

PROVE ME WRONG: THE IMPACTS OF ANXIOUS ATTACHMENT AND  
NONAPOLOGY ON CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

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### **Abstract**

Managing conflict is an integral aspect of romantic relationships. When a romantic partner transgresses against the other partner, the way the victim of the transgression responds to conflict is often motivated by their attachment style and the post-transgression responses (PTRs) of their romantic partner. The present research involved 238 participants in romantic relationships. Participants completed an online study to assess the association between a victim's anxious attachment and destructive PTR (i.e., grudge-disdain, avoidance, and low forgiveness), the moderating role of a victim's perception of their offending partner's nonapology, and the mediating explanation of a victim's perceived availability and responsiveness of an offending partner. A moderated mediation model was hypothesized and tested. Results confirmed that a victim's perception of their offending partner's nonapology moderated the association between victims' anxious attachment and destructive PTRs. Perceived availability and responsiveness did not mediate the moderated association. Overall, these finds suggest that offending partners' PTRs play a role in motivating the post-transgression responses of anxiously attached victims.

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## **Prove me wrong: The impacts of anxious attachment and nonapology on conflict resolution in romantic relationships**

Inevitably romantic partners will transgress against each other (e.g., romantic infidelity, dishonesty, insensitive behaviors, and expressions that the relationship is not important; Roloff et al., 2001), which can jeopardize the maintenance of their relationship by increasing emotional distress and relationship dissolution (Agnew & VanderDrift, 2015). However, despite the popular belief that conflict<sup>1</sup> imposes more harm than good (Laursen & Hafen, 2010), conflict can play a pivotal role in promoting closeness and relationship security depending on how romantic partners respond to each other (Agnew & VanderDrift, 2015; Lemay & Dudley, 2011). When an offending partner engages in constructive post-transgression responses such as offering amends, the victim is more likely to respond with forgiveness (Hannon et al., 2010). However, if an offending partner responds with destructive post-transgression responses such as a nonapology (i.e., a response that deflects or reduces blame through strategies such as justifying behavior, denying the transgression, or blaming and lashing out against the victim), then the victim may also respond with more destructive behaviors such as unforgiveness and harboring a grudge (Guilfoyle et al., 2019; Schumann, 2018; Schumann & Dweck, 2014). A key theory in understanding the motivation behind romantic partners' use of post-transgression responses is attachment theory (Hazan & Shaver, 1994; Hazan & Shaver, 1987), which provides a framework geared toward explaining individual differences in how romantic partners manage interpersonal threats such as conflict.

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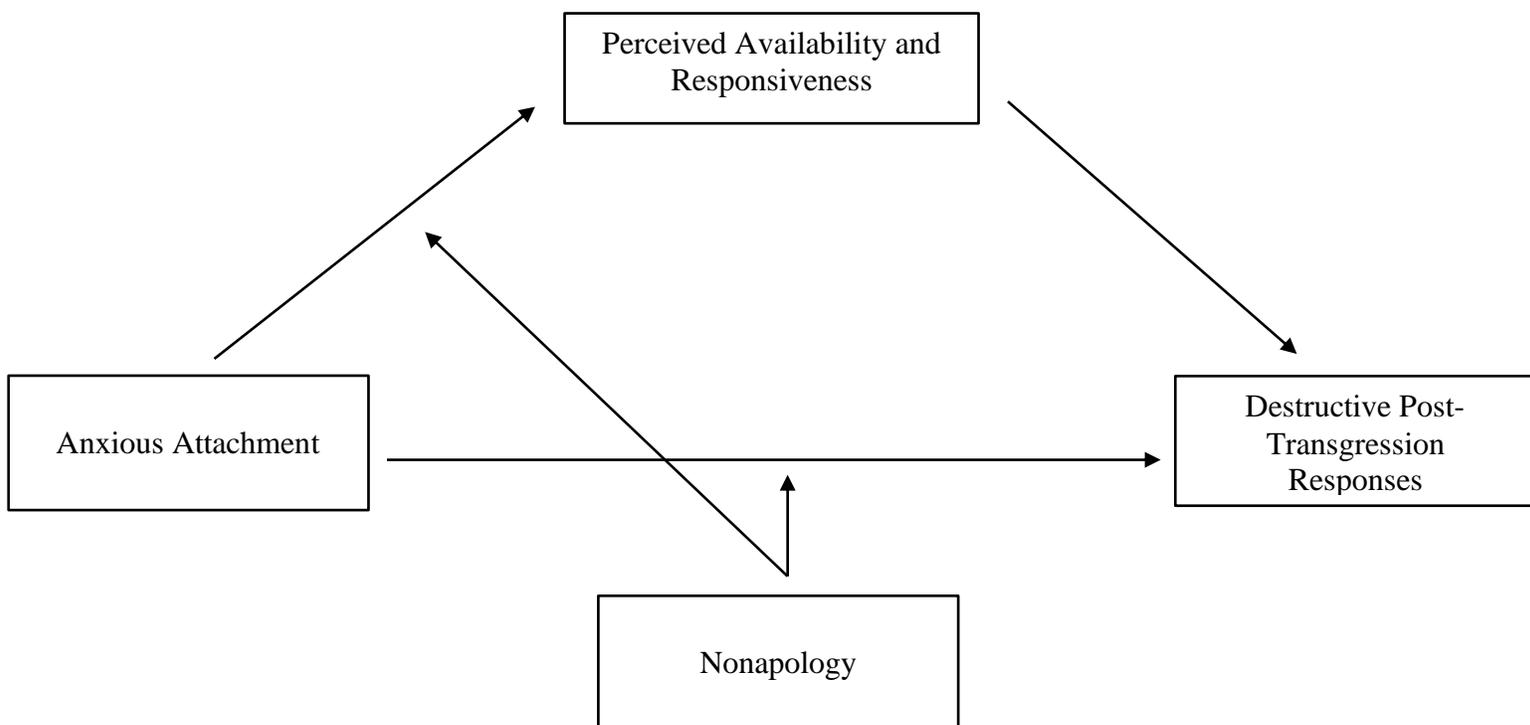
<sup>1</sup> For this thesis, the source of conflict that will be referred to is a transgression, which is when a romantic partner transgresses against (or harms) the other partner. For example, when a romantic partner ignores the other partner by not responding to their text messages. The terms conflict and transgression will be used interchangeably throughout this thesis.

The mental representations an individual has regarding the self and their romantic partner, referred to as their *attachment style*, impact how they navigate conflict within their romantic relationships. Individual differences in attachment styles are typically viewed as two dimensions: anxious attachment and avoidant attachment (Hazan & Shaver, 1994). For this thesis, I will draw specifically on anxious attachment due to the unique and contrasting characteristics and behaviors of individuals with attachment anxiety. Individuals higher on *anxious attachment* desire close relationships but struggle to maintain them due to a fear of being rejected and anxiety that their partner will be unavailable and unresponsive to their needs (Pietromonaco & Beck, 2015). Given that anxiously attached individuals desire intimacy and closeness, such individuals may be motivated to use less destructive post-transgression responses within their relationships. However, their fear of being abandoned and anxiety about their partner's availability and responsiveness may also motivate anxiously attached individuals to use more destructive post-transgression responses. This thesis aimed to provide a deeper and more nuanced level of understanding about conflict resolution in romantic relationships through the lens of attachment theory by exploring how victims who are anxiously attached respond to conflict in romantic relationships. Specifically, I sought to test the moderating effect of an anxiously attached victims' perception of their offending romantic partner's nonapologetic behavior on their destructive post-transgression responses, and the mediating effect of an anxiously attached victims' perception of their partners' availability and responsiveness on the moderated relationship between anxious attachment and destructive post-transgression responses (see Figure 1). Given the impact romantic relationships have on individuals' well-being (Sedikides et al., 1994) and the threat conflict poses to romantic relationships, it is important to

understand how, when, and why victims' individual differences and motivating factors impact couples' ability to engage in healthy conflict management.

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual Figure for Moderated Mediation Model (PROCESS Model 8)*



## **Adult Attachment Theory**

Attachment theory outlines a system that functions to guide an individual's cognition, behavior, and affect when responding to threat in close relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1994; Pietromonaco & Beck, 2015). The attachment-behavioral system develops during infancy through repeated interactions in which infants seek proximity, resist separation, and rely on an attachment figure to provide a secure base and act as a "safe haven" during threat (Bowlby, 1969; Feeney, 2008). Over time, these repeated infant-caregiver interactions lead to the development of an attachment style, which consists of an individual's working model of the self and others (e.g., a romantic partner). Individuals with a secure attachment style are low in both attachment anxiety and avoidance. They tend to have positive views of themselves and their romantic partners. Through consistent availability and responsiveness of their attachment figures, they hold high levels of self-worth and have very few self-doubts (Feeney, 2008; Feeney & Noller, 1991). They are often considerate of their partner's emotions and needs and express their thoughts and feelings in respectful and flexible ways (Brennan & Shaver, 1995). Although they have a desire for intimate relationships, securely attached individuals seek a balance between closeness and independence (Feeney, 2008; Feeney & Noller, 1991). In response to threat, securely attached individuals acknowledge felt distress and are confident about their romantic partner's responsiveness and availability (Feeney, 2008; Pietromonaco & Beck, 2015). They believe their romantic partner is capable and willing to provide a sense of security and emotional well-being (Campbell et al., 2001; Pietromonaco & Beck, 2015).

Individuals with avoidant attachment tend to have negative views of the self and a mix of negative and positive views of their attachment figure (Campbell et al., 2001). Due to consistent interactions where an attachment figure has been unresponsive and unavailable during situations

of distress, in adult relationships, avoidantly attached individuals are fearful of depending on others, have a distrust toward romantic relationships, and experience great discomfort with closeness and intimacy (Brennan & Shaver, 1995; Campbell et al., 2001; Pietromonaco & Beck, 2015). During threat, individuals high in attachment avoidance tend to respond with deactivation by avoiding their romantic partner and the distressing situation, seeking and providing less support from and to their partner, and refusing to self-disclose (Brennan & Shaver, 1995; Pietromonaco & Beck, 2015).

Conversely, individuals with anxious attachment have a negative view of themselves and a positive, but apprehensive, view of their attachment figure (Campbell et al., 2001). Through inconsistent patterns of an attachment figure's availability and responsiveness, anxiously attached individuals fear being rejected and abandoned by their romantic partner, worry about the availability and responsiveness of their partner, believe they are unworthy of receiving love and affection (low self-esteem), and are overly involved in their relationships (Feeney & Noller, 1991; Pietromonaco & Beck, 2015). However, despite their fear of abandonment and rejection, they also have a strong desire for extreme closeness and intimacy with their romantic partner (Feeney, 2008; Feeney & Noller, 1991; Pietromonaco & Beck, 2015). During threatening situations, anxiously attached individuals are unsure of the responsiveness and availability of their romantic partner and as a result, they respond with hyperactivation of distress and anger, hypersensitivity to the emotions of their romantic partner, seek immediate closeness, and are constantly in need of reassurance from their partner (Brennan & Shaver, 1995; Feeney & Noller, 1991; Pietromonaco & Beck, 2015).

Given that an individual's attachment style stems from the interactions they have with their attachment figure during threatening situations, such internal working models may explain

the motivation behind the post-transgression responses individuals use when reacting to the threat of conflict within their romantic relationships.

### **Adult Attachment Theory and Post-Transgression Responses**

Conflict between romantic partners is a common event that can play a pivotal role in shaping the development, quality, and stability of a romantic relationship (Schumann & Orehek, 2019; Pistole & Arricale, 2003). Given that conflict has the potential to be emotionally distressing, the extent to which the outcomes of conflict are beneficial or detrimental to one's relationship is dependent on how romantic partners respond to and resolve conflict. If resolved in a relatively constructive and positive manner (e.g., apology, forgiveness), conflict can enhance a couple's level of interdependence, commitment, and relationship satisfaction (Agnew & VanderDrift, 2015; Tran & Simpson, 2009). However, if left unresolved or resolved with more destructive post-transgression responses (e.g., nonapology, grudge holding), conflict can cause irreparable damage to the quality of the romantic relationship and increase the chances of relationship dissolution (Feeney & Fitzgerald, 2019; Kato, 2016).

The emotional distress experienced during conflict triggers romantic partners' attachment systems, which play an influential role in motivating romantic partners' post-transgression responses toward each other and the conflict at hand (Simpson & Rholes, 2012). When victims of a transgression, securely attached individuals have higher emotional tolerance for conflict and are able to engage in more constructive post-transgression responses including problem-focused and support-seeking coping strategies, forgiveness, and adaptive problem-solving (Lawler-Row et al., 2006; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005; Overall & Simpson, 2015). Victims with avoidant attachment have been found to use more destructive post-transgression responses such as avoidance, revenge, and dominating conflict styles (MacDonald et al., 2019; Shi, 2003; van

Monsjou et al., 2015) to maintain self-reliance and avoid emotional disclosure (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005). In contrast, the post-transgression responses used by victims high in attachment anxiety are mixed between constructive and destructive responses because they are motivated by multiple factors including their desire for intimacy, fear of rejection, and the responses of their offending romantic partner. Thus, given that the conflict responses of anxiously attached individuals are motivated by multiple factors relating to their romantic partner (i.e., intimacy, partners availability and responsiveness) and the conflict responses of avoidantly attached individuals are motivated by maintaining distance from their partner and self-reliance, it may be more likely that the conflict responses of an offending partner will buffer against anxiously attached individuals destructive conflict responses opposed to those with avoidant attachment. Therefore, this thesis will focus on anxious attachment because the conflict responses of an offending romantic partner may have a greater association with the responses of anxiously attached individuals.

During conflict, anxiously attached individuals place greater importance and concern on attachment-related needs such as proximity, comfort, and affection compared to those with secure attachment (Collins et al., 2006). Thus, when an offending romantic partner responds to conflict with greater levels of commitment, caregiving, concealed discontent, and reassurance about their positive feelings toward the relationship, victims who are anxiously attached respond to conflict with more constructive behaviors (Overall & Simpson, 2015; Tran & Simpson, 2009). However, offending romantic partners may not always respond to conflict with constructive and reassuring behaviors due to conflict burnout or limited knowledge about how to constructively respond to their anxiously attached partner (Lemay & Dudley, 2011). As such, offending romantic partners' may respond to conflict with behaviors that elicit signs of rejection or

abandonment, which likely threatens the relationship and motivates destructive responses from their anxiously attached partners (Nakamura et al., 2020). Previous research has found that in general anxiously attached victims engage in more destructive post-transgression responses such as grudge holding, avoidance, and low forgiveness (Hirst et al., 2019; Paquette et al., 2020; van Monsjou et al., 2015), as means to protect themselves from their fear of being rejected by their partner. Therefore, it seems that the ways an offending romantic partner responds to conflict have some level of influence on the post-transgression responses used by anxiously attached victims.

The clash between desiring a satisfying relationship and fearing rejection affects anxiously attached victims' use of constructive post-transgression responses to maintain intimacy and destructive post-transgression responses to protect against harm (Levy & Davis, 1988; MacDonald et al., 2019; Paquette et al., 2020; Shi, 2003). Further, anxiously attached victims' tendencies to turn to their romantic partner to meet their attachment-related needs (i.e., closeness, comfort, and affection) and refer to their offending partner's conflict responses may also play a part in how they respond to conflict (Collins et al., 2006). Given this, it is important to focus on attachment anxiety to further understand how offending romantic partners' responses to conflict can buffer against the destructive conflict responses of those with anxious attachment and guide them toward a more secure relationship. One way this may be done, is through the anxiously attached victims' perception of how their offending romantic partner responds to conflict.

### **Nonapology and Anxious Attachment**

When faced with conflict, romantic partners who transgress against their partners have a range of strategies to make amends. However, previous research has found that initially, offending partners' use more self-protective post-transgression responses to preserve their self-

image from moral wrongdoing (Exline et al., 2007; Guilfoyle et al., 2019; Shnabel & Nadler, 2008). As such, offending partners have been found to initially withhold an apology (Kim et al., 2009; Schumann, 2018; Schumann & Dweck, 2014) and instead, engage in *nonapology* – a response that deflects or reduces blame through strategies such as justifying behavior, denying the transgression, or blaming and lashing out against the victim (Exline et al., 2007; Guilfoyle et al., 2019; Schumann & Dweck, 2014). Given the destructive nature of nonapology toward relationship repair, engaging in nonapology may pose challenges for the maintenance of romantic relationships and have detrimental effects on the victim. Specifically, perceiving a nonapology from an offending romantic partner may present serious harm or threat for anxiously attached victims. Nonapologetic behaviors (e.g., blaming and lashing out against the victim) may be indicative of an offending romantic partner's inability to meet attachment-related needs by showing they are unavailable and unresponsive during threat. Given that victims high in attachment anxiety tend to hyperfocus on attachment-related needs such as proximity to a partner, comfort, and affection from a partner (Collins et al., 2006), nonapologetic behaviors may confirm the anxious victim's expectations and beliefs about their partner's lack of availability and responsiveness, as well as emphasize their fear of being rejected by their partner. Thus, the extent to which an anxiously attached victim perceives an offending romantic partner's nonapologetic behavior may motivate the degree to which anxiously attached victims use destructive post-transgression responses by either confirming or disconfirming their worry about their romantic partner's availability and responsiveness.

### **Perceived Availability and Responsiveness**

The apprehension anxiously attached individuals have toward their romantic partners stem from previous child-caregiver interactions where their attachment figures expressed

inconsistent availability and responsiveness during distress (Feeney & Noller, 1991; Pietromonaco & Beck, 2015). As a result, anxiously attached individuals consistently worry about whether their romantic partner will be available and responsive during threats and engage in destructive post-transgression responses to protect themselves from harm. Thus, given that anxiously attached victims rely on their romantic partners to provide felt security by being available and responsive, the ways in which an offending romantic partner responds to conflict may play a significant role in reducing an anxious victim's use of destructive post-transgression responses. Specifically, an offending romantic partner's nonapologetic response to conflict may confirm or disconfirm an anxiously attached victim's belief that their romantic partner will be unavailable or unresponsive during threatening situations.

Research suggests that internal working models are relatively stable across an individual's lifespan but are subject to change as a function of romantic partners' responses during conflict (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Hazan & Shaver, 1994). The extent to which perceptions of an offending partner's nonapologetic response confirms or disconfirms the expectations and beliefs an anxiously attached victim has regarding their partner's availability and responsiveness may motivate the conflict responses of a victim with attachment anxiety. For instance, if an anxiously attached victim perceives an offending partner's low nonapology, the low nonapology would potentially disconfirm the anxious victim's worry about their romantic partner's availability and responsiveness by providing reassurance and evidence that the offending partner is capable of being a secure base. It then follows that the anxiously attached victim will be more likely to perceive their partner as more available and responsive to their attachment-related needs. Thus, the anxiously attached victim may be motivated to use less destructive post-transgression responses if they were to receive a low nonapology from their partner because the

low nonapology would disconfirm the worry they hold for their partner's availability and responsiveness. In contrast, if an anxiously attached victim perceives a high nonapology from their offending partner, the high nonapology may confirm the worry an anxiously attached victim has for the availability and responsiveness of their partner during threat. A high nonapology consists of higher levels of lashing out, blaming, justifying, and diminishing the conflict, all of which signal that the offending partner is unable to provide support and nurturance during threatening situations of conflict. Therefore, if an anxiously attached victim perceived a high nonapology from their partner they would be more motivated to use more destructive post-transgression responses because the high nonapology would confirm the anxiously attached victims' worry about their romantic partner's availability and responsiveness. Thus, the extent to which an offending romantic partner's nonapologetic response to conflict confirms or disconfirms the anxious victim's worry about their partner's availability and responsiveness may explain their motivation to use less or more destructive post-transgression responses.

### **Present Research**

Currently, there is limited research examining attachment orientation and nonapologetic behaviors from the perspective of the victim, as well as how perceived nonapologetic behaviors play a role in the relationships of those with anxious attachment. Thus, this thesis addressed this gap in the literature by: (1) testing the association between victim's attachment anxiety and victim's destructive post-transgression responses; (2) testing the moderating role of perceived romantic partner's nonapology on the association between victim's attachment anxiety and victim's destructive post-transgression responses; and (3) testing whether a victim's perception of their romantic partner's availability and responsiveness explains why anxiously attached

victims engage in destructive post-transgression responses when they perceive a nonapology from their partner.

### **Predictions**

For this thesis, I predicted a positive association between a victim's attachment anxiety and their destructive post-transgression responses, which was operationalized as disdain for their romantic partner, avoidance, and low forgiveness. Individuals higher in attachment anxiety will report more destructive post-transgression responses of grudge-disdain, avoidance, and low forgiveness compared to individuals low in attachment anxiety.

I also predicted that the association between a victim's attachment anxiety and their destructive post-transgression responses will be moderated by their perception of their offending romantic partner's nonapology. At perceived low levels of nonapology, individuals high in attachment anxiety will report less destructive post-transgression responses compared to individuals low in attachment anxiety. At perceived high levels of nonapology, individuals high in attachment anxiety will report more destructive post-transgression responses compared to individuals low in attachment anxiety.

Further, I predicted that a victim's perception of their romantic partner's availability and responsiveness during conflict will explain why anxious victims engage in destructive post-transgression responses, particularly when faced with a nonapology. More specifically, when an individual high in anxious attachment reports a low nonapology from their partner, they will perceive their partner as more available and responsive, which will motivate them to use less destructive post-transgression responses. When an individual high in anxious attachment reports a high nonapology from their partner, they will perceive their partner as less available and responsive, and in turn, will motivate them to use more destructive post-transgression responses.

I do not expect an effect of partner nonapology on perceptions of partner availability and responsiveness for individuals low in attachment anxiety.

Lastly, given that avoidantly attached individuals tend to deactivate and distance from their romantic partner during threat and experience discomfort with closeness (Brennan & Shaver, 1995; Campbell et al., 2001; Pietromonaco & Beck, 2015), I do not expect perceptions of an offending partners' nonapologetic behavior or perceptions of an offending partner's availability and responsiveness to buffer against avoidantly attached individuals' use of destructive conflict responses. Thus, the predictions for this thesis are focused on effects for anxiously attached individuals and avoidant attachment was controlled for in all analyses.

### **Potential Covariates**

When using attachment theory, researchers often assume that an individual is either securely, anxiously, or avoidantly attached. However, it is possible that an individual may show characteristics and behaviors of both anxious and avoidant attachment. Previous research has found that individuals with anxious and avoidant attachment use similar conflict resolution styles such as dominating behaviors and less compromise (MacDonald et al., 2019; Shi, 2003). Thus, given that there are similarities between the conflict responses used by anxiously or avoidantly attached individuals, the two attachment styles may covary. To prevent covariation and because anxious attachment is the main focus of this thesis, I measured both anxious and avoidant attachment to control for the effects of avoidant attachment and ensure our results regarding a victim's destructive post-transgression responses were unique to anxious attachment. Avoidant attachment was controlled for in all analyses.

## Method

### Design

This study used a nonexperimental design to assess the moderated mediation association between victims' anxious attachment (predictor variable), perceived offenders' nonapology (moderator variable), perceived romantic partners' availability and responsiveness (mediation variable), and victims' destructive post-transgression responses (dependent variable, i.e., grudge-disdain, avoidance, benevolence-reverse coded). All material and data supporting this study's findings were preregistered. This thesis was preregistered on AsPredicted (#111884, [https://aspredicted.org/MM1\\_1HM](https://aspredicted.org/MM1_1HM)) and approved by the Human Participants Review Subcommittee (HPRC), York University's Ethics Review Board, certificate # STU 2022-315.

### Participants

For this study participants consisted of a community sample who were recruited using a snowball technique, in which students enrolled in undergraduate courses at York University were asked to recruit two individual adults from separate romantic relationships that have lasted for a minimum of six months. Based on an a priori power analysis conducted in G\*Power (Faul et al., 2007), to achieve a small effect size (Cohen's  $d = 0.30$ ) with 80% power and  $\alpha = .05$ , a total of 325 participants were required. In addition, based on previous experience using exclusion criteria in studies conducted in the lab, this current study oversampled participants by 20-30% to account for excluded participants. As such, a total of 455 participants completed the online study, however, due to inattentive, incomplete, and random responders identified by the Conscientious Responders Scale (Marjanovic et al., 2012), 136 participants were removed from further analyses. In addition, 81 participants who reported that they were not able to recall an unresolved conflict with their romantic partner were also removed from further analyses. Therefore, the final

sample size for this study was 238 individuals ( $N = 153$  females, 78 males, 6 nonbinary, and 1 preferred not to say). A sensitivity power analysis conducted in G\*Power (Faul et al., 2007) with  $\alpha = .05$  and six predictors demonstrated that with our sample of 238 participants there was 80% power to detect a medium effect size ( $f^2 = .05$ ). Participants ranged from 18 to 82 years of age ( $M = 29.51$ ,  $SD = 13.17$ ) and were diverse in ethnicity (43.70% White, 15.97% South Asian, 9.66% Black, 8.82% Middle Eastern, 7.14% South-East Asian, 5.46% East Asian, 4.62% Latin American, 2.52% Other, 1.68% South American, 0.04% Polynesian). For additional information refer to Table 1.

**Table 1***Sample Characteristics (N = 238)*

Characteristic	Mean or <i>n</i>	<i>SD</i> or %
Age (years)	29.51	13.17
Ethnicity		
White	104	43.70%
South Asian	38	15.97%
Black	23	9.66%
Middle Eastern	21	8.82%
South-East Asian	17	7.14%
East Asian	13	5.46%
Latin American	11	4.62%
Other	6	2.52%
South American	4	1.68%
Polynesian	1	0.04%
Sexual orientation		
Heterosexual/straight	201	84.45%
Bisexual	22	9.24%
Queer	6	2.52%
Other	5	2.10%
Lesbian	2	0.08%
Gay	2	0.08%
Relationship status		
Exclusively dating	149	62.61%
Married	58	24.37%
Common-law	15	6.30%
Consensually non-monogamous	6	2.52%
Engaged	5	2.10%
Other	5	2.10%
Relationship length (years)	8.05	10.93

## Measures

### Baseline Measures

**Attachment Style.** Thirty-six items from The Experiences in Close Relationships – Revised Questionnaire (ECR-R, Fraley et al., 2011) were used to measure victim’s attachment style. The scale consists of two subscales that measure avoidant and anxious attachment. The subscale for anxious attachment contains eighteen items (i.e., *I’m afraid that I will lose my romantic partner’s love*; Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .91$ ). Two items are reversed coded, “*I rarely worry about my romantic partner leaving me*” and “*I do not often worry about being abandoned*”. The remaining eighteen items are a part of the subscale for avoidant attachment (i.e., *I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on my romantic partner*; Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .92$ ). Twelve of the items are reverse coded, such as “*I feel comfortable depending on romantic partners*”. All items from each subscale were measured on a 7-point scale from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly agree*).

### Recalled Transgression

Participants were asked to recall and write about a conflict that occurred between themselves and their romantic partner. The recalled conflict must have been unresolved and one where they were the victim, and their romantic partner was the offender. Participants were prompted to recall the unresolved conflict with the following stimulus:

Please take a moment to think about a time in the last two weeks in which an unresolved negative event occurred between you and your romantic partner (i.e., spouse, girlfriend, boyfriend, wife, husband). If you cannot recall such an event in the past two weeks, then please think about the most recent negative event you can involving your romantic partner that they caused. In particular, try to think about when your current romantic partner committed a transgression by hurting you (e.g., psychologically, emotionally, etc.). The event could have been due to something your romantic partner did (e.g., criticized you) or failed to do (e.g., forgot your birthday) but it must have had a moderate to severe impact on you.

In the space below, please describe what happened, what your romantic partner did, and how it affected you and your relationship with your romantic partner.

### **Victims' Perception of Offending Partners' Availability and Responsiveness**

**Availability and Responsiveness.** The extent to which the offending romantic partners' post-transgression response was perceived as them being available and responsive was measured using the Psychological Availability Scale (Kobak & Hazan, 1991; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .89$ ). The scale consisted of nine items (i.e., *My romantic partner was available when I was upset*, *My romantic partner provided support*). All items were answered on a 7-point scale from 1 (*Not at all*) to 7 (*Very much so*).

### **Perceived Destructive Post-Transgression Responses**

**Nonapology.** The Nonapology Scale (Guilfoyle et al., 2019; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .90$ ) was used to assess participants' perception of whether their romantic partner engaged in low or high nonapologetic behaviors. Twelve items were used to measure the six components of nonapology including justification, victim blaming, diminishing responsibility, denial, lashing out, and excusing behavior (i.e., *My romantic partner believes their actions were justified*, *My romantic partner blamed me for their actions*). All items were answered on a 7-point scale from 1 (*Not at all*) to 4 (*Somewhat*) to 7 (*Very much so*).

### **Victims' Destructive Post-Transgression Responses**

Previous research has found that anxiously attached victims are more likely to engage in destructive post-transgression responses including grudge-disdain, avoidance, and low forgiveness (Hirst et al., 2019; Paquette et al., 2020; van Monsjou et al., 2015). Thus, for this thesis, a composite variable was created to capture anxiously attached victims' destructive post-transgression responses and is operationalized as grudge-disdain; having a strong disliking and intolerance toward the offending romantic partner, avoidance; avoiding the offending partner and conflict, and benevolence (reverse coded); responding with low forgiveness toward the offending

partner. The composite variable is based on the psychometric properties of the subscale grudge-disdain from the Grudge Aspect Measure (GAM-D; van Monsjou et al., 2022; original Cronbach's  $\alpha = .95$ ), the avoidance subscale from the Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory (TRIM-A; McCullough et al., 1998; original Cronbach's  $\alpha = .86$ ) and the benevolence subscale from Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory (TRIM-B; McCullough & Hoyt, 2002; original Cronbach's  $\alpha > .85$ ).

**Grudge-Disdain.** The Grudge Aspect Measure (GAM; van Monsjou et al., 2022; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .95$ ) was used to assess the extent to which participants harbored a grudge over their offending romantic partner. The scale consisted of eighteen items and three subscales: Disdain, Emotional Persistence, and Perceived Longevity. For the purpose of this thesis, only the Disdain subscale was used. Specifically, eight items from the subscale disdain (GAM-D) were used to capture the participant's level of contempt and intolerance for the offender (i.e., *I will never like my romantic partner again, If I could cut my romantic partner out of my life, I would*; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .94$ ). All items were answered on a 7-point scale from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 4 (*Somewhat*) to 7 (*Strongly agree*).

**Avoidance.** The extent to which the anxiously attached victim engaged in avoidance toward the offending romantic partner was measured using the avoidance subscale (TRIM-A; McCullough et al., 1998; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .92$ ) from the Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory (TRIM-18). The avoidance subscale consisted of seven items (i.e., *I will withdraw from my romantic partner*). Each of the seven items were answered on a 7-point scale from 1 (*Not at all*) to 4 (*Somewhat*) to 7 (*Very much so*).

**Forgiveness.** The benevolence subscale (TRIM-18; McCullough & Hoyt, 2002; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .78$ ) from the Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory

(TRIM-18) was used to measure the anxious victim's level of forgiveness toward the offending romantic partner. The subscale includes six items (i.e., *I will give up my hurt and resentment*) measured on a 7-point scale from 1 (*Not at all*) to 4 (*Somewhat*) to 7 (*Very much so*).

### **Recalled Conflict Event Items**

***Conflict Severity.*** Participants completed three items assessing the severity of the unresolved conflict they recalled (i.e., *How negative was this event?*, *To what extent did the event have a negative effect on you?*, *To what extent was your relationship with your romantic partner harmed by this event?*). Each item was answered on a 7-point scale from 1 (*Not at all*) to 4 (*Somewhat*) to 7 (*Very much so*).

***Situational Details.*** One item was used to collect details about when the unresolved conflict occurred (i.e., *How long ago did the negative event occur?*). This item was answered on a 7-point scale with 1 (*Today*), 2 (*Yesterday*), 3 (*Several days ago*), 4 (*A week ago*), 5 (*More than a week ago*), 6 (*2 weeks ago*), 7 (*More than 2 weeks ago*). Another single item was used to understand the cause for the unresolved conflict (i.e., *The main cause of this negative event was...*). This item was answered on a 7-point scale from 1 (*Something about your romantic partner*) to 7 (*Something about the situation itself*).

### **Exclusion Measures**

***Conscientious Responders Scale.*** To identify inattentive and inconsistent responders, the Conscientious Responders Scale (CRS; Marjanovic et al., 2014) was used. The CRS includes five items that instruct the participant on how to respond. Example items included, "*To answer this question, please choose option number four, neutral*" and "*In response to this question, please choose option number three*". Based on the recommendations of Marjanovic and colleagues (2014), participants who failed to respond correctly to three or more of the five items were

excluded from the study. In addition to distracted responders, participants were excluded if they had missing data.

***Recalled Conflict.*** To confirm participants were able to recall an unresolved conflict between themselves and their romantic partner, one item was used at the end of the survey, “*Were you able to recall a time when your romantic partner committed a transgression against you?*”. The single item was answered either “*Yes*” or “*No*”. If participants indicated that they were unable to recall an unresolved conflict with their partner by answering “*No*”, they were excluded from the study.

### **Procedure**

Students from advanced undergraduate courses at York University were provided with a virtual flyer containing a URL link to the online survey. They were asked to distribute the virtual flyer and URL links to two individual adults who were currently in separate exclusive romantic relationships for at least six months.

After agreeing to participate in the study, participants completed a series of items addressing demographics, attachment orientation, and relationship quality (relationship trust, commitment, satisfaction, and intimacy). Participants were then asked to recall and write about an unresolved conflict with their romantic partner. After the transgression recall task, participants completed event items regarding details of the transgression, the nonapologetic behavior scale, the availability and responsiveness scale, and the destructive post-transgression scales. To conclude the online survey, all participants were provided with a debrief form and were redirected to a separate survey where they were given the opportunity to enter their email into a draw for one of three \$100 gift cards.

## Results

### Preliminary Analyses

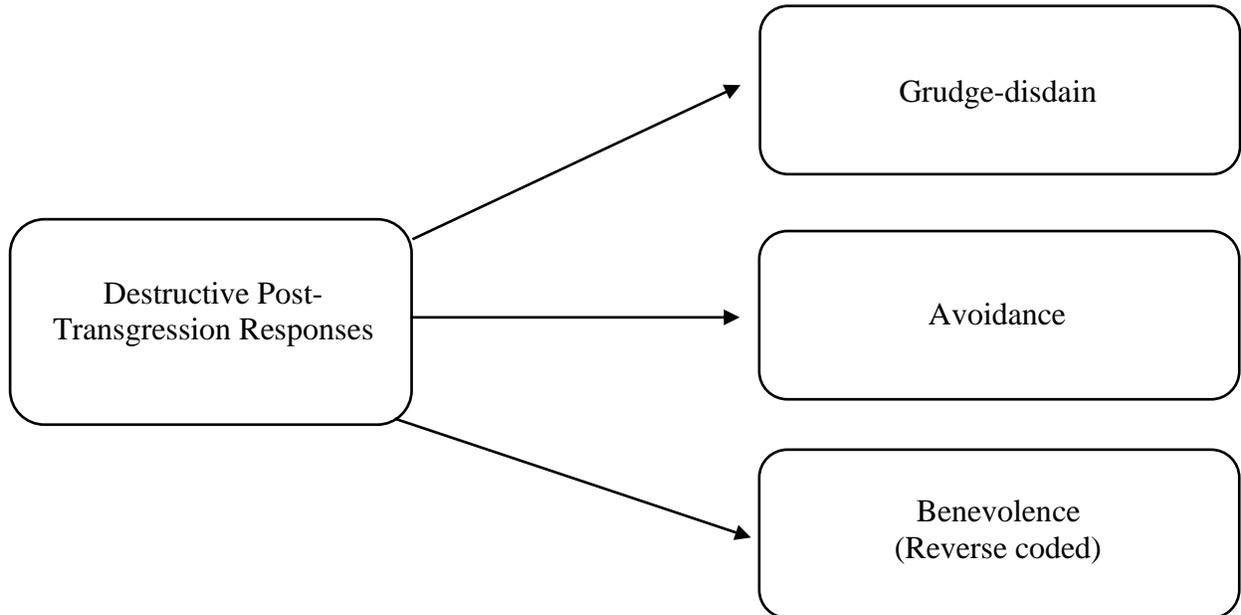
Based on inter-item correlations and adequate levels of internal consistency, item scores were averaged to create the following variables: anxious attachment ( $M = 2.89$ ,  $SD = 1.17$ ,  $\alpha = 0.91$ ), avoidant attachment ( $M = 2.46$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ,  $\alpha = 0.92$ ), nonapology ( $M = 3.09$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ ,  $\alpha = 0.90$ ), perceived availability and responsiveness ( $M = 4.79$ ,  $SD = 1.38$ ,  $\alpha = 0.89$ ), grudge-disdain ( $M = 1.66$ ,  $SD = 1.17$ ,  $\alpha = 0.95$ ), avoidance ( $M = 1.78$ ,  $SD = 1.21$ ,  $\alpha = 0.92$ ), and benevolence (reverse coded;  $M = 2.40$ ,  $SD = 1.16$ ,  $\alpha = 0.78$ ). Zero-order correlations, means, and standard deviations for variables can be found in Table 2.

Furthermore, the associations between grudge-disdain, avoidance, and benevolence (reverse coded) were examined. It was predicted that there would be moderate to strong positive correlations between each of the three constructs, which would be important for capturing the overarching destructive post-transgression responses of anxiously attached victims. Results showed that grudge-disdain was positively associated with avoidance ( $r = 0.92$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and benevolence (reverse coded;  $r = 0.65$ ,  $p < .001$ ). In addition, and as predicted, there was a positive association between avoidance and benevolence (reverse coded;  $r = 0.63$ ,  $p < .001$ ). See Table 2 for zero-order correlations, means, and standard deviations for all variables. Overall, the results confirm predictions by demonstrating that the destructive post-transgression responses of grudge-disdain, avoidance, and benevolence (reverse coded) are positively and strongly associated. Given the results, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that the construction of a composite variable for destructive post-transgression responses is important for capturing the overarching destructive conflict responses of anxiously attached victims. Thus, the composite variable of destructive post-transgression responses was used for this thesis and was

operationalized as grudge-disdain (i.e., dislike and intolerance for the offender), avoidance (i.e., avoiding the offender and conflict entirely), and benevolence reverse coded (i.e., engaging in low forgiveness). Refer to Figure 2 for the composite variable of destructive post-transgression responses. The composite variable was created by averaging scale items scores for GAM-D, TRIM-A, and TRIM-B (reverse coded) to construct the key variable of a victim's destructive post-transgression responses ( $M = 1.91$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ,  $\alpha = 0.96$ ).

**Figure 2**

*Composite Variable of Destructive Post-Transgression Responses*



**Table 2***Zero-Order Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations for Key Variables*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
1. Anx-Attach	---	0.49***	0.50***	0.53***	0.35***	0.52***	-0.33***	0.40***	-0.18	2.89	1.17	238
2. Avoid-Attach		---	0.59***	0.62***	0.49***	0.63***	-0.50***	0.48***	0.03	2.46	1.03	238
3. GAM-D			---	0.92***	0.65***	0.96***	-0.44***	0.63***	-0.01	1.66	1.17	238
4. TRIM-A				---	0.63***	0.95***	-0.44***	0.62***	0.003	1.78	1.21	238
5. TRIM-B					---	0.81***	-0.38***	0.42***	-0.02	2.40	1.16	238
6. D-PTR						---	-0.46***	0.62***	-0.01	1.91	1.08	238
7. Aval-Resp							---	-0.69***	-0.23***	4.79	1.38	238
8. Nonapology								---	0.18***	3.09	1.33	238
9. Rel-Length									---	8.11	10.95	238

*Note:* Anx-Attach = Anxious attachment, Avoid-Attach = Avoidant Attachment, GAM-D = Grudge-disdain, TRIM-A = Avoidance, TRIM-B = Benevolence, D-PTR = Destructive post-transgression responses, Aval-Resp = Perceived availability and responsiveness of offending romantic partner, Nonapology = Perceived nonapologetic behavior of offending romantic partner. Rel-Length = Length of relationship in years. Destructive post-transgression responses include grudge-disdain, avoidance, and benevolence (reverse coded). Benevolence items were reverse coded to match the measurement direction of grudge-disdain and avoidance. \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

## Recalled Transgression

Participants were asked to recall and write about an unresolved conflict that occurred between themselves and their romantic partner over the past two weeks. Overall, 39% of participants reported that the conflict occurred more than two weeks ago, 18% reported a week ago, 15% reported two weeks ago, 13% reported several days ago, 7% reported more than a week ago, 6% reported the conflict occurred yesterday, and 1% reported the conflict occurred that day. In addition, the recalled conflict must have been an incident where their romantic partner transgressed against them and must have had a moderate to severe impact. Participants indicated that the conflict was a result of both something their romantic partner did and something about the situation itself ( $M = 4.48$ ,  $SD = 2.19$ ). Regarding conflict severity, participants indicated that the conflict they recalled had a moderate impact on themselves ( $M = 4.42$ ,  $SD = 1.75$ ) and their romantic relationship ( $M = 3.03$ ,  $SD = 1.92$ ). Overall, participants recalled a moderately negative conflict with their romantic partner ( $M = 4.30$ ,  $SD = 1.56$ ).

In addition, the context of participants recalled unresolved conflict followed four common themes. The first theme was betrayal and disloyalty, for instance, participants recalled that their romantic partner transgressed against them by talking to ex-partners and past flings. The second theme dealt with failed responsibilities, for example participants recalled an event when their offending partner promised to do something but failed to follow through with their promise. The third theme was misunderstanding or failing to listen to expressed feelings. Participants commonly recalled a time when they opened up to their partner about how they were feeling, and their partner failed to respond or acknowledge such feelings. Lastly, the fourth theme was jealousy, for example participants wrote about a time when they had plans with

friends and the offending partner respond to their plans with irrational negative emotion and expressions of unjustified distrust.

### **Main Analyses**

Hayes (2012) PROCESS and bootstrapping analysis (RStudio, Model 1) was used to test the moderating role of perceived offending partner's nonapology on the association between victims' anxious attachment and destructive post-transgression responses. A significant positive association was found between anxious attachment and destructive post-transgression responses,  $b = 0.15$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $t = 2.62$ ,  $p < .01$ , 95% CI [0.04, 0.26], victim's higher in attachment anxiety reported more destructive post-transgression responses. As predicted, victim's anxious attachment interacted with their perception of their offending romantic partner's nonapology to predict their destructive post-transgression responses,  $b = 0.11$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ ,  $t = 2.30$ ,  $p = .02$ , 95% CI [0.02, 0.21]. Refer to Table 3 for regression results. To probe this interaction, simple slope tests were conducted to test the association between anxious attachment and destructive post-transgression responses for low (-1SD) and high (+1SD) nonapology (see Figure 3). There was no significant association between anxious attachment and destructive post-transgression responses when an anxiously attached victim perceived low levels of nonapology (-1SD) from their partner,  $b = -0.003$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $t = -0.50$ ,  $p = .96$ , 95% CI [-0.13, 0.12]; however, as predicted, there was a significant positive association between anxious attachment and destructive post-transgression responses when a high nonapology was perceived (+1SD),  $b = 0.30$ ,  $SE = 0.10$ ,  $t = 2.93$ ,  $p = .003$ , 95% CI [0.10, 0.51], which supports the prediction that the association between anxious attachment and victim's destructive post-transgression responses are moderated by an offending partners nonapology.

The simple slopes for an offending partner's low (-1SD) and high (+1SD) nonapology on participants' destructive post-transgression responses were also tested for victims who were low (-1SD) and high (+1SD) in attachment anxiety (see Figure 3). For those low in attachment anxiety, there was a nonsignificant association between perceptions of an offending partner's nonapology and destructive post-transgression responses,  $b = 0.13$ ,  $SE = 0.07$ ,  $t = 1.82$ ,  $p = .07$ , 95% CI [-0.01, 0.27]. For participants high in attachment anxiety, there was a significant positive association between nonapology and destructive post-transgression responses,  $b = 0.40$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ ,  $t = 5.17$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [0.25, 0.55], specifically, victims high in attachment anxiety engaged in more destructive post-transgression responses when they perceived a high nonapology compared to a low nonapology.

**Table 3***Regression results for the prediction of destructive post-transgression responses*

Variable	<i>B</i>	$\beta$	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI	
						LL	UL
Anx-Attach	-0.20	0.15	0.06	2.62	< .01	[0.03, 0.26]	
Aval-Resp	0.05	0.05	0.06	0.90	0.37	[-0.06, 0.17]	
NonApol	-0.03	0.30	0.06	4.69	< .001	[-0.17, 0.42]	
Anx-Attach x NonApol	0.11	0.11	0.05	2.30	0.02	[0.02, 0.21]	
Avoid-Attach	0.40	0.40	0.09	4.60	< .001	[0.23, 0.58]	

*Note:* Anx-Attach = Anxious attachment, Aval-Resp = Availability and responsiveness,

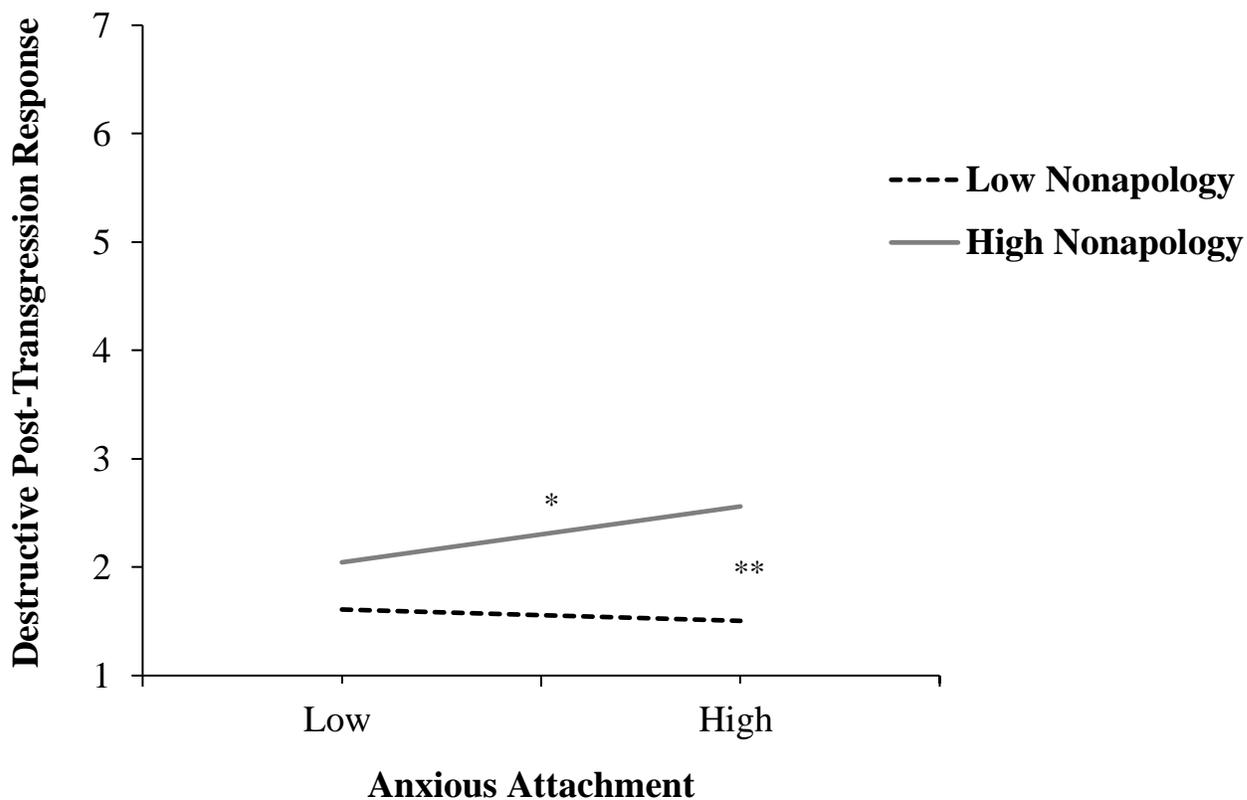
NonApol = Perceived Nonapology, Avoid-Attach = Avoidant Attachment (covariate). CI =

Confidence Interval, LL = Lower Limit, UL = Upper Limit.

**Figure 3**

*Simple slopes for Anxious Attachment by Nonapology on Destructive Post-Transgression*

*Responses*



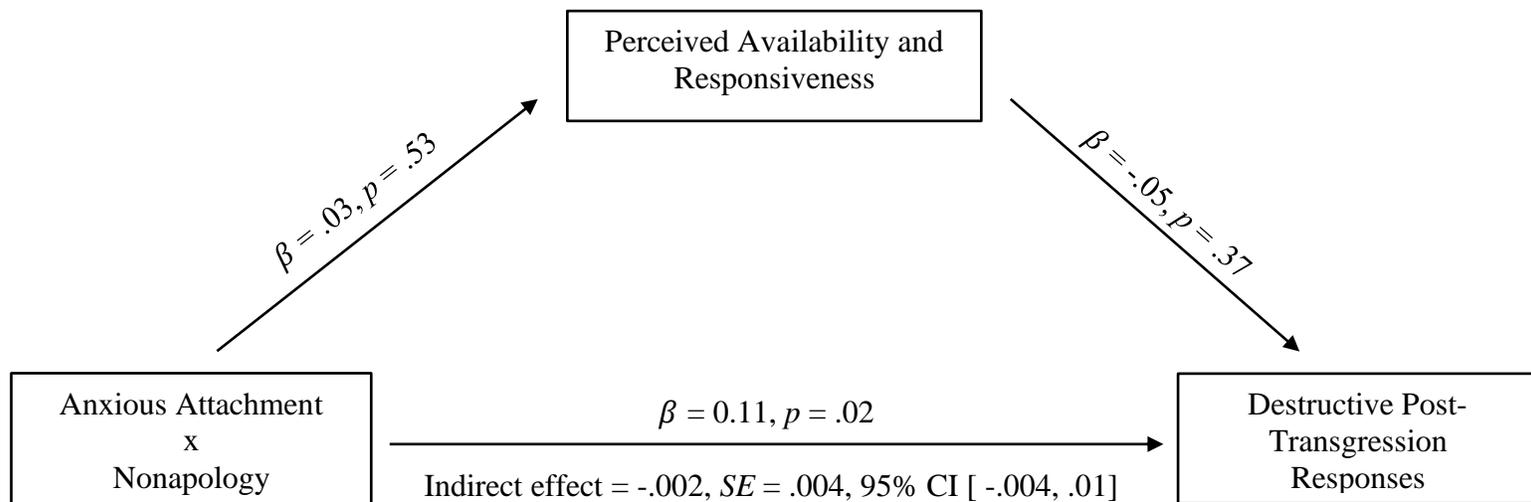
*Note:* Simple slopes for the interaction between victims' anxious attachment and offending partners' nonapology on victim's destructive post-transgression responses. Destructive post-transgression responses are a composite variable containing grudge-disdain, avoidance, and benevolence (reverse coded). Regression lines are plotted based on 1 standard deviation above and below the mean for anxious attachment and nonapology. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Next, I examined whether the moderated association between anxious attachment and victim's destructive post-transgression responses could be explained by a victim's perception of their romantic partner's availability and responsiveness during conflict. Using Hayes (2012) PROCESS and bootstrapping analysis (RStudio, Model 8), a moderated mediation analysis was conducted to test the mediating role of perceived availability and responsiveness on the moderated association between anxious attachment by nonapology on destructive post-transgression responses. See Figure 4 for the model tested. A nonsignificant interaction between anxious attachment and an offending partner's nonapology on victims' perceived availability and responsiveness was found,  $b = 0.03$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ ,  $t = 0.62$ ,  $p = 0.54$ , 95% CI [-0.06, 0.12], indicating that availability and responsiveness did not explain the moderated association. In addition, the indirect effect for availability and responsiveness was nonsignificant,  $b = -.002$ ,  $SE = .004$ , 95% CI [-.004, .01]. Thus, there was no evidence of a moderated mediation. Refer to Table 4 for regression results.

**Table 4***Regression results for the prediction of availability and responsiveness (mediator)*

Variable	<i>B</i>	$\beta$	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI	
						LL	UL
Anx-Attach	-0.08	0.01	0.06	0.20	0.83	[-0.11, 0.14]	
NonApol	-0.69	-0.61	0.06	-10.15	< .001	[-0.73, -0.49]	
Anx-Attach x NonApol	0.03	0.03	0.05	0.62	0.54	[-0.06, 0.12]	
Avoid-Attach	-0.32	-0.32	0.08	-4.19	< .001	[-0.47, -0.17]	

*Note:* Anx-Attach = Anxious attachment, NonApol = Perceived Nonapology, Avoid-Attach = Avoidant Attachment (covariate). CI = Confidence Interval, LL = Lower Limit, UL = Upper Limit.

**Figure 4***Moderated-Mediation Analysis (PROCESS Model 8)*

## General Discussion

Current research has focused on how romantic partner's positive behaviors can buffer against the harmful behaviors of those with anxious attachment (Simpson & Overall, 2014; Overall et al., 2022). However, there is limited research exploring how the negative behaviors of a romantic partner may exacerbate the harmful behaviors of anxiously attached individuals. Prior research has emphasized the tendency for offending romantic partners to engage in behaviors that protect their self-image rather than behaviors that nurture the attachment-related needs of their romantic partner (Exline et al., 2007; Guilfoyle et al., 2019; Shnabel & Nadler, 2008). Further, romantic partners of anxiously attached individuals have been found to engage in more destructive behaviors during threat as a result of the destructive behaviors of the anxiously attached partner (Campbell et al., 2001). Thus, this thesis aimed to address a gap in empirical literature by testing whether the association between victims' anxious attachment and destructive post-transgression responses depends on perceptions of an offending partner's nonapology, as well as investigate the role of a victim's perception of their offending romantic partner's availability and responsiveness.

This research demonstrated that the association between victims' anxious attachment and destructive post-transgression responses is moderated by perceptions of their offending romantic partner's nonapologetic response. As predicted, a positive association was found between victims' anxious attachment and destructive post-transgression responses when anxiously attached victims perceived a high nonapology from their offending partner. In contrast, no association was found between victims' anxious attachment and destructive post-transgression responses when they perceived a low nonapology from their offending partner. Lastly, the research findings demonstrated that anxious victims' perception of their romantic partner's

availability and responsiveness during conflict did not mediate the interaction between anxious attachment and perceived nonapology on victims' destructive post-transgression responses.

Overall, the findings from this thesis build on and extend attachment theory, social motivation, and conflict resolution in romantic relationships by emphasizing the role attachment anxiety and romantic partners' behaviors play in motivating victims' responses to conflict. Specifically, this current research contributes toward explaining the circumstances for *when* a victim with anxious attachment is likely to engage in destructive post-transgression responses by looking at different levels of an offending partner's nonapology. Previous research has demonstrated that the behaviors of a romantic partner can motivate and regulate the behaviors of those with insecure attachment styles (Lemay & Dudley, 2011). Specifically, when romantic partners respond to partners high in anxious attachment with exaggerated affection, the anxiously attached partner feels more supported, valued, and cared for in their relationship which allows them to behave more securely. This is demonstrated in our current research, such that when offending romantic partners respond to anxiously attached victims with low nonapology they are motivated to use less grudge-disdain, avoidance, and low forgiveness as strategies for conflict resolution.

In contrast, prior research has further demonstrated that anxiously attached individuals respond more negatively to conflict as means to protect themselves from their fear of rejection and abandonment from their partner (Hirst et al., 2019; Paquette et al., 2020; van Monsjou et al., 2015). Anxiously attached individuals are further motivated to use destructive behaviors during moments of threat when romantic partners fail to respond or provide support, as the failure to provide reassurance leads anxiously attached individuals to feel greater distress (Overall et al., 2014; Tran & Simpson., 2009). Congruent with this past work, our findings demonstrate that

when the romantic partner of an anxiously attached victim fails to provide support during conflict, specifically by responding with nonapology, the anxiously attached victim engages in more destructive post-transgression responses.

Additionally, this thesis attempted to provide further explanation for *why* anxiously attached victims engage in destructive post-transgression responses by considering a victim's perception of an offending romantic partner's availability and responsiveness during conflict. Results showed that the interaction between anxious attachment and nonapology on victims' destructive post-transgression responses was not mediated by a victim's perception of their romantic partner's availability and responsiveness. An explanation for this finding may rest in the fact that anxiously attached individuals tend to make pessimistic attributions about their romantic partner's behaviors during threat (Kimmes & Durtschi, 2016; Pietromonaco & Beck, 2015). Previous research has found that in situations of conflict, anxiously attached individuals unconsciously endorse relationship-distressing attributions (e.g., negatively biased perceptions of their romantic partner's behaviors) that tend to confirm the negative beliefs they have toward their romantic relationships (Collins et al., 2006). Given the unconscious nature of anxiously attached individual's negative attributions, receiving a low nonapology may not be enough to override their fearful beliefs and negative attributions toward their partner, which in turn would prevent them from perceiving their romantic partner as available and responsive. As such, anxiously attached individuals would continue to be motivated toward destructive post-transgression responses to protect themselves from the emotional distress caused by their partner, as well as their fears of rejection and abandonment.

Furthermore, anxiously attached individuals not only make pessimistic attributions about their romantic partners but tend to make such attributions about themselves. Anxiously attached

individuals are known to have low self-esteem, which often leads to behaviors of self-blame (Chandler & Lawrence, 2022). Therefore, it may not be a matter of how available and responsive an anxiously attached victim perceives their romantic partner to be during conflict, but rather it may be a function of an anxiously attached individual's perception of the self. For instance, it may be the case that if an anxiously attached victim were to receive a nonapology from their romantic partner, they would be more likely to engage in destructive post-transgression responses (i.e., grudge-disdain, avoidance, and low forgiveness) because the nonapology would confirm the anxious victim's low self-esteem (i.e., self-blame) and cause more emotional distress. Thus, given that anxiously attached individuals carry low self-esteem and are quick to blame themselves during conflict, the explanation for *why* they engage in destructive post-transgression responses when receiving a nonapology from their offending partner may deal with perceptions of the self.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

One of the limitations of the current research is its nonexperimental design. Given that the data is correlational in nature, causal claims cannot be made for the cause and effect of offending partners' nonapology, as well as perceived availability and responsiveness on anxiously attached victims' destructive post-transgression responses.

In addition, anxiously attached individuals tend to hold onto and recall negative details about an event more readily compared to positive details (Hirst et al., 2019). As such, when participants were asked to recall and report on the post-transgression responses of their offending romantic partner, those high in attachment anxiety may not have been able to readily recall a less negative responses such as a low nonapology and instead, conflated the negative details of the conflict with the post-transgression response of their offending partner. Therefore, it is possible I

found no effect for an offending partner's low nonapology because victims' high in attachment anxiety tend to recall negative details more readily.

Therefore, considering these limitations, future research may consider experimentally testing the impact offending partners' nonapology has on anxiously attached victims' use of destructive post-transgression responses. In doing so, casual inferences could be made regarding the impact of offending partners' nonapology, as well as perceived availability and responsiveness on anxiously attached victims' destructive post-transgression responses. Additionally, using experimental methods such as manipulating nonapology may account for anxiously attached individuals' tendencies to hold onto and refer to negative information more readily than positive information, as there would be greater control over the information victims refer to regarding their offending partners conflict response.

Although this thesis provided preliminary evidence that the association between anxious attachment and victims' destructive post-transgression responses was moderated by nonapology, I did not find supporting evidence for *why* nonapology motivates anxiously attached victims to use destructive post-transgression responses. Moving forward, future research should consider exploring varying mechanisms to further explain the interaction between anxious attachment and nonapology on victims' destructive post-transgression responses. Previous research has demonstrated that perceptions of a romantic partner still play an important role in motivating the behaviors of anxiously attached individuals (Overall et al., 2014). Specifically, perceptions of a romantic partner's guilt. Anxiously attached individuals have been found to maintain positive relationship evaluations and respond to threat in more secure ways when they perceive their romantic partner to feel some level of guilt. Therefore, the extent to which an offending romantic partner's post-transgression response expresses guilt may motivate the anxiously attached victim

to respond with less or more destructive post-transgression responses. Thus, perceptions of a romantic partner's guilt may work toward explaining why anxiously attached victims engage in destructive post-transgression responses when they receive a low or high nonapology.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis examined the role of an offending romantic partner's nonapologetic behavior on motivating the destructive conflict responses of anxiously attached victims. Further, this thesis explored whether an anxiously attached victim's perception of their romantic partner's availability and responsiveness could explain why an offending partner's nonapology motivates anxiously attached victims' destructive post-transgression responses. When anxiously attached victims received a high nonapology from their romantic partner they were more likely to engage in destructive post-transgression responses. However, when anxiously attached victims received a low nonapology from their partner they were not less likely to engage in destructive post-transgression responses. Furthermore, an anxiously attached victim's perception of their romantic partner's availability and responsiveness did not explain why they engage in more destructive post-transgression responses when receiving a nonapology from their romantic partner. Taken together, the findings from this research demonstrate the role an offending romantic partner's behaviors play in motivating the conflict responses of anxiously attached individuals. Future research is necessary to experimentally test the impact nonapology has on the destructive post-transgression responses of anxiously attached victims, as well as to further understand why anxiously attached victims engage in destructive post-transgression responses upon receiving a nonapology from their offending romantic partner.

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