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Examining the association between perceived partner commitment and relationship feelings among anxiously attached people at the daily level

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ABSTRACT

The Attachment Security Enhancement Model proposes that a romantic partner reassuring an anxiously attached person of their commitment can help deescalate negative feelings (i.e. an interpersonal process). However, this can be taxing on the partner and requires the anxious person to accurately detect the partner's buffering attempts. Instead, it may be beneficial for anxious people to consistently perceive greater partner commitment on their own (i.e. an intrapersonal process) to promote relationship quality. The current study incorporated a dyadic diary design. On days in which highly anxious participants perceived greater partner commitment, they reported greater positive relationship feelings; less anxious (i.e. secure) and avoidant participants did not exhibit this pattern. These results add to the existing literature on attachment buffering by providing preliminary evidence of daily perceived partner commitment as one possible defense against erosion of relationship satisfaction due to high levels of attachment anxiety.

ARTICLE HISTORY

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KEYWORDS

Attachment insecurity; daily diary; perceived partner commitment

People characterized by high levels of attachment anxiety can struggle to overcome their early, insecure interpersonal experiences even when their romantic partners become the primary attachment figure later in life (Hazan & Shaver, 1994). This is because the attachment behavioral system serves as a lens for interpreting social information and is biased toward how their inconsistent caregiver behaved during formative years (Bowlby, 1982; Hazan et al., 2006). As a result, high levels of attachment anxiety are generally associated with ambivalent feelings (i.e., both positive and negative) toward romantic partners. Unsurprisingly, anxiously attached people typically experience lower levels of relationship satisfaction in comparison to secure people (Candel & Turliuc, 2019). When experiencing relationship threats, in particular, maladaptive attachment responses (e.g., lashing out at the partner when feeling hyperactivated or feeling unworthy of love) can contribute to *further* declines in relationship satisfaction (Overall & Simpson, 2015) and the eventual erosion of commitment (Campbell et al., 2005). It is therefore important to identify processes that help protect relationship satisfaction from high levels of attachment anxiety.

The Attachment Security Enhancement Model (ASEM; Arriaga et al., 2014, 2018) proposes specific interpersonal and intrapersonal processes that afford insecurely attached people opportunities to experience higher quality relationships. While both insecure attachment styles (i.e., anxiety and avoidance) experience high levels of relationship anxiety, they manifest very differently within relationships and therefore require unique buffering processes. Therefore, strategies aimed at quieting the core fear of abandonment associated with attachment anxiety may be ineffective or even harmful

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to avoidantly attached people's journey to earned security (Fraley, 2019). A longer-term attachment goal detailed by the ASEM (Arriaga & Kumashiro, 2019) is to provide opportunities for anxiously attached people to rely *less* on their partners for reassurance and to instead build confidence within themselves. The goal of the current work was therefore to examine an *intrapersonal* process that may promote daily positive relationship feelings within anxiously attached people and perceived partner commitment.

Intrapersonal regulation of attachment anxiety

More recently, the stability of attachment patterns has been questioned by relationship researchers (e.g. Chopik et al., 2024; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2019). The Dyadic Regulation Model of Insecurity Buffering (Simpson & Overall, 2014) and the ASEM (Arriaga et al., 2014, 2018) both suggest that there are opportunities for partners to help regulate an insecure person's distress in-the-moment (i.e., interpersonal processes), and opportunities for the individual to experience longer-term shifts in felt security within non-threatening contexts (i.e., intrapersonal processes). Because attachment anxiety is associated with hyperactivating when distressed, messages of the partner's continued dedication (i.e., safe strategies; Arriaga & Kumashiro, 2019) may need to be received more regularly (i.e., at the daily level) to consistently buffer anxiety. While the partner providing reassurance in the moment can help temporarily reduce negative affect for anxiously attached people, it can be taxing to the current partner and be costly (e.g., Lemay & Dudley, 2011). Indeed, excessive reassurance seeking is associated with greater levels of depression for people with high levels of attachment anxiety and is therefore not a healthy or permanent solution for mitigating attachment anxiety (Shaver et al., 2005). It is therefore important to examine intrapersonal processes that an anxiously attached person can consistently deploy *on their own* to prevent declines in relationship satisfaction.

This raises a question – Are relationship-promoting perceptions (i.e., intrapersonal strategies) effective at buffering high levels of attachment anxiety? Park et al. (2019) examined the role of gratitude within relationships characterized by high levels of attachment insecurity and tested both perceived and partner reported levels of gratitude. They found that for highly anxious people in particular, greater daily *perceived* partner gratitude was effective at preventing declines in relationship satisfaction, whereas the partner's *actual* self-reported daily feelings of gratitude were not. Relatedly, *perceived* partner sacrifice protected relationship quality from high levels of attachment anxiety (Murphy et al., 2022). Lastly, greater *perceived* goal support predicted declines in attachment anxiety over time when participants reported high *perceived* partner responsiveness at baseline (Jakubiak et al., 2023). These results provide some evidence that relationship-promoting perceptions derived from *within* an anxious partner may be just as important for protecting relationship satisfaction from high levels of attachment anxiety.

Perceptions of the partner's commitment

Within the context of romantic relationships, perceptions of the partner's commitment level serve as an indicator for relationship longevity. For example, higher levels of perceived partner commitment are associated with greater expectations for relationship stability (Tan et al., 2020). Perceiving lower partner commitment, on the other hand, has negative consequences for relationship longevity and is associated with breakup, beyond the person's own commitment level (Arriaga et al., 2006; Joel et al., 2018). This may help to explain why anxiously attached people in particular react strongly to perceived threats to the partner's commitment level (e.g., Kim et al., 2018). It makes sense that the learned hypervigilance for abandonment will result in anxiously attached people paying greater attention to their partners' commitment levels. Relatedly, people high in attachment anxiety were found to accurately track when their partners were considering ending the relationship, highlighting the importance placed on perceived partner commitment (Tan et al., 2023). Greater perceived partner

commitment is therefore essential for the success of any long-term relationship but may have a unique function in relationships with anxiously attached partners.

Speaking to the importance of perceived partner commitment, the ASEM (Arriaga et al., 2014, 2018) specifically mentions that anxiously attached people can benefit from the partner's continuous dedication and previous research supports this (e.g., Tran & Simpson, 2009). However, the partner's regulation attempt to communicate commitment may not be received by the anxiously attached person, thereby not having its intended impact (e.g., Lemay & Ryan, 2018). The anxiously attached person perceiving greater partner commitment is therefore the *ultimate* outcome of the partner buffering process and is the most appropriate variable to examine in the current study's context. Because of the dyadic nature of the buffering process (Arriaga et al., 2014; Simpson & Overall, 2014), it should be optimal for *both* partners if the anxiously attached person can perceive greater partner commitment *on their own* to help promote positive relationship feelings. Anxiously attached people assert dependence when threatened, and it's not unlikely for them to exhibit a motivated perception such as the partner being highly committed (Arriaga & Kumashiro, 2019). By doing so, relationship satisfaction can be protected. The present work therefore sought to examine how daily perceptions of the partner's commitment are associated with daily relationship feelings as a function of high levels of attachment anxiety. Because the ASEM proposes that buffering processes can either amplify the positive or dampen the negative, the current study also examined if daily perceived partner commitment was associated with lower daily negative relationship feelings.

Hypotheses

The current study proposed that daily perceived partner commitment would be uniquely beneficial for people high, but not low, in attachment anxiety because it signals dependence and can quiet the core fear of abandonment, and as a result, protects relationship satisfaction from eroding. More specifically, it was hypothesized that on days in which people high in attachment anxiety perceived greater partner commitment, they would also report greater daily positive relationship feelings in comparison to those low in attachment anxiety (Hypothesis 1). An additional, exploratory hypothesis predicted that on days in which people high in attachment anxiety perceived high partner commitment, they would report lower negative relationship feelings in comparison to people low in attachment anxiety (Hypothesis 2). The current study sought to determine if daily perceived partner commitment uniquely buffers high levels of anxiety (i.e., is ineffective at buffering attachment avoidance) and as a result, attachment avoidance was included in all models; there were no specific predictions for the moderating effect of attachment avoidance.

The current research

The current work examined daily perceived partner commitment and daily positive and negative relationship feelings within romantic dyads, as moderated by attachment anxiety and avoidance.¹ Due to the dyadic nature of the data, a nested design (i.e., nesting individuals within their respective dyads) was used to account for the interdependencies. Hypothesis 1 was pre-registered on OSF: https://osf.io/x57sd/?view_only=fefe1604c454459fa3fd165da5ea25cc; Hypothesis 2 was exploratory. No specific predictions were made for the interactions with attachment avoidance, but its effect was included in all models and this is reflected in the preregistration. The study was approved by the University of Rochester's review board (where these data were collected).

Method

Participants and procedure

Optimal Design Version 3.01 (Spybrook et al., 2013) was used to compute the minimum number of dyads required with power = .80, alpha = .05, a small effect size ($SD = .25$) and the variability of effect size = .10; the required number of dyads was 100.² Dyads were recruited on ResearchMatch and completed an initial screening survey to determine their eligibility; inclusion criteria specified that dyads needed to be cohabiting and interact with each other every day. Following this initial screening, a member of the research team scheduled a phone or zoom call with each dyad to go over the diary study instructions. Data were collected between. Five dyads were excluded from analysis: Two dyads withdrew from the study, two dyads provided less than seven days in which both people completed the survey, and one dyad was excluded for missing over half of the daily attention checks. The final sample consisted of 197 dyads (i.e., 394 total participants; 200 women, 191 men, and 3 non-binary people). Of the 197 dyads, 367 were between people who reported different genders from each other and 27 were same-gendered dyads.³ Participants ($M_{age} = 34.24$, $SD_{age} = 9.31$) self-identified as 65.7% White, 16.8% Black or African American, 15.0% Asian, 1.3% specified mixed race, 1.0% American Indian or Alaskan Native, 0.3% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander; 94.1% Non-Hispanic/Latinx. The majority of the dyads reported being married to their current partners (55.1%) or indicated they were in a committed, monogamous relationship (33.8%; 11.2% engaged; $M_{relationship\ length} = 9.34$ years; $SD_{relationship\ length} = 8.30$ years). Participants filled out an initial baseline survey followed by a daily diary survey for 14 days and were compensated for their participation. Each dyad had the opportunity to be paid up to \$150 for completing the baseline survey and all diary surveys; they were also entered into a \$200 bonus lottery. The baseline survey contained a measure of attachment anxiety and avoidance, while the daily surveys contained measures of daily fluctuations in PPC and positive and negative relationship feelings. Descriptive statistics for all measures are reported in Table 1.

Baseline measures

Baseline attachment style

Participants rated the 12-item Experiences in Close Relationships Short Form (ECR-S) attachment measure (Wei et al., 2007), which was adapted from the original ECR-R (Fraley et al., 2000). Participants were given instructions to answer items, “according to how you generally experience relationships,” on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) scale. Six items (e.g., “My desire to be very close sometimes scares people away”) represented the anxiety subscale ($\alpha = .75$) and six items (e.g., “It helps to turn to my romantic partner in need”) represented the avoidance subscale ($\alpha = .82$). Construct validity was established by correlating the ECR-S items with attachment-related behaviors (e.g., excessive reassurance seeking and depressed mood); test–retest reliability over 1 month was established for the anxiety ($r = .80$) and avoidance ($r = .83$) subscales (Wei et al., 2007).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of all measures.

| Measures | Mean (SD) | α |
|--------------------------------|-------------|----------|
| Baseline Measures | | |
| Attachment Anxiety | 3.31 (1.15) | .75 |
| Attachment Avoidance | 2.02 (0.89) | .82 |
| Daily Measures | | |
| Perceived Partner Commitment | 6.43 (0.92) | .84 |
| Positive Relationship Feelings | 5.20 (1.26) | .87 |
| Negative Relationship Feelings | 6.32 (1.02) | .83 |

Note. The alpha coefficients represent measures of internal consistency.

Daily diary measures

Daily perceived partner commitment (PPC)

Participants rated four items each day from the Dedication Subscale of Owen et al. (2011) Revised Commitment Inventory Dedication, adapted to reflect the measure on a daily level (e.g., “Today, I felt like [partner’s name]’s relationship with me is clearly part of my partner’s future life plans,” and, “Today, I felt like [partner’s name] may not want to be with me a few years from now (reverse-coded)”) on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree; $\alpha = 0.84$). Criterion validity for the Dedication Subscale was established with negative communication and relationship adjustment (Owen et al., 2011).

Daily relationship feelings

Participants rated 10 unpublished items with six items reflecting positive relationship feelings (e.g., “Today, I felt loved by [partner name],” and, “Today, I enjoyed our time together”) and four items reflecting negative relationship feelings, (e.g., “Today, I felt distance between us,” and, “Today, I felt worried about our relationship”) on a scale of 1 (not at all true) to 7 (very true). Separate composites for positive daily feelings ($\alpha = 0.87$) and negative daily feelings ($\alpha = 0.83$) were created with higher scores reflecting greater levels of the constructs.

Data analysis

Determining distinguishability

The analyses focused on how people perceive their partners’ commitment level on a daily basis and how these perceptions are associated with daily positive and negative relationship feelings as a function of attachment anxiety. Distinguishability was tested to determine if the gender of the individuals (93.4% of the dyads were mixed-gender) within a dyad influenced the paths (i.e., predictors to the outcomes) and if gender differences should be accounted for in the subsequent analyses (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2020). One distinguishable model was tested, allowing for heterogeneity of variance (i.e., CSH) between men and women and one indistinguishable model was tested with homogeneity of variance specified (i.e., CSR) for each predictor and outcome variable pairing. The results of the chi-square tests are presented in Table 2. Based on the chi-square results, all models were ran as distinguishable.⁴

Testing for gender differences

To account for the hierarchical nature of the individuals being nested within dyads, a two-slope, two-intercept model was used. Women and men had their own random intercepts and own fixed slopes. By doing so, each partner within a dyad was allocated their own freely varying starting point on the variables and their own slope, or changes over time in the variables, which were set as fixed to allow the model to converge. These unique intercepts and slopes based on gender were included in the model with a dummy code representing women and a dummy code representing men. Changes in the daily variables across the 14 days for men and women are illustrated in Figures 1–3.

Table 2. Tests of the difference between distinguishable and indistinguishable models.

| | <i>df</i> | χ^2 | <i>p</i> |
|--------------------------------|-----------|----------|----------|
| Positive Relationship Feelings | 30 | 48.65 | .017 |
| Negative Relationship Feelings | 30 | 77.98 | < .001 |

Note. Models with perceived partner commitment as the predictor were estimated with and without constrained pathways for men and women. The chi-square values were calculated from subtracting the two models’ deviances; the *df* values were calculated from subtracted the two models’ number of parameters. If the *p*-values are significant, this signifies that the model should be treated as distinguishable.

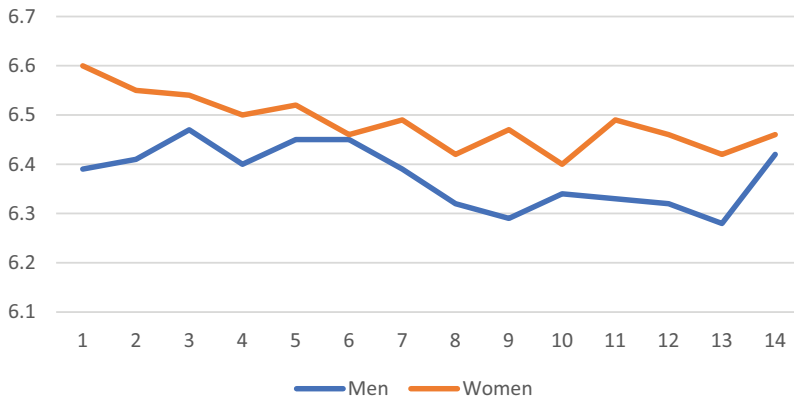


Figure 1. Perceived partner commitment across 14 days.

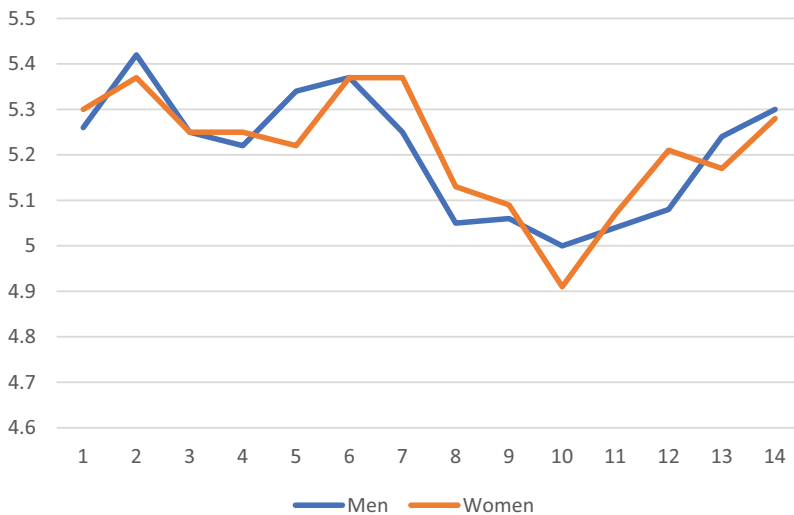


Figure 2. Positive relationship feelings across 14 days.

Multilevel models

Multilevel analyses were conducted with day as the level 1, within-subjects predictor, and with between-subjects differences represented at level 2. The daily variables were person-mean centered so that values above or below a person's mean represented their daily fluctuations from their own average values (i.e., the within-person effects). The between-person effects were also included as a comparison of the variable levels across participants.⁵ The between-person effects were therefore determined if individuals who were generally above average on the predictors experienced greater levels of the outcomes than individuals who were generally below average. Correlations between the daily variables and average variables are included in [Tables 3](#) and [4](#), respectively.

The models accounted for men and women's unique effects. Centered time (day-7.5) representing the diary day in the analysis was included for both genders, as were the main effects of the within- and between-person predictors. Centered attachment anxiety and avoidance were included in the models as moderators at level 2 (they were only measured once at baseline), as were their interactions with both the within- and between-person components for men and women. Simple slopes were computed with a variable representing +1 SD above the mean and a variable representing -1 SD below the mean in the moderators to clarify the nature of any significant interactions that were obtained. To account

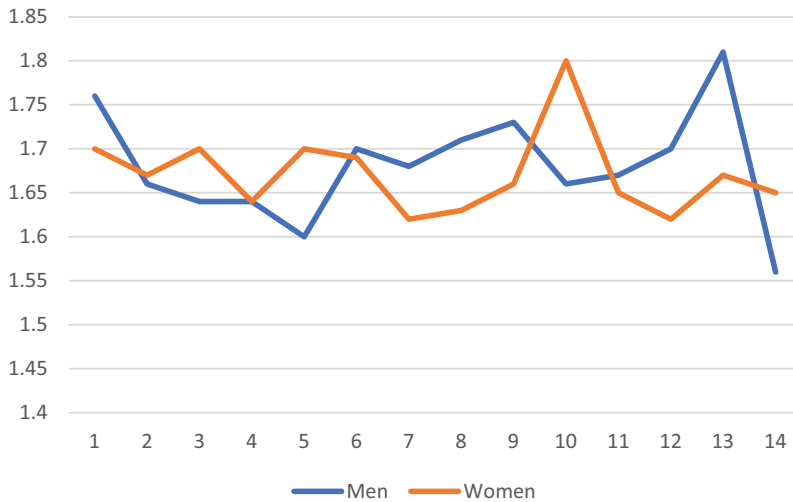


Figure 3. Negative relationship feelings across 14 days.

Table 3. Correlations of the daily (within-persons) variables.

| Variables | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|---------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|
| 1. Perceived Partner Commitment | – | .19** | –.28** |
| 2. Positive Feelings | .24** | – | –.64** |
| 3. Negative Feelings | –.34** | –.59** | – |

Note. Correlations were computed for each day and then averaged across the 14 days.

Correlations for men are reported above the diagonal; women are below.

*= $p < .05$; **= $p < .01$.

Table 4. Correlations of the average (between-persons) variables.

| Variables | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| 1. Attachment Anxiety | – | .32** | –.19** | –.07 | .09 |
| 2. Attachment Avoidance | .26** | – | –.40** | –.24** | .24** |
| 3. Perceived Partner Commitment | –.26** | –.30** | – | .44** | –.47** |
| 4. Positive Feelings | –.12 | –.35** | .41** | – | –.74** |
| 5. Negative Feelings | .27** | .28** | –.39** | –.58** | – |

Note. Correlations for men are above the diagonal; women are below.

*= $p < .05$; **= $p < .01$.

for changes in the outcome from the previous day, a lagged term was included to represent the previous day's level of the outcome variable (i.e., day $n-1$ outcome)⁶.

Two models were tested – one with positive relationship feelings and one with negative relationship feelings as the outcome. The perceived partner commitment (within and between) \times attachment \times gender effects are of the current paper's focus, with full results reported in Tables 5 and 6. Within-person effects are presented first followed by between-person effects for women and men separately.

Results

Perceived partner commitment (PPC) predicting positive relationship feelings

Attachment anxiety

Does attachment anxiety moderate the association between PPC and positive relationship feelings for women? The interaction between the daily (i.e., within-persons) PPC \times attachment anxiety was

Table 5. Daily perceived partner commitment predicting daily positive relationship feelings.

| Fixed Effects | <i>B</i> | <i>S.E.</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>p</i> | 95% <i>CI</i> | |
|---------------------|----------|-------------|-----------------------|----------|---------------|-----------|
| | | | | | <i>LL</i> | <i>UL</i> |
| Men | 4.35 | .09 | $t(778.272) = 45.99$ | < .001 | 4.16 | 4.53 |
| Women | 4.32 | .09 | $t(626.287) = 45.83$ | < .001 | 4.13 | 4.50 |
| Men*Day | -.00 | .00 | $t(3515.930) = -0.89$ | .375 | -.01 | .00 |
| Women*Day | -.01 | .00 | $t(3400.067) = -1.47$ | .141 | -.02 | .00 |
| Men*Anxiety | -.07 | .05 | $t(162.066) = -1.38$ | .171 | -.17 | .03 |
| Women*Anxiety | -.25 | .04 | $t(188.595) = -5.65$ | < .001 | -.33 | -.16 |
| Men*Avoidance | -.30 | .06 | $t(290.300) = -5.16$ | < .001 | -.41 | -.18 |
| Women*Avoidance | -.28 | .05 | $t(363.963) = -6.02$ | < .001 | -.37 | -.19 |
| Men*PPC_w | .42 | .03 | $t(3625.891) = 13.28$ | < .001 | .36 | .48 |
| Women*PPC_w | .40 | .03 | $t(3601.709) = 14.20$ | < .001 | .35 | .46 |
| Men*PPC_b | -.14 | .05 | $t(441.575) = -2.90$ | .004 | -.23 | -.04 |
| Women*PPC_b | -.21 | .03 | $t(1006.172) = -6.11$ | < .001 | -.27 | -.14 |
| Men*PPC_w*Anx | .10 | .03 | $t(3625.891) = 3.43$ | < .001 | .04 | .15 |
| Women*PPC_w*Anx | .09 | .03 | $t(3692.780) = 3.78$ | < .001 | .05 | .14 |
| Men*PPC_b*Anx | .25 | .05 | $t(266.887) = 4.98$ | < .001 | .15 | .35 |
| Women*PPC_b*Anx | .28 | .05 | $t(268.758) = 6.18$ | < .001 | .19 | .37 |
| Men*PPC_w*Avoid | -.07 | .03 | $t(3226.587) = -2.49$ | .013 | -.13 | -.02 |
| Women*PPC_w*Avoid | -.17 | .03 | $t(3219.756) = -5.72$ | < .001 | -.23 | -.11 |
| Men*PPC_b*Avoid | -.10 | .03 | $t(521.792) = -3.20$ | .001 | -.17 | -.04 |
| Women*PPC_b*Avoid | -.40 | .06 | $t(161.567) = -6.69$ | < .001 | -.52 | -.28 |
| Yesterday's outcome | .17 | .01 | $t(4751.908) = 12.29$ | < .001 | .14 | .20 |

Note. The outcome variable is daily report of positive relationship feelings. PPC stands for perceived partner commitment. The “_b” denotes the between-subjects variables and the “_w” denotes within-subjects variables.

Table 6. Daily perceived partner commitment predicting daily negative relationship feelings.

| Fixed Effects | <i>B</i> | <i>S.E.</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>p</i> | 95% <i>CI</i> | |
|---------------------|----------|-------------|------------------------|----------|---------------|-----------|
| | | | | | <i>LL</i> | <i>UL</i> |
| Men | 1.43 | .06 | $t(189.429) = 22.75$ | < .001 | 1.30 | 1.55 |
| Women | 1.43 | .06 | $t(181.103) = 24.83$ | < .001 | 1.32 | 1.54 |
| Men*Day | -.00 | .00 | $t(3791.174) = -0.79$ | .432 | -.01 | .00 |
| Women*Day | -.01 | .00 | $t(3683.470) = -1.67$ | .094 | -.01 | .00 |
| Men*Anxiety | .06 | .05 | $t(152.841) = 1.34$ | .183 | -.03 | .16 |
| Women*Anxiety | .21 | .04 | $t(175.252) = 5.66$ | < .001 | .14 | .28 |
| Men*Avoidance | .25 | .05 | $t(284.023) = 4.61$ | < .001 | .14 | .35 |
| Women*Avoidance | .09 | .04 | $t(325.871) = 2.26$ | .024 | .01 | .17 |
| Men*PPC_w | -.47 | .03 | $t(4114.337) = -16.79$ | < .001 | -.52 | -.41 |
| Women*PPC_w | -.47 | .03 | $t(3870.900) = -18.57$ | < .001 | -.51 | -.42 |
| Men*PPC_b | .26 | .04 | $t(404.162) = 5.82$ | < .001 | .17 | .34 |
| Women*PPC_b | .30 | .03 | $t(1021.252) = 10.22$ | < .001 | .24 | .36 |
| Men*PPC_w*Anx | -.06 | .02 | $t(4033.899) = -2.61$ | .009 | -.11 | -.02 |
| Women*PPC_w*Anx | -.04 | .02 | $t(3984.670) = -1.72$ | .086 | -.08 | .01 |
| Men*PPC_b*Anx | -.19 | .05 | $t(249.906) = -4.07$ | < .001 | -.29 | -.10 |
| Women*PPC_b*Anx | -.27 | .04 | $t(261.580) = -6.95$ | < .001 | -.35 | -.20 |
| Male*PPC_w*Avoid | .07 | .03 | $t(3712.147) = 2.63$ | .009 | .02 | .12 |
| Female*PPC_w*Avoid | .14 | .03 | $t(3357.335) = 5.29$ | < .001 | .09 | .19 |
| Men*PPC_b*Avoid | .06 | .03 | $t(478.378) = 2.12$ | .035 | .00 | .12 |
| Women*PPC_b*Avoid | .33 | .05 | $t(154.718) = 6.49$ | < .001 | .23 | .43 |
| Yesterday's outcome | .13 | .01 | $t(4603.368) = 9.74$ | < .001 | .11 | .16 |

Note. The outcome variable is daily report of negative relationship feelings. The same note about variable names from Table 4 applies.

significant for women's unique fixed slope, $B = .09$, $S.E. = .03$, $t(3692.780) = 3.78$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.05, .14]. Among women relatively high (+1 SD) in anxiety, higher daily levels of PPC were associated with greater daily positive relationship feelings, $B = .16$, $S.E. = .06$, $t(3645.444) = 2.54$, $p = .011$, 95% CI [.04, .29], whereas no significant effect was found with women relatively low (-1 SD) in anxiety, $B = -.03$, $S.E. = .04$, $t(3711.612) = -0.79$, $p = .428$, 95% CI [-.12, .05]. See Figure 4.

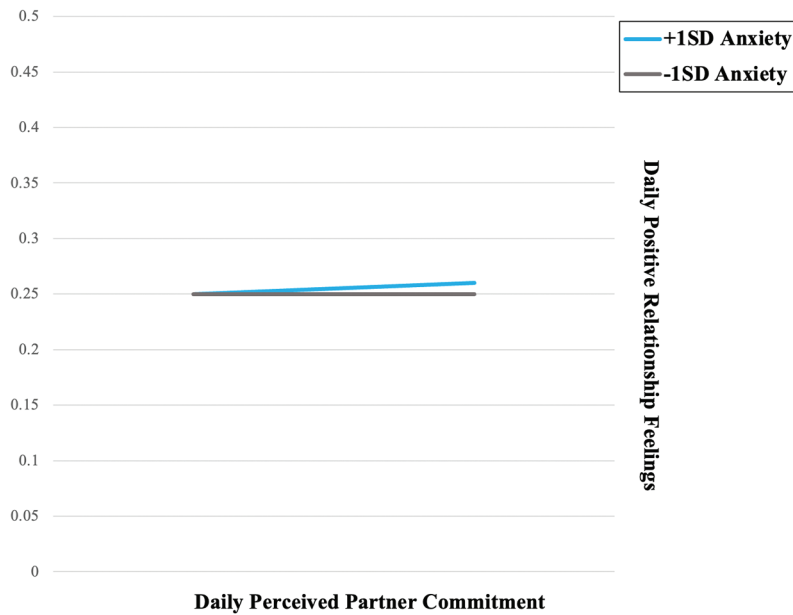


Figure 4. Key Findings: daily perceived partner commitment on daily positive relationship feelings as moderated by attachment anxiety among women. *Note.* The intercepts and slopes were small in magnitude, and therefore the y-axis has a smaller range of values.

The interaction between the *average* (i.e., between-persons) PPC \times attachment anxiety was also significant for women's unique fixed effect, $B = .28$, $S.E. = .05$, $t(268.758) = 6.18$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.19, .37]. Simple effects analyses revealed that for more anxious (+1 SD) women, greater average levels of PPC across the 14 diary days were associated with greater average positive relationship feelings, $B = .09$, $S.E. = .05$, $t(3416.039) = 2.08$, $p = .038$, 95% CI [.01, .18] whereas no significant effect was found with less (–1 SD) anxious women, $B = -.01$, $S.E. = .04$, $t(3715.831) = -0.34$, $p = .736$, 95% CI [–.09, .07].

Does attachment anxiety moderate the association between PPC and positive relationship feelings for men? The interaction between *daily* (i.e., within-persons) PPC \times attachment anxiety was significant for men's unique fixed slope, $B = .10$, $S.E. = .03$, $t(3659.804) = 3.43$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.04, .15]. Among men with relatively high (+1 SD) in anxiety, higher daily levels of PPC were associated with greater daily positive relationship feelings, $B = .12$, $S.E. = .04$, $t(3636.505) = 3.01$, $p = .003$, 95% CI [.04, .20], but no significant effect was found with men relatively low (–1 SD) in anxiety, $B = .02$, $S.E. = .05$, $t(3509.253) = 0.39$, $p = .700$, 95% CI [–.08, .12]. See Figure 5.

The interaction between *average* (i.e., between-persons) PPC \times attachment anxiety was also significant for men's unique fixed effect, $B = .25$, $S.E. = .05$, $t(266.887) = 4.98$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.15, .35]. Simple effects analyses revealed that for highly anxious (+1 SD) men, greater average levels of PPC across the 14 diary days were associated with greater average positive relationship feelings, $B = .09$, $S.E. = .04$, $t(3230.478) = 2.60$, $p = .009$, 95% CI [.02, .16], and a marginal, negative association was found with men lower (–1 SD) in anxiety, $B = -.09$, $S.E. = .05$, $t(3590.558) = -1.95$, $p = .052$, 95% CI [–.19, .00].

Attachment avoidance

Does attachment avoidance moderate the association between PPC and positive relationship feelings for women? The interaction between *daily* (i.e., within-persons) PPC \times attachment avoidance was significant for women's unique fixed slope, $B = -.17$, $S.E. = .03$, $t(3219.756) = -5.72$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [–.23, –.11]. No significant effect was found among women relatively high (+1 SD) in avoidance, $B = -.01$, $S.E. = .03$, $t(3153.716) = -0.35$, $p = .724$, 95% CI [–.07, .05]. However, among women with

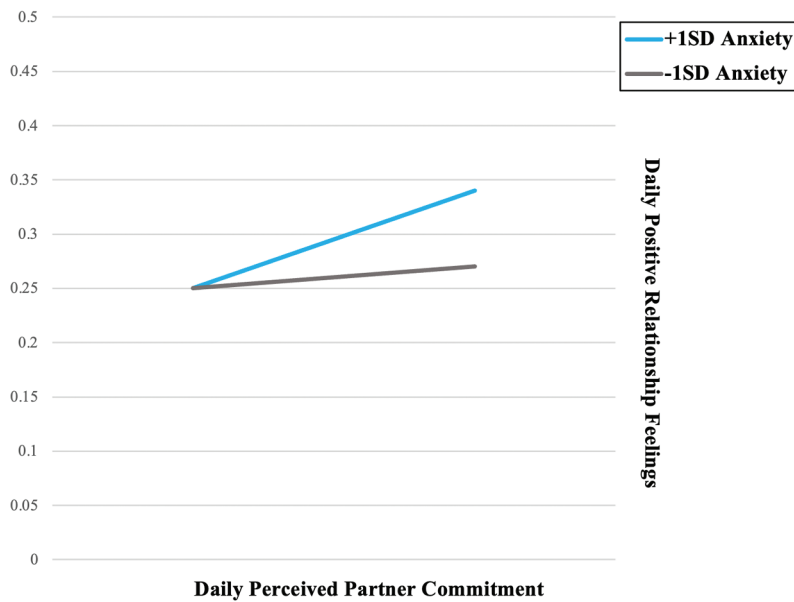


Figure 5. Key findings: daily perceived partner commitment on daily positive relationship feelings as moderated by attachment anxiety among men. *Note.* The intercepts and slopes were small in magnitude, and therefore, the y-axis has a smaller range.

relatively low (-1 SD) in avoidance, higher daily levels of perceived partner commitment were associated with higher daily positive relationship feelings, $B = .14$, $S.E. = .06$, $t(3767.204) = 2.44$, $p = .015$, 95% CI [.03, .25].

The interaction between *average* (i.e., between-persons) PPC \times attachment *avoidance* was significant for *women's* unique fixed effect, $B = -.40$, $S.E. = .06$, $t(161.567) = -6.69$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-.52, -.28]. Simple effects analyses revealed that highly avoidant ($+1$ SD) women with greater average levels of PPC across the 14 diary days also reported greater average positive relationship feelings, $B = .06$, $S.E. = .03$, $t(3133.199) = 2.01$, $p = .044$, 95% CI [.00, .13], but no significant effect was found with less (-1 SD) avoidant women, $B = .03$, $S.E. = .04$, $t(3729.026) = 0.67$, $p = .505$, 95% CI [-.06, .11].

Does attachment avoidance moderate the association between PPC and positive relationship feelings for men? The interaction between *daily* (i.e., within-persons) PPC \times attachment *avoidance* was significant for *men's* unique fixed slope, $B = -.07$, $S.E. = .03$, $t(3326.587) = -2.49$, $p = .013$, 95% CI [-.13, -.02]. Among men with relatively high ($+1$ SD) in avoidance, higher daily levels of perceived partner commitment were associated with lower daily positive relationship feelings, $B = -.15$, $S.E. = .04$, $t(3451.039) = -3.77$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-.23, -.07]; however, among men with relatively low (-1 SD) in avoidance, higher levels of daily perceived partner commitment were associated with higher daily positive relationship feelings, $B = .29$, $S.E. = .05$, $t(3568.894) = 6.11$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.20, .39].

The interaction between *average* (i.e., between-persons) PPC \times attachment *avoidance* was significant for *men's* unique fixed slope, $B = -.10$, $S.E. = .03$, $t(521.792) = -3.20$, $p = .001$, 95% CI [-.17, -.04]. Simple effects analyses revealed no significant effect with highly ($+1$ SD) avoidant men, $B = .04$, $S.E. = .04$, $t(3611.991) = 1.10$, $p = .271$, 95% CI [-.03, .12], and a marginal effect with less (-1 SD) avoidant men above average in PPC across the 14 diary days was associated with lower average positive feelings, $B = -.07$, $S.E. = .04$, $t(3261.497) = -1.80$, $p = .071$, 95% CI [-.15, .01].

Perceived partner commitment (PPC) predicting negative relationship feelings

Attachment anxiety

Does attachment anxiety moderate the association between PPC and negative relationship feelings for women? The interaction between *daily* (i.e., within-persons) PPC \times attachment anxiety was not significant for women's unique fixed slope, $B = -.04$, $S.E. = .02$, $t(3984.670) = -1.72$, $p = .086$, 95% CI $[-.08, .01]$. However, the interaction between *average* (between-persons) PPC \times attachment anxiety was significant for women's unique fixed effect, $B = -.27$, $S.E. = .04$, $t(261.580) = -6.95$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[-.35, -.20]$. Simple effects analyses revealed that highly (+1 SD) anxious women above average in PPC across the 14 diary days also reported lower average negative relationship feelings, $B = -.13$, $S.E. = .04$, $t(3616.684) = -3.30$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[-.21, -.05]$. A similar effect was also found with less (-1 SD) anxious women, $B = -.12$, $S.E. = .03$, $t(3974.993) = -3.48$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[-.19, -.05]$.

Does attachment anxiety moderate the association between PPC and negative relationship feelings for men? The interaction between *daily* (within-persons) PPC \times attachment anxiety was significant for men's unique fixed slope, $B = -.06$, $S.E. = .02$, $t(4033.899) = -2.61$, $p = .009$, 95% CI $[-.11, -.02]$. Simple effects analyses revealed that among highly (+1 SD) anxious men, higher daily levels of PPC were associated with lower daily negative relationship feelings, $B = -.28$, $S.E. = .04$, $t(3843.071) = -7.97$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[-.35, -.21]$. No significant effect was found with less (-1 SD) anxious men, $B = -.04$, $S.E. = .04$, $t(3723.735) = -0.87$, $p = .386$, 95% CI $[-.12, .05]$.

The interaction between *average* (i.e., between-persons) PPC \times attachment anxiety was also significant for men's unique fixed effect, $B = -.19$, $S.E. = .05$, $t(249.906) = -4.07$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[-.28, -.10]$. Simple effects analyses revealed no significant effect among highly (+1 SD) anxious men, $B = -.02$, $S.E. = .03$, $t(3392.046) = -0.72$, $p = .470$, 95% CI $[-.08, .04]$. However, less (-1 SD) anxious men above average in PPC across the 14 diary days also were above average in daily negative relationship feelings, $B = .15$, $S.E. = .04$, $t(3816.977) = 3.53$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[.07, .23]$.

Attachment avoidance

Does attachment avoidance moderate the association between PPC and negative relationship feelings for women? The interaction between *daily* (i.e., within-persons) PPC \times attachment avoidance was significant for women's unique fixed slope, $B = .14$, $S.E. = .03$, $t(3357.335) = 5.29$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[.09, .19]$. Simple effects analyses revealed no significant effect among women relatively high (+1 SD) in avoidance, $B = .00$, $S.E. = .03$, $t(3323.315) = 0.18$, $p = .860$, 95% CI $[-.05, .06]$. Among women with relatively low (-1 SD) in avoidance, higher daily levels of perceived partner commitment were associated with lower daily negative relationship feelings, $B = -.10$, $S.E. = .05$, $t(4032.782) = -2.23$, $p = .026$, 95% CI $[-.20, -.01]$.

The interaction between *average* (between-persons) PPC \times attachment avoidance was also significant for women's unique fixed effect, $B = .33$, $S.E. = .05$, $t(154.718) = 6.49$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[.23, .43]$. Simple effects analyses revealed that highly (+1 SD) avoidant women above average in PPC across the 14 diary days reported lower average negative relationship feelings, $B = -.08$, $S.E. = .03$, $t(3319.632) = -2.88$, $p = .004$, 95% CI $[-.13, -.03]$. A similar, but stronger effect was found with less (-1 SD) avoidant women, $B = -.16$, $S.E. = .04$, $t(3949.641) = -4.42$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[-.23, -.09]$.

Does attachment avoidance moderate the association between PPC and negative relationship feelings for men? The interaction between *daily* (i.e., within-persons) PPC \times attachment avoidance was significant for men's unique fixed slope, $B = .07$, $S.E. = .03$, $t(3712.147) = 2.63$, $p = .009$, 95% CI $[.02, .12]$. Simple effects analyses revealed that among men relatively high (+1 SD) in avoidance, higher daily levels of perceived greater partner commitment were associated with lower daily negative relationship feelings, $B = -.07$, $S.E. = .04$, $t(3621.554) = -1.98$, $p = .048$, 95% CI $[-.14, -.00]$. Men relatively low (-1 SD) in avoidance exhibited an even stronger effect in the same direction, $B = -.25$, $S.E. = .04$, $t(3849.381) = -6.33$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[-.33, -.17]$.

Table 7. Summary table of the multilevel analyses with perceived partner commitment and anxiety.

| Interaction Coefficient | Simple Slope HIGH | Simple slope LOW | Interaction Coefficient | Simple Slope HIGH | Simple slope LOW |
|---|-------------------|------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Perceived Partner Commitment Predicting Positive Relationship Feelings | | | | | |
| Within-persons effects | | | | | |
| | Women | | | Men | |
| .09 | .16 | -.03 | .10 | .12 | .02 |
| Between-persons effects | | | | | |
| | Women | | | Men | |
| .28 | .09 | -.01 | .25 | .09 | -.09 |
| Perceived Partner Commitment Predicting Negative Relationship Feelings | | | | | |
| Within-persons effects | | | | | |
| | Women | | | Men | |
| -.04 | N/A | N/A | -.06 | -.28 | -.04 |
| Between-persons effects | | | | | |
| | Women | | | Men | |
| -.27 | -.13 | -.12 | -.19 | -.02 | .15 |

Note. The values in the table are B coefficients. Bolded values indicate significant results. "Simple slope high" represents the +1 SD attachment anxiety simple slope and "simple slope low" represents the -1 SD attachment anxiety simple slope for the significant interactions. N/A indicates simple effects tests were not performed due to a non-significant interaction term.

The interaction between *average* (i.e., between-persons) PPC \times attachment avoidance was significant for men's unique fixed effect, $B = .06$, $S.E. = .03$, $t(478.378) = 2.12$, $p = .035$, 95% CI [.00, .12]. Simple effects analyses revealed that highly (+1 SD) avoidant men above average in PPC across the 14 diary days also reported greater average negative relationship feelings, $B = .20$, $S.E. = .03$, $t(3782.823) = 5.90$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.13, .27]. The opposite pattern emerged with less (-1 SD) avoidant men above average in PPC across the 14 diary days reporting lower average negative relationship feelings, $B = -.12$, $S.E. = .03$, $t(3403.647) = -3.44$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-.18, -.05].

Discussion

Overview of the results

Moderation by attachment anxiety

An overview of the results with attachment anxiety is presented in Table 7. Among women and men relatively high in anxiety, higher daily levels of PPC were significantly associated with higher positive relationship feelings and these results support the preregistered Hypothesis 1. This association was not observed among women and men relatively low in anxiety (i.e., secure people), which further supports the prediction that PPC is particularly effective for protecting relationship quality from high levels of attachment anxiety. A similar pattern of results was found with the average levels of PPC and attachment anxiety. Additionally, highly anxious men who reported higher daily levels of PPC reported significantly lower daily negative feelings. This result provides some evidence of PPC dampening the negative relationship feelings typically experienced by anxiously attached people and provides partial support for Hypothesis 2.

Interestingly, less anxious men reported lower average positive relationship feelings and greater average negative relationship feelings when they perceived greater than average PPC. Because these effects occurred across participants at level 2, it is difficult to identify the potential mechanism explaining the association. It could be that greater levels of negative relationship feelings are generally associated with greater PPC as a compensatory behavior to maintain relationship investment during difficult relationship times. Secure people do tend to respond to dissatisfaction in more relationship-promoting ways, and perceived partner commitment could help maintain expectations for relationship stability despite feelings of dissatisfaction (Pizzano et al., 2013; Tan et al., 2020). Future studies

Table 8. Summary table of the multilevel analyses with perceived partner commitment and avoidance.

| Interaction Coefficient | Simple Slope HIGH | Simple slope LOW | Interaction Coefficient | Simple Slope HIGH | Simple slope LOW |
|---|----------------------|------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| Perceived Partner Commitment Predicting Positive Relationship Feelings | | | | | |
| Within-persons effects | | | | | |
| -.17 | Women -.01 | .14 | -.07 | Men -.15 | .29 |
| Between-persons effects | | | | | |
| -.40 | Women .06 | .03 | -.10 | Men .04 | -.07 |
| Perceived Partner Commitment Predicting Negative Relationship Feelings | | | | | |
| Within-persons effects | | | | | |
| .14 | Women .00 | -.10 | .07 | Men -.07 | -.25 |
| Between-persons effects | | | | | |
| .33 | Women -.08 | -.16 | .06 | Men .20 | -.12 |

Note. The values in the table are B coefficients. Bolded values indicate significant results. "Simple slope high" represents the +1 SD attachment avoidance simple slope and "simple slope low" represents the -1 SD attachment avoidance simple slope for the significant interactions.

should continue to assess the function of global PPC during periods of relationship dissatisfaction among less anxious men.

Moderation by attachment avoidance

An overview of the results with attachment avoidance is presented in Table 8. Among women and men relatively low in avoidance, higher levels of daily perceived partner commitment were significantly associated with higher daily positive relationship feelings, whereas the opposite pattern was found with highly avoidant men reporting significantly lower daily positive feelings. A similar pattern was found with highly avoidant men above average in PPC also reporting more negative relationship feelings. These findings could speak to the possibility that greater perceived partner commitment poses a threat to highly avoidant men's autonomy needs. Indeed, the ASEM (Arriaga et al., 2014, 2018) details that softening strategies are instead needed when buffering attachment avoidance so that interdependence is perceived more positively without creating direct relationship demands that threaten autonomy (Kumashiro & Arriaga, 2020; Overall et al., 2013). These results suggest that perceiving greater partner commitment may not be as helpful for maintaining daily relationship satisfaction among people high in attachment avoidance. Furthermore, the results suggest that perceiving greater daily partner commitment may even be a relational *barrier* for highly avoidant men, again highlighting that this strategy may be particularly useful for anxiously attached partners, as hypothesized.

Theoretical implications and future directions

Together, the current study's findings suggest that perceiving greater partner commitment is associated with greater daily positive relationship feelings for men and women who are high – but not low – in attachment anxiety (supporting the preregistered Hypothesis 1) and less daily negative relationship feelings specifically for highly anxious men (partial support for the exploratory Hypothesis 2). These results demonstrate a targeted effect whereby perceiving high partner commitment is uniquely promoting of positive relationship feelings (i.e., feeling of satisfaction) for anxiously attached people but not secure or avoidantly attached people. It could be that high levels of perceived partner commitment directly address the core fear of abandonment associated with high levels of attachment anxiety (Fraley, 2019; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2020). In fact, greater feelings of relatedness need fulfillment (i.e., feeling loved and cared for) were associated with decreases in attachment anxiety over time, suggesting that greater perceived partner commitment

may address attachment concerns in a similar manner (Girme & Overall, 2024). It could be that deriving relationship-promoting cognitions (i.e., the partner as highly committed) on one's own allows highly anxious people to experience greater relationship quality beyond the momentary reassurance that a romantic partner can offer, although future studies would need to empirically test this (Arriaga et al., 2014, 2018). Interestingly, the most consistent results were with the models predicting *positive* relationship feelings (supporting the preregistered Hypothesis 1), suggesting that perceiving high partner commitment is a strategy that is associated with enhancing daily relationship satisfaction, not just preventing dissatisfaction. The current study provides attachment researchers with some evidence that greater daily perceived partner commitment is effective for protecting relationship quality uniquely from high levels of attachment anxiety but not attachment avoidance.

Previous research has assessed daily feelings of relationship security in a similar manner by assessing both positive (e.g., "I felt comfortable being close to my partner") and negative (e.g., "I worried about being rejected or hurt") relationship feelings (Sadikaj et al., 2015). Future research should therefore continue to examine daily fluctuations in positive and negative feelings toward one's romantic partner as a function of attachment style. While the current study assessed more immediate associations within days, perhaps the momentary boosts in positive relationship feelings associated with greater perceived partner commitment can help foster the interpersonal environment needed to experience more permanent (i.e., longer-term) shifts in security. The ASEM (Arriaga et al., 2014, 2018) posits that longer-term shifts in security (i.e., more positive internal working models of self) are possible for anxiously attached people during non-threatening situations. By feeling more secure in the immediate sense, anxiously attached people can then focus on developing greater internal confidence and less overdependence on the partner. Or, perhaps daily perceived partner commitment can directly increase greater feelings of security over time. Future studies should continue to examine the function of perceived partner commitment for anxiously attached people within the context of earned security.

Arriaga et al. (2021) identified the transition to parenthood as one appropriate context to assess longer-term security enhancement through increased feelings of self-efficacy. The transition to parenthood is an attachment-relevant event that can introduce stressors as first-time parents learn to navigate their new roles and manage their relationships. It may therefore be especially important during the transition to parenthood to identify daily positive partner perceptions, such as perceived partner commitment, that can help promote relationship quality and deter declines in satisfaction. The experience of positive emotions was associated with greater relationship satisfaction during the transition to parenthood, highlighting the importance of mitigating the negative emotions associated with attachment insecurity during stressful times (Arriaga & Kumashiro, 2019; Don et al., 2022). Future studies should therefore continue to focus on identifying additional relationship perceptions that afford anxiously attached people the opportunity to feel more consistently secure in their relationships without having to overly rely on their partners.

Limitations

The current results provide evidence of the intrapersonal processes that occur at the daily level within anxiously attached people in relationships, but it is still unknown if these perceptions are accurately detecting fluctuations in the partner's actual commitment level. Previous research has suggested that anxious people are able to detect the partner's fluctuating commitment, presumably because of their hypervigilance for possibility of abandonment (Tan et al., 2023). Future research should therefore include a measure of daily own commitment to compare the partner's actual commitment with the anxious actor's perceived partner commitment and their combined influence on daily relationship feelings. Additionally, including a daily indicator of attachment insecurity (i.e., state-like fluctuations in anxiety or avoidance) would determine the in-the-moment shifts in

insecurity that are associated with fluctuations in perceived partner commitment. These findings only speak to short-term associations with relationship satisfaction and long-term consequences should therefore also be explored.

There were also some notable limitations with the study sample. The sample consisted of participants from the United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK) and therefore represent data from people in W.E.I.R.D (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic) populations (Henrich et al., 2010); the results therefore cannot be generalized to interdependent cultures. Most participants reported being married to their current partners, with the average reported time together being almost a decade; it is important to measure these daily perceptions with less established relationships as well. The sample also primarily consisted of white women reporting that they were involved in monogamous relationships with men. Additionally, the statistical models were ran as distinguishable, which in effect only tested the associations for relationships between people of different genders and required assigning gender to non-binary individuals to include them in the analyses. Future research should oversample from the BIPOC. Consensually Non-Monogamous (CNM) and LGBTQIA+ communities to include diverse relationship perspectives and incorporate inclusive dyadic analytic strategies to retain data from all participants. It remains an empirical question if diverse relationship structures (e.g., CNM) function similarly to the types of relationships that have been most commonly studied (e.g., monogamous) and is a limitation of the broader relationship science literature.

Conclusion

The current work's findings provide attachment researchers with additional insight into how daily partner perceptions are associated with daily relationship feelings for individuals who exhibit high levels of attachment insecurity. In particular, higher daily levels of perceived partner commitment were associated with greater daily positive relationship feelings for anxiously attached, but not avoidantly or securely attached people. Future studies should continue to examine possible intrapersonal processes that may help protect relationship quality from high levels of attachment anxiety both in the shorter- and longer-term.

Notes

1. Additional models with daily perceived partner devaluation (PPD) and trust as predictors were also preregistered and are available in the supplemental online material in Tables S1-S4; there was simply not enough space to include them in the current manuscript.
2. The power analysis was conducted for a colleague's project and included additional measures outside of the scope of this paper.
3. Sexual orientation demographic information was not collected from participants.
4. When cleaning the dataset, the research team wanted to indicate that the non-binary people identified as a distinct gender identity from their partners, while acknowledging that $n = 3$ was not large enough to test a third gender effect. The three non-binary people were therefore assigned the gender code that was distinct from their partner's to include those couples in the analyses. The author is actively seeking out a better solution that honors the gender identities of all people when testing for gender differences with a small sample size. If you have identified a solution for this, please e-mail the author.
5. The level-2 predictors were comparisons across the participants in the sample on the daily intrapersonal perceptions, not between couples. Level-2 attachment style was also examined across participants.
6. It was an oversight to not include the lagged term in the preregistration; nonetheless, it was important to include the lagged term in the longitudinal analyses (see Bolger & Laurenceau, 2013).

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Open scholarship



This article has earned the Center for Open Science badges for Open Data, Open Materials and Preregistered. The data and materials are openly accessible at https://osf.io/x57sd/?view_only=fefe1604c454459fa3fd165da5ea25cc

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