Attachment Style's Impact On The Perception Of Self-verifying And Self-enhancing Comforting Messages

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ATTACHMENT STYLE'S IMPACT ON THE PERCEPTION OF SELF-VERIFYING AND
SELF-ENHANCING COMFORTING MESSAGES

by

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the connection between one's adult attachment style and one's evaluation of verifying or enhancing comforting messages. Drawing from research by Swann (2005) and Katz and Joiner (2002), the hypothesis predicted that an individual would prefer verifying messages over enhancing messages regardless of attachment style. A research question was also posed: Will an individual's adult attachment style moderate the degree to which a person perceives the communication of verifying or enhancing messages as helpful or effective? In an effort to find these answers, a questionnaire was completed by 251 individuals.

Results indicate a preference for verifying messages among participants regardless of attachment style. This is consistent with the findings of Katz and Joiner (2002) and Swann (2005). However, results did not indicate a significant difference between attachment style and a preference of enhancing or verifying messages.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER 1   INTRODUCTION

"Without friendship and the openness and trust that go with it, skills are barren and knowledge may become an unguided missile."

-Frank H.T. Rhodes

The communication of individual identities is a core element in the management of close relationships. Scholars identify two, sometimes competing, identity management processes at work in interpersonal interactions. The "self-enhancement" process involves messages that claim a positive identity for the message recipient whether or not a positive identity is supported by the facts of the situation. On the other hand, the self-verification process involves messages that claim an identity for the message recipient that is faithful with the recipient's own understanding of his/her identity whether or not his/her understanding is positive or negative.

Often, depending upon the situation, an individual's preference for enhancing or verifying messages may change. For example, research illustrates that a person will typically prefer a potential mate to have a more enhancing view of physical features (Swann, Bosson, & Pelham, 2002). However, as the situation changes and a relationship has been more established, verification may be more desirable. Katz and Beach (1997) found that individuals are most committed and satisfied with spouses who provide verifying feedback. Relational and situational goals factor in to an individuals preference of messages.

After reviewing the current research on self-enhancement and self-verification one element researchers have not examined is whether individual differences in people's attachment

style may also influence desires for self-verifying or self-enhancing messages. Examination of this possibility is the reason for this thesis.

1.1   Self-Verification and Self-Enhancement Research

1.1.1   Introduction

Research indicates that self-verifying (SV) and self enhancing (SE) messages play an integral role in relationship development and maintenance.   For the purpose of this research, self-verification represents the process of receiving feedback that matches the person's own perception of the self. Self-enhancement, on the other hand, describes the process in which an individual receives favorable feedback about the self whether or not the person's self perception is favorable (Katz and Beach, 2000). In the case that a person has a favorable self-image, favorable feedback is both enhancing and verifying. When a person has a negative self-perception, favorable feedback is enhancing, but not verifying and negative feedback is verifying but not enhancing.

Although there has been a great deal of research in this area, there is some debate concerning the conditions under which an individual prefers to be viewed as they view themselves (i.e., self-verification) or in a more positive manner (i.e., self-enhancing). Katz and Joiner (2002) suggest that a realistic and verifying view, similar to the individuals self evaluation, would provide the most effective environment for personal growth. However, a study by Swann, De La Ronde, and Hixon (1994) found that, "Individuals in romantic relationships were more intimate with partners who view them more positively as opposed to married

2

individuals who were more intimate with a spouse who viewed them as they viewed themselves" (p. 860). Depending on the situation, and interaction goals Katz and Joiner (2002) suggest that an individual may prefer to be seen in a variety of different ways.

1.1.2   Self-Verifying Messages

Self-verifying relationships represent an important element in an individual's life. Katz and Joiner (2002) found that "relatively mature adults are especially likely to feel known, intimate, and valued by self-verifying relationship partners" (p. 52). For example, in a mature romantic relationship, it is important for one partner to perceive the other in a realistic manner similar to the way that they view themselves. Through consistent evaluations of one another, relationship partners are more observant of a partner's strengths and better equipped to deal with limitations. This research concludes that the self-verification process plays an important role in relationship quality and individual personal growth.

A message of verification, more likely to provide personal growth, would provide an individual with a realistic evaluation of the situation (Katz & Joiner, 2002). For instance, when asked to evaluate your recent performance a friend may state that "the game you played was not your best performance, but we can practice more next week before your game." This statement would acknowledge a performance that could be improved, while encouraging growth. This type of verification provides the recipient with an honest evaluation and it is my hypothesis that individuals, regardless of attachment style, will prefer verifying messages.

In addition, Swann (2005) suggests that people prefer relationships in which the partner provides self-confirming messages. Research indicates that people prefer and seek self-verification from relationship partners, even if this means attaining evaluations that verify negative self-views. This is particularly true when the verification does not threaten some important aspect of their relational identity. For instance, one exception would be in the case of a romantic partner. If an individual's perception of self included ideas of unattractiveness, the individual may still seek a more enhancing view from a partner. However, in most other instances, people will seek relational partners who will confirm their own self-view. Self-confirming messages have been credited with improving work performance as well as impacting group processes. The positive effect of self-verifying messages can be contributed to an increase in the individual's perception of prediction, control, and interpersonal cohesion (Giesler, Josephs, & Swann, 1996).

With this information in mind, the Hypothesis in this study proposes that individuals will rate self-verifying comforting feedback as more effective than self-enhancing from a romantic partner following a non-identity threatening failure event.

1.1.3   Self-Enhancing Messages

In contrast, the SE theory suggests that an individual will seek relationships with those that will view them more favorably. Katz and Beach suggest that we are simply attracted to those

who value us (2000). SE theory is particularly valid when considering initial attraction in romantic relationships. While examining self-verification and self-enhancing practices in dating relationships, Swann, Bosson, and Pelham found that "people recognize that positivity on relationship-relevant dimensions is needed for their relationships to work…" (2002, p. 1225). For instance, in the beginning of a dating relationship, when physical attraction is considered a crucial element, individuals seek self-enhancing views from their relationship partner. They dress accordingly to attract the opposite sex and attempt to "negotiate identities with an eye to satisfy their interaction goals" (1216).Physical attraction plays a vital role in the initiation of romantic relationships, therefore the goal becomes to create an enhanced image in the partners mind. It is simply more effective for an individual to focus on presenting particular areas more positively during particular stages of a relationship (Swann, Bosson, & Pelham, 2002).

Favorable, self-enhancing feedback plays an integral role in initial attraction as well as ongoing relationships. However, in 2000, Katz and Beach found that self-enhancing feedback is most effective in potential romantic partners when it is combined with self-verifying feedback. In other words, although a potential mate may provide limitless positive feedback, the recipient must regard the feedback as genuine or else the potential mate may be viewed negatively. In fact, excessive self-enhancement may lead an individual to believe that the person has a hidden agenda. Both self-enhancing and self-verifying messages are important with in romantic relationships and must be balanced in order to initiate and maintain a healthy relationship.

Until this point, I have discussed research that deals primarily with individuals seeking a more positive, enhancing, view from a relationship partner. However, researchers have found that the opposite is also true. Often people with a negative self view prefer and seek negative

verifications. For instance, an individual, who views herself as unattractive, may feel uncomfortable with being seen as attractive, so she may seek companions who share her view of her level of attractiveness (Swann, Bosson, & Pelhan, 2007). In addition to this, people with a negative self-view are often less dedicated to relationships in which they are seen more positively (Swann, De La Ronde, & Hixon, 1994).

1.2   Attachment Research

1.2.1   Definitions

This research draws on Attachment Theory articulated by Bowlby (1988) as, "attachment theory regards the propensity to make intimate bonds to particular individuals as a basic component of human nature, already present in germinal form in the neonate and continuing through adult life into old age" (p. 120). In addition to this definition of attachment theory, it is also important to define attachment style. In 2000, Fraley and Shaver defined a person's attachment style as "the systematic pattern of relational expectations, emotions, and behaviors that results from a particular history of attachment experiences" (p. 132).These attachment experiences may involve a combination of positive or negative experiences, leading an individual to develop a secure or insecure way of attaching. Initially, this attachment process was observed in infants.

1.2.2   Infant Attachment Style

Bowlby (1969/ 1982) spoke of attachment relationships when referring to interpersonal relationships in which one person's emotional security depends on another person's sensitive,

responsive, and supportive care-giving. Bowlby as well as other researchers argued that infants are born with behaviors designed to assure proximity and support from adults. These behaviors are thought to have emerged throughout the centuries in an effort to increase the likelihood of survival. Researchers such as Bowlby and Ainsworth (1993) focused much of initial research on infants.

Initial research included mothers and infants. Bowlby found that approximately 70% of the infants studied were classified as securely attached. These children would show signs of distress when his or her mother would leave the room and illustrated signs of relief as the mother would return. Avoidant infants, on the other hand, represented 20% of the participants, and would show distress when mothers left and ignore her upon her return. The final 10% of infants studied illustrated an ambivalent attachment style. These children would become distressed when the mother left and would not respond to attempts at comforting when she returned. Although Bowlby focused a great deal on the attachment of infants, he did not limit the attachment system to children. These relationships are not only important during childhood, but Bowlby (1988) claimed that this attachment system also plays an important role during adulthood.

1.2.3   Adult Attachment Style

After the initial studies concerning infants, additional definitions and findings led researchers to develop categories for adult attachment behaviors. In 1987, Hazan and Shaver developed three categories to depict adult attachment styles: secure, avoidant, and anxious/ambivalent which were originally based on the studies of infant attachment. Later studies revealed that there are two fundamental dimensions involved in attachment. These dimensions include attachment related anxiety and attachment related avoidance (Brennan,

7

Clark, & Shaver, 1998). As research has progressed, researchers have begun to adopt the idea of

a two dimensional space which can be divided into four categories based on anxiety and

avoidance (Schachner, Shaver, & Mikulincer, 2005).

The two dimensional model has become widely accepted with adult attachment

researchers. Attachment avoidance, the first aspect of this model is typically referred to as the

extent that an individual distrusts a relationship partner. This is usually characterized by a desire

to maintain self-reliance and emotional distance.   The second portion of this model, attachment

anxiety, represents the amount that an individual worries that a partner will not provide comfort

during times of need (Schachner, Shaver, & Mikulincer, 2005). These two dimensions create a

continuum in which an adult individual may have an attachment style considered secure,

preoccupied, dismissive avoidant, or fearful avoidant (Bartholomew, 1990). This notion led

Bartholomew and Horowitz to create a four category model of attachment style (1991). Figure

one illustrates these four categories.

MODEL OF SELF
(Dependence)

	Positive (Low)	Negative (High)
Positive **(Low)** **MODEL OF OTHER** **(Avoidance)**	CELL I **SECURE** Comfortable with intimacy and autonomy	CELL II **PREOCCUPIED** Preoccupied with relationships
Negative **(High)**	CELL IV **DISMISSING** Dismissing of intimacy Counter-dependent	CELL III **FEARFUL** Fearful of intimacy Socially avoidant

Figure 1-1: Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) Four Dimension Model

These four categories are quite similar to the initial categories created for infants. Cell I represents a category in which a person may feel a sense of worthiness. These are individuals who generally feel that others are accepting and responsive to their needs. Cell II symbolizes an individual who feels a sense of being unworthy of love. This individual has a positive view of others, but a negative view of self, creating an environment where the individual strives for self acceptance by gaining the acceptance of others. Cell III is representative of an individual who has both a negative view of self as well as a negative view of others. This type of individual fears intimacy and distrusts others. They seek to protect themselves through distance and avoidance. Finally, in cell IV, dismissive individuals are represented. Dismissive persons have a positive view of self; however they have a negative view of others. They believe that they deserve love, however, others will disappoint, and therefore, they protect themselves through avoidance of

9

close relationships. Independence and invulnerability characterize these individuals (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991).

Having discussed the types of attachment styles in adults, it is important to note that the initial attachment of an infant has been linked to the attachment style of an adult. In fact, during a twenty year longitudinal study, researchers found that "individual differences in attachment security may remain stable throughout much of one's lifespan while remaining open to revision in light of experience" (Waters, Merrick, Treboux, Crowell, & Albersheim, 2000, p. 684). This study verified that early attachment style was significantly associated with adult attachment style. 64% of adult participants involved in this study had an attachment style which corresponded to the same style during infancy. This continuity suggests a possibility for attachment style to have a considerable impact upon many relationships throughout an individual's life.

1.2.4   Importance of Attachment

The process of attaching to other individuals involves a variety of dimensions. Attachment involves activities including provision of support, resources, affiliation, and care-giving behaviors (Mikulciner, Florian, Cowan & Cowan, 2002; Feeney & Collins 2003). Positive attachment experiences during infancy and adulthood are related to positive feelings such as joy, comfort, and contentment. Conversely, attachment experiences that are negative, hurtful, and traumatic can have negative effects on the individual's thoughts, emotions, and physical health (Sable, 2007). The attachment process involves many components and is essential to the development and maintenance of close relationships.

Research illustrates the important role that attachment style plays in romantic relationships. Relationship partners often provide us with support during times of grief and distress. The presence or absence of social support during these times can determine our ability to cope with such situations and influence how these events affect us (Burleson & Goldsmith, 1998). In addition, some research suggests that close relationships have the ability to increase perceived personal growth (Ruvolo & Brennan, 1997). Through close relationships, one is able to navigate through tough times as well as grow personally.

An individual's attachment style may play a considerable role in an individual's relationships. In a study conducted in 1987, Hazan and Shaver suggest that romantic love is an attachment process and thus dependent on an individual's ability to connect. They conceptualize romantic love as an attachment process, a "biological process designed by evolution to facilitate attachment between adult sexual partners" (p. 523). The attachment style of an individual may determine one's desire to seek particular relationship partners as well as the level of closeness pursued within these interactions.

In addition initial role that attachment style may play, an individual's ability to connect may also impact relationship interactions and satisfaction. In a recent study it was found that "one partner's attachment style was associated with the other partner's relationship satisfaction" (Kane, Jaremka, Guichard, Ford, Collins, & Feeney, 2007, p. 551). In fact, less support and less care were perceived by the partner of an insecurely attached individual. In other words, the quality of care-giving that is provided by insecure individuals impacts relationship outcome. In the end, research indicates that individuals are more satisfied with relationships in which they

feel "well cared-for" by their partners (p. 553). This is more easily understood when one considers some of the characteristics associated with particular styles of attaching.

Often, relationship development and satisfaction is impacted by typical characteristics associated with individual attachment styles (Brennan & Shaver, 1995). For instance, an anxious ambivalent individual is usually characterized by a fear of independence and autonomy as well as a tendency to drink or binge under stressful situations. These individuals may fall in love at first sight or express jealousy, clinginess, or overdependence in romantic relationships. Emotional instability and lack of trust are also associated with anxious ambivalent individuals (Mikulincer, 1998b). Characteristics associated with avoidant individuals include emotional distance and leaving in the midst of adversity (Brennan & Shaver, 1995). These individuals are the least accepting of their partners faults. Whereas the secure individuals are most accepting and sensitive to their partners needs. Secure persons tend to trust and share openly with relationship partners with a sense of flexibility, which often allows for deeper and more beneficial relationships.

An individual's relationships may be impacted not only by the characteristics that are associated with his or her attachment style, but also by their ability to cope with distress. In a study conducted by Mikulincer (1998a), attachment style was found to impact the way that an individual deals with negativity. In this study, avoidant individuals were found to respond to insecurity by detaching from distress related cues. Anxious ambivalent participants regulated mood by attempting to gain other's love and care. Conversely, secure persons' positive self view remained unaffected by distress. One's ability to cope with negative distress impacts an

individual's relationships in positive or negative ways depending upon the manner in which the stress is handled.

Research illustrates that attachment style also plays an important role in the perceptions of relationship partners (Fraley, Niedenthal, Marks, Brumbaugh, & Vicary, 2006). In a recent study, individuals were shown movies of changing facial expressions. Anxiously attached individuals were more likely to perceive positive or negative changes of emotion earlier than other securely attached participants. The heightened sensitivity is thought to lead to inaccurate assumptions regarding judgment of emotion. Results from this study led researchers to conclude that securely and insecurely attached individuals perceive visual cues with differing levels of vigilance.

Not only are close relationships important for the emotional well-being of an individual, they also provide a source of feedback for the self. In close relationships, an individual may receive honest and accurate evaluations from relational partners. When this occurs, an individual receives verification of strengths and is better equipped to accept limitations (Katz &Joiner, 2002). However, research indicates that insecurely attached individuals may not perceive the same cues as securely attached persons (Fraley, Niedenthal, Marks, Brumbaugh, & Vicary, 2006).

Research suggests that attachment theory not only influences an individual's actions, but may also play a role in people's perception of messages (Fraley, Garner, & Shaver, 2000; Jones, 2005). Results indicate that avoidant individuals are less perceptive and attentive during emotional events (Fraley, Garner, & Shaver, 2000). Thus avoidant individuals often encode less of the information available to them. In addition to this, Jones (2005) found that dismissive and

preoccupied individuals viewed low person-centered comforting messages more positively than secure or fearful avoidants. Avoidant individuals viewed affective communication skills as much more essential than non avoidant individuals. In other words, research illustrates that individuals perceive messages differently depending upon the attachment style that the person employs.

Does an individual's attachment style impact their perceptions of verifying and enhancing messages? For example, individuals with a preoccupied or fearful avoidant style of attaching have a negative view of themselves. This leads one to believe that they would prefer more negatively verifying messages rather than enhancing. Whereas dismissing individuals have a more positive view of themselves which would indicate that they would prefer more positive verifying messages or possibly more enhancing messages. A secure individual would probably be comfortable hearing either message. However research indicates that a verifying message would probably be the most preferred.

The current study tested one hypothesis and one research question.

Hypothesis 1: Individuals will rate self-verifying feedback as more effective than self-enhancing comforting from a romantic partner following a non-identity threatening failure event.

RQ 1: Will attachment style moderate the effect of an individual's preference of either self-verifying messages or self-enhancing messages?

CHAPTER 2   METHODOLOGY

2.1   Participant Recruitment and Experimental Procedures

In order to test the relationship between adult attachment style and perception of verifying and enhancing messages, a survey has been created to tap into these variables. Each variable will be measured using a separate scale (see attached questionnaires). The questionnaire was designed to measure the following variables: adult attachment style, evaluation of three verification messages, or evaluation of three enhancing messages.

Participants were recruited from two undergraduate communication classes at UCF during the spring term of 2008 (N= 248). The students were selected directly from classes with the consent of the instructor. Instructor consent was obtained via email prior to the experimenter coming to class to recruit participants. Extra credit was granted according to the desires of the professor involved. Anyone interested in participating in the questionnaire or an alternate assignment was offered extra credit.

After introduction to the study, participants completed questionnaire packets in which they completed three sections. Each participant received a questionnaire which contained the experimental stimulus messages, a measure of message preference, two attachment style measures, and a set of demographic questions. Participants completed the survey at their own pace and were given as much time as needed.

2.2   Experimental Stimuli

In the first section, three hypothetical scenarios were used to measure the evaluation of S.V. or S.E. messages. These hypothetical situations were constructed for use in this study. The scenarios were phrased in a manner which indicated poor performance on the part of the individual, yet also provided reasoning to alleviate feelings of failure. Scenarios include one classroom condition in which the individual is disappointed with a grade, one athletic setting in which the person does not play well, and finally a work setting in which the individual does not receive a promotion. These scenarios were chosen because each scenario places the individual in a situation that is relevant and realistic for the age of the participants involved. In an effort to maintain reliability, six versions of S.V. and S.E. message questionnaires were created by counter balancing the order in which the scenarios were presented in order to control possible order effects.

Prior to reading the scenarios, the participants received the following instructions: "For the following examples please imagine yourself in the situation that is described. You do not have to be currently involved in a romantic relationship, but try to imagine what it would be like to actually have the following conversations." After reading the scenario participants evaluated each message's effectiveness (described below). Table 2-1 illustrates the experimental stimuli used.

Table 2-1 Experimental Stimuli Table

Scenario	Scenario Description	Message
Poor Sports Performance	You just completed an intramural game. Although you have been unable to practice lately so you don't expect to play very well, but you hoped that you would still play well. Unfortunately, you play about how you expected, but not as well as you had hoped and your team loses the game. You tell your partner that you are disappointed with how you played and your partner says:	**Enhancing**: *"You shouldn't be disappointed. You played wonderfully. I think you played the best game of anyone out there."* **Verifying:** *"It's ok to be disappointed, you can't be the best player every time. Maybe before the next game, you can practice more. You'll play better next time."*
Bad Grade	You just took an exam in a subject that is difficult for you. You studied hard and hoped that you would do well, however you did not do as well as you had hoped and you tell your romantic partner you are disappointed with how you performed on the exam. Imagine that your partner then says:	**Enhancing:** *"What does that professor know anyway? You are so good in that subject and I know how smart you are! You really deserved an 'A'."* **Verifying:** *"It really isn't your best subject and everyone makes mistakes. Next time you have a test, we can study together and hopefully improve your score. It will be O.K."*
Lost Promotion	Recently, at work, you have interviewed for a promotional. You recognize that several others also want the promotion and that some coworkers may be more qualified than you (they have been with the company longer and have more experience in that area of the company). Today, you were informed that another more qualified individual received the promotion and even though you didn't really expect to get the promotion you feel disappointed. You tell your romantic partner how you feel about what happened and your partner says:	**Enhancing:** *"Those people don't realize what they are missing. You should have received that promotion. I think you would have been the best one for the job."* **Verifying:** *"It's ok. You may not have been the most qualified for this promotion this time. Keep doing your best and continue applying for promotions, you will get one someday."*

2.3   Measurement Instruments

2.3.1   Independent Variables

2.3.1.1   Attachment

The next section of the questionnaire entailed a series of 36 questions, the Experiences in Close Relationships questionnaire, which enabled the researcher to assess the participant's attachment style (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998). Two subscales can be created from this self-report instrument: avoidance (discomfort with closeness and depending on others) and anxiety (fear of rejection and abandonment).Using scores from the two subscales, participants can be categorized into the four adult attachment types. Sample items from the avoidance subscale are illustrated in examples such as "I get uncomfortable when a romantic partner wants to be very close" and "I prefer not to show a partner how I feel deep down." Samples from the anxiety subscale include, "I worry about being alone" and "my desire to be very close sometimes scares people away." Responses are scored on a five-point scale ranging from SA (strongly agree) to SD (strongly disagree). Participants were asked to think of how he or she generally feels concerning romantic relationships, not necessarily in a current relationship. The reliability and validity of this type of questionnaire has been repeatedly demonstrated (e.g. Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007; Gillath & Shaver, 2007). In the current study, the cronbach's alpha for the avoidance subscale was .88 and for the anxiety variable it was .92.

After collecting and counting the data, attachment style was broken down into the four adult attachment categories. The number of preoccupied individuals included within the enhancing condition was considered too small for meaningful analysis. Therefore, the preoccupied surveys were combined with the fearful avoidant surveys for further analysis. This

allowed the researcher to continue with data analysis without skewing or providing less meaningful results.

Also, enclosed in section two, the participant was asked to indicate which of Bartholomew and Horowitz's (1991) four attachment style descriptions best characterized him or her. This attachment style assessment tool enabled the individual to read four paragraphs which are typical of the four adult attachment categories and establish which paragraph that they believe to be most typical of him or herself. For instance the paragraph indicating preoccupied attachment read: "I want to be completely emotionally intimate with others, but I often find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like. I am uncomfortable being without close relationships, but sometimes worry that others don't value me as much as I value them." This evaluation method has also been utilized in previous research and illustrates a reliable measure for analyzing adult attachment style (e.g. Pistole & Vocaturo 1999). Unfortunately, the number of participants who identified themselves as "preoccupied" was very low, making proper data analysis difficult if not impossible due to small cell sizes. Based on the Hazan & Shaver (1987) model, the preoccupied individuals were merged with the fearful avoidant individuals because both groups tend to have high anxiety. An attempt to validate this decision involved computing two single variable analyses of variance using the three category system as the independent variable and the continuous measures of "anxiety" and "avoidance" as the dependent variables. Results of the ANOVA indicate, consistent with Hazan and Shaver's conceptualization, that "anxious/ambivalent" group was significantly more anxious than either the "secure" or the "avoidant" groups. In addition, the "avoidant" group scored significantly higher on the avoidance dimension than either the "anxious/ambivalent" group or the "secure" group. This analysis seems

19

to support the decision to collapse the preoccupied and fearful avoidant groups. See table 2-2.

Table 2-2 Validation of Attachment Style Categories

	Avoidant $n = 53$	Secure $n = 109$	Anxious/Ambivalent $n = 89$
Anxiety	2.30 (.60)a	2.35 (.55)a	2.92 (.65)b
Avoidance	2.64 (.63)a	1.97 (.50)b	2.29 (.52)c

Notes: Standard deviations are in parentheses. Means with different subscripts are different at the $p < .05$ level of significance.

2.3.2   Control Variables

The third section of the questionnaire includes basic demographic information concerning

the individual. Sex, age, and ethnic background of the participant were also collected.

2.3.3   Dependent Measure

Message Effectiveness

The dependent measure in the analysis consists of a ten item measures of message

effectiveness. Participants indicated their level of agreement on a five point scale (strongly

disagree to strongly agree) with each of the ten items. Cronbach's alpha was conducted for this

measure and reliability was found to be internally consistent (.913).

CHAPTER 3   RESULTS

3.1   Multivariate Analysis

Hypothesis one predicted that self-verifying messages would be judged more effective than self enhancing messages. In order to test this hypothesis, a MANOVA was computed using Experimental Condition and Attachment Style as independent variables as well as the interaction between Experimental Condition and Attachment Style. Message Effectiveness across the three scenarios served as the dependent variables. Results indicate that people rated the self-verifying messages more positively than self-enhancing feedback, Wilk's Lambda = .74, $F(3,243) = 27.37$, $p < .001$, $Eta^2 = .25$. Question 1 asks whether attachment style moderates the effect of message type on perceptions of message effectiveness. Results of the MANOVA showed no effect differences, Wilks' Lambda = .98, $F (6,488) = .86$, $p = .53$, Eta2 = .01. There were no interaction effects between the participant's attachment style and their evaluation of comforting messages. Although not a focus of theoretical interest, MANOVA results also indicate a main effect for Attachment Style, Wilks' Lambda = .947, $F (6, 486) = 2.22$, $p = .04$, Eta2 = .03.

3.2   Univariate Anova

Follow-up univariate ANOVA's were computed in order to examine effects across specific scenarios. The Table 3-1 illustrates the means and standard deviations across conditions and scenarios. The univariate ANOVAs reveal a main effect for message condition for the Bad Grade scenario, $F (1,245) = 37.83$, $p < .001$, Eta2 = .19, and for the Poor Sports Performance

21

scenario, $F(1,245) = 3.95$, $p = .03$, Eta2 $= .04$. No main effect for message condition emerged

for the Lost Promotion Scenario, $F(1, 245) = .086$, $p = .73$, Eta2 $= .00$. As with the MANOVA,

univariate analyses show no significant interaction effects across scenarios. Again, although not

a theoretical focus, the Lost Promotion Scenario resulted in a main effect for Attachment Style, F

$(2,245) = 5.51$, $p = .03$, Eta2 $= .03$. Follow up tests of differences among means using Tukey

tests indicate Avoidants perceived all messages to be less effective than either Secures or

Anxious/Ambivalents.

Table 3-1 Means and Standard Deviations Across Conditions

Attachment Style	Bad Grade Scenario		Lost Promotion Scenario		Sports Performance Scenario	
	Enhancing	Verifying	Enhancing	Verifying	Enhancing	Verifying
Avoidant	3.02	3.61	3.1	3.2	3.1	3.3
	(.85)	(.76)	(.81)	(.81)	(.98)	(.83)
Secure	2.85	3.71	3.5	3.5	3.1	3.3
	(.89)	(.87)	(.90)	(.86)	(.98)	(.87)
Anxious/	2.85	3.86	3.4	3.2	3.1	3.3
Ambivalent	(.75)	(.81)	(.80)	(.77)	(.74)	(1.0)
	2.9	3.7	3.4	3.3	3.1	3.3
Total	(.84)	(.83)	(.85)	(.83)	(.90)	(.91)

Note: Standard Deviations are in parentheses.

Table 3-2 Univariate ANOVA Analyses

Scenario	Source of Variance	F	P	η^2 (eta 2)
Bad Grade				
	Condition	54.44	.000	.18
	Attachment Style	.20	.820	.00
	Condition X Attachment Style	1.06	.349	.01
Lost Promotion				
	Condition	.124	.73	.00
	Attachment Style	3.70	.03	.03
	Condition X Attachment Style	.28	.995	.00
Sports Performance				
	Condition	4.72	.03	.02
	Attachment Style	.01	.76	.00
	Condition X Attachment Style	.00	.997	.00

3.3   Multiple Regression

As a way to validate the findings presented above, the underlying dimensions of

attachment (i.e., anxiety and avoidance) were measured using the procedure described in the

Methods section. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted using perceived

message effectiveness as the dependent variable and Condition, Avoidance, Anxiety, as the

predictor variables all entered on the first step of the equation. Interaction terms representing

Avoidance by Condition and Anxiety by Condition were entered on the second step. The results

of these analyses are depicted in Table 3-3.   The results of these analyses closely mirror the

univariate and multivariate analyses. Condition emerged as a significant predictor for the Bad

Grade and Poor Sports Performance scenarios but not in the Lost Promotion scenario. None of

the Attachment by Condition interactions were significant. In the Lost Promotion scenario,

Avoidant Attachment was found to be negatively associated with Message Effectiveness, but not

Anxious Attachment.

Table 3-3 Multiple Regression Analysis Table

Variables	R^2 Change	F Change	B	Pr	p
Bad Grade					
Step 1	.216	22.643			.000
Condition			.452	.450	.000
Anxiety			.061	.068	.285
Avoidance			-.048	-.053	.404
Step 2	.004	.566			.568
Condition X Anxiety			-.305	.085	.288
Condition X Avoidance			-.029	-.010	.912
Lost Promotion					
Step 1	.050	4.293			.006
Condition			-.054	-.055	.389
Anxiety			.096	.098	.123
Avoidance			-.194	.192	.002
Step 2	.001	.087			.917
Condition X Anxiety			-.129	-.026	.683
Condition X Avoidance			.015	.003	.957
Sports Performance					
Step 1	.030	2.511			.059
Condition			.137	.136	.032
Anxiety			.062	.062	.329
Avoidance			-.064	-.064	.316
Step 2	.010	1.231			.294
Condition X Anxiety				-1.00	.118
Condition X Avoidance				-.004	.949

CHAPTER 4   DISCUSSION

This study concluded that self-veryifying comforting messages were rated by participants as being more effective in two out of three scenarios studied. Both the bad grade and the poor sports performance scenarios received higher ratings for verifying messages. These findings support previous studies which indicate the importance and preference of self-verifying messages (Katz, & Joiner, 2002; Swann 2005).

Although self-enhancement may be appreciated on relationship-relevant dimensions (Swann, Bosson, Pelham, 2007), this thesis illustrates that verification is often preferred when dealing with daily disappointments. When considering the response of a romantic relationship partner, in both scenarios (poor sports performance and bad grade), most individuals rated self-verifying messages as more effective than self-enhancing messages.

Romantic relationship partners seek messages of self-verification throughout daily communication scenarios and are more likely to rate them more favorable than self-enhancing comforting strategies. Throughout these scenarios, participants were more content with realistic, self-confirming analysis of a scenario rather than receiving a more enhancing view.

Previous studies considering preference of verifying or enhancing messages have neglected the inclusion of attachment style. So, this study sought to verify whether or not individual differences in people's attachment style may also influence desires for self-verifying or self-enhancing messages. Although this research question resulted in no interaction effects between the participant's attachment style and their evaluation of comforting messages, an

interesting finding involved the Avoidant participants. Avoidants perceived all messages to be less effective than either Secures or Anxious/Ambivalents

4.1　Limitations of the Current Study

This research has some limitations. First, there is a possibility when using scenarios that the situation may not properly indicate true relational preferences. It may have been easy for an individual to rate messages from scenarios; however, a real life situation may impact the perception of these messages.　The use of a questionnaire may limit the real-life situational analysis. For instance, in the bad grade scenario, the survey illustrates that most individuals prefer their relationship partner to use a verifying comforting message. However, given the real situation, when one observes or tapes relational partners reactions to verifying or enhancing messages, nonverbal cues may illustrate otherwise.

In addition to this, because my participants were young and may have had less experience with romantic relationships and career decisions, the question pertaining to a lost promotion may have involved a type 2 error. Also, previous research indicates that "relatively mature adults are especially likely to feel known, intimate, and valued by self-verifying relationship partners" (Katz & Joiner, 2002, p. 52), however the participants in this study were not questioned with regards to maturity level. Therefore it is impossible to determine whether maturity level may have played a role in the current study. Possibly including a maturity rating scale or revising the lost promotion scenario would improve results.

4.2   Future Directions

Future research may benefit from including additional message evaluations. In the future, it may be helpful to analyze responses to a message which contains both self-verifying and self-enhancing ideas. Katz and Beach (2007) explain that this combination is most attractive to individuals who are considering attraction to a possible romantic partner. It is possible that this combination of messages would be appreciated throughout all communication during all stages of a relationship.

Additionally, it was noted in this research that more anxious individuals evaluated all messages less positively than other participants. This negative view of the messages may be related to the role that attachment style plays in people's perception of messages (Fraley, Garner, & Shaver, 2000; Jones, 2005). Or, it could indicate that anxious individuals may prefer a message that is less person-centered and more distracting. For example, possibly providing a message such as "Well, forget about the test, let's go play some basketball." A message like this may receive more positive assessments from more anxious individuals.

Also, there is a possibility that the preference of particular types of messages would change over the course of a relationship as indicated by Katz and Beach (2007). A study that included a variable indicating the relationship stage may impact the participant's perception of messages.

4.3   Implications of This Study

Establishing supportive and caring relationships represents a common goal for most adult individuals. Although there are a great variety of variables which impact these friendships and

romantic relationships, this research addressed the influence that an individual's attachment style plays when an individual evaluated verifying and enhancing messages within a relationship.

The results of this study contribute to current research in the area of self-verification and self-enhancement. Previous research has indicated that self-verifying messages are important for the growth of individuals and relationships (Katz and Joiner, 2002). In addition, Swann (2005) suggests that people prefer relationships in which the partner provides self-confirming messages. This study links these findings by taking into consideration individuals' preference of self-verifying or self-enhancing comforting messages. The results, which indicate that individuals consistently rated self-verifying messages more highly than self-enhancing lead one to presume that when comforting is necessary, one should consider utilizing a more self-verifying message.

Future research in this area could lead to a better understanding of the needs and wants of relationship partners. Previous research illustrated that self-verifying messages were found to help "mature adults" feel more known and intimate (Katz and Joiner, 2002). In the future, researchers should consider the positive implications that could result from comforting an individual in a manner which they feel most supported. This research could influence not only individuals but also relationship partners and lead to more positive interactions.

APPENDIX: QUESTIONNAIRE

Perceptions Of Communication

Instructions: For the following examples please imagine yourself in the situation that is described. You do not have to be currently involved in a romantic relationship, but try to imagine what it would be like to actually have the following conversations.

SITUATION 1: You just took an exam in a subject that is difficult for you. You studied hard and hoped that you would do well, however you did not do as well as you had hoped and you tell your romantic partner you are disappointed with how you performed on the exam. Imagine that your partner then says:

 "What does that professor know anyway? You are so good in that subject and I know how smart you are! You really deserved an 'A'."

Please rate how much you agree or disagree with each statement using the following scale:
SA = Strongly AGREE
A = AGREE
N = NEUTRAL
D = DISAGREE
SD = Strongly DISAGREE

This comment is helpful	SA	A	N	D	SD
This comment is honest	SA	A	N	D	SD
This comment is mean	SA	A	N	D	SD
This comment would hurt my feelings	SA	A	N	D	SD
This comment is appropriate for the situation	SA	A	N	D	SD
This comment is insensitive	SA	A	N	D	SD
This comment is something a person might say in real life	SA	A	N	D	SD
This comment shows that your partner understands how you feel in this situation.	SA	A	N	D	SD
This is what I would want my partner to say in this situation.	SA	A	N	D	SD
This comment would make me feel better.	SA	A	N	D	SD

Situation 2: Recently, at work, you have interviewed for a promotion. You recognize that several others also want the promotion and that some coworkers may be more qualified than you (they have been with the company longer and have more experience in that area of the company). Today, you were informed that another more qualified individual received the promotion and even though you didn't really expect to get the promotion you feel disappointed. You tell your romantic partner how you feel about what happened and your partner says:

"**Those people don't realize what they are missing. You should have received that promotion. I think you would have been the best one for the job**."

Please rate how much you agree or disagree with each statement using the following scale:
SA = Strongly AGREE
A = AGREE
N = NEUTRAL
D = DISAGREE
SD = Strongly DISAGREE

This comment is helpful	SA	A	N	D	SD
This comment is honest	SA	A	N	D	SD
This comment is mean	SA	A	N	D	SD
This comment would hurt my feelings	SA	A	N	D	SD
This comment is appropriate for the situation	SA	A	N	D	SD
This comment is insensitive	SA	A	N	D	SD
This comment is something a person might say in real life	SA	A	N	D	SD
This comment shows that your partner understands how you feel in this situation.	SA	A	N	D	SD
This is what I would want my partner to say in this situation.	SA	A	N	D	SD
This comment would make me feel better.	SA	A	N	D	SD

Situation 3: You just completed an intramural game. Although you have been unable to practice lately so you don't expect to play very well, but you hoped that you would still play well. Unfortunately, you play about how you expected, but not as well as you had hoped and your team loses the game. You tell your partner that you are disappointed with how you played and your partner says:

"You shouldn't be disappointed. You played wonderfully. I think you played the best game of anyone out there."

Please rate how much you agree or disagree with each statement using the following scale:
SA = Strongly AGREE
A = AGREE
N = NEUTRAL
D = DISAGREE
SD = Strongly DISAGREE

This comment is helpful	SA	A	N	D	SD
This comment is honest	SA	A	N	D	SD
This comment is mean	SA	A	N	D	SD
This comment would hurt my feelings	SA	A	N	D	SD
This comment is appropriate for the situation	SA	A	N	D	SD
This comment is insensitive	SA	A	N	D	SD
This comment is something a person might say in real life	SA	A	N	D	SD
This comment shows that your partner understands how you feel in this situation.	SA	A	N	D	SD
This is what I would want my partner to say in this situation.	SA	A	N	D	SD
This comment would make me feel better.	SA	A	N	D	SD

Questions About You

Instructions: The following statements concern how you feel about romantic relationships. We are interested in how you generally experience relationships, not just in what is happening in a current relationship. Respond to each statement by indicating how much you agree or disagree with it.

Please rate how much you agree or disagree with each statement using the following scale:
SA = Strongly AGREE
A = AGREE
N = NEUTRAL
D = DISAGREE
SD = Strongly DISAGREE

1. I resent it when my partner spends time away from me.   SA   A   N   D   SD

2. I turn to my partner for many things, including comfort and reassurance   SA   A   N   D   SD

3. When romantic partners disapprove of me, I feel really bad about myself.   SA   A   N   D   SD

4. It helps to turn to my romantic partner in times of need.   SA   A   N   D   SD

5. I get frustrated if romantic partners are not available when I need them.   SA   A   N   D   SD

6. I don't mind asking romantic partners for comfort, advice, or help.   SA   A   N   D   SD

7. I get frustrated when my partner is not around as much as I would like.   SA   A   N   D   SD

8. I feel comfortable depending on romantic partners.   SA   A   N   D   SD

9. When I'm not involved in a relationship, I feel somewhat anxious and insecure   SA   A   N   D   SD

10. I usually discuss my problems and concerns with my partner.   SA   A   N   D   SD

11. I find that my partner(s) don't want to get as close as I would like.   SA   A   N   D   SD

12. I tell my partner just about everything.   SA   A   N   D   SD

13. If I can't get my partner to show interest in me, I get upset or angry.   SA   A   N   D   SD

14. I prefer not to be too close to romantic partners.   SA   A   N   D   SD

15. I often worry about being abandoned.   SA   A   N   D   SD

16. I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on romantic partners.   SA   A   N   D   SD

17. Sometimes I feel that I force my partners to show his/her feelings for me.   SA   A   N   D   SD

18. I find it relatively easy to get close to my partner.   SA   A   N   D   SD

19. I need a lot for reassurance that I am loved by my partner.   SA   A   N   D   SD

20. I try to avoid getting too close to my partner.   SA   A   N   D   SD

21. My desire to be very close sometimes scares people away.   SA   A   N   D   SD

22. I feel comfortable sharing my private thoughts and feelings with my partner.   SA   A   N   D   SD

23. I worry about being alone.   SA   A   N   D   SD

24. I am nervous when partners get too close to me.   SA   A   N   D   SD

25. I often want to merge completely with romantic partners, and this sometimes scares them away.   SA   A   N   D   SD

26. I want to get close to my partner, but I keep pulling back.   SA   A   N   D   SD

27. I often wish that my partner's feelings for me were as strong as my feelings for him/her.   SA   A   N   D   SD

28. I don't feel comfortable opening up to romantic partners.   SA   A   N   D   SD

29. I worry a fair amount about losing my partner.   SA   A   N   D   SD

30. I get uncomfortable when a romantic partner wants to be very close.   SA   A   N   D   SD

31. I worry that romantic partners won't care about me as much as I care about them.   SA   A   N   D   SD

32. Just when my partner starts to get close to me I find myself pulling away.   SA   A   N   D   SD

33. I worry a lot about my relationships.   SA   A   N   D   SD

34. I am very comfortable being close to romantic partners.   SA   A   N   D   SD

35. I rarely worry that my partner will leave me.   SA   A   N   D   SD

36. I prefer not to show a partner how I feel deep down.   SA   A   N   D   SD

Instructions: Read each of the following paragraphs and put an "X" next to the paragraph that BEST describes how you feel about close relationships.

_____1. I am comfortable without close emotional relationships. It is very important to me to feel independent and self-sufficient, and I prefer not to depend on others or have others depend on me.

_____2. I want to be completely emotionally intimate with others, but I often find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like. I am uncomfortable being without close relationships, but sometimes worry that others don't value me as much as I value them.

_____3. It is easy for me to become emotionally close to others. I am comfortable depending on others and having others depend on me. I don't worry about being alone or having others not accept me.

_____4. I am somewhat uncomfortable getting close to others. I want emotionally close relationships, but I find it difficult to trust others completely or to depend on them. I worry that I will be hurt if I allow myself to become too close to others.

Demographic Information

Instructions: Please circle or fill in the response that best represents the following categories:

Your Biological Sex: Male   Female

Your age: _____

Your ethnic background:

Asian

African American

Caucasion (or western European)

Hispanic

Other_____

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