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# Attachment and Negative Relational Maintenance: Dyadic Comparisons Using an Actor-Partner Interdependence Model

Alan K. Goodboy, Marianne Dainton, Dana Borzea,  
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*This study used attachment theory to examine romantic partners' use of negative behaviors to maintain their relationships. Romantic couples (N = 227 dyads) completed self-reports of their attachment styles and use of negative relational maintenance behaviors. Actor-partner interdependence models provided dyadic results: (a) having a secure attachment produced inverse actor effects for all negative maintenance behaviors except avoidance, and inverse partner effects for allowing control and infidelity; (b) having a preoccupied or a fearful attachment produced positive actor effects for all negative maintenance behaviors and positive partner effects for allowing control; and (c) having a dismissive attachment produced positive actor effects for jealousy induction, avoidance, infidelity, and destructive conflict, and positive partner effects for jealousy induction, spying, and allowing control.*

**Keywords:** *Actor-Partner Interdependence Model; Attachment; Negative Relational Maintenance*

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For decades, interpersonal relationship scholars have programmatically studied how partners maintain their romantic relationships (Canary & Dainton, 2006). This research has focused largely on the prosocial communication behaviors that partners use to maintain their relationships, including Stafford and Canary's original typology of maintenance behaviors: positivity, openness, assurances, shared tasks, and social networks (Canary & Stafford, 1992; Stafford & Canary, 1991). Despite this focus on positive behaviors, maintenance itself is not inherently or exclusively prosocial (Dindia, 2003). On the contrary, some partners rely on antisocial or negative behaviors to keep their relationship the way they want it (Ayres, 1983; Dainton & Gross, 2008; Roloff & Cloven, 1994; Stafford, 2003). For instance, numerous studies have revealed that individuals maintain their relationships using avoidance (Ayres, 1983; Canary, Stafford, Hause, & Wallace, 1993; Dainton & Gross, 2008; Dainton & Stafford, 1993; Dindia & Baxter, 1987). Likewise, antisocial behaviors, such as deception (Guthrie & Kunkel, 2013) and acting rude or moody are also used to maintain relationships (Baxter & Dindia, 1990; Canary et al., 1993; Dainton & Stafford, 1993; Dindia & Baxter, 1987; Messman, Canary, & Hause, 2000). Beyond studies of couple interaction, the use of negative maintenance is also apparent in popular culture representations of romantic life (Anderegg, Dale, & Fox, 2014). At question, then, is not *whether* people engage in negative relationship maintenance, but *why* they do so. Therefore, the goal of this study was to conduct a dyadic examination using attachment styles as a theoretical explanation for why individuals use negative maintenance behaviors.

### *Negative Relational Maintenance*

Relational maintenance refers to the behaviors individuals use to keep their relationship in a desired state (Dindia & Canary, 1993). In maintenance scholarship, most often, the dependent variable of interest is relational satisfaction, although other characteristics have been studied such as commitment, love, liking, and control mutuality (Dainton, Stafford, & Canary, 1994; Stafford & Canary, 1991). Although the earliest formulations of maintenance focused on both positive and negative behaviors enacted to sustain these desired relational characteristics (e.g., Ayres, 1983; Dindia & Baxter, 1987), most recent research has used Stafford and Canary's typology, which centers exclusively on prosocial maintenance (Stafford, 2003). Without question, the use of this typology has generated a wealth of information regarding how prosocial maintenance functions (see Ogolsky & Bowers, 2013), but has left other aspects of maintenance largely understudied and undertheorized. This is problematic for several reasons. First, positive and negative behaviors co-occur in relationships, and a focus on one to the exclusion of the other provides a distorted view of relational life (Duck, 1994). Second, research indicates that relational partners attend to negative romantic events more than they do to positive romantic events (Birchler, Weiss, & Vincent, 1975; Watson, Hubbard, & Wiese, 2000). Accordingly, relational partners might assess the quality of their relationship through the lens of negative maintenance to a greater extent than through the lens of prosocial maintenance. Finally, open-

ended responses to how individuals maintain their romantic relationships consistently have revealed reports of negative and antisocial behaviors (Canary et al., 1993; Dainton & Stafford, 1993; Dindia & Baxter, 1987). To ignore these negative behaviors is to ignore a significant part of what people say they do to maintain their relationship.

To address this positivity bias, Dainton and Gross (2008) sought to uncover the spectrum of what individuals consider to be negative maintenance behaviors. Defining negative maintenance as the antisocial things that partners do to keep the relationship in a desired state, Dainton and Gross instructed participants:

As we all know, there are positives and negatives in all relationships, even the best relationships. In fact, sometimes we behave in what might seem like negative ways, but we are doing so in order to maintain our relationship. We are interested in some of the negative things you may have done in order to keep your relationship the way that you like it. (p. 182)

Responses to this question were coded and developed into a scale that evinced six distinct factors. Specifically, they discovered that partners maintained their relationships using *jealousy induction* (i.e., flirting with, and commenting about, extradyadic others), *avoidance* (i.e., avoiding certain interactions with the partner or avoiding the partner altogether), *spying* (i.e., searching for information about the partner through private channels), *infidelity* (i.e., participating in emotional or physical extradyadic relationships), *destructive conflict* (i.e., starting arguments using antisocial strategies), and *allowing control* (i.e., conceding to the partner's desired plans and activities instead of the individual's own preferences).

Research has found that the use of these negative relational maintenance behaviors is symptomatic of low-quality relationships (Goodboy & Bolkan, 2011; Tokunaga, 2016), as all six behaviors are correlated negatively with relationship satisfaction, commitment, control mutuality, liking, and respect (Dainton & Gross, 2008; Goodboy, Myers, & Members of Investigating Communication, 2010). At question, then, is why people would use these behaviors to maintain their relationships. Do individuals actually desire lower quality relationships? Or do individuals not understand, or perhaps not care about, the potential repercussions of using seemingly antisocial actions to attain desired end states? We believe that the latter explanation makes the most sense, as there are theoretically sound reasons that explain the potentially misguided use of antisocial acts. For example, Goodboy et al. (2010) found that the ludus and mania love styles predicted all six negative maintenance behaviors. It appears that an individual's attitudes about love might explain the decision to enact an antisocial behavior. However, the love styles approach has been criticized as focusing on only one aspect of the romantic relationship experience, hence limiting the approach's overall ability to explain interaction in romantic relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). This assessment comports with the work of Galinha, Oishi, Pereira, Wirtz, and Esteves (2014), who found that although attachment security was associated with love styles in a predictable fashion, and that relationship satisfaction was associated with both attachment security and love styles, in a structural model only attachment and relationship satisfaction predicted well-being; love styles were

nonsignificant. Indeed, Hendrick and Hendrick (1989) argue that attachment styles represent the building blocks of romantic relationships, serving as a foundation for understanding all relational processes. Accordingly, we use attachment theory to examine why individuals might use negative maintenance behaviors with their partner.

### *Attachment Theory*

Attachment theory is based on Bowlby's (1980) research on infant and caregiver bonds, as these relationships shape working models of the self and others based on the availability and supportiveness of attachment figures (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Attachment security is crucial to the development of adult love as adults form pair bonds with their partners (Feeney, 2008; Hazan, Campa, & Gur-Yaish, 2006). Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) proposed four prototypic forms of adult attachment that are based on a partner's perception of self and others. Individuals with a *secure attachment*, who have a positive perception of self and a positive perception of others, are comfortable with intimacy and autonomy in relationships. Individuals with a *preoccupied attachment*, who have a negative view of self and a positive view of others, tend to be overly dependent, feel unworthy of love, and desire acceptance from their partner. Individuals with a *fearful attachment*, who have a negative view of self and negative view of others, avoid intimacy to protect themselves from getting hurt by others. Individuals with a *dismissive attachment*, who have a positive view of self but a negative view of others, tend to be independent and invulnerable to relationships by keeping distance and dismissing intimacy.

Volumes of research highlight the importance of adult attachment and differentiate between couples' attachment styles and their cognitions, emotions, and behaviors in committed relationships (see Cassidy & Shaver, 2008; Mikulincer & Goodman, 2006). Generally, secure individuals tend to be more supportive and understanding of their partner's shortcomings and are highly romantically involved (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Secure partners also experience more satisfaction and cohesion in their relationships, compared to insecure partners (Egeci & Gencoz, 2011). In contrast, fearful partners refrain from relying on others, self-disclose infrequently, and embody low self-confidence; preoccupied partners frequently self-disclose, express emotions, and rely on their partner; and dismissive partners possess high self-confidence and control over their romantic partners, but do not tend to be intimate, and self-disclose infrequently (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991).

Adult attachment has been a salient explanation for prosocial maintenance behaviors and numerous studies have replicated the finding that secure individuals use more prosocial maintenance than do insecure individuals (Bippus & Rollin, 2003; Dainton, 2007; Guerrero & Bachman, 2006; Pistole, Roberts, & Chapman, 2010; Simon & Baxter, 1993; Yum & Li, 2007) and, conversely, that insecure individuals use more negative maintenance than secure individuals (Goodboy & Bolkan, 2011). In the only study to examine attachment as a predictor of negative relational

maintenance, Goodboy and Bolkan (2011) found that (a) secure attachment was associated negatively with all six negative maintenance behaviors, (b) dismissive and fearful attachments were associated positively with jealousy induction, avoidance, and infidelity, but negatively with allowing control, and (c) preoccupied attachment was associated positively with destructive conflict, allowing control, and spying.

These findings are consistent with an attachment theory explanation for romantic relationship experience. Because secure individuals have positive views of themselves and others, and because they are highly romantically involved, they are more likely to engage in prosocial maintenance and report greater satisfaction in their relationships (Dainton, 2003). Insecure individuals, on the other hand, either suffer from low self-worth or a distrust of others (or both), which suppresses prosocial behaviors (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Bartholomew (1993) proposed an attachment reinforcement effect that functions as a form of self-fulfilling prophecy. That is, anxious individuals might be so afraid that their partners might leave them that they may behave in ways that actually encourage their partners to do so (Guerrero & Bachman, 2006). Similarly, preoccupied individuals often cling to their relationships and become controlling, which can cause partners to withdraw (Shaver & Hazan, 1993).

Goodboy and Bolkan (2011) found that attachment styles predicted between 9% of the variance (in the case of destructive conflict and spying) to 20% of the variance (in the case of infidelity) in negative maintenance use, but they did not study the dyadic effects of self and partner attachment styles in the use of negative maintenance as a couple. This is unfortunate because Goodboy and Bolkan provide an incomplete portrayal of how attachment functions for couples who use negative maintenance; likewise, attachment researchers agree that examining attachment at the dyadic level is a more comprehensive assessment of the romantic relationship (e.g., Butzer & Campbell, 2008; Feeney, 2002; Kane et al., 2007; Rholes, Simpson, Tran, Martin, & Friedman, 2007; Tran & Simpson, 2009). Moreover, previous research has found that individuals are responsive to their partner's attachment style during conflict interactions (Winterheld, Simpson, & Oriña, 2013), and that an individual's own attachment belief interacts with his or her partner's belief to predict extramarital sex, even when controlling for marital satisfaction (Russell, Baker, & McNulty, 2013). Not surprisingly, secure individuals are the most sensitive to the needs of their partners (Kunze & Shaver, 1994).

Despite these findings, as Campbell, Simpson, Kashy, and Rholes (2001) noted, very little research has examined how one partner's attachment orientation is associated with the behavior displayed by the other partner. This is surprising because measuring both romantic partners' attachment styles at the dyadic level can provide a more comprehensive explanation for their use of negative maintenance than measuring only one partner's style and her/his maintenance (cf. Goodboy & Bolkan, 2011). Like attachment scholars, maintenance scholars have long recognized that dyadic perspectives provide a more nuanced approach to understanding maintenance and have incorporated statistical techniques that account for nonindependence between relational partners (e.g., Hesse, Pauley, & Frye-Cox, 2015; Ledbetter, 2013; McEwan,

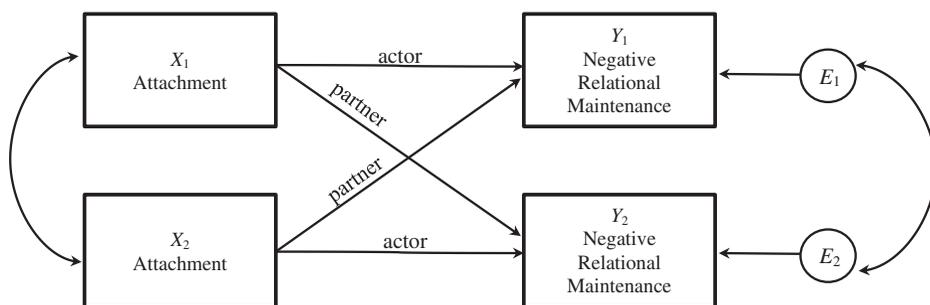
2013; Ramirez, 2008; Weigel & Ballard-Reisch, 2008) including the actor-partner interdependence model (APIM; Kenny, 1996; Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006).

The APIM “is a model of dyadic relationships that integrates a conceptual view of interdependence in two-person relationships with the appropriate statistical techniques for measuring and testing it” (Cook & Kenny, 2005, p. 101). Statistically speaking, the APIM takes into account the nonindependence between partners’ measurements and allows researchers to test for an actor effect (the effect of one individual’s attachment on his/her own negative relational maintenance), a partner effect (the effect of one individual’s attachment on the other partner’s use of negative relational maintenance), and actor-by-partner interactions (dyadic moderation, or the presence of conditional actor effects that are dependent upon partner effects). The conceptual display of the actor-partner interdependence model (APIM) guiding this study appears in Figure 1.

In summary, attachment theory predicts that individuals with a secure attachment style would be less likely to engage in negative maintenance than insecure individuals because they tend to be responsive to the partner and they engage in more pro-relationship behaviors (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Egeci & Gencoz, 2011; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). In contrast, insecure individuals, who have preoccupied, fearful, or dismissive attachments, are more likely to engage in negative maintenance because of their anxiety and/or avoidance tendencies within romantic relationships (Goodboy & Bolkan, 2012). This leads to our hypotheses for actor effects:

- H1: An actor’s secure attachment style will be an inverse predictor of her/his own negative maintenance behaviors (controlling for the partner effect).
- H2: An actor’s insecure attachment style (i.e., preoccupied, fearful, dismissive) will be a positive predictor of his/her own negative maintenance behaviors (controlling for the partner effect).

It is important to also consider how one partner’s attachment might influence the other partner’s use of negative maintenance behavior. We know that individuals who



**Figure 1** Proposed Actor-Partner Interdependence Models.

*Note.*  $X$  = predictor variables.  $Y$  = outcome variables.  $E$  = residuals (correlated). Curved arrows are correlations. Straight arrows are hypothesized actor or partner effects. Attachment ( $X_1$  &  $X_2$ ) are dyadic measurements of each partner’s attachment styles (secure, preoccupied, fearful, dismissive). Negative relational maintenance ( $Y_1$  &  $Y_2$ ) are dyadic measurements of each partner’s use of jealousy induction, avoidance, spying, infidelity, destructive conflict, allowing control. All APIMs were estimated using multilevel modeling with restricted maximum likelihood estimation.

have avoidant partners engage in more negative affect expression (Campbell et al., 2001; Paley, Cox, Burchinal, & Payne, 1999), and infidelity (Russell et al., 2013); moreover, individuals who have anxious partners are less supportive (Feeney, 2003) and engage in more aggressive behavior (Bookwala, 2002; Rholes, Kohn, & Simpson, 2014). This implies that there might be partner effects in the use of negative maintenance. Yet, because we do not know if an individual's attachment style influences the other partner's use of negative maintenance, we offer the following research questions about partner effects:

- RQ1: Does an actor's secure attachment style inversely predict the partner's use of negative maintenance behaviors (controlling for the actor effect)?
- RQ2: Does an actor's insecure attachment style (i.e., preoccupied, fearful, dismissive) positively predict the partner's use of negative maintenance behaviors (controlling for the actor effect)?
- RQ3: Is there an interaction effect between an actor's attachment style and a partner's (same) attachment style on the use of negative maintenance behaviors?

## METHOD

### *Participants*

The participants in this study were 454 individuals in heterosexual romantic relationships who were matched as 227 couples/dyads (the original sample was comprised of 462 individuals but 4 dyads could not be matched due to incomplete data). Although we did not intentionally exclude gay or lesbian couples from our data collection, we did not recruit a sufficient sample size for these couples. The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 80 years ( $M = 22.23$ ,  $SD = 5.91$ ). The ethnicity of the participants was mostly Caucasian/White ( $n = 390$ ), followed by Black/African American ( $n = 33$ ), Asian/Asian American ( $n = 13$ ), Hispanic ( $n = 10$ ), and Middle Eastern ( $n = 8$ ). Participants were required to be in the romantic relationship for at least 2 months; the relationship length ranged from 2 to 768 months ( $M = 30.46$  months/2.54 years,  $SD = 64.16$  months). Participants labeled their romantic involvement as dating ( $n = 174$ ), seriously committed ( $n = 248$ ), engaged ( $n = 16$ ), and married ( $n = 16$ ).

### *Procedures and Measurement*

After obtaining IRB approval, we administered voluntary surveys to undergraduate communication studies classes as part of a larger study. All participants were recruited anonymously and all surveys were labeled with unique code numbers to pair the dyadic data. Participants provided their anonymous responses in sealed envelopes and solicited their partner's responses in a separate sealed envelope as well. Participants were also given the researchers' contact information in case they desired to return their envelope directly. These decisions were made to avoid potential problems with

the privacy of responses. The survey contained the measures listed below along with demographic items.

#### *Adult Attachment*

Guerrero, Farinelli, and McEwan's (2009) Attachment Style Measure was used to operationalize four continuous adult attachment styles: secure (7 items), preoccupied (7 items), fearful-avoidant (5 items), and dismissive (6 items). This measure is 25 items and uses a 7-point Likert response format (1 = *strongly disagree* and 7 = *strongly agree*). Previous reliability alphas for the attachment subscales have ranged from .71 to .86 (La Valley & Guerrero, 2012). In this study, obtained Cronbach alphas for each subscale were: secure ( $M = 4.97$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ ,  $\alpha = .81$ ), preoccupied ( $M = 3.48$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ ,  $\alpha = .75$ ), fearful ( $M = 3.29$ ,  $SD = 1.42$ ,  $\alpha = .87$ ), and dismissive ( $M = 3.79$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ,  $\alpha = .71$ ).

#### *Negative Relational Maintenance*

Dainton and Gross's (2008) Negative Maintenance Scale was used to operationalize six continuous maintenance behaviors: jealousy induction (2 items), avoidance (4 items), spying (3 items), infidelity (2 items), destructive conflict (4 items), and allowing control (5 items). This measure is 20 items and uses a 7-point Likert response format (1 = *strongly disagree* and 7 = *strongly agree*). Previous reliability alphas for the maintenance subscales have ranged from .74 to .89 (Dainton & Gross, 2008). In this study, obtained Cronbach alphas were: jealousy induction ( $M = 1.92$ ,  $SD = 1.24$ ,  $\alpha = .86$ ), avoidance ( $M = 3.55$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ ,  $\alpha = .71$ ), spying ( $M = 2.38$ ,  $SD = 1.32$ ,  $\alpha = .79$ ), infidelity ( $M = 1.73$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ ,  $\alpha = .76$ ), destructive conflict ( $M = 2.70$ ,  $SD = 1.29$ ,  $\alpha = .80$ ), and allowing control ( $M = 2.76$ ,  $SD = 1.17$ ,  $\alpha = .76$ ).

## RESULTS

To test the APIMs, multilevel modeling was used (with partners nested within the dyad and the dyad serving as the unit of analysis; Cook & Kenny, 2005; Kenny & Kashy, 2010) to examine actor and partner effects of attachment (i.e., secure, preoccupied, fearful, dismissive) on negative relational maintenance behaviors (i.e., jealousy induction, avoidance, spying, infidelity, destructive conflict, allowing control). Before estimating these models, the data were transformed into a pairwise data set to allow for dyadic analyses. Actor and partner variable scores were grand mean centered for interpretability (Kenny et al., 2006). Because our dyadic sample consisted of heterosexual couples, we tested for distinguishability between partners by contrast coding sex (1 = male, -1 = female) and using maximum likelihood estimation to determine if partner sex should be treated as a distinguishing factor (i.e., should separate effects be estimated for men and women) in the models (Kashy & Donnellan, 2012). We screened all APIMs (i.e., 24 models) by computing actor and partner by sex interactions using heterogeneous compound symmetry, and only six of these models

revealed significant interaction effects. Upon further inspection of the six models that produced significant actor-partner sex interactions, only two of these models produced significant deviance tests: preoccupied attachment predicting infidelity ( $\chi^2(4) = 11.775, p < .05$ ) and fearful attachment predicting allowing control ( $\chi^2(4) = 21.672, p < .001$ ). With only two of the 24 APIMs revealing empirical distinguishability by sex, we decided to pool the actor and partner effects for the sake of parsimony (Kashy & Kenny, 2000) and therefore all APIM analyses treated couples as indistinguishable. Pairwise intraclass correlations ( $\rho$ ) were computed to establish nonindependence of the dependent variables (Griffin & Gonzalez, 1995). The intraclass correlations were all significant and are reported in Table 1, along with bivariate associations among all variables.

All APIMs were calculated using compound symmetry (CSR) and restricted maximum likelihood estimation (REML) to report unstandardized and standardized parameters for actor, partner, and actor-by-partner interactions, standard errors, intercepts, and variance accounted for (pseudo  $R^2$ ). The complete reporting of all 24 APIMs and statistics are available in Table 2.

Overall, attachment styles produced 21 actor effects, 7 partner effects, and 1 actor-by-partner interaction explaining negative relational maintenance behaviors (see Table 2 for significant APIM effects in bold). These results supported our hypotheses, and answered each of the research questions in the affirmative. *Secure attachment* produced negative actor effects (betas ranging from  $-.20$  to  $-.32$ ) on jealousy induction, spying, infidelity, destructive conflict, and allowing control, and negative partner effects for infidelity and allowing control (betas =  $-.10$  and  $-.12$  respectively). *Preoccupied attachment* produced positive actor effects (betas ranging from  $.12$  to  $.39$ ) on jealousy induction, avoidance, spying, infidelity, destructive conflict, and

**Table 1** Intraclass Correlations and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Matrix

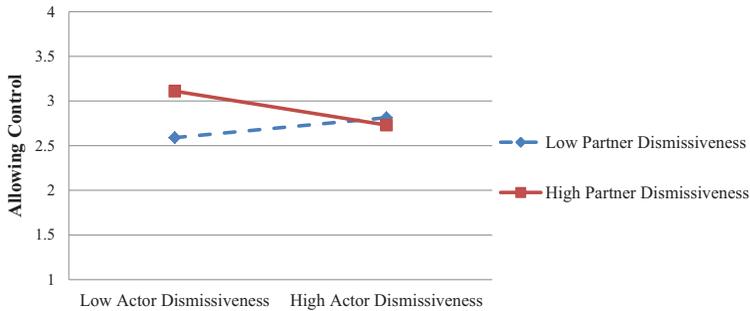
	$\rho$	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
<i>Attachment Styles</i>										
1. Secure	—	—								
2. Preoccupied	—	$-.61^*$	—							
3. Fearful	—	$-.52^*$	$.58^*$	—						
4. Dismissive	—	$-.04$	$.15^*$	$.31^*$	—					
<i>Negative Maintenance</i>										
5. Jealousy Induction	$.38^*$	$-.24^*$	$.20^*$	$.21^*$	$.20^*$	—				
6. Avoidance	$.21^*$	$-.04$	$.10^\wedge$	$.13^\dagger$	$.19^*$	$.27^*$	—			
7. Spying	$.37^*$	$-.17^*$	$.25^*$	$.17^*$	$.09$	$.40^*$	$.26^*$	—		
8. Infidelity	$.42^*$	$-.19^*$	$.11^\wedge$	$.19^*$	$.21^*$	$.51^*$	$.19^*$	$.39^*$	—	
9. Destructive Conflict	$.35^*$	$-.22^*$	$.26^*$	$.18^*$	$.15^\dagger$	$.38^*$	$.30^*$	$.54^*$	$.32^*$	—
10. Allowing Control	$.36^*$	$-.32^*$	$.38^*$	$.21^*$	$.01$	$.25^*$	$.21^*$	$.43^*$	$.24^*$	$.42^*$

Note.  $\rho$  = intraclass correlation. Correlations between variables 1–9 are Pearson Product-Moment correlations.  $^\wedge p < .05$ .  $^\dagger p < .01$ .  $*p < .001$ .

**Table 2** Multilevel Parameter Estimates for Actor Effects, Partner Effects, and Actor × Partner Interactions

Attachment Style	Jealousy Induction			Avoidance			Spying			Infidelity			Dest. Conflict			Allow Control		
	B	SEB	β	B	SEB	β	B	SEB	β	B	SEB	β	B	SEB	β	B	SEB	β
<i>Secure Attachment</i>	(Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> = .055)			(Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> = .000)			(Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> = .024)			(Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> = .166)			(Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> = .047)			(Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> = .113)		
Intercept	1.94			3.54			2.39			1.72			2.72			2.79		
Actor Effect	<b>-.29</b>	(.05)*	<b>-.25</b>	-.05	(.06)	-.04	<b>-.20</b>	(.06)*	<b>-.16</b>	<b>-.20</b>	(.05)*	<b>-.17</b>	<b>-.27</b>	(.05)*	<b>-.22</b>	<b>-.32</b>	(.05)*	<b>-.29</b>
Partner Effect	.02	(.05)	.02	.00	(.06)	.00	-.04	(.06)	-.04	<b>-.10</b>	(.05) <sup>^</sup>	<b>-.09</b>	.02	(.05)	.02	<b>-.12</b>	(.05) <sup>^</sup>	<b>-.10</b>
Actor x Partner	-.05	(.06)	-.04	.00	(.06)	.00	-.02	(.06)	-.01	.03	(.06)	.03	-.09	(.06)	-.08	-.10	(.05)	-.10
<i>Preoccupied Attachment</i>	(Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> = .041)			(Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> = .003)			(Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> = .064)			(Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> = .008)			(Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> = .067)			(Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> = .144)		
Intercept	1.95			3.54			2.40			1.74			2.71			2.76		
Actor Effect	<b>.23</b>	(.05)*	<b>.19</b>	<b>.12</b>	(.06) <sup>^</sup>	<b>.10</b>	<b>.31</b>	(.05)*	<b>.25</b>	<b>.11</b>	(.05)*	<b>.10</b>	<b>.30</b>	(.05)*	<b>.25</b>	<b>.39</b>	(.05)*	<b>.36</b>
Partner Effect	.00	(.05)	.00	.00	(.06)	.00	.01	(.05)	.01	.05	(.05)	.04	.01	(.05)	.01	<b>.10</b>	(.05) <sup>^</sup>	<b>.09</b>
Actor x Partner	-.10	(.05)	-.09	.03	(.06)	.02	-.09	(.05)	-.08	-.05	(.06)	-.04	-.10	(.05)	-.08	-.01	(.05)	-.01
<i>Fearful Attachment</i>	(Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> = .044)			(Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> = .011)			(Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> = .027)			(Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> = .037)			(Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> = .033)			(Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> = .055)		
Intercept	1.94			3.54			2.38			1.72			2.71			2.77		
Actor Effect	<b>.18</b>	(.04)*	<b>.21</b>	<b>.11</b>	(.04) <sup>^</sup>	<b>.12</b>	<b>.14</b>	(.04)*	<b>.15</b>	<b>.16</b>	(.04)*	<b>.18</b>	<b>.17</b>	(.04)*	<b>.18</b>	<b>.16</b>	(.04)*	<b>.20</b>
Partner Effect	.03	(.04)	.03	.04	(.04)	.04	.07	(.04)	.08	.07	(.04)	.08	-.01	(.04)	-.01	<b>.09</b>	(.04) <sup>^</sup>	<b>.11</b>
Actor x Partner	-.05	(.03)	-.08	.02	(.03)	.03	.02	(.04)	.03	.02	(.03)	.03	-.06	(.03)	-.09	-.04	(.03)	-.07
<i>Dismissive Attachment</i>	(Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> = .040)			(Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> = .033)			(Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> = .023)			(Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> = .039)			(Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> = .024)			(Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> = .016)		
Intercept	1.95			3.55			2.40			1.75			2.73			2.81		
Actor Effect	<b>.19</b>	(.06)*	<b>.16</b>	<b>.25</b>	(.06)*	<b>.20</b>	.06	(.06)	.05	<b>.23</b>	(.05)*	<b>.19</b>	<b>.17</b>	(.06) <sup>†</sup>	<b>.14</b>	-.04	(.05)	-.03
Partner Effect	<b>.12</b>	(.06) <sup>^</sup>	<b>.10</b>	-.03	(.06)	-.02	<b>.14</b>	(.06) <sup>^</sup>	<b>.11</b>	.05	(.05)	.04	.01	(.06)	.01	<b>.11</b>	(.05) <sup>^</sup>	<b>.09</b>
Actor x Partner	-.07	(.06)	-.06	-.02	(.06)	-.02	-.06	(.06)	-.05	-.05	(.06)	-.04	-.11	(.06)	-.09	<b>-.14</b>	(.06) <sup>^</sup>	<b>-.13</b>

Note. Significant effects are in bold.  
<sup>^</sup>p < .05, <sup>†</sup>p < .01, \*p < .001.



**Figure 2** Actor × Partner Interaction (Dismissiveness Predicting Allowing Control).

Note. Interaction was probed using a pick-a-point approach ( $SD = 1.03278$ ) where “Low” denotes  $-1$  SD and “High” denotes  $+1$  SD for Dismissive Attachment Style. Allowing control was grand mean centered.

allowing control, and a positive partner effect on allowing control ( $\beta = .10$ ). *Fearful attachment* produced positive actor effects (betas ranging from .11 to .18) on jealousy induction, avoidance, spying, infidelity, destructive conflict, and allowing control, and a positive partner effect on allowing control ( $\beta = .09$ ). *Dismissive attachment* produced positive actor effects (betas ranging from .17 to .25) on jealousy induction, avoidance, infidelity, and destructive conflict, and positive partner effects on jealousy induction, spying, and allowing control (betas ranging from .11 to .14). Uniquely, an actor-by-partner interaction was significant for dismissive attachment on allowing control ( $\beta = -.13$ ). To probe this interaction, simple slopes were calculated to determine the partner effect for actors who were high or low in dismissive attachment using the pick-a-point approach of  $\pm 1$  SD (Jaccard & Turrissi, 2003). The actor-by-partner interaction is displayed in Figure 2. The simple slopes analysis of the interaction revealed that when the actor’s dismissiveness was low but the partner’s dismissiveness was high, allowing control was used more frequently as a maintenance behavior.

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to conduct a dyadic investigation testing attachment theory’s ability to explain the use of negative relational maintenance. In other words, this study sought to answer the question: Why do some couples resort to using negative behaviors to maintain their relationships? The parsimonious answer to this question is that having an insecure attachment makes one or both partners resort to negative maintenance. However, a more detailed examination of these theoretical findings reveals a complex pattern of actor and partner effects that explains couples’ use of negative relational maintenance behaviors. Each attachment style will be discussed in turn.

First, in support of hypothesis 1, inverse actor effects were discovered for secure attachment and five of the six negative relational maintenance behaviors (except avoidance). Secure couples may not resort to using negative maintenance behaviors

because they are satisfied (Goodboy & Bolkan, 2011) and want to maintain a relationship built on trust and respect (Goodboy et al., 2010). Because secure partners tend to be more direct and constructive with their communicative responses to negative emotions (Feeney, 1995; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003), they are likely to view negative maintenance as counterproductive to the relationship. Interestingly, the results did not reveal a significant actor effect for secure individuals' use of avoidance. Although on the surface this finding might not seem to support attachment theory, it should be noted that respondents in Dainton and Gross's (2008) study identified avoidance as a negative maintenance behavior, but avoidance in and of itself might not always be antisocial. Caughlin and Afifi (2004) found that the motivation for avoidance determined whether it had a harmful or helpful effect on the relationship; it is possible, then, that secure individuals use avoidance for relationship-enhancing purposes rather than for self-protection.

As an answer to our first research question, which inquired about partner effects for secure attachment, there were two partner effects, suggesting that when an individual is secure, his/her partner is less likely to allow control or engage in infidelity as maintenance behaviors. These partner effects make sense and align with previous research, since secure individuals, who are more comfortable with closeness in the relationship, typically have partners who feel reassured and feel less of a need to resort to negative partner behaviors (Feeney, 2002). In line with attachment theory, secure partners might avoid using negative maintenance because these behaviors could undermine the quality and closeness of the relationship (Feeney, 2008).

As predicted by the second hypothesis, an opposite pattern emerged for insecure attachments, in that individuals with preoccupied and fearful attachments produced positive actor effects for all six negative relational maintenance behaviors. Accordingly, attachment theory explains why insecure individuals engage in negative maintenance. The fear of abandonment and rejection associated with the preoccupied style leads to hypervigilance and an inability to control negative affect, which in turn is associated with engaging in more antisocial behaviors (Creasey, 2002). That is, preoccupied individuals behave badly because they are so invested in the relationship they cannot restrain from expressing their anxiety. Fearful individuals, on the other hand, tend to mistrust their partners and interpret their partner's behaviors in negative ways (Lemay & Spongberg, 2015). Thus, individuals with a fearful attachment may preemptively engage in negative behaviors because they worry that their partner will behave badly.

Yet, there are surprises in these results. Why would preoccupied individuals, whose high levels of anxiety make them hyper-attached to their partner, engage in avoidance? Typically this style is described as having low attachment avoidance coupled with a desire for closeness and reassurance, making them highly expressive and disclosive. Guerrero and Jones (2005) suggest that results regarding the communication behavior of individuals with a preoccupied style are less consistent than the results for other attachment styles. In conflict situations, preoccupied individuals might feel emotionally threatened, leading them to engage in more controlled and cautious behavior, perhaps including topic avoidance (Guerrero & Jones, 2005).

Continuing with a discussion of actor effects, and in line with our second hypothesis, our results demonstrate that dismissive attachment produced positive actor effects for jealousy induction, avoidance, infidelity, and destructive conflict. These results are also in harmony with attachment theory and previous research investigating the behaviors of those with a dismissive attachment style. Individuals with a dismissive style tend to be more avoidant, less intimate, and seek to manipulate and control the partner (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Our results are entirely consistent with this pattern, as the two negative maintenance behaviors that are not predicted by a dismissive style are spying and allowing control; dismissive individuals are not attached enough to spy on their partner, and seek to gain control rather than allow control.

Turning to our second research question, positive partner effects were discovered for all three insecure attachments (i.e., preoccupied, fearful, dismissive) and allowing control, suggesting that individuals who have any of these insecure attachment styles have relational partners who forego their own interests and concede to their partner's wishes. These consistent effects for allowing control may be due to the fact that individuals in a relationship with a fearful or dismissive partner might recognize their partner's low concern for the relationship and offer more control as an incentive for them to remain involved. In contrast, preoccupied individuals might have partners who allow control to help decrease the individual's recurring anxiety about the relationship, since a preoccupied individual relies heavily on her/his partner and perceives more threats to the relationship (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; MacDonald, Locke, Spielmann, & Joel, 2012). Preoccupied, fearful, and dismissive individuals might have partners who use allowing control to ensure that the individual's relational and personal needs are being met, thus helping to maintain the stability of the relationship.

Additional partner effects were found for dismissive individuals; these individuals had partners who were more likely to engage in jealousy induction, spying, and allowing control, supporting the theoretical contention that individuals with a dismissive partner are likely to feel insecure in their relationship regardless of their own attachment orientation. Both jealousy induction and spying are a form of information-seeking in the relationship as one romantic partner is searching for information about the other partner's commitment to them or the relationship (Bell & Buerkel-Rothfuss, 1990). As such, individuals with a dismissive partner might use these strategies as a mechanism for assessing the state of the relationship; moreover, as indicated earlier, allowing control is likely a means to keep the less committed partner in the relationship.

As partial evidence of this speculation, the results of our third and final research question suggest that there is an actor-by-partner interaction for dismissiveness on allowing control. As revealed in Figure 2, allowing control is used most frequently to maintain the relationship when one partner is low in dismissiveness but the other partner is high in dismissiveness. In line with the principle of least interest (Sprecher, Schmeekle, & Felmlee, 2006), the less dismissive partner might use allowing control to permit the dismissive partner to make the decisions for both partners in the

relationship because of the discrepancy in value placed on the relationship (i.e., the nondismissive partner values the relationship more).

The collective results of this study are in line with attachment theory which predicts that attachment insecurity affects working models of relationships, and guides relationship experiences such as jealousy, distrust, and closeness, as well as behaviors such as disclosure, conflict, and sexuality (see Feeney, 2008). As Feeney (2008) noted, "Communication is the main avenue through which attachment relationships are maintained" (p. 467). Indeed, our collective results reveal that negative forms of communication are used to maintain romantic relationships when one or both partners' attachment styles are more preoccupied, fearful, or dismissive. Couples with attachment security, who prefer to deal with conflict and negative affect in more constructive ways (Feeney, 2008), did not resort to using negative maintenance.

### *Limitations and Future Directions*

There are several limitations to this study. Only 7% of our sample were engaged or married. Previous research has indicated that dating couples and married couples vary in the frequency and type of maintenance used (Dainton & Stafford, 1993; Stafford & Canary, 1991). Thus, although much of the maintenance literature has been built using nonmarried samples, it is important to consider how negative maintenance is used by married partners, including gay and lesbian couples. Indeed, another limitation of this study was that a heterosexual sample was recruited. With the exception of Haas and Stafford's (1998, 2005) scholarship, relational researchers have not yet adequately examined gay couples' relational maintenance. Third, long-distance relationships deserve more empirical attention, as the frequency and enactment of negative maintenance might occur differently for geographically distant partners; because individuals in long-distance relationships are more idealized and hold romanticized views of the relationship (Stafford, 2005) they may be less likely to engage in negative maintenance regardless of their own or their partner's attachment style. Finally, we acknowledge that since we distributed survey materials in communication classes, our sample might be slightly biased since these students could be more aware of relational maintenance issues.

Although our results are consistent with attachment theory, a significant amount of the variance in negative maintenance has yet to be explained. Future directions for maintenance researchers should include using additional theoretical perspectives to explain negative maintenance. Previously, maintenance scholars have used theories of equity (e.g., Canary & Stafford, 1992) and uncertainty (e.g., Dainton, 2003) to explain the use of prosocial relational maintenance behaviors. It may be that attachment beliefs are more predictive when perceptions of inequity or uncertainty are high as, for instance, when one partner puts much more effort in raising children than the other or when the future of the relationship is uncertain, which in turn influences the use of negative maintenance. Dyadic comparisons using these approaches should be

conducted as well. Finally, negative relational maintenance behaviors might be reactions to the suppression of basic needs in the relationship; accordingly, self-determination theory shows promise (Deci & Ryan, 2014) in explaining the dyadic processes behind negative maintenance.

### Conclusion

Attachment theory explains why individuals might enact maintenance behaviors that do not actually function to maintain a high-quality relationship. As predicted, attachment styles explained variance in negative maintenance behaviors, revealing both actor and partner effects. The results of this study suggest that romantic couples' working models of themselves and others contribute to relationship behavior, such that being insecure may encourage negative maintenance behaviors for one or both partners in the relationship.

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