

**Implicitly Imprinting the Past on the Present:  
Automatic Partner Attitudes and the Transition to Parenthood**

Sandra L. Murray

Mark D. Seery

University at Buffalo, The State University of New York

Veronica M. Lamarche

University of Essex

Cheryl Kondrak

University at Buffalo, The State University of New York

Sarah Gomillion

Facebook

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**Abstract**

A new model is proposed to explain how automatic partner attitudes affect how couples cope with major life transitions. The Automatic Partner Attitudes in Transition (APAT) model assumes that people simultaneously possess contextualized automatic attitudes toward their partner that can differ substantively in valence pre- and post-transition. It further assumes that evaluatively *inconsistent* pre- and post-transition automatic partner attitudes elicit heightened behavioral angst or uncertainty, self-protective behavior in response to risk, and relationship distress. A longitudinal study of the transition to first parenthood supported the model. People with evaluatively inconsistent automatic partner attitudes, whether more *negative pre-transition* and *positive post-transition*, or more *positive pre-transition* and *negative post-transition*, exhibited heightened evidence of cardiovascular threat discussing conflicts, increased self-protective behavior in response to parenting-related transgressions in daily interaction, and steeper declines in relationship well-being in the year following the transition to parenthood.

**Implicitly Imprinting the Past on the Present:****Automatic Partner Attitudes and the Transition to Parenthood**

*“Before I got married I had six theories about bringing up children; now I have six children, and no theories.”* John Wilmot

New parenthood is one of the most confounding experiences couples encounter. No matter the advanced preparation, the birth of a baby fundamentally changes the interdependence structure of the relationship. Transitioning from partners to parents compels couples to rely on one another to accomplish even the simplest of life necessities, such as eating a meal, taking a shower, or catching a nap (Doss, Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2009). Couples also reliably encounter new incompatibilities and sources of conflict as the challenge of meeting an infant’s relentless and often unpredictable needs reveals novel ways for them to disappoint one another (Hackel & Ruble, 1992). Indeed, new parents typically experience paradoxical declines in personal happiness (Clark, Diener, Georgellis, & Lucas, 2008) and relationship satisfaction (Doss et al., 2009) after the joyous and eagerly anticipated birth of a first baby.

Much like Wilmot, the existing literature roots difficulties adjusting to parenthood in the consciously held theories couples bring to the relationship, such as expectations for the fair division of labor (Hackel & Ruble, 1992), specific beliefs about a partner’s responsiveness (Rholes, Simpson, Campbell & Grice, 2001), or generalized attachment models (Filio, Simpson, Rholes, & Kohn, 2015; Simpson, Rholes, Campbell, Tran, & Wilson, 2003). But, in the sleep-deprived, taxing, and perplexing world that is new parenthood, people may have little recourse but to rely on automatic associations to their partner to navigate ongoing parental interactions (Dijksterhuis & Nordgren, 2006). This paper advances a new contextual model of how automatic partner attitudes regulate approach versus avoidance behavior in relationships

undergoing major transitions, such as the birth of a new baby. This model assumes that multiple automatic partner attitudes – formed pre- and post-transition – exist simultaneously in memory and jointly regulate how couples respond to the challenges specific to the new transition.

### **Motivating Self-Protection: Automatic Partner Attitudes as a Behavioral Guide**

Imagine the parents of a colicky infant daughter facing the 3 AM necessity of lulling her back to sleep (again). This evening Aaron promised Arya that he would take on the nighttime responsibilities to allow her a solid night of sleep before her first day back at work. But, Aaron slept soundly on through his daughter's wails, leaving Arya tending her daughter's needs through the night on her own once again. When Aaron and Arya greet the dawn of a new day, will she forgive and forget or rebuff and chastise him, making her less dependent on his future promises?

Vulnerability-inducing situations – that is, situations that highlight a partner's potential to be hurtful and unresponsive – press for action (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003; Murray, Holmes, & Collins, 2006). But, they also pose a behavioral quandary: They pit the situationally immediate goal to self-protect and blunt the pain of rejection against the larger goal to connect to the partner and protect the relationship (Murray, Derrick, Leder, & Holmes, 2008; Murray et al., 2006). To act to restore safety in such situations, people need to resolve this goal conflict (Harmon-Jones, Amodio, & Harmon-Jones, 2009). In the risk regulation model, expectations for a partner's future responsiveness dynamically arbitrate this conflict (Murray et al., 2006; Murray & Holmes, 2009). Expecting a partner to be accepting and responsive, and thus *desirable to approach*, reinforces the situational goal to connect and inhibits the goal to self-protect, motivating people to be forgiving and accommodative. However, expecting a partner to be rejecting and unresponsive, and thus *better to avoid*, strengthens the situational goal to self-protect and inhibits the goal to connect, motivating people to push their partner away (Derrick, Leonard, & Homish,

2012; Ford & Collins, 2010; Forest & Wood, 2011; Murray & Holmes, 2009; Murray & Holmes, 2017; Murray et al., 2008; Murray, Bellavia, Rose & Griffin, 2003; Murray, Rose, Bellavia, Holmes, & Kusche, 2002; Overall & Fletcher, 2010; Overall & Sibley, 2009a; 2009b).

The attitudes literature suggests that people implicitly learn whether specific attitude objects are desirable to approach or better to avoid through past experience interacting with such objects (Fazio, 1986; Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006; Gregg, Seibt, & Banaji, 2006; Grumm, Nestler, & von Collani, 2009; Olson & Fazio, 2008; Rydell, McConnell, Mackie, & Strain, 2006; Wilson, Lindsey & Schooler, 2000). Automatic behavioral inclinations to approach versus avoid a specific attitude object are even embodied within the attitudinal representation itself (Fazio, 2007; Fazio, Ledbetter & Towles-Schwen, 2000; Towles-Schwen & Fazio, 2006). For instance, priming positively evaluated objects elicits arm movements associated with bringing such favored objects closer, whereas priming negatively evaluated objects elicits arm movements associated with pushing such disfavored objects away (Chen & Bargh, 1999). Priming thoughts of being old slows walking speed for people with positive automatic attitudes toward the elderly, while it accelerates walking speed for people with negative automatic attitudes (Cesario, Plaks, & Higgins, 2006). Similarly, imagining being approached by a favored friend elicits postural shifts for stepping forward, whereas imagining being approached by a stranger activates postural shifts for stepping back (Miles, Christian, Masilamani, Volpi, & Macrae, 2014).

Like any other attitude, automatic attitudes toward a romantic partner similarly function to signal the partner's desirability to approach because these attitudes sensitively track the partner's responsiveness in past interactions. The available research suggests that daily interactions with a more responsive partner condition more positive later automatic evaluative associations to that partner (Murray, Gomillion, Holmes, Harris, Lamarche, 2013; Murray,

Holmes, & Pinkus, 2010). Automatic partner attitudes even capture diagnostic information about a partner's desirability to approach that deliberative reasoning misses (LeBel & Campbell, 2009; Lee, Rogge, & Reis, 2010; McNulty, Baker, & Olson, 2014; McNulty, Olson, Meltzer, & Shaffer, 2013; Scinta & Gable, 2007). For instance, even though people with more negative automatic attitudes toward their partner profess great happiness at the point of marriage, they ultimately experience much steeper declines in satisfaction over their newlywed years than people with more positive automatic partner attitudes (McNulty et al., 2013).

When situations highlight the potential for a partner to be hurtful and rejecting, automatic partner attitudes convey uniquely diagnostic information about the partner's likely responsiveness and desirability to approach. Consequently, these attitudes can help arbitrate the goal conflict inherent to hurtful situations because automatic behavioral inclinations to approach versus avoid the partner are embodied within the attitude itself (Murray, Pinkus, Holmes, Harris, Gomillion, Aloni, Derrick, & Leder, 2011; Murray et al., 2013). In vulnerability-inducing situations, more negative automatic partner attitudes activate behavioral inclinations to avoid the partner that reinforce the situational goal to self-protect and distance, making it easier to inhibit the conflicting situational goal to connect. However, more positive automatic partner attitudes activate behavioral inclinations to approach that reinforce the situational goal to connect to the partner in vulnerability-inducing situations, making it easier to inhibit the conflicting situational goal to self-protect (Murray et al., 2011, 2013). As a result, people with more positive automatic partner attitudes can paradoxically think and behave *better* in high than low risk situations.

For instance, believing one's partner has just provided a laundry list of one's faults elicits automatic distancing from the partner for people with less, but not more, positive automatic partner attitudes (Murray et al., 2011). Believing one's partner has just extensively itemized

one's faults also decreases psychophysiological threat reactions and evaporates apprehension about a partner's criticism when people with more positive automatic attitudes are low in executive resources and especially susceptible to these attitudes (Murray, Lupien, & Seery, 2012). Even people who normally retaliate against their partner's daily transgressions, such as those low in self-esteem or self-control, instead draw closer when they possess more positive automatic partner attitudes (Murray et al., 2013; Murray, Gomillion, Holmes, & Harris, 2015).

### **Automatic Partner Attitudes in Transition (The APAT Model)**

Prior research has tacitly assumed that people possess only one automatic attitude toward their partner at any given time. However, people can sometimes possess more than one simultaneous attitude toward a specific attitude object because they encounter the attitude object in different contexts (Gawronski & Cesario, 2013; Gawronski, Ye, Rydell, & De Houwer, 2014, Gawronski, Rydell, Vervliet, & De Houwer, 2010). In relationships, significant transitions, such as moving in together, becoming parents and then empty nesters, or retiring, similarly add to the contexts in which the partner is encountered. Indeed, such transitions can introduce markedly new interactions patterns (Huston, Caughlin, Houts, & Smith, & George, 2001; Huston, McHale & Crouter, 1986; Huston & Vangelisti, 1991). For instance, expectant parents generally experience a pre-baby bump in satisfaction, swept away in nervous excitement. However, this ebullience sometimes gives way to a post-birth funk when greater time spent on tedious than tantalizing tasks reveals rifts and conflicts that partners never realized they possessed (Claxton & Perry-Jenkins, 2008; Cowan & Cowan, 1988; MacDermid, Huston, & McCale, 1990).

Figure 1 presents the Automatic Partner Attitudes in Transition (APAT) model. In this model, relationship transitions, such as first parenthood, offer the opportunity to learn about the partner in a new, previously unexplored, situations (Kelley, 1979). Consequently, this transition

is thought to condition a new, and contextualized, automatic partner attitude, one that is specific to newly emergent situations. In the case of the transition to parenthood, Arya's new, post-transition attitude should summarize her newly forming hopes and experiences with her baby and Aaron as her *partner in parenting*. Indeed, her new attitude toward Aaron may be experientially confounded with her attitude toward her baby (i.e., the transition itself). Her old, pre-transition attitude instead summarizes her past experiences with Aaron as her *romantic partner*. Because old, pre-transition attitudes are conditioned through a longer history of interaction than new, post-transition attitudes (Murray et al., 2010), new attitudes do not replace old attitudes in the APAT model. Instead, both "old", post-transition, and "new", pre-transition, automatic partner attitudes exist simultaneously as available representations in memory, ready to guide action.

The APAT model builds on the PAST (Past Attitudes are Still There) model of explicit attitude representations (Petty, Tormala, Brinol, & Jarvis, 2006). Like the APAT model, the PAST model assumes that new and old attitude representations exist simultaneously in memory. However, the PAST model further assumes that people tag the old attitude as "false" or untrustworthy when they encounter attitudinal information that prompts a new, corrected attitude. When retrieved, the "false" tag attached to the old attitude discounts its behavioral implications, which minimizes any implicit behavioral conflict posed by inconsistent old and new attitudes. The APAT model instead grants pre- and post-transition automatic partner attitudes equal claims to veracity in memory. Relationship transitions, such as the birth of a new baby, do not invalidate the couple's history. In fact, pre-transition explicit attitudes toward the partner actually predict later adjustment to new parenthood (Rholes et al., 2001; Simpson et al., 2003), suggesting these representations are not tagged as "false" in post-transition life.

### **Evaluative In/consistency Regulates Relationship Dynamics**

In the APAT model, pre- and post-transition attitudes necessarily differ in *situational associations*. In the case of the transition to parenthood, experiences parenting an actual infant as a couple can only condition the new, contextualized, automatic partner attitude; such experiences cannot reach backwards in time to retroactively erase existing associative ties between the partner's pre-baby behavior as a romantic partner and the old, pre-transition attitude.

But, pre- and post-transition attitudes may or may not differ in *evaluative tone* and the correspondent behavioral inclinations they automatically elicit. When interactions in new, post-parenthood situations, such as tending for an infant's physical needs, echo the evaluative nature of pre-parenthood interactions, pre- and post-transition automatic partner attitudes should be *evaluatively consistent*. However, when interactions in new, post-parenthood situations do *not* echo the evaluative tone of pre-transition interactions, pre- and post-transition automatic partner attitudes should be *evaluatively inconsistent*. In the APAT model, evaluative in/consistency in pre- and post-transition automatic partner attitudes controls how constructively couples manage the threats and opportunities afforded by their newly heightened dependence on one another.

Consider how evaluative consistency in pre- and post-transition attitudes might affect how people navigate situations that highlight the partner's "new" potential to be hurtful as a *partner in parenting* (e.g., Aaron sleeping through his daughter's cries) and "old" potential to be hurtful *as a romantic partner* (e.g., Aaron forgetting Arya's birthday again). Both "new" and "old" situations put the goal to connect in conflict with the goal to self-protect, sensitizing people to the action implications of their automatic partner attitudes. However, only the "new" parenting risk situations are likely to strongly and simultaneously activate both partner attitudes.

Why would this be the case? "Old" or pre-transition attitudes have a long prior history of

activation in past situations where the partner might prove to be hurtful, likely rendering these “old” attitudes more chronically accessible and readily generalized than the “new” pre-transition attitudes (Murray et al., 2011; 2013). Thus, pre-transition attitudes should be more likely to be activated whenever the partner proves to be hurtful, whether it happens in a “new” parenting or “old” romantic partner situation. However, “new” or post-transition attitudes have a shorter history of activation in specific and still evolving situations with the baby and the partner. Thus, post-transition attitudes should be more strongly activated when the partner might prove to be hurtful *as a parent* than when the partner fails on the romantic side because the associative content of this new, post-transition partner attitude is specifically tagged to parenting situations.

**The behavioral angst hypothesis.** When ongoing situations activate both attitudes, as is likely when Aaron sleeps through his infant daughter’s wails, the APAT model stipulates that people will experience greater behavioral angst or uncertainty when pre- and post-transition attitudes are evaluatively inconsistent than consistent (see Path A in Figure 1). In such situations, the simultaneous activation of evaluatively *inconsistent* pre- and post-transition attitudes elicits discordant inclinations to both approach *and* avoid the partner. However, people cannot simultaneously pursue two opposing goals, creating an aversive state of behavioral angst or indecision for people with evaluatively inconsistent pre- and post-transition attitudes (Harmon-Jones, Harmon-Jones, & Levy, 2015; Newby-Clark, McGregor, & Zanna, 2002; Orehek & Vazeou-Nieuwenhuis, 2013). Indeed, just thinking of reasons to both approach and avoid an unfamiliar attitude object makes people physically totter, unable to decisively step forward or back (Schneider, Eerland, van Harreveld, Rotteveel, Pligt, Stoep, & Zwaan, 2013). However, the simultaneous activation of evaluatively *consistent* attitudes automatically elicits concordant behavioral inclinations to either approach or avoid the partner. Therefore, Arya

should not experience any angst about her inclination to forgive Aaron's parenting transgressions when both attitudes are relatively positive or rebuff him when both are relatively negative.

According to the biopsychosocial model of challenge/threat, cardiovascular responses can diagnose people's appraisals of ongoing situations as relatively manageable, tenable and actionable or unmanageable, untenable, and unactionable (Blascovich, 2008; Blascovich & Tomaka, 1996; Seery, 2011; 2013; Seery & Quinton, 2016). When people perceive personal resources as high and situational demands as low, their hearts work more efficiently, a state of psychophysiological challenge captured through higher cardiac output (CO) and lower total peripheral resistance (TPR). When people instead evaluate situational demands as high and personal resources as low, their hearts work less efficiently, a state of psychophysiological threat captured through lower CO and higher TPR. For people with evaluatively inconsistent pre- and post-transition attitudes, the activation of their implicit behavioral conflict should make already vulnerability-inducing situations feel even less manageable, tenable, and actionable (Harmon-Jones et al., 2012). Therefore, the APAT model assumes that people with evaluatively inconsistent pre- and post-transition attitudes should be more vulnerable to behavioral angst or uncertainty, and thus, the experience of relative cardiovascular threat, in situations that activate both new and old attitudes than people with evaluatively consistent attitudes.

**The self-protection hypotheses.** To act, people need to reduce behavioral angst or uncertainty (Harmon-Jones & Harmon-Jones, 2012; Jonas, McGregor, Klackl, Agroskin, Fritsche, Holbrook, Nash, Proulx, & Quirin, 2011; Harmon-Jones, Amodio, & Harmon-Jones, 2009; Harmon-Jones, Schmeichel, Inzlicht, & Harmon-Jones, 2011; McGregor, Nash, Mann, & Phillips, 2010; Proulx, Inzlicht, & Harmon-Jones, 2012). To act in vulnerability-inducing situations, people with evaluatively inconsistent automatic partner attitudes have an attitudinal

conflict to resolve that people with evaluatively consistent attitudes do not experience.

Specifically, people with evaluatively inconsistent attitudes have to “decide” which of their discordant automatic attitudes (pre- or post-transition) to trust and which to suppress.

The APAT model posits that evaluative *inconsistency* between pre- and post-transition automatic partner attitudes gives specific features of parenting situations, such as their level of risk, the power to sway which of the opposing attitudinal inclinations to heed. In the APAT model, people with evaluatively inconsistent pre- and post-transition automatic partner attitudes consequently behave much like people who fail to retrieve the “false” tag attached to explicit old attitudes in the PAST model (Petty et al., 2006). They too rely on features of the current situation to resolve the behavioral indecision created by evaluatively inconsistent attitudes.

Situations that more strongly highlight the partner’s power to be hurtful and unresponsive elicit stronger automatic temptations to self-protect and avoid the partner (Cavallo, Fitzsimons & Holmes, 2010; Murray et al., 2008). In such situations, more negative automatic partner attitudes reinforce the inclination to avoid the partner supplied by the situation. But, when evaluatively inconsistent pre- and post-transition automatic partner attitudes are simultaneously activated, heeding such an avoidance inclination also requires *suppressing* the approach inclination supplied by the competing more positive attitude. Such suppression is necessary because people cannot successfully pursue a favored goal without overriding competing goals (Fishbach, Friedman, & Kruglanski, 2003; Kunda & Spencer, 2003; Olson & Fazio, 2008; Orehek & Vazeou-Nieuwenhuis, 2013; Shah, Kruglanski, & Friedman, 2003).

In fact, the literature on counteractive control suggests that temptations often facilitate rather than impede goal pursuit. That is, people make stronger, more concerted efforts to achieve desired goals in the presence than absence of temptations because suppressing present

temptations requires attaching compensatory importance to the goal (Fishbach & Shah, 2006; Fishbach & Trope, 2007; Fishbach, Zhang, & Trope, 2010). In other words, dieting goals become more important to dieters when the vending machine is filled with chocolate than granola bars because stronger dieting goals can better inhibit the temptation to eat chocolate.

The APAT model's logic is analogous. Parenting situations that strongly highlight the risks of being hurt prioritize the situational goal to self-protect. In such risky parenting situations, the inclination to connect to the partner supplied by more positive automatic partner attitudes functions as a temptation that competes with prioritized situational goal to self-protect. Consequently, people should be more likely to behave self-protectively when evaluatively inconsistent attitudes tempt them to seek connection because overriding this temptation requires more zealous efforts to distance from the partner (Murray, Derrick, Aloni & Leder, 2008).

For this reason, the APAT model's "self-protection" hypotheses are situationally specific. Namely, people with evaluatively inconsistent pre- and post-transition automatic partner attitudes should be more likely to self-protect and distance from their partner in "new" situations that highlight the risks of depending on partners *as parents* than people with evaluatively consistent attitudes because parenting situations simultaneously activate *both* pre- and post-transition attitudes (Path B in Figure 1). However, evaluative inconsistency should *not* have the same power to potentiate self-protection in "old" situations likely to activate only *pre-transition* attitudes, such as a partner being inattentive or forgetting a birthday or anniversary once again.

In risky situations, one partner's tendency to self-protect and distance typically elicits the other partner's tendency to self-protect and distance (Holmes & Rempel, 1989; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). For instance, rejection-sensitive women behave more negatively toward their partner during conflicts and elicit more rejecting behavior from their partner in return (Downey,

Freitas, Michaelis, & Khouri, 1998). People who feel less valued by their partner also treat their partner coldly on days after they feel rejected, which then elicits their partner's hurt and anger (Murray, Bellavia, Rose, & Griffin, 2003). Because one partner's inclination to self-protect directly and indirectly pulls for its behavioral reciprocation by the other partner, the APAT model also explores the possibility of behavioral contagion. Namely, people paired with *partners* with *evaluatively inconsistent* attitudes will be more likely to self-protect in "new" situations that make the risks of depending on them *as parents* salient to *partners* than people paired with *partners* with evaluatively consistent attitudes (Path B in Figure 1).

**The relationship well-being hypotheses.** Distancing from hurtful and rejecting partners can often sacrifice real opportunities for fostering greater closeness within the relationship (Murray, Holmes, Derrick, Harris, Griffin, Pinkus, 2013; Murray, Holmes, Griffin, & Derrick, 2015). People with evaluatively inconsistent attitudes should be more likely to forego such opportunities over time as parenting interactions come to consume more of their lives, making it continually likely that they will find ways to disappoint one another as parents. For this reason, people with evaluatively inconsistent, and thus behaviorally polarizing, pre- and post-transition attitudes should also experience steeper declines in relationship well-being than people with evaluatively consistent attitudes. Because the positivity of relationship sentiments tends to be reciprocated (Kelley, 1979), people should also experience steeper declines in relationship well-being when paired with *partners* who possesses evaluatively inconsistent than consistent pre- and post-transition automatic attitudes towards them (Path C in Figure 1).

### Overview and Hypotheses

The APAT model posits that pre- and post-transition automatic partner attitudes jointly regulate how constructively couples respond to the challenges specific to new parenthood. A

longitudinal study of this transition provided the first opportunity to test the model's "behavioral angst", "self-protection", and "relationship well-being" hypotheses as well as validate the assumption that post-transition attitudes capture highly contextualized associations. Expectant parents completed pre-transition measures of automatic partner attitudes and relationship well-being and a 2-week daily diary study six weeks before their due date. Five months later, they returned to the lab as new parents to complete measures of automatic partner attitudes and relationship well-being and negotiate two conflicts while their psychophysiological reactions were recorded and completed a 2-week daily diary study. Over the next 10 months, they completed 5 online surveys reassessing automatic partner attitudes and relationship well-being.

In the APAT model, simultaneously held pre-and post-transition attitudes vary independently in valence, making it possible for pre- and post-transition attitudes to be relatively concordant (i.e., evaluatively consistent) or discordant (i.e., evaluatively inconsistent). Testing the APAT model hypotheses thus involves testing a statistical interaction. Any relationship effects of pre-transition attitudes should depend on post-transition attitudes, and vice versa. In fact, the hypothesized effects of evaluative consistency we have been describing specifically translate into the conceptual crossover interaction illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1 depicts hypothetical "relationship vulnerability" scores (which could capture cardiovascular threat, daily self-protection, or declines in relationship well-being) as a function of pre-transition and post-transition automatic partner attitudes, dichotomizing attitudes for illustrative simplicity. In the APAT model, evaluatively *inconsistent* attitudes come in two types, corresponding to cells 2 and 3: (1) relatively *positive pre-transition and negative post-transition* attitudes (cell 2) and (2) relatively *negative pre-transition and positive post-transition* attitudes (cell 3). Evaluatively *consistent* attitudes also come in two types, corresponding to cells

1 and 4: (1) consistently negative (cell 1) and (2) consistently positive (cell 4).

The APAT model's crossover interaction hypothesis makes the following *intrapersonal* predictions (i.e., statistical *actor* effects). People with more *positive pre-transition* and *negative post-transition* attitudes (cell 2) and people with more *negative pre-transition* and *positive post-transition* attitudes (cell 3) will evidence (1) greater behavioral angst in situations that highlight the risks of depending on the partner *as a parent*, (2) heightened self-protection in situations that highlight the risks of depending on the partner *as a parent*, and (3) steeper declines in relationship well-being, than people with *consistently negative* (cell 1) or *consistently positive* (cell 4) pre- and post-transition attitudes. The APAT model also makes the following *interpersonal* predictions (i.e., statistical *partner* effects). People paired with *partners* who possess evaluatively inconsistent pre- and post-transition automatic attitudes toward them will also evidence (1) heightened self-protection in situations that make the risks of depending on them *as a parent* more salient to their *partner* and (2) steeper declines in relationship well-being than people paired with *partners* with evaluatively consistent automatic attitudes toward them.<sup>i, ii</sup>

## Method

### Participants

Two hundred two first-time expectant couples initiated participation in a longitudinal study of the transition to parenthood in upstate New York. At Time 1, expectant couples completed a preliminary survey at home, in-laboratory measures, and a 2-week daily diary study. At Time 2, 148 couples completed the in-laboratory measures and 151 couples completed the preliminary survey and two-week daily diary measures at home. At Time 3, six weeks after the post-birth assessment, 137 couples completed the first of 5 on-line surveys (administered every 8 weeks thereafter,  $N_{\text{Time } 4} = 134$ ,  $N_{\text{Time } 5} = 127$ ,  $N_{\text{Time } 6} = 120$ ,  $N_{\text{Time } 7} = 122$ ). Fifty-one couples did

not participate beyond the first assessment (1 miscarried, 3 separated, 1 spouse died, and 47 became uninterested or unreachable after the pre-birth assessment).<sup>iii</sup> The sample was predominantly White (4.70% African American, 1.49% Asian, 3.22% Hispanic, 86.39% White, 3.96% other) and couples were married (72.03%), engaged (8.17%) or cohabiting (19.80%). At Time 1, participants averaged 28.73 ( $SD = 4.66$ ) years in age and relationships averaged 36.49 ( $SD = 31.10$ ) months in length. The median household income ranged from \$20,001-\$35,000 per year. Participants received payment at each time point.<sup>iv</sup>

### **Procedure**

We recruited expectant couples through advertisements placed in local newspapers, Craigslist and Facebook and through visits to prenatal classes. Eligible couples had to be expecting a first child, residing in the same residence, cohabiting no more than 15 years, and able to access the internet at home. Both couple members completed the Time 1 background and diary 5.80 ( $SD = 2.03$ ) weeks pre-birth and the Time 2 background and diary assessments 15.93 ( $SD = 3.26$ ) weeks post-birth. Both couple members completed the five subsequent on-line follow-up surveys at 30, 38, 46, 54, 62 weeks post-birth.

Prior to the Time 1 and the Time 2 laboratory sessions, participants individually completed a questionnaire at home tapping self-perception (i.e., depression, dispositional trustworthiness and responsiveness), personality (i.e., attachment style, BIS/BAS, Big 5 personality traits, self-control, regulatory focus, and need for cognition), perceptions of their actual and ideal partner, and a measure of cumulative lifetime adversity.

At the Time 1 laboratory session, participants individually completed a digit span test assessing working memory capacity and Implicit Association and GNAT tests assessing automatic partner attitudes. Next, they completed self-report measures of self-esteem and

relationship evaluations that included satisfaction, trust, closeness, perceptions of the partner's closeness, commitment, perceptions of the partner's commitment, perceived regard, conflict, and problem severity. They also completed questions tapping current and expected division of housework post-birth, expected division of childcare post-birth, and expectations for infant temperament, relationship quality, and parenting styles post-birth. They also reported activity and task preferences and experienced stress. The graduate assistant then introduced couples to the procedures for the 14-day diary study. Couples were told they would receive an individualized link to the daily survey each day by email, that they should complete the survey before going to bed, and that they should not discuss their responses with one another. The daily survey asked participants to indicate which of 81 events had happened that day, including self-initiated and partner-initiated accepting, rejecting, and accommodative behaviors, perceptions of the partner's interference with one's goals, self-initiated communal behavior, support behavior, parenting behavior, and physical and emotional intimacy. The daily survey also asked participants to rate the proportion of responsibility they took for housework and childcare, their feelings about themselves in general and as a parent, their feelings about their partner in general and as a parent, their perceptions of their baby's temperament, their perceptions of their partner's feelings for them, and their overall daily evaluations of their relationship on 45 further items.<sup>v</sup>

At the Time 2 laboratory session, participants completed a digit span task assessing working memory capacity, the IAT measure of automatic partner attitudes, and a reduced set of self-report measures. Then they discussed problems in their relationship while their cardiovascular responses were assessed. To prepare for this interaction, each member of the couple first nominated an area of difficulty in the relationship he/she wanted to resolve using the inventory of marital problems (McNulty & Russell, 2010). Each partner then entered a separate

recording room where a graduate assistant attached the cardiovascular sensors and then left for the duration of the discussions. Although in separate rooms, partners could see one another via video and communicate via intercom. After a 5-minute resting baseline, couples spent 2 minutes discussing activities for the upcoming weekend (to increase comfort talking over the intercom). Next, they engaged in two 8-minute conflict discussions, one for each partner's nominated area of difficulty. (A coin toss determined whose issue they discussed first). Participants then rated their partner's and their own responsiveness during the conflict interactions. The interaction concluded with a 2-minute discussion of a shared positive memory (to end the interaction on a positive note). Finally, participants received the instructions for completing the 14-day diary component of the research. The post-birth diary participants completed daily was identical to the pre-birth diary, but also included items tapping incompatibility and conflict in allocating parenting tasks and self and partner perceptions of parenting skills and contributions.

For each of the 5 follow-ups, participants received an individual email with a link to the follow-up survey. This survey included the IAT measure of automatic partner attitudes and self-report measures of self, relationship, and parenting perceptions. Participants completed self-report measures of self-esteem, relationship sentiments (i.e., satisfaction, trust, closeness and perceptions of the partner's closeness, commitment and perceptions of the partner's commitment, perceived regard, perceptions of the partner's interpersonal qualities, conflict), perceived stress, and depressed mood. They also completed questions tapping the current division of housework and childcare, perceptions of infant temperament, and parenting competence. We describe the measures utilized in this paper in greater detail below.

### **Implicit Measures**

**Automatic partner attitudes.** The IAT measure contained 7 blocks (Murray et al.,

2011; 2013). Participants categorized words belonging to four categories: (1) pleasant words (e.g., vacation, pleasure), (2) unpleasant words (e.g., bomb, poison), (3) words associated with the partner (e.g., partner's first name, last name, nickname), and (4) words not associated with the partner (e.g., first name not associated with partner). The words in the latter two categories were generated idiographically. The critical blocks consisted of the compatible pairing blocks (practice and test blocks), in which participants used the same response key to respond to pleasant and partner words, and the incompatible pairing blocks (practice and test blocks), in which participants used the same response key to respond to unpleasant and partner words. We computed IAT scores following the improved scoring algorithm procedure recommended by Greenwald, Nosek and Banaji (2003). Higher scores reflect more positive automatic attitudes.

**Challenge/threat.** More detailed information on the C/T measures is provided in the supplementary methods file in the supplementary materials. Impedance cardiography (ICG) and electrocardiogram (ECG) recordings allowed computation of heart rate (HR), ventricular contractility (VC), a measure of the left ventricle's contractile force (for presentational purposes, pre-ejection period reactivity  $\times -1$ ), and CO; the addition of blood pressure monitoring allowed computation of TPR (mean arterial pressure  $\times 80 / \text{CO}$ ; Sherwood, Allen, Fahrenberg, Kelsey, Lovallo, & Doornen, 1990). Increases in HR and VC reflect psychological engagement in the situation (task engagement) and are common across the challenge/threat continuum; in the sample as a whole, both HR ( $ps < .001$ ) and VC ( $ps < .02$ ) increased significantly from baseline on initiation of both conflict discussions. Because changes in both TPR and CO should reflect the same underlying physiological activation and relative differences in challenge/threat, TPR and CO were combined into a single challenge/threat index (e.g., Blascovich, Seery, Mugridge, Norris, & Weisbuch, 2004; de Wit, Scheepers, & Jehn, 2012; Moore et al., 2012; Seery,

Weisbuch, & Blascovich, 2009; Seery, Weisbuch, Hetenyi, & Blascovich, 2010; Vine, Freeman, Moore, Chandra-Ramanan, & Wilson, 2013).<sup>vi</sup>

### **Explicit Global Measures Assessed Pre- and Post-Transition**

**Satisfaction.** This 4-item scale ( $\alpha = .91$ , Murray, Griffin, Derrick, Harris, Aloni & Leder, 2011) tapped satisfaction in the relationship (e.g., “I am extremely satisfied with my relationship”, 1 = *not at all true*, 9 = *completely true*).

**Closeness.** This 5-item measure ( $\alpha = .92$ , Murray et al., 2002) tapped the participant’s feelings of closeness to the partner (e.g., “I am closer to my partner than any other person in my life”, 1 = *not at all*, 9 = *completely true*).

**Commitment.** This 3-item measure ( $\alpha = .93$ , adapted from Rusbult, Martz & Agnew, 1998), tapped the participant’s intentions to sustain the relationship (e.g., “I am committed to maintaining my relationship with my partner”, 1 = *not at all*, 9 = *completely true*).

**Relationship feelings.** This 16-item measure ( $\alpha = .97$ , McNulty et al., 2013), asked participants to rate their feelings about their marriage on 16 opposing dimensions (e.g., “interesting/boring”, “weak/strong”, “rewarding/disappointing”, “stable/unstable”, “unpleasant/pleasant”). The follow-up surveys utilized an abbreviated 8-item measure.

**Perceptions of partner’s interpersonal qualities.** This 20-item measure ( $\alpha = .88$ , Murray et al., 2011), asked participants to describe their partner on various positive and negative interpersonal qualities (e.g., “kind and affectionate”, “distant”, “open and disclosing”, “thoughtless”, 1 = *not at all characteristic*, 9 = *extremely characteristic*).

**Baby’s temperament (Time 2 only).** This 6-item scale ( $\alpha = .81$ ) asked participants to describe how their baby’s fussiness and capacity to be soothed (e.g., “How easy or difficult is it

for you to calm or soothe your baby when he/she is upset” (1 = *very easy*, 7 = *difficult*); “How easy or difficult is it for you to know what’s bothering your baby when he/she cries or fusses” (1 = *very easy*, 7 = *difficult*); “How much does your baby cry and fuss in general”, (“1 = *very little*... 7 = *a lot*”). Higher scores captured with more difficult infant temperaments.

### **Explicit Daily Measures Assessed During Post-Transition Two-Week Daily Diary Period**

**Connection strength.** This 4-item measure ( $\alpha = .87$ ) asked participants to rate the daily strength of their connection to their partner on 4 dimensions, closeness (i.e., “How close do you feel to your partner today?” 1 = *not at all*, 7 = *extremely*), doubt (i.e., “I had some doubts about my partner or relationship today”, 1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very true*, reversed), goodness (i.e., “Overall, how would you describe your relationship today?” 1 = *terrible*, 7 = *terrific*), and balance (i.e., “Did your interactions with your partner today make you think more about his/her positive or negative qualities?”, 1 = *positive*, 7 = *negative*, reversed).

**Own sacrificing behavior.** This 5-item index tapped how often participants sacrificed or compromised their own needs to meet their partner’s needs (e.g., “I did something I did not want to do because my partner wanted to do it”; “I forgave my partner for something he said or did”; “I put my partner’s tastes (e.g., food, music, movie) ahead of my own tastes”;

**Own communal behavior.** This 7-item index, adapted from Clark and Grote (1998) tapped how often participants did something kind or considerate for their partner (e.g., “I searched for something my partner had lost”; “I went out of my way to run an errand for my partner”; “I repaired something my partner had damaged or broken”).

**Partner’s parenting transgressions.** This 5-item index tapped how often participants identified their partner as transgressing or failing to uphold their responsibilities in parenting (e.g., “My partner left too much of the childcare to me”; “My partner spent too much time on

work and not enough on family”; “My partner criticized the way I cared for our baby”; “My partner didn’t do something for our baby that I asked him/her to do”). For these, and all further behavior items, participants indicated whether each behavior occurred (1 = *yes*, 0 = *no*) each day.

**Partner’s parenting skills.** This 1-item scale asked participants how they felt about their partner’s parenting skills that day (1 = *terrible*, 7 = *terrific*).

**Domestic fairness.** This 1-item scale asked participants which partner took undue responsibility for house/childcare responsibilities that day (1 = *I did more than my fair share*, 4 = *chores were evenly divided*, 7 = *My partner did more than his fair share*).

**Partner’s rejecting behavior.** This 8-item index, adapted from Murray et al. (2013), tapped how often participants identified their partner as engaging in rejecting or hostile behavior (e.g., “My partner snapped or yelled at me”; “My partner criticized or insulted me”; “My partner ignored or did not pay attention to me”).

**Partner’s interfering behavior.** This 7-item index, expanded from Murray, Holmes, Aloni, Derrick, Pinkus, and Leder (2009), tapped how often participants identified their partner as disrupting their personal goal pursuits (e.g., “My partner did what he/she wanted to do instead of what I wanted him/her to do”; “My partner used the last of something I needed and didn’t replace it”; “My partner did not do something he/she told me he/she would do”).

### **Explicit Measures Assessed During Post-Transition Conflict Interaction**

**Inventory of marital problems.** This inventory asks participants to individually rate how much of a problem 19 separate issues pose in their marriage (e.g., “children”, “in-laws”, “parents”, “relatives”, “household management”, “sex”, “trust”, “career decisions”) on an 11-point scale, 1 = *not a problem*, 11 = *major problem* (McNulty & Russell, 2010).

**Own responsiveness during conflict.** This 10-item scale ( $\alpha = .91$ ) asked participants to

rate their own caring and responsiveness toward their partner during the conflict interactions (e.g., “How willing were you to compromise?”; “How responsive were you to your partner’s needs?”; “How selfishly did you behave?”, reversed, 1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very*).

**Perceived partner responsiveness during conflict.** This parallel 10-item scale ( $\alpha = .94$ ) asked participants to rate their partner’s caring and responsiveness toward them during the conflict interactions (e.g., “How willing was your partner to compromise?”; “How responsive was your partner to your needs?”; “How selfishly did your partner behave?”).

## Results

We start with a general introduction to the analytic strategy. In our first analytic step, we operationalized evaluative consistency in automatic partner attitudes using the IAT measures obtained immediately before and after the baby’s birth given their immediate proximity to the transition. In our second step, we translated the APAT model’s conceptual “crossover interaction” hypothesis into a general analytic strategy for testing the omnibus interaction depicted in Table 1 and decomposing the effects into interpretable contrasts that allowed us to compare each type of evaluative inconsistency against each type of evaluative consistency.

We index evaluative in/consistency through the statistical interaction between pre- and post-transition automatic partner attitudes for two reasons. The first is conceptual. The APAT model conceives of pre- and post-transition attitudes as separate and simultaneously held memory representations. It does not assume that people hold one automatic attitude toward their partner that changes over time. Testing for both main and interactive effects of pre- and post-transition attitudes within the same analytic model is the best way to contrast the APAT model’s evaluative consistency predictions against such competing predictions about change. For instance, if initial, *pre-transition positivity* in automatic partner attitudes matters, people should

evidence greater relationship vulnerability when only their *pre-transition* attitudes are more negative. If *evaluative change* in automatic attitudes matters, people should evidence greater relationship vulnerability when their post-transition *residual* attitudes are more negative controlling for their pre-transition attitudes. However, if evaluative consistency matters, as the APAT model stipulates, we should find statistical interactions between pre- and post-transition attitudes. The interaction models we test contrast all these possibilities. The second reason is empirical. Pre- and post-transition attitudes were weakly correlated for women,  $r(139) = .16, p = .056$ , and men,  $r(134) = .31, p < .001$ . Also, plotting pre- against post-transition attitudes (mean-centered) revealed good scatter for both men and women, suggesting that participants fell into each of the four conceptual quadrants of evaluative in/consistency illustrated in Table 1.<sup>vii</sup>

The results unfold in four parts. First, we test the *intrapersonal* “behavioral angst” hypothesis by using challenge/threat responses during the conflict discussion. Second, we test the *intra-* and *inter-*personal “self-protection” hypotheses by using the daily diary and the in-vivo conflict interactions. Third, we test the *intra-* and *inter*personal “relationship well-being” hypotheses by using the follow-up surveys. Finally, we use all 7 automatic partner attitude assessments and interaction data from the pre- and post-birth diary periods to evaluate whether *post-transition* automatic partner attitudes are indeed contextualized attitude representations. Table 2 presents descriptive information for the variables used to test the primary hypotheses.

### **The Behavioral Angst Hypothesis: Challenge/Threat Responses During Conflict**

The APAT model assumes that pre- and post-transition automatic partner attitudes are simultaneously activated, creating an aversive state of behavioral angst, when situations highlight the risks of depending on one another *as parents*. Although each participant was free to discuss any problem he/she wished from the Inventory of Marital Problems, we reasoned we

could still isolate conflict discussions likely to highlight *parenting risks* for both partners.

Women take disproportionate responsibility for domestic tasks over the transition to parenthood (Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010; Freudenthaler & Mikula, 1998). This unequal division of labor means that the domestic status quo typically advantages men over women post-parenthood, giving women greater incentive to seek change and men greater incentive to resist it.

Therefore, we examined challenge/threat reactions separately for the problems women and men nominated, assuming that women would nominate more contentious conflicts-of-interest likely to make the risks of depending on one another *as parents* especially salient to both partners. Consistent with this logic, the discrepancy between the nominators' and partners' perceptions of the nominated problem's severity was significantly greater for the problems women nominated ( $M = 7.09$  vs.  $M = 5.16$ ) than men the problems men nominated ( $M = 6.45$  vs.  $M = 5.99$ ). (A repeated measures ANOVA revealed a significant interaction between perspective on the problem (i.e., nominator vs. partner) and gender,  $F(1, 129) = 11.95, p = .001$ .) Video coding also revealed that parenting was explicitly mentioned in 89% of the discussions of women's problems even though most were about manifestly different topics (e.g., finances, sex).

For the analysis of each issue, we modeled the data as a two-level nested structure using the multilevel modeling program MLwiN (Goldstein et al., 1998) with minute of the interaction (i.e., time) at level 1, couple at level 2, and gender within couple modeled as a multivariate outcome. This approach simultaneously estimates one regression equation for women and one for men, controlling for the dependence between dyad members. It also allows exploratory tests of gender differences and the pooling of coefficients across gender in their absence.<sup>viii</sup>

Table 3 lists the effects included in the multilevel equations testing the "behavioral angst" hypotheses. The first column contains the results for women's nominated issue; the second

column, men's nominated issue. We only modeled *intrapersonal* or *actor* effects (i.e., the effects of Arya's automatic partner attitudes on her own outcomes) given that cardiovascular responses may not be immediately obvious to partners, limiting the potential for contagion.<sup>ix</sup>

How do the parameters in this model map onto the APAT model's conceptual crossover interaction illustrated in Table 1? Because we scored the first minute of the interaction as zero in the "time" variable, the main effects of pre- and post-transition attitudes thus capture whether automatic partner attitudes (either pre- or post-transition) predict challenge/threat at the start of the discussion; the 2-way interaction between pre- by post-transition attitudes tests whether *evaluative consistency* in pre- and post-transition automatic partner attitudes predicts challenge/threat at the discussion's initiation. The remaining effects involving *time* predict challenge/threat trajectories (i.e., increasing threat, a more negative trajectory, vs. increasing challenge, a more positive trajectory). The 2-way interaction *time* by pre- and time by post-transition attitudes interactions respectively capture the association between automatic partner attitudes (pre- or post-) and challenge/threat responses over time. The 3-way time by pre- and post-transition attitudes interactions tests whether *evaluative consistency* predicts the effect of time on challenge/threat responses (i.e., increasing threat vs. increasing challenge).<sup>x</sup>

**Discussion of women's issue: Initial C/T.** The pre- by post-transition automatic partner attitude interaction predicting initial challenge/threat was significant and positive for men, but not significant for women. (The difference in model fit when this interaction was constrained to be equal for men and women versus free to vary was significant,  $\chi^2(1) = 4.30, p = .038$ .)

Table 4 presents the predicted scores for men's challenge/threat responses at the start of the discussion of women's issues. The predicted scores for evaluatively *inconsistent* attitudes (*positive pre/negative post* and *negative pre/positive post*) are in cells 2 and 3, respectively. The

predicted scores for evaluatively *consistent* attitudes (negative pre-/post and positive pre-/post) are in cells 1 and 4, respectively. These predicted scores illustrate the APAT crossover: Men with evaluatively inconsistent attitudes (cells 2 and 3) generally evidenced greater cardiovascular threat at the start of the discussion than men with evaluatively consistent attitudes (cells 1 and 4).

Next, we statistically compared initial challenge/threat levels for men with each type of evaluatively inconsistent attitude (cells 2 and 3) against men with each type of evaluatively consistent attitude (cells 1 and 4). To do this, we decomposed the 2-way interaction into the conditional simple effects of (1) *post-transition* attitudes when pre-transition attitudes were 1.0 and 1.5 standard deviations (*SD*) above/below the mean and (2) *pre-transition* attitudes when post-transition attitudes were 1.0 and 1.5 *SD* above/below the mean. We decomposed this (and all subsequent) interactions using pre- and post-transition attitude scores at both 1 *SD* and 1.5 *SD* above/below the mean because the APAT model expects the effects of evaluative inconsistency to be pronounced when pre- and post-transition attitudes are themselves more evaluatively extreme.<sup>xi</sup> Although both decompositions supported the model, the predicted effects were indeed clearer for more (1.5 *SD*) rather than less (1.0 *SD*) evaluatively extreme pre- and post-transition attitudes. Given recommendations to decompose interactions at values that provide more theoretically sensitive tests (Spiller, Fitzsimons, Lynch, McClelland, 2013), we focus on the 1.5 *SD* decompositions in the text and tables. We also report the 1.0 *SD* decompositions in Supplementary Tables 1 through 9 and integrate the two approaches in the Discussion.

The bottom of the columns and ends of the rows in Table 4 also contain the conditional simple effects tests contrasting each type of evaluatively inconsistent attitude against evaluatively consistent attitudes. Let's first compare men with *positive pre-/negative post-transition* attitudes (cell 2) against men with *consistently negative* (cell 1) and *consistently*

*positive* (cell 4) attitudes. Men with *positive pre-/negative post-transition* attitudes evidenced significantly greater cardiovascular threat initially than men with *consistently negative* attitudes. That is, for men with more *negative post-transition* attitudes, the simple effect of *pre-transition attitudes* was significant and *negative* (comparing cells 2 vs. 1). However, men with more *positive pre-/negative post-transition* attitudes did not evidence significantly greater cardiovascular threat initially than men with *consistently positive* attitudes. That is, for men with more *positive pre-transition* attitudes, the simple effect of *post-transition* attitudes was positive, as expected, but not significant (comparing cell 2 vs. 4).

Now let's compare men with *negative pre-/positive post-transition* attitudes (cell 3) to men with *consistently negative* (cell 1) and *consistently positive* (cell 4) attitudes. Men with *negative pre-/positive post-transition* attitudes evidenced significantly greater cardiovascular threat initially than men with *consistently negative* attitudes. That is, for men with more *negative pre-transition* attitudes, the simple effect of *post-transition* attitudes was significant, but negative (comparing cells 3 vs. 1). Men with *negative-pre/positive post-transition* attitudes also evidenced significantly greater cardiovascular threat initially than men with *consistently positive* attitudes. That is, for men with more *positive post-transition* attitudes, the simple effect of *pre-transition* attitudes was significant and positive (comparing cells 3 vs. 4).

**Discussion of women's issue: Trajectory/Change over time.** Evaluative consistency effects consistent with APAT predictions were evident for women, but not men. The 3-way time by pre- by post-transition attitudes interaction was significant and positive for women, but, unexpectedly, significant and negative for men,  $\chi^2(1) = 13.94, p = .0009$ . Figures 2A and 2B present challenge/threat trajectories for women (2A) and men (2B) with evaluatively inconsistent and consistent attitudes (1.5 *SD* above/below the mean for pre- and post-transition attitudes).

**Women.** How well do the challenge/threat trajectories illustrated in Figure 2A mirror the APAT conceptual crossover interaction presented in Table 1? Table 5 puts the time trajectories illustrated in Figure 2A into the APAT crossover interaction template by representing the simple effects of time numerically, as slope coefficients (and standard errors), rather than graphically, as predicted C/T scores over 8 interaction minutes. Table 5 thus contains the coefficients for the predicted simple effects of time on challenge/threat responses for women with evaluatively *inconsistent* (cells 2 and 3) and *consistent* (cells 1 and 4) attitudes. More negative coefficients reflect steeper increases in cardiovascular threat. (Dividing the slope for time by its standard error (in parentheses) provides a z-test of the significance of this change.) We compared challenge/threat trajectories for women with evaluatively inconsistent versus consistent attitudes by decomposing the 3-way into conditional 2-way interactions: (1) *time by post-transition attitudes* when pre-transition attitudes are 1.5 *SD* above/below the mean and (2) *time by pre-transition attitudes* when post-transition attitudes are 1.5 *SD* above/below the mean.

The margins of Table 5 contain these conditional tests. Let's first compare women with *positive pre-/negative post-transition* attitudes (cell 2) to women with *consistently negative* (cell 1) and *consistently positive* (cell 4) attitudes. Women with *positive pre-/negative post-transition* attitudes evidenced significantly steeper increases in cardiovascular threat over time than women with *consistently negative* attitudes. That is, for women with more *negative post-transition* attitudes, the time by pre-transition attitudes interaction was significant and negative (comparing the time slopes in cells 2 vs. 1). Women with *positive pre-/negative post-transition* attitudes also evidenced significantly steeper increases in cardiovascular threat than women with *consistently positive* attitudes. That is, for women with more *positive pre-transition* attitudes, the time by post-transition attitudes interaction was significant, but positive (comparing the time slopes in

cells 2 vs. 4). Now let's compare women with *negative pre-/positive post-transition* attitudes (cell 3) to women with *consistently negative* (cell 1) and *consistently positive* (cell 4) attitudes. For this type of evaluatively inconsistent attitude, only one conditional 2-way approached significance. Women with *negative pre-/positive post-transition* attitudes tended to evidence steeper increases in cardiovascular threat than women with *consistently positive* attitudes. That is, for women with more *positive post-transition* attitudes, the time by *pre-transition* attitudes interaction was marginal and positive (comparing the time slopes in cells 3 vs. 4).

**Men.** Table 6 presents the coefficients (and standard errors) for the simple effects of *time* on men's challenge/threat responses. These trajectories did not illustrate the expected APAT crossover. Instead, men with *consistently negative* automatic partner attitudes evidenced steeper increases in cardiovascular threat than men with *positive pre-/negative post-transition* attitudes (cell 1 vs. cell 2). That is, for men with more *negative post-transition* attitudes, the 2-way time by pre-transition attitudes interaction was significant and positive. Men with *consistently negative* attitudes also evidenced steeper increases in cardiovascular threat than men with *negative pre-/positive post-transition* attitudes (cell 1 vs. 3). That is, for men with more *negative pre-transition* attitudes, the 2-way time by post-transition attitudes interaction was also significant and positive (cell 1 vs. cell 3). These unexpected effects likely emerged because men with *evaluatively inconsistent* attitudes started the discussion in an already-heightened state of threat, perhaps diminishing the physiological potential for further increases over time.

**Discussion of men's issues.** Only a significant main effect of time for men emerged when couples discussed men's issues: Men evidenced cardiovascular responses consistent with significantly greater threat over time regardless of their automatic partner attitudes.

### **The Situationally-Specific Self-Protection Hypotheses: Daily Interactions**

Because couples encountered situations that variously highlighted the risks of depending on another *as parents* vs. *romantic* partners on a daily basis, the diary data provided our first means for testing situational specificity in the “self-protection” hypotheses. The *intrapersonal* “self-protection” hypothesis: Actors with evaluatively inconsistent pre- and post-transition automatic partner attitudes will be more likely to self-protect and limit connection when daily situations highlight the risks of depending on *a partners as a parent* than actors with evaluatively consistent attitudes. The *interpersonal* hypothesis: Actors paired with *partners* with evaluatively inconsistent pre- and post-transition automatic partner attitudes will also be more likely to limit connection in situations that make the risks of depending on them *as a parent salient to their partner*, implicitly mirroring their partner’s self-protective inclinations.

First, we created two separate daily independent variables capturing exposure to situations that highlighted the risks of depending on one another as *parents* versus *romantic partners*. To capture *daily* exposure to situations that highlight the risks of *parental dependence*, we z-transformed responses to the partner’s parenting transgressions, partner’s parenting skills, and domestic fairness items and then created a composite index of *daily parenting risk*, wherein a higher incidence of parenting transgressions committed by the partner, feeling worse about the partner’s parenting skills, and the partner taking an unduly light share of responsibility on a given day corresponded to greater exposure to situations that revealed the risks of depending on the partner as a *parent*. To capture daily exposure to situations that highlight the general risks of *romantic dependence*, we summed responses to the partner’s rejecting and partner’s interfering behavior scales. Second, we created daily dependent variables capturing connection versus distancing, through (1) the 4-item index of daily connection strength and (2) an index of daily responsive behavior created by summing sacrificing and communal behaviors.

**Situations that highlight the risks of depending on the partner *as a parent*.** Table 7 lists the effects in the multilevel equations testing the “self-protection” hypotheses for situations that *highlight the risks of depending on a partner as a parent*. These multilevel equations specified both *intrapersonal* or *actor* effects (i.e., actors’ automatic attitudes on actors’ outcomes) and *interpersonal* or *partner* effects (i.e., *partners*’ automatic attitudes on actors’ outcomes).<sup>xii</sup> How do the parameters in this model map onto the APAT model’s conceptual crossover interaction illustrated in Table 1? Because we centered the daily parenting risk variables on each person’s average across days, the simple slopes for daily parental risk capture whether actors reduce connection the days after they experienced greater than usual vulnerability depending on their partner *as a parent* (i.e., the actor effect) or their partner experienced greater than usual vulnerability depending on them *as a parent* (i.e., the partner effect). The 2-way interactions between daily parental risk and pre-transition and daily parental risk and post-transition attitudes, respectively, capture whether *actors* are more likely to self-protect in response to yesterday’s threats when *actors* have more negative automatic attitudes toward their partner or *partners* have more negative automatic attitudes toward actors. The 3-way actor and partner interactions test whether actors are more likely to self-protect in response to yesterday’s parental risks when either *actors* or *partners* possess evaluatively inconsistent attitudes.

***Indexing self-protection through daily connection strength in response to yesterday’s parenting risks.*** APAT model evaluative consistency effects were evident for actors, but not partners. That is, gender-pooled 3-way parenting risk yesterday by pre-transition by post-transition automatic partner attitudes interaction was significant for actors, supporting the *intrapersonal* “self-protection” hypothesis. Figure 3 presents predicted slopes for self-protection (i.e., the simple effect of yesterday’s parenting risk on today’s sense of connection) for actors

with evaluatively inconsistent and evaluatively consistent attitudes.

How well do the simple effects of yesterday's parenting risk predicting today's connection mirror the APAT conceptual cross over interaction in Table 1? Table 8 puts the simple effects of parenting risk illustrated in Figure 3 into the APAT crossover interaction template by representing these parenting risk simple effects numerically, as slope coefficients and standard errors, rather than graphically, as daily reports of connection at low vs. high levels of daily parenting risk. Table 8 thus contains the coefficients (and standard errors) for the simple effect of yesterday's parenting risk on today's connection for actors with evaluatively inconsistent (cells 2 and 3) and evaluatively consistent (cells 1 and 4) attitudes. More negative coefficients for parenting risk capture greater self-protection (i.e., being more likely to limit connection in response to greater parenting risk yesterday). (Dividing the slope coefficient for daily parenting risk by its standard error (in parentheses) tests the self-protection effect.) We compared the simple effects of parenting risk for actors with evaluatively inconsistent versus consistent attitudes by decomposing the 3-way into its conditional 2-way interactions: (1) *yesterday's parenting risk by post-transition attitudes* when pre-transition attitudes are 1.5 *SD* above/below the mean and (2) *yesterday's parenting risk by pre-transition attitudes* when post-transition attitudes are 1.5 *SD* above/below the mean. The Table 8 margins also contain the results of these conditional tests comparing evaluatively inconsistent and consistent attitudes.

Let's compare actors with *positive pre-/negative post-transition* attitudes (cell 2) to actors with *consistently negative* (cell 1) and *consistently positive* (cell 4) attitudes. Actors with more *positive pre-/negative post-transition attitudes* were significantly more likely to self-protect, limiting connection on days after the risks of depending on their partner *as a parent* were usually salient, than actors with *consistently negative* attitudes. That is, for actors with more *negative*

*post-transition* attitudes, the parenting risk by pre-transition attitudes interaction was significant and negative (comparing the parenting risk slopes in cells 2 vs. 1). Actors with more *positive pre/negative post-transition attitudes* were also significantly more likely to self-protect in response to daily parenting risk than actors with *consistently positive* attitudes. That is, for actors with more *positive pre-transition* attitudes, the parenting risk by post-transition attitudes interaction was significant, but positive (comparing the parenting risk slopes in cells 2 vs. 4).

Let's now compare actors with *negative pre-/positive post-transition attitudes* (cell 3) to actors with *consistently negative* (cell 1) and *consistently positive* (cell 4) attitudes. Actors with more *negative pre-/positive post-transition attitudes* tended to be more likely to self-protect, limiting connection on days after the risks of depending on their partner as a parent were unusually salient, than actors with *consistently negative* attitudes. That is, for actors with more *negative pre-transition* attitudes, the parenting risk by post-transition attitudes interaction was marginal, but negative (comparing the parenting risk slopes in cells 3 vs. 1). Actors with more *negative pre-/positive post-transition attitudes* also tended to be more likely to self-protect in response to daily parenting risk than actors with *consistently positive* attitudes. That is, for actors with more *positive post-transition* attitudes, the parenting risk by pre-transition attitudes interaction was marginal and positive (comparing the parenting risk slopes in cells 3 vs. 4).

***Indexing self-protection through daily responsive behavior in response to yesterday's parenting risks.*** Evaluative consistency effects consistent with the APAT model were evident for *partners*, but not actors. That is, the pooled 3-way pre-transition by post-transition by parenting risk interaction was significant for *partners*, supporting the *interpersonal* "self-protection" hypothesis. Figure 4 presents predicted slopes for self-protection (i.e., the simple effect of the *partner's* perception of parenting risk yesterday on the actor's responsive behavior

today) for actors paired with *partners* with evaluatively inconsistent and evaluatively consistent pre- and post-transition automatic attitudes. Table 9 puts the simple parenting risk effects illustrated in Figure 4 into the APAT crossover interaction template. It thus presents the predicted slopes (i.e. *partners*' perceptions of yesterday's parenting risk predicting actors' responsiveness today) for actors paired with *partners* with evaluatively inconsistent (cells 2 and 3) and evaluatively consistent (cells 1 and 4) attitudes. More negative coefficients capture greater self-protection. We again decomposed the 3-way interaction for partners into its component 2-way interactions to compare actors' tendency to self-protect when paired with *partners* with evaluatively consistent versus inconsistent attitudes.

The margins of Table 9 contain the results of these conditional interaction tests. Let's first compare actors paired with partners with *positive pre-/negative post-transition* attitudes (cell 2) to actors paired with partners with *consistently negative* (cell 1) and *consistently positive* (cell 4) attitudes. Actors paired with partners with more *positive pre-/negative post-transition* attitudes were significantly more likely to self-protect, limiting connection on days after their *partner* perceived them to be riskier to depend on as parents, than actors paired with partners with *consistently negative* attitudes. That is, for actors paired with *partners* with more *negative post-transition* attitudes, the parenting risk by pre-transition attitudes interaction was significant and negative (comparing the parenting risk slopes in cells 2 vs. 1). Actors paired with partners with more *positive pre-/negative post-transition* attitudes were also significantly more likely to self-protect than actors paired with partners with *consistently positive* attitudes. That is, for actors paired with *partners* with more *positive pre-transition* attitudes, the parenting risk by post-transition attitudes interaction was significant, but positive (comparing the parenting risk slopes in cells 2 vs. 4).

Let's now compare actors paired with partners with *negative pre-/positive post-transition* attitudes (cell 3) to actors paired with partners with *consistently negative* (cell 1) and *consistently positive* (cell 4) attitudes. Actors paired with partners with *negative pre-/positive post-transition* attitudes were significantly more likely to self-protect, limiting connection on days after their partner perceived them to be riskier to depend on as parents, than actors paired with partners with *consistently negative* attitudes. That is, for actors paired with partners with more *negative pre-transition attitudes*, the parenting risk by post-transition attitudes interaction was significant and negative (comparing the parenting risk slopes in cells 3 vs. 1). Actors paired with partners with *negative pre-/positive post-transition* attitudes were also significantly more likely to self-protect than actors paired with partners with *consistently positive* attitudes. That is, for actors paired with partners with more *positive post-transition* attitudes, the parenting risk by pre-transition attitudes interaction was significant, but positive (comparing the parenting risk slopes in cells 3 vs. 4).<sup>xiii</sup>

**Situations that highlight the risks of depending on the partner as a romantic partner.** We again modeled the data as a three-level nested structure, but this time we used perceptions of the partner's transgressions as a *romantic partner in general* (not specific to parenting) on the prior day as the index of risk. Table 10 presents the model coefficients predicting daily connection and responsive behavior. None of the effects obtained using parenting risk emerged using general romantic risk. Instead, for daily sense of connection, only the main effect of actors' pre-transition automatic partner attitudes was significant. Actors felt more connection across their daily interactions when their *pre-transition* automatic partner attitudes were more positive. For responsive behavior, a significant 2-way pre-transition automatic partner attitudes by daily partner transgressions interaction emerged for actors. Actors

with more positive pre-transition automatic partner attitudes were less likely to limit responsiveness on days after their partner proved riskier to depend on as a romantic partner.<sup>xiv, xv</sup>

### **The Situationally-Specific Self-Protection Hypotheses: The Conflict Interaction**

The conflict interaction provided our second means for testing the situationally specific “self-protection” hypotheses. But, in this case, the risky situation, a conflict-discussion, was held constant rather than naturally varying day to day. Participants also rated responsiveness once, at the end of the discussion of both women’s and men’s issues, making it difficult to associate more threatening content in either discussion with contingent responsive behavior, as we did in the daily analyses. So, we conceptualized variability in the risks inherent in depending in the partner *as a parent* versus *romantic partner* as a property of the *partner* rather than the situation. To do this, we averaged across the daily reports provided in the 14-day diary period following the lab interaction (assuming these daily interactions would also capture the tenor of couple interactions in the days prior to the lab interaction as only two weeks had elapsed).

We created a between-person measure of *parental risk* by averaging daily reports on the composite index of parenting risk utilized in the daily analyses. Higher scores on this composite capture partners who are perceived to be generally riskier to depend on as *parents* (i.e., being seen as transgressing more as a parent, demonstrating less parenting skill, and taking unduly light responsibility for caretaking and household chores on an average daily basis). Similarly, we created a between-person measure of *general romantic partner risk* by averaging daily reports on perceived partner rejecting and interfering behavior. Higher scores on this composite capture partners who are perceived to be riskier to depend on as a *romantic partner* across days (i.e., being seen as engaging in more hurtful and rejecting and interfering behaviors on an average daily basis). We created the *dependent measure* tapping responsive and caring behavior during

the conflict interactions by averaging the actor's reports on his or her own responsiveness *and* the partner's reports on the actor's responsiveness.

These data allowed us to provide a convergent test of the situationally specific "self-protection" hypotheses. The *intrapersonal* hypothesis: Actors with evaluatively inconsistent pre- and post-transition automatic partner attitudes will self-protect more, evidencing less responsiveness when they perceive partners to be riskier to depend on as *parents*, than actors with evaluatively consistent attitudes. The *interpersonal* hypothesis: Actors paired with *partners* with evaluatively inconsistent pre- and post-transition automatic partner attitudes will also self-protect more, evidencing less responsiveness when *partners* perceive them to be riskier to depend on as *parents*, than actors paired with partners with evaluatively consistent attitudes. We used structural equation modeling (SEM) to test these hypotheses because we measured responsiveness once, rather than repeatedly over time. Like the multilevel models, SEM accommodates dyadic data, allows actor and partner effects, and affords tests of gender differences and pooling of coefficients in their absence (Kenny, 1996).

**Risk as a partner in parenting.** Table 11 lists the effects included in this model and their corresponding coefficients. In this model, the 2-way *actors'* perceived parental risk by pre-transition and *actors'* perceived parental risk by post-transition attitudes interactions, respectively, capture whether *actors* with more negative automatic partner attitudes are more likely to self-protect and behave less responsively when they perceive their partner to be generally riskier to depend on *as a parent*. The corresponding *partner effects* capture whether actors are also more likely to self-protect when *partners* with more negative automatic attitudes perceive actors to be generally riskier to depend on *as a parent*. The 3-way interactions test whether actors are more likely to self-protect in response to perceived parental risk when *actors*

or *partners* possess evaluatively inconsistent attitudes.<sup>xvi</sup>

**Actor effects.** APAT model evaluative consistency effects were evident for *actors*, supporting the *intrapersonal* “self-protection” hypothesis. That is, the 3-way average parental risk by pre-transition by post-transition automatic partner attitudes interaction was significant for *actors*. Figure 5 presents the predicted slopes for self-protection (i.e., the simple effect of actors’ perceptions of the risks of depending on their partner *as a parent* on responsive behavior during the conflict) for actors with evaluatively inconsistent and consistent attitudes.

Table 12 puts the parental risk simple effects illustrated in Figure 5 into the APAT crossover interaction template by representing these simple effects numerically, as slope coefficients and standard errors, rather than graphically, as responsiveness at low versus high levels of partner parental risk. Table 12 thus contains the coefficients (and standard errors) for the predicted simple effect of perceived parental risk on actors’ responsive behavior for actors with evaluatively inconsistent (cells 2 and 3) and evaluatively consistent (cells 1 and 4) attitudes. More negative slopes index heightened self-protection (i.e., actors behaving less responsively when they perceive their partner to be riskier to depend on *as a parent*). Table 12 also contains the conditional 2-ways: (1) perceived parental risk by *post-transition attitudes* interaction for pre-transition attitudes 1.5 *SD* above/below the mean and (2) perceived parental risk by *pre-transition attitudes* interaction for post-transition attitudes 1.5 *SD* above/below the mean. These conditional 2-ways index whether actors with evaluatively inconsistent attitudes (cells 1 and 3) are more likely to self-protect than actors with evaluatively consistent attitudes (cells 2 and 4).

Let’s first compare actors with *positive pre-/negative post-transition* attitudes (cell 2) to actors with *consistently negative* (cell 1) and *consistently positive* (cell 4) attitudes. Actors with more *positive pre-/negative post-transition* attitudes tended to be more likely to self-protect,

limiting responsive behavior in response to greater parenting risk, than actors with *consistently negative* attitudes. That is, for actors with more *negative post-transition* attitudes, the perceived parental risk by pre-transition attitudes interaction was marginal and negative (comparing the parental risk slopes in cells 2 vs. 1). However, actors with more *positive pre-/negative post-transition* attitudes were not more likely to self-protect than actors with *consistently positive* attitudes. The conditional 2-way comparing the slopes in cells 2 versus 4 was not significant.

Let's now compare actors with *negative pre-/positive post-transition* attitudes (cell 3) to actors with *consistently negative* (cell 1) and *consistently positive* (cell 4) attitudes. Actors with more *positive pre-/negative post-transition* attitudes were significantly more likely to self-protect, limiting responsive behavior in response to greater parenting risk, than actors with *consistently negative* attitudes. That is, for actors with *more negative pre-transition* attitudes, the perceived parental risk by post-transition attitudes interaction was negative and significant (comparing the parental risk slopes in cells 3 vs. 1). Actors with more *negative pre-/positive post-transition* attitudes were also significantly more likely to self-protect than actors with *consistently positive* attitudes. That is, for actors with more *positive post-transition* attitudes, the perceived parental risk by *pre-transition attitudes* interaction was significant, but positive (comparing the parental risk slopes in cells 3 vs. 4).

**Partner effects.** The 3-way interaction was also significant for partners supporting the interpersonal “self-protection” hypothesis. Figure 6 presents the predicted slopes for self-protection (i.e., the simple effect of *partners' perceptions* of actors' general parental risk on actors' responsive behavior) for *partners* with evaluatively consistent vs. inconsistent attitudes. Table 13 presents the coefficients (and standard errors) for the simple slopes of *partners' parenting risk* illustrated in Figure 6. As before, we decomposed the 3-way interaction into

conditional 2-way interactions that contrasted self-protection (i.e., actors' tendency to be less responsive when *partners* perceived them to be riskier to depend on *as parents*) for partners with evaluatively inconsistent (cells 1 and 3) versus consistent attitudes (cells 2 and 4).

Let's first compare actors paired with partners with *positive pre-/negative post-transition* attitudes (cell 2) to actors paired with partners with *consistently negative* (cell 1) and *consistently positive* (cell 4) attitudes. Actors paired with partners with *positive pre-/negative post-transition* attitudes were significantly more likely to self-protect, limiting responsiveness in response to the parenting risks their *partner* perceived, than actors paired with partners with *consistently negative* attitudes. That is, for actors paired with *partners* with more *negative post-transition* attitudes, the perceived parental risk by pre-transition attitudes interaction was significant and negative (comparing the parental risk slopes in cells 2 vs. 1). However, actors paired with partners with *positive pre-/negative post-transition* attitudes were not more likely to self-protect than actors paired with partners with *consistently positive* attitudes. The 2-way interaction contrast comparing cells 2 and 4 was not significant.

Let's now compare actors paired with partners with *negative pre-/positive post-transition* attitudes (cell 3) to actors paired with partners with *consistently negative* (cell 1) and *consistently positive* (cell 4) attitudes. Actors paired with partners with *negative pre-/positive post-transition* attitudes were significantly more likely to self-protect, limiting responsiveness in response to the parenting risks their *partner* perceived, than actors paired with partners with *consistently negative* attitudes. That is, for actors paired with partners with more *negative pre-transition* attitudes, the perceived parental risk by post-transition attitudes interaction was negative and significant (comparing the parenting risk slopes in cells 3 vs. 1). Actors paired with partners with *negative pre-/positive post-transition* attitudes also tended to be more likely to self-protect

than actors paired with partners with *consistently positive* attitudes. That is, for actors paired with *partners* with more *positive post-transition* attitudes, the perceived parental risk by *pre-transition attitudes* interaction was marginal, but positive (comparing the parenting risk slopes in cells 3 vs. 4).

**Risk as a romantic partner.** We again used SEM to model the hypotheses, but this time we used average perceptions of the risks of depending on the partner as a *romantic partner in general* (rather than as a parent) during the daily period to index situational vulnerability. Table 14 lists the model variables and corresponding coefficients. Actors behaved less responsively in the lab the more often actors and their partners perceived risks of depending on one another as romantic partner, but none of the interactions observed for *parenting* risk emerged.<sup>xvii</sup>

### **The Relationship Well-Being Hypothesis: Trajectories Over Time**

The pre-birth and 6 post-birth assessments allowed us to test the *intra-* and *interpersonal* “relationship well-being” hypotheses. Namely, actors with evaluatively inconsistent pre- and post-transition automatic partner attitudes will experience steeper declines in relationship well-being than actors with evaluatively consistent attitudes. Actors paired with *partners* with evaluatively inconsistent pre- and post-transition automatic partner attitudes will also evidence steeper declines in relationship well-being than actors paired with *partners* with evaluatively consistent attitudes. We created a composite measure of relationship well-being at each time point by averaging z-scored responses on the closeness, commitment, satisfaction, and relationship feelings scales ( $\alpha = .88$ ). We then modeled the data as a two-level nested structure using the multilevel modeling program MLwiN (Goldstein et al., 1998) with time of assessment at level 1, couple at level 2, and gender within couple modeled as a multivariate outcome.

Table 15 lists the actor and partner effects included in the multilevel equations testing the

“relationship well-being” hypotheses. We scored the pre-birth assessment as zero in the “time” variable. The main effects of pre- and post-transition attitudes thus capture whether *actors* report greater well-being initially when either *actors* or *partners* possess more negative automatic partner attitudes (either pre- or post-transition). The 2-way interactions between *actors*’ and *partners*’ pre- and post-transition attitudes test whether actors report lower initial relationship well-being when *actors* or *partners* possess *evaluatively inconsistent* automatic attitudes. The 2-way interactions between time and pre-transition attitudes and time and post-transition attitudes, respectively, capture whether actors report steeper declines in relationship well-being when actors or partners possess more negative automatic partner attitudes, whether pre- or post-transition. The 3-way interactions test whether *evaluative consistency* in *actors* or *partners* automatic partner attitudes predict actors’ relationship well-being trajectory over time.<sup>xviii, xix</sup>

**Actor effects.** APAT model evaluative consistency effects were evident for women, supporting the *intrapersonal* “relationship well-being” hypothesis. The 3-way time by pre-transition by post-transition automatic partner attitudes interaction was significant for women, but not men,  $\chi^2(1) = 15.4, p < .0001$ . Figure 7 presents the relationship well-being trajectories (i.e., the simple slope for time) for women with evaluatively consistent versus evaluatively inconsistent attitudes. Table 16 puts the 3-way interaction depicted in Figure 7 into the APAT crossover interaction template by representing the simple effects of time numerically, as slope coefficients (and standard errors), rather than graphically, as predicted relationship well-being scores at each assessment wave. More negative time coefficients in Table 16 thus capture steeper declines in relationship well-being. (Dividing the slope coefficient for time by its standard error (in parentheses) proves a z-test of the significance of this change.) Next, we decomposed the 3-way into its conditional 2-way interactions; namely (1) *time by post-transition*

*attitudes* interaction when pre-transition attitudes are 1.5 *SD* above/below the mean and (2) *time by pre-transition attitudes* interaction when post-transition attitudes are 1.5 *SD* above/below the mean to statistically compare relationship well-being trajectories between women with evaluatively inconsistent versus consistent automatic partner attitudes.

Table 16 also contains these conditional tests. Let's first compare women with *positive pre-/negative post-transition* attitudes (cell 2) to women with *consistently negative* (cell 1) and *consistently positive* (cell 4) attitudes. Women with *positive pre-/negative post-transition* attitudes evidenced significantly steeper declines in relationship well-being than women with *consistently negative* attitudes. That is, for women with more *negative post-transition* attitudes, the time by pre-transition attitudes interaction was negative and significant (comparing time slopes in cells 2 vs. 1). Women with *positive pre-/negative post-transition* attitudes also evidenced significantly steeper declines in relationship well-being than women with *consistently positive* attitudes. That is, for women with more *positive pre-transition* attitudes, the time by post-transition attitudes interaction was significant, but positive (comparing time slopes in cell 2 vs. 4).

Let's now compare women with *negative pre-/positive post-transition* attitudes (cell 3) to women with *consistently negative* (cell 1) and *consistently positive* (cell 4) attitudes. Women with *negative pre-/positive post-transition* attitudes evidenced significantly steeper declines in relationship well-being than women with *consistently negative* attitudes. That is, for women with more *negative pre-transition* attitudes, the time by post-transition attitude interaction was significant and negative (comparing the time slopes in cells 3 vs. 1). Women with *negative pre-/positive post-transition* attitudes also evidenced significantly steeper declines in relationship well-being than women with *consistently positive* attitudes. That is, for women with more

*positive post-transition* attitudes, the time by pre-transition attitude interaction was significant, but positive (comparing the times slopes in cells 3 vs. 4).

**Partner effects.** APAT model evaluative consistency effects were evident for men, supporting the *interpersonal* “relationship well-being” hypothesis. The 3-way time by *partners’* pre-transition by *partners’* post-transition automatic partner attitudes interaction was significant for men, but not women,  $\chi^2(1) = 4.28, p = .039$ . Figure 8 presents the relationship well-being trajectories for men paired with women with evaluatively consistent versus inconsistent automatic partner attitudes. Table 17 presents the coefficients (and standard errors) for the illustrated trajectories. It also presents the conditional 2-way (1) *time by women’s post-transition attitudes* when women’s pre-transition attitudes are 1.5 *SD* above/below the mean and (2) *time by women’s pre-transition attitudes* when post-transition attitudes are 1.5 *SD* above/below the mean interactions that compare men’s relationship well-being trajectories when paired with women with evaluatively inconsistent (cells 1 and 3) versus consistent attitudes (cells 2 and 4).

Let’s first compare men paired with women with *positive pre-/negative post-transition* attitudes (cell 2) to men paired with women with *consistently negative* (cell 1) and *consistently positive* (cell 4) attitudes. Men paired with women with *positive pre-/negative post-transition* attitudes evidenced significantly steeper declines in relationship well-being than men paired with women with *consistently negative* attitudes. That is, for men paired with women with more *negative post-transition* attitudes, the time by pre-transition attitudes interaction predicting men’s relationship well-being trajectories was negative and significant (comparing the time slopes in cells 2 vs. 1). Men paired with women with *positive pre-/negative post-transition* attitudes also evidenced significantly steeper declines in relationship well-being than men paired with women with *consistently positive* attitudes. That is, for men paired with women with more *positive pre-*

*transition* attitudes, the time by post-transition attitudes interaction predicting men's relationship well-being trajectories was significant, but positive (comparing the time slopes in cells 2 vs. 4).

Let's now compare men paired with women with more *negative pre-/positive post-transition* attitudes (cell 3) to men paired with women with *consistently negative* (cell 1) or *consistently positive* (cell 4) attitudes. Men paired with women with more *negative pre-/positive post-transition* attitudes evidenced significantly steeper declines in relationship well-being than men paired with women with *consistently negative* attitudes. That is, for men paired with women with more *negative pre-transition* attitudes, the time by post-transition attitude interaction predicting men's relationship well-being trajectories was significant and negative (comparing the time slopes in cells 3 vs. 1). Men paired with women with more *negative pre-/positive post-transition* attitudes also evidenced significantly steeper declines in relationship well-being than men paired with women with *consistently positive* attitudes. That is, for men paired with women with more *positive post-transition* attitudes, the time by pre-transition attitude interaction was significant, but positive (comparing the time slopes in cells 3 vs. 4).

**An artifact?** The relationships of people with consistently negative automatic partner attitudes reported relatively stable relationship well-being. This raises the possibility that ceiling or floor effects in initial levels of relationship well-being drove the longitudinal effects.

However, people with evaluatively consistent versus inconsistent automatic partner attitudes did not differ in their initial level of relationship well-being. Neither actor nor partner effects for the interactive effects of pre- and post-transition automatic partner attitudes were significant (see Table 15). Moreover, when we controlled for initial levels of well-being and its interaction with time in a further analysis, the time by pre-transition by post-transition automatic partner attitudes interactions were still significant for both women,  $b = .123$ ,  $SE = .029$ ,  $z = -4.24$ ,  $p < .0001$ , and

men,  $b = .074$ ,  $SE = .027$ ,  $z = 2.74$ ,  $p = .006$ . Thus, the power evaluative inconsistency has to foreshadow declines in relationship well-being is not due to differences in initial well-being.

### **Specific to Automatic Partner Attitudes?**

The APAT model contends that evaluatively inconsistent automatic partner attitudes intensify self-protection and impose relationship vulnerability because they supply conflicting automatic inclinations to approach versus avoid the partner. However, evaluative inconsistency in automatic partner attitudes might have its corrosive effects simply because attitudinal inconsistency of any sort is experienced as aversive. If that is the case, pre- and post-transition evaluative inconsistency in people's *explicit* attitudes toward their partner should mimic the effects of evaluative inconsistency in their automatic attitudes. To examine this possibility, we conducted the daily interaction, in-vivo conflict, and longitudinal well-being analyses again, substituting explicit evaluations of the partner's interpersonal qualities pre- and post-transition for automatic partner attitudes pre- and post-transition. We did not find any significant interactive effects of evaluative consistency predicting self-protective behavior or changes in relationship well-being over time in these analyses (see Supplementary Tables 10-12).

### **Are Post-Transition Automatic Partner Attitude Highly Contextualized?**

The APAT model assumes that transitions such as parenthood introduce a "new" contextualized automatic partner attitude because partners learn about one another in new situations post-transition. Because our study design lacks a control group of nonparents, we cannot prove that becoming parents to a new baby introduced a "new" attitude. Nonetheless, the fact that our design included a time-series (i.e., one measure of automatic partner attitudes pre-transition and 6 measures post-transition) does provide means for arguing that post-transition automatic partner attitudes are likely contextualized, "new and different," attitudes.

**Looking at automatic partner attitudes over time.** If immediate post-birth attitudes are specific to the new context of parenting, they should “look” different than pre-transition and later post-transition attitudes. First, their evaluative signature should be unique. To see if it was, we conducted a multilevel model predicting the positivity of automatic partner attitudes at each time point from an intercept term, the fixed linear effect of time (centered around parenthood), and two dummy coded variables indexing whether “immediate” post-transition attitudes (i.e., the first post-birth assessment) were evaluative anomalies. The first dummy code compared immediate post-birth attitudes (coded 0) to pre-birth attitudes (coded 1). The second dummy code compared immediate post-birth attitudes (coded 0) to all subsequent post-birth attitudes (coded 1). As Figure 9 illustrates, the automatic partner attitudes assessed at each time point generally became less positive over time. The effect of time was significant and negative,  $b = -.039$ ,  $SE = .008$ ,  $z = -4.89$ ,  $p < .0001$ . However, the baby’s birth interjected a positive blip in this downward spiral. Immediate post-birth attitudes were significantly more positive than pre-birth attitudes for both women,  $b = -.300$ ,  $SE = .039$ ,  $z = -7.69$ ,  $p < .0001$ , and men,  $b = -.179$ ,  $SE = .041$ ,  $z = -4.37$ ,  $p < .0001$ , although this effect was especially strong for women,  $\chi^2(1) = 7.77$ ,  $p = .001$ . Immediate post-birth attitudes were also significantly more positive than later post-birth attitudes for both men and women,  $b = -.595$ ,  $SE = .037$ ,  $z = 16.08$ ,  $p < .0001$ .

If immediate post-birth attitudes are contextualized, their associative context should also be unique (and help explain the positivity blip). That is, post-transition attitudes should be associated with present and ongoing experiences with the baby and the partner in parenting rather than past negative experiences with the partner as a romantic partner. We conducted two sets of SEM models to isolate the associative content of immediate post-transition (Time 2) attitudes relative to pre-transition (Time 1) attitudes and later (Time 3) post-transition attitudes.

The first model examined whether immediate and later post-transition automatic partner attitudes are contextually bound to experiences with babies and parenting. Figure 10 presents a simplified version of the actual SEM model (which contained all possible actor and partner paths rather than just the actor paths highlighted in Figure 10). This model predicts immediate post-transition automatic partner attitudes (Time 2) from pre-transition attitudes at Time 1 (to isolate the “new” from “old” attitudes), perceptions of the risks of depending on the partner *as a parent* (i.e., an average of the composite measure of daily parental risk), and the difficulty of the baby’s temperament, operationalized as the average of both parents’ responses. It also predicts later post-transition attitudes at Time 3 from pre- and post-transition automatic partner attitudes, perceptions of the risks of depending on the partner *as a parent*, and baby temperament.

Figure 10 also contains the gender-pooled coefficients central to our questions here. (Supplementary Table 13 presents the complete analysis). When babies had more difficult temperaments at birth, and people presumably needed to depend on one another more *as parents*, their “new” post-transition automatic partner attitudes were significantly more positive. Indeed, people with more difficult babies even tended to evidence more positive automatic partner attitudes later post-transition. But, when people perceived their partner to be more generally risky to rely on *as parents*, their “new” post-transition automatic partner attitudes were significantly more negative, both immediately (Time 2) and later (Time 3) post-transition.

The second model examined whether immediate, but not later, post-transition attitudes are experientially isolated from the partner’s *past* failures to behave responsively as a *romantic* partner. Figure 11 presents a simplified version of the actual SEM model (which again contained all possible actor and partner paths rather than just those highlighted here). This model predicts immediate post-transition (Time 2) automatic partner attitudes from pre-transition (Time 1)

attitudes (to isolate the “new” from “old” attitude) and perceptions of the general risks of depending on the partner as a romantic partner during the *pre-birth* diary period (an average of daily perceived rejecting and interfering partner behaviors). It also predicts later post-transition (Time 3) attitudes from pre- and post-transition automatic partner attitudes and perceptions of the partner’s riskiness as a romantic partner during the pre-birth and post-birth diary periods.

Figure 11 also contains the gender-pooled coefficients central to our questions here. (Supplementary Table 14 presents the complete analysis). The partner’s perceived failures as a romantic partner during the pre-birth diary conditioned later post-transition, but not immediate post-transition automatic partner attitudes. That is, when people perceived their partner to be riskier and more undependable and unresponsive as a romantic partner prior to their baby’s birth, such behavior had no significant effect on their immediate post-transition attitudes. But, such behavior nonetheless conditioned more negative later post-transition automatic partner attitudes.

In sum, these supplemental analyses suggest that immediate post-transition automatic partner attitudes appear to be contextualized representations, with distinct evaluative and associative signatures. These attitudes are significantly more positive than pre-transition and later post-transition attitudes. They are also contextually bound to experiences with the baby and the partner as a parent and isolated from the partner’s failures as a romantic partner that nonetheless had lasting power to condition later post-transition attitudes (Murray et al., 2013).

### **Discussion**

The bouncing and often vexing bundle of joy that comes with new parenthood introduces a myriad of new ways for partners to reward and disappoint one another. This transition also appears to introduce a new automatic partner attitude, one that is contextualized in valence and its associative ties to the new baby and parenting experiences. In such newly challenging times,

evaluatively *consistent* pre- and post-transition automatic partner attitudes elicit unconflicted inclinations to approach or avoid the partner. However, evaluatively *inconsistent* pre- and post-transition attitudes elicit conflicted inclinations to both approach *and* avoid the partner. Such states of attitudinal inconsistency predict heightened self-protective responses to the risks posed by co-parenting and steeper declines in relationship well-being.

### Revisiting the APAT Model in Light of the Findings

The APAT model advanced “behavioral angst”, “self-protection”, and “relationship well-being” hypotheses. First, the “behavioral angst” hypothesis: Evaluatively inconsistent pre- and post-transition automatic partner attitudes should elicit an aversive state of angst or uncertainty in situations that simultaneously activate both attitude representations. Evidence of such a state of angst was evident in the cardiovascular challenge/threat responses of new parents discussing the problems women perceived in the relationship. Men with *evaluatively inconsistent* pre- and post-transition attitudes (both types, *pre-negative/post-positive* and *pre-positive/post-negative*) started the discussion in a greater state of cardiovascular threat than men with *consistently negative* automatic partner attitudes. Women with more *positive pre-/negative post-transition* automatic partner attitudes also evidenced steeper increases in cardiovascular threat as the discussion progressed than women with either *consistently positive* or *negative* attitudes.

Second, the situationally specific “self-protection” hypotheses: Evaluatively inconsistent automatic partner attitudes should heighten self-protective behavior for *both* partners in situations that make the risks of depending on one another *as a parent* painfully clear. Day-to-day, new mothers and fathers with evaluatively inconsistent automatic partner attitudes (both types) were more likely to self-protect, reducing connection after days that highlighted the risks of depending on their partner *as a parent*, than new parents with *consistently positive or negative*

automatic partner attitudes. New mothers and fathers paired with *partners* with evaluatively inconsistent automatic partner attitudes (both types) were also more likely to self-protect, limiting their own responsiveness on days after their *partner* perceived them to be transgressing more as *parents*, than new mothers and fathers paired with *partners* with *consistently positive* or *negative* attitudes. In the conflict interaction, new mothers and fathers with evaluatively inconsistent automatic partner attitudes (*negative pre-/positive post-transition*) were also more likely to self-protect, limiting their responsiveness toward partners who proved to be generally risky and undependable as *parents*, than new parents with either *consistently positive* or *negative* automatic partner attitudes. Moreover, new mothers and fathers paired with *partners* with more *negative pre-transition* and *positive post-transition* automatic partner attitudes were also more likely to self-protect when their partner perceived them to be less dependable as parents, than people paired with *partners* with *consistently positive* or *negative* attitudes.

Third, the “relationship well-being” hypotheses: Evaluatively inconsistent pre- and post-transition automatic partner attitudes should hasten declines in relationship well-being for *both* partners. New mothers with evaluatively inconsistent pre- and post-transition automatic partner attitudes (both types) experienced steeper declines in well-being than new mothers with either *consistently positive* or *negative* automatic partner attitudes. New fathers paired with wives with evaluatively inconsistent attitudes (both types) also experienced steeper declines in relationship well-being than men paired with wives with *consistently positive* or *negative* attitudes.

### **Reassessing the APAT Model in Light of the Findings**

The present findings do have limitations. One limitation is conceptual. The APAT model assumes that pre- and post-transition attitudes are especially likely to be activated in situations that highlight the risks of depending on a partner *as a parent*. However, we found

evaluative inconsistency effects for both challenge/threat and relationship well-being trajectories without considering this moderator. This might suggest that parenting risk is not essential to the APAT model, but such a conclusion is likely unwarranted.

First, even though women could nominate any problem they wished from the marital problems inventory, the vast majority discussed their new baby and parenting in their actual conversations, which should be sufficient to activate post-transition attitudes. Second, as couples become more immersed in their responsibilities as new *parents*, their romantic lives together shrink, making it more likely that parenting issues populate most of the interactions together (Claxton & Perry-Jenkins, 2008; Cowan & Cowan, 1988; Huston, Caughlin, Houts, & Smith, & George, 2001; Huston, McHale & Crouter, 1986; Huston & Vangelisti, 1991; MacDermid, Huston, & McCale, 1990). Thus, post-transition attitudes are likely to become more readily activated in most situations over time (which is why we did not include the between-person measure of perceived parental risk in testing the relationship well-being hypotheses). Nonetheless, when we conducted a further exploratory analysis that included this index of parenting risk as a further moderator, it revealed a significant 4-way interaction. Evaluative inconsistency in women's automatic pre- and post-transition automatic attitudes was especially predictive of increases in declines in relationship well-being when women perceived their partner to be more generally riskier to depend on *as a parent*.<sup>xx</sup>

Other limitations are empirical. The asymmetry in the effects predicting women's challenge/threat responses is first on this list. While women with *positive pre-transition* and *negative post-transition* automatic partner attitudes evidenced heightened threat suggestive of greater behavioral angst, women with *negative pre-transition* and *positive post-transition* attitudes generally did not. Despite this anomaly, women with *negative pre-transition* and

*positive post-transition* attitudes nonetheless still evidenced self-protection in the daily and in-vivo conflict interactions and steeper declines in relationship well-being over time.

Limited asymmetries in the evidence for the “self-protection” hypotheses are second on the list. Across the hypothesis tests, we decomposed all significant interactions using 1.0 (Supplementary Tables) and 1.5 *SD* above/below the pre-/post-transition mean for automatic partner attitudes. The majority of the interaction contrasts were either significant at both conditional values or marginal with 1.0 *SD* and significant with 1.5 *SD*. Nonetheless, testing the “self-protection” hypotheses yielded exceptions for the daily connection strength and in-lab responsiveness, but not daily responsiveness. Predicting daily connection strength, people with *positive pre-/negative post-transition* attitudes were significantly more likely to self-protect than people with evaluatively consistent attitudes using both 1.0 and 1.5 *SD* for the 2-way contrasts. However, the 2-ways comparing *negative pre-/positive post-transition* attitudes to *consistently positive* and *negative* attitudes were marginal using 1.5 *SD* and not significant using 1.0 *SD*. Predicting responsiveness in the conflict interaction, evaluative inconsistency predicted significantly heightened self-protective behavior for actors with *negative pre-/positive post-transition* attitudes using both 1.0 and 1.5 *SD* for the 2-way interaction contrasts. However, the 2-way comparing actors’ *positive pre-/negative post-transition* automatic partner attitudes to actors’ *consistently negative* attitudes was marginal using 1.5 *SD* and not significant using 1.0 *SD*. Similarly, the 2-way interaction contrasts comparing actors paired with *partners* with *negative pre-/positive post-transition* attitudes to *partners* with *consistently negative* attitudes were significant using both 1.0 and 1.5 *SD*, but with one exception, the remaining contrasts were stronger at 1.5 *SD*. These limited shifts in the significance of the conditional 2-way interaction contrasts put both conceptual and empirical boundaries on the self-protection effect. Namely,

evaluative inconsistency appears most likely to predict heightened self-protection when *pre-* and *post-transition* automatic partner attitudes are *more*, rather than *less*, attitudinally discrepant.

The contrasting effects for daily connection and in-lab responsiveness also reveal an asymmetry in the *type* of evaluative inconsistency that most reliably predicted connection in daily life (i.e., *positive pre-/negative post-transition*) and in lab responsiveness (i.e., *negative pre-/positive post-transition*). Nonetheless, this asymmetry does have an upside. Perhaps people with more *positive pre-transition* and *negative post-transition* automatic partner attitudes behave more self-protectively on a daily basis because their relationships have already taken a decided turn for the worse, not because evaluative inconsistency itself heightens self-protective behavior. However, finding especially marked self-protective behavior for people with more *negative pre-transition and positive post-transition* automatic partner attitudes in the in-vivo conflict interaction suggests that it is indeed evaluative *inconsistency* (and not just declines in attitude or behavior positivity) that heightens self-protective behavior in vulnerability-inducing situations.

The empirical breadth and the conceptual specificity of the findings do help counter these limited anomalies. In terms of empirical breadth, we found convergent support for the APAT model predictions in psychophysiology, daily interaction, conflict interactions, and over time in the transition to parenthood. We also found even more robust effects contrasting evaluatively inconsistent attitudes (both types) to consistently *negative* than consistently *positive* attitudes. People evidenced greater relationship vulnerability when their pre- and post-transition automatic partner attitudes were evaluatively inconsistent – whether *pre-negative/post-positive* or *pre-positive/post-negative* – than they did when their attitudes were *consistently negative*. This particular contrast suggests that evaluatively inconsistent “new” and “old” attitudes depend on counteractive control processes to be behaviorally resolved (Fishbach, Zhang, & Trope,

2010). In essence, the temptation to approach the partner supplied by evaluatively inconsistent attitudes makes the competing goal to self-protect in risky situations even more pressing than it is likely to be when both automatic attitudes are negative (Murray et al., 2008).

In terms of conceptual specificity, the APAT model also assumes that evaluatively inconsistent pre-and post-transition attitudes exist as separate representations in memory, not as singular, changing representations. Consistent with this logic, we did not find consistent main or interactive effects for pre-transition attitudes. Nor did we find consistent main or interactive effects for *post-transition* attitudes (controlling for pre-transition attitudes). This suggests that conceptual models that assume multiple automatic partner representations, like the APAT model, are likely to shed more light on relationship vulnerability than conceptual models that assume one underlying attitude representation. The APAT model also assumes that evaluatively inconsistent attitudes pose an especially vexing behavioral quandary when they are automatic because such attitudes embody competing *automatic* inclinations to approach *and* avoid the partner. Supporting this supposition, evaluative consistency in pre- and post-transition explicit attitudes toward the partner did not mimic the obtained effects. This is likely because people can more readily rationalize evaluative inconsistency in explicit attitudes, perhaps discounting more positive attitudes toward the partner as “false” and due to the baby (Petty et al., 2006).

### **Revising the APAT Model Through Future Research**

The present findings also contain paradoxes that raise questions for future research. The first concerns the magnitude of the evaluative inconsistency needed to potentiate (or perhaps obviate) the effects. As is typical in psychological research, we conceptualize automatic partner attitudes in relative terms (see Footnote 1). We deem automatic partner attitudes as “more negative” or “more positive” relative to other attitudes at the same transition point, just as

researchers generally deem people as high or low in self-esteem relative to others or high or low in prejudice relative to others. But most automatic partner attitudes are reasonably positive in an absolute sense. Indeed, immediate post-transition automatic partner attitudes were unusually positive. Despite the fact that the range of automatic partner attitudes is naturally compressed by the simple fact that couples are still choosing to be together, evaluative inconsistency in pre- and post-transition attitudes still elicited the predicted effects. This raises a paradox. How can evaluatively inconsistent attitudes predict heightened relationship vulnerability when both “old” pre-transition and “new” post-transition attitudes are still largely positive ones?

This naturalistic suppression in attitudes may be central for understanding the observed effects. For some people, evaluative inconsistency in automatic partner attitudes may not necessarily correspond to simultaneously strong inclinations to approach and avoid the partner. Instead, evaluative inconsistency might capture two separate approach inclinations that vary in intensity. Experientially, then, the less positive (or more negative) automatic partner attitude might elicit caution and trepidation in response to the partner rather than outright avoidance. In the present study, it might be the very hesitation that comes from not being able to fully trust the more positive automatic partner attitude that accounts for heightened self-protective behavior, especially as the discrepancy between pre- and post-transition attitudes becomes more pronounced (Murray et al., 2013). Future research is needed to determine whether evaluative inconsistency effects appear in situations where both attitudes are unequivocal in valence, but one is unequivocally positive and the other is unequivocally negative, or depend instead on one automatic attitude being more equivocal in its inclinations for either approach or avoidance.

The present findings lend further support to prior research that suggests automatic partner attitudes are conditioned in part through behavioral interaction (Murray et al., 2010; 2013;

McNulty et al., 2013). In the current study, people evidenced more positive immediate post-transition automatic partner attitudes when their baby had a more difficult temperament, and couples likely needed to depend on one another more as *parents*. Indeed, the fact that most parents evidenced more positive automatic associations to their partner immediately post-transition suggests that most new parents experienced a short-term, perhaps dramatic, positive shift in the quality of the experiences they associated with their partner.

Nevertheless, new parents with more *negative pre-* and *even-more-positive post-transition* attitudes ultimately still withdrew from their partner in situations that highlighted the risks of depending on them as a *partner in parenting*. In the daily aftermath of such situations, they reported less connection and their partner also behaved less responsively. They also limited their responsiveness in the conflict interaction the more often they perceived their partner to be unresponsive as a *parent*. Women with more *negative pre-* and *positive post-transition* attitudes also experienced steeper declines in relationship well-being that their partner mirrored.

This paradoxical juxtaposition of a positive post-transition attitude in the face of increasingly negative interactions suggests such attitudes exist in a stubbornly fluid state. Such attitudes can be fluid because marked changes in the context in which the partner is encountered can condition a new, contextualized attitude, seemingly overnight (Gawronski & Cesario, 2013; Gawronski et al., 2014; Gawronski et al., 2010). In the case of the transition to parenthood, being unthinkingly awash in positive emotions immediately after a baby's birth could quickly condition a new highly positive, contextualized attitude because the partner is strongly associated with an unusually affectively provoking event. However, such attitudes can also be stubborn and slow to change because new parents are likely to be highly motivated to discount the negative aspects of their interactions as a romantic couple (Murray & Holmes, 2017). Such a

motivational bias could then create an experiential lag wherein new, more negative attitudes only develop as negative experiences accumulate and become more difficult to discount. The current findings point to the possibility of such a sleeper effect. Negative pre-transition experiences with the partner as a romantic partner left immediate post-transition automatic partner attitudes unaffected, but nonetheless, still conditioned later, more negative automatic evaluations of the partner. Future research might examine how pre-and post-transition attitudes and experiences potentially become integrated into more general attitudinal representations over time.

Although the current paper focused on vulnerability-inducing situations, the APAT model propositions should also extend to vulnerability-*reducing* situations. Safe or vulnerability-reducing situations affirm a partner's availability and responsiveness, as can happen when a partner provides invisible support (e.g., Bolger, Zuckerman, & Kessler, 2001), offers a sacrifice (e.g., Van Lange, Rusbult, Drigotas, Arriaga, Witcher, & Cox, 1997), or revels in one's good news (e.g., Gable, Gonzaga, & Strachman, 2006). Such situations prime an automatic inclination to approach the partner, which more positive pre- and post-transition automatic partner attitudes should validate and reinforce (Murray & Holmes, 2017). But, when people have evaluatively inconsistent pre- and post-transition attitudes, heeding the automatic approach injunctive supplied by the more positive automatic partner attitude also requires suppressing the behavioral injunctive supplied by the competing more negative automatic partner attitude. Therefore, new parents with evaluatively inconsistent pre- and post-transition attitudes should be more likely to approach one another when their partner dramatically affirms their availability and responsiveness as a parent than new parents with consistently positive attitudes. Because the daily diary survey did not specifically identify situations wherein new parents evidenced such responsiveness in parenting, this hypothesis remains to be tested.

Finally, the current paper focused on parenthood as the transition in question because the birth of a new baby fundamentally changes the way in which couples relate to one another, creating the potential for marked attitudinal shifts (Doss et al., 2013). However, the transition to parenthood is only one of the challenges couples face in navigating their lives together. Newly contextualized automatic partner attitudes are also likely to develop as couples encounter other transitions in their relationship. Indeed, such constant re-contextualization in automatic partner attitudes is likely because of the ambiguity inherent in compartmentalizing reactions toward the partner from reactions to the transition itself (given their experiential confounding). For instance, as children grow up and move out of the house, any resultant feelings of emptiness or loss could be implicitly associated with the partner rather than the role transition itself, creating the potential for an automatic attitudinal shift toward the partner. Similarly, if one partner becomes depressed or physically ill, anger and animosity toward the illness itself could be implicitly associated with the partner, also creating the potential for an attitudinal shift. Future research should thus examine how changes in life context create new, contextualized automatic partner attitudes and how attitude consistency affects adjustment to such transitions.

### Conclusion

In the topsy-turvy, theory-out-the-window world that is life as a new parent, couples may have little choice but to rely on automatic associations to one another to navigate constantly changing demands. New parents with evaluatively *inconsistent*, and thus behaviorally perplexing, pre- and post-transition automatic attitudes seem likely to struggle over this transition. In the present study, new parents with evaluatively inconsistent pre- and post-transition automatic partner attitudes, whether more *negative pre- and positive post-* or more *positive pre- and negative post-transition*, evidenced greater psychophysiological threat,

heightened self-protective behavior, and decreased relationship well-being over time.

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### Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> We use the terms “more positive” and “more negative” automatic partner attitudes as both conceptual and linguistic shorthand throughout. Given the interaction analysis we use for hypothesis testing, this shorthand captures a relative comparison. That is, pre-transition and post-transition attitudes are centered relative to the average person, and thus, people possess “more positive” or “more negative” automatic partner attitudes relative to others at the same transition point. This means that even “more negative” automatic partner attitudes may be reasonably positive in an absolute sense. In the APAT model, evaluatively inconsistent automatic partner attitudes pose relationship vulnerabilities because they elicit automatic inclinations to approach versus avoid the partner with conflicting or varying intensity. For such a conflict to be conceptually present, it is not necessary for one attitude to be positive and one attitude to be negative in an absolute sense. It is sufficient that one attitude elicit a strong inclination to approach the partner, while the other elicits only a weak inclination to approach.

<sup>ii</sup> The transition to parenthood is an especially influential context for women because they tend to take on disproportionate responsibility over this transition (Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010; Freudenthaler & Mikula, 1998). Therefore, we conducted exploratory tests for gender differences in the hypothesized effects.

<sup>iii</sup> Participants who did versus did not complete the Time 2 (immediate post-transition) measures were indistinguishable on the pre-transition measures reported here. There were no significant differences between participants who did versus did not complete Time 2 measures on the pre-transition measures of automatic partner attitudes, satisfaction, closeness, commitment, relationship feelings, and perceptions of the partner’s interpersonal qualities.

<sup>iv</sup> A subset of the measures utilized in the current study were also differently utilized in Murray, Lamarche, Gomillion, Seery, & Kondrak (2017). Murray et al. (2017) examined how violating cultural expectancies affect commitment defense over the transition to parenthood. The prior paper predicted pre- to post-birth changes in commitment (i.e., a composite of commitment and closeness) and trust (i.e., a composite of perceived commitment, perceived closeness, trust, and perceptions of the partner's interpersonal qualities) from the linear and quadratic effects of pre-birth satisfaction and expectancy violations (about the post-birth division of housework and childcare). It also predicted a composite of motivational readiness to meet the partner's needs (i.e., the perceiver's average C/T during the conflict discussion of the partner's issue and the partner's ratings of the perceiver's responsiveness) from the linear and quadratic effects of pre-birth satisfaction and expectancy violation. The current paper is the first to focus on pre- and post-transition automatic partner attitudes and it is the first to predict initial levels and changes in challenge/threat over time and the first to predict the trajectory of change in relationship well-being. It is also the first to utilize the post-birth daily diary data.

<sup>v</sup> The daily diary items asking about the parenting and the baby were only included in the Time 2 diary assessment; excluding these items, the Times 1 and 2 daily diaries were largely identical.

<sup>vi</sup> Despite their discrete labels, challenge and threat represent the two anchors of a single bipolar continuum, such that intermediate relative differences (e.g., greater vs. lesser challenge) are not only possible, but are of central importance. Consistent with this idea, research applying the BPSC/T perspective tests for relative differences in the challenge/threat continuum, not for the presence or absence of challenge or threat (see Seery & Quinton, 2016).

<sup>vii</sup> These scatter plots are included in Supplementary Figures 1 and 2. Automatic partner

attitudes were not significantly associated across partners at Time 1,  $r(185) = -.023, p = .76$ , but they were weakly, positively, associated across partners at Time 2,  $r(134) = .23, p = .008$ .

<sup>viii</sup> We present separate coefficients for men and women when the deviance tests for separate coefficients were significant,  $\chi^2 > 3.84, p < .05$ .

<sup>ix</sup> The significant effects of actors' evaluative consistency revealed in the actors-effect-only analytic model were also significant in a further multilevel model that included partner effects in addition to the actor effects included in the model reported in Table 3.

<sup>x</sup> The intercepts were specified as random. Time was specified as fixed because tests of cross-level interactions have greater power to detect between-person variation in slopes than the deviance test of random slopes (LaHuis & Ferguson, 2009; Snijders & Bosker, 1999).

Nevertheless, when we conducted a further model that specified the effect of time to be random rather than fixed, we found a parallel pattern of significant effects.

<sup>xi</sup> We thank an anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.

<sup>xii</sup> The intercepts were specified as random. The lagged effects of yesterday's perception of parenting threat were specified as fixed rather than random because tests of cross-level interactions have greater power to detect between person-variation in slopes than the deviance test of random slopes (LaHuis & Ferguson, 2009; Snijders & Bosker, 1999). When we conducted further models that specified the effects of parenting threat to be random rather than fixed, we found a parallel pattern of significant effects predicting daily connection strength, but the model predicting responsive behavior would not converge.

<sup>xiii</sup> Actors' daily reports of responsiveness were not significantly associated with their daily reports of connection,  $b = -.088, SE = .055, z = 1.60, p = .11$ . Moreover, when we conducted

further analyses that controlled for the nonsignificant association between daily reports of connection and responsiveness, we still found a significant 3-way parenting threat by pre- by post-transition automatic partner attitudes interaction for actors predicting daily connection strength,  $b = .386$ ,  $SE = .111$ ,  $z = 3.48$ ,  $p = .00005$ , and for partners predicting daily responsiveness,  $b = .693$ ,  $SE = .282$ ,  $z = 2.46$ ,  $p = .014$ .

<sup>xiv</sup> A 3-way interaction between pre- and post-transition automatic partner attitudes and daily perceptions of the partner's transgressions in general also emerged predicting women's, but not men's, daily responsive behavior. This 3-way interaction did not mimic either of the interactions that emerged using the partner's *parenting* transgressions as the index of daily threat (as it was opposite in sign). Generally, this 3-way for women emerged because the daily partner transgression by *post-transition* automatic partner attitudes interaction was *not* significant for women with more positive pre-transition attitudes. In contrast, this conditional 2-way interaction was significant and positive for men with more positive pre-transition attitudes, preventing a 3-way interaction for men. Thus, evaluative inconsistency in automatic partner attitudes did not significantly heighten self-protection in response to daily partner transgressions in general.

<sup>xv</sup> Actors were more likely to perceive their partner to be transgressing in general as a romantic partner on days when they perceived their partner to be transgressing more as a parent,  $b = 1.010$ ,  $SE = .046$ ,  $z = 22.0$ ,  $p < .00001$ . Therefore, we conducted a further analysis to see if the observed effects for parenting transgressions still emerged when we controlled for transgression in general as a romantic partner (and its interaction with pre- and post-transition automatic partner attitudes). They did. In analyses that included these controls, the 3-way yesterday's parental risk by pre- by post-transition automatic partner attitudes interaction was significant for

*actors* predicting daily connection,  $b = .402$ ,  $SE = .115$ ,  $z = 3.50$ ,  $p = .0005$ , and for *partners* predicting daily responsiveness,  $b = .776$ ,  $SE = .296$ ,  $z = 2.62$ ,  $p = .009$ .

<sup>xvi</sup> Although we focus on the results for the composite index of responsiveness in the text, we found parallel patterns of results when we examined each of the components of this composite separately. Specifically, the 3-way actors' average parenting threat by pre-transition by post-transition automatic partner attitude interaction was significant predicting actors' self-reports on their own responsiveness,  $b = 1.05$ ,  $SE = .324$ ,  $z = 3.24$ ,  $p = .001$ , and approaching significance for partners' reports on actors' responsiveness,  $b = .641$ ,  $SE = .442$ ,  $z = 1.45$ ,  $p = .15$ .

<sup>xvii</sup> Actors were more likely to perceive their partner to be generally risky to depend on *as a parent* when they perceived their partner to be riskier to depend on as a romantic partner,  $b = 1.19$ ,  $SE = 1.22$ ,  $z = 9.77$ ,  $p < .0001$ . Therefore, we conducted a further analysis to see if the observed effects for general *parental* risk still emerged when we controlled for general risk as a romantic partner (and its interaction with pre- and post-transition automatic partner attitudes). They did. In analyses that included these controls, the 3-way perceived *parental* risk by pre- by post-transition automatic partner attitudes interaction predicting responsiveness during the conflict interaction was significant for *actors*,  $b = .626$ ,  $SE = .295$ ,  $z = 2.12$ ,  $p = .034$ , and marginally significant for *partners*,  $b = .481$ ,  $SE = .296$ ,  $z = 1.62$ ,  $p = .104$ .

<sup>xviii</sup> The intercepts were specified as random. Time was specified as fixed because tests of cross-level interactions have greater power to detect between-person variation in slopes than the deviance test of random slopes (LaHuis & Ferguson, 2009; Snijders & Bosker, 1999). Nevertheless, when we conducted a further model that specified the effect of time to be random rather than fixed, we found a parallel pattern of significant effects.

<sup>xix</sup> We found parallel patterns of results when we examined the components of relationship well-being separately. The 3-way time by women's pre-transition by post-transition automatic partner attitudes interaction was significant predicting women's closeness,  $b = .189$ ,  $SE = .062$ ,  $z = 3.05$ ,  $p = .0069$ , commitment,  $b = .200$ ,  $SE = .049$ ,  $z = 4.01$ ,  $p = .0001$ , satisfaction,  $b = .157$ ,  $SE = .057$ ,  $z = 2.75$ ,  $p = .006$  and relationship feelings,  $b = .199$ ,  $SE = .063$ ,  $z = 3.16$ ,  $p = .0016$ . The 3-way time by women's pre-transition by post-transition automatic partner attitudes interaction was marginally significant predicting men's closeness,  $b = .096$ ,  $SE = .052$ ,  $z = 1.85$ ,  $p = .064$ , and significant predicting men's commitment,  $b = .095$ ,  $SE = .045$ ,  $z = 2.11$ ,  $p = .035$ , satisfaction,  $b = .106$ ,  $SE = .043$ ,  $z = 2.47$ ,  $p = .014$ , and relationship feelings,  $b = .124$ ,  $SE = .055$ ,  $z = 2.25$ ,  $p = .024$ , although the gender difference in this partner effect was only significant for satisfaction and relationship feelings.

<sup>xx</sup> The 4-way time by average parenting risk by pre- by post-transition automatic partner attitudes interaction predicting women's relationship well-being was positive and significant,  $b = .244$ ,  $SE = .071$ ,  $z = 3.44$ ,  $p = .0006$ . For women who perceived their partner to be riskier to depend on *as a parent*, the conditional 3-way time by pre- by post-transition automatic partner attitudes interaction was positive and significant  $b = .204$ ,  $SE = .051$ ,  $z = 4.00$ ,  $p < .0001$ , as was the unconditional 3-way interaction in the principal analysis.

**Authors' Note**

Table 1. The APAT model’s conceptual crossover interaction hypothesis predicting relationship vulnerability.

		Pre-Transition APA	
		Negative	Positive
Post-Transition APA	Negative	.50	-.50
	Positive	-.50	.50

*Note.* More positive values reflect greater relationship resilience; more negative values reflect greater relationship vulnerability.

Table 2. Descriptive information for the primary variables.

	Women		Men	
	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>
Pre-transition APA	1.17	.47	1.29	.54
Post-transition APA	1.41	.62	1.44	.54
Pre-transition satisfaction	7.93	1.48	7.86	1.42
Post-transition satisfaction	7.46	1.79	7.54	1.50
Pre-transition closeness	8.16	1.00	7.83	1.40
Post-transition closeness	7.45	1.56	7.38	1.50
Pre-transition commitment	8.93	0.35	8.60	1.10
Post-transition commitment	8.68	1.18	8.40	1.38
Pre-transition relationship feelings	7.03	1.11	6.93	1.10
Post-transition relationship feelings	6.50	1.54	6.49	1.25
Pre-transition perceptions of partner's interpersonal qualities	6.79	0.93	6.51	0.98
Post-transition perceptions of partner's interpersonal qualities	6.57	1.07	6.27	1.09
Daily connection strength	5.55	1.24	5.65	1.18
Daily own sacrificing behavior	0.60	0.91	.75	1.06
Daily own communal behavior	1.34	1.15	1.16	1.26
Daily partner's parenting transgressions	0.49	0.88	0.25	0.65

Daily partner's parenting skills	5.62	1.33	6.11	1.04
Daily domestic fairness	3.57	1.32	4.20	1.18
Daily partner's rejecting behavior	.59	1.03	.65	1.28
Daily partner's interfering behavior	0.72	1.27	.51	1.03
Own responsiveness during conflict	5.69	0.96	5.51	0.99
Perceived partner responsiveness during conflict	5.54	1.29	5.41	1.20

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Table 3. Predicting challenge/threat responses as a function of pre- and post-transition automatic partner attitudes (APA).

Predictor	<u>Women's Issue</u>		<u>Men's Issue</u>	
	b (SE)	<u>z</u>	b (SE)	<u>z</u>
Intercept	.025 (.060)	--	.037 (.059)	--
Time	-.020 (.005)	-4.00***	-.006 <sub>W</sub> (.006)	-1.00
			-.030 <sub>M</sub> (.008)	-3.75***
Actors' pre-transition APA	.012 (.118)	0.10	-.088 (.115)	-0.77
Actors' post-transition APA	-.152 (.100)	-1.52	-.074 (.096)	-0.77
Actors' pre-transition by post-transition APA	-.056 <sub>W</sub> (.283)	-0.20	.186 (.197)	0.94
	.774 <sub>M</sub> (.280)	2.76**		
Actors' pre-transition APA by time	-.017 <sub>W</sub> (.014)	-1.21	.012 (.010)	1.20
	.037 <sub>M</sub> (.015)	2.47*		
Actors' post-transition APA by time	.015 (.008)	1.88 <sup>+</sup>	.006 (.008)	0.75
Actors' pre-transition by post-transition APA by time	.060 <sub>W</sub> (.023)	2.61*	.001 (.017)	0.06
	-.074 <sub>M</sub> (.028)	-2.64*		

<sup>+</sup>  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Table 4. Men's challenge/threat at the start of the discussion of women's issues as a function of evaluative consistency in men's automatic partner attitudes.

		<b>Pre-Transition APA</b>		
		<i>Negative</i>	<i>Positive</i>	
<b>Post-Transition APA</b>	<i>Negative</i>	.63 1	-.34 2	
	<i>Positive</i>	-.60 3	.41 4	<b>Cell 2 vs. 1</b> <b>b = -.613 (.257)</b> $z = 2.39$ $p = .017$  <b>Cell 3 vs. 4,</b> <b>b = .600 (.293)</b> $z = 2.05$ $p = .040$
		<b>Cell 3 vs. 1,</b> <b>b = -.894 (.271)</b> $z = -3.29$ $p = .001$	<b>Cell 2 vs. 4,</b> <b>b = .318 (.292)</b> $z = 1.09$ $p = .28$	

*Note.* More positive values reflect greater challenge; more negative values reflect greater threat.

Table 5. Women's challenge/threat trajectories as a function of evaluative consistency in women's automatic partner attitudes.

		<b>Pre-Transition APA</b>		
		<i>Negative</i>	<i>Positive</i>	
<b>Post-Transition APA</b>	<i>Negative</i>	.005 (.021) 1	-.080 (.023) 2	
	<i>Positive</i>	-.019 (.020) 3	.020 (.017) 4	<b>Cell 2 vs. 1</b> <b>b = -.072 (.029)</b> $z = -2.48$ $p = .013$  <b>Cell 3 vs. 4</b> <b>b = .039 (.022)</b> $z = 1.77$ $p = .077$
		<b>Cell 3 vs. 1</b> <b>b = -.019 (.019)</b> $z = -1.00$ $p = .32$	<b>Cell 2 vs. 4</b> <b>b = .050 (.018)</b> $z = 2.78$ $p = .005$	

Note. More positive values reflect increasing challenge; more negative values reflect increasing threat. Values in parentheses are standard errors.

Table 6. Men's challenge/threat trajectories as a function of evaluative consistency in men's automatic partner attitudes.

		<b>Pre-Transition APA</b>		
		<i>Negative</i>	<i>Positive</i>	
<b>Post-Transition APA</b>	<i>Negative</i>	-0.096 (.022)	.045 (.029)	
	<i>Positive</i>	-0.023 (.031)	-.024 (.024)	
		1	2	<b>Cell 2 vs. 1</b> <b>b = .095 (.025)</b> $z = 3.80$ $p = .0001$
		3	4	<b>Cell 3 vs. 4</b> <b>b = -.022 (.029)</b> $z = -0.76$ $p = .45$
		<b>Cell 3 vs. 1</b> <b>b = .083 (.027)</b> $z = 3.07$ $p = .002$	<b>Cell 2 vs. 4</b> <b>b = -.043 (.028)</b> $z = -1.54$ $p = .12$	

*Note.* More positive values reflect increasing challenge; more negative values reflect increasing threat. Values in parentheses are standard errors.

Table 7. Predicting daily connection strength and daily responsive behavior as a function of pre- and post-transition automatic partner attitudes (APA) and daily parenting risk.

Predictor	<u>Actors' Connection</u>		<u>Actors' Responsive</u>	
	<u>Strength Today</u>		<u>Behavior Today</u>	
	b (SE)	<u>z</u>	b (SE)	<u>z</u>
Intercept	5.67 (.072)	--	1.07 (.137)	--
Actors' outcome on the prior day	.040 (.023)	1.74 <sup>+</sup>	-.006 (.021)	-0.29
Actors' parenting risk on the prior day	-.098 (.034)	-2.88**	.032 (.075)	0.43
Actors' pre-transition APA	.299 (.119)	2.51*	.089 (.247)	0.36
Actors' post-transition APA	.177 (.097)	1.82 <sup>+</sup>	-.180 (.192)	-0.94
Actors' pre-transition by post-transition APA	-.293 (.213)	-1.38	-.071 (.430)	-0.17
Actors' pre-transition APA by parenting risk on prior day	-.106 (.060)	-1.77 <sup>+</sup>	.074 (.151)	0.49
Actors' post-transition APA by parenting risk on prior day	.093 (.053)	1.75 <sup>+</sup>	.114 (.131)	0.87
Actors' pre-transition by post-transition APA by parenting risk on prior day	.358 (.106)	3.38***	.205 (.262)	0.78
Partners' outcome on the prior day	.042 (.023)	1.83 <sup>+</sup>	.024 (.020)	1.20
Partners' parenting risk on the prior day	.028 (.034)	0.82	-.094 (.078)	-1.21
Partners' pre-transition APA	.146 (.119)	1.23	.018 (.235)	0.08

Partners' post-transition APA	.094 (.096)	0.98	-.436 (.208)	-2.10*
Partners' pre-transition by post-transition APA	-.337 (.213)	-1.58	.381 (.439)	0.87
Partners' pre-transition APA by parenting risk on prior day	-.056 (.060)	-0.93	.050 (.156)	0.32
Partners' post-transition APA by parenting risk on prior day	.029 (.051)	0.57	.119 (.141)	0.84
Partners' pre-transition by post-transition APA by parenting risk on prior day	.120 (.104)	1.15	.731 (.278)	2.63*

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<sup>+</sup>  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Table 8. Actors' self-protection slopes (i.e., yesterday's parenting risk predicting today's connection) as a function of evaluative consistency in actors' automatic partner attitudes.

		<b>Pre-Transition APA</b>		
		<i>Negative</i>	<i>Positive</i>	
<b>Post-Transition APA</b>	<i>Negative</i>	.120 (.073) 1	-.444 (.101) 2	<b>Cell 2 vs. 1</b> <b>b = -.390 (.094)</b> $z = -4.15$ $p < .0001$
	<i>Positive</i>	-0.183 (.110) 3	.139 (.101) 4	
		<b>Cell 3 vs. 1</b> <b>b = -.171 (.088)</b> $z = -1.94$ $p = .052$	<b>Cell 2 vs. 4</b> <b>b = .335 (.094)</b> $z = 3.56$ $p = .0008$	<b>Cell 3 vs. 4</b> <b>b = .232 (.123)</b> $z = 1.89$ $p = .059$

*Note.* More negative values reflect heightened self-protection; values in parentheses are standard errors.

Table 9. Actors' self-protection slopes (i.e., partners' perception of parenting risk yesterday predicting responsive behavior today) as a function of evaluative consistency in *partners'* automatic partner attitudes.

		<b>Pre-Transition APA</b>			
		<i>Negative</i>	<i>Positive</i>		
<b>Post-Transition APA</b>	<i>Negative</i>	.149 (.212) 1	-.317 (.250) 2	<b>Cell 2 vs. 1</b> <b>b = -.527 (.238)</b> <i>z</i> = -2.21 <i>p</i> = .027	
	<i>Positive</i>	-.564 (.290) 3	.435 (.265) 4	<b>Cell 3 vs. 4</b> <b>b = .694 (.323)</b> <i>z</i> = 2.15 <i>p</i> = .032	
		<b>Cell 3 vs. 1</b> <b>b = -.485 (.234)</b> <i>z</i> = -2.07 <i>p</i> = .038	<b>Cell 2 vs. 4</b> <b>b = .563 (.254)</b> <i>z</i> = 2.22 <i>p</i> = .026		

*Note.* More negative values reflect heightened self-protection; values in parentheses are standard errors.

Table 10. Predicting daily connection strength and daily responsive behavior as a function of pre- and post-transition automatic partner attitudes (APA) and daily romantic risk.

Predictor	<u>Actors' Connection</u>		<u>Actors' Responsive</u>	
	<u>Strength Today</u>		<u>Behavior Today</u>	
	b (SE)	<u>z</u>	b (SE)	<u>z</u>
Intercept	5.67 (.072)	--	.979 <sub>w</sub> (.141)	--
			1.47 <sub>M</sub> (.212)	
Actors' outcome on the prior day	.057 (.025)	2.28*	-.006 (.021)	-0.29
Actors' perceived partner transgressions on prior day	-.016 (.013)	-1.23	.010 (.031)	0.32
Actors' pre-transition APA	.295 (.119)	2.48*	.083 (.245)	0.34
Actors' post-transition APA	.178 (.097)	1.84 <sup>+</sup>	-.172 (.189)	-0.91
Actors' pre-transition by post-transition APA	-.290 (.213)	-1.36	-.085 (.426)	-0.20
Actors' pre-transition APA by perceived partner transgressions on prior day	-.039 (.024)	-1.63	.117 (.062)	1.89 <sup>+</sup>
Actors' post-transition APA by perceived partner transgressions on prior day	.024 (.018)	1.33	.124 (.045)	2.76**
Actors' pre-transition by post-transition APA by perceived partner transgressions on prior day	.057 (.040)	1.43	-.353 <sub>w</sub> (.114)	3.10**
			.245 <sub>M</sub> (.180)	1.36
Partners' outcome on the prior day	.033 (.025)	1.32	.020 (.020)	1.00

Partners' perceived partner transgressions on prior day	.038 <sub>w</sub> (.016)	2.38*	.054 (.031)	1.74 <sup>+</sup>
	-.012 <sub>M</sub> (.014)	-0.86		
Partners' pre-transition APA	.144 (.119)	1.21	.020 (.232)	0.09
Partners' post-transition APA	.093 (.096)	0.97	-.428 (.206)	-2.08*
Partners' pre-transition by post-transition APA	-.333 (.212)	-1.57	.406 (.434)	0.94
Partners' pre-transition APA by perceived partner transgressions on prior day	-.037 (.024)	-1.54	.111 (.061)	1.82 <sup>+</sup>
Partners' post-transition APA by perceived partner transgressions on prior day	.024 (.018)	1.33	-.035 (.050)	-0.70
Partners' pre-transition by post-transition APA by perceived partner transgressions on prior day	.001 (.040)	0.03	.027 (.107)	-0.25

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<sup>+</sup>  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Table 11. Predicting responsive behavior during conflict discussion as a function of pre- and post-transition automatic partner attitudes (APA) and average daily perceptions of the partner's parental risk.

Predictor	<u>Actors' Responsive Behavior</u>	
	b (SE)	z
Actors' perceptions of partners' parental risk	-.718 (.097)	-7.41***
Actors' pre-transition APA	.114 (.102)	1.12
Actors' post-transition APA	-.120 (.077)	-1.56
Actors' pre-transition by post-transition APA	-.313 (.173)	-1.81 <sup>+</sup>
Actors' pre-transition APA by perceptions of partners' parental risk	.174 (.206)	0.84
Actors' post-transition APA by perceptions of partners' parental risk	-.475 (.149)	-3.19**
Actors' pre- by post-transition APA by perceptions of partners' parental risk	.743 (.283)	2.63**
Partners' perceptions of actors' parental risk	-.649 (.096)	-6.73***
Partners' pre-transition APA	.086 (.103)	0.83
Partners' post-transition APA	-.125 (.077)	-1.64
Partners' pre-transition by post-transition APA	-.235 (.173)	-1.36
Partners' pre-transition APA by perceptions of actors' parental risk	.083 (.207)	0.40
Partners' post-transition APA by perceptions of actors' parental risk	-.308 (.148)	-2.08*
Partners' pre- by post-transition APA by perceptions of actors' parental risk	.699 (.284)	2.46*

<sup>+</sup>  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

$\chi^2(14) = 15.69$ ,  $p = .33$ , CFI = .997, RMSEA = .024.

Table 12. Actors' self-protection slopes (i.e., perceptions of partner's parental risk predicting responsive behavior during the conflict interaction) as a function of evaluative consistency in actors' automatic partner attitudes.

		<b>Pre-Transition APA</b>		
		<i>Negative</i>	<i>Positive</i>	
<b>Post-Transition APA</b>	<i>Negative</i>	-0.003 (.182) 1	-0.603 (.233) 2	<b>Cell 2 vs. 1</b> <b>b = -.405 (.228)</b> $z = -1.78$ $p = .075$
	<i>Positive</i>	-1.74 (.370) 3	-.544 (.306) 4	<b>Cell 3 vs. 4</b> <b>b = .859 (.388)</b> $z = 2.21$ $p = .027$
		<b>Cell 3 vs. 1</b> <b>b = -1.06 (.247)</b> $z = -4.06$ $p < .0001$	<b>Cell 2 vs. 4</b> <b>b = -.049 (.255)</b> $z = -0.19$ $p = .85$	

*Note.* More negative values reflect heightened self-protection; values in parentheses are standard errors.

Table 13. Actors' self-protection slopes (i.e., *partners'* perceptions of actors' parental risk predicting actors' responsive behavior during the conflict interaction) as a function of evaluative consistency in *partners'* automatic partner attitudes.

		<b>Pre-Transition APA</b>		
		<i>Negative</i>	<i>Positive</i>	
<b>Post-Transition APA</b>	<i>Negative</i>	-0.044 (.184) 1	-.731 (.230) 2	<b>Cell 2 vs. 1</b> <b>b = -.463 (.229)</b> $z = -2.02$ $p = .044$
	<i>Positive</i>	-1.37 (.371) 3	-.435 (.306) 4	
		<b>Cell 3 vs. 1</b> <b>b = -.806 (.248)</b> $z = -3.25$ $p = .0012$	<b>Cell 2 vs. 4</b> <b>b = .204 (.252)</b> $z = 0.81$ $p = .42$	<b>Cell 3 vs. 4</b> <b>b = .658 (.390)</b> $z = 1.69$ $p = .09$

*Note.* More negative values reflect heightened self-protection; values in parentheses are standard errors.

Table 14. Predicting responsive behavior during the conflict discussion as a function of pre- and post-transition automatic partner attitudes (APA) and perceptions of the partner's romantic risk.

Predictor	<u>Actors' Responsive Behavior</u>	
	b (SE)	z
Actors' perceptions of partners' romantic risk	-.180 (.041)	-4.34***
Actors' pre-transition APA	.125 (.104)	1.19
Actors' post-transition APA	-.135 (.086)	-1.57
Actors' pre-transition by post-transition APA	-.195 (.194)	-1.00
Actors' pre-transition APA by perceptions of partners' romantic risk	-.057 (.106)	-0.54
Actors' post-transition APA by perceptions of partners' romantic risk	-.083 (.076)	-1.09
Actors' pre-transition by post-transition APA by perceptions of partners' romantic risk	.079 (.185)	0.43
Partners' perceptions of actors' romantic risk	-.187 (.042)	-4.49***
Partners' pre-transition APA	.101 (.105)	0.96
Partners' post-transition APA	-.134 (.085)	-1.57
Partners' pre-transition by post-transition APA	-.154 (.195)	-0.79
Partners' pre-transition APA by perceptions of actors' romantic risk	-.055 (.106)	-0.52
Partners' post-transition APA by perceptions of actors' romantic risk	-.096 (.084)	-1.15
Partners' pre-transition by post-transition APA by perceptions of actors' romantic risk	.027 (.187)	0.15

<sup>+</sup>  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .  $\chi^2(13) = 16.36$ ,  $p = .23$ , CFI = .994, RMSEA = .036.

Table 15. Predicting relationship well-being as a function of pre- and post-transition automatic partner attitudes (APA) and time.

Predictor	<u>Actors' Relationship Well-Being</u>	
	b (SE)	<u>z</u>
Intercept	.255 (.063)	--
Time	-.056 (.026)	-2.15*
Actors' pre-transition APA	.074 (.10)	0.74
Actors' post-transition APA	.084 (.080)	1.05
Actors' pre-transition by post-transition APA	-0.222 (.171)	-1.30
Actors' pre-transition APA by time	-.009 (.012)	-0.75
Actors' post-transition APA by time	.027 (.010)	2.70**
Actors' pre-transition by post-transition APA by time	.121 <sub>W</sub> (.030)	4.03***
	-.030 <sub>M</sub> (.026)	-1.15
Partners' pre-transition APA	-.081 <sub>W</sub> (.109)	-0.74
	.200 <sub>M</sub> (.143)	1.40
Partners' post-transition APA	.011 (.082)	0.13
Partners' pre-transition by post-transition APA	-.125 (.170)	-0.74
Partners' pre-transition APA by time	-.008 (.012)	-0.66
Partners' post-transition APA by time	.020 (.010)	2.00*
Partners' pre-transition by post-transition APA by time	-.010 <sub>W</sub> (.027)	-0.37
	.067 <sub>M</sub> (.028)	2.39*

<sup>+</sup>  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Table 16. Women's relationship well-being trajectories as a function of evaluative consistency in women's automatic partner attitudes.

		<b>Pre-Transition APA</b>		
		<i>Negative</i>	<i>Positive</i>	
<b>Post-Transition APA</b>	<i>Negative</i>	.028 (.035) 1	-.166 (.037) 2	<b>Cell 2 vs. 1</b> <b>b = -.136 (.039)</b> $z = -3.49$ $p = .0005$
	<i>Positive</i>	-.091 (.036) 3	.022 (.032) 4	
		<b>Cell 3 vs. 1</b> <b>b = -.061 (.026)</b> $z = -2.35$ $p = .019$	<b>Cell 2 vs. 4</b> <b>b = .099 (.025)</b> $z = 3.96$ $p < .0001$	<b>Cell 3 vs. 4</b> <b>b = .084 (.032)</b> $z = 2.63$ $p = .009$

*Note.* More negative values reflect decreasing well-being; values in parentheses are standard errors.

Table 17. Men's relationship well-being trajectories as a function of evaluative consistency in women's automatic partner attitudes.

		<b>Pre-Transition APA</b>		
		<i>Negative</i>	<i>Positive</i>	
<b>Post-Transition APA</b>	<i>Negative</i>	-0.043 (.032) 1	-0.153 (.034) 2	<b>Cell 2 vs. 1</b> <b>b = -.088 (.036)</b> $z = -2.44$ $p = .015$
	<i>Positive</i>	-0.134 (.035) 3	-0.045 (.030) 4	
		<b>Cell 3 vs. 1</b> <b>b = -.051 (.024)</b> $z = -2.13$ $p = .033$	<b>Cell 2 vs. 4</b> <b>b = .059 (.023)</b> $z = 2.57$ $p = .010$	<b>Cell 3 vs. 4</b> <b>b = .067 (.029)</b> $z = 2.31$ $p = .021$

*Note.* More negative values reflect decreasing well-being; values in parentheses are standard errors.

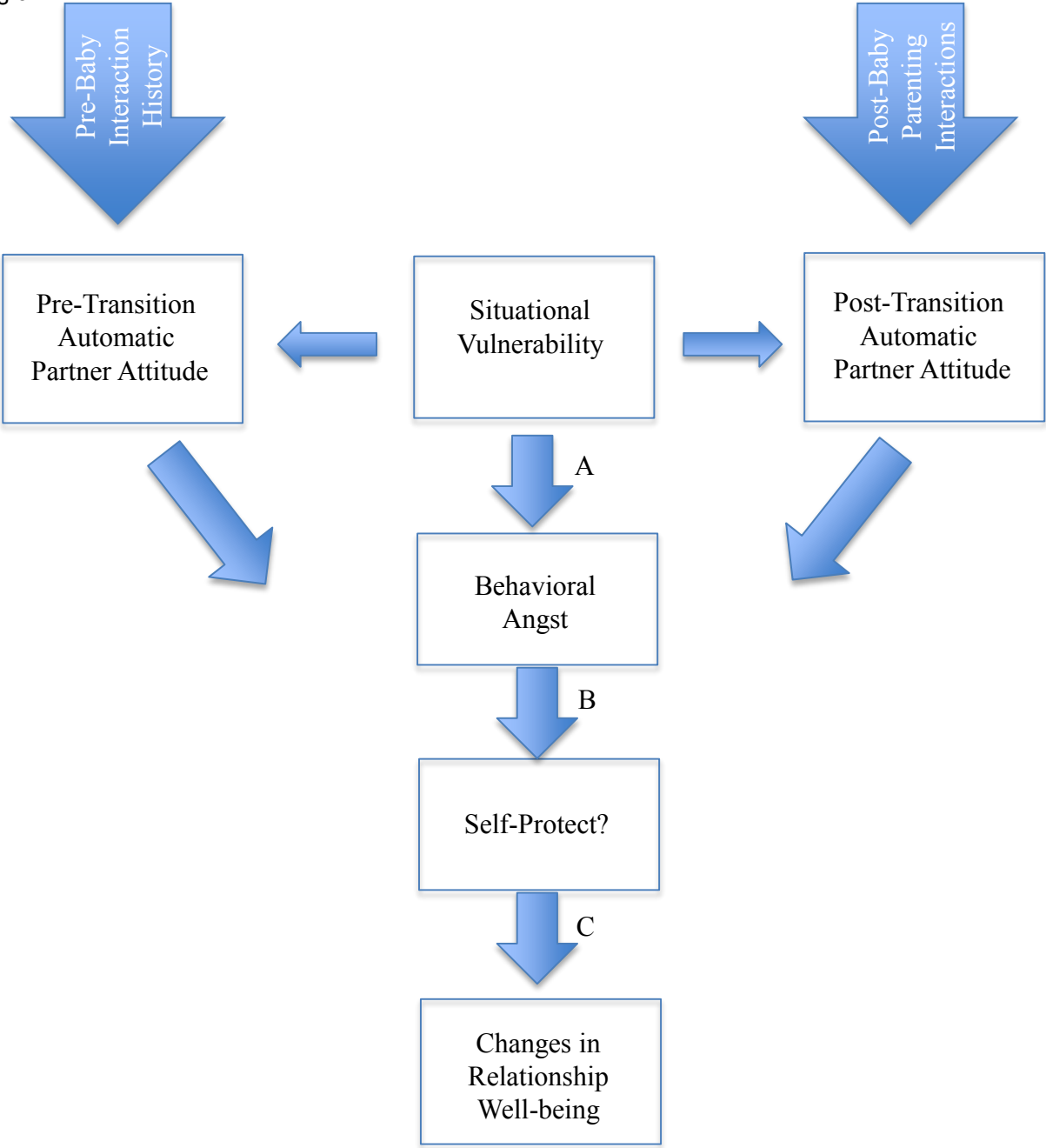


Figure 1. The Automatic Partner Attitudes in Transition (APAT) Model.

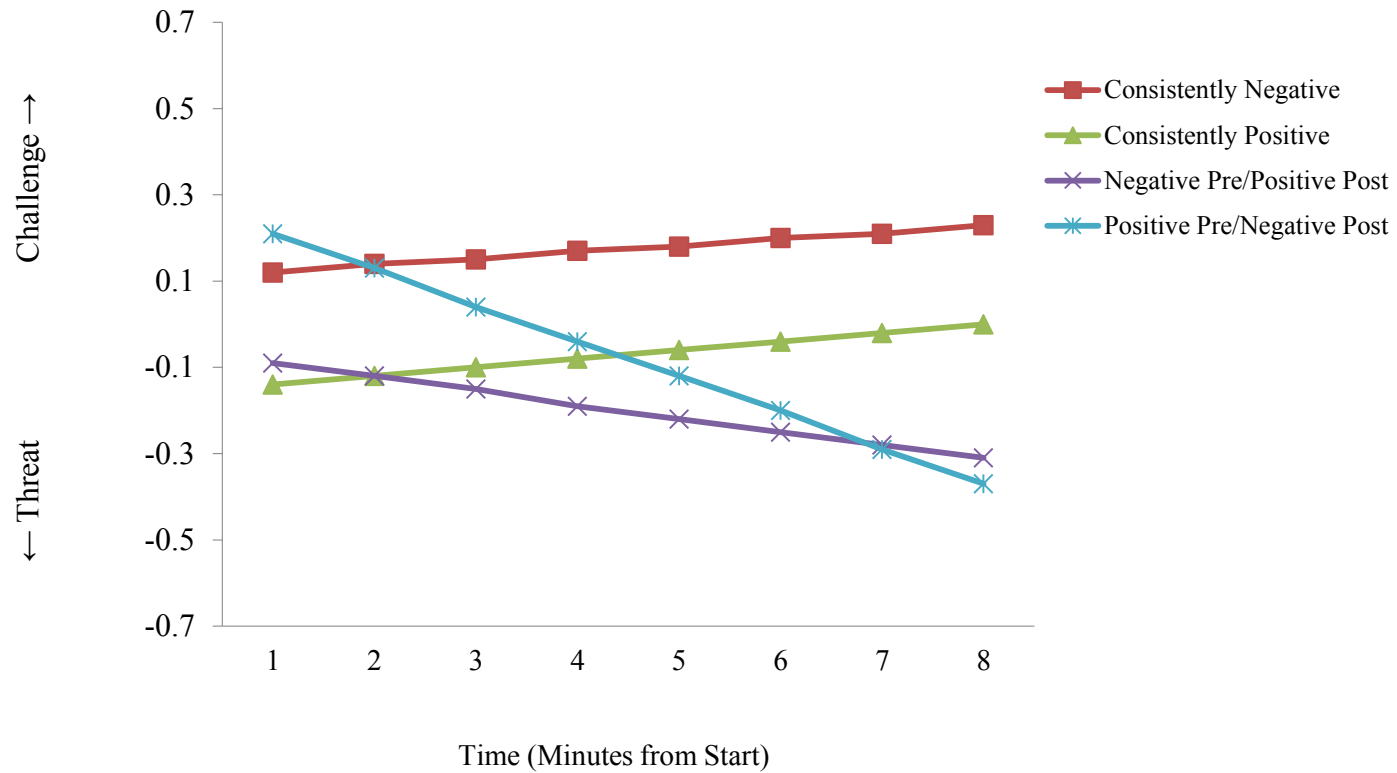


Figure 2A. Changes in women's challenge/threat responses as a function of evaluative consistency in pre- and post-transition automatic partner attitudes.

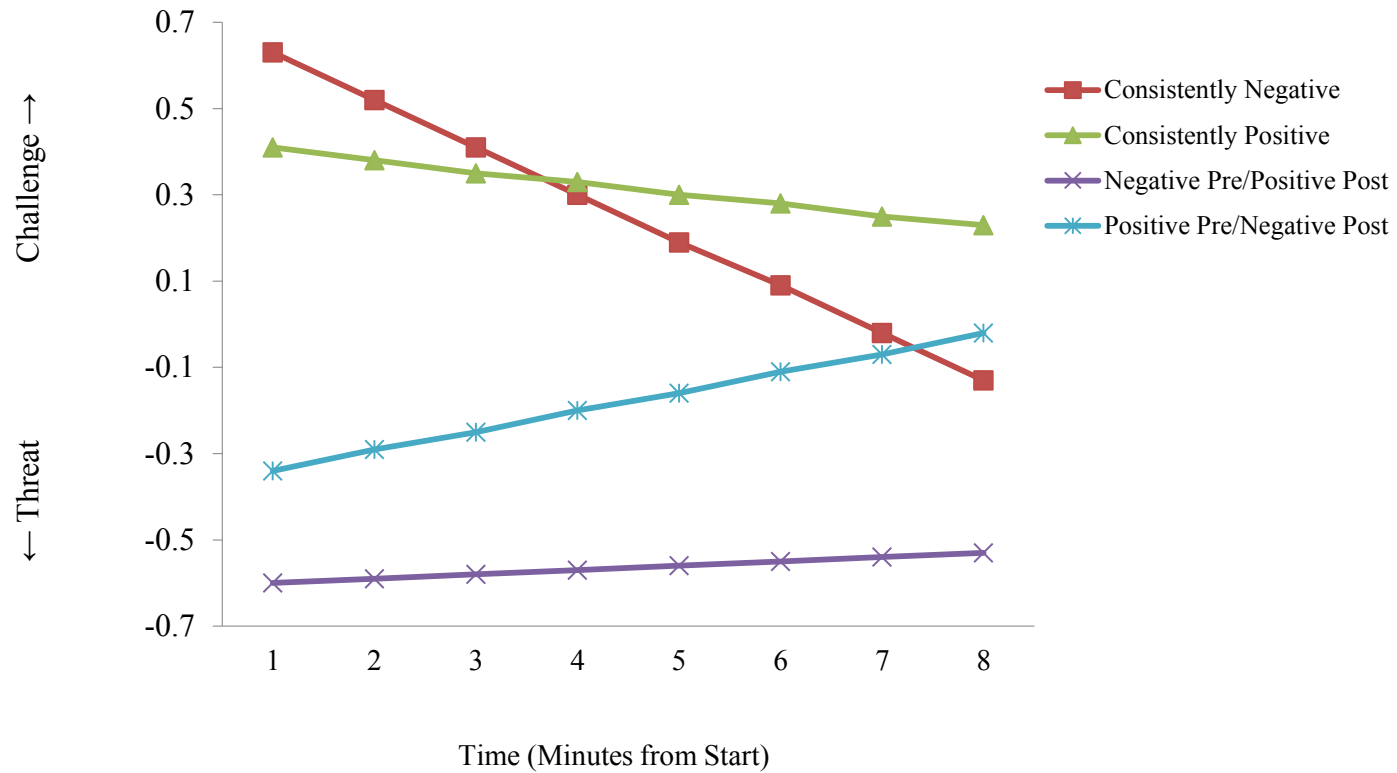


Figure 2B. Changes in men's challenge/threat responses as a function of evaluative consistency in pre- and post-transition automatic partner attitudes.

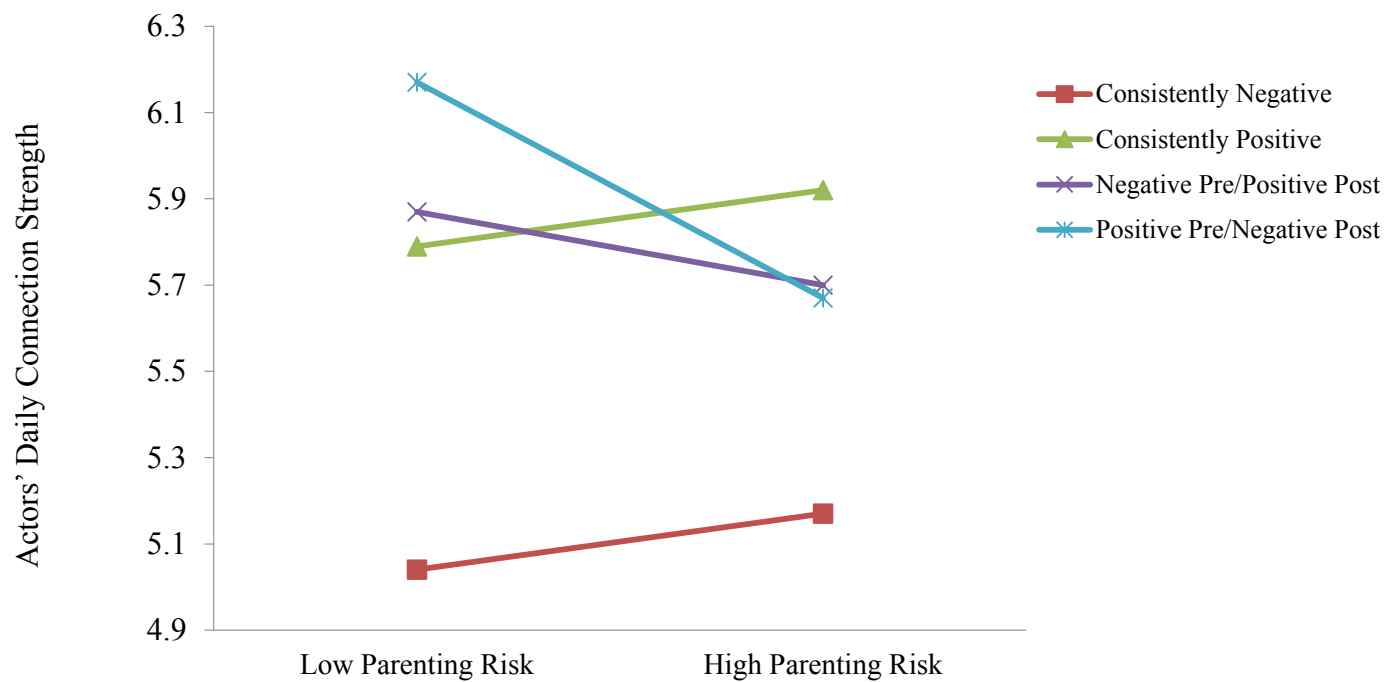


Figure 3. Changes in actors' daily connection as a function of evaluative consistency in actors' pre- and post-transition automatic partner attitudes and the prior day's parenting risk.

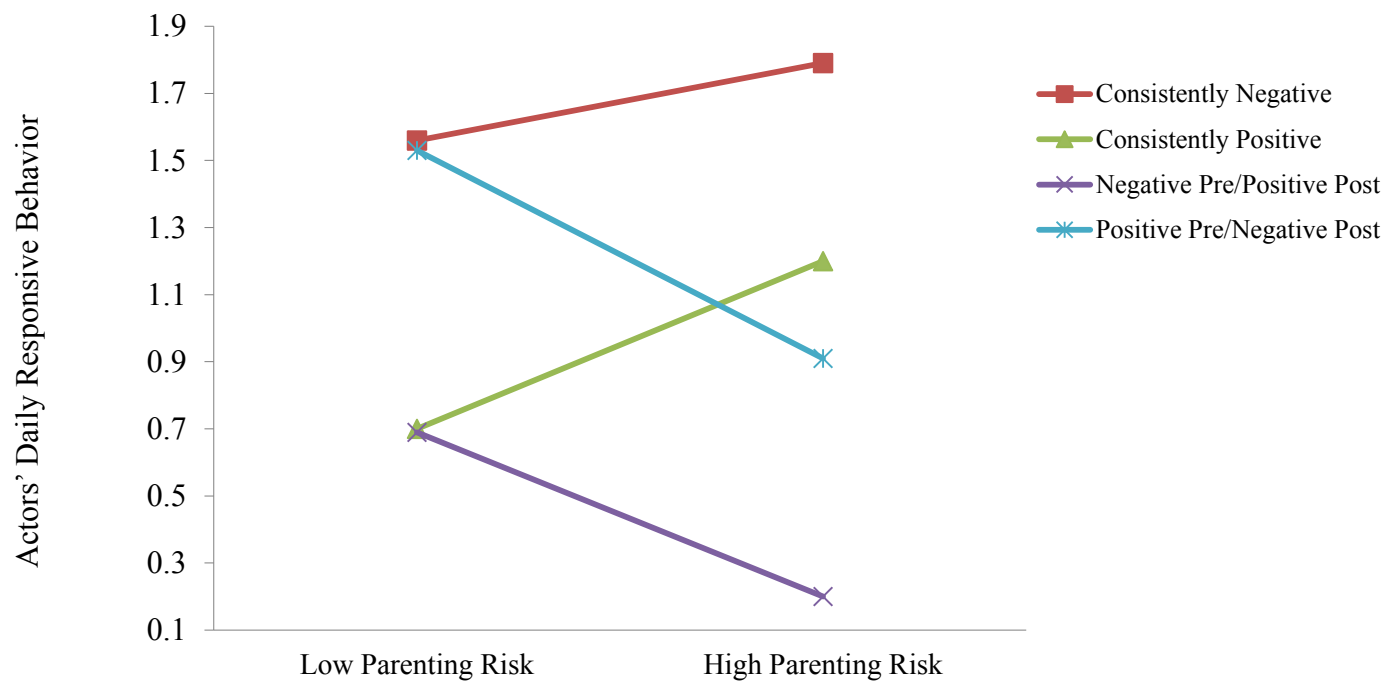


Figure 4. Changes in actors' daily responsive behavior as a function of evaluative consistency in *partners'* pre- and post-transition automatic attitudes toward the actor and the prior day's parenting risk.

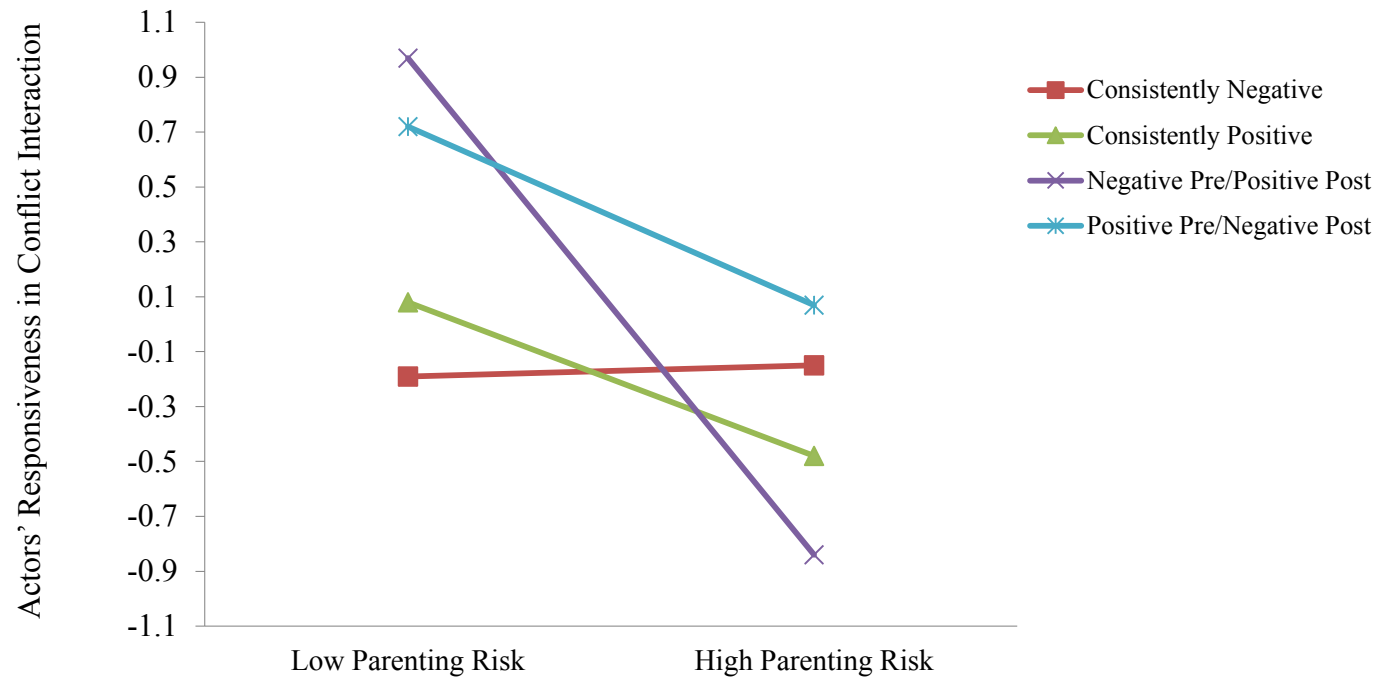


Figure 5. Actors' responsiveness during the conflict interaction as a function of evaluative consistency in actors' pre- and post-transition automatic partner attitudes and perceived parental risk.

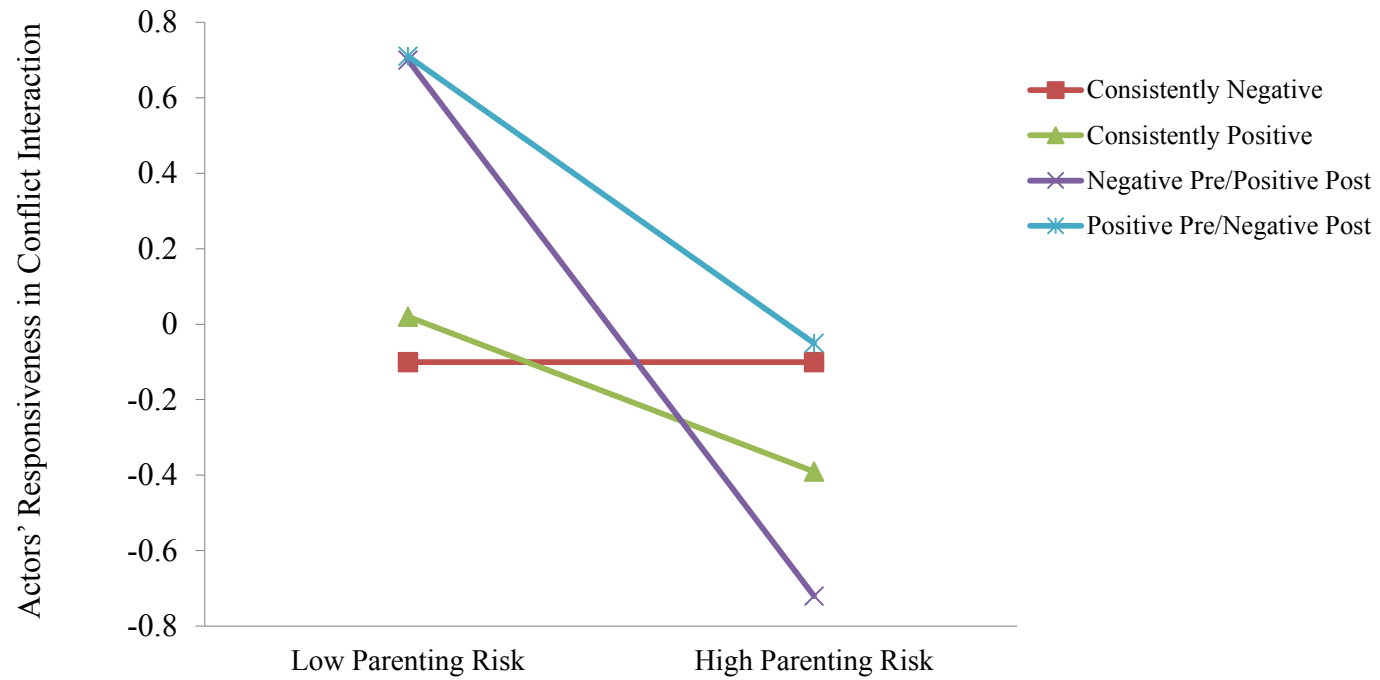


Figure 6. Actors' responsiveness during the conflict interaction as a function of evaluative consistency in *partners'* pre- and post-transition automatic partner attitudes and perceived parental risk.

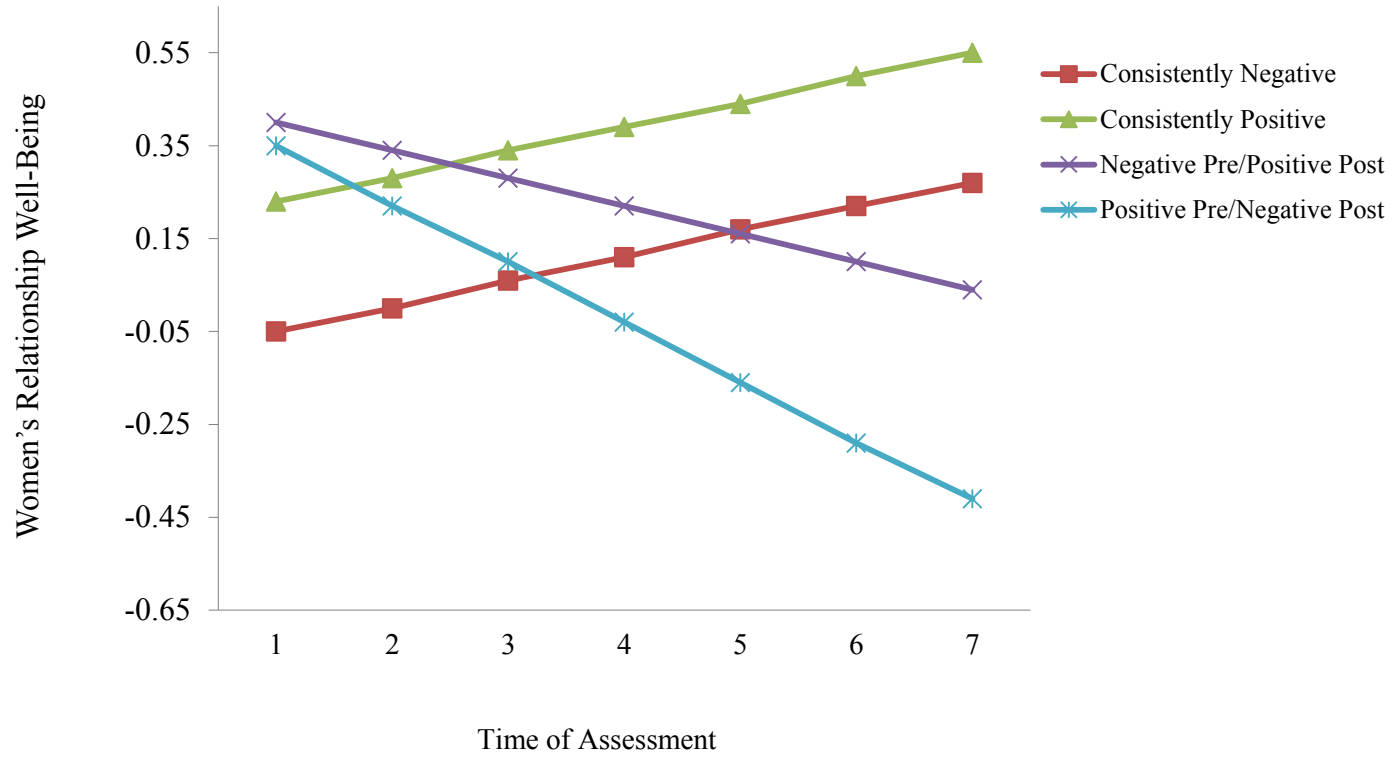


Figure 7. Changes in women's relationship well-being as a function of women's pre- and post-transition automatic partner attitudes.

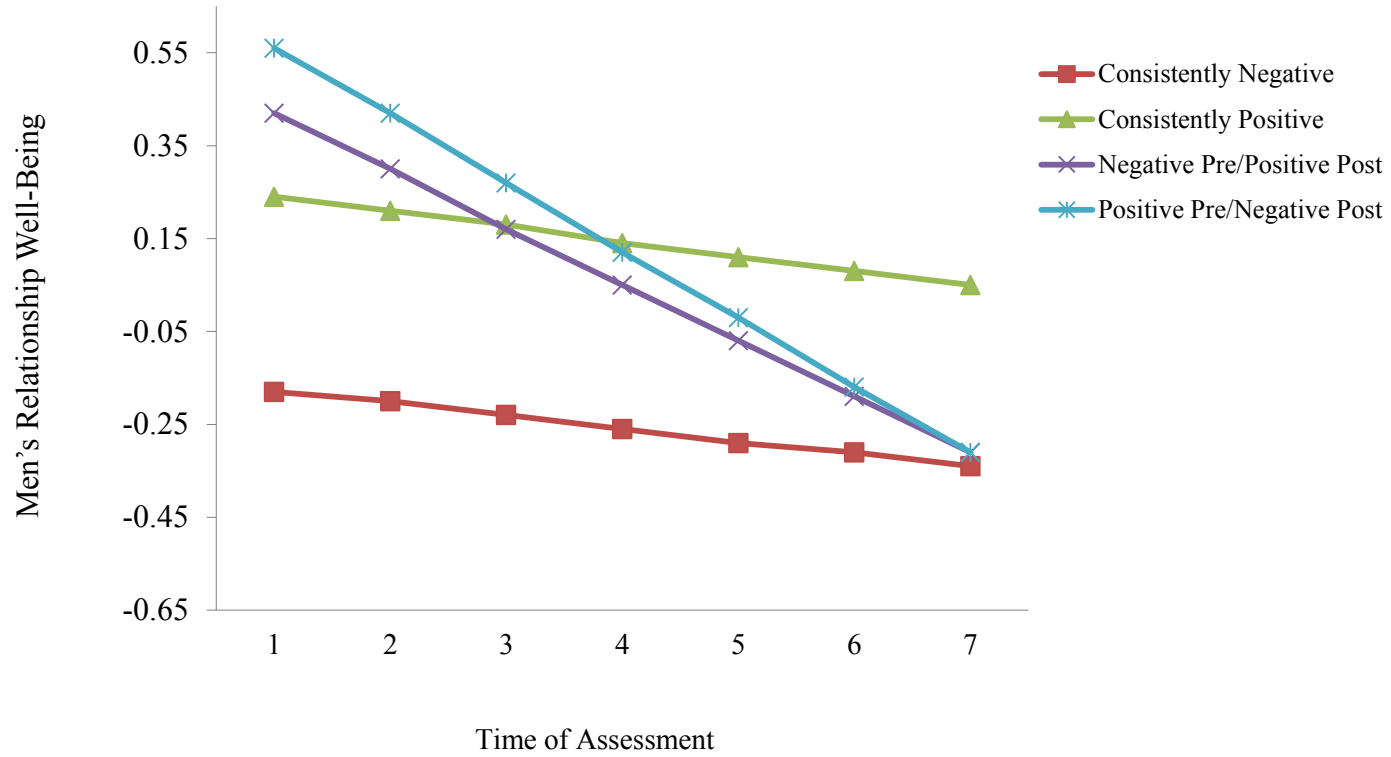


Figure 8. Changes in men's relationship well-being as a function of women's pre- and post-transition automatic partner attitudes.

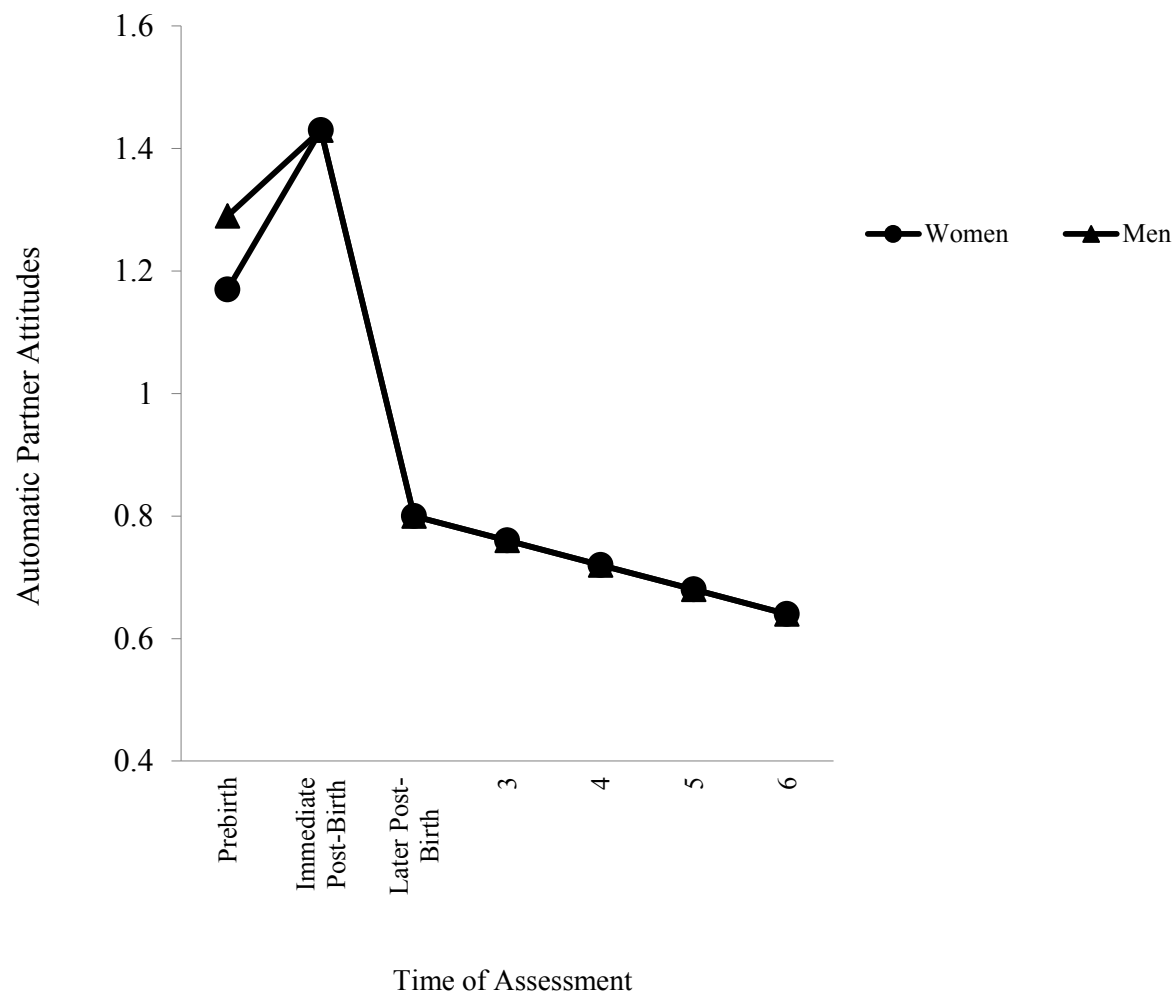


Figure 9. Automatic Partner Attitudes at Pre-Birth, Immediate Post-Birth, Later Post-Birth and Subsequent Assessment Waves

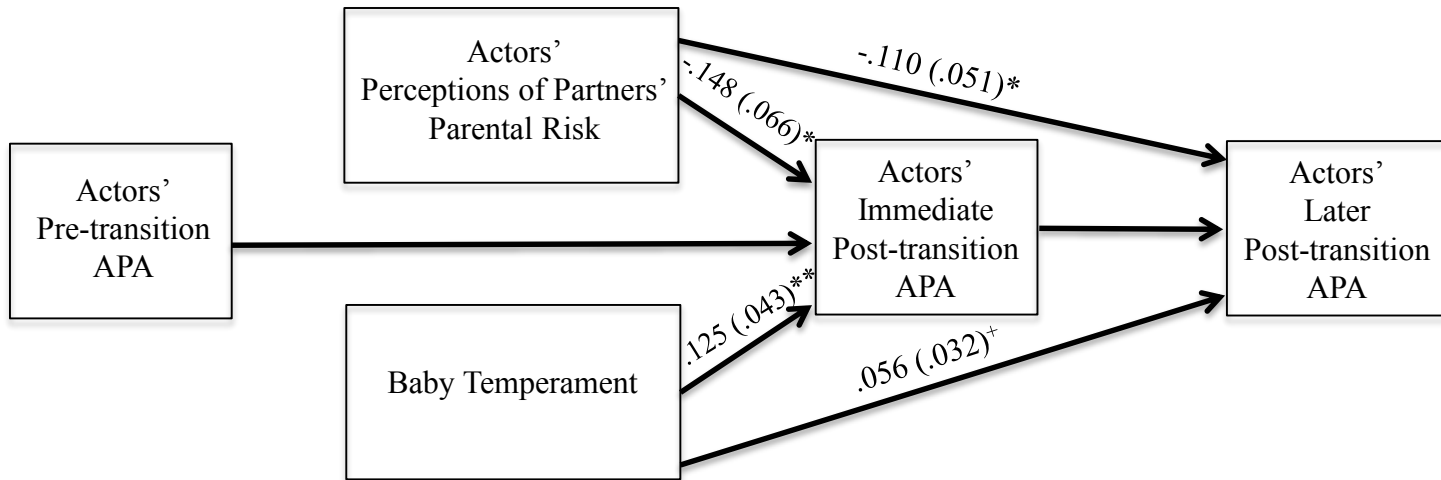


Figure 10. Parenting Experiences Predict Immediate and Later Post-Transition Automatic Partner Attitudes (APA)

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

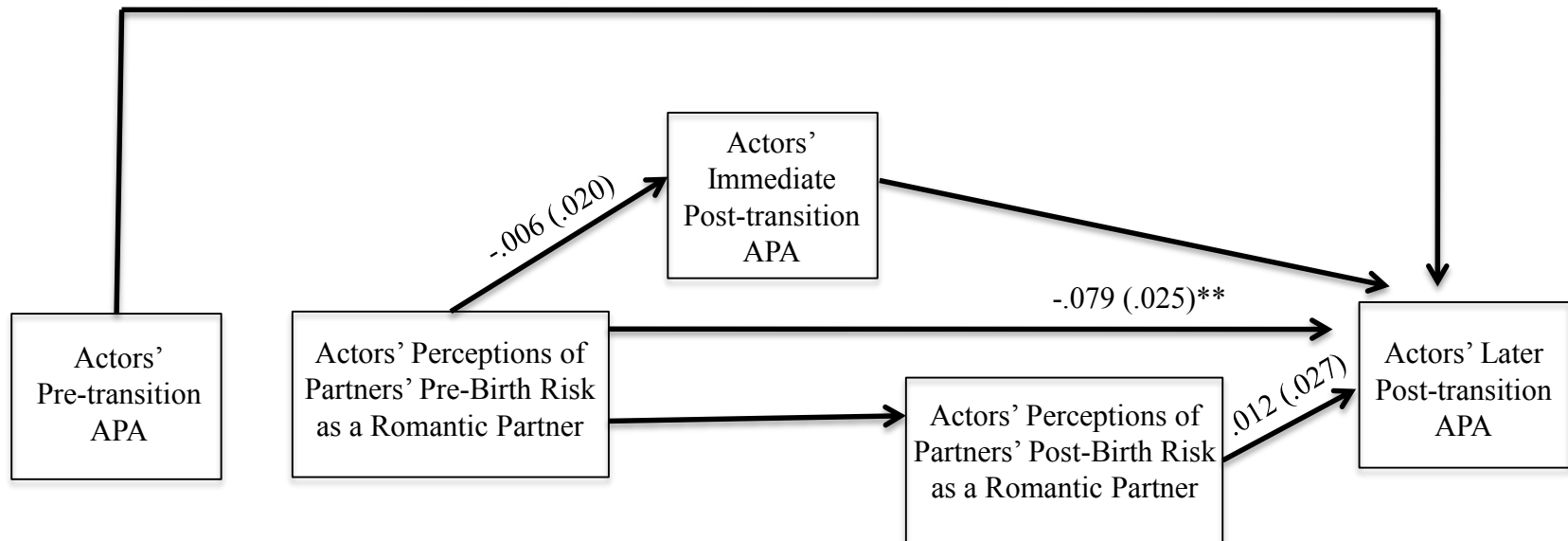


Figure 11. Pre-Parenting Experiences with Romantic Partner Predict Later Post-Transition Automatic Partner Attitudes (APA)

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