

Attachment Theory

Attachment theory has been around for awhile. David Wexler, PhD, explains it this way in his book *Men In Therapy*.

When we look at why couples struggle, we sometimes need to look at how people attach and how they attached in the past.

We often replay the attachment with our spouse. Our spouse may have no idea that is what we are doing and we are likewise unconsciously doing it.

What types attachment are there:

1. **The Secure attachment** comes from childhood. He sought out his mother (usually it is the mother) for comfort and did not stray too far from her before going back to play. It is like a check-in.

He plays, not too far from his mom. While playing, he comes over to his mom, may touch her or sit on her lap for a very short time, then resumes playing. This type rarely struggles with loneliness and they have a strong sense of self.

2. **The Anxious-Ambivalent (Preoccupied)** likewise comes from childhood. *With this attachment believes he has to please others in order to receive approval.* He would play and then go over to his mother but felt angry at the amount and quality of that contact, even if she did nothing wrong. He felt neglected or abandoned.

When he is fearful or doubting, he gets clingy and angry.

He sometimes questions his ability to maintain the attention and interest of his partner, as well. He may be worried about being rejected in his adult relationships and feel unappreciated. He tends to be more emotionally dependent than you would expect and be romantically obsessive and jealous. They are s preoccupied with their partner.

3. **The Anxious-Avoidant (Dismissing) attachment** can produce a person who looks like he is not connected emotionally. After being away from mom for awhile, he avoided or ignored her. He may have said to himself, "I will not let you hurt me again."

They tend to alternate between lacking empathy, being distant and cold then critical and controlling. They may be cynical and have predominantly negative views of others. When they break up, they have less distress, less grief, because they were less emotionally invested. The goal may end up being turning toward the partner and articulating what hurts and scares them without pretending it does not matter.

4. The final attachment style is **Fearful/Disorganized**. There are elements of both the dismissing and the preoccupied.

When they feel too close, they feel the fear of rejection and betrayal. They then dismiss and distance themselves. If they feel too distant, they have anxiety and become preoccupied with their partner.

As a child, this style was ambivalent (had mixed feelings) when he came back to his mother. His body would arch away from her during the same time that he sought proximity. Another way to describe this style is that he feels anxious when he is cut off from her and feels uncomfortable, even unsafe when attached to her. His unspoken words might be similar to these, "I expect the worst from relationships and I need relationships to soothe my anxieties and heal my damaged self-image."

If you would like more on attachment theory, check out *Hold Me Tight* by Sue Johnson, PhD. Also, check out the blog on my website www.boicecounseling.com I blogged about it for about a month in 2023. If you think your attachment style might be affecting your current relationship, let me know and we can talk about it. 585.544.5342