

Patterns of Attachment in Childhood and Adult Relationships

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Abstract: *The aim of the present study was to identify the correlation between childhood attachment with parents and adulthood relationships. The sample of 100 adults who meet the criteria were included in the study out of which 50 were males and 50 were females. The population to be studied consisted of adults who are married or involved in romantic relationships. The sample was administered to Attachment Style Classification Questionnaire and Adult Attachment Scale. Correlation and Independent Samples t-Test were used for statistical analysis and significant differences were observed between childhood attachment patterns of avoidance and anxiousness and also between avoidant and anxious patterns in adulthood.*

Keywords: Attachment, Childhood Attachment, Adult Relationships, Ainsworth, Bowlby.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Human brains are wired to fall in love- to fancy pleasure, to feel the bliss, elation of romance and to bond and create. Love perhaps is the highest ideal and relationships provide our lives with meaning and purpose. Our partner becomes our companion when we face difficulties initiating actions on our own. Being wanted and loved by someone validates our sense of self-esteem and helps overcome shame-based doubts concerning our lovability, soothing our fears of loneliness.

Erik Erikson described eight stages from infancy to old age in his theory of psychosocial development. According to each stage, people face different psychosocial crisis and that crisis can hold either a positive or a negative impact on the individual's personality. His first stage of psychosexual development, known as Trust vs Mistrust begins at birth and continues to 18-24 months of age. The infant during this stage is uncertain about the world they live in and look upto their primary care giver for stable and consistent care. If the care received by the infant is warm, reliable and predictable, they develop a sense of trust which they also carry with them to future relationships.

Individuals between the ages of 19 to 40 undergo the Intimacy vs Isolation stage. This is when men and women begin exploring close relationships with someone other than their family members. This is the stage where most people find themselves longing for another individual to share their joys and sorrows with. However, some avoid getting involved in relationships and retreat in isolation.

The findings of Erikson's study on the importance of trust and how it is carried to other relationships is consistent with the research done by Bowlby and Ainsworth which outlined how the quality of early experience of attachment can affect relationships with others in life.

John Bowlby recognized **attachment** as an infant's emotional tie to the caregiver as an evolved response which promotes survival. He believed that infants are endowed with a set of built-in behaviours that keep a parent nearby to protect the infant from danger and to provide support for exploring and mastering the environment. Contact with the parent also ensures that the baby will be fed, but he pointed out that feeding is not the basis for attachment. Rather, the attachment bond has strong biological roots.

He gave four stages of attachment-

1. Pre-Attachment Phase (birth to 6 weeks)- built-in signals such as smiling, crying, grasping help infants to come closer to all adults. They can recognize their mother by her voice or smell but are not typically attached to them and therefore do not mind being left alone with strangers.
2. Attachment in making phase (6 weeks to 8 months)- infants begin developing a sense of trust for their primary and secondary caregiver. They respond more to them and soothe more easily when picked up by them. The attachment is not very strong at this time and they do not protest if left with others.
3. Clear cut attachment phase (8 months to 18-24 months)- the attachment with primary caregiver becomes evident and the child becomes distressed and anxious when left alone with someone else. The anxiety also depends on temperament of the child.
4. Formation of Reciprocal Relationship (18-24 months and on)- the rapid language development permits toddlers to understand most of the factors that influence their parent's departure and arrival. With age, children depend less on physical proximity of parents and more on a sense of confidence that they will be accessible and responsive in times of need.

Although relationships with romantic partners are completely different from the ones with parents, romantic partners do fulfill some of the similar needs for adults like parents do for their children. Many studies have shown that adult attachment styles with partners are a reflection of childhood attachment with parents. Mary Ainsworth, a student of Bowlby created a laboratory test that measured an infant's attachment to his parent. This test is known as the Strange Situation Test. The procedure takes around twenty minutes, in which the parent and the kid are left alone in a room full of toys and the kid is left free to explore the toys. Then a stranger enters the room and the parent exits, leaving the child alone with the stranger. After a few minutes, the parent returns and the stranger leaves the room. Throughout the session, the infant's behaviour is recorded by a camera and is later analyzed by the experimenter. The experiment gave 4 attachment styles:

Secure Attachment: children who were happily exploring the room in presence of their parent. They were upset when their parents left but became happy once they returned. Adults who are securely attached to their partners view their relationships positively, easily get close to others and are not stressed or overly concerned about their relationship. They tend to be in committed and long lasting relationships.

Anxious Attachment Style: these children clinged to their parent rather than exploring the toys. They became uncomfortable when the stranger entered and were extremely distressed when left alone with him. On parent's return, the child was still angry and difficult to soothe. These are the adults who demand closeness from their partner but are themselves less trusting, more emotional, possessive and jealous.

Avoidant Attachment Style: the children were not very much concerned about the departure of the mother or presence of the stranger. They did not explore the toys much, no matter who was present in the room. The stranger was not treated very differently than the mother. These adults are mostly introverted and prefer to stay alone than in company of other people.

Disorganized/ Disoriented Attachment: the child was distressed when the parent left and cried. On parent's return, the child stopped crying but did not go near the parent or make eye contact with them. avoidant adults are doubtful about getting involved in relationships and once they get into a relationship, they have a tendency to distance themselves from their partner.

Interpersonal adult relationships are dynamic systems that change unceasingly throughout their existence. Like all living organisms, relationships have an initial stage, a lifespan and an end. They have an inclination to grow and improve step by step as people start to understand each other and become emotionally close. One of the most influential relationship models was given by psychologist George Levinger. This model describes heterosexual, adult relationships by dividing their development into five stages-

1. Acquaintance and Acquaintanceship- becoming acquainted depends on one's past relationships, physical proximity and first impressions. If two people begin to like each other, more and more interactions may lead to the next stage of relationship.
2. Buildup- in this stage, people start to care for and develop trust in each other. Common backgrounds, goals, need for intimacy and compatibility will decide whether or not interaction continues.
3. Continuation- this is a long and stable period which follows commitment to a close long term relationship or even marriage.
4. Deterioration- dissatisfaction, boredom, resentment, decreased communication lead to deterioration of relationships. Sometimes individuals may find ways to resolve problems and re-establish trust.
5. Termination- this is the final stage that marks the end of relationship either by divorce, breakup, death or spatial separation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

Carlson et al. (1995) provided an overview of attachment theory with respect to the major claims of attachment theory: (a) that individual differences in attachment are rooted in patterns of early caregiver–infant interaction (the quality of care), (b) that patterns of dyadic regulation provide the basis for individual differences in the emerging self, and (c) that such early differences have implications for evolving patterns of adaptation in later development. It reviewed theory and research on processes and mechanisms of continuity in development within attachment theory and presented recent work on implications of attachment differences for psychopathology.

Fraley et al. (1997) tested implications of attachment theory on 237 American adults by using questionnaire method. As predicted, majority of the participants, 60% in this study, used parents as their primary attachment figures and were still in the process of transferring attachment functions from parents to romantic partners. Also, factors such as trust, care giving and intimate contact that promotes the formation of attachment in infancy were found to be positively related to the development of attachment in adult relationships.

McCarthy et al. (2003) conducted a study in which role of attachment style, self esteem and relationship were seen as possible mediators between abusive childhood experiences and difficulties in maintaining supportive love relationships in adulthood. When child abuse and avoidant/ ambivalent attachment style were considered together, the avoidant/ ambivalent attachment style, and not the child abuse was found to be related to relationship difficulties.

Rholes et al. (2006) college students who were about to marry and start a family were asked about their desire to have children, their expectations about their roles as parents and the characteristics of their prospective children. Subjects with more anxious-ambivalent models of relationships harbored more negative models of parenthood and parent-child relationships. The findings indicate that these models of parenting and parent-child relationships form well before marriage and the birth of children and these models are systematically associated with attachment styles in adult relationships. The findings also suggest that insecure attachments between child and parent may be influenced by the caregiver's models of parenting and parent-child relationships.

Simpson (1990) conducted a longitudinal study on 144 dating couples which examined the impact of secure, avoidant and anxious attachment styles on romantic relationships. For both men and women, secure attachment was associated with greater commitment, trust, interdependence and satisfaction than were avoidant or anxious attachment styles. The avoidant and anxious attachment styles were associated with less frequent positive and more frequent negative emotions.

3. METHOD:

Aim: the aim of the present study is to identify the correlation between childhood attachment with parents and adulthood relationships.

3.1 Objectives:

- 1) To study correlation between child-parent and adulthood relationship
- 2) To study the mean difference between anxious and avoidant attachment in childhood
- 3) To study the mean difference between anxious and avoidant attachment in adulthood

3.2 Hypothesis

The main hypothesis formulated for the study is-

- 1) there is a correlation between childhood attachment and adulthood relationships
- 2) there is a difference between anxious and avoidant attachment in childhood
- 3) there is a difference between anxious and avoidant attachment in adulthood

3.3 Psychological Tools

➤ Attachment Style Classification Questionnaire

The Attachment Style Classification Questionnaire constructed by Ricki Finzi Dottan contains fifteen items divided into three factors based on Mary Ainsworth's attachment styles: secure, anxious/ambivalent and avoidant. The children were asked to read each item and to rate the extent to which the item described themselves on a 5-point scale, with scores ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much).

➤ Adult Attachment Scale

The Adult Attachment Scale was originally developed in 1990 based on the work of Hazen and Shaver (1987) and Levy and Davis (1988). It is an 18 item questionnaire which includes three factors for measuring adulthood relationships as "secure", "anxious/ambivalent" and "avoidant". The items are scored on a five point likert scale and are marked accordingly.

➤ Sampling Size and Sampling Method

The sample of 100 adults who meet the criteria were included in the study out of which 50 were males and 50 were females.

The population to be studied consisted of adults who are married or involved in romantic relationships. The sample was purposely selected and the participants were from various cities in India including Bhopal, Bhubaneswar, Chandigarh, Dehradun, Delhi, Gwalior, Imphal, Jaipur, Jamshedpur, Kota, Mallapuram, Meerut, Pune, Jind etc.

Inclusion Criteria

- adults aged 18-45
- adults who are married or in a romantic relationship
- adults who are literate and understand English

Exclusion Criteria

Participants who are single.

Actual Procedure

The procedure followed in data collection was: the 100 subjects who stood fit for the study were cautiously identified. As personally meeting the participants was not viable because of the lock-down, each of them was sent a copy of the questionnaires made through google forms. Each participant was telephonically contacted and told about the purpose of the investigation and how valuable their co-operation was to the study. The subjects were explained the purpose of study and informed consent was obtained. The respondents were then assured confidentiality regarding their identity and responses.

The average time taken by the participants to fill the questionnaire consisting of demographic details, ASCQ scale and ASA was around 20-25 minutes. Doubts regarding certain questions were clarified over the phone and the participants were also told that there is no correct or incorrect answer to any of the questions. After receiving the forms the participants were duly thanked.

Statistical Analysis

Correlation was used to examine the correlation between child parent attachment and adulthood relationships. Independent Samples t-Test was used to examine differences between the means of anxious and avoidant attachment in childhood and in adulthood.

4. RESULT:

The results reveals that there is a significant differences in anxious and avoidant attachment patterns in childhood. The results indicate that scores of avoidant attachment are higher than the scores of anxious attachment. The mean difference between participants of both groups is significant at 0.05 level, “t” = 1.97, (P<.05). The mean and SD of anxious attachment is 14.56 and 15.29 whereas the mean and SD of avoidant attachment is 16.18 and 9.12 respectively. (Table 1)

It is also revealed the difference between means of anxious and avoidant attachment patterns in adulthood. The results indicate that the scores are insignificant at 0.05 level “t” = 1.97, (P>0.5). The mean and SD for anxious attachment is 14.83 and 17.96 whereas mean and SD for the avoidant attachment is 35.91 and 41.26 respectively. (Table 2)

Thus, the correlation between the child attachment and adult relationships is insignificant as the value of p=0.42 and p>0.05.

5. DISCUSSION :

Results in Table 1 reveal that there is a significant difference between anxious and avoidant attachment in children. The mean of avoidant attachment tends to be more than the mean of anxious attachment whereas in Table 2 the mean of avoidant attachment tends to be more than mean of anxious attachment in case of adult relationships. But the correlation in childhood and adult relationship stands insignificant.

Anxious attachment strategies are developed in childhood by infants who receive love and care with unpredictable sufficiency. They generally have a positive view of their peers, but a negative view of themselves. Their romantic relationships have often been overly idealized and they rely too heavily on them for their own self-esteem. People with anxious attachment types are often nervous and stressed about their relationships. They need constant reassurance and affection from their partner. They have trouble being alone or single. They’ll often succumb to unhealthy or abusive relationships. They have trouble trusting people, even if they’re close to them. Their behavior can be irrational and overly-emotional and complain that everyone of the opposite sex are cold and heartless. For example, the girl who calls you 36 times in one night wondering why you didn’t call her back. Or the guy who follows his girlfriend to work to make sure she’s not flirting with any other men. Women are more likely to be anxious types than men.

Avoidant attachment strategy is developed in childhood by infants who only get some of their needs met while the rest are neglected for instance, he/she gets fed regularly, but is not held enough. They often hold a negative view of others but a positive view of themselves. They haven’t depended too much on their romantic relationships for intimacy and feel like they can don’t need others for emotional support. People avoidant attachment style are extremely independent, self-directed and often uncomfortable with intimacy. They’re not open to commitment and are experts at making their way out of any intimate situation. They regularly complain about feeling crowded or suffocated when people try to get close to them. They have an exit strategy in almost every relationship. And they often construct their lifestyle in such a way to avoid commitment or too much intimate contact. For example, the guy who works 80 hours a week and gets annoyed when women he dates want to see him more than once on the weekend. Or the girl who dates dozens of guys over the course of years but tells them all she doesn’t want “anything serious” and inevitably ends up ditching them when she gets tired of them.

No.	Child Attachment	Mean	SD	t- Value
1	Anxious	14.56	15.29	1.97
2	Avoidant	16.18	9.12	

TABLE 1- Child Attachment

No.	Adult Attachment	Mean	SD	t- Value
1	Anxious	14.83	17.96	1.97
2	Avoidant	35.91	41.26	

TABLE 2- Adult Attachment

6. CONCLUSION:

There is a lack of previous studies showing that there is little or no correlation between childhood and adult attachment patterns. Most studies show that attachment pattern in both phases of life are positively correlated (Carlson et al., 1995; Rholes, 2006). Some studies also showed that factors such as trust, care giving and intimate contact that promotes the formation of attachment in infancy were found to be positively related to the development of attachment in adult relationships (Fraley, 1997).

In the present study, there were significant differences between the means of childhood attachment patterns of avoidance and anxiousness and significant differences were also observed in the avoidant and anxious attachment patterns in adulthood. However, the correlation between the two stood insignificant which makes the study quite different from related studies available.

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