

Not “Capitalizing” on Social Capitalization Interactions: The Role of Attachment Insecurity

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Capitalization interactions, in which partners share positive events, typically produce positive relationship outcomes (Gable, Gonzaga, & Strachman, 2006). However, the limiting conditions of these interactions have not been examined. In this study, 101 dating couples discussed a positive event in the life of each partner. Ratings of perceived responsiveness were made by both the romantic partner who disclosed a positive event and his/her responding partner. Trained observers then rated each videotaped interaction. More avoidantly attached responders reported being and were rated by coders as less responsive, particularly if their disclosing partners were more anxiously attached. Avoidantly attached individuals also underestimated their partners' responsiveness relative to observer ratings. Anxious responders underestimated their own responsiveness when their disclosing partners were more avoidantly attached. These results indicate that insecurely attached individuals are relatively less likely to be responsive and to perceive responsiveness in capitalization interactions than are more securely attached individuals. This is especially true when highly anxious and highly avoidant individuals are relationship partners.

Keywords: attachment, couples, capitalization, responsiveness

Sally: Guess what? You won't believe it!

Harry: What? Tell me!

Sally: I got a promotion!

Harry: Wow! That's amazing! You totally deserve it. Tell me everything. I want to hear it all.

Hundreds of studies have investigated how relationship partners cope when one partner is upset and needs support (e.g., Bolger, Zuckerman, & Kessler, 2000). Considerably less research has investigated what happens during relationship interactions, such as the one depicted above, when partners disclose *positive* life events. This imbalance is surprising given that positive events occur more frequently in daily life than negative ones (Gable, Reis, & Downey, 2003).

Theory and research have begun to address this gap by examining *capitalization* discussions—interactions in which individuals share important positive life events with their partners in the hope of receiving positive responses from them. Positive responses are active and constructive, that is, those in which the “responding” partner (Harry) is attentive and encouraging and shares enthusiastically in the

good news being shared by the “disclosing” partner (Sally). Active and constructive responses from partners in capitalization exchanges are associated with more intimacy, higher marital satisfaction (Gable, Reis, Impett, & Asher, 2004), and greater relationship stability (Gable, Gonzaga, & Strachman, 2006). In fact, supportive exchanges in the context of positive events (capitalization) are more strongly associated with relationship well-being and stability than are supportive exchanges in the context of negative events (social support; Gable et al., 2006).

One major, unaddressed area within capitalization research concerns individual differences in how partners respond to each other's disclosures (e.g., how Harry responds to Sally) and how partners, in turn, perceive those responses (e.g., how Sally perceives Harry's response). The purpose of this research was to address this gap by examining the relation between attachment orientations and perceptions and behaviors during capitalization interactions. Specifically, romantic partners engaged in two separate capitalization interactions. In one interaction, the female partner disclosed a positive event and her male partner listened and responded. In the other interaction, the male partner disclosed and the female partner responded. We expected that each partner's attachment orientations would influence his/her perceptions and behaviors differently, depending on which role each partner was in (i.e., *responder or discloser*), as described below.

Capitalization Interactions and the Role of Attachment

According to attachment theory (Bowlby, 1973), individuals develop interpretive filters (working models) based

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partly on how they have been treated by past attachment figures (e.g., parents, close friends, romantic partners). Once formed, interpretive filters guide how individuals construe their own as well as their current partner's intentions and actions, especially in situations that could reveal how important the relationship truly is to each partner. Interpretative filters can thus play a significant role in the development and maintenance of intimacy (Laurenceau, Rivera, Schaffer, & Pietromonaco, 2004; Reis, Clark, & Holmes, 2004; Reis & Shaver, 1988).

Highly secure individuals have a history of receiving consistently good care and support from significant others (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007), which leads them to develop positive views of themselves and their partners. Attachment security serves as an "inner resource," one that allows secure individuals to turn to their partners for comfort and support when they need it (Simpson, Rholes, & Nelligan, 1992) and to aid their partners more effectively when partners require comfort and support (Mikulincer & Florian, 1998). Thus, in capitalization interactions, secure individuals should respond actively and constructively to their partners' positive disclosures and recognize their partners' responsiveness when it is enacted (see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

Insecurely attached people may fare less well in capitalization interactions, primarily because these interactions pull for intimacy. In fact, attachment insecurities should *adversely* affect behaviors toward and perceptions of one's partner for different reasons. Highly avoidant people have been consistently rejected or rebuffed by past relationship partners. Because of this, they have learned to become self-reliant, maintain emotional independence, and take control in their relationships (Mikulincer, 1998). Given these motives, avoidant people feel threatened in situations that pull for intimacy (Bowlby, 1973). Moreover, they dislike caring for others and behave in a less sensitive and less comforting manner when asked to do so (Feeney, 1996). Thus, when they are in the *responding* role in capitalization interactions, highly avoidant individuals should be less responsive, recoiling from the potential increase in intimacy that might occur. Consistent with this expectation, Gable and colleagues (2006) have found that avoidantly attached men reported being less active and constructive in capitalization interactions. When they are in the *disclosing* role, avoidant persons may be less likely to perceive that their partners are responsive to their own self-disclosures, especially in situations (e.g., a lab discussion) they cannot avert and from which they cannot easily exit. Active-constructive responses could signal the desire for greater intimacy, which avoidant individuals find very uncomfortable given their negative relationship history (Bowlby, 1973). To protect themselves from heightened intimacy, avoidant disclosers might discount, downplay, or underperceive their partners' responsiveness. In sum, when *responding* to the disclosures of their partners in capitalization interactions, highly avoidant people should clearly be less responsive. When *disclosing* to their partners, highly avoidant individuals might perceive their partners as less responsive.

A different pattern of effects should be found for highly anxious people. Anxious individuals have received inconsistent or unpredictable care and support in past relationships. As a result, they crave more felt security in their current relationships (Mikulincer, 1998). Although capitalization interactions could help them achieve this goal, the self-protective needs of highly anxious people may limit their ability to detect and respond effectively to the needs of their partners (Kunce & Shaver, 1994). Moreover, given their need for constant reassurance (Shaver, Schachner, & Mikulincer, 2005), anxious individuals should have skewed perceptions of their partners when *disclosing* information to them. Specifically, they should perceive their partners as less responsive than their partners might actually be. It is more difficult to derive predictions for anxious individuals in the responding role, partly because their behaviors and perceptions should depend on what their partners disclose to them (cf. Campbell, Simpson, Boldry, & Kashy, 2005).

In sum, avoidant and anxious people have *opposing* motivations and behavioral tendencies that should become apparent in situations that elicit intimacy. Highly avoidant individuals should try to minimize intimacy in capitalization interactions, whereas highly anxious individuals should attempt to maximize intimacy, thereby fulfilling their need for greater felt security. These conflicting motivations might guide perceptions and behavior most strongly when they play out within the same relationship. In other words, when highly anxious and highly avoidant individuals are involved in the same relationship, this combination should produce "the perfect storm." Attachment theorists have long posited that the anxious-avoidant relationship pairing should be the most tempestuous one (e.g., Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994).

To fully comprehend this dynamic, one must consider not only the attachment orientations of each partner, but also the disclosing or responding *role* of each partner (i.e., one must conceptualize the interaction *dyadically*). Consider a capitalization interaction in which a highly avoidant partner is in the role of *discloser* and his/her highly anxious partner is in the role of *responder*. Because the self-worth of anxious persons hinges on the perceived approval of significant others (Park, Crocker, & Mickelson, 2004), anxious responders' perceptions of their own responsiveness should depend on how their (avoidant) disclosing partner reacts to them. Highly avoidant people are less likely to seek or provide comfort and support (Collins & Feeney, 2000), and they should have difficulty both self-disclosing and being responsive in capitalization situations. Avoidant individuals should also be more withdrawn when they encounter the excessive caregiving style characteristic of many anxious responders (Kunce & Shaver, 1994). Even slight indications of partner disapproval or disinterest should trigger feelings of worthlessness in anxious responders (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Thus, when in the *responding* role in capitalization interactions, highly anxious individuals may perceive that they are less responsive, especially when they have an avoidant partner who is less disclosing. On the other hand, highly anxious responders may perceive that they are more responsive when interacting with less avoidant part-

ners, who should be more comfortable with and receptive to responsiveness.

Despite the intuitive appeal of this dyadic hypothesis, the caustic effects of anxious–avoidant pairings have been difficult to document. Most prior relationship research has investigated conflict or support discussions (Sheldon & King, 2001), which tend to have clearer norms and role prescriptions than capitalization interactions. Offering support to a distressed partner who is recounting a negative experience usually elicits politeness norms (Brown & Levinson, 1987) that dampen the expression of individual differences. However, responses to positive events recounted by a partner are likely to be less norm- or role-governed, permitting individual differences such as attachment orientations to guide perceptions and behavior more strongly. Responders in capitalization interactions may also perceive fewer negative consequences for violating expectations about how to react to positive events compared with negative ones. If so, reactions to positive events may be more indicative of the responder’s true feelings about the situation. For all of these reasons, capitalization interactions should be a particularly good context in which to test for anxious and avoidant effects (Gable et al., 2004).

The Current Study and Hypotheses

The purpose of this study was to assess the relations between attachment orientations and specific perceptions and behaviors during capitalization interactions when relationship partners are put in both disclosing and responding roles. Partners in established romantic relationships first completed background measures online. One week later, each couple engaged in two videotaped capitalization interactions rated by trained observers. In one interaction, the male was the discloser and his female partner was the responder; in the other interaction, the roles were reversed. Immediately after each interaction, both partners completed perceived responsiveness measures that assessed how actively and constructively they believed the responding partner (i.e., the partner in the responding role) behaved. This unique quasi-experimental design allowed us to obtain three “perspectives” of each partner’s responsiveness during each interaction—the discloser’s perspective (i.e., Sally’s perception of Harry’s responsiveness), the responder’s perspective (i.e., Harry’s perceptions of his own responsiveness), and the perspective of objective raters (who evaluated each person relative to everyone else in the study). Previous capitalization research (e.g., Gable et al., 2006) has assessed only disclosers’ self-reported perceptions of their partners’ responsiveness. Assessing responsiveness from all three perspectives allowed us to test for biases in perceptions of responsiveness by comparing each discloser’s and each responder’s perceptions to observers’ perceptions of them. For example, we were able to test whether anxious and avoidant people perceived their own and their partners’ responsiveness in an overly negative or overly positive manner.

We tested four hypotheses, each of which was derived from attachment theory and past research. First, highly

avoidant responders should be perceived as less responsive by their romantic partners and rated as less responsive by trained observers (H1). Second, highly anxious and highly avoidant disclosers should perceive their partners as less responsive (H2). Third, highly avoidant and highly anxious disclosers may also underestimate (relative to observers’ ratings) their partners’ responsiveness (H3). Finally, responsive behaviors and perceptions of responsiveness should be *lowest* in couples in which one partner is more avoidant and the other is more anxious (H4). For example, highly anxious disclosers paired with more avoidant responders should have capitalization interactions in which the avoidant partner is rated by observers as lower in responsiveness.

Method

Participants

Couples were recruited from undergraduate psychology classes and advertisements posted on campus. To participate, couples had to be involved exclusively for at least 6 months, and both partners had to be at least 18 years old. One lesbian couple was excluded from the analyses because gender was used as a distinguishing variable (Kashy & Kenny, 2000). The sample consisted of 101 couples who had been involved an average of 19.76 months ($SD = 16.65$). Five percent of couples were engaged or married and 16% were cohabitating. The mean age of the women was 19.75 years ($SD = 1.37$, range = 18–24), and the mean age of the men was 20.96 years ($SD = 2.52$, range = 18–36). The ethnic breakdown was 73% White, 16% Asian/Pacific Islander, 4% African American, and 7% other. Eighty-six percent of the sample was full-time college students. Each participant was offered extra-credit points or \$20 for participating.

Procedure and Measures

Phase 1: Questionnaires. Each partner first privately completed an online survey that contained demographic, individual difference, and relationship measures. Embedded in the survey was the Adult Attachment Questionnaire (AAQ; Simpson, Rholes, & Phillips, 1996), a well-validated 17-item measure that assesses attachment anxiety (e.g., “I usually want more closeness and intimacy than others do”) and avoidance (e.g., “Others often want me to be more intimate than I feel comfortable being”). Alphas ranged from .76 to .79 for men and women.¹ The scale anchors for the AAQ are 1 = *strongly disagree* and 7 = *strongly agree*. The mean scores for the anxiety dimension were 2.97 ($SD =$

¹ Secure people score low on anxiety or avoidance. The effects for attachment security, therefore, are represented by people who score low on one or both dimensions. There were no within-person anxiety by avoidance interaction effects, which is typical of adult attachment studies. To be consistent with the attachment literature, we interpret the effects for the two attachment dimensions in terms of individuals who score higher (i.e., are more insecure) on each dimension.

0.91) for men and 3.11 ($SD = 1.03$) for women. The mean scores for the avoidance dimension were 3.00 ($SD = 0.93$) for men and 3.29 ($SD = 1.08$) for women.

The online survey also contained a relationship quality measure (the 18-item Perceived Relationship Quality Components scale [PRQC]; Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000; $\alpha_s = .83$ for men and $.91$ for women), and the seven-item Neuroticism scale from the Berkeley Personality Profile (John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991; $\alpha_s = .76$ for men and $.79$ for women). These latter two scales were used for discriminant validity purposes (see below).

Phase 2: Lab capitalization discussion tasks. One week later, each couple came to the lab to engage in two videotaped capitalization discussions. Each member of the couple disclosed an important positive event to his/her partner for 6 to 7 min. In each interaction, the partner who disclosed the positive event was the “discloser” and the listening partner was the “responder.” Before the first discussion, participants were given instructions modeled after those used by Gable et al. (2006). Specifically, participants were asked to think of a positive event that had happened to them personally (but *not* something they had done as a couple, such as going on a vacation or something their partner had recently done for them) to discuss. There were no constraints placed on when the event had occurred. We provided several examples of possible positive events (e.g., receiving a good grade on an important exam, being offered a job, receiving a phone call from an old friend). Couples were randomly assigned to have either the female or the male be the “discloser” in the first discussion. The roles were reversed for the second discussion. Because discussion order did not have any effects on the outcomes, it is not discussed further.

Perceptions of responsiveness. Immediately after each discussion, partners completed measures of perceived responsiveness privately. Disclosers rated their partner’s responsiveness, and responders rated their own responsiveness, using adapted versions of the Perceived Responses to Capitalization Attempts scale (PRCA; Gable et al., 2004). The PRCA measures an individual’s perceptions of his/her partner’s *typical* responsiveness to capitalization attempts, with three items tapping each of the four possible quadrants defined by two dimensions (i.e., active–passive, constructive–destructive). These items were rated on a 9-point scale, anchored 1 = *not at all true* and 9 = *completely true*. Items were modified to assess perceptions of partner responsiveness during each specific interaction rather than assessing perceptions of general responsiveness. For example, an item originally phrased “My partner reacts to my good fortune enthusiastically” was reworded to read “My partner reacted to my good fortune enthusiastically.” The scale was similarly adapted to assess perceptions of self-responsiveness (e.g., “I reacted to my partner’s good fortune enthusiastically”). Composite capitalization scores were then calculated by subtracting the means of the Passive–Constructive, Active–Destructive, and Passive–Destructive subscales from the mean of the Active–Constructive subscale. This scoring method is consistent with previous research (Gable et al., 2004). Alphas ranged from $.74$ to $.78$ for male and female ratings of their

partner’s as well as their own responsiveness. Higher scores indicated more active–constructive responding.

Phase 3: Behavioral coding. Each videotaped discussion was then rated by eight trained observers, all of whom were blind to all hypotheses and other data. During the initial training, the observers were given detailed definitions and concrete behavioral examples of high versus low scores on each construct they would rate. They then watched most of the interactions (without making ratings) to understand how much variability there was in the sample with respect to each construct. Following this extensive training, each observer independently rated the behavior of each *responding* partner on the two PRCA dimensions (active–passive and constructive–destructive) using 5-point scales. We created observer-rated measures by summing the eight observer ratings of each responding partner on the active–passive dimension and the constructive–destructive dimension. Interrater reliabilities were good for the active–passive dimension ($\alpha_s = .70$ and $.78$ for female and male responders, respectively) and the constructive–destructive dimension ($\alpha_s = .76$ and $.80$ for female and male responders, respectively). Consistent with previous research (Gable et al., 2006), we then computed an overall observer-rated responsiveness score for each responder by summing the active–passive and constructive–destructive dimension scores. Higher scores reflected more active–constructive responding.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics for perceptions of responsiveness to capitalization attempts were calculated. Male disclosers’ ratings of PRCA ($M = 9.94$, $SD = 6.57$) were similarly distributed to female disclosers’ ratings of PRCA ($M = 9.90$, $SD = 5.99$). The same was true of male responders’ self-ratings of PRCA ($M = 9.61$, $SD = 4.93$) and female responders’ PRCA ($M = 10.70$, $SD = 6.12$). Observer ratings of female responders ($M = 6.96$, $SD = 1.34$) and male responders ($M = 6.83$, $SD = 1.44$) were also consistent. The scale and range for the PRCA (range = -9 to 24) are different from the scale and range for the observers’ ratings of responsiveness (range = 2.75 – 11.25). Thus, comparisons between means on these scales are not informative.

Data Analytic Strategy

Because partners’ scores were significantly correlated for many variables, we used the Actor–Partner Interdependence Model (APIM; Kashy & Kenny, 2000) to analyze the data. The APIM is a form of multilevel modeling in which each participant is nested within a dyad, and the dyad (each relationship) is the unit of analysis. Modeling the nonindependence that exists in dyads, the APIM estimates both *actor effects* (the effect that an individual’s predictor variable score has on his/her *own* outcome score) as well as *partner effects* (the effect that an individual’s *partner’s* predictor variable score has on the actor’s outcome score).

Thus, APIM analyses provide separate, statistically independent tests of actor and partner paths in which the effects of the actor's independent variable score on the actor's dependent measure control for the partner's independent variable score, and the effects of the partner's independent variable score on the actor's dependent measure control for the actor's independent variable score. Here is a sample regression equation:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Actor Perceptions of Partner Responsiveness} = & a_{0i} \\ & + a_{1i}(\text{actor anxiety}) + a_{2i}(\text{partner anxiety}) \\ & + a_{3i}(\text{actor avoidance}) + a_{4i}(\text{partner avoidance}) \\ & + a_{5i}(\text{gender}) + a_{6-Ni}(\text{2-way interactions}) + e_{ij}, \end{aligned}$$

where a_0 = the intercept, a_{1-N} = the beta weights, and e = the error term.

The APIM analyses were conducted using the SPSS Mixed Model program (Version 18). Dyads were treated as distinguishable because one partner was female and the other was male in each analyzed couple. This is standard practice when analyzing data from heterosexual couples (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006). The actor and partner effects are reported as regression coefficients, the independent variables were standardized, and the dependent variables were unstandardized. Gender was effect coded (1 = female, -1 = male). All variables were centered on the grand mean. Thus, every one standard unit of change in an independent variable corresponds to one *unstandardized* unit of change in the dependent variables. The degrees of freedom were calculated for each step (i.e., they were estimated for both the between-dyads and the within-dyad variables; Kenny et al., 2006). In some analyses, actor variables refer to *disclosing* partners and partner variables refer to *responding* partners. In other analyses, the opposite is true. For clarity, we report effects using discloser-responder terminology, given that each participant was a discloser in one discussion and a responder in the other.

Preliminary analyses revealed no significant gender main effects or interactions (i.e., gender did not qualify the effects reported below). Gender, therefore, was not included as a predictor variable in the final APIM models. For all of the analyses reported below, each regression model contained the same set of predictor variables: actor and partner avoidant attachment, actor and partner anxious attachment, and the two hypothesized two-way interactions involving actor avoidance and partner anxiety and actor anxiety and partner avoidance.² All significant effects that emerged are reported below.

Hypotheses 1: Are Avoidant Individuals Less Responsive?

As predicted, compared with less avoidant responders, more avoidant responders were perceived as being relatively less responsive by their disclosing partners, and they were rated as behaving less responsively by raters (see Table 1, Row 1).

Hypothesis 2: Do Anxious or Avoidant Disclosers Perceive Their Partners as Less Responsive?

As hypothesized, more anxious disclosers perceived their partners as being relatively less responsive than did less anxious disclosers. More avoidant disclosers, however, did not perceive their partners as being less responsive (see Table 1, Rows 2 and 3, Discloser column).

Hypothesis 3: Do Anxious or Avoidant Disclosers Underestimate Their Partners' Responsiveness?

To test whether more anxious or more avoidant disclosers underestimated their partners' responsiveness relative to observers' ratings, we created residual scores by regressing disclosers' ratings of their partners' responsiveness onto observers' ratings of their partners' responsiveness (for male disclosers: $M = 0.07$, $SD = 1.34$; for female disclosers: $M = -0.07$, $SD = 1.38$; see Cohen & Cohen, 1983).³ These residual scores reflect underestimation or overestimation by disclosers of the level of responsiveness displayed by their partners in relation to observers' ratings of their partners. As predicted, more avoidant disclosers underestimated their partners' responsiveness relative to observers' ratings more than did less avoidant disclosers (see Table 1, Row 2, Discloser-Observer Discrepancy column). This effect was not significant for more anxious disclosers.

Residual scores were also created by regressing responders' self-ratings of responsiveness onto observers' ratings of their responsiveness (for male responders: $M = -0.05$, $SD = 1.44$; for female responders: $M = 0.05$, $SD = 1.35$). The results revealed that individuals underestimated their own level of responsiveness (relative to observers' ratings) if they responded to a disclosing partner who was more avoidant than if they responded to one who was less avoidant (see Table 1, Row 2, Responder-Observer Discrepancy column). In other words, independent of their attachment status, responding partners were more likely to "underperceive" how responsive they were, relative to what observers saw, if they interacted with a disclosing partner who was more avoidant.

Hypothesis 4: Are Perceptions of Responsiveness Compromised in Anxious-Avoidant Pairings?

Hypothesis 4 predicted statistical interactions between discloser and responder attachment orientations in predict-

² Additional analyses were conducted that contained all six possible interactions among actor and partner attachment orientations. All significant effects found in the reduced models remained significant in the full models.

³ The residualized score represents the difference between self-reported responsiveness and observer (i.e., objective) ratings of behavior. Because this procedure partials out variance associated with observable behavior, these residualized scores are indicators of over- or underestimation of responsiveness. This procedure also controls for the differences in scaling between our self-report and observer-rated measures of the PRCA (which were 1-9 and 1-5 Likert-type scales, respectively).

Table 1

Relations Between Discloser (D) and Responder (R) Attachment Orientations and Perceptions of Partner Responsiveness (Perceived Responses to Capitalization Attempts Scale)

Row	Predictor variable	Outcome: Perspective of partner responsiveness			
		Discloser	Observer	Discloser–observer discrepancy	Responder–observer discrepancy
1	(R) Avoidance	−1.75****	−0.33****	0.14	0.07
2	(D) Avoidance	0.42	0.09	−0.33****	−0.30**
3	(D) Anxiety	−1.16*	−0.15	0.08	0.02
4	(R) Anxiety	−0.10	0.02	−0.14	−0.13
5	(D) Anxiety × (R) Avoidance	−0.37	−0.19*	−0.003	−0.02
6	(D) Avoidance × (R) Anxiety	−0.21	−0.05	−0.24**	−0.23**

Note. $n = 101$ women and 101 men. The reported values are unstandardized regression coefficients. All listed predictor variables were included in every regression model.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. **** $p < .001$.

ing ratings of responsiveness. Three significant interactions emerged, all of which followed a similar pattern (see Figures 1 and 2).

First, as predicted, the lowest levels of observer-rated responsiveness occurred when more anxious disclosers were paired with more avoidant responders (see Table 1, Row 5, Observer column). As shown in Figure 1, when disclosers scored higher in anxiety, there was a strong negative association between responder avoidance and observer ratings of responsiveness. In contrast, when disclosers scored lower in anxiety, there was essentially no association between responder avoidance and observer ratings of responsiveness. Thus, lower attachment anxiety in disclosers buffered the effects of avoidance in responders on observers' responsiveness ratings.

Second, discloser avoidance interacted with responder anxiety to predict discrepancies between discloser and observer ratings of responder responsiveness (see Table 1, Row 6, Discloser–Observer Discrepancy column). Specifically, the greatest underestimation of partner responsiveness by disclosers occurred when more avoidant disclosers were paired with more anxious responders (see Figure 2). Similar to the previous interaction, there was a strong relation between discloser avoidance and partner underestimation when the responder was more anxious, but there was essen-

tially no relation between discloser avoidance and partner underestimation when the responder was less anxious. Thus, lower attachment anxiety in responders buffered the effects of disclosers' avoidance on disclosers' underestimation of their partners' responsiveness.

Finally, discloser avoidance interacted with responder anxiety in predicting discrepancies between responder and observer ratings of responder responsiveness (see Table 1, Row 6, Responder–Observer Discrepancy column). Specifically, the largest underestimation of self-rated responsiveness occurred when more anxious responders were paired with more avoidant disclosers. The pattern was very similar to the pattern reported in Figure 2. As before, lower attachment anxiety in responders buffered the effects of disclosers' avoidance on responders' ratings of their own level of responsiveness.

Discriminant Analyses

Because highly anxious and highly avoidant people have less satisfying relationships (Simpson, 1990), more anxious people typically score higher on neuroticism (Brennan & Shaver, 1995), and highly neurotic individuals might be less likely to benefit from support generally (Karney & Bradbury, 1997), we reran each analysis reported above statis-

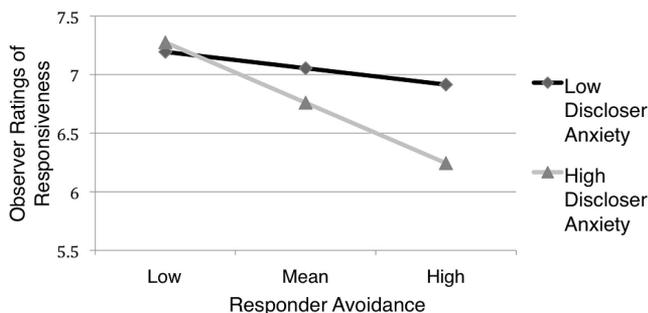


Figure 1. Interaction between discloser anxiety and responder avoidance predicting observer ratings of responder's responsiveness. Regression lines are plotted for individuals scoring 1 standard deviation above and 1 standard deviation below the sample means on anxiety and avoidance.

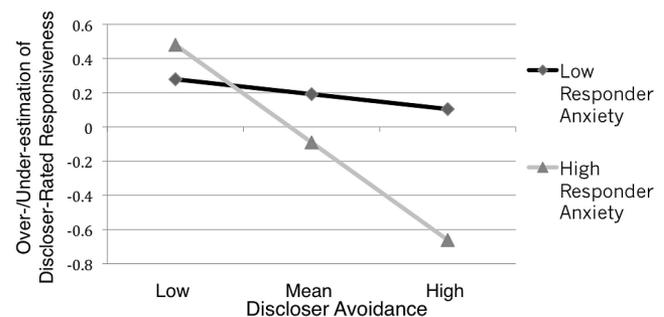


Figure 2. Interaction between discloser avoidance and responder anxiety predicting discloser's over- and underestimation of partner responsiveness. Regression lines are plotted for individuals scoring 1 standard deviation above and 1 standard deviation below the sample means on anxiety and avoidance.

tically controlling for each participant's scores on relationship quality (the PRQC) and neuroticism. All of the significant effects reported above remained significant when we did so. Thus, the effects reported above are not attributable to variance that attachment orientations share with either partners' degree of neuroticism or the quality of their relationship.

Discussion

In most relationships, capitalization interactions should and do have positive effects on disclosers (Gable et al., 2004, 2006). In the current study, disclosers *and* responders who scored lower on attachment anxiety or avoidance—more securely attached people—were more likely to reap the benefits of their capitalization discussions in that they perceived their partners as more responsive. Insecurely attached people, however, were less likely to reap these benefits of capitalization interactions, as discussed below.

As predicted, more avoidant people behaved less responsively toward their partners during the capitalization discussions, according to both their partners and observers. These effects are similar to those found in previous support provision studies (e.g., Feeney, 1996). Although avoidant disclosers did not perceive their partners as less responsive compared with the perceptions of other disclosers, they underestimated their partners' level of responsiveness relative to ratings made by observers. Moreover, participants in general underestimated their own level of responsiveness when responding to more avoidant partners. These slightly skewed perceptions could create a vicious cycle within relationships. Avoidant individuals, for example, may disclose less personal information to their partners, which may make it difficult for their partners to respond well to them, which may then lead avoidant people to view their partners as less responsive.

Also as predicted, more anxious disclosers perceived their partners as less responsive. This pattern, however, did not emerge in the observer ratings. This suggests that anxious individuals' interpretive filters may have been primarily responsible for leading them to perceive their partners as less responsive. We also did not find that highly anxious disclosers underestimated their partners' responsiveness. This may be because the partners of highly anxious people often admit that they are less supportive of *their anxious partners* (cf. Rholes, Simpson, Campbell, & Grich, 2001). That being said, observers rated avoidant individuals as less responsive if their partners were more anxious. Because observers saw and rated the full range of behaviors enacted by all participants in the study, they might have been able to see the "perfect storm" pattern more easily. We suspect that the chronic neediness of highly anxious people might make highly avoidant individuals behave even *less* responsively than they would behave toward a less anxious partner, and the current findings support this conjecture. For example, more anxious individuals perceived their partners as less responsive, but only more avoidant individuals behaved less responsively toward anxious persons. Viewed together, these results are very consistent with the underlying needs

and motives that guide the interpersonal lives of insecure people (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

Other findings highlight the caustic effects of the anxious-avoidant pairing (Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994). For example, even though participants generally underestimated their own responsiveness when responding to more avoidant partners, this was particularly true of highly anxious individuals. When more anxious responders interacted with more avoidant disclosers, they were most likely to underestimate their own responsiveness. More avoidant disclosers may not provide their partners with sufficient information or feedback for their partners to view themselves as effective responders, which should be particularly distressing to highly anxious individuals who want to be responsive to increase intimacy and felt security (Kunce & Shaver, 1994). This situation is further compounded by the fact that more avoidant disclosers underestimated their partners' responsiveness when their partners were more anxious.

The dynamics underlying anxious-avoidant pairings are conceptually similar to the demand-withdrawal pattern that defines certain distressed married couples (Heavey & Christensen, 1990). This pattern is characterized by one partner expressing greater needs and making more demands (often in the form of criticism; Gottman, 1994) while the other partner responds by withdrawing or stonewalling. Withdrawal, in turn, evokes more demands, resulting in a reciprocally corrosive interaction pattern. Couples in which one partner is anxiously attached and the other is avoidantly attached may display a similar destructive pattern. It is important to note that gender did not moderate any effects. Attachment orientations and the role that each partner was in during each discussion (discloser vs. responder) had a stronger impact on the results than participants' gender did. This information is important because it indicates that the demand-withdrawal pattern may be less closely linked to sex roles than it is to the variables investigated in this study.

These anxiety-avoidance interactions are genuine dyadic effects in which outcomes depend on the attachment style of each partner. This is one of the first studies—and the first social interaction study—to document this elusive but widely hypothesized pattern. As discussed above, capitalization situations should elicit different motives and concerns in highly avoidant and highly anxious people. Avoidant people should not fare well in capitalization situations, either as disclosers or responders, given that these situations call for intimacy. Anxious persons should not fare well in these situations if their partners are highly avoidant because highly avoidant people apparently do not provide enough disclosure or responsiveness for capitalization interactions to go well, thereby confirming the fears of highly anxious people.

It is important to reiterate that capitalization situations *should and do* benefit most people in most relationships, given that most people are securely attached. Most likely, they are also somewhat beneficial to insecure people, just less so than is true of most secure people. Moreover, one partner's attachment security may help insecure people achieve better outcomes in capitalization situations. Indeed, in the current study, lower anxiety (greater security) buff-

ered the negative effects of partner avoidance, and anxious responders overestimated their own responsiveness if their partners were less avoidant (more secure).

In terms of clinical implications, given that attachment insecurity is associated with lower relationship satisfaction (Feeney, 2008; Simpson, 1990), couples in which one or both partners are insecurely attached are likely to be overrepresented in many clinical settings. Thus, the current findings may be useful to therapists in understanding and intervening in problematic couple dynamics, especially those that center on perceived (or actual) deficiencies in responsiveness to positive events. Specifically, therapists may need to help anxious individuals give their partners fuller credit when their partners are, in fact, being responsive. They may also need to help avoidant people be more active and constructive, especially when their partners share important, positive life events. When targeting observably responsive or unresponsive acts, interventions will be most effective if therapists explore the shared meaning of these behaviors between spouses (Peterson & Smith, 2010). When counseling “perfect storm” couples, therapists may also need to assist each partner in interpreting the other’s behaviors while considering the countervailing motivations of anxious and avoidant individuals. Johnson (2004), in fact, has developed a new form of therapy, emotionally focused couples therapy, which is based on principles of attachment theory.

The current study has some limitations. For example, our sample consisted primarily of long-term dating couples, so it is not clear whether our results generalize to more committed romantic relationships. However, given that most married couples were at one time dating partners, understanding these processes in dating relationships (and ultimately how they may predict the transition to marriage) is likely to shed light on capitalization interactions in more committed dyads. Also, our sample included only heterosexual couples, who were primarily White (73%), young (18- to 36-year-old) undergraduate students. This may limit the generalizability of our findings. In addition, participants were asked to discuss recent positive events. These discussions may not occur in some relationships, or they may be different in less structured settings. Finally, although our study adds to the literature by documenting important, theoretically meaningful connections between attachment orientations and responsiveness in capitalization interactions, we did not assess whether responsiveness predicts long-term relationship outcomes.

These shortcomings notwithstanding, this study fills several major gaps in our knowledge. For example, it is the first social interaction study to collect discloser, responder, and observer ratings in capitalization discussions. It is the first study to document that the working models of highly anxious and highly avoidant individuals “twist” perceptions and behaviors relevant to responsiveness in theoretically anticipated ways during these unique and understudied discussions. And it is first social interaction study to confirm that anxious–avoidant pairings do, in fact, produce a “perfect storm” pattern.

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