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*Pers Soc Psychol Bull* 2010 36: 119 originally published online 2 November 2009

DOI: 10.1177/0146167209349374

The online version of this article can be found at:

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# Who Recognizes and Chooses Behaviors That Are Best for a Relationship? The Separate Roles of Knowledge, Attachment, and Motivation

Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin  
36(1) 119–131  
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DOI: 10.1177/0146167209349374  
<http://pspb.sagepub.com>  


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## Abstract

Participants made relationship decisions in several *Choose Your Own Adventure*-type dating story tasks by choosing between two options at each of 20 points throughout the computerized stories. One option was always the relationship-enhancing option; the other option was detrimental to the relationship. Study 1 included two experimental conditions: Participants were either asked to identify the relationship-enhancing option or to report which option they would actually choose. Individuals high in relationship knowledge were more likely to identify relationship-enhancing behaviors but not more likely to actually choose them. Secure individuals and individuals strongly motivated to have supportive relationships were more likely to identify and to choose relationship-enhancing options. In Study 2 partner supportiveness was manipulated; the fictitious partner was either supportive or nonsupportive. Individuals high in relationship knowledge were better at recognizing when a partner was supportive and when not, whereas attachment anxiety lessened the appreciation of having a supportive partner.

## Keywords

relationship knowledge, attachment, trust, KNOWI, dating, partner selection, risk

Received October 5, 2008; revision accepted June 21, 2009

Individuals in romantic relationships are faced with a multitude of decisions each day. Should one take time out of a busy schedule to listen to one's partner complain about a rough day? If one's partner snaps at him or her, does one respond in an equally negative fashion or does one try to be understanding? Some options are relationship enhancing—they strengthen one's connection with the partner (e.g., choosing to listen to the partner's problems). Other options are detrimental to the relationship (e.g., refusing to listen to the partner's problems). This article examines the following questions: (a) Who is able to recognize relationship-enhancing options? (b) Who actually chooses relationship-enhancing options? (c) Who recognizes whether one's partner is supportive? The method we used to explore these questions was a computerized interactive story task—a *Choose Your Own Adventure* type of story (Vicary & Fraley, 2007)—in which participants made relationship-based choices throughout a fictional interaction.

## Knowing Versus Choosing Relationship-Enhancing Behaviors

Imagine that you are sick and need to buy some medicine. You have a choice: (a) You can decide not to mention this to

your new partner or (b) you can ask your partner for help in picking up the medicine. Which of these choices would be better for the relationship: to avoid being a burden or to ask for help?

We hypothesized that people differ in the degree to which they recognize the best actions needed to build quality intimate relationships in which partners are supportive of each other. It is important to note, however, that theoretical knowledge of what one should do may be different than what one actually does in a dating situation. One reason for this discrepancy may be that even though asking for help may increase intimacy it also raises the possibility of rejection. Murray, Holmes, and Collins (2006) argued that how a person solves this “interdependence dilemma” depends on the person's expectations about likely reactions from the partner. If a person is hypersensitive to rejection or has generalized expectations that others are likely to reject himself or herself, the

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person may not feel comfortable choosing the relationship-enhancing option—even if he or she knows that this option is better for the relationship.

### Who Is Able to Recognize and Choose Relationship-Enhancing Options?

In brief, we assumed that to develop high-quality intimate relationships in which partners are supportive of each other, a person has to (a) identify what actions are best for a supportive relationship and (b) actually carry out those behaviors. Theoretically, the following factors should play a role in recognizing and/or choosing relationship-enhancing options.

#### Knowledge

Some people possess more knowledge about supportive relationships. Such knowledge is obviously an important resource that a person needs to identify relationship-enhancing options. Relationship knowledge has not received much attention in the existing literature, partly because of the difficulty in assessing individual differences in knowledge. To fill this gap, Turan and Horowitz (2007) applied signal detection methods to develop a method for assessing one component of the knowledge needed to develop supportive relationships: indicators that a potential partner will be supportive. Turan and Horowitz first used a prototype analysis to identify the indicators that people generally consider most important or prototypic. One highly prototypic indicator, for example, is “my partner notices changes in my mood and asks if anything is wrong.” A much less prototypic indicator is “my partner does not ignore others on the street.” Using the resulting list of good (highly prototypic) and poor (less prototypic) indicators, Turan and Horowitz then created a signal detection task—the Knowledge of Indicators (KNOWI) Task—to assess the degree to which each individual possesses the knowledge needed to discriminate between good and poor indicators of a supportive partner.

Turan and Horowitz (2007) showed that (a) people differ in the degree to which they know valid indicators of supportiveness (surprisingly, not everyone seems to know these indicators); (b) these individual differences shape information processing, judgments, and performance on related tasks; and (c) knowledge of indicators of supportiveness is related to knowledge about other support-relevant processes in relationships. Therefore, in these studies we used a person’s knowledge of indicators of supportiveness as one predictor of whether the person recognizes relationship-enhancing behaviors.

#### Attachment Security

According to Bowlby (1982), people develop working models of attachment relationships that guide their thoughts and

behaviors in relationships. Research has shown that insecure attachment leads a person to interpret partners’ behaviors negatively, which in turn leads insecure individuals to exhibit negative behavioral responses (that are detrimental to the relationship; see Collins, Guichard, Ford, & Feeney, 2004, for a review). Thus, insecure attachment should have a negative association with choosing relationship-enhancing options (Vicary & Fraley, 2007).

What about the effect of attachment security on a person’s ability to recognize relationship-enhancing behaviors? We hypothesized that attachment avoidance is associated with a reduced ability to recognize these behaviors because avoidance should limit a person’s opportunities to obtain the knowledge needed to identify relationship-enhancing options. Theoretically, individuals high in attachment anxiety chronically worry about abandonment. Therefore, they should be hypersensitive to the status of the relationship. Thus, one may hypothesize that individuals high in attachment anxiety are sensitized to ways of enhancing a relationship and are more likely to recognize relationship-enhancing behaviors.

However, one might also make the opposite prediction because anxious individuals’ chronic relationship worries may cloud their judgments and lead them to believe that the only way to enhance a relationship is to express negative emotions. Even if an anxious person can identify relationship-enhancing behaviors in a nonrisk situation (e.g., when thinking about other people’s relationships), it may not be easy to do the same when the actual risk of rejection is high. In high-risk situations—for example, when one has to make a decision about one’s actual relationship—attachment security (lack of anxiety as well as lack of avoidance) may serve as an important psychological resource that prevents fears of rejection from interfering with judgments and, therefore, may help people in identifying relationship-enhancing behaviors. It is possible that individuals high in attachment anxiety make a distinction between high- and low-risk situations because they want to be cautious and self-protective. They may believe that it is dangerous to place oneself in a vulnerable position by increasing closeness in high-risk situations. Thus, they may know which behaviors, in general, are relationship-enhancing, but they may not think that these behaviors should be chosen when the risk of rejection is high.

#### Motivation to Have Supportive Partners

Another important factor is motivational. Motives energize and direct behavior to achieve motive-relevant goals. Thus, a strong motive to have supportive relationships should help a person to identify relationship-enhancing behaviors. Whether a person then takes the risk and actually chooses to behave in a relationship-enhancing way should also depend on the strength of the person’s motivation for support (Murray et al., 2006; Turan & Horowitz, 2009).

## The Separate Roles of Knowledge, Attachment Security, and Motivation

We argue that knowledge about attachment processes, attachment security, and motivation for support are logically distinct constructs and should explain unique variance in related behaviors, cognitions, and emotions (cf. Mikulincer, 2007). We hypothesized that a person's knowledge of the valid indicators of a partner's supportiveness would predict whether that person also knows what the best actions are for the relationship—but not necessarily whether the person would actually take those actions. On the other hand, whether the person would actually take the relationship-enhancing action should be predicted by the person's motivation for supportive relationships as well as by the person's attachment orientation.

### Who Is Able to Recognize Whether a Partner Is Supportive?

We have argued that one important factor in developing supportive relationships is identifying and choosing relationship-enhancing behaviors. A second important factor is having a partner who is willing and able to behave in a relationship-enhancing manner. Note that whereas up to this point we had only discussed whether the person's own behavior is relationship enhancing, we are now considering whether the partner behaves in a relationship-enhancing manner. Thus, another question this article addresses is "Who is able to recognize whether a partner is supportive?" To answer this question, we examined participants' satisfaction with a partner. We argue that knowledge, attachment security, and motivation for support play important roles in both of these processes that are crucial in developing supportive relationships: (a) identifying and choosing relationship-enhancing behaviors and (b) identifying and choosing supportive partners.

Whether one's partner is perceived to behave in relationship-enhancing ways and, therefore, is judged to be supportive and invested in the relationship should play an important role in whether one is satisfied with one's partner. However, people may differ in their ability to correctly interpret the supportiveness of a new partner. A person who knows what indicators to look for to make this kind of judgment should be in a better position to make correct judgments about partners.

In addition, even when judging the same partner (i.e., keeping partner supportiveness constant) some people may be more satisfied with that partner if they perceive and interpret the same partner behaviors more positively. What factors shape differences in interpreting the same partner behaviors? For one, the person's attachment style should be important: Attachment avoidance is associated with a negative view of others (Collins et al., 2004); thus, it should lead to a negative evaluation of partners. In support of this hypothesis, Vicary and Fraley (2007) found that high avoidance was associated

with low satisfaction. Vicary and Fraley also found that, contrary to their expectations, attachment anxiety was associated with more satisfaction.

Finally, a person's level of desire (motivation) for supportive partners should also affect the person's satisfaction. Lemay, Clark, and Feeney (2007) have shown that people "project their own supportiveness and motivation to attend to their partner's needs onto perceptions of partners" (p. 834; see also Lemay & Clark, 2008). Therefore, we hypothesized that people with a stronger motive for support view their partners more positively because they project their own focus on support to their partners.

## Present Studies

In two studies we examined the separate roles of knowledge, attachment, and motivation in judgments, choices, and satisfaction in romantic relationships. Participants completed computerized interactive story tasks in which they were asked to make judgments or choices at different junctures. Participants had to choose between two options at each of 20 points: One was always the relationship-enhancing option; the other option was detrimental to the relationship. After completing this task, participants were asked to rate their satisfaction with their fictitious partner.

In Study 1, there were two between-participant conditions. Participants in one condition were asked to indicate which option they thought was best for the relationship. Participants in the other condition indicated what they actually would do in those situations. We hypothesized that when participants were instructed to select the choices they thought were best for the relationship, the effect of knowledge would be important. We also hypothesized that attachment security would provide the necessary resource for being able to recognize relationship-enhancing behaviors even in situations when the risk of rejection is high. In the second condition, in which participants were instructed to select the choices they would actually make, we expected attachment security and motivation for supportive relationships to be the main predictors of choices.

In Study 2, all participants were asked to indicate what they thought was best for the relationship. There were two between-participant conditions: Participants in one condition had a generally warm and supportive partner, whereas participants in the other condition had a generally cold and unsupportive partner. This manipulation of partner behavior allowed us to assess whether knowledgeable participants would be better able to detect whether their partner was supportive, which in turn should affect their satisfaction with the interaction. In the unsupportive partner condition, we expected participants high in knowledge to be less satisfied than were participants low in knowledge. Conversely, in the supportive partner condition, we expected participants high in knowledge to be more satisfied than were participants low in knowledge.

In Study 2, in addition to knowledge and motivation, we examined the role of attachment. Individuals high in attachment anxiety may be hesitant to label a partner as supportive to avoid possible disappointment as a result of prematurely getting their hopes high. Thus, one may expect them to be overcautious in acknowledging that a partner is supportive, which would lessen their appreciation of a genuinely supportive partner.

This research provides a significant contribution to the existing literature in several ways. First, we identify different components of the ability to have a high-quality relationship: (a) recognizing relationship-enhancing options, (b) choosing these options, and (c) recognizing whether one's partner is supportive. Second, we identify predictors of each of these abilities. Third, although previous research (Vicary & Fraley, 2007) demonstrated that insecure individuals are less likely to make relationship-enhancing choices compared to more secure individuals, the roles of relationship knowledge and motivation were unclear. Do some individuals not know which options are best for the relationship or do some individuals simply not care to make those choices? By assessing knowledge, attachment orientation, and motivation, we were able to assess the independent effects of these different constructs. Fourth, these studies allowed us to tease apart the effects of knowledge, attachment, motivation, and partner supportiveness on relationship satisfaction.

## Study 1—Knowing What Is Best to Do Versus Actually Doing It: Judgments and Choices in Intimate Relationships

### Method

**Participants.** Data were collected on the Internet via an online study designed by the second author using perl script. The study was posted on a website inviting people to participate in studies regarding personality and close relationships. The site receives approximately 300 visitors a day (although not all visitors participate in each study posted). Participants are not paid but receive personalized feedback at the end of the study. There were 5,912 participants; 71% were female. Their median age was 24 years ( $M = 26.6$ ,  $SD = 9.41$ ).

### Instruments

**The KNOWI task.** As described above, the KNOWI (Turan & Horowitz, 2007) consists of a mixture of good and poor indicators of a partner's supportiveness—11 good indicators, 11 poor indicators, and 19 filler items. It is constructed to be analogous to a signal detection task in which participants have to discriminate signal (good indicators) from noise (poor indicators). Participants are asked to rate (on a scale from 1 to 8) the degree to which each indicator increases their confidence that a potential partner "will be there" for them. Each participant's accuracy (or sensitivity) on this discrimination task is computed using signal

detection methods to operationalize that participant's knowledge of good (valid) indicators of a partner's supportiveness: The participant's ratings are first averaged separately for good (G) and poor (P) indicators. A participant's accuracy is then defined as the difference between that participant's two means ( $G - P$ ).

As a signal detection task, the KNOWI task also provides a measure of criterion bias, which reflects a greater readiness for judging an item to be a valid indicator of supportiveness (i.e., a "yes bias"). This index, KNOWI-readiness, is assessed by the sum ( $G + P$ ) of the ratings for good and poor items. Turan and Horowitz (2009) presented data from laboratory and questionnaire studies showing that the KNOWI-readiness assesses the strength of a participant's motive to form supportive relationships. In the present study, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for the sum was .89.

Thus, the two indexes of the KNOWI assess knowledge of indicators of supportiveness and motivation for support. Noting that accuracy and criterion bias are typically correlated in signal detection research on individual differences, Paulhus and Harms (2004) recommended that investigators statistically control each for the effect of the other. We follow this recommendation when using the KNOWI scores.

**Experiences in Close Relationships—Revised (ECR-R) Questionnaire.** The ECR-R 36-item questionnaire (Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000) assesses attachment-related anxiety (18 items) and avoidance (18 items). Participants clicked on a continuous scale ranging from 1 to 7 to indicate the extent to which they agreed with items such as "I'm afraid that I will lose my partner's love" and "I prefer not to show my partner how I feel deep down." The correlation between anxiety and avoidance for the present sample was .31 ( $p < .001$ ), which is consistent with previous research using the ECR-R. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for this sample was .93 for anxiety and .93 for avoidance.

**Relationship Assessment Scale.** Participants completed a modified, nine-item version of the Relationship Assessment Scale (Hendrick, 1988), which assesses relationship satisfaction. Participants clicked a continuous scale ranging from 1 to 7 to indicate their agreement with items such as "This person is likely to meet my needs" and "This person is someone I could trust." Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for this sample was .93.

**Procedure.** Participants first completed the ECR-R and then the KNOWI. Then they were given instructions on the *Choose Your Own Adventure* task.<sup>1</sup> They were informed that they were going to read an interactive story in which they were the main character. They were told that they would be presented with choices at various points throughout the story and that those choices would affect the way the story unfolded. This novel medium allowed us to simulate a real interaction. Participants in one condition were instructed to select the choices that they should make (i.e., the ones that they thought would be best for the relationship—the "should" condition);

participants in the other condition were told to select the choices that they would be most likely to make in a relationship (the “would” condition). There were 20 points throughout the story at which participants had to choose between two response options. One of the response choices was designed to be relationship enhancing; the other choice was detrimental to the relationship. As an example, in one part of the story, the participant’s grandmother is hospitalized and the participant is upset. The participant can choose between (a) discussing this with the partner (the relationship-enhancing choice), and (b) not mentioning the incident, thinking that it might ruin the night (the relationship-detrimental choice). In a pretest, we had approximately 10,000 individuals read one (and only one) segment of the story and choose which of the response options would be “beneficial for the relationship.” The options that we labeled as beneficial were selected on average 84% of the time as being the most helpful for the relationship.

The response options were randomly counterbalanced throughout the story—sometimes the positive option was listed first and sometimes the negative option was listed first. Moreover, testing indicated that the response options did not change in difficulty as the story progressed. In other words, the positive options available later in the story were not more positive than were those presented earlier.

In this study, the *Choose Your Own Adventure* task was interactive: The fictitious partner’s responses depended on the participant’s choices. If the participant chose the relationship-enhancing choice, the fictitious partner’s response was warm and supportive (e.g., when the participant chooses to talk about his or her grandmother’s hospitalization, the partner is reassuring, telling the participant that everything will be fine). If the participant chose the relationship-detrimental choice, the partner’s response was relatively cold and unsupportive (e.g., when the participant chooses not to talk about his or her grandmother’s hospitalization, the partner seems annoyed that the participant does not want to talk about it). This method allowed us to examine the cumulative effects of relationship decisions that simulate real interactions.

To make the stories as similar as possible for each participant, we manipulated only the responses of the partner and not the actual events that took place (e.g., all participants read the same section of the story in which the participant’s grandmother is hospitalized.) The story did not have a complex branching structure but instead had only two branches at each point. Thus, it was possible for two participants to read the same sections of the story even if they made different choices at earlier points.

After finishing the story, participants completed the Relationship Assessment Scale (Hendrick, 1988), which was used to assess participants’ satisfaction with their fictional partner. Participants were then given personalized feedback concerning their attachment orientation and their progression through the story.

**Table 1.** Means and Standard Deviations of Study Variables

Variable	M (SD)	
	Study 1	Study 2
Individual intercept	.69 (.18)	.70 (.19)
Individual slope	.007 (.01)	.004 (.02)
Relationship satisfaction	5.14 (1.16)	4.67 (1.44)
KNOWI-accuracy	0.98 (1.08)	0.69 (0.90)
KNOWI-readiness	12.48 (2.08)	13.03 (1.90)
Attachment anxiety	3.66 (1.33)	3.51 (1.33)
Attachment avoidance	3.13 (1.20)	3.10 (1.19)

Means and standard deviations are computed for the whole sample in each study (collapsed across the two conditions). KNOWI = Knowledge of Indicators.

## Results and Discussion

*Judgments and choices at story junctures.* In the *Choose Your Own Adventure* task, participants make multiple choices over the course of the story. Vicary and Fraley (2007) examined two aspects of participants’ choices: (a) the positivity of choices made at the beginning of the story and (b) how the positivity of those choices changed over the course of the story. To assess these two components, Vicary and Fraley computed a separate regression equation for each participant. The intercepts in these regression equations reflect the positivity of choices in the beginning of the story. (The first decision point was coded as zero.) The slopes assess the rate of change in the positivity of the participants’ responses throughout the story. In our analyses, we followed this method and computed an intercept and a slope separately for each participant.<sup>2</sup>

*Choices made at the start of the story.* Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations of study variables are presented in Tables 1 and 2. The average intercept value (across participants in the two conditions) was .69 ( $SD = .18$ ), suggesting that participants were more likely to pick the positive alternative at the start of the story. We examined how these intercepts were related to attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, KNOWI-accuracy, and KNOWI-readiness in the two conditions (would vs. should).

To do this, we regressed the intercepts simultaneously on these predictor variables and their interactions with condition as well as the following control variables: condition, gender, age, and education level. As expected, the interaction between condition and KNOWI-accuracy was significant and will be discussed below. Condition did not yield significant interactions with KNOWI-readiness, avoidance, or anxiety (all  $ps > .05$ ). Therefore, those interaction terms were not retained in the final equation.

The results of this regression analysis are presented in Table 3. Low avoidance, low anxiety, and high KNOWI-readiness all predicted more positive choices in the beginning of the story. That is, the two attachment dimensions and

**Table 2.** Intercorrelations Between Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Study 1							
1. Individual intercept	—	-.68	.28	.00	.10	-.09	-.17
2. Individual slope		—	-.05	.02	-.09	-.07	.05
3. Relationship satisfaction			—	-.03	.22	-.06	-.23
4. KNOWI-accuracy				—	-.29	.05	-.06
5. KNOWI-readiness					—	.08	-.20
6. Attachment anxiety						—	.31
7. Attachment avoidance							—
Study 2							
1. Individual intercept	—	-.65	.21	.01	.16	-.11	-.22
2. Individual slope		—	.01	.00	-.08	-.09	.05
3. Relationship satisfaction			—	-.05	.20	-.06	-.19
4. KNOWI-accuracy				—	-.25	.06	-.04
5. KNOWI-readiness					—	.02	-.25
6. Attachment anxiety						—	.31
7. Attachment avoidance							—

Correlations are computed for the whole sample in each study (collapsed across the two conditions). KNOWI = Knowledge of Indicators.

the strength of participants' motive for social support all predicted unique variance in how positive participants' initial choices were—regardless of condition (whether they had to indicate what they would do or what they should do).

Thus, participants who are highly motivated to have supportive partners were more likely to identify and choose relationship-enhancing options, presumably because they are determined to make the relationship work. The effect of attachment avoidance on choosing the negative option may be because of the avoidant people's reluctance to get close to others: They attempt to regulate their emotions by maintaining emotional distance from their partners, which would lead them to be less likely to choose relationship-enhancing behaviors. Such avoidance would also limit their opportunities for acquiring knowledge of relationship-enhancing behaviors. On the other hand, attachment anxiety is associated with a chronic uncertainty about partners' availability. This uncertainty and the associated anxiety may interfere with the person's ability to identify and to choose the better actions in an interaction (thus resulting in a negative correlation between attachment anxiety and identifying relationship-enhancing

**Table 3.** Regression Equation Predicting Participants' Intercept Values in Study 1

Predictor variable	$\beta$	$t$
Age	-.03**	-2.27
Education level	.04***	3.15
Gender	.05***	3.87
Condition	.06***	4.25
Anxiety	-.06***	-4.47
Avoidance	-.13***	-9.12
KNOWI-readiness	.08***	5.71
KNOWI-accuracy	-.06	-1.41
Interaction (Condition $\times$ KNOWI-accuracy)	.09**	2.21

$R^2 = .04, f^2 = .04$ . KNOWI = Knowledge of Indicators.

\*\* $p < .05$ . \*\*\* $p < .01$ .

options). It should be noted that attachment anxiety showed a positive correlation with KNOWI-accuracy ( $r = .07$  in both studies, controlling for KNOWI-readiness, which, as mentioned in the Method section, should always be partialled out when examining the effect of KNOWI-accuracy). Thus, it seems that anxiety is associated with better knowledge but it also interferes with applying the knowledge in high-risk situations. In brief, the effects of both attachment dimensions may be understood in terms of emotions and emotion regulation.

How about the role of knowledge? We argue that participants' choices in the should condition and their scores on KNOWI-accuracy both reflect knowledge: Choices in the should condition reflect knowledge of the actions that are best for the relationship, and KNOWI-accuracy reflects knowledge of indicators of supportiveness. Therefore, we hypothesized that KNOWI-accuracy and intercept values would be associated in the should condition. On the other hand, participants' choices in the would condition reflect what they would actually do in those situations and, hence, do not characterize knowledge.

Therefore, we examined the interaction between condition and KNOWI-accuracy, which yielded a significant effect (see Table 3). To understand the nature of this interaction, we regressed the intercept values on KNOWI-accuracy as well as all the other predictors separately for each condition. As expected, when asked to select the choices that would be most beneficial for the relationship (the should condition), participants high on KNOWI-accuracy were more likely to correctly identify the positive choice at the beginning,  $t(2342) = 2.61$ ,  $\beta = .06$ ,  $p \leq .01$ . Therefore, knowledge about indicators of supportiveness seems to be related to knowledge about behaviors that are best for a relationship even after controlling for the two attachment dimensions. On the other hand, when asked to select the choices that one would actually make in a relationship (the would condition), the effect of KNOWI-accuracy was not significant,  $t(3286) = 0.25$ ,  $\beta = .01$ ,  $p > .80$ .

**Table 4.** Regression Equation Predicting Participants' Slope Values in Study I

Variable	$\beta$	$t$
Age	.05***	5.31
Education level	.03***	3.08
Gender	.03***	3.28
Condition	.05***	5.37
Individual intercept	-.70***	-71.70
Anxiety	-.18***	-11.26
Avoidance	-.03***	-2.97
KNOWI-readiness	-.01	-1.14
KNOWI-accuracy	-.07**	-2.24
Interaction (Condition $\times$ KNOWI-accuracy)	.09***	3.17

$R^2 = .49, f^2 = .96$ . KNOWI = Knowledge of Indicators.

\*\* $p < .05$ . \*\*\* $p < .01$ .

That is, participants' knowledge did not predict what they would actually do.

*Choices made throughout the story.* Next, we examined participants' slope values, which reflect the degree to which participants tended to increase the positivity of their choices as they went through the story (i.e., became more likely to pick the relationship-enhancing options). The average slope was positive ( $M = .007, SD = .01$ ). We regressed these slopes on the same predictor variables as above: attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, KNOWI-accuracy, KNOWI-readiness, and condition (would vs. should) as well as interactions with condition and the following control variables: gender, age, education level, and participants' intercept values (to control for the positivity of the participants' initial choices). Results were very similar to the ones reported above where the intercepts served as the dependent variable (except for KNOWI-readiness; see Table 4).

Because condition did not yield significant interactions with KNOWI-readiness, avoidance, or anxiety (all  $ps > .05$ ), those interaction terms were not retained in the final equation. As might be expected, participants who had high intercept values had nowhere to go but down ( $\beta = -.70, t = -71.70$ ). Increases in the frequency of relationship-enhancing choices occurred at a slower rate for highly anxious and highly avoidant individuals. The reason for the slower rate for insecure people may be that they are slow to trust partners—and, therefore, are cautious to take the risk of choosing relationship-enhancing behaviors. KNOWI-readiness was not significantly associated with the slopes, indicating that individuals with a stronger motive for a supportive relationship did not increase at a faster rate.

The interaction between condition and KNOWI-accuracy was again significant. Therefore, we regressed the slope values on KNOWI-accuracy as well as all the other predictors separately for each condition. When participants selected the choice that would be best for the relationship (i.e., the should

condition), knowledge predicted the slope: Participants higher on KNOWI-accuracy showed a bigger increase in their accuracy in correctly identifying the positive choices,  $t(2342) = 3.76, \beta = .06, p \leq .001$ . In other words, participants who were more knowledgeable concerning the characteristics of a supportive partner (higher KNOWI-accuracy scores) increased at a faster rate in selecting the positive choices. However, when participants were asked what choice they would actually make in a relationship (i.e., the would condition), the effect of KNOWI-accuracy was not significant,  $t(3286) = -0.38, \beta = -.01, p > .70$ .

Thus, results concerning the slopes parallel the results concerning the intercepts: Knowledge of the indicators of supportiveness and knowledge of the best choices seem to be associated, suggesting that they are both part of a higher order knowledge about relationships. Furthermore, attachment avoidance, attachment anxiety, motivation for supportive relationships, and knowledge of indicators of supportiveness (in interaction with condition) all explained unique variance in participants' choices, both in the beginning of the story and in how participants progressed through the story (except for motivation for supportive relationships, which only predicted the intercepts).

It is important to note that the fictional partner's behavior changed throughout the story based on the participant's choices: If a participant selected an answer choice that showed trust or affection toward the partner, the partner was in turn supportive and kind; if the participant selected an answer choice that expressed distrust in the partner, the partner would respond in a negative fashion. The finding that highly insecure individuals in the would condition did not increase the positivity of their choices at the same rate as did more secure people, even when given this feedback, suggests that insecure individuals either do not pick up on this feedback or do not care to do anything about it. The fact that knowledge of partner supportiveness as measured by the KNOWI-accuracy did not relate to the decisions made in the would condition sheds further light on this finding—even if a person possesses knowledge of the indicators of a supportive partner, this knowledge still does not result in making better choices.

*Satisfaction.* Next, we examined participants' satisfaction with their fictitious partner using hierarchical regression analysis. Table 5 presents the results when all predictors are entered into the equation. In the first step, we entered the following variables as predictors of satisfaction: gender, age, education, condition, individual intercepts, and individual slopes. (No interactions with the condition were significant; therefore, they were not used in the model.) The model explained 13% of the variance. Both intercept and slope values were significant predictors, which suggests that if people themselves made positive choices at the beginning or if they increased the positivity of their choices at a faster rate, they felt more satisfied with the partner.



**Table 5.** Regression Equation Predicting Satisfaction With the Fictitious Relationship Partner in Study 1

Variable	$\beta$	<i>t</i>
Age	-.05***	-4.05
Education level	-.04***	-2.68
Gender	.05***	4.18
Condition	-.03**	-2.10
Individual intercept	.44***	25.68
Individual slope	.28***	16.39
Anxiety	.03*	1.86
Avoidance	-.15***	-11.26
KNOWI-readiness	.16***	12.30
KNOWI-accuracy	.02	1.60

$R^2 = .19, f^2 = .23$  (final model when all predictors have been entered).

KNOWI = Knowledge of Indicators.

\* $p < .10$ . \*\* $p < .05$ . \*\*\* $p < .01$ .

In the second step, we entered attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance, which yielded a significant increase in  $R^2$ ;  $\Delta R^2 = .03, F(2, 5602) = 109.65, p < .001$ . Avoidance predicted lower satisfaction ( $p < .001$ ), whereas there was a trend for a positive association between anxiety and satisfaction ( $p = .06$ ). This is in line with the conceptualization of anxiety as being associated with a positive view of others and avoidance with a negative view of others. This result suggests that the two attachment dimensions affect satisfaction for reasons that have nothing to do with the person's own choices (intercept and slope were controlled in the analysis).

In the final step, we entered KNOWI-accuracy and KNOWI-readiness, which resulted in another significant increase in  $R^2$ ;  $\Delta R^2 = .02, F(2, 5600) = 79.24, p < .001$ . This was because of the significant unique effect of KNOWI-readiness (KNOWI-accuracy was not a significant predictor): As expected, higher KNOWI-readiness, a measure of motivation for support, predicted higher satisfaction. That is, motivation for supportive partners led to higher satisfaction with the partner's behaviors while controlling for participants' own choices, avoidance, and anxiety, which suggests that motivation for support leads people to perceive their partners more positively.

### Summary of Results.

Surprisingly, not everyone seems to know or choose the relationship-enhancing options. More secure individuals and individuals who had a stronger motive for social support were more likely to make the relationship-enhancing choice at the start of the story regardless of condition. Importantly, participants who had more accurate knowledge of the indicators of supportiveness were more likely to select the positive option when they were asked to decide what would be best for a relationship (i.e., the should condition). On the other hand, when asked to choose the option they would actually pick, knowledge did not matter.

Participants' choices throughout the story followed a similar pattern: Participants with a more secure attachment

increased at a quicker rate in making positive choices compared to insecure individuals. Also, participants who had greater knowledge of the indicators of a supportive partner increased at a quicker rate compared to people with less knowledge—but only in the should condition, not in the would condition. Therefore, it seems that for the choices made immediately as well as the choices made throughout the story there is a difference between knowing what one should do and actually choosing to do it.

In terms of satisfaction, people who made the positive choice at the start of the story or increased the positivity of their choices at a faster rate felt more satisfied with the interaction. Also, attachment affected satisfaction in that highly anxious individuals were more satisfied, whereas highly avoidant individuals were less satisfied, regardless of choices made. Finally, people who had stronger motives for a supportive partner felt more satisfied with the interaction.

### Study 2—Detecting Whether a Partner Is Supportive: How Knowledge Shapes Satisfaction

A particularly important decision in a relationship is whether one is satisfied with the partner—whether one judges the partner as supportive, committed, and trustworthy. If the partner is not supportive or committed, the person will not be able to enhance the relationship successfully even if he or she chooses relationship-enhancing options. Thus, it is important that a person is able to recognize whether a partner is supportive.

Previous research provides support for the notion that having an unsupportive partner influences the decisions one makes in a relationship. For instance, Gillath and Shaver (2007) found that after imagining an unsupportive partner people were more likely to choose insecure response options to fictional relationship scenarios (compared to when they imagined a supportive partner). In this study, however, we did not specifically tell participants whether the partner was supportive or unsupportive because we were interested in examining whether they could detect this behavior.

We hypothesized that relationship knowledge is related to participants' ability to recognize when a partner is supportive and when not. To examine this ability, we created two conditions in the story task: In the supportive partner condition, the fictitious partner acted in a consistently warm and supportive way, whereas in the unsupportive partner condition, the fictitious partner acted in a relatively cold and unsupportive way. In the unsupportive partner condition, we expected that participants high in knowledge would judge their partner to be less trustworthy and would be less satisfied with the partner than would participants low in knowledge. On the other hand, in the supportive partner condition, we expected participants high in knowledge to be more satisfied than participants low in knowledge.

This hypothesis is based on the notion that the working models of attachment consist of two components: (a) generalized expectations about others' supportiveness, which shape a person's average level of trust across all partners, and (b) sophisticated if-then knowledge structures, which allow a person to make judgments about specific partners who may differ in terms of supportiveness.

Attachment research has mostly focused on the first component, which is based on the hypothesis that people develop generalized expectations about others' supportiveness and that these expectations shape how they perceive new partners. Findings of Study 1 supported this hypothesis: Attachment anxiety and avoidance predicted participants' satisfaction with the story partner. By manipulating the fictitious partner's supportiveness, Study 2 aimed to examine the effects of the second component of internal working models of attachment: if-then knowledge structures that allow a person to make judgments about specific partners.

In addition to this important hypothesis, Study 2 also examined the roles of attachment and motivation in satisfaction. As in Study 1, we expected low avoidance and high motivation for support to be positively associated with satisfaction with the fictitious partner, regardless of condition (supportive vs. unsupportive partner). One might hypothesize that attachment anxiety lessens the appreciation of a supportive partner because labeling a partner as supportive—and therefore setting up expectations for support—means increased vulnerability. Thus, one may expect that attachment anxiety diminishes a person from distinguishing a supportive from a nonsupportive partner in an effective manner.

In Study 1, the way the story unfolded depended on the participants' choices. Thus, satisfaction could result from two factors: (a) responses elicited from the partner because of the participant's own choices and (b) the way the participant perceived the partner's response. In analyzing the data of Study 1, we controlled for participants' own choices to remove the effect of the first factor. In this study, we kept partner responses constant (within each condition) to eliminate this factor altogether: All participants assigned to the same condition were presented with the same responses from their fictitious partner regardless of whether the participant's own choice was positive or negative. By standardizing partner responses, we could examine differences among participants in their perception of the behavior of the same fictitious partner (who was either consistently supportive or consistently unsupportive).

## Method

**Participants.** Data were collected via the Internet through the same means described in Study 1. There were 9,702 participants; 66% were female. The median age of participants was 26 years ( $M = 29.03$ ,  $SD = 10.50$ ).

**Instruments.** Participants completed the same instruments as in Study 1. For the ECR-R, the correlation between

anxiety and avoidance was .34 ( $p < .001$ ); Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was .93 for anxiety, .93 for avoidance, and .95 for the Relationship Assessment Scale.

**Procedure.** Participants first completed the ECR-R. They were then given the same story instructions as in Study 1 with the exception that all participants were told to select the choices that would be best for the relationship. There were two conditions: In the supportive-partner condition, the fictional partner behaved in a consistently supportive manner regardless of which answer choice the participant selected. In the unsupportive-partner condition, the fictional partner behaved in a consistently insensitive, unsupportive manner. For example, in one part of the story the participant is giving his or her partner a ride home. The partner tells the participant that the participant is driving too fast. The participant can choose between thanking the partner for his or her concern (the relationship-enhancing choice) and responding angrily to the partner's comment (the relationship-detrimental choice). In the supportive condition, regardless of the participant's choice, the partner immediately apologizes to the participant in the next part of the story. In the unsupportive condition, the partner blatantly ignores the participant.

It is important to note that, unlike in Study 1, the story evolved independently of the participant's actual choices. In other words, regardless of which answer choice was selected, participants either received consistently supportive partner behaviors or consistently unsupportive partner behaviors. Participants were not aware of this fact, however, and were operating under the assumption that their choices had consequences for the way in which the partner responded. After finishing the story, participants completed the Relationship Assessment Scale and the KNOWI, then they were given debriefing information and personalized feedback.

## Results

**Choices made at the start of the story.** First, we wanted to replicate the findings of Study 1 concerning knowledge of choices that are best for the relationship. The average intercept value (averaged across participants in the two conditions) was .71 ( $SD = .18$ ), suggesting that participants were more likely to identify the positive alternative in the beginning. We examined how these intercepts were related to attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, KNOWI-accuracy, and KNOWI-readiness in the two conditions (supportive vs. unsupportive partner). To do this, we regressed the intercepts simultaneously on these predictor variables as well as the following control variables: condition, gender, age, and education level. The very beginning of the story was the same for participants in both conditions (supportive vs. unsupportive partner). Therefore, we did not include interaction terms with condition. The results of this regression analysis are presented in Table 6. Replicating results of Study 1, low avoidance, low anxiety, high KNOWI-accuracy, and high

**Table 6.** Regression Equation Predicting Participants' Intercept Values in Study 2

Variable	$\beta$	$t$
Age	.04***	3.89
Education level	.04***	3.40
Gender	.04***	3.48
Condition	.05***	5.12
Anxiety	-.05***	-4.14
Avoidance	-.16***	-14.41
KNOWI-accuracy	.04***	3.96
KNOWI-readiness	.13***	11.96

$R^2 = .07, f^2 = .08$ . KNOWI = Knowledge of Indicators.  
\*\*\* $p < .01$ .

**Table 7.** Regression Equation Predicting Participants' Slope Values in Study 2

Variable	$\beta$	$t$
Age	.10***	12.57
Education level	.04***	4.46
Gender	.03***	3.16
Condition	.09***	11.68
Individual intercept	-.69***	-88.70
Anxiety	-.14***	-16.68
Avoidance	-.04***	-4.75
KNOWI-accuracy	.03***	3.51
KNOWI-readiness	.03***	3.65

$R^2 = .48, f^2 = .92$ . KNOWI = Knowledge of Indicators.  
\*\*\* $p < .01$ .

KNOWI-readiness all predicted picking the more positive behavior as the one that would be best for the relationship. That is, the two attachment dimensions, knowledge about the indicators of supportiveness, and the strength of participants' motives for social support all predicted unique variance in identifying the initial positive choice.

*Pattern of choices made throughout the story.* Next, we examined the participants' slope values. On average, participants tended to increase the positivity of their choices as they went through the story; the average slope was .004 ( $SD = .02$ ). We regressed these slopes on the following predictor variables: attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, KNOWI-accuracy, KNOWI-readiness, and condition (supportive vs. unsupportive partner) as well as interactions with condition. The following were also entered as covariates: gender, age, education level, and participants' intercept values. Because condition did not yield significant interactions with KNOWI-readiness, KNOWI-accuracy, avoidance, or anxiety (all  $ps > .05$ ), interaction terms were not retained in the final equation. As can be seen in Table 7, the results concerning the slopes parallel the results concerning the intercepts: Low avoidance, low anxiety, high KNOWI-accuracy, and high KNOWI-readiness all predicted unique variance

in the amount of increase in identifying the positive choices as the story progressed. In other words, individuals who were highly anxious, highly avoidant, low in knowledge of the indicators of partner supportiveness, or low in motivation for a supportive partner did not increase as quickly in their rate of making positive choices. These results replicate the findings of Study 1.

*Satisfaction and judgments about the fictitious partner.* We hypothesized that participants who were more knowledgeable about the indicators of supportiveness would be more sensitive to the supportiveness of the fictitious partner. That is, we expected an interaction between condition (supportive vs. unsupportive partner) and KNOWI-accuracy when predicting satisfaction (judgments about partner), such that higher KNOWI-accuracy would lead to higher satisfaction in the supportive partner condition but to lower satisfaction in the unsupportive partner condition. Similarly, one might also expect a significant interaction between condition and KNOWI-readiness: Strength of motivation for supportive relationships should have a stronger relationship with satisfaction when the partner is supportive compared to when the partner is unsupportive. Finally, a significant interaction between condition and attachment anxiety would also be expected if attachment anxiety makes a person less willing to label a partner as supportive in an attempt to prevent future disappointment.

To test these hypotheses, we regressed participants' satisfaction with the story partner on the following variables: gender, age, education, condition, intercepts, slopes, anxiety, avoidance, KNOWI-accuracy, KNOWI-readiness, and interaction terms (condition with anxiety, avoidance, KNOWI-accuracy, and KNOWI-readiness). This analysis yielded  $R^2 = .24, f^2 = .32$ . As expected, the interaction between condition and KNOWI-accuracy was significant,  $t = 5.10, p < .001$ . Similarly, interaction terms between condition and KNOWI-readiness as well as between condition and anxiety were also significant,  $t = 5.25, p < .001$ , and  $t = 2.69, p < .01$ , respectively.

Therefore, we conducted separate hierarchical regression analyses for each condition. Table 8 presents the final results when all predictors are entered into the equation. In the first step, we entered the following variables as predictors of satisfaction: gender, age, education, condition, intercepts, and slopes. The model explained 6% and 11% of the variance in the unsupportive and supportive partner conditions, respectively. In both conditions, both intercept and slope were significant predictors of satisfaction, suggesting that if people themselves made positive choices at the beginning or if they increased the positivity of their choices at a faster rate, they felt more satisfied with the interaction.

In the second step, we entered attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance, which yielded a significant increase in  $R^2$  in both conditions; in the unsupportive condition,  $\Delta R^2 = .01, F(2, 4614) = 27.04, p < .001$ , and in the supportive condition,  $\Delta R^2 = .03, F(2, 4531) = 86.14, p < .001$ . That is, as in

**Table 8.** Regression Equation Predicting Satisfaction With the Fictitious Relationship Partner in Study 2

Variable	$\beta$		<i>t</i>	
	Unresponsive Partner	Responsive Partner	Unresponsive Partner	Responsive Partner
Age	-.04***	-.09***	-2.79	-6.00
Education level	.01	-.04***	0.62	-2.96
Gender	.10***	.08***	6.80	5.48
Individual intercept	.28***	.33***	14.01	17.29
Individual slope	.19***	.24***	9.87	12.89
Anxiety	.04**	-.02	2.69	-1.18
Avoidance	-.09***	-.13***	-5.91	-8.27
KNOWI-readiness	.09***	.22***	6.12	14.64
KNOWI-accuracy	-.05***	.05***	-3.20	3.58

In the unresponsive partner condition,  $R^2 = .09$ ,  $f^2 = .10$ . In the responsive partner condition,  $R^2 = .19$ ,  $f^2 = .23$ . KNOWI = Knowledge of Indicators. \*\* $p < .05$ , \*\*\* $p < .01$ .

Study 1, the attachment dimensions predicted relationship satisfaction even when controlling for the participants' choices. This result suggests that the two attachment dimensions affect relationship satisfaction for reasons that have nothing to do with the partner's behavior (all participants within a condition were presented with the same partner behaviors) or with the person's own choices (intercept and slope were controlled in the regression equation).

As in Study 1, avoidance predicted lower satisfaction in both conditions. Ironically, anxiety predicted higher satisfaction in the unsupportive condition (but was not a significant predictor in the supportive condition). To better understand this interaction effect, we examined the effect of condition (supportive partner vs. unsupportive partner) when anxiety was either high or low (i.e., at 1 *SD* above or 1 *SD* below the mean). This analysis of simple slopes showed that at both levels of anxiety satisfaction with the supportive partner was higher than satisfaction with the unsupportive partner. However, this effect was stronger when anxiety was low ( $\beta = .36$ ,  $t = 26.85$ ,  $p < .001$ ) compared to when anxiety was high ( $\beta = .31$ ,  $t = 22.95$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Thus, high attachment anxiety seems to lessen the appreciation of having a supportive partner.

In the final step, we entered KNOWI-accuracy and KNOWI-readiness, which resulted in another significant increase in  $R^2$ ; in the unsupportive condition,  $\Delta R^2 = .01$ ,  $F(2, 4612) = 32.95$ ,  $p < .001$ , and in the supportive condition,  $\Delta R^2 = .04$ ,  $F(2, 4529) = 107.40$ ,  $p < .001$ . As expected, higher KNOWI-accuracy was associated with lower satisfaction with the unsupportive partner but with higher satisfaction with the supportive partner. That is, the more knowledge participants had, the less satisfied they were with the

unsupportive partner and the more satisfied they were with the supportive partner. It seems that knowledge about indicators of supportiveness makes a person detect the supportiveness of the partner in the story, which affects how much the person is satisfied with that partner.

According to theories of trust and risk regulation, perceiving a partner's behavior as responsive is crucial to making judgments about how much that partner can be trusted to be supportive and affects how much risk the person is willing to take (Murray et al., 2006). It may be argued that the Relationship Assessment Scale (Hendrick, 1988) in essence measures the participants' trust in the fictitious partner; therefore, results concerning this measure can contribute to theories on trust and risk regulation. In fact, four items of this scale specifically concern trust and felt security (e.g., "This person is someone I could trust"). Analyses using only these items of the Relationship Assessment Scale led to very similar results and identical conclusions, providing support for the argument by Collins et al. (2004) that "felt security within a relationship should therefore depend in large part on whether one's partner is perceived to be both willing and able to be responsive to one's own needs" (p. 212). These results further suggest that avoidant people distrust all partners and knowledgeable people use the relevant cues about each specific partner to decide how much to trust that specific partner.

KNOWI-readiness was associated with higher satisfaction in both conditions. However, this association was stronger in the supportive partner condition (based on the significant interaction between condition and KNOWI-readiness). We reasoned that high motivation for support leads people to project their motivation for support to their partners, which in turn leads to a more positive evaluation. The significant interaction suggests that this is more likely to happen when the partner is actually supportive.

It is important to note that in Study 2 partner behavior was held constant regardless of the participant's choices. Therefore, the effects on satisfaction cannot be mediated by the behaviors that the participant's own decisions elicited from the partner. Thus, the effects on satisfaction must be mediated by the participant's idiosyncratic perceptions of their partners.

### Summary of Results

Regardless of whether individuals interacted with a consistently supportive or unsupportive partner, more secure individuals, individuals with more knowledge about the indicators of a supportive partner, and individuals with stronger motivation for support were more likely to select the positive option—both at the start and throughout the story. These results replicate the findings of Study 1.

People who made the positive choice at the start of the story or increased the positivity of their choices at a faster rate felt more satisfied with the interaction. On average, highly avoidant individuals were less satisfied with the interaction regardless of condition and attachment anxiety lessened the

appreciation of having a supportive partner. Importantly, individuals who had greater knowledge of indicators of supportiveness were more satisfied when they had a supportive partner and less satisfied when they had an unsupportive partner. This finding highlights the importance of knowledge in evaluating relationship partners.

## General Discussion

Why do some relationships fail while others flourish? What makes some people more likely to develop satisfying intimate relationships in which partners are supportive of each other? These studies suggest several important factors: whether people (a) can recognize relationship-enhancing behaviors, (b) actually carry out relationship-enhancing behaviors, and (c) can identify supportive partners.

Although previous research has demonstrated that attachment affects decision making and satisfaction in romantic relationships (Collins, 1996; Vicary & Fraley, 2007), it has remained unclear how knowledge and motivation may come into play as well. These studies extend previous research by assessing the independent effects that knowledge, attachment, and motivation exert on decisions and satisfaction. First, knowledge of the indicators of a supportive partner seems to translate into identifying relationship-enhancing behaviors in a relationship. However, simply having knowledge does not seem to guarantee that one will make the best decisions, for when participants were asked to select the options they would actually make in a relationship, knowledge did not matter.

If knowledge does not affect the decisions one will make in a relationship, what does? These studies suggest that one's attachment orientation influences the choices made at the start of and throughout an interaction. Highly anxious and highly avoidant individuals were less likely to make the positive choice compared to more secure individuals. Finally, motivation for a supportive partner seems to play a key role: People who are motivated to have a warm, supporting relationship make the decisions that are most likely to bring about this type of relationship.

How do these factors play out in terms of satisfaction? First, motivation seems to be important: People who had a stronger motive for social support were more satisfied with the interaction, perhaps simply because they projected their own focus on support to their partners. In general, participants were more satisfied with the supportive partner compared to the unsupportive partner. However, this difference was smaller for participants high in attachment anxiety, which suggests that attachment anxiety lessens the appreciation of having a supportive partner.

This may be because anxious people have chronic fears that their partner will reject or abandon them. Therefore, they may never be fully convinced that their partner is actually supportive or that their partner will continue to provide support. They may also be reluctant to allow themselves to fully trust

partners in an attempt to prevent future rejection or disappointment. Study 1 found that attachment anxiety predicts a slower rate of identifying and choosing relationship-enhancing options. In addition, Study 2 found that individuals high in attachment anxiety show a smaller difference in satisfaction when the partner is supportive rather than non-supportive. One might hypothesize that both of these associations arise because individuals high in attachment anxiety are slower to trust partners because they want to avoid rejection and disappointment.

Finally and most importantly, the impact of knowledge on satisfaction is apparent. If one has a supportive, warm partner, then having the knowledge of the accurate cues of partner supportiveness seems to help a person appreciate such a partner. However, if the partner is unsupportive, knowledge reduces satisfaction, presumably because the person is able to detect the unsupportiveness. Thus, satisfaction seems to depend on the interaction of two factors: (a) the partner's qualities and (b) the person's knowledge. This finding suggests that future research may benefit from focusing on both of these factors instead of examining each in isolation.

In brief, the findings of these studies indicate that relationship knowledge plays an important role in two separate processes that are crucial to the development of supportive relationships: (a) identifying supportive partners and (b) identifying relationship-enhancing options.

## Limitations and Future Directions

These studies, although providing an initial examination of an important issue, have limitations. The *Choose Your Own Adventure* paradigm allowed us to assess relationship behavior in a controlled setting (e.g., where we could hold partner behavior constant across participants, as in Study 2) using a fictitious relationship. More research is needed to assess the generalizability of these findings to actual relationships. In addition, longitudinal research could help to determine the roles that these constructs play at different stages of a relationship.

We found that knowledge affects a person's ability to recognize whether a partner is supportive. However, recognizing that a partner is not supportive would not automatically lead to relationship dissolution. Future studies should examine factors that play a role in choosing to end an unsatisfactory relationship with an unsupportive partner.

Highly significant statistical effects across two studies supported many of our theoretical predictions. However, some of the effect sizes were quite small. As discussed by Abelson (1985) and Prentice and Miller (1992) large effect sizes cannot be expected from a very thin slice of behavior. As such, we did not expect large effects in these studies, in which participants reported choices and judgments about a single interaction with a hypothetical partner possessing many unspecified qualities. Small effects are, nevertheless,

considered to be important when they (a) accumulate over time to produce large effects in the long run—when the process gets repeated many times in the real world,<sup>3</sup> (b) are theoretically important, and (c) have important practical implications (Abelson, 1985; Prentice & Miller, 1992). In an actual relationship, choices and judgments of satisfaction are accumulated over time, which then should result in more pronounced effects on the relationship.

Additionally, there are countless factors that can influence people's decision making and satisfaction in romantic relationships, many of which we could not control in our studies. Indeed, given the large number of factors that potentially contribute to the variation in people's choices and satisfaction, it could be argued that it is surprising that we see any of the effects reported in these studies. Future research should further examine choices and satisfaction in relationships by examining cumulative effects and by including factors that have not been measured in these studies. For example, relationship experience may affect knowledge, and the presence or absence of alternative partners may influence satisfaction.

In sum, being in a romantic relationship requires one to make many decisions. The course of action a person chooses in these situations and the satisfaction the person experiences are based on many factors, including the person's knowledge, attachment, and motivation. Importantly, the effects of these factors may also depend on what kind of partner one has, as people higher in relationship knowledge tend to feel more satisfied with a supportive partner but less satisfied with an unsupportive partner. In other words, one's predispositions influence relationship satisfaction, both independent of and in conjunction with one's partner.

### Acknowledgment

We are indebted to Carol Dweck for valuable comments on the manuscript.

### Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared that they had no conflicts of interests with respect to their authorship or the publication of this article.

### Funding

The authors declared that they received no financial support for their research and/or authorship of this article.

### Notes

1. We reasoned that completing the Knowledge of Indicators (KNOWI) Task before the story task would not affect participants' choices. Nevertheless, In Study 2 we switched the order of these two tasks and replicated findings of Study 1 concerning the should condition.

2. These two indexes only approximate the parameters of interest because the choices are binary—coded 0 or 1 for relationship-detrimental and relationship-enhancing choices, respectively.

3. In Abelson's (1985) famous example, batting skill of a baseball player accounts for only 0.3% of variance in whether the player gets a hit or not at any single time at bat. Abelson argued that when the effects of explanatory variables accumulate over time (e.g., over the whole baseball season) small effects become very important.

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