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Attachment, Relational Uncertainty, Communication Efficacy and Avoidance Following Events that Increase Uncertainty in Close Relationships

Su Ahn Jang
Jina H. Yoo
Yan Tian

University of Missouri – St. Louis

Su Ahn Jang (Ph.D., University of Texas at Austin) is an assistant professor at the University of Missouri - St. Louis. Jina H. Yoo (Ph.D., Michigan State University) and Yan Tian (Ph.D., Temple University) are associate professors at the University of Missouri - St. Louis. A version of this paper was proposed to the Interpersonal Communication Division of the National Communication Association, Chicago, 2007. Correspondence to: Su Ahn Jang, Department of Communication, 591 Lucas Hall, One University Boulevard, St. Louis, MO 63121. Phone: 314-516-5498, E-mail: jangs@umsl.edu.

Abstract

The current study examined the effects of attachment, relational uncertainty, and communication efficacy on people's avoidance behavior following the events that increase uncertainty in close relationships. Our findings revealed that attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance were associated with the way people experience relational uncertainty. The results concerning relational uncertainty variables identified that partner uncertainty is directly and indirectly associated with relationship uncertainty through self uncertainty. Further, relationship uncertainty was associated with communication efficacy, which, in turn was related to avoidance behavior. Taken together, the current research highlights combined and unique effects of attachment, relational uncertainty, and communication efficacy on people's avoidance behavior following events that increase uncertainty in close relationships.

Keywords: Attachments, relational uncertainty, communication efficacy, avoidance, close relationships

According to Planalp and Honeycutt (1985), uncertainty can stem from countless issues or events in close relationships, including betraying a confidence, a change in personality or values, deception, or competing relationships. When people encounter such events, they typically doubt the honesty of their partner and experience intense negative emotions (Planalp, Rutherford, & Honeycutt, 1988). To deal with events that produce uncertainty, individuals may use one or more of the following methods to communicate with the partner: Talk over the issue, talk around the issue, argue over the issue, avoid the issue, or avoid the person (Planalp & Honeycutt, 1985). Although the most direct response to experiencing uncertainty may be openly asking the partner about the event, research shows that people often avoid discussing the event with their partner. In fact, people use avoidance as a communication strategy to stay away from talking about an issue while continuing to communicate on other topics with a partner. For the purpose of the current study, we denote avoidance as a communication pattern that is lacking direct information-seeking about a particular issue with a partner.

Several factors have been identified as leading people to choose avoidance as their communication strategy, most prominently attachment (Bretherton, 1990; Jang, Smith, & Levine, 2002), relational uncertainty (Knobloch & Solomon, 2002), and communication efficacy (Afifi & Weiner, 2004). Studies that investigated the link between attachment and communication in uncertainty uncovered that while people with an anxious/ambivalent attachment seem to be characterized by avoidance behavior, people with a secure attachment have the ability to engage in direct communication (Bretherton, 1990; Jang et al., 2002). Because events that create uncertainty would trigger individuals' attachment propensity, attachment is an important attribute that influences people's communication behavior. Research has also shown that people's perceptions of uncertainty about themselves, their partner, and the relationship, namely relational uncertainty, are linked with avoidance (Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004; Theiss & Solomon, 2006). Individuals who experience high relational uncertainty may have difficulty communicating fluently with the partner. Surely, when the partner's level of involvement in the relationship is highly doubtful, people may have trouble asking the partner about the events that created uncertainty in their relationship. Further study has shown a connection between communication efficacy and avoidance of communication following uncertainty. According to Afifi and his colleagues (2004; 2010), individuals may engage in both active and passive information avoidance when they feel they possess weak communication efficacy. While the findings associated with the sources of avoidance behavior may vary from study to study, according to Planalp and Honeycutt (1985), individuals often use avoidance to deal with uncertainty.

Although scholars have identified above the mentioned attributes as the predictors of avoidance under the conditions of uncertainty, the links between the three predictors and avoidance behavior under the conditions are relatively unclear. To date, there is little to no evidence on understanding the function of attachment together with relational uncertainty and communication efficacy in the process of how people come to choose avoidance following events that increase uncertainty within close relationships. Exploring the link is the purpose of this study. To address this issue, we report an empirical study that examined the link between (a) attachment and relational uncertainty, (b) relational uncertainty and communication efficacy, and (c) communication efficacy and avoidance behavior under the conditions of uncertainty.

Attachment and Relational Uncertainty

Attachment is developed in the family of origin, and the quality of attachment is mainly determined by the primary caregiver's emotional availability and responsiveness to the infant's

needs (Bowlby, 1973; 1979). This first relationship has a profound impact on the child's developing personality and view of the social world. Bowlby suggests that, through constant interactions with the caregiver, infants develop internal working models containing beliefs and expectations about whether the caregiver is available and responsive, and also if they are worthy of attention and care. These working models of attachment are carried further into the context of new relationships where they guide individuals' expectations, perceptions, and behaviors. And, this attachment tendency is most evident when people experience threat or anxiety in their close relationships. In other words, when people encounter relational threats, they are likely to think, feel, and behave in certain ways as the byproducts of their internal working models of attachment (Collins & Allard, 2001).

In an attempt to understand attachment orientations, early attachment theorists have developed an attachment scheme and classified people as having one of the three types of attachment: Secure, anxious/ambivalent, or avoidant (see Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). Alternatively, a four-type attachment scheme has been used by scholars, and this schema puts people in one of four attachment types: Secure, preoccupied, dismissing, and fearful (Bartholomew, 1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). More recently, however, the typology or category view on attachment is less common. Instead, scholars support *anxiety* and *avoidance dimensions* of internal working models to tap individuals' attachment orientations (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998). Avoidance dimension reflects the extent to which individuals doubt the relational partner's good will and struggle to preserve behavioral and emotional independence from the partner. Alternatively, anxiety dimension reflects the degree to which individuals worry that the partner will not be available when wanted. Since attachment is based on the interactions with primary caregivers during infancy, Mikulincer and Shaver (2007) suggest that people's attachment in the anxiety and avoidance dimensions are fairly stable over time.

When people involved in close relationships experience an event that increases uncertainty, their beliefs about the partner are disrupted, and they feel doubts about the partner and the relationship (Planalp & Honeycutt, 1985). Although the qualities that influence the way people experience relational uncertainty in various circumstances is still unclear, attachment theorists would argue that the attachment system is likely to be activated as people encounter an event that increases uncertainty in attachment relationships. Uncertainty that occurs in the context of interpersonal relationships (i.e., relational uncertainty) can be defined in terms of three types, including self, partner, and relationship uncertainty (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999). People experience *self uncertainty* when they are "unable to describe, predict, or explain their own attitudes or behaviors" (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999, p. 262). These scholars define self uncertainty as individuals' uncertain thoughts and feelings about their own attitudes regarding their involvement in a relationship. *Partner uncertainty* reflects individuals' "inability to predict the other person's attitudes and behaviors within interaction" (p. 262). Alternatively, people experience *relationship uncertainty* when they question the status of their relationship.

Because people may end their relationship as a result of a relational partner's transgression that produces uncertainty (Jang et al., 2002), an event that increases uncertainty within attachment relationships certainly is a condition of relational threat, which sets off individuals' attachment propensity. Thus far, however, little is known about the specific links between anxiety and avoidance dimensions of attachment and relational uncertainty following events that increase uncertainty within close relationships. One study specifically examined the link between attachment and relational uncertainty in the context of jealousy. Knobloch, Solomon, and Cruz (2001) specifically focused on the connection between attachment anxiety

and relational uncertainty and found a positive association. Consistent with this finding, attachment researchers suggest that people who have high attachment anxiety may experience plenty of doubts and frustration concerning themselves, the partner, and their relationship. Individuals with an anxious tendency generally have high levels of self-doubts, and see their relationship as an experience packed with obsession, jealousy, emotional extremes, and desire for reciprocation and union (Bartholomew, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). The tendency of anxious people gets severe when they consider their relationship is in jeopardy (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Based on the findings, we posit that events that create uncertainty may activate people's attachment anxiety, which then affects their experience of relational uncertainty:

H1a-c: Attachment anxiety will be positively associated with (a) self uncertainty, (b) partner uncertainty, and (c) relationship uncertainty following events that increase uncertainty in close relationships.

Despite the limited research on the connection between attachment avoidance and relational uncertainty, the theoretical basis of the association between uncertainty and affective experience may help us establish the link between the two. Evidence suggests that attachment avoidance may be positively associated with relational uncertainty. Research demonstrates that individuals with high attachment avoidance often distrust their partner and distance themselves behaviorally and emotionally from the partner (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Hazan and Shaver also suggest that highly avoidance people are doubtful of "the existence or durability of romantic love" (p. 513). Therefore, avoidance people's tendency to easily sensing doubts about their partner and the relationship are associated with their experience of relational uncertainty. Taken together, these findings suggest that attachment avoidance may be tied to relational uncertainty following events that increase uncertainty within close relationships. We put forward a research question to explore the link between attachment avoidance and relational uncertainty:

RQ1a-c: What will be the association between attachment avoidance and (a) self uncertainty, (b) partner uncertainty, and (c) relationship uncertainty following events that increase uncertainty in close relationships?

It is, however, important to note that, according to uncertainty reduction theory (Berger & Bradac, 1982), self- and partner-focused doubts generally cause people to doubt about the status of their relationship. These scholars would argue that self uncertainty and partner uncertainty may predict relationship uncertainty. Similarly, Knobloch and her colleagues (2001) suggest that, under the conditions of jealousy, partner uncertainty generally influences self uncertainty, which then causes people to question the status of the relationship. These findings are useful to infer the association among self, partner, and relationship uncertainty. In line with previous research, partner uncertainty may be directly influence relationship uncertainty and indirectly influence relationship uncertainty through self uncertainty. Accordingly, we put forward the following hypotheses to examine the links between self uncertainty and partner uncertainty, self uncertainty and relationship uncertainty, and partner uncertainty and relationship uncertainty:

H2a: Partner uncertainty will be associated with self uncertainty following events that increase uncertainty in close relationships.

H2c: Self uncertainty will be associated with relationship uncertainty following events that increase uncertainty in close relationships.

H2b: Partner uncertainty will be associated with relationship uncertainty following events that increase uncertainty in close relationships.

Relational Uncertainty and Communication Efficacy

According to Knobloch and Solomon (2002), the effect of relational uncertainty on communication is that relational uncertainty may hinder fluent communication. Research demonstrates that the inability to confidently communicate an issue with a partner may be a reason for people's avoidance (Afifi & Weiner, 2004). Specifically, Afifi and Weiner state that "individuals' perception that they possess the skills to complete successfully the communication tasks" is *communication efficacy*, and it is considered a key factor that affects behaviors associated with communication (p. 179). Therefore, when people experience uncertainty about the self, the partner, and their relationship, they would experience difficulty communicating about the issue that produced uncertainty with their partner.

However, based on previous research concerning the association among self, partner, and relationship uncertainty, relationship uncertainty would be directly connected to individuals' communication efficacy following the events that increase uncertainty in close relationships. That is to say, self and partner uncertainty influence the way people experience relationship uncertainty, and relationship uncertainty ultimately influences communication efficacy. People who feel a great deal of doubts about the status of their relationship are relatively more likely to perceive that they lack the ability to talk about the event with the partner, when compared with people who perceive little relationship uncertainty. To our knowledge, however, research lacks on examining the specific link between relationship uncertainty and communication efficacy following events that increase uncertainty in close relationships. Thus, the following research question was posed to examine the association:

RQ2: What will be the association between relationship uncertainty and communication efficacy following events that increase uncertainty in close relationships.

Communication Efficacy and Avoidance in Uncertainty

While the literature suggests that there is more than one factor that influences people's avoidance behavior (e.g., relational uncertainty and attachment style), Afifi and Weiner (2004) argue that a lack of communication efficacy is one of the main reasons for people's avoidance in a number of circumstances. A perceived lack of communication efficacy impedes an individual's ability to talk about events or issues that increase uncertainty. Numerous researchers have found communication efficacy to be a predictor for people's decision to seek information or avoidance on various issues in close relationships (Afifi et al., 2006; Afifi & Weiner, 2006; Jang & Vangelisti, 2006). Research indicates that communication efficacy is associated with avoidance (and information-seeking) about sexual health between couples (Afifi & Weiner, 2006) and about organ donation within the family (Afifi et al., 2006). Likewise, Jang and Vangelisti found that communication efficacy is negatively associated with avoidance behavior following a partner's deceptive communication. Findings such as these suggest that people's perception about their ability to talk about an issue is an important factor that predicts avoidance behavior. Thus, the following hypothesis was put forth:

H3: Communication efficacy will be negatively associated with avoidance behavior following events that increase uncertainty in close relationships.

Methods

Participants and Procedures

One hundred eighty undergraduate students at a midwestern university participated in the current study. Seventy three (41 %) were men and 107 (59 %) were women. Their ages ranged from 19 to 52, and their mean age was 25.73 ($SD = 6.55$). Of the total sample, 151 were single, 24 were married, and 5 were divorced and dating. The duration of the relationships that

participants described in the study ranged from one month to 18 years and three months with a mean of 31 months ($SD = 30.40$).

An online extra credit opportunity was announced during undergraduate communication classes. The web address of the survey site was given to potential research participants. The announcement stipulated that potential research participants for the study be individuals who were currently involved in a romantic relationship. Another research opportunity was offered to those who were not romantically involved at the time the study was announced. Once participants had gone to the site of the study, they read a brief introduction to the study, explaining and ensuring confidentiality, and a consent procedure. After the consent page, we assessed the respondents' attachment with an attachment measure. They then completed an open-ended question which asked them to recall an incident that caused them to experience increased uncertainty within their current intimate relationship. Based on Planalp and Honeycutt's (1985) definition of events that increase uncertainty, the following instruction was given to the participants:

Please think about the most recent event that increased your uncertainty in your romantic relationship. An event that increases uncertainty is a specific event that disrupts your previous beliefs about the partner and the relationship. In other words, an event that increases uncertainty occurred when you were unable to understand and predict the partner's attitudes and behaviors based on your past experience with the partner.

They were asked to describe the event in detail. Next, the respondents completed a series of measures, including self uncertainty, partner uncertainty, relationship uncertainty, communication efficacy, and avoidance. Then, demographics, including age, sex, relationship length, and relational status, were assessed.

Measurements

Attachment. Participants' attachment was measured using the Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R) questionnaire (Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000). Of the 36 questions, the attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance subscales consist of 18 items each. An example item from the anxiety subscale was "I often worry that my partner will not want to stay with me," and the avoidance subscale was "I find it relatively easy to get close to my partner." Each item was followed by a 7-point Likert-type scale with 1 representing "strongly disagree" and 7 representing "strongly agree." Confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) were used to determine the unidimensionality of the scales: The anxiety scale, $\chi^2(77) = 205.66, p < .01$; CMIN/df = 2.67, CFI = .90; RMSEA = .10, $\alpha = .93$, and the avoidance scale, $\chi^2(65) = 156.15, p < .01$; CMIN/df = 2.40, CFI = .92; RMSEA = .09, $\alpha = .92$.

Relational uncertainty. A modified version of relational uncertainty used by Theiss and Solomon (2006) were employed in the current study. The modified instructions read "We would like you to rate how certain you were about each statement immediately following the event that increased your uncertainty." An example item in a 6-item self uncertainty scale was "How certain were you about your feelings for your partner?" Participants' partner uncertainty was assessed by a 6-item scale (e.g., How certain were you about how much your partner likes you?). Participants also completed an 8-item relationship uncertainty measure (e.g., How certain were you about where this relationship is going?). Each item was followed by a 6-point Likert-type scale with 1 representing "completely uncertain" and 6 representing "completely certain." Items were reflected and combined so that higher scores indicate greater uncertainty. Consistent with the findings of Knobloch and Solomon (2002), the relational uncertainty variables were highly interconnected. CFAs were used to determine the unidimensionality of the three uncertainty

scales: The self uncertainty scale, $\chi^2(4) = 11.34, p > .05$; CMIN/df = 2.26, CFI = .99; RMSEA = .07, $\alpha = .93$; the partner uncertainty scale, $\chi^2(5) = 6.55, p > .05$; CMIN/df = 1.31, CFI = .99; RMSEA = .05, $\alpha = .93$, and the relationship uncertainty scale, $\chi^2(9) = 16.41, p > .05$; CMIN/df = 1.82, CFI = .98; RMSEA = .08, $\alpha = .90$.

Communication efficacy. Afifi, Dillow, and Morse's (2004) communication efficacy scale was employed. Three items asked the respondents' ability to successfully carry out direct information-seeking about the event that they described in the survey (e.g., I felt that I could approach my partner to ask about the event that increased uncertainty). Each item was followed by a 7-point Likert-type scale with 1 representing "strongly disagree" and 7 representing "strongly agree." Because a CFA with three items results in zero degrees of freedom and fit indices cannot be obtained, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with a maximum likelihood (ML) estimation was conducted, which yielded one factor, with an eigenvalue of 2.03 and explained 70.01% of the variance. The factor loadings were .92, .68, and .92 ($\alpha = .84$).

Avoidance behavior. Three items from Afifi et al.'s (2004) information avoidance scale were selected to measure avoidance. A questions in the avoidance scale included "I went out of my way to avoid information about this event". Each item was followed by a 6-point Likert-type scale with 1 representing "strongly disagree" and 6 representing "strongly agree." Higher scores indicate greater avoidance behavior. The EFA yielded one factor, with an eigenvalue of 1.76 and explained 60.10% of the variance. The factor loadings were .83, .70, and .79 ($\alpha = .81$).

Results

In order to evaluate our hypotheses, we conducted two sets of analyses. Zero-order correlations were first computed to examine the hypotheses and research questions. Subsequently, structural equation analyses were conducted to learn about multivariate associations among attachment, relational uncertainty, communication efficacy, and avoidance. Results of the analyses are presented next.

The first hypothesis (*H1*) was posited to test the associations between attachment anxiety and relational uncertainty following events that increase uncertainty in close relationships. As predicted, bivariate correlations showed that attachment anxiety was positively associated with self uncertainty, partner uncertainty, and relationship uncertainty (see Table 1). A research question was posed to examine the association between attachment avoidance and relational uncertainty, and the data revealed that attachment avoidance was also positively associated with self, partner, and relationship uncertainty. Next, we predicted that partner uncertainty would be related to self uncertainty (*H2a*), self uncertainty would be related to relationship uncertainty (*H2b*), and partner uncertainty would be related to relationship uncertainty (*H2c*) following uncertainty. Bivariate correlations showed that all three links were positively associated. The current study then explored the link between relationship uncertainty and communication efficacy under the conditions of uncertainty (*RQ2*). A bivariate correlation indicated that relationship uncertainty was negatively linked with communication efficacy. *Hypothesis 3* predicted that there would be a negative link between communication efficacy and avoidance. As expected, individuals who reported relatively high communication efficacy were less likely to use avoidance following uncertainty. Accordingly, all of the study hypotheses were supported.

Next, a maximum likelihood structural equation model was built (with Amos 18) to further test the hypotheses and research questions. This procedure was valuable because structural equation modeling was able to clarify the direct and indirect associations in the test of multivariate hypotheses. Our model was developed by constructing the paths predicted by our hypotheses and research questions. Please see Figure 1. Specifically, attachment avoidance and

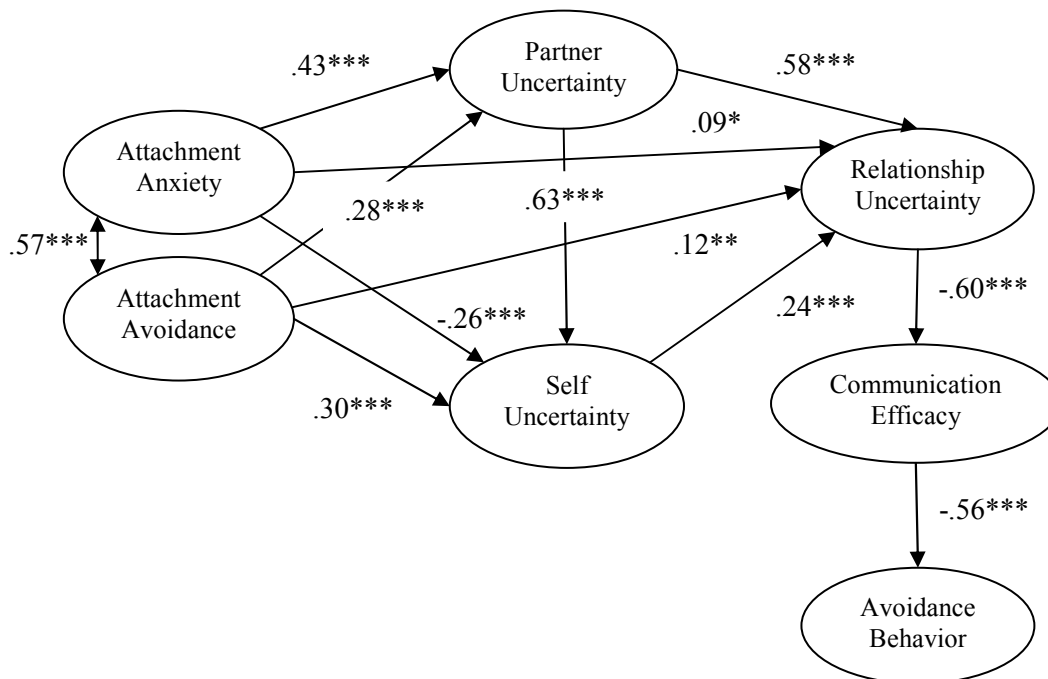
attachment anxiety were the exogenous variables specified by multiple indicator variables. Self, partner, and relationship uncertainty as well as communication efficacy are called antecedent endogenous variables, since they are antecedents of other variables but also being predicted by the exogenous variables. Finally, avoidance behavior was the outcome endogenous variable.

Table 1
Correlation Matrix, Means, and Standard Deviations of the Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. Attachment anxiety	--							2.97	1.20
2. Attachment avoidance	.44*	--						3.00	1.18
3. Self uncertainty	.25*	.45*	--					1.99	1.17
4. Partner uncertainty	.56*	.44*	.64*	--				2.31	1.30
5. Relationship uncertainty	.53*	.53*	.69*	.85**	--			2.36	1.18
6. Communication efficacy	-	-	-	-	-	--		5.65	1.52
7. Avoidance behavior	.24*	.21*	.27*	.27*	.32*	-	--	2.21	1.34

Note. * $p < .01$, ** $p < .001$

Figure 1.
Structural model



* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. The parameters are standardized estimates.

To control for the effects of relationship length on the variables in the model, separate regression analysis was performed on each variable in the model. In each regression analysis, each variable in the model (e.g., self uncertainty) was the dependent variable, and the relationship length variable was the predictor. The standardized residuals from each regression analysis were saved as the new measured variables. Through this serial of regression analyses, the effects of relationship length on the variables in the model were controlled for.

All the variables were operationalized as latent variables, since the latent composite approach could “account for unreliability by extracting measurement error from the latent constructs used in the structural model” (Holbert & Stephenson, 2002, p. 534). Both direct and indirect effects of the related variables were calculated. A bootstrap for each model (number of bootstrap samples is 2000) was performed, and 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals were used to test the significance of the direct and mediation effects. To gauge the fit of the structural equation models, an omnibus model fit was evaluated using the comparative fit index (CFI) and the root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA). Prior criteria we used were .90 for CFI and .08 for RMSEA. In addition, given the guidelines of Hoyle and Panter (1995), the chi-squared distributed goodness of fit test was also reported.

Our Model fit the data well, with $X^2 = 53.07$, $df = 37$, $CMIN/df = 1.43$, $CFI = .985$, and $RMSEA = .05$. The direct effect of attachment anxious on self uncertainty ($H1a$; $\beta = -.26$, $p < .001$), partner uncertainty ($H1b$; $\beta = .43$, $p < .001$), and relationship uncertainty ($H1c$; $\beta = .09$, $p < .05$) were significant. Although the link between attachment anxiety and self uncertainty was statistically significant, the direction of the association was the opposite of what we originally hypothesized. The data revealed that attachment anxiety and self uncertainty was negatively associated. *Hypothesis 1* was thus partially supported by the current data. The direct effect of attachment avoidance on self uncertainty ($RQ1a$; $\beta = .30$, $p < .001$), partner uncertainty ($RQ1b$; $\beta = .28$, $p < .001$), and relationship uncertainty ($RQ1c$; $\beta = .12$, $p < .01$) were all significant. Next, the direct effect of partner uncertainty on self uncertainty ($H2a$; $\beta = .63$, $p < .001$), self uncertainty on relationship uncertainly ($H2b$; $\beta = .24$, $p < .001$), and partner uncertainty on relationship uncertainly ($H2c$; $\beta = .58$, $p < .001$) were also significant. Accordingly, *Hypothesis 2* was supported. Additionally, the direct effect of relationship uncertainty on communication efficacy ($RQ2$; $\beta = .60$, $p < .001$), and communication efficacy on avoidance behavior ($H3$; $\beta = .56$, $p < .001$) were significant. Thus, *Hypothesis 3* was supported.

In addition to the direct effects, we examined the indirect effects in the model. The indirect effect of attachment anxiety on communication efficacy (standardized mediation effect = $-.21$, $p < .001$), and the indirect effect of attachment avoidance on communication efficacy were significant (standardized mediation effect = $-.23$, $p < .001$). The indirect effect of partner uncertainty on communication efficacy was significant (standardized mediation effect = $-.44$, $p < .001$). The indirect effect of relationship uncertainty on avoidance behavior was also significant (standardized mediation effect = $.34$, $p < .001$). The total indirect effect of attachment anxiety on avoidance behavior, mediated by relational uncertainty and communication efficacy, was significant (standardized mediation effect = $.12$, $p < .001$). Similarly, the total indirect effect of attachment avoidance on avoidance behavior, mediated by relational uncertainty and communication efficacy, was also significant (standardized mediation effect = $.13$, $p < .001$).

Discussion

The current study proposed a model to investigate the function of attachment with relational uncertainty and communication efficacy in the process of how people use avoidance following events that increase uncertainty within close relationships. The results of this study

extend previous work by indicating that attachment, relational uncertainty, and communication efficacy are uniquely linked to avoidance behavior following events that increase uncertainty in close relationships. The discussion below will highlight the findings with regard to the model and discuss the present findings in terms of previous research.

In this study, we found that attachment influences relational uncertainty variables. At the bivariate level, both attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance were positively associated with self, partner, and relationship uncertainty. However, results of the structural equation analyses showed different effects. The structural equation analyses revealed that attachment anxiety was negatively associated with self uncertainty and positively linked with partner and relationship uncertainty. In other words, when highly anxious individuals experience events that increase uncertainty, they are likely to demonstrate confidence in their own attitudes toward the involvement in the relationship but suspect their partner's involvement in the relationship and the status of their relationship. One explanation for this pattern of findings may involve anxious individuals' attachment propensity. Research suggests that anxious individuals are notorious for dependence and strong desire for commitment in relationships (Feeney & Noller, 1990). Therefore, they may perceive certainty regarding their involvement in the relationship by overestimating their own attitudes and behavior toward the relationship. In addition, anxious individuals may perceive high partner uncertainty. Although they idealize the partner (Feeney & Noller, 1992), they also feel suspicious about the partner's fidelity (Feeney & Kirkpatrick, 1996). As a result of the ambivalent tendency, they are subject to clinging and hating reaction toward their partner (Jang et al., 2002). For this reason, highly anxious individuals they may experience a great deal of relationship uncertainty following events that increase uncertainty within their relationship.

The findings associated with attachment avoidance and relational uncertainty were the same as those of bivariate analyses. People with a high attachment avoidance are relatively more likely to experience self, partner, and relationship uncertainty than people with a low attachment avoidance. Because highly avoidance individuals doubt the stability of intimate relationships and distrust their partner (Hazan & Shaver, 1987), following uncertainty, they are likely to question the status of their relationship (relationship uncertainty) and their partner's involvement in their relationship (partner uncertainty). In addition, they may also experience self uncertainty. According to Simpson (1990), highly avoidance people generally fear intimacy and have difficulty completely trusting and depending on the partner, suggesting that they may experience relatively more self uncertainty when compared with people with a low avoidance tendency. Therefore, an event that increases uncertainty may lead high avoidance individuals to question even more about their own involvement in their relationship.

In addition to attachment, the current investigation focused on relational uncertainty as another predictor for avoidance. The associations among relationship uncertainty variables are notable. Our findings add to the literature that highlights the unique quality of self, partner, and relationship uncertainty within close relationships. We found that partner uncertainty directly predicts relationship uncertainty and indirectly predicts relationship uncertainty through self uncertainty, and this pattern of finding was documented by previous research (Knobloch et al., 2001). In fact, this type of associations is in line with uncertainty reduction theory's claim that self-focused and partner-focused doubts often cause people to question the status of their relationship (Berger & Bradac, 1982). Although Planalp and Honeycutt (1985) suggest that events that increase uncertainty generally cause people to doubt the honesty of their partner in the relationship, the types of relational uncertainty people would experience and the associations

among the variables were not specified in their research. Based on the results of the current study, we presume that, following events that increase uncertainty, people initially feel doubts about the partner's involvement in the relationship that cause them to feel self-doubts, which then lead to the worries about the status of the relationship. Given that previous research has identified the significance of relational doubts on seeking information (Baxter & Wilmot, 1984), on information avoidance (Jang & Vangelisti, 2006), and following events that increase uncertainty (Planalp & Honeycutt, 1985; Planalp et al., 1988), this investigation clearly demonstrated that relational uncertainty has an important role in the process of information avoidance following uncertainty.

The current study also revealed that relationship uncertainty was negatively linked with communication efficacy at the bivariate level. The structural analysis also found that relationship uncertainty has a negative effect on communication efficacy. Our result suggests that ambiguity associated with the status of the relationship may influence people's perception about their ability to talk about the uncertainty with their partner. Indeed, the results are consistent with Bandura's (1986) claim that when people are in a negative psychological or physiological condition, they generally feel a lack of self-efficacy. Perhaps due to the fear of losing close relationships, people who feel insecurities surrounding the future of the relationship may also perceive that they are incapable of discussing the event with the partner.

Furthermore, our findings add to the literature that emphasizes the importance of communication efficacy in predicting avoidance behaviors following events that increase uncertainty in close relationships (Afifi, 2010; Afifi & Weiner, 2004; Jang & Vangelisti, 2006). When individuals perceive that they are unable to talk about an event with their partner, they are more likely to avoid discussing the event with the attachment partner. This result supports Bandura's (1997) findings that having high self-efficacy about a behavior is positively associated with execution of the behavior. Indisputably, the present research highlights that a lack of communication efficacy is a reason for people's avoidance behavior following events that increase uncertainty within attachment relationships.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that this investigation identified unique and combined effects of attachment, relational uncertainty, and communication efficacy on avoidance behavior following uncertainty in close relationships. Our findings suggest that events that increase uncertainty within close relationships would prompt individuals' attachment propensity. And, the impact of relational uncertainty is contingent upon attachment. Further, attachment indirectly influences communication efficacy through relational uncertainty, and communication efficacy ultimately affects avoidance. Nevertheless, we certainly understand that the present investigation is unable to determine the causal directions of the aforementioned effects. Given that "information seeking (or avoidance) and uncertainty is more complex than initially believed" (Afifi & Weiner, 2006, p.48), more research needs to be done to fully understand the effects of attachment, relational uncertainty, and communication efficacy on individuals' avoidance under the conditions of uncertainty in close relationships.

A number of limitations of the current research must be recognized. One of these involves the use of retrospective reports. Participants may not have accurately remembered the event that increased their uncertainty or may have found it difficult to recall and rate the degree to which they felt relational uncertainty (Loftus & Loftus, 1980). Likewise, respondents may have reconstructed their memory of the event so that they reported their attitudes toward the partner or the relationship and efficacy perceptions consistent with the reconstructed memory. Another limitation of the present study is the sample. There is a concern about using college

students in the study of couples' relationships (Bullis, Clark, & Sline, 1993). Bullis and her colleagues would argue that because "relational dynamics differ depending on age and life stage" (p. 215), the findings associated with studies such as the current one are not generalizable to other groups. Finally, a potential problem here may be that only one party's attachment was assessed. Since communication is a cooperative behavior, a partner's attachment orientation may have some impact on the couple's behavior associated with communication.

Along with addressing these limitations, this study provides several ideas that may be elaborated on and pursued in the future. It would be useful for researchers to further study events that increase uncertainty in relationships besides intimate relationships. Because attachment propensity is most relevant within attachment relationships (Bowlby, 1979), the current research recommends that the proposed model is most suitable for intimate relationships. Even so, research suggests that attachment tendency can be observed in friendships (Rubin, et al., 2004). Thus, our model may be helpful to understand people's avoidance behavior with close friends. For example, issues of uncertainty in friendships are usually seen as more acceptable than they are in romantic relationships; individuals who are friends generally do not seek to understand their uncertainty as they would with a romantic partner. Afifi and Burgoon (1998) found that cross-sex friends perceived more uncertainty in their relationship but were less likely to communicate about the issues than dating partners. Thus, it would be useful to study the effects of attachment, relational uncertainty, and communication efficacy on avoidance in friendships.

In conclusion, the current research highlights combined and unique effects of attachment, relational uncertainty, and communication efficacy on people's avoidance behavior following uncertainty. Given the results of our study, we are convinced that these constructs should be the key attributes researchers should consider when studying avoidance behavior following events that increase uncertainty in attachment relationships.

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