

The Impact of Attachment Styles on Relationships Over the Lifespan

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### Introduction

Bowlby (1958) analysed the emotional bond that develops between mother and child and coined the term attachment. Ainsworth (1969) initially identified three styles of attachment (secure, insecure-avoidant and insecure-resistant), that were later extended by disorganized-disoriented. Hazan and Shaver's (1987, 1990) statistical analyses correlation between relationships and attachment styles factored attachment styles into secure, avoidant and anxious/ambivalent later in life. The model of attachment styles was further expanded by Bartholomew & Horowitz (1991), who transcended the categorical model and placed adult attachment styles along two orthogonal, linear axes of attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance. The four corner extremes are termed secure, dismissing-avoidant, fearful-avoidant and preoccupied.

### Characterization of Attachment Styles

To expand on the influence of attachment styles on lifespan development, this paper focuses on the attachment styles of Bartholomew & Horowitz (1991), who give the following characterization: *Secure* attachment implies a positive self-sense (self-worth and lovability) together with the expectation of being generally accepted and that other people are responsive. This style matches the secure style found by Hazan and Shaver. *Dismissing-Avoidant* individuals implies a positive self-worth and expectance to be loved, together with negative attitudes towards others. To the extreme, dismissing-avoidant people show narcissist behaviour. Their main motive is the avoidance of disappointment by others by the way of evading close relationships. This style was not present in Ainsworth's work, but has been described as dismissing by Main et al. (1985). *Fearful-Avoidant* are driven by a sense of self-unworthiness (not being lovable) and expect that people will generally be rejecting and mistrust other people. Their primary motive seeks to evade rejection by avoiding

relationships. This style correspond's to Hazan & Shaver's (1987) avoidant attachment style. *Preoccupied* people don't value themselves, but generally trust in other people. In the sense of Jungian extraverted feeling, they generate their self-worth by positive evaluation and praise by others.

### **Influence of Attachment Styles on Lifespan Development**

The work of Hazan and Shaver (1987) and Bartholomew & Horowitz (1991) have both shown that attachment styles influence adult relationships.

### **Types of Attachment**

#### **Attachment as a Trajectory of Social Developmental**

The relationship with the mother is also an important starting point for future bonding. Securely attached children have an ideal basis to build later relationships on the basis of love and trust. If the mother was deemed unreliable, this basic mistrust may be carried forward to later relationships that are characterized by either indifference (emotional detachment) or overdependence (clinging). However, later experience may modify this initially acquired tendency. Owing to the trait-like nature of attachment, Fotios & Tzesiona (2016) discuss the close relationship of insecure attachment and high neuroticism in the light of worrying, health anxiety and safety-seeking behaviours. Insecure attachment may be aggravated by a large amount of non-maternal care, particularly combined with low quality. However, any theory of social developmental trajectories must take into account the reciprocal nature of mutual relationships. Both, biology and habits of mother and infant contribute to the mutual interplay and its affective connotations. Attachment may therefore be explained as the dissonance of the mutual, affective responses of two personalities when they interact. From this point of view, attachment may boil down to two sets of Big Five personality traits interacting with each other, with two endpoints of related, affective experience.



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