

RELATIONSHIP CONFIDENCE IN NEWLYWED MILITARY MARRIAGES:
RELATIONSHIP CONFIDENCE PARTIALLY MEDIATES THE LINK BETWEEN
ATTACHMENT AND COMMUNICATION

by

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationships between attachment style, relationship confidence, and constructive communication among a sample of 71 newlywed military couples. Using Karney & Crown's (2007) military adapted Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation model as a guide, the current study predicted that romantic attachment style (an enduring vulnerability) would be associated with couples' communication (an adaptive process) directly, and indirectly through marital confidence (a marital resource). Actor and partner effects were examined using the Actor Partner Interdependence Model (APIM; Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006). Results indicate that after controlling for financial worry and husband's rank, wives' avoidant attachment was directly associated with her constructive communication and husband's anxious attachment was directly associated with his constructive communication. Tests of mediating paths from anxious and avoidant attachment to relationship confidence through constructive communication were significant for wives. When accounting for anxious attachment partner effects were present between relationship confidence and constructive communication. The results suggest the importance of assessing for attachment style and relationship confidence when working with military couples in the early years of their marriage.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

Over the past decade, many media reports have highlighted stories of military marriages negatively impacted by military deployments and separations, (e.g., Sweeney, February, 2012; Carter, December, 2011) including reports purporting that divorce rates are higher among military couples who face war demands (e.g., McIntyre, 2005). But what do we know about the nature of marriage and divorce among military marriages? In their investigation of marriages in the military, Karney & Crown (2007) provide some evidence that these media reports may be overstated and perhaps even inaccurate indicating that military divorce rates may be more comparable to civilian divorce rates. However, they note the shortage of research on marital processes and outcomes for military couples, especially when compared to civilian couples. Research on factors impacting marital quality in the military has only begun to receive more attention (e.g. Allen, Rhoades, Stanley, Markman, 2010). This study contributes to this emerging body of literature focused on marital processes among service members and their spouses by investigating the relationships between attachment style, relationship confidence, and constructive communication among newlywed military couples.

The demands of military service, such as long work hours and long periods of separation due to deployment, may limit the time and activities that military spouses have together making communication, problem solving, and positive bonding difficult (Karney & Crown, 2007). Effective communication has been linked to successful adaptation and greater marital quality in numerous studies (for a review see, Gottman & Notarius, 2000). However, it is difficult to tease out *why* some couples communicate effectively and others do not. Attachment vulnerabilities may explain communication behavior in couples (e.g., Crowell et al., 2002). Individuals with secure attachment styles believe that relationships are stable and can be a source of emotional

safety where needs can be communicated. Those with an insecure attachment style often have anxiety about relationship stability leading to negative emotionality in communication, or they may prefer emotional distance in their relationships leading to avoidance around communication (Simpson, 1990). The military context may exacerbate attachment vulnerabilities leading to increased problems with communication.

Confidence in the future of one's marriage and the belief that problems can be overcome (Whitton et al., 2007) may provide one explanation of how attachment styles are linked to communication behavior in marriage. Securely attached individuals tend to believe that relationships are stable; thus, they may be more likely to have confidence in the future of their current relationship. Trusting their marriage will endure and believing that as a couple they can work through their problems may be related to better communication. Therefore, this study will investigate whether there is a direct relationship between insecure attachment (i.e., avoidant and anxious attachment styles) and constructive communication in a sample of newly married military couples and whether this relationship is mediated by relationship confidence.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Theoretical Model

Karney & Crown's (2007) "Integrative Framework to Account for Success and Failure in Military Marriages" will be used as a framework for this study (see Figure 1; *constructs tested in this study are shaded in the model*). This model is an expanded version of Karney & Bradbury's (1995) earlier Vulnerability, Stress, and Adaptation (VSA) model developed to guide research specifically on military couples. This study will test a portion of Karney and Crown's integrative framework which proposes that enduring traits are associated with adaptive processes both directly and indirectly through marital resources. The enduring traits described in this model are the individual vulnerabilities that each spouse brings to their marriage (e.g., attachment style). According to the VSA model, it is believed that individual traits are relatively stable and have an enduring impact on marital outcomes. It is proposed that enduring vulnerabilities are directly associated with adaptive processes, defined as the ways in which spouses communicate, solve problems and interact with one another. Added to the original VSA model is the construct of marital resources, defined as "attributes of a relationship that a couple may draw upon in times of stress" (Karney & Crown, 2007, p. 22). These attributes might include commitment, confidence, and relationship satisfaction. This study will examine confidence as a mediator through which an enduring vulnerability such as attachment is associated with an adaptive process, in this case, constructive communication.

Attachment as an Enduring Trait

Attachment was originally a conceptualization of the bond between a caregiver and child (Bowlby, 1969), and then grew to become an organizing framework for understanding adult romantic relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). In early experiences with primary caregivers

children develop internal working models that guide relationship expectations and behavior throughout life. Internal working models are the way in which children organize and make sense of the world and relationships through their early social experience (Bowlby, 1969). Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall (1978) described how internal working models could be divided into different attachment styles. These same styles guide research on attachment in adults although the names of these styles have been somewhat adapted depending on the measure (e.g., Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000). Insecure attachment styles fall on a continuum between two constructs: anxiety and avoidance (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998). Those who have an anxious attachment orientation are characterized by wanting to be close to their partners but questioning whether their partner will reject or abandon them. They seek proximity while doubting the availability of their partners (Simpson et al., 1996). Thus they may be more doubtful of their partner's supportive behaviors (Collins & Feeney, 2004). Those with an avoidant orientation are characterized by less investment in the relationship and greater emotional distance from their partner (Mikulincer & Florian, 1998). They avoid emotional proximity and respond negatively to the pressure for closeness (Mikulincer & Florian, 1998). In contrast, individuals with a secure attachment believe in the continuity of relationships and are more likely to seek intimacy and regulate negative emotions (Simpson, 1990).

Attachment styles are arguably stable traits (for a review of the debate see Cassidy & Shaver, 2008, p. 465-466). Supporting this hypothesis, the results of various longitudinal studies have found that infant attachment predicted later adult attachment (e.g., Hamilton, 2000; Waters, Merrick, Treboux, Crowell, & Albersheim, 2000). For example, Waters and colleagues (2000) showed that attachment style found in infants predicted later attachment style at 18 years old. A recent test of the nature of the stability of these attachment styles indicated that they follow a

pattern similar to that of personality traits (Fraley, Vicary, Brumbaugh, & Roisman, 2011). Thus, attachment style, like personality, can be categorized as an enduring vulnerability in relationships. Furthermore, Fraley and Brumbaugh (2004) found that the choice of partners that individuals make often stems from attachment styles and these choices may maintain the stability of these styles. This might also explain how attachment styles can remain stable after entering a new relationship in adulthood. One example of this is the perpetuating impact of an anxious partner and an avoidant partner (Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994). The reciprocal effects deepen the stability of each of these styles. The more an anxious individual tries to cling to their partner the more the avoidant partner feels pressure for closeness. This deepens the avoidant partner's pattern of needing to retreat and in so doing perpetuates the anxious partner's attachment pattern of questioning and clinging to the relationship (Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994). This pattern may be an underlying thread in conflict dynamics between couples (Feeney, 2011).

Adult attachment has been linked to various relationship dynamics (for a review, see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007, Ch. 10). Attachment security is related to satisfaction, commitment, trust (Simpson, 1990), and sexual satisfaction (Butzer & Campbell, 2008). Anxious and avoidant attachment styles have also been shown to lead to more reactivity in relationships around daily stresses (Neff & Karney, 2009) and to couple violence (Babcock, Jacobson, Gottman, & Yerington, 2000). Further, attachment related couple processes have been found to be associated with the development and maintenance of PTSD symptoms among veterans and secondary traumatic stress in their wives (Ein-Dor, Doron, Solomon, Mikulincer, & Shaver, 2010). This study seeks to understand how attachment styles are connected to relationship processes, namely, relationship confidence and constructive communication.

Attachment and Communication

Constructive communication is a hallmark of successful couple relationships. It has been found to significantly predict divorce (Gottman, 1994; Gottman & Notarius, 2000) and marital satisfaction (e.g. Caughlin 2002; Caughlin & Huston, 2002). Communication has consistently been linked to successful relationship outcomes in civilian studies (for a review see, Gottman & Notarius, 2000). For example, communication quality among newlyweds has been shown to predict marital satisfaction and stability up to ten years later (Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998; Gottman & Krokoff, 1989; Pasch & Bradbury, 1998; Rogge and Bradbury, 1999). Markman, Rhoades, & Whitton (2010) specifically investigated the changes in communication over time in a longitudinal study of couples transitioning to marriage. They found that after five years of marriage all couples showed decreases in negative communication but that non-distressed couples showed larger decreases in negative communication and increases in positive communication suggesting that couples who do well are better able to handle negative emotions and communicate more constructively.

When Karney & Crown (2007) proposed their expanded framework, there had been no research to date that investigated communication between military spouses. Since then, a few articles have been published on the subject. In a study of 434 couples, Allen and colleagues (2010) found that negative communication partially mediated the relationship between husband's PTSD symptoms and marital satisfaction. Further, when controlling for husbands' PTSD symptoms Allen et al. found that wives' reported higher marital satisfaction when adaptive processes such as constructive communication were active in the relationship whereas husband's satisfaction was not related to the adaptive processes in the model when controlling for his PTSD symptoms. This suggests that adaptive processes such as good communication may partially mediate the negative association between PTSD symptoms and wives' marital satisfaction.

Attachment style has shown to have strong associations with effective communication between spouses (e.g. Crowell et al., 2002; Creasey & Ladd, 2005). Those with secure attachments use more constructive communication tactics (O'Connell, Corcoran & Mallinckrodt, 2000). Guerrero, Farinelli, and McEwan (2009) identified communication as a partial mediator between attachment and relationship satisfaction. Communication patterns can be conceptualized according to different attachment styles. For instance, anxious partners have shown to react to conflict in destructive and coercive ways (e.g. Simpson et al., 1996), whereas avoidantly attached individuals are more likely to withdraw from communication since conflict is often perceived as a threat (Mikulincer & Florian, 1998; Paley, Cox, Burchinal, & Payne, 1999).

Attachment style has also been linked to how conflict is perceived by partners (Brassard, Lussier, & Shaver, 2009; Pietromonaco, Greenwood, & Barrett, 2004). Pietromonaco and colleagues (2004) propose that attachment styles are linked to the beliefs and expectations about one's partner and relationship and that these beliefs in turn influence conflict patterns. Anxiously attached individuals fear their partners might abandon them and may interpret conflict as a threat. This could lead to a lack of emotional restraint during communication. Avoidantly attached individuals may interpret conflict as pressure for self-disclosure which may lead to further distancing, decrease their belief that they can succeed and decrease their investment in communicating (Pietromonaco et al. 2004). This may be exacerbated in a military context where service members dealing with combat stress may not wish to share openly their experiences and emotions. This study will further test the association between attachment and communication and will investigate whether a marital resource (i.e. relationship confidence) partially mediates this association.

Relationship Confidence as a Mediator?

Relationship confidence has been defined as a sense of efficacy in handling couple conflicts and a belief that one's relationship will be successful into the future (Whitton et al., 2007). Relationship confidence encompasses a couple-level efficacy in which partners believe that together they can handle conflict and difficulty and maintain the stability of their relationship (Whitton et al., 2008). This construct has been negatively associated with negative interactions (Whitton et al., 2007) and positively associated with marital satisfaction (Kaplan & Maddux, 2002). Among military couples, relationship confidence has been linked to husband's PTSD symptoms and various adaptive processes including communication and positive bonding (Allen et al., 2010).

How might attachment styles be linked to relationship confidence? There are conceptual reasons to suppose that relationship confidence and attachment styles may be highly correlated constructs since part of having a secure attachment is trust in the stability of relationships. However, relationship confidence is also a distinct concept in that it highlights a couples' current level of efficacy or belief in their ability to effectively handle problems together. Secure individuals are more likely to believe that their partners are in it for the long term and are emotionally available (Simpson, 1990) and thus may seek to employ effective communication strategies (Pietromonaco et al. 2004). They are more likely to express genuine needs and adapt to the needs of their partner in conflict discussions (Simpson et al, 1996). An individual who believes in the emotional availability of their partner seems more likely to trust that relationships can last and will thus be more likely to risk vulnerability and openness during communication in addition to restraining negative emotionality. Attachment security may orient spouses to attend

to evidence that their relationship can last, thereby partially explaining why attachment security is related to better communication.

How might relationship confidence be linked with communication? Interdependence theory (Kelly & Thibaut, 1978) suggests that couple level processes including perceptions of the relationship transforms motivations from being self-centered to relationship-centered. The level of motivation of each spouse in turn impacts their behavior (Rusbult & Van Lange, 1996). Consistent with the expanded VSA model, *marital resources* may create motivation for *adaptive process* behaviors. Thus, it is plausible that if a couple believes they can successfully handle conflicts that their level of motivation to make an effort at communicating in healthy ways would increase. Likewise, if a couple struggled with poor communication, their belief in the success of their relationship would presumably go down. Interdependence theory also highlights the dyadic nature of these processes in which spouses relationship dynamics affect one another's behaviors, motivations, and perspective (Rusbult & Van Lange, 1996). Thus one spouse's motivation for effective communication may stem from their spouse's confidence in the marriage or the emotional tone they set through their attachment style.

Lack of confidence in the longevity of the relationship could explain why insecure attachment styles can be so strongly associated with communication strategies. For instance, since anxiously attached individuals do not trust in the stability of their relationship, they may be more likely to doubt the ability they have as a couple to succeed. This lack of confidence can weaken the motivation to communicate effectively and negative communication strategies may be used to gain reassurance. Avoidantly attached individuals may also lack trust in their future as a couple since they are more prone to seek independence. Their lack of confidence however might lead them to retreat and emotionally disengage. Although there are conceptual differences

in how poor communication may be expressed according to the different attachment styles, this study will only investigate whether relationship confidence is a significant mediator through which attachment styles are associated with constructive communication.

Control Variables

A number of demographic variables have demonstrated connections with relationship outcomes and processes. For instance, research has shown that parent's marital status is associated with their adult children's negative attitudes toward marriage, lack of commitment, and relationship quality (Cui & Fincham, 2010). Couples with a history of cohabitation prior to marriage have shown poorer outcomes than those without this history (e.g. Kamp Dush, Cohan, & Amato, 2003), particularly in regards to those who cohabit without a strong commitment to marriage and instead "slide" into marriage (Stanley, Rhoades, & Markman, 2006). Relationship length has also been used as a control among cohabiting (e.g. Willoughby, Carroll, Busby, 2012) and newlywed couples (e.g., Kouros, Papp, & Cummings, 2008). Differences in marital processes have been associated with military specific contexts including deployment (e.g. Allen et al., 2010) and service members' rank in the military has previously been considered in analyses of marital dissolution rates (Karney & Crown, 2007). In addition, military couples with children who are in their first marriage experience the military as less stressful whereas those who bring children into a second or subsequent marriage experience it as more stressful (Karney & Crown, 2007). Various reports indicate financial strain to be common among military couples (Adler-Baeder et al., 2005; Wolpert et al., 2000). While there is no research on the effects of economic strain on military couples, research on civilian marriages have found economic strain to impact longitudinal rates of marital distress and dissolution (Conger et al., 1990) and that this impact is mediated through the negative effect of economic strain on couple's communication

(Conger, Rueter, and Elder, 1999). It seems likely that financial burden could affect feelings of security and confidence in the future of the relationship. In addition, a higher rank in the military could bolster confidence among couples facing military demands. This study sought to highlight how attachment, confidence, and communication would be linked together considering various demographic variables including number of children, parent's marital status, rank, deployment, wife's financial worry, husband's financial worry, relationship length, and cohabitation history.

The Present Study

The present study sought to test the following hypotheses:

1. Husbands' and wives' attachment style (i.e., avoidant and anxious attachment) will be negatively associated with their own and their spouses' constructive communication.
2. Husbands' and wives' attachment style will be negatively associated with their own and their spouses' relationship confidence.
3. Husbands' and wives' relationship confidence will be positively associated with their own and their spouses' constructive communication.
4. Relationship confidence will partially mediate the association between attachment style and constructive communication.

To test these hypotheses a portion of Karney and Crown's (2007) "Integrative Framework" was used in which both individual characteristics and marital resources are associated with adaptive processes. The model suggests that individual characteristics (such as attachment style) have a direct link to adaptive processes (communication) and an indirect link through marital resources (relationship confidence). This study investigated whether attachment is associated with constructive communication and to what degree relationship confidence mediates this association for both insecure attachment styles (anxious and avoidant). Partner

effects were furthermore investigated to determine whether each person's attachment style is associated with their partner's relationship confidence and constructive communication.

This study seeks to contribute to the limited amount of research on military couples. In particular it highlights certain relationship processes during a high risk period of marriage and a potentially vulnerable transition during military service. Given that military couples marry younger and may be qualitatively different than civilian marriages in many other aspects such as longer working hours, frequent relocations, and deployments (Adler-Baeder, Pittman, & Taylor, 2005), it is important to consider the way military couples draw upon relationship confidence and employ effective communication in their marriage considering the attachment styles and stressful context in which these relationship processes develop.

Chapter 3 - Method

Research Design

The data for this study uses the first wave of the *Transition to Marriage in the U.S. Military Study*, a longitudinal study of U.S. military service members and their spouses who participate in an on-line survey every six months over the first four years of their marriage. Participants for this study were recruited through a variety of convenience sampling methods including newspaper advertisements, county marriage certificate records, and through connecting with individuals that are part of the local military community. Once both partners in the couple relationship filled out the survey the couple received an incentive of \$30. This paper specifically analyzed the results of the first wave of data. In order to be included in the study participants had to have been recently married (within a year) or engaged to be married (within six months) and to be in their first marriage. In addition, at least one of the partners had to be a member of the military, they both had to be at least 18 years old, and they both had to be proficient enough in English to be able to complete the survey. Data collection was carried out through an online survey in which both partners provided separate email addresses and were sent a unique link to the survey.

Sample

Participants were selected from a sample of 86 couples who originally enrolled in the study. Fifteen couples were excluded from the current analyses because they were either dual military couples or the female partner was military and married to a civilian husband. In one case neither provided military information and thus they were excluded. The current sample consists of 71 recently married (within 1 year) or soon-to-be married (within 6 months) couples where the male partner is a member of the U.S. military. A variety of service branches were represented,

including the Army (74.3%), Army Reserves (11.4%), Air Force (5.7%), Marine Corps (5.7%), and Navy (2.9%). Most of the soldiers in this study were junior enlisted, with 50.7% holding a rank between E1 and E4 and 18.3% between E5 and E9. The remaining 31% of the soldiers were officers, both warrant officers and commissioned officers. Just under half of the military members (47.9%) in the sample have been or were currently deployed overseas since 2001. Of those that experienced deployment, the majority had deployed once (76.8%), 13.3% deployed twice, and 9.9% had deployed more than twice.

The mean age for the soldiers in the sample was 24.28 years ($SD = 4.02$) and was 23.23 years ($SD = 3.63$) for the spouses (for brevity, the term spouse is used to refer to the soldier's female partner, whether married or engaged). Just over 14.3% had been a couple one year, 31.4% had been a couple between one and two years, 20% between two and three years, and the remaining 34.3% had been a couple for more than three years. The majority of participants self-identified as European American (82.4%), 6.3% as Asian or Pacific Islander, 6.3% as Latino/a, 7.0% as African American, American Indian as 4.9% and 1.4% as multiracial.

Measures

Adult Attachment. The Experience of Close Relationships- Relationship Structures questionnaire (ECR-RS; Fraley, Heffernan, Vicary, & Brumbaugh, 2011) is a self-report measure of attachment and was used in this study to assess the individual spouse's attachment to their current partner. Participants rated their agreement (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*) on 9 questions. The ECR-RS assesses two dimensions of attachment: anxiety and avoidance. Three items reflect attachment-related anxiety which refers to how much the individual fears their partner will reject or abandon them (e.g., "I'm afraid that this person may abandon me"). Six items reflect attachment-related avoidance which refers to how comfortable

the individual is with closeness to their partner (e.g., “I don’t feel comfortable opening up to this person”). When the individual is low on both dimensions it is said that they have a secure attachment to their current partner. Total mean scores were taken for each subscale with a possible range from 1 to 7 for each subscale. Higher scores on each scale indicate greater anxiety or avoidance and thus less secure attachment. The anxious and avoidant attachment subscales of the ECR-RS in the current sample demonstrated high reliability ($\alpha = .81$; $\alpha = .80$; respectively). In this study, attachment is measured as one’s attachment to their current partner, but it is presumed that attachment is an enduring trait that remains relatively stable over time.

Relationship Confidence. The confidence scale (CS) developed by Stanley, Hoyer, and Trathen (1994) was used to measure each individual spouse’s confidence in the future of their marriage. A 7-point scale is used in which participants rate their agreement (*Strongly disagree* to *Strongly agree*) on 10 items. This study utilized 4 items from the 10 item scale. Sample items include, “I believe we can handle whatever conflicts will arise in the future.” and “I am very confident when I think of our future together.” A total mean score was computed with a possible range from 1 to 7. In the current sample the CS demonstrated high reliability with an alpha of .91.

Constructive Communication. How well couples communicate in this sample was measured using the Communication Patterns Questionnaire-Constructive Communication subscale (CPQ-CC; Heavey, Larson, Zumtobel, & Christensen, 1996). This 7-item subscale assesses a couples’ ability to handle conflict. A 9-point scale is used in which participant responses range from *very unlikely* to *very likely*. The total score consists of the sum of the three constructive items (mutual discussion, mutual expression, and mutual negotiation) minus the sum of the four destructive items (mutual blame, mutual threat, husband verbal aggression, and

wife verbal aggression). The total score for the destructive items were computed and subtracted from the total score of the constructive items producing an overall total score for the measure. For constructive scores there is a possible range from 3 to 27 and for destructive scores there is a possible range from 4 to 36. In the present sample the CPQ-CC demonstrated internal consistency where the constructive scale had an alpha of .89 and the destructive scale had an alpha of .86.

Control Variables. Financial worry and husband's rank were included as control variables in the two models. One item assessed financial worry: "How often do you worry that your total family income will not be enough to meet your family's expenses and bills." Possible responses ranged from "never" (1) to "almost all the time" (5). Respondents were asked "What is your current rank?" Options included various levels of being enlisted or officers. Rank was scored along a continuum of lower rank to higher rank ranging in values from 2 to 17, where E2 was the lowest rank (2) and O3 was the highest rank (17).

Analytic Procedures

The Actor Partner Interdependence Model (APIM; Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006) was used to analyze the data. The APIM is a dyadic data procedure that captures the interdependent effects of each variable between partners. The APIM estimates the effect of one's independent variable on one's own dependent variable (actor effect) and one's independent variable on their partner's dependent variable (partner effect). Data were analyzed using Mplus 6.0 with maximum likelihood estimation (ML) which was chosen after assumptions of normality were met. Missing data were handled through full information maximum likelihood estimation (FIML) procedure, which has been shown to produce less biased results than listwise deletion, pairwise deletion or mean substitution and produces comparable results to multiple imputations

(Acock, 2005). Mediating paths were tested using a bootstrapping analysis with 2,000 bootstraps (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Two APIM models were tested in the current study—one examining spouses' levels of avoidant attachment on relationship confidence and communication, and one examining the spouses' levels of anxious attachment on relationship confidence and communication. Correlations were run for 8 potential control variables and two were selected (financial worry and rank) to be run as part of each model.

Chapter 4 - Results

To test the research questions and hypotheses it was first determined which control variables could be added to the proposed models. Eight variables were considered as possible controls including number of children, parent's marital status, rank, deployment, wife's financial worry, husband's financial worry, relationship length, and cohabitation. After running correlations between each potential control variable and the outcome variable (constructive communication) it was determined to include wife's financial worry ($r = -.39, p < .01$), husband's financial worry ($r = -.43, p < .01$), and rank ($r = .19, p = .11$) in the models. Financial worry had the most significant relationships with constructive communication across all considered control variables. Rank was included for its demographic significance though it was not significantly related to constructive communication in the analysis. More control variables were not added to preserve sufficient statistical power.

Correlations

Correlations between the measured constructs are shown Table 1. There were several important findings from this analysis. First, the relationship between avoidant attachment style and constructive communication was significant for both husbands ($r = -.63, p < .01$) and wives ($r = -.40, p < .01$). Second, the relationship between avoidant attachment style and relationship confidence was significant for both husbands ($r = -.56, p < .01$) and wives ($r = -.69, p < .05$). Third, the relationship between anxious attachment style and constructive communication was significant for both husbands ($r = -.53, p < .01$) and wives ($r = -.48, p < .01$). Fourth, the relationship between anxious attachment style and relationship confidence was significant for both husbands ($r = -.63, p < .01$) and wives ($r = -.52, p < .01$). Fifth, the correlation between relationship confidence and constructive communication was significant for both husbands ($r =$

.64, $p < .01$) and wives ($r = .43$, $p < .01$). In addition, the correlations among parallel constructs between husbands and wives were also significant ($r = .38$, $p < .01$ between avoidant attachment; $r = .26$, $p < .05$ between anxious attachment; $r = .19$, $p = .12$ between relationship confidence; and $r = .53$, $p < .01$ between constructive communication), indicating dyadic association among all variables except relationship confidence. All other correlations in the analysis were consistent with expectations.

Dyadic Models

Figure 2 shows the results for the APIM model for *avoidant* attachment, relationship confidence, and constructive communication for husbands and wives while controlling for rank and financial worry. Figure 3 shows the results for *anxious* attachment, relationship confidence, and constructive communication for husbands and wives while controlling for rank and financial worry. Each model displays the actor and partner effects. For example, the association between a wife's confidence with her own communication is an "actor effect" while the association between a husband's confidence with his wife's communication is a "partner effect."

Avoidant Model

Figure 2 provides the standardized path coefficients in the avoidant model. First, the direct actor path from wives' avoidance to their own constructive communication was significant ($\beta = -.26$, $p < .01$), while husbands' avoidance to their own constructive communication was not significant. Second, for both husbands and wives the actor paths from their own avoidance to their own confidence were significant ($\beta = -.59$, $p < .001$; $\beta = -.50$, $p < .001$; respectively). Third, the actor path from wives' relationship confidence to their own communication was significant ($\beta = .47$, $p < .001$) but this path was not significant for husbands. Finally, two partner paths were significant in the model. Wives' avoidance was significantly associated with husband's

constructive communication ($\beta = -.24, p < .05$), as well as with husband's relationship confidence ($\beta = -.23, p < .05$). As shown in the model, the various other predicted paths were non-significant.

Anxious Model

Figure 3 provides the standardized path coefficients in the anxious attachment model. First, the direct path from attachment anxiety to constructive communication was significant for husbands ($\beta = -.25, p < .05$) but not for wives. Second, just as in the avoidant model, for both husbands and wives the actor paths from their own anxiety to their own confidence were significant ($\beta = -.45, p < .001$; $\beta = -.59, p < .001$; respectively). Third, the actor path from relationship confidence to constructive communication was significant for both husbands and wives ($\beta = .21, p < .05$; $\beta = .50, p < .001$; respectively) although the path coefficient was larger for wives. Finally, two partner paths were significant in the model. Unlike the avoidant model, for both husbands and wives, the partner paths from their own confidence to their partners' communication were significant ($\beta = .36, p < .001$; $\beta = .27, p < .05$; respectively).

Tests of Mediating Pathways

Bootstrapping procedures were used to test the mediating pathways (Preacher & Hayes, 2008) in both dyadic models (see Table 2). The actor indirect effect from avoidance \rightarrow confidence \rightarrow communication was significant for wives, ($b = -2.33, p < .05, CI = -4.50, -.47$). Likewise, the actor indirect effects from anxiety \rightarrow confidence \rightarrow communication was significant for wives ($b = -1.93, p < .01, CI = -3.22, -.63$). Evidence for mediating effects through combined actor and partner pathways were found in the anxious model where Husband's anxiety \rightarrow husband's confidence \rightarrow wives' communication was significant ($b = -1.38, p = .05$,

CI = -3.17, -.20) and wives' anxiety → wives' confidence → husband's communication was significant ($b = -1.12$, $p < .05$, CI = -2.71, -.06).

The overall model for avoidant attachment accounted for 35% of the variance in wives' confidence, 62% of the variance in wives' communication, 54% of the variance in husbands' confidence, and 41% of the variance in husbands' communication. The overall model for anxious attachment accounted for 44% of the variance in wives' confidence, and 59% of the variance in wives' communication, 30% of the variance in husbands' confidence, and 42% of the variance in husbands' communication.

Chapter 5 - Discussion

The purpose of this study was to test a portion of Karney & Crown's (2007) conceptual model specifying the associations between insecure attachment styles, relationship confidence, and constructive communication in a sample of newlywed U.S. Military couples. It was expected that anxious and avoidant attachment styles would be associated with both relationship confidence and constructive communication and that relationship confidence would partially mediate the relationship between attachment insecurity and constructive communication. Each partner's attachment insecurity, relationship confidence, and constructive communication would be taken into account to understand the dyadic relevance of these variables.

Avoidant Model

Significant actor and partner paths were found in the avoidant attachment model. The hypothesis that attachment avoidance would be negatively related to constructive communication was supported for wives but not for husbands. However, wives' avoidance was negatively related to husbands' communication. The hypothesis that attachment avoidance would be negatively associated with relationship confidence was supported for both husbands and wives. In addition, wives' avoidance was negatively related to her spouses' confidence but not the other way around. Relationship confidence *partially* mediated the link between wives' avoidant attachment and communication supporting the third hypothesis, at least for wives. Husband's confidence was not related to their own communication, which was somewhat surprising, but wives' confidence was positively associated with their own communication, as hypothesized. A trend shown in previous research that may explain these results is that wives typically engage more in relational maintenance behaviors (Acitelli, 1992) which may contradict behaviors typical of an avoidant style such as emotional distance (Simpson, 1990). It may be that husbands in this

sample communicate more on the basis of the relational tone set by his wife rather than his own avoidant tendencies or personal beliefs about the relationship. Thus, wives with more avoidant attachment styles may engage in less relational maintenance behaviors which could affect a husband's confidence in the relationship and decrease his motivation to communicate effectively.

Anxious Model

Significant actor and partner paths were also found in the model accounting for anxious attachment. The hypothesis that attachment anxiety would be negatively associated with constructive communication was supported for husbands but not for wives. However, relationship confidence *fully* mediated the path from wives' anxious attachment to own constructive communication. For husbands', the mediation tests were not significant, though this may be the result of inadequate power. Also, wives' attachment anxiety was positively associated with husband's constructive communication. Both spouses attachment anxiety was positively associated with their own relationship confidence again supporting the third hypothesis. In addition, husband's and wives' relationship confidence was positively related to their own and to their partner's constructive communication. Why were these mutual partner effects present when accounting for anxious attachment? One possible explanation for these links could be the nature of highly anxious individuals. An anxious individual is more likely to doubt the availability of their spouse (Simpson et al., 1996) and thus may try to gauge his/her partner's confidence in the relationship. This sensitivity may then be reflected in how each partner communicates. Thus an anxious attachment style may orient spouses towards this gauging of their partner's confidence which in turn may impact their desire and motivation to communicate effectively. Military couples going through post-deployment transitions have been shown to make assessments of the state of their relationship including questions about their partner's view

of the relationship (Theiss & Knobloch, 2011). Accordingly, relationship confidence may have a highly salient influence on individual and spousal behavior between couples in a military context. This finding supports the view proposed in interdependence theory that spouses affect and are affected by one another and that their motivation for certain behaviors can be explained through the interdependent processes between partners (Rusbult & Van Lange, 1996). This perspective may highlight how marital resources possibly function between partners and how this could motivate pro-relationship behaviors between spouses. Marital resources are considered attributes of the relationship that buffer couples against stress. Couples who assess their relationship as having what it takes to endure and who can potentially sense this confidence in their partner would theoretically have a resource that would lead them to be more motivated to communicate effectively and handle difficult moments in their relationship.

In the anxious model, husbands' relationship confidence *fully* mediated the link between husbands' anxious attachment and their wives' constructive communication. Further, wives' confidence *partially* mediated the link between her anxious attachment and her husband's communication. This means that wives' constructive communication is only connected with her husbands' anxious attachment through his confidence in the relationship and husbands' communication is connected with his wife's anxious attachment both directly and indirectly through her confidence in the relationship. Why these differences between spouses? Husbands may be affected by other attributes manifest in an anxious attachment style other than those that are related to confidence. Anxious partners have a tendency to pressure for closeness which may not have anything to do with their future confidence. One example may be how soldier husbands who are in an atmosphere where vulnerability can be seen as a weakness (e.g. training for war scenarios) may have difficulty transitioning from work to home where emotional expressiveness

may be more expected. Thus, husbands may respond more to an anxious partner's pressure for emotional disclosure rather than his own belief in the state of the relationship by distancing himself or conveying annoyance or frustration with bids for emotional connection. Wives' communication behavior was only associated with her husband's attachment style through his confidence in the relationship. As noted previously, wives may pay more attention than husbands to the state of the relationship (Acitelli, 1992). Thus a wife may track her husband's immediate beliefs around the relationship rather than responding on the basis of other manifestations of an anxious attachment style, such as pressure for closeness.

Avoidant and Anxious Models

Similar to both models was the partner effect between wives' attachment style and husbands' constructive communication. The finding that husband's attachment styles had no significant partner effects on his spouse was somewhat surprising since another study has shown men's avoidant attachment to be associated with his partner's perceptions of conflict whereas women's avoidance was not linked with her partner's perceptions (Brassard, Lussier, & Shaver, 2009). This study however consisted mostly of European (non-military) cohabiting couples (69.9%) who were nearly 30 and who had been together for 6 years and 60% had children whereas the current study consisted only of those who were married or soon to be married, whose average age was 24, been together on average for 3 years, and only seven couples had children. Thus, findings may be due to qualitative differences in samples. For example, it may be that having a marriage status buffers the effect of an avoidant attachment style on the wife's relationship confidence or that partner effects from husband's attachment style develop over a longer period time. Further work will need to address these associations longitudinally and among different military samples.

As predicted, participant's own attachment anxiety and avoidance were associated with his/her own relationship confidence. This suggests that both styles have implications for how much confidence each spouse has in the future of the relationship. While both attachment styles are strongly associated with relationship confidence, it is probable that each style is linked to relationship confidence in unique ways. For instance, an anxious individual is more likely to doubt the availability of their spouse (Simpson et al., 1996) which may lead them to wonder whether they can succeed together in maintaining a solid relationship. Civilian spouses may feel anxiety about the state of the relationship when soldiers return (Theiss & Knobloch, 2011) and an anxious attachment style could magnify these feelings. Because avoidantly attached individuals respond negatively to the pressure for closeness (Mikulincer & Florian, 1998), they may doubt whether they can succeed with their partner when such pressure to be emotionally available exists in the relationship. Soldiers returning home from deployments may not want to share sensitive information related to their missions and an avoidant attachment style could exacerbate the tendency to withhold emotionally vulnerable information. This may in turn lead them to question whether they can have a successful relationship. Wives' relationship confidence was strongly associated with her communication in both models, Husband's confidence was only associated with his communication in the anxious model, though not as strongly as wives' suggesting that at least for wives, confidence in the marriage is related to better communication skills.

Significant mediational actor pathways were found only for wives in both models suggesting that wives who score higher on anxious or avoidant attachment styles have less confidence in the longevity of their relationship which in turn is linked to how she communicates in the relationship. Significant indirect actor pathways were not found for husband's in either

model, suggesting that overall the models tend to have greater relevance for wives than for husbands. This is consistent with other findings that indicate higher correlations between cognitions and behavior for wives (e.g. Bradbury, Beach, Fincham, & Nelson, 1996). Some research indicates that wives think more about relationship status, think in relational terms, and pay more attention to subtle relationship details (Acitelli, 1992). It may be that in this sample wives' think more about the state of the relationship which could explain why the link from their confidence to their own communication is stronger. If wives' assess their marriage as having less of a chance they may be less motivated to communicate effectively whereas husbands may not pay as much attention to the state of the relationship. This study may be a case of civilian wives married to soldier spouses who are concerned about the efficacy of their relationship due to the military context they are in. For instance, they may be anticipating future separations due to deployments and may wonder about how the relationship will function in the future either during or after a long deployment. Many military couples have reported that they believe military stress leads to divorce (Rosen & Durand, 2000). These preliminary findings highlight the interdependent nature of attachment styles, relationship confidence, and communication by highlighting the actor and partner associations described in each model. They also point to the need for greater attention to these variables in intervention efforts and future research.

Implications

This study supports Karney & Bradbury's (1995) assertion that research on marriage and other romantic relationships should consider individual level vulnerabilities and how these relate to adaptive processes in relationships. Attachment style, an individual vulnerability, seems to be related to couple-level processes among military newlywed couples. It also is highly related to the confidence that military couples have in the future of their relationship.

The findings in these models may also be reflective of other civilian populations but what is left to be determined is how military specific factors such as frequent separations due to deployments, multiple moves, etc. impact the more general model. Military families have been described as “families under stress” due to long and frequent deployments with exposure to combat (Karney & Crown, 2007, p. i). This study provides a case of 71 couples who potentially face unique stresses to their marriage. Civilian wives may think more about their future with their spouse when uncertainty is present pertaining to whether their spouse will return safe or how they will return both emotionally and otherwise. An already anxious spouse may feel even more anxious about the future of the relationship with the added layer of military stressors. Thus, this study may have unique implications for newlywed couples in the military anticipating military demands on the functioning of their marriage

Therapists working with military couples should consider these underlying dynamics that are related to more overt communication patterns. While, many couples’ therapists focus on altering communication patterns, this work would probably be enhanced by having a clear understanding of the attachment orientations that are associated with these behaviors. Furthermore, if a couple’s lack of communication abilities are rooted in their hope and confidence in the future of their relationship, skills training may have little impact unless the motivating factors that lead to positive communication are addressed. It is recommended that military couples in therapy should be assessed for their confidence in the marriage. Addressing relationship confidence may shed light on the nature of negative communication patterns in the relationship. This may be particularly useful to assess during stressful transition points such as pre and post deployment when couples may be more vulnerable to question the longevity of their relationship or their capacity to maintain it.

The importance of helping military couples access greater confidence in the relationship and gain important communication skills has been emphasized in recent efforts to strengthen military marriages. For instance, pre-marital and relationship education programs such as the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) have been applied to military couples with the intention of increasing their confidence in their abilities to make their marriage last and in learning effective communication skills (Stanley et al., 2005). In a brief report of a recent randomized control trial, Army couples receiving PREP had one-third fewer divorces than the control group who did not receive PREP (Stanley, Allen, Markman, Rhoades, & Prentice, 2010). A later report of the same study provided results on the more specific relationship dynamics that were influenced by the intervention. Results showed that training in PREP increased both relationship confidence and constructive communication demonstrating that relationship education for military couples can improve these marital processes. Greater gains from the intervention were more likely to occur among higher risk couples such as those involved in deployments. Thus more vulnerable couples have been greatly helped by these interventions especially in regards to their confidence and communication. The findings in this study support such efforts and can offer a better understanding of how these relationship constructs fit together including how attachment vulnerabilities could contribute to these marital processes. Greater understanding in this realm will hopefully lead to better approaches to strengthen military marriages.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study contained several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. First, although the temporal ordering of the variables was theoretically derived and their associations tested, this study is cross-sectional in design making it impossible to make causal

inferences. Future research could test these associations over time to better understand their temporal ordering. Second, the smaller sample size made it necessary to separate attachment styles in two separate models and to not include other potential control variables. With a larger sample size it would be possible to combine both attachment styles into the same model, use more control variables, and use more complicated analyses such as Structural Equation Modeling. Finally, the type of sample drawn limits the generalizability of these results.

This sample consisted of those who were engaged to be married or within their first year of marriage and where the male partner was enlisted and the female partner was not. Thus the results may not apply to military couples where the wife or both are enlisted. Most couples were European American and the large majority of respondents did not have kids together. In addition, this was a convenience sample and therefore, those who volunteered to participate may be different on a number of characteristics than those who chose not to participate. For instance, relationship confidence may function differently among different racial groups or among cohabiting couples. Future research needs to tease out whether the temporal ordering of the variables presented in this study reflects chronological order. Longitudinal data will be needed to test whether attachment style predicts relationship confidence and constructive communication.

To further confirm Karney & Crown's (2007) directional theory of Individual Traits → Adaptive Processes and Individual Traits → Marital Resources → Adaptive Processes, other variables could be tested including enduring traits such as depression, marital resources such as marital satisfaction, and adaptive processes such as positive bonding. With a larger sample size and more time points it would also be possible to expand this model to include other theoretical components of the integrative framework such as emergent traits and military related circumstances that arise in military service or marital success outcomes such as quality or

stability. This study focused on those who are in their first year of marriage or about to be married. Future research could test the relevance of attachment styles and relationship confidence among military samples of dating, cohabiting, and longer-term married couples. Gathering a more racially diverse population as would be more typical of the general demographic in the army would also identify how this model fits the more general military population. Certain gender differences emerged in the models that point to the need for future research to further investigate these differences. Particularly it would be helpful to see whether these differences change over time or across samples. Research could investigate whether these gender differences are unique to the military context or whether findings are comparable to civilian populations particularly in regards to whether the models still have greater relevance for wives when accounting for military circumstances that may develop over time. For instance, husband's attachment style could have more relevance to the relationship over time especially when considering emergent traits (e.g. PTSD symptoms) that may develop in a military context. It would be helpful to tease out attachment style influences from other military influences on the marital relationship in later studies.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study demonstrated that attachment style is associated with constructive communication and that relationship confidence partially mediates this link. The use of the actor partner interdependence modeling made it possible to look at how these processes are connected both individually and between husbands and wives in a sample of newlywed military couples. This study points to the need to assess for and target relationship confidence and underlying attachment styles in interventions when working with military couples in the early stages of their relationship. This study also points to the need for future research to clarify

the temporal ordering of these variables and their relevance across samples. Finally, this study points out the need for continued prevention and intervention efforts directed at strengthening military couples and building their hope and confidence that they can succeed in their marriage as they face the demands of a military lifestyle.

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Appendix A - Figures

Figure A.1 An Integrative Framework to Account for Success and Failure in Military Marriages

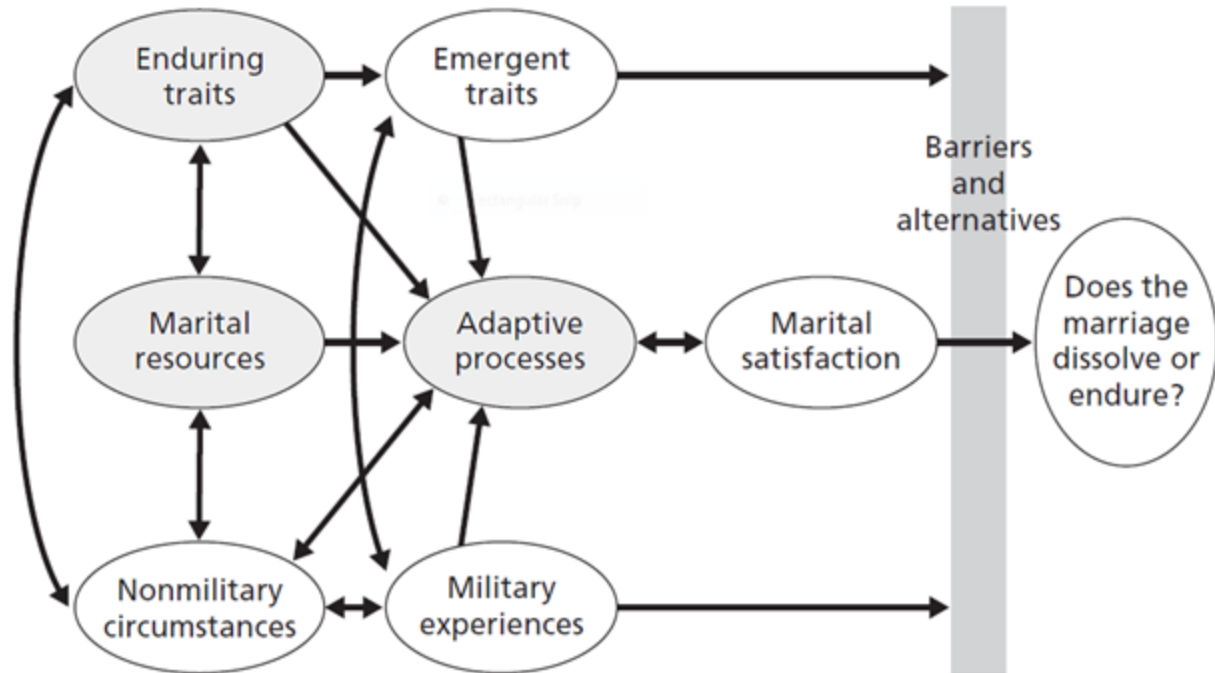
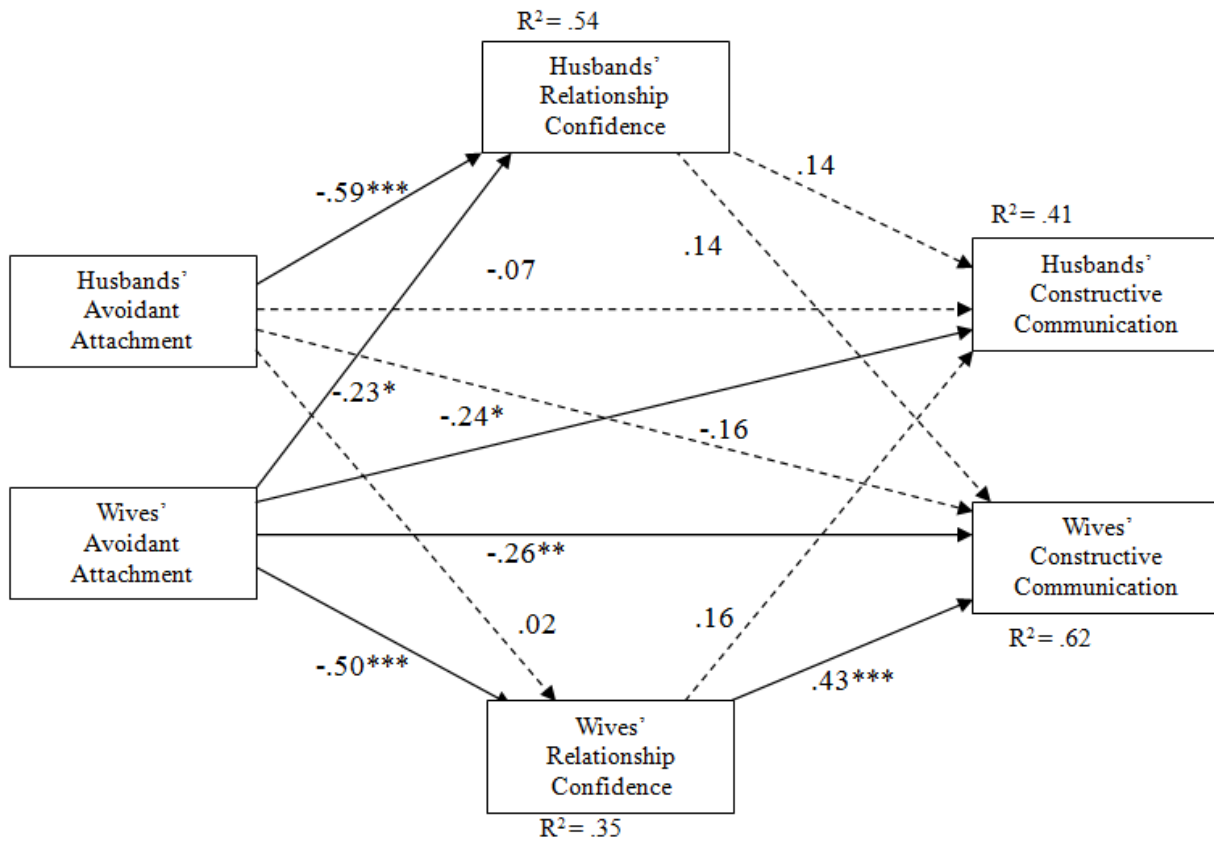
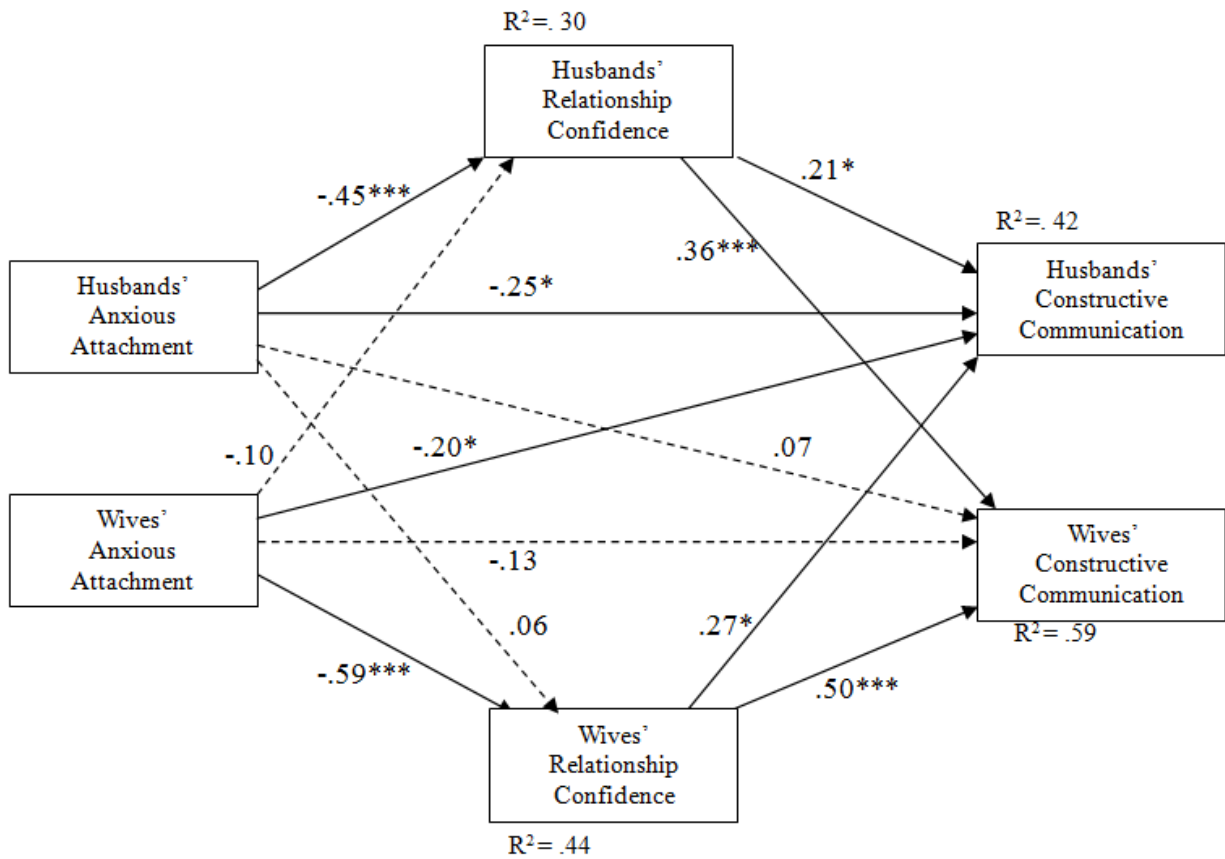


Figure A.2 Actor-Partner Interdependence Model 1: Avoidant Attachment, Relationship Confidence, and Constructive Communication (Standardized Solution; N = 71 Couples)



Note: This model controlled for husbands' and wives' financial worry and husband's military rank. * $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$ *** $p \leq .001$ (one-tailed).

Figure A.3 Actor-Partner Interdependence Model 2: Anxious Attachment, Relationship Confidence, and Constructive Communication (Standardized Solution; N = 71 Couples)



Note: This model controlled for husbands' and wives' financial worry and husband's military rank. * $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$ *** $p \leq .001$ (one-tailed).

Appendix B - Tables

Table B.1 Individual Reports of Attachment Style, Relationship Confidence, Constructive Communication, Financial Worry, and Rank: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations For Study Variables: Husband Soldier (n =71) Wife Spouse (n = 71).

Variables	Husband Soldier		Wife Spouse		1	2	3	4	5	6
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>						
1. Avoidant Attachment	2.24	1.14	1.92	.97	.38**	.42**	-.69*	-.40**	.28*	.16
2. Anxious Attachment	1.90	1.19	2.05	1.56	.31**	-.26*	-.52**	-.48**	-.36**	-.24*
3. Relationship Confidence	6.35	.82	6.49	.84	-.56**	-.63**	.19	.43**	.32**	.10
4. Constructive Communication	10.17	4.48	11.54	10.30	.63**	-.53**	.64**	.53**	-.43**	.24*
5. Financial Worry	2.57	1.31	2.7	1.29	.26*	.21	-.28*	-.39**	.47**	-.20
6. Husband's Rank	7.49	5.60	—	—	-.21	-.07	.14	.09	-.24	—

Note: Husbands above, wives below, and between husbands and wives along the diagonal.

*** $p < .001$ (one-tailed)

Table B.2 Mediating Effects for the Actor-Partner Interdependence Models with Avoidance and Anxiety as Independent Variables, Confidence as a Mediator, and Communication as the Outcome with Rank and Financial Worry as Control Variables. Bootstrap Analyses of the Magnitude and Significance of Mediating Pathways (Standardized Solution; N = 71 Couples)

Predictor	Mediator(s)	Outcome	<i>b</i> (β)	CI	<i>t</i> value
Wife Avoidance→	Wife Confidence→	Wife Communication	-2.33 (-.22)	-4.50, -.47	-2.19*
Wife Anxiety→	Wife Confidence→	Wife Communication	-1.93 (-.29)	-3.22, -.63	-2.91**
Husband Anxiety→	Husband Confidence→	Wife Communication	-1.38 (-.15)	-3.17, -.20	-1.76*
Wife Anxiety→	Wife Confidence→	Husband Communication	-1.12 (-.16)	-2.71, -.06	-1.65*
Husband Anxiety→	Husband Confidence→	Husband Communication	-.85 (-.09)	-2.31, .05	-1.36

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$ (one-tailed). Indirect paths tested with 2,000 bootstraps. CI = 95% confidence interval.

Appendix C - Measures Questionnaires

ECR-RS Questionnaire

Attachment Avoidance Questions

1. It helps to turn to this person in times of need.
2. I usually discuss my problems and concerns with this person.
3. I talk things over with this person.
4. I find it easy to depend on this person.
5. I don't feel comfortable opening up to this person.
6. I prefer not to show this person how I feel deep down.

Attachment Anxiety Questions

7. I often worry that this person doesn't really care for me.
8. I'm afraid that this person may abandon me.
9. I worry that this person won't care about me as much as I care about him or her.

(ECR-RS; Fraley, Heffernan, Vicary, & Brumbaugh, 2011)

Relationship Confidence 4-item scale

1. I believe we can handle whatever conflicts will arise in the future.
2. I feel good about our prospects to make this relationship work for a lifetime.
3. I am very confident when I think of our future together.
4. We have the skills a couple needs to make a marriage last.

(Stanley, Hoyer, and Trathen, 1994)

CPQ-CC Questionnaire

“We are interested in how you and your partner typically deal with problems in your relationship”

Constructive items

1. Mutual Discussion. Both members try to discuss the problem.
2. Mutual Expression. Both members express their feelings to each other.
3. Mutual Negotiation. Both members suggest possible solutions and compromises.

Destructive items

1. Mutual Blame. Both members blame, accuse, and criticize each other.
2. Mutual Threat. Both members threaten each other with negative consequences.
3. Verbal Aggression. Man calls Woman names, swears at her, or attacks her character.
4. Verbal Aggression. Woman calls Man names, swears at him, or attacks his character.

(Heavey, Larson, Zumtobel, & Christensen, 1996)