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Relational Uncertainty in Romantic Relationships: The Influence of Attachment and Relational Maintenance Behaviors

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Citation

Relational Uncertainty in Romantic Relationships:
The Influence of Attachment and Relational Maintenance Behaviors

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by

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This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of attachment and relational maintenance behaviors on relational uncertainty. Ninety individuals currently involved in romantic relationships completed measures assessing their attachment (i.e., secure, preoccupied, dismissive, fearful), relational uncertainties (i.e., self, partner, relationship), and relational maintenance behaviors (i.e., shared tasks, shared networks, positivity, openness, assurances). Findings demonstrated that both secure attachment and fearful attachment were not significantly associated with self, partner, or relationship uncertainty. In addition, dismissive attachment was negatively associated with partner uncertainty and positively associated with relationship uncertainty. Preoccupied attachment was positively associated with both partner and relationship uncertainty. Furthermore, secure attachment was positively associated with shared tasks, preoccupied attachment was negatively associated with shared tasks, and dismissive attachment was negatively associated with assurances. All other hypothesized relationships between attachment and relational maintenance behaviors were nonsignificant. Finally, results indicated minimal support for a statistical model in which relational maintenance behaviors mediated the associations between attachment and relational uncertainty.

Keywords: relational uncertainty, romantic relationships, attachment, relational maintenance behaviors

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CHAPTER 1

Literature Review

Attachment is defined as strong affective bonds between infants and primary caregivers (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bowlby, 1973, 1988). Attachment develops from and is determined by our primary caregivers' responsiveness and support during childhood (Bowlby, 1988). Attachment scholars distinguish between four attachment styles, namely secure, preoccupied, dismissive, and fearful attachment. Previous research specified that security in attachment benefits individuals psychologically (Hazan & Shaver, 1990; Quick, Nelson, Matuszek, Whittington, & Quick, 1996), behaviorally (Mikulincer, 1997), and physically (Priel & Shamai, 1995; Simmons, Nelson, & Quick, 2003), compared to preoccupation, dismission, and fear in attachment.

Earlier work demonstrated relationships between attachment and both relational uncertainty (Fox & Warber, 2014; Jin & Pena, 2010) and relational maintenance behaviors (Bippus & Rollin, 2003; Guerrero & Bachman, 2006). Relational uncertainty refers to the degree of confidence people perceive regarding their romantic relationships (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999, 2002). Confidence is influenced by three sources, specifically the self, the partner, and the relationship. Given that security in attachment is associated with increased confidence in interpersonal relationships, I saw utility in confirming previous work that examined how attachment contributes to relational uncertainty within romantic relationships.

The extent to which attachment influences self, partner, and relationship uncertainty may be influenced by RMBs. Previous work identified five types of relational maintenance behaviors, particularly shared tasks, shared networks, positivity, openness, and assurances (Stafford & Canary, 1991). Furthermore, Bippus and Rollin (2003) demonstrated an association between

secure attachment and prosocial maintenance behaviors. In addition, I expected shared tasks, shared networks, positivity, openness, and assurances to mediate the association between attachment and relational uncertainty given that RMBs are associated with both individual and relational benefits (Feeney, Noller, & Roberts, 1998; Keelan, Dion, & Dion, 1994; Kobak & Hazan, 1991; Senchak & Leonard, 1992).

In the sections that follow, I first review research highlighting attachment theory, the four distinct attachment styles, and the outcomes associated with secure, preoccupied, dismissive, and fearful attachment. Then, I examine uncertainty reduction theory, specify three distinct sources of uncertainty within interpersonal relationships, and advance four hypotheses linking attachment styles to relational uncertainty. Lastly, I describe RMBs and articulate a statistical model in which RMBs mediate the associations between attachment styles and relational uncertainty.

Attachment

Initial theoretical constructions defined attachment as a strong affective bond between an infant and the infant's primary caregiver (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bowlby, 1973, 1988). Bowlby (1988) theorized that the nature and quality of this attachment relationship is largely determined by the caregiver's emotional availability for, supportiveness of, and responsiveness to the child. Given that infants are dependent on their primary caregivers, they require proximity for survival (Bowlby, 1973). This attachment bond with a primary caregiver provides the infant with a secure base from which to explore the environment and develop personal competencies (Bretherton, 1992). According to attachment theory, the early attachment-related experiences of the infant become internalized as working models of self and the generalized other. Furthermore, infants form a repertoire of communication skills and affective

responses that will reflect, reinforce, and modify these internalized models through subsequent interactions (Bowlby, 1988).

Measures of attachment recognize four distinct attachment styles: (a) secure, (b) preoccupied, (c) dismissive, and (d) fearful (Bartholomew, 1990; Guerrero, 1994). Secure attachment develops when a child experiences the proximity, consistent responsiveness, and support of primary caregivers (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1969; Bowlby, 1973). A securely attached infant develops a positive view of self and a positive view of others (Bowlby, 1958). Security in attachment demonstrates comfort and confidence in the dependent nature of interpersonal relationships (Simpson, 1990). The remaining three attachment styles emphasize different aspects of insecure attachment orientations. A preoccupied attachment style develops when a primary caregiver does not demonstrate immediacy, accessibility, and responsiveness (Bowlby, 1973). A preoccupied attachment style indicates a negative view of self and a positive view of others (Bowlby, 1958). Preoccupation with attachment manifests in the concern for, engrossment with, and distraction by relational intimacy (Simpson, 1990). In addition to preoccupation, dismissive attachment develops when a primary caregiver does not express emotions toward the infant and is unresponsive to the child's needs (Bowlby, 1977; Ward, Hudson, & Marshall, 1996). A dismissive individual possesses a positive view of self and a negative view of others (Bowlby, 1958; Murphy & Bates, 1997). Dismissiveness captures the extent to which people believe that relationships are nonessential and of secondary importance (Simpson, 1990). Lastly, fearful attachment develops when a child does not experience care, concern, or consistency from primary caregivers (Bowlby, 1977). Fearfully attached individuals embody a negative view of self and a negative view of others (Bartholomew, 1990). Fearful individuals are uncomfortable with closeness, develop emotionally distant relationships, and find

it difficult to trust others (Simpson, 1990).

Ainsworth and colleagues (1978) specified that attachment styles explain individual differences through childhood into adulthood. More specifically, security in attachment is associated with psychological, behavioral, and physical advantages. There is a robust association between secure attachment and psychological well-being, including lower levels of anxiety and depression (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987), and higher levels of self-esteem (Ryan & Deci, 2001). In addition to the psychological benefits of a secure attachment style, individuals are also less likely to develop behavioral problems, including problematic substance use, dangerous sexual activity, and other delinquent conduct (Cooper, Shaver, & Collins, 1998). Finally, recent research points to emboldened physical health for securely attached individuals. Empirical evidence suggests secure attachment is related to less frequent experiences of pain, psychosomatic illnesses, and physical ailments (Hazan & Shaver, 1987, 1990; Feeney, 2000).

Whereas security in attachment is beneficial for individuals, attachment insecurity is related to psychological, behavioral, and physical ramifications. More specifically, there is a relationship between insecure attachment and psychological deficiencies, including higher levels of apprehension, depression, and neuroticism (Shaver & Brennan, 1992), and lower levels of self-confidence (Hart, Shaver, & Goldenberg, 2005). In addition to the psychological consequences of an insecure attachment style, individuals are also more likely to develop behavioral problems, including educational underachievement, problematic substance use, and dangerous sexual activity (Cooper et al., 1998). Finally, recent research points to diminished physical health for insecurely attached individuals. Empirical evidence suggests attachment insecurity encourages problematic reactions to stress, including greater hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) reactivity to stressful stimuli and faster rates of rising cortisol levels

(Powers, Pietromonaco, Gunlicks, & Sayer, 2006).

      Attachment style forms the foundation for how we generalize ourselves, others and how we relate to people. Our attachment styles form during our childhood and are largely determined by the level of responsiveness and support given us by our primary caregivers (Bowlby, 1988). We do not have much control over what attachment style we develop, but we can be educated about what they are, how they manifest themselves and how to redirect unhealthy behaviors to become positive, healthy ones. There are four main attachment styles: secure, preoccupied, dismissive and fearful (Bartholomew, 1990; Guerrero, 1994). Preoccupied, dismissive and fearful attachment are all types of insecure attachment styles. Secure attachment is the ideal style and is reflected in a positive view of self and a positive view of others (Bowlby, 1958). Preoccupied attachment is when one has a negative view of self and a positive view of others (Bowlby, 1958). Dismissive attachment is reflected in a positive view of self and a negative view of others (Bowlby, 1958). Fearful attachment is when one has a negative view of self and a negative view of others (Bowlby, 1958). The three insecure attachment styles are imbalanced in one way or another, which causes problematic relationship outcomes. On the other hand, secure attachment is the ideal balance because it constitutes a healthy view of self and others. Contrary to the insecure attachment styles, secure attachment leads to beneficial relationship outcomes.

      In summary, attachment theory allows us to see the root factors influencing individual frameworks for how people relate to themselves and others in nonromantic and romantic relationships. Understanding ourselves is an important precursor to understanding others and how we relate to them. Gathering insight on our attachment style enables us to increase self-awareness so that we may improve the quality of our relationships, which will increase the quality of our lives.

Uncertainty Reduction Theory

 Uncertainty reduction theory argues that individuals are motivated to enhance understanding and diminish ambiguity (Berger & Bradac, 1982; Berger & Calabrese, 1975). Berger (2005) contends that the anticipation of a future interaction, the incentive value of the interaction, and the interaction partner's deviance from behavioral norms drive individuals to pursue uncertainty reduction. Uncertainty is defined as a person's inability to describe, explain, and predict behavior within social situations (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Solomon & Knobloch, 2001). According to uncertainty reduction theory, doubt is generated by three related, but distinct sources within interpersonal relationships, namely the self, the partner, and the relationship. Self-uncertainty is defined as an individual's questions about his/her participation in a relationship (Knobloch & Solomon, 2002). Whereas self uncertainty is focused on one's own involvement, partner uncertainty is defined as an individual's questions about his/her partner's participation in the relationship (Knobloch & Solomon, 2002). Notably, self and partner uncertainty exist at a lower order of abstraction than relationship uncertainty. Relationship uncertainty is present at the dyadic level and describes an individual's questions about the relationship itself (Berger & Bradac, 1982; Knobloch & Solomon, 2002).

 Given that information acquisition about and knowledge of interaction partners is the goal of uncertainty reduction theory, researchers were prompted to understand information-seeking strategies deployed during interpersonal contact. Berger and Calabrese (1975) identified three strategies to reduce uncertainty: (a) passive, (b) active, and (c) interactive. Passive strategies decrease doubt by unobtrusively observing another individual (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). In addition to passive observation, active strategies refer to gathering information about another person without interaction, such as looking at social media profiles and asking others

about the individual (Antheunis, Valkenburg, & Peter, 2010). Finally, interactive strategies involve seeking information through conversation by asking questions and reciprocal self-disclosure (Berger & Calabrese, 1975).

Uncertainty reduction theory provides us insight on the motives and strategies behind peoples' interactions. It is foundational because it tells us that the fundamental goal of each interaction is to reduce uncertainty. We interact to gain clarity and seek to understand more about someone or something. Uncertainty is defined as our inability to predict or explain behavior within social situations (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Solomon & Knobloch, 2001). Uncertainty reduction helps us paint a clearer picture of ourselves, our relationships and the world around us. We are more content when things make sense and when we understand why things are the way they are. Uncertainty is caused by three primary sources: the self, the other, and the relationship itself. Self-uncertainty is concerned with doubts about one's own participation in the relationship (Knobloch & Solomon, 2002). Partner uncertainty focuses on doubts about one's partner's participation in the relationship (Knobloch & Solomon, 2002). Relationship uncertainty refers to doubts we have about the relationship itself (Berger & Bradac, 1982; Knobloch & Solomon, 2002). Both self and partner uncertainty exist at the individual level while relationship uncertainty exists at the dyadic level (i.e., both parties share the concerns). We can control self-uncertainty since it is largely dependent on our actions and decisions in relationships. Partner uncertainty is not as much in our control since it is based on our questions about our partner's participation in the relationship. This requires us to communicate with them and be clear about expectations for the relationship. Relationship uncertainty requires both parties to communicate and compromise to meet mutual goals. This requires teamwork and both sides to put in the work necessary to have a successful relationship. All of us experience these three types of uncertainty

in our lives to varying degrees.

There are three strategies we employ to reduce uncertainty: passive, active, and interactive strategies (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). Passive strategies usually involve observation and learning about relationships by people-watching. Active strategies mean that we are actively looking for information about people without directly communicating with them. This can look like asking others about them, searching them up on social media, etc. (Antheunis, Valkenburg, & Peter, 2010). Lastly, interactive strategies refer to direct communication with others where we ask questions and communicate our thoughts and desires to each other (Berger & Calabrese, 1975).While we can learn a lot by observing people and looking for information about them, the best way to get to know someone is to be directly interactive and talk to the person themselves.

Consistent with uncertainty reduction theory, empirical research demonstrated the negative relationship, physiological, and emotional consequences of relational uncertainty (Knobloch, 2008). In particular, relational uncertainty damages relationship well-being, resulting in increased relational dissatisfaction, relationship irritation, and perceptions of partner avoidance (Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004; Solomon & Knobloch, 2004; Theiss & Solomon, 2006). In addition to the relationship ramifications, relational uncertainty encourages physiological problems, including increased cortisol reactivity and disruption of cortisol recovery (Priem & Solomon, 2011). Finally, research points to decreased emotional health for individuals experiencing relational uncertainty. Empirical evidence suggests that relational uncertainty causes individuals to feel more negative emotions such as anger, sadness (Knobloch & Solomon, 2003), and fear (Knobloch, Miller, & Carpenter, 2007; Knobloch, Solomon, & Cruz, 2001; Guerrero & Chavez, 2005).

Counter to the theoretical foundation of uncertainty reduction theory and research that

demonstrated the ramifications of uncertainty, researchers have also documented benefits associated with relational uncertainty in romantic relationships. More specifically, relational uncertainty promotes feelings of excitement and romance in intimate relationships (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Relational uncertainty also mitigates perceptions of boredom that could encourage relational partners to terminate their romantic partnership (Baxter, 1986). According to Knobloch and Solomon (2002), relational uncertainty provides romantic partners the opportunity to reinforce intimacy, build camaraderie, and enhance feelings of togetherness.

Given that security in attachment is associated with decreased levels of anxiety (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987) and increased confidence in interpersonal relationships (Simpson, 1990), I posit that secure attachment is negatively associated with self, partner, and relationship uncertainty. In addition, I advance that dismissive attachment is negatively associated with relational uncertainty because dismissive individuals do not prioritize close relationships (Simpson, 1990). The remaining two attachment styles, preoccupied and fearful, demonstrate indecision, vacillation, and doubt regarding interpersonal relationships (Bowlby, 1958, 1973, 1977). Accordingly, I hypothesize that preoccupied and fearful attachments are positively associated with self, partner, and relationship uncertainty.

H1: Secure attachment is negatively associated with relational uncertainty.

H2: Dismissive attachment is negatively associated with relational uncertainty.

H3: Preoccupied attachment is positively associated with relational uncertainty.

H4: Fearful attachment is positively associated with relational uncertainty.

Relational Maintenance Behaviors

Relational maintenance behaviors (RMBs) are strategies utilized to demonstrate and preserve interpersonal commitment. More specifically, RMBs continue relationships in specified,

satisfactory states. Stafford and Canary (1991) identified five types of relational maintenance behaviors, specifically shared tasks, shared networks, positivity, openness, and assurances. Shared tasks and shared networks create associations within relationships through referential interactions that promote interdependence. Positivity, openness, and assurances are demonstrated through routine verbal interactions that decrease uncertainty and ambiguity in interpersonal relationships.

Referential interactions are RMBs that sustain relationship definitions through associative practices (e.g., shared tasks and shared networks; Canary & Stafford, 1992). Relational maintenance through shared tasks describes a partner's willingness to sustain the relationship by assisting with daily activities, such as preparing meals together (Dainton, Stafford, & Canary, 1994). Shared networks describe collective kinship networks created at the intersection of each partner's social circle (Stafford & Canary, 1991).

Relational maintenance behaviors refer to actions we perform to keep our relationships afloat, healthy and progressing forward. There are five main relational maintenance behaviors (RMBs) that can be further divided into two main categories: routine verbal interactions and referential interactions (Stafford & Canary, 1991). Routine verbal interactions refer to positivity, openness, and assurances. These are regular communication strategies used to create, maintain and strengthen bonds within relationships. Positive affirmations and transparent communication are important for healthy relationships. Referential interactions refer to shared tasks and shared networks. Examples of shared tasks include grocery shopping, cooking, building a bookshelf together, etc. Shared networks mean allowing our partners to step into our friend groups and allowing them to intersect. My friends become your friends and your friends become my friends. This creates a greater sense of continuity and fullness in the relationship since two people are

combining their worlds together and not living in segmented realities. Lastly, referential interactions are behaviors where we collaborate with partners to build camaraderie and strengthen bonds through shared experiences. Referential interactions are about sharing and doing things together to grow closer to each other.

Previous research found that shared tasks and shared networks are associated with psychological, emotional, and relational benefits for individuals. More specifically, there is a relationship between associative practices and psychological well-being, including increased levels of self-esteem and favorable mental health (Ledbetter, 2009; Schrodt, Ledbetter, & Ohrt, 2007). Beyond the psychological benefits of referential interactions, the emotional benefits of referential interactions include decreased negative emotions such as levels of anxiety and fear (Street Jr., Makoul, Arora, & Epstein, 2009). Finally, recent research points to propitious relational advantages associated with shared tasks and shared networks. Empirical evidence demonstrates that referential interactions result in increased partner liking, relational closeness, and relationship commitment (Canary & Stafford, 1992; Ledbetter, 2009).

While referential maintenance behaviors promote interdependence through associative practices (e.g., shared tasks and shared networks), routine verbal interactions (e.g., positivity, openness, assurances) include maintenance strategies that serve to reduce uncertainty by affirming the relationship and promoting stability (Canary & Stafford, 1992; Ficara & Mongeau, 2000). More specifically, positivity refers to gratifying, uplifting, and supportive statements (Stafford & Canary, 1991). In addition to positivity, openness is a relationship maintenance behavior that describes direct disclosure or unfurled discussion (Stafford & Canary, 1991). Finally, assurances are behaviors that involve covert and overt statements that demonstrate relational value and importance (Canary, Stafford, Hause, & Wallace, 1993).

Positivity, openness, and assurances are associated with psychological, physiological, and relational benefits for individuals. More specifically, routine verbal interaction is associated with positive psychological well-being, including lower levels of distress, depression, and hostility (Scheier & Carver, 1992). Beyond the psychological benefits of routine verbal interaction, individuals are also likely to experience physiological advantages, such as decreased systolic blood pressure and heart rate (Gottman & Notarius, 2000). Finally, recent research demonstrates the relational benefits associated with positivity, openness, and assurances, namely interdependence, emotional closeness (Canary & Stafford, 1992), and continued investment in relational success (Stafford & Canary, 1991).

While the enactment of RMBs are beneficial for both individuals and relationships, insufficient attempts to maintain close relationships are associated with negative psychological, behavioral, and relational ramifications. In particular, there is an association between low levels of RMBs and problematic psychological outcomes, such as depression, distress, and loneliness (Scheier & Carver, 1992). In addition, limited RMBs are likely to encourage problematic behavioral outcomes for individuals, including serial arguing and selective ignoring (Johnson & Roloff, 2000). Finally, recent research demonstrates relational ramifications associated with insufficient maintenance, including decreased intimacy, commitment, and investment (Baxter & Dindia, 1990; Stafford & Canary, 1991).

When examining the relationship between the four attachment styles and the enactment of RMBs, Simon and Baxter (1993) found that security in attachment is associated with behaviors aimed at sustaining interpersonal associations, such as the expression of positive emotions and reassurances regarding the nature of the relationship. Similarly, Bippus and Rollin (2003) demonstrated that securely attached individuals were perceived by friends as using more

prosocial behaviors than non-secure individuals. People who identify as comfortable and confident in the dependent nature of interpersonal relationships (Simpson, 1990) work to cultivate and nurture those relationships. Comparatively, insecurity in attachment including preoccupation, dismission, and fear, demonstrate concern for and distraction by relational intimacy. Although previous research failed to produce significant relationships between insecure attachment styles and the use of RMBs (Bippus & Rollin, 2003), the inherent hesitancy regarding interpersonal relationships suggests a negative association. Thus, I advance the following hypotheses:

H5: Secure attachment is positively associated with relational maintenance behaviors.

H6: Preoccupied, dismissive, and fearful attachment are negatively associated with relational maintenance behaviors.

Given that RMBs are utilized to demonstrate and preserve interpersonal commitment, RMBs may inherently reduce uncertainty (Dainton & Aylor, 2001). More specifically, referential maintenance behaviors promote connection through engagement and routine verbal interactions affirm the relationship intended to develop relational endurance (Canary & Stafford, 1992; Ficara & Mongeau, 2000). Consistent with the conceptualizations of both referential maintenance behaviors and routine verbal interactions, previous research demonstrated compelling associations between RMBs and relational uncertainty, particularly self, partner, and relationship uncertainty (Dainton, 2003; Dainton & Aylor, 2001; Ficara & Mongeau, 2000). Building from previous empirical findings, I posit the following hypothesis:

H7: Relational maintenance behaviors are negatively associated with relational uncertainty.

Since attachment orientations have their foundation in early childhood experiences, they are an antecedent to both the enactment of RMBs and relational uncertainty. As discussed

previously, individuals' attachment styles are empirically linked to the enactment of RMBs. In particular, Bippus and Rollin (2003) found that securely attached people used more prosocial behaviors than insecurely attached individuals. Previous research also indicated that RMBs reduce self, partner, and relationship uncertainty (Dainton, 2003; Dainton & Aylor, 2001; Ficara & Mongeau, 2000). To the extent that attachment orientations influence the use of RMBs, RMBs might mediate the association between attachment and relational uncertainty. In particular, attachment styles, developed from early childhood experiences, may form the foundation for how individuals maintain relationships in adulthood. My reasoning is reflected in a final hypothesis.

H8: Relational maintenance behaviors mediate the associations between attachment styles and relational uncertainty.

CHAPTER 2

Method

I tested my hypotheses using self-report data collected from college students. Participants were emailed a URL that directed them to an online survey hosted by Qualtrics. To track participation, all participants received a code number. All data provided by the participants were attributed to the code numbers to ensure the confidential nature of the research. The survey collected demographic information (e.g., sex, age) and items to capture the variables of interest. The survey was available to participants for a 4-week period. Potential issues with these methods include an insufficient sample size and snowball/nonrandom convenience sampling, which creates response bias due to the demographic of the population. In the future I would remove class standing and specify relationship status to mean, "people that are fully invested in committed relationships lasting longer than 6 months". I want the length of relationship to be more than 6 months because that is typically past the honeymoon stage, which allows me to hopefully get more rational relationship assessments. These criteria are beneficial because it allows me to measure a specific type of relationship that my research can address.

Participants

Ninety individuals were recruited via the Department of Communication's Research Participant Pool, Facebook, and Instagram to participate in the study. The sample consisted of 51 men (56.67 %) and 39 women (43.33 %). Ages ranged from 18 to 60 ($M = 27.81$, $SD = 10.31$). Participants were primarily non-traditional students ($n = 46$, 51.11 %), but also included seniors ($n = 18$, 20.00 %), juniors ($n = 12$, 13.33 %), fifth year seniors ($n = 9$, 10.00%), sophomores ($n = 4$, 4.44 %), and freshmen ($n = 1$, 1.11 %). Most of the sample identified as White ($n = 65$, 72.22 %); individuals also identified as Asian ($n = 22$, 24.44 %), and mixed race ($n = 3$, 3.33 %).

Measures

Please refer to Appendix for full measures.

  Attachment. Guerrero's (1994) Attachment Scale assessed the participants' relational orientations using 25 items. Participants responded to the statements using a 7-point Likert scale where higher numbers reflected more agreement, ranging from 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 7 (*agree strongly*). The *secure* subscale featured eight items measuring individuals' levels of confidence in interpersonal relationships (e.g., "It is easy for me to develop close relationships with others", $M = 4.85$, $SD = 0.91$, $\alpha = 0.79$). The *preoccupied attachment style* subscale featured seven items measuring individuals' concerns for relational intimacy (e.g., "I feel a strong need to have a close relationship", $M = 3.62$, $SD = 1.13$, $\alpha = 0.75$). The *dismissive style* subscale featured six items measuring individuals' perceptions of relationships as nonessential and of secondary importance (e.g., "Achieving things is more important to me than building relationships", $M = 3.44$, $SD = 1.18$, $\alpha = 0.84$). The f*earful style* subscale featured four items measuring how uncomfortable individuals are being close to others (e.g., "I would like to have closer relationships, but getting close makes me uneasy", $M = 3.27$, $SD = 1.22$, $\alpha = 0.75$).

  Relational Uncertainty. Fifty-four items measured self, partner, and relationship sources of relational uncertainty (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999). Participants responded to the statements using a 6-point scale where higher numbers reflected more uncertainty, ranging from 1 (*completely or almost completely certain*) to 6 (*completely or almost completely uncertain*). The s*elf-uncertainty* subscale featured 19 items measuring the doubts people have about their own participation in relationships (e.g., "How certain are you about how committed you are to the relationship?" $M = 1.32$, $SD = 0.66$, $\alpha = 0.98$). The *partner uncertainty* subscale featured 19 items measuring the doubts people have about their partners' participation in relationships (e.g.,

"How certain are you about how committed your partner is to the relationship?", $M = 1.36$, $SD = 0.75$, $\alpha = 0.98$). The *relationship uncertainty* subscale featured 16 items measuring the doubts people have about their relationships (e.g., "How certain are you about the norms of this relationship?", $M = 1.42$, $SD = 0.62$, $\alpha = 0.93$).

   Relational Maintenance Behaviors. Stafford and Canary's (1991) Relational Maintenance Behaviors (RMBs) Scale evaluated the participant's referential interactions and routine verbal communication. Participants responded to the statements using a 6-point Likert scale where higher numbers reflected more agreement, ranging from 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 6 (*agree strongly*). The *sharing tasks* subscale featured three items measuring efforts to maintain relationships by performing household responsibilities together (e.g., "I help equally with tasks that need to be done"; $M = 5.56$, $SD = 0.79$, $\alpha = 0.87$). The *shared networks* subscale featured two items measuring individuals' common associations (e.g., "I like to spend time with our same friends"; $M = 5.23$, $SD = 0.93$, $\alpha = 0.72$). The *positivity* subscale featured nine items measuring cheerful, optimistic, and uncritical behavior (e.g., "I attempt to make our interactions very enjoyable"; $M = 5.43$, $SD = 0.47$, $\alpha = 0.79$). The *openness* subscale featured four items measuring direct disclosure about the relationship (e.g., "I encourage him/her to disclose thoughts and feelings to me", $M = 5.17$, $SD = 0.93$, $\alpha = 0.83$). The *assurances* subscale featured three items measuring individuals' messages that emphasize commitment to continuation in the relationship (e.g., "I stress my commitment to him/her", $M = 5.54$, $SD = 0.64$, $\alpha = 0.53$). It should be noted that the *assurances* alpha coefficient is not reliable. Therefore, its results cannot be used as valid conclusions.

CHAPTER 3

Results

Table 1 reports correlations among all of the variables of interest. Counter to H1, secure attachment was not significantly associated with self, partner, or relationship uncertainty. Consistent with H2, dismissive attachment was significantly and negatively associated with self uncertainty; however, dismissive attachment was not significantly associated with partner uncertainty and was significantly and positively associated with relationship uncertainty. Preoccupied attachment was significantly and positively associated with both partner and relationship uncertainty; preoccupied attachment was not significantly associated with self uncertainty (H3). Furthermore, fearful attachment was not significantly associated with self, partner, or relationship uncertainty (H4). Consistent with H5, secure attachment was significantly and positively associated with shared tasks. In addition, preoccupied attachment was significantly and negatively associated with shared tasks (H6), and dismissive attachment was significantly and negatively associated with assurances (H6). All other hypothesized relationships between attachment and relational maintenance behaviors were nonsignificant. Consistent with H7, positivity and assurances were significantly and negatively associated with relationship uncertainty. Counter to H7, however, shared tasks, shared networks, and assurances were significantly and positively associated with self uncertainty. Furthermore, shared tasks, positivity, and assurances were significantly and positively associated with partner uncertainty. All other hypothesized relationships between relational maintenance behaviors and relational uncertainty were nonsignificant.

To gain insight into the mediational model specified in H8, I conducted a hierarchical regression analysis (see Table 2). Specifically, I entered secure attachment, preoccupied

attachment, dismissive attachment, and fearful attachment as independent variables in the first step of a regression model with self uncertainty as the dependent variable. I observed a significant negative coefficient for dismissive attachment; the coefficients for secure, preoccupied, and fearful attachment were nonsignificant. The second step evaluated the additional influence of five relational maintenance behaviors as independent variables. Results revealed significant negative coefficients for openness and assurances. Furthermore, the coefficient for dismissive attachment remained significant in the second step of the analysis.

In a second model, I entered secure attachment, preoccupied attachment, dismissive attachment, and fearful attachment as independent variables in the first step with partner uncertainty as the dependent variable (see Table 2). I observed a significant positive coefficient for dismissive attachment; the coefficients for secure, preoccupied, and fearful attachment were nonsignificant. The second step evaluated the additional influence of five relational maintenance behaviors as independent variables. Results revealed a significant negative coefficient for positivity. Furthermore, the coefficient for dismissive attachment remained significant in the second step of the analysis.

In the final model with relationship uncertainty as the dependent variable, I entered secure attachment, preoccupied attachment, dismissive attachment, and fearful attachment as independent variables in the first step. I observed significant positive coefficients for preoccupied attachment and dismissive attachment. The second step evaluated the additional influence of five relational maintenance behaviors as independent variables. Results revealed significant negative coefficients for shared tasks and positivity. Furthermore, the coefficients for preoccupied attachment and dismissive attachment remained significant in the second step of the analysis.

CHAPTER 4

Discussion

Extending the tenets of uncertainty reduction theory, this study examined self, partner, and relationship uncertainty as a result of attachment and relational maintenance behaviors (RMBs). Both the zero order correlations and the regression analyses indicated nonsignificant associations between both secure and fearful attachment, and self, partner, and relationship uncertainty. Given that security in attachment is associated with positive self perception and confidence in relationships (Simpson, 1990), I hypothesized that secure attachment was negatively associated with relational uncertainty. Perhaps secure individuals' positive perceptions of themselves and others decreases doubts about their relationships. Furthermore, secure individuals are confident in the interdependent nature of relationships and are better able to trust others. Conversely, fearful individuals demonstrate indecision and doubt regarding close relationships (Bowlby, 1958, 1973, 1977). Accordingly, fearful attachment was posited to increase relational uncertainty. Since fearful individuals have a negative view of themselves and others, they may experience increased doubts about their relationships. Fearful individuals may lack confidence in the interdependent nature of relationships and have difficult believing in others participation in relationships. Taken together, the findings suggest that congruent perspectives of self and other dampen the associations with self, partner, and relationship uncertainty to negligible.

Consistent with H3, preoccupied attachment was positively associated with partner and relationship uncertainty. Preoccupation with and distraction by relational intimacy invites questions about a partner's commitment to the relationship and creates dyadic uncertainty. As posited in H2, dismissive attachment was negatively associated with self uncertainty. Perceiving

relationships as nonessential discourages individuals to query about their participation in close relationships. Surprisingly, both the zero order correlation and regression analysis demonstrated that dismissiveness was positively associated with relationship uncertainty. Because dismissive attachment is related to discomfort with emotional intimacy (Morey, Gentzler, Creasy, Oberhauser, & Westerman, 2013), it may also encourage individuals to scrutinize the relationship itself. More specifically, dismissively attached individuals tend to feel under benefited because they place a high value on themselves and a low value on relationships (Dainton, 2011). This causes them to feel like they are not getting what they deserve in their relationships (Dainton, 2011). Furthermore, dismissive individuals are the least likely to perform prosocial maintenance (Guerrero & Bachman, 2006; Dainton, 2007; Dainton, 2011), which can increase relationship uncertainty. Dismissive individuals overlook relationships in favor of accomplishments and goals, which causes their relationship partners to feel neglected.

Using Simon and Baxter's (1993) work as a foundation, I advanced positive relationships between security in attachment and RMBs. In support of the posited associations, secure attachment was positively associated with shared tasks. Secure individuals' comfort and confidence in the dependent nature of interpersonal relationships (Simpson, 1990) explains their propensity to sustain relationships through associative practices. Comparatively, insecurity in attachment was hypothesized to decrease the use of RMBs (Bippus & Rollin, 2003). As expected, preoccupied attachment was negatively associated with shared tasks. Relational preoccupation may encourage unhealthy needs for proximity (Pistole, Roberts, & Chapman, 2010) that are insufficiently accessible for individuals. In addition, dismissive attachment was negatively associated with assurances. Dismissive individuals' self reliance and preference for limited emotional involvement dissuades overt statements of relational importance.

All other hypothesized relationships between attachment and RMBs were nonsignificant. Fearful individuals' negative view of self and others may explain the nonsignificant associations with RMBs. While fearful individuals desire dependence on others, they are also nervous to create intimate bonds and worry that they will get hurt if they form such relationships (Dainton, 2011). Guerrero and Bachman (2006) found a negative relationship between fearful attachment and positivity. In addition, the strong fear of being hurt may lead fearful individuals to avoid emotional expressiveness (Guerrero & Jones, 2003), including perhaps routine verbal RMBs.

In opposition of the posited negative relationships between RMBs and relational uncertainty, shared tasks, shared networks, and assurances were significantly and positively associated with self uncertainty in the regression analyses. Additionally, shared tasks, positivity, and assurances were significantly and positively associated with partner uncertainty. This is contrary Dainton and colleagues' works which demonstrated extensive support for moderate to strong negative associations between uncertainty and RMBs (Dainton, 2003; Dainton & Aylor, 2001; Ficara & Mongeau, 2000). Perhaps increased usage of RMBs actually demonstrates partner uncertainty. Individuals may perceive RMBs as necessary to quell their perceptions of partners' uncertainty. In other words, more shared tasks, greater statements of positivity, and increased assurances may be used as a result of partner uncertainty.

Consistent with the posited negative relationships between RMBs and relational uncertainty, assurances, positivity, shared tasks were significantly and negatively associated with relationship uncertainty. Associative practices and routine verbal interactions decrease relationship uncertainty by demonstrating a partner's willingness to sustain the relationship (Dainton, Stafford, & Canary, 1994; Stafford & Canary, 1991). This may explain why individuals experienced lower levels of relationship uncertainty. The results suggest that the

more RMBs present, the less relational uncertainty.

Lastly, RMBs did not mediate the associations between attachment styles and relational uncertainty. This finding suggests that both attachment styles and RMBs independently influence self, partner, and relationship uncertainty.

This research is important because it has real-world implications for our relationships. We need to understand ourselves and our attachment styles in order to increase awareness about how we see ourselves and others. This allows us to notice our blind spots and triggers in relationships so that we can be proactive initiators characterized by positive, healthy relationships instead of passive victims who are left to pick up the pieces of brokenness and dysfunction. Knowing our attachment style is important because it has implications for how we relate to ourselves and others for the rest of our lives. We cannot change our default attachment style, but we can consciously choose to adopt relational maintenance behaviors and strategies outlined above in order to alter the trajectory of our relationships. That is the intervention point. There is hope beyond the attachment style that we are born with, but it will take knowledge and work on our parts to have healthy relationships. If we want it, it is available for us, but we must be willing to educate ourselves and execute based on our education.

Limitations

The primary limitation of the present study is the self-report method used to measure participants' communication experiences within romantic relationships. Participants recalled and reported RMBs and relational uncertainties in their relationships. Relying on such methodology can be unreliable. Future research should collect data from both partners to increase the confidence in the accuracy of the measures. In addition, it would be useful to track RMBs and relational uncertainty over time to truly evaluate causality. The number of participants also

restricts generalization to the wider population. Gathering more responses from a more diverse population would increase the strengths of the findings. Despite its limitations, this study illuminates the influence of attachment style and RMBs on individuals' perceptions of relational uncertainty.

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APPENDICES

Tables

Table 1
Correlations between the variables of interest

Measure	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.
1. Secure	-											.
2. Preoccupied	-.65**	-										
3. Dismissive	-.23*	.14	-									
4. Fearful	-.74**	.70**	.35**	-								
5. Self-uncertainty	-.16	.18	-.44**	-.18	-							
6. Partner uncertainty	-.16	.33**	-.18	-.16	.50**	-						
7. Relationship uncertainty	-.10	.30**	.29*	.15	-.67**	-.79**	-					
8. Shared tasks	.33**	-.32**	-.03	-.15	.27*	.35**	-.44	-				
9. Shared networks	.18	-.08	-.23	-.02	.27*	.21	-.19	.18	-			
10. Positivity	.23	-.05	-.11	-.07	.21	.45**	-.40**	.27*	.52**	-		
11. Openness	.09	.03	-.18	-.01	-.01	.23	-.22	.17	.25*	.31**	-	
12. Assurances	.01	.10	-.54**	-.05	.46**	.28*	-.45**	.21	.42**	.35**	.57**	-

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

Table 2
The regression of relational uncertainty onto attachment and relational maintenance behaviors

	B	R^2	R^2 change	F change
Step 1				
Secure	**.-.05**, (-.08), *.03*	**.26**, (.17), *.23*	-	**5.56****, (3.23*), *4.8**2*
Preoccupied	**.13**, (.20), *.21**			
Dismissive	**-.29*****, (.19**), *.23****			
Fearful	**-.11**, (-.13), -.*12*			
Step 2				
Secure	**-.02**, (.10), *.18*	**.44**, (.38), *.49*	**.18**, (.21), *.26*	**5.31*****, (4.02***), *6.50****
Preoccupied	**.12**, (.19), *.20***			
Dismissive	**.16****, (.17*), *.15**			
Fearful	**-.07**, (-.05), -.*05*			
Tasks	**-.13**, (-.17), -.*23***			
Networks	**-.05**, (.07), *.08*			
Positivity	**-.07**, (-.62***), -.*41***			
Openness	**-.27****, (-.05), *.05*			
Assurances	**-.51****, (.03), -.*24*			

Self: $F(\#,\#) = \#$, $p < .001$; Partner: $F(\#,\#) = \#$, $p < .001$; Relationship: $F(\#,\#) = \#$, $p < .001$

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

Note: Results for self-uncertainty as the dependent variable are bold; results for partner uncertainty as the dependent variable are in parentheses; results for relationship uncertainty as the dependent variable are in italics.

Appendix A

Data Collection Instrument

Demographics

1. What is your assigned code number?

2. What is your sex?

Male	Female

3. What is your age?

4. What year are you in college?

Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Super-Senior	Non-Traditional Student

5. What is your race? Circle all that apply.

American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Black or African American	Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	Hispanic or Latino	White or Caucasian	Other

Attachment Scale.

Indicate the extent to which each of the following statements accurately reflects the way that you think and feel. Do not indicate agreement with things that you think you should do, or with things you did/felt at one time, but no longer do/feel. That is, think about the everyday

thoughts and feelings you have right now. Please use the following codes to indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree that each of the following statements characterizes you:

Disagree Strongly	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree somewhat	Agree	Agree Strongly
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

6. I sometimes worry that I don't really fit in with other people.

7. I worry that people don't like me as much as I like them.

8. I would like to trust others, but I worry that if I open up too much people might reject me.

9. Sometimes others seem reluctant to get as close to me as I would like.

10. I find it relatively easy to get close to people.

11. I worry a lot about the well-being of my relationships.

12. I feel smothered when a relationship takes on too much time away from my personal pursuits.

13. I worry about getting hurt if I allow myself to get too close to someone.

14. I sometimes worry that I don't "measure up" to other people.

15. Being independent is more important to me than having a good relationship.

16. I am confident that others will accept me.

17. I tend not to take risks in relationships for fear of getting hurt or rejected.

18. Achieving personal goals is more important to me than maintaining relationships.

19. I am confident that other people will like me.

20. I worry that others do not care about me as much as I care about them.

21. It makes me uncomfortable when relational partners make too many demands on my time.

22. I wonder how I would cope without someone to love me.

23. I would like to have closer relationships but getting close makes me feel vulnerable.

24. It is easy for me to develop close relationships with others.

25. I need relational partners to give me space to "do my own thing."

26. I sometimes worry that my relational partners will leave me.

27. I avoid getting too close to others so that I won't get hurt.

28. It is easy for me to get along with others.

29. I frequently pull away from relational partners when I need time to pursue my personal goals.

30. I need to be in a close relationship to be happy.

Relational Uncertainty Scale

Self-Uncertainty Subscale

Indicate the extent to which each of the following accurately reflects your thoughts on your relationship. Do not indicate agreement with things that you think you should do, or with things you did at one time but no longer do. Answer truly based on what you currently do in your relationship right now.

Completely or almost completely uncertain <---			---> Completely or almost completely certain		
1	2	3	4	5	6

How certain are you about…?

31. How committed you are to the relationship?

32. Your feelings for your partner?

33. How much you like your partner?

34. How much you want this relationship right now?

35. How you feel about the relationship?

36. How much you want to pursue this relationship?

37. Whether or not you are ready to commit to your partner?

38. Whether you want a romantic relationship with your partner or to be just friends?

39. How important this relationship is to you?

40. How much you are romantically interested in your partner?

41. How ready are you to get involved with your partner?

42. Whether or not you want to maintain your relationship?

43. Your view of this relationship?

44. Whether or not you want this relationship to work out in the long run?

45. Whether or not you want this relationship to last?

46. Whether or not you will want to be with your partner in the long run?

47. Your goals for the future of the relationship

48. Whether or not you want to stay in a relationship with your partner?

49. Where you want this relationship to go?

Partner Uncertainty Subscale

Indicate the extent to which each of the following accurately reflects your thoughts on your partner's participation in the relationship. Do not indicate agreement with things that you

think your partner should do, or with things your partner did at one time but no longer does.

Answer truly based on what your partner currently does in your relationship right now.

Completely or almost completely uncertain <---			---> Completely or almost completely certain		
1	2	3	4	5	6

How certain are you about…?

50. How committed your partner is to the relationship?

51. Your partner's feelings for you?

52. How much your partner likes you?

53. How much your partner wants this relationship right now?

54. How your partner feels about the relationship?

55. How much your partner wants to pursue this relationship?

56. Whether or not your partner is ready to commit to you?

57. Whether your partner wants a romantic relationship with you or to be just friends?

58. How important this relationship is to your partner?

59. How much your partner is romantically interested in you?

60. How ready your partner is to get involved with you?

61. Whether or not your partner wants to maintain your relationship?

62. Your partner's view of this relationship?

63. Whether or not your partner wants this relationship to work out in the long run?

64. Whether or not your partner wants this relationship to last?

65. Whether or not your partner will want to be with you in the long run?

66. Your partner's goals for the future of the relationship

67. Whether or not your partner wants to stay in a relationship with you?

68. Where your partner wants this relationship to go?

Relationship Uncertainty Subscale

Indicate the extent to which each of the following accurately reflects your thoughts on your relationship. Do not indicate agreement for what you think your relationship should look like, or for ways your relationship looked like at one time but no longer does. Answer truly based on what your current relationship looks like.

Completely or almost completely uncertain <---			Completely or almost completely certain --->		
1	2	3	4	5	6

How certain are you about…?

69. What your partner can or cannot say to you in this relationship?

70. The boundaries for appropriate and/or inappropriate behavior in this relationship?

71. The norms for this relationship?

72. How your partner can or cannot behave around you?

73. Whether or not you and your partner feel the same way about each other?

74. How you and your partner view this relationship?

75. Whether or not your partner likes you as much as you like him or her?

76. The current status of this relationship?

77. The definition of this relationship?

78. How you and your partner would describe this relationship?

79. The state of the relationship at this time?

80. Whether or not this is a romantic or platonic relationship?

81. Whether or not you and your partner will stay together?

82. The future of the relationship?

83. Whether or not this relationship will end soon?

84. Where this relationship is going?

Relational Maintenance Behaviors Scale

Indicate the extent to which each of the following statements accurately reflects the way that you maintain your relationship. Do not indicate agreement with things that you think you should do, or with things you did at one time but no longer do. That is, think about the everyday things you actually do in your relationship right now. Remember that much of what you do to maintain your relationship can involve mundane or routine aspects of day-to-day life.

Behavior not at all present in relationship <---				---> Behavior very present in relationship		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

85. I attempt to make our interactions very enjoyable.

86. I am cooperative in the ways I handle disagreements between us.

87. I try to build up his/her self-esteem, including giving him/her compliments.

88. I ask how his/her day has gone.

89. I am very nice, courteous, and polite when we talk.

90. I act cheerful and positive when with him/her.

91. I do not criticize him/her.

92. I try to be romantic, fun, and interesting with him/her.

93. I am patient and forgiving of him/her.

94. I present myself as cheerful and optimistic.

95. I encourage him/her to disclose thoughts and feelings to me.

96. I simply tell him/her how I feel about our relationship.

97. I seek to discuss the quality of our relationship.

98. I disclose what I need or want from our relationship.

99. I remind him/her about relationship decisions we made in the past.

100. I like to have periodic talks about our relationship.

101. I stress my commitment to him/her.

102. I imply that our relationship has a future.

103. I show my love for him/her.

104. I show myself to be faithful to him/her.

105. I like to spend time with our same friends.

106. I focus on common friends and affiliations.

107. I show that I am willing to do things with his/her friends or family.

108. I include our friends or family in our activities.

109. I help equally with tasks that need to be done.

110. I share in the joint responsibilities that face us.

111. I do my fair share of the work we have to do.

112. I do not shirk my responsibilities.

113. I perform my household responsibilities.