TESIS DOCTORAL

La victimización en las relaciones románticas: El papel del apego y las estrategias de resolución de conflictos

Victimization in romantic relationships: The role of attachment and conflict resolution strategies

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Universidad de La Laguna
La Laguna, 2017

UNIVERSIDAD DE LA LAGUNA

FACULTAD DE CIENCIAS DE LA SALUD (SECCIÓN PSICOLOGÍA)

Departamento de Psicología Cognitiva, Social y Organizacional

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La Laguna, a 03 de Abril de 2017

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Por un mundo donde seamos socialmente iguales,
humanamente diferentes y totalmente libres

Rosa Luxemburgo

Agradecimientos

Aún recuerdo mis primeros años en la universidad y la seguridad de que nunca me dedicaría a la investigación. ¡No podía estar más equivocada! No voy a negar que haya sido un camino difícil con muchos momentos de frustración, desmotivación y desesperanza. Sin embargo, los aspectos positivos han primado y, a día de hoy, no es solo que me quiera desarrollar profesionalmente en este ámbito, sino que mis ganas por querer saber, analizar y encontrar respuestas han ido en aumento. La satisfacción personal en este punto del camino me desborda, pero esta tesis no es solo mía. Está compuesta de muchos grandes corazones que me han apoyado, me han ayudado a levantarme y me han motivado a recoger la toalla y continuar.

Rosaura, no hay palabras suficientes de agradecimiento. Desde el principio y sin conocerme, me abriste las puertas de tu despacho y confiaste en mí. Me has guiado en este proceso desde tu conocimiento, constancia y esfuerzo, mientras que desde la generosidad, me has dado alas para volar. Gracias por enseñarme y volcarte conmigo, por tus palabras reconfortantes, por tu apoyo y por animarme en esta carrera de fondo. Eres un verdadero ejemplo a seguir.

Danke schön Barbara. Your generosity is immense and I feel very grateful for your time, support, and kindness to me. Working under your supervision has been really important in my PhD training, and your professional guidance was an essential component to complete my thesis. Thank you once again.

Quisiera mostrar también mi gratitud a Gustavo. Tu dedicación ha jugado un papel importante en esta tesis. A Juan Andrés por tu R que R y tu paciencia infinita para enseñarme. Y a Naira, porque llenas de alegría e ilusión todo lo que tocas y te has convertido en un valiosísimo modelo.

Many thanks to all the members of the committee, as well as Tara Cornelius and Marie-France Lafontaine who act as international expert reviewers, for accepting to evaluate this thesis.

Los pilares fundamentales de mi vida también han tenido un papel relevante. Débora, siempre me has recordado cuál era mi sueño y no me has permitido abandonarlo. Me encanta tu capacidad de apoyar sin juzgar, de quererme y de estar disponible cada vez que te necesito. Eres una de las grandes responsables de que esta tesis haya llegado a su fin, pero también estás detrás de las decisiones más importantes que he tomado en los últimos años. Jesús, qué bonito es tenerte en mi vida y disfrutar de nuestras conversaciones absurdas, profundas o irónicas en cualquier rincón. Mis años en Granada y los recuerdos de esa época no serían tan felices si tu no hubieras formado parte de ellos. Fernando, eres capaz de darme lo que necesito en cada momento y, tan sólo nos basta una mirada para entendernos. Me encanta tener un amigo tan cómplice, pero sobre todo tan buena persona. Le habéis puesto banda sonora a mi vida y pensar en vosotros me hace sonreír. ¡Os quiero!

Gracias a Truski y Adeychi, porque con vosotras la palabra amistad cobra otro significado y la distancia desaparece con sólo escucharos. Me siento muy afortunada de teneros y de saber que llegaremos a doñitas queriéndonos igual. Rocío, un mes en Tenerife fue suficiente para querer contagiarme de tu emoción y tus ganas de convertir el mundo en un lugar más humano. Isabell, gracias por llenar de luz y calor los días fríos y grises de Berlín. Me ha encantado conocerte y compartir contigo nuestros momentos berlineses. Thanks Daniel for assisting me each time I have needed you. You are a wonderful soul. Naza, reencontrarte en Berlín fue un regalo que me hace muy feliz, porque siempre has sido un hombro al que poder arrimarme. Gracias por todas esas tardes de cafés y por tu infinita ayuda.

Madre, a ti quiero agradecerte tu generosidad al recibirme con los brazos abiertos y tu orgullo inagotable hacia mi. Por demostrarme que, con esfuerzo es posible lograr todo lo que te propongas. Eres una luchadora y una valiente.

Gracias padre por enseñarme lo que es el amor al trabajo y darme lo que he podido necesitar a lo largo del camino. Mi dedicación a la investigación se ha convertido en un apasionante hobby desde esta perspectiva.

Amor, con todas sus letras, es lo que tenemos nosotros, Salva. Me has seguido cada vez que te lo he pedido y has acortado la distancia cuando esta era inevitable. Me apoyas en cada paso, regalándome tu paciencia para mostrarme cuando estoy en el camino equivocado. Llenas mis días de felicidad, complicidad y cariño, haciéndome ver que todo es fácil y posible. Gracias por ser mi compañero de vida.

Al resto de amigxs y familiares, gracias porque de una forma u otra habéis sido estado presente. Sois una gran red social en la que descansar cuando hace falta, con la que compartir mis locuras y mis alegrías, y con la que disfrutar de la vida.

Índice

Overview

Dating violence (DV) is a widespread problem, which is defined as the psychological, physical and/or sexual abuse within a romantic relationship (*Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, 2016). These harmful dynamics can start in adolescence and may be repeated in future relationships (Cui, Ueno, Gordon, & Fincham, 2013) with serious health consequences for young victims (Exner-Cortens, Eckenrode, & Rothman, 2013; Teten et al., 2009). Research on DV has identified several personal factors involved that may converge with specific situational factors, increasing the likelihood to victimization. For instance, romantic attachment perspective has been useful for understanding interpersonal processes. In particular, insecure attachment styles have been linked to negative management of conflicts, which may lead into destructive communication patterns (Fowler & Dillow, 2011; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2012). Thus, the use of these destructive conflict resolution strategies with in partner relationships facilitates the escalation of disagreements to violence (Katz & Myhr, 2008; Messinger, Rickert, Fry, Lessel, & Davidson, 2012).

Most of the available data on DV victimization and its association with romantic attachment and conflict resolution have been obtained in adult couples. Although literature suggests that these links may be similar in adolescents and young adults, findings cannot be extrapolated directly because both age groups show different characteristics, related to the period of development (Shorey, Cornelius, & Bell, 2008). Accordingly, this dissertation attempts to clarify how attachment styles and conflict resolution strategies used within romantic relationships make teenagers and adults more likely to experience DV. From our perspective, analyzing factors related to victimization does not imply victim blaming (Hamby & Grych, 2016). By contrast, it offers a clearer understanding of

how to develop prevention and intervention programs aimed at reducing these unhealthy relationships.

The present thesis encompasses four chapters. The Chapter 1 defines basic concepts and provides a theoretical review of some personal and situational factors that have been associated with DV in adolescence and early adulthood. Specifically, it focuses on romantic attachment and conflict resolution strategies as predictors of DV victimization. In Chapter 2, the reader will find the main aim of the thesis, as well as the set of particular goals of each empirical study. Chapter 3 contains the empirical studies of the thesis, which are presented through three published papers. Finally, the last chapter presents a general discussion and the main conclusions, as well as practical implications.

Given that the studies presented in third chapter of this thesis have been published in scientific journals, the reader will find that some concepts, theories and explanations inevitably appear several times. Moreover, in order to fulfill the requirements of the International Doctoral Program at University of La Laguna, Chapter 1 was written in Spanish, and the others in English.

Chapter 1

Introduction

1. Desarrollo de las relaciones románticas

La adolescencia es un periodo caracterizado por la coincidencia e interrelación de múltiples tareas del desarrollo (Little y Welsh, 2011). Durante esta etapa, los jóvenes[1] afrontan cambios físicos y emocionales, mientras adquieren diversas capacidades para responder a las nuevas demandas socioculturales, educativas y profesionales (Hurrelmann y Richter, 2006). Su identidad se va configurando bajo la presión del grupo de iguales, ya que les mueve una fuerte necesidad de aceptación y un elevado miedo al rechazo social (London, Thompson, Anderson y Velilla, 2011). Esto explica, por ejemplo, que tiendan a involucrarse en conductas de riesgo más a menudo que los adultos (Mahalik et al., 2013), y que lo hagan especialmente en presencia de sus iguales (Chein, Albert, O 'brien, Uckert y Steinberg, 2011). En este sentido, aunque los investigadores tienden a resaltar los aspectos negativos de tales conductas, la participación en actividades de riesgo cumple una importante función en la socialización y el desarrollo adolescente (Levesque, 2011).

El inicio de las relaciones íntimas es otra tarea relevante en el proceso evolutivo. En dicha tarea, influyen otras relaciones significativas (padres, amigos, etc.) que favorecen la formación de actitudes, expectativas y conductas sobre las relaciones románticas (Van De Bongardt, Yu, Deković y Meeus, 2017). A su vez, estas primeras experiencias van a contribuir a la configuración de la identidad y al desarrollo de habilidades relacionales en los jóvenes (Little y Welsh, 2011). Además, representan una oportunidad de aprendizaje que condiciona la naturaleza, la calidad y la

1 A lo largo de esta introducción, se utilizará el masculino como género gramatical para describir a la población femenina y masculina, con el objeto de facilitar la lectura.

duración de las relaciones posteriores (Little y Welsh, 2011). En este sentido, los datos reflejan que aunque las parejas de jóvenes adultos y adolescentes tienen características comunes, también pueden mostrar diferencias relacionadas con el periodo evolutivo en el que se encuentran (Shorey et al., 2008). En general, la duración y el número de estas experiencias románticas tienden a aumentar a medida que nos acercamos a los primeros años de la edad adulta (Shulman y Connolly, 2013). Específicamente, mientras la duración media entre los más jóvenes tiende a ser de unos pocos meses, los de más edad suelen mantener relaciones más duraderas, con una media de 20 meses (Carver, Joyner y Udry, 2003; Little y Welsh, 2011). Asimismo, las relaciones tienden a caracterizarse por mayores niveles de compromiso, apoyo e intimidad a partir de la adolescencia tardía, entre 17 a 25 años. En este periodo, tiende a pasarse más tiempo a solas con la pareja y a mantener más relaciones sexuales, en comparación con las relaciones románticas que se establecen a edades más tempranas (Meier y Allen, 2009; Seiffge-Krenke, 2003). No obstante, aunque la mayoría de los jóvenes manifiesta sentir satisfacción y cercanía con sus parejas (Seiffge-Krenke y Burk, 2015), algunas de estas relaciones pueden llegar a ser violentas.

2. La violencia en las relaciones románticas

Aunque la mayoría de los jóvenes califica sus relaciones como satisfactorias y positivas, la violencia afecta a un número importante de relaciones románticas durante la adolescencia y el inicio de la edad adulta (Teten et al., 2009). Los datos revelan que alrededor del 23% de adolescentes (Vagi, O'Malley Olsen, Basile y Vivolo-Kantor, 2015; Viejo, Monks, Sanchez y Ortega-Ruiz, 2015; Ybarra, Espelage, Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Korchmaros y Boyd, 2016) y el 37% de jóvenes adultos (Straus y Gozjolko, 2014; Ybarra et al., 2016) se ven implicados en relaciones violentas. Dicha violencia engloba principalmente tres formas de agresión (*Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, 2016): a) el *abuso psicológico*, que incluye intimidación verbal, humillaciones, aislamiento social de la víctima, conductas de control, dominación y amenazas; b) la *agresión física*, que se manifiesta a través de golpes, bofetadas, empujones e intentos de provocar asfixia; y c) el *abuso sexual*, que puede presentarse en forma de violencia

sexual, lo que implica el uso de la fuerza física para conseguir sexo en contra de la voluntad de la otra persona, o en forma de coerción sexual, que consiste en el uso de tácticas no físicas como la presión verbal, el chantaje emocional y la manipulación destinadas a lograr que la pareja acceda a mantener relaciones sexuales no deseadas (Degue y DiLillo, 2004; Krahé, Tomaszewska, Kuyper y Vanwesenbeeck, 2014; Koss y Oros, 1982).

Con respecto a la prevalencia, existe un amplio consenso al señalar el abuso psicológico como la forma de violencia más frecuente entre los jóvenes, seguida por la agresión física (Coker et al., 2014; Haynie et al., 2013; Muñoz-Rivas, Graña, O'Leary y González, 2007). En cuanto al abuso sexual, la coerción suele ser más utilizada que otras formas de agresión sexual más graves (Muñoz-Rivas, Graña, O'Leary y González, 2009). La prevalencia de esta forma de coerción tiende a aumentar con la edad, ya que parece estar relacionada con las relaciones sexuales activas (Calvete, Orue, Gamez-Guadix y López de Arroyabe, 2016; Katz, Tirone y Schukrafft, 2012). De hecho, un 3% de adolescentes informa haber sufrido coerción sexual (Teten et al., 2009; Ybarra, et al., 2016), porcentaje que llega hasta el 21% entre el estudiantado universitario (Katz y Myhr, 2008; Salwen y O'Leary, 2013).

Los estudios longitudinales indican que las relaciones violentas siguen distintas trayectorias (Brooks-Russell, Foshee y Ennett, 2013; Orpinas, Hsieh, Song, Holland y Nahapetyan, 2013). En algunos casos, la violencia tiende a ser más grave y a seguir un patrón de género marcado. En la mayoría, en cambio, la violencia suele ser menos grave y remitir con el tiempo, mostrando un patrón frecuentemente bidireccional (Desmarais, Reeves, Nicholls, Telford y Fiebert, 2012; Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Misra, Selwyn y Rohling, 2012; Straus y Gozjolko, 2014).

El Modelo General de Agresión (GAM, Anderson y Bushman, 2002) ofrece un marco explicativo para abordar la conducta agresiva. Concretamente, plantea la existencia de una serie de factores de riesgo que predisponen a la agresión y que tienen su origen en procesos distales, así como de otros factores situacionales que actúan como desencadenantes más directos del comportamiento agresivo. De acuerdo con esta perspectiva, la violencia en las relaciones románticas puede verse facilitada por la interacción entre distintos atributos personales y situacionales que afectan a la toma de decisiones (DeWall, Anderson y Bushman, 2011). La

posibilidad de aplicar este modelo a la victimización dentro de las relaciones de pareja apenas ha sido explorada. Sin embargo, sabemos que algunos factores distales pueden incrementar la vulnerabilidad frente a la victimización (Hamby y Grych, 2013) y que algunas condiciones del entorno contribuyen a potenciar dicha vulnerabilidad (Carbone-Lopez y Kruttschnitt, 2010; Gonzalez-Mendez, Martín y Hernández-Abrante, 2014). Desde este enfoque, la dinámica durante los conflictos puede entenderse como un contexto situacional donde confluyen los riesgos y vulnerabilidades que cada miembro de la pareja trae a la relación. Así, por ejemplo, se ha señalado que las dinámicas románticas disfuncionales pueden derivar de las creencias que los jóvenes mantienen sobre sí mismos y los demás, así como de la falta de regulación emocional y de habilidades interpersonales (Collins, Welsh y Furman, 2009; Rubio-Garay, Carrasco, Amor y López-González, 2015; Zimmermann y Iwanski, 2014). Más concretamente, la victimización en el noviazgo se ha relacionado tanto con los estilos de apego romántico como con las estrategias de resolución de conflictos. Desde este enfoque, una vez que la conducta disfuncional se convierte en parte del repertorio habitual de los jóvenes, pueden activarse guiones comportamentales que se vuelven más accesibles durante las interacciones de pareja (Huesmann y Kirwil, 2007). De este modo, mientras los individuos con apego seguro tienden a usar estrategias positivas (Exner-Cortnes, 2014; Tan et al., 2016), aquellos con apego inseguro suelen mostrar conductas destructivas en su intento de solucionar las discrepancias con la pareja (Collins, Ford, Guichard y Allard, 2006; Feeney y Karantzas, 2017; Sierau y Herzberg, 2012). Además, es frecuente que los conflictos en las parejas jóvenes y adolescentes escalen hasta alcanzar la violencia (Messinger, Fry, Rickert, Catallozzi y Davidson, 2014).

En este sentido, entender qué hace a las personas más vulnerables frente a la violencia, no implica culpabilizar a las víctimas, ya que la responsabilidad siempre es de la persona agresora (Hamby y Grych, 2016). Por el contrario, dicha información es fundamental para desarrollar y mejorar las intervenciones con adolescentes y jóvenes adultos. Especialmente, si se considera que los patrones tempranos de abuso pueden reiterarse en las futuras relaciones de pareja (Cui, et al., 2013), y que la victimización tiene múltiples consecuencias adversas para la salud y el bienestar (Exner-Cortens et al., 2013; Muñoz-Rivas et al., 2007).

3. El apego romántico

La teoría del apego (Bowlby, 1973) ha demostrado ser esencial para entender las relaciones interpersonales. Desde esta perspectiva, se postula que las características de las interacciones tempranas con los cuidadores guían las actitudes, creencias, pensamientos y expectativas sobre las relaciones cercanas a lo largo de la vida (Mikulincer y Shaver, 2012). De este modo, el sistema de apego descansa sobre modelos internos que las personas mantienen sobre sí mismas y sobre los demás. Estas representaciones pueden ser positivas o negativas en la medida en la que el individuo se percibe como merecedor de amor y apoyo, y percibe a los otros como sensibles y dignos de confianza para satisfacer sus necesidades de apego (Gillath, Karantzas y Fraley, 2016). Actualmente, se asume la existencia de diferentes estilos de apego, que emergen a partir de dos dimensiones: la *ansiedad* ante el abandono y la *evitación* de la intimidad (Mikulincer y Shaver, 2012). En este sentido, los individuos con altos niveles de ansiedad consideran que no son dignos de amor, por lo que sienten miedo a ser rechazados, a la vez que muestran una fuerte necesidad de intimidad. Por el contrario, las personas con altos niveles de evitación perciben que los demás no son merecedores de su confianza, prefiriendo el distanciamiento emocional y exhibiendo malestar ante la proximidad y la dependencia. Frente a estos individuos inseguros, aquellos con apego seguro (bajos niveles de ansiedad y evitación) poseen modelos positivos sobre sí mismos y los demás, por lo que tienden a mostrar comodidad con la intimidad e independencia.

Según la investigación en este ámbito, la mayoría de los individuos busca conexiones con otras personas fuera del contexto familiar, añadiendo nuevas figuras significativas en el sistema de apego a lo largo del ciclo vital (Simpson, Collins, Farrell y Raby, 2015). A partir de la adolescencia, la pareja suele ser incorporada a este sistema, convirtiéndose a menudo en la figura principal de apego durante la edad adulta (Exner-Cortnes, 2014). En el transcurso de este proceso, las características de las experiencias románticas tempranas se añaden a los modelos internos que las personas sostienen sobre las relaciones íntimas, transfiriendo a las sucesivas relaciones las creencias, pensamientos y expectativas adquiridas (Gillath et al., 2016). De este modo, si las primeras relaciones adolescentes son positivas y se fundamentan en el cariño, el compromiso y un

buen ajuste emocional, es altamente probable que se activen representaciones de apego seguro durante las dinámicas relacionales posteriores. Si, por el contrario, las relaciones románticas tempranas se basan en el rechazo y en la falta de disponibilidad y apoyo, aumenta la posibilidad de que los estilos de apego inseguros se vean potenciados en sucesivas relaciones (Simpson et al., 2015).

El apego romántico permite explicar diferentes procesos que se desarrollan en el ámbito de las relaciones íntimas, especialmente en situaciones de cambio o estrés. Por ejemplo, los estilos de apego se han asociado a la atracción y selección de pareja (Brumbaugh, Baren y Agishtein, 2014; Holmes y Johnson, 2009), a la ruptura y disolución de la relación (Gilbert y Sifers, 2011; Marshall, Bejanyan y Ferenczi, 2013), al manejo de los conflictos (Fowler y Dillow, 2011; Sierau y Herzberg, 2012) y a las diferentes formas de violencia (Capaldi, Knoble, Shortt y Kim, 2012; Yarkovsky y Fritz, 2014).

4. Las estrategias de resolución de conflictos en parejas

La interdependencia entre los miembros de las parejas proporciona un contexto en el que expresar los desacuerdos, las diferencias y las incompatibilidades (Feeney y Karantzas, 2017). Pese a que estas situaciones de conflicto son inevitables, la forma en la que se abordan puede fortalecer la intimidad y el compromiso (Cupach, Canary y Spitzberg, 2010) o, por el contrario, puede reducir el bienestar subjetivo y llevar a la disolución de la relación (Gottman, 1994; Siffert y Schwarz, 2011). En este sentido, se han identificado principalmente tres estrategias de resolución de conflictos. Por un lado, el *estilo constructivo* engloba conductas positivas y de negociación tales como atender las quejas de la pareja, asumir la responsabilidad y dar apoyo. Por otro, los estilos destructivos incluyen la *implicación conflictiva*, que conlleva el uso de ataques personales, confrontación, manipulación y culpabilización de la pareja; y la *retirada*, que supone distanciamiento físico y emocional, rechazo a discutir temas en los que hay desacuerdo y evitación de las situaciones de conflicto (Feeney y Karantzas, 2017).

Aunque los adolescentes tienden a implicarse más en los conflictos con sus parejas que con otras personas significativas como los progenitores o los iguales (Furman y Shomaker, 2008), la mayoría suele emplear estrategias positivas o ignorar los conflictos con el objetivo de preservar sus relaciones románticas (Shulman, Tuval-Mashiach, Levran y Anbar, 2006). No obstante, una comunicación eficaz supone un desafío importante para los adolescentes, al requerir un nivel de regulación emocional y unas habilidades interpersonales de las que muchos carecen (Moed et al., 2015; Zimmermann y Iwanski, 2014). Esto permite explicar por qué algunos adolescentes tienden a usar estilos destructivos como la implicación conflictiva o la retirada (Furman y Shomaker, 2008). Asimismo, los investigadores han señalado la importancia de analizar la conducta de ambas personas en las relaciones interpersonales, ya que las estrategias empleadas por un miembro de la pareja están interrelacionadas con las estrategias empleadas por el otro, estableciéndose así *patrones de comunicación* destructivos que pueden perpetuarse en la relación (Paradis, Hébert y Fernet, 2017). Concretamente, los adolescentes pueden exhibir un *patrón de minimización*, en el que ambos le restan importancia a la discusión y evitan la confrontación o, por el contrario, pueden enfrentarse activamente, generando una *escalada de los conflictos* (Fernet, Hébert y Paradis, 2016; Shulman et al., 2006). Por su parte, el patrón de *demanda/retirada* consiste en que, mientras uno critica, acosa e interpela a su pareja, la otra persona evita el conflicto a través del silencio, cambiando de tema y alejándose emocional o físicamente de la situación. Este patrón ha sido ampliamente estudiado en población adulta (Schrodt, Witt y Shimkowski, 2014), así como en la relación entre adolescentes y sus progenitores (Caughlin y Ramey, 2005), pero hay muy pocos estudios que se hayan ocupado de su identificación en las primeras relaciones románticas.

De acuerdo a lo mencionado anteriormente, las estrategias empleadas para resolver los conflictos son importantes en la dinámica de las relaciones románticas. Por ello, es necesario contar con instrumentos capaces de medir tales habilidades si se quiere avanzar en el análisis de esta faceta del desarrollo adolescente. No obstante, en España no existe una herramienta adecuada que distinga entre formas destructivas de resolución de conflictos y otras formas más complejas de abuso emocional (Ureña, Romera, Casas, Viejo y Ortega-Ruiz, 2015). Aunque algunos cuestionarios, como el CADRI (Fernández-Fuertes,

Fuertes y Pulido, 2006) o el M-CTS (Muñoz-Rivas, Andreu, Graña, O'Leary y González, 2007), incluyen algunos ítems de resolución de conflictos, estos instrumentos no discriminan entre las diferentes estrategias y algunos de ellos son interpretados como indicadores de agresión psicológica (por ejemplo, "marcharse molesto de la habitación" o "negarse a hablar de un tema"). En este sentido, el *Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory* (CRSI; Kurdek, 1994) es un instrumento que ha demostrado ser eficaz para evaluar estas habilidades y los patrones de comunicación en diferentes relaciones románticas (Antle, Sullivan, Dryden, Karam y Barbee, 2011; Kurdek, 1994). Además, cuenta con dos versiones (CRSI-Yo/CRSI-Pareja), lo que permite analizar tanto las estrategias utilizadas por el participante como las percibidas en su pareja.

5. El apego romántico y las estrategias de resolución de conflictos

Como se ha indicado en párrafos anteriores, la mayoría de los adolescentes emplea estrategias positivas y de negociación para manejar los conflictos con la pareja (Shulman et al., 2006). Sin embargo, algunos de ellos tienden a usar estilos destructivos como la implicación conflictiva o la retirada (Furman y Shomaker, 2008). En este sentido, los estilos de apego permiten entender las diferencias individuales a la hora de abordar los conflictos en las relaciones románticas (Feeney y Karantzas, 2017). Así, mientras el apego seguro ha sido vinculado a habilidades positivas y constructivas de comunicación (Exner-Cortnes, 2014; Tan et al., 2016), los estilos de apego inseguros han sido asociados a estrategias destructivas, aunque con distintos procesos subyacentes para el apego ansioso y evitante. Específicamente, las personas con niveles de apego ansioso más altos pueden exhibir estrategias de retirada por temor a ser rechazadas, pero también tienden a manifestar conductas de implicación conflictiva, a modo de estrategia disfuncional, para asegurar la atención, el cuidado y el apoyo de la pareja (Fowler y Dillow, 2011). Por su parte, los individuos con niveles elevados de evitación son propensos a evadir la comunicación y a rehuir de los enfrentamientos (Fowler y Dillow, 2011). Sin embargo, cuando los conflictos escalan, pueden recurrir a la estrategia de implicación conflictiva como una forma de distanciarse de su pareja (Mikulincer y Shaver, 2012).

Los estilos de apego también influyen en la interpretación que las personas hacen del comportamiento de la pareja y de sus dinámicas relacionales. Las situaciones estresantes facilitan la activación de emociones negativas (Mikulincer y Shaver, 2012) y de esquemas relacionados con el apego inseguro (Furman y Shomaker, 2008). Esto hace más probable que, durante los conflictos, se juzgue la conducta de la pareja como hostil y negativa (Beck, Pietromonaco, DeVito, Powers, y Boyle, 2014). Además, las personas que emplean estrategias destructivas también son más propensas a este tipo de interpretaciones (Honeycutt, Sheldon, Pence y Hatcher, 2015). En este sentido, el apego ansioso está relacionado con la atribución de estrategias destructivas a la pareja y la percepción de un tono emocional negativo durante en la dinámica interpersonal (Feeney y Karantzas, 2017). En concreto, los individuos ansiosos pueden sentir que su pareja se evade de la situación y que no satisface sus necesidades de apego (Collins et al., 2006; Gallo y Smith, 2001). Este tipo de percepción predice conductas intrusivas, que el individuo ansioso emplea como una manera de obtener más cercanía de la pareja (Feeney y Karantzas, 2017). En esta situación, es probable que la pareja muestre conductas de implicación conflictiva, puesto que las personas con un estilo de apego ansioso tienden a describir que sus conflictos tienden a la escalada (Campbell, Simpson, Boldry y Kashy, 2005; Exner-Cortnes, 2014). Con respecto al apego evitante, los resultados son menos consistentes. Mientras algunos estudios han encontrado que los evitantes perciben poca sensibilidad y apoyo por parte de sus parejas (Beck et al., 2014; Segal y Fraley 2015), otros no han hallado ninguna asociación (Karantzas, Feeney, Goncalves y McCabe, 2014). No obstante, es plausible que puedan llegar a percibir que su pareja vulnera su necesidad de autonomía cuando ésta demanda cambios y se implica activamente en las discusiones, lo que se correspondería con el patrón de demanda/retirada.

Pese a que la mayoría de estos hallazgos se ha encontrado en parejas adultas, la investigación ofrece un marco útil para orientar los estudios en población adolescente. De hecho, la evidencia sugiere que la relación entre los estilos de apego y las estrategias de resolución de conflictos puede ser similar en este último grupo de edad. Sin embargo, los resultados no son directamente extrapolables, ya que adultos y adolescentes muestran múltiples diferencias al encontrarse en periodos evolutivos distintos (Shorey et al., 2008). Por tanto, se requiere más

investigación para confirmar que el apego romántico y los patrones destructivos de comunicación están vinculados en ambos grupos poblacionales.

6. Las estrategias de resolución de conflictos y la violencia en las parejas

El uso de un estilo constructivo de comunicación promueve relaciones de pareja positivas y satisfactorias, y crea un contexto que facilita la negociación y el compromiso (Cornelius, Alessi y Shorey, 2007). Por el contrario, las estrategias destructivas de resolución de conflictos tienden a asociarse a insatisfacción con la relación y a niveles más bajos de bienestar psicológico, lo que aumenta la probabilidad de que los conflictos escalen (Siffert y Schwarz, 2011) y deriven en violencia (Cornelius, Shorey y Beebe, 2010; Schrodt et al., 2014). De hecho, se ha sugerido que el análisis de tales dinámicas destructivas es esencial para entender las consecuencias de la violencia en jóvenes (Copp, Giordano, Longmore y Manning, 2016). Asimismo, las intervenciones destinadas a prevenir las relaciones violentas enfatizan la necesidad de mejorar las habilidades de comunicación, negociación y resolución de conflictos para aumentar la probabilidad de cambio del comportamiento violento (Cornelius y Resseguie, 2007; De La Rue, Polanin, Espelage y Pigott, 2016).

A pesar de la evidencia acumulada hasta ahora, la investigación en este ámbito presenta diversas carencias que merecen ser señaladas. Por un lado, algunos estudios han englobado en un mismo factor la implicación conflictiva y la retirada como si se tratara de un único componente (Paradis et al., 2017; Russell et al., 2014), a pesar de que se han definido como estrategias distintas (Feeney y Karantzas, 2017; Kurdek, 1994). Por otro lado, el análisis de la relación entre los patrones destructivos de comunicación y la violencia en las relaciones románticas ha recibido más atención desde la perspectiva de la perpetración (Burk y Seiffge-Krenke, 2015; Fernet et al., 2016). No obstante, los estudios que han explorado esta asociación desde el punto de vista de la víctima indican que las estrategias destructivas de resolución de conflictos también están relacionadas con la

victimización en algunos casos (Katz y Myhr, 2008; Messinger et al., 2012). Por ejemplo, estudios con adolescentes indican que si ambos miembros de la pareja usan la implicación conflictiva como estrategia, los conflictos pueden escalar, incrementándose la posibilidad de victimización (Messinger et al., 2012). La estrategia de retirada se ha vinculado a distintos resultados según quién la emplee. Específicamente, la victimización se ha asociado a las propias conductas de retirada (Katz y Myhr, 2008), pero no cuando es la pareja quien usa este estrategia (Messinger et al., 2012). Estos resultados van en la misma dirección que aquellos que señalan que los agresores tienden a percibir que sus parejas usan tanto la retirada como la implicación conflictiva (Katz, Carino y Hilton, 2002). Por tanto, considerando ambas perspectivas, los hallazgos sugieren que si la víctima usa estrategias destructivas de resolución de conflictos, se incrementa la probabilidad de experimentar violencia. Sin embargo, no sucede lo mismo si es el agresor el que se retira del conflicto.

7. La relación indirecta entre los estilos de apego y la victimización a través de las estrategias de resolución de conflictos

Identificar los procesos cognitivos y relacionales implicados en la violencia de pareja es fundamental para entender la naturaleza de este tipo de abuso (Calvete et al., 2016). Como se ha mencionado en epígrafes anteriores, los estilos de apego permiten entender las diferencias individuales a la hora de abordar los conflictos de pareja (Feeney y Karantzas, 2017). Además, las personas que usan estrategias destructivas, tienden a informar de patrones negativos de comunicación en su relación (Honeycutt et al., 2015). De este modo, algunas estrategias empleadas para solventar los conflictos pueden llevar a dinámicas relacionales destructivas que pueden alcanzar la violencia (Katz & Myhr, 2008; Messinger et al., 2012). Asimismo, el apego también ha sido relacionado con la victimización en las relaciones románticas. Específicamente, se ha mostrado que el apego ansioso y evitante predicen el abuso en las relaciones (Capaldi et al. , 2012; Yarkovsky y Fritz, 2014), incluso medido cuatro años después (Miga, Hare, Allen, & Manning, 2010).

Estos hallazgos parecen indicar que los estilos de apego y las estrategias de resolución de conflictos pueden converger en determinadas circunstancias, incrementando las probabilidades de experimentar violencia en la pareja. Específicamente, la evidencia sugiere que el apego inseguro y la victimización mantienen una relación indirecta, a través de las estrategias destructivas para solventar los conflictos. De acuerdo con esta línea de razonamiento, se ha encontrado que el apego inseguro y el uso frecuente de estrategias destructivas predicen conductas agresivas recíprocas en adolescentes (Burk y Seiffge-Krenke, 2015; Seiffge-Krenke y Burk, 2015). Además, en parejas adultas se ha observado mayor probabilidad de experimentar violencia entre quienes tienen un estilo de apego ansioso (Péloquin, Lafontaine y Brassard, 2011), especialmente cuando informan de estrategias destructivas durante sus conflictos (Bond y Bond, 2004).

A pesar de esta evidencia, apenas existen estudios que examinen conjuntamente el papel que desempeñan el apego y las estrategias de resolución de conflictos en la victimización de jóvenes adultos y adolescentes. Dado que la violencia en las relaciones de pareja es un fenómeno preocupante a nivel mundial, con importantes consecuencias para la población de adolescentes y jóvenes que la sufren (Exner-Cortens et al., 2013; Teten et al., 2009), la presente tesis doctoral pretende integrar dichos factores en un mismo análisis.

Chapter 2

Aims of the Research

As described in the introduction, both personal and situational factors are relevant to predict DV (DeWall et al., 2011; Hamby & Grych, 2013). Furthermore, evidence suggests that romantic attachment and conflict resolution strategies may converge, increasing the likelihood of experiencing DV (Capaldi et al., 2012; Cornelius et al., 2010; Messinger et al., 2012; Yarkovsky & Fritz, 2014). Nevertheless, the literature reveals that relatively little is known about the association between these factors and DV victimization in adolescence and early adulthood. In an effort to address these gaps and integrate prior research, the present dissertation is aimed at providing a better understanding of underlying processes associated to DV victimization. In particular, this thesis has examined the relationship between insecure attachment, self-reported conflict resolution strategies and those perceived in the partner, and several forms of DV victimization (Figure 1 shows the specific goals of each empirical study).

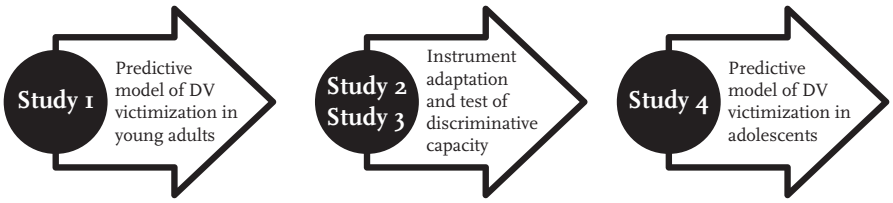

Figura 1. Sequence of studies developed.

As mentioned above, attachment framework has been useful for explaining interpersonal processes. Specifically, insecure attachment has been associated with destructive conflict resolution behaviors (Fowler & Dillow, 2011; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2012), as well as with the experienced DV (Capaldi et al., 2012;

Yarkovsky & Fritz, 2014). Likewise, negative communication patterns within romantic relationships predict high levels of DV. However, most of research has focused on perpetration of violence (Burk & Seiffge-Krenke, 2015; Fernet et al., 2016; Schrodt et al., 2014). Therefore, the main goal of the Study 1 was to unify previous research and to develop a predictive model of DV victimization in young adults. A twofold aim was followed. Firstly, to analyze the direct links between attachment styles, conflict resolution patterns, and experienced DV in the form of psychological abuse and sexual coercion. Secondly, to examine whether insecure attachment styles and DV victimization were indirectly related through conflict resolution styles, both self-reported and attributed to the partner.

The role of romantic attachment and conflict resolution in DV victimization has been explored especially in adults, while its study in adolescent population has received little attention. However, findings in adulthood cannot be extrapolated directly to adolescence (Shorey et al., 2008). Taking into account the need to provide empirical evidence, the next step was to replicate the unifying model in adolescent population. However, in Spain there were no appropriated scales to assess conflict styles used by teen partners. Given the importance of these interpersonal processes in first romantic experiences, it was considered necessary to have an instrument to measure conflict resolution strategies in this age group. In this sense, the *Conflict Resolution Strategies Inventory* (CRSI; Kurdek, 1994) was chosen because it has two versions (CRSI-Self/CRSI-Partner), making possible to evaluate the strategies of the participant and those perceived in the partner. The CRSI has also proved to be able to predict changes across different romantic relationships (opposite and same-sex couples, in courtship or married, with or without children). For instance, destructive conflict resolution strategies have been linked to dissatisfaction, poor subjective well-being, and low levels of marital quality (Scheeren, Vieira, Goulart, & Wagner, 2014; Siffert & Schwarz, 2011). Thus, the main goal of Study 2 was to analyze psychometric properties of the items and test the validity of this new adaptation through a related construct, such as trait anxiety. Furthermore, the Study 3 was conducted in order to verify the ability of the CRSI to discriminate between violent and non-violent adolescent partners.

The alarming prevalence rates of adolescents who experience DV and the important consequences for teenager´s psychological adjustment and well-being (Viejo et al., 2015) requires a greater understanding of factors related to teen DV victimization. However, the knowledge about the role of romantic attachment styles and conflict resolution strategies in DV victimization is scarce. Therefore, once the Spanish version of the CRSI showed to be a reliable instrument, the main objective of Study 4 was to develop an integrative model in this age population. Nevertheless, psychological abuse and physical aggression were the two forms of DV victimization evaluated, instead of sexual coercion. The reason for this change was that, according to the research on teen DV, the sexual coercion is less prevalent in early adolescence. Apart from that, the same double aim of Study 1 was pursued. Firstly, to examine the direct links between romantic attachment styles, conflict resolution strategies, and teen DV victimization. Secondly, to analyze the indirect relationship between insecure attachment and the two forms of victimization (psychological abuse and physical aggression) through conflict resolution strategies used by adolescents and perceived in their partners.

Chapter 3

Empirical Studies

Adult Attachment Styles, Destructive Conflict Resolution, and the Experience of Intimate Partner Violence[2]

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2 Paper published as: Bonache, H., Gonzalez-Mendez, R., & Krahé, B. (2016). Adult attachment styles, destructive conflict resolution, and the experience of intimate partner violence. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. doi: 10.1177/0886260516640776

Abstract

Although there is ample evidence linking insecure attachment styles and intimate partner violence (IPV), little is known about the psychological processes underlying this association, especially from the victim's perspective. The present study examined how attachment styles relate to the experience of sexual and psychological abuse, directly or indirectly through destructive conflict resolution strategies, both self-reported and attributed to their opposite-sex romantic partner. In an online survey, 216 Spanish undergraduates completed measures of adult attachment style, engagement and withdrawal conflict resolution styles shown by self and partner, and victimization by an intimate partner in the form of sexual coercion and psychological abuse. As predicted, anxious and avoidant attachment styles were directly related to both forms of victimization. Also, an indirect path from anxious attachment to IPV victimization was detected via destructive conflict resolution strategies. Specifically, anxiously attached participants reported a higher use of conflict engagement by themselves and by their partners. In addition, engagement reported by the self and perceived in partners was linked to an increased probability of experiencing sexual coercion and psychological abuse. Avoidant attachment was linked to higher withdrawal in conflict situations, but the paths from withdrawal to perceived partner engagement, sexual coercion, and psychological abuse were non-significant. No gender differences in the associations were found. The discussion highlights the role of anxious attachment in understanding escalating patterns of destructive conflict resolution strategies, which may increase the vulnerability to IPV victimization.

Keywords

Attachment styles, conflict resolution, intimate partner violence, psychological abuse, sexual coercion.

Introduction

Accumulating research indicates high prevalence rates of different forms of intimate partner violence (IPV) among college students, with a wealth of negative consequences on health and well-being (Kaukinen, 2014; Shorey, Febres, Brasfield, & Stuart, 2012). This has led researchers to investigate the factors that enable a better understanding of violence in intimate relationships. In this line of research, attachment theory has been proposed as an useful framework for analyzing psychological abuse (Doumas, Pearson, Elgin, & McKinley, 2008) and sexual coercion (Sutton & Simons, 2015), two forms of violence with high prevalence rates among college students (Krahé & Berger, 2013; Muñoz-Rivas, Graña, O'Leary, & González, 2009). However, the psychological processes underlying the association between attachment style and IPV are still not well understood (Péloquin, Lafontaine, & Brassard, 2011). One potential mechanism is couples' conflict resolution strategies, which have been related repeatedly to both adult attachment styles and differential vulnerability to IPV victimization. Specifically, insecure attachment has been linked to the use of negative communication patterns in handling conflicts in romantic relationships (Fowler & Dillow, 2011; Sierau & Herzberg, 2012). In some relationships, these patterns have also been associated with different forms of IPV (Katz & Myhr, 2008; Salwen & O'Leary, 2013). The majority of these studies have focused on the link between attachment style and IPV perpetration and have identified insecure attachment as a risk factor for abusive behavior toward an intimate partner among both men and women (e.g., Bélanger, Mathieu, Dugal, & Courchesne, 2015; Dutton, 2011).

A small number of studies have found that insecure attachment styles are also related to IPV victimization (e.g., Bookwala, 2002; Henderson, Bartholomew, Trinke, & Kwong, 2005; Higginbotham, Ketring, Hibbert, Wright, & Guarino, 2007; McKeown, 2014). To extend this limited body of research, the present study examined the role of conflict resolution styles (self-reported and attributed to the partner) as a variable underlying the relationship between adult attachment styles and vulnerability to two common forms of victimization in a sample of Spanish college students: psychological abuse and sexual coercion. Psychological abuse is composed of acts intended to humiliate, intimidate, threaten, dominate, or control the partner but do not include physical aggression (Shorey et al., 2012).

Verbal coercive sexual strategies, such as insistence or emotional blackmail, are also common in romantic relationships (Katz & Myhr, 2008).

Based on previous research, we investigated the proposition that insecure attachment is a vulnerability factor for IPV victimization. Research has shown both avoidantly attached and anxiously attached women to be more vulnerable of experiencing sexual victimization compared with securely attached women (Gentzler & Kerns, 2004), albeit through different pathways. Continued attempts by avoidantly attached individuals to avoid conflicts may contribute to undermine their confidence in their ability to prevent partner's abusive behavior. Moreover, anxiously attached individuals may be more likely to give in to unwanted sexual sex because they need sexual intimacy for reassurance and are afraid of eliciting negative affect in their partner. They may also be less able to reject psychological abuse for fear of alienating the partner. These considerations suggest that attachment style may be implicated in IPV victimization by facilitating patterns of communication that increases the occasions of abuse by an aggressive partner. Insecure attachment not only shapes people's own communication strategies in conflict situation, but also their perception of the partner's conflict resolution strategies, so that, for instance, anxiously attached individuals are more likely to perceive their partner as withdrawing in conflict situations.

Attachment Styles and Conflict Resolution

From an attachment perspective, it is assumed that experiences in early close relationships lead to the formation of internal working models that influence cognition, affect, and behavior in relationships with later attachment figures (Simpson, Rholes, & Winterheld, 2010). These working models are considered to be expressed as different attachment styles. While securely attached individuals (i.e., low attachment anxiety and avoidance) tend to show independence and comfort with intimacy, insecurely attached people tend to display a variety of dysfunctional thoughts and feelings about the self and others (Sierau & Herzberg, 2012). Specifically, individuals high on anxious attachment show a strong need for intimacy and fear of being rejected by their partners, whereas highly avoidant persons tend to show emotional detachment and self-sufficiency. Thus, dysfunctional thoughts and behaviors associated with these styles often

favor the use of destructive conflict resolution strategies of both partners (Fowler & Dillow, 2011; Sierau & Herzberg, 2012). Hence, depending on adult attachment style, conflicts may be resolved, remain unresolved, or get worse. It is important to note that in the present context, conflict styles are qualified as "destructive" in the sense of having the potential to destroy the relationship. This does not rule out the possibility that engagement or withdrawal may be functional for the victim in an abusive relationship. For example, withdrawal may be a more successful strategy than attempts at resolving a conflict through negotiation in relationship in which one partner coercively controls the other, as indeed it happens in the "intimate terrorism" (Johnson, 2006; Straus & Gozjolko, 2014).

Secure attachment has been associated with positive conflict resolution styles (Creasey & Ladd, 2005), whereas anxious attachment has been consistently linked to withdrawal strategies, such as refusing to discuss the issue further ignoring the partner, as well as to conflict engagement behaviors, such as personal attacks and losing control (Collins, Ford, Guichard, & Allard, 2006; Sierau & Herzberg, 2012). Specifically, anxiously attached individuals seem to fluctuate between withdrawal and active engagement through intrusive behaviors and criticisms; the former strategy being driven by their fear of rejection and the latter by trying to satisfy the needs for proximity, support, and love (Fowler & Dillow, 2011).

Moreover, individuals who endorse conflict engagement responses tend to see their relationship in a more negative light and make more negative interpretations of their partner's behaviors (Honeycutt, Sheldon, Pence, & Hatcher, 2015), especially when they score high in attachment anxiety (Collins et al., 2006). Thus, anxiously attached individuals may interpret their partner's transgressions either as hostility or withdrawal (Collins et al., 2006; Gallo & Smith, 2001). Likewise, higher levels of attachment anxiety have been related to the escalation of conflicts (Campbell, Simpson, Boldry, & Kashy, 2005). In this sense, anxious attachment seems to be related to both forms of destructive conflict strategies.

By contrast, an avoidant attachment style has been more frequently associated with evasive communication, avoiding disagreements, and getting away from conflicts (Fowler & Dillow, 2011). Therefore, it seems reasonable to expect that

while avoidantly attached individuals keep silent or use delaying tactics, their partners tend to criticize, demand changes, and engage in conflict.

Conflict Resolution Styles and IPV

Given that conflicts are an unavoidable feature of close relationships, a large body of research has examined how individuals' strategies for managing these conflicts relate to the functioning of the couple (McGinn, McFarland, & Christensen, 2009). According to this body of research, the use of a constructive style promotes positive and satisfying relationships, which generate more open discussions and compromise strategies in conflict situations (Cornelius, Alessi, & Shorey, 2007). By contrast, destructive conflict resolution strategies, such as conflict engagement and withdrawal, predicted poor satisfaction and subjective well-being in couples, increasing the likelihood that conflicts will escalate (Siffert & Schwarz, 2011).

Engagement/withdrawal is one destructive communication pattern that has received considerable attention. While one partner criticizes, annoys, and demands, the other partner evades the conflict through silence, changing the topic, or passively disengaging from the interaction (Christensen & Heavey, 1990). Despite early studies that found that the most common pattern was for women to actively engage in conflict and men to withdraw, more recent research has suggested that engaging or withdrawing depends not so much on gender, but on who generates the conflict topic (Eldridge, Sevier, Jones, Atkins, & Christensen, 2007; Holley, Sturm, & Levenson, 2010).

Although destructive conflict resolution styles have been most commonly associated with psychological abuse, they may also be linked to the perpetration of both physical aggression (Honeycutt et al., 2015) and sexual coercion (Katz & Myhr, 2008). Moreover, research has also examined links between IPV victimization and self-reported and partner-attributed conflict resolution styles. For example, sexual coercion (Leavitt & Willoughby, 2015; Salwen & O'Leary, 2013) and psychological abuse victimization (Hellmuth, Jaquier, Overstreet, Swan, & Sullivan, 2014) have been found to be related to self-reported conflict engagement, withdrawal, and miscommunication. Moreover, evidence has also

shown that partners' conflict engagement is strongly related to IPV victimization and perpetration (Bonache, Ramírez-Santana, Gonzalez-Mendez, in press; Carlson & Jones, 2010). Thus, victims of emotional abuse reported that their partners show a frequent engagement communication pattern (Katz & Myhr, 2008) and aggressors admitted showing conflict engagement behaviors (Fournier, Brassard, & Shaver, 2011). These findings suggest that victims' attributions of partner engagement are matched by aggressors' reported engagement. By contrast, findings on withdrawal strategies do not show a consistent relation to IPV victimization. Specifically, victims of either psychological or sexual abuse did not report more withdrawal behaviors by their partners compared with non-victims, but victims of both forms of IPV did (Katz, Moore, & May, 2008).

Furthermore, an interrelation between conflict engagement strategies of self and partner has been found regarding psychological and sexual abuse. When both members of a couple actively engage in conflicts through making demands, annoying, and criticizing the partner, arguments may escalate toward a more abusive behavior (Allison, Bartholomew, Mayseless, & Dutton, 2008). By contrast, dyadic withdrawal patterns have remained largely unexplored, probably because it has been assumed that conflicts tend to fade away if both partners use withdrawal behaviors.

Indirect Paths From Attachment to IPV via Conflict Resolution Strategies

In male perpetrator samples, an indirect path has been found from insecure attachment to psychological abuse through the perception of destructive conflict resolution. Specifically, anxiously attached men tended to report more frequent abusive behaviors when they perceived a man-engagement/woman-withdrawal communication pattern. However, their perception of this communication pattern did not explain the relationship between avoidant attachment and IPV (Fournier et al., 2011). Although these findings are based on samples of perpetrators of IPV, the literature suggests similar relationships between insecure attachment and IPV when conflict management styles are analyzed from the victim's perspective (Higginbotham et al., 2007; Oka, Sandberg, Brandford, & Brown, 2014). In fact, vulnerability to IPV was found to increase when both members of couples showed insecure attachment (Allison et al., 2008; Péloquin,

et al., 2011), especially when poor conflict resolution strategies were included in the analysis (Bond & Bond, 2004).

In short, previous research and theorizing suggest an association between insecure attachment styles, conflict resolution strategies (self-reported and perceived in the partner), and IPV victimization (psychological abuse and sexual coercion). However, further analyses are required to investigate the direct and indirect links among these factors.

The Current Study

Based on the literature reviewed above, this study is aimed at better understanding the links between adult attachment style, conflict management strategies in romantic relationships, and two forms of IPV, namely psychological abuse and sexual coercion. There are several gaps in the current body of knowledge that require attention. First, only a minority of studies have examined vulnerability factors for IPV victimization (Gentzler & Kerns, 2004; Higginbotham et al., 2007; Sutton & Simons, 2015). Second, research has paid little attention to how insecurely attached individuals perceive their own and their partner's behaviors during relationship conflicts (Collins et al., 2006; Fournier et al., 2011), and how these perceptions are linked to IPV victimization (Bond & Bond, 2004). Third, the focus has been almost exclusively on women as victims (Kuijpers, van der Knaap, & Winkel, 2012), despite evidence that both women and men may suffer psychological abuse and sexual coercion in their romantic relationships (Allison et al., 2008; Krahé & Berger, 2013; Péloquin et al., 2011). In addition, gender has not been found to moderate the relationship between attachment styles and IPV victimization (Henderson et al., 2005). However, whether the path from attachment styles to IPV via conflict resolution strategies varies between men and women still remains to be investigated. Fourth, although verbal sexual coercion in dating relationships is closely related to psychological abuse (Katz & Myhr, 2008; Salwen & O'Leary, 2013), it has been analyzed less frequently than other forms of IPV (Medina-Ariza & Barberet, 2003).

In an effort to address these gaps in the literature and integrate prior research on IPV victimization into an unifying model, the aim of our study was twofold:

(a) to analyze the direct links between attachment styles, conflict resolution patterns, and IPV victimization and (b) to examine the role of self-reported conflict resolution styles and conflict resolutions styles perceived in the partner in explaining the link between insecure attachment and vulnerability to IPV victimization in the form of psychological abuse and sexual coercion. Male and female college students from Spain were asked about withdrawal and engagement behaviors shown during conflicts in their relationships both by themselves and their partners. In addition, their attachment style and their experience of sexual coercion and psychological abuse were measured.

For the first goal, the following hypotheses were specified:

Hypothesis 1: Anxious (H1a) and avoidant (H1b) attachment styles will be significantly and positively related to both forms of IPV victimization (psychological abuse and sexual coercion).

Hypothesis 2: While anxious attachment will relate positively to self-reported conflict engagement (H2a) and withdrawal (H2b), avoidant attachment will only be related to higher self-reported withdrawal (H2c).

Hypothesis 3: While highly anxious individuals will attribute more withdrawal (H3a) and conflict engagement (H3b) behaviors to their partners, those high in avoidance will attribute more engagement to their partners (H3c).

Hypothesis 4: Regarding the engagement/withdrawal pattern, self-reported conflict engagement will be positively related to perceived partner withdrawal (H4a), and self-reported withdrawal will be related to partner-attributed conflict engagement (H4b). Given the proposed escalation pattern, it is expected that conflict engagement strategies of self and partner are significant and positively associated (H4c).

Hypothesis 5: Conflict engagement behaviors of self (H5a) and partner (H5b), as well as withdrawal strategies of self (H5c), will be significant and positively related to both forms of IPV victimization.

For the second objective addressing the indirect paths from attachment styles to victimization, three hypotheses were proposed:

Hypothesis 6: Anxious attachment will be indirectly related to both forms of IPV victimization through conflict engagement behaviors of both self and partner.

Hypothesis 7: Anxious attachment (H7a) and avoidant attachment (H7b) will be indirectly related to both forms of IPV victimization through self-reported withdrawal and conflict engagement attributed to the partner.

The role of gender in the proposed relationships was also analyzed. However, no specific hypotheses were put forward because no previous studies have examined male victimization in relation to adult attachment styles and conflict communication patterns.

Method

Participants and Procedure

A total of 216 undergraduates from Spain (76.4% women), sexually oriented to persons of the opposite sex, participated in the study. The mean age was 21.40 years (SD = 3.63, range = 17-44). More than half of the participants (61.6%) were in a steady relationship at the time of the study, and all of them indicated that they had been in a romantic relationship in the past. On average, the current dating relationship had lasted for 18.9 months (SD = 27.96), and the participants not currently in a relationship had been without a steady partner for 5.99 months (SD = 11.62) on average.

Participants were recruited in classrooms, and those who participate voluntarily were informed about the main characteristics of the study. Data collection was conducted online and anonymity of their responses and confidentiality of data was also assured.

Instruments

Adult attachment style. To measure attachment style, we used the Spanish adaptation (Fernández-Fuertes, Orgaz, Fuertes, & Carcedo, 2011) of the Experiences in Close Relationships–Revised Scale (ECR-R; Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000). This 18-item measure comprises nine items assessing anxiety about abandonment (α = .86; example item: "I often wish that my partner's feelings for me were as strong as my feelings for him or her") and nine items assessing avoidance of intimacy (α = .88; example item: "I get uncomfortable when a romantic partner wants to get very close"). The response scale ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

Conflict resolution strategies. The Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory (CRSI; Kurdek, 1994) used to measure conflict resolution strategies consists of 16 items, which are grouped into four categories: Conflict Engagement, Positive Problem Solving, Withdrawal, and Compliance. Participants indicated how frequently (1 = *never*; 5 = *always*) they had used each of the styles when having an argument or disagreement with their partner (CRSI-Self). In a second part, they rated the same items for their partner's behavior (CRSI-Partner). For this study, only Conflict Engagement (e.g., "Exploring and getting out of control") and Withdrawal (e.g., "Tuning the other person out") were used as both self-ratings and perceived partner ratings. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of the Spanish version of both subscales indicated a clear two-factor structure (χ^2 / *df* = 1.58, root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] = .052, comparative fit index [CFI] = .96), the loadings of the items on their respective factors ranged from .35 to .86. Cronbach's alphas for the present sample (self and perceived in the partner, respectively) were .77 and .84 for conflict engagement, and .73 and .81 for withdrawal. These coefficients are consistent with prior research (Kurdek, 1994; Sierau & Herzberg, 2012; Siffert & Schwarz, 2011).

Psychological abuse victimization. Psychological abuse victimization was measured with the Spanish adaptation of the Subtle and Overt Psychological Abuse Scale (SOPAS; Marshall, 2001) by Buesa and Calvete (2011). Respondents reported how often (0 = *never* to 5 = *many times*) their partner had used a list of 34 behaviors in a loving, joking, or serious manner in the past year, such as "say something that

makes you worry about whether you're going crazy," and "say or do something that makes you feel unloved or unlovable." All items were summed to create a total psychological abuse score. The scale had an internal consistency of .97, which is similar to other studies including both men and women (Rauer, Kelly, Buckhalt, & El-Sheikh, 2010).

Sexual coercion victimization. To assess sexual coercion victimization, a scale consisting of 15 items was used (Hernández & Gonzalez-Mendez, 2009). Participants were asked to report how often their partners had shown each of 15 behaviors when they refused his or her sexual advances. It includes items such as "He/she tells me that with his/her previous partners this didn't happen," "He/she questions my femininity/masculinity," or "He/she stops being in love with me." Answers were given on an 11-point scale (0 = *never*; 10 = *all the time*). Five of the items were not considered for this analysis: two provided non-coercive alternatives (e.g., "He/she completely understands and does not insist more"); one made reference to alcohol or drugs use (e.g., "He/she encourages me to drink alcohol or drugs to overcome my resistance"), which is less present in romantic relationships (Abbey, Zawacki, Buck, Clinton, & McAuslan, 2004); and two referred to sexual violence (e.g., "He/she forces me to have sex with penetration"), that it is different from sexual coercion (Koss et al., 2007; Struckman-Johnson, Struckman-Johnson, & Anderson, 2003). A composite score was calculated across the remaining 10 items, with higher scores indicating more frequent victimization. The good internal consistency of $\alpha = .89$ was consistent with prior research (Hernández & Gonzalez-Mendez, 2009).

Socio-demographic variables. Participants completed a demographic information section that included questions on gender, age, sexual orientation, and number and length of relationships.

Results

Descriptive Statistics and Zero-Order Correlations

A multivariate analysis of variance was conducted, using participant gender as the independent variable, and sexual coercion, psychological abuse, self-reported and perceived conflict engagement and withdrawal, and anxious as well as avoidant attachment as dependent variables. A significant multivariate effect of gender was found, $F(8, 207) = 3.34$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .11$, and four of the univariate effects were significant. Specifically, men scored higher than did women on sexual victimization, $F(1, 214) = 7.92$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$; psychological abuse victimization, $F(1, 214) = 5.77$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$; and perception of partner withdrawal strategies in conflict situations, $F(1, 214) = 5.22$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$. Women reported more withdrawal behaviors of self than did men, $F(1, 214) = 5.10$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$. The latter two findings indicate that men perceived their partners as moving away from conflicts, and correspondingly women perceive themselves as using more withdrawal strategies. No gender differences were found in anxious or avoidant attachment, neither in self-reported or perceived partner conflict engagement strategies.

In a second multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), further differences in anxious and avoidant attachment styles were analyzed by comparing participants who were single or in a relationship. The multivariate effect of relationship status was significant, $F(2, 223) = 18.59$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .14$, and the univariate effects for both anxious attachment, $F(1, 214) = 13.28$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$, and avoidant attachment, $F(1, 214) = 28.68$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .12$, were significant. Participants who were in a relationship at the time of the study had lower scores than those not in a relationship on attachment anxiety, $M = 3.24$ ($SD = 1.22$) versus $M = 3.89$ ($SD = 1.36$), and on attachment avoidance, $M = 1.97$ ($SD = 1.00$) versus $M = 2.74$ ($SD = 1.06$).

Besides the means and standard deviations, Table 1 also shows the zero-order correlations between all variables, separately for women and men. In both gender groups, the two forms of IPV victimization showed positive correlations with all study variables (i.e., higher levels of anxious and avoidant attachment

and more destructive conflict strategies of self and partner). The only exception was a non-significant correlation between self-reported conflict withdrawal and sexual coercion in men.

Among women, self-reported and perceived partner conflict engagement were significantly correlated, as were self-reported and perceived partner withdrawal. In addition, self-reported engagement was significantly correlated with partner withdrawal, and self-reported withdrawal correlated significantly with perceived partner engagement. These demand/withdrawal communication patterns were not found in men, but male participants showed a significant correlation between self-reported and perceived partner conflict engagement.

In both gender groups, anxious attachment correlated significantly with both destructive conflict styles, self-reported and perceived in the partner. Correlations between avoidant attachment and destructive conflict resolution styles were significant only among women. Among men, only the correlation between avoidance and self-reported withdrawal was significant.

Paths From Attachment Style to IPV Victimization

The role of dyadic conflict resolution strategies in the relationship between insecure attachment and psychological and sexual victimization were examined through structural equation modeling using the Mplus 7.1 software (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2012). The following indicators of fit were used: the chi-square, the CFI (cut-off criterion of .95 or higher), RMSEA (values between .05 and less than .08 indicate an acceptable fit), and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR, values equal or less than .08 indicate a good fit; see Schreiber, Nora, Stage, Barlow, & King, 2006).

We tested the hypothesized links between attachment style, destructive conflict resolution strategies of self and partner, and psychological abuse as well as sexual coercion victimization in a single model. However, for the sake of clarity, we present the paths for the two forms of IPV victimization separately in Figure 1 (sexual coercion) and Figure 2 (psychological abuse) ($\beta = .48$, $p < .01$). The aggregate scores on each measure were used as manifest variables. All direct

Table 1. Bivariate Correlations and Means Between IPV Victimization, Perception of Conflict Resolution Styles of Self and Partner, and Romantic Attachment for Men and Women.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. SexCoer	—	.70**	.26**	.19*	.50**	.16*	.29**	.35**
2. PsyAbu	.64**	—	.17*	.22**	.64**	.37**	.38**	.48**
3. EngSelf	.36*	.29*	—	.34**	.36**	.22**	.18*	.13
4. WithSelf	.22	.34*	.53**	—	.32**	.20*	.21**	.28**
5. EngPart	.45**	.45**	.40**	.23	—	.33**	.24**	.26**
6. WithPart	.36*	.37**	.26	.16	.58**	—	.24**	.22**
7. Anxiety	.53**	.58**	.30*	.33*	.39**	.47**	—	.22**
8. Avoidance	.34*	.50**	.12	.36**	−.00	.10	.13	—
Men: *M* (*SD*)	2.20[a] (1.65)	1.45[a] (0.90)	2.03 (0.75)	2.21[a] (1.01)	2.49 (1.12)	2.68[a] (1.11)	3.44 (1.26)	2.30 (0.91)
Women: *M* (*SD*)	1.46[b] (1.65)	1.09[b] (0.97)	2.27 (0.85)	2.53 (0.86)	2.27[b] (0.95)	2.31[b] (0.97)	3.50 (1.33)	2.26 (1.14)

Note. Coefficients above the diagonal refer to women, coefficients below the diagonal refer to men. SexCoer = sexual coercion; PsyAbu = psychological abuse; EngSelf = self-reported conflict engagement; WithSelf = self-reported withdrawal; EngPart = perceived partner's conflict engagement; WithPart = perceived partner's withdrawal.

[a,b]Means differ significantly between men and women.

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

and indirect paths were tested by bootstrapping (10,000). We first specified a model in which all paths were constrained to be equal for the two gender groups. This constrained model showed a good fit with the data, $\chi^2(df = 34) = 52.83$, $p = .02$, RMSEA = .07, 95% confidence interval (CI) = [.03, .11], CFI = .96; SRMR = .07. Next, we estimated a model in which all paths were freely estimated for each gender group, $\chi^2(df = 11) = 18.08$, $p = .08$, RMSEA = .08, 95% CI = [.00, .14], CFI = .99; SRMR = .04. A comparison of the two models showed that the unconstrained model did not fit the data significantly better than the constrained model, diff $\chi^2(df = 23) = 34.95$, $p = .06$. Therefore, a model for the whole sample was estimated. Gender was included as a predictor for all variables in the model to account for the gender main effects, as indicated by the MANOVA. This model showed a good fit with the data, $\chi^2(df = 5) = 10.51$, $p = .06$, RMSEA = .07, 95% CI = [.00, .13], CFI = .99, SRMR = .029, and was therefore adopted as the final model. The path coefficients postulated in our hypotheses are presented in both figures.

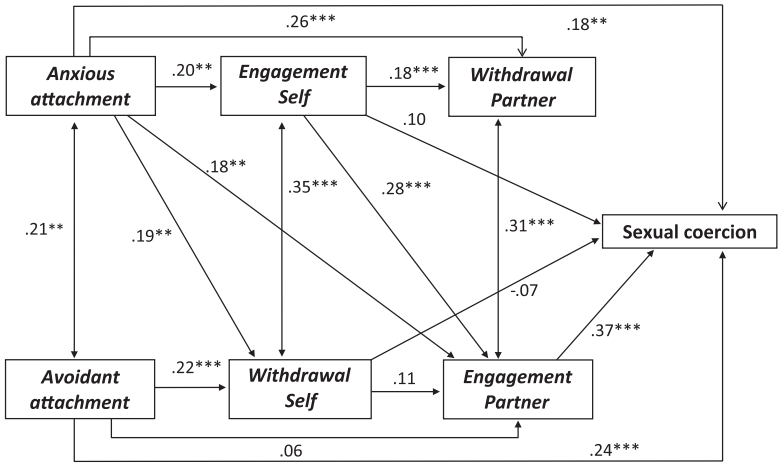

Figure 1. Paths from adult attachment style to sexual coercion through the perception of conflict resolution strategies of self and partner.

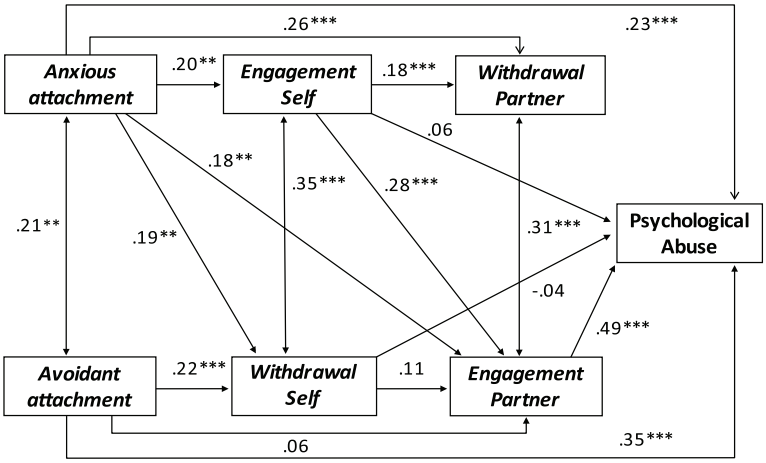

Figure 2. Paths from adult attachment style to psychological abuse through the perception of conflict resolution strategies of self and partner.

All proposed direct paths between insecure attachment styles and both forms of victimization were significant, supporting Hypothesis 1. The direct paths from anxious attachment to self-reported engagement and withdrawal strategies were also significant, as was the path from avoid attachment to self-reported withdrawal behaviors, supporting Hypothesis 2. Regarding partner's conflict resolution, anxious attachment was associated with both types of destructive conflict strategies perceived from the partner, supporting Hypotheses 3a and 3b. Contrary to what we expected in Hypothesis 3c, the association between avoid attachment and perception of partner's conflict engagement was not significant.

Confirming the predicted engagement/withdrawal pattern, self-reported conflict engagement strategies was significantly linked to partner's withdrawal behaviors. However, self-reported withdrawal was not related to perceived conflict engagement by the partner. In combination, these findings support Hypothesis 4a, but not Hypothesis 4b. In line with the proposed escalation pattern, a significant path was found from self-reported conflict engagement to conflict engagement strategies attributed to the partner, consistent with Hypothesis 4c.

As expected, the higher partner's conflict engagement was perceived to be the higher participants' scores on the sexual coercion and psychological abuse measures, supporting Hypothesis 5b. However, the links between the self-reported strategies and both forms of victimization predicted in Hypothesis 5a were not supported. Neither self-reported conflict engagement nor self-reported withdrawal were significantly linked to psychological abuse and sexual coercion.

The indirect paths from attachment styles to IPV victimization were tested using the bootstrapping approach. In line with Hypothesis 6, significant indirect paths were found from anxious attachment via self-reported conflict engagement and perceived partner conflict engagement to both sexual coercion ($\beta = .02$, $p < .05$, 95% CI = [.002, .075]) and psychological abuse ($\beta = .03$, $p < .05$, 95% CI = [.001, .054]). Contrary to Hypothesis 7a, the indirect paths from anxious attachment via self-reported withdrawal and partner's conflict engagement to sexual coercion ($\beta = .01$) and psychological abuse ($\beta = .01$) were not significant. No significant indirect paths from avoidant attachment to the two outcome variables were found (sexual coercion: $\beta = .01$; psychological abuse: $\beta = .01$), failing to support Hypothesis 7b. A final significant result referred to the indirect paths from self-reported conflict engagement via perceived partner engagement to sexual coercion ($\beta = .10$, $p < .05$, 95% CI = [.05, .43]) and to psychological abuse ($\beta = .14$, $p < .05$, 95% CI = [.05, .31]). These paths are consistent with the escalation pattern proposed in Hypothesis 4c.

Finally, to account for the differences in attachment styles between participants who were single and in a relationship at the time of the study, we conducted a set of multigroup analyses in which relationship status was used as the grouping variable and gender was included as a covariate. The model constraining all paths to be equal for the two relationship groups showed a good fit with the data, $\chi^2(df = 42) = 58.87$, $p = .04$, RMSEA = .06, 95% CI = [.01, .10], CFI = .96, SRMR = .08, and did not fit worse than a model in which all path were allowed to vary, diff $\chi^2(df = 31) = 42.91$, $p = .09$. Thus, there is no indication that the paths from attachment styles to IPV victimization differed as a function of participants' relationship status.

Discussion

Although research has consistently shown a link between insecure attachment and IPV (Doumas et al., 2008; Lawson & Malnar, 2011), there is a lack of evidence about the mechanisms underlying this relationship, especially with regard to the likelihood of experiencing IPV victimization. To address this gap in the literature, the current study analyzed whether insecure attachment may be indirectly linked to two forms of IPV victimization, psychological abuse and sexual coercion, through conflict resolution strategies employed by individuals and perceived from their partner. The proposed links were examined in a sample of Spanish college students.

According to attachment theory, individuals perceive and experience their intimate relationships through their internal working models, which are reflected in their attachment styles (Simpson et al., 2010). Evidence has also indicated that insecurely attached individuals are more likely to use destructive conflict resolution strategies (Fowler & Dillow, 2011; Sierau & Herzberg, 2012). Thus, it was hypothesized that anxious attachment would be associated with greater self-reported conflict engagement and withdrawal, whereas avoidant attachment would be more likely to be associated with self-reported withdrawal.

The results of this study support these predictions, and they are consistent with attachment theoretical considerations. Individuals high in avoidance tend to use more evasive communication strategies, which can be interpreted as an intent to stay away from dependency and closeness (Beck, Pietromonaco, DeVito, Powers, & Boyle, 2014; Fowler & Dillow, 2011). Moreover, those high in anxiety, characterized by the fear of rejection, may avoid discussing conflict topics, while trying to satisfy their needs for proximity, support, and love through conflict engagement (Collins et al., 2006; Gallo & Smith, 2001). Consistent with this pattern, communication difficulties are among the most frequently endorsed motives among young couples involved in less severe violence (Carlson & Jones, 2010).

With regard to gender, our analysis showed that the proposed pathways from attachment styles to victimization did not vary for men and women. This finding is consistent with earlier research including both female and male participants

(Henderson et al., 2005). However, given the limited number of studies including both men and women as victims of IPV, more research is needed to conclusively determine the role of gender in the relationship between attachment style conflict resolution and victimization.

In addition, insecurely attached individuals tend to interpret their partner's behaviors in ways that are consistent with their working models (Campbell et al., 2005; Gallo & Smith, 2001). As expected, the more anxiously attached participants were, the more likely they were to interpret their partners' conflict strategies in a more negative way, perceiving them to show more conflict engagement and withdrawal behaviors. In contrast, avoidant attachment was not associated with the perception of partner conflict engagement strategies. These findings are consistent with prior research which showed that highly avoidant individuals tend to blame themselves for their partner's transgressions (Collins et al., 2006), instead of perceiving their partner behaving in a proactive way during marital conflicts (Allison et al., 2008; Beck et al., 2014). These biased perceptions may help to reduce negative affect by dismissing the importance of arguments. At the same time, they reinforce the internal working models of avoidant attachment, upholding distance and independence in romantic relationships. It is worth noting that although both attachment styles and conflict resolution patterns rely on internal working models of relationship and may show some overlap at the behavioral level, the associations found in our study were relatively small, which attests to the conceptual distinction between these constructs.

Although the engagement/withdrawal communication pattern has been strongly supported in previous research (Eldridge et al., 2007; Holley et al., 2010), our findings only confirmed the association between self-reported engagement and partner's withdrawal behaviors. The reverse communication pattern from self-reported withdrawal to partner engagement was not significant, which suggests two different but compatible explanations. One is that individuals who adopt withdrawal strategies to try to evade conflicts and prevent arguments may be less attentive to their partner's behavior. In addition, their own conflict issues may have been more salient to participants than their partner's, leading them to perceive their active conflict engagement to be more pronounced than their partner's while being less aware of their own than their partner's withdrawal

behavior. This interpretation is consistent with findings from McGinn et al. (2009), who studied demand/withdrawal patterns in couples and found that the pattern of self-demand/partner-withdraw was more pronounced when discussing their own as opposed to their partner's conflict issues.

Even though the design used in this study is cross-sectional, the results also seem to support the conflict escalation pattern among couples. Consistent with prior research (Katz & Myhr, 2008; Leavitt & Willoughby, 2015), the perception of partner's conflict engagement was linked to sexual coercion and psychological abuse victimization, whereas self-reported withdrawal and engagement did not relate to either form of victimization. However, perceiving conflict engagement in the partners during disagreement was also related to the self-reported use of this strategy, suggesting an escalation of conflicts.

The second purpose of this study was to examine the indirect relationships between attachment and both forms of victimization through conflict resolution styles, shown by the self and attributed to the partner. Our results showed that only anxious attachment indirectly related to IPV through conflict engagement, whereas no indirect paths were found for avoidant attachment. Past research found that male perpetrators who are high in attachment anxiety tend to behave more aggressively when they report more conflict engagement by themselves and perceive withdrawal by the partner, but no parallel pattern was found for avoidant attachment (Fournier et al., 2011). The present study failed to support a complementary path from the victim's perspective from self-reported withdrawal to perceived partner engagement. As noted above, this may be due to the possibility that thinking about their own conflict issues may have made the self-demand/partner withdrawal more salient than the self-withdrawal/partner engagement (McGinn et al., 2009).

Although the findings are largely consistent with our hypotheses, several limitations of the study must be mentioned. First, the sample was limited to college students, which does not allow for the generalization of the results to other young adult populations. Second, our measure of IPV was limited to psychological abuse and sexual coercion and it did not include physical abuse. Although there is some evidence that emotional abuse has a more negative

impact on victims (Weston, 2008), whether attachment style is differentially linked to physical as compared with psychological abuse or sexual coercion remains to be conclusively established. Therefore, it should be necessary to test the model among adult couples involved in physical violence. A third limitation of this study is its cross-sectional design, which makes it impossible to establish the direction of the identified links. A longitudinal design would allow us to better understand interrelations between adult attachment styles, perception of conflict resolution strategies, and IPV victimization. For example, although conceptually attachment styles are considered to be relatively stable dispositional constructs, Weston (2008) found changes toward more avoidant and anxious attachment in a longitudinal study with women who had experienced emotional abuse. Therefore, further research is needed to examine the causal impact of IPV on adult attachment styles.

Finally, the data were obtained only from one of the partners and this may have introduced a bias in the reported partner behavior. However, studies which include both self-reported and observational data suggest partners are valuable informants on the conflict resolution behavior of both partners within a dyad (Siffert & Schwarz, 2011). Nonetheless, collecting data independently from both partners would be an important task for future research.

The findings from this study have implications for diversity by providing evidence from a sample of college students from Spain. The findings link up with results found in the United States, Canada, and Germany. They suggest that the associations between attachment style conflict resolution styles and vulnerability to IPV victimization apply to both gender groups, adding to a small but growing body of international research that places the victimization experiences of men on the agenda of IPV research (e.g., Chan, Straus, Brownridge, Tiwari, & Leung, 2008).

In summary, the results supported the proposition that the experience of psychological and sexual abuse is linked to insecure attachment, especially when anxiously attached victims perceive a communication pattern that may give rise to the escalation of conflicts. Identifying vulnerabilities in victims of IPV is not the same as blaming them (Hamby & Grych, 2016), but it is crucial

to prevention. Just like constructive conflict resolution strategies are skills that need to be strengthened to prevent violence in romantic relationships (De La Rue, Polanin, Espelage, & Pigott, 2014), promoting working models of secure attachment might reduce destructive patterns of interacting in conflict situations and improve communication styles among intimate partners.

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Conflict Resolution Styles and Teen Dating Violence[3]

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3 Paper published as: Bonache, H., Ramírez-Santana, G., & Gonzalez-Mendez, R. (2016). Conflict resolution styles and teen dating violence. *International Journal of Clinical and Health Psychology, 16,* 276–286. doi: 10.1016/j.ijchp.2016.03.003

Author's note: This research was funded in part by the Ministerio de Sanidad, Servicios Sociales e Igualdad (Spain) and European Social Fund under Grant 53/12.

Abstract

Background/Objective: Training in conflict resolution strategies is a goal in different intervention contexts, and the Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory is a proven, useful tool for assessing these skills. Two studies were conducted, one aimed at analyzing psychometric properties of this instrument, and the other at verifying its ability to discriminate between violent and non-violent adolescent dating partners. *Method*: In the first study, with 592 adolescents, confirmatory factor analyzes were performed with the two subscales (self and partner). The second study, with 1,938 adolescents, tested whether the factorial structure obtained discriminates between levels of dating violence involvement. *Results*: Besides verifying the adequacy of items, the results of the first study showed the same three-factor structure in both versions: a positive approach to conflicts and two non-constructive styles, engagement and withdrawal. The second study demonstrated the discriminative capacity of both scales. *Conclusions*: The final tool, which consisted of 13 items with a good internal consistency, may be useful for assessing the effectiveness of interventions to improve conflict resolution skills, as well as for screening and classification purposes.

Keywords

Conflict resolution; teen dating violence; adolescents; dysfunctional dynamics; instrumental study

Estilos de resolución de conflictos y violencia en parejas de adolescentes

Resumen

Antecedentes/Objetivo: El entrenamiento en resolución de conflictos es objeto de intervención en diferentes contextos, y el *Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory* ha demostrado su utilidad para evaluar dichas habilidades. Se realizaron dos estudios, uno orientado a analizar las propiedades psicométricas del instrumento, y otro a demostrar su capacidad para discriminar entre parejas de adolescentes violentas y no violentas. *Método*: En el primer estudio, con 592 adolescentes, se realizó un análisis factorial confirmatorio con las dos sub-escalas (para sí mismo y para la pareja). El segundo estudio, con 1.938 adolescentes, comprobó si la estructura factorial encontrada discrimina entre niveles de implicación en violencia. *Resultados*: Además de verificar la adecuación psicométrica de los ítems, los resultados del primer estudio mostraron la misma estructura trifactorial en ambas versiones: una aproximación positiva a los conflictos y dos estilos no constructivos, implicación y retirada. El segundo estudio demostró la capacidad discriminante de ambas escalas. *Conclusiones*: La versión final del instrumento, con 13 ítems y buena consistencia interna, puede ser útil para evaluar la eficacia de las intervenciones para mejorar la resolución de conflictos y con fines de *screening* y clasificación.

Palabras clave

Resolución de conflictos; violencia en parejas de adolescentes; adolescentes; dinámica disfuncional; estudio instrumental.

Romantic relationships during adolescence and emerging adulthood have important implications for development and well-being (Van de Bongardt, Yu, Deković, & Meeus, 2015). In addition to helping with the acquisition of specific relational skills, these experiences may influence successive relationships, modifying adolescents' conceptions. Thus, the way in which adolescents deal with conflicts may lead to various significant health problems (Ha, Overbeek, Cillessen, & Engels, 2012). Overall, satisfactory relationships are characterized by effective strategies of conflict resolution and repair, which favor adequate coping and prevent negative exchanges (Rholes, Kohn, & Simpson, 2014). By contrast, dysfunctional interactions increase the likelihood that conflicts will

worsen and predict poor subjective well-being (Siffert & Schwarz, 2011). Defined as interpersonal behaviors used to deal with disagreements, conflict resolution strategies were initially classified into constructive and destructive styles. While the former shows a positive emotional tone and helps to preserve affection, the latter damages the individuals and the relationships due to hostility and disrespect displayed (Flora & Segrin, 2015). Starting from this point, scholars have attempted to describe conflict management styles in more detail.

Kurdek (1994) designed the Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory (CRSI) for assessing the conflict resolution strategies used by both partners. Initially, the scale consisted of four conflict resolution styles: (1) *positive*, which involves compromise and negotiation; (2) *conflict engagement* referring to the use of personal attacks and loss of control; (3) *withdrawal*, which implies refusing to discuss a problematic issue, tuning out the partner; and (4) *compliance*, which occurs when the person gives in and does not defend his or her own opinion. Subsequently, Kurdek depicted three styles instead of four. Conflict engagement and withdrawal appeared in both, but the third factor varied from compliance (Kurdek, 1995) to positive (Kurdek, 1998). Research on adolescent romantic couples has also shown that constructive, withdrawal and conflict engagement are common strategies to manage their conflicts (Shulman, Tuval-Mashiach, Levran, & Anbar, 2006).

The CRSI has been used across different romantic relationships (opposite and same-sex couples, with or without children), and has proved able to predict changes in couples. For example, the communication pattern in which one partner engages and the other partner withdraws has been related to dissatisfaction and poor subjective well-being (Siffert & Schwarz, 2011). The CRSI has also two versions (CRSI-Self/CRSI-Partner), which makes it possible to evaluate the conflict resolution styles of both partners. Training individuals in conflict resolution strategies is an important goal in different intervention contexts, and is also a common target in programs to prevent teen dating violence (TDV). In this regard, the CRSI has proved to be a useful tool for assessing improvements in these skills (Antle, Sullivan, Dryden, Karam, & Barbee, 2011). In Spain, there are no scales that have been adapted to assess different conflict resolution styles in adolescent dating relationships. Given that dysfunctional early relationships may have numerous negative consequences on health and development (Exner-

Cortens, 2014; Fernández-González, O'Leary, & Muñoz-Rivas, 2014), it is essential to have instruments for this purpose. Some questionnaires such as CADRI (Fernández-Fuertes, Fuertes, & Pulido, 2006) or M-CTS (Muñoz-Rivas, Andreu, Graña, O'Leary, & González, 2007) contain a few items that indicate conflict resolution strategies. However, these instruments do not discriminate between different strategies, and some of the items are interpreted as indicators of psychological aggression (e.g., leaving the room annoyed or refusing to discuss the issue). Looking ahead to the intervention, it is important to have measures to distinguish dysfunctional forms of conflict resolution from other more complex types of emotional abuse (Cortés-Ayala et al., 2014; Ureña, Romera, Casas, Viejo, & Ortega-Ruiz, 2015). Moreover, evidence also indicates that Spanish adolescents show some cultural differences in severity of TDV compared with other countries (Viejo, Monks, Sánchez, & Ortega-Ruiz, 2015), which underlines the interest on a Spanish questionnaire adaptation.

A twofold purpose guides the studies described below: first, to adapt the two versions of the CRSI (Kurdek, 1994) in a sample of Spanish adolescents; and second, to verify its ability to discriminate between violent and non-violent adolescent partners.

Study 1

In the first study, the psychometric properties of the items and evidence of validity were analyzed through a related construct (Carretero-Dios & Pérez, 2007). Specifically, the relationships between conflict resolution strategies and trait anxiety were examined. As occurs with other facets of neuroticism, higher scores on anxiety have been related to both contending and avoiding as a conflict resolution strategy (Coleman, Deutsch, & Marcus, 2014). Specifically, research has demonstrated a robust association between anxiety and quality of interaction in adolescent partners (Exner-Cortens, 2014). While teens without emotional problems are more capable of using negotiating tactics that lead to acceptable solutions for both partners (Ha et al., 2012), those who report higher levels of dating anxiety display less positive and more negative interactions in their romantic relationships (La Greca & Mackey, 2007).

Method

Participants

Participants were 592 adolescents (47.3% boys and 52.7% girls) aged from 13 to 21 (M = 15.67; SD = 1.26). All claimed to have or have had at least one dating partner who was of the opposite sex (N = 562) or same sex (N = 18). Also, nine teens stated they were bi-sexually oriented, and three did not report any sexual orientation. At the time of the study, 44.1% were involved in an intimate relationship. The mean length of their dating relationships was 9.26 months with a median of 5 months (SD = 9.86).

Instruments

Conflict resolution strategies. The Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory (CRSI; Kurdek, 1994) consists of 16 items, which were initially grouped into four styles: Positive, Conflict engagement, Withdrawal, and Compliance. Participants indicated the frequency of use of these 16 strategies by themselves (CRSI-Self) and their partners (CRSI-Partner). Both subscales ranged from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*). In the first version of the CRSI, Kurdek (1994) showed good face validity, evidence for construct validity, and evidence for concurrent and predictive criterion-related validity. Also, moderate correlations (from -.20 to .42) were found between conflict resolution styles and dissimilar constructs, like marital satisfaction. Later, Kurdek (1998) used the three-factor version of the CRSI: conflict engagement, positive, and withdrawal. Cronbach's alphas for the composite scores of both partners were between .78 and .87. Other researchers have also found evidence of a good internal consistency of the CRSI in different samples. Ha et al. (2012) found Cronbach's alphas ranged from .77 to .84 in a sample of adolescents.

Anxiety. Anxiety was measured through The Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI; Spielberger, Gorssuch, Lushene, Vagg, & Jacobs, 1983). This self-report subscale consists of 20 items which measure anxiety level as a personal characteristic (α = .79). Participants' answers to each item ranged from 0 (*almost never*) to 3 (*almost always*).

Procedure

Prior to analyzing the psychometric properties of the CRSI (Self/Partner), a (English-Spanish-English) reverse translation of items and instructions was performed, taking into account cultural and linguistic differences (Muñiz, Elosua, & Hambleton, 2013). Two independent translators, with a good knowledge of both languages, performed the translation from English to Spanish. These two versions were subsequently compared and any discrepancy discussed to reach a consensus on the items. From this set of items, a bilingual translator, unrelated to the previous process, proceeded to translate the scale back from Spanish to English. Finally, the quality of the translation was assessed by comparison with the initial release, while considering possible intercultural differences.

The study was approved by the ethics committee of the university to which the authors belong. Also, permission from the families was requested. Participation was voluntary and anonymity was ensured in advance. This instrumental study was carried out using an instrumental transversal design (Montero & León, 2007).

Data analysis

CFA were performed with LISREL 8.80 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 2006), using weighted least squares. Three models were tested for each of the two subscales, and then compared with each other to see which best fit the data: the four-factor model proposed by Kurdek (1994) and two other three-factor models (Kurdek, 1995, 1998). For these latter models, item loadings were left free to vary on the subscales proposed, and were fixed at zero for the remaining subscales. Goodness of fit of the specified models was evaluated through χ^2. Given that virtually any deviation from perfection may produce a statistically significant chi-square with a large sample, three fit indices independent of sample size were also used: (1) the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR, absolute character), where values less than .08 are considered optimal fit, and fit improves as the value approaches .00; (2) the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA, parsimonious character), where values close to .06 are considered optimal fit; and (3) the Comparative Fit Index (CFI, incremental character), where values .95 or higher are indicative of a good fit (Carretero-Dios & Pérez, 2007). The

goodness of fit of the models was determined according to the method proposed by Hu and Bentler (1999), who suggested a two-index presentation format. This always includes the SRMR (.08 or lower) with RMSEA (.06 or lower) or with CFI (.95 or higher). To calculate reliability indices and to assess convergent validity, the SPSS v.22 program was used.

Results

Confirmatory Factor Analyses, item analysis and reliability

To test whether the factor structures proposed by Kurdek were suitable for the data, a CFA was performed for each model and subscale (Table 1). All the models allowed correlation between the three factors.

Table 1. Goodness of fit indices for each tested model.

Models		χ^2	*df*	*p*	χ^2/df	*RMSEA*	*CFI*	*SRMSR*
CRSI-SELF								
A	4 factors (F1:F2:F3:F4)	351.87	96	.03	3.67	.067	.89	.061
B	3 factors (F1:F3:F4)	151.10	48	.02	3.15	.060	.94	.053
C	3 factors (F1:F2:F3)	112.14	44	.03	2.55	.014	.99	.021
CRSI-PARTNER								
A	4 factors (F1:F2:F3:F4)	334.90	96	.03	3.49	.065	.91	.057
B	3 factors (F1:F3:F4)	163.05	48	.02	3.40	.064	.94	.055
C	3 factors (F1:F2:F3)	104.03	44	.03	2.36	.048	.98	.038

Note. F1: Conflict engagement; F2: Positive; F3: Withdrawal; F4: Compliance

Model A, which represents the original 4-factor model (1994), did not show a good fit because RMSEA > .06 and CFI < .95. Model B, which excludes factor 2 (Positive) of the four original factors (Kurdek, 1995), also yielded inadequate fit values because CFI < .95. Finally, Model C (Kurdek, 1998) excludes factor 4 (Compliance) of the four original factors. By recovering item 12 (which comes from Compliance) for factor 3 (Withdrawal), model C shows the best fit to meet all criteria (SRMR < .08, RMSEA < .06 and CFI > .95). The CFA also showed that all items had loadings on the expected factors over .30, with *p*values < .001. The best-fitting solution for both subscales (model C) is a three-factor structure composed of Withdrawal, Conflict engagement, and Positive, adding a new item to the former factor "not defending my position" (Figures 1 and 2).

While analyzing the overall internal consistency of both subscales, none of the elements revealed inappropriate behavior (Table 2). The standard deviations are almost 1, so it is possible to assume adequate variability in the ratings. All items show a corrected homogeneity index greater than .30. The subscales exhibited adequate reliability, reaching Cronbach's alphas of .76 (CRSI-Self) and .73 (CRSI-Partner). While no alpha increase would be observed if any item was deleted in the former subscale, two items could be deleted in the latter case.

Construct validity

The factor scores in each of the two subscales were calculated. Pearson product-moment coefficients were computed for the total score of STAI and for each of the factors. *Conflict engagement* and *Withdrawal* factors were correlated significantly with STAI from .16 to .61 ($p < .001$). The *Positive* factor was only correlated significantly in the subscale *partner* ($r = .09$, $p < .05$). Additionally, the 33rd and 66th percentiles on the STAI were determined to classify each participant as "low" (those who scored below the 33 percentile), "medium" (between 33 and 66 percentile), or "high" (those who scored higher than the 66 percentile) in trait anxiety. Subsequently, ANOVA were performed to detect significant differences in conflict resolution strategies used by participants with low, medium, and high anxiety.

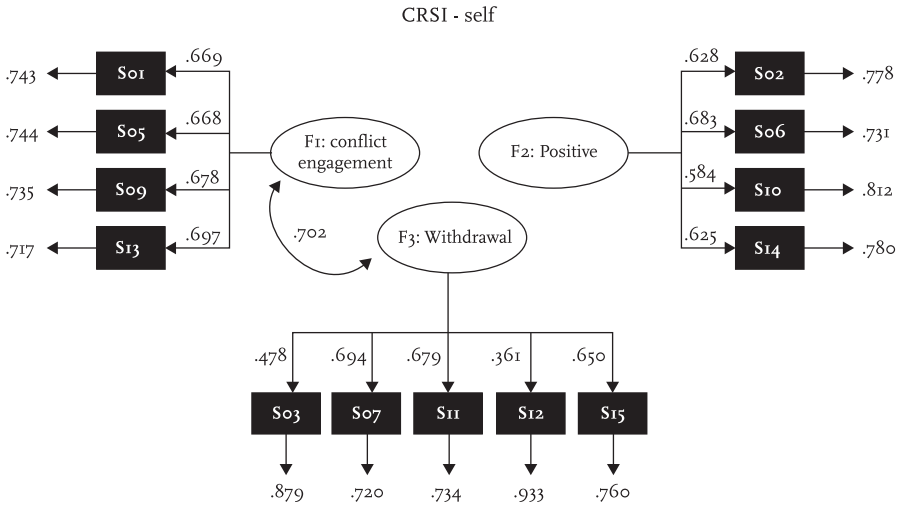


Figure 1. Path Diagram of Model E with three factors. CRSI-Self (scores correspond to standardized factor loadings and intercorrelations among the factors).

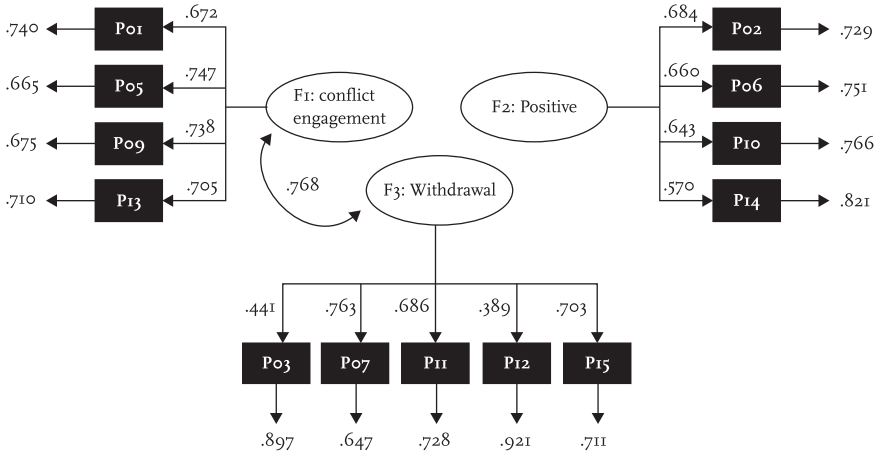


Figure 2. Path Diagram of Model E with three factors. CRSI-Partner (scores correspond to standardized factor loadings and intercorrelations among the factors).

Table 2. Mean (*M*), Standard Deviation (*SD*), corrected homogeneity index (r_{it}^{c}), and Cronbach's alpha if item is deleted (α_{-i}) of each factor.

Item		CRSI-SELF				CRSI-PARTNER			
Nº		*M*	*SD*	r_{it}^{c}	α-i	*M*	*SD*	r_{it}^{c}	α-i
Factor 1: Conflict engagement									
1	Launching personal attacks	1.60	.86	.58	.69	1.63	.82	.60	.75
5	Exploding and getting out of control	1.61	.84	.59	.69	1.59	.84	.66	.73
9	Getting carried away and saying things that aren't meant	2.23	1.02	.54	.73	2.28	1.07	.59	.77
13	Throwing insults and digs	1.40	.84	.56	.71	1.49	.85	.62	.75
	Total				.76				.80
Factor 2: Positive									
2	Focusing on the problem at hand	3.4	5.99	.54	.63	3.31	1.05	.56	.67
6	Sitting down and discussing differences Constructively	3.00	1.07	.50	.65	2.97	1.12	.55	.67
10	Finding alternatives that are acceptable to each of us	3.65	1.01	.49	.65	3.46	1.11	.53	.69
14	Negotiating and compromising	2.92	1.06	.47	.67	2.91	1.06	.50	.70
	Total				.71				.74
Factor 3: Withdrawal									
3	Remaining silent for long periods of time	2.50	1.09	.43	.74	2.43	1.06	.42	.73
7	Reaching a limit, "Shutting down", and refusing to talk any further	1.89	.93	.55	.74	1.93	1.00	.62	.65
11	Tuning the other person out	1.81	.92	.55	.74	1.81	.97	.55	.68
12	Not defending my position	1.81	.91	.56	.76	1.83	.93	.34	.75
15	Withdrawing, acting distant and not interested	1.94	.92	.28	.74	1.88	.95	.61	.66
	Total				.71				.74
Factor 4: Compliance									
4	Not being willing to stick up for myself	2.07	.96	.44	.42	2.05	.95	.39	.40
8	Being too compliant	1.96	.97	.33	.51	1.88	.86	.28	.50
12	Not defending my position	1.81	.91	.35	.50	1.83	.93	.34	.45
16	Giving in with little attempt to present my side of the issue	2.25	.96	.28	.55	2.26	.95	.28	.50
	Total				.57				.54
	Scale Total	36.09	7.12		.76				.73

Results were consistent with what was expected, showing the same pattern in both subscales. While high anxiety adolescents showed greater engagement and withdrawal than low and medium anxiety ones, there were no differences regarding positive strategy (Table 3).

Table 3. ANOVA and post-hoc for factor and anxiety group.

	F	*p*	η_p^2	*Power*	*Post Hoc*		
					LA *vs* MA	MA *vs* HA	LA *vs* HA
CRSI-SELF							
Conflict engagement	6.71	.001	.022	.916	-.08	-.29*	-.20*
Positive	2.19	.113	.007	.447	-	-	-
Withdrawal	8.50	.000	.028	.966	-.07	-.19*	-.27*
CRSI-PARTNER							
Conflict engagement	4.72	.009	.016	.790	-.01	-.16*	-.17*
Positive	3.21	.051	.011	.613	-	-	-
Withdrawal	12.11	.000	.039	.995	-.03	-.29*	-.32*

Note. df: 2,589; LA: low-anxiety group; MA: medium-anxiety group; HA: high-anxiety group.
* $p \leq .05$.

Study 2

Research interested in TDV has increased over the last decades in Spain, indicating a high prevalence and negative correlates (Cortés-Ayala et al., 2014; Fernández-González et al., 2014; Gonzalez-Mendez, Yanes, & Ramírez-Santana, 2015). TDV is often characterized by be moderate and bidirectional (Viejo et al., 2015), which suggests that most of cases do not follow a gender violence pattern. However, little attention has been paid to relationship communication compared to other processes (Messinger, Rickert, Fry, Lessel, & Davidson, 2012). This has meant putting the focus on aggressive tactics and failing to analyze conflict resolution styles that predict escalation to aggression, despite young people in violent relationships use both escalating strategies and temporary avoidance

more frequently than those in nonviolent relationships (Bonache, Gonzalez-Mendez, & Krahé, in press; Messinger et al., 2012).

Moreover, effective prevention programs in different areas are oriented towards strengthening positive skills and not only reducing risks (American Psychological Association, 2013). Thus, having instruments to measure conflict resolution strategies is critical to assess relational dynamics from a preventive point of view. Immaturity and poor skills favor high prevalence of aggression in adolescent couples, and it also explains desistence detected in most cases (Orpinas, Hsieh, Song, Holland, & Nahapetyan, 2013). In this sense, treating TDV exclusively as a problem of gender inequality may be a limited contribution to preventing the problem, as long as teens are not provided with adequate tools to do things right. According to these ideas, the ability of the CRSI to discriminate between violent and non-violent dating partners was tested.

Method

Participants

In this second study, participants were 1,938 adolescents (942 boys and 996 girls), with ages ranging from 13 to 18 (M = 15.50; SD = 1.12). All claimed to have or have had at least one dating partner (38.4% were involved in a romantic relationship at the time of the study). Regarding their sexual orientation, 95.1% indicated a preference for opposite-sex partners, 1.8% same-sex partners, 2.8% partners of both sexes and 0.3% did not report any sexual orientation. The dating relationships had lasted an average of 9.46 months (SD = 9.81) with a median of 5 months.

Instruments

Dating violence victimization/perpetration. A subscale developed by Safe Dates-Psychological Abuse Victimization (Foshee et al., 1998) was used for assessing both psychological abuse victimization and perpetration. This subscale consists

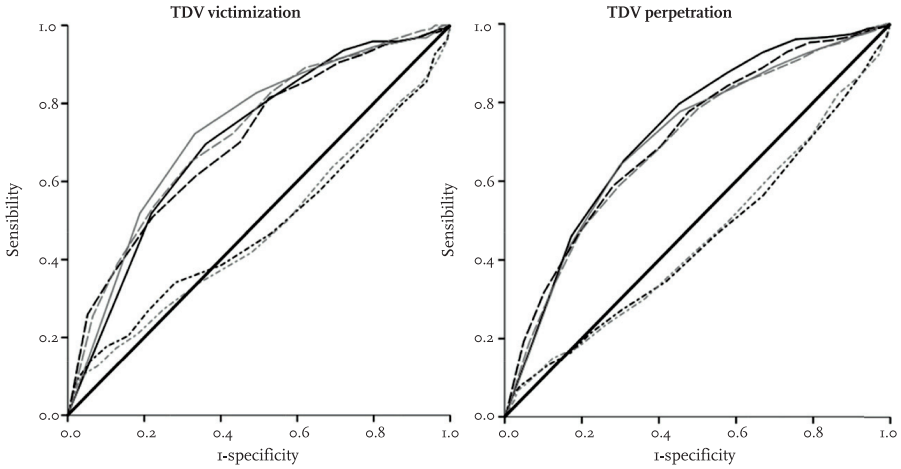
of 14 items that measure: verbal aggression (said things to hurt my feelings on purpose, brought up something from the past to hurt me, etc.), control of the intimate partner (told me I could not talk to someone of the opposite sex, etc.), and interrupted physical aggression (threw something at me but missed, etc.). In addition, three items from a shortened version of the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS; Straus & Douglas, 2004) were used to measure physical aggression (pushing, hitting, and causing injury). All responses ranged from 0 (*never*) to 3 (*very often*). Cronbach's alpha reached .87 for victimization and .83 for perpetration.

Procedure

The study was approved by the ethics committee of the university to which the authors belong. Also, prior authorization was requested from educational centers and families. All students responded to the same questionnaire, and all received identical instructions. The data set was collected in the classrooms, with participation being voluntary. However, the data from participants who had never had a dating relationship were later excluded from the analysis.

Results

First, the 33rd and 66th percentile composite scores on TDV perpetration and victimization were determined separately. Then, participants were classified as "low" (those who scored below the 33rd percentile) or "high" (those who scored above the 66th percentile) in each measure and selected for further analyses. Also, the different conflict resolution strategies measured through CRSI-Self and CRSI-Partner were used. Subsequently, ROC curves were generated, confirming that the strategies withdrawal and conflict engagement show great discriminatory power, while the positive resolution strategy shows no ability to discriminate, neither victimization nor perpetration (Figure 3). Discrimination between high and low perpetrators showed a sensitivity of 88.0% and a specificity of 65.3% with an accuracy of 75.7%. In victimization case, it had a sensitivity of 82.3% and a specificity of 75.3% with an accuracy of 78.6%.



AUC	95% CI		Conflict resolution strategies	AUC	95% CI	
.71	.67	.75	Self reported conflict engagement	.73	.69	.76
.70	.66	.74	Self reported withdrawal	.71	.68	.74
.48	.43	.53	Self reported positive strategy	.45	.41	.49
.73	.69	.77	Partner's conflictengagement	.71	.67	.74
.72	.68	.76	Partner's withdrawal	.70	.66	.73
.47	.43	.52	Partner's positive strategy	.46	.42	.49

Figure 3. ROC Analysis of the two subscales of CRSI (self and partner).

Finally, a multivariate analysis was computed using participants' age as a covariate to verify these results. Multivariate contrasts showed significant differences according to both the level of victimization ($F(6, 459) = 37.39$, $p < .001$, $\mu p^2 = .33$) and the level of perpetration ($F(6, 627) = 39.02$, $p < .001$, $\mu p^2 = .27$). As shown in Table 4, significant between-subject effects were detected for both TDV perpetration and victimization. Those who scored higher in victimization or perpetration reported conflict engagement and withdrawal, both by their partners and themselves, more often than those who scored lower. Moreover, no significant differences were detected regarding positive strategy.

Table 4. Comparison between conflict resolution strategies reported by participants high or low in TDV perpetration and victimization.

	Low		High			MANCOVA		
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	F_{Lev}	*F*	*p*	η_p^2
TDV victimization	(N = 220)		(N = 247)			(1,464)		
Self-reported conflict engagement	-.51	.76	.54	1.12	42.7	131.2(a)	.001	.22
Self-reported withdrawal	-.53	.85	.35	.96	7.5	104.0(a)	.001	.18
Self-reported positive strategy	-.00	1.21	-.15	.89	26.1	3.6(a)	.069	.01
Partner's conflict engagement	-.53	.72	.60	1.10	46.7	166.7(a)	.001	.26
Partner's withdrawal	-.58	.75	.45	1.01	12.9	149.7(a)	.001	.24
Partner's positive strategy	-.03	1.17	-.07	1.05	13.8	6.4(a)	.052	.02
	Low		High			MANCOVA		
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	F_{Lev}	*F*	*p*	η_p^2
TDV perpetration	(N = 382)		(N = 253)			(1,632)		
Self-reported conflict engagement	-.47	.72	.60	1.19	79.42	195.7(a)	.001	.24
Self-reported withdrawal	-.46	.83	.39	1.02	19.89	128.2(a)	.001	.17
Self-reported positive strategy	.09	1.10	-.04	.93	6.98	3.7(a)	.064	.01
Partner's conflict engagement	-.42	.76	.44	1.11	48.49	131.5(a)	.001	.17
Partner's withdrawal	-.44	.85	.36	1.04	14.06	109.6(a)	.001	.15
Partner's positive strategy	.09	1.09	-.02	.97	2.91	2.4	.121	.01

*Note. F*Lev: Levene's test; (a) Welch's test.

Discussion

The first study was aimed at adapting the CRSI (Kurdek, 1994) in a sample of Spanish adolescents. The analysis of the 16 items showed adequate psychometric properties in its two versions (Self/Partner). Given that the structure of the CRSI has changed in successive studies (Kurdek, 1994, 1995, 1998), the different dimensional possibilities were examined. CFAs were performed with the two subscales separately, and then compared to each other. The Spanish adolescent final version of the CRSI shows a common dimensional structure for both subscales, composed of three factors with 13 items in total. It is shorter than

the original because some items have been removed to ensure consistency and homogeneity of the factors (Appendix). The dimensions detected are Positive, Conflict engagement, and Withdrawal. While the former two have the original composition, a fifth item, originally from Compliance, had to be added to Withdrawal ("not defending my position"). This three-dimensional structure partially replicates that depicted by Kurdek (1998) and finds support in other studies as discussed below. Compliance has been elusive for researchers, showing low reliability. Therefore, its absence in this study is consistent with previous evidence. In fact, it may not be easy to observe in the partner because it may be confused with avoidance or withdrawal (Zacchilli, Hendrick, & Hendrick, 2009), which might explain the transfer of an item from compliance to withdrawal. Although Kurdek was unable to replicate the positive strategy after his first study, the current confirmatory factor analysis preserves this strategy without changing the valence of any item. Keeping this positive style is interesting for prevention because it facilitates the evaluation of strengths.

By contrast, conflict engagement and withdrawal have emerged as distinct styles through the CRSI and other instruments. These styles correspond with the demand/withdraw pattern, which has been consistently linked to low satisfaction in relationships (Flora & Segrin, 2015). In this pattern, while one partner attempts to discuss conflictive issues and demands changes, the other partner withdraws, through silence, defensiveness, or refusal to discuss the issue. Conflict engagement and withdrawal are used by both genders, depending on who generates the conflict topic (Christensen, Eldridge, Catta-Preta, Lim, & Santagata, 2006). Finally, it is worth mentioning that the three conflict resolution styles detected in this study have also been found using this instrument by other researchers (Kosic, Noor, & Mannetti, 2012).

Evidence of construct validity was obtained by confirming that the CRSI (Self/Partner) discriminates between the high-anxiety group and the other two groups (medium and low anxiety) in two dysfunctional conflict resolution strategies. Specifically, the more anxious the teens are, the more likely they are to use conflict engagement and withdrawal. These results are consistent with previous research indicating that highly anxious teens are more likely to inadequately address conflicts than those who score low in anxiety (Exner-Cortens, 2014; Ha et al., 2012).

As noted in the introduction, early romantic experiences have implications for development and well-being (Van de Bongardt et al., 2015), and dysfunctional dynamics may adversely affect health, academic achievement, and even future income (Exner-Cortens, 2014). This makes it necessary to have instruments capable of evaluating conflict resolution styles in adolescent partners. By analyzing its psychometric properties, the Spanish version of the CRSI has showed it can be a useful tool in both research and intervention with adolescents.

The purpose of the second study was to test the ability of the CRSI to discriminate between violent and non-violent dating partners. In this sense, the results confirmed that adolescents classified as high or low in TDV victimization/perpetration differ significantly in the destructive strategies reported. Thus, highly victimized teens reported higher engagement and withdrawal by their partners and themselves than the less victimized. In addition, those high in perpetration also reported higher engagement and withdrawal by their partners and themselves than those low in perpetration. These results clearly show that the two subscales of the CRSI make it possible to distinguish between the strategies of those who have been involved in violence and those who have not. By contrast, no differences were found in the use of positive problem solving. This latter result is consistent with evidence indicating that violent dating relationships do not differ in levels of love, intimate self-disclosure, or perceived partner caring (Giordano, Soto, Manning, & Longmore, 2010; Viejo et al., 2015).

Emotional and physical abuse is highly prevalent in adolescent population and it is associated with important consequences on health and development (Fernández-González et al., 2014; Vagi, Olsen, Basile, & Vivolo-Kantor, 2015). However, while it is claimed that interventions should be geared towards strengthening resilience (Grych, Hamby, & Banyard, 2015), underlying processes of TDV, such as communication patterns, have received peripheral attention. In this sense, conflict resolution strategies are an adequate target, since they may increase the individual's capacity to both manage negative affect and maintain positive affect. This Spanish version of the CRSI may be useful as a tool for evaluating the effectiveness of this type of intervention, as well as for screening and classification purposes. Specifically, it may help detect those teens at high risk of becoming involved in dating violence.

The study's results should be interpreted in the context of its limitations. Despite having detected a clear three-factor structure in adolescents, this structure is not directly transferable to other populations. In addition, although this three-factor structure has been found in relationships with parents and friends (Kosic et al., 2012), further research is required to confirm whether it is applicable to other types of relationship. Moreover, the usefulness of the instrument to predict different consequences arising from dysfunctional dating relationships should be tested through longitudinal designs.

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Appendix Spanish Version of the *Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory* (CRSI) (Kurdek, 1994).

Instructions: From 1 = Never to 5 = Always, indicate how often YOU or YOUR PARTNER use the following strategies to deal with the arguments or disagreements.

Items		You		Your Partner	
		Never	Always	Never	Always
1	Launching personal attacks *(Lanzar ataques personales)*	1 2 3 4 5		1 2 3 4 5	
2	Focusing on the problem at hand *(Centrarse en el problema en cuestión)*	1 2 3 4 5		1 2 3 4 5	
3	Remaining silent for long periods of time *(Permanecer en silencio durante largos períodos de tiempo)*	1 2 3 4 5		1 2 3 4 5	
4	Exploding and getting out of control *(Enfadarse y perder el control)*	1 2 3 4 5		1 2 3 4 5	
5	Sitting down and discussing differences Constructively *(Sentarse y hablar de las diferencias de manera constructiva)*	1 2 3 4 5		1 2 3 4 5	
6	Reaching a limit, "Shutting down", and refusing to talk any further *(Llegar al límite, "cerrarse", y negarse a hablar más*)	1 2 3 4 5		1 2 3 4 5	
7	Getting carried away and saying things that aren't meant *(Dejarse llevar y decir cosas que no se quieren mencionar)*	1 2 3 4 5		1 2 3 4 5	

8	Finding alternatives that are acceptable to each of us *(Encontrar alternativas que sean aceptables para los dos)*	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
9	Tuning the other person out *(Pasar de la otra persona)*	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
10	Not defending one's position *(No defender la propia opinión)*	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
11	Throwing insults and digs *(Lanzar insultos y pullas)*	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
12	Negotiating and compromising *(Negociar y asumir compromisos con el/la otro/a)*	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
13	Withdrawing, acting distant and not interested *(Encerrarse en uno mismo actuando de forma distante)*	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5

Items for each factor: *Conflict Engagement*: 1, 4, 7, and 11; *Positive*: 2, 5, 8, and 12; *Withdrawal*: 3, 6, 9, 10, and 13.

Romantic Attachment, Conflict Resolution Styles, and Teen Dating Violence[4]

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4 Paper published as: Bonache, H., Gonzalez-Mendez, R., & Krahé, B. (2017). Romantic attachment, conflict resolution styles, and teen dating violence. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*. doi: 10.1007/s10964-017-0635-2

Abstract

Although research on dating violence has increased in the last decades, little is known about the role of romantic attachment and conflict resolution in understanding victimization by an intimate partner among adolescents. This study examined the relationships between insecure attachment styles, destructive conflict resolution strategies, self-reported and perceived in the partner, and psychological and physical victimization by a dating partner in 1,298 adolescents (49% girls). Anxious attachment was related to both forms of victimization via self-reported conflict engagement and conflict engagement attributed to the partner among boys and girls. Moreover, both insecure attachment styles were also indirectly linked to victimization via self-reported withdrawal and conflict engagement perceived in the partner, but only among boys. The implications of the findings for promoting constructive communication patterns among adolescents for handling their relationship conflicts are discussed.

Keywords

Attachment style, conflict resolution, teen dating violence, victimization, adolescence.

Introduction

The formation of romantic relationships during early and middle adolescence is a normative developmental task (van de Bongardt, Yu, Deković, & Meeus, 2015), and the quality of these relationships is critical for adolescents' psychological adjustment and well-being (Viejo, Ortega-Ruiz, & Sánchez, 2015). However, research has shown substantial prevalence rates ranging from 30% to 51% for any

form of teen dating violence experienced (Exner-Cortens, 2014; Vagi, O'Malley, Basile, & Vivolo-Kantor, 2015; Ybarra, Espelage, Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Korchmaros, & Boyd, 2016). This substantial variation in prevalence depends on how violence is defined (Winstok, 2016), differences in methodological approach, such as sampling design and assessment procedures, as well as characteristics of the populations studied (Vagi et al., 2015). Moreover, recent research has identified different trajectories with distinctive types of victimization. While some adolescents report only experiences of psychological abuse, others experience multiple forms of dating violence victimization (especially emotional abuse in conjunction with physical violence; Sabina, Cuevas, & Cotignola-Pickens, 2016).

Although research and prevention programs on teen dating violence have increased over the last decades, some vulnerability factors have received only peripheral attention. For example, while both attachment styles and conflict resolution strategies have been widely associated with an increased vulnerability to victimization in college-age couples (Bonache, Gonzalez-Mendez, & Krahé, 2016a; Cornelius, Shorey, & Beebe, 2010; Yarkovsky & Fritz, 2014), only a few studies have examined these factors in relation to violence among adolescent partners (Burk & Seiffge-Krenke, 2015; Messinger, Rickert, Fry, Lessel, & Davidson, 2012). Moreover, findings on adults' experience of intimate partner violence cannot be generalized to adolescents because research has noted different patterns in both developmental periods (Johnson, Giordano, Manning, & Longmore, 2015). For instance, the formation of romantic relationships emerges as a new developmental task in adolescence (van de Bongardt et al., 2015), and partners become attachment figures (Exner-Cortens, 2014). Although dating relationships provide an opportunity for building constructive conflict resolution strategies (Simon & Furman, 2010), there are individual differences in interpersonal skills (Reese-Weber, 2000). Moreover, adolescents are involved in risk behaviors, such as alcohol or drug abuse, and violence more frequently than adults (Mahalik et al., 2013), especially when they are insecurely attached (Letcher & Slesnick, 2014). These risk behaviors and the lack of communication skills tend to make teens more vulnerable to dating victimization than adults, which seems to be reflected in the peak of violence observed during adolescence (Brooks-Russell, Foshee, & Ennett, 2013; Orpinas, Hsieh, Song, Holland, & Thus, 2013).

Because of these characteristics of adolescence as a developmental period, findings based on college-age samples cannot be generalized to adolescents, and empirical studies are required to address the association between attachment styles, conflict resolution strategies, and dating victimization in this age group. Furthermore, identifying vulnerabilities in victims may be useful for developing evidence-based prevention programs, which does not imply victim blaming (Hamby & Grych, 2016). Additionally, research highlights the need to incorporate skill-building components to increase the effectiveness of teen dating violence prevention programs (De la Rue, Polanin, Espelage, & Pigott, 2016). Based on this evidence, the present study examined the role of romantic attachment styles and conflict resolution strategies (self-reported and attributed to the partner) as predictors of psychological abuse and physical violence victimization in a sample of adolescents.

Attachment Styles and Conflict Resolution Strategies

According to attachment theory, experiences in early close relationships with caregivers lead to the formation of internal working models about the self and the other (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2012). These working models guide cognition, affect, and behavior through different attachment styles, which emerge from two underlying dimensions: anxiety about abandonment and avoidance of intimacy (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2012). While securely attached individuals (low in attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance) tend to show independence and comfort with intimacy, insecurely attached people tend to show a strong need for intimacy and fear of being rejected by their attachment figures (high anxious attachment) or emotional detachment and self-sufficiency (high avoidant attachment). Moreover, attachment styles have been related to emotion regulation strategies. In particular, anxiously attached individuals experience high levels of negative affect and hypersensitive proximity-seeking behaviors, whereas those with high levels of avoidant attachment are characterized by employing strategies to deactivate their negative emotions. By contrast, securely attached individuals tend to be able to deal properly with both positive and negative affect (Maas, Laan, & Vingerhoets, 2011).

As mentioned above, attachment theory has also been useful to explain some aspects of dating relationship dynamics, such as conflict resolution strategies. However, research on this topic is limited in adolescents even though they report higher levels of conflicts with their romantic partners than in their other close relationships (Furman & Shomaker, 2008). In adult samples, the use of destructive conflict resolution strategies has been related to insecure attachment, with different underlying processes for anxious and avoidant attachment (Fowler & Dilow, 2011; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2012). Specifically, individuals scoring high on anxious attachment tend to report conflict engagement, based on the desire to secure attention, care, and support. At the same time, they tend to report withdrawal strategies based on the fear of being rejected by their partners. Individuals with higher levels of avoidant attachment tend to report evasive communication, avoidance of disagreements, and withdrawal from conflicts (Bonache et al., 2016a; Fowler & Dilow, 2011). However, when arguments escalate, avoidantly attached individuals may resort to conflict engagement as a way of distancing themselves from their partner (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2012). By contrast, secure attachment has been linked to positive social skills and constructive conflict resolution strategies in adolescents (Exner-Cortens, 2014; Tan et al., 2016). Although adolescents tend to employ positive conflict resolution styles more often than destructive strategies (Simon, Kobielski, & Martin, 2008), some of them also use withdrawal and conflict engagement strategies to manage arguments with their partners (Shulman, Tuval-Mashiach, Levran, & Anbar, 2006), which may be explained by limited emotion regulation abilities (Zimmermann & Iwanski, 2014). Poor affect regulation, which has been related to insecure attachment styles, was shown to play a key role in interpersonal conflicts. For instance, adolescents who report more emotion dysregulation also report higher levels of conflicts with their parents (Moed et al., 2015). These findings suggest that insecure attachment styles may be related to destructive conflict resolution strategies in adolescents in a similar way as in adults.

Communication patterns tend to be developed within romantic relationships, and conflict resolution strategies used by both partners are interrelated during disputes. Some of these dyadic communication patterns have been consistently linked to violence in adult couples, especially the demand/withdrawal pattern (Fournier, Brassard, & Shaver, 2011). Researchers have also shown that

attachment styles affect perceptions of the partner's conflict resolution strategies. For instance, stressful situations, such as conflicts with the partner, tend to activate both negative emotions (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2012) and schemas related to insecure attachment (Furman & Shomaker, 2008), making a negative interpretation of the partner's behaviors more likely (Beck, Pietromonaco, DeVito, Powers, & Boyle, 2014). Therefore, anxiously attached individuals perceive a higher frequency of both withdrawal and conflict engagement behaviors in their partners compared to avoidantly attached individuals (Collins, Ford, Guichard, & Allard, 2006), and they also tend to report escalation (conflict engagement by one partner predicting conflict engagement by the other partner) during their arguments (Bonache et al., 2016a; Exner-Cortens, 2014).

Regarding avoidant attachment, the findings are less consistent. While some studies have shown that avoidantly attached adults perceive their partners as less responsive and supportive than do non-avoidant individuals (Beck, et al., 2014; Segal & Fraley, 2015), others did not find an association between avoidant attachment and the perception of partner support (Karantzas, Feeney, Goncalves, & McCabe, 2014) or between avoidant attachment and the attribution of destructive conflict strategies to the partner (Bonache et al., 2016a). Based on attachment theory, it may be assumed that avoidantly attached individuals see their partner's behavior as conflict engagement because they perceive it as undermining their desire for independence.

Conflict Resolution Strategies and Teen Dating Violence Victimization

Effective communication is a challenge for many teens, as it requires emotion regulation and interpersonal skills that may still be insufficiently developed, making different forms of victimization more likely than in later developmental stages (Espelage, Low, Polanin, & Brown, 2015). Although some adolescents manage conflicts with their partner by using compromise strategies, others tend to ignore them to preserve the relationship (Shulman et al., 2006) or may be prone to using conflict engagement and withdrawal strategies in trying to handle arguments (Furman & Shomaker, 2008). In addition, evidence has shown that conflict resolution strategies of one partner depend on the strategy used by the

other partner (Paradis, Hébert, & Fernet, 2017). For example, adolescents may display a *downplaying pattern*, in which both partners tend to minimize and avoid confrontational arguments, or a *conflictive pattern* that is characterized by active confrontation and reciprocal escalation of conflicts by both partners (Fernet, Hébert, & Paradis, 2016; Shulman et al., 2006). The demand/withdrawal communication pattern has rarely been explored in teen dating relationships, even though its use in adult relationship conflicts has been demonstrated (Fournier, et al., 2011; Siffert & Schwarz, 2011).

Although negative communication patterns may produce adverse relational outcomes, such as dating violence (Schrodt, Witt, & Shimkowski, 2014), they have been much less studied in adolescents than in adults. In addition, conflict resolution strategies have received more attention in relation to teen dating violence perpetration than to victimization (Burk & Seiffge-Krenke, 2015; Fernet et al., 2016), and some of those studies refer to negative styles of resolving conflict based on a composite score that encompasses engagement and withdrawal strategies, both by the self and seen in the partner (Paradis et al., 2017; Russell et al., 2014). The few studies that have analyzed them separately found different findings for conflict engagement and withdrawal. Female adolescents' physical victimization was predicted by self-reported conflict engagement and conflict engagement attributed to the partner (Messinger et al., 2012). Regarding withdrawal from conflicts, self-reported withdrawal was found to be unrelated to victimization in college students (Bonache et al., 2016a), whereas other studies have found a significant association between both factors in college females (Katz & Myhr, 2008) and in adolescents (Bonache, Ramírez-Santana, & Gonzalez-Mendez, 2016b). No association was found between withdrawal strategies attributed to the partner and victimization (Messinger et al., 2012), suggesting that conflicts in adolescent couples do not lead to physical or psychological victimization if the partner shows, or is perceived to show, withdrawal behaviors. This finding is consistent with the literature on adult couples (Bonache et al., 2016a; Katz, Moore, & May, 2008).

Indirect Paths from Attachment Styles to Teen Dating Violence Victimization via Conflict Resolution Strategies

Studies demonstrating an association between attachment styles and victimization by a romantic partner have mostly focused on adult couples (Bonache et al., 2016a; Yarkovsky & Fritz, 2014). Nevertheless, there is some evidence that more anxiously and avoidantly attached adolescents are more likely to experience abuse in dating relationships (Capaldi, Knoble, Shortt, & Kim, 2012). Likewise, longitudinal research has shown that insecure attachment styles predicted both teen dating violence victimization and perpetration over a four-year period (Miga, Hare, Allen, & Manning, 2010).

Few studies have included attachment styles and conflict resolution patterns in the same analysis to explain teen dating violence victimization. For example, Pepler (2012) suggested that insecurely attached adolescents, who are prone to using destructive conflict resolution strategies, tend to choose partners with similar attachment styles. This may promote a negative communication pattern, increasing the vulnerability to victimization in romantic relationships. In line with this reasoning, it has been found that insecure attachment and higher rates of conflict predict reciprocal aggressive behaviors in teen dating relationships (Burk & Seiffge-Krenke, 2015).

In a similar vein, research on adult couples has demonstrated that vulnerability to intimate partner violence is high in partners with an anxious attachment style (Péloquin, Lafontaine, & Brassard, 2011), especially when they report destructive conflict strategies (Bond & Bond, 2005). Thus, an indirect path from anxious attachment to victimization has been shown via self-reported conflict engagement strategies and conflict engagement perceived in the partner (Bonache et al., 2016a). In accordance with the demand/withdrawal pattern, two further indirect effects may be expected. As noted above, individuals high on avoidant or on anxious attachment may show more withdrawal strategies, at the same time they may attribute more conflict engagement to their partner. This dyadic communication pattern may be related to higher vulnerability to victimization among teen partners. However, more

research is necessary to clarify the role of insecure attachment on patterns of conflict resolution and teen dating violence victimization.

Gender Differences

Although there is evidence that both females and males may be victimized by dating partners, findings on the role of gender in teen dating violence victimization are mixed (Brooks-Russell, et al., 2013; East & Hokoda, 2015; Paradis et al., 2017), and only few studies have examined possible gender differences in attachment styles, conflict resolution strategies, and their relationship with teen dating violence victimization. According to the literature on romantic attachment, boys show higher attachment avoidance and lower attachment anxiety compared to girls (Furman & Simon, 2006). Anxious attachment has been linked to increased dating victimization among females (Grych & Kinsfogel, 2010), but little comparative evidence is available for males (Sandberg, Valdez, Engle, & Menghrajani, 2016). Moreover, past research on conflict resolution strategies in adolescents has found inconsistent findings with regard to gender differences. Some studies found no differences between females and males (Furman & Shumaker, 2008; Paradis et al., 2017), and others have shown that the use of specific conflict resolution strategies depends on who generated the conflict topic regardless of gender (Laurent, Kim, & Capaldi, 2008). Therefore, gendered links between attachment styles, conflict resolution strategies, and teen dating violence victimization need to be further examined.

The Current Study

The aim of the current study was to address the aforementioned gaps in the literature by examining the associations between attachment styles, conflict resolution strategies, and victimization by a dating partner among adolescents. More specifically, we examined whether insecurely attached adolescents would be more likely to use destructive strategies and perceive these strategies in their partner when dealing with relationship conflict and whether these dysfunctional conflict resolution strategies would be linked to an increased vulnerability to physical and psychological victimization in a dating relationship. A structural

equation model, displayed in Figures 1 and 2, was tested to explore these associations in a sample of adolescents.

According to attachment theory, we expected that insecure attachment styles (characterized by higher scores on the anxious or avoidant attachment dimensions) would be positively related to both psychological abuse and physical violence experienced in teen dating relationships (Hypothesis 1). We further proposed that insecure attachment styles would be positively related to self-reported conflict engagement (Hypothesis 2a) and withdrawal (Hypothesis 2b). Additionally, research has noted that attachment styles relate to perceptions of the partner's conflict resolution strategies (Beck et al., 2014; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2012). Building on this line of research, we hypothesized that the higher the avoidant attachment, the more conflict engagement adolescents would attribute to their partner, because this strategy tends to be perceived as undermining their desire for independence (Hypothesis 3a). The higher the anxious attachment, the more conflict engagement (Hypothesis 3b) and withdrawal strategies (Hypothesis 3c) would be perceived in their partner.

Based on previous research on communication patterns describing escalation of conflicts, demand/withdrawal patterns, and downplaying patterns when couples handle disagreements, we expected that both self-reported conflict engagement and withdrawal strategies would be positively related to conflict engagement and withdrawal attributed to the partner (Hypothesis 4). Moreover, destructive conflict resolution strategies may increase the vulnerability to victimization (Bonache et al., 2016b; Messinger et al., 2012). Specifically, while both self-reported conflict engagement and withdrawal were predicted to be positively related to the two forms of victimization (Hypothesis 5a), we expected only partner-attributed conflict engagement to be positively associated with victimization (Hypothesis 5b).

In accordance with the theoretical and empirical evidence mentioned above, a focus of our analysis was on the indirect paths from attachment styles to victimization via destructive conflict resolution strategies. Thus, we predicted that anxious attachment would be indirectly related to both forms of teen dating violence victimization through conflict engagement behaviors, shown by the self and perceived in the partner (Hypothesis 6). Additionally, anxious and avoidant

attachment were predicted to be indirectly linked to psychological and physical victimization through self-reported withdrawal, which in turn should predict conflict engagement attributed to the partner (Hypothesis 7). These indirect paths were assumed to reflect the escalation of conflict and demand/withdraw patterns found in adult couples.

Finally, since little research has tested gender differences in relation to attachment styles, conflict resolution strategies, and teen dating violence victimization, further analysis are needed to shed light on gendered patterns. Hence, this study explored commonalities and differences between male and female adolescents in the associations of these factors.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Participants were recruited from eight public high schools located in urban, rural, and tourist areas within a Spanish region (The Canary Islands), which ensured that they represented a variety of socioeconomically strata. All students aged from 13 to 18 years enrolled in these schools ($M = 15.41$, $SD = 1.11$) completed the questionnaires ($N = 1917$). Only those students who had had at least one opposite-sex romantic partner were included in the study. The final sample included 1,298 adolescents (638 females, 660 males) who had an opposite-sex romantic partner at the time of the study (37.4%), or had been in at least one romantic relationship in the past (62.6%). All participants were born in Spain and of European ethnic origin.

The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the first author's university. In addition, permission was obtained from the heads of the participating high schools and from participants' parents. Participants were told that participation was voluntary and unpaid (only 0.3% refused to participate). Confidentiality and anonymity of their responses was guaranteed. Data were collected by trained research staff who administered paper-and-pencil questionnaires during school hours.

Instruments

Attachment styles. A Spanish adaptation by Fernández-Fuertes, Orgaz, Fuertes, and Carcedo (2011) of the Experiences in Close Relationships–Revised Scale (ECR-R; Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000) was used to measure attachment styles. This 18-item scale comprises nine items to assess anxiety about abandonment (e.g., "I often wish that my partner's feelings for me were as strong as my feelings for him or her") and nine items to measure avoidance of intimacy (e.g., "I get uncomfortable when a romantic partner wants to get very close"). The response scale ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The internal consistency, measured by Cronbach's alpha, was high with .87 for anxiety and .85 for avoidance.

Conflict resolution strategies. Destructive conflict resolution strategies were measured with the Spanish adaptation by Bonache et al. (2016b) of the Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory (CRSI; Kurdek, 1994). This version is a 13-item self-report scale designed to assess patterns of behavior during couples' attempts to resolve disagreements. For this study, two of the three conflict resolution styles that have proven to discriminate between victims and non-victims of dating partners' aggression were selected. Specifically, Conflict Engagement, which includes criticizing, attacking, and losing self-control (e.g., "Launching personal attacks"), and Withdrawal, which includes becoming silent, refusing to discuss the topic, and avoiding the problem (e.g., "Staying silent for long periods of time"). Adolescents were asked to rate the extent (1= *never*; 5= *always*) to which they (CRSI-Self) and their partners (CRSI-Partner) generally used these behaviors in conflict situations. Cronbach´s alphas for CRSI-Self and CRSI-Partner, respectively were .73 and .75 for conflict engagement, and .70 and .70 for withdrawal.

Teen dating violence victimization. Psychological abuse was assessed through a subscale developed by Safe Dates–Psychological Abuse Victimization (Foshee et al., 1998). It consists of 14 items (e.g., "said things to hurt my feelings on purpose", "told me I could not talk to someone of the opposite sex"). In addition, three items from a shortened version of the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS; Straus & Douglas, 2004) were used to measure physical violence victimization (pushing,

hitting, and causing injury). In both scales, responses were made on a scale from 0 (*never*) to 3 (*very often*). Cronbach´s alphas were .73 and .75 for psychological abuse and physical violence victimization, respectively.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Means and standard deviations for all study variables are presented in Table 1. A series of oneway analyses of variance was conducted to explore gender differences, adopting an alpha level of .05/8 = .006 to correct for multiple testing. Only three significant gender differences were found: Boys scored significantly higher than girls on avoidant attachment, F (1, 1189) = 15. 54, $p < .001$, and on physical violence victimization, F (1, 1185) = 12.47, $p < .001$, and lower on self-reported withdrawal, F (1, 822) = 12.63, $p < .001$.

Zero-order correlations among all variables are also shown in Table 1, separately for males and females. The two forms of victimization were positively correlated with all factors in both gender groups. Self-reported and partner-attributed withdrawal and conflict engagement strategies were highly correlated, suggesting a destructive dyadic communication pattern. Avoidant and anxious attachment styles were significantly, but moderately correlated with each other ($r = .12$, $p < .01$ among males and $r = .26$, $p < .001$ among females), supporting their conceptual distinctiveness. Both styles also correlated significantly with all conflict resolution strategies among boys, and with all but one (self-reported conflict engagement) among girls. Few correlations with age were found. Age correlated negatively with attachment anxiety and avoidance among females. Among males, age was negatively correlated with avoidant attachment and positively correlated with perceived partner withdrawal. To account for these correlations, age was included as a covariate in the path models.

Hypothesis Testing

The hypotheses were tested by structural equation modeling using the Mplus 7.1 software (Muthén & Muthén, 2012). The predicted pathways for the two forms

of teen dating violence victimization were tested in a single model. Missing data were handled using a robust Full Information Maximum Likelihood (FIML) estimator implemented in Mplus (Muthén and Muthén, 2012). To test the proposed indirect paths, we inspected the bootstrapped confidence intervals with 10,000 replications, using the ML estimator in Mplus. Indirect paths were considered significant at $p < .05$ if the 95% confidence intervals did not include zero and at $p < .01$ if the 99% confidence intervals did not contain zero.

We first specified a multigroup model by gender in which all path coefficients were constrained to be equal for males and females. This constrained model showed an acceptable fit with the data, χ^2 ($df = 39$) = 135.25, $p < .001$, CFI = .954; TLI = .916, SRMR = .078; RMSEA = .062, 95% CI = (.051; .073). In the next step, we compared this model against an unconstrained model in which all paths were freely estimated for each gender group, χ^2 ($df = 6$) = 19.45), $p < .004$, CFI = .994, TLI = .924, SRMR = .014, RMSEA = .059, 95% CI = (.031; .089). A significant chi-square difference test, diff χ^2 ($df = 33$) = 115.80, $p < .001$, indicated that the unconstrained model provided a significantly better fit with the data than the constrained model. Therefore, the unconstrained multigroup model was adopted as the final model, and individual coefficients were compared between the gender groups using the DIFF test option in Mplus. The model is presented in Figure 1 for psychological abuse as the outcome variable and in Figure 2 for physical violence victimization as the outcome variable. Splitting the results in this way is done for clarity of presentation. The path models were estimated including both outcomes in a single model. The association between the two forms of dating violence victimization was .68 for males and .35 for females, both *p*s < .001, with the gender difference being significant at $p < .01$.

The results largely supported our hypotheses about direct and indirect paths between the factors, although some gender differences deserve attention. Consistent with Hypothesis 1, we found that anxious and avoidant attachment styles were significantly related to psychological abuse in both gender groups. For physical violence victimization, the path from anxious attachment was significant for males, but not for females, whereas the path from avoidant attachment was significant only for females, lending only qualified support to our prediction.

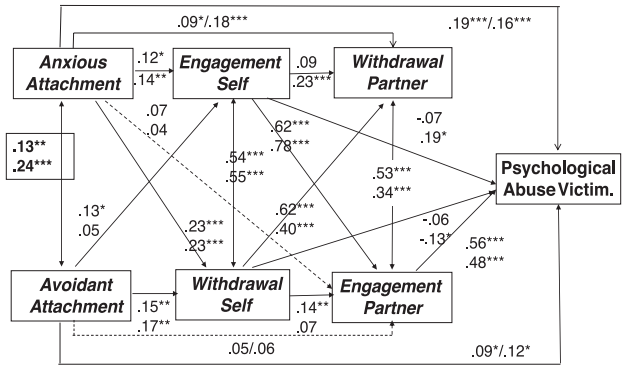

Figure 1. Paths from adult attachment style to psychological abuse (multigroup model by gender, paths freely estimated; age as covariate). $N = 1289$ (652 males; 637 females). Chi2($df = 6$) = 19.45; $p = .004$, CFI = .994; SRMR = .014, RMSEA = .059 (C.I. .031 –.089). First coefficients refer to males, second coefficients refer to females. Boxed coefficients differ significantly. *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$

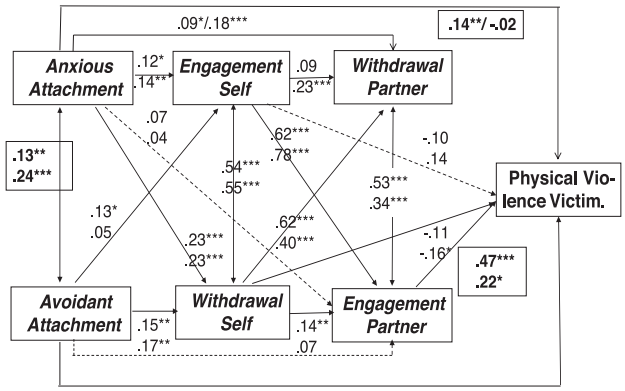

Figure 2. Paths from adult attachment style to physical violence victimization (multigroup model by gender, paths freely estimated; age as covariate). $N = 1289$ (652 males; 637 females). Chi2($df = 6$) = 19.45; $p = .004$, CFI = .994; SRMR = .014, RMSEA = .059 (C.I. .031 –.089). First coefficients refer to males, second coefficients refer to females. Boxed coefficients in bold differ significantly. *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$

Table 1: Bivariate Correlations and Means between Teen Dating Violence Victimization, Perception of Conflict Resolution Styles of Self and Partner, and Attachment Styles.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Psych Abuse	-	.73***	.36***	.25***	.52***	.38***	.26***	.20***	.08
2. Phys Viol	.46***	-	.21***	.12*	.40***	.20***	.20***	.11*	-.01
3. Eng_Self	.55***	.25***	-	.56***	.72***	.46***	.13*	.15**	.03
4. With_Self	.33***	.09	.56***	-	.53***	.70***	.25***	.16**	.03
5. Eng_Part	.61***	.29***	. 83***	.53***	-	.66***	.20***	.21***	.05
6. With_Part	.41***	.10*	.47***	.57***	.57***	-	.25***	.18***	.13**
7. Anx Attach	.27***	.05	.16**	.27***	.19***	.33***	-	.12**	-.02
8. Avoid Att	.23***	.19***	.08	.20***	.17**	.23***	.26***	-	-.11**
9. Age	.08	.00	.02	.05	.01	.02	-.15***	-.19***	-
M_{Males}	4.31	0.41[a]	6.62	7.79[a]	7.21	8.22	32.02	23.78[a]	15.41
SD	5.98	1.30	2.79	3.11	3.34	3.45	12.08	9.57	1.11
$M_{Females}$	5.18	0.19[b]	7.08	8.63[b]	7.00	8.11	33.47	21.51[b]	15.41
SD	6.08	0.79	3.08	3.59	3.22	3.32	13.35	10.33	1.11

Psych Abuse = psychological abuse, Phys Viol = physical violence, Eng_Self = self-reported conflict engagement, With_Self= self-reported withdrawal, Eng_Part = perceived partner´s conflict engagement, With_Part = perceived partner´s withdrawal, Anx Attach = anxious attachment; Avoid Att = avoidant attachment. Coefficients above the diagonal are for males, coefficients below the diagonal are for females.
Note. [a,b] denote a significant gender difference. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

The links proposed between attachment and self-reported conflict resolution strategies were also confirmed with some exceptions in the two gender groups. Specifically, in partial support of Hypothesis 2a, anxious attachment predicted self-reported conflict engagement in males and females, but the path from avoidant attachment to conflict engagement was significant for males only. Consistent with Hypothesis 2b, anxious and avoidant attachment predicted self-reported withdrawal as a conflict resolution strategy among both males and females.

Our predictions concerning the links between insecure attachment and the attribution of destructive conflict resolution to the partner were partially confirmed. Against our predictions in Hypothesis 3a and 3b, the paths from anxious and avoid attachment to partner's perceived conflict engagement strategies were non-significant among both males and females. However, in line with our prediction in Hypothesis 3c, higher anxious attachment was associated with higher withdrawal behaviors perceived in the partner in both gender groups.

In accordance with the communication patterns proposed in Hypothesis 4, self-reported conflict strategies were related to conflict strategies attributed to the partner, although the results varied by gender. In both gender groups, self-reported conflict engagement and withdrawal were significantly related to the respective strategies perceived in the partner. In addition, self-reported conflict engagement predicted withdrawal perceived in the partner for females, but not for males, whereas self-reported withdrawal predicted conflict engagement perceived in the partner for males, but not for females.

Contrary to our prediction in Hypothesis 5a, self-reported withdrawal was a significant negative predictor of both forms of victimization among girls; for boys, the path was non-significant. Likewise, the path from self-reported conflict engagement to psychological abuse was significant only for girls, while the path to physical victimization was non-significant in both gender groups. In line with Hypothesis 5b, the perceived use of conflict engagement by the partner was a significant predictor of both forms of teen dating violence victimization in males and females.

The DIFF test indicated some significant gender differences on individual paths in our model. As noted above, the association between psychological abuse and physical aggression victimization was closer for males than for females. In addition, physical violence victimization was more closely linked to anxious attachment in males than in females; in fact, the path for females was non-significant. Perceived conflict engagement by the partner was more strongly linked to physical violence victimization among males than among females, whereas the association between anxious and avoidant attachment was stronger for females than for males.

Table 2. Proposed Indirect Paths from Attachment Styles to Dating Violence Victimization for the Models in Figures 1 and 2 (Bootstrapped Confidence Intervals)

	Males	Females
Psychological abuse victimization		
Anx Attachment -> Eng_Self -> Eng_Partner -> Psych Abuse	.041*	.051**
Confidence intervals	.007;.094	.002;.119
Anx Attachment -> With_Self -> Eng_Partner -> Psych Abuse	.018*	.008
	.004;.048	-.003;.029
Avoid Attachment -> With_Self -> Eng_Partner -> Psych Abuse	.012*	.006
	.001;.034	-.002;.024
Physical violence victimization		
Anx Attachment -> Eng_Self -> Eng_Partner -> Phys Violence	.034*	.023*
	.005;.087	.003;.086
Anx Attachment -> With_Self -> Eng_Partner -> Phys Violence	.016*	.004
	.003;.046	-.002;.019
Avoid Attachment -> With_Self -> Eng_Partner -> Phys Violence	.010**	.003
	.001; .033	-.001;.016

Psych Abuse = psychological abuse, Phys Violence = physical violence, Eng_Self = self-reported conflict engagement, With_Self= self-reported withdrawal, Eng_Part = perceived partner´s conflict engagement, With_Part = perceived partner´s withdrawal, Anx Attachment = anxious attachment; Avoid Attachment = avoidant attachment.
** 99% confidence interval does not include zero; * 95% confidence interval does not include zero

All hypothesized indirect paths from insecure attachment styles to teen dating violence victimization were found to be significant in males, as shown in Table 2. Consistent with Hypothesis 6, anxious attachment was indirectly linked to experiences of psychological abuse and physical violence through self-reported conflict engagement and perceived conflict engagement by the partner. Additionally, significant indirect paths were found from both anxious and avoid attachment via self-reported withdrawal and conflict engagement attributed to the partner to psychological abuse and physical violence victimization, as predicted in Hypothesis 7. For females, a different picture emerged: Anxious

attachment was indirectly linked to both forms of victimization via the escalation pattern of conflict engagement by the self, which in turn predicted conflict engagement perceived in the partner, consistent with Hypothesis 6. The routes from anxious and avoidant attachment via self-reported withdrawal predicting perceived conflict engagement by the partner were not significant in the female sample, failing to support Hypothesis 7.

Significant indirect paths were found in both gender groups from self-reported conflict engagement via conflict engagement perceived in the partner to physical violence victimization and psychological abuse, for males: .30 (99% C.I. .112; .169) for physical violence victimization and .35 (99% C.I. .203; .534) for psychological abuse victimization, for females: .17 (95% C.I. .037; .504) for physical violence victimization and .38 (99% C.I. .152; .599) for psychological abuse victimization.

Discussion

On the basis of attachment theory, the present study developed a model describing the relationships between romantic attachment, conflict resolution strategies employed by adolescents and attributed to their partner, and teen dating violence victimization in the form of psychological abuse and physical violence. Some previous studies have analyzed the role of attachment styles or conflict resolution skills (Burk & Seiffge-Krenke, 2015; Capaldi et al., 2012; Fernet et al., 2016) to explain dating violence in teen romantic relationships, although without integrating those factors in the same design from the victim's perspective. Only one previous study has studied the combination of these factors, testing a similar model in college student couples (Bonache et al., 2016a). Although the present findings for adolescents largely confirm those found in a sample of college students, there are also differences, which suggest that the findings on intimate partner violence among adults cannot be generalized to adolescents (Johnson, et al., 2015; Mahalik et al., 2013). The direct paths found in our adolescent sample were comparable with findings published in other parts of Europe, Canada, and the United States (Exner-Cortnes, 2014), which provides support for the potential generalizability of our results in the age group of adolescents. Additionally, the

current study extends prior knowledge by examining gender differences. The analysis identified some differences between males and females that suggest a gendered approach to increase the effectiveness of intervention programs.

Research on attachment has shown strong links between anxious attachment and different forms of victimization in adult samples, especially among women (Yarkovsky & Fritz, 2014). By contrast, avoidant attachment has been linked to victimization to a lesser extent (Bonache et al., 2016a). In the current study, the higher adolescents scored on both insecure attachment styles, the more psychological abuse victimization they reported. For physical violence victimization, a gender difference emerged in that attachment anxiety was a significant predictor in boys and attachment avoidance was a significant predictor in girls. In line with attachment theory, these results reflect that avoidantly attached girls may demand autonomy and independence from their partners, while anxiously attached boys may claim attention and care. These behaviors are contrary to traditional gender roles, which are learned in the family and reinforced by other socialization agents (Montañés, et al., 2012; van de Bongardt et al., 2015). Adolescents have been shown to be highly accepting of sexist attitudes (Ferragut, Blanca, Ortiz-Tallo, & Bendayan, 2016) and may therefore react negatively to behavior by their partner that is incongruent with gender role expectations. In this sense, physical aggression may be more likely when partners behave differently than expected according to gender roles. As pointed out by England (2015), the expectations partners have of each other because of their respective social positions are constraints that make the social become personal by influencing relationship dynamics. Our finding that for females self-reported conflict engagement predicted withdrawal perceived in the male partner, whereas for males self-reported withdrawal predicted conflict engagement perceived in the female partner is in line with the gender stereotype that males are more likely to avoid communication about relationship conflicts, which may trigger pressure from their female partners.

Based on previous findings in adults (Bonache et al., 2016a; Fowler & Dilow, 2011), we expected that anxious and avoidant attachment styles would be related to destructive conflict resolution strategies as reported for the self and perceived

in the partner. The results largely confirmed our hypotheses, although three exceptions were found. First, the association between avoidant attachment and self-reported conflict engagement strategies was only found in boys. Evidence suggests that avoidantly attached individuals may use conflict engagement strategies when arguments escalate to maintain independence and relational distance from their partners (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2012). Males tend to score higher on avoidant attachment than do females (Furman & Simon, 2006), which has also been confirmed in the current study. Some research has found that hostile dominance mediated this association in men (Lawson & Brossart, 2013). Therefore, future studies should test if hostile dominance explains the gendered pathways found in our study. Second, both anxious and avoidant attachment styles were unrelated to perceived conflict engagement by the partner in both males and females. This lack of association is consistent with the finding that some anxiously attached individuals are involved in romantic relationships with secure partners, who usually employ positive conflict resolution strategies during arguments (Sierau & Herzberg, 2012). To address this possibility, future research should assess both partners' attachment styles.

The significant associations found in our study between self-reported strategies and strategies attributed to the partners during conflicts are consistent with destructive interaction patterns. In line with previous research, our results suggest that the escalation of conflict pattern is displayed in teen romantic relationships as well. Additionally, the downplaying pattern, consisting of both partners avoiding confrontation and retreating from the conflict situation (Fernet, et al., 2016; Shulman et al., 2006), was also supported by the significant link between self-reported withdrawal strategies and withdrawal perceived in the partner.

The predicted relationship between conflict engagement attributed to the partner and psychological abuse and physical violence victimization was found in both gender groups. For physical violence victimization, it was stronger in boys than in girls. The assumption of a direct path from self-reported conflict engagement and both types of victimization was only partially supported. Females, but not males, who reported more conflict engagement behaviors experienced higher levels of psychological abuse, while self-reported conflict engagement was not directly related to physical violence victimization in either gender group. However, these

findings are qualified by the significant indirect paths in both gender groups from self-reported conflict engagement via conflict engagement perceived in the partner to physical abuse and psychological violence victimization.

Contrary to the expected direction in the paths, those female adolescents who employed more withdrawal strategies reported less psychological abuse and physical violence victimization. This is a notable finding because it may suggest that withdrawal behaviors could be a protective factor against teen dating violence for girls. Better understanding the context in which this negative association occurs and corroborating the gender differences would help to optimize interventions. For instance, in addition to promoting healthy relationships, it would suggest providing adolescents with skills to leave relationships without incurring the risk of violent confrontations (Wolfe et al., 2009).

Beyond examining the direct paths, a main objective of our study was to demonstrate indirect pathways by which individual differences in attachment style are related to teen dating violence victimization. As hypothesized, anxious attachment was indirectly linked to experienced psychological abuse and physical violence through an escalation of conflicts through self-reported conflict engagement that predicted conflict engagement perceived in the partner. Among boys, anxious attachment was additionally linked to victimization through self-reported withdrawal that predicted conflict engagement perceived in the partner. Different results also emerged for boys and girls regarding the link of avoidant attachment to victimization. Among boys, avoidant attachment was related to both types of victimization through self-reported withdrawal strategies and conflict engagement behaviors attributed to their partner. No parallel indirect effect of avoidant attachment was found for girls. One explanation could be that boys in our sample were more avoidantly attached than girls, so the level of avoidant attachment among girls might have been too low to play a role in the communication dynamics that predicting victimization. This reasoning is compatible with the finding that the paths from avoidant attachment to both self-reported conflict engagement and conflict engagement attributed to the partner were non-significant for girls.

These results provide further useful information for intervention programs. For example, raising awareness of the link between insecure attachment

and destructive conflict resolution patterns may help teens to improve their communication in response to disagreements with a romantic partner. Programs should also focus on emotion regulation to address conflict communication patterns and attachment schemas to reduce dating violence victimization. This may be specifically helpful for adolescents, as they often show a lack of effective emotion regulation strategies compared to adults (Zimmermann & Iwanski, 2014), which is related to insecure attachment (Maas et al., 2011) and poor interpersonal skills (Espelage, et al., 2015).

Altogether, our findings emphasize the importance of jointly analyzing both attachment styles and conflict resolution strategies as predictors of psychological abuse and physical violence victimization in teen dating relationships. The gender differences observed in several associations underline the necessity to examine gender-specific pathways to teen dating violence victimization. For example, the direct effect suggested that withdrawal behaviors may be a protective factor against psychological abuse for girls. For boys, self-reported withdrawal emerged as a vulnerability factor for psychological and physical victimization by predicting conflict engagement attributed to the partner.

The current study has some limitations that need to be addressed in future research. First, information gathered to develop the model comes from only one of the partners. Therefore, it would be necessary to test the model using the responses of both partners. Second, data collection was conducted in high schools in Spain, which calls for replication of these findings in other populations. Another limitation of this study is the cross-sectional design that does not permit any conclusions about causality. Previous longitudinal research with adults and adolescents has found that changes in the perception of the partner are related to attachment style (Segal & Fraley, 2015) and to experiences of dating violence (Calvete, Orue, Gámez-Guadix, & López de Arroyabe, 2016). Hence, longitudinal studies would provide insight into possible causal relations among attachment style, conflict resolution dynamics, and vulnerability to teen dating violence victimization.

Conclusion

The current study extends past research on adolescents' experience of dating violence by testing a model that conceptualizes the associations of romantic attachment style and conflict resolution strategies in predicting psychological abuse and physical violence victimization. Our study provides evidence of how insecure attachment and teen dating violence victimization are indirectly linked, identifying gender-specific paths. Specifically, anxious attachment was related to victimization via conflict engagement strategies (self-reported and perceived in the partner) among boys and girls, whereas both anxious and avoidant attachment styles were indirectly linked to victimization via self-reported withdrawal and conflict engagement perceived in the partner only among boys. This study has implications for the design of prevention programs aimed at facilitating healthy relationships through training constructive conflict resolution strategies. Moreover, it highlights the role of individual differences in attachment style in relation to dysfunctional conflict resolution strategies.

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Chapter 4

General Discussion

According to the General Aggression Model (GAM, Anderson & Bushman, 2002), aggressive behavior occurs in interpersonal context because of the convergence of personal factors that predispose to aggression and situational factors that act as triggers. In an effort to increase the knowledge about how to prevent DV, the literature has identified a large list of personal and situational factors. However, although this integrative social-cognitive framework has been applied to a better understanding of perpetration of violence within couples (DeWall et al., 2011), some researchers have suggested it also offers explanations on DV victimization (Hamby & Grych, 2013). Based on this approach, this dissertation has focused on romantic attachment as personal factor due to its high explanatory capability for interpersonal processes within intimate relationships. In this sense, attachment styles have proven their ability to predict negative communication patterns (Fowler & Dillow, 2011; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2012), as well as DV victimization (Capaldi et al., 2012; Péloquin et al., 2011; Yarkovsky & Fritz, 2014), even after 4-year period (Miga et al., 2010). Moreover, conflict resolution strategies were chosen as situational factors because of research has indicated that some strategies to manage partner's disagreements may also lead to violence (Katz & Myhr, 2008; Messinger et al., 2012). Despite the fact that both romantic attachment and conflict resolution strategies predict DV victimization, to date there has been no research integrating all these factors. From this perspective, the present thesis has provided evidence that the GAM (Anderson & Bushman, 2002) is useful to a better understanding of DV victimization. Specifically, the models presented in the first and fourth studies show the relationships between insecure attachment styles, conflict resolution strategies of self and those perceived in the partner, and several forms of DV victimization.

Given that the romantic relationships have different characteristics depending on the developmental period in which they take place (Little & Welsh, 2011), the first model (Study 1) was developed in adults and the second (Study 4) in adolescents, which has allowed us to compare relationship dynamics in both age groups. Previously, in order to develop the model in teenagers, it was necessary to have a reliable instrument to measure strategies used by adolescents to manage conflicts with the partner. Given that in Spain there were not appropriated scales to assess them, two studies were carried out to adapt and validate the *Conflict Resolution Strategies Inventory* (CRSI; Kurdek, 1994) in Spanish adolescent samples. The original instrument contains four conflict resolution styles (Positive, Conflict Engagement, Withdrawal, and Compliance), as well as two subscales (CRSI-Self/CRSI-Partner), which makes possible to evaluate the self-reported conflict resolution strategies and those attributed to the partner. Initially, the psychometric properties of the scale and its evidence of validity were tested through other theoretically related construct, such as trait anxiety. The findings led to remove some items to ensure consistency and homogeneity of the factors. The final version of the CRSI has 13 items that compose a three-factor structure for each of the two subscales: Positive, Conflict Engagement, and Withdrawal. Subsequently, the factorial structure and its discriminative ability were corroborated. Specifically, it was confirmed that the more use of withdrawal and conflict engagement strategies to solve partner disagreements, the higher levels of DV involvement among adolescents. Based on these results, the CRSI extends research on interpersonal processes in couples by providing the first instrument to measure conflict resolution strategies in Spanish adolescents. In addition, it offers methodological support for the model developed in the last empirical research of this thesis.

In view of our results, the comparison between adult and adolescent models shows similarities in the experience of DV, but also differences by age group. Consistent with research on teen DV, some small changes were inserted in the Study 4, such as testing a new path and analyzing physical aggression instead sexual coercion. Nevertheless, the differences found emphasize that adults' experience of DV cannot be generalized to teenagers (Johnson et al., 2015). For clarity in the presentation of the models, the direct and indirect links are broken down into the following issues:

a) Romantic attachment as personal factor related to destructive conflicts and DV victimization.

Overall, both models support previous literature by showing that insecure attachment is a predictor of unhealthy interpersonal processes. Specifically, insecure attachment was related to destructive conflict resolution strategies of self and those perceived in the partner, with one exception: the link between avoidance and conflict engagement attributed to partner was non-significant in any of the two age groups. In addition, insecure attachment predicted several forms of DV victimization.

Nevertheless, adolescents and young adults also differ in some findings. For instance, while anxiously attached teenagers unperceived conflict engagement in the partner, adults did. Two complementary explanations are possible. First, given that teens tend to act by a strong need for acceptance and high fear of social rejection (London et al., 2011), it is plausible that they would be more sensitive to perceive withdrawal behaviors, and pay less attention to conflict engagement strategies of the partner. Furthermore, some anxiously attached individuals are involved in romantic relationships with secure partners, who often use positive strategies to manage conflicts (Sierau & Herzberg, 2013). Another difference found between both age groups was that, although avoidantly attached individuals may resort to conflict engagement as a way to distancing themselves from their partner (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2012), this link was only found in boys. Some evidence suggests that this result might be a consequence of the high testosterone levels in male adolescents, which have been associated with social status-seeking (Harden, Kretsch, Tackett, & Tucker-Drob, 2014). In this sense, Del Giudice (2009) noted that avoidantly attached boys may display competitive and aggressive behaviors as a status-seeking strategy.

In the adolescent model, physical aggression was explored instead sexual coercion. The results showed that only anxiously attached boys and avoidantly attached girls reported physical aggression victimization. This gendered pattern reminds us that adolescents have to shape their identity under pressure of peers and sociocultural demands (Little & Welsh, 2011), and that patriarchy and traditional gender roles are widely accepted in Western societies (Brandt, 2011),

especially among this age group (Ferragut et al., 2016). Therefore, it seems plausible that anxiously attached boys and avoidanlty attached girls behave differently than expected according to gender roles, being more likely to face a negative reaction from their sexist partners, such as physical aggression.

b) Destructive communication patterns in romantic relationships.

Research has pointed out the importance of analyzing conflict resolution strategies of both partners, due to behaviors of one partner are interrelated to the strategies used by the other partner (Paradis et al. 2017). In this way, there have been identified some destructive communication patterns that tend to be recurrent in some romantic relationships, such as escalation of conflicts, demand/withdrawal pattern, and downplaying pattern. According to previous literature, the escalation of conflicts is defined as active confrontation and an interrelation between conflict engagement strategies of self and partner (Honeycutt et al., 2015; Messinger et al., 2012; Shulman et al., 2006). Our results support that this pattern is exhibited both by adolescent and adult couples. In this sense, interventions to avoid escalation of conflicts could focus on cognitive distortions that emerge during the disagreements, since minimization and excuse of the own behavior, together the reciprocal partner's blame and accusation, lead to emotional arousal and further escalation (Whiting & Cravens, 2016).

Although the demand/withdrawal pattern has been widely found in adult couples (Schrodt et al., 2014), it has rarely been examined in teen dating relationships. This destructive communication interaction indicates that while one partner criticizes, uses personal attacks, and demands changes, the other partner avoids confrontation of conflicts, changes the topic or passively disengages from the interaction. Researchers have suggested that women-demand/men-withdrawal pattern is displayed more frequently than the reverse pattern because of the gender differences of power (Schrodt et al., 2014), which seems to be supported by our adolescent sample. As mentioned above, adolescents tend to show strong sexist attitudes (Ferragut et al., 2016), hence traditional gender roles and dating scripts may guide early romantic experiences. This and the social rejection fear for behaving contrary to gender roles, would explain why girls reported self-demand and partner-withdrawal, whereas boys displayed self-withdrawal and

partner-demand. By contrast, in adult couples it was found the link between self-report conflict engagement and perception of withdrawal strategies in the partner, but not the reverse communication pattern. Consistent with previous literature, this result suggests that engaging or withdrawing depends not so much on gender, but on who generates the conflict topic especially in early adulthood (McGinn, McFarland, & Christensen, 2009).

The downplaying pattern is characterized by a high tendency of both partners to avoid discussing conflicts or clarifying them, which has been found especially in teen dating relationships (Fernet et al., 2016; Shulman et al., 2006). According to this evidence, the last empirical study of this thesis also confirms this communication pattern in adolescent sample. Thus, the fact that both partners use withdrawal strategies may be explained because of several typical characteristics of this period, such as their motivation to prevent the dissolution of the relationship (Shulman et al., 2006), their limited emotion regulation abilities (Zimmermann & Iwanski 2014), and their poor communication skills (Furman & Shomaker, 2008).

c) Conflict resolution strategies as situational factors related to DV victimization.

Given that perpetrators of DV tend to display destructive behaviors, such as criticize, blame, demand and pressure, to manage partner's disagreements (Fournier, Brassard, & Shaver, 2011), it is reasonable to expect victims would perceive these same strategies in the partner. In this vein, our results were consistent with previous research in supporting that adults and adolescents who attribute conflict engagement strategies to the partner also show high levels of DV victimization (Messinger et al., 2012). Therefore, the perception of conflict engagement in the partner is a factor that increases the likelihood of experiencing DV regardless of the development period.

The findings reveal differences in the links between self-reported strategies and DV victimization in both age groups. In particular, destructive conflict resolution strategies reported by adult participants were unrelated to DV victimization, whereas self-reported conflict engagement and withdrawal were significant for girls, but in different direction. In particular, while withdrawal strategy seems a

protector factor against physical and psychological abuse, self-reported conflict engagement increases the likelihood of experiencing psychological abuse, but not physical aggression. These results may be understood from interrelated approaches. For instance, DV perpetrators often blame the partner for starting conflicts and for the actions taken during the discussion (Scott & Straus, 2007). In fact, women tend to feel guilty after a conflict situation, especially when they show high levels of dependency and anxious attachment (Valor-Segura, Expósito, Moya, & Kluwer, 2014). Moreover, adolescents who self-blaming tend to develop expectations, attitudes, and interpretations of romantic relationships that may reach further destructive interactions (Simon & Furman, 2010). Therefore, female adolescents of our sample may blame themselves and attribute their psychological victimization to their own conflict engagement behaviors, while they perceive that evading disagreements may help them stop the abuse.

d) Convergence of romantic attachment, destructive communication patterns, and DV victimization.

According to the GAM (Anderson & Bushman, 2002), one of the main objectives of this thesis was to analyze if some personal and situational components converge in partner interactions to increase the vulnerability to DV. More specifically, personal factors, such as romantic attachment, and situational factors, such as destructive conflict resolution strategies of both partners were examined. The indirect links between insecure attachment and several forms of DV victimization, through destructive communication patterns, have been studied in male perpetrator samples (Fournier et al., 2011). However, these relationships remain unexplored from victims' perspective. Nevertheless, the results supported that anxiously attached adults and adolescents are often involved in escalation of conflicts, leading to victimization in their romantic relationships.

Although more indirect pathways were examined in both age groups, they were significant only in boys. In particular, both insecure attachment styles predicted psychological and physical victimization when boys self-reported withdrawal behaviors and perceived conflict engagement in the partner. In this regard, the convergence of several factors might be explaining this result. For instance, some individuals are able to emotionally and behaviorally regulate an insecure

partner, which generates constructive interactions. By contrast, others have troubles to manage own and partner's emotions and behaviors during stressful situations (Simpson & Overall, 2014). Furthermore, when partners of avoidant individuals are insensitive to their autonomy needs, they use withdrawal strategy as defensive reaction, leading to less successful discussions (Overall, Simpson, & Struthers, 2013). Likewise, consistent with previous research (Brumbaugh et al., 2014) it is likely that insecure boys of our sample tend to prefer physical beauty over securely attached partners. In this sense, they may be involved with insecure girlfriends, which may increase the perception of the male-withdrawal/female-engagement pattern. Therefore, while boys withdraw of disagreements, girls may demand, attack, and criticize them. In this conflict of attachment needs, male adolescents may feel victimized by their partner. In addition, this destructive communication pattern may be reinforced by their sexist attitudes and negative models of attachment.

Conclusions and practical implications

The current thesis extends research on DV victimization by providing two integrative models, which show the relationships between romantic attachment, destructive communication patterns, and the experience of several forms of DV in adults and adolescents. In particular, both models evidence that the likelihood of being victim of DV increases when insecure attachment styles (personal factors) and conflict resolution strategies of self and those perceived in the partner (situational factors) converge. Consistent with previous literature, these results highlight the importance of including conflict-management skills in prevention programs (Cornelius & Resseguie, 2007; De La Rue et al., 2016). However, some researchers have considered conflict resolution strategies as an individual component instead of as a situational factor (Foshee & Langwick, 2004), in spite of disagreements take place in an interpersonal context in which the behaviors of one partner depend on the behaviors used by the other partner (Paradis et al., 2017). In this sense, this dissertation emphasizes the need of assessing destructive resolution strategies of both partners through communication patterns, such as escalation of conflicts and demand/withdrawal pattern, to reach positive outcomes in interventions. Furthermore, the inclusion of activities to make

individuals aware of how models of attachment guide their behaviors, expectations, emotions, and attitudes in relationships, as well as to promote secure attachment might prevent the development of unhealthy interactions in couples. In fact, research has indicated that some partners are able to buffer the impact of insecure attachment in conflictive interactions, leading to the use of constructive strategies and successful discussions (Simpson & Overall, 2014). Therefore, the inclusion of romantic attachment and communication patterns in prevention programs of DV seems to be a promising way to gain effectiveness in interventions.

By comparing young adults and adolescents, the results reveal that both age groups share similarities in their experiences of DV, but also some differences. In this way, this thesis provides evidence by supporting that the findings on DV victimization in early adulthood samples cannot be generalized to adolescent population. Thus, future research should be aimed at analyzing and interpreting both age groups separately, considering the developmental period in which they are. Moreover, in order to design effective prevention programs, the efforts should be tailored for particular characteristics of interventions' targets, such as age and gender (Jennings et al., 2017). For instance, DV prevention interventions should include skill-building components aimed at reducing destructive communication patterns. However, while escalation of conflicts has to be dealt in both genders and both age groups, the male-withdrawal/female-engagement pattern needs more attention in boys.

As consequence of the results found in this thesis, new questions have emerged. In this regard, given that sexism has been related to romantic attachment (Hart, Hung, Glick, & Dinero, 2012), it would be interesting to explore in future research the possible relationship between sexist ideology, attachment styles, and conflict resolution strategies in partners. Similarity, it would be convenient to analyze the sort of conflicts in which the participants think while they complete the *Conflict Resolution Strategies Inventory*.

In summary, this thesis evidences that DV victimization in young adults and adolescents depends on personal and situational factors, such as attachment styles and destructive communication patterns that converge in the romantic

interactions. In this sense, establishing healthy and safe relationships implies promoting secure attachment style and constructive strategies to manage partner's conflicts. Likewise, the intervention programs should focus on particular characteristics of gender and of the development.

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