Making it Work: What's Important in Romantic Relationships?

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Abstract

Building healthy, strong, and long-term romantic relationships is important for many adults. Romantic relationships are unique to individuals based on factors that include parent-child attachment styles, communication skills, and conflict resolution skills. While the romantic relationship literature is extensive, much of the research focuses on identifying the independent effects of these core relationship characteristics. It is possible that restrictions arising from the COVID-19 pandemic have led to changes in relationship characteristics and relationship quality. The current study addressed these gaps in the literature to examine how attachment (e.g., anxious and avoidance), communication (e.g., face-to-face and online), and conflict styles are associated with adults' romantic relationship commitment and satisfaction. Participants included 474 adults aged 18 to 69 ($M_{age} = 24.04$, $SD = 6.14$; 88.9% females) who completed self-reported surveys about their current romantic relationship. As expected, the use of technology, type of communication, conflict styles, and relationship quality changed for many participants since the pandemic. Results from hierarchical regression models indicate that greater face-to-face communication and reduced avoidance attachment were associated with greater relationship commitment and satisfaction. Conflict styles moderated associations between face-to-face communication and relationship commitment and satisfaction, demonstrating how conflict management and communication. Understanding what makes romantic relationships work, particularly during the pandemic is important for adults to improve their romantic relationships.

Making it Work: What's Important in Romantic Relationships?

According to the Need for Belongingness theory (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), the desire to connect and feel a sense of belonging with others is a fundamental aspect of human life. Feeling connected within interpersonal relationships is important because it is associated with higher levels of well-being (Kolozsvari, 2015). Conversely, when a sense of belonging is not satisfied, higher rates of mental and physical illness are more frequent (Pillow et al., 2015). Therefore, a deprivation of belongingness classifies the need to belong as a 'need' and not simply a 'want' (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Such needs are largely constructed in the earliest stages of life (Lambert et al., 2010).

Early Attachment Patterns and the Influence on Peer and Romantic Relationships

Attachment is a biological and behavioural system that is integral to human life (Bosmans et al., 2020). With a basis in psychological, evolutionary, and ethological perspectives, John Bowlby's Attachment theory (1958) focuses on how children develop social and emotional attachments with at least one consistent caregiver (Bretherton, 1992). The attachment begins to form based on the interactions between an infant and the caregiver they spend the most time with and is categorized as secure or insecure (Fearon & Roisman, 2017). Infants with a secure attachment feel safe to wander and explore their environment when their caregiver is not near, and when the infant returns to their caregiver, they feel comforted (Beijersbergen et al., 2012). Infants with an insecure attachment typically demonstrate one of two behaviours, anxious or avoidance patterns. Infants who have an anxious attachment show considerable distress when separated from their caregiver, seek closeness when the caregiver returns, but are not easily comforted by the caregiver (Moutsiana et al., 2014). Infants who have an avoidance attachment show

limited distress when separated from their caregiver, do not seek closeness when the caregiver returns, and may actively avoid the caregiver (Moutsiana et al., 2014).

Moving from infancy to childhood, in moments of distress, a child's proficiency to seek support from a caregiver helps to determine the child's developmental outcomes such as mental health and social behaviours (Bosmans et al., 2020). These early formed attachments provide children with an expectation for what relationships are supposed to look like, which carries throughout the lifespan in relationships developed with peers and romantic partners (Kerns et al., 2001; Muris et al., 2001). For example, children who developed an anxious attachment are more likely to fear rejection and abandonment within close relationships, while children who developed an avoidance attachment are more likely to experience discomfort in close relationships (Bosmans et al., 2020; Joeng et al., 2017; Pellerone et al., 2017).

Peer relationships can be broadly defined by a range of people who are part of every-day life in the social context, being present from an early age and carrying throughout the entire lifespan (Reitz et al., 2014). Peer relationships may include a child who sits next to another student on the school bus, a co-worker who covers the shift of another co-worker, or roommates who become friends through post-secondary studies. Regardless of the type of peer relationship, peers have both a direct and indirect influence on individuals' external relationships (Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2007).

Attachments within peer relationships are representative of attachment patterns that arise throughout adolescence and young adulthood. The psychosocial changes that individuals' experience are largely attributed to the relationships they have with peers (Gorrese, 2015). Specifically, adolescents who have secure attachments with their peers

report fewer mental health concerns (e.g., anxiety and depression), higher levels of trust, and lower levels of alienation from their peers than adolescents who have insecure attachments (Gorrese, 2015; Muris et al., 2001). Adolescents' reliance on peers for support in the face of changes during adolescence continue to play a role in adulthood as new and more serious romantic relationships emerge (Connolly et al., 2000). Maintaining significant peer relationships during adolescence can promote greater opportunities for later romantic relationships (Boisvert & Poulin, 2016).

Characteristics of Romantic Relationship Quality

Young adulthood is marked by a transition to adult-like roles and responsibilities (e.g., becoming financially independent, starting families of their own, and separating from the family they grew up with), and experimentation with sexual and romantic partners (Tillman et al, 2019). Romantic relationships are typically a larger and more serious commitment than those seen in adolescence, as young adults are learning how to form and maintain meaningful romantic relationships. (Rauer et al., 2013).

The romantic relationship literature is extensive, and typically focuses on common characteristics within relationships. For example, areas of emphasis include sexual exploration (Boislard et al., 2016), individual development (Lantagne & Furman, 2017), effects on well-being (Kansky, 2018), and socio-demographic factors (e.g., gender, race, socioeconomic status, and sexual identity) (Tillman et al., 2019) that are associated with romantic relationships. Components that are associated with positive well-being include partners developing their potential, achieving personal and shared goals, as well as maintaining a secure attachment through cognitive, emotional, and behavioural skills (Gómez-López et al., 2019). Social, emotional, and instrumental

support that romantic partners provide for one another contribute to overall well-being (Braithwaite et al., 2010). Feeling understood by a romantic partner, using open communication about individuals' needs in the relationship, and expressing trust in one another are relationship experiences that are also positively associated with well-being (Kanksy, 2018).

Broadly, romantic partners who show more support, care for, and make more efforts to connect with one another experience more positive relationship outcomes (Kansky & Allen, 2018). Romantic partners who are personally committed to their relationship experience greater relationship quality (Givertz & Segrin, 2005). Companionship, sexual expression, and supportive communication have been found to be associated with commitment in relationships (Kanksy, 2018). Greater trust (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006), greater intimacy (Yoo et al., 2013), more positive and open communication (Sanchez et al., 2017), and less conflict (McDaniel et al., 2017) are also consistently shown to be correlated with greater relationship commitment and subsequently, satisfaction among young adults. Although research typically looks at relationship characteristics individually (Feeney & Fitzgerald, 2019), it is important to consider their combined influence towards relationship commitment and satisfaction.

Understanding the Role of Communication and Conflict in Relationship Commitment and Satisfaction

Deriving from the Latin word 'communis' (to share), communication signifies the sharing of messages, words, ideas, and emotions that are expressed (Venter, 2019). Being mindful of the thoughts and feelings observed during a conversation makes for positive and supportive communication (Jones & Hansen, 2014). This is an important aspect of

every-day life, and effective communication skills are integral for creating meaning and understanding between romantic partners (Venter, 2019). Day-to-day conversations, both face-to-face (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006) and online (Vaterlaus et al., 2017) are indicative of how well a romantic relationship is functioning (Boyle & O'Sullivan, 2016). Positive and open communication between romantic partners (i.e., talking to one another frequently and using honest communication) maintains feelings of excitement in romantic relationships (Yoo et al., 2013) and is associated with greater feelings of love and relationship satisfaction (Meeks et al., 1998; Sanchez et al., 2017). However, it is the quality of communication between romantic partners, rather than the amount or frequency of communication, that is most important in predicting relationship satisfaction (Emmers-Sommer, 2004). Given that the quality of communication may not be the same in face-to-face and online environments, it is important to consider both experiences.

The traditional form of communication occurring between romantic partners is face-to-face communication (Venter, 2017). Face-to-face interaction encompasses aspects that are vital to understanding, connecting, and forming meaningful relationships with others (Przybylski & Weinstein, 2012). The main characteristics of this type of communication are verbal and nonverbal cues, which assist in the expression of an individual's thoughts, feelings, and body language about the interaction taking place (Venter, 2017). Face-to-face communication is the most efficient way for individuals to share thoughts, words, and feelings with one another (Gapsiso & Wilson, 2015). Indeed, high-quality face-to-face communication within romantic relationships is necessary for the functioning of the relationship and is associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction (Caughlin & Sharabi, 2013; Yoo et al., 2013). Further, romantic partners are

more likely to feel sexual and emotional intimacy with one another when they perceive their communication styles to be positive, and this is associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction (Yoo et al., 2013).

Despite the importance and benefits of face-to-face communication, the role of online communication must not be overlooked. There are several positives for the use of online communication within romantic relationships (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006; Baym et al., 2004; Boyle & O'Sullivan, 2016). In circumstances where individuals cannot meet in physical face-to-face interactions, online communication is the only way for them to interact and connect (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006). Long-distance romantic relationships, in particular, face challenges due to reduced face-to-face contact (Emmers-Sommer, 2006). In such romantic relationships, online communication accounts for most of the contact and connection that partners can maintain with one another, and the quality of online interactions is associated with the quality of the relationship (Emmers-Sommer, 2006). For some young adults, online communication allows for more positive expression of thoughts and feelings, greater self-disclosure, and greater opportunities for intimacy with their romantic partners (Boyle & O'Sullivan, 2016). On the other hand, research shows the consequences of using online communication as a primary source of communication between romantic partners (Juhasz & Bradford, 2016). Partners who engage in more online communication with each other report lower levels of interpersonal competencies, such as negative assertion (e.g., standing up for oneself) and poorer conflict management skills (e.g., solving problems with their partner) in the relationship (Nesi et al., 2016). Other negative outcomes associated with relying on online communication in romantic relationships include,

limited practice of social skills, delayed responses to text messages, and misinterpretations of text messages (Lapierre & Custer, 2020; Nesi et al., 2016; Tu et al., 2018). It may be that there are more disadvantages associated with online communication than with face-to-face communication in the context of romantic relationships (Juhasz & Bradford, 2016). However, to understand how communication operates within current romantic relationships, it is important to examine both face-to-face and online communication.

There is also value in looking at how effective communication can incorporate a balance of both face-to-face and online communication (Rizzo et al., 2019; Venter, 2019). Feeling a sense of closeness in one's romantic relationship arises from a positive integration of face-to-face and online communication (Caughlin & Sharabi, 2013). However, research focusing on the integration between both forms of communication is limited, as research tends to mainly explore face-to-face or online communication exclusively, or the consequences of replacing face-to-face communication with online communication (Cornwell & Lundgren, 2001). Consequences may include reduced empathic responses, reduced relationship seriousness and commitment, and increased distractions from the outside world (Cornwell & Lundgren, 2001; Juhasz & Bradford, 2016; Luo, 2014; Nguyen et al., 2021; Novak et al., 2015; Vaterlaus et al., 2017; Vossen et al., 2017).

Conflict, which may go hand in hand with communication, can generally be understood as any disagreement, difference in interest, or instances of incompatibility that often result in some form of dispute (Feeney & Karantzas, 2017). Depending on the context, conflict can be damaging to romantic relationships (i.e., increased levels of stress

and anxiety to one or both partners) (Merrill & Afifi, 2017). Conflict between romantic partners is an inevitable aspect of a relationship (Kato, 2016), however, what appears to matter most is the ways in which individuals handle the conflict when it presents itself (Gordon & Chen, 2016). The ability of romantic partners to effectively manage conflict is key to short- and long-term satisfaction in romantic relationships (Ogolsky et al., 2017).

In times of conflict, it is beneficial for romantic partners to still feel valued and respected within the relationship. When romantic partners feel understood and cared for by one another, they are more likely to behave in positive and constructive ways (i.e., humour and affection) when facing conflict as opposed to expressing negative and destructive conflict management behaviours (i.e., hostility and aggression) (Gordon & Chen, 2016). Categories of conflict management include positive problem solving, conflict engagement, withdrawal, stubbornness, compliance, and defensiveness (Ogolsky et al., 2017). Romantic partners who engage in positive conflict management behaviours report greater relationship satisfaction (Courtain & Glowacz, 2019). Showing a romantic partner that they are understood during times of conflict provides a sense of security in the relationship and is associated with greater romantic relationship satisfaction (Gesell et al., 2020; Gordon & Chen, 2016). Individuals who value intimacy, cooperative communication, and compromise in their romantic relationships are more likely to use positive conflict management strategies and experience greater relationship satisfaction (Sanderson & Karetsky, 2002). Specific components of positive conflict management such as negotiation and compromise have a positive correlation with romantic relationship maintenance and satisfaction, whereas negative conflict management behaviours such as withdrawal (e.g., dismissing the conflict/conversation) and conflict

engagement (e.g., launching attacks at partner) are associated with negative relationship outcomes and in some cases, the end of a relationship (Courtain & Glowacz, 2019).

It is evident that the management of conflict plays an important role in romantic relationship satisfaction and longevity (Gordon & Chen, 2016). However, there are contradictory ideas regarding associations between conflict management and relationship commitment. For example, when romantic partners feel strongly committed to their relationship, they may be more likely to underestimate or dismiss their concerns (e.g., lack of understanding they receive from their partner) (Gordon & Chen, 2016; Roloff & Solomon, 2002). On the other hand, when partners express their concerns and receive a sense of security and understanding from each other, their commitment to the relationship may increase along with feelings of relationship satisfaction (Gordon & Chen, 2016). Thus, it is expected that more positive conflict resolution styles would be associated with greater relationship commitment.

Relationship Changes since the COVID-19 Pandemic

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the nature and quality of adults' romantic relationships may have changed (Pietromonaco & Overall, 2020). For some, social distancing, community restrictions (i.e., bubbles within households), and travel restrictions may have created more physical distance and reduced the frequency of face-to-face interactions between romantic partners. Thus, romantic partners have had to rely on technology as a primary form of communication to maintain the relationship. In fact, 83% of young adults are spending more time using technology since the pandemic (Maximum City, 2020). This could also mean that technology is being used more frequently as a means of communication between romantic partners. Additionally,

because online communication is sometimes associated with negative romantic relationship outcomes (Cornwell & Lundgren, 2001), it is possible that when online communication increases, so does interpersonal conflict. A prevalent issue among romantic partners involves a lack of knowledge or unwillingness to communicate when conflict arises (Overall & McNulty, 2017). Examining the conflict management styles and quality of communication that romantic partners are experiencing since the pandemic can provide insight on couples' overall relationship quality during the pandemic. Given the benefits of face-to-face versus online communication, it is possible that positive face-to-face communication would be associated with more positive relationship outcomes when conflict is resolved in a positive way.

The Current Study

Although it is possible that the restrictions arising from the pandemic have led to changes in relationship patterns, it is not known how these are associated with romantic relationship quality. The current study will address these gaps in the literature to examine how relationship characteristics such as attachment (anxious and avoidance), communication (face-to-face and online), and conflict management styles (e.g., conflict engagement, positive problem solving, self-protection, and acceptance) are associated with adults' romantic relationship commitment and satisfaction. First it was hypothesized that reduced anxious or avoidance attachments, and more positive conflict management styles would be associated with greater relationship commitment and satisfaction. Second, it was expected that greater face-to-face communication would be more strongly associated with relationship commitment and satisfaction than online communication. Lastly, it was hypothesized that greater quality of face-to-face communication would be

more strongly associated with relationship commitment and satisfaction when adults report positive conflict management styles. In other words, when romantic partners address conflict positively (e.g., reduced conflict engagement, reduced self-protection, reduced acceptance, and increased positive problem solving), face-to-face communication will positively correlate with relationship commitment and satisfaction. Changes in relationship characteristics since the COVID-19 pandemic were also explored to determine the effects that the pandemic may have had on adults' current romantic relationships.

Method

Participants

Participants included 474 undergraduate students at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland, and members of the general public. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 69 (M_{age} = 24.04 years, SD = 6.14; 88.90% females). Most participants self-identified as Caucasian (83%), followed by indigenous (11%), and other groups (5%). The majority of participants completed some post-secondary education, a complete bachelor's degree, or graduate degree (96.3%).

Participants were recruited through the Grenfell Campus Psychology Participant Pool, Brightspace page, and posts on my personal Facebook and Instagram accounts. A brief description of the study as well as a link to the online survey was provided to participants during the recruitment process. The participants completed the survey after providing informed consent.

Procedure

The online questionnaire was administered via Qualtrics and participants were notified of the ongoing study via Facebook and Instagram. Once they clicked the link, participants were directed to the informed consent page (Appendix A). By clicking on the next screen, consent was assumed, and participants were presented with the questionnaire (Appendix B). The questionnaire took participants approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete. After the completion of the questionnaire, participants were directed to an information/debriefing form (Appendix C).

Materials

An informed consent form, online questionnaire and an information/debriefing

form were used in this study. The informed consent form (Appendix A) included

information about the study, such as the purpose, task requirements including the

duration and any potential risks and/or benefits that were associated with participation.

The informed consent form also informed participants that their responses were

anonymous and that they had the right to withdraw consent from the study at any time.

The contact information for the researcher and supervisor was also provided.

The online questionnaire examined participants' experiences in their current

romantic relationships such as attachment styles, face-to-face and online communication,

conflict resolution styles, and relationship commitment and satisfaction. This survey also

included questions about change in adults' relationship experiences since COVID-19.

Romantic relationship status. Participants were asked to self-report on their

current relationship status, "*Are you currently in a romantic relationship?*", and length,

"*How long have you been in your current romantic relationship?*"

Changes since COVID-19. Participants were asked to self-report on their

experiences with technology use, and experiences within their romantic relationship since

the COVID-19 pandemic, "*How has your amount of screen time (i.e., social networking*

sites, video games, streaming such as Netflix) changed?", "*How has the conflict in your*

romantic relationship changed?", "*How has the satisfaction in your romantic*

relationship changed?", "*How has the commitment in your romantic relationship*

changed?", "*How has the offline (i.e., face-to-face) communication with your romantic*

partner changed?", and "*How has the online communication (i.e., text messaging,*

Facebook Messenger, Snapchat, Facetime) with your romantic partner changed?".

Participants were asked to rate each item on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (*no change*) to 4 (*a lot of change*). If participants indicated a change for any item, they were asked to indicate the direction of the change (e.g., increase, decrease, neither increase or decrease, or not sure).

Attachment. Participants were asked to self-report on their experiences in their romantic relationships using the 12-item Experiences in Close Relationship Scale-Short Form (ECR-S; Wei et al., 2007). The ECR-S is constructed of two subscales (i.e., anxious and avoidance) that assess whether an individual has an anxious or avoidance attachment style. Previous research has found the ECR-S to have strong reliability and validity (Johnson et al., 2016). Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with each statement (e.g., anxious, "*I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by my partner*"; avoidance, "*I want to get close to my partner, but I keep pulling back*") on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). After reversed scoring, items were averaged for each subscale with higher scores indicating greater anxiety or avoidance attachment patterns (α ranged from .71 to .80).

Communication (face-to-face). Participants were asked about the quality of face-to-face conversations they have with their romantic partner using the 8-item abridged version (Vanlear, 1991) of Hecht's Communication Satisfaction Scale. Past research has found the scale to have strong reliability and validity (Anderson & Emmers-sommer, 2006). Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with each statement (e.g., "*I feel that this person values what I have to say*") on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from

1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Items were averaged with higher scores

indicating more positive face-to-face communication ($\alpha = .94$).

Communication (online). Participants were asked about the quality of online

conversations they have with their romantic partner, again using the 8-item abridged

version (Vanlear, 1991) of Hecht's Communication Satisfaction Scale. This scale was

modified from the original face-to-face scale to reflect online forms of communication

(e.g., "*I feel that this person values what I have to say online*"). Participants were asked

to rate their level of agreement with each statement on a 7-point Likert scale ranging

from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Items were averaged with higher scores

indicating more positive online communication ($\alpha = 0.93$).

Conflict. Participants were asked to self-report their experiences with conflict

management in their romantic relationship using the 16-item Conflict Resolution Styles

Inventory (CRSI; Kurdek, 1994). Past research has found this scale to have strong

reliability and validity (Bonache et al., 2016). The CRSI assesses an individual's most

often used conflict management style and includes four subscales: 1) Conflict

engagement (4 items) assesses the ways in which partners 'lose control' during times of

conflict (e.g.,*"Launching personal attacks"*); 2) Positive problem solving (4 items)

assesses cooperative and constructive ways of managing conflict (e.g., "*negotiating and

compromising*"); 3) Self-protection (4 items) assesses the degree of withdrawal from

conflict (e.g., "*Reaching a limit, shutting down, and refusing to talk any further*"); and 4)

Acceptance (4 items) assesses the degree of compliance to conflict (e.g., "*Not being

willing to stick up for myself*"). Participants were asked to rate how they typically

responded to and handled conflict in their current romantic relationship on a 5-point

Likert scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*). Scores for each subscale were averaged with higher scores in positive problem solving indicating a positive conflict management style ($\alpha = .80$) and higher scores for conflict engagement, self-protection, and acceptance indicating more negative conflict management styles (α ranged from .82 to .88).

Relationship commitment. Participants were asked about their commitment to their romantic partner using the 6-item adapted version (Lemieux & Hale, 1999) of Lund's Commitment Scale (Lund, 1985). Past research has found this scale to have strong reliability and validity (Sokolski & Hendrick, 1999). Participants were asked how committed they are to their partner as well as the relationship (e.g., "*I think of our relationship as a permanent one*"). Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with each statement on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). After reverse scoring, items were averaged with higher scores indicating greater relationship commitment ($\alpha = .88$).

Relationship satisfaction. Participants were asked to rate their level of satisfaction in their current romantic relationship using the 6-item revised version (Norton, 1983) of Norton's Quality Marital Index Scale (Nazarinia & Schumm, 2009; Nazarinia et al., 2016). Strong psychometric properties have been established in past research with this measure (Maroufizadeh et al., 2019). Participants rated their level of agreement with each statement (e.g., "*My relationship with my partner is very stable*") on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). Items were averaged with higher scores indicating greater relationship satisfaction ($\alpha = .96$).

Demographics. Participants were asked about their age, gender, ethnicity, and level of education.

The information/debriefing form (Appendix C) thanked participants for their participation and described the nature of the study. Contact information was also provided for the researcher, as well as the researcher's supervisor in case participants were interested in learning about the results of the study after April 2021. Contact information was also provided for the Grenfell Campus Research Ethics Board, the Newfoundland and Labrador Mental Health Crisis Line and the Canadian Crisis Hotline in case participants had ethical concerns or experienced any discomfort from the survey questions.

Data Analysis Plan

All analyses were conducted with IBM SPSS Statistics version 25.0. Although 474 participants began the survey, data from 22 participants was excluded because they were not currently in a romantic relationship, and data from 106 participants was excluded because there was missing or incomplete data. All analyses that were presented are based on a total sample of 346 participants. Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations were assessed to examine the relationships between all study variables. Two hierarchical regression models were computed using the 'enter' method to examine the predictive effects of relationship characteristics (e.g., anxious and avoidance attachment, face-to-face and online communication, and types of conflict) on romantic relationship commitment and satisfaction. Variables were entered in the same way in each model. In Step 1, covariates of age and gender were included. Main effects of attachment (anxious and avoidant), communication (face-to-face and online), and conflict (conflict engagement, positive problem solving, self-protection, and acceptance) were added to Step 2 of the model. Two-way interactions between face-to-face communication and each

type of conflict were added to Step 3, and two-way interactions between online communication and each type of conflict were added to Step 4. To reduce the risk of multi-collinearity, interactions terms were created from mean-centered continuous variables. Significant interactions were probed using a Microsoft Excel template for two-way interactions created by Dawson (2014). Regression assumptions were also tested before models were run and indicated no concerns (VIF values ranged from 1.37 to 3.29; tolerance values ranged from .30 to .73).

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 shows participants' change in each of the study variables since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Participants were asked to indicate self-reported change in technology and relationship experiences. However, assessments of whether the change was significant was not tested. Most participants (86.2%) reported a change in screen time with most (59.8%) indicating an increase in screen time. Communication patterns (i.e., face-to-face and online) also changed within the context of romantic relationships (ranging from 59.6% to 62.4%). Interestingly, some participants reported an increase in communication (ranging from 28% to 29.2%) and some participants reported a decrease in change in communication (ranging from 24.3% to 31.8%). Changes in the amount of relationship conflict was reported for 53.2% of participants with more reporting (26.6%) an increase in conflict rather than a decrease (16.2%) or unclear change (6.1%). Indicators of relationship quality changed for many participants (ranging from 32.1% to 60.5%) with more participants (ranging from 23.4% to 32.7%) reporting an increase in commitment and satisfaction rather than a decrease (ranging from 6.1% to 17.6%) or an unclear change (ranging from .9% to 5.8).

On average, participants reported being in their current romantic relationship for 46.43 months (approximately 3 years). As shown in Table 2, levels of face-to-face and online communication were high (average ranged from 5.45 to 5.96) indicating more positive communication patterns. Similarly, many participants reported being highly committed ($M = 5.85$, $SD = 1.17$) and highly satisfied ($M = 5.26$, $SD = .89$) within their current romantic relationships.

Bivariate correlations between all study variables are presented in Table 3. Anxious and avoidance attachment patterns were negatively associated with romantic relationship commitment (r range = -.22 to -.64) and satisfaction (r range = -.37 to -.69). In other words, more secure attachments characterized by reduced anxious and avoidance attachment were associated with greater relationship commitment and satisfaction. Greater face-to-face and online communication were positively associated with romantic relationship commitment (r range = .36 to .58) and satisfaction (r range = .57 to .82). Participants who reported having high-quality communication with their partners also indicated having greater relationship commitment and satisfaction. The conflict engagement, self-protection, and acceptance management styles were negatively associated with relationship commitment (r range = -.21 to -.33) and relationship satisfaction (r range = -.44 to -.54). Thus, conflict that was not managed well was associated with more problematic relationship indicators. However, positive problem solving was positively associated with relationship commitment (r = .37) and relationship satisfaction (r = .56). Thus, when conflict is handled more positively, relationship quality is also higher. The conflict engagement, self-protection, and acceptance management styles were negatively associated with both face-to-face (r range = -.44 to -.56) and online (r range = -.28 to -.42) communication. However, positive problem solving was positively associated with both face-to-face (r = .56) and online (r = .41) communication. Thus, the management of conflict was directly associated with the nature of face-to-face and online communication with romantic relationships.

Hierarchical Regression Models

In the first hierarchical regression model predicting romantic relationship commitment (see Table 4), Step 1 was significant, $F(2, 316) = 3.11$, $p = .046$ and predicted 2% of the variance in relationship commitment. Being a male ($\beta = -.14$, $p = .013$) was associated with greater relationship commitment. When the main effects were added to Step 2, there was a significant increase in R^2: F_{inc} (8, 308) = 39.48, $p < .001$, and the overall model remained significant, $F(10, 308) = 32.81$, $p < .001$. Greater face-to-face communication ($\beta = .38$, $p < .001$) and lower avoidance attachment ($\beta = -.49$, $p < .001$) were associated with greater relationship commitment. When the potential moderation effects of face-to-face communication with each type of conflict were added were added in Step 3, there was again a significant increase in R^2: F_{inc} (4, 304) = 2.77, $p = .028$, and the overall model stayed significant, $F(14, 304) = 24.77$, $p < .001$. Interactions between face-to-face communication and conflict engagement ($\beta = -.23$, $p = .008$), and between face-to-face communication and self-protection ($\beta = .20$, $p = .026$) were significant predictors of relationship commitment. As shown in Figure 1, higher levels of face-to-face communication (1 *SD* above the mean) were more strongly associated with relationship commitment when conflict engagement was low. Likewise, as shown in Figure 2, higher levels of face-to-face communication (1 *SD* above the mean) were more strongly associated with relationship commitment when participants reported high self-protection. Adding the two-way interactions between online communication and each type of conflict in Step 4 did not result in a significant increase in R^2: F_{inc} (4, 300) = .28, $p = .89$, but the overall model stayed significant, $F(18, 300) = 19.14$, $p < .001$.

As shown in Table 5, the second hierarchical regression predicted romantic relationship satisfaction. Step 1 of the regression was significant, $F(2, 315) = 3.37$, $p =$

.036, and predicted 2% of the variance in relationship satisfaction. Being younger (β = -.13, p = .018) was associated with greater relationship satisfaction. When the main effects were added in Step 2, there was a significant increase in R^2: F_{inc} (8, 307) = 105.82, $p <$ .001, and the overall model was significant, $F(10, 307) = 87.12$, $p < .001$. Greater face-to-face communication (β = .55, $p < .001$) and lower avoidance attachment (β = -.29, $p <$ .001) were associated with greater relationship satisfaction. When the moderation effects of face-to-face communication with each type of conflict were added in Step 3, there was again a significant increase in R^2: F_{inc} (4, 303) = 3.60, p = .007, and the overall model was significant, $F(14, 303) = 65.37$, $p < .001$. The interaction between face-to-face communication and self-protection (β = .16, p = .015) was a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction. As shown in Figure 3, lower levels of communication (1 SD above the mean) were more weakly associated with relationship satisfaction when participants reported higher levels of self-protection. Adding the two-way interactions between online communication and each type of conflict in Model 4 did not result in a significant increase in R^2: F_{inc} (4, 299) = .73, p = .57, but the overall model remained significant, $F(18, 299) = 50.82$, $p < .001$.

Discussion

Research consistently demonstrates the benefits of strong and supportive relationships across all ages of development. The need for belonging begins early with the attachment formed between an infant and their caregiver that provides the foundation for later peer and romantic relationships (Kerns et al., 2001). In particular, romantic relationships provide rich experiences for adults and are associated with higher overall levels of well-being throughout adulthood (Kansky, 2018). Although the romantic relationship literature is extensive (Ogolsky et al., 2017), research typically focuses on understanding how relationship indicators (e.g., trust, intimacy, communication, or conflict) are individually associated with relationship quality. Examining how relationship characteristics such as communication and conflict are individually and collectively associated with relationship quality is particularly important during the pandemic due to restrictions encouraging social distancing and limiting face-to-face interactions. To address these gaps in the literature, the current study examined associations between attachment (anxious and avoidance), communication quality (face-to-face and online), and conflict resolution styles, on adults' relationship commitment and satisfaction.

Associations between Relationship Characteristics and Relationship Quality

The first hypothesis that reduced anxious or avoidance attachments, and more positive conflict management styles would be associated with greater relationship commitment and satisfaction was partially supported. Reduced avoidance, but not anxious attachment was associated with greater relationship commitment and satisfaction. It is important to note that reduced avoidance attachment is beneficial in the context of

romantic relationships as it represents a more secure type of attachment. Specifically, reduced avoidance attachments are associated with positive interpersonal experiences such as greater trust (Arriaga et al., 2014) and honesty (Gillath et al., 2010). Within the context of romantic relationships, adults with a reduced avoidance attachment seek greater closeness, express greater affection, and are more likely to make commitments to their partner (Kansky, 2018; Miga et al., 2010). In other words, adults who have a reduced avoidance attachment may feel greater security, commitment, and satisfaction in their romantic relationships. These feelings of security may help adults to feel more trust and comfort with their romantic partner, and not surprisingly, relate to positive relationship experiences (Murray, 2005).

Unexpectedly, reduced anxious attachments were not significantly associated with relationship commitment or satisfaction after controlling for avoidance attachments, communication, and conflict management strategies. Reduced anxious attachments are characterized by decreased demands of attention from another person (Beeney et al., 2019). Specific to romantic partners, reduced anxious attachment can be described as seeking a reasonable level of affection and intimacy from one another, which is associated with higher relationship quality (Beeney et al., 2019). Romantic partners who have reduced anxious attachments demonstrate a healthy amount of want and need towards one another, rather than demanding frequent attention, affection, and reassurance that corresponds with high anxious attachments (Doumas et al., 2008). Reduced anxious attachments would be expected for romantic partners who live together during the pandemic as the fear associated with romantic partners not knowing where one another is, what they are doing, who they are with, and so on, would be significantly decreased. If

partners are expecting, receiving, and reciprocating a healthy amount of affection and reassurance due to being with one another every day, the commitment and satisfaction they feel in their relationship is likely stable; neither increasing nor decreasing. Given this stability, the reduced anxious attachments that adults reported in the current study may not have a large influence on the overall quality of their romantic relationships.

Overall, these findings support past research demonstrating that characteristics of reduced avoidance attachments (e.g., feeling secure, committed, and satisfied) have a greater association with relationship quality than reduced anxious attachments, and are essential for positive relationship experiences (Gouin et al., 2009). For example, adults who have reduced avoidance attachments show their partner that they are wanted and needed within the relationship. However, adults who have reduced anxious attachments do not show their partner the same want and need, and the partner is left to wonder their purpose in the relationship. Because of the certainty felt between partners who have reduced avoidance attachments, and the uncertainty felt between partners who have reduced anxious attachments, partners benefit more from a reduction of avoidance attachments in the relationship (Li & Chan, 2012).

Surprisingly, conflict management styles were also not associated with romantic relationship commitment and satisfaction. In particular, positive and healthy conflict management strategies (i.e., positive problem solving) and negative conflict management strategies (i.e., conflict engagement, self-protection, and acceptance) were not related to romantic partners' self-reported levels of commitment and satisfaction. The finding is inconsistent with past research that found the management of conflict was a key aspect of relationship quality (Greeff & Bruyne, 2000). Specifically, greater collaboration (e.g.,

romantic partners working toward a mutual agreement) to resolve conflict was positively

associated with relationship satisfaction, whereas greater competition (e.g., when

romantic partners care more about their own pride and winning an argument than they

care about their partner's point of view) to resolve conflict was associated with reduced

relationship satisfaction (Greeff & Bruyne, 2000). The inconsistency may in part, relate

to differences in the conflict management styles assessed in the current study (e.g., did

not include elements of collaboration or competition). In addition, the length of adults'

romantic relationships may be relevant. In longer-term relationships, such as those in the

current study (e.g., average of approximately 3 years), conflict may be less of an issue as

romantic partners are more comfortable with and knowledgeable of each other. If there is

less conflict in these relationships, the use of conflict management styles may be largely

irrelevant for the commitment and satisfaction that romantic partners feel in a

relationship.

It is also possible that characteristics of the conflict experienced within romantic

relationships are important to consider. Specifically, the frequency of the conflict, the

type of conflict, and the reason for the conflict may influence how adults manage conflict

in a relationship. Indeed, the frequency of conflict has been shown to influence conflict

management styles and relationship satisfaction (Cramer, 2000). If conflict occurs

frequently, is occurring for the same reason, and partners are not trying new ways of

managing it, conflict resolutions styles may be largely ineffective as they remain the

same each time conflict occurs. Similarly, if the type of conflict experienced was

perceived to be minor within a relationship, it likely would not be associated with how

committed and satisfied adults report feeling within a romantic relationship. Due to

COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, romantic partners are spending more time apart, meaning that they have less opportunity to find themselves in conflict with one another. On the other hand, it could be that romantic partners are spending more time together, which provides more opportunity for bonding experiences (e.g., reduced conflict). With these factors in mind, the conflict management measure used in the current study may not have been sensitive enough to capture some of the important elements of conflict resolution that are sometimes associated with romantic relationship quality. Future research is necessary to examine how both the amount of conflict and the use of conflict management strategies contribute to adults' relationship quality.

Consistent with hypothesis two and past research (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006), face-to-face communication was more strongly associated with relationship commitment and satisfaction than online communication. Face-to-face communication has many benefits within the context of romantic relationships (Goodman-Deane et al., 2016). Both the frequency and quality of face-to-face communication is associated with greater intimacy and overall relationship satisfaction between romantic partners (Dainton & Aylor, 2001; Emmers-Sommer, 2004). Although online communication is beneficial in some respects (i.e., maintaining closeness in long-distance relationships) (Toma & Choi, 2016), it typically does not provide romantic partners with the same level of authenticity and intimacy as face-to-face communication (Dainton & Aylor, 2001). It may be that face-to face communication is more beneficial than online communication because it is highly personal. There are certain aspects of face-to-face communication such as non-verbal cues, body language, and physical closeness (Venter, 2017) that do not accompany means of online communication. These aspects aid in positive bonding experiences

between romantic partners. In addition, face-to-face communication may strengthen feelings of sexual attraction more than online communication. With online communication, there is a technological, and in some cases, a distance barrier that prevents romantic partners from sharing meaningful face-to-face contact.

The third hypothesis that the quality of face-to-face communication would be more strongly associated with commitment and satisfaction when adults used positive conflict management styles was partially supported. Consistent with this hypothesis, interactions were only significant for face-to-face communication, and not online communication. Specifically, in one interaction, face-to-face communication was more strongly associated with relationship commitment when conflict engagement was low. Low conflict engagement suggests a positive conflict management style characterized by patience, understanding, consideration, and cooperation with a romantic partner and the way that they feel during conflict (Hojjat, 2000). When romantic partners practice low conflict engagement, they are more likely to show respect to one another despite the conflict that is occurring. Therefore, it is not surprising that high-quality face-to-face communication is more strongly associated with relationship commitment when partners express low conflict engagement styles when conflict arises in the relationship.

In a second interaction, greater face-to-face communication was more strongly associated with relationship commitment when levels of self-protection were high. When levels of self-protection are high, romantic partners are more likely to become silent, act uninterested, and withdraw from communication with a partner when conflict arises (Bonache et al., 2016). Thus, when conflict was not addressed, face-to-face communication was more strongly associated with relationship commitment. Longer

romantic relationships are often associated with greater relationship commitment (Ackerman et al., 2011). When conflict arises in these relationships where partners feel highly committed to one another, they are more likely to understand the conflict management styles that each other uses. While communication is key to many aspects of romantic relationships, there are times when certain conflict (i.e., conflict perceived as minor) does not require communication (Overall et al., 2009). That is, partners may benefit more when they 'let go' and look beyond certain conflict. In the current study, it may be that adults' long-term relationships benefit more in terms of commitment when certain conflict is not addressed.

Levels of self-protection also moderated the association between face-to-face communication and relationship satisfaction such that reduced face-to-face communication was more strongly associated with lower levels of relationship satisfaction when levels of self-protection were high. Thus, withdrawing from conflict may lead romantic partners to communicate less and report less satisfaction within a relationship. In other words, when romantic partners avoid dealing with the conflict, face-to-face interactions may become limited, as the problem remains unresolved. Continued withdrawal from the conflict may further jeopardize the relationship (Cramer, 2000). In this case, reduced face-to-face communication could have been more strongly associated with lower relationship satisfaction when adults reported high self-protection because given the pandemic restrictions (e.g., limited contact with people outside of an individual's bubble), romantic partners who are geographically separated do not have the option of effectively communicating (i.e., face-to-face) about the conflict when it arises.

Implications

The current findings demonstrate that the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in significant changes in adults' romantic relationships. Despite these changes (i.e., increased screen time), face-to-face communication continues to play a significant and more important role than online communication in the relationship commitment and satisfaction reported by adults. Although the pandemic may have limited the nature and extent of face-to-face interactions between romantic partners, the quality of the time spent communicating when they are together is essential for the short- and long-term success of a relationship. Given the restrictions, it is also possible that adults are placing more value and meaning in the face-to-face interactions they have with their romantic partner given the restrictions. The findings show that now, more than ever, it is crucial for romantic partners to experience positive face-to-face communication. Despite an increasing reliance on technology for the development and maintenance of relationships, adults need to understand why face-to-face interactions are necessary for the success of a relationship. Further, how romantic partners manage conflict is influential in how face-to-face communication is associated with indicators of relationship quality. Understanding when and how to manage conflict within a romantic relationship influences how romantic partners communicate and feel committed and satisfied in a relationship. In some cases, actively communicating with a partner during conflict is beneficial for the relationship whereas withdrawing from communication during conflict is necessary. Regardless of the conflict that occurs between partners, though, face-to-face communication was consistently associated with greater relationship quality, reiterating the importance of positive face-to-face communication within romantic relationships.

Limitations

The current study highlights how attachment styles, communication, and conflict resolution styles are associated with adults' commitment and satisfaction in their current romantic relationships. However, the study does not come without limitations. First, the sample was not representative with the majority of participants self-identifying as female. A more diverse sample would allow for differences in associations across males, females, and other gender to be examined. Second, the cross-sectional study design only examined adults' experiences in their romantic relationships at one point in time during the pandemic. Thus, it is not clear what particular restrictions were present during the survey completion and how they may have contributed to reported relationship commitment and satisfaction. A longitudinal study is needed to examine how changes during the pandemic correspond with potential changes in relationship characteristics among adults. As well, the study did not target specific forms of romantic relationships such as those of lesbian sexual orientation, heterosexual sexual orientation, gay male sexual orientation, bisexual sexual orientation, and so on. Targeting specific forms of romantic relationships could help to determine whether associations in relationship experiences differ across relationships. Lastly, the current study did not explore additional factors of conflict management strategies such as the use of humor, discussing novel/creative solutions, and practicing high self-regulation that may be important for relationship quality (Butzer & Kuiper, 2008; Cann et al., 2008; Salvatore et al., 2011; Winterheld & Simpson, 2011). Using a more comprehensive assessment of conflict management would help to highlight what types may be particularly advantageous for romantic partners' relationship quality.

Conclusion

Despite these limitations, the present study extends our understanding of the factors associated with adults' current romantic relationship quality during the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, reduced avoidance attachments and higher quality face-to-face communication were associated with greater relationship commitment and satisfaction. Thus, adults who exhibited greater closeness and affection, and communicated well with their romantic partner in face-to-face situations reported more positive relationships. Despite increasing reliance on technology to maintain relationships, online communication patterns were not associated with relationship quality suggesting face-to-face communication continues to be most important even during the pandemic. Conflict management styles also moderated associations between face-to-face communication and relationship quality indicators. Adults in romantic relationships can gain a better understanding of what may be negatively and positively impacting their relationships by reflecting on their communication skills and their management of conflict in order to strengthen the commitment and satisfaction in their relationships. Regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and the changes it has initiated within romantic relationships, adults need to effectively communicate with their partners to optimize the quality of their romantic relationships.

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Table 1

COVID-19 Change Questions

Variable	Amount of change (%)	Degree of change (%)			
		Increase	Decrease	Neither increase nor decrease	Unsure
Screen time	86.2	59.8	22.8	1.4	2.0
Online communication	62.4	28	31.8	2.6	0
Face-to-face communication	59.6	29.2	24.3	3.5	2.3
Conflict	53.2	26.6	16.2	6.1	4.3
Relationship commitment	32.1	23.4	6.1	.9	1.4
Relationship satisfaction	60.5	32.7	17.6	5.8	4

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics

Variables	*M* (*n*)	*SD* (%)	Range
Age	23.89	5.62	18 to 54
Gender			
Females	(289)	(83.5)	
Males	(32)	(9.2)	
Avoidance attachment	2.02	.97	1 to 7
Anxious attachment	3.32	1.12	1 to 7
Face-to-face communication	5.96	1.02	1 to 7
Online communication	5.45	1.15	1 to 7
Conflict engagement	1.93	.72	1 to 5
Positive problem solving	3.77	.69	1 to 5
Self-protection	2.16	.79	1 to 5
Acceptance	2.06	.85	1 to 5
Relationship commitment	5.85	1.17	1 to 7
Relationship satisfaction	5.26	.89	1 to 7

Note. Conflict engagement, positive problem solving, self-protection and acceptance are subscales of conflict.

Table 3

Bivariate Correlations

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Age	-										
2. Gender	.03	-									
3. Avoidance attachment	.14*	.03	-								
4. Anxious attachment	-.10	-.10	.37***	-							
5. Face-to-face communication	-.15**	-.004	-.61***	-.41***	-						
6. Online communication	-.17**	.03	-.43***	-.38***	.69***	-					
7. Conflict engagement	.08	-.05	.27***	.38***	-.55***	-.42***	-				
8. Positive problem solving	-.11	-.08	-.47***	-.29***	.56***	.41***	-.46***	-			
9. Self-protection	.16**	-.02	.38***	.32***	-.56***	-.42***	.60***	-.47***	-		
10. Acceptance	.02	-.004	.35***	.29***	-.44***	-.28***	.27***	-.34***	.48***	-	
11. Relationship commitment	.01	-.14*	-.64***	-.22***	.58***	.36***	-.21***	.37***	-.32***	-.33***	-
12. Relationship satisfaction	-.13*	-.06	-.69***	-.37***	.82***	.57***	-.46***	.56***	-.54***	-.44***	.73***

Note. Conflict engagement, positive problem solving, self-protection and acceptance are subscales of conflict.

*p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001.

Table 4

Hierarchical Regression Predicting Romantic Relationship Commitment

Variable	B at entry	SE B	β	R^2	ΔR^2
Step 1				.02*	
Age	.002	.01	.01		
Gender	-.55	.22	**-.14***		
Step 2				**.52***	**.50***
Avoidance attachment	-.58	.06	**-.49***		
Anxious attachment	.11	.05	**.11***		
Face-to-face communication	.43	.08	**.38***		
Online communication	-.03	.06	.03		
Conflict engagement	.14	.09	.09		
Positive problem solving	-.04	.09	-.03		
Self-protection	-.04	.09	-.02		
Acceptance	-.06	.07	-.05		
Step 3				**.53***	**.02***
Face-to-face communication x conflict engagement	-.18	.07	**-.23***		
Face-to-face communication x problem solving	.03	.08	.03		
Face-to-face communication x self-protection	.17	.08	**.20***		
Face-to-face communication x acceptance	.07	.06	.08		
Step 4				**.53***	.002
Online communication x conflict engagement	-.04	.09	-.05		
Online communication x positive problem solving	-.10	.10	-.10		
Online communication x self-protection	-.004	.09	-.004		
Online communication x acceptance	-.05	.08	-.05		

Note. Conflict engagement, positive problem solving, self-protection and acceptance are subscales of conflict. *$p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 5

Hierarchical Regression Predicting Romantic Relationship Satisfaction

Variable	B at entry	SE B	β	R^2	ΔR^2
Step 1				.02*	
Age	-.02	.01	-.13*		
Gender	-.16	.17	-.05		
Step 2				.74***	.72
Avoidance attachment	-.26	.04	-.29***		
Anxious attachment	.03	.03	.04		
Face-to-face communication	.47	.05	.55***		
Online communication	.01	.03	.01		
Conflict engagement	-.02	.05	-.02		
Positive problem solving	.07	.05	.06		
Self-protection	-.08	.05	-.07		
Acceptance	-.06	.04	-.05		
Step 3				.75**	.01
Face-to-face communication x conflict engagement	-.06	.04	-.09		
Face-to-face communication x problem solving	-.02	.04	-.02		
Face-to-face communication x self-protection	.11	.04	.16*		
Face-to-face communication x acceptance	.03	.03	.04		
Step 4				.75	.002
Online communication x conflict engagement	-.00	.05	-.01		
Online communication x positive problem solving	-.05	.06	-.06		
Online communication x self-protection	.05	.05	.07		
Online communication x acceptance	-.06	.05	-.08		

Note. Conflict engagement, positive problem solving, self-protection and acceptance are subscales of conflict. *$p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Figure 1

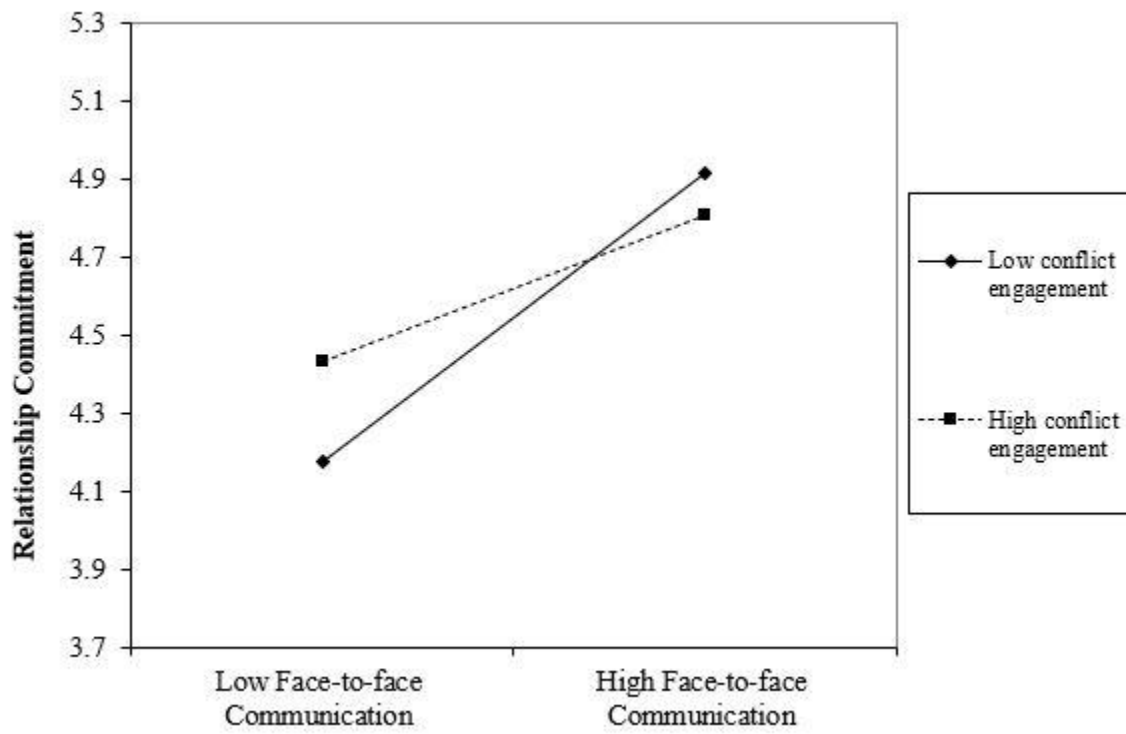*Interaction between Face-to-Face Communication and Conflict Engagement on Relationship*

Commitment

Figure 2

Interaction between Face-to-Face Communication and Self-Protection on Relationship
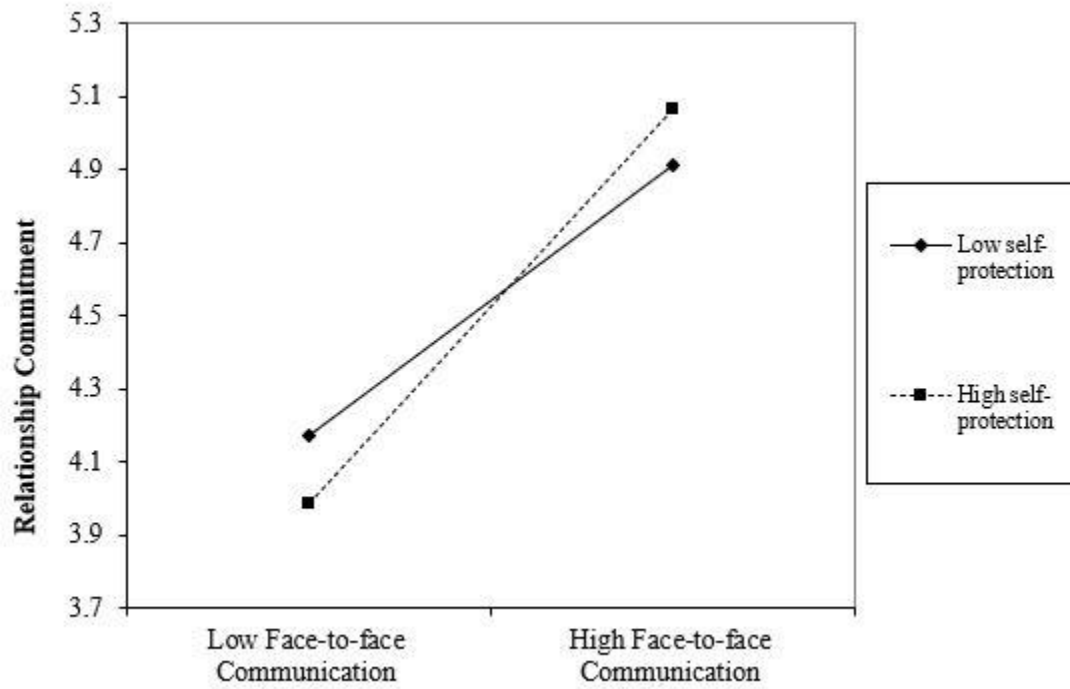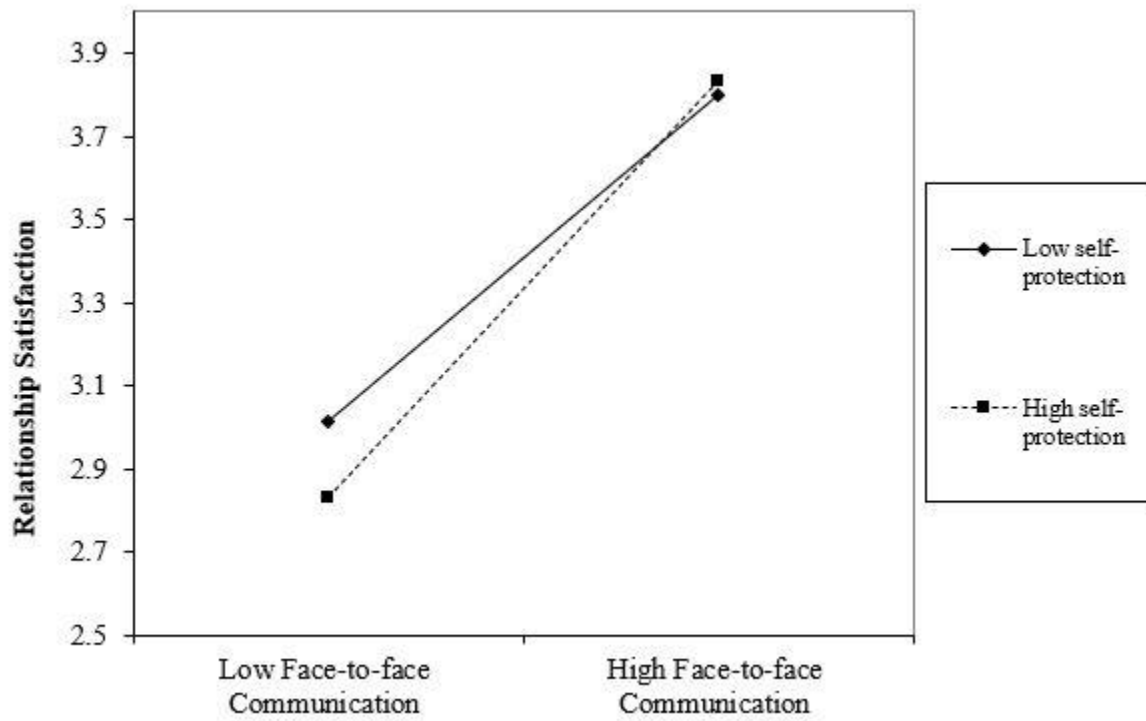
Commitment

Figure 3

Interaction between Face-to-Face Communication and Self-Protection on Relationship

Satisfaction

Appendix A

Making it Work: What's Important in Romantic Relationships?

Informed Consent Form

The purpose of this Informed Consent Form is to ensure you understand the nature of this study and your involvement in it. This consent form will provide information about the study, giving you the opportunity to decide if you want to participate.

Researchers: This study is being conducted by Abigail Poole as part of the course requirements for Psychology 4951 and Psychology 4959 (Honours project in Psychology I and II) under the supervision of Dr. Brett Holfeld.

Purpose: The study will investigate adults' current romantic relationships including experiences of communication, conflict, and relationship quality. The results will be used to write an Honours thesis as part of the course requirements for PSYC 4959. The results will be presented and may be published in the future.

Task Requirements: You will be asked to complete a short online questionnaire about your experiences in your current romantic relationships. There are no right or wrong answers, and you may omit questions you do not wish to answer. By participating in this study, you acknowledge that you are at least 19 years of age or a university/college student, and currently in a romantic relationship.

Duration: The online questionnaire will take approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete.

Risks and Benefits: You will be asked about your experiences in your current romantic relationship. If answering any of the questions makes you uncomfortable and you are a student at Grenfell campus, please contact Counselling and Psychological Services at 637-7919. Participants can also call the Canadian Crisis Hotline at 1-888-353-2273.

Anonymity and Confidentiality: Your responses will be anonymous. IP addresses will not be collected. All information will be analyzed and reported on a group basis. Thus, individual responses cannot be identified.

Right to Withdraw: Your participation in this research is totally voluntary and you are free to stop participating at any time. Once you complete this survey and click submit, your data cannot be removed because identifying information is not collected, therefore data cannot be linked to individuals.

Contact Information: If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please feel free to contact myself, Abigail Poole at appoole@grenfell.mun.ca or my supervisor, Dr. Brett Holfeld at 709-639-2740 or bholfeld@grenfell.mun.ca. If you interested in knowing the results of the study, please contact myself or Dr. Brett Holfeld after April 2021.

This study was approved by an ethics review process in the psychology program at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University and was found to be in compliance with Memorial University's

ethics policy as well as Tri-council Policy on Ethics. If you have ethical concerns about the research you may contact the chairperson of the GC-REB at gcethics@grenfell.mun.ca or by calling 709-639-2736.

_____

By clicking next, I acknowledge that I am at least 19-years old and/or a college/university student; I have been informed of, and understand, the nature and purpose of the study, and I freely consent to participate.

Appendix B

Making it Work: What's Important in Romantic Relationships?

<u>*Part 1*</u>. *Please answer the following questions about your current romantic relationship experience.*

1) Are you <u>*currently*</u> in a romantic relationship?
   a. Yes
   b. No

2) How long have you been in your <u>*current*</u> romantic relationship?
   a. Years _____
   b. Months _____

<u>**Part 2**</u>. *Please answer the following questions about your experiences since COVID-19.*

1) Has your amount of screen time (i.e., social networking sites, video games, streaming such as Netflix) changed?

0	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*
No		*Some*		*A lot of*
change		*change*		*change*

2) Has the conflict in your romantic relationship changed?

0	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*
No		*Some*		*A lot of*
change		*change*		*change*

3) Has the satisfaction in your romantic relationship changed?

0	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*
No		*Some*		*A lot of*
change		*change*		*change*

4) Has the commitment in your romantic relationship changed?

0	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*
No		*Some*		*A lot of*
change		*change*		*change*

5) Has the offline communication (i.e., face-to-face) with your romantic partner changed?

0	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*
No		*Some*		*A lot of*
change		*change*		*change*

6) Has the online communication (i.e., text messaging, Facebook Messenger, Snapchat, Facetime) with your romantic partner changed?

0	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*
No		*Some*		*A lot of*
change		*change*		*change*

For each question above, if participants indicated a change, they will be asked a follow-up question:

7) What was the direction of this change?
   a. Increase
   b. Decrease
   c. Neither increase nor decrease
   d. Not sure

Part 3. *The following statements concern your feelings in your current romantic relationship.*

1) It helps to turn to my romantic partner in times of need**.**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	*Disagree*	*Slightly Disagree*	*Neutral*	*Slightly Agree*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*

2) I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by my partner.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	*Disagree*	*Slightly Disagree*	*Neutral*	*Slightly Agree*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*

3) I want to get close to my partner, but I keep pulling back.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	*Disagree*	*Slightly Disagree*	*Neutral*	*Slightly Agree*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*

4) I find that my partner doesn't want to get as close as I would like.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	*Disagree*	*Slightly Disagree*	*Neutral*	*Slightly Agree*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*

5) I turn to my partner for many things, including comfort and reassurance.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	*Disagree*	*Slightly Disagree*	*Neutral*	*Slightly Agree*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*

6) My desire to be very close sometimes scares my partner away.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	*Disagree*	*Slightly Disagree*	*Neutral*	*Slightly Agree*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*

7) I try to avoid getting too close to my partner.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	*Disagree*	*Slightly Disagree*	*Neutral*	*Slightly Agree*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*

8) I do not often worry about being abandoned by my partner.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	*Disagree*	*Slightly Disagree*	*Neutral*	*Slightly Agree*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*

9) I usually discuss my problems and concerns with my partner.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	*Disagree*	*Slightly Disagree*	*Neutral*	*Slightly Agree*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*

10) I get frustrated if my romantic partner is not available when I need them.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	*Disagree*	*Slightly Disagree*	*Neutral*	*Slightly Agree*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*

11) I am nervous when my partner get too close to me.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	*Disagree*	*Slightly Disagree*	*Neutral*	*Slightly Agree*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*

12) I worry that my romantic partner won't care about me as much as I care about them.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	*Disagree*	*Slightly Disagree*	*Neutral*	*Slightly Agree*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*

Part 4. *The next statements are related to <u>face-to-face</u> conversations between you and your current romantic partner.*

1) I enjoy conversations with the person I'm dating.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	*Disagree*	*Slightly Disagree*	*Neutral*	*Slightly Agree*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*

2) We each get to say what we want.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	*Disagree*	*Slightly Disagree*	*Neutral*	*Slightly Agree*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*

3) I feel that this person values what I have to say.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	*Disagree*	*Slightly Disagree*	*Neutral*	*Slightly Agree*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*

4) We are attentive to each other's comments.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	*Disagree*	*Slightly Disagree*	*Neutral*	*Slightly Agree*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*

5) I feel accepted and respected during our conversations.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	*Disagree*	*Slightly Disagree*	*Neutral*	*Slightly Agree*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*

6) This person shows me that they understand what I say.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	*Disagree*	*Slightly Disagree*	*Neutral*	*Slightly Agree*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*

7) Our conversations flow smoothly.

1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*
Strongly Disagree	*Disagree*	*Slightly Disagree*	*Neutral*	*Slightly Agree*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*

8) This person expresses a lot of interest in what I have to say.

1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*
Strongly Disagree	*Disagree*	*Slightly Disagree*	*Neutral*	*Slightly Agree*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*

Part 5. *The next statements are related to <u>online</u> conversations between you and your current romantic partner.*

1) I enjoy online conversations with the person I'm dating.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neutral	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

2) We each get to say what we want in online conversations.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neutral	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

3) I feel that this person values what I have to say online.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neutral	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

4) We are attentive to each other's comments.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neutral	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

5) I feel accepted and respected during our online conversations.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neutral	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

6) This person shows me that they understand what I say online.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neutral	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

7) Our conversations flow smoothly online.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	*Disagree*	*Slightly Disagree*	*Neutral*	*Slightly Agree*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*

8) This person expresses a lot of interest in what I have to say online.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	*Disagree*	*Slightly Disagree*	*Neutral*	*Slightly Agree*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*

Part 6. *The next statements are related to how you deal with conflict in your current romantic relationship. Rate how frequently you use each of the following styles to deal with arguments or disagreements with your romantic partner.*

1) Launching personal attacks.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	*Rarely*	*Sometimes*	*Very Often*	*Always*

2) Exploding and getting out of control.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	*Rarely*	*Sometimes*	*Very Often*	*Always*

3) Getting carried away and saying things that aren't meant.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	*Rarely*	*Sometimes*	*Very Often*	*Always*

4) Throwing insults and digs.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	*Rarely*	*Sometimes*	*Very Often*	*Always*

5) Focusing on the problem at hand.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	*Rarely*	*Sometimes*	*Very Often*	*Always*

6) Sitting down and discussing differences constructively.

	1	2	3	4	5
	Never	*Rarely*	*Sometimes*	*Very Often*	*Always*

7) Finding alternatives that are acceptable to each of us.

	1	2	3	4	5
	Never	*Rarely*	*Sometimes*	*Very Often*	*Always*

8) Negotiating and compromising.

	1	2	3	4	5
	Never	*Rarely*	*Sometimes*	*Very Often*	*Always*

9) Remaining silent for long periods of time.

	1	2	3	4	5
	Never	*Rarely*	*Sometimes*	*Very Often*	*Always*

10) Reaching a limit, "shutting down," and refusing to talk any further.

	1	2	3	4	5
	Never	*Rarely*	*Sometimes*	*Very Often*	*Always*

11) Tuning the other person out.

	1	2	3	4	5
	Never	*Rarely*	*Sometimes*	*Very Often*	*Always*

12) Withdrawing, acting distant and not interested.

	1	2	3	4	5
	Never	*Rarely*	*Sometimes*	*Very Often*	*Always*

13) Not being willing to stick up for myself.

	1	2	3	4	5
	Never	*Rarely*	*Sometimes*	*Very Often*	*Always*

14) Being too compliant.

	1	2	3	4	5

Never	*Rarely*	*Sometimes*	*Very Often*	*Always*

15) Not defending my position.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	*Rarely*	*Sometimes*	*Very Often*	*Always*

16) Giving in with little attempt to present my side of the issue.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	*Rarely*	*Sometimes*	*Very Often*	*Always*

Part 7. *The next statements ask about your perceptions of your current romantic relationship.*

1) I am attracted to a single lifestyle.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	*Disagree*	*Slightly Disagree*	*Neutral*	*Slightly Agree*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*

2) I am attracted to other potential partners.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	*Disagree*	*Slightly Disagree*	*Neutral*	*Slightly Agree*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*

3) I think of our relationship as a permanent one.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	*Disagree*	*Slightly Disagree*	*Neutral*	*Slightly Agree*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*

4) I am likely to pursue another relationship in the future.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	*Disagree*	*Slightly Disagree*	*Neutral*	*Slightly Agree*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*

5) I think this relationship will last forever.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neutral	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

6) I would rather be with my partner than anyone else.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neutral	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

Part 8. *The next statements are related to your perceived satisfaction you feel within your current romantic relationship.*

1) We have a good relationship.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree

2) My relationship with my partner is very stable.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree

3) Our relationship is strong.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree

4) My relationship with my partner makes me happy.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree

5) I really feel like part of a team with my partner.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly	*Disagree*	*Disagree*	*Agree*	*Agree*	*Strongly*
Disagree		*Somewhat*	*Somewhat*		*Agree*

6) The degree of happiness, everything considered, in your relationship.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Unhappy					*Perfectly happy*

Part 9. *Please answer the following questions about yourself. With the exception of gender, demographic information will be used to describe participant population and not for any analyses.*

1) How old are you? _____ years old.

2) How would you describe your gender?

    a. Female

    b. Male

    c. Non-binary or other gender

    d. I prefer not to answer

3) How would you describe your race or ethnicity? _____

4) What is the highest educational level that you have completed?

    a. Elementary school

    b. Junior high school

    c. High school diploma

    d. Some post-secondary education

    e. Complete post-secondary diploma/certificate

    f. Some university education

    g. Complete Bachelor's degree

    h. Graduate degree

Appendix C

Debriefing Form

Thank you kindly for participating in my study which examined how experiences in your current romantic relationship influence relationship quality.

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please feel free to contact myself, Abigail Poole, at appoole@grenfell.mun.ca or my supervisor, Dr. Brett Holfeld, at bholfeld@grenfell.mun.ca. As well, if you are interested in knowing the results of the study, please contact myself or Dr. Brett Holfeld after April 2021.

This study has been approved by an ethics review process in the psychology program at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland and has been found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research (such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant), you may contact the Grenfell Campus Research Ethics Board through the Grenfell Research Office at gcethics@grenfell.mun.ca or 709-639-2736.

If this study has raised any concerns for you, please contact the Newfoundland and Labrador Mental Health Crisis Line at 1-888-737-4668 or the Canadian Crisis Hotline at 1-888-353-2273.

Thank you, again! Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Appendix D

Making it Work: What's Important in Romantic Relationships?

Abigail Poole supervised by Dr. Brett Holfeld

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED!

As part of my Psychology Honours thesis, I am examining the experiences of adults in their

current romantic relationships! I am looking for participants who are in a *current romantic*

relationship to complete a 10-to-15-minute online questionnaire that is completely anonymous.

This study was approved by an ethics review process in the psychology program at Grenfell

Campus, Memorial University and was found to be in compliance with Memorial University's

ethics policy as well as Tri-council Policy on Ethics. If you have any questions, please contact

myself at appoole@grenfell.mun.ca or my supervisor, Dr. Brett Holfeld at

bholfeld@grenfell.mun.ca.

If you wish to participate in this study, please go to the following link:

ADD IN LINK HERE

Appendix E

Recruitment Advertisements

Participant Pool. Hey everyone! As part of my Honours thesis, I am conducting a study that will examine the experiences of adults' current romantic relationships. You will be asked to take an online questionnaire that will take about 10-15 minutes to complete. By participating in this study, you acknowledge that you are at least 19 years of age or a university/college student, and currently in a romantic relationship. This study was approved by an ethics review process in the psychology program at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University and was found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy as well as Tri-council Policy on Ethics. If you have any questions, please contact myself, at appoole@grenfell.mun.ca or my supervisor, Dr. Brett Holfeld at bholfeld@grenfell.mun.ca. Participation is completely voluntary and anonymous! If you are interested in participating, please click the link below. Thank you kindly 😊

Brightspace page for Psychology majors/minors. Hey everyone! As part of my Honours thesis, I am conducting a study that will examine the experiences of adults' current romantic relationships. You will be asked to take an online questionnaire that will take about 10-15 minutes to complete. By participating in this study, you acknowledge that you are at least 19 years of age or a university/college student, and currently in a romantic relationship. This study was approved by an ethics review process in the psychology program at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University and was found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy as well as Tri-council Policy on Ethics. If you have any questions, please contact myself,

at appoole@grenfell.mun.ca or my supervisor, Dr. Brett Holfeld at bholfeld@grenfell.mun.ca.

Participation is completely voluntary and anonymous! If you are interested in participating,

please click the link below. Thank you kindly 😊

Personal Facebook post. Hey friends! As part of my Honours thesis, I am conducting a study that

will examine the experiences of adults' current romantic relationships. You will be asked to take

an online questionnaire that will take about 10-15 minutes to complete. By participating in this

study, you acknowledge that you are at least 19 years of age or a university/college student, and

currently in a romantic relationship. This study was approved by an ethics review process in the

psychology program at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University and was found to be in

compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy as well as Tri-council Policy on Ethics. If

you have any questions, please contact myself, at appoole@grenfell.mun.ca or my supervisor,

Dr. Brett Holfeld at bholfeld@grenfell.mun.ca. Participation is completely voluntary and

anonymous!! If you are interested in participating, please click the link below. Thank you kindly

😊

Personal Instagram post. Hey friends! As part of my Honours thesis, I am conducting a study that

will examine the experiences of adults' current romantic relationships. You will be asked to take

an online questionnaire that will take about 10-15 minutes to complete. By participating in this

study, you acknowledge that you are at least 19 years of age or a university/college student, and

currently in a romantic relationship. This study was approved by an ethics review process in the

psychology program at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University and was found to be in

compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy as well as Tri-council Policy on Ethics. If

you have any questions, please contact myself, at appoole@grenfell.mun.ca or my supervisor,

Dr. Brett Holfeld at bholfeld@grenfell.mun.ca. Participation is completely voluntary and

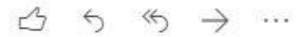anonymous!! If you are interested in participating, please click the link below. Thank you kindly

😊

Scale permission

Poole, Abigail P.
Sat 11/21/2020 3:59 PM
To: rlemieux@mcdaniel.edu

Hi there,

I am in the process of completing my undergraduate honours thesis in Psychology. My study will look at online and offline communication, conflict resolution, and parent-child attachment style in relation to relationship commitment and satisfaction.

I am interested in applying your adapted version of Lund's (1985) commitment scale. I am writing to request permission for this 🙂

Kindest regards,

Abby.

Robert Lemieux <rlemieux@mcdaniel.edu>
Sun 11/22/2020 10:01 PM
To: Poole, Abigail P.

Hi Abigail,

Your study sounds quite interesting, and I like your assortment of variables (I've always been fascinated by attachment theory). Feel free to use our commitment scale, and I hope it serves you well. If you have additional questions, feel free to contact me again.

Robert

p.s. With the exception of Newfoundland and Labrador, I've visited almost all of Canada. At some point, I look forward to catching the ferry from Nova Scotia for a visit.

Robert Lemieux
Department of Communication and Cinema
McDaniel College
2 College Hill
Westminster, MD 21157
410.857.2425
http://www.mcdaniel.edu/

. . .

Poole, Abigail P.
Sun 11/15/2020 10:23 AM
To: art.vanlear@uconn.edu

Hi there!

I am in the process of completing my undergraduate honours thesis in Psychology. My study will look at online and offline communication, conflict resolution, and parent-child attachment style in relation to relationship quality.

I am interested in applying the abridged version of Hecht's Communication Satisfaction Scale. I intend to modify the scale by adjusting the 8 items to suit an online context. For example, "I enjoy online conversations with the person I'm dating". I am writing to request your permission for this 🙂

Kindest regards,

Abby.

Vanlear, C. Arthur <art.vanlear@uconn.edu>
Tue 11/24/2020 8:03 PM
To: Poole, Abigail P.

That sounds good to me.
Arthur

Poole, Abigail P.
Wed 11/18/2020 1:28 PM
To: wei@iastate.edu

Hi there,

I am in the process of completing my undergraduate honours thesis in Psychology. My study will look at online and offline communication, conflict resolution, and parent-child attachment style in relation to relationship quality.

I am interested in applying the 12-item ECR-S scale in my study to look at parent-child attachment style, and how it relates to romantic relationships later. I am writing to request permission for this 🙂
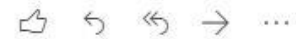
Kindest regards,

Abby.

Wei, Meifen [PSYCH] <wei@iastate.edu>
Wed 11/18/2020 2:59 PM
To: Poole, Abigail P.

📄 ECR-S Experiences in Close R...
29 KB

You are very welcome to use it. All the best for your study! Meifen

· · ·

Poole, Abigail P.
Mon 1/25/2021 10:31 AM
To: roudi.roy@csulb.edu <Roudi.Roy@csulb.edu>

Hi there,

After our conversation yesterday I realized that I was not clear in what I was asking. After speaking to my supervisor, I decided it would be more beneficial to use your revised scale, with different response options than Norton's original scale, the last statement ranging from 1-6 rather than 1-10, and replacing 'marriage' with 'relationship' throughout the entire scale. Can I have permission to use your scale as described?

If anything if unclear please let me know 🙂

Thanks, again!

Roudi Roy <Roudi.Roy@csulb.edu>
Mon 1/25/2021 11:36 AM
To: Poole, Abigail P.
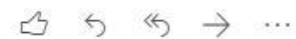
Hi,
I would have advised you to do so as well!
Good luck
Roudi

Roudi Nazarinia Roy, Ph.D., CFLE
Associate Professor
Area Coordinator, Child Development and Family Studies
Department of Family and Consumer Sciences
California State University, Long Beach
1250 Bellflower Blvd.
Long Beach, CA 90840-0501
Office: FCS 103
Phone: 562-985-7496
Fax: 562-985-4414

Certificate of Completion

This document certifies that

Abigail Poole

*has completed the Tri-Council Policy Statement:
Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans
Course on Research Ethics (TCPS 2: CORE)*

Date of Issue: **20 January, 2020**