## Attachment and Relational Satisfaction: The Mediating Effect of Emotional Communication

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*This study investigated associations among one partner's relational satisfaction and the other partner's style of attachment and emotional communication. Findings from a questionnaire study involving 581 couples showed that participants reported more relational satisfaction when their partners scored high in security and low in dismissiveness and preoccupation. These associations between one's relational satisfaction and the partner's attachment style were partially mediated by how the partner reported communicating emotions. Specifically, participants were less satisfied in relationships with preoccupied partners who reported expressing anger using destructive communication. Participants were less satisfied with dismissive partners who reported using detached emotional communication. Finally, participants were more satisfied with secure partners who reported using prosocial emotional communication. These findings suggest that the often-cited relationship between attachment and relational satisfaction is partially explained by emotional communication.*

*Keywords: Attachment; Emotion; Emotional Communication; Relational Satisfaction*

The way emotion is communicated (or not communicated) is critical in romantic relationships. Satisfied couples experience and express more positive emotion, whereas dissatisfied couples tend to express more negative affect through aggression and withdrawal (Gottman, Markman, & Notarius, 1977; Guerrero & La Valley, 2006; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Kelly, Fincham, & Beach, 2003). Attachment theory provides a framework for investigating both relational satisfaction and emotional communication. Secure attachment is associated with relational satisfaction, whereas

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dismissive, fearful, and preoccupied attachments are associated with relational dissatisfaction (see Feeney, Noller, & Roberts, 2000, for a review). Securely attached couples also report expressing more positive emotion and less negative emotion than insecure couples (Feeney, 1995).

The present study ties these areas of research together by examining how attachment and emotional communication work together to predict relational satisfaction. Specifically, we argue that emotional communication helps explain why people are more satisfied when they have a secure relational partner. To test this idea, we examine three key issues. First, we test associations between attachment and expressions of anger, sadness, and positive affect. Second, we replicate past research showing that having a securely attached partner is associated with relational satisfaction. Finally, we examine whether attachment and the communication of anger, sadness, and positive affect are directly associated with relational satisfaction, as well as whether emotional communication mediates the association between attachment and relational satisfaction. One of the key features of this study is that one partner independently completed a measure of relational satisfaction, whereas the other partner completed measures related to attachment and emotional communication. This method helped combat the problem of common method variance that is associated with most self-report studies linking attachment and relational satisfaction.

## Attachment Theory

Attachment theory was originally proposed as a framework for studying how children develop secure (or insecure) attachments as a function of early interaction with caregivers (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980). Security is based on the development of a positive model of self (as worthy of attention and affection) and a positive model of others (as accepting and responsive). Scholars have theorized that adults also vary in their level of security, with both their initial attachment to caregivers and attachment to significant others in adulthood shaping working models of self and others (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). The capacity for change in security is demonstrated in research on romantic bonds, with 30% of adults reporting variability in levels of security throughout their lives (e.g., Davila, Karney, & Bradbury, 1999). Moreover, scholars have acknowledged the multifaceted nature of working models, with general models, domain-specific models (kinds of relationships), and relationship-specific models. These models are moderately associated with one another (Cozzarelli, Hoekstra, & Bylsma, 2000; Pierce & Lydon, 2001).

Attachment styles have been conceptualized as "relatively coherent and stable patterns of emotion and behavior [that] are exhibited in close relationships" (Shaver, Collins, & Clark, 1996, p. 25). People with different attachment styles should vary in their expression of emotion because they have learned to cope with anxiety-producing events differently (Simpson & Rholes, 1994; Simpson, Rholes, & Nelligan, 1992). Based on the different combinations of working models, Bartholomew (1990)

delineated four styles of adult attachment. *Secures*, who have positive models of themselves and others, are self-confident and comfortable with intimacy. *Dismissives*, who have positive models of themselves but negative models of others, are highly independent, and see relationships as nonessential. *Preoccupieds*, who have negative models of themselves but positive models of others, desire excessive intimacy to validate their self-worth. Finally, *fearfuls*, who have negative models of themselves and others, avoid intimate relationships because they fear being hurt or rejected.

## Attachment-Style Differences in Emotional Communication

Many researchers have argued that attachment styles develop primarily as mechanisms that guide how people experience, respond to, and regulate negative affect (Consedine & Magai 2003; Kobak & Sceery, 1988; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005; Sroufe & Waters, 1977). Simpson and Rholes (1994) outlined three ways that attachment is related to emotion: (a) Working models help individuals develop rules and expectations about emotional experience, (b) working models provide individuals with guidelines for expressing and regulating emotion, and (c) working models contain memories of emotions experienced in past relationships. Simpson and Rholes also argued that the attachment system is most likely to be activated when individuals feel negative affect.

Empirical evidence supports the theorized connection between attachment anxiety and emotion. Magai, Consedine, Gillespie, O'Neal, and Vilker (2004) found that adults characterized by anxious attachment reported experiencing high levels of negative emotion. Other research has also shown that preoccupieds experience extreme emotional highs and lows (Hazan & Shaver, 1987), including intense negative affect (Feeney, 2005; Simpson, 1990). Although preoccupieds are generally expressive and affiliative when interacting with romantic partners (Guerrero, 1996; Guerrero & Jones, 2005), they may become withdrawn and inexpressive (Tucker & Anders, 1998) or demanding (Bartholomew, 1993) when they experience negative affect.

In contrast, secure individuals "openly acknowledge distress when it arises and readily turn to significant others for comfort and emotional support" (Simpson & Rholes, 1994, p. 183). Secures may curb displays of negative affect so that they communicate aversive emotions in a socially skilled manner. In addition, secures display more positive affect, affiliation, and general expressiveness than those with fearful or dismissive attachment styles (e.g., Guerrero, 1996; Guerrero & Jones, 2005; Tucker & Anders, 1998), yet they may also be better able to regulate negative affect, which contributes to effective problem solving (Kobak & Hazan, 1991).

Two particular types of negative affect—anger and sadness—were chosen for investigation in the present study because they are implicated in Bowlby's (1969, 1973, 1980) seminal work on attachment as well as Mikulincer and Shaver's (2005) more recent review of the potential effects of attachment on emotion. Bowlby discussed patterns of attachment-related behavior related to protest (which includes anger), despair (which includes sadness), and detachment (which includes repressing

negative emotions). According to Bowlby (1973), anger toward an attachment figure (in both children and adults) serves two attachment-related functions: to assist in reunion with the loved person, and to discourage the attachment figure from leaving. Thus, from an attachment perspective, anger is an emotional response that can serve to promote, rather than disrupt, the attachment bond (Bowlby, 1973).

### Anger

In addition to the internal experience of anger, we contend that the *manner* in which anger is communicated is likely to be highly relevant to attachment bonds. Guerrero (1994) identified four forms of anger expression: *assertion* (direct statements that are not threatening, such as explaining why one is angry), *aggression* (statements and behaviors that are direct and threatening, such as criticism), *passive aggression* (behaviors that indirectly communicate negative affect in a destructive manner, such as ignoring someone), and *avoidance* (behaviors that focus on avoiding the issue or denying angry feelings, such as pretending not to feel any emotion). These four forms of anger expression likely differ on the basis of attachment style.

Individuals with secure attachments are likely to engage in constructive responses to anger, such as assertion, that promote attachment bonds. Feeney (1995) found a tendency for secures to describe using direct means of communicating anger, such as negotiation and expression, which comports with the notion that secure attachment is related to forms of anger expression that preserve one's relationship as well as one's positive self-image. In contrast, those with insecure attachments are more likely to report using destructive responses that disrupt attachment bonds. Individuals with insecure attachments possess a restricted range of reactions to emotional events that are biased by deactivation or hyperactivation of the attachment system.

Deactivation of the attachment system is likely related to avoidant responses to anger expression. Individuals with dismissive, and, to a lesser extent, fearful attachments tend to detach when experiencing emotion. Dismissive individuals, who are motivated by a negative model of others and a desire for detachment (Pietromonaco, Greenwood, Feldman, & Barrett, 2004), generally avoid anger expression. In one study, individuals with dismissive attachments tended not to experience much anger or show much distress after having a discussion with a romantic partner about a relationship problem (Simpson, Rholes, & Phillips, 1996). Individuals with fearful attachments tend to deactivate the attachment system when they worry that getting too involved with someone could lead to hurt feelings (Bartholomew, 1990). In fact, both fearful and preoccupied persons may avoid expressing anger during conflict episodes if they fear rejection (Pietromonaco et al., 2004). Thus, although the reasons for deactivating the attachment system vary based on the type of insecure attachment a person possesses, people with dismissive, fearful, and preoccupied attachment may all have a tendency to engage in avoidant anger expressions in certain situations.

Hyperactivation of the attachment system, on the other hand, is likely related to aggressive anger responses. In general, preoccupied individuals experience the most hyperactivation. These individuals seek self-worth in relationships (Bartholomew &

Horowitz, 1991) and attempt to "minimize distance from attachment figures and to elicit and ensure their support through the use of clinging ... and controlling responses" (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2004, p. 162). Bartholomew (1993) suggested that preoccupied individuals resort to demands, threats, and aggression when they cannot get as close to their partner as they would like. Shaver and Mikulincer (2004) also noted that highly anxious individuals (such as preoccupied or fearful individuals) have difficulty controlling anger expressions, leading to more potential for aggression. Thus, for preoccupied and fearful individuals, the attachment system tends to be hyperactivated when they experience anxiety about being rejected or abandoned. For dismissive individuals, the attachment system becomes activated as a defense mechanism that protects self image at the expense of relationships, through behaviors such as hostility, contempt, pity, or gloating (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005). Indeed, Feeney's (1995) research suggests that dismissive and fearful individuals are likely to use either avoidant tactics (such as avoiding the partner or issue) or aggressive tactics (such as yelling at or blaming the partner) when they experience anger. Thus, as for avoidant expressions of anger, aggressive expressions of anger appear to be related to all three styles of insecure attachment, although the underlying mechanisms predicting aggression are different for each style.

In some cases, preoccupied and fearful individuals may use passive aggressive modes of expression that reflect both their desire to change the relationship and their fear of abandonment. For example, Feeney (1995) found preoccupied individuals to report a preference for using indirect influence strategies (similar to passive aggression or manipulation) when angry, presumably because they are uncomfortable expressing their intense emotions in a directly confrontational manner. People with preoccupied attachments may avoid direct discussions of anger-evoking issues because they believe that their partners are less involved in the relationship than they are, which puts them in a less powerful negotiating position. Dismissive and secure individuals are less likely to use passive aggressive responses because they do not fear rejection or abandonment.

Although Feeney (1995) has already addressed the role attachment plays in how anger is communicated, she noted the need for further investigation and warned that her findings should be interpreted with caution given small cell sizes. The present study, therefore, replicates Feeney's work using a larger sample size and somewhat different measures of anger expression. Based on Feeney's work and theoretical conceptualizations of attachment styles, we pose the following hypotheses:

> H1a: Self-reports of assertive anger expression are positively associated with security/confidence; and negatively associated with dismissiveness, fear of intimacy, and preoccupation.
> H1b: Self-reports of avoidant anger expression are positively associated with dismissiveness, fear of intimacy, and preoccupation; and negatively associated with security/confidence.
> H1c: Self-reports of aggressive anger expression are positively associated with preoccupation, fear of intimacy, and dismissiveness; and negatively associated with security/confidence.

H1d: Self-reports of passive aggressive anger expression are positively associated with preoccupation and fear of intimacy; and negatively associated with security/confidence and dismissiveness.

### Sadness

Research also suggests that there are attachment-style differences in how people experience sadness. Guerrero (1998) found that individuals who had negative models of themselves (preoccupieds and fearfuls) reported the most jealousy-related sadness, whereas dismissive individuals reported the least jealousy-related sadness. Fearful avoidance and the experience of sadness have been positively associated in other studies, albeit marginally in some cases (Consedine & Magai, 2003). Of the four attachment groups, Batgos and Leadbeater (1994) found preoccupieds to experience the highest levels of interpersonal dysphoria, which is characterized by feelings of helplessness and of being abandoned. Moreover, people who are insecurely attached to parents or romantic partners, especially preoccupieds, are at greater risk for experiencing unipolar depression (Cooper, Shaver, & Collins, 1998; Mickelson, Kessler, & Shaver, 1997; Scott & Cordova, 2002). Bowlby (1980) suggested that most depressive disorders are linked to a person's inability to develop and maintain attachments, with insecure individuals more likely to have a history of inadequate or unfulfilling attachment bonds.

We extend this argument by proposing that secure individuals are likely to cope with sadness more constructively than those with insecure attachment styles, which reinforces their positive models of self and others. Research suggests that engaging in *positive activity* and seeking *social support* from others help alleviate sadness and are therefore constructive responses to sadness or depression (e.g., Guerrero & Reiter, 1998; Nolen-Hoeksema, 1987; Segrin, 1998). These two constructive responses are proactive strategies that help individuals utilize resources such as friends and enjoyable activities to cope effectively with sadness. Those who engage in positive activity likely see themselves as able to uplift themselves, whereas those who seek social support likely have confidence that others will be responsive to their needs. Thus, these two responses appear to reflect positive models of self and others. In support of this reasoning, Feeney (1995) found that secure individuals may indeed be more likely to confront sadness directly by communicating their feelings to a partner. Specifically, Feeney compared how secure, insecure, and mixed couples perceived themselves and their partners to control expressions of sadness. Insecure couples were more likely to report inhibiting sad expressions than were mixed or secure couples. In addition, insecure couples were most likely to desire emotional control of sadness, whereas secure couples were least likely to want to inhibit expressions of sadness.

Strategies such as *solitude* (e.g., handling the problem alone and staying away from others), *immobilization* (e.g., moping around the house, staying in bed, and otherwise avoiding normal activity), and *dependent behavior* (e.g., acting helpless and waiting for others to give advice) maintain a person's depressive state and are destructive to relationships (Guerrero & Reiter, 1998; Nolen-Hoeksema, 1987). Solitude and immobilization are responses to sadness that are directed inwardly, and, thus, may

reflect avoidant orientations toward coping with negative emotion. For fearful and dismissive individuals, coping with sadness through expressions of immobilization and solitude may serve a self-protective function against partners who they perceive to be unavailable, untrustworthy, or nonessential for solving their problems (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991), thus reflecting negative models of others. For preoccupied individuals, expressing sadness through dependent behavior may be an attempt to receive validation from relational partners (Bartholomew & Horowitz). Similarly, anxiety over abandonment may lead fearful individuals to engage in dependent behaviors. When people have negative models of self, as both preoccupied and fearful individuals do, they may trust others to help them more than they trust themselves, leading to more dependent behavior.

Overall, then, research and theory suggests that secure attachment is related to constructive responses to sadness, whereas insecure forms of attachment are related to more destructive responses that involve isolating oneself or relying on others too much. People with negative models of others should be most likely to isolate themselves. Those with negative models of self should be most likely to depend on others too much. To test these contentions, we pose the following hypotheses:

H2a: Self-reports of positive activity and social support seeking as responses to sadness are positively associated with security/confidence; and negatively associated with dismissiveness, fear of intimacy, and preoccupation.

H2b: Self-reports of solitude and immobilization as responses to sadness are positively associated with dismissiveness and fear of intimacy; and negatively associated with security/confidence and preoccupation.

H2c: Self-reports of dependent behavior as a response to sadness are positively associated with preoccupation and fear of intimacy; and negatively associated with security/confidence and dismissiveness.

### Positive Affect

Several studies suggest that security is related to the communication of positive affect. Observational studies have shown that secure individuals display especially pleasant and expressive communication when interacting with their relational partners (Guerrero, 1996; Le Poire, Shepard, & Duggan, 1999). In a study of romantic couples, Tucker and Anders (1998) found secure individuals to use more smiling and affectionate touch than insecure individuals when talking about their relationship. Feeney (1999) demonstrated that secure individuals are more likely to express a variety of positive emotions to their spouses, including love, happiness, and pride. People with secure attachment styles also report using more prosocial maintenance behaviors, such as affection and positivity, than people with dismissive, fearful, and preoccupied styles (Bippus & Rollin; 2003; Guerrero & Bachman, 2006; Simon & Baxter, 1993). In contrast to secures, preoccupied individuals express positive emotions, such as affection, at both high and low levels, whereas fearful and dismissive persons express affection in more consistently low amounts (Floyd, 2002; Guerrero & Bachman, 2006), a finding that comports with fearful and dismissive

persons' negative models of others (Rholes & Simpson, 2004). These findings lead to our next hypothesis and first research question:

> H3: Self-reported communication of positive affect is positively associated with security/confidence, and negatively associated with dismissiveness and fear of intimacy.

> RQ1: Is self-reported communication of positive affect associated with preoccupation?

## Attachment and Relational Satisfaction

Several studies have demonstrated a link between secure attachment and relational satisfaction, starting with Hazan and Shaver (1987) who found that secure individuals had happier and more trusting relationships than insecure individuals. Researchers have also shown that avoidance (or discomfort with closeness) and attachment anxiety are related to less satisfaction, both for the person with the insecure attachment and the insecure person's partner (Collins & Read, 1990; Feeney, 1994; Feeney, Noller, & Callan, 1994; Feeney, Noller, & Roberts, 1998; Simpson, 1990). Relationships that contain two secure individuals have been shown to be especially satisfying (Senchak & Leonard, 1992). The present study replicates past research by examining whether one partner's self-reported attachment is associated with the other partner's reported level of relational satisfaction. This study also extends past research by examining how the four concepts underlying attachment—security/confidence, dismissiveness, preoccupation, and fear of intimacy—associate with relational satisfaction. With the exception of Feeney, Noller, and Callan's (1994) work, studies testing the link between relational satisfaction and attachment have either compared people who fall into different attachment categories or examined only how anxiety and avoidance associate with satisfaction. Thus, we predict that:

> H4: People report more relational satisfaction when their partners report high levels of security/confidence and low levels of dismissiveness, preoccupation, and fear of intimacy.

## Emotional Communication and Relational Satisfaction

Research also suggests that specific aspects of emotional communication may be associated with relational satisfaction. Relational partners who communicate positive emotions on a regular basis tend be satisfied with their relationships (e.g., Broderick & O'Leary, 1986; Davidson, Balwick, & Halverson, 1983; Kelly et al., 2003). Similarly, individuals who handle negative emotions constructively are more likely to maintain happy relationships. Whether individuals are expressing anger (Guerrero, 1994), engaging in conflict (Canary & Cupach, 1988), complaining (Alberts, 1988), or responding to jealousy (Andersen, Eloy, Guerrero, & Spitzberg, 1995), refraining from aggression, withdrawal, and the display of intense negative affect is associated with more relational satisfaction. A number of studies have shown that relational

satisfaction is inversely related to the use of avoidant, passive aggressive, or aggressive modes of anger expression (e.g., Canary, Spitzberg, & Semic, 1998; Guerrero, 1994; Sereno, Welch, & Braaten, 1987). When experiencing sadness, behaviors such as seeking social support and engaging in positive activity are often classified as constructive responses, whereas behaviors such as acting dependent and isolating oneself are classified as destructive (Guerrero & Reiter, 1998). Together, these studies suggest that specific types of emotional communication related to positive affect, anger, and sadness may be associated with relational satisfaction as predicted in our next hypothesis:

> H5: People report more relational satisfaction when their partners report engaging in more constructive emotional communication (assertive anger expression, positive activity and social support seeking when sad, and positive affect) and less destructive emotional communication (avoidant, aggressive, and passive aggressive anger expression; and solitude, immobilization, and dependent behavior when sad).

Researchers have argued that communication mediates the association between attachment and relational satisfaction (Guerrero, 2008). As Feeney et al. (2000) put it, communication may be "the underlying mechanism" that explains the link between attachment and relational satisfaction (p. 198), with secure individuals engaging in more effective patterns of communication that promote relational harmony, cooperation, and satisfaction. Several studies have supported this reasoning. Morrison, Urquiza, and Goodlin-Jones (1997) found that perceptions of affiliative interaction mediated the relationship between secure attachment and relationship distress, such that affiliation was related to more security and less distress. Feeney et al. (1998) found that women were more relationally satisfied when their male partner was secure, in part because secure men were perceived as expressing "feelings such as sadness in a direct and open manner" (p. 499). However, Feeney et al.'s study was limited to examining general emotional expressiveness versus control, rather than looking at specific expressions of emotions. Feeney et al. (2000) summarized other research showing that conflict behaviors and self-disclosure also partially mediate the association between attachment and relational satisfaction. The present study extends this line of research by examining specific forms of emotional expression as potential mediators. Therefore, we ask:

> RQ2: Does emotional communication mediate the association between attachment and relational satisfaction?

## Method

*Respondents and Procedures*

Data were collected using a social networking sample. Undergraduate students in a communication department at a university in the Southwest USA were asked to administer questionnaires in person to one dating or married couple they knew. Each student was given two questionnaires in envelopes along with two additional

envelopes that were marked with a number (so partners' responses could later be matched). Questionnaire A included items measuring attachment style and emotional communication. Questionnaire B included items measuring relational satisfaction as well as other relationship characteristics. Both questionnaires included demographic items. The student recruiters did not know which questionnaires were in each envelope, and they had the relational partners complete their questionnaires in different rooms so they could not look at each other's questionnaires at any point during the process. Students asked respondents to place their completed questionnaires into one of the envelopes and then seal the envelope to keep answers private. Fifty of the questionnaires included a request for a phone number. These respondents were later called on a university telephone (that did not include caller ID or any other mechanism for identifying who they were calling) to verify that students administered the questionnaire as instructed. Participants were asked to tell us what the questionnaire was about, how long it took them to complete it, and whether they filled out the questionnaire in the same or a different room than their partner. In all of these cases, the participants we phoned answered these questions satisfactorily.

The social networking sample resulted in a pool of 581 heterosexual couples. Of these, approximately 13% were married; the rest were seriously dating or engaged. Respondents ranged in age from 18 to 63 years old, with an average age of 25 years. The respondents' ethnic breakdown was as follows. For female participants, 83.3% identified themselves as White, 6.8% as Hispanic/Latina, 2.4% as Asian, 3.0% as African-American, and the remainder as "other." For male participants, 78.6% identified themselves as White, 8.1% as Hispanic/Latino, 4.3% as Asian, 1.4% as African-American, and the remainder as "other." In 293 cases, the woman completed Questionnaire A and the man completed Questionnaire B. In the other 288 cases, the woman completed Questionnaire B, and the man completed Questionnaire A.

### Measures

*Attachment.* In the first section of Questionnaire A, respondents rated a series of items assessing attachment style dimensions based on work by Feeney, Noller, and Hanrahan (1994) and Guerrero (1996). We believe this operationalization is superior to one-item categorical measures of attachment style. In addition, we contend that using only two dimensions (usually anxiety and avoidance) does not get at the unique characteristics associated with each attachment style (Guerrero, 2008). *Security/ confidence* was measured with seven items (e.g., "I am confident that other people will like me"). *Dismissiveness* was measured with six items that capture the extent to which people view relationships as secondary (e.g., "Achieving personal goals is more important to me than maintaining good relationships"). *Preoccupation* was initially measured with nine items that gauge how much people depend on and worry about their relationships (e.g., "I worry that others do not care about me as much as I care about them"). Finally, *fear of intimacy* was measured with five items (e.g., "I worry about getting hurt if I allow myself to get too close to someone").

Although the continuous measures discussed above constitute our main operationalization of attachment, it was important to see how these measures related to

the categorical measures used in many attachment studies. Thus, the final section of Questionnaire A contained paragraph-length descriptions of Bartholomew and Horowitz's (1991) four attachment styles. Respondents placed a checkmark next to the one paragraph that they felt characterized them best. For example, the paragraph describing fearful attachment read: "I am somewhat uncomfortable getting close to others. I want emotionally close relationships, but I find it difficult to trust others completely, or to depend on them. I sometimes worry that I will be hurt if I allow myself to become too close to others." This categorical operationalization of attachment style resulted in 235 secures (122 women, 113 men); 126 fearful avoidants (74 women, 52 men); 131 dismissives (46 women, 85 men); and 62 preoccupieds (38 women, 24 men).

A series of ANOVAs and Tukey-B range tests were utilized to determine that the continuous attachment measures corresponded to these categories. All four ANOVAs were significant, with security/confidence, $F(3, 550) = 15.24$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .10$; dismissiveness, $F(3, 546) = 30.30$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .14$; preoccupation, $F(3, 550) = 25.46$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .13$; and fear of intimacy, $F(3, 55) = 67.89$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .27$; all varying as a function of attachment category (see Table 1).

*Communicating anger.* The respondents who completed Questionnaire A answered a series of items assessing how they communicate anger using Guerrero's (1994) scales. Respondents were asked to think about the last few times they were angry with their relational partner. They were instructed to: "Keep in mind that you did not need to express your anger verbally or get into a conflict for anger to occur." Respondents used 7-point Likert-scales, with 7 representing strong agreement. Five items measured *assertive communication* (e.g., "I discuss problems with my partner"). Six items assessed *aggressive communication* (e.g., "I criticize my partner"). Four items measured *passive aggression* (e.g., "I give my partner the 'silent treatment"). Finally, three items gauged *avoidance* or "nonassertive denial" (e.g., "I keep angry feelings to myself").

*Responses to sadness.* The respondents who completed Questionnaire A also filled out five subscales from Guerrero and Reiter's (1998) revised Responses to Sadness scale (Guerrero, La Valley, & Farinelli, 2008). Instructions read: "Think about the last few times you felt sad or depressed when around your partner. What did you do and how did you act toward your relational partner during these times?" Respondents

**Table 1** Means and (Standard Deviations) for Differences in Attachment-Style Dimensions as a Function of Attachment Style Category

| Dimension | Secures | Dismissives | Fearfuls | Preoccupieds |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Security/confidence | 4.98 (1.08)a | 4.62 (1.11)b | 4.65 (1.01)b | 4.51 (0.97)b |
| Dismissiveness | 3.68 (0.99)b | 4.48 (1.02)a | 3.91 (1.00)b | 3.11 (1.01)c |
| Preoccupation | 3.38 (0.99)c | 3.40 (0.94)c | 4.08 (0.84)b | 4.41 (1.02)a |
| Fear of intimacy | 3.04 (1.02)c | 3.70 (1.08)b | 4.63 (0.92)a | 3.72 (1.05)b |

Means with different subscripts in a given row are significantly different at the .05 level or less as determined by Tukey-B range tests.

used 7-point Likert-type scales to indicate how much they used each of seven tactics, with 7 ("agree strongly") meaning they tended to use a particular strategy frequently. *Positive activity* refers to attempts to stay positive and engage in usual or new activities (seven items, e.g., "I try to keep myself busy with things that I like to do," and "I try to act positive to keep my spirits up"). *Social support seeking* involves actively seeking support from one's partner (six items, e.g., "I talk over my problems with my partner"). *Solitude*, in contrast, refers to attempts to isolate oneself from others (three items, e.g., "I spend time alone"). *Dependent behavior* includes passive and active attempts to get others to help (four items, e.g., "I wait for someone to help me"). Finally, *immobilization* is comprised of behaviors that function to cease normal activity (five items, e.g., "I stay in bed").

*Communicating positive affect.* A scale measuring general expressions of positive affect was developed for use in Questionnaire A. Respondents were asked to think about how much they openly expressed emotions such as love, appreciation, and affection to their partners. Six items then measured the overall expression of positive affect, including "I show a lot of affection to my partner," and "I frequently share positive feelings with my partner."

*Relationship satisfaction.* Hendrick's (1988) seven-item relationship satisfaction scale was included in Questionnaire B, along with several other scales measuring relationship characteristics. Hendrick's scale includes seven items, including: "How much do you love your partner" (1 = "not very much" to 7 = "very much"); and "In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship" (1 = "very unsatisfied" to 7 = "very satisfied"). Items were averaged with higher scores representing more relational satisfaction.

### Confirmatory Factor Analyses

Next, CFAs were conducted to confirm that all of the scales were unidimensional. In line with most research, we used multiple indices to assess whether the data were an adequate fit to each unidimensional model. In Table 2, we report the $\chi^2$, $\chi^2/df$, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) for each CFA. To evaluate the fit of the models, we relied most heavily on the CFI and $\chi^2/df$. Chi-square estimates tend to be inflated (and therefore significant even if the data adequately fit the model) with sample sizes over 200, whereas the $\chi^2/df$ is a normed chi square that is less sensitive to sample size. Some researchers have suggested that a $\chi^2/df$ under 5.00 is acceptable with large sample sizes (Schumacker & Lomax, 2004), whereas others suggest that the $\chi^2/df$ should be less than 3.00 (Carmines & McIver, 1981). A CFI over .95 is considered to be a very good fit, whereas a CFI over .90 is considered acceptable (Hu & Bentler, 1995, 1999). In general, an RMSEA of .10 or lower is regarded as evidence that the data adequately fit the model (Browne & Cudek, 1993) with an RMSEA of .06 or less regarded as evidence of excellent fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999), although some researchers have argued that the RMSEA is a biased measure (Curran, Bollen, Paxton, Kirby & Chen, 2002; Raykov, 2005).

Based on the results of the CFAs, the relational satisfaction scale was adjusted to include only five items. Two items were also dropped from the preoccupation scale, reducing it from a nine-item to a seven-item scale. After these adjustments was made, all of the scales produced acceptable CFI (at or above .90) and $\chi^2/df$ less than 5.0. RMSEAs ranged from .01 to .11 (Table 2). To construct scales for the present study, the items for each variable were averaged. Means and standard deviations for each of the scales can be found in Table 2. Correlations between all the variables of interest were then computed, and interitem reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha statistic (Table 3).

## Results

### Communicating Anger

A series of regression analyses was conducted to test H1, which predicted that attachment is associated with how one communicates anger. Specifically, each form of anger expression was regressed on the four attachment variables (Table 4). The models for avoidance, $F(4, 566) = 5.11$, $p < .001$, $R = .20$, adjusted $R^2 = .03$; aggressive communication, $F(4, 566) = 10.48$, $p < .001$, $R = .26$, adjusted $R^2 = .07$; and passive aggression, $F(4, 566) = 13.94$, $p < .001$, $R = .30$, adjusted $R^2 = .08$; were significant and provided partial support for H1b, H1c, and H1d. The model for assertive communication, on the other hand, was not significant, $F(4, 564) = 1.21$, $p > .05$,

**Table 2** Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results and Scale Means and Standard Deviations with Items Averaged

| Variable | df | $\chi^2$ | $\chi^2/df$ | CFI | RMSEA | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Attachment | | | | | | | |
|   Security/confidence | 14 | 33.87** | 2.42 | .94 | .10 | 4.85 | 1.07 |
|   Dismissiveness | 9 | 14.06 | 1.56 | .98 | .07 | 3.86 | 1.06 |
|   Preoccupation | 14 | 53.87*** | 3.84 | .93 | .11 | 3.81 | 1.11 |
|   Fear of intimacy | 5 | 6.22 | 1.24 | .99 | .03 | 3.64 | 1.17 |
| Anger expression | | | | | | | |
|   Assertion | 5 | 12.67* | 2.54 | .97 | .08 | 4.78 | 1.15 |
|   Aggression | 9 | 20.52* | 2.28 | .98 | .10 | 3.12 | 1.28 |
|   Passive aggression | 2 | 4.59 | 2.30 | .98 | .07 | 3.72 | 1.39 |
|   Avoidance | 1 | 1.45 | 1.45 | .99 | .05 | 3.70 | 1.50 |
| Responses to sadness | | | | | | | |
|   Positive activity | 14 | 29.90** | 2.13 | .97 | .07 | 4.52 | 0.90 |
|   Social Support | 9 | 37.35*** | 4.15 | .96 | .11 | 4.71 | 0.94 |
|   Solitude | 1 | 1.54 | 1.54 | .99 | .03 | 3.88 | 1.31 |
|   Dependent behavior | 2 | 2.70 | 1.35 | .99 | .04 | 2.81 | 1.55 |
|   Immobilization | 5 | 17.70** | 3.54 | .98 | .06 | 3.48 | 1.09 |
| Positive affect | 9 | 7.78 | 0.86 | .99 | .01 | 4.18 | 1.49 |
| Relationship satisfaction | 5 | 5.38 | 1.08 | .99 | .02 | 5.13 | 1.08 |

All scales except for relational satisfaction were included only in Questionnaire A. Relational satisfaction was measured only in Questionnaire B. Thus, relational partners completed different questionnaires. $^*p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$, two-tailed.

**Table 3**  Reliabilities and Correlations among Variables

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Security/confidence | **.87** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Dismissiveness | −.01 | **.82** | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Preoccupation | −.14*** | −.28*** | **.84** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4. Fear of intimacy | −.10* | .09 | .47*** | **.91** | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5. Assertion | .10* | −.02 | −.04 | −.04 | **.86** | | | | | | | | | | |
| 6. Aggression | −.12** | −.08 | .25*** | .15*** | −.51*** | **.82** | | | | | | | | | |
| 7. Passive aggression | −.13** | −.15*** | .23*** | .20*** | −.39*** | .52*** | **.78** | | | | | | | | |
| 8. Avoidance | −.16*** | −.01 | .06 | .16*** | −.15*** | .10* | .41*** | **.84** | | | | | | | |
| 9. Positive activity | .18*** | −.03 | −.09* | −.08* | .42*** | −.16*** | −.10* | −.05 | **.88** | | | | | | |
| 10. Social support | .22*** | −.16*** | .02 | −.08* | .41*** | −.25*** | −.28*** | −.30*** | .38*** | **.85** | | | | | |
| 11. Solitude | −.19*** | .13** | .15*** | .15*** | −.13** | .23*** | .29*** | .26*** | −.26*** | −.20*** | **.81** | | | | |
| 12. Dependent behavior | .01 | −.18*** | .22*** | .06 | −.01 | .18 | .11** | .00 | .01 | .37*** | .08* | **.78** | | | |
| 13. Immobilization | −.15** | .05 | .02 | .10 | −.18*** | .03 | .20*** | .25*** | −.04 | −.11* | .30*** | .04 | **.77** | | |
| 14. Positive affect | .26*** | −.06 | .15*** | .09* | .30*** | .26*** | .18*** | .10* | −.31*** | .48*** | −.11* | .17*** | .22*** | **.91** | |
| 15. Relationship satisfaction | .27*** | −.18*** | −.15*** | −.12* | .35*** | −.29*** | −.21*** | −.15*** | .20*** | .39*** | −.11** | −.05 | −.20*** | .24*** | **.92** |

Reliabilities (Cronbach's alpha statistic) are shown in bold on the diagonal. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$, two-tailed.

**Table 4** Predictor Variables for the Models Regressing Anger Expression on Attachment

| Anger expression | Predictors | β | t |
|---|---|---|---|
| Assertion | Security/confidence | .09 | 1.92* |
| | Dismissiveness | −.02 | −0.39 |
| | Preoccupation | −.01 | −0.18 |
| | Fear of intimacy | −.03 | −0.63 |
| Avoidance | Security/confidence | −.15 | −3.54*** |
| | Dismissiveness | −.02 | 0.66 |
| | Preoccupation | −.04 | 0.72 |
| | Fear of intimacy | .11 | 2.12* |
| Aggression | Security/confidence | −.09 | −2.10* |
| | Dismissiveness | −.02 | 0.73 |
| | Preoccupation | .23 | 4.57*** |
| | Fear of intimacy | .03 | 0.98 |
| Passive aggression | Security/confidence | −.10 | −2.41** |
| | Dismissiveness | −.13 | −3.02** |
| | Preoccupation | .12 | 2.64** |
| | Fear of intimacy | .14 | 2.99** |

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$, one-tailed.

even though there was a small significant association between security/confidence and assertive anger expression, $r = .16$, $p < .01$, as predicted in H1a. Overall, however, H1a was not supported.

*Expressions of Sadness*
A series of regression analyses was also conducted to test H2, which predicted that attachment is associated with how people respond to sadness. All five models were significant: positive activity, $F(4, 563) = 3.41$, $p < .01$, $R = .19$; adjusted $R^2 = .03$; social support seeking, $F(4, 563) = 10.63$, $p < .001$, $R = .28$, adjusted $R^2 = .07$; solitude, $F(4, 563) = 9.78$, $p < .001$, $R = .28$, adjusted $R^2 = .07$; immobilization, $F(4, 563) = 8.54$, $p < .001$, $R = .27$, adjusted $R^2 = .06$; and dependent behavior, $F(4, 563) = 6.57$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .05$. As shown in Table 5, the beta weights in these analyses provide partial support for H2.

*Communicating Positive Affect*
A regression analysis tested H3 and RQ1. The model was significant, $F(4, 571) = 15.62$, $p < .001$, $R = .32$; adjusted $R^2 = .10$, and supported H3. People reported expressing more positive affect when they scored high in security/confidence, $β = .20$, $t = 4.99$, $p < .001$; and low in dismissiveness, $β = −.14$, $t = −3.39$, $p < .001$, and fear of intimacy, $β = −.11$, $t = −2.40$, $p < .01$ (with one-tailed $p$-values). In response to RQ1, people high in preoccupation showed a tendency to report using more positive affect in their relationships, $β = .15$, $t = 2.89$, $p < .01$ (two-tailed).

*Attachment and Relational Satisfaction*
Regression was also used to test H4, which predicted that people report more relational satisfaction when their partners score high in security/confidence and low

**Table 5** Predictor Variables for the Models Regressing Responses to Sadness on Attachment

| Response to sadness | Predictors | β | t |
|---|---|---|---|
| Positive activity | Security/confidence | .12 | 2.70** |
| | Dismissiveness | −.05 | −1.18 |
| | Fear of intimacy | −.03 | −0.65 |
| | Preoccupation | −.10 | −2.02* |
| Social support seeking | Security/confidence | .20 | 4.90*** |
| | Dismissiveness | −.14 | −3.23** |
| | Fear of intimacy | −.09 | −1.91* |
| | Preoccupation | .04 | 0.85 |
| Solitude | Security/confidence | −.15 | −3.57*** |
| | Dismissiveness | .10 | 2.13* |
| | Fear of intimacy | .11 | 2.19* |
| | Preoccupation | .06 | 1.08 |
| Immobilization | Security/confidence | −.13 | −3.38*** |
| | Dismissiveness | .02 | 0.34 |
| | Fear of intimacy | .16 | 3.71*** |
| | Preoccupation | .04 | 0.84 |
| Dependent behavior | Security/confidence | .03 | 0.76 |
| | Dismissiveness | −.12 | −2.70** |
| | Fear of intimacy | −.02 | −0.34 |
| | Preoccupation | .15 | 2.92** |

$^*p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$, one-tailed.

on the other measures of attachment that represent insecurity. This hypothesis was partially supported. The regression model was significant, $F(4, 571) = 15.90$, $p < .001$, $R = .35$; adjusted $R^2 = .11$, with three of the four attachment variables showing significant associations with relational satisfaction. Specifically, people were most likely to report high levels of relational satisfaction when their partners scored high in security/confidence, $\beta = .22$, $t = 5.39$, $p < .001$; and low in both dismissiveness, $\beta = −.18$, $t = −4.33$, $p < .001$, and preoccupation, $\beta = −.13$, $t = −2.47$, $p < .01$ (with one-tailed $p$-values). Fear of intimacy was not associated significantly with relational satisfaction in the regression model, $\beta = −.04$, $t = −0.81$, $p > .05$.

*Emotional Communication and Relational Satisfaction*

To test H5, we conducted a regression model with satisfaction as the criterion variable and the emotional communication variables (the four anger expressions, the five responses to sadness, and the general measure of communicating positive affect) as independent variables. The overall model was significant, $F(10, 560) = 25.12$, $p < .001$, $R = .56$, adjusted $R^2 = .30$, demonstrating an association between relational satisfaction (as reported by one partner) and emotional expression (as reported by the other partner). Specifically, in partial support of H5, people reported the most relational satisfaction when their partners perceived themselves to: (a) express anger using assertive rather than aggressive or passive aggressive means, (b) express sadness using positive activity and social support seeking rather than immobilization or dependent behavior, and (c) express more general positive affect (Table 6).

**Table 6** Predictor Variables for the Model Regressing Relational Satisfaction on Emotional Communication Variables

| Type of emotional communication | β | t |
|---|---|---|
| Assertive anger expression | .14 | 2.81*** |
| Avoidant anger expression | −.04 | −0.92 |
| Aggressive anger expression | −.12 | −2.27* |
| Passive aggressive anger expression | −.11 | −2.09* |
| Positive activity (response to sadness) | .10 | 2.03* |
| Social support seeking (response to sadness) | .20 | 4.03*** |
| Solitude (response to sadness) | .02 | 0.57 |
| Immobilization (response to sadness) | −.11 | −2.43** |
| Dependent behavior (response to sadness) | −.10 | 2.45** |
| General expression of positive affect | .34 | 8.49*** |

Partner A reported her or his level of satisfaction. Partner B reported how he or she expresses emotion. Therefore, this analysis regresses Partner A's relational satisfaction on Partner B's reports of emotional expression. $^*p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$, one-tailed.

*Emotional Communication as a Mediator of Attachment and Relational Satisfaction*

RQ2 asked whether the associations between attachment and relational satisfaction are mediated by emotional communication. To determine which variables to consider as potential mediators, Baron and Kenny's (1986) criteria were employed. Specifically, based on the results from our earlier hypothesis tests, we checked to determine whether: (a) the independent variable (in this case, attachment) was significantly associated with potential mediating variables (in this case, types of emotional communication); and (b) potential mediating variables were significantly associated with the dependent variable (in this case, relational satisfaction). We also checked to see if the effect of the independent variable vanished or was diminished after the mediating variables were entered (contact the first author for more information on these analyses). Variables that met all of these criteria were then entered into structural equation models (SEMs) to test for mediation.

This screening procedure led to the development of three mediation models, with separate models developed for security, dismissiveness, and preoccupation. The attachment variables were represented as latent constructs in each of these models. To create more parsimonious models, we elected to use parcels rather than individual items as indicators of attachment (Bandalos, 2002; Weston & Gore, 2006). For each of the three attachment measures, two to three items were chosen randomly and averaged so that there were three parcels per latent variable. Similarly, three parcels served as indicators of relational satisfaction, with one parcel consisting of the item that was most strongly associated with satisfaction in the CFA reported earlier, and the other two parcels representing an average across two items. Within all the models tested, the standardized estimates for the paths between these parcels and the latent variables ranged from .92 to .99.

The first model (Figure 1) examined whether prosocial emotional communication mediated the association between security and relational satisfaction. First, using SEM, we confirmed that the four scales measuring positive forms of
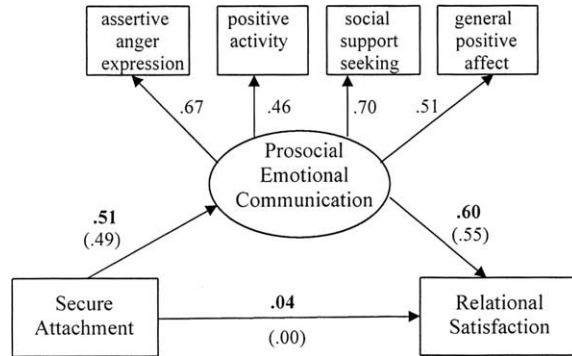
**Figure 1** Prosocial emotional communication as a mediator between secure attachment and relational satisfaction. The full model included 3 parcels as indicators of secure attachment, as well as 3 parcels as indicators of relational satisfaction. The standardized estimates for the partially mediated model that included both the direct and indirect associations between secure attachment and relational satisfaction are reported in bold. The standardized estimates for the fully mediated model (with the path between security and satisfaction constrained to 0) are reported in parentheses. Partner A reported on her/his levels of secure attachment and prosocial emotional communication; Partner B reported her/his level of relational satisfaction.

communication—assertion when angry, positive activity when sad, social support seeking when sad, and general positive affect—were associated with the latent variable that we labeled *prosocial emotional communication*, $\chi^2 = 8.74$, $df = 2$, $p < .01$, $\chi^2/df = 4.37$, CFI $= .97$, RSMEA $= .07$. Then we constructed a model that included both direct and indirect paths from security to relational satisfaction. This model fit the data well, $\chi^2 = 95.30$, $df = 32$, $p < .001$, $\chi^2/df = 2.98$, CFI $= .99$, RSMEA $= .058$ (.045–.072). In line with a mediation effect, the standardized estimate for the association between security and relational satisfaction dropped to .04 in this model (compared to .22 in the regression model reported earlier). Next, we provided a more stringent test for mediation by constraining the direct path from security to relational satisfaction to 0 so that the model only included the indirect effect. This model showed a nearly identical fit to the data, $\chi^2 = 97.44$, $df = 33$, $p < .001$, $\chi^2/df = 2.95$, CFI $= .99$, RSMEA $= .052$ (.041–.070), suggesting that prosocial emotional communication mediates the association between attachment security and relational satisfaction. The standardized indirect (mediated) effect of security on satisfaction was estimated at .27.

The second model (Figure 2) examined whether detached emotional communication mediated the association between dismissiveness and relational satisfaction. Based on the regression analyses conducted earlier, two variables qualified as potential mediators—social support seeking and general positive affect. We reverse coded these two variables so that they would be consistent with a latent construct that we labeled *detached communication*. The model fit the data well, $\chi^2 = 32.93$, $df = 17$, $p < .05$, $\chi^2/df = 1.94$, CFI $= .99$, RSMEA $= .040$ (.019–.061), and the standardized estimate for
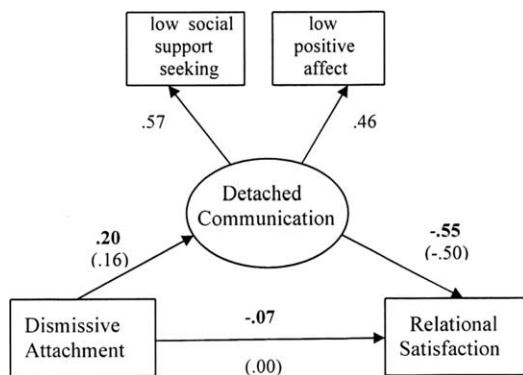
**Figure 2** Detached emotional communication as a mediator between dismissive attachment and relational satisfaction. The full model included 3 parcels as indicators of dismissive attachment, as well as 3 parcels as indicators of relational satisfaction. The standardized estimates for the partially mediated model that included both the direct and indirect associations between dismissive attachment and relational satisfaction are reported in bold. The standardized estimates for the fully mediated model (with the path between dismissiveness and satisfaction constrained to 0) are reported in parentheses. Partner A reported on her/his levels of dismissive attachment and detached emotional communication; Partner B reported her/his level of relational satisfaction.

the association between dismissiveness and relational satisfaction was $-.07$, compared to $-.18$ in the regression model that examined the direct effect. Model fit was similar when the path from dismissiveness to relational satisfaction was constrained to 0, $\chi^2 = 33.68$, $df = 18$, $p < .05$, CFI $= .99$, RSMEA $= .039$ (.017–.059), which suggests that detached communication acted as a mediator. The standardized indirect (mediated) effect of dismissiveness on satisfaction was estimated at $-.15$.

The third model (Figure 3) was constructed to determine whether destructive anger expression mediated the association between preoccupation and relational satisfaction. Aggression and passive aggression were entered as indicators of *destructive anger expression.* The model was an excellent fit to the data, $\chi^2 = 28.99$, $df = 17$, $p = .035$, $\chi^2/df = 1.71$; CFI $= .998$, RSMEA $= .035$ (.009–.056). The standardized estimate for the path between preoccupation and satisfaction was $-.03$, compared to $-.13$ in the earlier regression analysis. When the path between preoccupation and relational satisfaction was constrained to 0, the fit was nearly identical, $\chi^2 = 29.92$, $df = 18$, $p = .05$, $\chi^2/df = 1.66$; CFI $= .998$, RSMEA $= .032$ (.003–.053). The standardized indirect effect for preoccupation on satisfaction was $-.12$.

## Discussion

The present study demonstrates that attachment is associated with specific forms of emotional communication related to anger and sadness, as well as the general expression of positive affect. Perhaps more importantly, emotional communication appears to provide a partial explanation for the often-cited link between attachment
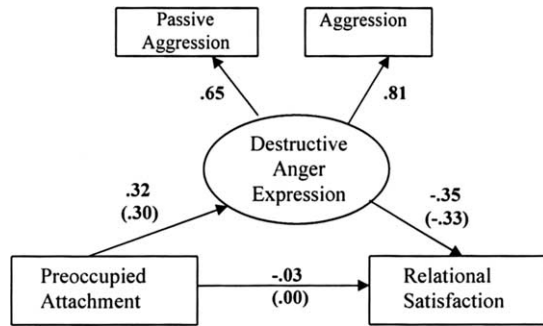
**Figure 3** Destructive anger expression as a mediator between preoccupied attachment and relational satisfaction. The full model included 3 parcels as indicators of preoccupied attachment, as well as 3 parcels as indicators of relational satisfaction. The standardized estimates for the partially mediated model that included both the direct and indirect associations between preoccupied attachment and relational satisfaction are reported in bold. The standardized estimates for the fully mediated model (with the path between preoccupation and satisfaction constrained to 0) are reported in parentheses. Partner A reported on her/his levels of preoccupied attachment and destructive anger expression; Partner B reported her/his level of relational satisfaction.

and relational satisfaction. The results also provide specificity in the types of emotional communication that act as mediators between attachment and relational satisfaction. In the present study, prosocial emotional communication helped explain the positive association between secure attachment and relational satisfaction. Detached emotional communication helped account for the link between dismissive attachment and low levels of relational satisfaction. Finally, the inverse relationship between preoccupied attachment and satisfaction was mediated by destructive expressions of anger. These findings underscore the important role that emotional communication plays in the attachment process—both as a correlate of attachment style and as a mediator that explains why people experience different levels of satisfaction with secure, dismissive, and preoccupied partners.

### Security/Confidence

Individuals who perceived themselves as secure reported being less likely to express anger through aggression, passive aggression, or avoidance. This finding is in accordance with previous work suggesting that secures prefer to cope with negative emotions through direct communication and negotiation (Feeney, 1995). In the present study, individuals who scored high in security/confidence were also more likely to report using positive activity and social support seeking when sad. This comports with attachment theorists' claim that secure individuals "openly acknowledge distress when it arises and readily turn to significant others for comfort and emotional support" (Simpson & Rholes, 1994, p. 183). An alternative, yet complementary explanation is that people with secure attachment styles simply experience less negative emotions, such as anger and sadness, and more positive

emotions (Simpson, 1990). Indeed, in the current study, individuals who reported high levels of secure attachment reported expressing more positive affect.

### Preoccupation

In contrast, preoccupation was associated with a less constructive pattern of emotional communication. Individuals high in preoccupation reported communicating anger through aggression and passive aggression. This finding flows logically from previous research showing that preoccupieds tend to experience negative affect intensely, ruminate about angry thoughts, express hostile attitudes toward relational partners, and engage in manipulation (Feeney, 1995, 2005; Magai et al., 2004; Mikulincer, 1998). With regard to the expression of sadness, our data showed that individuals high in preoccupation reported using more dependent behavior and less positive activity. In combination, these findings suggest that preoccupieds are unable to resolve feelings of sadness on their own; instead they may rely on their attachment partner to help them deal with sadness. This pattern of dependence may reinforce a preoccupied person's negative models of self and positive model of others. Preoccupied individuals also reported communicating relatively high levels of positive affect to their partners, which is consistent with their positive perceptions of others.

### Dismissiveness

According to Bartholomew (1990), dismissives do not experience intense emotional highs and lows because they view themselves as adequate and independent. These characteristics help explain the inverse relationship between dismissiveness and passive aggression in the present investigation. Dismissives simply may not care enough about the other to become overly angry or manipulative (Bowlby, 1973). The negative model of others that is associated with dismissiveness (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) also prevents them from seeking out their attachment figures to share sadness. Such reasoning is supported by our findings, which revealed a negative relationship between dismissiveness and modes of sadness expression that involve outreach to others, such as social support seeking and/or dependent behavior. Dismissive individuals also reported showing their partners less positive affect, which is consistent with their needs for autonomy.

### Fear of Intimacy

In the current study, individuals who fear intimacy reported using passive aggression and avoidance as responses to feelings of anger. These findings mirror prior research demonstrating that fearful individuals are plagued with high anxiety and have difficulty communicating their feelings directly (Bartholomew, 1990, 1993; Feeney, 1995). Individuals who fear intimacy also reported experiencing difficulty sharing sadness and, in fact, reported responding to feelings of sadness by seeking solitude rather than soliciting social support from others. Although fearful individuals desire intimacy, they often retreat from intimate relationships and intimate interactions because they fear rejection (Bartholomew, 1990). Perhaps this is why they reported

communicating relatively low levels of positive affect to their partners in the current study. These findings add to the growing body of literature that connects fear of intimacy to patterns of passive and avoidant behavior (e.g., Guerrero, 1996).

### Relational Satisfaction

The aforementioned results focus on one person's report of her or his own attachment style and emotional communication. However, the results for relational satisfaction involved predicting one partner's relational satisfaction from the other partner's reports of attachment and emotional communication. Such an approach is advantageous for several reasons. As argued by Rodgers and Escudero (2004), "relationships are viewed as emergent social structures that are created and defined by the relational members' communication patterns with one another" (p. 4). Utilizing only one person's perception fails to provide a full picture (Cicirelli, 1985). Our study's findings move beyond one person's perceptions by showing that associations between attachment, emotional communication, and relational satisfaction are not just in one partner's head; rather, the perceptions one person has about her or himself are associated with the other person's evaluation of the relationship.

Specifically, our data replicated past research by showing that people report high levels of relational satisfaction when their partners: (a) report being secure rather than dismissive or preoccupied, and (b) report using constructive rather than destructive emotional communication. The present study goes beyond previous research by testing both the direct and indirect associations between relational satisfaction and emotional communication by considering emotional communication as a mediator. Importantly, the type of emotional communication that mediated the association between attachment and relational satisfaction varied based on the specific style of attachment. For security, prosocial emotional communication acted as a mediator; for dismissiveness, detached communication acted as a mediator; and for preoccupation, destructive anger expression acted as a mediator. In each case, the type of emotional communication that mediated the association between attachment and relational satisfaction reflected a central component of that particular attachment style. Being able to communicate in a positive, confident manner helps reinforce a secure individual's positive model of self, while also leading others to view her or him favorably (Bartholomew, 1993). Detached communication reflects a dismissive individual's view of relationships as relatively unimportant, and destructive forms of anger expression expose a preoccupied person's frustrations, doubts, and need for attention. In line with Feeney et al.'s (2000) arguments, the present study's findings suggest that these types of communication patterns are the underlying mechanisms that explain why attachment associates with relational satisfaction.

### Implications, Limitations, and Future Research

These mediation effects have theoretical implications for the role communication plays in the attachment process. The mediation models for secure and dismissive attachment illustrate how important positive emotional communication is in relationships. When people report engaging in prosocial emotional communication,

such as assertive anger expression, social support seeking when sad, being cheerful and positive when sad, and showing affection, their partners report being more relationally satisfied. In contrast, when people report communicating detachment by engaging in less social support seeking and showing less positive affect, their partners report being less relationally satisfied.

Studies on relational maintenance have produced similar findings. For example, supportiveness, which includes behaviors such as seeking and providing comfort, help people maintain satisfying relationships (Haas, 2002; Haas & Stafford, 1998; Messman, Canary, & Hause, 2000). Affectionate behaviors, including saying "I love you" and using touch to communicate positive affect, have also been identified as key maintenance behaviors that promote closeness and relational satisfaction (Dainton & Stafford, 1993), as has positivity, which involves being cheerful and optimistic (Stafford & Canary, 1991). As the present study and other studies (e.g., Bippus & Rollin, 2003; Guerrero & Bachman, 2006) suggest, secure individuals are especially likely to report using prosocial emotional communication and maintenance behavior, whereas dismissives are less likely to report using such behaviors. These types of prosocial behavior appear to be more proximally associated with relational satisfaction than attachment.

Similarly, our data suggest that aggressive ways of communicating anger may be more proximally associated with relational satisfaction than preoccupied attachment, since destructive anger expression partially mediated the association between preoccupation and relational satisfaction. Thus, the anxiety and worry that a preoccupied person experiences may sometimes translate into aggression, which could push the partner away or perhaps lead to negative spirals of behavior. Preoccupieds who cope with negative affect through nonaggressive means may be less likely to experience some of the relational problems that typically plague relationships involving a preoccupied partner.

Although the evidence from this study highlights the importance of including emotional communication as a mediating variable in attachment research, future work should explore other communication variables (e.g., relational maintenance behavior, different types of disclosures) that may also mediate the association between attachment and relational satisfaction. In addition to playing a mediating role, Guerrero (2008) argued that communication acts as both a cause and a consequence of attachment. For instance, attachment may lead to differences in emotional communication, and emotional communication by one partner might lead to changes in the other partner's attachment style. More research is necessary to examine the direct and indirect causal pathways between communication, attachment, and relational outcomes such as satisfaction. The present study is limited by use of cross-sectional data, so causality cannot be determined.

The present study is also limited in that attachment was assessed by tapping into people's general perceptions about themselves and others, rather than perceptions of themselves and their partner within their specific relationship. Thus, future research may benefit from assessing both participants' general and context-specific attachment styles, including domain-specific models (i.e., friendships vs. romances) and

relationship-specific models (i.e., attachment in a particular relationship). Research-ers may also want to determine how the various combinations of attachment style in a dyad (e.g., a dismissive paired with a preoccupied) produce different patterns of emotional communication associated with relational satisfaction. The present study was limited in that attachment data was only collected for one member of the dyad. Although more work remains to be done, this investigation takes scholars one step closer to understanding the interplay between attachment and communication as well as the impact these variables have on relational satisfaction.

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