Recovering From Conflict in Romantic Relationships: A Developmental Perspective

Jessica E. Salvatore[1], Sally I-Chun Kuo[1], Ryan D. Steele[2], Jeffry A. Simpson[2], and W. Andrew Collins[1]
[1]Institute of Child Development and [2]Department of Psychology, University of Minnesota

Abstract

This study adopted a developmental perspective on recovery from conflict in romantic relationships. Participants were 73 young adults (target participants), studied since birth, and their romantic partners. A novel observational coding scheme was used to evaluate each participant's degree of conflict recovery, operationalized as the extent to which the participant disengaged from conflict during a 4-min "cool-down" task immediately following a 10-min conflict discussion. Conflict recovery was systematically associated with developmental and dyadic processes. Targets who were rated as securely attached more times in infancy recovered from conflict better, as did their romantic partners. Concurrently, having a romantic partner who displayed better recovery predicted more positive relationship emotions and greater relationship satisfaction. Prospectively, target participants' early attachment security and their partners' degree of conflict recovery interacted to predict relationship stability 2 years later, such that having a partner who recovered from conflict better buffered targets with insecure histories.

Keywords

How—and especially how well—partners resolve conflict is central to understanding the functioning, quality, and maintenance of romantic relationships (Gottman, 1994). Much less attention, however, has been paid to the ability to *recover* from a heated or hurtful conflict discussion in order to meet immediate situational demands (Gottman & Levenson, 1999). This lack of attention to recovery is surprising given the negative consequences that even short-term conflict spillover (Gottman & Levenson, 1999) can have on relationship outcomes. Conflict recovery, which we conceptually define as the capacity to isolate and confine interpersonal conflict in order to achieve other important dyadic goals, is a self-regulatory process that most likely draws upon attentional and cognitive resources linked to emotion regulation (Gross & Thompson, 2007). This self-regulatory process should have important consequences for relationship functioning and quality. In the research reported in this article, we adopted a developmental perspective on conflict recovery and tested several novel hypotheses concerning its link to a measure of early (infant) dyadic regulation, as well as its associations with concurrent and future relationship outcomes.

Our approach is grounded in an organizational perspective on behavior and development (Sroufe, Egeland, Carlson, & Collins, 2005). Four tenets of this perspective are relevant.

First, according to this perspective, the meaning of a behavior depends on how it is orchestrated with other behaviors in a social context. Disengaging from conflict when it is appropriate or necessary to do so should buffer individuals and couples from the negative consequences of residual conflict (Gottman, 1994). Conversely, failure to effectively disengage from conflictual interactions—especially when conflict is no longer appropriate—may undermine current and future relationship functioning (Gottman & Levenson, 1999). Perseverating on disagreements, especially in the face of situational cues indicating that conflict is no longer appropriate, should hamper an individual's ability to engage effectively in other types of interactions, such as decision making (Gottman et al., 1976), co-parenting (McHale, Lauretti, Talbot, & Pouquette, 2002), provision of social support (Cutrona, 1996), and caregiving (Kunce & Shaver, 1994). Moreover, if conflict recovery is an important self-regulatory process that has interpersonal consequences, the speed and completeness to which an individual

Corresponding Author:
Jessica E. Salvatore, Institute of Child Development, University of Minnesota, 51 East River Rd., Minneapolis, MN 55455
E-mail: salv0041@umn.edu

can disengage from conflict should be reflected in his or her partner's relationship perceptions.

Second, according to an organizational perspective, self-regulation should be partially rooted in the pattern of dyadic regulation initially established in infant-caregiver relationships (Cassidy, 1994; Kobak & Sceery, 1988; Sroufe & Fleeson, 1986; Thompson, 2008). Synchronous and supportive early relationships are the initial context in which good self-regulation skills are forged (Sroufe et al., 2005). Indeed, studies show that attachment security, an important marker of early interactional synchrony and dyadic regulation (Schore, 2005), is positively related to self-regulation later in development (Sroufe et al., 2005; Thompson, 2008). Conflict recovery, being a self-regulatory process (e.g., controlling the urge to reengage in conflict when it is not appropriate to do so), should be related to one's history of dyadic regulation, as indexed by infant attachment security. In addition, the link from attachment security to conflict recovery in adult relationships should be unique and specific, with effects holding even when more global indicators of adult relationship functioning, such as relationship quality and negative affect, are statistically controlled.

The third tenet of the organizational perspective is that working models of the self and others established early in life should be systematically tied to interaction patterns in other relationships across the life span, including romantic relationships during adulthood (Roisman, Collins, Sroufe, & Egeland, 2005; Simpson, Collins, Tran, & Haydon, 2007; Sroufe & Fleeson, 1986). According to Bowlby's (1973) prototype hypothesis, experiences with early caregivers are probabilistically related to the interpersonal dynamics of subsequent close relationships. For this reason, a person's developmental history might also affect his or her romantic partner's conflict recovery. This continuity between past and present relationships may be attributable to the activation and operation of multiple mechanisms. For instance, people may select partners who behave in model-consistent ways, or they may consciously or unconsciously elicit partner responses that are consistent with their own working models (cf. Berk & Andersen, 2000). Accordingly, individuals who have secure attachment histories should have partners who are better at recovering from conflict, whereas those who have insecure attachment histories should have partners who are worse at recovering from conflict.

The fourth tenet of the organizational perspective involves the cumulative effects of early and later relationship experiences. Experiences in early (e.g., parent-child) and later (e.g., friendship, romantic) relationships should jointly contribute to subsequent psychosocial outcomes (Carlson, Sroufe, & Egeland, 2004). This notion is consistent with evidence indicating that positive relational experiences later in life may at times compensate for early negative experiences and that romantic partners may buffer certain individual vulnerabilities (e.g., Rönkä, Oravala, & Pulkkinen, 2002; Tran & Simpson, 2009). This fourth tenet suggests that romantic partners who are good at conflict recovery may buffer individuals who were insecurely attached in infancy from the potentially deleterious effects of conflict spillover, including relationship dissolution (Gottman & Levenson, 1999). Individuals who have insecure attachment histories may be at risk for later difficulties with the self-regulation capacities tied to conflict recovery, but if they have romantic partners who facilitate situationally appropriate disengagement from conflict, these relationships should be stable over time.

In this research, we collected observational and self-report data from 73 target participants, who had been followed longitudinally since birth, and their romantic partners. All participants were young adults (ages 20–21). Guided by the developmental-organizational reasoning just outlined, we tested three hypotheses:

1. Having a romantic partner who displays better conflict recovery should be associated with experiencing more positive relationship emotions and higher relationship satisfaction.
2. Target participants who were more securely attached in infancy (i.e., who experienced better early dyadic regulation) should display better recovery from romantic-relationship conflict, as should their adult romantic partners. These effects should hold when global indicators of romantic-relationship functioning (i.e., relationship quality and negative affect) are statistically controlled.
3. Partners' conflict recovery should interact with target participants' infant attachment histories to predict relationship stability 2 years later. This effect should also hold when potential confounds, such as relationship length, global indicators of relationship functioning (i.e., relationship quality and negative affect), and partners' commitment, are statistically controlled.

Method
Participants

The sample consisted of 73 young-adult heterosexual couples. One member of each couple was a target participant (51% female, 49% male) in the Minnesota Longitudinal Study of Risk and Adaptation (Sroufe et al., 2005). When targets were 20 to 21 years old, they and their romantic partners (mean relationship length = 26.71 months, *SD* = 20.52) participated in the present study. Sixty-nine percent of the targets were White, 16% were of mixed race, 10% were African American, and 5% were unclassifiable.

Procedure

Target participants and their partners were first interviewed (separately) about their romantic relationship. Each participant then completed self-report relationship measures independently. Next, each couple was videotaped for approximately 10 min while they performed the Markman-Cox

Conflict Discussion Task (Cox, 1991), during which they tried to resolve the most significant problem they had identified. Immediately following this task, each couple engaged in a videotaped "cool-down" task for approximately 4 min; during this task, they were instructed to discuss those aspects of their relationship about which they agreed the most (or disagreed the least). Then, each couple completed a videotaped untimed Ideal Couple Q-sort (Collins et al., 1999), during which partners and targets collaborated to sort 45 cards listing potential couple characteristics (e.g., "have the same interests," "make sacrifices for each other"). Each couple was asked to read each card aloud and select which of three labeled baskets the card belonged in: "most like an ideal couple," "least like an ideal couple," or "middle/unsure." After sorting all the cards, they together nominated the top 7 cards from the "least ideal" basket (i.e., those that least described an ideal couple) and the top 7 cards from the "most ideal" basket (i.e., those that best described the ideal couple). (Detailed information on the Couple Q-sort procedure can be found in Simpson et al., 2007.)

Relationship measures

Observer-rated conflict recovery. Four trained observers rated each participant's conflict recovery, operationally defined as the extent to which the participant disengaged from the conflict interaction and made a complete transition to the cool-down task. On a 5-point Likert-type scale, low scores were assigned to individuals who perseverated on the preceding conflict discussion, sabotaged the cool-down interaction by bringing up new problems, disputed their partner's suggestions of topics on which the couple agreed, or refused to talk. High scores were assigned to individuals who made substantial, positive contributions to the cool-down interaction by consistently bringing up positive (and no negative) aspects of the relationship or by building on positive aspects mentioned by the other dyad member. Interrater reliabilities (intraclass correlation coefficients, or *ICC*s) for this measure were high for both male and female participants, $ICC_{male} = .90$, $ICC_{female} = .95$.

Emotional tone. A modified version of the Emotional Tone Index (Berscheid, Snyder, & Omoto, 1989) assessed the frequency with which each participant reported experiencing 24 different emotions (10 positive, 14 negative) in the relationship. Ratings were made on 7-point Likert-type scales, from 1 (*never*) to 7 (*almost always*). The difference between each participant's average rating of positive emotions and average rating of negative emotions was calculated to index his or her typical ratio of positive to negative emotions experienced in the relationship. The subscales from which these difference scores were derived were both internally consistent (positive emotions: $\alpha_{female} = .94$, $\alpha_{male} = .82$; negative emotions: $\alpha_{female} = .90$, $\alpha_{male} = .89$).

Relationship satisfaction. Participants rated their satisfaction with their current partner and relationship on the Relationship Assessment Scale (Hendrick, 1988). Responses were made on 7-point Likert-type scales, from 1 (*low*) to 7 (*high*). The relationship-satisfaction scale was internally consistent ($\alpha_{female} = .85$, $\alpha_{male} = .81$).

Control variables. Participants rated their partner and relationship on Lund's Commitment Scale (Lund, 1985). Responses were made on 7-point Likert-type scales, from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very/a lot*); internal consistency was acceptable ($\alpha_{female} = .66$, $\alpha_{male} = .59$). Observer-rated dyadic romantic-relationship quality during the entire videotaped session was calculated as the average of six observer ratings (Conflict Resolution, Overall Quality, Secure Base, and Positive Affect scales, plus two scales that tapped the degree to which individuals could be themselves in the relationship and the relationship promoted individual development; $\alpha = .95$; for additional information on these scales, see Roisman, Madsen, Hennighausen, Sroufe, & Collins, 2001). Observer-rated dyadic negative affect during the entire videotaped session was calculated as the average of three observer ratings (Negative Affect, Anger, and Hostility scales; $\alpha = .91$; see Roisman et al., 2001).

Relationship stability. The stability of each relationship was assessed 2 years after the lab discussions, when most targets were 23 years old. Target participants were interviewed and asked whether they were still involved with the same romantic partner. Of the 69 participants for whom stability data were available (< 6% attrition), 38 couples (55%) were still together.[1]

Developmental history: infant attachment security

Each target participant's infant attachment security was measured when he or she was 12 and 18 months old using Ainsworth's Strange Situation procedure (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). At each assessment, certified raters classified each target participant as secure, insecure-avoidant, or insecure-resistant on the basis of the target's behavior in response to a series of mildly stressful separations and reunions with his or her mother. We created a continuous attachment-security score by summing the number of times that each target was classified as secure. Targets classified as insecure at both time points received a score of 0, and those who were secure at one or both time points received a score of 1 or 2, respectively. Of the 73 targets who took part in the romantic-relationship assessment, 67 (92%) had complete data for both infant attachment assessments.

Results
Descriptive statistics

Table 1 reports the means, standard deviations, and correlations for the primary variables.

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for Focal Variables

Variable	M	SD	1 (targets)	1 (partners)	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
			Correlations								
1. Target's infant attachment	1.28	0.75	—	1.00							
2. Conflict recovery: females	3.11	1.33	.33†	.19	—						
3. Conflict recovery: males	3.04	1.31	.25	.60**	.76**	—					
4. Relationship satisfaction: females	5.88	0.92	.25	.12	.31**	.35**	—				
5. Relationship satisfaction: males	5.78	0.85	.32†	.09	.28*	.30*	.41**	—			
6. Emotional tone: females	3.24	1.69	.34†	.14	.25*	.31**	.81**	.36**	—		
7. Emotional tone: males	3.15	1.42	.38*	.22	.34**	.33**	.34**	.70**	.30*	—	
8. Relationship stability (1 = stable)	.55	—	.27*	.27*	.16	.23*	.23*	.14	.11	.20	—

Note: N = 73 for all variables except target's infant attachment (n = 67; 52% male, 48% female) and relationship stability (n = 69 couples).
For correlations with targets' infant attachment, results are presented separately for target participants and their partners.
†p < .10. *p ≤ .05. **p < .01.

Recovery from conflict, relationship satisfaction, and emotional tone

Because targets' scores were correlated significantly with their partners' scores for most variables (indicating that dyadic interdependence existed within couples), we analyzed the data using the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM; Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006). The APIM allows one to test the degree to which dyad partners' responses or behaviors are associated with factors attributable to the actor (i.e., the individual providing the response or behavior) and to the actor's partner. The APIM, therefore, estimates both *actor effects* (effects that an individual's predictor-variable score has on his or her own outcome score) and *partner effects* (effects that an individual's partner's predictor-variable score has on the individual's outcome score).[2] In an APIM approach, the dyad is treated as the unit of analysis, and actor and partner effects are tested with the proper degrees of freedom. All analyses were conducted using multilevel modeling in PASW 17.0 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL). Actor and partner effects are reported

as standardized regression coefficients. All predictor variables were z-scored, and sex was effect-coded (female = 1; male = −1). All significant effects are reported here.

The first set of analyses tested Hypothesis 1. We first examined the degree to which each participant's conflict recovery was associated with his or her emotional tone (ratio of positive to negative emotions typically experienced in the relationship) and the degree to which each participant's partner's conflict recovery was associated with that participant's emotional experience. As shown in Table 2, a partner effect ($\beta = 0.39$), $t(97) = 2.26$, $p = .03$, revealed that actors involved with partners who displayed better conflict recovery reported a more favorable ratio of positive to negative emotions in the relationship. We next tested the degree to which each participant's conflict recovery was associated with his or her relationship satisfaction, as well as the degree to which each participant's partner's conflict recovery was related to that participant's satisfaction. The results revealed a marginally significant partner effect ($\beta = 0.18$), $t(105) = 1.90$, $p = .06$; actors involved with partners who displayed better conflict recovery were more satisfied with their relationship (see Table 2).

Table 2. Effects of Actor and Partner Conflict Recovery on Emotional Tone and Satisfaction

Parameter	Emotional tone			Satisfaction		
	β	SE β	t (df)	β	SE β	t (df)
Intercept	3.20	0.14	23.39 (70)**	5.83	0.08	71.93 (70)**
Actor effects						
Actor's conflict recovery	0.15	0.17	0.84 (97)	0.13	0.09	1.44 (106)
Actor's sex (1 = female)	0.05	0.11	0.47 (70)	0.05	0.06	0.91 (70)
Partner effect						
Partner's conflict recovery	0.39	0.17	2.26 (97)*	0.18	0.09	1.90 (105)†
Interaction effects						
Actor's Conflict Recovery × Actor's Sex	−0.09	0.20	−0.43 (82)	−0.05	0.12	−0.38 (80)
Partner's Conflict Recovery × Actor's Sex	0.09	0.21	0.44 (82)	0.08	0.12	0.66 (80)

†p < .10. *p ≤ .05. **p < .01.

Developmental analyses

Multiple regression analyses were used to test Hypothesis 2.

To test whether target participants' attachment security was related to their own observer-rated conflict recovery during the videotaped discussions with their romantic partners, we regressed target participants' conflict-recovery scores on their infant attachment-security scores. As shown in Table 3 (Model 1), this hypothesis was confirmed. Target participants' infant attachment security was significantly related to their conflict-recovery scores 20 years later ($b = 0.54$), $t(64) = 2.48$, $p = .02$, $R^2 = .07$; targets who were more secure early in life (i.e., who were rated secure more times in the 12- and 18-month infant attachment assessments) displayed better conflict recovery with their romantic partners immediately following the conflict discussion.

In separate analyses, sex was tested as both a main effect in predicting conflict recovery and a moderator of the effect of attachment security in predicting conflict recovery. No significant effects were revealed.

To determine whether the association between infant attachment security and conflict recovery at age 20 to 21 remained significant when indicators of relationship functioning that could have contributed to conflict recovery were statistically controlled, we ran another set of regressions. As shown in Table 3 (Models 2 and 3), infant attachment security continued to predict conflict recovery significantly, even after controlling for observer-rated relationship quality ($b = 0.48$), $t(63) = 2.26$, $p = .03$, and observer-rated dyadic negative affect ($b = 0.38$), $t(63) = 1.96$, $p = .05$.

To test the second part of Hypothesis 2, we regressed targets' partners' conflict-recovery scores on targets' infant attachment security. As shown in Table 3 (Model 1), targets who were more secure in early childhood also had romantic partners who displayed better conflict recovery ($b = 0.62$), $t(64) = 3.20$, $p < .01$,

$R^2 = .12$. Observer-rated relationship quality and dyadic negative affect were then statistically controlled in separate regressions to determine whether this effect was attributable to global indicators of relationship functioning. As shown in Table 3 (Models 2 and 3), targets' early attachment security remained a significant predictor of their partners' conflict recovery, even after controlling for observer-rated relationship quality ($b = 0.59$), $t(63) = 3.01$, $p < .01$, and observer-rated dyadic negative affect ($b = 0.50$), $t(63) = 2.77$, $p < .01$.

Targets' infant attachment, partners' conflict recovery, and relationship stability

Hayes and Matthes's (2009) moderated logistic regression macro for SPSS was used to test Hypothesis 3, namely, the prediction that targets' attachment history would interact with their partners' conflict recovery to predict relationship stability 2 years later. As shown in Step 1 of Table 4, this interaction was significant, $b = -0.94$, Wald $\chi^2 = 5.79$, $p = .02$, odds ratio (OR) = 0.39. Simple-slopes analyses revealed that the effect of partner conflict recovery on relationship stability was significant and positive for targets who had insecure attachment histories, $b = 0.95$, Wald $\chi^2 = 4.29$, $p = .04$, $OR = 2.58$. As shown in Figure 1, the relationships of targets who had lower (1 SD below the mean) early attachment security were more likely to be intact 2 years later if the targets' partners displayed better (1 SD above the mean) conflict recovery than if those partners displayed poorer (1 SD below the mean) conflict recovery. The simple slope for participants high (1 SD above the mean) in early attachment security was not significantly different from zero. Table 4 (Step 2) also shows that the interaction between targets' attachment history and partners' conflict recovery remained significant, $b = -1.02$, Wald $\chi^2 = 6.76$, $p = .01$,

Table 3. Regressions Predicting Conflict Recovery From Targets' Infant Attachment

Dependent variable and predictor	Model 1				Model 2				Model 3			
	b	SE b	t(64)	Model adjusted R^2	b	SE b	t(63)	Model adjusted R^2	b	SE b	t(63)	Model adjusted R^2
Target's conflict recovery				.07				.12				.29
Constant	2.38	0.32	7.44**		1.43	0.56	2.54*		3.66	0.39	9.27**	
Target's infant attachment	0.54	0.22	2.48*		0.48	0.21	2.26*		0.38	0.19	1.96*	
Observer-rated relationship quality					0.26	0.13	2.01*		—	—	—	
Observer-rated negative affect									−0.53	0.12	−4.58**	
Partner's conflict recovery				.12				.14				.27
Constant	2.31	0.29	8.05**		1.72	0.52	3.33**		3.28	0.37	8.81**	
Target's infant attachment	0.62	0.19	3.20**		0.59	0.19	3.01**		0.50	0.18	2.77**	
Observer-rated relationship quality					0.16	0.12	1.39		—	—	—	
Observer-rated negative affect									−0.40	0.11	−3.67**	

Note: Model 1 predicted targets' and partners' conflict recovery as a function of targets' infant attachment, Model 2 predicted targets' and partners' conflict recovery as a function of targets' infant attachment while controlling for observer-rated relationship quality, and Model 3 predicted targets' and partners' conflict recovery as a function of targets' infant attachment while controlling for observer-rated dyadic negative affect.
*$p \leq .05$. **$p < .01$.

Table 4. Hierarchical Logistic Regression Analysis of 2-Year Relationship Stability

| Predictor	Step 1				Step 2			
	Odds ratio	*b*	*SE b*	Wald χ^2	Odds ratio	*b*	*SE b*	Wald χ^2
Constant	—	0.49	0.31	2.47	—	0.54	0.33	2.78[†]
Target's infant attachment	2.01	0.70	0.46	2.27	1.58	0.46	0.51	0.78
Partner's conflict recovery	1.26	0.22	0.27	0.70	1.19	0.18	0.33	0.29
Target's Infant Attachment × Partner's Conflict Recovery	0.39	−0.94	0.39	5.79*	0.36	−1.02	0.39	6.76**
Target's relationship commitment					1.29	0.25	0.50	0.25
Partner's relationship commitment					0.87	−0.13	0.45	0.09
Observer-rated relationship quality					1.43	0.35	0.37	0.94
Observer-rated negative affect					1.05	0.05	0.42	0.01
Relationship length (months)					1.01	0.01	0.01	0.44
Time between assessments (years)					0.58	−0.54	0.49	1.21

[†]$p < .10$. *$p \leq .05$. **$p < .01$.

$OR = 0.36$, even after statistically controlling for partners' and targets' self-reported commitment to the relationship, observer-rated relationship quality, observer-rated dyadic negative affect, relationship length (in months), and the precise number of days between each couple's lab discussion and the stability follow-up (converted to years).

Discussion

The results of this longitudinal study are consistent with predictions derived from an organizational-developmental perspective (see Sroufe et al., 2005). With respect to concurrent outcomes, having a partner who is better at conflict recovery is associated with experiencing more positive relationship emotions and greater relationship satisfaction. The absence of actor effects in these analyses indicates that individuals who are better at recovering from conflict generally do not experience more favorable relationship emotions or tend to be more satisfied. Rather, it is the degree to which one's partner recovers from conflict that predicts one's own relationship emotions and satisfaction. This pattern of findings is consistent with the hypothesis that disengaging from conflict in situationally appropriate ways serves an important regulatory function in romantic relationships, protecting partners from the detrimental consequences of conflict spillover.
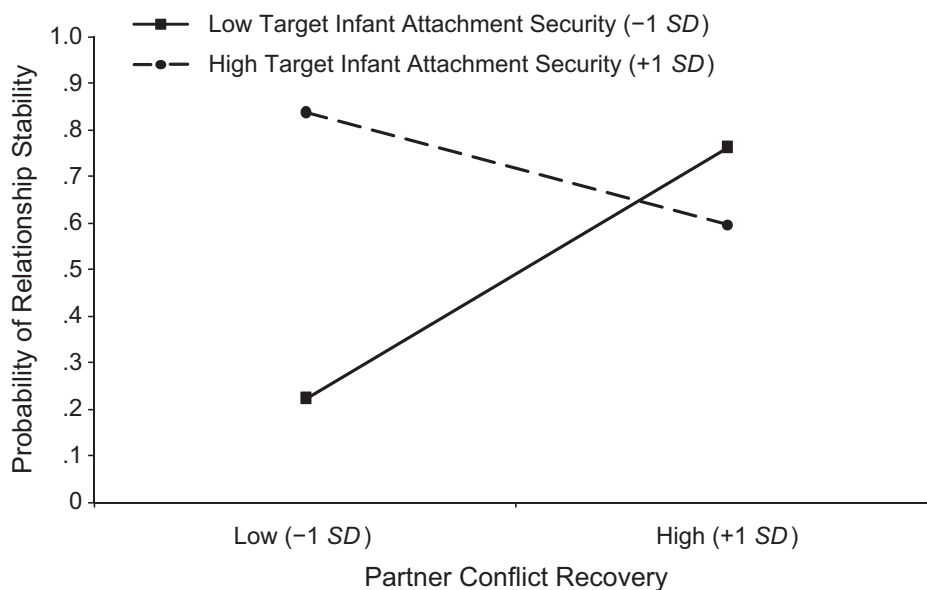
Fig. 1. Probability of a couple's relationship remaining intact over a 2-year period as a function of the target participant's infant attachment security (1 *SD* above or below the mean) and the partner's conflict recovery (1 *SD* above or below the mean).

The results of our developmental analyses indicate that individual differences in conflict recovery for both targets and their partners can be predicted from the quality of early care that targets received. Targets who were more securely attached in infancy—a marker of optimal dyadic regulation early in life (Schore, 2005)—were better able to recover from conflict in their adult romantic relationships. This is consistent with the organizational-developmental notion that the quality of early dyadic regulation influences later self-regulation (Sroufe et al., 2005). Furthermore, follow-up analyses indicated that this effect held after controlling for observer-rated relationship quality and negative affect.

The finding that participants who had more secure attachment histories also had romantic partners who were better at recovering from conflict is consistent with the organizational-developmental tenet that interaction patterns established in earlier relationships are often carried forward into later relationships (Sroufe et al., 2005). Unfortunately, our study cannot pinpoint why the partners of more secure target participants were better at recovering from conflict. This outcome could be attributable to partner selection effects, whereby more secure individuals choose romantic partners who have better conflict-recovery capacities. However, we suspect that targets who have secure attachment histories might also facilitate conflict recovery in their partners via their actions and dyadic modeling (cf. Berk & Andersen, 2000). It is important to emphasize that these early-experience effects held when two proximal variables (i.e., observer-rated relationship quality and dyadic negative affect) were statistically controlled. This rather stringent test bolsters our confidence that early dyadic regulation is meaningfully associated with this specific form of self-regulation in adult romantic relationships and can be distinguished from global indicators of functioning in romantic relationships (Roisman et al., 2005).

Our study does more than document longitudinal associations between a person's relationships early in life and later in life. The relationship-stability analyses, for example, revealed that target participants' attachment histories interacted with their partners' conflict recovery to predict whether or not relationships still existed 2 years later. The relationships of target participants who had insecure attachment histories were more stable if their partners were better at recovering from conflict. This finding supports Bowlby's (1980) claim that development is a product of one's relationship history in combination with later life circumstances. To the extent that more insecure individuals are less capable of disengaging from conflict, having a partner who can contain the potential spillover of conflict interactions and smooth the transition to other types of interactions ought to buffer insecure people in particular from negative relationship outcomes. This interpretation is consistent with recent research showing that individuals who are highly committed to their current romantic relationships find ways to mitigate their romantic partners' earlier negative relationship experiences and personal vulnerabilities (Tran & Simpson, 2009). Other examples of such corrective experiences (e.g., Rholes, Simpson, Campbell, & Grich; 2001; Rönkä et al., 2002) indicate that romantic partners can play important roles in limiting or even reducing the detrimental effects typically associated with childhood risk factors such as attachment insecurity.

We have conceptualized conflict recovery as the ability to effectively isolate conflict discussions in order to achieve other important dyadic plans and goals. We suspect that conflict recovery is a self-regulatory process associated with adaptive emotion regulation (Gross & Thompson, 2007). However, we do not know the specific set (or sets) of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral skills that conflict recovery entails. For example, is conflict recovery a specific form of self-regulation that isolates and curtails negative affect and behavior when conflict discussions end? Is it a capacity to "bounce back" from negative interpersonal feelings and events and to act in ways that quickly restore emotional balance and harmony in relationships? Is it some combination of these attributes? These are important directions for future research.

In conclusion, conflict recovery is systematically linked with both developmental and dyadic processes. Our study complements past research on how couples resolve conflict (Gottman, 1994) and provides new evidence suggesting that interactional processes in the moments immediately following an argument play an important role in concurrent and future relationship outcomes (Gottman & Levenson, 1999). Measures of conflict recovery may also be useful indicators of relationship functioning for marital and relationship therapists. This research also provides some of the first prospective evidence suggesting that individuals may be able to compensate for the vulnerabilities that their romantic partners carry with them from earlier in their development.

Acknowledgments

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared that they had no conflicts of interest with respect to their authorship or the publication of this article.

Funding

Notes

1. Sixty-two of these couples were included in the relationship-stability analysis. Infant attachment data for the target participant were missing in 6 couples for whom we had stability data, and 1 couple could not be rated on variables that made up the observer-rated relationship-quality composite.

2. In APIM models, each individual is both an actor and a partner. In this article, however, we use the term *partner* to refer to the targets' partners everywhere except in this section.

References

Ainsworth, M., Blehar, M., Waters, E., & Wall, S. (1978). *Patterns of attachment*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Berk, M.S., & Andersen, S.M. (2000). The impact of past relationships on interpersonal behavior: Behavioral confirmation in the social-cognitive process of transference. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *79*, 546–562.

Berscheid, E., Snyder, M., & Omoto, A.M. (1989). The Relationship Closeness Inventory: Assessing the closeness of interpersonal relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *57*, 792–807.

Bowlby, J. (1973). *Attachment and loss: Vol. 2. Separation: Anxiety and anger*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Bowlby, J. (1980). *Attachment and loss: Vol. 3. Loss: Sadness and depression*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Carlson, E.A., Sroufe, L.A., & Egeland, B. (2004). The construction of experience: A longitudinal study of representation and behavior. *Child Development*, *75*, 66–83.

Cassidy, J. (1994). Emotion regulation: Influences of attachment relationships. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*, *59*(2–3), 228–249.

Collins, W.A., Aguilar, B., Hennighausen, K., Hyson, D., Jimerson, S., & Levy, A. (1999). *Scales and coding manual for observed interactions in romantic relationships*. Unpublished manuscript, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.

Cox, M.J. (1991). *Marital and parent-child relationships study*. Unpublished manuscript, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC.

Cutrona, C.E. (1996). *Social support in couples: Marriage as a resource in times of stress*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Gottman, J., Notarious, C., Markman, H., Bank, S., Yoppi, B., & Rubin, M.E. (1976). Behavior exchange theory and marital decision making. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *34*, 14–23.

Gottman, J.M. (1994). *What predicts divorce? The relationship between marital processes and marital outcomes*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Gottman, J.M., & Levenson, R.W. (1999). Rebound from marital conflict and divorce prediction. *Family Process*, *38*, 287–292.

Gross, J.J., & Thompson, R.A. (2007). Emotion regulation: Conceptual foundations. In J.J. Gross (Ed.), *Handbook of emotion regulation* (pp. 3–24). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Hayes, A.F., & Matthes, J. (2009). Computational procedures for probing interactions in OLS and logistic regression: SPSS and SAS implementations. *Behavior Research Methods*, *41*, 924–936.

Hendrick, S.S. (1988). A generic measure of relationship satisfaction. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, *50*, 93–98.

Kenny, D.A., Kashy, D.A., & Cook, W.L. (2006). *The analysis of dyadic data*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Kobak, R.R., & Sceery, A. (1988). Attachment in late adolescence: Working models, affect regulation, and representations of self and others. *Child Development*, *59*, 135–146.

Kunce, L.J., & Shaver, P.R. (1994). An attachment-theoretical approach to caregiving in romantic relationships. In K. Bartholomew & D. Perlman (Eds.), *Advances in personal relationships: Vol. 5. Attachment processes in adulthood* (pp. 205–237). London, England: Jessica Kingsley.

Lund, M. (1985). The development of investment and commitment scales for predicting continuity of personal relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, *2*, 3–23.

McHale, J.P., Lauretti, A., Talbot, J., & Pouquette, C. (2002). Retrospect and prospect in the psychological study of coparenting and family group process. In J.P. McHale & W.S. Grolnick (Eds.), *Retrospect and prospect in the psychological study of families* (pp. 127–165). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Rholes, W.S., Simpson, J.A., Campbell, L., & Grich, J. (2001). Adult attachment and the transition to parenthood. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *81*, 421–435.

Roisman, G.I., Collins, W.A., Sroufe, L.A., & Egeland, B. (2005). Predictors of young adults' representations of and behavior in their current romantic relationship: Prospective tests of the prototype hypothesis. *Attachment & Human Development*, *7*, 105–121.

Roisman, G.I., Madsen, S.D., Hennighausen, K.H., Sroufe, L.A., & Collins, W.A. (2001). The coherence of dyadic behavior across parent-child and romantic relationships as mediated by the internalized representation of experience. *Attachment & Human Development*, *3*, 156–172.

Rönkä, A., Oravala, S., & Pulkkinen, L. (2002). "I met this wife of mine and things got onto a better track": Turning points in risk development. *Journal of Adolescence*, *25*, 47–63.

Schore, A.N. (2005). Back to basics: Attachment, affect regulation, and the developing right brain: Linking developmental neuroscience to pediatrics. *Pediatrics in Review*, *26*, 204–217.

Simpson, J.A., Collins, W.A., Tran, S., & Haydon, K.C. (2007). Attachment and the experience and expression of emotions in romantic relationships: A developmental perspective. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *92*, 355–367.

Sroufe, L.A., Egeland, B., Carlson, E.A., & Collins, W.A. (2005). *The development of the person: The Minnesota Study of Risk and Adaptation From Birth to Adulthood*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Sroufe, L.A., & Fleeson, J. (1986). Attachment and the construction of relationships. In W.W. Hartup & Z. Rubin (Eds.), *Relationships in development* (pp. 51–71). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Thompson, R. (2008). Early attachment and later development: Familiar questions, new answers. In J. Cassidy & P.R. Shaver (Eds.), *Handbook of attachment* (2nd ed., pp. 348–365). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Tran, S., & Simpson, J.A. (2009). Prorelationship maintenance behaviors: The joint roles of attachment and commitment. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *97*, 685–698.