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PERCEPTION DES CONFLITS ET SATISFACTION CONJUGALE CHEZ LES JEUNES COUPLES : CONTRIBUTION DE LA THÉORIE DE L'ATTACHEMENT

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Sommaire

La présente thèse de doctorat comporte deux articles scientifiques. Le premier article présente les résultats d'une étude transversale réalisée auprès d'un échantillon de 299 couples hétérosexuels de la population québécoise. Il s'intéresse à l'influence des conflits dans les liens unissant l'attachement amoureux et la satisfaction conjugale. Les partenaires adultes, âgés de 18 à 35 ans, ont complété séparément des questionnaires évaluant les deux dimensions de l'attachement amoureux (anxiété d'abandon et évitement de la proximité), leur perception des conflits conjugaux ainsi que leur ajustement dyadique. Des modèles d'équations structurales ont permis de dégager le rôle médiateur des conflits dans l'association entre l'attachement et l'ajustement conjugal. Plus spécifiquement, les conduites d'attachement de chaque conjoint caractérisées par de l'anxiété ou de l'évitement sont positivement reliées à leur perception de conflits. Chez les deux membres du couple, l'association négative entre l'anxiété d'abandon et l'ajustement dyadique est expliquée par les conflits, tandis que le lien direct entre l'attachement évitant et l'insatisfaction conjugale demeure présent, malgré l'existence d'un lien indirect via les conflits. Sur le plan dyadique, l'attachement anxieux de la femme est lié au niveau de conflits rapportés par son conjoint, tandis que l'évitement de la proximité de l'homme prédit les conflits perçus par la femme. De plus, les conflits rapportés par l'un des partenaires affectent l'ajustement conjugal de l'autre.

Le second article se base sur des données longitudinales recueillies auprès d'un échantillon de 253 couples adultes hétérosexuels provenant de la population générale du

Québec. Il vise à améliorer la compréhension de la nature du lien entre l'attachement amoureux et la perception de différentes catégories de conflits dans le couple, en considérant à la fois la perspective de l'homme et de la femme. De plus, il cherche à prédire de façon longitudinale l'évolution des conflits au sein du couple en fonction de l'attachement du répondant et de son conjoint, de même que de l'interaction entre les styles d'attachement des deux partenaires. À deux reprises, les participants ont répondu à des questionnaires mesurant les dimensions de l'attachement amoureux et cinq grandes catégories de conflits (communication, problèmes relationnels majeurs, décisions familiales, ajustements quotidiens et intimité), et ce, à environ un an d'intervalle. Des modèles basés sur l'analyse des courbes latentes (*latent curve modeling*) permettent d'établir que l'anxiété et l'évitement dans l'attachement de l'homme sont associés à sa perception initiale des conflits entourant la communication, les ajustements quotidiens, les décisions familiales, ainsi que l'intimité. Les deux dimensions de l'attachement de la femme prédisent également sa perception des conflits ayant trait à la communication, aux problèmes relationnels majeurs, aux ajustements quotidiens, ainsi qu'à l'intimité. Trois des cinq catégories de conflits rapportés par la femme (communication, conflits relationnels majeurs et intimité) sont de plus en lien avec l'évitement de l'homme, alors que l'anxiété d'abandon de la femme est une variable prédictive de l'ensemble des catégories de conflits rapportés par l'homme, à l'exception des conflits sur les décisions familiales. Des dynamiques de couple spécifiques sont également associées aux conflits initialement perçus par les conjoints, de même qu'à l'évolution des conflits sur une période d'une année.

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Introduction

Ce travail de recherche a pour principal objectif de fournir une meilleure compréhension du fonctionnement des relations de couples hétérosexuelles en intégrant la théorie de l'attachement à l'étude des conflits conjugaux. Il se distingue des études précédentes en se centrant sur la perception des conflits comme variable médiatrice du lien entre l'attachement amoureux et la satisfaction conjugale à l'intérieur d'une perspective dyadique, c'est-à-dire en examinant les données des deux membres du couple. Afin de bien situer la problématique de recherche qui sous-tend les deux articles scientifiques de cette thèse, l'introduction fera d'abord état des connaissances actuelles sur les conflits conjugaux dans les relations de couple hétérosexuelles. Ensuite, la présentation de la théorie de l'attachement de même que la description des liens à la fois théoriques et empiriques avec la présence de conflits au sein du couple seront abordées. L'analyse des limites des études antérieures et des recommandations émises par les chercheurs permettra enfin de formuler les objectifs généraux de cette thèse doctorale.

Conflits conjugaux

À l'époque actuelle où près d'une union sur deux se termine par une rupture (Bramlett & Mosher, 2002), les spécialistes du couple et de la famille sont intéressés à rendre compte d'une meilleure compréhension de la nature, de la dynamique et des possibilités de traitement des conflits conjugaux (Heyman, 2001). Afin d'étayer leurs

connaissances sur les conflits de couple, les chercheurs se basent sur des études traitant des facteurs de risque et de protection contre la dysfonction conjugale. À ce jour, les approches théoriques proposent des idées différentes sur les facteurs étiologiques et de maintien des difficultés conjugales, les amenant à se pencher sur des construits multiples et complexes et à développer différents programmes d'intervention. Parmi les différentes approches, un postulat simple rallie chercheurs et cliniciens : «la communication dans le couple est le chemin commun des dysfonctions conjugales» (traduction libre, Heyman, 2001, p. 6). En effet, toutes les théories du fonctionnement conjugal et les approches en thérapie de couple soulignent le rôle catalyseur de la communication pour prédire la stabilité des relations de couple, en particulier lors de la résolution des conflits (Jacobson & Gurman, 1995). Cependant, la notion de conflit n'est pas toujours définie de la même manière entre chercheurs et les différentes conclusions quant à l'impact des conflits sur les relations de couple ne sont donc pas homogènes.

Définitions

Dans la documentation scientifique, le sens attribué aux conflits conjugaux varie surtout en fonction de l'approche théorique des chercheurs, de même que de l'instrument utilisé pour évaluer les conflits, d'où l'absence de consensus entre les auteurs. De façon plus générale, Peterson (1983) définit la structure du conflit comme la divergence d'intérêt entre deux individus, c'est-à-dire les différences entre ceux qui leur posent un problème ou un dilemme. À la base, les personnes ont toutes des buts plus ou moins explicites et conscients qui sont propres à leurs valeurs et idéaux. Le conflit se produit

lorsqu'une personne poursuit un but d'une manière qui interfère avec l'atteinte des buts de l'autre (Lewin, 1948). Le processus menant au conflit peut être représenté par l'interaction négative ou non fonctionnelle qui se produit entre les deux conjoints, c'est-à-dire par la manière dont ils tentent de régler le problème à travers leurs échanges (Christensen & Walczynski, 1997). La plupart des approches reconnaissent cette définition mais envisagent le conflit sous des angles différents.

D'abord, les béhavioristes perçoivent les conflits comme un événement manifeste que des observateurs perçoivent à l'aide d'une métrique normative (voir Gottman, 1979; Weiss & Heyman, 1990). Plusieurs chercheurs ont développé des systèmes d'observation micro-analytiques pour catégoriser et décrire les séquences de comportements à partir de vidéos d'interactions conjugales dans un laboratoire (p. ex., MICS-IV = *Marital Interaction Coding System*, Heyman, Weiss, & Eddy, 1995; SPAFF = *Specific Affect Coding System*, Gottman, McCoy, Coan, & Collier, 1996; VTCS = *Verbal Tactics Coding Scheme*, Sillars, 1986; voir Heyman, 2001, pour une revue). L'utilisation des systèmes d'observation des comportements pendant la gestion des conflits a permis aux chercheurs d'obtenir des informations extrêmement riches et précises sur les interactions conjugales (Baucom & Kerig, 2004). Toutefois, certaines de ces mesures ne reposent pas sur une théorie et n'ont pas fait l'objet d'une validation psychométrique rigoureuse, laissant parfois croire aux chercheurs qu'ils en connaissent plus sur la dynamique conjugale qu'en réalité (Heyman, 2001). De plus, plusieurs de ces systèmes de cotations de comportements évaluent également les affects positifs (p. ex.,

affection, humour) ou négatifs (colère, tristesse) émis pendant la résolution de problème et certains évaluent même le soutien fourni pendant les échanges conflictuels (p. ex., SSICS = *Social Support Interaction Coding System*, Bradbury & Pasch, 1994), élargissant davantage la définition du conflit.

Afin d'organiser les différents aspects issus de l'observation des comportements, Canary, Cupach et Messman (1995) proposent trois niveaux de classification des comportements utilisés par les couples en regard des conflits. Une première caractéristique fondamentale de la gestion des conflits concerne la dimension de l'engagement versus l'évitement (p. ex., Chistensen & Heavey, 1990; Sillars & Wilmot, 1994). L'engagement dans les conflits implique une confrontation verbale claire des enjeux conflictuels (critiques personnelles, dévoilement), tandis que l'évitement suggère le retrait et l'aversion à aborder directement les désaccords (déni, changement de sujet, fermeture). La seconde grande dimension utilisée implique la positivité versus la négativité des affects émis (p. ex., Gottman, 1979). Les actions émises lors des conflits sont perçues comme étant plus positives en termes de sentiment (commentaire soutenant et harmonisant), alors que d'autres sont plus hostiles et négatives (menaces et insultes). Enfin, la troisième caractéristique concerne le caractère constructif (coopération) ou destructeur (compétition) de l'action pour les conjoints (p. ex., Rusbult, 1987).

L'approche cognitive s'intéresse au conflit du point de vue intérieur, c'est-à-dire à la signification que les individus accordent aux comportements particuliers ou événements

qui déclenchent les conflits. Au cours des années 80, il y a eu une grande emphase mise sur l'étude du processus d'attribution (Fincham, Bradbury, & Grych, 1990), se définissant comme la tendance à expliquer les causes d'un comportement. Ne pouvant faire l'objet d'observation directe, les attributions sont plus souvent évaluées au moyen de questionnaires auto administrés (p. ex., Fincham & Bradbury, 1992). Maintes études ont montré que les individus qui ont tendance à porter des jugements négatifs, surtout en percevant les causes du conflit à l'aide de facteurs globaux (c.-à-d., applicables à une variété de situations) plutôt que spécifiques et en attribuant les comportements négatifs de leur partenaire à des caractéristiques stables (p. ex., « il ne m'écoute jamais » « elle est toujours en retard ») augmentent la possibilité de conflits conjugaux (voir Bradbury & Fincham, 1990, pour une revue). De plus, les tendances cognitives à attribuer la responsabilité du problème au conjoint compliquent la résolution du conflit, puisque les partenaires blâment et accusent l'autre pendant les discussions, entraînant l'escalade des conflits et l'absence de résolution (Christensen & Walczynski, 1997). En plus des attributions, Baucom, Epstein, Sayers et Sher (1989) ont identifié quatre autres types de cognitions associées à l'exacerbation des conflits conjugaux : (1) l'attention sélective se définit comme la perception individuelle des événements se produisant pendant les interactions; (2) les attentes sont les prédictions formulées par chaque personne sur la probabilité qu'un événement se produise; (3) les suppositions représentent les croyances rationnelles ou irrationnelles que chaque personne entretient concernant les caractéristiques d'une relation de couple; et (4) les standards sont les croyances envers les éléments jugés nécessaires pour maintenir une relation de couple.

Enfin, la théorie de l'interdépendance met l'accent sur la structure du dilemme typique que les conjoints affrontent dans leurs interactions. La compatibilité des buts des individus est vue comme centrale pour comprendre leurs perceptions et réponses subséquentes (Kelley et al., 1983). Selon les tenants de cette approche, les problèmes surgissent en raison de l'interdépendance des individus qui forment une relation. Ils reflètent également les positions adoptées par chacun des conjoints dans la dynamique du couple. Par exemple, dans le patron d'interactions demande – retrait (Christensen & Heavy, 1990), un partenaire (le poursuivant) tente d'amener son conjoint à changer en lui faisant des demandes, tandis que l'autre évite le changement en utilisant le retrait de la discussion, la passivité ou l'opposition (Christensen & Walczynski, 1997).

Dans ce patron d'interactions, la personne qui désire de l'indépendance peut la prendre seule, tandis que la personne qui souhaite plus d'engagement doit demander la coopération du partenaire pour l'obtenir (Christensen & Heavy, 1990). Avec le temps, ce patron tend à se rigidifier, puisque la personne qui demande et celle qui se retire augmentent respectivement leurs efforts dans le but d'obtenir satisfaction. Donc, des conflits de couple peuvent en émerger et prendre racine, tout comme ceux-ci peuvent amplifier la présence de ces patrons dysfonctionnels de communication. Parce qu'il implique le fait d'éviter la discussion et de se retirer, Gill, Christensen et Fincham (1999) recommandent d'évaluer ce patron à l'aide d'un questionnaire auto administré (Christensen & Sullaway, 1984) plutôt qu'au moyen d'observations en laboratoire. En

effet, aucun membre du couple ne pourra facilement quitter la pièce ou refuser de parler de ce sujet plus tard, même si c'est ce qu'il ferait à la maison.

Dans un autre ordre d'idées, certains auteurs considèrent les comportements de cœrcition évoluant sur une continuum d'intensité et de gravité (variant de la simple critique à l'égard du partenaire à des gestes plus sérieux de violence conjugale, comme frapper l'autre) comme une stratégie de gestion des conflits et ne font pas toujours de distinction entre celle-ci et le concept de violence au sein du couple (p. ex., Kinsfogel & Grych, 2004) alors que d'autres auteurs les distinguent clairement (p. ex., Holtzworth-Munroe, Smutzler, & Bates, 1997). La publication du questionnaire auto administré de Straus (1979), le *Conflict Tactics Scales* peut être à l'origine de cette ambiguïté, puisqu'il évalue à la fois la négociation, la violence physique, ainsi que la violence verbale et sexuelle. Pourtant, les conceptualisations récentes de la violence conjugale sont maintenant sensibles au fait que la violence n'est pas un phénomène unitaire (DeMaris, Benson, Fox, Hill, & Van Wyk, 2003).

En effet, les auteurs distinguent deux sous-types majeurs. D'abord, la *violence patriarcale* (ou terrorisme conjugal) représente une forme sévère de violence émise par l'homme envers sa conjointe, motivée par le désir de contrôler totalement sa partenaire (Johnson & Ferraro, 2000). Cette forme de violence est caractérisée par des actes fréquents de violence physique sévère et tend à s'intensifier avec le temps. La *violence conjugale commune* représente des confrontations physiques qui éclatent

occasionnellement pendant les conflits conjugaux, dans laquelle s'engagent à des niveaux plutôt équivalents les deux conjoints, et démontre une faible ou moyenne tendance à l'escalade avec le temps (Johnson & Ferraro, 2000), pouvant toutefois se chroniciser.

Ces deux profils de violence sont suffisamment différents pour avoir des étiologies et des implications différentes. Selon Johnson (2001), seules les racines de la violence conjugale commune reposent sur les enjeux de la communication inefficace et de la gestion de la colère. En effet, les couples violents affichent des styles d'interaction regroupant des hauts niveaux de colère, de mépris, d'hostilité, de même que des difficultés à mettre fin aux patrons négatifs d'interactions (Holtzworth-Munroe et al., 1997). De plus, les couples violents démontrent une plus grande tendance à s'engager dans des patrons de réciprocité négative que les couples en détresse conjugale mais non-violents et que les couples heureux (Cordova Jacobson, Gottman, Rushe, & Cox, 1993). Ce patron représente la tendance à reproduire les comportements négatifs du conjoint en émettant à son tour des comportements négatifs (Cordova et al., 1993). Ainsi, l'individu qui émet une plainte et la personne qui doit y répondre, par leurs actions, tendent à s'alimenter l'un et l'autre dans un cycle qui amplifie la colère de chacun à mesure que les accusations augmentent (Holmes & Murray, 1996).

L'examen des conflits au sein des couples a également amené des chercheurs à élaborer des *typologies* de couple, qui traduisent les différences entre les couples quant à

la manière de considérer les conflits et de les régler (Canary et al., 1995). Par exemple, Fitzpatrick (1988) propose une typologie regroupant trois types de couple. D'abord, les couples *traditionnels* endossent des idées plus conventionnelles à propos du couple et de la famille, valorisent l'interdépendance et préfèrent n'aborder que les conflits majeurs. Les couples *indépendants* se montrent moins conventionnels, valorisent à la fois l'autonomie et l'interdépendance et préfèrent la confrontation directe sur une grande variété de conflits. Enfin, les couples *séparés* présentent une ambivalence envers le mariage et la famille conventionnels, valorisent l'autonomie et préfèrent éviter les conflits.

Dans la typologie de Gottman (1994) en quatre styles, les conjoints de type *évitant* tendent à minimiser les conflits, sont relativement neutres émotionnellement et plutôt distants. Les couples *explosifs* ou *volatiles* sont des individus plutôt passionnés qui cherchent à s'influencer, se disputent fréquemment et sont très expressifs émotionnellement. Le type de couples *validant* démontre une grande interdépendance émotionnelle et des affects neutres pendant la résolution de conflit, tandis que les couples *hostiles* sont caractérisés par des patrons défensifs de retrait, de critiques et de mépris entre les conjoints (Gottman, 1994).

Enfin, Rusbult et Zembrodt (1983) ont élaboré une typologie de réponses à l'insatisfaction conjugale qui peut se rapprocher des typologies décrites ci haut. La sortie ou *exit* (p. ex., menacer de quitter la relation, crier hargneusement à son partenaire) et la

voix ou *voice* (p. ex., discuter des problèmes, faire des compromis) constituent des réponses actives, tandis que la loyauté (p. ex., soutenir le partenaire, attendre ou prier pour que les choses s'améliorent) et la négligence (p. ex., ignorer le conjoint ou passer moins de temps avec lui, refuser de discuter les problèmes) représentent les réponses passives. Par ailleurs, la voix et la loyauté représentent des réponses d'accommodation ayant pour but le maintien de la relation, alors que la sortie et la négligence se traduisent par des actions négatives centrées sur la personne, qui sont destructrices pour la relation (Rusbult et al., 1991).

Les *sujets* de discorde potentiels qui préoccupent les conjoints sont pratiquement infinis et ils ont également fait l'objet de plusieurs études auprès des couples. Afin de les évaluer, plusieurs questionnaires et inventaires de difficultés conjugales ont vu le jour dans les années soixante-dix (p. ex., *Areas of Change Scale*, Weiss & Birchler, 1975; *Relationship Problem Inventory*, Knox, 1970; *Dyadic Adjustment Scale*, Spanier, 1976). Les enjeux reliés à la communication, la sexualité, la jalousie, les tâches ménagères, les finances, entre autres, émergent le plus souvent dans les études sur les conflits conjugaux et le divorce (p. ex., Gottman, 1994). Jones et Burdette (1994) ont identifié des types de conflits particulièrement destructeurs qui touchent la violation de la confiance, de l'engagement et des attentes générales envers une relation : la relation extra-conjugale, les mensonges, une trahison de confiance, l'abandon, le manque de soutien, l'ignorance ou l'évitement et la critique. Amato et Rogers (1997) ont également mis l'emphase sur les conflits entourant l'infidélité, les dépenses excessives d'argent et

la consommation d'alcool ou d'autres drogues, qu'ils ont identifiés comme étant les désaccords les plus susceptibles d'entraîner une rupture.

Plus récemment, Sanford (2003) a proposé une classification des sujets de désaccord en fonction de leur niveau de difficulté, tel qu'évalué par douze psychologues conjugaux. Il a démontré que le niveau de difficulté du sujet de discorde ne semble pas entretenir de lien immédiat avec le fonctionnement du couple. Toutefois, le fait de discuter à maintes reprises d'une situation conflictuelle plus difficile était associé à plus de comportements négatifs pendant la résolution de problèmes et à une moins bonne qualité de la relation (Sanford, 2003). Ainsi, les couples qui terminent souvent une discussion autour d'un désaccord sans avoir atteint un accord ou trouvé une solution peuvent vivre de l'insatisfaction face aux conflits (Cramer, 2002). De ce fait, il n'est donc pas surprenant que la répétition d'un même conflit non-résolu puisse altérer la qualité de la relation de couple (Roloff & Johnson, 2002). À long terme, des désaccords en apparence mineurs peuvent prendre de l'ampleur s'ils ne sont jamais résolus et se transformer en conflits majeurs, qui risquent davantage de miner la qualité des interactions du couple.

Indépendamment de la manière dont il est conceptualisé, le conflit est un aspect inévitable des relations de couple, puisque deux conjoints ne peuvent désirer exactement les mêmes choses en tout temps et au même moment (Christensen & Walczynski, 1997). De plus, le conflit est au cœur du fonctionnement conjugal, car la relation partagée entre

les conjoints de même que les interactions conflictuelles se construisent et s'influencent de façon réciproque (Canary et al., 1995). Par ailleurs, les conflits sont nécessaires dans la relation de couple car ils permettent la négociation d'enjeux importants pour les conjoints en regard de leurs objectifs de vie de même que leur style d'interdépendance (Canary et al., 1995). Enfin, les conflits leur fournissent l'opportunité d'évaluer et de remettre en question leurs sentiments et croyances envers leur conjoint et la relation (Simpson & Rholes, 1994). Il va sans dire que l'influence positive ou négative qu'auront les conflits sur la dyade conjugale dépendra, entre autres, de la manière dont ils seront perçus, discutés et résolus ou non.

À ce jour, peu d'études intégrant l'attachement adulte et l'ajustement dyadique ont conceptualisé les conflits selon la perspective de la *perception* du niveau de conflit au sein du couple. Il apparaît pertinent d'évaluer la perception de chacun des partenaires, afin de vérifier jusqu'à quel point une source de désaccord constitue un conflit important pour chaque membre du couple. L'examen des différentes sources de conflits au sein de la relation permet de distinguer les conflits touchant les tâches ménagères, qui ne réfèrent pas du tout aux mêmes enjeux relationnels qu'un conflit concernant l'infidélité, davantage relié à la détresse conjugale (Amato & Roger, 1997). De plus, cette façon de conceptualiser les conflits a l'avantage de laisser à l'individu le soin de juger s'il s'agit d'un désaccord majeur ou non pour lui. Ainsi, ce ne sont pas les comportements émis pendant les tentatives de résolution de conflits qui sont évalués, mais plutôt l'impression de la personne quant à l'intensité du conflit. Il est en effet possible qu'un couple ne

discute jamais d'une source de conflit présente entre eux et que le fait d'éviter la discussion entourant celui-ci l'exacerbe davantage. Ces conflits ne seraient donc pas détectés par les méthodes d'observation des comportements lors des conflits, puisque les couples sont invités à rejeter les sujets dont ils ne souhaitent pas parler sous observation (Gill et al., 1999). Par ailleurs, un conflit qui est sans cesse répété sans trouver résolution devient un désaccord majeur qui peut être très dommageable pour la relation (Sanford, 2003). C'est donc pour ces raisons que cette conceptualisation du conflit sera retenue dans le cadre de ce travail de recherche.

Conflits et satisfaction conjugale

Un bon nombre d'études transversales ont établi le lien entre les conflits et la qualité de la relation conjugale en comparant les comportements des couples mariés heureux et en détresse (voir Gottman, 1994, pour une revue). De ces études ressortent quatre conclusions : (1) Les couples perturbés, c'est-à-dire insatisfaits de leur union, utilisent plus fréquemment des comportements négatifs, qu'ils soient de nature verbale ou non (p. ex., comportements hostiles, sarcastiques, critiques, coercitifs et de rejet), et le font de manière plus intense que les couples non-perturbés (p. ex., Gottman, 1979, 1994); (2) Les couples perturbés s'engagent également plus souvent dans le patron d'interaction de type demande – retrait (p. ex., Christensen & Heavey, 1993; Heavy, Christensen, & Malamuth, 1995) et rapportent plus de séquences impliquant la réciprocité négative (Gottman, 1979; Gottman & Levenson, 1992); (3) Les couples heureux affichent un ratio plus élevé de comportements positifs (p. ex., se montrer en

accord, valider l'autre, utiliser l'humour) sur les comportements négatifs que les couples en détresse (Gottman & Levenson, 1992); (4) Les couples heureux rapportent des niveaux plus élevés de dévoilement de soi et de satisfaction envers la discussion (p. ex., Noller & Feeney, 2002).

Bien qu'utiles, les résultats des études transversales peuvent amener les chercheurs et cliniciens à prendre pour acquis que la mauvaise gestion des conflits est nécessairement une cause des dysfonctions conjugales. En fait, ces recherches se basent uniquement sur la présence de comportements émis pendant les conflits chez des couples perturbés, ne permettant pas d'établir de relation de cause à effet (Bradbury, Rogge, & Lawrence, 2001). Seules des études longitudinales peuvent mettre en lumière la séquence temporelle qui existe entre les comportements de résolution de problèmes et la satisfaction conjugale.

Une des premières études longitudinales sur les affects émis lors de la résolution de problèmes a montré que la colère des femmes était reliée à une meilleure satisfaction conjugale future (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989), suggérant que le fait de s'engager dans la discussion des problèmes pouvait être bénéfique à long terme (Karney & Bradbury, 1997). Dans le même sens, Heavey, Christensen et Malamuth (1995) ont établi que l'utilisation du patron de retrait chez l'homme et de demande chez la femme prédisent le déclin de la satisfaction conjugale de la femme après une période de 30 mois. Par ailleurs, deux études (Huston & Vangelisti, 1991; Rogge & Bradbury, 1999) ont trouvé

un lien entre les affects négatifs et une plus faible satisfaction dans le temps, tandis que Gottman, Coan, Carrere et Swanson, (1998) ont établi que les affects négatifs discriminaient parmi les couples intacts et séparés six ans plus tard, mais n'influençaient pas leur satisfaction. Newton et Kiecolt-Glaser (1995) ont également montré que l'hostilité exprimée par les hommes nouvellement mariés était associée à une diminution de leur propre satisfaction conjugale et de celle de leur femme.

Des études longitudinales suggèrent également qu'une bonne communication avant le mariage prédit la satisfaction conjugale à long terme (Lindahl, Clements, & Markman, 1998). Dans les premiers mois du mariage, des faibles niveaux d'affects positifs pendant la résolution de problème prédisent le divorce à long terme (Gottman et al., 1998). De plus, les comportements positifs des deux conjoints pendant la résolution de problème sont reliés à l'augmentation de la satisfaction conjugale des femmes un an plus tard, tandis que les comportements négatifs des conjoints prédisent une plus faible satisfaction conjugale des femmes à long terme (Gill et al., 1999).

D'autres auteurs ont par ailleurs démontré que l'insatisfaction conjugale influençait les processus de conflits futurs, tels que la négativité, le désengagement et le retrait chez la femme et le désengagement chez l'homme (Noller, Feeney, Bonnell, & Callan, 1994). Au contraire, Smith, Vivian et O'Leary (1990) ont démontré qu'un retrait qui s'exprime par un désengagement affectif (silence et tranquillité pendant les interactions) avant le mariage est associé avec des plus faibles niveaux de satisfaction

conjugale 18 et 30 mois après le mariage. Plus récemment, Noller et Feeney (2002) ont démontré que la satisfaction conjugale des hommes à long terme est prédite par la fréquence des conflits avant le mariage. Chez les femmes, la satisfaction avant le mariage est inversement liée à la fréquence des conflits à long terme. De plus, les auteurs suggèrent que l'insatisfaction conjugale des hommes amène du désengagement et du retrait à long terme, alors que la faible satisfaction des femmes s'explique par des niveaux plus élevés de négativité et d'autres comportements destructeurs de résolution de conflit (Noller & Feeney, 2002).

À la lumière de ces résultats, il semble que la manière dont les conflits sont gérés et la satisfaction conjugale interagissent dans le temps. Les affects et les comportements positifs apparaissent protéger la dyade et être influencés par une bonne satisfaction envers la relation, tandis que le retrait et les autres comportements négatifs représentent des marqueurs importants des relations à risque. Bien que ces résultats éclairent les chercheurs sur des facteurs explicatifs de la détresse conjugale, Bradbury et al. (2001) soulignent que les stratégies de gestion de conflit comptent pour seulement 10% de la variance observée au niveau de la satisfaction conjugale future (Karney & Bradbury, 1995), suggérant que 90% de la variance de la détresse des couples soit expliquée par d'autres facteurs.

Selon Bradbury et ses collègues (2001), la validité des échantillons pourrait être une piste d'explication, puisque ce sont les couples les plus perturbés qui abandonnent

plus souvent les études longitudinales. Ils soulignent également que plusieurs variables proximales (processus subjectifs liés au contexte) et distales (processus psychologiques stables) sont souvent négligées au profit des conflits et de la résolution de problème pour prédire l'ajustement des couples (Bradbury et al., 1998). En effet, il se peut que les conflits soient des médiateurs des liens entre la détresse à long terme et d'autres facteurs d'explication (Bradbury et al., 2001).

En ce sens, certains facteurs ont retenu l'attention des chercheurs et des cliniciens qui s'entendent pour dire que la relation entre les conflits et la satisfaction conjugale est complexe et influencée par des concepts variés. Entre autres, Story et Bradbury (2004) ont étudié l'influence des antécédents familiaux, plus particulièrement du divorce et des conflits parentaux, sur la gestion des conflits chez les couples. D'autres chercheurs se sont intéressés à l'impact des événements stressants sur les interactions et la satisfaction conjugale (Conger, Rueter, & Elder, 1999), au soutien social dans le mariage (Katz, Beach, Smith, & Myers, 1997), ainsi qu'aux traits de personnalité (Donnellan, Larsen-Rife, & Conger, 2005). Toutefois, des modèles empiriques qui tiennent compte de tous ces facteurs pour prédire le fonctionnement du couple à long terme manquent toujours. La théorie de l'attachement adulte, qui sera présentée dans la prochaine section, constitue un facteur qui permet d'apporter un éclairage nouveau sur les interactions entre les partenaires en relation de couple.

Attachement

L'attachement amoureux constitue une caractéristique individuelle que chaque conjoint amène dans sa relation, avant même que les interactions débutent. Cette théorie a l'avantage de fournir des pistes d'explications quant aux perceptions d'enjeux conjugaux potentiellement conflictuels, des interactions conjugales à propos de ceux-ci, des réactions à ces sources de conflits, de même qu'à l'évaluation qui est faite par l'individu de celles-ci et de sa relation de couple. La prochaine section présente des éléments explicatifs de cette théorie ainsi que les résultats d'études empiriques qui justifient d'examiner le rôle de l'attachement dans l'explication des conflits et de l'ajustement conjugal.

Aspects théoriques

La théorie de l'attachement adulte repose en grande partie sur les écrits de Bowlby (1969/1982) sur l'attachement de l'enfant à la mère. Bowlby a postulé la présence d'un système de contrôle du comportement de l'enfant ayant pour but de le protéger du danger et ce, en favorisant le maintien d'une proximité avec la personne qui en prend soin (que la théorie nomme « figure d'attachement »). Lorsque l'enfant se sent protégé et en sécurité, le système d'attachement est inactif. Cependant, la présence de menaces (symboliques ou réelles) et la perception de la figure d'attachement comme distante, non suffisamment disponible ou attentive aux besoins de l'enfant activent le système d'attachement. En pareille situation, l'enfant ressent le besoin de retrouver une proximité avec sa figure d'attachement, soit en pleurant, en criant ou en tentant de se

déplacer vers elle (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). Lorsque l'enfant évolue dans un milieu sécurisant et que sa figure d'attachement est disponible, l'enfant est rassuré et le système n'est plus actif. Cependant, l'inconsistance dans la disponibilité de la figure d'attachement ou son incapacité à protéger ou rassurer l'enfant amène un dérèglement au niveau du système d'attachement de l'enfant, qui peut se défendre en désactivant son système d'attachement ou devenir encore plus sensible aux signes de rejet ou de distance de la figure d'attachement (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002). Ainsi, les interactions avec la figure d'attachement influencent les représentations cognitives que l'enfant se fait de lui-même et des autres, représentations qui sont considérées comme stables dans le temps, à moins qu'un événement stressant ou un abus physique ne perturbe la relation avec la figure d'attachement (Zhang & Labouvie-Vief, 2004).

Bowlby (1969/1982) a suggéré que le système d'attachement est activé plus fréquemment pendant l'enfance, mais qu'il continue de fonctionner pendant toute la vie. Hazan et Shaver (1987) ont utilisé la théorie de l'attachement afin de mieux comprendre les relations de couple chez les adultes. Alors que les parents sont plus souvent les figures d'attachement pendant l'enfance, les partenaires amoureux deviennent les figures d'attachement à l'âge adulte dans la mesure où ils sont : (1) la cible de la recherche de proximité; (2) une source de protection, confort, soutien et de soulagement au besoin; et (3) une base sécurisante, qui encourage l'individu à poursuivre ses propres buts dans le contexte d'une relation de confiance (Hazan & Shaver, 1994).

Dans leurs premiers travaux sur l'attachement amoureux, Hazan et Shaver (1987) ont proposé une mesure de l'attachement en trois styles (sécurisant, évitant et anxieux - ambivalent). Cette typologie a été étendue par Bartholomew (1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) qui a proposé une distinction entre deux types d'attachement évitant : détaché et craintif. Des recherches subséquentes ont démontré que le style d'attachement était mieux évalué en se basant sur deux dimensions sous-jacentes (Fraley & Waller, 1998; Simpson, 1990) : l'anxiété d'abandon et l'évitement de la proximité. Afin de fournir une mesure fidèle et valide de ces deux dimensions dites indépendantes, Brennan, Clark et Shaver (1998) ont élaboré un questionnaire auto administré de l'attachement amoureux en se basant sur l'ensemble des mesures de l'attachement ayant émergé avant 1998. La dimension de l'évitement de la proximité se traduit par un inconfort envers l'intimité émotionnelle dans une relation. L'individu qui fait preuve d'évitement investit moins dans la relation et valorise l'indépendance psychologique et émotionnelle (Hazan & Shaver, 1994). L'anxiété face à l'abandon représente le degré auquel l'individu s'inquiète et rumine la peur d'être abandonné ou rejeté par le partenaire (Brennan et al., 1998; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994).

Récemment, Mikulincer et Shaver (2003) ont proposé un modèle du système d'attachement dans lequel l'évitement est associé à la « désactivation » de ce système. En effet, les individus dits « évitants » utiliseraient une variété de stratégies pour minimiser l'intimité, éviter l'interdépendance, inhiber leurs sentiments de vulnérabilité et leurs besoins de protection, en plus de ne compter que sur eux-mêmes mais de façon

compulsive, ce que Bowlby (1982/1969) a nommé *compulsive self-reliance*. Par contre, l'attachement de type anxieux serait marqué par une « hyper activation » du système d'attachement, impliquant une vigilance et des doutes extrêmes quant au soutien, à l'engagement et à la proximité du partenaire. Ces individus seraient également beaucoup plus sensibles aux signes de rejet ou au manque de disponibilité ou d'intérêt de leur partenaire. En considérant que le système d'attachement est activé par toutes menaces externes ou détresse relationnelle (Bowlby, 1982/1969), les conflits entre les membres d'un couple seraient certainement susceptibles d'activer le système d'attachement de chacun des conjoints (Simpson, Rholes, & Phillips, 1996), mettant ainsi en évidence les perceptions, défenses et réactions qui les caractérisent.

Attachement et conflit

En théorie, les individus qui possèdent un style d'attachement sécurisant ont des attentes positives envers la disponibilité de leur partenaire et ne se sentent pas menacés par les désaccords quotidiens et les conflits. Des études ont démontré que les individus sécurisants sont plus ouverts, communiquent mieux, se dévoilent davantage pendant les conflits et sont plus flexibles dans l'utilisation de stratégies de négociation (Feeney, Noller, & Roberts, 1998; Kobak & Duemmler, 1994; Pistole, 1989; Simpson et al., 1996). Ils vivent généralement moins de conflits, car ils gèrent bien l'équilibre entre leurs besoins de dépendance et d'autonomie (Pistole, 1994). Au contraire, les individus qui présentent de l'insécurité d'attachement ont plus de chance de percevoir les conflits comme une menace à leur relation, mais pour des raisons différentes selon leur niveau

d'anxiété ou d'évitement. Dans les deux cas, ils sont plus susceptibles d'entretenir des biais négatifs envers les conflits (Pietromonaco, Greenwood, & Feldman-Barrett, 2004).

Les individus qui possèdent un style d'attachement anxieux perçoivent davantage les conflits comme une menace à leur relation, activant ainsi les peurs face à l'abandon et l'hyperactivation du système d'attachement (Simpson et al., 1996). De ce fait, ils ont plus tendance à réagir de façon négative et avec des émotions intenses (Paley, Cox, Burchinal, & Payne, 1999), des comportements coercitifs ou dommageables pour leur relations (Levy & Davis, 1988; Noller et al., 1994; Simpson et al., 1996) et un manque de considération pour le point de vue de leur partenaire en raison de leur difficulté à orienter leur regard ailleurs que sur leur propre détresse. De plus, leur grand besoin de proximité peut les amener à rechercher l'intimité d'une façon telle qu'elle rend leur partenaire inconfortable (Pistole, 1994), puis les mènent à percevoir le désir d'autonomie de l'autre comme un signe de rejet. Qui plus est, leur difficulté à réguler la proximité et la distance peut faire en sorte qu'ils se montrent intrusifs envers leur partenaire (p. ex., en leur posant des questions très personnelles, Lavy, 2006), ce qui peut frustrer ces derniers et favoriser le rejet ou la séparation.

En ce qui concerne les individus qui endossent davantage le style d'attachement évitant, ces derniers perçoivent également le conflit comme une menace, mais qui vise cette fois leur indépendance et leur tendance à ne compter que sur eux-mêmes. Lors de la négociation des conflits, ils ont tendance à se sentir poussés ou forcés à discuter de

choses intimes sur le plan psychologique (p. ex., parler de leurs sentiments et d'eux-mêmes), ce qui les rend inconfortables (Bradford, Feeney, & Campbell, 2002) et les amènent à désactiver (le plus souvent inconsciemment) leur système d'attachement (Kobak & Duemmler, 1994). Ils possèdent en général de plus faibles habiletés de communication que les individus sécurisants (Feeney, Noller, & Callan, 1994) et utilisent davantage le retrait en situation de conflit (Paley et al., 1999). De plus, leur difficulté à s'investir complètement dans une relation de couple (Morgan & Shaver, 1999; Simpson & Gangestad, 1991) est susceptible de créer des tensions avec leur conjoint ou conjointe, voire d'augmenter leur malaise envers toute tentative de rapprochement de la part de leur conjoint (Pistole, 1994).

Les deux dimensions de l'attachement insécurisant ont été associées avec l'escalade des conflits, l'expression de colère (Lafontaine & Lussier, 2005) et même l'évitement des conflits (Creasey, 2002; O'Connell Corcoran, & Mallinckrodt, 2000). Par contre, une étude n'a trouvé aucun lien entre le style d'attachement et les comportements émis lors de la résolution de problèmes (Bouthillier, Julien, Dubé, Bélanger, & Hamelin, 2002). De plus, puisque les individus qui présentent de l'anxiété ou de l'évitement ont moins tendance à pardonner leur partenaire amoureux (Mikulincer, Shaver, & Slav, 2006), il est possible de postuler qu'ils sont aux prises avec davantage de conflits non résolus.

Récemment, des chercheurs ont démontré que les individus anxieux perçoivent plus de conflits au quotidien que les individus moins anxieux, mais qu'ils en perçoivent également plus que leurs conjoints n'en rapportent (Campbell, Boldry, Simpson, & Kashy, 2005). Bien que d'autres études aient également montré que l'anxiété d'abandon était associée à une plus grande perception de conflits (Gallo & Smith, 2001; Rholes, Simpson, & Stevens, 1998), certaines ont permis de constater que c'est l'évitement de l'intimité qui était associé à un nombre plus grand de conflits (Collins & Read, 1990), tandis que d'autres ont montré que l'attachement anxieux *et* évitant étaient associés à une présence plus élevée de conflits (Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994). Enfin, certains auteurs ont affirmé que les différences dans la perception des conflits n'étaient pas attribuables au style d'attachement (Pietromonaco & Feldman Barrett, 1997; Tidwell, Reis, & Shaver, 1996). Il est important de noter que plusieurs de ces résultats divergents peuvent provenir du fait que les chercheurs ont utilisé différentes mesures de l'attachement adulte et des conflits, qu'ils n'ont pas toujours tenu compte du sexe des participants et qu'ils ont étudié des échantillons d'individus qui ne sont pas homogènes.

De plus, il est possible que les divergences obtenues entre les différentes études reflètent les différentes associations avec l'attachement en fonction du type de conflit discuté. Par exemple, les individus qui présentent de l'évitement pourraient rencontrer plus de conflits entourant la communication, puisqu'ils présentent de plus faibles habiletés de communication (Feeney et al., 1994), sont inconfortables à parler d'eux-mêmes (Bradford et al., 2002) et ont tendance à se retirer des conflits (Paley et al.,

1999). Par contre, la grande sensibilité des individus anxieux à toutes menaces à la relation pourraient faire en sorte qu'ils perçoivent davantage de conflits de tous types, incluant des tensions minimes qui font partie des ajustements normaux des couples au quotidien. Leur besoin extrême de proximité peut aussi devenir désagréable pour leur partenaire (Pistole, 1994) et occasionner des tensions en ce qui a trait à l'intimité.

Parmi les études qui ont considéré le sexe des partenaires, des différences ont été obtenues dans le lien unissant l'attachement à la perception de conflits. En effet, Collins et Reads (1990) ont établi que les femmes rapportaient davantage de conflits lorsque leur conjoint présentait de l'évitement, tandis que les hommes percevaient plus de conflits lorsque leur partenaire avait un attachement marqué par une plus grande anxiété. De plus, l'anxiété chez la femme et l'évitement chez l'homme ont été associés à la présence de difficultés avec la distance et la proximité (Feeney & Noller, 1991). Qui plus est, un nombre plus élevé de conflits ont été identifiés chez les femmes mariées qui sont plus anxieuses face à l'abandon, tandis que les hommes mariés qui évitent l'intimité présenteraient les niveaux les plus faibles d'engagement dans la conversation (Feeney et al., 1994). Paley et ses collègues (1999) ont également montré que les femmes anxieuses sur le plan de l'attachement expriment moins d'affects positifs pendant les discussions entourant les conflits, alors que les femmes qui présentent plus d'évitement auraient tendance à se retirer des discussions. Par ailleurs, les hommes au style d'attachement évitant feraient preuve de plus de fermeture et de mépris en situation de conflit (Babcock, Jacobson, Gottman, & Yerington, 2000). Toutefois, ces auteurs ne précisent

pas les différences sexuelles quant à la perception du niveau de conflit dans le couple et ne considèrent pas non plus l'attachement et le niveau de conflits rapportés par les deux conjoints dans un même modèle.

Les chercheurs soulignent l'importance d'examiner la dynamique conjugale en considérant les insécurités des deux partenaires (Pietromonaco et al., 2004). À ce jour, trois conclusions ont émergé des études qui ont inclus les styles d'attachement des deux conjoints : (1) la combinaison de deux conjoints sécurisants est associée avec les meilleures stratégies de résolutions de conflits et patrons de communication (Bouthillier et al., 2002; Senchak & Leonard, 1992); (2) les couples dans lesquels au moins un des conjoints a un style d'attachement sécurisant gèrent mieux leurs conflits que les couples dans lesquels les deux conjoints présentent des insécurités et (3) le style d'attachement de l'homme influence davantage la manière de gérer les conflits que celui de la femme (Kobak & Hazan, 1991; Paley et al., 1999), une affirmation qui est moins documentée.

Attachement, conflits et satisfaction conjugale

Le lien établi entre l'attachement adulte et la satisfaction conjugale est l'un des constats les mieux établis dans la documentation scientifique sur l'attachement (voir Feeney, 1999, pour une revue), que l'attachement soit conceptualisé en terme de styles ou de dimensions. Des différences sexuelles ont aussi été notées dans cette association où, tel qu'illustré précédemment, la détresse conjugale est davantage reliée à l'évitement chez l'homme et à l'anxiété chez la femme (p. ex., Collins & Reads, 1990; Kirkpatrick

& Davis, 1994). De plus, certaines recherches ont démontré que l'évitement était plus fortement lié à l'insatisfaction dans les couples en relation de fréquentation (où le développement de l'intimité apparaît une tâche plus importante), tandis que la dimension de l'anxiété était davantage reliée à l'insatisfaction chez les couples mariés (p. ex., Feeney, 1994; Feeney et al., 1998).

Afin de mieux comprendre les relations existant entre l'attachement et la satisfaction conjugale, des études ont identifié d'autres variables médiatrices ou modératrices, à savoir les attributions (Sumer & Cozzarelli, 2004), les cognitions (Gallo & Smith, 2001) et les stratégies d'adaptation (Lussier, Sabourin, & Turgeon, 1997). Toutefois, puisque les liens entre : (1) l'attachement amoureux et la satisfaction conjugale; (2) les conflits et la satisfaction conjugale; de même que (3) l'attachement amoureux et les conflits ont tous été établis, il apparaît plus logique de postuler la présence d'une médiation des conflits dans le lien unissant l'attachement à la satisfaction (Davila, Karney, & Fincham, 1998).

Parmi les quelques études qui ont intégré ces trois concepts, le rôle médiateur de l'expression des émotions (Feeney et al., 1998), des affects négatifs (Davila et al., 1998), de la négociation mutuelle des conflits (Feeney, 1994), ainsi que du dévoilement de soi (Keelan, Dion, & Dion, 1998) ont été identifiés dans l'association entre l'attachement et la satisfaction conjugale. Par ailleurs, une étude effectuée par Marchand (2004) a révélé que chez les femmes, les comportements d'attaques lors de la résolution de conflits

médiatisaient partiellement le lien entre l'anxiété des femmes et leur satisfaction conjugale. Toutefois, dans une autre étude (Feeney et al., 1994), l'attachement et la communication étaient associés de façon indépendante à la satisfaction des couples nouvellement mariés.

Limites des études antérieures

Bien que de plus en plus de chercheurs réalisent l'importance d'aller au-delà de l'examen des conflits pour comprendre la détresse conjugale des couples, un nombre toujours insuffisant d'études intègrent les caractéristiques individuelles des conjoints pour expliquer la présence de conflits et l'insatisfaction conjugale (Bradbury et al., 2001). Qui plus est, parmi les récents travaux de recherche qui se sont penchés sur les facteurs qui précèdent les conflits dans les relations de couples, rares sont ceux qui ont considéré à la fois la perception des deux partenaires, ce qui constitue pourtant une avenue importante pour la recherche, selon Marchand (2004).

Par ailleurs, même si de plus en plus de recherches ont démontré la présence de liens entre l'attachement adulte et la fréquence des conflits conjugaux, de même que les stratégies entourant leur résolution, il n'est toujours pas possible d'établir la séquence temporelle qui unit ces deux concepts de façon claire et seules des études longitudinales peuvent pallier à cette lacune (Pietromonaco et al., 2004). De plus, ces études sont souvent limitées par la nature des échantillons, principalement des étudiants en relation de fréquentation, de même que par la présence d'un seul partenaire dans l'étude,

restreignant l'examen de l'attachement et des conflits des deux conjoints en relation de couple. Pour leur part, Pietromonaco et ses collègues (2004) soulèvent un questionnement en ce qui a trait aux types de conflits qui sont les plus susceptibles d'être associés à l'attachement anxieux et évitant, une avenue qui n'a pas encore été explorée.

Enfin, des progrès ont été notés dans la présentation de modèles médiateurs du lien unissant l'attachement et la satisfaction conjugale, en utilisant principalement des comportements ou stratégies de résolutions de conflits à titre de variables médiatrices (p. ex., Davila et al., 1998; Feeney, 1994; Feeney et al., 1998; Keenan et al., 1998; Marchand, 2004). Cependant, en se basant sur les liens théoriques entre l'attachement et les conflits, il apparaît important de vérifier la possibilité que l'anxiété et l'évitement pourraient également être associés à la *perception* des sources et de l'intensité des conflits présents dans la relation. Cette façon de conceptualiser le conflit, qui a été associée à un moindre ajustement conjugal (Sanford, 2003), pourrait jeter un éclairage nouveau sur le rôle médiateur des conflits entre l'attachement et la détresse conjugale.

Objectifs de la recherche

Afin de poursuivre la clarification des liens qui unissent l'attachement aux conflits, d'une part, et l'examen des vulnérabilités qui influencent les conflits et la satisfaction conjugale, d'autre part, la présente thèse de doctorat propose quatre objectifs qui seront abordés à l'intérieur de deux articles scientifiques. Le premier article cherche à vérifier le rôle de la perception des conflits dans le lien unissant l'attachement anxieux et évitant

à l'ajustement conjugal. En présentant la perspective des deux partenaires du couple, cette étude favorise l'exploration de la dynamique d'interdépendance qui existe entre les deux membres du couple et ce, à la fois en terme d'attachement, de perception de conflits et de satisfaction conjugale. De plus, cet article permet de clarifier les différences sexuelles notées dans les études précédentes en les intégrant dans un modèle dyadique auprès d'un large échantillon de jeunes couples.

Le second article vise à améliorer la compréhension de la nature du lien entre l'attachement amoureux et la perception de différentes catégories de conflits dans le couple, en considérant à la fois la perspective de l'homme et de la femme. Sur le plan transversal, il étendra la compréhension des chercheurs et cliniciens en identifiant les types spécifiques de conflit qui sont susceptibles d'être retrouvés chez des conjoints anxieux ou qui possèdent un attachement évitant, de même que chez leur partenaire. De plus, il cherche à prédire de façon longitudinale l'évolution des conflits au sein du couple en fonction de l'attachement de l'individu et de son (sa) conjoint(e), de même que de l'interaction entre les styles d'attachement des deux partenaires.

Puisque cette thèse est constituée de deux articles scientifiques, chacun d'entre eux sera présenté de façon détaillée dans les pages qui suivent. Ils seront suivis d'une discussion générale incluant la synthèse des résultats, la contribution scientifique et les limites de ce projet de recherche, ainsi que les pistes de recherches futures. Enfin, la conclusion bouclera cette thèse de doctorat.

Chapitre I

Attachment, conflict, and couple satisfaction: Test of a dyadic model

Attachment, Conflict, and Couple Satisfaction: Test of a Dyadic Model

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Running Head: ATTACHMENT, CONFLICT, AND COUPLE SATISFACTION

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of conflict in the association between attachment styles and couple satisfaction in a sample of 299 young French-Canadian adult couples. Cohabiting and married heterosexual partners aged 18 to 35 completed attachment, conflict, and couple satisfaction questionnaires. Confirming predictions, both women's and men's own attachment anxiety and avoidance predicted their experience of greater conflict. Women's anxiety was also associated with men's experience of conflict, and men's avoidance was associated with women's experience of conflict. For both men and women, the association between attachment anxiety and relationship dissatisfaction was explained by conflict, whereas the association between avoidant attachment and dissatisfaction remained even after perceived conflict was considered.

It is widely recognized that conflict occurs in most close relationships (Brehm, Miller, Perlman, & Campbell, 2002), and that conflict is the most important proximal factor affecting couple satisfaction and, ultimately, relationship stability and survival (Christensen & Walczynski, 1997). On the one hand, dealing with conflict may facilitate the development of intimacy and satisfaction in a relationship (Canary & Cupach, 1988); on the other hand, it may lead to negative outcomes such as couple distress and breakup. Researchers are legitimately interested in understanding and preventing marital discord (Heyman, 2001), because in North America one out of two marriages will end in separation or divorce (Bramlett & Mosher, 2002).

Most studies of couple conflict and relationship quality have focused on behaviors and expressed emotions characteristic of happy versus distressed marriages (see Gottman, 1994, for a review). Cross-sectional studies have revealed, for example, that distressed couples display more anger and contempt, often in unmitigated series of exchanges of negative expressions, which initially caused researchers to think that angry conflicts were the *cause* of dissatisfaction. (More satisfied couples typically expressed more positive emotions, or freed themselves from negative exchanges by including expressions of sympathy or affectionate humor.)

However, longitudinal studies have not been as consistent in finding an association between conflict and couple satisfaction. Although some researchers have found that emotionally negative interactions occurring early in marriage predict future marital dissatisfaction and dissolution (e.g., Gill, Christensen, & Fincham, 1999; Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998; Lindahl, Clements, & Markman, 1998), others have found anger early in a relationship to be predictive of increased marital

satisfaction one to three years later (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989; Heavey, Christensen, & Malamuth, 1995). These and other studies (e.g., Karney & Bradbury, 1997) suggest that engaging in conflict and problem-solving may be more beneficial to a couple than withdrawing from conflicts. Moreover, other studies revealed that repeatedly discussing the same problems over and over without resolving them (e.g., Sanford, 2003) could be highly detrimental to a relationship. In other words, behaviors and emotions could matter as much as whether a particular topic or set of topics becomes an irreconcilable source of irritation and frustration for a particular couple.

The literature on marital relationships suggests that conflict is just one important determinant of relationship quality and outcomes (Bradbury, Rogge, & Lawrence, 2001). Other variables, including individual differences in couple members' attachment styles, personalities, or ability to provide support also need to be taken into account. Recently, Bradbury and Karney (2004) have argued that models of couple adjustment need to consider individual strengths and vulnerabilities as antecedents of conflict behaviors and of the relational effects of conflict.

Attachment

Over the past two decades, the understanding of couple relationships has been greatly advanced by romantic attachment theory (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). This theory, an extension of Bowlby's (1982/1969) theory of human infants' emotional attachments to their primary caregivers, is based on postulating of an innate "attachment behavioral system" which causes a person, beginning in infancy, to react to threats and stresses by seeking protection and support from other people – in particular from close relationship partners whom the theory calls "attachment figures." A

person's history of relationships, in which the need for protection and support was either met reliably and sensitively or met inconsistently or not at all, is thought to influence or bias the operation of the person's attachment system. According to this theory, individual differences in attachment security guide expectations about relationships, perceptions of relationship events, and behavioral reactions to these events.

Hazan and Shaver (1987) first assessed patterns of attachment security and insecurity (typically called "attachment styles") in terms of three distinct styles (secure, avoidant, and anxious). This typology was then extended by Bartholomew (1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991), who distinguished between two kinds of avoidant attachment, "dismissing" and "fearful." Subsequent researchers (e.g., Simpson, 1990) showed that attachment styles could be measured in terms of two continuous dimensions, and Brennan, Clark, and Shaver (1998) factor analyzed the various measures that had emerged by 1998, showing that two dimensions, attachment anxiety (i.e., fear of rejection and abandonment) and avoidant attachment (i.e., discomfort with intimacy and interdependence), captured the bulk of systematic variance in self-report attachment measures (see also Fraley & Waller, 1998).

In the most recent models of romantic attachment (e.g., Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003), the avoidant form of attachment insecurity is discussed in terms of "deactivation" of the attachment system, which involves a variety of methods to down-regulate intimacy, feelings of dependency, and fears of rejection or abandonment. People who score high on avoidance generally do not want to rely on their partner for emotional support, do not like having to provide emotional support for their partner, think about alternative partners or short-term sexual affairs, and pride themselves on their autonomy

and independence. The anxious form of attachment insecurity is discussed in terms of "hyperactivation" of the attachment system, which involves extreme vigilance concerning a partner's interest, commitment, and faithfulness. Both forms of insecurity have been shown to correlate with relationship dissatisfaction and probable dissolution.

Many studies have found that attachment security, whether assessed with self-reports or coded interviews, and whether conceptualized in terms of categories or dimensions, is related to relationship satisfaction (see Feeney, 1999, for a review). Some conditions on this association are worth considering, however. Some studies suggest that couple distress is predicted most strongly by men's avoidance and women's anxiety (e.g., Collins & Read, 1990; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994). There is also evidence that avoidance is a stronger predictor of dissatisfaction in dating couples (where the development of intimacy is important), and that dissatisfaction in marriage is more consistently predicted by anxiety (Feeney, Noller, & Callan, 1994; Feeney, Noller, & Roberts, 1998).

Previous studies also suggest that the effects of anxious and avoidant attachment on couple functioning are mediated or moderated by several factors – for example, attributions (Sumer & Cozzarelli, 2004), perceptions (Gallo & Smith, 2001), negative affect (Davila et al., 1998), coping strategies (Lussier, Sabourin, & Turgeon, 1997), and communication (Noller & Feeney, 1994). Thus, it is important to consider additional explanatory factors when studying the issue of attachment within couple relationships, including marriage.

Attachment and Conflict

Attachment researchers have agreed with other relationship researchers that couple conflict is one important determinant of relationship satisfaction, and the

attachment researchers have shown that conflict is influenced by attachment style (Pietromonaco, Greenwood, & Feldman Barrett, 2004). Moreover, since the attachment system is assumed (in Bowlby's, 1982/1969, theory) to be triggered by relationship distress, conflicts between romantic partners are likely to be contexts in which the attachment system is activated (Simpson, Rholes, & Phillips, 1996).

Theoretically, securely attached people expect their partner to be responsive and available, even following conflicts, so they tend not to perceive conflict as a threat to their relationship. They are generally able to communicate openly during conflicts and be flexible in their negotiation strategies (Kobak & Duemmler, 1994; Pistole, 1989; Simpson et al., 1996). In contrast, insecure people are more likely to experience conflict as a threat to their relationship, but for different reasons depending on the kind of insecurity.

For highly anxious people, conflict tends to trigger concerns about being abandoned by the partner or about the partner's responsiveness to needs, leading to hyperactivation of the attachment system (Kobak & Duemmler, 1994; Simpson et al., 1996). As a result, they react to conflict with intense emotions (e.g., Paley, Cox, Burchinal, & Payne, 1999), coercive or relationship-damaging behaviors (e.g., Levy & Davis, 1988; Simpson et al., 1996), a focus on their own concerns, and inability to consider the information presented by their partner. For highly avoidant people, conflict is often perceived as a threat to their self-reliance and independence. During conflict, they may feel uncomfortably pressured to engage in intimacy-promoting behaviors (e.g., expressing feelings), which leads to deactivation of the attachment system (Kobak & Duemmler, 1994), poor communication skills (Feeney et al., 1994), and withdrawal from the conflict (Paley et al., 1999).

However, some studies revealed similarities between anxious and avoidant individuals. Both kinds of insecurity have been associated with conflict escalation, expression of negative emotions, and conflict avoidance or withdrawal (e.g., Creasey, 2002; O'Connell Corcoran, & Mallinckrodt, 2000). But at least one other study found no association between attachment style and behavior during conflictual discussions (Bouthillier, Julien, Dubé, Bélanger, & Hamelin, 2002). In summary, attachment anxiety and avoidance sometimes encourage different reactions to conflict, but the results are not consistent across studies, possibly because anxious people sometimes express their negative feelings, but at other times they may suppress or inhibit them if they believe that expressing them may result in disapproval or rejection.

Differences between anxious and avoidant individuals in conflict situations may be due in part to their different experiences or interpretations of conflicts (Pietromonaco et al., 2004). Some researchers have argued that anxious individuals should perceive more relationship conflict given their high sensitivity to rejection (Campbell, Boldry, Simpson, & Kashy, 2005), whereas avoidant individuals should not perceive as much conflict given their tendency to withdraw when attachment-related issues surface (Mikulincer & Florian, 1998). Compatible with this line of reasoning, some studies have found attachment anxiety to be associated with reports of marital conflict (Campbell et al., 2005; Gallo & Smith, 2001), but contradictory evidence exists as well. In a few studies, avoidant women (Collins & Read, 1990) or women who were either anxious or avoidant (Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994) reported more conflict. To make the matter even less clear, two daily diary studies found no attachment-style differences in perceived conflict (Pietromonaco & Feldman Barrett, 1997; Tidwell, Reis, & Shaver, 1996).

Overall, the results suggest that the association between attachment style and level of conflict is not straightforward. Moreover, studies should consider the effect of the partner, as Pietromonaco et al. (2004) have suggested.

Attachment, Conflict, and Couple Satisfaction

In an early study, Pistole (1989) found that secure individuals were more likely to use constructive problem-solving strategies (integrating, compromising) and reported higher relationship satisfaction than anxious or avoidant individuals, but she did not explore the pathways linking attachment style, conflict, and relationship quality. A study by Collins and Read (1990) extended those initial results to dating partners, also showing that more secure partners had less conflict and more satisfying relationships. Moreover, Collins and Read (1990) noticed a gender difference in the effects of a partner's attachment style on relationship functioning. Men were less satisfied and reported more conflict when their female partner was more anxious, whereas women were less satisfied and reported more conflict when their male partner was more avoidant.

Taking a broader view of the issues, studies have shown that the link between attachment style and marital satisfaction is *mediated* by emotional expressiveness (Feeney et al., 1998), mutual negotiation of conflict (Feeney, 1994), and self-disclosure (Keelan, Dion, & Dion, 1998). These studies all suggest that secure individuals have more satisfying relationships because they are able to self-disclose and express feelings constructively and negotiate conflicts successfully. However, at least two other studies did not support this mediational hypothesis. Feeney et al. (1994) found that attachment style and communication had independent effects on newlyweds' marital satisfaction.

Feeney (2002) investigated spouse behaviors in daily interactions and did not support the mediation model.

The present research was designed to look more closely at the relations between attachment dimensions, conflict, and satisfaction using a dyadic approach (assessing all variables for both members of each couple). The participants were young couples, some of whom were married and some of whom were cohabiting. Young couples were chosen because conflicts are thought to be more frequent and intense during the early years of a relationship (Leonard & Cohen, 1998), and cohabiting couples were included because in French Canada, where the study was conducted, young couples are more likely to cohabit than to marry (Statistics Canada, 2002). We planned to examine the mediational links between attachment insecurities (anxiety and avoidance), level of conflict, and couple adjustment or satisfaction. Based on both theory and previous studies, we expected that: (a) both avoidance and anxiety would be related to an individual's perception of conflict and would correlate negatively with relationship satisfaction; (b) individuals' reports of conflict would be negatively related to both their own and their partner's relationship satisfaction; (c) individuals' reports of conflict would mediate the association between their attachment styles and satisfaction; and (d) women's anxiety would predict men's reports of conflict, whereas men's avoidance would predict women's reports of conflict.

Method

Participants and Procedure

The sample consisted of 299 heterosexual Canadian couples residing in Quebec. They were recruited by a survey firm, using random-digit dialing to locate people who met several criteria: being between 18 and 35 years old; having been married or

cohabiting for at least 6 months. To ensure confidentiality, two separate envelopes, each containing a questionnaire packet and a pre-paid return envelope for one partner in a relationship, were mailed to 600 couples. Of these, 274 couples completed and returned both partners' questionnaires (30.4% married; 69.6% cohabiting). In addition, 20 women returned their questionnaires whereas their male partner did not, and 5 men returned their questionnaires whereas their female partner did not (response rate = 47.8 %). The mean age was 28.02 years (*SD* = 3.97) for women and 30.08 years (*SD* = 5.46) for men. Couples had been living together for approximately 6 years (*SD* = 3.78), and 59.8% of them had children. The majority of female (75.9%) and male (90.9%) partners were employed. The annual individual income was CAN$ 28,536 (*SD* = $15,981) for employed women and CAN$ 39,685 (*SD* = $18,879) for employed men. On average, women had received 14 years of education and men had received 15 years of education.

Measures

Attachment. The two main dimensions of attachment insecurity – anxiety and avoidance – were assessed with a French-language version of the Experiences in Close Relationships measure (ECR: Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998; Lafontaine & Lussier, 2003), which includes 18 items assessing avoidant attachment and 18 items assessing anxious attachment. Participants were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement with each statement based on their current relationship. Agreement was assessed with a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 7 (*agree strongly*). Two scores were computed for each participant by averaging the relevant items (following appropriate reversals of negatively worded items); higher scores indicate higher anxiety and avoidance. Reliability of the two scales has been demonstrated in many previous

studies (e.g., Lafontaine & Lussier, 2003; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2004). In the present study, alphas for the anxiety scale were .86 for women and .89 for men. For the avoidance scale, alphas were .89 for women and .85 for men.

Level of conflict. The level of conflict in the relationship was assessed with a list of 24 different topics developed by Sanford (2003), which included items from previous questionnaires such as the DAS, the Areas of Change Scale (Weiss & Birchler, 1975), and the Relationship Problem Inventory (Knox, 1970). Participants were asked to report the level of conflict they were experiencing in each of the 24 categories. Level of conflict was assessed with a 4-point scale ranging from 0 (*no disagreement*) to 3 (*major disagreement*). The global score was computed for each partner by averaging the item ratings; higher scores indicate a higher level of conflict. In this study, alphas were respectively .90 and .91 for women and men.

Couple adjustment. A short 4-item version of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976; Sabourin, Valois, & Lussier, 2005) was used to assess couple satisfaction. This short form was created using nonparametric item response theory methods to select the 4 best-discriminating items (DAS-4: Sabourin et al., 2005). These items provide a global evaluation of couple adjustment (*thinking about separation or divorce; confiding in your mate; degree of happiness in your relationship; things between you and your partner are going well*) and did not assess areas of disagreement. Compared to the 32-item version of the DAS, the DAS-4 was as effective in predicting couple dissolution and was significantly less contaminated by socially desirable responding (Sabourin et al., 2005). In the present study, Cronbach's alpha was .83 for women and .78 for men.

Results

Preliminary analyses revealed only a few significant associations between sociodemographic variables and the main measures (attachment, conflict, and adjustment). For women, income was negatively associated with attachment anxiety ($r(259) = -.16, p < .05$) and level of conflict ($r(269) = -.20, p < .01$). In addition, positive correlations were found between length of the relationship and women's avoidance ($r(242) = .14, p < .05$), and between number of children and their reports of conflict ($r(269) = .13, p < .05$). For men, education was negatively related to avoidant attachment ($r(257) = -.14, p < .05$) and positively linked to DAS ($r(265) = .14, p < .05$), whereas their annual income was associated with their relationship satisfaction ($r(259) = .13, p < .05$). These correlations were small and infrequent, so we did not control for sociodemographic variables in subsequent analyses.

Means and standard deviations of the major variables are displayed in Table 1 for both partners. Sex differences for the 274 couples with complete data were examined using paired *t*-tests. Overall, women reported more attachment anxiety than men. They also reported a higher level of conflict than their male partners. However, men were slightly more attachment avoidant than women, although this difference did not reach significance (the *p* level was .055).

Zero-order correlations among couple members' variables are shown in Table 2. Attachment anxiety and avoidance were moderately correlated with each other, both within partners and between partners. For men and women, both insecurity dimensions were moderately to strongly correlated with both conflict and DAS, indicating that both forms of insecurity were associated with greater conflict and poorer adjustment. Also,

conflict was highly correlated with couple adjustment for each partner, as expected. To a lower extent, individuals' conflict and DAS scores were predicted moderately by the partner's anxiety and avoidance.

Structural Equation Modeling

To create stable indicators of the latent anxiety and avoidance variables, the 18 items on each ECR scale were randomly divided into three parcels and averaged (Kishton & Widaman, 1994; Little, Cunningham, Shahar, & Widaman, 2002). In order to create conflict indicators, a principal axis factor analysis with oblique rotation was conducted on the 24 topics, and five interpretable conflict factors resulted: (1) poor communication (e.g., unwillingness to listen); (2) major issues (e.g., extramarital affairs); (3) domestic decisions (e.g., finances); (4) daily adjustment (e.g., household tasks); and (5) intimacy (e.g., sexuality). There were 4 to 6 items on each factor, and these were averaged to create five conflict indicators (which correlated with each other with *r*s ranging from .50 to .80), which could be used together to represent a latent conflict variable. Finally, the 4 DAS items were used separately as four indicators of couple adjustment. Factor loadings of all indicators are presented in Table 3.

In order to test the model with a structural equation modeling program (e.g., AMOS, Arbuckle, 1999), some preliminary specifications were made. Because all indicators of each latent variable were duplicated (across women and men), the unique variance of each observed variable (i.e., the combination of reliable specific variance and random error) was allowed to be correlated within couples. (For example, the men's first parcel of anxiety items was allowed to be correlated with the women's first parcel of anxiety items.) Because of the significant zero-order correlations between attachment-

related avoidance and anxiety, we decided to include both in a single model, and we added a correlational path between those exogenous latent variables, for both women and men. Moreover, because the levels of conflict reported by male and female partners were highly correlated and were focused on the same conflicts, the residuals of the two endogenous latent conflict variables (reported by women and men) were allowed to be correlated. The same procedure was used for the women's and men's reports of relationship satisfaction.

The structural equation model is shown in Figure 1. Overall, the proposed model fit the data adequately [$\chi 2$/d.f. = 2.12, *RMSEA* = 0.06, *CFI* = 0.91]. In the women's portion of the model (shown on the left-hand side of Figure 1), the anxiety and avoidance latent variables were moderately correlated, consistent with the zero-order correlations shown in Table 2. These two latent variables both predicted greater conflict, which in turn predicted poorer couple adjustment (as reported by the women). There was also evidence of a indirect association between attachment anxiety and relationship satisfaction. The direct path between these variables was not significant once level of conflict was taken into account.[1] In contrast, the direct link between women's avoidance and relationship satisfaction remained significant, even after the level of conflict was accounted for. This pattern of findings was duplicated in the men's portion of the model (on the right-hand side of Figure 1), indicating considerable similarity between the women and men.

Turning to the dyadic aspects of the model, we see that there were some gender differences. As predicted (and in line with Collins & Read, 1990), women's attachment anxiety was significantly associated with men's reports of conflict. In contrast (and also

as expected), men's avoidant attachment was associated with women's reports of conflict. Moreover, the men's experience of conflict predicted women's relationship satisfaction, and the women's experience of conflict predicted the men's satisfaction. Thus, women's attachment anxiety indirectly affected both their own and their partner's satisfaction by influencing his experience of conflict, which in turn affected his and her satisfaction. And men's avoidant attachment indirectly affected both their own and their partner's satisfaction by influencing women's experience of conflict.

Discussion

This study was aimed at expanding our knowledge of associations between attachment style, conflict, and satisfaction in young adult heterosexual couples. We expected that attachment insecurities would be associated with both conflict and satisfaction, and that conflict would mediate the relation between insecurity and dissatisfaction. We wanted to take simultaneously into account the characteristics and experiences of both members of each couple and the dyadic interplay of those variables.

For both women and men, participants' own attachment-related anxiety and avoidance predicted their experience of greater conflict. Moreover, women's anxiety was also associated with men's experience of conflict, and men's avoidance was associated with women's experience of conflict. Thus, women seemed to be especially sensitive to men's avoidance, which may have been associated with withdrawal from conflictual discussions, whereas men seemed to be especially sensitive to women's anxiously pressing them to deal openly with conflict. These results fit with those of Collins and Read (1990), who found that women's attachment anxiety predicted men's experience of

conflict and relationship dissatisfaction, whereas men's avoidance predicted women's experience of conflict and relationship dissatisfaction.

This pattern presumably arises because women, for either biological or socialization reasons, are more concerned with maintaining closeness and becoming psychologically intimate (which is compatible with both their higher anxiety mean in this study and their higher mean level of experienced conflict), whereas men, for either biological or socialization reasons, are more concerned with maintaining independence and keeping their emotions under control (which is compatible with their slightly higher avoidance scores in this study). (For biological explanations of this difference, see Buss, 2005; for sex-role socialization explanations, see Eagly, Beall, & Sternberg, 2004.) Future studies should include measures of sex-role orientation or sex-role socialization to see whether they do or do not explain the gender differences we obtained.

It is interesting and perhaps relevant to a sex-role explanation of our results that women with higher incomes were less attachment-anxious and experienced less conflict than their less well off counterparts. Men who were better educated and had higher incomes were less avoidant and more satisfied with their relationships. These findings suggest that education and higher SES went along with a softening of traditional sex roles, with beneficial effects on couples' relationships. The size of these effects was small, but that may have been partly because our sample was, overall, well educated and financially comfortable for their age and place of residence.

As predicted, both attachment insecurity and conflict were related to lower relationship satisfaction. The link between attachment anxiety and dissatisfaction, which was evident in the zero-order correlational analyses (Table 2), was fully explained,

among both men and women, by reported conflict in the multivariate model, suggesting that anxiety damages satisfaction by virtue of making conflict more likely or more intense. The link between avoidant attachment and dissatisfaction was only partially mediated by conflict, for both men and women. Thus, being avoidant contributes to perceived conflict, perhaps by making conflict more difficult to resolve. But avoidance also erodes relationship satisfaction for other reasons as well. The research literature suggests several possibilities: lower commitment (Morgan & Shaver, 1999), providing or receiving insufficient care or support (Collins, Guichard, Ford, & Feeney, 2006; Kunce & Shaver, 1994), greater interest in having sex with extra-relationship partners (Schachner & Shaver, 2002; Simpson & Gangestad, 1991), and negative working models of others (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) or critical interpretations of others' character or behavior (Sumer & Cozzarelli, 2004; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). Future studies should consider these possible mediators of the effect of avoidant attachment on relationship satisfaction.

Interestingly, each partner's satisfaction was affected by both own and partner's experience of conflict. Since partners generally agreed about their level of joint conflict, these dyadic influences must be a result of aspects of each person's experience of conflict that are not explained by the other person's experience of what, we assume, are generally the same conflicts (although perhaps perceived somewhat differently). When one person's experience of conflict erodes satisfaction, it is fairly easy to understand why. The experience of conflict, especially if the conflict is unresolved, is inherently unpleasant. But it is less clear how one person's residual sense of conflict might influence the other person's dissatisfaction. Presumably, the first person's residual sense of conflict

affects his or her behavior toward the partner, and in ways that decrease the partner's satisfaction. The mediating behaviors or emotional expressions remain to be identified.

Another interesting finding was that women's attachment anxiety affected their relationship satisfaction partly indirectly, by increasing their partners' experience of conflict, which in turn affected the women's satisfaction. Theoretically, this may mean that anxious women add to the stridency of their conflicts with their mates, and the mates in turn withdraw, which erodes the women's satisfaction further. This pattern of interaction is the one that marital researchers have called demand-withdrawal (Christensen & Heavey, 1990) or pursuing-distancing (Bartholomew & Allison, 2006), and it is well documented that women are more likely to be the pursuers and men more likely to withdraw – a pattern that sometimes leads to violence (e.g., Babcock, Waltz, Jacobson, & Gottman, 1993).

Despite our emphasis on gender differences, it is important to note that the models for both men and women were quite similar in several respects. For both men and women, perceived conflict mediated the association between attachment anxiety and relationship dissatisfaction. Also for both, the association between avoidant attachment and dissatisfaction was only partially mediated by perceived conflict, leaving a sizeable direct effect of avoidance on dissatisfaction even after perceived conflict was considered. Also, for both men and women the two aspects of attachment insecurity were moderately correlated, which is not often the case with large college-age samples containing people who are not in a relationship as well as ones who are involved in a committed relationship.

Although most research linking couple conflict with relationship dissatisfaction has deliberately focused on behavioral measures of conflict and expressed emotions while criticizing self-reports (Gottman, 1994), our results indicate that partners' perceptions of their conflicts are important to understanding how their satisfaction or dissatisfaction is generated. Moreover, their descriptions of their own attachment patterns are also important explanatory variables when one wishes to understand conflict and satisfaction.

Limitations

This study had several limitations. First, the cross-sectional design and correlational nature of the study limits our ability to interpret the mediational results with complete confidence (Johnson et al., 2005). To better document the mediational process, longitudinal data from at least three time points would be needed. Second, the generalizability of the results may be limited by the nature of the sample. We studied only French-speaking Canadians in a certain age group. We do not know how representative they are of people in general (although, on the other hand, it is important to add this French Canadian sample to the vast majority of studies conducted on English-speaking people living in the United States). Third, the exclusive use of self-report measures of attachment, conflict, and couple adjustment may have introduced response biases; it would be desirable in the future to combine these measures with behavioral observations. Other techniques, such as daily diaries, might also be useful, because they reveal in a more detailed way how attachment, conflict, and satisfaction develop day by day (e.g., Campbell et al., 2005).

Despite these limitations, this study reveals systematic individual-level and dyadic-level contributions to relationship conflict and satisfaction. It also reinforces

Bradbury et al.'s (2001) claim that couple relationship studies should consider individual-level personal strengths and vulnerabilities, such as those associated with attachment styles. We have shown that the routes to satisfaction or dissatisfaction are complex, some being fairly direct and others running through multiple mediators and across both members of a couple. Clinically, the study emphasizes the importance of considering both concrete aspects of conflictual interactions and personal dispositions that create and shape these interactions. As Johnson and Whiffen (2003) have recently shown, couple therapy needs to deal with "attachment injuries" and individual differences in attachment style that are often bound up with particular patterns of conflict and dissatisfaction. It is unlikely that clinicians will change couple members' behaviors without having an understanding of where the behaviors are coming from.

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Footnotes

[1]We also conducted a hierarchical regression analysis to see whether conflict mediated the relationship between attachment anxiety and relationship satisfaction (according to Baron & Kenny's, 1986, well-known procedures). That is, we entered anxiety in the first step, followed by conflict in the second step, to see how much the association between anxiety and satisfaction decreased. For women, the beta coefficient for anxiety was -.37 in the first step, and it fell to .-.09 (*n.s.*) in the second step, when conflict, with a beta coefficient of -.61, entered the equation. For men, the beta coefficient for anxiety was -.34 in the first step, and it fell to .-.01 (*n.s.*) in the second step, when conflict (with a beta coefficient of -.63) entered the equation.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of Attachment Anxiety and Avoidance, Level of Conflict, and Couple Adjustment

	Women ($n = 274$)	Men ($n = 274$)	*t*-paired
Anxiety	3.06 (1.23)	2.74 (1.31)	3.59***
Avoidance	1.73 (0.94)	1.86 (0.90)	1.93†
Conflicts	0.86 (0.45)	0.79 (0.47)	2.95**
Couple adjustment	16.85 (3.06)	16.60 (2.93)	1.55

† $p < .06$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 2

Correlations between Attachment Anxiety and Avoidance, Level of Conflict, and Dyadic Adjustment among Women and Men

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Anxiety W							
2. Anxiety M	.340						
3. Avoidance W	.408	.338					
4. Avoidance M	.292	.438	.309				
5. Conflict W	.462	.370	.452	.367			
6. Conflict M	.450	.515	.380	.515	.625		
7. DAS W	-.367	-.418	-.696	-.442	-.660	-.555	
8. DAS M	-.297	-.344	-.431	-.570	-.523	-.634	.610

Note. All correlations are significant at $p < 0.001$. W = Women. M = Men.

Table 3

Factor Loadings of the Indicators on Latent Variables for Women and Men

	Women		Men	
	Loading	(SE)	Loading	(SE)
Anxiety				
Indicator 1	1.00		1.00	
Indicator 2	1.198	.104	1.178	.082
Indicator 3	.909	.089	.844	.07
Avoidance				
Indicator 1	1.00		1.00	
Indicator 2	1.180	.065	1.203	.099
Indicator 3	.796	.057	.868	.078
Conflict				
Indicator 1	1.00		1.00	
Indicator 2	.893	.070	.883	.067
Indicator 3	.720	.068	.649	.064
Indicator 4	.725	.062	.766	.056
Indicator 5	.787	.065	.836	.059
DAS				
Indicator 1	1.00		1.00	
Indicator 2	1.234	.101	1.163	.124
Indicator 3	1.060	.120	1.323	.174
Indicator 4	1.755	.144	1.580	.168

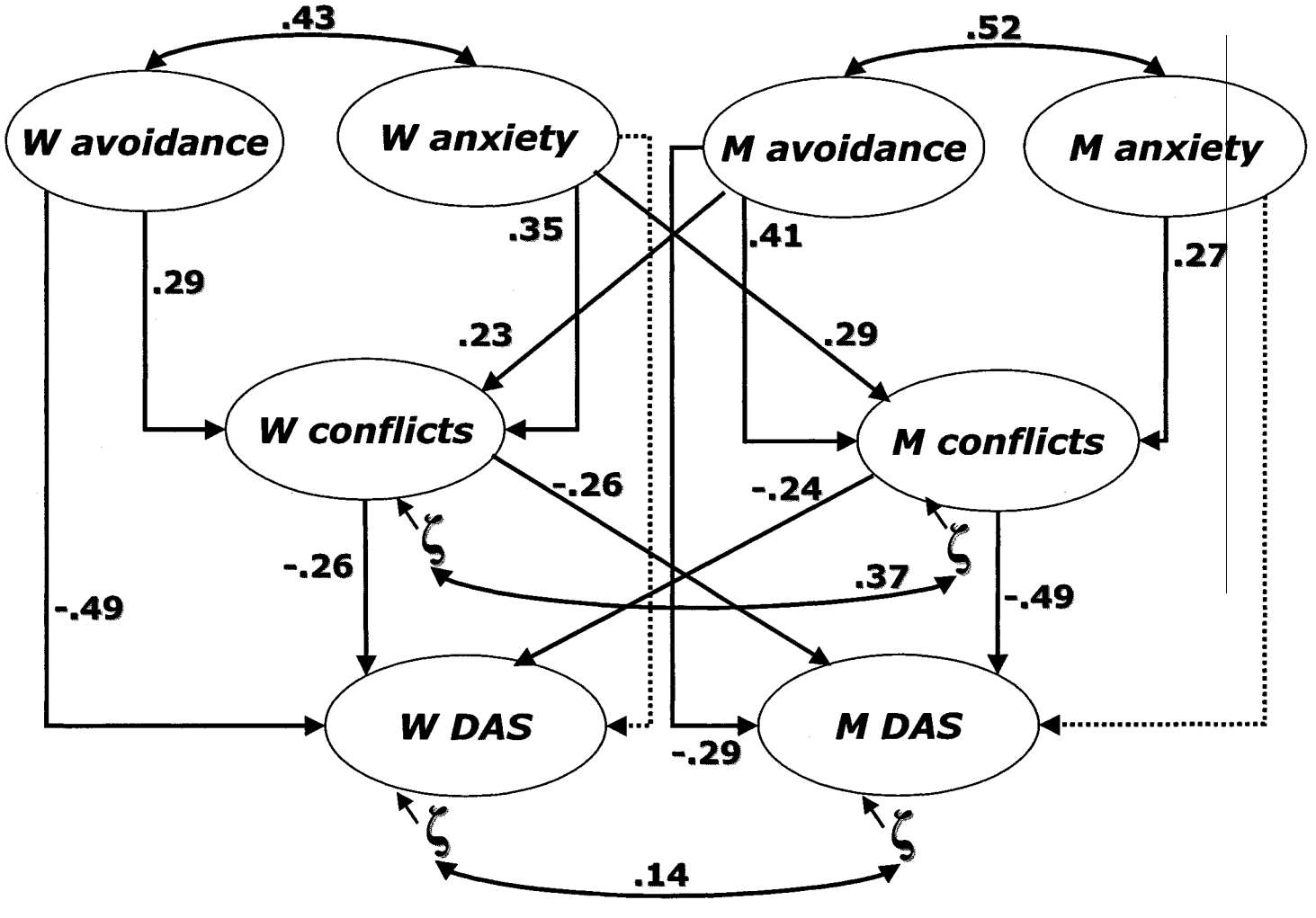

Figure 1. Relationships between attachment dimensions, conflicts and couple satisfaction (DAS) in women (W) and men (M).

Chapitre II

Attachment and conflict in romantic relationships: Conflict categories and couple dynamics

Attachment and Conflict in Romantic Relationships:

Conflict Categories and Couple Dynamics

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Abstract

The goal of this research was to extend the association between attachment styles and conflict in romantic relationships by exploring different categories of conflict between partners and looking at both partners' attachment styles and perceptions of conflict, using a longitudinal design. A sample of 253 French-Canadian heterosexual couples (with partners aged 18 to 35) completed attachment and conflict questionnaires on two separate occasions, one year apart. Avoidant and anxious attachment were related to perception of conflict about communication, daily annoyances, and intimacy, for both men and women. Women's reports of conflict related to communication, major relationship issues, and intimacy were predicted by men's avoidance, whereas women's anxiety predicted men's reports of conflict concerning communication, major relationship issues, daily annoyances, and intimacy. Specific couple dynamics were also associated with perception of conflict and change in perception of conflict over one year.

For more than two decades, researchers have been interested in understanding and ameliorating marital discord (Heyman, 2001), partly because of the high rate of separation and divorce in North America (Bramlett & Mosher, 2002). The large literature on couple conflict suggests three generalizations. First, conflict occurs in all romantic relationships (Brehm, Miller, Perlman, & Campbell, 2002). Second, dealing effectively with conflict can promote intimacy and relationship satisfaction (e.g., Gottman, 1994). Third, in distressed couples, conflict is associated with negative behaviors, emotions, and thoughts that are likely to escalate conflicts and interfere with their resolution (e.g., Fincham & Beach, 1999). However, as Karney and Bradbury (1995) have argued based on an extensive meta-analysis, it is important to consider individual-level strengths and vulnerabilities as antecedents of conflict and determinants of its effects on a relationship. Whether conflict increases intimacy or escalates couple dysfunction depends on individual differences in how couples interpret and deal with conflict (Pietromonaco, Greenwood, & Feldman Barrett, 2004).

Attachment

The adult attachment perspective (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003) offers a framework for understanding individual differences in perception of conflicts and responding to them. Based on Bowlby's (1982/1969) theory of human infants' emotional attachment to their primary caregiver, romantic attachment theory postulates the existence of an innate "attachment behavioral system." This system is thought to influence a person's reactions to threats and stresses, including the person's

ability and willingness to seek protection, comfort, and support from other people (called "attachment figures" in the theory).

Hazan and Shaver (1987) first suggested a three-category measure of attachment style (secure, avoidant, and anxious). This typology and measure were amended by Bartholomew (1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) to include four categories defined by two dimensions. Subsequent research showed that attachment styles were best assessed in terms of these two dimensions (e.g., Simpson , 1990), which Brennan, Clark, and Shaver (1998) called attachment-related *Anxiety* and *Avoidance.* The anxiety dimension is characterized by fear of rejection and abandonment by romantic partners; the avoidance dimension is characterized by discomfort with dependence and intimacy.

Recently, Mikulincer and Shaver (2003) proposed a model of the attachment behavioral system in which avoidant attachment is associated with "deactivation" of the system. Avoidant individuals use a variety of strategies to down-regulate intimacy, avoid interdependence, inhibit feelings of vulnerability and need for protection, and insist on what Bowlby (1982/1969) called "compulsive self-reliance." In contrast, the anxious form of attachment insecurity is marked by "hyperactivation" of the attachment system, which involves extreme vigilance and worry about a partner's support, commitment, and closeness. Attachment-anxious individuals are sensitive to cues of rejection or a partner's disinterest or unavailability. Since the attachment system is activated by external threats or relationship distress (Bowlby, 1982/1969), conflicts between romantic partners are likely to activate the partners' attachment systems (Simpson, Rholes, &

Phillips, 1996), thereby bringing their unique perceptions, defenses, and action tendencies strongly into play.

Attachment and Conflict

Theoretically, securely attached individuals hold positive expectations about their partner's availability and are unlikely to feel threatened by normal disagreements and conflicts. They tend to give their partner the benefit of the doubt and easily readjust once a conflict is settled. Research has shown that secure people are open and self-disclosing during conflicts and more flexible in their negotiation strategies (Kobak & Duemmler, 1994; Pistole, 1989; Simpson et al., 1996). They generally experience less conflict, especially conflict related to intimacy (Pistole, 1994), because they are able to balance their need for dependence and autonomy. In contrast, insecure people are more likely to experience conflict as a threat to their relationship, but for different reasons depending on their degree of anxiety and avoidance. Moreover, attachment insecurities are likely induce a negative bias in couple members' perceptions of their conflicts (Pietromonaco et al., 2004).

Since anxiously attached individuals tend to experience conflict as a threat to their relationship, they often react with strong negative emotions (Paley, Cox, Burchinal, & Payne, 1999), coercive or relationship-damaging actions (Simpson et al., 1996), and lack of consideration for their partner's point of view. Their extreme need for closeness can cause them to seek closeness to such an extent that it makes their partner uncomfortable (Pistole, 1994) and then interpret their partner's desire for autonomy as a sign of rejection. Their difficulty in regulating closeness and distance can cause them to become

intrusive toward their partner (e.g., asking very personal questions; Lavy, 2006), which is likely to annoy the partner and encourage separation or rejection.

Among avoidant people, conflict is also perceived as threatening, but the major aspect of the threat is to their sense of self-reliance and independence. During conflict, they are likely to feel pressured to engage in psychologically intimate discussions that make them uncomfortable (e.g., sharing feelings), leading to further attempts to deactivate their attachment system (Kobak & Duemmler, 1994). They are also more likely than secure adults to have poor communication skills (Feeney, Noller, & Callan, 1994), be uncomfortable with self-disclosure (Bradford, Feeney, & Campbell, 2002), and withdraw from conflict (Paley et al., 1999). Moreover, their general reluctance to commit themselves fully to a relationship (Morgan & Shaver, 1999; Simpson & Gangestad, 1991) is likely to create tension between partners, whereas their desire to remain emotionally distant is likely to reduce their responsiveness to any proximity-promoting behavior on the part of their partner and increase their tendency to withdraw (Pistole, 1994).

Both kinds of insecurity have been associated with conflict escalation, expressions of anger, and conflict avoidance or withdrawal (e.g., Creasey, 2002; O'Connell Corcoran, & Mallinckrodt, 2000). But at least one study found no association between attachment style and behavior during conflictual discussions (Bouthillier, Julien, Dubé, Bélanger, & Hamelin, 2002). Moreover, since both attachment anxious and avoidant people are less likely to forgive their romantic partners (Mikulincer, Shaver, & Slav, 2006), one might expect that they would experience more unresolved

conflicts. Recently, researchers (Campbell, Boldry, Simpson, & Kashy, 2005) found that anxious individuals perceived more relationship conflict (than less anxious people perceived, and less than their own partners perceived) on a daily basis. Although some other studies have also found that attachment anxiety is related to reports of conflict (Gallo & Smith, 2001), others have found that avoidant individuals were the ones who experienced more conflict (Collins & Read, 1990), or that both anxious and avoidant people reported more conflicts (Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994), or that there was no difference in perceived conflict as a function of attachment style (Pietromonaco & Feldman Barrett, 1997; Tidwell, Reis, & Shaver, 1996). Many of these differences may be a function of the different attachment-style measures used in the different studies, the way gender was or was not considered, the different measures of conflict employed, and the different kinds of samples that were studied.

In summary, both theory and many studies suggest that attachment insecurity increases conflict and affects people's perceptions of conflict, but there are many contradictions among the findings, and the best theoretical interpretation remains unclear. There is a need for studies that consider conflict at a more detailed level and include both members of actual long-term couples. Within such studies it is important to consider gender differences (Pietromonaco et al., 2004). Pietromonaco et al. suggested that distinguishing among different areas or kinds of conflict might illuminate the contexts in which anxiously and avoidantly attached people experience more conflict.

Gender Differences and Partner Effects

In the literature linking attachment insecurities and conflict, gender differences have been found. Collins and Read (1990) identified men's avoidance as the strongest correlate of women's reports of conflict, whereas women's anxiety was more strongly associated with men's report of conflict in their relationships. Feeney and Noller (1991) showed that problems in regulating closeness and distance were most evident among attachment-anxious women and avoidant men. In a sample of married couples, higher levels of conflict were observed when the wife was anxious, and lower levels of conversational involvement were found when the husband was avoidant (Feeney et al., 1994). Paley et al. (1999) found that anxious women expressed less positive affect during conflictual interactions, and avoidant women withdrew more from the discussion. Babcock, Jacobson, Gottman, and Yerington (2000) found that avoidant husbands displayed more stonewalling behavior and contempt during conflicts. In sum, although insecure attachment is never helpful when it comes to couple conflicts, the nature of the difficulty is somewhat different for men and women.

Many studies have suggested that it is important to consider both partners' attachment insecurities, because some of the effects on conflict are determined in part by a partner's behaviors. To date, despite some conflicting findings, three main generalizations have emerged from studies that included both partners' attachment styles: (1) the combination of two secure partners is associated with the most constructive patterns of communication and handling of conflicts (Bouthillier et al., 2002; Senchak & Leonard, 1992); (2) couples that include one secure partner handle

conflict better than couples in which both partners are insecure (e.g., Paley et al., 1999); and (3) men's attachment style appears to play a greater role than women's attachment style when it comes to dealing with conflict (Kobak & Hazan, 1991; Paley et al., 1999).

Objectives and Hypotheses

The goal of the present study is to extend the research on attachment style and conflict in three ways: (1) by exploring different specific kinds or areas of conflict between partners; (2) by looking at both partners' attachment styles and perceptions of conflict; and (3) by using a longitudinal design, to see if couple members' attachment styles at one time affect change in conflict levels within specific domains over a period of roughly one year. Consistent with the theory and previous findings, we predicted that avoidant attachment would predict more conflict about communication (i.e., low self-disclosure). We also expected both avoidance and anxiety to be related to conflicts over intimacy (e.g., sexuality, showing affection) and major relationship issues (e.g., commitment). Finally, we expected attachment-anxiety to be related to daily annoyances (e.g., arguments over household chores). This latter prediction was based on previous findings in the literature suggesting that more anxious people tend to magnify negative emotional reactions to what other people might consider minor problems and read more significance into daily hassles than less anxious individuals do (Campbell et al., 2005).

Method

Participants

The initial sample consisted of 299 heterosexual French-Canadian couples from the general population of Quebec. They were recruited by a survey firm, using random-

digit dialing to locate people who met two criteria: being aged 18 to 35 years and having been married or cohabiting for at least 6 months. In February 2004, questionnaire packages, each containing two separate questionnaire packets and a pre-paid return envelope for each partner in a relationship, were mailed to 600 couples. From these, 274 couples completed and returned both questionnaires, 20 women returned their questionnaires without their male partner doing so, and five men returned their questionnaires without their female partner doing so (response rate = 47.8 %). A year later, couples were asked to fill out the questionnaires again, and both partners of 139 couples completed and returned questionnaires. In addition, 37 women returned their questionnaires without their male partner doing so, and two men returned theirs without their partner doing so (response rate = 55.3 %).

Because participants varied in the amount of time they took to return their questionnaires at Times 1 and 2, there was a variable length of time between assessments. The temporal span varied from 9 to 20 months, with a mean of 13 months. To check for possible differences between people who participated at both times (178 couples) and those who did not, the groups were compared using *t*-tests, within genders, to see whether they differed on the attachment variables or any of the five conflict variables. No significant differences were obtained.

We report data for a sample of 253 couples who had conflict data for at least the first time point and complete data on the predictor variables (i.e., anxiety and avoidance measures). For this sample, the mean age was 27.92 years (*SD* = 3.99) for women and 30.16 years (*SD* = 5.49) for men at Time 1. Couples had been living together for

approximately 6 years (*SD* = 3.86), 59% of them had children, and 30.8 % were married (69.2% were cohabiting). The majority of women (74.6 %) and men (90.7 %) in the sample were employed. Their annual income corresponded to CAN$ 28,505 (*SD* = $15,751) for employed women and CAN$ 39,851 (*SD* = $18,692) for employed men. The number of years of education was, on average, 15 for women and 14 for men.

Measures

Attachment. Attachment anxiety and avoidance were assessed with a French-language version of the Experiences in Close Relationship measure (ECR; Brennan et al., 1998; Lafontaine & Lussier, 2003), which includes 18 items assessing avoidant attachment and 18 items assessing anxious attachment. Participants were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement with each statement based on their current relationship. Agreement was assessed with a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 7 (*agree strongly*). Two scores were computed for each participant by averaging the relevant items; higher scores indicate higher anxiety and avoidance. Reliability of the two scales has been demonstrated in many previous studies (e.g., Lafontaine & Lussier, 2003; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2004). In the present study, alphas for the anxiety scale were .86 for women and .89 for men. For the avoidance scale, alphas were .89 for women and .85 for men.

Conflict scales. Participants were presented with 24 areas of possible conflict (from a French-language version of Sanford, 2003; Brassard, Lussier, & Shaver, under review). Participants were asked to report the level of conflict they were experiencing in each of the 24 areas. Level of conflict was assessed with a 4-point scale ranging from 0

(*no disagreement*) to 3 (*major disagreement*). Five multi-item scales were created based on a factor analysis (Brassard et al., under review) which yielded five interpretable factors assessing conflicts related to: (1) communication (e.g., lack of listening, poor communication skills); (2) major relationship issues (e.g., lack of commitment, disrespectful behavior, extramarital intimacy boundary issues [e.g., flirting, jealousy]); (3) family and domestic decisions (e.g., important financial decisions, childrearing issues, in-laws and extended family); (4) daily annoyances (e.g., annoying behavior, external frustrations or potential stresses, careless or unthinking behavior); and (5) intimacy and sharing (e.g., sexual relations, showing affection, extent or quality of time together). There were 4 to 6 items on each factor, and these were averaged to create five conflict scales, on which higher scores indicate more conflict. In this study, scale alphas for women at Time 1 were .80, .75, .64, .70, and .71; for men, .85, .80, .65, .72, and .72. (At Time 2, the alphas, in the same order of scales, were .83, .76, .61, .75, .73, .87, .78, .70, .77, .76.)

Results

Demographic Variables

Small correlations were found at Time 1 between demographic and primary study variables (attachment and conflict). For women, income was negatively associated with attachment anxiety ($r(239) = -.15$, $p = .017$), and conflict over communication ($r(239) = -.19$, $p = .003$), major relationship issues ($r(239) = -.14$, $p = .028$), and intimacy and sharing ($r(239) = -.16$, $p = .015$). In addition, positive correlations were found between women's conflict about family and domestic issues and their age ($r(221)$

= .24, p <.001), whereas number of children was related to women's reports of conflict concerning family and domestic decisions (r(235) =.22, p = .001) and intimacy and sharing (r(235) = .18, p = .006). Length of relationship was also linked with avoidance (r(226) = .17, p = .011) and conflict about family and domestic decisions (r(226) = .29, p < .001). For men, education was negatively associated with avoidant attachment (r(247) = -.15, p = .021), conflict over communication (r(247) = -.13, p = .046), and major relationship issues (r(247) = -.15, p = .015). Number of children was linked with more conflict concerning communication (r(235) =.13, p = .041), family and domestic decisions (r(235) = .21, p = .001), and more conflict about intimacy and sharing (r(235) = .16, p = .017). Length of relationship was also correlated with conflict over communication (r(226) = .16, p = .017) and family and domestic decisions (r(226) = .26, p < .001). Their annual income was also correlated with less conflict about major relationship issues (r(241) = -.24, p < .001), whereas conflict about family and domestic decisions was related to their age (r(219) = .17, p = .012). Although fairly numerous, these correlations were small, so we did not control for demographic variables in subsequent analyses.

Men's and Women's Means on Key Variables

Means and standard deviations for the major variables at Time 1 are displayed in Table 1 for both women and men. Sex differences for the 253 couples were examined using paired t-tests. Overall, women reported more attachment anxiety than men, whereas men reported more avoidance. Partners perceived similar amounts of conflict in each of three areas: communication, major relationship issues, and intimacy and sharing.

However, women reported a higher level of conflict than their partners did over family and domestic decisions, and daily annoyances.

Zero-Order Correlations

Attachment. The couple members' attachment insecurity scores were related, both within persons and across partners. Women's avoidant attachment correlated with their own attachment anxiety score ($r(251) = .41$, $p < .001$), their partner's avoidance score ($r(251) = .30$, $p < .000$), and their partner's anxiety score ($r(251) = .35$, $p < .001$), whereas their attachment anxiety correlated with their partner's avoidance ($r(251) = .29$, $p < .001$) and anxiety ($r(251) = .35$, $p < .001$) as well. In other words, there was a tendency for secure people to have secure partners and insecure people to have insecure partners. Men's avoidance and anxiety scores were also significantly correlated ($r(251) = .44$, $p < .001$).

Conflict. Zero-order correlations among all of the conflict scales (five for women and five for men) at Time 1 are shown in Table 2. Partners generally agreed about their level of conflict in each area. Overall, the correlations within and across genders were moderate to strong, indicating that partners who were experiencing relationship conflicts in one area were likely to be experiencing conflicts in the other areas as well. Zero-order correlations among couple members' attachment scores and conflict scores at Time 1 are shown in Table 3. Correlations indicated moderate associations between attachment insecurities and conflicts of various kinds.

Latent Curve Modeling Procedure

Latent curve models were used to study how men's and women's avoidance and anxiety levels at Time 1 were related to both their initial levels of conflict and the monthly rate of change in conflict between the first and second assessments. Unlike standard methods that require complete data across measurement occasions and identical time spans between measurements across individuals, such as repeated measures ANOVA, latent curve models do not require complete data for each individual, nor do they require that each participant be measured at the same times. Latent curve models account for dependencies in longitudinal data by considering a model at the individual level. Accounting for dependencies in longitudinal data in general is necessary because failure to do so may lead to inflation of Type I errors when making statistical inferences based on the fixed effects of a model (Snijders & Bosker, 1999). In a latent curve model, an individual's response is assumed to be a function of time (where time may be uniquely defined for each individual), and model coefficients (e.g., intercept and linear time effect) are also specific to the individual. The individual-level coefficients are assumed to be random observations, representative of a larger population of coefficients. Thus, the coefficients are treated as random components in the model. At the population level, fixed coefficients characterize the average response. Together, the population- and individual-level models describe the average response while providing information about individual differences in responses over time (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002; Singer & Willett, 2003).

In a latent curve model, variability in responding is considered both within individuals (level 1) and between individuals (level 2). Within individuals, error is time-specific and is typically assumed to be identically distributed across individuals as normal with mean equal to zero and independent between time points with constant variance across occasions. Between individuals, the coefficients characterizing change in the response may vary across individuals. For example, in a model that assumes linear change for a variable, the response may be a function of an intercept and a linear time effect. In a latent curve model, these coefficients may vary across individuals. These effects are known as random effects or random coefficients (Singer & Willett, 2003). The random coefficients are assumed to be independent between individuals and normally distributed about a corresponding fixed effect. Each random coefficient has a variance, and if two or more random coefficients are specified in a model at the second level, then there may be covariances between them.

Given two assessments for each individual on each measure, we were limited to considering only linear change between assessments. The interval between assessments varied across individuals and so was taken into account in specifying the model. That is, individual conflict measures were assumed to be a function of time, which varied across individuals. Time was centered to the start of the study so that the individual-level intercepts of each model corresponded to the response level of a particular variable at the study's start. Changes in variables represented differences in scores from the first to the second assessment, taking into account the varying intervals between assessments. Here, the effect of time for each variable represents the monthly change rate. A standard

application of latent curve modeling is to consider a single variable measured over time. In the present case, we apply a multivariate latent curve model in which we treat multiple longitudinal measures simultaneously to consider the associations between the random coefficients of multiple longitudinal variables (Blozis, 2004; MacCallum, Kim, Malarkey, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 1997). This allows us to determine how avoidance and anxiety ratings of both partners at Time 1, and the interactions of the two partners' attachment variables, are related to levels of particular kinds of conflict (as reported by both partners) and monthly change rates in those kinds of conflict. A total of 253 couples with data for at least one member at one or both time points were included in the analysis.

Prior to specifying the multivariate latent curve model, scores on the five conflict measures were considered individually as a function of time. For each measure, a linear growth model with an intercept and slope at the individual level was specified as $y_{ti} = \beta_{0i} + \beta_{1i}Time_{ti} + \varepsilon_{ti}$. The value y_{ti} denotes an individual's response at a given time point, where $Time = 0$ denotes the start of the study and $Time = t_i$ denotes the lapse in months between assessments for the individual. The coefficients β_{0i} and β_{1i} represent the individual's expected response level on y at the start of the study and the monthly change rate, respectively; ε_{ti} denotes the error of the model at time t for the individual. Within individuals, the error was assumed to be normally distributed with mean equal to zero and independent between occasions with constant variance across time. Between individuals, the coefficient β_{0i} was assumed to be a combination of a fixed effect, β_0, common to all individuals, and a random effect, b_{0i}, unique to the individual and with

expected value equal to zero. The coefficient β_0 represents the average score for a given measure at the first assessment. Allowing the intercept to vary across individuals meant that individuals could vary with respect to their levels on a given measure at the first occasion. The coefficient β_{1i} was assumed to be a combination of a fixed effect, β_1, common to all individuals, and a random effect, b_{1i}, unique to the individual and with expected value equal to zero. The fixed effect β_1 represented the average monthly rate of change across individuals.

Given the limit in observing scores at only two time points, it was not possible to estimate variances for both the random intercept and slope for a given measure.[1] That is, although it was possible to estimate the variance associated with the random intercepts, the variance for the random slopes could not be estimated (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). However, it was possible to allow the random slopes to vary as functions of other variables in what is referred to as a non-randomly varying slope model (see Raudenbush & Byrk, 2002, p. 28). In our analyses, we considered the regression of conflict levels for men and women at the first assessment (corresponding to the random intercepts of the models for conflict measures) as functions of avoidance and anxiety levels for both couple members, as well as their interactions, at the first assessment, plus the error of the regression. For individual-level changes in conflict scores (corresponding to the random change rate of the models for conflict measures), we considered a regression of the

[1] Although the associations between random intercepts and slopes was of primary interest, we also allowed for correlations between observed scores within individuals as well as between members within couples. That is, we allowed correlations between measures of conflict, anxiety, and avoidance within couples and within individuals at Time 1. Ignoring additional sources of associations between measures may lead to biased estimates of the associations between the random coefficients at the second level of the model.

random slopes in which the individual-level monthly change rates relating to the conflict measures were functions of anxiety and avoidance levels for male and female partners, and their interactions, at the first assessment, assuming no random error in the regression as described above.

The regressions of the individual-level intercepts (i.e., response levels at the start of the study) and slopes (i.e., monthly change rates) were specified as

$$\text{Conflict Level, } T_1 \text{ Woman}_i = \gamma_{10} + \gamma_{11}\text{AnxT}_1\text{Woman}_i + \gamma_{12}\text{AvoidT}_1\text{Woman}_i + \gamma_{13}\text{AnxT}_1\text{Man}_i + \gamma_{14}\text{AvoidT}_1\text{Man}_i + \gamma_{15}\text{AnxT}_1\text{Woman}_i\text{XAnxT}_1\text{Man}_i + \gamma_{16}\text{AnxT}_1\text{Woman}_i\text{XAvoidT}_1\text{Man}_i + \gamma_{17}\text{AvoidT}_1\text{Woman}_i\text{XAvoidT}_1\text{Man}_i + \gamma_{18}\text{AvoidT}_1\text{Woman}_i\text{XAnxT}_1\text{Man}_i + r_{1i} \quad (1a)$$

$$\text{Change in Conflict, Woman}_i = \gamma_{20} + \gamma_{21}\text{AnxT}_1\text{Woman}_i + \gamma_{22}\text{AvoidT}_1\text{Woman}_i + \gamma_{23}\text{AnxT}_1\text{Man}_i + \gamma_{24}\text{AvoidT}_1\text{Man}_i + \gamma_{25}\text{AnxT}_1\text{Woman}_i\text{XAnxT}_1\text{Man}_i + \gamma_{26}\text{AnxT}_1\text{Woman}_i\text{XAvoidT}_1\text{Man}_i + \gamma_{27}\text{AvoidT}_1\text{Woman}_i\text{XAvoidT}_1\text{Man}_i + \gamma_{28}\text{AvoidT}_1\text{Woman}_i\text{XAnxT}_1\text{Man}_i \quad (1b)$$

$$\text{Conflict Level, } T_1 \text{ Man}_i = \gamma_{30} + \gamma_{31}\text{AnxT}_1\text{Woman}_i + \gamma_{32}\text{AvoidT}_1\text{Woman}_i + \gamma_{33}\text{AnxT}_1\text{Man}_i + \gamma_{34}\text{AvoidT}_1\text{Man}_i + \gamma_{35}\text{AnxT}_1\text{Woman}_i\text{XAnxT}_1\text{Man}_i + \gamma_{36}\text{AnxT}_1\text{Woman}_i\text{XAvoidT}_1\text{Man}_i + \gamma_{37}\text{AvoidT}_1\text{Woman}_i\text{XAvoidT}_1\text{Man}_i + \gamma_{38}\text{AvoidT}_1\text{Woman}_i\text{XAnxT}_1\text{Man}_i + r_{3i} \quad (2a)$$

$$\text{Change in Conflict, Man}_i = \gamma_{40} + \gamma_{41}\text{AnxT}_1\text{Woman}_i + \gamma_{42}\text{AvoidT}_1\text{Woman}_i + \gamma_{43}\text{AnxT}_1\text{Man}_i + \gamma_{44}\text{AvoidT}_1\text{Man}_i + \gamma_{45}\text{AnxT}_1\text{Woman}_i\text{XAnxT}_1\text{Man}_i + \gamma_{46}\text{AnxT}_1\text{Woman}_i\text{XAvoidT}_1\text{Man}_i + \gamma_{47}\text{AvoidT}_1\text{Woman}_i\text{XAvoidT}_1\text{Man}_i + \gamma_{48}\text{AvoidT}_1\text{Woman}_i\text{XAnxT}_1\text{Man}_i \quad (2b)$$

In the first expression (1a), the woman's conflict level at the first assessment is considered a function of her anxiety and avoidance levels, her partner's anxiety and avoidance levels, and the interactions between his and her anxiety and avoidance levels, at the first assessment. The coefficient γ_{10} represents the expected conflict level when anxiety and avoidance for both partners are equal to zero. This value is not of interest here so is not considered further. The partial regression coefficients relating the woman's anxiety and avoidance levels and the man's anxiety and avoidance levels to her conflict levels are given by γ_{11}, γ_{12}, γ_{13}, and γ_{14}, respectively. These coefficients represent the effects of the anxiety and avoidance measures on a conflict rating holding constant the other effects in the model. The partial regression coefficients relating the interactions between the woman's anxiety and avoidance levels and the man's anxiety and avoidance levels to her conflict levels are given by γ_{15}, γ_{16}, γ_{17}, and γ_{18}. These coefficients represent the effects of the interactions between anxiety and avoidance measures between partners on a conflict rating holding constant the other effects in the model. The error of the regression is denoted by r_{1i}.

In the second expression (1b), the monthly rate of change in the woman's conflict score is considered to be a function of her anxiety and avoidance levels, her

partner's anxiety and avoidance levels, and the interactions between his and her anxiety and avoidance levels, measured at the first assessment. The coefficient γ_{20} represents the average monthly change rate in conflict when anxiety and avoidance for both partners are equal to zero. Similar to the previous model, this value is not of interest here so it is not considered further. The partial regression coefficients relating the woman's anxiety and avoidance levels and the man's anxiety and avoidance levels to the monthly rate of change in her conflict scores are given by γ_{21}, γ_{22}, γ_{23}, and γ_{24}, respectively. These coefficients represent the effects of the anxiety and avoidance measures on the monthly rate of change in conflict ratings holding constant the other effects in the model. The partial regression coefficients relating the interactions between the woman's anxiety and avoidance levels and the man's anxiety and avoidance levels to her conflict levels are given by γ_{25}, γ_{26}, γ_{27}, and γ_{28}. These coefficients represent the effects of the interactions between anxiety and avoidance measures between partners on a conflict rating holding constant the other effects in the model. Unlike the regression for conflict levels in (1a), the error of the regression of individual-level change rate in the conflict score is assumed to be equal to zero, as explained earlier. The expressions for the man's conflict levels and monthly rate of change in conflict are given in (2a) and (2b) and have interpretations similar to those given for women and so are not described here.

Latent Curve Modeling Results

Maximum likelihood estimates of the model parameters were obtained using Mplus version 3 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2004). Effect estimates for the prediction of women's conflict levels at Time 1 from men's and women's attachment variables and

the interactions between the partners' attachment variables are reported in Table 4. As shown in the first panel of the table, women's attachment anxiety and avoidance, as well as men's avoidance, predicted women's reports of conflict related to communication. In addition, the combination of an avoidant woman with an anxious man predicted more conflict about communication, as reported by women. The second panel of Table 4 shows that both forms of attachment insecurity for both partners predicted women's reports of conflict about major relationship issues. Here again, the interaction of avoidance in women and anxiety in men predicted more conflict. In the third panel, we see that women's reports of conflict about family and domestic decisions were predicted by an interaction between women's attachment anxiety and men's avoidance; that is, more conflicts of this kind were reported when women were anxious and their male partner was avoidant. The fourth panel shows that women's reports of conflict about daily annoyances were predicted by their anxiety and avoidance. The fifth and final panel shows that women's reports of conflict about intimacy and sharing were predicted by their anxiety and avoidance scores as well as their male partner's avoidance scores.

Effect estimates for the prediction of women's monthly rate of change for each kind of conflict from men's and women's attachment variables (and the interactions between the partners' attachment variables) are reported in Table 5. As shown in the first panel of the table, the change rate in women's reports of conflict related to communication was predicted by an interaction between her avoidance and his anxiety. Specifically, women's perception of conflict about communication decreased if men were less anxious (more secure in terms of the anxiety dimension) and women were

avoidant. The second panel of Table 5 shows that rate of change in women's reports of conflict about major relationship issues was also predicted by an interaction between her avoidance and his anxiety. Here again, the combination of an avoidant woman with a less anxious man predicted a decrease in women's perceptions of conflict. As indicated in the third panel, there were no significant predictors of the rate of change in women's reports of conflict about family and domestic decisions. The fourth panel shows that rate of change in women's reports of conflict about daily annoyances was predicted by the interaction of the two partners' attachment anxiety scores. A decrease in those conflicts was reported by women when a less anxious man was paired with a more anxious woman. The fifth and final panel shows that women's reports of conflict about intimacy and sharing were predicted by all four possible two-way interactions. Women reported an increased level of conflict over intimacy when: (1) both her and his anxiety scores were high; (2) a more anxious man was paired with a more avoidant women; (3) a less anxious (more secure, in one sense) man was paired with a more avoidant woman; and (4) a non-avoidant man was paired with an avoidant woman.

Effect estimates for the prediction of men's conflict levels at Time 1 are reported in Table 6. As shown in the first panel of the table, men's attachment anxiety and avoidance, as well as women's anxiety, predicted men's reports of conflict related to communication. The interaction of women's avoidance and men's anxiety also predicted more conflict, as reported by men. The second panel of Table 6 shows that men's reports of conflict about major relationship issues were predicted by both partners' attachment anxiety scores. In the third panel, we see that men's reports of conflict about family and

domestic decisions were predicted by men's anxiety and avoidance scores and two interactions, one between women's anxiety and men's avoidance and between women's avoidance and men's anxiety. Specifically, men perceived more conflict when (1) they were avoidant and their partner was anxious; (2) he was anxious and she was avoidant. The fourth panel shows that men's reports of conflict about daily annoyances were predicted by their own anxiety and avoidance and their partner's anxiety. The fifth and final panel shows that men's reports of conflict about intimacy and sharing are predicted by the same three attachment variables (men's anxiety and avoidance and women's anxiety).

Effect estimates for the prediction of men's monthly rate of change for each kind of conflict are reported in Table 7. As shown in the first panel of the table, the rate of change in men's reports of conflict about communication was predicted by an interaction between his anxiety and her avoidance. Men reported an increased level of conflict over the one-year period if they were less anxious (more secure) and their female partners were more avoidant at Time 1. In the second, third, and fifth panels, there were no significant results. The fourth panel shows that rate of change in men's reports of conflict about daily annoyances was predicted by women's anxiety. Indeed, a decrease in men's perception of conflict over time was predicted by their partner's level of anxiety at Time 1.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of both partners' attachment insecurities on each partner's experiences of conflicts of various kinds. As

expected, the influences of attachment anxiety and avoidance were somewhat different for different kinds of conflict, as were the influences of gender and partner's insecurities. Moreover, specific combinations of partners' attachment styles predicted different areas of conflict, as well as change in the level of conflict over a one-year period.

Conflict about Communication

Both men's and women's own anxiety and avoidance were linked with their reports of conflict over communication. Consistent with Kirkpatrick and Davis (1994), both anxious and avoidant people reported more conflicts. However, men's avoidance was associated with women's perception of conflict related to communication, whereas women's anxiety predicted men's perception of this kind of conflict. Communication problems may be reported by women because of the tendency of avoidant individuals to display stonewalling and contempt during conversations (Babcock et al., 2000), as well as more distance and less nonverbal expressiveness and self-disclosure (Bradford et al., 2002; Feeney et al., 1994; Le Poire, Shepard, & Duggan, 1999), which may create conflict about the couple's communication. Communication problems may also be experienced by men because of the communication style of their anxious partners (Bradford et al., 2002), who tend to focus on themselves and their feelings and self-disclose too profusely for their male partners (Mikulincer & Nachshon, 1991). Interestingly, the polarized combination of an avoidant woman, who is likely to avoid communication directly or indirectly (e.g., less self-disclosure), with an anxious man, who may seek verbal and emotional reassurance from his partner, was also associated with both partners' perception of conflict about communication.

Conflict about Major Relationship Issues

A gender difference emerged between men's and women's reports of conflict about major relationship issues. For women, both partners' anxiety and avoidance were associated with higher levels of conflict, suggesting that women were sensitive to major issues if they or their partners were insecurely attached. Those results fit with the literature indicating that avoidance is related to low commitment and extra-dyadic sexual interests and activities (Morgan & Shaver, 1999; Simpson & Gangestad, 1991), two issues that could easily endanger a relationship. In contrast, men's perception of conflicts in this category was predicted only by his own and his partner's anxiety. One possible explanation for the latter finding is that anxiety is a stronger predictor of conflict than avoidance because of anxious individuals' high sensitivity to threats to the relationship and excessive fear of losing their partner (e.g., Campbell et al., 2005). Another possible explanation would be that avoidant men minimize or deny the presence of conflict about major relationship issues, in line with their "deactivating strategies" (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003), but that their female partners still notice them.

Conflict about Family and Domestic Decisions

Men's perception of conflict about family and domestic issues was also associated with their attachment anxiety and avoidance, but this was not the case for women. Two polarized couple dynamics also predicted men's perception of conflict: an avoidant woman with an anxious man and an anxious woman with an avoidant man. The latter combination of partners' attachment styles was the only predictor of women's perception of conflict about family and domestic decisions. These findings suggest that

men and women may experience more of this kind of conflict when they are sensitive to the lack of their partner's availability (i.e., they are anxious) and their partner is relatively uninvolved (i.e., avoidant). The combination of an anxious woman with an avoidant man may also reflect the demand-withdraw pattern of communication identified as problematic by Christensen (Christensen & Heavy, 1990). This pattern is characterized by one partner, typically the woman, demanding change and the other partner, typically the man, avoiding discussion and withdrawing from arguments. This pattern has also been described in terms of "pursuit-distancing" (Fogarty, 1976) and has been associated with marital separation (Gottman & Levenson, 2000) and violence (Sagrestano, Heavy, & Christensen, 1999).

Conflict about Daily Annoyances

Here again, men's and women's perceptions of conflict about daily annoyances were related to their own attachment insecurities, suggesting that both anxious and avoidant individuals are likely to experience daily annoyances as problematic in their relationship. As Campbell et al. (2005) suggested, anxious individuals are more likely to report conflicts on a daily basis, given their high sensitivity to minor disagreement. Moreover, women's anxiety was associated with a higher level of conflict, as reported by men. Men may be bothered more by daily annoyances experienced by every couple if their female partner is overly sensitive to cues of rejection or change in the men's level of attention or care. However, avoidant men and women may experience more unresolved conflicts as a result of their unwillingness to address them, an explanation that has not been tested in this study.

Conflict about Intimacy and Sharing

Consistent with the pattern described earlier, men's and women's own anxiety and avoidance were linked with their reports of conflict over intimacy and sharing. Men's avoidance was also associated with women's perception of conflict related to intimacy, as was women's anxiety related to men's perception of this kind of conflict. The effect of men's avoidance on their partner's sense of conflict about intimacy and sharing seems consistent with the description of avoidant individuals as less comfortable with closeness, intimacy, physical affection (e.g., hugging), and interdependence (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003), an aspect of the relationship that women are most likely to notice. Anxious women's extreme need for closeness is also likely to create tension over intimacy, because they may complain about their partner's lack of responsiveness to their needs, or lack of emotional closeness. These results are also consistent with Collins and Read's (1990) study of partner effects on relationship quality, which revealed that men's avoidance predicted women's reports of conflict and women's anxiety predicted men's reports of conflict. Collins and Read explained this gender difference in terms of sex-role socialization: Men are socialized to be more independent and may therefore be afraid of losing their freedom and independence if their partner seems overly intrusive and dependent, whereas women are more socialized to seek emotional closeness and therefore may be sensitive to a partner's emotional distance.

Longitudinal Effects

Some couple dynamics also predicted change in the partners' perceptions of conflict over a one-year period. For men, conflict about communication increased if

their anxiety was low and their partner's avoidance was high, suggesting that less anxious (more secure) men became increasingly dissatisfied by their partner's lack of communication and support. On the contrary, this combination of attachment styles predicted a *decreased* perceived level of conflict about communication as reported by women within the same period. Avoidant women may be denying conflicts or withdrawing from their partner over time and noticing less conflict as a result (withdrawal perhaps being comfortable for them), while the partner becomes increasingly bothered. The same pattern was noted with respect to women's rate of change in perceived conflict over major relationship issues.

The interaction of men's and women's anxiety predicted changes in women's perception of two kinds of conflict. The combination of an anxious woman and a non-anxious man predicted a decrease in her perception of conflict about daily annoyances. One possible explanation of this finding is that, over time, the anxious woman may feel less threatened by minor incidents if her partner is reassuring and perceives them as less important. However, anxious women in relationships with anxious men seemed to experience greater conflict about intimacy and sharing over the year. Both partners' desires for extreme intimacy and attention may ignite conflicts, with neither person being able to keep the interactions on a realistic footing.

Interestingly, women's perceptions of conflict about intimacy and sharing increased during the year if they were anxious or avoidant and paired with a non-avoidant man. These two results suggest that the more secure men tried to work out a better form of relationship, rather than withdraw the way the more avoidant men did.

This may have led to more explicit conversations about problems, leading the insecure women to feel that the conflicts were fairly severe. (The anxious women may interpret such discussions as a sign of relationship failure, and the avoidant women may be uncomfortable about being drawn into discussions about intimacy and sharing). Finally, the combination of an anxious man with an avoidant woman predicted an increase in women's perception of conflicts about intimacy and sharing. Here again, the anxious men may have sought more closeness and reassurance than their avoidant partners felt comfortable having to provide.

Limitations

This study has a number of limitations. First, the use of self-report questionnaires may result in some degree of social desirability or recall biases. The use of daily diary methods, as suggested by Campbell et al. (2005), might reduce these biases, as would direct observations (e.g., video cameras) in participants' homes. Second, analyses and interpretations were based on only two time points which limited the analyses to describing change in conflict measures as sole functions of attachment measures (as opposed to allowing change to vary at random across individuals), the longitudinal findings should be interpreted with caution. In future studies it would be valuable to have more time points, spanning a longer total time period. Third, we lost many participants over time. However, the methods applied here did allow us to retain couples in the analyses with at minimum data for one time point for at least one partner, reducing the overall loss of information. Although we found that drop-out was not related to attachment insecurity or level of conflict at Time 1, it would have been better if we

could have retained the full sample. Even with the attrition considered, we had an unusually large sample of committed couples, which compares favorably with the many studies of dating couples or individuals in relationships in which the partners were not assessed. Finally, possible mediators of the associations between attachment insecurities and conflict were not explored, and other variables, such as caregiving or lack of commitment, might explain some of the associations we found. We have suggested what some of the mediators might be; future studies should explore these and other possible mediators of the links between attachment insecurities and conflict.

Although all of the kinds of conflict we studied tended to go together, the different kinds of conflict were sufficiently distinct to reveal different patterns of association with attachment anxiety, avoidance, gender, and partner variables. These results may be clinically useful. When couples enter counselling, conflict is likely to be a major issue. Our findings suggest that assessment of attachment styles and types of conflict might speed the clinician's understanding of the nature of the dynamics linking these styles, gender, types of conflict, and partner influences. As Johnson and Whiffen (2003) have shown, it is possible to focus couple therapy on "attachment injuries" – past damage to partners' reliance on each other for protection, love, and support – and ease a couple toward mutual revelation of their hurt feelings and violated expectations. When using this method, it is helpful to consider each person's attachment style and the way it is entangled with needs, expectations, and perceptions of conflicts and disagreement. Future research might contribute to the working out of this method by revealing more details about attachment and dealing with conflicts.

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Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations on Attachment Anxiety, Avoidance, and Areas of Conflict at Time 1

	Women	Men	*t*-paired
Attachment anxiety	3.05 (1.24)	2.73 (1.30)	3.50**
Attachment avoidance	1.72 (0.93)	1.86 (0.90)	2.04*
Conflicts			
Communication	0.79 (0.60)	0.72 (0.61)	1.73
Major relationship issues	0.57 (0.60)	0.56 (0.64)	0.23
Family and domestic decisions	0.83 (0.59)	0.73 (0.58)	2.90**
Daily annoyances	1.15 (0.54)	1.02 (0.54)	3.96***
Intimacy and sharing	0.87 (0.57)	0.85 (0.57)	0.69

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

Table 2

Correlations between Time 1 Conflict Categories Scores for Women and Men

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Women's conflict									
1. Communication									
2. Major relationship issues	.649								
3. Family and domestic decisions	.509	.440							
4. Daily annoyances	.537	.508	.425						
5. Intimacy and sharing	.551	.427	.366	.484					
Men's conflict									
6. Communication	.544	.417	.267	.387	.372				
7. Major relationship issues	.402	.551	.277	.440	.350	.634			
8. Family and domestic decisions	.336	.314	.558	.350	.206	.507	.422		
9. Daily annoyances	.359	.344	.291	.527	.373	.633	.570	.471	
10. Intimacy and sharing	.360	.331	.248	.340	.517	.660	.471	.408	.590

Note. All correlations are significant at $p < 0.001$, except for the .206 coefficient significant at $p < 0.01$.

Table 3

Correlations between Time 1 Conflict Scores and Attachment Anxiety and Avoidance for Women and Men

	Women's Anxiety	Women's Avoidance	Men's Anxiety	Men's Avoidance
Women's conflict				
Communication	.403	.385	.307	.389
Major relationship issues	.335	.323	.348	.349
Family and domestic decisions	.212	.255	.243	.160
Daily annoyances	.354	.352	.249	.225
Intimacy and sharing	.378	.403	.306	.317
Men's conflict				
Communication	.434	.321	.470	.511
Major relationship issues	.359	.353	.481	.375
Family and domestic decisions	.238	.223	.291	.274
Daily annoyances	.335	.281	.369	.380
Intimacy and sharing	.366	.329	.438	.518

Note. All correlations are significant at $p < 0.001$, except for the .212 coefficient significant at $p < 0.01$ and the .160 coefficient significant at $p < 0.05$.

Table 4

Multivariate Latent Curve Models for Types of Conflict Reported by Women at Time 1

	Communication		Major relationship issues		Family and domestic decisions		Daily annoyances		Intimacy and sharing	
	MLE (SE)	95% CI	MLE (SE)	95% CI	MLE (SE)	95% CI	MLE (SE)	95% CI	MLE (SE)	95% CI
Constant	.789(.034)	(.722, .856)	.568(.036)	(.497, .639)	.833(.040)	(.755, .911)	1.167(.034)	(1.100, 1.234)	.873(.035)	(.804, .942)
Anxiety level T1, women	.100(.029)	(.043, .157)	.078(.031)	(.017, .139)	.053(.034)	(-.014, .120)	.095(.029)	(.038, .152)	.097(.030)	(.038, .156)
Avoidance level T1, women	.173(.043)	(.089, .257)	.118(.046)	(.028, .208)	.091(.050)	(-.007, .189)	.146(.043)	(.062, .230)	.162(.044)	(.076, .248)
Anxiety level T1, men	.024(.029)	(-.033,.081)	.071(.030)	(.012, .130)	.059(.033)	(-.006, .124)	.032(.029)	(-.025, .089)	.033(.029)	(-.024,.090)
Avoidance level T1, men	.131(.042)	(.049, .213)	.103(.045)	(.015, .191)	.028(.049)	(-.068, .124)	.027(.042)	(-.055, .109)	.085(.043)	(.001, .169)
Anxiety women X anxiety men	.024(.023)	(-.021, .069)	.038(.025)	(-.011,.087)	.027(.027)	(-.026, .080)	-.010(.023)	(-.055, .035)	.015(.024)	(-.032, .062)
Anxiety women X avoidance men	.030(.034)	(-.037, .097)	.004(.037)	(-.069, .077)	-.081(.040)	(-.159, -.003)	.026(.035)	(-.043, .095)	-.009(.035)	(-.078, .060)
Avoidance women X anxiety men	-.087(.030)	(-.146, -.028)	-.068(.032)	(-.131, -.005)	-.028(.035)	(-.097, .041)	-.032(.030)	(-.091, .027)	-.029(.031)	(-.090, .032)
Avoidance women X avoidance men	.017(.038)	(-.057, .091)	.029(.041)	(-.051, .109)	.062(.044)	(-.024, .148)	-.010(.039)	(-.086, .066)	.010(.039)	(-.066, .086)

Notes: MLE is maximum likelihood estimate. Standard errors are in parentheses. 95% CI is a 95% confidence interval for the effect

Table 5

Multivariate Latent Curve Models for Change in Types of Conflict Reported by Women

	Communication		Major relationship issues		Family and domestic decisions		Daily annoyances		Intimacy and sharing	
	MLE (SE)	95% CI	MLE (SE)	95% CI	MLE (SE)	95% CI	MLE (SE)	95% CI	MLE (SE)	95% CI
Constant	-.007(.003)	(-.013, -.001)	-.007(.004)	(-.015, .001)	.004(.004)	(-.004, .012)	-.002(.003)	(-.008, .004)	.002(.003)	(-.004, .008)
Anxiety level T1, women	-.002(.003)	(-.008, .004)	.000(.003)	(-.006,.006)	-.003(.003)	(-.009, .003)	.001(.003)	(-.005, .007)	-.001(.003)	(-.007, .005)
Avoidance level T1, women	-.002(.004)	(-.010, .006)	-.001(.005)	(-.011, .009)	.001(.004)	(-.007, .009)	-.003(.004)	(-.011, .005)	-.002(.004)	(-.010, .006)
Anxiety level T1, men	.003(.003)	(-.003, .009)	.002(.003)	(-.004, .008)	.003(.003)	(-.003, .009)	.001(.003)	(-.005, .007)	.003(.003)	(-.003, .009)
Avoidance level T1, men	-.005(.004)	(-.013, .003)	-.007(.005)	(-.017, .003)	-.003(.005)	(-.013, .007)	-.003(.004)	(-.011, .005)	-.004(.004)	(-.012, .004)
Anxiety women X anxiety men	-.004(.002)	(-.008, .000)	-.003(.002)	(-.007, .001)	-.001(.002)	(-.005, .003)	-.005(.002)	(-.009, .001)	-.005(.002)	(-.009, -.001)
Anxiety women X avoidance men	.003(.004)	(-.005,.011)	.003(.004)	(-.005, .011)	.002(.004)	(-.006, .010)	.004(.004)	(-.004, .012)	.010(.004)	(.002,.012)
Avoidance women X anxiety men	.011(.003)	(.005, .017)	.009(.003)	(.003, .015)	.003(.003)	(-.003, .009)	.005(.003)	(-.001, .011)	.006(.003)	(.001, .012)
Avoidance women X avoidance men	-.002(.004)	(-.010, .006)	-.006(.005)	(-.016, .004)	-.003(.005)	(-.013, .007)	-.002(.004)	(-.010, .006)	-.009(.004)	(-.017, -.001)

Notes: MLE is maximum likelihood estimate. Standard errors are in parentheses. 95% CI is a 95% confidence interval for the effect

Table 6

Multivariate Latent Curve Models for Types of Conflict Reported by Men at Time 1

	Communication		Major relationship issues		Family and domestic decisions		Daily annoyances		Intimacy and sharing	
	MLE (SE)	95% CI	MLE (SE)	95% CI	MLE (SE)	95% CI	MLE (SE)	95% CI	MLE (SE)	95% CI
Constant	.728(.034)	(.661, .795)	.548(.038)	(.474, .622)	.770(.037)	(.697, .843)	1.039(.034)	(.972, 1.106)	.840(.033)	(.775, .905)
Anxiety level T1, women	.115(.029)	(.058, .172)	.083(.032)	(.020, .146)	.058(.032)	(-.005, .121)	.077(.029)	(.020, .134)	.069(.028)	(.014, .124)
Avoidance level T1, women	.066(.043)	(-.018, .150)	.085(.048)	(-.009, .179)	.082(.047)	(-.010, .174)	.070(.043)	(-.014, .154)	.072(.041)	(-.008, .152)
Anxiety level T1, men	.104(.028)	(.049, .159)	.159(.032)	(.096, .222)	.064(.031)	(.003, .125)	.080(.029)	(.023, .137)	.080(.027)	(.027, .133)
Avoidance level T1, men	.208(.042)	(.126, .290)	.073(.047)	(-.019, .165)	.128(.046)	(.038, .218)	.132(.042)	(.050, .214)	.211(.040)	(.133, .289)
Anxiety women X anxiety men	.033(.023)	(-.012, .078)	.003(.026)	(-.048, .054)	.027(.025)	(-.022, .076)	-.007(.023)	(-.052, .038)	.000(.022)	(-.043, .043)
Anxiety women X avoidance men	-.004(.034)	(-.071, .063)	.026(.038)	(-.048, .100)	-.110(.038)	(-.184, -.036)	-.003(.034)	(-.070, .064)	-.053(.033)	(-.012, .118)
Avoidance women X anxiety men	-.083(.030)	(-.142, -.024)	-.031(.033)	(-.096, .034)	-.084(.033)	(-.149, -.019)	-.043(.030)	(-.102, .016)	-.004(.029)	(-.061, .053)
Avoidance women X avoidance men	.021(.038)	(-.053, .095)	.058(.043)	(-.026, .142)	.032(.042)	(-.050, .114)	-.001(.038)	(-.075, .073)	-.047(.036)	(-.118, .024)

Notes: MLE is maximum likelihood estimate. Standard errors are in parentheses. 95% CI is a 95% confidence interval for the effect

Table 7

Multivariate Latent Curve Models for Change in Types of Conflict Reported by Men

	Communication		Major relationship issues		Family and domestic decisions		Daily annoyances		Intimacy and sharing	
	MLE (SE)	95% CI	MLE (SE)	95% CI	MLE (SE)	95% CI	MLE (SE)	95% CI	MLE (SE)	95% CI
Constant	-.002(.004)	(-.010, .006)	.000(.004)	(-.008,.008)	.000(.004)	(-.008, .008)	.002(.003)	(-.004, .008)	.003(.003)	(-.003, .009)
Anxiety level T1, women	-.005(.003)	(-.011, .001)	-.003(.003)	(-.009, .003)	-.005(.003)	(-.011, .001)	-.006(.003)	(-.012, .000)	-.006(.003)	(-.012, .000)
Avoidance level T1, women	.003(.005)	(-.007, .013)	-.002(.005)	(-.012, .008)	-.004(.005)	(-.014, .006)	.002(.004)	(-.006, .010)	.000(.004)	(-.008, .008)
Anxiety level T1, men	-.005(.003)	(-.011, .001)	-.005(.003)	(-.011, .001)	-.001(.003)	(-.007, .005)	.000(.003)	(-.006, .006)	-.002(.003)	(-.008, .004)
Avoidance level T1, men	-.004(.005)	(-.014, .006)	-.004(.005)	(-.014, .006)	-.007(.005)	(-.017, .003)	-.004(.004)	(-.012, .004)	-.005(.004)	(-.013, .003)
Anxiety women X anxiety men	-.003(.002)	(-.007, .001)	-.003(.003)	(-.009, .003)	-.003(.003)	(-.009, .003)	-.003(.002)	(-.007, .001)	-.004(.002)	(-.008, .000)
Anxiety women X avoidance men	-.001(.004)	(-.009, .007)	-.003(.004)	(-.011, .005)	.006(.004)	(-.002, .014)	-.003(.004)	(-.011, .005)	-.005(.004)	(-.013, .003)
Avoidance women X anxiety men	.007(.003)	(.001, .013)	.002(.004)	(-.006, .010)	.005(.004)	(-.003, .013)	.002(.003)	(-.004, .008)	.004(.003)	(-.002, .010)
Avoidance women X avoidance men	-.001(.004)	(-.009, .007)	-.005(.005)	(-.015, .005)	.004(.005)	(-.006, .014)	.000(.004)	(-.008, .008)	.006(.004)	(-.002, .014)

Notes: MLE is maximum likelihood estimate. Standard errors are in parentheses. 95% CI is a 95% confidence interval for the effect

Discussion générale

Ce chapitre vise à proposer des éléments d'explication et de réflexion en regard des résultats qui émergent de la présente recherche. D'abord, la synthèse des résultats des deux articles scientifiques sera effectuée. La contribution de la présente recherche à l'avancement des connaissances scientifiques sera ensuite exposée. Puis, les limites et les recommandations qui émanent de cette étude seront discutées.

Rappel des principaux résultats

Les deux principaux objectifs poursuivis par cette thèse doctorale étaient d'effectuer l'examen d'un modèle de la satisfaction conjugale incluant à la fois les vulnérabilités individuelles, les conflits vécus par les conjoints et leur satisfaction conjugale à l'aide de la théorie de l'attachement. De plus, ce travail de recherche visait à approfondir la compréhension des liens unissant l'attachement amoureux de chaque partenaire aux différentes sources de conflits perçues dans la relation de couple. Deux articles scientifiques ont permis de rencontrer ces objectifs.

Le premier article s'est penché sur le rôle de la perception des conflits conjugaux dans l'association entre l'attachement anxieux et évitant et l'ajustement conjugal, et ce, en intégrant la perspective des deux membres du couple. Les résultats ont montré que l'anxiété et l'évitement de chaque conjoint sont associés de façon transversale à leur perception d'un niveau élevé de conflits conjugaux. Chez les deux partenaires, le lien

négatif entre l'anxiété et la satisfaction conjugale est expliqué par la présence de conflits, suggérant que les individus anxieux perçoivent plus de conflits au sein de la relation et que leur satisfaction s'en trouve affectée négativement. L'attachement évitant, quant à lui, semble éroder la satisfaction conjugale de multiples façons, puisqu'il demeure directement lié à l'insatisfaction conjugale malgré la présence d'un lien indirect via la présence de conflits. Sur le plan dyadique, des différences sexuelles ont été notées puisque l'anxiété de la femme est reliée positivement à la perception de conflits chez son conjoint, alors que c'est l'évitement de l'homme qui est lié positivement à la perception de conflits rapportés par sa partenaire. Enfin, le niveau de conflits rapportés par chaque membre du couple est associé à l'insatisfaction conjugale de son ou sa partenaire.

Les résultats de ce premier article semblent en continuité avec les études ayant démontré le rôle médiateur de l'expression des émotions (Feeney et al., 1998), des affects négatifs (Davila et al., 1998), de la négociation mutuelle des conflits (Feeney, 1994), ainsi que du dévoilement de soi (Keelan et al., 1998) dans l'association entre l'attachement et la satisfaction conjugale. De plus, il permet de vérifier l'hypothèse théorique de Pietromonaco et al. (2004) stipulant que l'insécurité dans l'attachement de l'individu soit liée à sa *perception* des conflits dans les interactions conjugales. En effet, il est possible que les différences individuelles au niveau de l'attachement amoureux se traduisent par une sensibilité différente des partenaires à percevoir les conflits vécus dans la relation, alors que plus il y a de conflits, plus leur satisfaction relationnelle diminue. Les différences sexuelles notées concordent également avec les écrits

antérieurs qui n'intégraient cependant pas l'ensemble des variables des deux conjoints dans un modèle global de la satisfaction conjugale (Collins & Read, 1990 ; Feeney et al., 1994 ; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994).

Les résultats du second article ont permis d'explorer de façon plus fine les liens entre l'attachement de chaque conjoint et leur perception de cinq grandes catégories de conflits conjugaux, à la fois sur les plans transversal et longitudinal. À l'aide de modèles statistiques basés sur l'analyse des courbes latentes, des résultats distincts ont été obtenus chez les hommes et les femmes. Sr le plan transversal, les hommes présentant plus d'anxiété et d'évitement rapportent davantage de conflits en regard de la communication, des ajustements quotidiens, des décisions familiales et de l'intimité au premier temps de l'étude (voir Tableau 1). Seule l'anxiété est associée à leur perception des conflits entourant les problèmes relationnels majeurs. Pour leur part, les femmes présentent plus de conflits initiaux entourant la communication, les problèmes relationnels majeurs, les ajustements quotidiens, de même que l'intimité lorsque leur anxiété et leur évitement étaient plus élevés (au premier temps de l'étude).

En ce qui a trait à l'influence de l'attachement d'un partenaire sur la perception des conflits de l'autre, l'évitement de l'homme prédit les conflits initiaux rapportés par la femme quant à la communication, les problèmes relationnels majeurs et l'intimité, suggérant une plus grande influence de l'évitement de l'homme chez sa conjointe dans la perception des conflits envers l'engagement dans le couple.

Tableau 1

Synthèse des résultats du second article quant au niveau initial de conflits rapportés par les hommes et les femmes

	Communication		Problèmes relationnels majeurs		Décisions familiales		Ajustements quotidiens		Intimité	
	Femme	Hommes	Femme	Hommes	Femme	Hommes	Femme	Hommes	Femme	Hommes
Femme										
Anxiété	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X
Évitement	X		X				X		X	
Homme										
Anxiété		X	X	X		X		X		X
Évitement	X	X	X			X		X	X	X
Interactions										
Fanx*Hanx										
Fanx*Hévit					X	X				
Févit*Hanx	X	X	X			X				
Févit*Hévit										

Note. Fanx*Hanx = Anxiété de la femme et anxiété de l'homme. Fanx*Hévit = Anxiété de la femme et évitement de l'homme. Févit*Hanx = Évitement de la femme et anxiété de l'homme. Févit*Hévit = Évitement de la femme et évitement de l'homme.

Chez l'homme, plus de conflits sont notés lorsque sa partenaire fait preuve d'anxiété d'abandon et ce dans toutes les catégories sauf les décisions familiales. Ainsi, l'homme semble plus irrité ou du moins percevoir plus de tensions au sein du couple si sa conjointe est plus sensible au rejet, à la distance et au manque d'attention. Une dynamique de couple plus polarisée (femme « évitante » et homme anxieux) est également associée à plus de conflits envers la communication, les conflits relationnels majeurs (femme seulement) et les décisions familiales (hommes seulement). Une autre combinaison de partenaires (femme anxieuse, homme évitant) est liée à plus de conflits liés aux décisions familiales, tels que rapportés par les deux conjoints.

Sur le plan longitudinal, seules des dynamiques de couples spécifiques ont permis de prédire le changement dans le niveau de conflits rapportés sur une période d'une année. Par exemple, les hommes rapportent une augmentation des conflits sur la communication lorsqu'ils sont peu anxieux et que leur conjointe présente un évitement élevé, tandis que cette même dynamique prédit une diminution chez la femme des conflits entourant à la fois la communication et les problèmes relationnels majeurs. De plus, l'interaction d'un homme peu anxieux avec une femme anxieuse prédit une augmentation des ajustements quotidiens rapportés par la femme. Enfin, quatre interactions prédisent l'augmentation des conflits entourant l'intimité chez la femme : (1) deux conjoints anxieux ; (2) un homme peu évitant et une femme anxieuse ; (3) un

homme peu évitant et une partenaire évitante ; et (4) un conjoint anxieux et une conjointe évitante.

Cette analyse plus fine des associations entre l'attachement amoureux et les catégories de conflits a permis d'identifier de façon plus claire les domaines de la relation de couple qui sont plus susceptibles d'être affectés par l'anxiété et l'évitement de chaque conjoint. Bien que les deux dimensions de l'attachement de l'individu soient associées avec la majorité des échelles de conflits, l'influence de l'attachement du partenaire, ainsi que des combinaisons spécifiques de couples en terme d'attachement ont donné lieu à des résultats plus variés. De plus, les différences sexuelles notées concordent avec les études évaluant les conflits de façon plus globale (p. ex., Collins & Read, 1990), mais aussi avec celles suggérant que l'anxiété chez la femme et l'évitement chez l'homme sont associés à la présence de difficultés à réguler la distance et la proximité (p. ex., Feeney & Noller, 1991). Enfin, les dynamiques de couples ont permis d'expliquer le changement dans la perception des conflits sur une période d'une année, ce qui n'avait jamais fait l'objet d'étude jusqu'à présent.

Contribution de la recherche

En accord avec les recommandations de Bradbury et ses collègues (2001), les résultats du premier article de cette thèse permettent de dégager un modèle complexe de la satisfaction conjugale, qui tient compte à la fois des interactions entre les conjoints (les conflits) et des caractéristiques individuelles des conjoints en se basant sur la théorie

de l'attachement. En incluant les variables des deux conjoints, ce modèle permet aussi de tenir compte du phénomène d'interdépendance entre les membres du couple et du réseau d'influence entre les partenaires (Marchand, 2004), en plus de démontrer comment l'attachement de l'homme et de la femme influent différemment sur la perception des conflits de l'autre conjoint. Qui plus est, le fait d'avoir utilisé un large échantillon de couples engagés (mariés ou en cohabitation) se compare de façon très favorable à une grande majorité d'études, qui émettent des conclusions en se basant sur de petits échantillons de couple, ou encore des échantillons d'étudiants ou d'individus ayant participé à l'étude sans leur partenaire.

Le deuxième article a permis de s'intéresser au style d'attachement de chaque membre du couple et de combiner les styles d'attachement des deux partenaires pour étudier des dynamiques spécifiques de couples. L'analyse plus fine des liens entre l'attachement et des catégories spécifiques de conflits a ainsi favorisé une meilleure compréhension à la fois sur le plan individuel et dyadique des difficultés de couple les plus touchées par l'anxiété et l'évitement de l'homme et de la femme. Cette étude permet, en outre, d'éclairer les chercheurs sur les contradictions retrouvées dans les recherches précédentes, les conflits étant parfois expliqués de façon plus spécifique par l'anxiété (p. ex., Campbell et al., 2005), l'évitement (p. ex., Collins & Read, 1990), l'anxiété et l'évitement (p. ex., Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994) ou aucune de ces dimensions (p. ex., Pietromonaco et al., 1997). Ces résultats pourraient donc être attribuables à l'utilisation d'une mesure globale de conflits, qui ne tient pas compte de la contribution

spécifique de chaque dimension de l'attachement dans des domaines distincts de la relation conjugale. Sur le plan longitudinal, il s'agit d'une des premières études qui tente d'expliquer le changement dans la perception de différentes sources de conflits sur une période d'une année à l'aide des variables d'attachement. Par ailleurs, l'utilisation d'une technique d'analyse relativement nouvelle (modèles d'analyse des courbes latentes) et qui permet d'utiliser un maximum de participants, même si ces derniers n'ont pas des données complètes aux deux temps de mesure, constitue sans aucun doute une force de la présente étude.

Limites de l'étude et recherches futures

Ce travail de recherche présente toutefois plusieurs limites, desquelles plusieurs études pourraient découler dans le futur. Premièrement, l'utilisation exclusive de questionnaires auto-rapportés pour mesurer l'attachement, les conflits et la satisfaction conjugale peut introduire des biais dans le rappel des informations et amener les individus à répondre de façon socialement désirable. Selon plusieurs auteurs (p. ex., Campbell et al., 2005) l'utilisation des méthodes journalières de cueillettes de données (grille quotidienne à compléter) permettent de réduire ces biais, en obligeant les individus à noter les informations sur une base quotidienne. Les études futures pourraient donc recourir à ces méthodes de cueillette de données ou encore utiliser des méthodes d'observation en laboratoire ou la combinaison de plusieurs méthodes d'évaluation afin de contrer ces biais. De plus, une évaluation clinique de l'attachement ou à partir d'entrevues semi-structurées comme le Adult Attachment Interview (AAI,

George, Kaplan, Main, 1985) ou le Secure Base Scoring System (SBSS, Crowell et al., 1998) permettrait de corroborer ou non les présents résultats et de faire ressortir les similitudes et distinctions sur le plan de la conceptualisation de l'attachement adulte et des liens avec les sources de conflits conjugaux.

Deuxièmement, le devis corrélationnel de l'étude, bien que reposant à la fois sur des données transversales et longitudinales, constitue tout de même une limite importante de la présente étude. À l'intérieur du premier article, seule la portion transversale de l'étude est exploitée, ce qui limite grandement la capacité à interpréter les résultats. En effet, le processus s'apparentant à la médiation décrit ci-haut ne peut être valide que s'il est vérifié à l'aide de trois temps de mesure, afin de décrire avec plus de certitude la séquence temporelle qui unit l'attachement, les conflits et la satisfaction conjugale. Les analyses du second article, qui se basent sur les données longitudinales prises lors de deux temps de mesure seulement, se limitent à la description du changement dans les conflits en fonction des dimensions de l'attachement. Ainsi, l'interprétation des résultats doit être effectuée avec prudence, car les courbes individuelles de changement ne peuvent être calculées avec seulement deux temps de mesure. Dans l'avenir, les chercheurs devraient donc recueillir des données qui s'étendent sur au moins trois temps de mesure et qui couvrent une plus longue période de temps.

Troisièmement, la nature même de l'échantillon ne permet pas de généraliser les résultats à l'ensemble des couples de la population générale. En effet, seuls des couples hétérosexuels canadiens-français, âgés entre 18 et 35 ans ont été étudiés et les résultats ne peuvent s'appliquer qu'à ce sous-groupe de la population. Des efforts devraient être alloués à recruter et à conserver des échantillons de participants représentatifs de la population générale afin de pouvoir étendre les conclusions obtenues dans les études au-delà des groupes de participants évalués. Il s'avère important de mentionner, toutefois, que les résultats de la présente thèse s'ajoutent à l'ensemble des études effectuées auprès des individus anglophones, en particulier vivant aux États-Unis.

Enfin, il est possible que d'autres variables modératrices ou médiatrices des liens entre l'attachement, les conflits et l'ajustement conjugal devraient être prises en compte pour expliquer le jeu des relations illustré dans cette présente thèse. Par exemple, l'examen des variables comme l'engagement, les liaisons extra-conjugales ou le soutien fourni dans la relation permettraient de mieux comprendre le lien direct entre l'évitement et la satisfaction conjugale, une fois que les conflits sont considérés. De plus, il se peut que l'attachement soit associé à la fois à la perception des conflits ainsi qu'aux affects et comportements émis (p. ex., communication, stratégies de résolution des conflits, etc.) et que ces deux éléments des interactions conflictuelles influencent de façon distincte la satisfaction des conjoints. À cet effet, les chercheurs devraient poursuivre l'étude des déterminants de la satisfaction conjugale en incluant plusieurs caractéristiques individuelles et conjugales. Ils devront déterminer le rôle de chacune

d'elles à l'intérieur d'un modèle causal qui permettrait de prédire la qualité et la stabilité de la relation de couple. Ainsi, il serait intéressant d'élaborer un modèle qui tiendrait compte à la fois des dispositions d'attachement de chaque partenaire du couple, ainsi que des déterminants qui activent (stresseurs) leur système d'attachement et qui influencent leurs réactions et réponses (affectives, cognitives et comportementales) à court, moyen et long terme.

Conclusion

Cette thèse de doctorat a permis d'élargir la compréhension des liens entre les conflits conjugaux et la satisfaction conjugale en incorporant la théorie de l'attachement adulte. D'une part, elle a permis d'identifier le jeu de relations (directes et indirectes) qui existent entre l'anxiété et l'évitement, la perception des conflits et la satisfaction conjugale. D'autre part, elle a permis de préciser les associations transversales et longitudinales entre les insécurités de chaque conjoint (et l'interaction de l'attachement des deux conjoints) et des catégories spécifiques de conflits rencontrés par les hommes et les femmes au sein de leur relation de couple. Sur le plan théorique, les résultats étendent la documentation scientifique déjà riche sur le rôle des conduites d'attachement dans l'évolution des relations conjugales en identifiant des dynamiques de couples plus susceptibles de rencontrer des conflits conjugaux de plus grande intensité et de vivre de l'insatisfaction envers leur union. Sur le plan clinique, cette recherche souligne de façon originale le processus par lequel les insécurités des conjoints influencent leur perception des conflits dans différents domaines ainsi que leur ajustement conjugal. En plus de s'intéresser aux conflits, chercheurs et cliniciens identifient maintenant les insécurités d'attachement des conjoints comme une cible d'intervention thérapeutique. Pour mieux comprendre pleinement le phénomène de la détresse conjugale, il apparaît toutefois nécessaire de poursuivre l'étude des déterminants des difficultés conjugales en raffinant les modèles existants et en incluant à la fois les interactions entre les conjoints, des caractéristiques individuelles et des éléments stressants extérieurs à la dyade.

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