IS YOUR FACE SECURELY ATTACHED? THE EFFECT OF ATTACHMENT

ON EVALUATIONS OF FACE THREATS FROM ROMANTIC PARTNERS

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

ABSTRACT

To understand why individuals differ in their perceptions of the severity of face threatening messages, the current study evaluated attachment security as a predictor of face threat sensitivity. The study sought to determine the extent to which the attachment theory constructs anxiety and avoidance function as useful predictors of individual variation in perceptions of face threatening messages from a romantic partner.

Undergraduate participants ($N = 631$) completed questionnaires measuring their attachment security and perceptions of the severity of hypothetical face threatening prompts. Results indicated that attachment-related avoidance is a significant predictor of sensitivity to messages threatening listeners' face need for autonomy. The results also suggest that although attachment-related anxiety is able to predict autonomy threat sensitivity to small degree, anxiety does not predict sensitivity to messages threatening listeners' face need for validation.

The current study contributes to politeness and face management theory research by offering an examination of attachment security as an individual difference variable affecting the perceived magnitude of face threatening messages. The study illustrates how the attachment dimensions anxiety and avoidance may account for trait face needs, adding to politeness theory's ability to predict the nature of threat interpretations as well as explain the possible origin of trait face need differences.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Significance of Studying Individual Differences in Face Threat Perception

Face is the identity individuals project during social interactions with others

(Goffman, 1955, 1956, 1967) and facework encompasses individuals' attempts to uphold

this projected identity by minimizing face threats for themselves and others. Everyone

has a socially constructed face and successfully upholding face for oneself and others

requires skillful communication (Cupach & Carson, 2002; Cupach & Metts, 1994;

Goffman, 1955; Goldsmith, 2007; Goldsmith & MacGeorge, 2000; Ho, 1976; Metts,

1997; Metts & Grohskopf, 2003; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998; Zhang, Cao, &

Grigoriou, 2011). Thus, any individual attempting to resolve conflict, offer support, show

affection, or persuade must understand how others perceive face threats. Maintaining and

saving face for oneself and others is necessary for individuals to successfully and

efficiently cooperate (Chen, 2001; Goffman, 1959; Park & Guan, 2009), demonstrate

respect (Hodgins & Liebeskind, 2003; Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003; Ting-Toomey &

Kurogi, 1998; Zhang & Stafford, 2008), and appear likeable (Baumeister, 1998; Vohs,

Baumeister, & Ciarocco, 2005), competent (Johnson, 2007; Oetzel et al., 2010; Ting-

Toomey & Kurogi, 1998; Vohs, et al., 2005), and credible (Oetzel et al., 2010). In

general, people seek to maintain and save face for both themselves and others because

face loss can cause embarrassment (Goffman, 1959), defensiveness (Cupach & Carson, 2002; Zhang, 2005), reputation damage (Goffman, 1959; Oetzel, Garcia & Ting-Toomey, 2008; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998), conflict (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998; Wilson et al., 1998), and relational dissatisfaction (Carson & Cupach, 2000; Metts, 1997; Zhang & Stafford, 2008). When someone loses face, other relational goals are put on hold until their face is successfully restored (Cupach & Metts, 1994; Oetzel, et al., 2010; Vangelisti & Crumley, 2009). Politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987) is useful for identifying the factors influencing the messages speakers choose to use, yet its ability to predict listener evaluations of face threatening messages remains limited. To improve the predictive power of politeness theory and related research, this paper proposes an examination of attachment security as a universal individual-level variable affecting message evaluation.

Statement of the Current Problem

Politeness theory's major propositions largely focus on message construction, assuming that listeners' objectively evaluate messages. However, the severity of a face threat is often relative to the individual imposed upon. In proposing a hierarchy of facework strategies, politeness theory applies universal rules for message construction to individual interactions. Brown and Levinson (1987) present five politeness techniques ranked from least to most polite (e.g., bald-on-record, on record with positive politeness redress, on record with negative politeness redress, off-record, and saying nothing) (Goldsmith, 2007), suggesting that certain messages are inherently more polite than

others based on their construction and that this order remains universally true for all communicators. Speakers' face honoring messages are ranked according to their ability to demonstrate consideration for two specific needs: autonomy, or the desire to have one's rights respected, unimpeded, or uninvaded (Zhang & Stafford, 2008) and validation, or understanding, affection, solidarity, and appreciation (Lim & Bowers, 1991). Positive face concerns involve a desire for approval and validation, while negative face concerns involve a desire for autonomy and freedom. Together, these desires motivate all face concerns. When a listener evaluates a message as face threatening, that listener believes that the speaker has failed to satisfy his or her needs (e.g., for autonomy, validation, or both). Yet, a relatively unexplored issue in politeness theory and research is the origin of individual variation in evaluations of face threatening messages. Personality traits may explain differences in listeners' needs for autonomy and validation – needs that influence the processing of relational information such as face threats.

To explain why some listeners consistently evaluate certain types of speech acts as more or less face threatening than others, researchers must examine listeners' communication goals and psychological needs. Politeness theory proposes that threats to listeners' face are an inherent attribute of message content, yet the threatening nature of a message depends on listeners' interpretations. Researchers have challenged both the concept that some messages are inherently more or less face threatening than others (Fraser & Nolen, 1980; Gumperz, 1982), as well as the order of the face threat rankings Brown and Levinson (1987) present. In testing Brown and Levinson's five hierarchical politeness strategies, Bauman (1988) found no support for the arrangement of positive

3

politeness redress over negative. Additionally, hierarchical politeness strategies deemphasize the importance of modifying message content and delivery according to listeners' personal qualities, although research shows that listeners evaluate speakers who use person-centered communication more positively (Jones, 2005). Facework and politeness research must consider variables affecting listener comprehension as well as those affecting speakers' message construction. To adequately account for differences in people's interpretations of message content, it is important to understand face threatening messages as a combination of objectively threatening content and subjectively understood meaning.

Brown and Levinson present three "social determinants" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p.2) that they argue affect the facework strategy people choose to employ: 'relational distance,' 'power,' and 'ranking of face threat.' Speakers construct messages based on the consideration of these three social determinants in order to influence listeners' perceptions of these messages. Of these three factors, 'ranking of face threat' is the most problematic because it is the most subjective. While individuals may establish and agree upon the social distance and power dynamics of their relationship, they may not agree upon the severity of particular face threats because listener-specific needs and expectations affect face threat severity. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), the nature of communication assumes that "intentions of actors are reconstructable by observers or recipients of actions" (p.7). Extant research documenting differences in listeners' perceptions of threat severity does not support the assumption that listeners reconstruct speakers' intentions accurately. Therefore, considering factors that predict

variation in threat perception is important for refining and extending the application of politeness theory.

A variety of previous studies suggest that although some messages may be inherently threatening, people do differ in how they evaluate such threats. Research indicates that listeners evaluate face threats and facework differently based on the nature of their relational needs (Erbert & Floyd, 2004; Park & Guan, 2009; Sifianou, 2012; Young, 2004; Zhang, 2005; Zhang et al., 2011). In addition, people are not equally concerned with upholding their own face and the face of others all of the time. According to Goffman (1967), "face-saving practices" are different for every individual, group, or society, though they share a common framework (p.13). Facework practices differ in the extent to which they are "defensive" (of one's own 'face') and "protective" (of other's 'face') (Goffman, 1967, p.45). For example, Oetzel et al. (2010) found that members of individualistic cultures were less concerned with others' face, more concerned with their own face, used less avoiding facework, and used more dominating facework compared to members of collectivistic cultures. Park et al. (2012) suggests that members of collectivist cultures may concern themselves more with protecting others' positive face to facilitate in-group harmony, while members of individualist cultures may concern themselves more with protecting their own negative face because they place greater importance on autonomy. Importantly, these findings indicate that listeners' values and desires influence the way they interpret message politeness, and regardless of the presence or absence of situational face transgressions, individual trends regarding attention to 'other' and 'self'

face persist. Therefore, to understand and predict reactions to face threatening messages, researchers must first examine differences in individuals' face needs.

Although most politeness research assumes people perceive threats in a similar way, more recent studies have introduced the concept of 'trait' face needs in an effort to describe individual differences in face threat perception (Erbert & Floyd, 2004; Zhang et al., 2011). Yet, the origin of this psychological distinction remains unknown. Researchers note measurable variation in communicators' attention to 'other' and 'self' face (Cai & Wilson, 2009; Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003; Park et al., 2012) as well as variation in the reported magnitude of positive (e.g., validation) and negative (e.g., autonomy) face concerns (Cai & Wilson, 2009; Erbert & Floyd, 2004; Park et al., 2012). Erbert and Floyd (2004) found that a trait need for autonomy had a direct predictive relationship on the extent to which individuals perceived relational boundary ambiguity as autonomy-threatening; those with higher autonomy need perceived greater threat. Emotional evaluations of messages that fail to honor face needs may differ among individuals because people experience different levels of these two primary needs.

In sum, there is clear and consistent evidence in recent politeness research suggesting that individual variation exists in attention to one's own and others' face and that trait needs for autonomy and validation may explain differences in interpretations of face threats. Therefore, overlooking these individual distinctions limits the practical and theoretical application of politeness theory. In order to understand why people might evaluate relational messages differently in terms of face threat severity, the next section presents attachment security as a possible factor affecting face threat interpretations.

Attachment Theory as a Proposed Solution

A closer look at face theory and attachment theory reveals that both are concerned with people's needs for validation and autonomy. Attachment theory (Ainsworth & Bell, 1970; Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bowlby, 1969/1973/1980/1982/1988) explains how differences in the intensity of desires for autonomy and validation influence people's relational goals (Bowlby, 1969; Sadikaj, Moskowitz, & Zuroff, 2011; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2004) as well as their expectations of close others (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2004). Additionally, the two dimensions of attachment, anxiety and avoidance, influence communication behavior by affecting the way individuals cognitively process and emotionally react to interactions with others (Sadikaj, Moskowitz, & Zuroff, 2011; Vohs, Baumeister, & Ciarocco, 2005). By describing how differences in attachment security inform positive and negative views of 'self' and 'other' and how these differences affect the processing of social interaction, attachment theory offers a potentially useful construct for explaining and predicting variation in face threat appraisals. Experiencing elevated concern for either of these needs (i.e. validation and autonomy) may inform the perceived imposition or devaluation a particular message communicates.

Attachment security is a promising individual difference variable that might affect the perceived severity of face threatening messages. Everyone experiences some level of anxiety and avoidance and attachment security is indicated by scores on both anxiety and avoidance dimensions. People experience attachment-related anxiety and avoidance in varying degrees and are therefore more or less secure on both of these attachment dimensions. Individuals low in anxiety and low in avoidance are securely attached

whereas individuals with elevated levels of either of these constructs are insecurely attached.

Attachment security is useful for explaining why the experience of anxiety and avoidance influences individuals' expectations of others' motives and how positively others will treat them. Whereas securely attached individuals have positive schemas of both self and other, insecurely attached individuals have a negative working model of themselves, others, or both (Guerrero & Bachman, 2006). Baldwin (1992) found that positive and negative expectations regarding relational dependency, trust, and closeness, correlated with secure and insecure attachment styles. That is to say, whereas secure individuals assume others will honor their needs, individuals desiring independence expect others to demand interdependence and individuals desiring validation expect others to invalidate them. Due to secure individuals' positive working models of both self and other, they are without clear cause for disproportionate sensitivity to positive or negative face threats. However, due to insecure individuals' negative expectations of others, they are likely to experience an elevated awareness of face threats. The hypotheses presented in this section make predictions about both anxiety and avoidance attachment dimensions in further detail.

Insecure individuals have difficulty balancing closeness and autonomy in relationships due to their compulsive drive to pursue goals that serve unmet attachment needs (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Attachment avoidance involves denial of the desire for intimacy and the suppression of related thoughts and emotions (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003), the tendency to pursue self-reliance (Bowlby, 1988), and avoid closeness by

maximizing the cognitive, emotional, and physical distance from others (Mikulincer &

Shaver, 2003). Therefore, the current study will test the following hypothesis:

H1: Attachment avoidance is positively associated with perceived severity of autonomy-threatening messages.

Attachment anxiety influences the way people pursue intimacy in relationships. Increased

vigilance or attention to relational cues and hypersensitivity to signs of rejection and

abandonment (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002) are common behaviors rooted in anxiety.

According to attachment literature, anxiety may also cause individuals to "intensify

emotional responses to threatening messages," and "heighten rumination on threat-related

concerns" (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2004, p.6); therefore, Hypothesis 2 is as follows:

H2: Attachment anxiety is positively associated with perceived severity of validation-threatening messages.

Attachment theory's focus on relational schemas and working models of 'self' and

'other,' make it a useful variable for examining face threats. Anxiety and avoidance are

likely to inform appraisals of speaker intention, severity of emotional reaction, and

attentiveness to certain types of messages, especially in the context of intimate

relationships.

The focus of the current study was to evaluate attachment security as a possible

predictor of perceived face threat severity. Identifying a context in which sensitivity to

face threat is highly salient will enable the current study to more easily detect these

possible predictors. To test the assumption that individual differences in anxiety and

9

avoidance affect face threat perception, the study reported here examined face threats in romantic relationships. A large body of attachment research indicates that romantic relationships more frequently activate the "attachment behavioral system" (Bowlby, 1969/1982), or attachment schema, than do less intimate relationships, thereby increasing the salience of autonomy and validation-related needs in individuals (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Sadikaj, Moskowitz, and Zuroff, 2011; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2004; Vohs et al., 2005; Zayas & Shoda, 2005). Face threat sensitivity may also be especially pronounced in the context of intimate relationships because highly intimate relationships involve both increased expectation of need fulfillment as well as a greater capacity for psychological need fulfillment (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2004; Zeifman & Hazan, 2000). Hazan and Shaver (1987) found support for the notion that the affectional bonds between adult lovers are formed similarly to the bonds between infants and their primary caregiver. Zayas and Shoda (2005) assessed adult romantic attachment at both a relationship-specific and a general level and found that automatic reactions elicited by thoughts of one's current romantic partner strongly relate to attachment security.

In romantic relationships, as opposed to professional (i.e. superior-subordinate) or parent-child relationships, power is often negotiated internally between partners rather than mandated or assumed according to an external role. Therefore, although social norms and gender expectations influence power dynamics to some degree, power is less likely to significantly dictate communication behavior in intimate partnerships. Speech acts that communicate a disregard for or devaluation of a relationship may be particularly face threatening when partners expect commitment (Cupach & Carson, 2002; Leary,

10

Springer, Negel, Ansell, & Evans, 1998; Zhang & Stafford, 2008). According to politeness theory, an increase in relational closeness commands a reduction in expected politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987); however, Baxter (1984) found that greater politeness is used in closer relationships. Face management theory suggests that as partners develop intimacy, they choose to sacrifice autonomy, making validation threats more damaging to the relationship than threats to autonomy (Cupach & Carson, 2002; Cupach & Messman, 1999; Cupach & Metts, 1994; Lim, 1994). Lim and Bowers (1991) found that the effect of intimacy depends upon the normalcy of the act being performed, with unusual acts demanding more facework and common acts requiring less facework in intimate relationships. Relational norms may affect intimate relationships more significantly than broader social or cultural norms because pre-established expectations are likely to be more salient, specific, and idiosyncratic.

In conclusion, recent facework and politeness research suggests that individual difference variables may help explain variation in face threat evaluations, yet particular traits useful for predicting this variation remain largely unidentified. Attachment security may function as a personality trait useful for explaining how and why individuals differ in their processing of relational information such as face threats. Facework practices and face threat evaluations vary culturally based on shared values, goals, and expectations; however, because everyone has some level of attachment security, attachment provides a universal predictor variable for an examination of message reception. The current study sought to examine variation in individuals' affective responses to pre-constructed messages within the context of romantic relationships to highlight personal attributes and

well-known relational expectations rather than sociological or cultural attributes and less

clear social expectations. The next chapter describes the study that tested the hypotheses

of difference presented in this chapter.

Chapter 2

METHOD

In order to test the hypotheses introduced in Chapter 1, the current study used

hypothetical autonomy-threatening and validation-threatening behavioral prompt

instrumentation as well as a measurement of attachment security. Participants rated the

severity of each hypothetical face threatening behavior on scales assessing validation and

autonomy. A pilot study validated the questionnaire used to test the hypotheses presented.

A questionnaire measured two predictor variables: attachment-related anxiety and

attachment-related avoidance, in addition to two outcome variables: perceived severity of

validation threats and perceived severity of autonomy threats. Linear regression analyses

tested the relationships between these two predictor and two outcome variables as well as

their interaction.

Pilot Study

Purpose. A pilot study was conducted to ensure that the hypothetical validation-

threatening and autonomy-threatening behavioral prompts constructed for the current

study were significantly different from one other in terms of the two primary face needs

threatened. For both the validation-threatening and autonomy-threatening behavioral

prompts, participants indicated how severely the message threatened both their autonomy

and validation needs. In this way, the pilot test procedures indicated which behavioral prompts the main study would retain and ensured the validity of the face threat instrumentation.

Participants. Pilot study participants ($N = 40$) were University of Delaware undergraduate students currently enrolled in Communication courses. Participants read face threatening hypothetical prompts and evaluated the severity and realism of each message.

Instrumentation. The original scenario pool of 30 hypothetical prompts included 10 behaviors intended to threaten recipients' need for autonomy, 10 intended to threaten their need for validation, and 10 neutral prompts not intended to present a face threat. Participants made judgments on ten 6-point semantic differential-type scales for perceived severity of face threat (Strongly Disagree/Strongly Agree) plus two items assessing perceived realism. Two subscales, each with five items, measured the two types of face threatening speech acts: positive and negative face threats. The first factor, comprising five items, all of which reflected negative emotions involving a partner's failure to honor negative face, or autonomy needs represented the autonomy threat dimension. The second factor, including the other five items, reflected positive emotions involving a partner honoring positive face, or validation needs, represented the validation threat dimension. See Appendix A for a list of each 5-item face threat subscale used in the pilot. Lower scores on items in this dimension indicated more severe face threats. All validation measures were recoded prior to analysis so that higher scores on items in this dimension indicated more severe face threats.

Results. Paired-samples *t*-tests were conducted to compare perceptions of autonomy threat severity to validation threat severity for each of the 30 scenarios included in the pilot questionnaire. This analysis was necessary for verifying that the messages function as invalidating speech acts, interdependence-centered speech acts, and neutral speech acts, as intended. Results showed significant differences in reported autonomy threat severity and validation threat severity for all 10 validation threats and all 10 autonomy threats, indicating that the autonomy-threatening messages were indeed perceived as speech acts that threatened participants' need for independence and the validation-threatening messages were indeed perceived as speech acts that threatened participants' need for approval. In an effort to choose the most effective face threat examples and shorten the length of the questionnaire for the main study, the three items with the highest *t*-values were chosen for both the validation- and autonomy-threatening prompts and the remaining seven items for each threat type were discarded, resulting in six total behavioral prompts retained for the main study. None of the original 10 neutral or non-threatening measures were retained for the current study due to paired-samples *t*-test results showing significant differences in autonomy threat severity and validation threat severity, indicating a trend of perceived threat to autonomy. In summary, behavioral prompts consistently rated as highly face threatening and invalidating became the final validation threat items and speech acts consistently rated as highly face threatening and interdependence-centered became the final autonomy threat items. Table 1 presents the paired-samples *t*-tests results for the six behavioral prompts retained from the pilot test for use in the main study.

Table 1   Paired-Samples *t*-test Analysis of Pilot Measures: Perceived Face Threat

by Behavior Type

Behavior Type	Validation	Autonomy	
	M(SD)	*M(SD)*	*t*
Validation threat			
Your partner doesn't notice your new haircut.	4.42(.79)	2.04(.89)	12.85***
Your partner seems upset and when you ask them why, they say that you wouldn't understand.	4.96(.68)	2.63(.94)	11.43***
Your partner forgets your birthday.	5.27(.83)	2.14(.98)	13.40***
Autonomy threat			
Your partner tells you they want to be with you for the rest of their life.	1.81(.82)	3.65(1.31)	8.39***
Your partner asks you to consider moving in with them.	2.15(.87)	3.59(1.13)	7.94***
Your partner drops by your house unannounced.	2.75(.89)	3.52(1.07)	4.16***

*** *p* < .001.

Reliability analyses for the autonomy threat subscale and the validation threat subscale revealed that both scales demonstrated acceptable level of internal consistency. Across the 30 scenarios, the autonomy threat subscale demonstrated Cronbach's alphas ranging from 0.809 to 0.974, and the validation threat subscale demonstrated Cronbach's alphas ranging from 0.898 to 0.98, indicating that the items in each respective subscale reflected the same underlying dimension. In addition, the perceived realism of the behaviors (e.g., "This situation is realistic" and "How likely is it that someone might say this statement to their partner?") was also acceptable, (*M* = 4.44, *SD* = 0.98) to (*M* = 4.98, *SD* = 0.93), on scales ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree/Very Unlikely) to 6 (Strongly Agree/Very Likely).

16

Main Study

Purpose. The purpose of this study was to examine the association between attachment security and perceptions of face threatening behaviors. The main study presented an 87-item questionnaire. In addition to the face threat sensitivity measures selected following the pilot analyses, the questionnaire included three demographic variables: age, sex, and romantic involvement, and attachment security measures.

Participants. The research population for this study included undergraduate college students enrolled in undergraduate communication classes. The final sample size for the study was ($N = 631$). Participants completed a series of self-report measures and received extra credit for participation. Students who participated in the pilot study were not eligible for the main study to avoid cross-contamination.

Behavioral prompts. Face threat stimuli consisted of hypothetical behaviors from a romantic partner. Following from the pilot study findings, the current study retained a total of six behavioral prompt items: three valid examples of autonomy threats and three valid examples of validation threats. (Table 1, as mentioned previously in this chapter, includes the six final prompt items and paired-samples t-test pilot results.) The scales ranged from 1 (Strongly Disagree//Very Unlikely) to 6 (Strongly Agree/Very Unlikely). The perceived realism was high for both the three validation-threatening messages ($M = 4.79$, $SD = 0.83$) and the three autonomy-threatening messages ($M = 4.90$, $SD = 0.97$).

Face threat severity. For each of the six behavioral prompts, participants indicated face threat severity on a 6-item scale in response to the statement, "What he/she

said would make me feel…" Following an examination of the Cronbach's alphas, standard deviations, and item means of the pretest, all 10 face threat perception items introduced and validated in the pilot were retained for the main study. Of the 10 scale items, five measured validation threat and five measured autonomy threat. To assess face threat severity, responses were scored on 6-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 6 (Strongly Agree) such that a higher score indicated a higher perceived threat. Recoding the five validation threat measures prior to analysis so that higher scores on items in this dimension indicated more severe face threats allowed for averaging participant scores for each respective scale to create measures of face threat severity for both validation and autonomy threats.

Attachment Security. The Experiences in Close Relationship Scale (ECR)-Short Form (Wei, Russell, Mallinckrodt, & Vogel, 2007) measured attachment security. Respondents indicated level of agreement on a scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree) for each statement of the 12-item ECR-S (e.g., "I am nervous when partners get too close to me"). The ECR-S includes two 6-item scales, one to assess anxiety and one to assess avoidance. Wei et al. (2007) report alpha coefficients ranging from .77 to .86 for the Anxiety subscale and from .78 to .88 for the Avoidance subscale across six different studies (Wei et al., 2007, p. 201). According to Wei et al. (2007), "the psychometric properties (i.e., internal consistency, test-retest reliability, factor structure, and validity) of the short (12-item) version of the scale appeared to be comparable or equivalent to the original (36-item) version of the scale" (p. 203). The ECR-S is the most suitable self-report attachment measure due to its valid and reliable assessment of the

anxiety and avoidance dimensions of attachment, which are of primary importance to the current study. Measuring attachment anxiety and avoidance allowed the current investigation to assess adult attachment as a possible predictor of emotional appraisals of face threatening messages. See Appendix B for the full item listing of the ECR-S.

Statistical Procedures

An a priori power analysis[1] identified the sample size needed for the pilot study to identify large effects (.35; minimum $N = 59$), medium effects (.15, minimum $N = 343$), and small effects (.02, minimum $N = 19,617$) with adequate statistical power (i.e., .80) at the 5% level (two tailed). Therefore, the sample obtained in the pilot study ($N = 40$) was slightly lower than suggested for obtaining sufficient power to detect a large effect size. A post hoc power analysis assessed the probability that the pilot study design was able to detect statistically meaningful differences between participants' responses on the face threat measures for the two threat types. This analysis determined that based on the obtained sample size ($N = 43$), the pilot design demonstrated a 67% chance of detecting a large effect size (.35), a 16% chance of detecting a medium effect size (0.15), and a 5% chance of detecting a small effect size (.02) between the two threat type measures as statistically significant at the 5% level (two tailed). Therefore, the pilot test was able to detect significant differences in the two types of face threats presented if the effect size of this difference was rather large.

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[1] G*Power is a tool to compute statistical power analyses for many different t tests, F tests, χ^2 tests, z tests and some exact tests. G*Power can also be used to compute effect sizes and to display graphically the results of power analyses (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009).

An a priori power analysis was also conducted prior to conducting the main study. Results indicated that the required sample size ($N = 343$) to obtain adequate statistical power (i.e., .80) assuming a medium effect size (.15) was satisfied by the final sample size for the main study ($N = 631$). A post hoc power analysis of the main study determined that based on the obtained sample size ($N = 631$), the main study demonstrated a 100% chance of detecting a large effect size (.35), a 97% chance of detecting a medium effect size (.15), and an 8% chance of detecting a small effect size (.02). Thus, there was more than adequate statistical power (i.e., .80) at the moderate to large effect size level, but less than adequate statistical power at the small effect size level.

Prior to testing the hypotheses, bivariate correlations between all major variables were examined to assess their impact on the relationships of interest. The significant correlation found between anxiety and avoidance provided rationale for including an interaction term between the two attachment constructs in the subsequent regression analyses. A linear regression analysis using Hayes' Process Macro[2] (Hayes, 2013) determined the contribution of the continuous predictor variable avoidance on the conditional outcome variable perceived severity of autonomy-threatening messages,

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[2] PROCESS uses an ordinary least squares or logistic regression-based path analytical framework for estimating direct and indirect effects in simple and multiple mediator models, two and three way interactions in moderation models along with simple slopes and regions of significance for probing interactions, conditional indirect effects in moderated mediation models with a single or multiple mediators and moderators, and indirect effects of interactions in mediated moderation models also with a single or multiple mediators. It also has the ability to estimate moderated mediation models with multiple mediators, multiple moderators of individual paths, interactive effects of moderators on individual paths, and models with dichotomous outcomes.

yielding results for Hypothesis 1. A second linear regression analysis using Hayes'

Process Macro (Hayes, 2013) determined the contribution of the continuous predictor

variable anxiety on the conditional outcome variable perceived severity of validation-

threatening messages, yielding results for Hypothesis 2. Previous research indicates that

sex (Jones, 2005; Knobloch, Satterlee, & DiDomenico, 2010; Parker, Johnson, &

Ketring, 2011) and relationship status or intimacy (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Cupach &

Carson, 2002; Leary, Springer, Negel, Ansell, & Evans, 1998; Zhang & Stafford, 2008)

may affect the way individuals interpret relational behaviors and messages. Relationship

status and sex are not pertinent to the hypotheses tested in this study; therefore, the

variables romantic involvement and sex were treated as covariates in the regressions

testing the proposed hypotheses in order to statistically control for their possible

influence on the relationships of interest.

Conclusion

This chapter has described the pilot study and its validation of the measures used

in the current investigation, explained the operationalization of the variables of interest

and their associated instrumentation, outlined the statistical procedures conducted prior to

the main study analyses, and previewed the statistical analyses used to test the hypotheses

proposed in Chapter 1. The following chapter will include the results of these analyses

and present interpretations of the findings.

Chapter 3

RESULTS

The purpose of the current study was to assess attachment security as a predictor

of perceived face threat severity. Hypothesis 1 predicted that attachment avoidance would

be positively associated with perceived severity of autonomy-threatening messages and

Hypothesis 2 predicted that attachment anxiety would be positively associated with the

perceived severity of validation-threatening messages. The current study presented

hypothetical autonomy-threatening and validation-threatening messages from romantic

partners and analyzed the relationships between the two threat types and two attachment

constructs. This chapter includes descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations for all

major variables. In addition, this chapter reports results of statistical analyses that tested

the hypotheses proposed in Chapter 1 and interprets the major findings from these tests.

The majority of participants were not currently involved in what they considered

to be a committed romantic relationship (65%) and there were fewer males (39%) than

females. An examination of the means and standard deviations of the study's main

variables (see Table 2) indicated that participants tended to experience greater anxiety

than avoidance overall. Additionally, participants were likely to find the validation-

threatening prompts to be more severely face threatening than the autonomy-threatening

prompts. The even spread of the standard deviations suggests that the variables were

within an appropriate range of variability.

Table 2   Descriptive Statistics of Major Variables

Variables Entered	Mean (SD)
Independent Variables	
Attachment Anxiety	3.94 (1.10)
Attachment Avoidance	3.01 (1.04)
Dependent Variables	
Validation Face Threat	4.64 (0.67)
Autonomy Face Threat	3.32 (1.00)

A zero-order correlation analysis examined the relationships among the variables of interest (see Table 3). The analysis of the correlations shows that many of the observed relationships were strong. The strongest correlation was between avoidance and autonomy threat, which indicated that if a participant experienced higher levels of avoidance, he/she was more likely to have perceived the autonomy-threatening messages as more face threatening. In addition, anxiety and avoidance were significantly correlated, indicating that anxiety and avoidance do not operate as completely separate attachment constructs, rather, they covary in the same direction together. Anxiety was also significantly correlated with autonomy threat. As anxiety increased, severity of autonomy threat evaluations increased. Avoidance was significantly correlated with autonomy threat. As avoidance increased, severity of autonomy threat evaluations increased. Finally, validation threat and autonomy threat were significantly correlated,

indicating that individuals were more likely to be sensitive to both types of threat than only one of the two types.

Table 3   Bivariate Correlations of Major Variables

	Anxiety	Avoidance	Validation Threat	Autonomy Threat
Anxiety	1			
Avoidance	.158**	1		
Validation Threat	.045	-.041	1	
Autonomy Threat	.176**	.467**	.125**	1

** $p < .01$

In order to test Hypothesis 1, a linear regression analysis determined the extent to which avoidance and anxiety predicted perceived severity of autonomy-threatening scenarios. Next, to test Hypothesis 2, a linear regression analysis determined the extent to which anxiety and avoidance predicted perceived severity of validation-threatening scenarios. To examine the effect these two predictor variables had on the two attachment-related outcome variables, this study presents a linear regression analysis for both of the hypotheses in Chapter 1.

Hypothesis 1: Attachment Avoidance and Autonomy Threat Perception

Hypothesis 1 predicted that attachment avoidance would be positively associated with perceived severity of autonomy-threatening messages. Hayes' Process Macro (Hayes, 2013) was used to run a linear regression including the interaction term between

anxiety and avoidance. Two covariates, romantic and sex, were also included to control

for the effect of respondents' current romantic involvement and sex. Research in

attachment theory describes the interplay between anxiety and avoidance as creating four

distinct attachment styles (Bartholomew & Horowitz et al., 1991; Mikulincer & Shaver,

2007). To examine how anxiety might moderate the effect of avoidance on perceived

autonomy threat, anxiety was included as a moderating variable in the regression model.

Table 4 presents the results of the multiple linear regression predicting perceptions of

autonomy threats. The overall model significantly predicted severity of autonomy threat

evaluations and accounted for nearly 27% of the variance in perceptions of autonomy

threat, $F(5,625) = 44.16$, $R^2 = .266$, $p < .001$. In other words, two attachment constructs,

current romantic involvement, and sex explained 27% of the variation in the perceived

severity of autonomy-threatening messages.

Table 4   Linear Regression Analysis Predicting Perceived Autonomy Threat

Variables Entered	β	S.E.	t	df	Sig.
Sex	-3.6*	1.06	-3.4	5	.0007
Romantic Involvement	.14	1.18	.12	5	.9083
Attachment Avoidance	.92*	.1	9.72	5	.0000
Attachment Anxiety	.25*	.08	3	5	.0028
Avoidance x Attachment	-.05*	.01	-4.4	5	.0000
Model fit: $R^2 = .266$; $F = 45.224$					

* $p < .05$, *All coefficients are unstandardized.*

Avoidance demonstrated the largest main effect, [3] $\beta = .92$, $t(625) = 9.72$, $p < .001$, indicating that avoidance was a significant predictor of perceived severity of autonomy-threatening messages. In other words, more avoidant individuals perceived autonomy-threatening messages to be more severe. Anxiety predicted the severity of perceptions to autonomy-threatening messages to a smaller degree, $\beta = .25$, $t(625) = 2.99$, $p = .003$. Although the predictive power of autonomy was nearly three times as strong as that of anxiety, anxiety still played a significant role in predicting respondents' sensitivity to autonomy-threats.

The covariate controlling for the effect of current romantic involvement on perceived severity of autonomy threats did not significantly account for any variance in the overall model; however, sex was a significant predictor of perceived autonomy threat severity, $\beta = 3.6$, $t(625) = 3.4$, $p < .001$ with men experiencing greater sensitivity to autonomy-threats than women. Therefore, controlling for the effect of sex on the relationship between avoidance and perceived severity of autonomy threat enabled a clearer understanding of the association among the variables relevant to the hypotheses.

Although the original hypotheses did not include predictions involving the possible effects of the interaction between anxiety and avoidance, this study included an examination of the interaction term for exploratory reasons. The interaction term of anxiety with avoidance predicted perceived severity of autonomy-threatening messages to a smaller degree than did avoidance alone, $\beta = .05$, $t(625) = 4.36$, $p < .001$. The pattern of this interaction demonstrated that when avoidance was low, anxiety had a greater

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[3] Note: All betas presented in this chapter are unstandardized.

effect on perceived severity of autonomy-threatening messages. As avoidance increased, the effect of anxiety on perceived severity of autonomy threats decreased. The interaction term between anxiety and avoidance increased the model's overall ability to predict perceived severity of autonomy-threatening messages by another 2.3%, $F(1,625) = 19.87$, $R^2 \Delta = .023$, $p < .001$. An examination of these results suggests that the interaction term is small and does not appear to be very meaningful: the size of the R^2 increase is small, the β for the interaction term is much smaller than those βs for either predictor individually, and the visual the graph provided (see Figure 1) shows that although the interaction effect was significant, it does not meaningfully predict the severity of perceptions of autonomy-threatening behaviors.
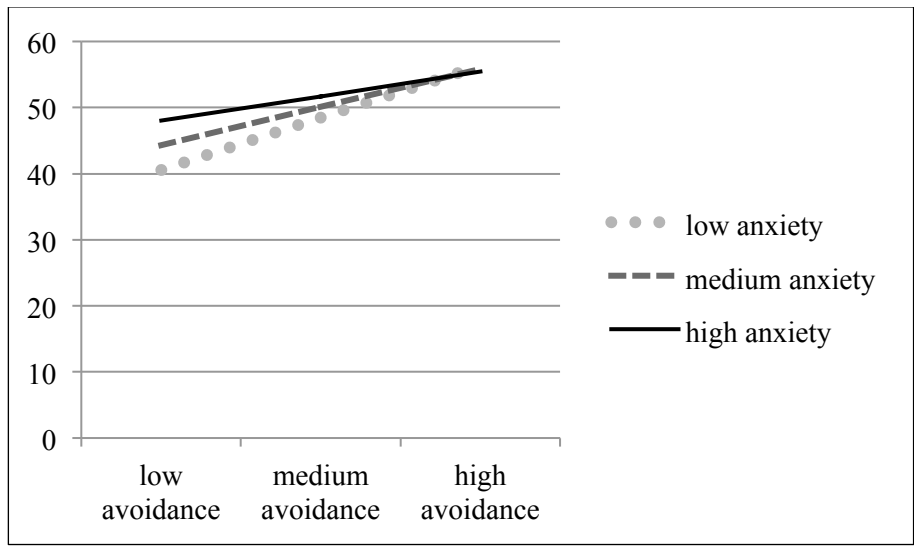
Figure 1   Interaction of Anxiety and Avoidance on Perceived Severity

of Autonomy Threat.

Hypothesis 2: Attachment Anxiety and Validation Threat Perception

Hypothesis 2 predicted that attachment anxiety would be positively associated with the perceived severity of validation-threatening messages. Hayes' Process Macro (Hayes, 2013) was used to run a linear regression analysis assessing the effect of anxiety on perceptions of validation threat. Mirroring the test for Hypothesis 1, the variable avoidance was included as a moderating variable and the interaction term between anxiety and avoidance was entered into the regression model. Including avoidance as a moderator as well as the interaction term between the two attachment constructs in the analysis for Hypothesis 2 allowed for an examination of both attachment constructs in isolation in addition to their united influence. Table 5 presents the results of the multiple linear regression predicting perceptions of validation threats. Results from this regression analysis yielded no support for Hypothesis 2. Anxiety did not significantly explain perceptions of validation threat and the overall model accounted for only about 3% of the variance in perceived severity of validation threat, $F(5,625) = 4.11$, $R^2=.032$, $p < .001$. Increased anxiety did not predict increased severity of validation-threatening message evaluations.

Table 5   Linear Regression Analysis Predicting Perceived Validation Threat

Variables Entered	β	S.E.	t	df	Sig. (p)
Sex	2.59*	.83	3.13	5	.002
Romantic Involvement	1.09	1.03	1.05	5	.292
Attachment Avoidance	-.14	.08	-1.85	5	.065
Attachment Anxiety	.05	.06	.74	5	.460
Avoidance x Attachment	-.02*	.01	-2.21	5	.028
Model fit: $R^2 = .032$; $F = 4.073$					

*$p < .05$, *All coefficients are unstandardized.*

The covariate romantic involvement did not significantly account for any variance in the overall model; however, sex was a significant predictor of perceived validation threat severity, $\beta = 2.59$, $t(625) = 3.13$, $p = .002$ with women experiencing greater sensitivity to validation-threats than men. Therefore, controlling for the effect of sex on the relationship between anxiety and perceived severity of validation threat allowed the regression model to more clearly illustrate the association between these two variables of interest. Although the interaction effect between anxiety and avoidance was statistically significant, $\beta = .02$, $t(5, 625) = 2.21$, $p = .028$, this interaction effect explained virtually no additional variance. The interaction term between anxiety and avoidance contributed to the model's overall ability to predict perceived severity of validation-threatening messages by less than 1%, $F(1,625) = 5.62$, $R^2 \Delta = .009$, $p < .050$ and was therefore not a meaningful predictor of validation threat severity. Highly avoidant individuals did not evaluate validation-threatening messages as severely face-threatening. Figure 2 offers a visual representation of this interaction.
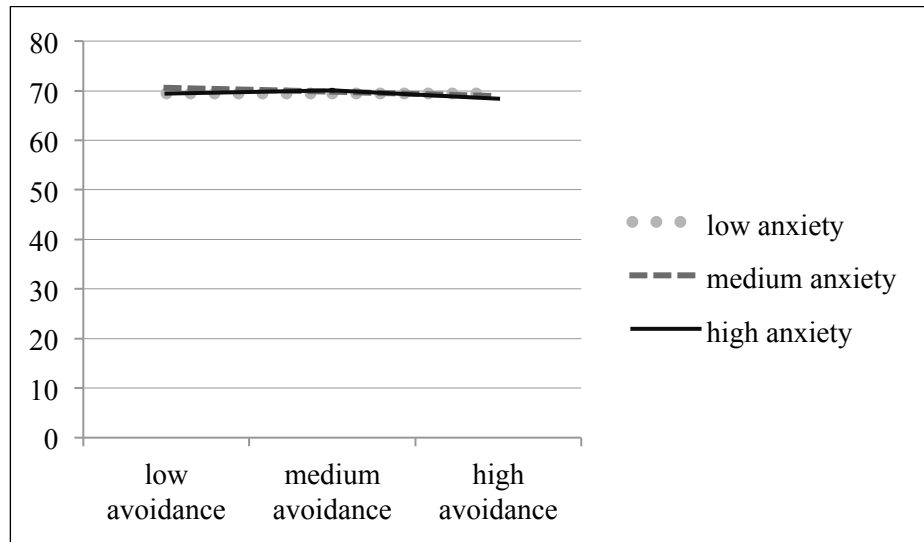
Figure 2 Interaction of Anxiety and Avoidance on Perceived Severity

    of Validation Threat.

    In summary, the results of the study supported H1 but did not support H2. Attachment-related avoidance positively predicted perceived severity of autonomy-threatening messages. Attachment-related anxiety, however, did not predict perceived severity of validation-threatening messages. Furthermore, the interaction between the two attachment constructs did not offer any meaningful explanation for explaining their relationship to perceptions of either validation threat severity or autonomy threat severity. The next chapter will discuss the theoretical and practical implications of these findings and present directions for future study.

Chapter 4

DISCUSSION

The current study sought to determine the effectiveness of attachment security as an individual difference variable for explaining variation in listener sensitivity to threatening messages. A face threat occurs when the desires for others to validate one's worth and honor one's independence are unfulfilled. Although research suggests that certain messages are more likely to threaten face, the threat level a message presents largely depends upon listeners' interpersonal needs and sensitivities. Individual differences in the need for validation and the need for autonomy may influence the way listeners evaluate face-threatening messages. Although previous research has documented variation in people's perception of face threats, more work is necessary to identify variables that are able to predict this variation. The focus of the current investigation was to evaluate the usefulness of attachment security as a trait predicting face threat severity. Identifying anxiety and avoidance as individual-level variables that account for differences in face threat interpretations would organize attachment theory research within the broader framework on politeness theory, allowing for a more nuanced conceptualization of politeness and more accurate prediction of face threat appraisals.

The current study tested the degree to which anxiety and avoidance predicted the perceived severity of face threats. Results suggest that a meaningful relationship exists

between attachment security and face threat evaluations, with anxiety and avoidance accounting for some of the individual variation found in face threat interpretations. The results are important for several reasons. First, consistent with prior research, (e.g., Erbert & Floyd, 2004; Park & Guan, 2010; Sifianou, 2012; Young, 2004; Zhang, 2005; Zhang et al., 2011), the current results indicate that individual differences predict how people perceive face threats. This study found that participants interpreted the same scenarios differently in terms of face threat severity. Previous research (Oetzel et al., 2010; Vangelisti & Crumley, 2009; Wilson, Aleman, & Leatham, 1998) indicates that the three factors presented in politeness theory: relational distance, power, and cultural ranking of face threat (Brown & Levinson, 1987, pp. 74-84) are not reliable predictors of face threat interpretations when tested exclusively; rather, many other situational and relational factors affect listeners' perceptions of face threat severity. The present study examined attachment security as an important predictor of face threat severity and found that people's attachment security predicted variations in their perceptions of severity of face threat. The indication that anxiety and avoidance partially inform evaluations of face threatening messages represents an important addition to politeness theory and face management theory by demonstrating how attachment security, as an individual difference variable, can account for variation in listeners' interpretations of events. The following discussion expounds upon the results from the current study and their theoretical and practical implications. Next, this chapter reviews the methodological limitations of the current study. Finally, this chapter provides suggestions for future directions in politeness theory and face management theory research.

Results Summary and Implications

Attachment Security on Autonomy Threat Perception

Hypothesis 1 proposed that attachment avoidance would be positively associated with perceived severity of autonomy-threatening messages. Consistent with H1, the current study found that attachment-related avoidance predicted receiver perceptions of face threat severity when messages threatened the receiver's autonomy. Research in politeness theory indicates that a trait need for autonomy directly predicts the extent to which individuals find relational boundary ambiguity threatening to their autonomy (Erbert & Floyd, 2004). In the present study, verbalized desire for long-term commitment and requests for increased physical proximity in the form of cohabitation and unannounced visits all presented changes in relational boundaries. Participants who rated these messages as severely threatening to their independence, personal freedom, and control tended to experience high attachment-related avoidance. This finding supports previous research in attachment theory stating that attachment avoidance predicts desiring distance (Bowlby, 1988) and avoiding closeness by maximizing the cognitive, emotional, and physical distance from others (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). In the current study, participants' avoidance level predicted the severity of their interpretations of autonomy-threatening scenarios.

Since anxiety and avoidance operate together to determine individual attachment orientation (Bartholomew & Horowitz et al., 1991; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007), the current study examined anxiety as a potential moderating variable affecting the hypothesized relationship between avoidance and autonomy threat sensitivity.

33

Unexpectedly, the main effect of anxiety on autonomy threat perception was small but significant. As participants' anxiety levels increased, so did their sensitivity to scenarios threatening their autonomy. Anxiety's prediction of autonomy threat sensitivity is inconsistent with existing attachment research stating that attachment-related anxiety predicts the motivation to pursue intimacy from others and often foster codependence in close relationships due to their increased need to satisfy their fears of rejection and abandonment (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002). A possible explanation for anxiety predicting autonomy threat sensitivity involves the interaction between these two attachment constructs forming four distinct attachment styles. It is possible that individuals experiencing low anxiety and low avoidance (termed *secure*) (Bartholomew & Horowitz et al., 1991) were not sensitive to either threat type and people experiencing both high anxiety and high avoidance (termed *fearful-avoidant*) (Bartholomew & Horowitz et al., 1991) demonstrated equally severe reactions to both validation and autonomy threats. This explanation would account for the positive relationship between anxiety and sensitivity to autonomy-threatening behavioral prompts.

The interaction between autonomy and anxiety did significantly predict perceived severity of autonomy threat, although the effect of this interaction was not strong enough to contribute substantively to the model's ability to predict autonomy threat sensitivity. That is to say, neither the effect of anxiety nor avoidance on one's perception of autonomy threats substantially depend on one's score on either attachment dimension. The effect of anxiety on autonomy-threatening scenarios was most apparent when avoidance was low. This finding suggests that the effect of avoidance on sensitivity to

34

autonomy threat is stronger in participants high in anxiety but the effect of anxiety becomes weaker as avoidance increases.

The results of the analysis for H1 have several implications. First, the results indicate that increased avoidance is related to less severe evaluations of partners' complaints and criticisms and more severe evaluations of partners' interdependence-centered messages. Attachment research supports the notion that avoidance involves denying the desire for intimacy by suppressing related thoughts and emotions (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003; Sadikaj et al., 2011). Although both validating messages and messages honoring one's autonomy may serve to foster relational intimacy, the negative relationship between avoidance and validation threat sensitivity the current study observed demonstrates the association between avoidance and the suppression and denial of a need for intimacy. Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) termed positive politeness, or validating messages 'approach-based' and termed negative politeness, or independence-honoring messages 'avoidance-based.' Because the scenarios presented were examples of face threats, not politeness tactics, the autonomy threats can be described as 'approach-based' and the validation threats can be described as 'avoidance-based.' In other words, avoidance predicted severe evaluations of the autonomy-threatening messages because attachment-related avoidance involves avoiding others' approaches for intimacy. The validation-threatening scenarios communicated disapproval; thereby reinforcing the relational distance avoidance motivates individuals to maintain. A partner's criticisms and messages communicating devaluation fail to offer the support and approval necessary for intimate relationships. In sum, the present finding

indicating that avoidance can significantly predict autonomy threat sensitivity is compatible with existing propositions of attachment theory and the conceptualization of the two attachment constructs interacting to create four attachment styles may explain the predictive relationship of anxiety on autonomy threat sensitivity.

Attachment Security on Validation Threat Perception

Hypothesis 2 proposed that attachment anxiety would be positively associated with perceived severity of validation-threatening messages. Interestingly, the results did not support H2. Attachment anxiety did not significantly affect participants' interpretations of validation-threatening scenarios. This finding is inconsistent with previous research suggesting that attachment-related anxiety involves hypersensitivity to rejection and intensely negative emotional responses to face threatening messages (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002). Participants' scores on the anxiety subscale of the ECR-S were not related to the intensity of their negative reactions to the validation prompts, suggesting that the experience of anxiety may not inform the severity of emotional responses to partners' face threatening messages. Although previous attachment literature indicates that anxiety is related to an increased need for others' approval and sensitivity to hurtful messages, the messages that threatened one's need to be respected, cared for, loved, accepted, and approved of presented in this study were no more or less severely face threatening in the presence of attachment-related anxiety.

One possible explanation for the non-significant finding of anxiety as a predictor of validation threat severity involves the 'approach' tendency anxiety manifests in close

relationships. Anxiously attached individuals may not feel hurt by validation-threatening messages because they are motivated to satisfy their unmet attachment needs through their continued approval-seeking (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). According to Mikulincer and Florian (1998), anxiety prevents individuals from cognitively and behaviorally detaching from the source of their distress. Therefore, it is possible that highly anxious individuals did not evaluate validation-threatening behaviors as severely face threatening because acknowledging the hurtfulness of a partner's behaviors contradicts their basic motivation to continue seeking a partner's approval. In other words, discounting the gravity of a validation threat may preserve anxious individuals' hyper-vigilant impulse to approach a partner for intimacy. Additionally, previous research suggests individuals who experience high attachment-related anxiety (termed either *preoccupied* or *fearful-avoidant*) (Bartholomew & Horowitz et al., 1991) tend to have negative views of themselves and positive views of others (Guerrero & Bachman, 2006). Validation-threatening messages may not severely threaten individuals high in anxiety because these criticisms and disapprovals correspond with preexisting low self-esteem. A partner's invalidating messages and behaviors serve to reinforce anxious self-doubt and verify anxious individuals' negative self-view. In other words, anxiety did not predict severity of validation threat evaluations because expectations of devaluation and disapproval accompany the experience of anxiety.

A conceptual explanation for why the validation-threatening messages were more severely face-threatening overall may be that autonomy threats operate on a less sensitive scale than validation threats. In other words, while a single failure to honor an

individual's independence might not create a strong negative threat reaction, a single failure to validate an individual's worthiness might create a very strong threat reaction. If moderate threats to one's validation and autonomy needs result in varying negative reactions to those threats, the constructs could be described as operating on scales differing in sensitivity to threat detection.

Content attributes of the behavioral threat prompts, (e.g., simplicity, brevity, word choice, phrasing, and situational context) present a possible methodological reason for the insignificant relationship between anxiety and severity of validation threat perceptions. Claiming that any pre-constructed behavioral prompts, regardless of the integrity and uniformity of their design, could function as perfect examples of either type of face threat runs contrary to the primary assertion of this paper. The current study provides additional support for previous research showing that people's evaluations, when presented with the same message, vary in terms of the severity of the threat presented. Identifying an individual-level variable suitable for explaining this variation was the primary goal of the present study. Therefore, the degree of reported face threat severity may have been a product of both traits informing respondents' subjective evaluations as well as objective message characteristics.

In an attempt to further explain why participants' evaluations of the validation-threatening prompts did not relate to their anxiety, follow-up analyses were conducted to determine whether there was a disparity in the strength of the threat presented between the hypothetical validation- and autonomy-threatening prompts that could be attributed to differences in the phrasing and message content. Results of paired-samples t-tests

comparing the average perceived face threat severity between the validation-threatening and autonomy-threatening prompts indicate statistically significant differences in reported autonomy threat severity ($M = 3.32$; $SD = 1.0$) and validation threat severity ($M = 4.64$; $SD = .67$), $t(630) = 29.67$, $p < .001$. These results suggest that participants evaluated hypothetical validation-threatening messages from their partner as significantly more face threatening than autonomy-threatening messages overall. It is unclear whether the specific validation-threatening prompts presented were indeed more face-threatening than the autonomy-threatening prompts or if this disparity in threat severity is due to meaningful differences in participant interpretations of a partner's behavior.

Framing the behavioral prompts as occurring within the context of a romantic partnership may serve as an additional explanation for why the invalidating messages were reported as being more threatening than autonomy-threatening messages overall. Previous face management theory research suggests that validation threats are more damaging to relationships between intimate partners because as partners develop intimacy, they choose to sacrifice autonomy (Cupach & Carson, 2002; Cupach & Messman, 1999; Cupach & Metts, 1994; Lim, 1994). Taking these previous research findings into consideration, it is possible that the romantic relational context of the prompts, a feature designed to enhance overall threat detection, created differences between participants' evaluations of the two threat types. Due to the fact that every scenario involved one's romantic partner, it is not possible to compare threat evaluations between relationship types, only evaluations of a romantic partner's face threatening actions between single and committed participants. Therefore, whether framing the face

threatening scenarios within the context of romantic relationships rather than a different type of relationship enhanced or muted the overall severity of face threat evaluations cannot be determined. The non-significant relationship between romantic involvement and either type of face threat suggests, however, that participants' ability or inability to draw from recent experiences in their own relationships did not affect the nature of their responses to these face threats.

Avoidance did not predict participants' perceptions of the severity of validation-threatening scenarios, offering support for the claim that avoidant individuals have positive working models of themselves and negative working models of others presented in extant attachment literature (Baldwin, Fehr, Keedian, Seidel, & Thomson, 1993; Guerrero & Bachman, 2006, Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). This preexisting positive self-appraisal may offset the potential face threat an invalidating message would cause. In other words, avoidance did not predict the severity of participants' interpretations of messages failing to validate their worth or demonstrate acceptance because self-worth and self-acceptance often accompany attachment-avoidance. The expected absence of a predictive relationship between avoidance and validation threat severity the results of this study demonstrate are in keeping with the claims proposed in attachment literature that attachment-related avoidance involves a motivation to pursue emotional distance from others (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003) and deny the desire for intimacy (Bowlby, 1988). For example, the behavioral prompt "Your partner seems upset and when you ask them why, they say that you wouldn't understand" prompts relief in individuals who prefer emotional distance from others because it frees one from the task of talking about

difficult emotions and increasing relational intimacy. Additionally, someone's partner failing to notice their new haircut or forgetting their birthday reinforces the relational separateness and personal autonomy attachment avoidance motivates individuals to uphold.

The interaction between anxiety and avoidance on the outcome variable perceived validation threat, although significant, was too small to add meaningful predictive power to the model. In other words, the effect of either anxiety or avoidance on perception of validation threat does not depend on the score on either attachment dimension.

The results of the analysis for H2 suggest that attachment-related anxiety may not be related to individuals' perceptions of validation-threatening messages within the context of romantic relationships. It is possible that attachment-related anxiety may have a more pronounced effect on evaluations of invalidating messages from persons other than one's romantic partner. One's attachment schema is less salient in non-romantic relationships compared to romantic relationships (Baldwin et al., 1993; Zayas & Shoda, 2005). Therefore, individuals may interpret threats from non-romantic others as more severe because the emotional and cognitive processing of these threats is less dependent upon attachment-driven relational motivations.

Methodological Limitations

Although this study produced interesting findings, interpretations of the results must also consider the study's limitations. First, the sample of college students represents a small section of the general population, indicating that the results obtained may not

generalize to all ages, cultures, or relationship types. Second, the limited number of

hypothetical prompts and associated threat severity measures the study offered restrict

it's ability to generalize the present findings to many different face-threatening situations.

Finally, the use of hypothetical message prompts may have affected the strength of

participants' threat evaluations.

The first limitation is that the sample may not be representative of the population

due to the age, sex, and romantic involvement of the participants. The participants were

young adults with females outnumbering males, and these factors may have affected the

results in terms of romantic involvement and ability to imagine themselves as recipients

of the face threatening scenarios. Due to possible inexperience with long-term romantic

relationships, asking participants to respond to scenarios involving a relational partner

may have affected the responses. In addition, because this study assessed current

romantic involvement using a yes/no measurement item, duration of involvement and

level of intimacy were unknown.

A limited number of behavioral prompt items and the mutual exclusivity of their

categorization present a second limitation to the current study. Although the brevity and

concision of the study's instrumentation benefitted response rate and the pilot confirmed

the appropriateness of the items chosen, this paper does not assume that the hypothetical

scenarios presented were able to capture the full spectrum of face wants in their nuances

comprehensively. The study measured severity of face threat using only six scenarios

total, three scenarios for both types of face threat. One possibility is that other scenarios

not included in the measurements may have been more or less severely face threatening

on average, thereby presenting different results while examining the same relationships. The pilot test validated the six scenarios and threat perception subscales used, verifying that the validation-threatening and autonomy-threatening scenarios were consistently rated as strongly invalidating and interdependence-centered respectively. However, as Table 1 (presented in Chapter 2) showed, the type of face need threatened may not have been mutually exclusive for the two types of scenarios. Although the difference between the validation-threatening and autonomy-threatening messages was statistically significant, some variation in the perception of these threats existed. In other words, participants did not indicate that autonomy-threatening messages threatened their face need for validation, but responses to items varied from 'Strongly Disagree' that the message was invalidating to 'Slightly Disagree' that the message was invalidating. This variation suggests that categorizing messages as either autonomy threats or validation threats assumes that these two threat types are mutually exclusive. Past research indicates that some messages and behaviors can honor one type of face while threatening the other (Goldsmith, 1992) or threaten both types of face simultaneously (Erbert & Floyd, 2004). Even messages that appropriately threatened the type of face need (e.g. autonomy or validation) they were designed to threaten exhibited variance in the extent to which they threatened participants' other basic face need. This variation, although not statistically significant, highlights a methodological limitation in presenting pre-constructed hypothetical face threat messages.

The hypothetical prompts' possible ineffectiveness at emotionally engaging participants presents a final limitation of the current study. The purpose of creating

uniform face threat measurements for the current study was to assess subjectivity in the form of deviations from the average perceived severity. However, the results might have been more interesting in terms of examining the difference between severity of face threat and attachment security if participants were asked to recall a recent situation in which they experienced hurt feelings in a close relationship and answer a series of free-response questions as well as scaled assessments. Recalling personal experiences might enhance the activation of participants' attachment schemas, thereby producing heightened emotional responses to compare with attachment scores. In a study by Trees and Manusov (1998) examining the effect of nonverbals on face threatening criticism, nonverbals were shown to both mitigate and exacerbate perceptions of politeness depending on their presentation. Prompting individuals to recall past experiences would allow for the inclusion of nonverbal cues as moderating variables as well as remove the need to measure scenario realism. However, applying a coding scheme to free responses would necessitate controlling for a host of other variables.

Directions for Future Research

Due to the limitations of the current study and the results generated after testing the present model, researchers now have several directions for future research on receiver assessments of face threatening messages. Although the current study provides additional support for the claim that a trait need for autonomy affects the perceived magnitude of autonomy-threatening messages, it also raises questions regarding the role anxiety plays in people's interpretations of threatening stimuli. In the regression analysis for H2

reported in the previous chapter, individuals' anxiety was not related to more severe interpretations of partners' face threats. Is it the case that although attachment-related anxiety is associated with hyper-vigilant attention to disapproval from others, it also entails decreased emotional responses to those disapproving messages? Additional research is needed to more clearly determine the usefulness of attachment security as a meaningful individual difference variable affecting threat perception.

Regarding methods, there are many directions that researchers can take to move beyond some of the limitations that exist in the current study. In terms of the relational context of message delivery, researchers might compare the severity of threat evaluations between relationship types by framing the face threatening message prompts within the context of romantic partnerships, friendships, parent-child and teacher-student relationships, and relationships between higher-ups and subordinates in the workplace. Additionally, researchers continuing to explore attachment security and its effect on face threats would benefit the literature by combining scaled measurement items with free response questions involving actual experiences in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the complex emotional impact of threatening messages.

In terms of theoretical suggestions for future research, there are several questions that researchers might answer to expand upon the literature. First, what other variables potentially serve as individual difference predictors of one's evaluations of face threatening messages? Researchers might explore the Big Five personality traits, trait dominance, narcissism, and cognitive complexity as additional predictors of face threat sensitivity. Second, how might face threat sensitivity impact one's chosen occupation and

their satisfaction with this choice? Researchers might explore the practical implications of face threat evaluations by examining career choice and sensitivity to validation and autonomy threats. Finally, are people most comfortable when others mirror their facework practices? Some extant research has examined the relationship between message construction and message perception in terms of self- and other-face concern and chosen politeness tactics in message construction. Exploring that relationship further by determining if the face-threatening nature in which one speaks to others correlates with the face-threatening nature in which they wish others to speak to them would be an interesting avenue to investigate further.

Summary of Findings and Conclusion

The current study sought to expand on politeness theory and research by measuring the relationship between attachment security as a personality variable on one's interpretations of face threatening messages from close others. Additionally, the study sought to provide explanation of face threat evaluation beyond what extant literature has already discovered by examining how attachment variables operate separately as well as together to explain within-culture differences in the interpretations of common face threatening behaviors of romantic partners. The results of the current study contribute to politeness theory research in an important way. The study revealed that attachment functions as a meaningful individual difference construct predicting face threat interpretation. Specifically, attachment avoidance significantly predicts the manner in which one perceives a romantic partner's autonomy-threatening messages and actions.

Individuals high in avoidance experience greater sensitivity to partners' autonomy-threatening messages. The difference between the effect of avoidance and anxiety on face threat sensitivity is important in helping researchers begin to understand individuals' primary face-saving motivations in romantic relationships. Although the findings of this study are both theoretically and practically significant, there are also some limitations that are important to keep in mind as future studies continue to examine the role of individual differences in perceptions of face threats.

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Appendix A

PERCEPTIONS OF FACE THREAT SEVERITY MEASURES

Face Threat Perception Subscale Items

Validation Threat
Like I am loved
Like I am valued
Like I am cared for
Like I am accepted
Like I am respected
Autonomy Threat
Smothered
Like my control is being taken away
Like my choices of action are limited
Like my personal freedom is being threatened
Like my independence is being taken away

Appendix B

ATTACHMENT MEASURES

Experiences in Close Relationships Short Form (ECR-S)

Item		Subscale
33R.	It helps to turn to my romantic partner in times of need.*	Avoidance
11.	I want to get close to my partner, but I keep pulling back.	Avoidance
35R.	I turn to my partner for many things, including comfort and reassurance.*	Avoidance
17.	I try to avoid getting too close to my partner.	Avoidance
27R.	I usually discuss my problems and concerns with my partner.*	Avoidance
13.	I am nervous when partners get too close to me.	Avoidance
26.	I find that my partner(s) don't want to get as close as I would like.	Anxiety
22R.	I do not often worry about being abandoned.*	Anxiety
16.	My desire to be very close sometimes scares people away.	Anxiety
32.	I get frustrated if romantic partners are not available when I need them.	Anxiety
18.	I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by my partner.	Anxiety
6.	I worry that romantic partners won't care about me as much as I care about them.	Anxiety

Note. * Items are reverse-coded.
The order of the final 12-item short version is 33R, 18, 11, 26, 35R, 16, 17, 22R, 27R, 32, 13, and 6.

Appendix C

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE

RESEARCH OFFICE

210 Hullihen Hall
University of Delaware
Newark, Delaware 19716-1551
Ph: 302/831-2136
Fax: 302/831-2828

DATE: November 19, 2013

TO: Jennifer Cichocki
FROM: University of Delaware IRB

STUDY TITLE: [513462-2] Fall 2013 Thesis Pretest Communication Survey

SUBMISSION TYPE: Amendment/Modification

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS
DECISION DATE: November 19, 2013

Thank you for your submission of Amendment/Modification materials for this research study. The University of Delaware IRB has determined this project is EXEMPT FROM IRB REVIEW according to federal regulations.

We will put a copy of this correspondence on file in our office. Please remember to notify us if you make any substantial changes to the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Nicole Farnese-McFarlane at (302) 831-1119 or nicolefm@udel.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.