

# Adult attachment as a predictor of adult relationships



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Adult couples face many problems that are not fully understood. Many of the complaints couple's therapists are presented with about communication failure or conflicts over issues are actually representations of distorted attachment needs (Solomon, 2009). Our childhood experiences are a crucial part of comprehending and evolving in our close relationships. As an outcome of our early caregiving experiences we develop an "internal working model", which paves the way to our future understanding about oneself and others (Chambers, 2012). The "Internal Working Model" was originally proposed by John Bowlby's "Attachment Theory" where he states that attachment is crucial within a child's first five years of life. Attachment Theory describes how we learn the rules of relationships from our early caregivers and pursue emotional aid while developing expectations of others (Chambers, 2012). According to Attachment Theory, our expectations of others can be categorized into three styles; Secure, Anxious and Avoidant. The various research provided utilizes Bowlby's attachment theory as a foundation in hopes of better understanding attachment and satisfaction in adult relationships.

## Goals

The Adult Exploration of Attachment Interview (AEAI) is a therapeutic interview developed by therapist, Heather Chambers, to assist adults in better understanding themselves and their relationships with others (Chambers, 2012). The goal is to explore adult's early relational learning, especially in regards to attachment needs, in order to overcome negative repeated patterns either in themselves or in intimate relationships (Chambers, 2012). A child who receives reliable and available care develops

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a completely different internal relational model to those who experience rejecting and hostile care (Chambers, 2012). Attachment Theory, psychotherapy and neurobiological understandings are all important for attachment repair in couple therapy. The importance of Attachment-Oriented couple therapy is to help partners overcome the defensive mechanisms engraved in their early attachment experiences by breaking the cycles of mutual hurt and begin to create the bonding experiences that characterize successful couples (Solomon, 2009). Researchers Rachel Diamond, Andrew Brimhall and Micheal Elliott (2018) conducted a study with a goal of determining whether attachment style in couples was a better predictor of relationship satisfaction, rather than relationship type. They not only hypothesized that attachment would be associated with differences in satisfaction between different relationship groups, such as first-marriage, divorced/separated and second-marriage participants, but also that first-marriages specifically would have a higher level of attachment security than post-divorce participants. Utilizing attachment as a prototype for the treatment of intimate relationships is an essential part to help couples establish themselves on a firm and lasting foundation (Solomon, 2009).

## Methods

Our early attachment experiences influence us immensely that the process of reviewing can bring forth a positive change in our behavior towards our partners or children. The AEAI begins with an exploration of early learning from a primary caregiver. This includes information concerning both sides of a relationship. For example, how children need to act towards a parent and how that parent responds to their children's needs (Chambers, 2012).  
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Secondly, clients are helped to understand in a judgement-free way that an internal mental representation of their primary caregiving bond has served them as a “ map” for all future relationships. This “ Inheritance Map” is not looked at in a positive or negative way, but rather explored for its usefulness (Chambers, 2012). The therapist is a vital part of the interview as he/she takes on a role as a companion and a secure base to clients as they explore themselves and their experiences. This includes showing interest, empathy, concern, acceptance and acknowledging strengths in the client (Chambers, 2012). A series of questions are broken up into two stages. Stage 1 includes questions about what was learned from their mother/ primary caregiver. Stage 2 questions are about what was learned from their mother/ primary caregiver about being a parent (Chambers, 2012). During the interview, responses are recorded on a white board so the client can follow their “ Inheritance Map” at all times. It is important to reveal to the client information that is currently unconscious or also known as ‘ out of sight’ and remind them that their behavior has not been irrational but based on real events that have now been exposed (Chambers, 2012). The white board information has then become the client’s “ Inheritance Map” and the client now has a better understanding of what part they play in the bigger picture. In viewing their inheritance map externally, it minimizes blame and encourages taking responsibility for change without feelings of guilt (Chambers, 2012).

Those with traumatic childhood experiences, or anxious and avoidant attachment styles, tend to develop coping methods that cause distance between them and their intimate partners. In Attachment-oriented therapy,

the therapist uses the relationship as a healing element and encourages the partners to tell of how they first came together. To achieve maximum results in individual or couples therapy, therapy requires a safe place to contain emotional outbursts, an opportunity to maintain cognitive awareness in facing intense feelings, the ability to connect with one's core and the challenge to face the fear of true closeness with others (Solomon, 2009). It is important to create a safety zone where core emotions can emerge.

Together the couple can explore the similarities or differences in their memories, as well as gain clarity about how the reenactment of their early traumatic events has, surprisingly, been a part of their reparative process (Solomon, 2009). The therapist can better help the couple understand that the desire for intimate connection is what provokes attachment yearnings, fear, and even sometimes despair.

A study was conducted to better understand relationship satisfaction and attachment styles in reference to individual's current relationship status (Brimhall, Diamond & Elliott, 2018). The sample size was 562 participants, where 340 were in a first marriage, 122 were separated/ divorced from their first spouse and 100 were in a second marriage. The participants were gathered without compensation via convenience sampling through national and local listservs and message boards purposefully targeting individuals who were in any of the three groups listed above (Brimhall, et al, 2018).

They were asked to access an online, self-administered survey which included informed consent, demographic questions and questionnaires. Two hypotheses were considered; Attachment would be associated with differences in satisfaction between relationship groups and first-marriages

would have a higher level of attachment than post-divorce participants (Brimhall et al, 2018). Contrary to popular literature, attachment style may be a better predictor of relationship satisfaction than relationship type.

Results

## References

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