

Types of Attachment Styles and Romantic Relationships

Attachment is a strong emotional bond people develop towards other people whom they consider important to them. Our relationships with our parents and other people who take care of us in our early ages form the basis of our attachment styles and relationships we build in adulthood. According to Bowlby, attachment is a lifelong process, occurring from “cradle to grave”, and every person feels the need to establish close emotional bonds with another person, attachment relationship affects the psychosocial development of the person. Infants form mental representations of themselves and their environment through the attachment patterns they experience with their primary caregivers. Bowlby argued that the patterns experienced with the attachment figure in childhood turn into generalised interaction styles towards the end of adolescence, shaped by the person’s internal working models.[1] Attachment patterns formed in the early years of life are migrated to adulthood without much change through the person’s internal working models. Bowlby suggested that this attachment system shapes a person's life for years to come. The attachment styles that people develop in the early stages of their childhood also determine their perceptions of self and the quality of their relationships with others. Parker argues that early experiences shape interpersonal relationships, and the inadequacies in the parent-child relationships affect personality and lead to feelings of self-worthlessness.[2] According to Bartholomew and Shaver, children’s relationships with attachment figures affect their expectations, feelings, and defence mechanisms vis-à-vis their close relationships in the future.[3] Behaviours exhibited by the person in relation to attachment styles also manifest themselves in romantic relationships. Attachment, which remains as a one-sided process until adulthood, becomes two-sided with the person’s engagement in romantic relationships in adulthood. Research on attachment theory has shown that parental care and love in childhood is closely associated with adults' developing a secure attachment style, while parental rejection leads to the development of an insecure (anxious-avoidant) style of attachment.[4]

Children who had a warm and consistent experience with their caregivers, that is a secure attachment style, develop positive mental representations of themselves and others, such as being lovable, kind, and friendly, strong, and capable. In secure attachment style, children exhibit uneasiness when separated from the person to whom they are attached, and when that person returns, they become cheerful again, showing positive behaviours towards that adult. Children with secure attachment style trust the persons individuals they are attached to, and

therefore they feel secure. Such children know that the adult they are attached to is always there to comfort and protect them and meet their needs.

Children who have experienced secure attachment at home may have longer and trust-based romantic relationships in their adulthood. Securely attached individuals perceive themselves as worthy and lovable, and they also tend to love others. Such individuals tend to have strong social relationships, they enjoy their relationships, and feel more comfortable sharing their feelings and thoughts with other people. Studies show that the relationships between couples who are securely attached to each other are healthier, more fulfilling, and last longer.

In anxious-ambivalent attachment style, children feel anxious and restless when their caregivers leave. When the caregiver returns, children's negative feelings do not subside, and they cannot easily calm themselves down. Children with this attachment style are very suspicious of strangers. They want to establish a very close relationship with the person they are attached to, yet they show resistance to deepen the relationship. Children who had an emotionally distant relationship with their caregivers, who experienced rejection and inconsistency growing up, develop mental representations of themselves as negative, unlovable, and bad, and mental representations of others as negative, untrustworthy, and distant. Adults with anxious-ambivalent attachment style have significant fear of abandonment in their romantic relationships, they have jealous tendencies and intense fear of rejection.

Children with the avoidant attachment style have an inability to engage in emotional intimacy. Avoidantly-attached children tend to ignore their caregiver, especially when the caregiver leaves the room and returns. Such children avoid physical intimacy with the person to whom they are attached. Individuals with avoidant attachment style have positive perceptions of themselves but negative perceptions of others. Since their parents may have expected them to be independent or reprimanded them for depending on them during their childhood, adults with avoidant attachment style have adopted a strong sense of independence. Since they believe it might be harmful to trust and bond with others, they persistently avoid emotional or physical intimacy, they are dismissive of others, they believe they don't need others in their lives. They have a hard time asking people for help or support. They avoid getting emotionally close. They tend to be cold and distant towards their partners.

In a relationship, differences between attachment styles become clearer in stressful situations. The negative events experienced in a relationship reveal people's reactions to such events, their

interpretation of them, their ways of thinking and the solutions they find to deal with them., Therefore, noticing the negative perceptions that a person has about himself, being aware of what makes them feel stressed and what types of difficulties they have in their relationship can be an initial step to change them. Getting professional help can lead you to notice clearly, become more aware of the difficulties you experience in your relationships, help you establish healthier ones, hence regain a sense of control over the problems in your life.

Özgü Kübra Halitoğulları

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