

# Relationship-specific attachment, risk regulation, and communal norm adherence in close relationships <sup>☆</sup>

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## Abstract

Close relationships characterized by attachment anxiety can result in an approach-avoidance conflict, making it difficult to follow the communal script. This research investigated relationship-specific attachment and adherence to communal norms in established close relationships. Participants were randomly assigned to think about a secure, avoidant, or anxious-ambivalent relationship, and visualized scenarios involving the receipt/payment of social commodities. Behavioral intentions, affect, and reciprocation timing and importance were assessed. Those in secure relationships followed the communal script, and reported comfort with their own and their partner's use of communal norms, whereas those in avoidant relationships used exchange norms and reported distress when their partner used communal norms. Those who felt anxious-ambivalent inconsistently adhered to the communal script: Although they intended to act communal (offer help), they were vigilant about reciprocation (a communal script violation). Moreover, when their partner used communal norms (did a favor), they said they would feel happy but ironically, anxious.

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## Introduction

As Murray, Holmes, and Collins (2006) observed, an approach-avoidance conflict in which the desire for closeness and interdependence must be weighed against the risk of rejection is a basic feature of interpersonal life. We have a fundamental need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), and to establish closeness with others, but with closeness comes dependency and the risk of outright rejection or

more subtle forms of disappointment. Murray et al. argue that a risk regulation system is responsible for optimizing assurance when these motives conflict. Specifically, conflict is resolved by assessing the other's regard (if rejection risk low, promote relationship; if rejection risk high, protect self), and adjusting behavior accordingly (increase/decrease dependency). The need to regulate risk varies across situations and individuals, with certain situations more likely to make salient/elicited conflict between these two motives, and certain individuals being more susceptible to experiencing this conflict.

We believe situations involving communal norm adherence should elicit an approach-avoidance conflict, and risk regulation, at least for some individuals. As Clark and colleagues (Clark, 1984; Clark & Mills, 1979; Clark, Mills, & Powell, 1986) have demonstrated, communal norms that characterize close relationships are distinguished by responsiveness to need: there is a basic concern for the other's welfare and people help and do favors for each other without concern for timely repayment (Clark &

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Grote, 1998). This is to be contrasted with exchange norms that characterize more casual relationships in which the guiding principle is reciprocity: Benefits are given in return for benefits received or with the expectation of compensation, and people tend to keep track of contributions. In light of the risk regulation model, the desire to seek closeness and to promote the relationship should motivate people to behave communally; however, the degree to which people fully adhere to the communal script should depend on the extent to which concerns about rejection and competing self-protective motives are aroused. Specifically, if there is relational uncertainty, the risk regulation system sets in motion an appraisal system to monitor the other's regard so that behavior can be adjusted to the situation; this appraisal process, however, can lead people to engage in behaviors that appear exchange-oriented despite communal goals. As Holmes (1981, 1991) explains, people use behaviors associated with the exchange of social commodities (e.g., offering help or favors) to signal interest and commitment; similarly, they look for evidence in the other's behavior to gauge interest and commitment. In this way, reciprocity—a violation of the communal script—gains importance because it is a means by which people assess relationship potential. The irony is that the appraisal process, which should let uncertain individuals know whether it is safe to be communal, leads them to engage in exchange behaviors, which may ultimately undermine closeness (i.e., if the other perceives them to be exchange oriented).

Lydon, Jamieson, and Holmes (1997) investigated this idea in a series of studies comparing “would-be friends” (people who hope to establish a relationship with another person) to established friends and acquaintances; the assumption being that would-be friends' uncertainty should motivate them to engage in this appraisal process and, consequently, undermine their adherence to the communal script. As predicted, although would-be friends intended to act like a friend, they experienced more discomfort than established friends following the communal script. Moreover, compared to established friends and acquaintances, would-be friends were more likely to interpret a kind gesture as having special meaning for the relationship, were more anxious to reciprocate favors, and felt that failure to reciprocate a favor (by either party) would have important consequences for the relationship.

These findings support the idea that following the communal script (i.e., give freely without concern for reciprocity) can be difficult when there is relational uncertainty. We believe anxiously attached individuals, who feel chronically uncertain about their self-worth, and/or the reliability of others, also should be susceptible to experiencing an approach-avoidance conflict in communal situations. Like the would-be friends described earlier, they should want to be selfless and to convey genuine care for the other, but should be preoccupied by reciprocity issues because of their chronic uncertainty and need to gauge the other's interest and commitment. Indeed, we have found that dif-

ferences in attachment security are associated with communal norm adherence in the context of a potential close relationship (Bartz & Lydon, 2006). Specifically, although anxiously attached individuals used communal norms and avoided using exchange norms when interacting with a potential close other, when a potential close other used communal norms, they experienced increased interpersonal anxiety and were more likely than their secure and avoidant counterparts to use discrete behaviors to diagnose relationship potential. Secure individuals, by contrast, were more comfortable in potential communal situations, and avoidant individuals disliked the other when the other used communal norms. The present research sought to extend these findings by investigating whether differences in attachment security are associated with communal norm adherence in established close relationships. Although there should be greater trust (and communal norm adherence) in established close relationships, as Murray et al. (2006) note, in actuality, the risk of dependence should be even greater in established relationships because one has so much more to lose.

### *Hypotheses*

People who feel securely attached feel worthy of love and believe significant others are generally reliable (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). These individuals should be least susceptible to experiencing an approach-avoidance goal conflict in relation to communal norm adherence because of their positive expectations about the other's regard; consequently, they should generally follow the communal script, responding to the other's needs without concern for reciprocation and feeling comfortable seeking support. Moreover, the other's communal behavior should not be distressing to them because of their comfort with closeness. Finally, they should not be overly concerned with signaling interest and/or assessing the other's regard because of their interpersonal confidence; thus, they should not feel the need to quickly reciprocate gifts or aid received and the other's failure to reciprocate on specific occasions should not be especially important to them.

Those who feel anxiously attached desire closeness but feel unworthy of affection. These individuals should be most susceptible to experiencing an approach-avoidance conflict in communal situations, resulting in increased anxiety and inconsistent communal norm adherence. Like the would-be friends in Lydon et al.'s (1997) research, they should be especially likely to act communal (e.g., responding to the other's needs) to signal commitment, but this behavior should arouse concerns about their greater investment and, in an effort to regulate risk, they should be vigilant about whether the other reciprocates their gestures—a violation of the communal script—to verify the other's regard. Moreover, they should feel more anxious about seeking support because of doubts about self-worth. With respect to the other's communal behavior (offering help

or favors), although they should feel happy, they may also feel anxious as the prospect for closeness may arouse competing relationship promotion/self-protection motives. Finally, like would-be friends, those who feel anxious should want to quickly reciprocate favors—not for exchange purposes—but to signal equal interest.

Those who feel avoidantly attached generally distrust close others and avoid closeness and dependency. They should also have trouble following the communal script and should use exchange norms—not because they experience an approach-avoidance conflict in communal situations—but to signal their aversion to closeness and to maintain independence. They should be less responsive to the other's needs and should be less likely to seek, and feel more anxious seeking, support. Moreover, they should be distressed when the other acts communally (offers aid or favors) because it threatens their independence. Finally, they should value reciprocity, quickly reciprocating favors or aid received (to restore equity), and placing value on the importance of the other's timely reciprocation.

The following study was designed to test these predictions. Because we were interested in the effects of attachment on communal norm adherence in established relationships, we focused on relationship-specific rather than global attachment style. It is generally acknowledged that the attachment system consists of global models containing general assumptions about close relationships and specific models containing information about specific relationships and events (Bowlby, 1980; Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985; Pierce & Lydon, 2001; Pietromonaco & Feldman Barrett, 2000). General models are thought to be influential when little is known about the relationship, whereas specific models should be influential in established relationships (Collins & Read, 1994), and research bears this out (Cozzarelli, Hoekstra, & Bylsma, 2000).

We used an attachment priming methodology (Baldwin, Keelan, Fehr, Enns, & Koh-Rangarajoo, 1996; Mikulincer & Arad, 1999) in which participants nominated exemplars of secure, anxious-ambivalent, and avoidant attachment relationships, and were randomly assigned to think about one of their nominees. This experimental methodology enabled us to more closely link participants' communal/exchange intentions to the attachment quality of the relationship. Drawing upon Lydon et al. (1997), we used a mental simulation procedure and presented participants with various social interaction scenarios involving the receipt or payment of social commodities, and assessed behavioral intentions, affect, and beliefs about reciprocity timing and importance.

## Method

### *Participants*

We recruited 115 participants; 14 were unable to nominate representatives from all attachment categories (similar to Baldwin et al., 1996, Study 3), and participation was dis-

continued because random assignment to attachment condition was not possible. Another 14 participants were dropped due to difficulties following instructions (e.g., two did not recognize their chosen person's initials). The final sample consisted of 87 participants (37 male, mean age = 19.7 years), with 29 in the secure, anxious-ambivalent, and avoidant attachment relationship conditions. Participants received \$8 (Canadian) for participation.

### *Procedure and materials*

Participants were told the study was investigating "social interactions and the self." Following Baldwin et al. (1996), participants completed via email a pre-study questionnaire, consisting of eight paragraphs describing different kinds of people or relationships; participants were instructed to nominate someone in their life who fit each description. Three paragraphs were based on Hazan and Shaver's (1987) attachment orientations modified to reflect a relationship with a specific person (e.g., "Name a person you find is reluctant to get as close as you would like. Someone you often worry does not really like/love you or would not want to stay with you. Someone you want to get very close to but whom you worry would be scared away by this."). These items were imbedded among five filler items describing different kinds of people (e.g., "Name a person who is adventurous..."). Participants were instructed to only nominate individuals with whom they have relationships they would characterize as important to insure the significance of the attachment nominees. Moreover, participants were instructed to nominate peers because the scenarios were most appropriate for peer relationships.

Upon arrival at the testing session, informed consent, demographic information, and baseline mood was assessed. Participants were then given the initials of the nominee (from the pre-study questionnaire) corresponding to the attachment condition to which they were randomly assigned. Following Lydon et al. (1997), participants went through a guided visualization in which they were instructed (via headphones) to think about their nominee, and to imagine interacting with that person. Afterwards they read and answered questions regarding various social interaction scenarios (see below). Participants were encouraged to visualize the scenarios; to help participants mentally simulate the experience, and discourage top-of-the-head responses, blank spaces were inserted throughout for participants to write their nominee's first name.

### *Social interaction scenarios*

The scenarios, which were taken from Lydon et al. (1997), involved the request, offer, or receipt of different social commodities, and were designed to capture an array of communal situations that participants might encounter in their daily experience. Specifically, the notes scenario assessed support-seeking intentions and expectations; and

the dinner and gift scenarios assessed responses to the other's unsolicited act of generosity, which allowed us to investigate whether insecure individuals are generally uncomfortable in communal situations, or whether their discomfort is restricted to situations in which they must rely on the other for help. Finally, the midterm/personal matter scenario assessed participants' responsiveness to the other's needs. After reading each scenario, participants answered questions assessing behavioral intentions, expectations about the other's behavior, affective response, and beliefs about the timing and importance of reciprocation by placing a slash through a line; these dependent measures were organized in terms of the following themes: (1) responsiveness to need; (2) support-seeking intentions and expectations; (3) affective response to communal situations; and (4) reciprocation timing and importance in communal situations.

#### Notes

This scenario involved the participant and the other taking a course together; the midterm exam is approaching and the participant has missed a few classes and needs to borrow the chosen person's notes. Participants rated the likelihood that they would ask to borrow the notes (support-seeking and expectations), and then rated how *uneasy*, *unsure*, *anxious*, *confident*, and *annoyed* they would feel about having to ask to borrow the other's notes (affective response to communal situations). They then rated the likelihood that the other would lend the notes (support-seeking intentions and expectations), and how comfortable they thought their chosen person would feel lending the notes (support-seeking intentions and expectations). Finally, reciprocation timing and importance was assessed by having participants rate: (1) the probability that they would feel the need to do something for the other on another occasion with the explicit intention of reciprocating the help received; (2) how much time (in years/months/days) they would feel comfortable letting pass before reciprocating<sup>1</sup>; and (3) the extent to which they felt it would say something about the overall nature of the relationship if the situation were reversed and the other person did not reciprocate the favor on another occasion.

#### Dinner

This scenario involved the participant and chosen person going out to dinner; at the end of the meal, the participant goes to the restroom, and in their absence the waitress brings the check. Participants rated the probability that their chosen person would treat them and pay for both dinners while they were away from the table, and indicated how *happy*, *elated*, *uneasy*, *unsure*, *anxious*, and *annoyed* they would feel if their chosen person had treated them to dinner (affective response to communal situations). Spe-

cific intentions to reciprocate help received, time participants would feel comfortable letting pass before reciprocating, and significance of the other's failure to reciprocate if the situation were reversed were also assessed (reciprocation timing and importance).

#### Gift

This scenario involved the holiday season and the chosen person giving the participant an expensive gift; questions focused on participants' affective response (*happy*, *elated*, *uneasy*, *unsure*, *anxious*, and *annoyed*) to the communal situation.

#### Midterm/personal matter

This scenario involved the participant studying one evening for a midterm the following day. Their chosen person phones expressing concerns about a personal matter and asking the participant to go for coffee. Affective response (*annoyed* and *angry*) to the situation, likelihood that they would sacrifice studying to go for coffee (responsiveness to need), comfort level sacrificing studying to go for coffee (responsiveness to need), and importance of the other's failure to reciprocate if the situation were reversed (reciprocation timing and importance) were assessed.

To consolidate the data and reduce the number of statistical tests, we conducted an exploratory principle components analysis (PCA) with Varimax rotation, which resulted in three factors with eigenvalues >1 that were further supported by Cronbach's alpha (Table 1). These factors were consistent with the themes described above. Specifically, factor one reflected beliefs about the timing and importance of reciprocation in communal contexts; factor two reflected support-seeking intentions and expectations; factor three reflected participants' willingness and comfort level making a sacrifice to help a friend in need. Composites of these factors were calculated by standardizing and aggregating individual items. We also aggregated standardized affect items across scenarios to create composites for *anxiety* ( $\alpha = .84$ ), *annoyance* ( $\alpha = .74$ ), and *happiness* ( $\alpha = .82$ ) in communal contexts.

#### Descriptive characteristics of chosen relationship

Relationship type (e.g., romantic), length, status (current/past), and importance were assessed at the end. As a manipulation check, participants were given descriptions of Hazan and Shaver's (1987) three attachment relationships modified to reflect a relationship with a specific person, and rated the extent to which each characterized the relationship they had thought about.

#### Chronic attachment assessment

Chronic attachment was assessed with a 7-item version of the Experience in Close Relationships Scale (Brennan et al., 1998), derived from Brennan et al.'s factor analysis and validated in previous research (Bartz & Lydon, 2004).

<sup>1</sup> One secure group outlier felt comfortable letting 280 days pass before reciprocating help; we replaced this response with the second highest value (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001).

Table 1  
Principal components analysis of intentions and expectations to follow communal/exchange norms

Factor description	Eigenvalue	Variance Explained (%)	Factor loadings	Alpha
Reciprocation timing and importance	2.93	26.6	.51–.77	.75
Support-seeking intentions and expectations	2.06	18.74	.6–.7	.60
Responsiveness to need	1.35	12.24	.46–.61	.57

Table 2  
Responses to manipulation check items as a function of attachment prime

	Experimental condition		
	Secure	Anxious-ambivalent	Avoidant
Mean (and standard deviation) ratings of relationship-specific attachment items			
Relationship-specific attachment security	6.48 (1.02) <sub>a</sub>	3.34 (1.59) <sub>b</sub>	2.34 (1.08) <sub>c</sub>
Relationship-specific attachment avoidance	1.84 (1.37) <sub>a</sub>	2.64 (1.67) <sub>b</sub>	5.55 (.95) <sub>c</sub>
Relationship-specific attachment anxiety	1.59 (1.05) <sub>a</sub>	5.04 (1.32) <sub>b</sub>	2.59 (1.61) <sub>c</sub>

Note. Within rows, means with different subscripts differ significantly ( $p < .05$ ).

### Baseline mood

Participants rated on a scale from 0 (*not at all*) to 100 (*extremely*) the extent to which they experienced 17 affect items from the Profile of Moods States (MacNair, Lorr, & Droppleman, 1971) in the past week.

## Results

### Manipulation check

One-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) showed that experimental condition was associated with relationship-specific security,  $F(2, 84) = 85.80$ ,  $p < .001$ , avoidance,  $F(2, 84) = 59.43$ ,  $p < .001$ , and anxious-ambivalence ratings,  $F(2, 84) = 50.10$ ,  $p < .001$ , confirming that the condition to which participants were assigned accurately reflected their relationship-specific attachment to the nominee they thought about (Table 2).

### Descriptive characteristics of chosen relationship

#### Relationship type

Of the individuals nominated, 75% were characterized as friends, 6% as siblings, 5% as romantic partners, 2% as co-workers, 5% as roommates, and 8% as classmates. Relationship-specific attachment was not associated with type,  $\chi^2(10, N = 87) = 10.22$ , *ns* (i.e., friends were as likely to be nominated as avoidant exemplars [ $n = 21$ ] as secure exemplars [ $n = 21$ ]; moreover, more avoidant exemplars were romantic [ $n = 2$ ] than secure exemplars [ $n = 0$ ]).

#### Relationship length and status

The mean relationship length was 377 days ( $SD = 751$ ). Relationship-specific attachment was not associated with length,  $F < 1$ . Fifty-four percent of participants thought

about current relationships; attachment was marginally associated with status,  $\chi^2(2, N = 87) = 5.92$ ,  $p = .052$ ; although secure relationships tended to be current (72%), status did not interact with experimental condition on any of the findings.

#### Relationship importance

The mean importance rating was 7.16 ( $SD = 2.08$ ). Relationship-specific attachment was associated with importance,  $F(2, 80) = 19.40$ ,  $p < .001$ ; those who felt secure rated their relationship as more important than those who felt avoidant or anxious-ambivalent ( $p < .001$ ;  $p = .005$ ); those who felt anxious-ambivalent rated their relationship as more important than those who felt avoidant ( $p = .001$ ).

#### Overview of main analyses

A series of ANOVAs, supplemented by planned contrasts ( $p = .05$ , two-tailed), were conducted on indices of communal/exchange behavior and affect; the between-subjects factor was experimental condition (relationship-specific attachment: secure, avoidant, or anxious-ambivalent). Relationship importance was included as a covariate to insure that findings were due to attachment quality differences and not relationship importance; relevant baseline affect was included as covariate in affect analyses.<sup>2</sup> To facilitate processing the results, Table 3 contains participants' responses on all dependent variables as a function of relationship-specific attachment style.

<sup>2</sup> All analyses were re-run controlling for chronic attachment; five remained significant and one became marginally significant. Moreover, for all but one analysis, chronic attachment was not a significant predictor or moderator of the effects reported.

Table 3  
Mean responses to communal/exchange behavioral indices and affect as a function of attachment prime

	Relationship-specific attachment style				
	Secure		Anxious-ambivalent	Avoidant	
Responsiveness to need	.19 <sub>a</sub>	=	.24 <sub>a</sub>	>	-.48 <sub>b</sub>
Support-seeking intentions and expectations	.34 <sub>a</sub>	>	-.12 <sub>b</sub>	=	-.26 <sub>b</sub>
Affective response across communal contexts					
Anxiety	-.38 <sub>a</sub>	<	.11 <sub>b</sub>	=	.31 <sub>b</sub>
Annoyance	-.17 <sub>a</sub>	=	-.21 <sub>a</sub>	<	.45 <sub>b</sub>
Happiness	-.04 <sub>a,b</sub>	≤	.33 <sub>a</sub>	>	-.27 <sub>b</sub>
Reciprocation timing and importance	-.27 <sub>a</sub>	<	.19 <sub>b</sub>	=	.13 <sub>b</sub>

Note. Within rows, means with different subscripts differ significantly ( $p < .05$ ).

### Responsiveness to need

Relationship-specific attachment was associated with responsiveness to need,  $F(2, 79) = 5.95$ ,  $p < .005$ . Post hoc analyses showed that those in anxious-ambivalent or secure relationships indicated they would be more willing to make, and felt more comfortable making, a sacrifice to help the other than those in avoidant relationships ( $p < .001$ ;  $p < .01$ ). Those who felt secure did not differ from those who felt anxious-ambivalent,  $t < 1$ .

### Support-seeking intentions and expectations

Relationship-specific attachment was also associated with support seeking,  $F(2, 79) = 3.30$ ,  $p < .05$ . Those who felt secure in relation to the other had more positive support-seeking intentions and expectations than those who felt avoidant or anxious-ambivalent ( $p < .01$ ;  $p < .05$ ). Those who felt avoidant did not differ from those who felt anxious-ambivalent ( $t < 1$ ).

Thus, as predicted and consistent with previous research, those who felt secure were more likely to follow the communal script, intending to help when the other expressed a need—even if it involved a personal sacrifice—and reporting more optimism about seeking support. Those who felt anxious-ambivalent also indicated they would be quite willing to make a sacrifice to help the other, but reported less optimism and less comfort seeking support. Finally, those who felt avoidant generally did not follow the communal script in these situations, stating that they would be less willing to respond to the other's needs and less likely to seek support.

### Affective response across communal contexts<sup>3</sup>

#### Anxiety (notes, dinner, gift)

Relationship-specific attachment was associated with anxiety ratings across the notes, dinner, and gift scenarios,  $F(2, 78) = 10.44$ ,  $p < .001$ . Those who felt secure reported less anxiety about receiving aid as well as unsolicited acts

of kindness than those who felt avoidant or anxious-ambivalent (both  $ps < .001$ ). Those who felt avoidant did not differ from those who felt anxious-ambivalent,  $t < 1$ .

#### Annoyance (notes, dinner, gift, midterm/personal matter)

Relationship-specific attachment was associated with annoyance ratings across scenarios,  $F(2, 78) = 8.04$ ,  $p = .001$ . Those who felt avoidant said they would feel more annoyed in these communal situations than those who felt secure or anxious-ambivalent (both  $ps < .001$ ). Those who felt secure did not differ from those who felt anxious-ambivalent,  $t < 1$ .

#### Happiness (dinner, gift)

Relationship-specific attachment was associated with happiness ratings in the dinner and gift scenarios,  $F(2, 78) = 4.24$ ,  $p = .018$ . Those who felt anxious-ambivalent reported more happiness in response to the other's unsolicited acts of kindness than those who felt avoidant ( $p < .005$ ) and reported slightly more happiness than those who felt secure ( $p = .074$ ). There was no difference between those who felt secure and those who felt avoidant,  $t < 1.5$ .

In sum, compared to their secure counterparts, those who felt insecure reported less comfort following the communal script. They said they would feel more anxious in support-seeking situations but, interestingly, their anxiety was not limited to situations of dependency. Specifically, those who felt anxious-ambivalent indicated they would feel happy but anxious if the other did something nice for them, whereas those who felt avoidant said they would feel anxious and annoyed in response to the other's unsolicited acts of kindness.

### Reciprocation timing and importance

Finally, relationship-specific attachment was associated with beliefs about reciprocation immediacy and importance,  $F(2, 79) = 3.37$ ,  $p < .05$ . As predicted, those who felt anxious-ambivalent or avoidant were more likely to endorse the importance of reciprocation in these communal contexts than those who felt secure ( $p < .01$ ;  $p < .05$ ). Those who felt avoidant did not differ from those who felt anxious-ambivalent,  $t < 1$ . Thus, compared to their secure counterparts, those who felt insecure were more likely to

<sup>3</sup> We collapsed affective response across scenarios for presentation clarity; however, results remain significant when scenarios were analyzed individually.

violate the communal script by endorsing reciprocity in these communal contexts.

## Discussion

This research investigated the relationship between difference in attachment security and communal norm adherence in close relationships in light of the risk regulation model proposed by Murray and colleagues (2006). Those who felt secure in relation to the other intended to follow the communal script. They indicated they would be more likely to make a personal sacrifice to help a friend in need, and expected that the other would help them if they were in need. They also reported feeling comfortable with the other's more general communal overtures—that is, being treated to dinner or given an expensive gift. Finally, they were less likely to say they would quickly reciprocate favors or help received, and did not attribute great importance to the other's failure to reciprocate on a specific occasion. These findings are consistent with previous research on attachment security and caregiving and support-seeking (Collins & Feeney, 2000; Feeney & Collins, 2001) and suggest that, consistent with Clark's theory and research, when people feel worthy of love and affection, and feel the other is trustworthy, they will follow the communal script.

Those who felt anxious-ambivalent reported more difficulty following the communal script. Although they indicated they would be quite willing to make a sacrifice to help the other, they were concerned with reciprocity, and believed the other's failure to reciprocate would have important consequences for the relationship. Reminiscent of Lydon et al.'s (1997) would-be friends, it seems that those who feel anxiously attached want to be communal, but putting themselves “on the line” is distressing and they become vigilant about reciprocity to reduce their distress. Those who felt anxious-ambivalent also reported they would quickly do something for the other in response to receiving help; although not tested directly, we believe this was motivated by their desire to signal equal interest like Lydon et al.'s would-be friends.

Those who felt anxious-ambivalent also had more negative support-seeking intentions and expectations, and reported more anxiety about seeking support, which is consistent with attachment theory. Interestingly, however, they indicated they would feel anxious if the other simply did something nice for them; one would think this would diminish their anxiety, but this was not the case. This finding is consistent with our previous report that anxious individuals' interpersonal anxiety and rumination was not ameliorated when a potential friend behaved communally (Bartz & Lydon, 2006). We believe these findings are indicative of the approach-avoidance conflict people experience in communal situations when they feel anxiously attached, and their inability to resolve this conflict through the appraisal process. That is, when assessing the other's com-

munal behavior, those who feel anxious may be torn between their desire to assign meaning to the gesture because of their hopes for the relationship and their reluctance to assign meaning because of doubts about the relationship and the potential pain of being wrong (Holmes, 1991).

Finally, those who felt avoidant in relation to the other seemed to follow exchange norms in these communal contexts. Consistent with previous research (Collins & Feeney, 2000; Feeney & Collins, 2001), they indicated they would be less responsive to the other's needs, less likely to ask for help, and would feel more anxious asking for help. Importantly, their anxiety was not limited to situations in which they felt dependent—those who felt avoidant reported they would feel anxious and annoyed if the other treated them to dinner or gave them an expensive gift. This finding is in accord with previous observations that avoidant individuals show more disliking for potential close others when they behave communally (Bartz & Lydon, 2006). Finally, those who felt avoidant intended to quickly reciprocate help received and valued reciprocity. Although this parallels the anxious findings, we believe avoidants' adherence to exchange norms was motivated by their desire to establish boundaries—as opposed to the desire to convey interest—but future research should empirically test this hypothesis.

## Research implications

These findings suggest that ambivalence about following the communal script may be an important factor underlying the finding that anxiously attached individuals' have difficulty achieving and sustaining close bonds (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Kirkpatrick & Hazan, 1994), and may shed light on why the close bonds they have with others can be marked by conflict and dissatisfaction (Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994; Simpson, Ickes, & Grich, 1999; Simpson, Rholes, & Phillips, 1996). According to Holmes (1991), if trust is lacking, people adopt a micro-level analysis of behavior to reduce uncertainty; ironically, though, this perspective can fuel insecurities because more symbolic meaning is attached to discrete behaviors than is warranted; moreover, as Holmes notes, this micro-level perspective makes people less willing to engage in the long-term, complex exchanges (i.e., communal behaviors) that are necessary to establish trust. The conditional responsiveness, uncertainty and anxiety about seeking support, and preoccupation with reciprocity displayed by those who felt anxiously attached should undermine the interdependence and trust that characterize healthy relationships.

This research also highlights the importance of studying relationship specific experiences and suggests that the unique features of relationships can be as important as the history people bring to relationships. It was not that securely attached individuals felt comfortable offering and asking for help, it was that when people—regardless of

their chronic attachment orientation—felt secure in relation to a close other, they were more comfortable offering and asking for help.

#### *Outstanding questions, limitations and future directions*

Although care was taken to make the scenarios as vivid as possible for participants, they were scenarios, and the findings were self-reports; given problems with affective forecasting (Gilbert, Pinel, Wilson, Blumberg, & Wheatley, 1998), we cannot be sure participants' predictions were indicative of what they would actually do and feel. That said, these findings are consistent with previous research in which actual behavior and affect were recorded in interactions with a real person (Bartz & Lydon, 2006). Nonetheless, future research should investigate behaviors between existing friends as it unfolds in naturally occurring interpersonal situations. A second question concerns the kind of causal inferences that can be drawn. Although we used an established attachment priming procedure (Baldwin et al., 1996; Mikulincer & Arad, 1999) and randomly assigned participants to attachment conditions, we recognize that the level of communal behavior in the relationship could have determined the attachment quality of the relationship. That is, it is possible that those in secure relationships followed the communal script because secure relationships are likely to be those in which the partner has consistently responded to one's needs. Because responsiveness to need is a key factor distinguishing communal relationships from more casual relationships and differences in attachment, we believe the influence of attachment on communal norm adherence in established relationships is a complicated question requiring multiple methodological approaches. For example, priming attachment and investigating interactions with novel partners can establish causality but does not tell us about what happens in established relationships. Studying behavior in established relationships sheds lights on what people do, but is confounded by other relationship factors that could contribute to communal norm adherence, including past experience. We believe this research is an important step in understanding this complicated question.

Finally, were participants thinking about attachment relationships? The majority (85%) of participants thought about prototypical communal relationships (friends, romantic partners, siblings), which they identified as reflecting a specific attachment style. There was variability on importance ratings but this did not account for our findings. Indeed, the person you can turn to in times of trouble should be more important than the person who cannot be trusted, but that does not mean that the relationship with the person who cannot be trusted is unimportant or insignificant. We believe people contend with close relationships in which they feel insecurely attached, and this research is directed at understanding the dynamics of those relationships.

#### *Concluding comments*

Close relationships are typically associated with communal norms; however, the degree to which people adhere to the communal script is influenced by trust and the need to reduce uncertainty about relationship status. Ironically, for individuals in less trusting relationships, the appraisal process can fuel the uncertainty it is designed to mitigate, and instigate a cycle of distrust and dissatisfaction because the preoccupation with fair-exchange and need to monitor discrete transactions can undermine closeness and interdependence. The exchange of social commodities may thus be one area in which attachment insecurities manifest and perpetuate themselves in close relationships.

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