

# LONGITUDINAL CHANGES IN ATTACHMENT REPRESENTATIONS PREDICT INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AND DYADIC ADJUSTMENT IN DATING RELATIONSHIPS.



Daspe, Marie-Ève<sup>1-4</sup>; Godbout, Natacha<sup>1-4</sup>; Lussier, Yvan<sup>2-4</sup>; Sabourin, Stéphane<sup>3-4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Université du Québec à Montréal, <sup>2</sup> Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, <sup>3</sup> Université Laval, <sup>4</sup> Centre de recherche interdisciplinaire sur les problèmes conjugaux et les agressions sexuelles



## Abstract

The goal of the study was to examine if longitudinal changes in attachment security are associated with variations in perpetrated dating violence (DV) and relationship satisfaction in adolescents and young adults. Results showed that increases in attachment insecurity were related to increases in DV and to decreases in relationship satisfaction. The findings suggest that changes in attachment are to be expected in these developmental periods and that these variations affect relationship outcomes.

## Introduction

- Attachment insecurity is a significant risk factor for the perpetration of dating violence (DV), in adolescents and emerging adults (e.g., Godbout et al., 2009);
- Given that adolescence and early adulthood are periods of new romantic experiences, internalized representations of romantic attachment are susceptible to develop or change;
- However, there is a longstanding debate over the stability of attachment (e.g., Fraley et al., 2011) and whether changes in attachment may predict relationship functioning;
- Examining reciprocal fluctuations between individual vulnerabilities and DV might help circumscribe relevant targets for intervention;
- Objective: To investigate if changes in attachment security are associated with variations in perpetrated DV and relationship satisfaction.**

## Results

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for attachment, dating violence, and relationship satisfaction at Time 1 and Time 2

Variables	$M_{T1}$	$SD_{T1}$	% <sub>T1</sub>	$M_{T2}$	$SD_{T2}$	% <sub>T2</sub>	$t$	$p$
Attachment anxiety	3,44	1,03	47,0	3,15	1,04	35,0	4,44**	,01
Attachment avoidance	1,86	0,68	16,2	1,69	0,55	9,4	3,15**	,01
Relationship satisfaction	4,33	0,63	7,8	4,31	0,64	7,4	0,28	,78
	At least one act (%) <sub>T1</sub>			At least one act (%) <sub>T2</sub>			$t$	$p$
Psychological DV	64,1			73,9			7973,00	,13
Physical DV	24,8			20,5			2264,00*	,045

Note. % = proportion of the sample in the clinical range

For all variables, scores at T1 were subtracted from scores at T2 (T2 - T1)

Table 2. Correlation coefficients between changes in attachment representations, dating violence, and relationship satisfaction,

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Anx	-				
2. Avoi	,18**	-			
3. Psy	,20**	,13	-		
4. Phy	,23**	,09	,44**	-	
5. DAS	-,19**	-,63**	-,38**	-,21**	-

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ . Note. Anx = Changes in attachment anxiety; Avoi = Changes in attachment avoidance; Psy = Changes in psychological DV; Phy = Changes in physical DV; DAS = Changes in relationship satisfaction.

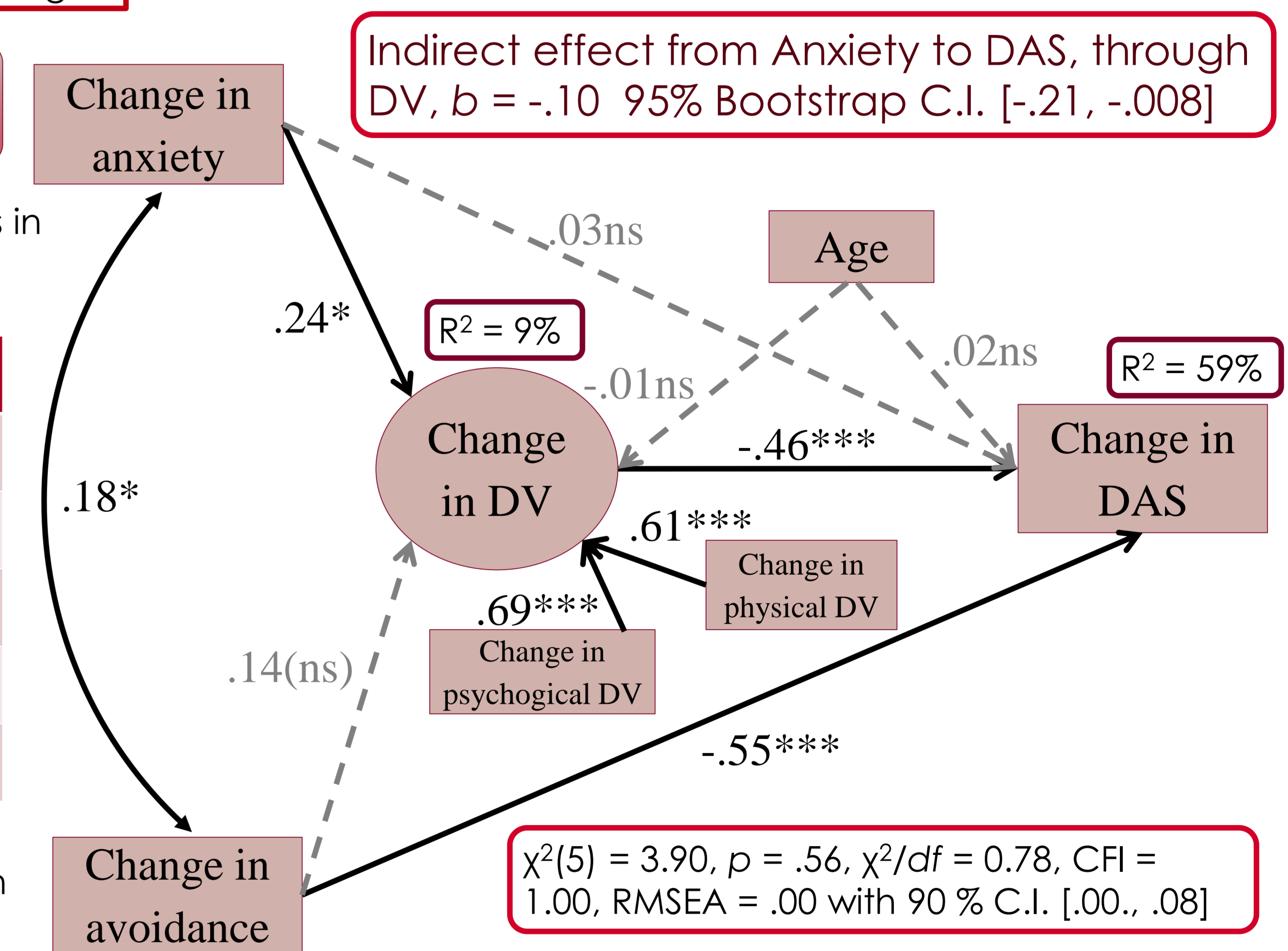


Figure 2. Associations between longitudinal changes in attachment, dating violence and relationship satisfaction. \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

## Method

- Participants:** 234 adolescents and young adults (195 women and 39 men) aged 15 to 24 years old ( $M = 18,23$ ,  $ET = 1,28$ ) at time 1, and engaged in a romantic relationship.
- Procedure**
- Time 1:** High school and college students invited in their classroom to complete a series of questionnaires and return them by mail. ( $n = 1252$ )
- Time 2:** 3 years later, participants were mailed the questionnaires. Attrition rate = 75,2%,  $n = 311$ . Participant still engaged in a relationship:  $n = 234$ .
- Measures:** Experiences in Close Relationships inventory (Brennan et al., 1998); Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS-4; Sabourin et al. 2005); Revised Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS2; Straus et al., 1996); Sociodemographic questionnaire.

## Discussion

- The findings suggest that (1) increases in attachment anxiety are related to increases in DV, which in turn, predict decreases in relationship satisfaction, and that (2) increases in attachment avoidance are directly associated with decreases in relationship satisfaction.
- Results support the plasticity of attachment representations in adolescence and young adulthood.
- Implications**
- This study highlights attachment insecurity as a key variable that could be targeted in treatment and prevention programs addressing early manifestation of DV, in order to avoid a crystallisation or escalation of violence throughout the romantic trajectory.