

Conflicting Pressures on Romantic Relationship Commitment for Anxiously Attached Individuals

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ABSTRACT Anxious attachment predicts strong desires for intimacy and stability in romantic relationships, yet the relation between anxious attachment and romantic commitment is unclear. We propose that extant literature has failed to find a consistent relation because anxiously attached individuals experience conflicting pressures on commitment. Data from Australia ($N = 137$) show that relationship satisfaction and felt security each act as suppressors of a positive relation between anxious attachment and commitment. Data from Japan ($N = 159$) replicate the suppression effect of felt security and also demonstrate that the residual positive relation between anxious attachment and commitment can be partly explained by dependence on the partner. These findings suggest that anxiously attached individuals may be ambivalent about commitment. Dissatisfaction and worries about negative evaluation appear to exert downward pressure on commitment, counteracting the upward pressure that is exerted by factors such as relational dependency.

Romantic commitment is a dynamic, motivational process that is based on one's cognitive and affective appraisals of the relationship, and its situational context, at a given time (e.g., Johnson, 1991; Rusbult, 1980; Stanley & Markman, 1992). Factors such as current satisfaction, feelings of moral or personal obligation, and environmental opportunities and constraints all play a role in the commitment process (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Although clear determination to stay with a romantic partner is one possible outcome of commitment processes, this multifaceted conceptualization of commitment

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also acknowledges the possibility of confusion, internal conflict, and enormous variability in one's commitment over time. Furthermore, this approach suggests that the decision process surrounding romantic commitment may be notably more difficult for some individuals than for others. In particular, individual differences related to ambivalence and indecisiveness, such as anxious attachment, are likely to play an important role in commitment to romantic partners. In the current research, we test the proposal that anxiously attached individuals experience opposing pressures on their decision to commit.

The Attachment Model

The attachment system appears to be an evolutionarily adaptive set of mechanisms that originally emerged to promote bonding between infants and caregivers in times of distress (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bowlby, 1982). A history of receiving emotional comfort in potentially threatening situations provides individuals with a sense of felt security, or a belief that they are cared for by important others (Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985). However, children who receive insensitive, infrequent, unreliable, or an absence of care often construct insecure working models, or problematic understandings of themselves and of others (for a review, see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Whereas secure attachment is predictive of relatively successful adult functioning, attachment insecurity is associated with less adaptive outcomes in adulthood. Insecure attachment can be understood in terms of two distinct continua: anxiety and avoidance.

High attachment anxiety is associated with inconsistent, unreliable care in childhood (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Thompson, 1999). Anxiously attached individuals tend to hold uncertain working models of others and poor working models of the self. Their attachment system remains chronically activated: They hypervigilantly search for signs of threat while craving excessive connection and reassurance from others (Feeney & Noller, 1990; Rom & Mikulincer, 2003). Anxious individuals desperately want acceptance and support from others, but due to their perceived lack of self-worth, they tend to doubt that others will be willing to provide the security that they need. In contrast, high levels of avoidance are associated with stable, low levels of support in childhood. These experiences lead avoidantly

attached individuals to have chronically deactivated attachment systems (Gillath et al., 2006) as well as discomfort with closeness or reliance on others (e.g., DeFronzo, Panzarella, & Butler, 2001; Mikulincer & Nachshon, 1991).

Attachment styles are highly predictive of a number of adult relationship dynamics (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Secure individuals find it easy to trust and rely on others (Simpson, 1990), and they engage in more adaptive, constructive relationship strategies (Kobak & Hazan, 1991). In contrast, anxious attachment is associated with chronic rumination, worry, and doubt about the availability of one's romantic partner (Feeney & Noller, 1990). In their relationships, anxious individuals are prone to more emotional highs and lows (Hazan & Shaver, 1987), conflicts of greater frequency and severity (Campbell, Simpson, Boldry, & Kashy, 2005), and lower levels of trust (Simpson, 1990). Finally, avoidant individuals appear to avoid closeness: Their romantic relationships are vested with less interdependency (Simpson, 1990), less intimacy, (Mikulincer & Erev, 1991), and less self-disclosure and trust (Pistole, 1993).

Attachment and Romantic Commitment

Given that commitment and the attachment dimensions are both fundamental constructs in relationship science, it is important to understand how secure versus insecure working models can contribute to the commitment process. The literature suggests fairly clearly that absence of both anxiety and avoidance (i.e., secure attachment) predicts greater commitment to one's romantic partner (e.g., Keelan, Dion, & Dion, 1994; Pistole, Clark, & Tubbs, 1995; Simpson, 1990). The literature also suggests consistently that high avoidance is predictive of lower commitment (e.g., Shaver & Brennan, 1992; Simpson, 1990), which corresponds with avoidant individuals' discomfort with closeness and intimacy.

The relationship between anxious attachment and commitment is less clear, with the literature yielding contradictory findings. Some research suggests that anxious attachment is related to higher commitment; for example, Feeney and Noller (1990) found that anxious attachment predicts a strong desire for romantic commitment. Anxious attachment in married men is associated with shorter length of courtship before marriage, suggesting that anxiously attached individuals commit to their romantic relationships more quickly than

secure or avoidant individuals (Senchak & Leonard, 1992). However, Hazan and Shaver (1987) found that anxiously attached individuals are more likely to endorse the idea that although it is easy to fall in love, it is difficult to find “true love” that will last. These findings suggest that although anxious individuals strive for deep involvement in romantic relationships, they are often either unwilling or unable to sustain those relationships. In Hazan and Shaver’s study, anxious attachment also correlated with shorter relationship duration. Similarly, when Simpson (1990) explicitly measured commitment levels in romantic partners, he found that anxious attachment was significantly, negatively correlated with global commitment.

Although subsequent studies have been conducted in an attempt to resolve these conflicting findings, researchers have been unable to establish a definitive relationship between anxiety and commitment as of yet. Shaver and Brennan (1992) found that although anxious individuals are less likely to be in relationships and tend to be in relationships of shorter duration, they are no more or less likely to be committed to romantic relationships when they are in them. Similarly, in Slotter and Finkel’s study (2009), anxious attachment predicted less of a commitment decline in unfulfilling relationships, but the overall relationship between anxious attachment and commitment was not significant. Kirkpatrick and Davis (1994) followed romantic dyads over a 3-year period and found essentially opposite patterns of relationships between attachment, satisfaction, and relational stability for men and women. In sum, relationship researchers have yet to find a reliable association between attachment anxiety and romantic commitment.

The Potential Role of Ambivalence

One reason that previous studies have failed to find a clear relationship between anxious attachment and romantic commitment may be that researchers have yet to consider the role of ambivalence in the commitment process. Ambivalence is produced when an individual holds strong positive and negative views on an issue simultaneously (Kaplan, 1972). Ainsworth et al. (1978) and Bowlby (1982) suggested that ambivalence is a central part of anxious attachment. Children who receive confusing, unpredictable treatment from their caregiver may learn to both fear and cling to the same person, creating a strongly ambivalent set of emotions toward one’s attachment figure.

This is reflected in the behavior that anxious children typically display in Ainsworth's Strange Situation task: Although anxious children cling to their parents following a brief separation, they tend to simultaneously display anger and resistance toward them. In fact, the original label for this type of insecurity was "anxious-ambivalence," prompted by these uniquely uncertain patterns observed in Ainsworth and colleagues' (1978) studies.

Current research is consistent with the suggestion that anxiously attached individuals remain characteristically ambivalent throughout adulthood. For example, Vogel and Wei (2005) have found that anxious individuals appear conflict-ridden about seeking support from others: Their support-seeking intentions are simultaneously heightened by psychological stress and suppressed by negative perceptions of close others' supportiveness. Anxiously attached individuals also appear to maintain confused representations of others. A study by Bartz and Lydon (2006) suggests that anxious individuals' desire for close connection can lead them to be particularly prosocial toward others. However, they simultaneously expect rejection, which leads them to react with uncertainty and anxiety when individuals reciprocate their affection and interest.

The state of ambivalence is generally unpleasant (Newby-Clark, McGregor, & Zanna, 2002). However, ambivalence leads to particularly acute discomfort when a person is forced to commit to a decision (van Harreveld, Rutiens, Rotteveel, Nordgren, & van der Pligt, 2009). Thus, the issue of commitment may bring to the fore any latent relationship ambivalence dynamics. That is, if the salience of ambivalent feelings is at its peak during the commitment process, then decisions around romantic commitment should be particularly conflict ridden for anxious individuals who are ambivalent about their romantic partners. Indirect evidence of this pattern exists in the literature on relationship dissolution. For example, anxiously attached individuals are particularly likely to break up and get back together with the same romantic partner (Kirkpatrick & Hazan, 1994). Furthermore, anxious individuals hold on to emotional attachment to ex-partners longer than secure individuals (Sbarra & Emery, 2005) but can be persuaded to let go of these attachments with relative ease (Spiellmann, MacDonald, & Wilson, 2009). Combined, this research suggests that anxious individuals are ambivalent about whether to maintain or dissolve their romantic relationships.

Understanding the Commitment Process for Anxiously Attached Individuals

By definition, ambivalence is the possession of simultaneous, opposing attitudes toward a topic, thereby generating the subjective experience of “mixed feelings.” To understand and directly measure commitment-related ambivalence using the best available analytic tools (e.g., Locke & Braun, 2009), it is necessary to identify the opposing pressures on commitment. We propose that two pressures that may act to decrease commitment include anxiously attached individuals’ tendencies to be dissatisfied with their romantic relationships and to feel unvalued by their partners. The finding that anxious attachment predicts relational dissatisfaction has been replicated repeatedly with diverse methodologies (e.g., Brennan & Shaver, 1995; Collins & Feeney, 2004; Collins & Read, 1990; Lussier, Sabourin, & Turgeon, 1997; Rholes, Simpson, Campbell, & Grich, 2001). In turn, satisfaction is an important facet of commitment, and relationship dissatisfaction is associated with lower global commitment levels (e.g., Le & Agnew, 2003; Rusbult, 1983). Further, numerous studies have found that anxious attachment predicts low felt security: Anxiously attached individuals lack confidence that they will continue to receive acceptance and positive regard from their romantic partners (Shaver, Schachner, & Mikulincer, 2005; Tucker & Anders, 1999). In general, low felt security is strongly linked to relationship dissatisfaction and instability (Holmes & Rempel, 1989; Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000).

In contrast to the downward pressure on commitment created by low felt security and dissatisfaction, we propose that relational dependency may exert upward pressure for anxiously attached individuals. Dependence is the degree to which an individual feels reliant on another person to meet his or her needs (Attridge, Berscheid, & Sprecher, 1998), and it is strongly predictive of relational commitment and stability (Attridge et al., 1998). In healthy relationships, this dependency often arises, in part, from satisfaction within the relationship (Rusbult, 1983), and the resulting commitment works to enhance the relationship by promoting relational maintenance strategies (e.g., Johnson & Rusbult, 1989; Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991; Van Lange et al., 1997). However, anxiously attached individuals chronically overrely on others for support, validation, and identity (e.g., Collins & Read, 1990; Feeney

& Noller, 1990). Furthermore, this reliance appears to stem from personal insecurities, such as lack of social confidence (Alonso-Arbiol, Shaver, & Yarnoz, 2002). We propose that these feelings of neediness create pressure for anxiously attached individuals to remain in their relationships, irrespective of the quality of those relationships.

We propose that anxious individuals experience conflicting pressures on their feelings of commitment, which may explain why previous research on anxious attachment and commitment has yielded contradictory findings. We tested this idea across two studies in the current research. Our first hypothesis was that although anxiously attached individuals wish to commit to their romantic partners, their relationship dissatisfaction and low felt security create separate downward pressures on relationship commitment. Among a sample of Australians, we predicted that controlling for satisfaction and felt security would reveal a positive relationship between anxious attachment and commitment. In the second study, we attempted to replicate the negative effects of low satisfaction and felt security, and also determine whether any remaining positive relation between anxious attachment and commitment could be accounted for by strong feelings of dependence. As a particularly stringent test of our hypotheses, we attempted to replicate and extend Study 1's findings in a different culture—Japan.

STUDY 1

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited from the University of Queensland psychology participant pool. All participants were currently in romantic relationships. The sample consisted of 137 participants (107 women, 30 men) with an average age of 19 (range = 17 to 35) and an average relationship length of 14 months (range = 1 to 65 months).¹

Materials

Attachment Style Questionnaire (ASQ). The ASQ (Feeney, Noller, & Hanrahan, 1994) is a 40-item questionnaire with scales designed to

1. Please note that the Australian data combine samples previously analyzed in MacDonald and Jessica (2006) as well as MacDonald, Marshall, Shimotomai, and July (2009). The Japanese data were previously analyzed in MacDonald et al. (2009).

measure the two attachment dimensions. Anxious attachment is measured with 13 items (e.g., “I find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like”; Cronbach’s $\alpha = .86$). Avoidance is measured with 16 items (e.g., “I prefer to depend on myself rather than other people”; Cronbach’s $\alpha = .85$). Responses were given on a 6-point scale (1 = *totally disagree* to 6 = *totally agree*).

Felt security. This measure (Murray, Holmes, Griffin, Bellavia, & Rose, 2001) asks how positively participants believe they would be evaluated by their romantic partners on a series of 20 positive and negative interpersonal traits such as “kind and affectionate” and “emotional or moody” (reverse scored; Cronbach’s $\alpha = .79$). Participants indicated the extent to which their partners would evaluate each item as descriptive of the participant on a 6-point Likert scale with 1 = *not at all* and 6 = *completely*. Higher scores represent a belief that the partner would evaluate them positively.

Satisfaction. This 5-item scale (Murray et al., 2001) measured participants’ level of satisfaction with their current relationship with items such as “I am extremely happy with my current romantic relationship” (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .93$). The ratings were made on a 6-point Likert scale with 1 = *not true at all* and 6 = *extremely true*.

Commitment. Two items from Murray et al. (2001) assessed commitment on a 6-point scale (1 = *not true at all* and 6 = *extremely true*). These items were “I am very committed to maintaining my relationship” and “I have made a firm promise to myself to do everything in my power to make my relationship work” (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .81$).

Procedure

After the consent process, participants completed a questionnaire package including the measures listed above. All participants were thanked and debriefed at the conclusion of the study.

Results and Discussion

Correlations between all variables can be seen in Table 1. Women ($M = 2.85$) reported lower levels of avoidant attachment than men ($M = 3.12$), $t(135) = 2.34$, $p = .02$. No other gender differences were found. Including gender as a covariate did not influence the suppression analyses, and thus suppression results are reported without controlling for gender.

Table 1
Correlations Between All Variables for Study 1

	Anxious Attachment	Avoidant Attachment	Commitment	Felt Security
Avoidant attachment	.44***			
Commitment	-.14	-.27**		
Felt security	-.36***	-.38***	.40***	
Satisfaction	-.29**	-.22**	.70***	.34***

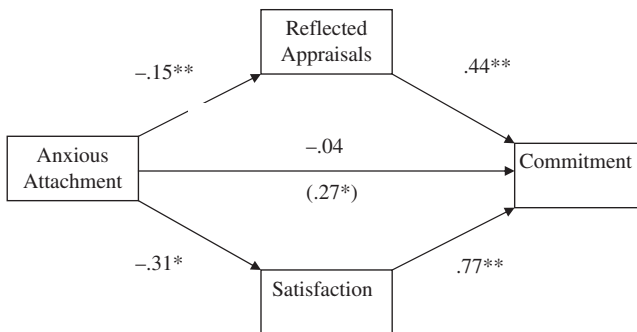
** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Examination of the suppression of the relation between anxious attachment and commitment was conducted via a bootstrap method for testing multiple mediation effects (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Suppression involves data wherein the relationship between an independent and dependent variable is strengthened when a third variable is included in the analyses (MacKinnon, Krull, & Lockwood, 2000). In suppression, then, when the *indirect effect* of an independent variable on a dependent variable (i.e., through a suppressor variable) is taken into account, the *direct effect* (i.e., controlling for the suppressor variable) of the independent variable on the dependent variable should be larger than the *total effect* (i.e., not controlling for the suppressor variable). Statistically, an indirect effect can be described as the product of the regression coefficient representing the effect of the independent variable on the suppressor variable and the regression coefficient representing the effect of the suppressor variable on the dependent variable (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). MacKinnon et al. (2000) noted that suppression effects can be tested using tools designed to examine mediation effects. Two commonly used tests of mediation are the causal steps strategy (Baron & Kenny, 1986) and the Sobel test (Sobel, 1982, 1986). Preacher and Hayes (2008) argued that neither method is optimal for testing mediation in the majority of cases. These authors argue that the causal steps approach offers no explicit test of an indirect effect, instead testing component parts of the indirect effect separately. They argue that the Sobel test relies on estimates of the standard error of the indirect effect that require an assumption of a normal distribution—an

assumption these authors argue is unlikely to be met in all but the largest sample sizes. Thus, Preacher and Hayes (2008) recommended bootstrapping methods for testing mediation as this approach does not rely on the assumption of normality.

To ensure effects could be uniquely attributed to anxious attachment, suppression analyses were conducted with avoidant attachment entered as a covariate. These analyses showed that the total effect (i.e., not controlling for the suppressor variables) of anxious attachment on relationship commitment was negative and not statistically significant, $\beta = -.04$, $p = .80$, $d = .04$ (see Figure 1). However, the direct effect (i.e., controlling for the suppressor variables) of anxious attachment on relationship commitment was positive and statistically significant, $\beta = .27$, $p = .01$, $d = .45$. Indirect effects (calculated by multiplying the effect of anxious attachment on a suppressor by the effect of that suppressor on commitment) were tested to examine whether these paths could account for significant variance in the suppression effect (see Table 2). These analyses revealed that both felt security and relationship satisfaction were separate, statistically significant suppressors of the relation between anxious attachment and relationship commitment.

The results confirmed our hypothesis: a positive relation between anxious attachment and commitment appeared to be counteracted



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

Figure 1

Unstandardized regression coefficients for indirect effects analyses in Study 1 ($N = 137$). The value in parentheses represents the direct effect of anxious attachment on commitment (i.e., controlling for indirect effects).

Table 2
Suppression of the Effect of Anxious Attachment on Relationship Commitment by Felt Security and Relationship Satisfaction in Study 1

	Point Estimate of Indirect Effect	Standard Error	BCa 95% CI	
			Lower	Upper
Felt security	-.0659	.0399	-.1674	-.0074
Satisfaction	-.2366	.1042	-.4536	-.0409
Total	-.3025	.1178	-.5499	-.0834

Note. BCa: bias corrected and accelerated; 5,000 bootstrap samples. Confidence intervals containing zero are interpreted as not significant.

by anxious individuals' tendencies to experience dissatisfaction and low felt security. When suppressor variables were not considered, no significant relationship was found between anxious attachment and commitment. However, controlling for satisfaction and felt security revealed a significant, positive relationship between anxious attachment and commitment. These results suggest anxiously attached individuals' attitudes toward their romantic relationships potentially provide sources of conflict that can create ambivalence. That is, in addition to the downward pressure on commitment that is exerted by dissatisfaction and low felt security, anxiously attached individuals experience simultaneous upward pressure on commitment. In the second study, we attempted to replicate and extend these findings in two important ways. First, we attempted to provide empirical evidence that dependence acts as the opposing, upward force on commitment. Specifically, we tested whether dependence mediates the residual positive relationship between anxious attachment and commitment found in Study 1. Second, we attempted this replication and extension in a considerably different cultural context—Japan—to allow for a strong test of the generalizability of our effects.

STUDY 2

Method

Participants

Participants were Japanese university students who were currently involved in dating relationships. The total sample included 159 students

(117 women, 42 men) recruited from five universities (Senshu University [$n = 32$], Fukushima University [$n = 27$], Kanazawa University [$n = 37$], Nihon Fukushi University [$n = 26$], and Jumonji University [$n = 43$]). Participants were an average age of 20 years old (range = 18 to 28 years), with an average relationship length of 13 months (range = 1 to 85 months).

Materials

To translate the study's measures from English to Japanese, one native Japanese speaking PhD psychologist translated the English version of the questionnaires into Japanese. Then, another PhD psychologist back-translated the translation into English. Any disagreement regarding the translation was discussed among the translators.

All scales used in Study 2, except the new dependence measure, were the same used in Study 1. Reliabilities in Study 2 were as follows: anxious attachment (.83), avoidant attachment (.79), felt security (.66), satisfaction (.83), and commitment (.68).

Dependence. The dependence scale (Murray, Holmes, MacDonald, & Ellsworth, 1998) consists of five items assessing the extent to which an individual feels he or she needs his or her relationship, such as "I feel that I need my partner a great deal" (Cronbach's $\alpha = .84$).

Procedure

Japanese participants were recruited during class time of various psychology classes. Following informed consent, participants completed questionnaire packages including the measures listed above. All participants were thanked and debriefed upon completion.

Results

Correlations between all Study 2 variables can be seen in Table 3. Japanese women ($M = 3.88$) reported higher levels of anxious attachment than Japanese men ($M = 3.47$), $t(144) = 3.26$, $p = .001$. No other gender differences were found. Although the zero-sum correlation between anxious attachment and dependence was not significant, we reasoned that this null effect may have been a result of variance shared with avoidant attachment. Indeed, entering anxious and avoidant attachment as simultaneous predictors of dependence in a regression analysis revealed anxiety to be a significant, positive predictor, $\beta = .24$, $p = .01$, whereas avoidance was a significant, neg-

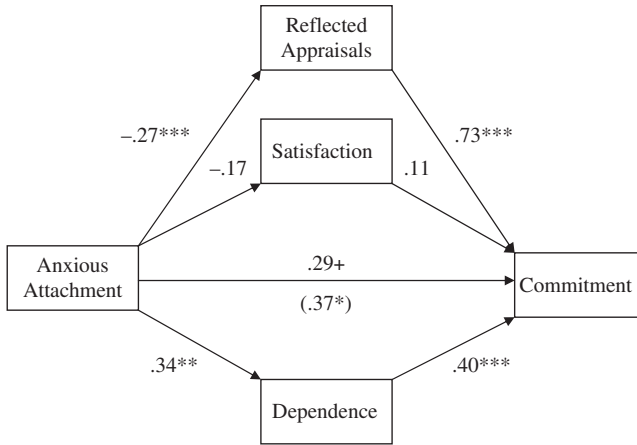
Table 3
Correlations Between All Variables for Study 2

	Anxious Attachment	Avoidant Attachment	Commitment	Felt Security	Satisfaction
Avoidant attachment	.36***				
Commitment	.06	-.16 ⁺			
Felt security	-.48***	-.35***	.26**		
Satisfaction	-.27**	-.35***	.33***	.30***	
Dependence	.09	-.18*	.45***	.13	.53***

⁺ $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

ative predictor, $\beta = -.30$, $p = .001$. This result suggested that dependence was a viable candidate for explaining any positive relation between anxious attachment and commitment. Indirect effects were examined using the bootstrap method employed in Study 1 (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Controlling for gender did not influence the indirect effects results, and thus these analyses are reported without gender as a control. Avoidant attachment was included as a covariate in the analyses. The total effect of anxious attachment on relationship commitment was positive and marginally significant, $\beta = .29$, $p = .06$, $d = .30$ (see Figure 2). The direct effect (i.e., controlling for the indirect effects) of anxious attachment on relationship commitment was positive and conventionally significant, $\beta = .37$, $p = .02$, $d = .38$. Most important for this analysis, indirect effects tests revealed that whereas the indirect effect of felt security was statistically significant and negative, the indirect effect of dependence was statistically significant and positive (see Table 4). The indirect effect of satisfaction was not statistically significant.²

2. In ancillary analyses available upon request, both low reflected appraisals and low dependence mediated the negative relation between avoidant attachment and commitment. Satisfaction did not emerge as a significant mediator. Thus, whereas reflected appraisals and dependence appear to create opposing pressures on commitment for those high in anxious attachment, these variables act in concert to place downward pressure on commitment levels for those high in avoidant attachment.



+ $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Figure 2

Unstandardized regression coefficients for indirect effects analyses in Study 2 ($N = 159$). The value in parentheses represents the direct effect of anxious attachment on commitment (i.e., controlling for indirect effects).

These results directly support and build on the findings from the first study by clearly identifying the sources of conflict in anxiously attached individuals' feelings of commitment. As with Study 1, feelings of low felt security appeared to place downward pressure on commitment for those high in anxious attachment. However, simultaneous feelings of dependence on the romantic partner placed upward pressure on commitment. In other words, anxiously attached individuals were less confident of their partners' acceptance and regard for them, as was found in the first study, yet they were also more likely to feel that they needed and relied on their partners. Low felt security suppressed relational commitment, whereas high dependence simultaneously promoted an increase in commitment. Overall, the data indicate a small total effect of anxious attachment on commitment, as has been found in previous research. The conflicting pressures of felt security and dependency help to illuminate the complexities underlying this seemingly trivial relationship.

Table 4
Examination of Indirect Effects of Anxious Attachment on Commitment in Study 2

	Point Estimate of Indirect Effect	Standard Error	BCa 95% CI	
			Lower	Upper
Felt security	-.1986	.0797	-.3766	-.0636
Satisfaction	-.0192	.0293	-.1127	.0172
Dependenc	.1369	.0638	.0383	.2971
Total	-.3025	.1178	-.5499	-.0834

Note. BCa: bias corrected and accelerated; 5,000 bootstrap samples. Confidence intervals containing zero are interpreted as not significant.

Of note, when both felt security and dependence were controlled, the remaining direct effect of anxious attachment on commitment was statistically significant, although the effect size was small. Nevertheless, controlling for dependence alone did not appear to account for all of the upward pressure on commitment for anxiously attached individuals. The fact that a positive relationship between anxious attachment and commitment still remained suggests that there are further, as of yet unidentified upward forces on commitment. Contrary to Study 1, satisfaction did not have a significant indirect effect in Study 2, meaning that it did not significantly suppress commitment levels for anxious individuals in the Japanese sample as it did for those in the Australian sample. The extent to which this is a meaningful difference is unclear and may require further empirical investigation.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Our hypothesis that anxiously attached individuals experience conflicting pressures on relationship commitment appears to be strongly confirmed. In Study 1, anxious attachment was associated with greater insecurity in partners' affections and lower satisfaction with relationships, each of which appeared to place downward pressure on levels of commitment. Accounting for these suppressor variables revealed a significant, positive relationship between anxious attachment and commitment, suggesting the existence of

competing commitment pressures that provide a potential source of internal conflict for anxiously attached individuals. Study 2 replicated a negative indirect effect of felt security, although not satisfaction, in the relation between anxious attachment and commitment. Study 2 also identified dependence as partly responsible for the positive residual relationship between anxious attachment and commitment. Anxiously attached participants were more likely to feel they needed their partners, which appeared to create an upward force on commitment, counteracting the downward force of low felt security. The oppositely valenced paths between anxious attachment and commitment uncovered in our research may explain why past literature has revealed an inconsistent relation between these two constructs. Notably, evidence of conflicting commitment pressures was found in both Australia and Japan. Such cross-cultural replication of simultaneous positive and negative relations between anxious attachment and commitment suggests that the tendency of anxiously attached individuals to experience conflicted commitment pressures may be particularly robust.

The conflicting commitment pressures that anxiously attached individuals experience may also help to account for some of their uncertain relationship behaviors. As previously noted, anxiously attached individuals experience tumultuous relationships characterized by emotional highs and lows (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). When anxiously attached individuals' relationships break up, the endings to those relationships tend to be confused in character as well (Kirkpatrick & Hazan, 1994; Sbarra & Emery, 2005; Spielmann et al., 2009). Such uncertain behaviors can be understood in the context of ambivalence: Strongly ambivalent attitudes toward the relationship resulting from the sources of conflict identified in the current research could potentially create conflicting feelings that lead to such confusion.

The finding that anxiously attached individuals' weak sense of felt security is related to lower relational commitment provides an important extension of Murray and colleagues' work on dependency regulation in romantic relationships (e.g., Murray et al., 1998). One of Murray and colleagues' key findings is that insecure individuals translate personal insecurities into relationship insecurities. In other words, when faced with threats to self-worth, insecure individuals respond by questioning their partners' regard for them. This low felt security leads such individuals to subsequently doubt and derogate

their partners. The dependency regulation model suggests that distancing is used as a self-protective strategy: Insecure individuals withdraw emotional investment from close relationships to avoid being hurt (Murray, Holmes, & Collins, 2006). Although work on the dependency regulation model has demonstrated this effect repeatedly and through multiple methodologies, emotional withdrawal is usually assessed by measuring feelings about the partner or the relationship rather than commitment per se. The current research appears to extend evidence for dependency regulation dynamics to the commitment construct by highlighting a negative relation between felt security and commitment. At the same time, however, the current research suggests that in spite of their low felt security, anxiously attached individuals may nevertheless experience particularly high levels of dependence on their partner for support and identity that may not be fully captured by existing dependency regulation research. At least in the current research, this neediness appears to lead to a countervailing increase in commitment that operates outside of the felt security mechanism.

One notable limitation to the present research is that it is purely correlational. Thus, although we have modeled the variables with particular assumptions about causal relations in mind, we cannot be sure that these assumptions are correct. Specifically, we hypothesize that anxious attachment leads to low satisfaction and low felt security as well as high relational dependence, which may cause anxiously attached individuals to be conflicted about commitment. However, alternative explanations are feasible. It is possible that unsatisfying, problematic relationships could generate ambivalent commitment attitudes in relationship partners while also causing those partners to become more anxiously attached over time. Future research examining the relations between anxious attachment, felt security, satisfaction, dependence, and commitment using longitudinal methods would help clarify causal pathways. Specifically, longitudinal studies would allow observations of how these factors may exert reciprocal influence over time for anxiously attached individuals.

It should also be noted that participants in this study were almost exclusively individuals in dating relationships of relatively short duration. It is possible that anxiously attached individuals experience conflicting pressures on feelings of commitment in the early stages of relationships, but that these conflicts subside over time as

their partners' affections are affirmed. Thus, without available evidence, caution is warranted in generalizing the current results to marriages and other long-term pairings.

Another limitation of this study is the use of a commitment scale that is relatively new to the commitment literature. Although the items appear to be high in face validity, it would be valuable to replicate these results with more established commitment scales. For example, the Investment Model Scale (Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998), developed from Rusbult's Investment Model (1980), is comprehensive and more extensively validated (e.g., Le & Agnew, 2003). Rusbult suggested that there are three primary influences in relational commitment: satisfaction, the quality of alternatives (perceived value of being in other relationships or solitude), and investments (what one stands to lose should the relationship end). These facets of commitment exert independent influences on global commitment levels. Not only would the future use of this scale provide conceptual replication of our findings, but it would also allow us to examine three unique contributors to global commitment levels.

The current studies suggest that felt security and dependence offer useful starting points for future research on commitment ambivalence by providing a basis for the measurement of the negative and positive components of such ambivalence. The potential consequences of commitment ambivalence are considerable. In the first study, anxiously attached participants felt unhappy within their romantic relationships, yet they were no less likely to be committed to their romantic partners. In the second study, anxiously attached individuals' dependence on their partners increased their interest in maintaining their relationships in spite of the low felt security they were experiencing. Together, this evidence suggests that anxiously attached individuals' relational commitment may stem from perceptions of entrapment rather than from intrinsic motivation. That is, such individuals may remain in their relationships not because they enjoy being with their partner, but because they feel that they need their partner, and they wish to avoid the consequences of leaving the relationship.

Commitment ambivalence may also predict greater susceptibility to fluctuations in commitment over time, particularly in response to environmental circumstances. Ambivalent individuals generally adopt strategies to reduce their discomforting feelings, one of which is to gather additional information on the topic in question (see van

Harrevel, van der Pligt, & de Liver, 2009, for a review). If anxiously attached individuals are uncertain about whether to commit to their romantic partners, they may look to everyday relational events to indicate how they should be feeling about their relationship. In support of this notion, Campbell et al. (2005) found that anxiously attached individuals rely heavily on daily perceptions of their relationships to assess current and future relationship quality. In other words, positive relationship experiences can increase anxious individuals' optimism about their relationships considerably, whereas even low levels of negativity can make them feel significantly less optimistic. Combined with our findings, this suggests that anxious attachment could predict dramatic fluctuation in commitment levels in response to day-to-day relational events. Such lack of stability can have deleterious effects on relationship functioning, particularly if those fluctuations in commitment are perceived by the relationship partner (Arriaga, Reed, Goodfriend, & Agnew, 2006).

Despite the limitations, we believe that the current results provide compelling evidence that helps clarify the relation between two foundational constructs in relationship science—anxious attachment and relationship commitment. The data suggest that feelings of insecurity and dissatisfaction place downward pressure on anxious individuals' feelings of commitment, thus masking the simultaneous upward pressure on commitment exerted, in part, by relational dependence.

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