

Attachment styles
and romantic
relationship outcomes
psychology essay



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Many researchers have shown a link between attachment styles and romantic relationship outcomes. Attachment styles deals with early infant parent caring and environment, internal working models of themselves, their early relationships with peer or friends and attachment security. These major attachment styles leads to the different timing of the first sexual intercourse which later shows links to relationship satisfaction, quality of romantic relationships, union formation and the number of romantic partners. The timing of first sexual activity is classified at either early age (14 or earlier), on time (15-19) or late age (19 or older) (Harden 2012). Many studies have shown that individuals prefer partners with similar attachment style, a complementary attachment style or either the attachment style most likely to form attachment security, is all dealt with the age of an individual. This theory of attachment increases the understanding of Hardens (2012) findings and explains these findings by him.

The characteristics and stability of teenagers romantic relationship in young adulthood is concerned with the timing of teenager's first sexual intercourse. One theory that suggests reasons for the quality of this romantic relationship is the attachment theory. John Bowlby was the first Psychologist to introduce the attachment theory, describing attachment as a " lasting psychological connectedness between human beings" (Bowlby, 1969). The attachment theory states that people construct internal, working models of themselves and their early relationships, which function to guide social behaviour throughout their life span (Bowlby, 1973). Hazen and shaver (1987) also concluded that attachment styles may influence the quality of their romantic experiences and their beliefs on relationships. This

attachment theory and peer relationships are able to explain Hardens (2012) findings that concluded that the timing of first sexual intercourse in adolescence predicts romantic outcomes in adulthood, including union formation, number of romantic partners, and relationship dissatisfaction.

The essential argument of the attachment theory is if parents are not available and responsive to their children's needs are likely to face difficulties in their lives. Belsky et al. (1991); Belsky, 1997) claimed that an individual's early family environment, including the childhood-parent attachment relationship, conveys to children the risks and uncertainties they are likely to face in their lifetimes (Belsky, J. et al. 2010). It has been stated that such information adaptively regulates psychological, behavioural, and reproductive development, either toward a mutually beneficial orientation to interpersonal relations or toward an opportunistic, advantage-taking point of view (Belsky, J. et al. 2010). This may result and affect mating behaviour, pair bonding, and parental investment, and also has been said to result earlier or later sexual intercourse, number of romantic partner, unstable or stable relationships and union formation (Belsky, J. et al. 2010). From this evidence attachment of individuals with their parents explains the results in which romantic relationships are created and built and timing of first sexual intercourse.

Friendships are extremely significant during adolescence, so an individual might experience internal working models (attachment theory) of close friendships to become particularly influential during this time (Trinke and Bartholomew, 1997; Weiss, 1991). Researchers have proposed that

friendship during adolescence is provided as a supplement rather than a
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replacement for relationships between parents and should be considered as a unique factor on adolescent functioning (Furman & Simon 1998; Paterson et al. 1994). Peer relationship or friendship is known to contribute to later romantic relationship outcomes, and best known by the scholar Sullivan(1953). He viewed friendships established in middle childhood as foundational for later romantic relationships (Madsen, S., & Collins, W. 2011). A research by Neemann et al. (1995), documented that peer relationships or friendships during the age of middle adolescence influences factors such as romantic relationship involvement, number of romantic partners, and relationship satisfaction and the quality of relationship in young adulthood. Furthermore, rejections experienced by friends in middle adolescence are significant issues in the development of rejection sensitivity, and the results of these experiences of rejection have been strongly correlated with dissatisfaction in romantic relationships (Downey, Bonica, & Rincin, 1999).

Many studies have focused on that relationship satisfaction and behavioural patterns is associated with attachment styles. Collins and Read (1990) stated that attachment characteristics were connected to the partner's evaluation of the relationship, although differently for both genders. A study by Pistole (1989) investigated attachment styles and conflict resolution recorded by college students concerning their most important romance. The results indicated that secure subjects reported more adaptive strategies, than insecure subjects, and adaptive strategies were associated with satisfaction relationships (Pistole 1989). In a previous study by Kobak and Hazan (1991), examined married couples and asked them to complete attachment

styles and marital satisfaction measures and to contribute in behavioural and marital interaction tasks. The results concluded that there is major relationship between security of attachment and both partners marital satisfaction (Senchak, M. and Lenonard, K. 1992). Both of these studies suggest a connection between attachment styles and evaluation of relationships, and behavioural conflict which leads to relationship dissatisfaction and union formation (Senchak, M. and Lenonard, K. 1992).

Adult attachment style may determine an individual's sense of security, and how felt security is sought, in order to be successful in achieving this goal is most likely dependent about their partner's attachment styles and behaviour (Holmes, B. and Johnson, K. 2009). Individuals that will show preference towards partners with similar attachment characteristics to their own is called the similarity hypothesis (Holmes, B. and Johnson, K. 2009).

Gaining insight of the similarity hypothesis, the application of self-enhancement theory, which proposes individuals will to enhance their self-image, will have a strong desire for positive feedback from others (Baumeister, 1982; Greenwald, 1980; Jones, 1973; Kaplan, 1975). From this theory, it represents that individuals might prefer partners on the basis of their attachment style. The results of this theory indicated secure individuals would prefer securely attached partners and would allow for the experience of confidence and independence (Holmes, B. & Johnson, K. 2009). However, insecure individuals, it is predicted that the preference of partners becomes more problematic (Holmes, B. & Johnson, K. 2009). Both of these theories predict secure individuals demonstrate preference to one another while

variations exist in the preferences of insecure individuals (Holmes, B. & Johnson, K. 2009).

Overall it can be seen from the above evidence, that the attachment theory can be an explanation for Hardens (2012) findings. From the attachment theory it is predicted that early parent-child relationships are influences of later love relationships. A major function of attachment relationships is to provide feelings of security (Sroufe & Waters, 1977). The internal working models of an individual and attachment styles determines and individual's quality of romantic outcomes, stability and number of romantic partners. The studies mentioned above supports this, and strongly suggest an explanation for Hardens (2012) findings. Peer relationships or friendships, a part of attachment styles is also known to influence individuals during middle adolescence and known to contribute to romantic relationship outcomes, number of romantic partners, union formation. These finding give a greater insight into the human psyche.