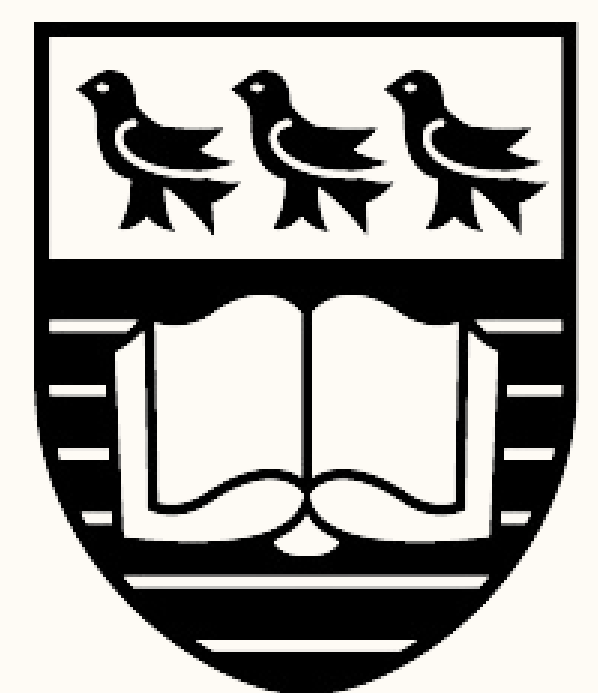


# Helping Each Other Up: Dyadic Experiences Underlying Enhanced Attachment Security in New Parents




University of Victoria

Ellie Curry, Erica Woodin, PhD & Sean Morgan, BSc | Psychology Department

## Introduction

- Attachment**
- Adult attachment systems function as “internal working models” of self and others<sup>1</sup>
  - Attachment ranges along two orthogonal dimensions: **attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance**<sup>2</sup>
- Transition to Parenthood**
- Considered an **ideal opportunity for chronic attachment change** due to significant activation of parents’ attachment systems<sup>3</sup>
- The ASEM**
- The Attachment Security Enhancement Model proposes a dual-process, dyadic model of increased attachment security over time<sup>4</sup>
    - **Process 1:** Partner buffering– specialized caregiving employed to calm partners’ attachment fears
    - **Process 2:** Security promotion– novel experiences provoking revisions to negative working models

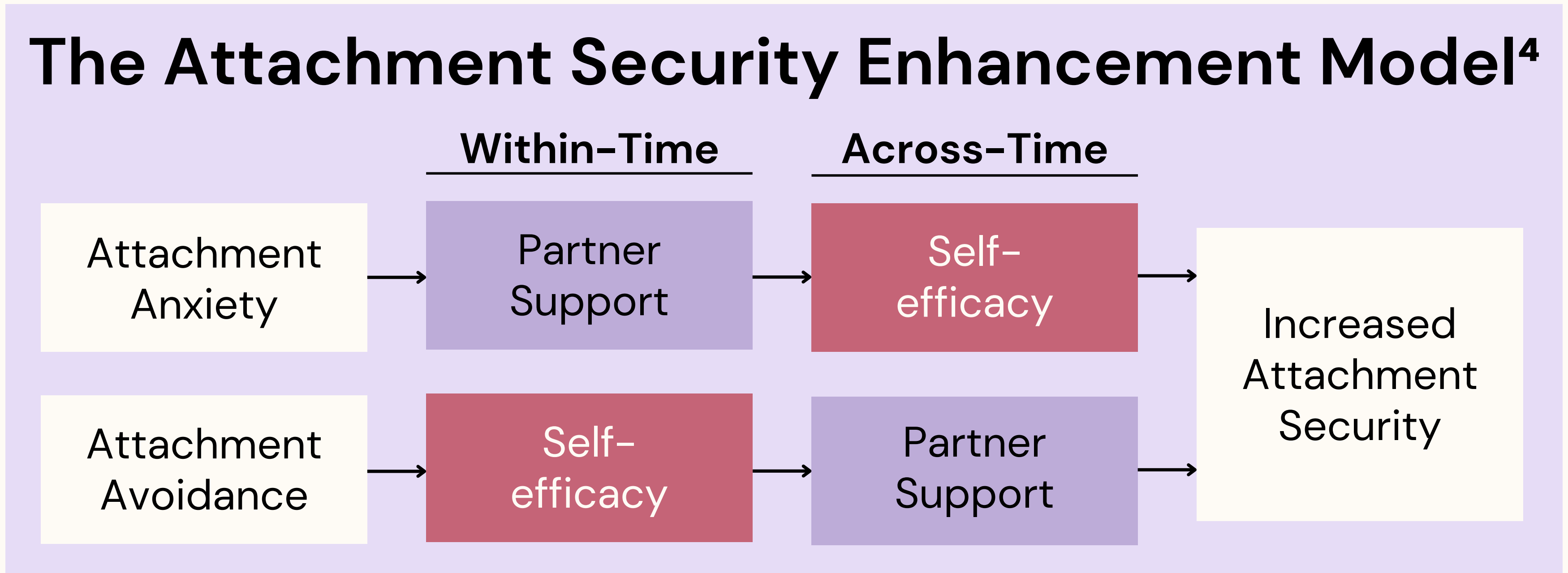
## Methods

- Data collected between 2008–2014
- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p><b>Time 1</b><br/>Third trimester of pregnancy</p>  | <p><b>98 cross-sex couples</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Three-hour lab session</li> <li>• \$50 Honoraria</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>Time 2</b><br/>One year after birth</p>   | <p><b>79 cross-sex couples</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Follow-up online survey</li> <li>• \$25 Honoraria</li> </ul> |

- Measures**
- **Attachment:** Experiences in Close Relationships Questionnaire<sup>2</sup>
  - **Partner Support:** Parenting Alliance Inventory (PAI)<sup>5</sup>
  - **Self-efficacy:** Parenting Sense of Competence Scale (PSC)<sup>6</sup>
- Data Analysis**
- Data analysis was performed using two multilevel models for distinguishable dyads across multiple time points<sup>7</sup>

## Hypotheses

1. Higher levels of partner support will be associated with lower attachment anxiety at Time 1 and decreased attachment avoidance at Time 2.
2. Higher levels of self-efficacy will be associated with lower attachment avoidance at Time 1 and decreased attachment anxiety at Time 2.



## Results

|       |           | Self-efficacy |   | Partner Support |   |
|-------|-----------|---------------|---|-----------------|---|
| Women | Anxiety   | T1            | / | T1              | / |
|       |           | T2            | / | T2              | / |
|       | Avoidance | T1            | / | T1              | / |
|       |           | T2            | / | T2              | / |
| Men   | Anxiety   | T1            | ↓ | T1              | ↓ |
|       |           | T2            | ↓ | T2              | ↓ |
|       | Avoidance | T1            | ↓ | T1              | ↓ |
|       |           | T2            | / | T2              | ↓ |

Support for model   ↓ Negative association   / Non-significant

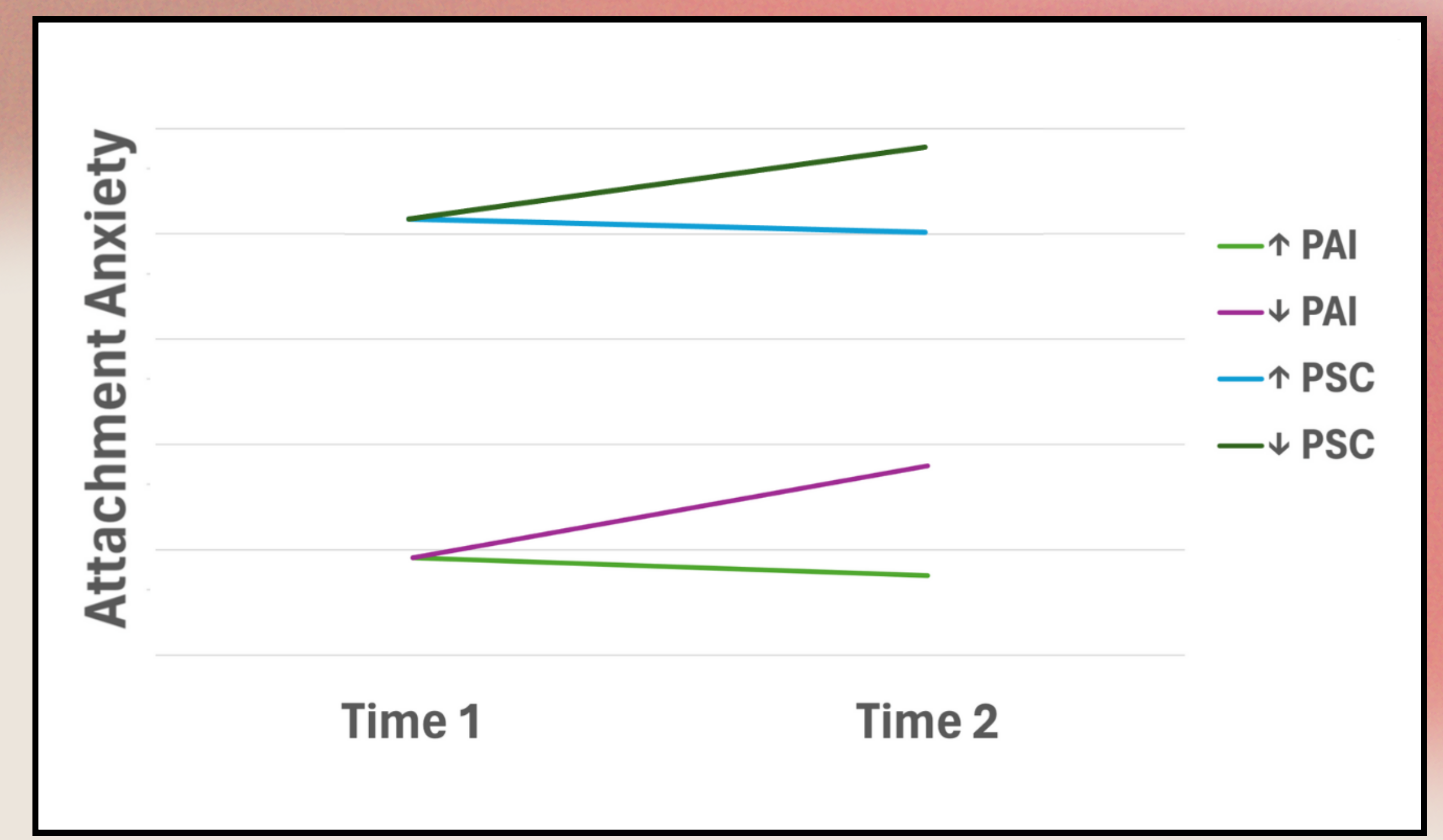


Figure 1. Partner Support & Self-efficacy Predicting Men’s Change in Anxiety

## Discussion

- **Results partially supported the ASEM**
  - Increases in self-efficacy and partner support buffered against attachment insecurity over time **for men but not women**
- Couples interventions may benefit from a focus on men’s attachment needs during new parenthood
- Future research should investigate the mechanisms underlying gender differences in attachment change across the transition to parenthood

