Adult Attachment Style and Its Effect on the Quality of Romantic Relationships in Spanish Students

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ATTACHMENT PROCESSES of children and those of adults—Hazan and Shaver (1987) established a parallel between them, suggesting that the experiences of attachment during childhood could give rise to different forms of love in the adult stage. Hazan and Shaver also identified three attachment styles in adults: one secure style and two insecure styles.

Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) extended the adult attachment styles to four, which originated from the cognitive models of self and others in relationships. The combination of the models and their corresponding valences (positive [+] and negative [−]) would lead to four attachment styles: secure (+, +), avoidant−dismissing (+, −), preoccupied (−, +), and avoidant−fearful (−, −).

Ample research (e.g., Brennan & Shaver, 1995; Collins, 1996; Collins & Read, 1990; Simpson, 1990) has indicated that the attachment styles partly predict the way in which a person feels, thinks, and behaves in their romantic relationships.

In the present work, we designed the experiments to check whether the relationship that has been found in samples from other cultures between security in attachment and quality of romantic relationships can be confirmed by Spanish samples.

Participants were 891 university students (255 men, 636 women; ages ranged from 17 years to 30 years, $M = 20.86$ years, $SD = 2.178$ years) who maintained some kind of romantic relationship. The set of questionnaires included two measurements of adult attachment style (Relationship Questionnaire) and a
questionnaire on the relationship of a couple including items about satisfaction, stability, commitment, intimacy, length of the relationship, and attitudes toward disclosure (telling their partner about their intimate aspects and expressing their feelings).

Secure attachment was positively correlated with all the measures that indicated that the relationship functioned well (for satisfaction, $r = .28$; for intimacy, $r = .31$; for stability, $r = .30$; for commitment, $r = .32$; for length of the relationship, $r = .12$; and for attitudes toward disclosure to their partners of their intimate aspects and feelings, $rs = .27$ and .29, respectively; all $ps < .01$) and negatively correlated with the breakup measure ($r = -.27, p < .001$). The two avoidant groups were negatively correlated with all measures indicative of a positive relationship ($rs$ ranged between $-.12$ and $-.37$, mean $r = -.29$, all $ps < .001$) and positively correlated with the breakup measure (for dismissing, $r = .33$; for fearful, $r = .31$; $ps < .001$). The significant correlations for the preoccupied group were the lowest of all groups (for satisfaction, $r = -.17$; for intimacy, $r = -.08$; for stability, $r = -.20$; for probability of breakup, $r = .13$; and for commitment, $r = -.09$; all $ps < .05$). We found no significant correlations between the preoccupied group and attitudes towards disclosure.

The analyses of variance showed that participants with a secure attachment style reported that they were more satisfied with their relationship and had the highest degree of stability and intimacy ($\eta^2 = .125$, .150, and .127, respectively; all $ps < .001$). The avoidant-dismissing group showed the lowest levels of satisfaction of the four attachment styles. The secure and preoccupied groups showed longer lasting relationships than did both avoidant groups ($\eta^2 = .035$; all $ps < .02$). The secure group reported the lowest probability of breakup. The avoidant groups reported a higher likelihood that their relationship would break up in the following 6 months than did the other two groups. In turn, the preoccupied group reported a lower probability of breakup than did the fearful and dismissing groups ($\eta^2 = .116$; all $ps < .001$). For secure individuals, the self-perceived probability of their relationship ending in marriage was significantly greater than those of the other groups ($\eta^2 = .116$; all $ps < .001$). Of the four groups, the secure and preoccupied ones showed the most positive attitudes toward telling their partner about their intimate aspects and toward expressing their feelings ($\eta^2$s = .147 and .129, respectively; $ps < .001$).

All of the present findings are consistent with those found in other studies that were on adult attachments and close relationships and that had Anglo-Saxon samples (Brennan & Shaver, 1995; Collins, 1996; Collins & Read, 1990; Feeney & Noller, 1990; Feeney, Noller, & Callan, 1994; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994; Knobloch, Solomon, & Cruz, 2001; Simpson, 1990).

It seems that the attachment style and the communication methods are central aspects of the relationship of a couple that jointly contribute to its satisfaction and stability (Fitzpatrick & Sollie, 1999). The present data appear to confirm the critical importance of those aspects of a couple’s relationship.
REFERENCES


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