
ATTACHMENT STYLES IN ADULT RELATIONSHIPS

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Abstract: Attachment is a deep emotional relationship that is formed between primary caregiver, usually the mother and the child in early childhood and lasts throughout life, as a permanent psychological bond established between two people. It is an important strong bond for every child's normal emotional and social development. Essentially, it is thought that our adult attachment style mirrors the way our parents cared for us when we were infants and children and its determinates our adult relationships, starting from who we choose as a partner to how our relationships will end. According to the creator of attachment theory, Jon Bowlby, attachment is formed through the way of how primary caregiver is dealing with the child, the way of responding or not responding to the child's needs and signals. If the answers to the child's needs are timely and adequate and the child shares strong emotional bond with the caregiver, the child will develop a secure attachment that will make it have a positive attitude towards life and develop a feeling of safety. If the answers to the child's needs are inadequate, untimely, absent or even frightening and the child shares weak emotional bond with the caregiver, it will develop insecure attachment that will make it fill insecure, negative, and have negative mind set throughout life. The attachment theory postulates that forming a secure attachment helps child to develop a sense of security, by knowing that he has safe place to return to and this child will become adult with a positive and confident attitude and with a feeling of independence about the exploration of the world around him. Nonetheless, if the bonding attachments in the early stages of life are not firm, there can be a feeling of uncertainty and the child may become anxious adult or with avoidant personality, or both; this will block the trust in humanity and his environment, and it will become negative and reserved. Depending what kind of care the child receives, there can be established four patterns of attachment: secure attachment, anxious attachment, avoidant attachment, and disorganized attachment. All those patterns of attachment in childhood affects the attachment style of the adult life, the way one form a love relationship, and the emotional response when a loved person leaves. In this paper we theoretically explore the adult attachment styles aiming to summarize the knowledge about their characteristics and relation to child attachment styles. We begin with summarizing exploration of the development of attachment theory, then explore the relationship between early childhood attachment, and finally recapitulate the four types of adult attachment to gain a clearer picture of their characteristics. This paper represents theoretical background for the ongoing research on adult attachment styles.

Keywords: Attachment, attachment styles, secure attachment,

1. INTRODUCTION

Attachment is emotional bond formed between an infant and a primary caregiver. It is a strong bond that is vital for the child's normal emotional, behavioral and social development. Although parents have different and numerous roles in a child's life, the role of a of attachment figure is considered the most important parental role, primarily because this role has the most long-term consequences. Attachment is formed through the way of dealing with the child, the way of responding or not responding to the child's needs and signals. If the answers to child's needs were timely and adequate and the child shares strong emotional bond with the caregiver, the child will develop a secure attachment that will make him have a positive attitude towards life and have a feeling of safety. If the answers of the child's needs are inadequate, untimely, absent or even frightening and the child shares weak emotional bond with the caregiver, he will develop insecure attachment that will make him fill insecure, negative, and have negative mind set throughout life.

A certain quality of attachment is experienced by everyone. Regardless of what the experiences in early attachment were, they represent the basis on which children build the image of themselves and others, positive or negative, and may represent a reliable base or an obstacle for further development.

People carry with them this early childhood experiences through life and based on them they function in life and form their adult relationships. So, they may become avoidant - those who know and can do everything by themselves, because in the early experiences there was no response to their needs and signals. Their life strategy boils down to defensively rejecting others and relying solely on themselves. They can be successful but also alone. They may become anxious types - those who do not know anything and can't do it on their own, because in their early childhood they were noticed only if they lacked something. They elicit protective behavior, thus ensuring attention. They may become disorganized – those that are constantly riding an emotional, painful rollercoaster, who struggle to feel safe in relationships but/and may push others away, even while saying that they want intimacy. Cold one moment, then overly engaged the next. Because they had parents who constantly failed to respond appropriately

to their child's needs and signals or had inconsistent response to their feelings of fear or distress. Or the lucky ones, secure, those whose needs and signals were adequately responded to in early childhood, and who did not build strategies to attract attention, they are authentic. This is brief and simple description of the four attachment styles (avoidant attachment style, anxious attachment style, disorganized attachment style and secure attachment style). In this paper we theoretically explore the adult attachment styles. We begin with a theoretical exploration of the development of attachment theory, then explore the relationship between early childhood attachment, and finally summarize the four types of adult attachment in order to gain a clearer picture of their characteristics. This paper represents theoretical background for the ongoing research on adult attachment styles.

2. ABOUT THE ATTACHMENT THEORY

The attachment theory was developed by John Bowlby as the result of his interest to comprehend the intense distress experienced by infants who had been separated from their parents. In his work as psychiatrist, he observed how the children acted when they were separated from their parents and the extreme measures, they took to stop their parents to leave or to be near them (e.g., crying, clinging, frantically searching). And while psychoanalysts of the time would explain these behaviors as immature manifestations of defense mechanisms, Bowlby noted the evolutionary nature of these responses and added a speculation for the evolutionary function of these behaviors.

According to the theory of evolution, Bowlby notices that attachment behaviors like crying or searching are adaptive responses to splitting from a primary attachment figure - the caregiver, the provider of protection and support. Bowlby's argument was that attachment is adaptive because it increases the infant's survival chance. Babies are born biologically prepared to form attachments with others, in the interest of their own survival. When threatened or under stress, infants need to be in proximity to their caregivers (Prior & Glaser, 2006). This motivation scheme, which Bowlby called the attachment behavioral system, was progressively "engineered" by natural selection to keep the proximity to the attachment figure. The attachment behavior system is a concept with great importance in the attachment theory as it brings conceptual linkage between ethological models of human development and modern theories on emotion regulation and personality.

As Bowlby states, If the child perceives that the attachment figure is nearby, accessible and attentive, he or she feels loved, secure and confident, and behaviorally, is likely to explore his or her environment, play with others, and be sociable. However, if the child perceives that attachment figure is not accessible and attentive, it becomes anxious and with his behavior is likely to demonstrate actions extending from simple visual searching to severe crying. The child will continue with these acts until either is physical or psychological reconnected with the attachment figure, or it "wears down", which can happen when a separation is prolonged or with loss, which Bowlby thought, leads to experiencing profound despair and depression.

In order for a relationship to be defined as attachment, the presence of four components, which are manifest in the behavior of the infant in relation to the parents, are significant, they include **proximity maintenance** - whom individuals prefer to be with; **safe haven** - who offers comfort to individuals; **secure base** - who is always there for individuals; **separation distress** - whom individuals miss most when they are apart from them (Moore, n.d.).

Bowlby's theory was further developed by his colleague Mary Ainsworth who systematically studied the idea of personal differences in the way children value the quality of being able to reach to the attachment figure and the way they control their attachment behavior when facing threats. She has developed the technique called a strange situation in which she examined how each infant reacted when was physically separated from the mother in an unknown environment, the way each infant interacted with an unfamiliar person and the way each infant received the mother's reappearance. Based on the observations, they sorted the infants into three major groups: secure, these are the children that become upset when the mother leaves the room and they actively seek her, but when she returns, there are easily comforted by her; anxious, these children start to feel extremely distressed when separated from the mother and upon the her's return they have a difficult time to calm down, often they show behavior of conflict and they indicate that they want to be comforted and also they want to "punish" the parent for departing; avoidant, these children don't show too much distress when separated from the mother and upon hers return, actively avoid contact with her, occasionally diverting their attention to play with objects on the laboratory floor.

In the 1980s there was an expansion of the attachment theory, done by social psychologists Cindy Hazan and Phillip Shaver, when they began to apply Ainsworth and Bowlby's attachment theory to adult romantic relationships, thus creating the contemporary concept of the adult attachment styles. In the year 1998, Kelly Brennan, a research psychologist, further developed the attachment theory by unveiling two dimensions of attachment as: related to anxiety and to avoidance (Gonsalves & Hallett, 2021). Anxiety - individuals focusing on whether their partner is responsive, attentive, available. Avoidance - not relying on or opening up with other individuals (Fralely, 2018). Some people can be low in both, can be high in both or can be high in one and low in the other, from what their attachment style can be determined.

3. ADULT ATTACHMENT STYLES

Attachment styles that are created during childhood influence relationships in general and also romantic relationships in adulthood. (Theodore T., 2021). As stated by Hazan and Shaver, in a romantic relationship, the emotional bond between the partners is partially a function from the same motivational system that is, the attachment behavioral system, that is coming from the emotional bond between infants and their parents. They also stated that same as the infant-parent relationships, the adult romantic relationships are attachments, and romantic love is a property of the attachment behavioral system, the same as the motivational systems from which sexuality and caregiving rise from.

Adult attachment styles reflect the satisfaction and trust that people have when they are in a romantic relationship, their anxiety of being rejected, their craving for intimacy and their preference for self-sufficiency or interpersonal distance. Attachment styles consists of cognitions referring to both the self ('Am I worthy of love') and others ('Can I depend on others during times of stress'). That means that people can have either a negative or positive perception of self and also a negative or positive perception of others, which can result in one of four possible styles of adult attachment.

The model for others can be viewed from the perspective of avoidant dimension of attachment, which is equal to the degree of discomfort one feels regarding psychological intimacy and dependency. On the other hand, the model of self can be conceptualized from the anxiety perspective of attachment, relating to beliefs about self-worth and whether or not one will be accepted or rejected by others (Collins & Allard, 2001).

In 1991, Bartholomew and Horowitz offered four adult attachment styles with regard to working models of self and others; including secure, anxious (also referred to as preoccupied), avoidant (also referred to as dismissive) and disorganized (also referred to as fearful avoidant).

In the following part of the paper, we will try to make summarization of the most important characteristics of the attachment styles, regarding the self-image and image of others, personal characteristics, and relationship behavior.

Secure attachment

People with secure attachment style are self-assured, direct, and responsive. They have a positive self-image, believe that they are worthy of love and have positive image of others. This people can manage their feelings, can have open communication about their emotions and do not avoid confrontation.

These people can form with ease secure, loving relationships in which they feel comfortable depending on others and others depending on them. Their relationships are marked with trust and love, empathy and forgiving. Even when problems occur in a relationship, securely attached individuals take responsibility of their actions and ask for help and support if needed (Robinson et al., 2022). Their relationships last longer and are based on mutual trust, commitment, and interdependence (e.g., Feeney, Noller, & Callan, 1994), and they are more likely to use romantic partners as a secure base from which to explore the world (e.g., Fraley & Davis, 1997). They have comfortable feeling in a pleasant intimate relationship full of love and emotions and they know how to arrange appropriate personal limits within which they can be dependent on the partner and let the partner to be dependent on them. Secure individuals thrive in relationship but also, they have no fear of being alone (Gonsalves & Hallett, 2021; Buescher, 2022). These people are available for their partner when needed and they abide to the need of their partner to separateness and do not feel lonesome or abandoned. They can be delicate, emotional, and caring parents that are responsive to the needs of their child.

Almost 56% of all adults have a secure attachment type, based on foundational attachment research by Cindy Hazan and Phillip Shaver in the 1980s.

Anxious attachment

People with anxious attachment style are self-doubting, anxious, and sensitive. Anxiously attached individuals have negative self-image but positive view for other people. They seek approval, support, responsiveness (Gonsalves & Hallett, 2021; Buescher, 2022).

Anxious attachment style represents a type of insecure attachment style characterized by a profound fear of abandonment. People with this type of attachment style tend to be highly insecure about their relationships, with a frequent worry about their partner leaving them and for that they are constant starving for validation. In a relationship, individual with ambivalent attachment style feel embarrassed for acting clingy or being in constant need of love and attention, they also experience anxiety when thinking and considering whether their partners actually love them (Robinson et al., 2022).

In their relationships they can be highly demanding, controlling, inconsistent, erratic and always looking for reassurance. Mostly they are absorbed with their partner, and they have a constant fear of desertion and rejection. They are hyperactive in terms of their attachment needs and their adhesiveness can push away their partner. These people can be greatly sensitive to the behavior, the mood and the actions of their partner and they can take them too personally. Their current relationship can be affected by their past unresolved family issues, like emotional pain,

fear, anger or rejection. When it comes to their relationships, often they can be very emotional, with mood changes, blaming, angry, controlling, combative and they can argue with poor personal boundaries. Their communication is uncollaborative and they miss to understand their relationship responsibilities. They also can respond unpredictably to the needs of their own children and can be erratically attuned with them.

In Hazan and Shaver's research from 1980 it was shown that around 19% of adults have the anxious attachment type.

Avoidant attachment

People with avoidant attachment style are self-reliant, avoidant and distant. Avoidant dismissive attachment style individuals value independency and their freedom (Robinson et al, 2022.) They have positive self-image but negative view for other people.

Avoidant attachment style is insecure attachment style characterized by fear of intimacy, difficulties in forming close relationships with others, trust issues and believe that others cannot meet their needs in a relationships. Accordingly, they try to avoid commitments and emotional closeness in their adult relationships. Avoidant attachment individuals are maintaining a strategic distance from anything that's associated with emotions and do not know how to bargain with circumstances that incorporate thick emotions (Gonsalves & Hallett, 2021; Buescher, 2022).

Avoidant attachment individuals are highly confident in themselves, but they are low on expressing emotions. They tend to withdraw emotionally, avoid intimacy, to be intolerant, rigid, and critical with tendencies to control others. They can also be stoic and self-sufficient and therefore choose solitary activities. When in relationships, avoidant people naturally choose to maintain distance from their partners or act most of the time as emotionally unavailable. Sometimes they even may feel that the relationships are suffocating them, and, in that case, they try to avoid it completely, choosing to be independent and rely on themselves. With rejecting intimacy and preferring independence over intimacy in the close relationships they actually deactivate their attachment needs and emotions by keeping their partner at a distance. They feel uncomfortable depending on their partner or when they need to allow their partner to depend on them. People with avoidant attachment can easily take to be in charge when that is needed from them or can be excellent in management of crises, but they tend to avoid conflicts that can usually lead to an outburst. Avoidant attachment individuals are not good at communicating their feelings openly. Their inclination to be unemotional and disengaged can reflect on them as a parent and make them and emotional unavailability and neglectful to the needs of their children. According to Hazan and Shaver research, it is found out that 25% of adults have the avoidant attachment type.

Fearful-avoidant attachment

People with fearful avoidant attachment style are self-sabotaging, unpredictable, isolated and have a negative image about themselves and also of others.

These individuals cannot process their emotions well and they feel mostly unsafe and frightened when it comes to relationships and the world around them (Robinson et al, 2022). It is very common for them to be in an unhealthy and toxic relationship. They can be abusive and aggressive towards their partner but also towards themselves and can have difficulty trusting the other person. Fearful-avoidant attachment style is a combination of both the characteristics of anxious and avoidant attachment styles. People who have this type of attachment are constantly torn between the desire to be in a close emotional relationship with someone and the constant fear that they will be hurt, that is way their behavior can seem very chaotic. These people were most often victims of some kind of abuse in the past, and their traumatizing experiences, thoughts and emotions have not been resolved.

The attachment behavior that these people manifests goes from extreme anxiety caused by the fear of being left alone at the other extreme to extreme avoidance caused by fear of being hurt. Individuals cannot regulate their emotions really well, so they avoid strong attachment to other people emotionally mostly because they are scared of getting hurt (Gonsalves & Hallett, 2021; Buescher, 2022). Disorganized attachment individuals cannot suppress their emotions (Fraley, 2018).

This attachment style is considered to be relatively rare, and it is not well-researched. What is known is that it is associated with considerable psychological risks and also relational risks that include difficulty regulating emotions, increased sexual behavior and increased risk for violence in their relationships.

4. CONCLUSION

Research on attachment and specifically on attachment in adult romantic relationships are not new and are not few, but in no case can we say that they exhaust all the questions on this topic. On the contrary, there are still many questions that needs to be explored and answered. This work is only a part of our attempt to add to the theoretical knowledge on this topic and which also represents a theoretical part of the previous research on attachment.

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