



# What can you do for me? Attachment style and motives underlying esteem for partners ☆

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Available online 2 August 2005

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## Abstract

Two event-contingent diary studies investigated whether people of different attachment styles value partners for different reasons (e.g., self-esteem regulation, closeness). In Study 1, preoccupied individuals more positively regarded partners when they provided help with self-regulatory functions, and they did so to a greater extent than either secure or dismissing-avoidant individuals. In Study 2, preoccupied and fearful-avoidant individuals were more likely to want to gain approval from partners. Also, when preoccupied individuals obtained partner approval, they valued their partner more, and they did so to a greater extent than secure individuals. Continuous attachment measures produced weaker findings, but people higher in anxious-ambivalence generally showed patterns similar to those found for preoccupied individuals. Findings suggest that the process by which people come to positively view their partners may vary depending on their attachment-related goals.

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☆ Preparation of this paper was supported, in part, by NSF Grants SBR-9727896, BCS 0074688 and NIMH Grant K02 MH001981 to Lisa Feldman Barrett. Portions of these data were presented at the New England Social Psychological Association, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH, October, 1999, and at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association, Boston, MA, August 1999.

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*Keywords:* Attachment style; Goals; Motives; Self-regulation; Self-esteem; Relationship partner; Social interaction; Daily diary

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## 1. Introduction

Most people are motivated to form relationships with others. This assertion is hardly controversial, and it appears in many psychological theories (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Bowlby, 1969, 1973; Deci & Ryan, 1991; Epstein, 1990; Maslow, 1968; Murray, 1938). The reasons why people value their relationship partners, however, are less clear. Although several motives may exist for forming and maintaining interpersonal bonds and for valuing relationship partners (e.g., see Baumeister & Leary, 1995), the present work focuses on two: a desire for closeness or belonging and a desire for help with self-esteem regulation.

Discussions of the goals of wanting closeness and wanting self-regulatory help appear in several different places in the psychological literature. A desire for closeness, relatedness, or belonging has been identified as a fundamental human need by a variety of psychological theorists (e.g., Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Bowlby, 1969; Deci & Ryan, 1991; Epstein, 1990; Maslow, 1968). A sense of belonging comes from interacting with and feeling close to others and leads people to value those others (see Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

A desire for help with self-regulation is highlighted in the research on social support. People turn to others for support and comfort in times of distress, and such interactions can help people to regulate their emotions (Rook, 1987; Rook & Pietromonaco, 1987) and bolster feelings of self-competence and self-worth (Markus & Cross, 1990). Likewise, theory and research on attachment processes (Bowlby, 1969, 1973; Murray & Holmes, 2000; Reis & Patrick, 1996) emphasize that close others play a role in regulating feelings about the self and in achieving a sense of “felt security” (Ainsworth, 1989; Sroufe & Waters, 1977).

The distinction between these two motives is captured within the psychoanalytic literature on self psychology. In self psychology terms, another person can function as an “object” or a “self-object” (Kohut, 1977, 1984). An interaction partner as an “object” provides a sense of closeness or pleasure, which can come from companionship and shared activities (Rook, 1987) that are independent of any self-regulatory functions the partner might serve. For example, two people may positively regard each other because they feel happy and relaxed when doing activities together (e.g., going out to eat or going to a movie). In this case, they may like each other for reasons that are unrelated to enhancing or maintaining their sense of self, and intimacy in the relationship might serve the function of providing a sense of closeness and connectedness, independent of self-regulatory needs. An interaction partner, as a “self-object,” provides help with regulating feelings about the self. In this case, the relationship serves the function of enhancing or restoring positive feelings about the self, or providing “esteem support” (Wills, 1985). While the desire to belong and to derive pleasure from interacting with others appears to be a widely held (and possibly

universal) goal (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), the desire to engage others in self-regulatory functions may show greater individual variability.<sup>1</sup>

Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980) provides a framework for understanding how and why people might vary in the degree to which they rely on others to regulate their feelings about themselves. According to Bowlby (1973), individuals form internal working models about themselves in relation to others on the basis of their interpersonal experiences. A central component of these working models is the degree to which people expect and want to rely on others for regulating feelings about the self. Bowlby's (1973) original theory, along with more recent theory and research (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Collins & Feeney, 2000; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Simpson, Rholes, & Nelligan, 1992) applying attachment theory to adult relationships, suggests that individual differences exist in the willingness and desire to rely on others. Secure individuals will rely on others when it is appropriate, whereas preoccupied (anxious-ambivalent) individuals may overly rely on others and avoidant individuals may have difficulty relying on others even when they are in need of help (Bowlby, 1973).

We (Pietromonaco & Feldman Barrett, 2000) have extended Bowlby's basic ideas to suggest that adults with either secure or preoccupied attachment styles are likely to rely on others to regulate feelings about themselves when they are faced with a threat to self. Adults with a preoccupied style, however, who show greater emotional reactivity and more negative, less certain views of self (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Collins, 1996; Collins & Read, 1990; Pietromonaco & Feldman Barrett, 1997), are likely to experience more frequent threats to the self and therefore more frequent activation of the attachment system than are secure adults (see Pietromonaco & Feldman Barrett, 2000). Thus, preoccupied adults are likely to show a chronic tendency to seek out and to rely on others in the interest of self-regulation (e.g., Mikulincer, 1998; Mikulincer, Orbach, & Iavnieli, 1998). In addition, when preoccupied individuals are faced with a threat to self, they are less able to use inner resources to cope because they hold more negative, more uncertain views of self (Mikulincer, 1998; Pietromonaco & Feldman Barrett, 1997). As a result, they may require support from a partner to manage their distress. It follows from this reasoning that preoccupied individuals will feel greater esteem for their partners when they receive help with self-regulation than will people of other attachment styles.

In contrast to preoccupied individuals, secure individuals hold positive and certain self-views (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Collins & Read, 1990; Pietromonaco & Feldman Barrett, 1997), and thus threats to the self are likely to occur less frequently. When secure individuals experience a threat to self, they may rely on others for help with self-regulation, but they may cope in other ways (e.g., by using cognitive strategies) if a partner is not available (e.g., Mikulincer & Florian, 1998; Mikulincer, Florian, & Weller, 1993). Overall, secure individuals are less dependent on support from a partner, and they should not be as likely as preoccupied individuals to express greater esteem for their partners when they receive self-regulatory help.

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<sup>1</sup> Although the desire for closeness may be nearly universal, it may be absent in some forms of psychopathology (e.g., schizoid personality).

People who evidence dismissing-avoidant attachment, who prefer to rely on themselves (Fraley & Davis, 1997), and who report dampened emotional responses (Pietromonaco & Feldman Barrett, 1997) are less likely to use others as a way of regulating feelings about the self, even when confronted with a threat. Instead, they may actively engage in strategies that promote self-reliance (Mikulincer, 1998). These ideas suggest that dismissing-avoidant individuals will be less likely than secure or preoccupied individuals to show esteem for partners for self-regulatory reasons. People who show a mix of avoidance and preoccupation (i.e., fearful-avoidant individuals), who fear rejection while wanting to rely on others, also may be less likely to use others to regulate feelings about the self, or their willingness to rely on others may be more variable. However, it is difficult to make predictions for fearful-avoidant individuals because they evidence conflicting tendencies to avoid and approach others. As a consequence, their responses vary in whether they are more similar to those of dismissing-avoidant or preoccupied individuals, and sometimes their responses fall in between these two groups (see Pietromonaco & Feldman Barrett, 1997).

The purpose of the present research was to examine whether people of different attachment styles vary in the degree to which they positively regard others in the interest of achieving closeness or receiving help with self-regulation. Previous work (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000) has shown that people who are low in self-esteem (i.e., who are likely to hold either a preoccupied or fearful-avoidant attachment style) show less positive regard for their partners than do people who are high in self-esteem (i.e., who are likely to hold either a secure or dismissing-avoidant attachment style) when they provide global evaluations of their partner's attributes. The present studies extend this previous work in several ways. First, we suggest specific conditions under which those low in self-esteem will hold positive regard for their partners, thereby allowing a more nuanced understanding than can be achieved with global measures of partner value. Second, and more specifically, we suggest that esteem for a partner is related to the interpersonal goals enacted in specific social interactions, and that these goals are related to attachment styles. These ideas build on earlier work (Collins & Read, 1994) suggesting that interpersonal goals are a central component of working models of attachment.

We examined the links between attachment styles and esteem for partners in two studies. Study 1 focused on whether people of different attachment styles might show positive regard for their partners for different reasons. Study 2 examined whether this differential regard is related to the interpersonal goals that people hold. Specifically, people with different attachment styles may approach a social interaction with interpersonal goals relevant to closeness or self-regulation, and the extent to which they meet such goals will influence how they feel about their partner. Both studies relied on an experience-sampling methodology in which participants completed a version of the Rochester Interaction Record (RIR; Reis & Wheeler, 1991). The RIR is an event-contingent diary that participants complete immediately following each social interaction that occurs over a specified period of time. In both studies, participants provided information about their social interactions over a 2-week period. This method allowed us to examine the links among the variables of interest on an interaction by interaction basis and across a range of interaction partners.

## 2. Study 1

Study 1 investigated the reasons that people feel greater esteem for their interaction partners. We expected that people of different attachment styles would differ in the degree to which they used others in the interest of self-regulation. Specifically, we hypothesized that preoccupied individuals, who hold more fragile self-views, would be more likely to show positive regard for partners when those partners served self-regulatory functions (i.e., helped them to feel better about themselves) than would secure and dismissing-avoidant individuals. Secure individuals should be less likely to experience greater regard for their partners for this reason because they experience fewer instances in which they need self-regulatory help and because they have more inner resources that allow them to cope when a threat arises (Mikulincer, 1998). Dismissing-avoidant individuals also should be less likely to turn to their interaction partners for help because they value self-reliance and independence. It is more difficult to make predictions for fearful-avoidant individuals. To the extent that their responses reflect their negative views of self, fearful-avoidant individuals, like preoccupied individuals, may use others in the interest of self-regulation. However, given that fearful-avoidant individuals also are similar in some respects to dismissing-avoidant individuals, they may fall in between the preoccupied and dismissing-avoidant groups.

Because we assume that the desire for closeness is a fundamental interpersonal goal, we expected that most people would value their partner when they felt close. Another possibility, however, is that people who strongly desire closeness will be more likely to value their partners when they achieve closeness. Attachment theory suggests that people who are preoccupied with attachment (i.e., anxious-ambivalent) are particularly likely to want closeness in their interactions. If this is true, then they also may value their partner more when they feel close.

Although we have framed our predictions in terms of differences in attachment categories (i.e., preoccupied individuals versus individuals in other attachment groups), some debate exists about whether adult attachment styles are best captured using categorical or continuous measures. Although continuous measures have some advantages over the categorical ones (Fraley & Waller, 1998), they also may make it difficult to detect subtle attachment differences in part because they are differentially sensitive to variation at high and low ends of the scale (see Elliott & Reis, 2003; Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000). Because our work focused on distinctions between people with a preoccupied style versus those with other attachment styles, we expected a categorical measure of attachment to provide a clearer picture of the predicted differences. In addition, the categorical measure allows for comparisons with previous closely related work (Mikulincer, 1998), which assessed attachment using a categorical measure. However, for continuity with more recent work, we also present results using two continuous dimensions: view of self and view of others (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) and their interaction. On these dimensions, a more negative view of self corresponds to greater anxious-ambivalence; a more negative view of others corresponds to greater avoidance. The interaction between the two dimensions captures the extent to which people fit each of the four prototypes. People with a more negative view of self and a more positive view of others fit the preoccupied prototype, whereas those with more negative

views on both dimensions fit the fearful-avoidant prototype. People with a more positive view of self and a more negative view of others fit the dismissing-avoidant prototype, whereas those with more positive views on both dimensions fit the secure prototype. The continuous measure will allow us to evaluate whether valuing partners in the interest of self-regulation is associated with greater anxious-ambivalence regardless of level of avoidance (i.e., for both preoccupied and fearful-avoidant styles), or whether it applies specifically to people high in anxious-ambivalence, but low in avoidance (i.e., those who more closely fit the preoccupied prototype).

## 2.1. Method

### 2.1.1. Participants

Participants were 126 psychology students who had attended a mass prescreening session at the beginning of the semester at either the University of Massachusetts or Pennsylvania State University. As part of the prescreening, students completed an attachment measure (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) in which they chose the one attachment prototype (secure, preoccupied, fearful-avoidant, or dismissing-avoidant) that best described their feelings in romantic relationships. They also rated, on a continuous scale, the degree to which each of the four prototypes described their feelings in romantic relationships. Eligibility for the study was determined based only on the prescreening measure. Students whose selected prototype on the prescreening also was the most highly rated prototype of the four continuous prescreening ratings were eligible to participate. Participants received extra credit in psychology courses and the chance to win \$50 in a lottery held at the end of the semester.<sup>2,3</sup>

### 2.1.2. Measures

*2.1.2.1. Attachment style.* Participants completed Bartholomew and Horowitz's (1991) Relationship Questionnaire (RQ). The measure includes four paragraphs that describe each attachment prototype (secure, preoccupied, fearful-avoidant, and dismissing-avoidant). Participants selected the paragraph that best described their feel-

<sup>2</sup> Analyses using the Study 1 data appear in one published article (Laurenceau, Feldman Barrett, & Pietromonaco, 1998, Study 2). The hypotheses and analyses reported in the previous article do not overlap with those presented here.

<sup>3</sup> The sample began with 244 participants, 158 from the University of Massachusetts and 86 from the Pennsylvania State University (see Laurenceau et al., 1998, Study 2). Because the study lasted for 2 weeks, 20% of the sample ( $n = 48$ ) did not complete the study. Of the original sample, 23% ( $n = 56$ ) did not follow instructions and reported using their memory to complete more than 30% of the interaction records; these participants were excluded to minimize the influence of recall bias on diary reports. One additional participant did not provide enough data for analysis. Of the remaining participants, 9% ( $n = 13$ ) did not meet the attachment classification criteria. Those who dropped out versus those who remained in the sample did not differ significantly in their scores on the attachment prototypes on the prescreen or initial lab test. Participants who used memory more than 30% of the time versus those who did not scored higher in preoccupation ( $M = 4.41$  vs.  $3.50$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and lower in security on the prescreen ( $M = 3.35$  vs.  $4.06$ ,  $p < .08$ ), and higher in fearful-avoidance ( $M = 4.29$  vs.  $3.49$ ,  $p < .04$ ) and lower in security ( $M = 3.86$  vs.  $4.98$ ,  $p < .003$ ) at the beginning of the study. Overall, Study 1 participants who were excluded from the sample for using memory tended to be more insecure than those who remained in the sample.

ings in romantic relationships, and they also rated, on a scale from 0 to 8, the degree to which each paragraph described their feelings in romantic relationships. This measure was administered at the prescreening, at the first lab session, and at the final debriefing session. We used only ratings provided at the prescreening and first lab session. We did not use ratings provided at the debriefing because they may have been affected by participation in the diary portion of the study.

We determined *attachment style category* by averaging the dimensional ratings provided at the prescreening and first laboratory session. Each participant received a mean score for preoccupation, fearful-avoidance, security, and dismissing-avoidance. Participants were assigned to an attachment category (e.g., preoccupied) if the mean for a dimension (e.g., mean for preoccupation) was greater than the means for each of the other three dimensions (e.g., means for secure, fearful, and dismissing ratings). This classification scheme yielded 42 secure (10 men), 29 preoccupied (15 men), 26 dismissing-avoidant (10 men), and 29 fearful-avoidant (9 men) participants.

In addition, we also calculated *continuous attachment scores* using the ratings for each of the four prototypes. Following Griffin and Bartholomew (1994a), view of self was computed as (secure + dismissing) – (preoccupied + fearful). View of other was computed as (secure + preoccupied) – (dismissing + fearful). Lower view of self scores indicate a more negative view of self (or greater anxious-ambivalence). Lower view of other scores indicate a more negative view of others (or greater avoidance).

Attachment category choices for the prescreening session and the first lab session corresponded well, especially for the secure and preoccupied groups. The percentages choosing the same category at both time points were 81% for secure, 81% for preoccupied, 62% for fearful-avoidant, and 52% for dismissing-avoidant. Continuous scores for view of self and view of others at the prescreening and first session also were highly correlated ( $r = .66$ ,  $p < .0001$  for view of self;  $r = .67$ ,  $p < .0001$  for view of other).

**2.1.2.2. Daily interaction record.** Participants completed a version of the RIR (Reis & Wheeler, 1991) after every social interaction that lasted for 10min or longer for 2 weeks. Participants indicated the number of interaction partners present in a given interaction. If the interaction included more than one partner, participants chose the partner they considered to be their main interaction partner, and they wrote the initials of the main interaction partner. All subsequent ratings were made in reference to the main partner. Participants rated their interaction with the main partner along a variety of dimensions; for this study, we focused on ratings of esteem for the partner, change in self-esteem, partner caring and understanding, and feeling close to the partner.

*Esteem for the partner*, which indexed the degree of positive partner regard, was assessed with three items. Participants indicated, on 5-point scales, whether they saw their interaction partner as not worthwhile/worthwhile, incompetent/competent, and unacceptable/acceptable. Ratings for these three items were averaged; higher mean scores reflect more esteem for the partner.

*Self-regulatory functions* were indexed by three variables. The first self-regulatory variable was self-reported change in self-esteem, which was assessed with the following item: “Compared to before the interaction do you feel...?” The anchors on the rating scale were “worse about yourself” (“1”) and “better about yourself” (“5”). The

second self-regulatory variable was the degree to which participants felt cared for (1 = “very little” and 5 = “a great deal”). The third self-regulatory variable was the degree to which participants felt that their interaction partner understood them (1 = “not at all” and 5 = “very understood”).

*Emotional closeness* in the interaction was assessed by asking participants to rate, on a 5-point scale, the degree to which the interaction was close (1 = “not at all” and 5 = “very”). We explained that the term “close” referred to emotional closeness and not solely to physical or sexual closeness.

### 2.1.3. Procedure

Participants attended three laboratory sessions. At the first session, the experimenter explained that the study focused on how people think and feel about their social interactions, and that participants would keep records of all of their social interactions for 14 days. Participants chose a code name to write on all of their materials to preserve confidentiality, and they also completed a set of questionnaires, including the attachment measures. The experimenter explained the procedure for the daily diary portion of the study and defined all terms on the interaction record. The experimenter also stressed the importance of answering questions honestly and of completing each interaction record immediately (within 15 min) after each interaction. Participants received practice interaction records to complete before the second lab session. During the second session, the experimenter checked the participants’ practice records and answered any questions. Participants received forms for 1 week at a time, and returned their interaction records three times during each recording week. Students who returned the forms on time received extra lottery tickets, thereby increasing their chance of winning the \$50 lottery. Those who did not return their forms were prompted with a phone call within 24 h.

At a final lab session, the experimenter collected information about the overall closeness and length of the relationship with each interaction partner mentioned on any interaction record. Participants also provided information about their experience completing the diary forms. In particular, they estimated how difficult they found the study, the accuracy of their recording, and whether they had recorded all of their interactions. If they had not recorded all interactions, the experimenter asked participants to estimate the percentage of forms they had completed from memory (see Footnote 3). The experimenter explained that it was important to obtain accurate information and assured participants that, regardless of their answers, they would still receive credit for participating and lottery tickets.

## 2.2. Results

We used hierarchical linear modeling (HLM; Bryk & Raudenbush, 1987, 1992; Bryk, Raudenbush, & Congdon, 1996) to examine why people positively regarded their partners and whether the reasons for positive regard for partners differed as a function of attachment style. In all analyses, lower-level predictor variables (i.e., the within-subjects variables assessed in the RIR) reflected either a self-regulatory outcome (i.e., self-reported change in self-esteem, feeling cared for by the partner, feeling

understood by the partner) or feeling close to the partner. These lower-level predictors were group-mean centered to control for potential relationships between the lower-level predictor and attachment style (Hofmann & Gavin, 1998). Two sets of analyses were performed; one set used the categorical attachment measure and the other set used the continuous attachment dimensions.

### 2.2.1. Structure of analyses using the categorical attachment measure

In the HLM analyses, three dummy-coded attachment style variables (using the preoccupied group as the anchor) served as the between-subject upper-level predictors (Dummy code 1: Preoccupied=0 vs. Fearful=1; Dummy code 2: Preoccupied=0 vs. Secure=1; Dummy code 3: Preoccupied=0 vs. Dismissing=1). The preoccupied group was used as the anchor because our predictions focus primarily on differences between those with a preoccupied attachment style versus those with other attachment styles. However, to examine the possibility that other insecure groups would differ from the secure group, we also repeated the analyses using the each of remaining insecure groups (i.e., fearful-avoidant, dismissing-avoidant) as the anchor. The criterion variable in all analyses was the extent to which the interaction partner was held in high esteem.

### 2.2.2. Structure of analyses using the continuous attachment dimensions

The between-subjects upper-level predictors were view of self (anxious-ambivalence), view of other (avoidance), and the interaction between view of self and view of others, and the criterion variable was esteem for the interaction partner.

### 2.2.3. Esteem for the partner in the interest of self-regulation

2.2.3.1. Attachment categories. As predicted, the associations between esteem for interaction partners and feeling better about the self generally were stronger for preoccupied individuals than for those with other attachment styles (see Table 1). Preoccupied individuals reported more esteem for their partner when they *felt better about themselves*, and this association was significantly stronger than the associations for secure individuals,  $p < .01$ , and fearful-avoidant individuals,  $p < .05$ , and it was marginally stronger than the association for dismissing-avoidant individuals,  $p < .08$ .<sup>4</sup>

Table 1 also shows that preoccupied individuals evidenced greater esteem for the partner when they *felt cared for*, and this association was significantly greater than for those who were secure,  $p < .05$ , or dismissing-avoidant,  $p < .05$ ; it was not statistically different from the association for fearful avoidants individuals.

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<sup>4</sup> The significance of an effect is determined, in part, by the degree of variability in lower-level slopes within a group. Differences between the average regression coefficients for two groups may fail to reach statistical significance because of large within group variability in the magnitude of lower-level slopes. In this case, although the magnitude of the effect for fearful-avoidant and dismissing-avoidant individuals (compared to preoccupied individuals) was the same, the effect reached a conventional level of significance only for the fearful-avoidant group, who showed slightly lower within-group variability in the lower-level relationships between the predictor and criterion. Thus, throughout the results, the significance of effects cannot be determined by looking only at the size of the  $\beta$ .

Similarly, preoccupied individuals expressed more esteem for their partner when they *felt understood* by the partner, and this association was significantly stronger than the association for secure individuals,  $p < .02$ , marginally stronger than the one for fearful-avoidant individuals,  $p < .06$ , and nonsignificantly greater than the association for dismissing-avoidant individuals.

Additional analyses using the other insecure groups as the anchor indicated that the associations for participants with a fearful-avoidant or dismissing-avoidant style did not differ significantly from the association for secure participants.

*2.2.3.2. Attachment dimensions.* Table 2 shows the HLM results predicting esteem for partner using view of self, view of others, and their interaction as the upper-level predictors. (The lower-level predictors were the same as in the analyses using the categorical attachment measure.) Consistent with the findings using attachment categories, people with a more negative view of self (greater anxious-ambivalence) reported marginally more esteem for their partner when they felt better about themselves,  $p < .08$ , and they reported significantly more esteem for their partner when they felt cared for,  $p < .004$ . Furthermore, those with a more negative view of self and a more positive view of others (i.e., higher in anxious-ambivalence and lower in avoidance) reported marginally more esteem for their partner when they felt understood,  $p < .07$ . Overall, findings for people who scored high on anxious-ambivalence paralleled those for preoccupied individuals on the categorical measure, but the effects were not as strong.

#### *2.2.4. Esteem for the partner in the interest of intrinsic closeness*

*2.2.4.1. Attachment categories.* As expected, all participants reported greater esteem for their partner when they felt emotionally close in the interaction, and, as expected, this association did not differ significantly by attachment style (see Table 1). The preoccupied group did not differ significantly from any of the other groups. Furthermore, additional analyses indicated that the fearful-avoidant and dismissing-avoidant groups did not differ from the secure group or from each other.

*2.2.4.2. Attachment dimensions.* Findings for the dimensional analyses paralleled those for the attachment categories (see Table 2). Neither attachment dimension nor the interaction significantly moderated the association between feeling close to the partner and esteem for the partner.

#### *2.2.5. Interactions with gender*

To verify that the findings did not vary by gender, we reanalyzed the Study 1 data including gender as a predictor. No significant interactions between gender and attachment were found in any of these analyses.

### *2.3. Discussion*

Study 1 suggests that people of different attachment styles show positive regard for their interaction partners for somewhat different reasons. A fundamental and

Table 1  
Categorical measure of attachment style (level 2) and self-regulation and closeness variables (level 1) as predictors of partner esteem (Study 1)

Predictors	Preoccupied				Secure				Fearful-avoidant				Dismissing-avoidant			
	<i>b</i>	$\beta$	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i> (122)	<i>b</i>	$\beta$	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i> (122)	<i>b</i>	$\beta$	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i> (122)	<i>b</i>	$\beta$	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>
Self-reported change in self-esteem	1.31	.49	.118	11.09***	.88	.33	.159	2.67**	.95	.35	.172	2.06*	.96	.35	.192	1.87 <sup>+</sup>
Felt cared for	.95	.51	.084	11.28***	.70	.38	.114	2.13*	.77	.42	.130	1.37	.65	.35	.136	2.12*
Felt understood	1.49	.61	.119	12.57***	1.12	.46	.159	2.32*	1.19	.49	.156	1.90 <sup>+</sup>	1.23	.50	.182	1.42
Felt close	.82	.37	.139	5.87***	.74	.33	.169	.45	.74	.33	.180	.41	.99	.45	.194	.91
<i>n</i>	29				42				29				26			

Note. *b* is the unstandardized regression coefficient and  $\beta$  is the standardized regression coefficient. The significance level for the preoccupied group refers to the value of the  $\beta$ ; significance values for any other attachment group refer to the difference between that group and the preoccupied group.

\*  $p < .05$ .

\*\*  $p < .01$ .

\*\*\*  $p < .0001$ .

<sup>+</sup>  $p < .08$ .

Table 2  
Continuous attachment dimensions (level 2) and self-regulation and closeness variables (level 1) as predictors of partner esteem (Study 1)

Predictors	View of self (anxious-ambivalence)				View of others (avoidance)				Interaction between view of self and view of others			
	<i>b</i>	$\beta$	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i> (121)	<i>b</i>	$\beta$	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i> (121)	<i>b</i>	$\beta$	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i> (121)
Self-reported change in self-esteem	-.017	-.006	.010	1.75 <sup>+</sup>	.009	.003	.011	.78	-.002	-.001	.002	1.15
Felt cared for	-.022	-.012	.008	2.89*	.005	.003	.008	.58	-.001	-.001	.002	.71
Felt understood	-.017	-.007	.010	1.58	.006	.003	.011	.61	-.004	-.002	.002	1.82 <sup>+</sup>
Felt close	.004	.002	.011	.36	-.005	-.002	.012	.39	-.003	-.001	.002	1.43

Note. *b* is the unstandardized regression coefficient and  $\beta$  is the standardized regression coefficient,  $n = 126$ . Higher scores on view of self indicate a more positive view of self (or *less* anxious-ambivalence); higher scores on view of others indicate a more positive view of others (or *less* avoidance).

\*  $p < .004$ .

<sup>+</sup>  $p < .08$ .

normative function of forming and maintaining relationships in adulthood may be to provide emotional closeness, but within this context, relationships also may serve a range of other functions, including helping people to regulate feelings about the self. Overall, people reported more esteem for their partners when they felt better about themselves, cared for, and understood by the partner, but, in the analyses using the categorical attachment measure, these associations generally were more pronounced for people with a preoccupied attachment style. Thus, people with a preoccupied style, to a greater extent than those with other attachment styles, reported greater esteem for their interaction partners when they felt better about themselves and when they believed that their partner cared for them and understood them (i.e., when they received self-esteem support). People also were more likely to value their partner when they felt close in the interaction, and this association was similar for people in all attachment groups.

Findings using the continuous attachment dimensions indicated that, in general, those higher in anxious-ambivalence (i.e., with more negative models of self) showed patterns similar to those found for the preoccupied attachment group, although the effects were not quite as strong. Specifically, people higher in attachment anxiety valued their partner more when they felt that their partner cared about them, and they also tended ( $p < .08$ ) to value their partner more when they felt better about themselves. Furthermore, people higher in attachment anxiety and lower in avoidance (i.e., more preoccupied) tended ( $p < .08$ ) to report more esteem for their partner when they felt understood. Consistent with the categorical analyses, feeling close in the interaction was associated with esteem for the partner, but this association did not vary by attachment style. Overall, these patterns suggest that high anxious-ambivalence (negative view of self), either alone or in combination with low avoidance (positive view of others), is associated with valuing others in the interest of self-regulation.

Although the findings using the categorical measure were generally in line with our predictions, the insecure groups did not differ as much as we might expect from adult attachment theory (e.g., Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Adult attachment theory (e.g., Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) suggests that people with a preoccupied style should differ most from those with a dismissing-avoidant style, but in the present study, people with a preoccupied style differed most consistently from those with a secure style. These findings parallel those of our previous experience sampling study (Pietromonaco & Feldman Barrett, 1997) in which people with insecure styles looked more similar than would be expected from the theoretical predictions (e.g., Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). It may be that experience sampling studies reduce memory biases (Reis & Wheeler, 1991), which contribute to the larger differences between preoccupied and dismissing-avoidant groups that are observed in retrospective self-report studies (Pietromonaco & Feldman Barrett, 1997).

Study 2 examined why people with different attachment styles might vary in the degree to which they rely on others to regulate their feelings about themselves. We (Pietromonaco & Feldman Barrett, 2000) have previously hypothesized that people who hold different attachment styles may be guided by different underlying goals in their interactions with others. Study 2 was designed to examine this idea.

### 3. Study 2

Study 2 investigated why people of different attachment styles might positively regard their partners by directly assessing interpersonal goals and how they contribute to esteem for an interaction partner. Unlike Study 1, participants explicitly reported on their interpersonal goals for each interaction and on the extent to which they met those goals in the interaction. We again focused on the desire for help with self-regulation as the main predictor variable that would distinguish individuals with a preoccupied attachment style from those with other attachment styles.

Study 2 addressed two sets of hypotheses. The first set of hypotheses focused on whether people of different attachment styles differed in their interpersonal goals during social interactions. As in Study 1, we expected that people of all attachment styles would desire closeness in their interactions. Furthermore, given the Study 1 findings, we expected preoccupied people to be more likely than either secure or dismissing-avoidant individuals to want to obtain liking and approval from their interaction partners. We anticipated that fearful-avoidant individuals would show patterns similar to those for preoccupied individuals, or that they would fall in between the preoccupied group and the other two groups.

The second set of hypotheses focused on whether meeting a particular interpersonal goal is linked to the degree to which a partner is regarded positively, and whether attachment style moderates this link. We again expected preoccupied individuals to show stronger associations between meeting self-regulatory goals and esteem for their partner, especially when compared with secure and dismissing-avoidant individuals. As in Study 1, we also examined these hypotheses using the two continuous attachment dimensions (view of self and view of others) and their interaction.

#### 3.1. Method

##### 3.1.1. Participants

Participants were 97 students sampled from psychology classes at the University of Massachusetts, Indiana University, and Pennsylvania State University. Unlike Study 1, participants in this study were not preselected on the basis of their attachment prototype choices.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> A total of 205 students initially participated, but only 131 students completed the 2-week study. Of the 131 participants, we had to exclude 22 who reported using memory to complete more than 30% of the interaction records and 12 who did not provide an estimate of memory use. Of the 97 remaining participants, two did not provide an adequate amount of data. Those who dropped out versus those who remained in the sample did not differ significantly in scores on the RSQ, but they were marginally higher in fearful-avoidance ( $M = 2.95$  vs.  $2.67$ ,  $p < .09$ ). Participants who used memory more than 30% of the time were similar to those who did not, although they scored marginally higher on the RSQ on preoccupation ( $M = 3.38$  vs.  $3.12$ ,  $p < .09$ ).

### 3.1.2. Measures

As in Study 1, *attachment style* in romantic relationships was assessed using the RQ (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991), but we also included 17 items from the Relationship Scales Questionnaire (RSQ; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994b). (This subset of items from the RSQ are those that are used to compute scores for each of the four attachment styles.) These two measures were administered at the first lab session and at the debriefing, but we relied on the scores from the first lab session because they would not be affected by participation in the diary portion of the study. (Study 2 participants did not complete a prescreening attachment measure.) For the categorical measure, we computed mean scores using the four Bartholomew and Horowitz dimensional ratings and the four scales (secure, preoccupied, fearful-avoidant, and dismissing-avoidant) from the RSQ. Scores on each measure were converted to *z*-scores and then averaged. Thus, each participant received a composite mean score for preoccupation, fearful-avoidance, security, and dismissing-avoidance. Participants were assigned to an attachment category if the mean rating for that style was greater than the mean rating for each of the other three styles. (Participants with tied scores were not included in the categorical analyses.) Of these participants, we classified 12 (6 male) as preoccupied, 21 (7 male) as fearful-avoidant, 50 (19 male) as secure, and 9 (4 male) as dismissing-avoidant. For the dimensional attachment measure, we first calculated scores for view of self and view of other separately for the Bartholomew and Horowitz dimensional ratings and for the RSQ; these scores were converted to *z*-scores and then averaged. View of self was computed as (secure + dismissing) – (preoccupied + fearful). View of other was computed as (secure + preoccupied) – (dismissing + fearful). Lower scores indicate a more negative view of self (greater anxious-ambivalence) or a more negative view of others (greater avoidance).

The RIR included a variety items asking about aspects of the interactions. The dependent measure for the present study, *esteem for partner*, was assessed after each interaction with the same three items (not worthwhile/worthwhile; competent/incompetent; and unacceptable/acceptable) used in Study 1.

Unlike Study 1, participants reported on their *interaction goals*. We focused on two goals: wanting to gain liking or approval and wanting to achieve closeness with the interaction partner. For comparison purposes, we also assessed an additional goal: wanting to provide support to the partner. Participants first rated, on 5-point scales (anchored as 1 = “not at all” and 5 = “a great deal”) the degree to which they *wanted* to achieve each goal in the interaction (e.g., “How much did you want to gain liking or approval?”), and they also rated the extent to which they felt they had *met* the goal in the interaction (e.g., “How much did you gain liking or approval?”).

### 3.1.3. Procedure

Participants kept records of their social interactions for 2 weeks, and they evaluated, after every interaction, how much they wanted to achieve particular goals in the interaction and how much they believed they had achieved their goals. They also rated other aspects of the interaction, including esteem for their partner. Other aspects of the procedure were the same as in Study 1.

### 3.2. Results

Hierarchical linear modeling (HLM; Bryk & Raudenbush, 1987, 1992; Bryk et al., 1996) was used for all analyses. We examined (a) whether people with different attachment styles differed in the degree to which they endorsed particular interaction goals, and (b) the degree to which attachment style moderated associations between meeting particular goals and esteem for the partner. Parallel analyses are reported for the categorical attachment measure and the continuous attachment dimensions. As in Study 1, for the categorical measure, we used three dummy-coded attachment style variables (using the preoccupied group as the anchor) as the between-subject upper-level predictors. We also repeated the analyses using each of the remaining insecure groups (i.e., fearful-avoidant, dismissing-avoidant) as the anchor. HLM analyses in which the attachment dimensions (i.e., view of self, view of others) served as predictors followed the same format used in Study 1.

#### 3.2.1. Endorsement of different interaction goals

**3.2.1.1. Attachment categories.** Table 3 shows the mean levels from the HLM analyses using the categorical measure to predict interaction goals. As expected, preoccupied individuals expressed a greater desire for liking and approval (i.e., help with self-regulation) from their interaction partners than did secure individuals,  $p < .09$  (two-tailed). (Note that a one-tailed comparison would be appropriate for testing this a priori prediction, and it would reach a conventional level of significance,  $p < .05$ .) Additional analyses indicated that fearful-avoidant individuals showed a pattern similar to preoccupied individuals; they reported wanting significantly ( $p < .05$ ) more liking and approval from their interaction partners than did secure individuals. Dismissing-avoidant individuals did not differ from secure individuals in their desire for self-regulation. Furthermore, as predicted, all individuals desired closeness, to some extent, in their interactions, and the means did not vary significantly by attachment style.

Table 3  
Attachment style categories as predictors of interaction goals: Mean levels from HLM analyses (Study 2)

Interaction goals	Preoccupied	Secure	Fearful-avoidant	Dismissing-avoidant	Group comparisons
Wanted liking/ approval	2.86 (.238)	2.42 (.116)	2.86 (.185)	2.69 (.331)	P vs. S, $p < .07$ F vs. S, $p < .05$
Wanted to give support	2.70 (.237)	2.71 (.276)	3.28 (.193)	2.70 (.246)	F vs. S, $p < .02$ F vs. P, $p < .04$ F vs. D, $p < .02$
Wanted closeness	2.83 (.158)	2.71 (.201)	2.93 (.234)	2.70 (.262)	All n.s.
<i>n</i>	12	50	21	9	

Note. P, preoccupied; S, secure; F, fearful-avoidant; D, dismissing-avoidant. *SE* is shown in parentheses. Group comparisons refer to the results of three different HLM analyses in which the preoccupied group or fearful-avoidant group or dismissing-avoidant group was used as the anchor.

We also explored whether people of different attachment styles would vary in their desire to give support to the partner. These analyses indicated that fearful-avoidant individuals were more likely to want to give support to their partner than were secure,  $p < .02$ , preoccupied,  $p < .04$ , or dismissing-avoidant,  $p < .02$ , individuals.

In addition, we examined whether people of different attachment styles varied in the degree to which they reported *meeting* each goal; ratings for obtaining approval and for achieving closeness did not differ significantly by attachment style. However, fearful-avoidant individuals (M level = 3.06) were significantly more likely to report meeting the goal to give support than were preoccupied individuals (M level = 2.55,  $p < .05$ ) or dismissing-avoidant individuals (M level = 2.57,  $p < .03$ ), and they were marginally more likely to report meeting this goal than secure individuals (M level for secure = 2.68,  $p < .08$ ).

*3.2.1.2. Attachment dimensions.* The HLM analyses including view of self, view of other, and the interaction as predictors for each interaction goal indicated that only view of self (anxious-ambivalence) significantly predicted any of the interaction goals (see Table 4). People who held a more negative view of self (i.e., who were more anxious-ambivalent) were more likely to report wanting to obtain liking or approval from their interaction partner,  $p < .05$ , and to report wanting to give support to their partner,  $p < .05$ .

Findings for the degree to which the attachment dimensions predicted *meeting* interaction goals paralleled those for wanting the particular goal. People with a more negative view of self (i.e., greater anxious-ambivalence) were more likely to report that they obtained liking or approval from their interaction partners, ( $b = -.171$ ,  $SE = .067$ ),  $t(91) = -2.56$ ,  $p < .01$ , and that they gave support to their partner ( $b = -.136$ ,  $SE = .066$ ,  $t(91) = -2.06$ ,  $p < .04$ ).

### *3.2.2. Esteem for the partner in the interest of self-regulation*

*3.2.2.1. Attachment categories.* Table 5 shows the results of the HLM analyses using attachment categories as the level 2 predictors. As hypothesized, meeting the goal of gaining approval from the partner was significantly associated with greater esteem for the partner for preoccupied individuals,  $p < .001$ . Furthermore, the association for those with a preoccupied style was significantly stronger than for those with a secure style,  $p < .03$ . To determine whether fearful-avoidant individuals showed a similar pattern, we reanalyzed the data using the fearful-avoidant group as the anchor. The pattern for fearful-avoidant individuals was similar to the one for preoccupied individuals, although it was not as strong. The association for those with a fearful style was marginally stronger than for the one for those with a secure style,  $p < .07$ . Further analyses using the dismissing-avoidant group as the anchor indicated that the association for those with a dismissing-avoidant style did not differ significantly from the associations for any of the other attachment groups.

*3.2.2.2. Attachment dimensions.* Table 6 shows the results of the HLM analyses using the attachment dimensions as the upper-level predictors. Although people with a more negative view of self (i.e., higher in anxious-ambivalence) tended to show more

Table 4  
View of self and view of others as predictors of interaction goals (Study 2)

Interaction goals	View of self (anxious-ambivalence)				View of others (avoidance)				Interaction between view of self and view of others			
	<i>b</i>	$\beta$	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i> (91)	<i>b</i>	$\beta$	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i> (91)	<i>b</i>	$\beta$	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i> (91)
Wanted liking/approval	-.149	-.095	.070	2.13*	.040	.025	.059	.68	-.015	-.004	.032	.46
Wanted to give support	-.170	-.115	.075	2.26*	-.077	-.052	.058	1.33	.035	.009	.036	.98
Wanted closeness	-.061	-.039	.062	.97	.045	.029	.049	.92	.007	.002	.030	.22

Note. *b* is the unstandardized regression coefficient and  $\beta$  is the standardized regression coefficient,  $n = 95$ . Higher scores on view of self indicate a more positive view of self (or *less* anxious-ambivalence); higher scores on view of others indicate a more positive view of others (or *less* avoidance).

\*  $p < .05$ .

Table 5  
Categorical measure of attachment style (level 2) and achieved interaction goals (level 1) as predictors of partner esteem (Study 2)

Goal achieved	Preoccupied				Secure				Fearful-avoidant				Dismissing-avoidant			
	<i>b</i>	$\beta$	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i> (88)	<i>b</i>	$\beta$	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i> (88)	<i>b</i>	$\beta$	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i> (88)	<i>b</i>	$\beta$	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i> (88)
Gained liking/approval	.826	.434	.208	3.98**	.392	.210	.220	1.98*	.646	.340	.240	-.75	.538	.283	.264	1.09
Achieved closeness	.850	.460	.145	5.87**	.485	.262	.157	2.33*	.620	.335	.193	-1.19	.554	.300	.187	1.58
Gave support	.541	.305	.142	3.80**	.354	.199	.154	1.21	.498	.280	.172	-.25	.171	.096	.183	2.03*
<i>n</i>	12				50				21				9			

Note. *b* is the unstandardized regression coefficient and  $\beta$  is the standardized regression coefficient. The significance level for the preoccupied group refers to the value of the  $\beta$ ; significance values for any other attachment group refer to the difference between that group and the preoccupied group.

\*  $p < .05$ .

\*\*  $p < .0001$ .

Table 6

Continuous attachment dimensions (level 2) and achieved interaction goals (level 1) as predictors of partner esteem (Study 2)

Goal achieved	View of self (anxious-ambivalence)				View of others (avoidance)				Interaction between view of self and view of others			
	<i>b</i>	$\beta$	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i> (91)	<i>b</i>	$\beta$	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i> (91)	<i>b</i>	$\beta$	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i> (91)
Gained liking/ approval	-.073	-.038	.053	-1.37	-.030	-.016	.054	-.55	.002	.001	.024	.08
Achieved closeness	-.077	-.042	.048	-1.61	-.022	-.012	.042	-.52	.012	.007	.020	.58
Gave support	-.085	-.048	.041	-2.09*	-.031	-.018	.040	-.78	.020	.011	.017	1.14

Note. *b* is the unstandardized regression coefficient and  $\beta$  is the standardized regression coefficient ( $n = 95$ ). For the continuous measure, higher scores indicate a more positive view of self (or less anxious-ambivalence) or a more positive view of other (or less avoidance).

\*  $p < .05$ .

esteem for their partners when they met the goal of attaining approval, this pattern did not reach significance. Consistent with the categorical analyses, people with a more negative view of self showed a stronger association between meeting the goal of giving support and esteem for their partner,  $p < .04$ .

### 3.2.3. Esteem for the partner in the interest of intrinsic closeness

3.2.3.1. *Attachment categories.* When participants reported meeting the goal of achieving closeness, they also evidenced greater esteem for their partner. This association was significant for preoccupied individuals,  $p < .001$ , and, unlike the findings for Study 1, it was stronger than for secure individuals,  $p < .02$ . Fearful-avoidant and dismissing-avoidant individuals fell in between these two groups. Further analyses using each of these groups as the anchor indicated that neither the fearful-avoidant nor dismissing-avoidant groups differed significantly from any of the other groups.

3.2.3.2. *Attachment dimensions.* The association between achieving closeness and esteem for partner was not significantly moderated by attachment when the dimensional measure was used.

### 3.2.4. Esteem for the partner and giving support

3.2.4.1. *Attachment categories.* We also explored whether the association between meeting a goal of giving support and esteem for the partner varied as a function of attachment style. We conducted a series of analyses in which each insecure group was used as the anchor. Preoccupied individuals expressed more esteem for their partner when they met the goal of giving support, and this association was not significantly different for either secure or fearful-avoidant individuals. Dismissing-avoidant individuals, when compared to preoccupied individuals, showed a significantly smaller association,  $p < .05$ ; for dismissing-avoidant individuals, meeting the goal of giving support appears less likely to be associated with greater regard for their partner.

*3.2.4.2. Attachment dimensions.* Table 6 shows that view of self significantly moderated the association between meeting the goal of giving support and esteem for partner. People with a more negative view of self (i.e., more anxious-ambivalent) felt more esteem for their partner when they met the goal of giving support.

#### *3.2.5. Interactions with gender*

To verify that the findings did not vary by gender, we reanalyzed the data for Study 2 including gender as a variable. Gender did not interact significantly with attachment in any of these analyses.

### *3.3. Discussion*

These findings replicate and extend those of the Study 1 in two ways. First, Study 2 demonstrated that people of different attachment styles varied in the degree to which they endorsed particular interpersonal goals. The findings were consistent for both the categorical and continuous measures. For the categorical measure, people with a preoccupied or fearful-avoidant attachment style sought liking and approval from their partners to a greater extent than did those with a secure style. For the continuous measure, people with a more negative view of self (i.e., higher in anxious-ambivalence) wanted more liking and approval from their interaction partners.

We also found, unexpectedly, that individuals classified as fearful-avoidant with the categorical measure, or those who evidenced a more negative view of self on the continuous measure, were the most likely to want to give support to their partner. Although this effect was not predicted, one explanation is that individuals who hold more negative and less certain views of self desire this type of interaction because it seems safe and unlikely to lead to rejection. Another possibility is that these individuals want to give support as a way of deliberately gaining favor, which also may serve to protect the self from rejection or criticism. In addition, the findings were consistent with the idea that a desire for closeness is a widely held goal. On average, people expressed a desire for some closeness in their interactions and, as expected, the endorsement of this goal did not vary by attachment style when assessed via the categorical or continuous measures.

Second, the Study 2 findings based on the categorical attachment measure indicated that people with a preoccupied attachment style show a stronger link between the perception that they have obtained self-regulatory assistance (i.e., approval and liking) from a partner and esteem for the partner. This finding further supports the idea that people with a preoccupied attachment style rely on others to help them regulate their feelings about themselves. We also found that people with a preoccupied attachment style evidenced a stronger association between the perception that they had achieved closeness in the interaction and esteem for the partner than did people with a secure attachment style. Thus, although people with a preoccupied style did not desire closeness to a greater degree than those with other attachment styles, this goal, when met, was connected to their positive feelings toward interaction partners more so than for people with a secure attachment style. Even though individuals with a preoccupied attachment style did not report wanting closeness more than those

with other attachment styles, it may be that achieving closeness is more important for them, leading them to more positively regard their partner when this goal is met. We did not observe this stronger association for preoccupied individuals in Study 1, possibly because people did not explicitly rate their interpersonal goals as they did in Study 2.

The analyses using the continuous dimensions indicated that people with more negative models of self (i.e., higher anxious-ambivalence) showed a tendency to express more esteem for their partners when they met the goal of attaining approval, but this pattern did not reach significance. In addition, people with a more negative view of self (i.e., those higher in anxious-ambivalence) showed a stronger association between meeting the goal of giving support and esteem for their partner. Although this finding was unexpected, it may be that giving support to a partner allows people with a more negative view of self (i.e., greater anxious-ambivalence) to feel better about themselves and, as a consequence, leads them to more positively regard their partners. This idea fits with other work (e.g., Cialdini, Baumann, & Kenrick, 1981) suggesting that, under some conditions, people feel better after providing help, and it will be worthwhile to examine it more fully in future work on attachment and social support.

As in Study 1 and in our previous work (Pietromonaco & Feldman Barrett, 1997), the most consistent differences using the categorical measure emerged between the preoccupied and secure groups. The differences among the insecure groups were less clear than would be expected from adult attachment theory. This pattern, which we have now observed in three experience sampling studies, is consistent with the idea that online, immediate reports limit memory-based responding and, as a consequence, attenuate many of the attachment differences that emerge when respondents are asked to provide global and more memory-based perceptions.

#### 4. General discussion

The present research investigated why people positively regard their social partners. We began with the idea that people might like partners in the interest of different underlying goals, specifically, for the pleasure of feeling close and for obtaining help with self-regulation. We further suggested that adult attachment theory provided a framework for making predictions about individual differences in the degree to which people would show esteem for a partner for each of these reasons. We expected that feeling close to others would be a widely held, normative motive and show little individual variation. Consistent with this idea, in Study 1, people of all attachment styles were more likely to positively regard their partners when they felt close to those partners, and in Study 2, people of all attachment styles were equally likely to desire closeness in their interactions with others. We also expected that people with a preoccupied attachment style, who are more willing to rely on others but who are uncertain about their self-worth, would be particularly likely to express positive regard for their partners when those partners helped them with self-regulation. In both studies, people with a preoccupied attachment style (assessed using the

categorical measure) showed a stronger tendency to view their partners in a positive light when they felt that they had received self-regulatory assistance. The patterns using the continuous dimensions were weaker than those with the categorical measure, but, across both studies, they generally indicated that people with a more negative view of self (i.e., higher in anxious-ambivalence) showed patterns similar to those in the preoccupied category. Taken together, these findings suggest that people differ in their attachment-related interaction goals, and that the degree to which people perceive that they have met their interaction goals contributes to how they feel about their interaction partners.

These findings extend previous research (e.g., Murray et al., 2000) showing that people with low self-esteem (who are similar in some respects to those with preoccupied or fearful-avoidant attachment styles), hold less positive global perceptions of their partners. Our findings refine this earlier work by demonstrating that the degree to which people hold positive views of their partners depends on attachment style and whether particular interaction goals are met. When partners provide self-regulatory assistance, people with a preoccupied attachment style (who hold global negative self-views but global positive views of others) regard their partner more highly than do people with a secure attachment style (who hold global positive views of the self and others). The findings using the continuous dimensions suggest that this pattern probably reflects participants' level of anxious-ambivalence, regardless of where they stand on avoidance.

It is important to note that our findings cannot be explained by differences in our data in positive or negative views of others, which, by definition, are supposed to vary with attachment style (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). In Study 1, partner esteem did not vary by attachment style across all interactions when either the categorical or continuous measure was used; in Study 2, secure, fearful, and dismissing individuals evidenced, on average, higher partner esteem across all interactions than did those with a preoccupied attachment style ( $p < .01$ ), but partner esteem was not significantly predicted by either of the continuous dimensions. These patterns do not fit the theoretical predictions (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) that people with secure and preoccupied attachment styles hold more positive views of others, and that those with fearful and dismissing styles hold more negative views of others. Nor can the findings be explained by differences in the level of the predictor variables (e.g., self-reported self-esteem change in Study 1; various goals in Study 2) for people of different attachment styles. By group-mean centering (Hofmann & Gavin, 1998) in all of the analyses, we controlled for any attachment-related differences in the lower-level predictor variable (e.g., self-reported self-esteem change in Study 1) when examining whether attachment style moderated the relationship between the lower-level predictor and the criterion variable (e.g., between self-reported self-esteem change and partner-esteem in Study 1).

Our findings also are consistent with previous work (Mikulincer, 1998) showing that, in contexts relevant to trust, preoccupied individuals were more likely to be especially concerned with "security attainment" (a concept that appears similar to obtaining help with self-regulation) in their relationships. In the present work, we found that preoccupied individuals were especially responsive when their partners

provided self-regulatory assistance. Mikulincer (1998) also found that secure individuals were more likely to seek intimacy in trust-related contexts, although both preoccupied and avoidant individuals also appeared to associate intimacy with trust under some circumstances. Our findings showing that people of all attachment styles express more positive regard for their partners when they feel close in the interaction suggest that seeking intimacy and closeness is a broadly held goal. The present studies add to this previous work by demonstrating the links between particular interpersonal goals and positive regard for interaction partners. Furthermore, given that feelings of positive regard for a partner provide a basis for trust in a relationship, our work suggests that a sense of trust will be more likely to develop when people perceive that they have met interaction goals relevant to their particular attachment concerns.

Why might people of different attachment styles more positively view their partners when they have met particular goals? Although an overarching goal of the attachment system is to achieve felt security (Ainsworth, 1989; Sroufe & Waters, 1977), adults may differ in the way in which they attempt to achieve felt security. We (Pietromonaco & Feldman Barrett, 2000) have previously proposed that adults experience felt security when an attachment figure responds in a way that leads them to believe that they are lovable and competent. For people with a secure attachment style, who are confident that they are lovable and competent, feeling close to a partner may be enough to promote and maintain feelings of felt security. In contrast, people with a preoccupied attachment style (or more generally, those who are more anxious-ambivalent), who are uncertain about their own lovability and competence, may need partners to provide them with positive, self-affirming feedback if they are to move toward experiencing felt security. We (Pietromonaco & Feldman Barrett, 2000) also have argued that people with an avoidant style might achieve felt security by not relying on others especially in times of threat, such that they may be most likely to feel safe and secure when their partners facilitate their self-reliance and sense of competence in achievement domains (Brennan & Morris, 1997). These variations in how people attempt to achieve felt security may arise from differences in social learning histories, from temperamental differences in emotional reactivity and hence in a more (or less) frequent need to regulate, or some combination of the two (see Pietromonaco & Feldman Barrett, 2000). Furthermore, such differences suggest that the types of interactions necessary for establishing felt security may vary considerably across individuals. In addition, the development of intimacy (Reis & Patrick, 1996; Reis & Shaver, 1988) and trust (Holmes, 2002) in relationships may rest on how well each partner is able to respond in a way that will allow the other to achieve a sense of felt security.

A particular advantage of the two studies presented here is that they investigated, on an interaction-by-interaction basis, how people's goals and perceptions are connected to their evaluations of their partners. This experience-sampling methodology reduces memory-based self-report biases (Reis & Wheeler, 1991) and provides insights into how people respond to others during natural, everyday interactions. Nevertheless, the present work also is limited in several respects.

First, people of different attachment styles appear to show esteem for their partners in the interest of different goals, but our correlational data leave open questions

about the direction and nature of the causal links. For example, we have hypothesized that people with a preoccupied attachment style are more likely to hold positive views of their partners when they believe that they have obtained liking and approval from a partner, but an alternative possibility is that, when people with a preoccupied style hold positive views of their partners, they assume that their partners like and approve of them.

Second, the continuous measure of attachment used in these two studies did not appear to capture differences as well as the categorical measure. Although the patterns were generally similar across the two measures, it will be important for future work to continue to compare effects using the two kinds of measures and to include improved dimensional measures (Fraley et al., 2000) that may be more likely to detect attachment differences.

Third, the differences between the preoccupied and dismissing-avoidant groups, especially in Study 2, were less pronounced than an attachment perspective would predict. It is noteworthy that this pattern was most evident in Study 2 in which the samples of both preoccupied and dismissing-avoidants were smaller than in Study 1, and participants had not been preselected for the study on the basis of their attachment style. Thus, this question will need to be examined further with a larger sample.

Fourth, we did not differentiate between types of interaction partners (e.g., romantic partners, friends, acquaintances), but attachment effects might be expected to be more pronounced in some kinds of relationships (see Tidwell, Reis, & Shaver, 1996). Because too few interactions occurred with each type of partner and because only about half of the participants were involved in romantic relationships, we did not have enough statistical power to adequately compare patterns across relationship types. However, participants provided ratings of the overall closeness of their relationship with each interaction partner (1 = not at all close and 7 = very close), and we did examine whether the overall closeness of the interaction partner moderated the reported patterns. The pattern of findings for Study 1 and Study 2 generally remained similar when we repeated the analyses including overall relationship closeness as a moderator. In Study 2, however, the differences between the preoccupied versus other groups also tended to become stronger as relationship closeness increased. Given that this pattern did not occur in Study 1, it is difficult to interpret. This limitation will need to be addressed in future work that samples larger numbers of interactions from particular kinds of relationships (e.g., relationships with romantic partners or best friends).

Fifth, we were able to assess only a few interaction goals, yet other goals may be important to consider in future work. For example, other work (Brennan & Morris, 1997; Vohs & Heatherton, 2001) suggests that some people (e.g., dismissing-avoidants) may seek feedback about task competence rather than more interpersonally oriented feedback, and meeting such competence-oriented goals may lead them to feel more positively toward their partner. Also, we focused on one person's goals and perceptions, but it will be important to investigate how the interplay between two partners' goals and perceptions in particular interactions contributes to their regard for each other (see Holmes, 2002).

Overall, this research suggests that people with a preoccupied attachment style, or those who are higher in anxious-ambivalence, are more likely to show esteem for their partners when those partners provide them with self-regulatory assistance. Although people of different attachment styles may tend, on average, to view their partners in a positive or negative light, our findings suggest a more complex, dynamic process: People of different attachment styles emphasize different interpersonal goals and feel positively toward their interaction partners based on meeting those goals. Thus, relationship quality may vary depending on the degree to which partners are able to meet each other's particular goals.

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