition, Sabourin and Stamp (1995) showed that the communication behaviours of physically aggressive couples were qualitatively different than non-aggressive couples based on seven different communication categories. As of yet, however, psychological partner aggression has not been examined to this effect as thoroughly. Nevertheless, the few available studies (e.g., Babcock et al., 1993; Fincham & Beach, 2002; Fournier et al., 2011) support the association between ineffective conflict management and psychological partner aggression perpetration. For instance, Cornelius, Shorey, and Beebe (2010) found that negative communication behaviours (i.e., criticism, defensiveness, contempt, sarcasm, hostility, and withdrawal) predicted psychological partner aggression perpetration. Because both conflict management and relationship satisfaction have important associations with psychological partner

aggression, examining these two aspects of couple functioning in combination could specify some of the conditions under which psychological partner aggression might occur.

The interaction between relationship satisfaction and conflict management. Given the frequency with which these two variables are studied together, a large body of work has illustrated a stable and robust association between relationship satisfaction and conflict management (for reviews, see Bélanger et al., 2017; Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000; Heyman, 2001; Vangelisti, 2015). Despite some exceptions (see Overall & Simpson, 2013), positive conflict management is generally associated with relationship satisfaction, whereas negative conflict management is generally associated with relationship dissatisfaction (e.g., Bodenmann, Bradbury, & Pihet, 2009; Egeci & Gençöz, 2006; Fournier & Brassard, 2010; Gill, Christensen, & Fincham, 1999; Marchand, 2004; Rogge & Bradbury, 1999; Stanley, Markman, & Whitton, 2002). This association is so robust that, in practice, it is not uncommon for studies using communication variables as predictors to also control for the potential variance due to relationship satisfaction (e.g., Heyman, Brown, Feldbau-Kohn, & O'Leary, 1999). Notwithstanding these consistent findings, the directionality of this association remains unclear. For instance, in a recent longitudinal study that examined the association between relationship satisfaction and a combination of problem-solving and social support behaviours, Lavner, Karney, and Bradbury (2016) found comparable effects for both communication-to-satisfaction and satisfaction-to-communication associations.

As described by Lavner et al. (2016), theoretical perspectives would support either one of these two variants. First, the social learning approach to couple relationships suggests that relationship quality develops as a function of dynamic and interdependent social-exchange processes (Huston & Burgess, 1979), such that relationship satisfaction depends on the valence

of interactional behaviours. Behavioural theory further extends this assumption to include communication skill, such that relationship satisfaction depends on effectual responses to couple conflict (Koerner & Jacobson, 1994; Litzinger & Gordon, 2005). Whereas these perspectives support a communication-to-satisfaction association, the alternative that satisfaction predicts communication is supported by enduring evidence that attitudes influence behaviour (e.g., Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977). For instance, frustrated by the quality of his or her relationship, a dissatisfied partner may be unmotivated to engage in positive communication or may even desire to communicate in a way that could have a negative impact (Burleson & Denton, 1997). In the absence of a clear causal relationship between these two variables, it is likely that relationship satisfaction and conflict management are interrelated in a way that each contributes to and maintains the other. Relationship satisfaction and conflict management may therefore operate together to contribute to psychological partner aggression.

Relationship Satisfaction and Psychological Partner Aggression: Conflict Management as a Moderator

Theoretically, the dyadic relationship perspective on intimate partner aggression identifies both relational quality and relationship behaviours as central constructs of aggression perpetration (Riggs & O'Leary, 1996). In addition, Riggs and O'Leary's (1989) background-situational model of intimate partner aggression named relationship satisfaction and communication as two of the situational factors that contribute to aggressive behaviour. Despite strong theoretical support, only a handful of studies have examined relationship satisfaction, conflict management, and intimate partner aggression in an integrative manner. Earlier studies of this nature were mostly interested in the ways in which relationship satisfaction and intimate partner aggression interacted to predict various communication behaviours. In general, results of

these factorial designs suggested that when physical aggression was accompanied by relationship distress, couple interactions were characterized by negative communication processes (Noller & Roberts, 2002), demand-withdraw communication patterns (Babcock et al., 1993; Holtzworth-Munroe, Smutzler, & Stuart, 1998), negative reciprocity (Cordova, Jacobson, Gottman, Rushe, & Cox, 1993), poor problem solving (Margolin, Burman, & John, 1989), and the like. In an alternative model that more closely resembles the one used in the current study, Feldman and Ridley (2000) found that although relationship distress did not moderate the association between various communication variables and male-to-female combined physical and psychological partner aggression, aggressive relationships had more maladaptive communication patterns and behaviours compared to non-aggressive relationships.

More recently, attention has shifted from discriminating between aggressive and non-aggressive couples towards predicting intimate partner aggression within a regression framework. There has also been increased interest in predicting psychological partner aggression in particular, whether in isolation or in combination with physical partner aggression. For instance, Fournier et al. (2011) found that both the male demand/female withdraw communication pattern and relationship satisfaction mediated the association between attachment anxiety and psychological partner aggression. In addition, in a systematic review, Capaldi et al. (2012) found that low relationship satisfaction was a risk factor for combined physical and psychological partner aggression, but qualified that this was likely due to its association with couple conflict. This observation suggests that both relationship satisfaction and couple conflict, the latter of which is only detrimental to the extent that it is poorly managed (Gottman, Gottman, Greendorfer, & Wahbe, 2014), are important interrelated risk factors for intimate partner aggression. As of yet, however, this research question remains untested, which

speaks to the theoretical value of and empirical need for examining relationship satisfaction, conflict management, and psychological partner aggression as suggested in the current work.

The Current Study

In an effort to complement and extend previous findings, the present study was designed to shed more light on the factors and conditions associated with psychological partner aggression perpetration. More specifically, this study has the objective to examine the moderating role of positive and negative conflict management behaviours in the association between relationship satisfaction and men's and women's use of psychological partner aggression in the past year. It is expected that effective conflict management will buffer against the negative influence of low relationship satisfaction on psychological partner aggression. The assumption that relationship satisfaction and conflict management will interact to predict psychological partner aggression was theoretically derived from theories of couple conflict and intimate partner aggression, and empirically derived from findings offering a complex picture of how these three variables are associated, as previously discussed. More specifically, theory and evidence suggest that while both relationship satisfaction and conflict management are individually associated with psychological partner aggression, these two relationship-level variables may actually operate together to contribute to psychological partner aggression. Furthermore, with an eye towards prevention and treatment interventions, the theoretical conceptualization of conflict management as the moderator variable in this model identifies it as a malleable factor that can be directly targeted for change (Marshall et al., 2011).

This research question also espouses essential features of modern couple research. First, the utilization of a dyadic research design and dyadic data analyses acknowledges that intimate partner aggression occurs in a relational context and is inherently a dyadic process (Bartholomew

et al., 2015; Marshall et al., 2011). In addition, the current study highlights psychological partner aggression as a critical form of intimate partner aggression. Comparably fewer studies have focused on psychological partner aggression over physical aggression, even though the former is both prevalent and harmful. Psychological partner aggression is also a particularly relevant outcome variable in the study of couple conflict as an escalating interpersonal process. Furthermore, given comparable rates of psychological partner aggression in both partners (Burczycka, 2016), this study addresses both male- and female-perpetrated aggression and uses reports from both perpetrator and victim in the measure of psychological partner aggression. This study also utilizes the direct observation of conflict management behaviours, which can add depth and richness to the data (Gottman & Notarius, 2000). Finally, this is the first study to examine the ways in which conflict management behaviours moderate the negative association between relationship satisfaction and psychological partner aggression. Compared to multifaceted models of intimate partner aggression, this refined model is aimed at addressing a specific theoretical question and testing specific hypotheses (Rogge & Bradbury, 1999).

Accordingly, the current study will examine specific factors and conditions associated with psychological partner aggression. In order to do so, this study will utilize a cross-sectional correlational design based on a research device of dyadic moderation. This design is justified given that it will allow for the examination of actor and partner effects, as well as the moderating role of conflict management (Garcia, Kenny, & Ledermann, 2015). In line with the theory and evidence presented above, the following hypotheses focus on the expected actor, partner, and interaction effects. It is first hypothesized that men's and women's relationship satisfaction will be negatively associated with their own (i.e., actor effect) use of psychological partner aggression. Similarly, it is hypothesized that men's and women's relationship satisfaction will be

negatively associated with their partner's (i.e., partner effect) use of psychological partner aggression. Finally, and most importantly, it is hypothesized that conflict management will moderate the negative association between relationship satisfaction and psychological partner aggression, whereby positive conflict management compared to negative conflict management on the part of either partner will act as a buffer for low relationship satisfaction.

Method

Participants

The final sample consisted of 179 Canadian heterosexual couples ($N = 358$ individuals). Participants were recruited from a community between June 2005 and May 2009 through various social events and gatherings, advertisements, and brochures touting a large study on relationship functioning. Eligibility criteria were as follows: (a) at least 18 years of age, (b) involved in a heterosexual romantic relationship with their partner for at least 12 months, and (c) cohabiting with their partner for at least 6 months. These criteria were established in an attempt to recruit close couples in a stable relationship from the general community. Compared to clinical samples, community samples are more likely to exhibit situational couple violence, wherein ineffective handling of couple conflict can escalate into intimate partner aggression (Johnson, 2006; Marshall et al., 2011).

The mean age of male participants was 32.32 years ($SD = 11.33$) and the mean age of female participants was 29.87 years ($SD = 10.14$). On average, couples had been together for 5.98 years ($SD = 7.91$) and had been cohabiting for 4.34 years ($SD = 7.61$). Only 14.6% of couples reported having at least one child with their current partner. The majority of the sample (83.8%) self-identified as being of European descent, while 4.7% of participants self-identified as Asian, 3.1% as Black, 2% as Latino or Hispanic, 1.1% as Middle-Eastern, and 0.8% as First

Nations. A small number of participants (4.2%) self-identified as having another racial or ethnic background not listed here (i.e., Jewish, Russian, Icelandic, German, Italian, West Indian, Turkish, Filipino, Polish, or mixed descent), and one participant did not report their racial or ethnic background. In addition, the majority of the sample had reached university-level education (60.1%), followed by college- (20.4%), high school- (18.7%), and primary school-level education (0.6%); one participant did not report their education level. Finally, participants' mean annual gross income was 37,379 Canadian dollars ($SD = 24,632$).

Procedure

This study was part of a larger three-year longitudinal study that consisted of three participation time points, which were each separated by a 12-month period. Participants from the present study included only those who participated in the first time point. The procedures performed in these studies, including the present study, were approved by a Research Ethics Board at an Eastern Canadian university. Prior to participating in the study, couples were informed about the purpose of the study, the procedures, the contractual obligation to ensure confidentiality, and possible ethical issues. Consent to engage in the conflict discussion was also obtained from both partners, as this procedure was implemented to ensure that both partners felt comfortable engaging in such a discussion with each other. Participants were also provided with a consent form detailing the contact information of the researchers involved in the study and the Protocol Officer for Research in Ethics from the university. During the 2.5-hour testing session, which took place at a laboratory located on a university campus, participants first completed a questionnaire package independently in a room with divided workspaces. The questionnaire package included measures of relationship satisfaction and intimate partner aggression (see description in the Measures section), among several others. The order of questionnaires was

counterbalanced to control for the potential effect of previously administered measures, which were not part of the present study. Partners were then reunited and instructed to identify a topic of disagreement (i.e., a recurrent argument that was important in their relationship). If necessary, participants were provided with a list of potential topics of disagreement from the *Potential Problem Checklist* (Patterson, 1976), which listed 16 different topics that can be a source of conflict for some couples (e.g., financial planning, religion, sexuality, hobbies). Once partners agreed on a topic, they were asked to aim for a solution to their problem and were left alone to discuss the topic for 15 minutes. These interactions were video recorded and scored using the *Global Couple Interaction Coding System* (GCICS; Bélanger et al., 1993) described in the Measures section. As an incentive, each couple was compensated 40 Canadian dollars for their participation.

Measures

Demographic information. Using a standard sociodemographic questionnaire, participants provided personal demographic information (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity) and relationship-related information (e.g., length of relationship, length of cohabitation, marital status, number of children).

Relationship satisfaction. The *Dyadic Adjustment Scale – 4 items* (DAS-4; Sabourin et al., 2005) is a four-item self-report instrument designed to assess the relationship satisfaction of individuals involved in an intimate relationship. The DAS-4 is an abbreviated version of the *Dyadic Adjustment Scale* (DAS; Spanier, 1976), a widely used and psychometrically validated self-report measure of dyadic adjustment. The DAS-4 is comprised of four items, all of which originate from the Satisfaction subscale of the original DAS. Participants rated items one through three on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (*All the time*) to 5 (*Never*), whereas item four was

rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (*Extremely unhappy*) to 6 (*Perfect*). Items included “How often do you discuss or have you considered divorce, separation, or terminating your relationship?” and “Do you confide in your mate?” The final summed score can range from 0 to 25, with higher scores indicating greater relationship satisfaction. Sabourin et al. (2005) reported that, psychometrically, the DAS-4 has good predictive validity, temporal stability, and strength against contamination by socially desirable responding. They also reported an alpha coefficient of .91 in a random sample of French-Canadian heterosexual adult couples who had been married or cohabiting for at least six months. Subscale reliability for the current sample indicated a lower yet reliable alpha coefficient of .70.

Conflict management behaviours. The *Global Couple Interaction Coding System* (GCICS; Bélanger et al., 1993) is a macroanalytic marital coding system that measures couples’ problem-solving interactions according to both global positive and negative conflict management behaviours. Positive conflict management is measured along two dimensions: support/validation (i.e., ability to list, validate, or reinforce the partner’s statements) and problem solving (i.e., ability to recognize a problem and find appropriate solutions). Negative conflict management is measured along three dimensions: withdrawal/avoidance (i.e., tendency to avoid discussion), dominance (i.e., non-symmetrical control of the discussion), and criticism/attack (i.e., tendency to criticize, blame, or disparage the partner, including the use of nonverbal hostility, negative mind-reading, threats, and negative reciprocity). Each of the five dimensions takes into account positive and negative affective content, as well as verbal and non-verbal behaviours. As opposed to microanalytic coding systems, which use very small and detailed units of observation, this macroanalytic coding system uses a time sampling method to define its units of observation. Therefore, the total interaction sequence is divided into three segments of equal duration in order

to capture the exchange as a whole. According to Bélanger et al. (1993), the psychometric properties of the GCICS are adequate. Inter-rater agreement on all five of the system's dimensions is acceptable (significant Pearson correlation coefficients between .36 and .90) and partners' behaviours fluctuate little over time. In addition, each negative conflict management dimension is inversely associated with the positive conflict management dimensions for both men and women. No alpha coefficients for subscale reliability were provided. Criterion-related validity was established by correlating both total positive and negative conflict management scores with the external criterion of dyadic adjustment, whereby an increase in positive communication should be associated with an increase in dyadic adjustment, and an increase in negative communication should be associated with a decrease in dyadic adjustment. This hypothesis was supported in women only.

For this study, couples' 15-minute discussions were coded by two graduate students and three undergraduate students in psychology (i.e., one primary rater and four secondary raters) who received training with this instrument. A single 15-minute discussion required approximately 40 minutes to code. In order to avoid bias, for half of the cases, men's behaviours were coded first, and women's behaviours were coded first for the other half. The discussions were divided into three 5-minute segments. For each of the target behaviours (i.e., items related to support/validation, problem solving, withdrawal/avoidance, dominance, and criticism/attack), each partner was given a score on a 9-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (*Not displayed*) to 9 (*Strongly displayed*) according to the frequency, intensity, and duration of the behaviours displayed during each of the three segments. The scores for the three segments were then averaged to yield the score for that dimension. Inter-rater agreement was calculated with average measures intraclass correlation coefficients (i.e., the average rating for k judges) using the

dimension scores of a quarter of randomly selected discussions (Berk, 1979; Heyman, Lorber, Eddy, & West, 2014; McGraw & Wong, 1996). In accordance with Bland and Altman's (1986) limits of agreement, and in an attempt to improve inter-rater agreement, fixed biases between the primary rater and the secondary raters were adjusted using the mean difference. Following these adjustments, the inter-rater agreements were .74 for support/validation, .68 for problem-solving behaviours, .72 for withdrawal/avoidance, .74 for dominance, and .75 for criticism/attack, with an average of .73. These values are comparable to those obtained by Bélanger, Sabourin, and El-Baalbaki (2012) as well as Lafontaine, Bélanger, and Gagnon (2009). Although there is some variability in the interpretation of intraclass correlation coefficients (ICC), a minimum reliability coefficient of .70 is considered sufficient for a measure used for research purposes (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Bech and Clemmesen (1983) further suggest that an ICC between .41 and .60 represents moderate agreement, an ICC between .61 and .80 indicates substantial agreement, and an ICC of .81 or above signifies near-perfect agreement between coders. The average of the scores given by the primary coder and one of the secondary coders made up the final score, when applicable. Finally, the scoring strategy of averaging the respective subscale dimensions into two global conflict management variables (i.e., positive and negative conflict management) was used to reduce the complexity of the model and therefore facilitate its interpretability. Positive conflict management behaviours consisted of the support/validation and problem solving dimensions, $r = .42, p < .01$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .58$. Negative conflict management behaviours consisted of the dominance and criticism/attack dimensions, $r = .58, p < .01$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .73$. The withdrawal/avoidance dimension was excluded from this global score due to its low correlation with dominance, $r = -.03, p > .05$, and criticism, $r = .24, p < .01$, and to its detrimental impact on reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .50$).

Psychological partner aggression. The *Revised Conflict Tactics Scales* (CTS2; Straus et al., 1996) is a 78-item self-report instrument designed to assess the presence and frequency of psychological aggression, physical aggression, and sexual coercion in couples, measured on the basis of aggression perpetrated by the respondent and their partner in the past 12 months. It also includes scales measuring negotiation strategies and sustained physical injury. Participants rated how often they and their partner have used each of the behaviours in the previous 12 months using a 7-point Likert scale: 0 (*This has never happened*), 1 (*Once*), 2 (*Twice*), 3 (*3-5 times*), 4 (*6-10 times*), 5 (*11-20 times*), and 6 (*21 or more times*). The CTS2 is the most widely used measure of intimate partner aggression and has been regarded by some as the standard instrument for obtaining such data (Mohammadkhani, Forouzan, Khooshabi, Assari, & Lankarani, 2009).

The Psychological Aggression scale, used by the current study to measure psychological partner aggression, assesses verbal and symbolic acts that are intended to cause psychological pain or fear, such as verbal attacks, insults, threats, and other loud, aggressive displays. A participant's score was based on averaging the reports from both partners (e.g., the man's report of yelling at his partner and the woman's report of being yelled at by her partner). Of the available scoring options (e.g., annual prevalence, annual chronicity, annual frequency, lifetime prevalence), the scoring strategy of averaging scores across all eight aggression items using the 7-point scale was chosen to incorporate both the variety and the frequency of the aggressive acts in a balanced way and to avoid the skewed distribution that typically results from approaches that recode scores using midpoints (O'Leary et al., 2007). As such, the response categories and any aggression score ranged from 0 to 6, with higher scores indicating more severe psychological aggression used against the partner. The response category "Not in the past year,

but it happened before” was given a value of 0 to limit behaviours to those perpetrated in the last year. Preliminary psychometric characteristics (Straus et al., 1996) indicated that the Psychological Aggression scale demonstrates good construct validity and good internal consistency, with an alpha coefficient of .79. In the current sample, the respondent and partner psychological aggression scales yielded alpha coefficients of .73 and .71, respectively.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Assumptions were evaluated and preliminary analyses were conducted with SPSS version 21. Data were first evaluated for problematic missing values, normality, and outliers. An evaluation of missing data using Little’s MCAR test showed that there were no variables with more than 5% missing data and that the values were missing at random, $\chi^2(3) = 0.99, p > .05$. These missing values were therefore estimated using the Expectation Maximization (EM) method. Normality assumptions were not met across the study variables, which included positively skewed distributions for negative conflict management and psychological partner aggression and a negatively skewed distribution for relationship satisfaction. Across all four variables, six univariate outliers were identified using standardized values and four multivariate outliers were identified using a test of Mahalanobis distance. In accordance with Tabachnick and Fidell’s (2007) recommendation against data transformations, all outliers were included as legitimate cases sampled from the intended population, and non-normal distributions were addressed through alternative methods. Robust standard errors, such as those generated from Mplus’ maximum likelihood estimation, are allegedly robust against non-normality (Kline, 2015; Muthén & Muthén, 2011).

Descriptive Analyses

Annual frequency of psychological partner aggression. The scoring strategy of recoding each response category of the CTS2's Psychological Aggression scale at the midpoint was used to estimate the annual frequency of men's and women's self-reported use of psychological partner aggression. This scoring approach correlated greater than .90 with the scoring approach used for the descriptive statistics and principal analyses. In the current sample, 83.8% of men and 89.9% of women reported using at least one act of psychological aggression against their partner in the past year. On average, men reported perpetrating 14.4 acts of psychological partner aggression in the past year, whereas women reported perpetrating 19.6 acts. A paired-sample t -test indicated that this difference was statistically significant, $t(178) = -3.21, p < .01$. In regard to the psychological aggression individuals reported receiving from their partner, 85.5% of men and 87.1% of women reported sustaining at least one act of psychological aggression from their partner in the past year. On average, both men and women reported sustaining 16.3 acts of psychological partner aggression in the past year. A paired-sample t -test indicated that there was no difference in these reports, $t(178) = -0.02, p > .05$. Finally, when one's own behaviours were compared to their partner's behaviours, paired-sample t -tests indicated that men reported equal rates of psychological partner aggression perpetration on behalf of themselves ($M = 14.4$) and their partners ($M = 16.3$), $t(178) = -1.92, p > .05$. However, women reported higher rates of psychological partner aggression perpetration due to their own behaviours ($M = 19.6$) compared to their partner's ($M = 16.3$), $t(178) = 3.40, p < .01$.

Descriptive statistics. The means, standard deviations, and Pearson correlation coefficients for all study variables can be found in Table 2.1, presented separately for men and women in order to represent the nonindependence of the data. Means and standard deviations

appeared plausible. There were a number of significant correlations between the study variables, all of which were in the expected direction. Of note, for both men and women, their own relationship satisfaction was negatively associated with their own and each other's psychological partner aggression. In addition, for both men and women, their own positive conflict management was negatively associated with their own and each other's psychological partner aggression, whereas there was a positive association for their negative conflict management. In support of the nonindependence of the dyad members through voluntary linkage, male and female psychological partner aggression were positively associated. The few non-significant correlations were as follows: male relationship satisfaction and female negative conflict management, male positive conflict management and female negative conflict management, as well as female relationship satisfaction and male positive and negative conflict management.

Dyad members could be clearly distinguished from one another by gender, which is a theoretically defensible defining characteristic of heterosexual couple relationships (Fitzpatrick, Gareau, Lafontaine, & Gaudreau, 2016). On account of this, four separate one-way between subjects analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted to compare the effects of gender on relationship satisfaction, positive and negative conflict management, and psychological partner aggression. There was only one significant effect of gender on negative conflict management, $F(1, 356) = 4.02, p < .05, d = 0.25$. Otherwise, there were no significant effects of gender on relationship satisfaction, $F(1, 356) = 0.20, p > .05$, positive conflict management, $F(1, 356) = .88, p > .05$, or psychological partner aggression, $F(1, 356) = 2.69, p > .05$.

Principal Analyses

The main analytic strategy consisted of an actor-partner interdependence moderation model (APIMoM; Garcia et al., 2015) using structural equation modeling (SEM) to examine the

hypothesized actor, partner, and moderation effects. SEM is the method of choice for analyzing the actor-partner interdependence model with distinguishable dyads due in part to its ability to treat the dyad as the unit of analysis (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006; Kenny & Ledermann, 2010), which is essential given that it is particularly important to take into account this mutual influence when conducting couple research (Kenny & Cook, 1999). Significant moderation effects were then plotted and examined by simple slopes analyses, the latter of which used the range of the individual predictor variables from one standard deviation below and above the mean (Aiken & West, 1991).

As previously mentioned, the hypothesized model consists of two independent variables (i.e., both men's and women's relationship satisfaction) and eight interaction variables based on the product of each partner's relationship satisfaction and their positive and negative conflict management behaviours. Men's and women's psychological partner aggression perpetration were the two dependent variables. When the interaction terms were included in the model, the moderator variables of men's and women's positive and negative conflict management were kept in the model as predictors as well (Hayes, 2013). In addition, covariances were specified between all of the independent variables, and correlations were specified between all disturbances to allow for the nonindependence in the data (Kenny et al., 2006). Finally, the independent variables were centered around the grand mean across both men and women to reduce multicollinearity and increase the interpretability of the effects (Cook & Kenny, 2005; Kenny et al., 2006).

The hypothesized model was estimated using the maximum-likelihood method with robust standard errors (MLR) available in Mplus version 6.12 (Muthén & Muthén, 2011). As a first step, only the actor and partner effects (i.e., the main effects) of relationship satisfaction

were included in the model (Cook & Kenny, 2005). The unstandardized regression coefficients and their respective test statistics for this model are presented in the first two rows of Table 2.2. Consistent with the correlations in Table 2.1, there were two clear actor effects: Men's relationship satisfaction was negatively associated with their own psychological partner aggression, $b = -0.05$, $\beta = -0.22$, $p < .05$, and women's relationship satisfaction was negatively associated with their own psychological partner aggression, $b = -0.07$, $\beta = -0.28$, $p < .001$. There were also two clear partner effects: Men's relationship satisfaction was negatively associated with their partner's psychological partner aggression, $b = -0.06$, $\beta = -0.19$, $p < .05$, and women's relationship satisfaction was negatively associated with their partner's psychological partner aggression, $b = -0.05$, $\beta = -0.22$, $p < .05$.

As a second step, the potential moderator variables (i.e., positive and negative conflict management) were included in the model along with relationship satisfaction in order to assess the association between conflict management and psychological partner aggression. The unstandardized regression coefficients and their respective test statistics for this model are presented in Table 2.2. To begin with, one of the actor effects and the two partner effects identified in the first step remained significant; however, the negative association between men's relationship satisfaction and their own psychological partner aggression was no longer significant, $b = -0.03$, $\beta = -0.13$, $p > .05$. Second, there were three additional actor effects found in regard to conflict management. Men's negative conflict management was positively associated with their own psychological partner aggression, $b = 0.25$, $\beta = 0.25$, $p < .05$. In addition, women's positive conflict management was negatively associated with their own psychological partner aggression, $b = -0.34$, $\beta = -0.25$, $p < .05$, whereas women's negative conflict management was positively associated with their own psychological partner aggression, $b = 0.20$, $\beta = 0.23$, p

$< .05$. There was also one additional partner effect, which indicated that women's positive conflict management was negatively associated with their partner's psychological partner aggression, $b = -0.23$, $\beta = -0.19$, $p < .05$. There were no other significant actor or partner effects.

The interaction effects found in an APIMoM can be categorized into four effect types: an actor by actor moderator interaction, a partner by actor moderator interaction, an actor by partner moderator interaction, and a partner by partner moderator interaction (Garcia et al., 2015). The large number of predictor variables in the hypothesized model of the current study yields a possibility of four of each interaction effect type for a total of 16 interaction effects, the interpretation of which can be quite complicated. One common strategy in actor-partner moderation consists of using only the actor's score on the mixed moderator (Garcia et al., 2015). In this case, a model-building strategy was implemented in order to progressively include interaction terms that are best guided by theory and face validity (Garson, 2015). As the next step, the first interaction terms entered in the model consisted of the four actor by actor moderator interactions (i.e., actor effects moderated by one's own moderator variables). These interaction terms were not significant and did not produce meaningful effect sizes ($\beta < 0.05$).

The second group of interaction terms entered in the model consisted of the four partner by actor moderator interactions (i.e., partner effects moderated by one's own moderator variables). This time, there was a significant interaction effect, whereby men's negative conflict management moderated the association between women's relationship satisfaction and men's psychological partner aggression, $b = -0.04$, $\beta = -0.12$, $p < .05$. The other interaction terms were not significant and did not produce meaningful effect sizes ($\beta < 0.05$). The next group of interaction terms entered in the model consisted of the four actor by partner moderator interactions (i.e., actor effects moderated by one's partner's moderator variables). While the

partner by actor moderator interaction effect identified in the previous step changed from significant to marginally significant, $b = -0.04$, $\beta = -0.12$, $p = .08$, the other interaction terms were not significant and produced trivial effect sizes ($\beta < 0.10$). The final group of interaction terms entered in the model consisted of the four partner by partner moderator interactions (i.e., partner effects moderated by one's partner's moderator variables). In this saturated model, no interaction terms were associated with psychological partner aggression and they generally produced trivial effect sizes ($\beta < 0.10$).

Finally, a model-trimming strategy was implemented based on theory, non-significant structural paths, and meaningless effect sizes (Garson, 2015; Wuensch, 2016). As a result, six of the 16 interaction terms were trimmed, four of which predicted women's psychological partner aggression and two of which predicted men's psychological partner aggression. The unstandardized regression coefficients and their respective test statistics for this final model are presented in Table 2.2, and its accompanying path diagram is shown in Figure 2.1. Several fit indexes showed good model fit: $\chi^2(6) = 0.65$, $p > .05$; CFI = 1; RMSEA = 0; SRMR = .004. As expected from the model-building step, there was one significant interaction effect, whereby men's negative conflict management moderated the association between women's relationship satisfaction and men's psychological partner aggression, $b = -0.05$, $\beta = -0.13$, $p < .05$, the form of which is depicted in Figure 2.2. The simple slope test for men's high negative conflict management was significant, $b = -0.09$, $t = -4.28$, $p < .001$: When men engaged in high rates of negative conflict management, a decline in women's relationship satisfaction was associated with more psychological partner aggression in men. The simple slope test for men's low negative conflict management was not significant, $b = -0.02$, $t = -0.86$, $p > .05$. The predictor variables

included in the final model accounted for 33.8% of the variance in men's psychological partner aggression and 35.7% of the variance in women's psychological partner aggression.

Discussion

Given the prevalence and adverse impacts of psychological partner aggression, it is essential to better understand the factors and conditions associated with such acts. Among the numerous factors associated with psychological partner aggression, there is strong theoretical and empirical evidence that relationship satisfaction and conflict management are particularly relevant predictors. However, few studies have examined these three variables in a manner befitting the hypothesis-testing of a specific theoretical question. As such, the objective of the current study was to examine the potential moderating role of positive and negative conflict management behaviours in the negative association between relationship satisfaction and men's and women's use of psychological partner aggression in the past year. This research question was theoretically derived from dyadic relationship perspectives and communication approaches to intimate partner aggression, and empirically derived from findings on the three study variables, as previously discussed. In addition, this research question was formulated in response to the clear need for identifying the relational conditions under which psychological partner aggression may occur.

To begin with, the current study corroborates previous research on the frequency of men's and women's psychological partner aggression perpetration. The high prevalence of psychological partner aggression reported by both men and women is comparable to that of other community sample studies (e.g., Jose & O'Leary, 2009; Taft et al., 2006), suggesting that this particular form of partner aggression is relatively common. In addition, results from the current study indicate that both men and women use psychological partner aggression, replicating

previous research that identified both genders as potential perpetrators (e.g., Cordova et al., 1993; Stets, 1991; Taft et al., 2006). In a similar vein, there is a strong association between male and female psychological partner aggression perpetration, supporting previous observations of a certain degree of reciprocity of aggression in couples (e.g., Follingstad & Rogers, 2013). The finding that women reported perpetrating more aggressive acts than men also reflects meta-analytic findings that women use more psychological partner aggression than men, regardless of its degree of intensity (Stockdale, Tackett, & Coyne, 2013). This finding may also echo the result that women were rated as engaging in more negative conflict management behaviours than men. Finally, although a previous study indicated that both men and women reported higher rates of psychological partner aggression due to their partner's actions compared with their own actions (Rogers & Follingstad, 2011), this pattern was not observed in the current sample. While men reported comparable rates of aggression on behalf of themselves and their partners, women reported higher rates of aggression due to their own behaviours compared to their partner's.

The descriptive statistics of the current study also corroborate previous observations that negative conflict management and psychological partner aggression are related yet qualitatively distinct communicative processes (Cornelius et al., 2010; Ro & Lawrence, 2007). Pearson correlation coefficients for both men and women suggest a low to moderate positive association between these two variables, which are comparable to Ro and Lawrence's (2007) correlation coefficients for the CTS2's Psychological Aggression scale and their communication measures. Despite this low to moderate construct overlap, psychological partner aggression as a whole spans a continuum of increasingly intense and forceful behaviours that reflect the perpetrator's intent to humiliate and control one's partner—the cornerstone of aggressive partner behaviour

(Jory, 2004) that is absent from negative conflict management. The data from the current study therefore suggest that they are indeed separate communicative processes.

The current study also advances the literature in several important ways. First, in predicting psychological partner aggression, it would appear that both relationship satisfaction and conflict management made unique contributions rather than operating together as hypothesized. When the effects of relationship satisfaction and conflict management were independently yet concurrently estimated, several significant actor and partner effects were identified. The actor effects support what is already known about the negative association between relationship satisfaction and psychological partner aggression (e.g., Kim et al., 2008; Schumacher & Leonard, 2005; Yoon & Lawrence, 2013), as well as the negative association between effective conflict management and psychological partner aggression (e.g., Babcock et al., 1993; Cornelius et al., 2010; Fournier et al., 2011). Consistent with our hypotheses, men's psychological partner aggression perpetration was positively associated with their own negative conflict management behaviours. In contrast, women's psychological partner aggression perpetration was positively associated with their own negative conflict management, but also negatively associated with their own relationship satisfaction and their own positive conflict management. These findings suggest that psychological partner aggression is susceptible to intrapersonal (i.e., actor) effects.

A number of significant partner effects also capture the interpersonal nature of a relationship (Cook & Snyder, 2005; Kenny & Cook, 1999). As hypothesized, women's relationship satisfaction and positive conflict management behaviours predicted less use of psychological partner aggression in their male partners. Similarly, men's relationship satisfaction predicted less use of psychological partner aggression in their female partners. These findings

extend previous individualistic research to this effect by providing essential information about some of the interpersonal processes that affect psychological partner aggression perpetration. This is particularly salient in the case of men's psychological partner aggression, whereby an increase in these acts was predicted by their own negative conflict management, but a decrease in these acts was predicted by their partner's relationship satisfaction and positive conflict management. In contrast, it would appear that women's own characteristics were particularly relevant to their own use of psychological partner aggression, with only one partner effect predicting a decrease in these acts by their partner's relationship satisfaction. Despite these gender differences, findings for both men and women corroborate the tenets of intimate partner aggression as an escalating interpersonal process (Noller & Feeney, 2002): Positive self and partner characteristics (i.e., relationship satisfaction and positive conflict management) are conducive to non-aggressive communication, whereas negative self characteristics (i.e., negative conflict management) are conducive to aggressive communication. Of note, although men's and women's negative conflict management was positively associated with their own psychological partner aggression, such behaviours were not associated with their partner's aggressive acts. Rather, the identified partner effects were more telling of decreases, as opposed to increases, in psychological partner aggression. Instead of relationship dissatisfaction and negative conflict management predicting victimization, the current study showed that relationship satisfaction and positive conflict management served as protective factors.

These direct effects were more effective in predicting psychological partner aggression perpetration than the interaction between relationship satisfaction and conflict management. Despite theory and research suggesting that these two variables operate together to predict psychological partner aggression, the results of the current study provide limited evidence in

support this hypothesis. Of the 16 estimated interaction effects, only one of them was significant. More specifically, the effect of women's relationship satisfaction on men's use of psychological partner aggression (i.e., men's partner effect) depended on men's use of negative conflict management (i.e., dominance and criticism/attack behaviours). That is, when men engaged in high levels of negative conflict management, decreasing levels of women's relationship satisfaction were associated with more psychological partner aggression in men. Alternatively, when men engaged in low levels of negative conflict management, women's relationship satisfaction failed to contribute to men's use of psychological partner aggression. Consistent with our hypotheses, it would appear that men's effective conflict management (i.e., low negative conflict management) buffers the effect of women's low relationship satisfaction on men's psychological partner aggression. As such, women's relationship satisfaction does not always negatively contribute to men's psychological partner aggression perpetration. In the current sample, in order to impact men's use of psychological partner aggression, women's low relationship satisfaction must be coupled with high levels of men's negative conflict management behaviour.

This finding further nuances the partner effect of women's relationship satisfaction on men's psychological partner aggression described previously. Although women's low relationship satisfaction is directly associated with an increased risk for psychological aggression victimization, it may not assure it and may actually depend on certain relational conditions. Both women's relationship satisfaction and men's negative conflict management provide contextual information for the conditions under which men may use psychological partner aggression. The form of this particular interaction reflects several elements of couple conflict and its potential for escalation into aggression. To begin with, prominent models of intimate partner aggression

suggest that aggressive behaviours are used to exert power and control over a partner (Eckhardt, 2011; Epstein & Baucom, 2002; Malik & Lindahl, 1998). For instance, social role theory posits that, through differential distribution, men tend to occupy higher status roles than women (Eagly, Wood, & Diekmann, 2000). This power differential is then reflected in the structure of couple conflict and what each partner hopes to accomplish. As a result, women consistently desire more change from their partner than men (Ball, Cowan, & Cowan, 1995; Doss, Simpson, & Christensen, 2004; Heyman, Hunt-Martorano, Malik, & Slep, 2009; Margolin, Talovic, & Weinstein, 1983) and start the majority of all couple conflict discussions (Gottman & Notarius, 2002). Put differently, women are motivated to press for change, particularly when they are dissatisfied with their relationship (Heyman et al., 2009; Margolin et al., 1983), whereas men are motivated to resist women's request for change and maintain the status quo in order to maintain their better position (Jacobson, 1990; Noller, 1993; Vogel, Wester, & Heesacker, 1999). Therefore, many couple conflicts are essentially a power struggle, as the most powerful partner ultimately exerts the most influence (Gottman & Notarius, 2002; Noller & Feeney, 2002). Men, who find themselves in a highly desirable position, may be particularly susceptible to using any means necessary to "win" an argument. As such, if men are unable to get what they want through non-coercive means (i.e., negative conflict management behaviours), they may resort to more aggressive behaviours (Lloyd, 1996; Stets, 1990). In fact, male dominance (Rogers, Castleton, & Lloyd, 1996) and demand (Babcock et al., 1993) behaviours are particularly important in the use or non-use of aggression. The results of the current study suggest that men who can effectively manage couple conflict may be able to curtail an argument associated with women's dissatisfaction rather than resorting to aggressive behaviour.

Unfortunately, there was no additional evidence that conflict management behaviours moderated the effects of relationship satisfaction on psychological partner aggression, despite the fact that both positive and negative conflict management were directly associated with psychological partner aggression. In the other cases, the forms of the interactions were broadly consistent with our hypotheses, but they were not statistically significant. That is, for the most part, the association between relationship satisfaction and psychological partner aggression was statistically equivalent across differing levels of conflict management. This finding is consistent with that of Feldman and Ridley (2000), who showed that relationship distress did not moderate the association between several communication variables and physical partner aggression. Together, these findings may indicate that relationship satisfaction and conflict management do not operate together to predict psychological partner aggression. However, they may also reflect the exceedingly complex interplay between these two variables. The association between relationship satisfaction and conflict management is plagued by inconsistent findings. For instance, in some cases, negative conflict management was found to be negatively associated with relationship satisfaction (e.g., Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Rogge & Bradbury, 1999), while in others it was found to be positively associated (e.g., Gottman & Krokoff, 1989; McNulty & Russell, 2010; Overall & Simpson, 2013). In some cases, relationship satisfaction predicted subsequent conflict management, and in others conflict management predicted subsequent relationship satisfaction (Lavner et al., 2016). The inconsistency of these findings may suggest that the association between relationship satisfaction and conflict management is moderated by other factors (Baron & Kenny, 1986), thus convoluting the ways in which they interact to predict relational outcomes. For instance, affective models would suggest that emotional expression

(e.g., Johnson et al., 2005) plays a moderating role, whereas cognitive models would stress the importance of attributional processes (e.g., Bradbury & Fincham, 1990).

Despite the sparsity of interaction effects, the presence of significant partner effects coupled with the one significant interaction effect refines our understanding of the interdependent nature of intimate partner aggression. Although each partner must undoubtedly be held accountable for their own actions and behaviour (Eckhardt, 2011; Heyman et al., 1999), it is clear that intimate partner aggression occurs within a relational context (Bartholomew et al., 2015). Results such as these speak to the need to study interpersonal processes within the dyad and to use couple-based methodologies to better understand psychological partner aggression perpetration (Kim et al., 2008; Marshall et al., 2011). Intimate partner aggression emerges in particular relational contexts that can involve reciprocated and escalating interpersonal processes (Bartholomew et al., 2015; Eckhardt, 2011). For example, evidence from the current study that one partner's relationship satisfaction and positive conflict management behaviours can mitigate the other partner's use of psychological partner aggression draws attention to the power of positively valued variables in couple relationships, and therefore enriches models of conflict management and relationship functioning.

From a clinical standpoint, the present study informs therapeutic approaches to couple conflict. For instance, given that relationship satisfaction and conflict management have been identified here and elsewhere as significant correlates of psychological partner aggression, these relational variables are important targets of prevention and intervention (Capaldi et al., 2012). A number of therapeutic approaches (e.g., cognitive-behavioural couple therapy, emotionally focused couple therapy) target relationship satisfaction and effective conflict management behaviours and therefore, according to the current findings, reduce the likelihood and/or

occurrence of psychological partner aggression. For instance, with an eye towards improving relationship satisfaction and conflict management, cognitive-behavioural couple therapy emphasizes beliefs and behavioural patterns as mechanisms of change (Epstein & Baucom, 2002), whereas emotionally focused couple therapy emphasizes attachment security (Johnson, 2004). Furthermore, Stockdale et al. (2013) suggest that psychological partner aggression in particular could be intentionally incorporated into established interventions dealing with positive and negative couple communication patterns. There is empirical evidence that interventions emphasizing effective conflict management and other relationship skills are as effective at preventing intimate partner aggression as other intervention programs (Murphy & Eckhardt, 2005). For more information about couple therapy for intimate partner aggression, see Epstein et al. (2015).

Limitations and Future Directions

Despite the numerous theoretical and methodological strengths of this study, some limitations should be considered when interpreting the results. First, although the direct and interactional associations identified herein are theoretically sound, the correlational and cross-sectional design of the current study precludes causal inferences. In other words, the directionality of these associations remains unclear because a robust causal relationship between the study variables has not yet been established. While it is not possible to know whether relationship dissatisfaction, for example, precedes or follows intimate partner aggression, most research finds an association in the expected direction (Stith et al., 2008). Addressing this research question with a longitudinal and/or prospective design would provide valuable insight into the nature of these associations. Second, the possibility remains that confounding factors (e.g., relationship length, emotional content of the discussion topic) could have been at play,

given that they were not taken into account. Future research could examine these effects while controlling for such variables. In addition, a proper measure of withdrawal, which is conceptually different than the approach-oriented conflict management behaviours of dominance and criticism/attack, would further nuance the use of maladaptive conflict management behaviours. Furthermore, although the sample size of the current study respects the minimum recommendation of 80 to 100 couples for an actor-partner interdependence model using SEM analyses (Ledermann & Kenny, 2017), the large number of interaction terms likely requires more statistical power. While a larger sample size may yield a greater number of effects (i.e., potential Type II error), the current sample size suggests that the effects identified herein are robust (i.e., no Type I error).

Another limitation stems from the characteristics of the current sample, which is relatively homogenous in its racial or ethnic background (i.e., predominantly of European decent) and level of education (i.e., predominantly post-secondary education). As the present sample was solely comprised of heterosexual community-based couples, there is an opportunity for future studies to test the replicability of these findings with different populations to determine whether they can be generalized to a diversity of couple types (e.g., lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer identified couples), clinical couples, or couples of various cultural backgrounds. In fact, several researchers have identified a pressing need to examine the cultural context of intimate partner aggression (e.g., Bartholomew et al., 2015). Cross-cultural studies have indicated that psychological partner aggression is an issue faced by a wide variety of intimate couples (Stockdale et al., 2013), and that some populations, such as members of a minority group, are particularly vulnerable to intimate partner aggression (Capaldi et al., 2012). Because culture is essential to one's view of the self, others, and relationships, the definition and

experience of psychological partner aggression must be considered within this context (Bond, 2004; Kelly, 2004).

Although little is currently known about the interactional processes involved in intimate partner aggression (Bartholomew et al., 2015), there is a general consensus that such behaviours are multidetermined (Feldman & Ridley, 2000). So although the results of the current study demonstrate that relationship satisfaction and conflict management independently predict psychological partner aggression, it is unlikely that either of these variables operates in isolation. Therefore, it would not be without warrant that further exploration in this particular trajectory be conducted. Other factors that may weaken the association between relationship dissatisfaction and psychological partner aggression perpetration may include adult romantic attachment security (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2013), commitment (Finkel & Eckhardt, 2013), dyadic coping (Bélanger et al., 2012; Bodenmann, Meuwly, Bradbury, Gmelch, & Ledermann, 2010), responsibility attributions (Byrne & Arias, 1997), or positive affect (Gottman, 1993; Gottman, Driver, & Tabares, 2002). In addition, the three study variables (i.e., relationship satisfaction, conflict management, and psychological partner aggression) have also been conceptualized by others within a mediation model rather than a moderation model. For instance, Eckhardt (2011) suggested that ineffective conflict management leads to relationship dissatisfaction, which then leads to intimate partner aggression. Clearly, intimate partner aggression is a complex interpersonal process that depends on a large number of variables.

Conclusion

Given its harmful nature, much effort has been dedicated to elucidating the factors and conditions associated with psychological partner aggression. Bolstered by strong theoretical and empirical foundations, as well as a vigorous research method, this is the first study to examine

whether conflict management behaviours moderate the negative association between relationship satisfaction and psychological partner aggression perpetration. Although there is some preliminary evidence that men's effective conflict management buffers the effect of women's low relationship satisfaction on men's psychological partner aggression, it appears that, in the current sample, relationship satisfaction and conflict management may be independent predictors of such acts. This interaction effect and the presence of several partner effects also provide additional support for the perspective that intimate partner aggression occurs in a relational context (Bartholomew et al., 2015). As such, dyadic perspectives on assessment, prevention, and intervention strategies may provide a more comprehensive understanding of intimate partner aggression.

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Table 2.1

Summary of Intercorrelations, Means, and Standard Deviations for Scores on Relationship Satisfaction, Conflict Management, and Psychological Partner Aggression Perpetration

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Male relationship satisfaction	-							
2. Male positive conflict management	.27**	-						
3. Male negative conflict management	-.21**	-.31**	-					
4. Male psychological partner aggression	-.33**	-.27**	.38**	-				
5. Female relationship satisfaction	.50**	.14	-.05	-.33**	-			
6. Female positive conflict management	.20**	.57**	-.29**	-.35**	.16*	-		
7. Female negative conflict management	-.07	-.14	.43**	.29**	-.18*	-.29**	-	
8. Female psychological partner aggression	-.34**	-.22**	.30**	.84**	-.38**	-.38**	.39**	-
<i>M</i>	16.85	1.60	0.92	0.89	16.97	1.68	1.08	1.02
<i>SD</i>	2.55	0.53	0.68	0.66	2.89	0.54	0.84	0.74

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

Table 2.2

Actor, Partner, and Interaction Effects of Study Variables

APIM parameters	Male psychological partner aggression			Female psychological partner aggression		
	<i>b</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>p</i>
Step 1: Actor and partner effects						
Male relationship satisfaction	-0.06	-2.51	.01	-0.06	-2.28	.02
Female relationship satisfaction	-0.05	-2.86	.004	-0.07	-3.89	.00
Step 2: Additional actor and partner effects						
Male relationship satisfaction	-.03	-1.72	.09	-0.04	-1.99	.047
Male positive conflict management	-0.01	-0.09	.93	0.09	0.83	.41
Male negative conflict management	0.25	3.09	.002	0.12	1.59	.11
Female relationship satisfaction	-0.05	-2.99	.003	-0.06	-3.50	.00
Female positive conflict management	-0.23	-2.25	.02	-0.34	-2.95	.003
Female negative conflict management	0.06	1.07	.28	0.20	3.19	.001
Final model: Interaction effects						
Male relationship satisfaction X Male positive conflict management	-	-	-	-	-	-
Male relationship satisfaction X Male negative conflict management	-0.03	-1.12	.26	-0.03	-1.37	.17
Male relationship satisfaction X Female positive conflict management	0.05	1.32	.19	0.05	1.11	.27
Male relationship satisfaction X Female negative conflict management	0.04	1.37	.17	0.03	0.78	.43

Female relationship satisfaction X Female positive conflict management	-0.03	-1.15	.25	-	-	-
Female relationship satisfaction X Female negative conflict management	-	-	-	-0.01	-0.64	.52
Female relationship satisfaction X Male positive conflict management	0.02	0.97	.33	-	-	-
Female relationship satisfaction X Male negative conflict management	-0.05	-2.15	.03	-	-	-

Note. Significant *p* values are italicized for quick reference. Trimmed paths are identified by a dash.

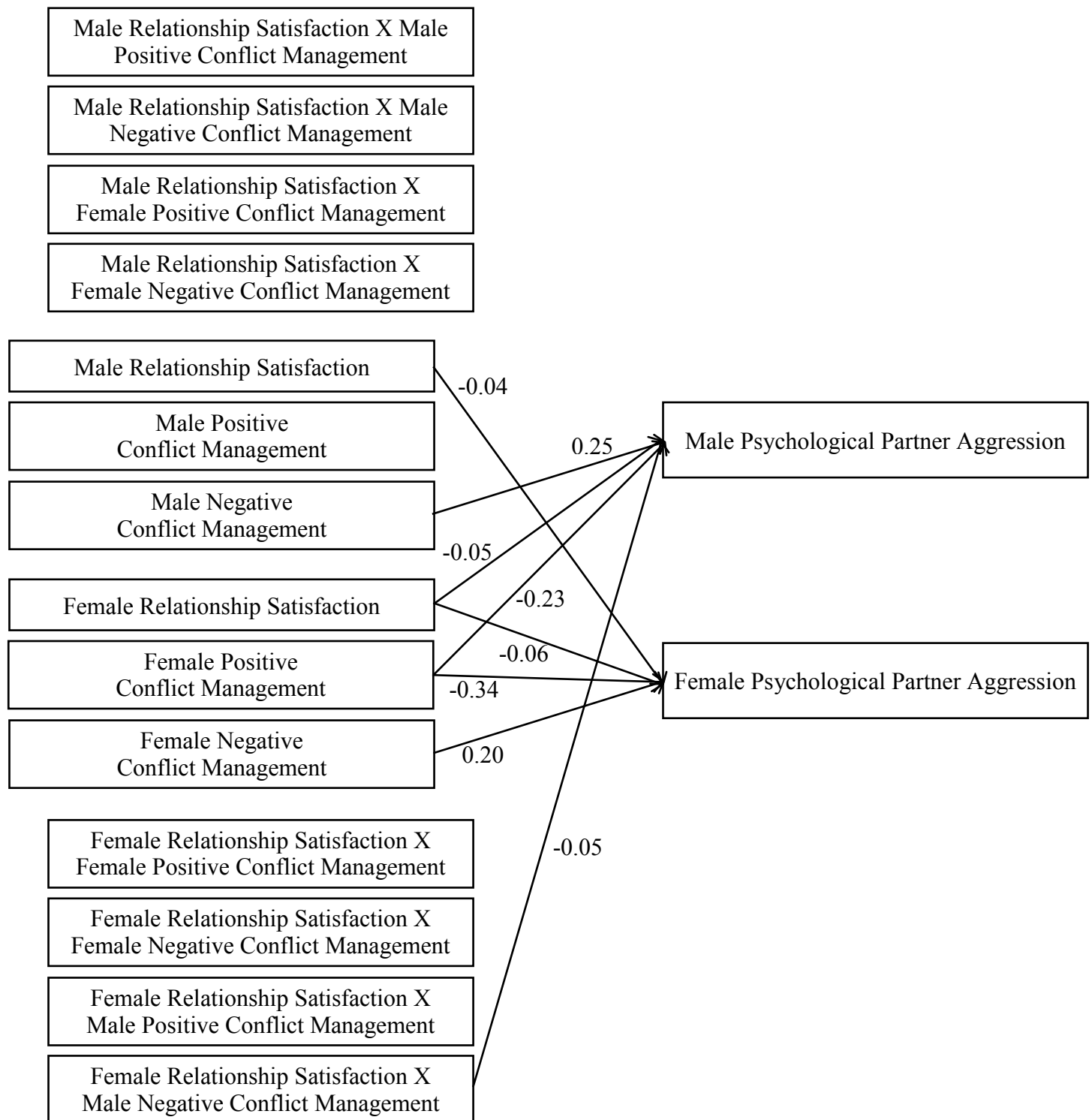


Figure 2.1. Structural equation model of the final actor-partner interdependence moderation model. Along with unstandardized estimates, statistically significant effects are represented by a solid line. For clarity's sake, the covariances specified between all of the independent variables and the correlations specified between all of the disturbances are not illustrated.

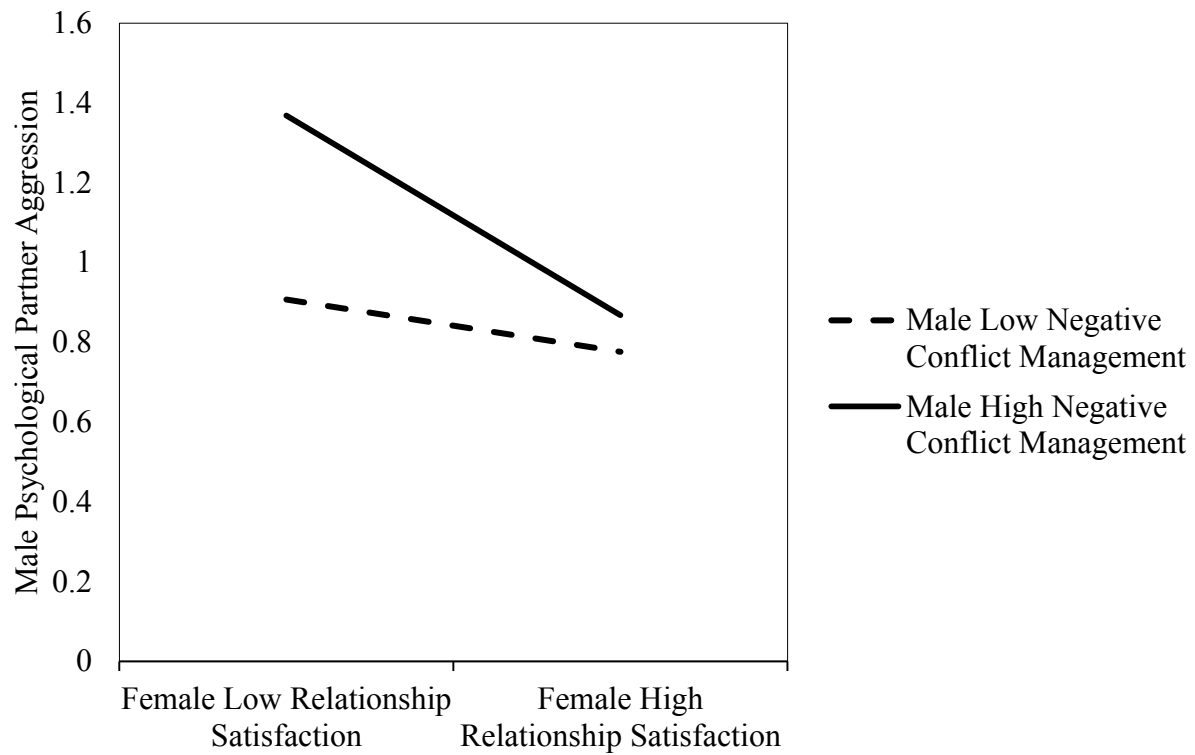


Figure 2.2. Moderating effect of male negative conflict management on the association between female relationship satisfaction and male psychological partner aggression. Regression lines are plotted for participants scoring one standard deviation below and above the centered mean of female relationship satisfaction and male negative conflict management.

General Discussion

General Discussion

Summary of Objectives, Key Findings, and Strengths

The overarching goal of the present thesis was to further advance the field's understanding of conflict management as an interpersonal process in heterosexual couple relationships. Because healthy couple relationships are an important component of individuals' well-being, couple researchers are particularly interested in how couples manage inevitable disagreements. Both studies of the thesis were therefore grounded in the objective of investigating the course of couple conflict by elucidating the factors associated with effective conflict management and the conditions associated with conflict escalation. This research question is of great theoretical, empirical, and practical importance given its emphasis on improving couple relationship functioning.

How partners manage disagreements can be influenced by many factors, a crucial one of which is adult romantic attachment. The first study therefore examined the ways in which partners' adult romantic attachment orientations interact to predict their conflict management behaviours. The results provide preliminary evidence that, in some cases, men's and women's conflict management depends on the interaction between their own and their partner's adult romantic attachment orientation, more so than a sole individual's attachment. More specifically, pairings consisting of men high in attachment avoidance and women low in attachment anxiety, as well as pairings consisting of men and women high in attachment avoidance, predicted increases in men's negative conflict management behaviours. In contrast, pairings consisting of women high in attachment avoidance and men high in attachment anxiety predicted decreases in women's positive conflict management behaviours. By grouping attachment pairings on the basis of attachment insecurity and gender, this study provides a contemporary interdependent

framework through which to view conflict management. This framework is mounted upon a number of methodological strengths, including the observational coding of positive and negative conflict management behaviours and the implementation of sophisticated dyadic data analyses.

In some cases, couple conflict can escalate into intimate partner aggression. Given its prevalence and harmful effects, it is essential to better understand the factors and conditions associated with psychological partner aggression perpetration. The second study therefore examined whether effective conflict management moderates the negative association between relationship satisfaction and men's and women's use of psychological partner aggression in the past year. In terms of descriptive statistics, the results support previous findings that both men and women engage in a fair amount of psychological partner aggression and that women perpetrate more of these acts than men, despite men's perception that both genders engage in comparable rates of aggression. The results also suggest that, in predicting psychological partner aggression perpetration, relationship satisfaction and conflict management make independent contributions rather than, as hypothesized, operating together. There is also preliminary evidence that, in regard to interaction effects, men who can effectively manage couple conflict may be able to curtail an argument when their partner is dissatisfied rather than resorting to psychological partner aggression. This study's attempt to further nuance the direct dyadic links between relationship satisfaction and psychological partner aggression is an especially elegant way of integrating the literature and moving towards a comprehensive understanding of this particularly egregious communicative process. Like the first study, this second study also features a number of methodological strengths, including the observational coding of positive and negative conflict management behaviours, the implementation of sophisticated dyadic data analyses, and the use of both partners' responses in the computation of their aggression scores.

Collective Implications across Studies

Overall, the studies of the present thesis have a number of theoretical, empirical, and clinical implications for the field of couple conflict. To begin with, both studies made significant contributions to the literature in terms of their novelty and focus on specific gaps within and across the study variables. For instance, the first study was developed in response to a clear need for work examining the interplay between both partners' attachment orientations in general (e.g., Overall & Simpson, 2013; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2006), as well as a more specific focus on dyadic perspectives on attachment and couple conflict that also considers the context of gender (e.g., Pietromonaco, Greenwood, & Barrett, 2004). This was therefore the first study to examine the ways in which men's and women's adult romantic attachment orientations interact to predict observed positive and negative conflict management behaviours in couples. As such, the results of this study extend the literature by showcasing the importance of both partners' adult romantic attachment for conflict management, as well as by distinguishing between the different dimensions of men's and women's attachment insecurity. Similarly, the second study was developed in response to a clear need to intentionally examine relationship satisfaction, conflict management, and psychological partner aggression within the context of escalating couple conflict. This was therefore the first study to examine the ways in which conflict management behaviours moderate the negative association between relationship satisfaction and psychological partner aggression perpetration. As such, the results of this study extend the literature by showing that relationship satisfaction and conflict management are independent rather than interrelated predictors of psychological partner aggression.

Furthermore, both studies provide invaluable evidence in support of the interdependent nature of couple relationships (Kelley, 1983). With the first study showing that conflict

management varies as a function of adult romantic attachment pairings, the second shows that psychological partner aggression is particularly susceptible to interpersonal effects. It is therefore clear that couple conflict occurs in a relational context that is best understood at the dyadic level. In fact, it is only natural that intimate partners involved in recurring behavioural patterns, such as couple conflict, would be connected by mutual influence (Arriaga, 2013; Epstein & Baucom, 2002). By responding to a clear need to adopt a dyadic perspective on relationship processes (Simpson & Campbell, 2013), the findings of the current thesis contribute to the growing body of work showing that intimate partners do indeed influence each other in meaningful ways. At the same time, these findings underscore the continuing need for and necessity of measuring and modeling the interdependencies between intimate partners (Simpson & Campbell, 2013).

In amalgamating the findings across both studies, a complex picture of couple conflict emerges. It appears that the use of psychological partner aggression depends on relationship satisfaction and conflict management (through various actor, partner, and interaction effects), and that conflict management itself depends on the interplay between partners' adult romantic attachment orientations. Although the exact nature of the associations between all four study variables are purely speculative within the current thesis' design, previous research alludes to the intricacies of these associations. For instance, Fournier, Brassard, and Shaver (2011) demonstrated that both the demand-withdraw communication pattern and relationship satisfaction mediated the association between adult romantic attachment and male-to-female intimate partner aggression. Given the importance of all four study variables to relationship maintenance and functioning, any indication about the ways in which they operate together has important implications, particularly for informing couple therapy.

Regardless of their theoretical orientation, most couple therapies devote some degree of attention to improving partners' communication and conflict management behaviours (for reviews of prevention and intervention programs for couple conflict, see Bodenmann, Bradbury, & Pihet, 2009; Epstein, Werlinich, & LaTaillade, 2015; Gottman, Gottman, Greendorfer, & Wahbe, 2014; Kline, Pleasant, Whitton, & Markman, 2006). This approach likely stems from the perspective that couple conflict is inevitable, but that it is only harmful to the extent that it is poorly managed (Gottman et al., 2014). However, effective conflict management requires a great deal of finesse that does not always come naturally. Indeed, it is a complex interpersonal process that involves a number of behavioural, cognitive, and affective components, including emotional awareness, emotional control, empathy, problem solving, perspective taking, moral reasoning, and the like (Epstein & Baucom, 2002; Sandy, 2014). Just imagine the degree of skill involved in starting a conflict discussion without blame, collaboratively defining the issue, responding in an appropriate manner, using positive affect to repair and de-escalate, generating appropriate solutions, adopting a solution based on both partners' preferences, and evaluating the outcomes (Epstein & Baucom, 2002; Gottman et al., 2014; Vangelisti, 2015). By addressing such a key interpersonal process as conflict management, couple therapy better equips individuals for handling couple conflict.

Within the context of the current thesis, there is some correlational evidence in support of this strategy. As per the second study, effective conflict management is associated with less psychological partner aggression perpetration, both independently and, in one case, through its association with relationship satisfaction. As such, conflict management may indeed be a key point of intervention in couple conflict escalation. Proponents of comprehensive therapeutic approaches would argue that decreasing negative behaviours is a fundamental first step in

developing a healthy relationship. For instance, several clinicians (e.g., Epstein & Baucom, 2002; Gottman et al., 2014; Halford, 2001) assert that decreasing negative exchanges allows couples to then recognize their strengths, increase positives (e.g., positive affect, positive day-to-day behaviours, major positive acts), and get their needs met.

When combined with cognitive restructuring, skill-based interventions operate from a top-down model of relationship functioning. Alternatively, bottom-up models are based on the idea that replacing maladaptive emotional responses with adaptive ones restructures one's view of the self and others (Greenberg, 2004), thus producing comparably adaptive behavioural responses. As evidenced by the first study, the makeup of couples' adult romantic attachment orientations may indeed be a crucial mechanism of change for conflict management behaviours. This finding provides correlational evidence in support of emotionally focused couple therapy (EFT), which contends that individuals must first experience their partners as a source of security and protection before issues can be resolved (Johnson, 2004). This is seen in insecurely attached individuals' reliance on secondary attachment strategies (Main, 1990) and ineffective conflict management behaviours (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016)—choosing to protect the relationship through effective conflict management is very difficult to do if both partners hold negative expectations about the other's availability and responsiveness. Given that attachment usually operates outside of awareness (Banse & Imhoff, 2013), couple therapies such as EFT work to bring into awareness and interrupt these automatic responses (Arriaga, 2013). By facilitating new emotional experiences and interactional events that disconfirm negative expectations and promote attachment security, intimate partners are then better able to learn and use effective conflict management behaviours (Johnson, 2004).

Limitations

Despite the numerous strengths and implications of the present thesis, some limitations should be considered when interpreting the results. To begin with, as with all correlational, cross-sectional research designs, it is not possible to make causal inferences about the significant associations identified herein. Nevertheless, these effects are informed by both theory and research, and provide additional support for conceptualizing the study variables in this way. Statistically significant paths were in the expected direction and, although small regression coefficients suggest low practical significance, these findings are a necessary first step towards better understanding the complexity of conflict management. Given the novelty of both studies, replication studies are required in order to more confidently determine the meaning of these effects.

A second limitation arises from the complexity of moderation models, which are often plagued by problems related to power (Aguinis, 1995). Add to that dyadic data analyses, and the resulting actor-partner interdependence models likely require more statistical power than a sample of 179 couples can offer. Under these circumstances, it is likely that some interaction effects were inaccurately dismissed (i.e., Type II error). Along these lines, a number of potential confounding factors were not taken into account in the current thesis, due in part to optimizing statistical power. In terms of sociodemographic characteristics, previous research shows the importance of age and relationship length for couple conflict and relationship satisfaction. More specifically, age is positively associated with relationship satisfaction and negatively associated with couple conflict (e.g., Henry, Berg, Smith, & Florsheim, 2007; Rook, Mavandadi, Sorkin, & Zettel, 2007), whereas relationship length is negatively associated with role flexibility during conflict, particularly in distressed couples (e.g., Eldridge & Christensen, 2002). In addition,

concerning the interaction paradigm, previous research suggests that the social structure of the interaction (i.e., whose issue was being discussed), as well as the emotional content of the discussion topic, can have important implications for couple conflict (Heyman, Hunt-Martorano, Malik, & Slep, 2009; Sagrestano, Heavy, & Christensen, 2006). More specifically, conflict about closeness and distance is likely to activate the attachment system, which may be particularly threatening and compromising for insecurely attached individuals (Feeney, 2016).

Another limitation stems from the measures used for data collection. Not only are self-report measures susceptible to response biases such as social desirability (Bonds-Raacke & Raacke, 2012), but they are also vulnerable to conceptual issues unique to the way in which the variable in question is operationalized. Similarly, although the observational coding system used in both studies was designed to be objective, observational methods are also susceptible to observer bias and observer effects (Morling, 2012), whereby couples likely display less severe conflict during observed interactions than they would at home (Fincham, 2003). In the current thesis, observer effects likely contributed to the low rate of observed withdrawal behaviours during the conflict interaction; participants are unlikely to engage in many withdrawal behaviours when they are specifically instructed to discuss a disagreement for a specific amount of time (Eldridge & Christensen, 2002). Perhaps a self-report measure of withdrawal, which is conceptually different than the approach-oriented conflict management behaviours of dominance and criticism/attack, would further nuance the use of negative conflict management behaviours. Such a distinction would be particularly meaningful given the relevance of withdrawal and avoidance behaviours to the demand-withdraw communication pattern and attachment avoidance. Despite these limitations, the psychometric properties of the measures used in the current thesis suggest that they are valid and reliable measures of the study variables.

Finally, a limitation that affects most North American research lies in its relatively homogenous sample characteristics. In the case of the current thesis, the participants are predominantly well-educated individuals of European descent, which limits the generalizability of the studies' findings not only to other cultures around the world, but also to those within the recruitment area itself. As Canada's capital city, Ottawa reflects national diversity: Visible minority groups constitute approximately one quarter of its population, while just over 200,000 immigrants from around the world reside there (Statistics Canada, 2013). Unfortunately, the current sample hardly represents the sociocultural context of the city. Couple relationships undoubtedly occur within a sociocultural context that holds certain expectations for and beliefs about these relationships (Halford, 2001). As such, the appropriateness of and response to couple conflict can vary between and within cultures and other dimensions of diversity (see Goodwin & Pillay, 2006, for a review of cross-cultural research on intimate relationships). Indeed, previous research has indicated that the study variables in question depend on cultural and contextual factors. For instance, in regard to communication and conflict management, Chinese couples tend to express themselves in a relatively indirect manner compared to Western couples' direct and open approach to intimate relationships (Epstein & Bradbury, 2002). In addition, compared to Australian couples, German couples exhibit less use of neutral information, more criticism, and more refusal (Halford, Hahlweg, & Dunne, 1990). In regard to adult romantic attachment, individuals from collectivist cultures are more likely to report an anxious attachment style (Schmitt et al., 2004), and exhibit stronger associations between attachment avoidance and relationship problems (Friedman et al., 2010) compared to individuals from individualistic cultures. Furthermore, Wood (2006) argues that intimate partner aggression reflects gendered narratives of heterosexual romance that are embedded in Western culture, thus implying that the

nature of aggressive acts may differ in other sociocultural contexts. Finally, in regard to relationship satisfaction, Gere and MacDonald (2012) found that their American sample had lower satisfaction scores than their Canadian, Indonesian, and Chinese samples.

Yet race and ethnicity represent only one aspect of diversity; couple relationships can also vary along the dimensions of sexual orientation, gender identity, socio-economic status, age, religious belief, etc. For instance, Gabbay, Lafontaine, Péloquin, Flesch, and Fitzpatrick (2017) emphasize that the sociocultural context of sexual minorities continues to be marked by stigma and discrimination. Along these lines, the conceptualization of gender as a binary construct by most research fails to capture the unique context of individuals who identify with other dimensions of the gender spectrum. In addition, a systematic review by Capaldi, Knoble, Shortt, and Kim (2012) indicates that unemployment and low income are strong and robust demographic risk factors for intimate partner aggression. In the same way that similarities and differences exist between and within various dimensions of diversity, study variables and research methods are variably susceptible to individual characteristics. Therefore, when replicating either of these studies with other samples, it is crucial to carefully delineate their characteristics, use measures validated with the population in question, and use analogue behavioural observations that consider the appropriateness of behaviours within the most fitting sociocultural context. In addition to methodological considerations, it is imperative to examine the larger question about why sociocultural differences exist in the first place. Perhaps combining additional levels of analysis that integrate various macro-, meso-, and microcontexts with individual characteristics would be a good first step in that direction (Goodwin & Pillay, 2006). Clearly, couple research utilizing diverse samples is not only particularly promising, but also sorely needed (Loving & Slatcher, 2013).

Directions for Future Research

With an eye towards hypothesis-testing specific theoretical questions, the scope of the current thesis is characterized by explicit conceptual variables and methodological parameters. For future endeavours, the study variables offer a slew of promising research avenues. To begin with, relational behaviours can be examined in a number of interesting ways. For instance, one of the emerging themes in this area is the focus on positive and relationship-enhancing processes of couple relationships (Loving & Slatcher, 2013; Lydon & Quinn, 2013). Compared to the conflict discussion paradigm, considerably less research has investigated positive interaction contexts (Canary & Wahba, 2006), such as giving or receiving support, disclosing positive life events, or sharing positive feelings for each other. What little research that has been completed to this effect points to important implications for attachment-related dynamics (e.g., Seedall & Lachmar, 2016) and relationship satisfaction (e.g., Graber, Laurenceau, Miga, Chango, & Coan, 2011).

Interaction paradigms, whether they are negative or positive, represent relationally diagnostic contexts for dyadic data collection (Simpson & Campbell, 2013). These paradigms offer a prime opportunity to observe the highly interdependent ways that intimate partners interact with each other. A second direction for future research therefore involves the identification of behavioural sequences and patterns of interaction (Vangelisti, 2015). Previous applications of sequential analytic methods, time-series analyses, and mathematical modeling have yielded important findings about the demand-withdraw communication pattern and negative reciprocity, two dyadic patterns illustrating the mutual influence of intimate partners (Gottman & Notarius, 2000; Vangelisti, 2015). Assessing and modeling the interdependence of communicative processes, for example, would address both how and why partners interact the

way they do (Epstein & Baucom, 2002; Overall & Simpson, 2013). An interdependent approach such as this one could shed light on the paradoxical observation that some positive conflict management behaviours can have adverse effects on a partner, whereas some negative conflict management behaviours can have favourable effects (Overall & Simpson, 2013).

Despite the widespread interest in the study of adult romantic attachment, there remains a number of fascinating research avenues in this area (see Gillath, Karantzas, & Fraley, 2016, for a review of open questions about attachment theory). As it stands, there is still much work to be done before fully understanding the interrelations among all three behaviour systems of attachment, caregiving, and sexuality (Feeney, 2016), as well as the ways in which intimate partners' adult romantic attachment orientations interact to predict relational outcomes. Furthermore, stemming from work on priming methods, there is question about intervening on attachment insecurity at the automatic level (Banse & Imhoff, 2013). In addition, as alluded to in the first study, there are a number of conceptual and measurement issues associated with adult romantic attachment that could be addressed more fully. More specifically, although popular self-report measures such as the *Experiences in Close Relationships* (ECR) scales reliably measure two dimensions of attachment insecurity (i.e., attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance), their inability to capture the full extent of Bartholomew and Horowitz's (1991) four-category model of attachment limits the measurement of attachment security (Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016; Scharfe, 2016). These measures may therefore be biased towards predicting relationship-hindering outcomes. Measures of adult romantic attachment that more explicitly assess attachment security (e.g., *Trent Relationship Scales Questionnaire*; Scharfe, 2016) could offer more information about relationship-enhancing outcomes.

Future research endeavours could also examine intimate partner aggression in a variety of different ways. First, in regard to predictors of intimate partner aggression, a large number of factors stemming from several different theoretical perspectives (see Ali & Naylor, 2013a, 2013b, for a review) provide many lenses through which to view conflict escalation and psychological partner aggression. One avenue for future study therefore involves examining psychological partner aggression alongside any number of cognitive, affective, physiological, and/or behavioural variables (Epstein & Baucom, 2002; Gottman & Notarius, 2000; Vangelisti, 2015). A theoretical framework based on regulatory processes, such as emotion regulation and dyadic regulation, may be particularly fitting given the role of maladaptive emotions (e.g., anger, hostility) and behaviours (e.g., conduct problems, negative conflict management) in conflict escalation (Capaldi et al., 2012; Mischel, DeSmet, & Kross, 2014; Overall & Simpson, 2013). Similarly, comprehensive approaches could provide insight into the context of intimate partner aggression, a research area that is sorely lacking in empirical evidence. Several researchers have indicated that, because intimate partner aggression occurs in particular relational and situational contexts, it is essential to investigate the situations in which such behaviours occur (e.g., Bartholomew, Cobb, & Dutton, 2015; Yoon & Lawrence, 2013). This poses significant methodological challenges because self-report measures, and to a lesser degree, observational coding schemes, are limited in the extent to which they can capture the context of the aggression (McHugh, Rakowski, & Swiderski, 2013), such as the precipitating events, the interpersonal processes culminating in aggression, and the outcomes of aggressive acts (Follingstad, 2007; Wilkinson & Hamerschlag, 2005). As with any communicative process, behavioural sequences and patterns of interaction are therefore promising areas of research for better understanding the context of psychological partner aggression. After all, there may be different interpersonal

dynamics involved in a single aggressive act compared to a general pattern of mutual aggression (Johnson, 2006).

Furthermore, in regard to conceptualizing intimate partner aggression, such behaviours can be operationalized in a number of compelling ways. For instance, the impact of psychological partner aggression for individual victims depends on its intensity, frequency, and intent (Kelly, 2004). Its impact also depends on the gender of the victim, whereby women perceive psychological partner aggression as more harsh and harmful than men (Rogers & Follingstad, 2011). Psychological partner aggression also spans a wide continuum of severity that warrants fleshing out. Given that victims who experience a high prevalence of psychological partner aggression are quantitatively and qualitatively different than those who experience a low prevalence (Follingstad & Rogers, 2012), there is a pressing need to study severe psychological partner aggression. The *Measure of Psychologically Abusive Behaviors* (Follingstad, 2011) and the *Communication Aggression Measure* (Dailey, Lee, & Spitzberg, 2007) both measure a wide range of increasingly severe behaviours. In contrast, few researchers have investigated to what extent psychological partner aggression may be a normative part of couple communication (Stockdale, Tackett, & Coyne, 2013). The impact and severity of intimate partner aggression therefore offer meaningful ways for future research to operationalize such behaviours.

In a broader sense, a number of relational variables were not examined within the scope of the present thesis, but offer interesting directions for future research. For instance, although the current thesis focused on relationship satisfaction, other indicators of relationship quality, such as dyadic adjustment and commitment, are likely associated with couple conflict as well (Woodin, 2011). In addition, physiological, cognitive, and affective variables would further nuance the models identified in the current thesis. While it has been shown that physiological

arousal plays an important role in generating the communication patterns of aggressive couples (e.g., Noller & Roberts, 2002), there is also evidence that individuals interpret utterances and behaviours according to a number of cognitive variables, such as selective attention, attributions, expectancies, assumptions, and standards (Arriaga, 2013; Epstein & Baucom, 2002). Along these lines, there is great promise in interdisciplinary work bridging the field of couple research with other schools of thought (Simpson & Campbell, 2013). Finally, although theoretical models of couple functioning undoubtedly inform clinical practice, empirical investigations of clinical implications are needed for evidence-based interventions.

Conclusion

As a whole, the current thesis advances the field's understanding of conflict management as an interpersonal process in heterosexual couple relationships. Of note, its novel aspects and dyadic perspective highlight the interdependence of intimate partners when working towards a solution to a disagreement. More specifically, the current thesis provides sorely needed evidence that partners' adult romantic attachment orientations can jointly predict their conflict management behaviours, and that partners' relationship satisfaction and effective conflict management behaviours are negatively associated with each other's use of psychological partner aggression. As discussed, these findings have valuable implications for the theoretical conceptualization, empirical understanding, and clinical treatment of couple conflict. Effective conflict management is a key resource within a couple's relationship (Epstein & Baucom, 2002). In fact, the sheer necessity of effective conflict management for successful couple relationships has generated a large number of empirical investigations, the findings of which point to the complexity of relationship maintenance in general and conflict management in particular. The field of couple research, with its many strengths and talents, is now tasked with continuing to

identify and describe the fundamental interpersonal processes that promote effective conflict management and prevent conflict escalation—a challenge to which we will undoubtedly rise.

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(as cited in the General Introduction and General Discussion sections)

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Appendix A
Consent Form

Identification Number: _____

Consent Form*Successful couple relationships: Personal and relationship factors*

I am invited to participate in the above-mentioned research study conducted by the *Couple Research Lab* at the University of Ottawa under the direction of Dr. Marie-France Lafontaine. This project is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

I understand that the purpose of the study is to better understand individuals' functioning in their couple relationships. My participation will consist essentially of a 2 ½ hours testing session during which I will complete a questionnaire, and participate in a 15-minute videotaped discussion on a topic that is a source of conflict in my relationship.

The questionnaires cover a number of topics related to my background information, how I resolve conflicts with my partner, my personal and relationship profile, my fear of my partner, my attachment in close relationships, my couple satisfaction, my trust in my partner, my social support behaviours, and my empathy. When answering the questions, I will be asked to answer them as honestly and accurately as possible. I understand that there are no right or wrong answers. What is asked of me is simply my honest opinion.

I understand that some questions and the participation in the filmed discussion may cause some discomfort. Of course, I am not obligated to answer any questions or to participate in the filmed discussion if I do not feel comfortable doing so. I also understand that if I feel tired during the testing session, I can ask for a break.

My participation in this study will contribute to the development of more comprehensive models of well-being and distress in the context of couple relationships.

I have been assured by the researcher that the information I will share will remain strictly confidential. I understand that the information will be used only for a research purpose and that confidentiality will be respected. My partner and I will be assigned identification numbers and only these numbers will appear on the questionnaires and consent forms. The consent forms and questionnaires will be stored separately in a locked cabinet (Couple Research Lab; 120 University) to ensure anonymity and only my identification number will be entered in the database on the computer. Moreover, my filmed discussion will be recorded on a DVD that will also be stored in a locked cabinet.

At the end of the testing session, my partner and I will receive \$40 (\$40 per couple) in order to compensate for our time and transportation fees. The research laboratory will also pay for our parking fees.

I am under no obligation to participate and if I choose to participate, I may withdraw from the study at any time, without suffering any negative consequences. If I choose to withdraw, all data gathered until the time of withdrawal will be either destroyed or used for research purpose, at my convenience.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researchers at 613-562-5800, ext. 4471. If I need help, I can contact the **Distress Centre of Ottawa and Region** at 613-238-3311, the **Victim Crisis Offices**, Ottawa Police Service at 613-236-1222, and the **Anti-Violence Program Family Services** at 613-725-3601. If I have any ethical concerns regarding my participation in this study, I may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 159, (613) 562-5841 or ethics@uottawa.ca.

I, _____, agree to participate in the above research study conducted by the *Couple Research Lab* at the University of Ottawa under the direction of Dr. Marie-France Lafontaine.

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is for me to keep.

Name of the participant
(Please print)

Sex of the Participant: Male ☐ Female ☐

Participant's signature

Date: _____

Researcher's signature
Dr. Marie-France Lafontaine, C. Psych.
Couple Research Lab
School of Psychology, University of Ottawa
11 Marie Curie
Ottawa, Ontario, CANADA, K1N 6N5
Phone: 613-562-5800, extension [redacted]
Fax: 613-562-5169
Email: [redacted]

- I am interested in the results of this study and wish to receive the *Couple Research Lab Newsletter*.
- E-mail: _____
- I do not have an E-mail address; please send it through regular mail.

In a few months, I may be contacted again in order to evaluate long-term effects of people's opinions. In the second phase of the study, I will be asked to participate in similar tasks.

- I **accept** to be contacted again to participate in the second phase of the study.
- I **refuse** to be contacted again to participate in the second phase of the study.

If you plan to move soon, please indicate the name and phone number of a relative or a friend that we could contact in order to be able to contact you at a later point in time.

Name of a relative or a friend

(_____) _____
Phone number

APPENDIX B

Self-Report Measures

The following questionnaire involves gathering information with respect to your sociodemographic background. For each question, please circle the number beside the appropriate answer.

SD1.	Indicate your sex. 1 = Male 2 = Female
SD2.	What is your age, in years and months? _____ years and _____ months
SD3.	What is your mother tongue? 1 = French 2 = English 3 = Other, specify: _____ (SDT3a.)
SD4.	What is your current marital status? 1 = Married (if married go to question SD4a.) 2 = Common law 3 = Separated 4 = Divorced 5 = Single 6 = Widowed (if not currently married go to question SD5.)
SD4a.	How long have you been married to your partner, in years and months? _____ years and _____ months
SD5.	Have you ever been married before this relationship? 1 = Yes 2 = No
SD6.	How long have you been in your current relationship, in years and months? _____ years and _____ months
SD7.	How long have you been living together with your partner, in years and months? _____ years and _____ months
SD8.	How many children do you have with your current partner? _____ (If none, write 0 and skip to question SD10.).
SD9.	How old are these children, starting from the youngest? 1 st _____ 2 nd _____ 3 rd _____ 4 th _____ 5 th _____ 6 th _____ 7 th _____
SD10.	How many children do you have from previous relationships? _____ (If none, write 0 and skip question SDT12).
SD11.	How old are these children, starting from the youngest? 1 st _____ 2 nd _____ 3 rd _____ 4 th _____ 5 th _____ 6 th _____ 7 th _____
SD12.	How many years have you lived in Canada? 1 = All my life (SD12a.) OR 2 = Number of years: _____

SD12b. What is your racial or ethnic background (circle as many as apply)?

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1 = White/Caucasian | 4 = Latino or Hispanic |
| 2 = Black (e.g., Haitian, African, Jamaican, Somali) | 5 = Pacific Islander |
| 3 = Asian (e.g., Chinese, East Indian, Japanese, Vietnamese) | 6 = Middle Eastern |
| | 7 = Native Canadian/First nations/Métis |
| | 8 = Other, specify: _____ |
| | (SD12c.) |

SD13. Indicate the highest educational degree you have received.

- 1 = University
2 = College
3 = High school
4 = Primary school

SD14. What is your main daily activity?

- | | |
|--|---------------------------|
| 1 = Blue collar (construction, factory worker, manual work, etc.) | 4 = Unemployed |
| 2 = White collar (administrator, lawyer, director, office work, sales, etc.) | 5 = Student |
| 3 = Enterprise owner or self-worker | 6 = Stay at home |
| | 7 = Other, specify: _____ |
| | (SD14a.) |

SD15. What is your annual personal gross revenue (before tax and deductions)? _____

In the past year, have you consulted a mental health professional (psychologist, social worker, psychiatrist, etc.)...

SD16. ...alone?

- 1 = Yes 2 = No (skip to question SD17.)

SD16a. Duration of services (e.g., 1 year and 2 months):

_____ years _____ months

How long have you consulted a mental health professional (psychologist, social worker, psychiatrist, etc.) with your partner?

SD17. Duration of services:

_____ years _____ months

SD17a. How many sessions have you attended? _____ ☐ Don't know

SD 18. Have you ever consulted a mental health professional (psychologist, social worker, psychiatrist, etc.) with your partner prior to this study?

- 1 = Yes 2 = No

In the past 12 months, have you or your partner experienced the following events? If your answer is “yes”, please indicate the person who experienced the event. Also, for each event experienced, evaluate its consequences on your relationship when it occurred using the following scale.

Extremely harmful 1	Moderately harmful 2	Slightly harmful 3	No consequence 4	Slightly beneficial 5	Moderately beneficial 6	Extremely beneficial 7
------------------------	-------------------------	-----------------------	---------------------	--------------------------	----------------------------	---------------------------

				Consequences on your relationship						
SD19a.	Pregnancy	0 = No	1 = Yes Me ____ My partner ____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
SD19b.	Miscarriage	0 = No	1 = Yes Me ____ My partner ____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
SD19c.	Serious illness or accident	0 = No	1 = Yes Me ____ My partner ____ Children ____ Other ____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
SD19d.	Being fired from work	0 = No	1 = Yes Me ____ My partner ____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
SD19e.	Death of a relative or close friend	0 = No	1 = Yes Me ____ My partner ____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
SD19f.	An affair	0 = No	1 = Yes Me ____ My partner ____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
SD19g.	Other major event?	0 = No	1 = Yes Me ____ My partner ____ Specify: _____ Children ____ Other ____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
SD19h.	Other major event?	0 = No	1 = Yes Me ____ My partner ____ Specify: _____ Children ____ Other ____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

SD20a. Have you and your current partner separated in the past 12 months because of conflicts in the relationship?

1 = Yes

2 = No (skip to question SD21.)

SD20b. How long was your separation, in weeks and days (e.g., 2 weeks and 3 days)?
_____ weeks and _____ days

SD20c. If your answer to question SD11a was « yes », evaluate the consequences of this separation on your relationship when the event occurred.

1 = extremely harmful

5 = slightly beneficial

2 = moderately harmful

6 = moderately beneficial

3 = slightly harmful

7 = extremely beneficial

4 = no consequence

SD20d. If your answer to question SD11a was “yes”, why did you and your partner decide to reconcile?

SD21. Have you ever needed help from Centers for violent partners or shelters for domestic violence victims?

1 = Yes

2 = No

SD22. Have you ever been diagnosed with a psychiatric disorder?

1 = Yes

2 = No

SD23. Are you currently taking medication for a psychiatric disorder?

1 = Yes

2 = No

SD24. Have you had a history of being a victim of abuse?

Physical abuse

Sexual abuse

1 = Yes

2 = No

1 = Yes

2 = No

On average, how much alcohol do you drink each week? _____ (# of drinks) (SD25a.)

SD25.

(1 drink = 5 oz of wine, 1.5 oz of spirits or 12 oz of regular strength beer)

Experiences in Close Relationships – 12 (ECR-12)
(Lafontaine et al., 2015)

The following statements concern how you feel in romantic relationships. We are interested in how you generally experience close relationships, not just in what is happening in a current relationship. Respond to each statement by indicating how much agree or disagree with it. Circle the number appropriate to your answer, using the following scale.

Disagree Strongly			Neutral/ Mixed			Agree Strongly					
1	2	3	4	5	6	7					
1.	I worry about being abandoned.				1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2.	I worry that romantic partners won't care about me as much as I care about them.				1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3.	I worry a fair amount about losing my partner.				1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4.	I don't feel comfortable opening up to romantic partners.				1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5.	I worry about being alone.				1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6.	I feel comfortable sharing my private thoughts and feelings with my partner.				1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7.	I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by my partner.				1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8.	If I can't get my partner to show interest in me, I get upset or angry.				1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9.	I tell my partner just about everything.				1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10.	I usually discuss my problems and concerns with my partner.				1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11.	I feel comfortable depending on romantic partners.				1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12.	I don't mind asking romantic partners to comfort, advice, or help.				1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Dyadic Adjustment Scale – 4 items (DAS-4)
(Sabourin, Valois, & Lussier, 2005)

All the time	Most of the time	More often than not	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
0	1	2	3	4	5

1.	How often do you discuss or have you considered divorce, separation, or terminating your relationship?	0	1	2	3	4	5
2.	In general, how often do you think that things between you and your partner are going well?	0	1	2	3	4	5
3.	Do you confide in your mate?	0	1	2	3	4	5

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

						
Extremely unhappy	Fairly unhappy	A little unhappy	Happy	Very happy	Extremely happy	Perfect
0	1	2	3	4	5	6

Revised Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS2)
(Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996)

No matter how well a couple gets along, there are times when they disagree, get annoyed with one another, want different things from each other, or just have spats or fights because they are in a bad mood, are tired, or upset for some other reason. Couples have many different ways of trying to settle their differences. This is a list of things that might happen when you have differences. Some questions are about you and others are about your partner. Please circle the response that describes how many times these things happened in the past year, using the following rating scale. If one of these things did not happen the past year, but happened before that, circle 7.

0= This has never happened		4= 6-10 times in the past year							
1= Once in the past year		5= 11-20 times in the past year							
2= Twice in the past year		6= more than 20 times in the past year							
3= 3-5 times in the past year		7= Not in the past year, but it happened before							
1.	I showed my partner I cared even though we disagreed.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2.	<i>My partner</i> showed care for me even though we disagreed.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3.	I explained my side of a disagreement to my partner.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4.	<i>My partner</i> explained his or her side of a disagreement to me.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5.	I insulted or swore at my partner.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6.	<i>My partner</i> insulted or swore at me.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7.	I threw something at my partner that could hurt.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8.	<i>My partner</i> threw something at me that could hurt.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9.	I twisted my partner's arm or hair.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10.	<i>My partner</i> twisted my arm or hair.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11.	I had a sprain, bruise, or small cut because of a fight with my partner.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12.	<i>My partner</i> had a sprain, bruise, or small cut because of a fight with me.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13.	I showed respect for my partner's feelings about an issue.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14.	My partner showed respect for my feelings about an issue.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15.	I made my partner have sex without a condom.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

0= This has never happened		4= 6-10 times in the past year							
1= Once in the past year		5= 11-20 times in the past year							
2= Twice in the past year		6= more than 20 times in the past year							
3= 3-5 times in the past year		7= Not in the past year, but it happened before							
16.	<i>My partner</i> made me have sex without a condom.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17.	I pushed or shoved my partner.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18.	<i>My partner</i> pushed or shoved me.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19.	I used force (like hitting, holding down, or using a weapon) to make my partner have oral or anal sex.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20.	<i>My partner</i> used force to make me have oral or anal sex.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21.	I used a knife or gun on my partner.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
22.	<i>My partner</i> used a knife or gun on me.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
23.	I passed out from being hit on the head by my partner in a fight.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
24.	<i>My partner</i> passed out from being hit on the head by me in a fight.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
25.	I called my partner fat or ugly.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
26.	<i>My partner</i> called me fat or ugly.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
27.	I punched or hit my partner with something that could hurt.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
28.	<i>My partner</i> punched or hit me with something that could hurt.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
29.	I destroyed something belonging to my partner.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
30.	<i>My partner</i> destroyed something that belonged to me.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
31.	I went to a doctor because of a fight with my partner.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
32.	<i>My partner</i> went to a doctor because of a fight with me.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
33.	I choked my partner.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
34.	<i>My partner</i> choked me.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
35.	I shouted or yelled at my partner.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
36.	<i>My partner</i> shouted or yelled at me.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

0= This has never happened		4= 6-10 times in the past year							
1= Once in the past year		5= 11-20 times in the past year							
2= Twice in the past year		6= more than 20 times in the past year							
3= 3-5 times in the past year		7= Not in the past year, but it happened before							
37.	I slammed my partner against a wall.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
38.	<i>My partner</i> slammed me against a wall.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
39.	I said I was sure we could work out a problem.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
40.	<i>My partner</i> was sure we could work it out.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
41.	I needed to see a doctor because of a fight with my partner, but I didn't.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
42.	<i>My partner</i> needed to see a doctor because of a fight with me, but didn't.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
43.	I beat up my partner.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
44.	<i>My partner</i> beat me up.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
45.	I grabbed my partner.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
46.	<i>My partner</i> grabbed me.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
47.	I used force (like hitting, holding down, or using a weapon) to make my partner have sex.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
48.	<i>My partner</i> used force to make me have sex.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
49.	I stomped out of the room or house or yard during a disagreement.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
50.	<i>My partner</i> stomped out of the room or house or yard during a disagreement.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
51.	I insisted on sex when my partner did not want to (but did not use physical force).	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
52.	<i>My partner</i> insisted that I have sex when I didn't want to (but did not use physical force).	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
53.	I slapped my partner.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
54.	<i>My partner</i> slapped me.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
55.	I had a broken bone from a fight with my partner.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
56.	<i>My partner</i> had a broken bone from a fight with me.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
57.	I used threats to make my partner have oral or anal sex.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

0= This has never happened		4= 6-10 times in the past year							
1= Once in the past year		5= 11-20 times in the past year							
2= Twice in the past year		6= more than 20 times in the past year							
3= 3-5 times in the past year		7= Not in the past year, but it happened before							

58.	<i>My partner</i> used threats to make me have oral or anal sex.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
59.	I suggested a compromise to a disagreement.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
60.	<i>My partner</i> suggested a compromise to a disagreement.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
61.	I burned or scalded my partner on purpose.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
62.	<i>My partner</i> burned or scalded me on purpose.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
63.	I insisted my partner have oral or anal sex (but did not use physical force).	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
64.	<i>My partner</i> insisted I have oral or anal sex (but did not use physical force).	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
65.	I accused my partner of being a lousy lover.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
66.	<i>My partner</i> accused me of being a lousy lover.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
67.	I did something to spite my partner.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
68.	<i>My partner</i> did something to spite me.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
69.	I threatened to hit or throw something at my partner.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
70.	<i>My partner</i> threatened to hit or throw something at me.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
71.	I felt physical pain that still hurt the next day because of a fight with my partner.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
72.	<i>My partner</i> still felt physical pain the next day because of a fight we had.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
73.	I kicked my partner.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
74.	<i>My partner</i> kicked me.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
75.	I used threats to make my partner have sex.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
76.	<i>My partner</i> used threats to make me have sex.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
77.	I agreed to try a solution to a disagreement my partner suggested.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
78.	<i>My partner</i> agreed to try a solution I suggested.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7