

INFORMATION SEEKING IN
ATTACHMENT STYLE ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

A Senior Honors Thesis

by

JAYE LINDSAY DERRICK

Submitted to the Office of Honors Programs
& Academic Scholarships
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the

UNIVERSITY UNDERGRADUATE
RESEARCH FELLOWS

April 2002

Group: Psychology One

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Abstract

Information Seeking in Attachment Style

Romantic Relationships. (April 2002)

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This study examined how a person's attachment style affects the type of information he or she is attuned to within a relationship. Specifically, this study assessed whether an individual is more likely to search for positive or negative information about a relationship when in a stressful situation and offered either a supportive or unsupportive note from a romantic partner. As hypothesized, a high degree of attachment ambivalence and an unsupportive note predicted more negative information seeking about relationship items. No hypotheses were formed for attachment avoidance, and the degree of avoidance alone did not significantly predict information seeking. However, note condition and relationship satisfaction contributed to several interactions with both attachment ambivalence and avoidance. These findings are discussed in terms of attachment theory.

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INTRODUCTION

Adult romantic relationships can be conceptualized as a type of attachment bond between two partners. The idea of attachment grows primarily from Bowlby's original studies of infant-caregiver relationships in the 1950s. He noted that during separation, infants go through a series of predictable emotional reactions, in which they may cry, actively search for the mother, resist attempts by others to sooth them, show passivity and obvious sadness, and demonstrate a defensive disregard for and avoidance of the mother when she returns (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

Subsequent researchers discovered that attachment emerges in a series of steps, growing from a baby's preference for people over inanimate objects, familiar people over unfamiliar people, and finally primary caregivers over other familiar people (Hetherington & Parke, 1999). The infant begins to actively seek out the primary caregiver, usually the mother, and benefit from contact with this caregiver. When a healthy and alert infant has established a strong relationship with his or her mother and is in her presence, the infant will often use the mother as a secure base from which to explore the environment and make contact with other family or members of the community. The mother helps the child's attachment to grow and through her behaviors often determines the quality and type of attachment (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

Three general styles appear most often: anxious/ambivalent, avoidant, and secure. Anxious/ambivalent children receive inconsistent care from their mothers and usually react to her in an ambiguous manner. They may show a desire for her attention at one moment and anger toward her in the next. Avoidant children do not receive much attention from their mothers, and in reaction, learn to ignore her as well. A secure child probably receives a proper amount of love and attention and shows trust and confidence in the mother in return (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Hetherington & Parke, 1999; Mikulincer & Nachshon, 1991).

Although attachment styles were first documented in infancy, researchers have observed that adults often show an attachment bond to their romantic partners. In other words, partners derive security and comfort from each other, want to be with each other, especially in times of stress, and protest when their partners threaten to become unavailable, much like infants' responses to caregivers. Researchers have also found that the types of attachment styles found in infancy are also found in adults (Feeney, 2001).

Attachment styles in adult romantic relationships can be measured on two orthogonal continuous scales: one of anxiousness or ambivalence and one of avoidance (Bartholomew, 1990; Brennan & Shaver, 1995; Fraley, Davis, & Shaver, 1998). High ambivalence and low avoidance can be seen in anxious/ambivalent individuals. These individuals, also known as preoccupied because of the

preoccupation with attachment needs and potential losses, are characterized by a readiness to express fear and anger, feelings of under appreciation by both romantic partners and coworkers, fears of adult independence and autonomy, fears of abandonment and rejection, belief in love at first sight, and a likelihood to be jealous, clingy, and overly dependent on romantic partners (Brennan & Shaver, 1995; Collins, 1996; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). They show a heightened awareness of and expression of negative feelings, but often prefer unqualified closeness, commitment, and affection, and tend to idealize their partners (Feeney, 2001).

Those high on the avoidance continuum are known as avoidant individuals. Their style is characterized by denial of attachment needs, failure to focus on feelings, avoidance of emotional dependency and commitment in romantic relationships, fears of intimacy, views of the end of a romantic relationship as unimportant, and lack of comfort-seeking from partners during an anxiety-producing laboratory situation (Brennan & Shaver, 1995; Collins, 1996; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Those who score high on avoidance often prefer clear limits to closeness, dependence, commitment, and displays of affection in a romantic relationship (Feeney, 2001).

Someone who scores low on both the ambivalence and avoidance continuums would be labeled secure. These individuals have been characterized as the opposite of all of the insecure tendencies, but also as being able and willing to trust romantic

partners and share ideas with them in a flexible, appropriate manner that is sensitive to their partners' needs and concerns (Brennan & Shaver, 1995; Collins, 1996; Collins & Read, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). They are more likely to handle negative feelings in a relatively constructive manner by acknowledging distress and turning to others for support and usually describe their romantic relationships as based on friendship (Feeney, 2001).

In childhood, three conditions should arouse attachment behavior: conditions in the environment, such as physical threat, conditions in the attachment figure, such as absence or inaccessibility, and conditions in the child, such as illness or hunger. The same idea is relevant to adult attachment behavior as well. The adult is most likely to demonstrate attachment due to environmental conditions, such as stress, conditions of the attachment relationship, such as the threat of abandonment, and conditions of the individual, such as ill health. Because attachment behavior is likely to be activated under stressful conditions, individual differences in attachment behavior should be most pronounced when a person finds himself or herself in such conditions (Feeney, 2001).

Different attachment styles predict different methods of interacting with romantic partners during stressful or ambiguous situations. This difference is due to the concept each individual carries of his or her relationship and his or her romantic

partner. The concept of the romantic partner has sometimes been described as a "working model," an internal representation that contains beliefs and expectations about the way the partner will treat the individual and also whether the individual is worthy of good treatment. Working models become labels that are useful in establishing proper social and relationship roles, and they offer an "easy fix" to understanding and interpreting social situations (Cohen, 1981; Collins & Allard, 2001; Collins & Read, 1990; Roskos-Edwolsen & Fazio, 1992).

Belief in working models becomes strong enough that people will actively seek information that confirms their beliefs about others and the self before paying attention to disconfirming information (Higgins, King, & Mavin, 1982; Markus, 1977; Swann, Pelham, & Krull, 1989; Swann & Read, 1981). In laboratory experiments (Swann & Read, 1981; Swann et al., 1989), people will choose interaction partners who offer feedback that is in accordance with beliefs about the self. People will also date others who confirm their beliefs about relationships. So, for example, an anxious/ambivalent individual would date a person who was avoidant because that person's distant and aloof style would verify the anxious/ambivalent individual's fears of distance and abandonment (Collins & Read, 1990; Feeney, 2001).

In a laboratory situation, anxious/ambivalent individuals were likely to create explanations for ambiguous actions by their partners that offered much more negative views of both their

partners and events than secure individuals' explanations. Secure individuals suggested much more positive explanations that were more likely to communicate confidence in their partner and their partner's love, they were less likely to believe their partners were purposely rejecting closeness, and overall they construed events in ways that did not impact broader issues of relationship stability. Anxious/ambivalent individuals were more likely to believe that their relationship was in jeopardy, that their partner was unresponsive to their needs, and that their partner was purposely rejecting closeness. They also showed lower beliefs in self-worth and self-reliance (Feeney, 2001).

Because anxious/ambivalent individuals have a very strong focus on attachment concerns, they are likely to have strong goals based on the idea of seeking approval and avoiding rejection. Their attentional focus is likely to keep them vigilant for signs of threat and disapproval, and because of this hyper-vigilance, they are more likely to notice signs of these negative possibilities, even in ambiguous events. Likewise, avoidant individuals' motivation to maintain autonomy and desire to avoid attachment-related issues will focus their attention away from environmental features that make attachment needs salient (Collins & Allard, 2001).

How pervasive is the anxious/ambivalent individual's attentional focus on threat in a relationship? In the present study, I will seek to answer this question. I will stress one

partner in a dating couple, as did Simpson, Rholes, & Nelligan (1992) when studying support seeking and giving during a stressful situation. In their experiment, after female participants were told that they would undergo stressful laboratory procedures, support seeking of the female participants from their male dating partners and support giving of the male dating partners was assessed. Securely attached females were more likely to seek support than avoidantly attached females, and securely attached males were more likely to give support than avoidantly attached males. However, their experiment was set up in a way that made it difficult to differentiate between anxious/ambivalent and secure attachment style behaviors, so no results were reported for anxious/ambivalent individuals. For my experiment, a way of differentiating between the anxious/ambivalent style and the other two styles must be devised.

One way to assure this differentiation would be to "prime" the attachment style condition, or to make attachment needs a salient issue. The first step would be to create a stressful situation, which will be accomplished by requiring study participants to give a speech. The second step would be to bring to the forefront the anxious/ambivalent individual's fear of abandonment. In Collins (1996), after an ambiguous event, one partner in a dating relationship wrote a note for the other. The content of the note was manipulated to be either supportive or

mildly unsupportive. Insecure participants did, in fact, view the unsupportive note as much more unsupportive than did secure participants (Collins & Allard, 2001). In using this same note manipulation in this study, the anxious/ambivalent individual's need for support and fear of abandonment should be brought to the forefront. An individual who scores high on ambivalence should, therefore, vary systematically in the type of information he or she is interested in learning about, based on the note condition to which he or she is assigned.

After receiving a note perceived as unsupportive, an anxious/ambivalent individual should be more likely to search for more evidence of threat to the relationship. In other words, the unsupportive note would increase attention to threat and rejection possibilities, thereby causing more negative information seeking if the anxious/ambivalent individual were provided the chance to ask for information about his or her partner.

I hypothesize that people with an anxious/ambivalent attachment style assigned to a less supportive note condition will seek more negative information about their partners than more secure people because of their hyper-vigilance to relationship threat and because of the likelihood that negative information will confirm negative beliefs about attachment figures. However, the anxious/ambivalent individuals should select positive information about their partners if given a

supportive note because their fears of threat to the relationship will not be activated when an attachment figure is shown to offer them support. More secure people should select relatively positive information despite their assigned note condition because no attachment concerns should be activated. No hypotheses are made about the avoidant individuals because the manipulations of this experiment have been created specifically for those with an anxious/ambivalent attachment style.

METHOD

Participants

Seventy couples, 69 heterosexual couples and 1 homosexual couple, in each of which at least one partner was enrolled in introductory psychology at Texas A&M University, participated in the study. Each couple was required to have been dating for at least three months to ensure that participants were part of an established relationship. Mean length of the dating relationship was 5.63 months. As described below, one partner from each relationship was the main focus of the experiment. Although the main focus was randomly assigned, at the end of the study the focus was found to be divided evenly between 35 males and 35 females. The introductory psychology student was given class credit for participating in the experiment.

Materials

Questionnaires. The set of preliminary questionnaires included the "Experiences in Close Relationships Questionnaire" (Brennan, Clark, and Shaver, 1998), "Adult Attachment Questionnaire" (Simpson, Rholes, and Phillips, 1996), "Bartholomew Questionnaire" (Bartholomew, 1990), "Big Five Inventory" (John, Hampson, and Goldberg, 1991), the mood scale from "PANAS" (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988), and "Hendrick Satisfaction Scale" (1988). These questionnaires were intended to measure attachment, views of self and other, personality, mood before manipulations, and relationship satisfaction.

A computer questionnaire, titled the Relationship Well-Being Survey, was put together based on questions from the above scales. It was constructed to look like a typical relationship survey, with questions about the relationship, career goals, personality, and so forth, and participants believed they would see information based on their answers and their partners' answers to this survey.

A set of manipulation-check questionnaires included the mood scale from "PANAS" (Watson, et al., 1988), "Hendrick Satisfaction Scale" (1988), and manipulation checks created for this experiment. These questionnaires were intended to assess change, if any, in mood or satisfaction due to the experimental manipulations. The new manipulation checks were included to assess perceived supportiveness of the romantic partner; perceived supportiveness of the note, the main experimental manipulation, which is described below; and perceived stress felt about giving a speech, which is also described below. The exact questions used can be seen in Appendix A.

Manipulation Items. The paragraph choice survey is completed on the Internet like the Relationship Well-Being Survey. Individuals are given a choice between five topics: three topics pertinent to the relationship, such as commitment to the relationship, ability to provide emotional support, and ability to understand the motivations of others, and two general topics, such as likelihood for success in his/her career and ability to

understand his/her own motivations. These topics are supposedly provided by participants' answers to the Relationship Well-Being Survey. Individuals are able to select either positive or negative information about each topic, and they are able to select as many as ten paragraphs for each topic but are instructed to select no more than ten paragraphs in all. See Appendix B for verbatim instructions and topic choices.

The Speech Information Sheet, which describes what the participant is supposed to prepare a speech about, can be found in Appendix C. The speech will be described in greater detail below.

The Couple Questionnaire asked three questions about personal information for the individual and the same three questions about his or her partner. These questions were considered to pertain to information that partners of an established dating couple should know about each other. The questionnaire was used to compare answers within a couple and gauge whether or not they were likely to really be dating. Exact questions can be seen in Appendix D. Either a supportive or unsupportive note, described below, will be written by one partner who will then complete a filler survey while the experiment is finished.

Design and Procedure

The experiment consisted of two phases. In Phase I, two participants (one couple) met the experimenter in a room where a

video camera was mounted on a wall near the door. The participants were told that they would participate in a relationship study that would involve filling out questionnaires and a computer-based survey pertaining to their current romantic relationship. They were told that the computer survey would enable them to learn information about their relationship and dating partner. They were also informed that they would be asked to give a short speech in front of the video camera. The speech would be recorded and submitted to Texas A&M University's student senate and administration. They were told that they would be given more information about the speech at a later time.

The couple was led to a room where multiple computers with access to the Internet were set up in a cubicle cluster. The partner who would later be identified as the stressed partner, or speech-giving partner, was seated at the cubicle nearest the door, and his or her partner was seated in the cubicle across from him or her. The walls of the cubicles were high enough to prevent visual contact and participants were reminded not to speak to each other. They were handed the preliminary questionnaires, a scantron with the couple identification number already entered, and a pencil.

After both participants completed the preliminary questionnaires, the experimenter described the Relationship Well-Being Survey. The participants were told that the data from both partners would be collected by computer, compiled, and compared

to a collection of normative data from other people their age. Based on the information provided by them and provided by people in other relationships, the computer would create a profile that the participants would be able to read to discover information about the "well-being" of their relationship. They were told that it would take a few minutes for the computers to process the information, and so they would give the speech while waiting.

Phase II began when both partners indicated that they had completed the survey, and the experimenter handed each participant the Speech Information Handout (Appendix C). This handout described the University Student Center fee increase, an increase that had recently gone into effect at Texas A&M University. The handout explained that only about 6% of the student body had voted at the fee referendum election, and administration was polling students to see whether the fee increase should be voted on again. Participants were told that, so far, the videos had revealed that student opinions were evenly divided, and that the participants' speeches might be a deciding factor about whether or not to have a second vote. After the participants finished reading the handout, they were told that the experimenter had already collected enough male/female opinions (sex of the unstressed partner) and would only need a speech from the other partner (the stressed partner). The stressed partner was told that he or she could continue to look

over the handout while the other participant, or unstressed partner, was taken away to do another part of the study.

After the unstressed partner and the experimenter were alone in another room, the experimenter told the participant that his or her help was needed for an experimental manipulation. He or she was given either the supportive or the unsupportive note to copy so that it would be in his or her own handwriting. The supportive note read, "Don't worry. You'll give a great speech." The unsupportive note read, "Don't blow it." The participant was told that his or her partner would be informed later that the experimenter had actually created the note. The participant was then given the Couple Questionnaire (Appendix D), followed by the filler questionnaire and a scantron, and the experimenter returned to the room where the stressed partner was waiting.

The experimenter handed the participant the note copied by the unstressed partner and stepped away to allow the participant a chance to read it. After a brief pause, the experimenter claimed that he or she had checked on the camera before returning, and it was not quite ready. The participant would finish the relationship profile before giving the speech. The participant clicked on the "continue" link from the Relationship Well-Being Survey, which brought up a set of instructions. The experimenter read the instructions out loud with the participant to ensure understanding. The participant was told that too much information was provided by the questionnaire for the time

allotted, and he or she would have to choose which information he or she was most interested in reading. The participant would be given a choice of several topics from which he or she could choose to read either the strengths or weaknesses. The topics included were partner's ability to commit to the relationship, partner's likelihood for success in his/her career, partner's ability to provide emotional support, partner's ability to understand others' feelings, and partner's ability to understand his/her own motivations. He or she would also be allowed to choose how many paragraphs he or she wanted to read for each topic, from zero to ten paragraphs. The participant would only be allowed to read a total of ten paragraphs. He or she was shown what to do on a sample item. For a more detailed explanation of the paragraph choices, see Appendix B.

After the participant had finished choosing paragraphs, the experimenter explained that a printout would be ready in a few minutes and gave him or her the manipulation-check questionnaires (Appendix A), followed by the Couple Questionnaire (Appendix D). The experimenter then led the participant to the camera room, where the unstressed partner was waiting. Upon reaching the camera room, the experimenter debriefed both participants. No one actually gave a speech, and no information was provided by the Relationship Well-Being Questionnaire.

RESULTS

In this section, I first report descriptive analyses testing for attachment dimensions, note condition, and satisfaction, then for types of information seeking and mood. I then report the results of prospective analyses testing for the ambivalent attachment dimension, and finally, for the avoidance attachment dimension.

Preliminary Analyses

The means and standard deviations for scores on measures of attachment style, relationship satisfaction, and information seeking are shown in Table 1. Pearson correlations for predictor variables are shown in Table 2. Pearson correlations for dependent variables are shown in Table 3.

Primary Analyses

My predictions regarding information seeking based on attachment style were tested using hierarchical regression methods. Preliminary analyses indicated that sex was not significantly related to information seeking; therefore it will not be included in the analyses described below.

Ambivalence

The first set of analyses tested the hypotheses about information seeking for highly ambivalent people. The dependent measure for the first analysis was negative relationship information. The predictor variables, in order of entry, were ambivalence, note condition, and the interaction of ambivalence

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of Predictor and DependentVariables

Variables	M	SD
Ambivalence	61.79	20.89
Avoidance	37.86	13.70
Satisfaction	34.53	4.29
Relationship Information		
Negative	6.60	1.26
Positive	4.30	1.18
General Information		
Negative	3.16	1.34
Positive	2.39	0.91

Table 2

Correlations Among the Predictor Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. Ambivalence	1.00	0.32	-0.02*	-0.46	0.22
2. Avoidance	0.32	1.00	-0.08	-0.22	-0.05*
3. Note	-0.02*	-0.08	1.00	0.03*	0.00**
4. Satisfaction	-0.46	-0.22	0.03*	1.00	-0.10
5. Sex	0.22	-0.05*	0.00**	-0.10	1.00

Note. The numbers in the column heads correspond to the numbered variables at the beginning of each row.

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

Table 3

Correlations Among Dependent Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. Neg Relationship	1.00	0.14	-0.71	-0.30	-0.20
2. Pos Relationship	0.14	1.00	-0.09	0.28	-0.24
3. Neg General	-0.71	-0.09	1.00	0.32	0.23
4. Pos General	-0.30	0.28	0.32	1.00	0.14
5. Pos Mood	-0.20	-0.24	0.23	0.14	1.00
6. Neg Mood	0.09	0.03*	-0.28	-0.10	-0.64
7. T2 Pos Mood	-0.14	-0.03*	0.23	0.15	0.72
8. T2 Neg Mood	0.10	-0.07	-0.26	-0.17	-0.44

Note. Neg = negative; Pos = positive; T2 = time 2. Numbers in the column heads correspond to the numbered variables at the beginning of each row.

* $p < .05$.

Cont.

Table 3 Cont.

Variables	6	7	8
1. Neg Relationship	0.09	-0.14	0.10
2. Pos Relationship	0.03*	-0.03*	-0.07
3. Neg General	-0.28	0.23	-0.26
4. Pos General	-0.10	0.15	-0.17
5. Pos Mood	-0.64	0.72	-0.44
6. Neg Mood	1.00	-0.32	0.66
7. T2 Pos Mood	-0.32	1.00	-0.51
8. T2 Neg Mood	0.66	-0.51	1.00

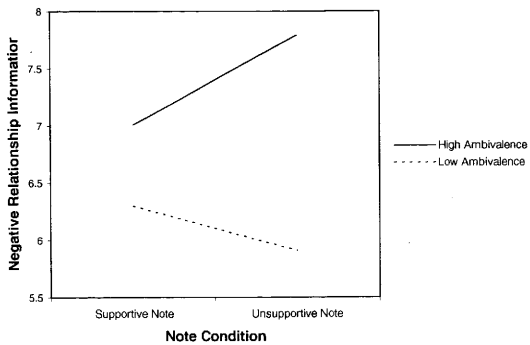
Note. Neg = negative; Pos = positive; T2 = time 2. Numbers in the column heads correspond to the numbered variables at the beginning of each row.

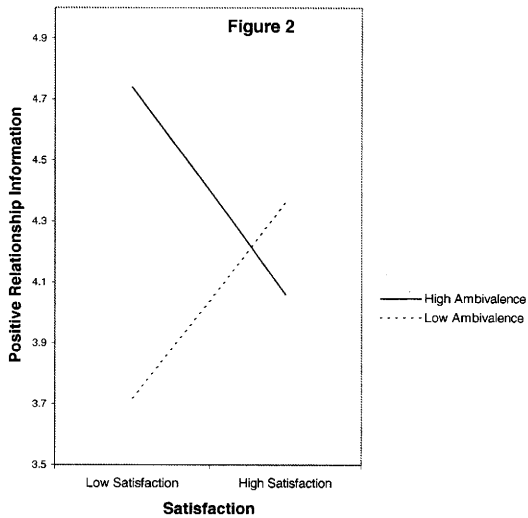
* $p < .05$.

and note condition. The ambivalent effect emerged as significant, $t = (68)$, $p < .05$, $\beta = .28$. The interaction between ambivalence and note condition also predicted the choice of negative relationship information, $t(66) = 2.04$, $p < .05$, $\beta = .23$, as depicted in Figure 1. High ambivalence individuals, upon receiving an unsupportive note, are much more likely to seek negative relationship information than those receiving a supportive note or low ambivalence individuals. Positive relationship information, negative general information, and positive general information were tested in the same manner, but no significant values were found.

The next analyses, involving relationship satisfaction instead of note condition, were conducted in the same manner. No significant interactions were found for negative relationship information, but the interaction between ambivalence and satisfaction did predict positive relationship information seeking, $t(66) = -1.99$, $p < .05$, $\beta = -.25$. This interaction is depicted in Figure 2. High ambivalence individuals, when high in relationship satisfaction, will seek less positive relationship information than when low in relationship satisfaction. Low ambivalence individuals will seek less positive relationship information when low in satisfaction than when high. No significant values were found for negative general information or for positive general information.

Figure 1

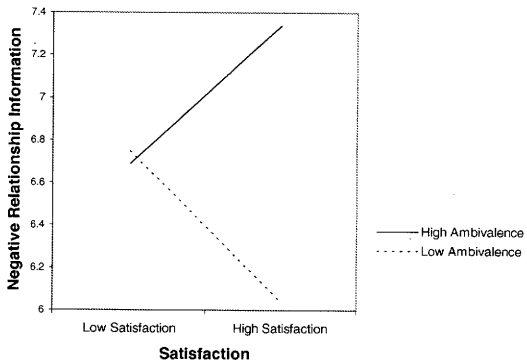




In the next set of analyses, mood was partialled out to determine whether or not information seeking depended on an individual's mood at the time of paragraph choice. The dependent variables were again negative relationship information, positive relationship information, negative general information, and positive general information. Because the mood scale was split between positive and negative mood, both were entered. The order the predictor variables were entered was as follows: positive mood, negative mood, ambivalence and either note condition or relationship satisfaction, followed by the interaction between ambivalence and either note condition or satisfaction. The only new significant interaction found was that the interaction between ambivalence and satisfaction, when controlling for mood, predicts negative relationship information seeking, $t(64) = 1.97$, $p < .05$, $\beta = .25$. This interaction is depicted in Figure 3. Although when low in relationship satisfaction high and low ambivalence individuals seek about the same amount of negative relationship information, when high in relationship satisfaction, high ambivalence people seek more negative relationship information and low ambivalence people seek less negative relationship information.

The last analyses for ambivalent individuals sought change in mood between the first, baseline survey, and the last, manipulation-check survey, labeled respectively as either positive or negative mood and either positive or negative mood

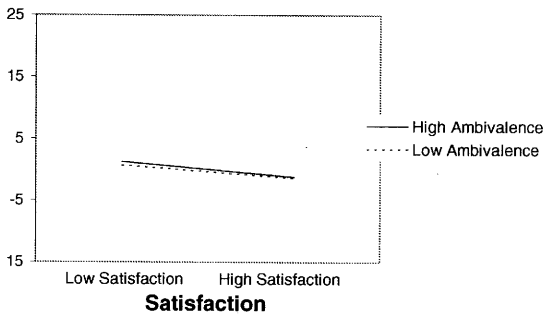
Figure 3



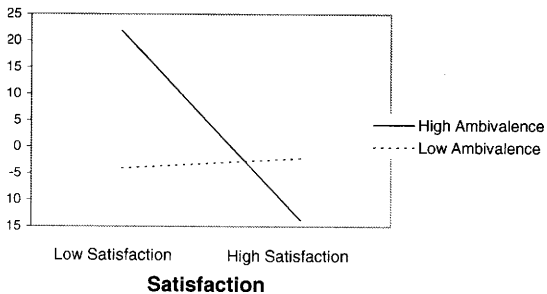
time 2. The dependent variable was either positive mood time 2 or negative mood time 2, depending on whether positive mood or negative mood, respectively, was entered as a predictor variable. The predictor variables entered, in order, were either positive or negative mood, note condition, and relationship satisfaction; followed by the interactions between ambivalence and note condition, ambivalence and relationship satisfaction, and note condition and satisfaction; and finally by the three-way interaction between ambivalence, note condition, and relationship satisfaction. Positive mood change was not significant, but the interaction between ambivalence, note condition, and relationship satisfaction did predict a difference between high and low ambivalence individuals for change in negative mood, $t(61) = -2.30$, $p < .05$, $\beta = -.26$. This interaction can be seen in Figure 4. For the supportive note condition, high and low ambivalence individuals showed nearly the same negative mood at time 2, independent of relationship satisfaction. For the unsupportive note condition, although low ambivalence people still did not show a change in mood between low and high satisfaction, highly ambivalent individuals had much more negative mood at time 2 if they were low in relationship satisfaction and had much less negative mood at time 2 if they were high in relationship satisfaction.

Figure 4

Supportive Note



Unsupportive Note

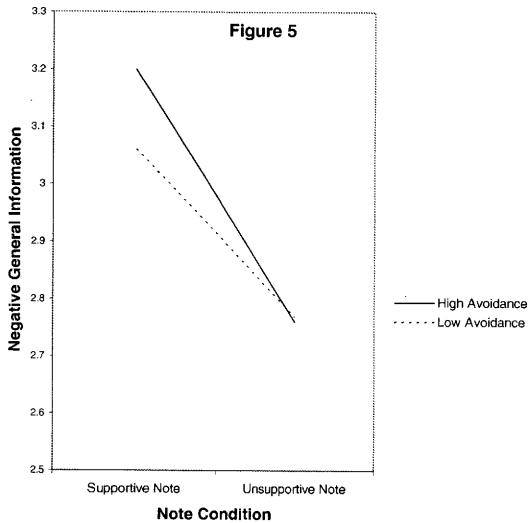


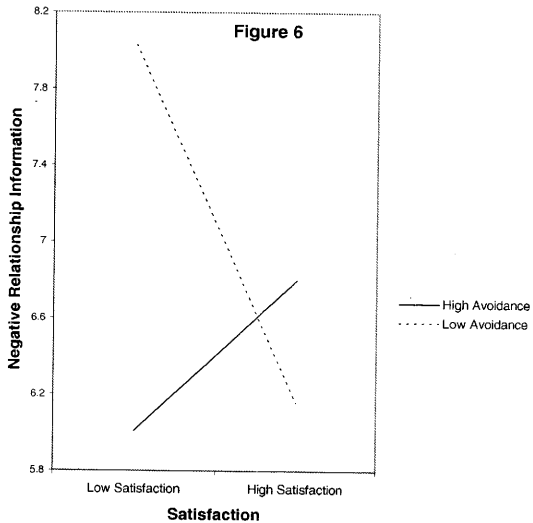
Avoidance

I had no predictions for avoidance, but I conducted exploratory analyses that paralleled the analyses for ambivalence. No main effects were found, but several interactions surfaced.

The first analyses tested for the dependent variables of negative relationship information, positive relationship information, negative general information, and positive general information. The predictor variables, in order of entry, were avoidance, note condition, and the interaction between avoidance and note condition. The only significant finding was for negative general information, $t(66) = -2.54$, $p < .01$, $\beta = -.30$. The interaction is depicted in Figure 5. Although individuals high and low in avoidance show nearly the same amount of negative general information seeking upon receiving an unsupportive note, high avoidance people sought much more negative general information upon receiving a supportive note.

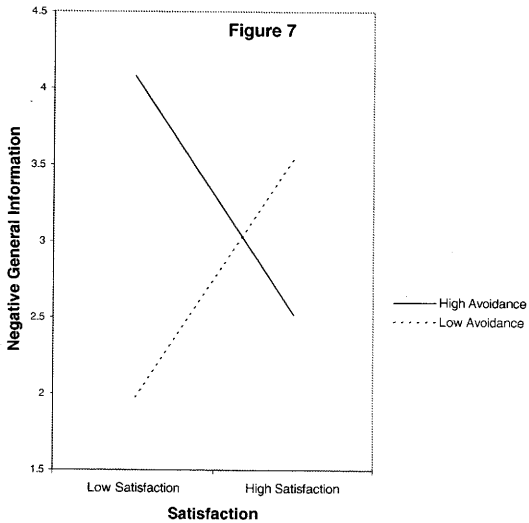
The second set of analyses was conducted in the same manner, substituting relationship satisfaction for note condition. The interaction between avoidance and relationship was found to predict negative relationship information seeking, $t(66) = 3.43$, $p < .01$, $\beta = .43$, as seen in Figure 6. Low avoidance people seek much more negative relationship information when low in relationship satisfaction than high avoidance people, but when high in relationship satisfaction, high avoidance people sought





more negative relationship information than low avoidance people. This interaction also predicted negative general information seeking, $t(66) = -3.89$, $p < .01$, $\beta = -.48$. This interaction can be seen in Figure 7. In this case, high avoidance people when low in relationship satisfaction are much more likely to seek negative general information than those low in avoidance, but when high in relationship satisfaction, low avoidance people sought more negative general information than high avoidance individuals. Avoidance and satisfaction did not significantly predict either positive relationship or positive general information seeking.

For avoidance, partialing out mood did not reveal any new significant interactions, nor did it reveal any significant differences between high and low avoidant individuals due to change in mood.



CONCLUSION

As predicted, individuals high in ambivalence were more likely to look for negative information about their relationships upon receiving the unsupportive note than the supportive note. This finding was specific to negative relationship information, as expected, and did not hold true for positive relationship information, negative general information, or positive general information, just as predicted. Ambivalent individuals should be more likely to seek negative information about the relationship when fears about the attachment relationship, such as the threat of abandonment or loss of trust in the partner, develop. The unsupportive note apparently activated these concerns, as I had hoped, and led the ambivalent individual to focus on more information about threat to the relationship rather than on positive relationship information or general information, each of which would have been considered unimportant while attachment concerns were raised.

Highly ambivalent individuals were more likely, overall, to seek negative relationship information than those low on ambivalence, independent of note condition. This was not exactly what I predicted since I believed that anxious/ambivalent individuals would show differences in information seeking from low ambivalence individuals only when attachment concerns were raised. Apparently, issues relevant to negative aspects of the relationship exacerbate an already existing tendency in highly

ambivalent individuals to seek negative information about the relationship. However, whereas high ambivalence individuals tend to seek more negative relationship information upon receiving the unsupportive note, low ambivalence individuals actually seek less.

I had no hypotheses about avoidance because the experiment was set up to activate attachment concerns in anxious/ambivalent individuals. Those high on avoidance should have focused their attention away from environmental features that made attachment needs salient, out of a desire to maintain autonomy. Therefore any attachment concerns that might have been raised by the note should have been suppressed or pushed out of awareness. Nevertheless, I examined information seeking in highly avoidant individuals in relation to note condition and found that although the note did not effect relationship information seeking, it did effect general information seeking. Both high and low avoidance individuals were likely to seek more negative general information when receiving the supportive note. However, although high avoidant individuals were even more likely than low avoidant individuals to seek negative general information when receiving the supportive note, high avoidance people sought about the same amount of negative general information, in fact slightly less, than low avoidance people when receiving the unsupportive note. In other words, their change in negative general information seeking was much greater than low avoidant individuals' change.

This finding does make sense with regard to attachment behaviors. Because highly avoidant individuals should try to avoid attachment salient issues, the fact that they sought non-relationship information followed their attachment pattern. They may have sought less negative information about their partners' goals and motivations upon receiving the unsupportive note to avoid worrying about an unsupportive partner's chances for success, or they may have distanced themselves more from the information seeking task by choosing an equal number of paragraphs from each category, thereby showing less interest in both the relationship and the partner. This second explanation may be more likely since a decrease in negative general information seeking did not correspond to an overall increase in positive general information seeking or negative or positive relationship information seeking. The issue is not clear and cannot be fully explained at this time, but further research in this area is likely to reveal important information about highly avoidant individuals and their reactions to support.

Although the focus of this study was information seeking with regard to support, or note condition, I also examined the relationship between information seeking and relationship satisfaction. Highly ambivalent individuals who were low in relationship satisfaction sought much more positive relationship information than those who were high in relationship satisfaction. This finding, though surprising for ambivalent

individuals at first, makes sense when considered in the confines of a relationship. Someone unhappy in his or her relationship but scared of abandonment may seek positive relationship information to reassure himself or herself, whereas someone who is happy overall with his or her relationship will follow his or her attachment style pattern and seek less positive relationship information (presumably, but not necessarily, in order to seek more negative relationship information). Low ambivalence individuals, however, showed the opposite tendency: when unsatisfied with their relationships, they sought less positive relationship information than when satisfied with their relationships. This is probably due to the secure individual's ability to regard a relationship comfortably, trustingly, and realistically. A person that is low in ambivalence is probably better able to look at an unsatisfying relationship objectively, possibly to see how to make it better or to decide whether or not to continue it. A low ambivalence individual in a relationship with high satisfaction may look at more positive relationship information to confirm beliefs he or she already holds.

Difference in relationship satisfaction only affected negative relationship information seeking significantly for ambivalent individuals when mood was partialled out. In other words, ambivalence and relationship satisfaction only predicted negative relationship information seeking when mood was taken into account and held constant across all participants. Then,

although both low and high ambivalence individuals sought the same amount of negative relationship information when low in relationship satisfaction, when highly satisfied in their relationships, low ambivalence individuals sought much less negative relationship information and highly ambivalent individuals sought much more negative relationship information. This finding confirms the idea presented previously that, when low in relationship satisfaction, anxious/ambivalents seek more positive relationship information and that, when high in relationship satisfaction, anxious/ambivalents seek more negative relationship information. Although this may not be due to the reasoning presented previously, namely that positive relationship information is sought for reassurance, it does heighten the plausibility of this conjecture.

When looking at the change in mood before and after the note manipulation, very little difference between high and low ambivalent individuals and high and low relationship satisfaction was seen for the supportive note condition. However, for the unsupportive note, although low ambivalence individuals were only slightly affected, highly ambivalent individuals were affected very differently, based on relationship satisfaction. Those with low satisfaction in their relationship showed a very high negative mood at time 2, and those with high relationship satisfaction showed a very low negative mood at time 2. In other words, the difference in negative mood between high and low

relationship satisfaction was much more different between high and low ambivalence individuals for the unsupportive note than the supportive note. Highly ambivalent people were, therefore, much more affected by the note condition than low ambivalence people, as predicted. Relationship satisfaction apparently played a role in which direction mood change occurred after the experimental manipulations. Anxious/ambivalents with low relationship satisfaction were much more upset by the unsupportive note than any other group of people. Negative mood decreased for anxious/ambivalents with high relationship satisfaction who received the unsupportive note. Perhaps this finding is due to the fact that their attachment beliefs were verified, but they still knew they had a strong relationship. More clarification is needed in this area.

Avoidant individuals' information seeking was also affected by relationship satisfaction. For low relationship satisfaction, highly avoidant individuals sought little negative relationship information. Low avoidance individuals sought a large amount of negative relationship information. For high relationship satisfaction, high avoidance individuals' negative relationship information seeking increased and low avoidance individuals' negative relationship information seeking decreased. Does this finding mean that avoidant individuals' attention to relationship information is dependent on relationship satisfaction? An avoidant individual may possibly be less worried about attachment

issues when happy with his or her partner. Why is this effect only found for negative and not positive relationship information seeking? In order to fully understand and clarify this interaction, more research is needed.

The avoidant individual, when not satisfied with his or her relationship, was more likely to seek negative general information, and when highly satisfied, was less likely. Once again, the opposite was true for those who were low on the avoidance scale. Possibly, the avoidant people were more interested in negative information, but when not satisfied in their relationships, they sought general information and when satisfied in their relationships they sought relationship information. Because this study used only relationship information and information about the romantic partner, avoidant individuals may have been forced to choose information they did not really want to read. If information about the self or information that was truly general, instead of information about the partner, had been provided, avoidant individuals may have chosen very different topics. Again, this study focused on anxious/ambivalence, but a future study that examined the nuances of highly avoidant individuals' information seeking might be very informative.

This study was the first done in information seeking with regard to attachment style. Because the manipulations were created with the anxious/ambivalent individuals in mind, the

findings for ambivalence are clearer than those for avoidance. The results of this study confirm the negativity bias of highly ambivalent individuals. When attachment needs are brought to the forefront, anxious/ambivalents are likely to seek negative information about their relationships. Whether this finding is due to the fact that they anticipate the worst or that they seek the worst in order to correct it has not been shown in this study and might be important to determine in the future. Relationship satisfaction has also been shown to mediate these results somewhat, although not enough to change the overall type of information sought. Anxious/ambivalent individuals showed no patterns for information seeking based on note condition other than negative relationship information, showing that highly ambivalent individuals are indeed hyper vigilant to attachment concerns.

Avoidant individuals showed a preference for negative information that seemed to be affected more by relationship satisfaction than note condition. Although interesting patterns for information seeking were found, they are difficult to interpret without more information specific to the avoidant attachment style.

Results for highly ambivalent individuals can be generalized to behavior patterns in relationships outside of a laboratory setting as well. Stressful conditions, such as illness, job difficulties, or family problems, are more likely to

cause ambivalent individuals to be hyper-vigilant for difficulties within the relationship if they receive a low level of support from their spouse or significant other. More relationship problems are likely to surface because they will be specifically looking for signs of these problems. A high level of support from the spouse or significant other will probably lead to fewer difficulties, although anxious/ambivalents would still be more likely to notice negative information than those low on the ambivalence scale. Whether this negative information is used to solve problems or cause more has yet to be determined.

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APPENDIX A

Manipulation-Check Questions

Using the following 7-point scale, please indicate the appropriate number on your scantron.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Not at all Supportive/
Not at all Comforting

Highly Supportive/
Comforting

1. How supportive do you think your partner is in general?
2. Does your partner comfort you when you are stressed?
3. How supportive was your partner's note?
4. To what extent did you feel comforted by the note?

Using the following 7-point scale, please indicate the appropriate number on your scantron.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Not at all
like me

Very much
like me

1. To what extent did you feel anxious about giving the speech?
2. To what extent did the idea of giving the speech make you feel stressed?

APPENDIX B

Paragraph Instructions and Choices

Instructions. The data that you entered into the computer has been analyzed and compared to data collected from a nationally representative sample of people your age. Based on these comparisons, the computer will present a rather detailed profile of your partner and relationship. It will generate information on a variety of topics. The topics vary from relationship to relationship, depending on the issues that come up in the information you and your partner provide. The profiles written by the computer sometimes can be very long. We simply don't have time for you to look at all of the material. What we do when this happens is to have you tell the computer how many paragraphs of feedback you want to see about each topic or category. So if you want a lot of detail about a specific topic or category, you may want to see more paragraphs about it than another topic. Please indicate how many paragraphs you want to see for each topic when the computer prompts you. It will generate a personalized profile for you to read. When you click on the link below, the list of topics for your profile will appear. Your partner will NOT be told what information you have (or have not) requested.

You can select information on one or more of the topics listed below. For each topic below, the computer can produce up to 10 paragraphs. For any one topic you can select information about your partner's strengths or weaknesses, but not both. For example, if your profile discusses your partner's ability to communicate, you can select information on his/her strengths or weaknesses in communication, but not both.

Since we have limited time, you can select no more than 10 paragraphs in all. For example, you might select all 10 paragraphs for one topic; or you can select 3 paragraphs from one topic, 2 paragraphs for a second topic, and 5 paragraphs for a third. You can select information on as many topics as you want, but you can select only 10 paragraphs in all.

To tell the computer what topic or topics you want information on, put the cursor in the circle to the left of the topic and left click. To tell the computer how many paragraphs you want on that topic, click on the numbered scale below the topic. If you have any questions, please notify the experimenter.

Sample item.

__Your partner's strengths in regard to his/her ability to communicate.

__Your partner's weaknesses in regard to his/her ability to communicate.

Paragraphs: __1 __2 __3 __4 __5 __6 __7 __8 __9 __10

Topics.

1a. __Your partner's strengths in regard to commitment to a relationship.

1b. __Your partner's weaknesses in regard to commitment to a relationship.

Paragraphs: __1 __2 __3 __4 __5 __6 __7 __8 __9 __10

2a. __Your partner's strengths in regard to being successful in his/her career.

2b. __Your partner's weaknesses in regard to being successful in his/her career.

Paragraphs: __1 __2 __3 __4 __5 __6 __7 __8 __9 __10

3a. __Your partner's strengths in regard to providing emotional support.

3b. __Your partner's weaknesses in regard to providing emotional support.

Paragraphs: __1 __2 __3 __4 __5 __6 __7 __8 __9 __10

4a. __Your partner's strengths in regard to understanding the feelings of other persons.

4b. __Your partner's weaknesses in regard to understanding the feelings of other persons.

Paragraphs: __1 __2 __3 __4 __5 __6 __7 __8 __9 __10

5a. __Your partner's strengths in regard to understanding his/her own motivations and psychological needs.

5b. __Your partner's weaknesses in regard to understanding his/her own motivations and psychological needs.

Paragraphs: __1 __2 __3 __4 __5 __6 __7 __8 __9 __10

APPENDIX C

Speech Information Sheet

The Texas A&M administration implemented an increase in the University Student Center fees, which is intended to benefit the Memorial Student Center. The Student Center fee bill was passed in the spring of 2001, increasing these student fees from 30 to 40 dollars a semester and increasing the fee cap from 40 to 100 dollars. In other words, students will be required to pay a minimum of 10 dollars more per semester, with the possibility of an increase to 70 dollars more per semester. This money will be used to refurbish several areas, such as the flag room, a room seen by all visitors and viewed as representative of the A&M University; the cafeteria; and the student recreation areas. Student clubs and organizations will also receive a percentage of this funding.

A fee referendum election was held in the spring of 2001, in which the University Student Center fee bill was passed. Only 2-3000 students of the 40-50,000 total population voted in the referendum election, less than 6% of the A&M student population. The administration is concerned that this small percentage may be a misrepresentation of the overall student opinion. Questions have been raised concerning the reliability of the results of this election and considerations are being made for a second vote to either continue or rescind this higher fee.

Administrators have asked several groups to become involved in measuring student opinion. Psi Chi, the Psychology Honor's Society, has been chosen as one of these groups. Members of Psi Chi will videotape as many student speeches as possible to look over as a group in a later meeting. They will select a substantial number of these videos to be viewed by the Student Senate and other relevant individuals.

APPENDIX D

Couple Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions to the best of your knowledge.

1. What is your birth date?
2. What is your middle name?
3. How many siblings do you have?
4. What is your partner's birth date?
5. What is your partner's middle name?
6. How many siblings does your partner have?

VITA

Jaye Lindsay Derrick was born in Spokane, Washington and raised in several cities throughout Texas. For the last several years her home has been at 13319 Misty Hills, Cypress, Texas 77429. She has received several recognitions for her high grades, such as the Dean's List, and she will graduate Magna Cum Laude with University Honors and Foundation Honors. Jaye received first place in her category for Student Research Week in March of 2002, where she presented the findings of this study. After graduation, Jaye will attend the State University of New York at Buffalo for graduate studies in psychology.