Avoidance of Intimacy: An Attachment Perspective

Kim Bartholomew

Journal of Social and Personal Relationships 1990 7: 147
DOI: 10.1177/0265407590072001

AVOIDANCE OF INTIMACY: AN ATTACHMENT PERSPECTIVE

Kim Bartholomew
Stanford University

A basic principle of attachment theory is that early attachment relationships with caregivers provide the prototype for later social relations. Working within an attachment framework, a new 4-group model of characteristic attachment styles in adulthood is proposed. In particular, two forms of adult avoidance of intimacy are differentiated: a *fearful* style that is characterized by a conscious desire for social contact which is inhibited by fears of its consequences, and a *dismissing* style that is characterized by a defensive denial of the need or desire for greater social contact. This distinction corresponds to two differing models of the self: people who fearfully avoid intimacy view themselves as undeserving of the love and support of others, and people who dismiss intimacy possess a positive model of the self that minimizes the subjective awareness of distress or social needs. The emotional and interpersonal ramifications of the two proposed styles of adult avoidance are discussed.

Satisfying intimate relationships are the most important source of most people's happiness and sense of meaning in life (e.g. Klinger, 1977; Freedman, 1978). Conversely, social isolation and loneliness constitute risk factors for psychological and physical disorders (e.g. Cobb, 1976; Jemmott, 1987; Lynch, 1977; Peplau & Perlman, 1982). Although almost everyone occasionally avoids getting too close to others, this paper focuses on those individuals for whom avoidance of intimacy is a defining feature of their interpersonal relationships. The purpose of the present paper is to conceptualize avoidance of close affectional bonds in adulthood. Particular atten-

---

Preparation of this paper was supported in part by a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Doctoral Fellowship. Thanks are given to Fraser S. Archibald, Laura L. Carstensen, S. Shirley Feldman, Leonard M. Horowitz, S. Plous and Daniel A. Weinberger, and also to Barbara Carlozzi, Perri Druen and Lee Kirkpatrick who acted as *JSPR*'s anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper. Reprint requests and correspondence should be sent to Kim Bartholomew, who is now at Department of Psychology, The University of British Columbia, 2136 West Mall, Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1Y7, Canada.

Journal of Social and Personal Relationships (SAGE, London, Newbury Park and New Delhi), Vol. 7 (1990), 147–178

tion will be given to possible developmental antecedents of adult avoidance and the defensive functions that avoidance may serve.

One useful framework considers avoidance as a distortion in the balance between independence and dependence, or individuation and connectedness. The two poles of this dialectic have variously been referred to as agency and communion (Bakan, 1966), autonomy and homonomy (Angyal, 1941), and identity and intimacy (Erikson, 1963). Recently, theorists have come to recognize that psychology has overemphasized the process of individuation, thereby neglecting the importance of a healthy connection with or dependence on others (e.g. Gilligan, 1982; Gurian & Gurian, 1983; Memmi, 1984).

While the terms 'fear of intimacy' and 'fear of commitment' are common in the popular press, surprisingly little attention has been directed toward defining exactly what such fears may entail (see Lutwak, 1985, and Hatfield, 1984 for exceptions). A number of lines of research, however, implicitly deal with avoidance of intimacy. For instance, researchers working within an Eriksonian framework talk of 'pseudo-intimacy', characterized by a hesitancy to get too close to others that is presumably motivated by a fear of losing ego boundaries (Orlofsky et al., 1973). Avoidance may also be related to a lack of motivation to seek affiliation (Atkinson et al., 1954) or intimacy (McAdams, 1980). A host of other literatures also deal with related constructs, including self-disclosure, loneliness, social support and friendship, to name but a few.

Each of these approaches recognizes that an interpersonal style characterized by a lack of desire or capacity to become deeply involved with others is potentially maladaptive, but the nature of such a style has not yet been clearly formulated. Many crucial questions remain unaddressed. For instance, how is the avoidance of closeness best conceptualized? Is it the 'opposite' of a capacity for intimacy? What role does defensiveness play in avoidant behavior? And are there distinct forms of avoidance, or do all highly avoidant individuals share certain common characteristics?

Fortunately, a framework exists which is well suited to exploring such questions. Attachment theory, as developed by Bowlby (1973, 1980, 1982b), Ainsworth (Ainsworth et al., 1978) and others, is 'a way of conceptualizing the propensity of human beings to make strong affectional bonds to particular others' (Bowlby, 1977: 201) and is designed 'to accommodate all those phenomena to which Freud called attention', including love relations, defense mechan-

isms and emotional detachment (Bowlby, 1982a: 668). As used here, attachment refers to an enduring affective bond between particular individuals. The extensive literature on infant avoidance of the caretaker is especially helpful in suggesting ways to think about avoidance in adulthood; from this perspective, the question becomes 'why do some adults avoid the natural inclination to form strong attachments to others?'

While infants are assumed to have an innate tendency to bond with their primary caretakers, adults have some control over the degree to which they become attached to others. Adults differ on both their motivation to *become* attached to others, a given in infancy, and their motivation to *not* become attached. Avoidance may therefore stem from either a fear of intimacy or a lack of interest or motivation to become intimate with others. In fact, two distinct styles of adult avoidance of attachment may be hypothesized: individuals who desire close attachments but avoid them out of fear, and individuals who claim to neither fear nor desire close attachments. This distinction is parallel to that made between the avoidant personality disorder, characterized by social avoidance motivated by a fear of social rejection, and the schizoid personality disorder, characterized by a lack of interest in social relations (American Psychiatric Association, 1987). In both cases close relationships are avoided, although the motivations for avoidance may differ dramatically.

This paper develops the thesis that adult avoidance of intimacy can be understood as a disturbance in the capacity to form interpersonal attachments which stems from the internalization of early adverse experiences within the family. First, the relevant childhood attachment literature will be reviewed, with particular attention to the avoidant pattern of infant attachment. Recent work on adult attachment will then be reviewed, and a model will be proposed that differentiates between the two different forms of adult avoidance, a distinction that has not previously been made. Finally, the emotional and interpersonal ramifications of the two proposed styles of adult avoidance will be explored.

Attachment theory

Attachment theory was originally developed to explain 'the many forms of emotional distress and personality disturbance, including

anxiety, anger, depression and emotional detachment, to which unwilling separation and loss give rise' (Bowlby, 1977: 201). The attachment construct describes an organized behavioral system which is regarded as an integral part of human nature. Attachment has been variously operationalized in terms of coherent *patterns* of behavior which indicate the quality of the attachment bond within a relationship. In Bowlby's initial conceptualization, the goal of the attachment system is to maintain proximity to the primary caretaker to ensure protection from dangers such as predators. The system is therefore especially prone to activation under conditions of anxiety, fear, illness and fatigue. Under such conditions, infants will exhibit *attachment behaviors* designed to establish contact with an attachment figure and thereby to regain a sense of security. Ainsworth has broadened Bowlby's conceptualization in viewing the attachment system as functioning continuously to provide the infant with a secure base from which to engage in exploration. Thus, the goal of the attachment system is the maintenance of *felt security*.

The quality of early attachment is rooted in the history of interactions between the infant and caretaker, and the degree to which the infant has learned to rely on the attachment figure as a source of security (Ainsworth et al., 1978). To assess individual differences in the security of attachment, Ainsworth and her colleagues developed a laboratory procedure called the 'Strange Situation'. This procedure involves a series of episodes of contact, separation and reunion with the caregiver designed to observe the infant's behavior toward the attachment figure under conditions of increasing stress and separation anxiety. Based on infants' responses to the separation and reunion episodes, Ainsworth has identified three distinct patterns of interaction shown by infants toward their parents. The modal group of infants — at least within North America — are classified as securely attached. Upon reunion, such children welcome their caretaker's return, and, if distressed, seek proximity and are readily comforted. A second category consists of infants classified as showing anxious-resistant attachment; these infants show ambivalent behavior toward caregivers and an inability to be comforted upon reunion.

The third category, of particular interest in the present context, is *avoidant* attachment. Avoidant infants tend to express less distress during separation episodes than do infants in the other groups. But their defining feature is a conspicuous avoidance of proximity or interaction with the caretaker upon reunion. This may take the

form of a blank expression seemingly directed past the caregiver, gaze aversion, a turning of the body or head away from the caregiver, or more active moving away (Main, 1981). Some avoidant infants ignore the caregiver altogether, while others combine movements toward the caregiver with avoidant responses, resulting in bizarre behavioral sequences. Avoidance is typically accompanied by a preoccupation with inanimate objects which may be interpreted as apparently normal exploratory behavior but which on closer inspection has a peculiar disorganized or mindless quality (Main, 1981). If picked up by a parent, avoidant infants are likely to indicate their preference to be put down by, for instance, showing an interest in a toy on the floor.

Bowlby argues that the child's confidence in the availability of an attachment figure in times of need is largely determined by early experiences. The dimension of maternal behavior that bears the strongest relation with childhood attachment classification is sensitivity to the infant's signals (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Mothers of securely attached infants tend to be consistently responsive to their infants' signals and show warmth in interactions. In contrast, mothers of infants classified as ambivalent tend to be inconsistent and inept in dealing with their infants, showing a general lack of sensitivity to their infants' needs.

The mothers of avoidant infants exhibit a particular pattern of insensitivity referred to by Ainsworth as 'rejecting' (Ainsworth et al., 1978). These mothers are averse to physical contact, direct hostility and criticism toward their infants, show blunted affective expression, and display a general rigidity and compulsiveness in caregiving. Egeland & Farber (1984) replicated many of Ainsworth's findings. They demonstrated, for instance, relationships between attachment classifications at 12 months and both mothers' sensitivity in feeding situations and avoidance of physical contact when their infants were 3 and 6 months of age. Moreover, self-reported negative attitudes toward motherhood and nurse ratings of mothers' interest in their 3-month-old infants also predicted attachment quality 9 months later.

The stability of attachment quality has been demonstrated in infants between 12 and 18 months of age. In a middle-class sample, the attachment style of only 4 percent of the infants changed over this time span (Waters, 1978). However, attachment is clearly affected by changes in life situations, as demonstrated by the instability of attachment ratings (38–40 percent changing) in low income

samples with relatively little continuity in the caretaking environment (Vaughn et al., 1979; Egeland & Farber, 1984). Moreover, meaningful relationships between changes in attachment classification and changes in maternal treatment of the child, apparently moderated by changes in life stress and living arrangements, have also been documented in these studies. Thus, in infancy and throughout childhood to a lesser extent, stability of attachment patterns is largely a function of stability in the quality of primary attachment relationships (see Lamb et al., 1985). High stability in the quality of child–parent relationships has been demonstrated from 12 months to 6 years (Main et al., 1985).

Bowlby posits that, based on their attachment relationships, children construct *working models* or internal representations of themselves and others which provide the foundation for later personality organization. He describes the basic process through which such working models of attachment are formed:

> Confidence that an attachment figure is, apart from being accessible, likely to be responsive can be seen to turn on at least two variables: (a) whether or not the attachment figure is judged to be the sort of person who in general responds to calls for support and protection; (b) whether or not the self is judged to be the sort of person towards whom anyone, and the attachment figure in particular, is likely to respond in a helpful way. Logically these variables are independent. In practice they are apt to be confounded. As a result, the model of the attachment figure and the model of the self are likely to develop so as to be complementary and mutually confirming. (1973: 204)

Such working models are presumed to become increasingly important in guiding the child's general style of social interaction and emotional regulation. They influence behavior by guiding the appraisal of social situations, as well as functioning to maintain a coherent world view and self-image by guiding the assimilation of new experiences.

Consistent with this formulation, a considerable body of research links an infant's attachment style at 12 or 18 months with various dimensions of social–emotional adjustment through early childhood. For instance, secure two-year-olds are more autonomous and competent in a problem-solving situation (Matas et al., 1978) and receive higher ratings on ego-resilience in kindergarten (Arend et al., 1979) than do their less secure counterparts. These results are consistent with the notion that insecure attachment relationships fail to adequately provide a safe base from which confident exploration of the environment can take place.

Of particular interest are prospective studies in which early attachment classifications predict the quality of children's later social relationships. Secure infants showed a greater willingness than insecure infants, for example, to play with a friendly unknown adult (Main & Weston, 1981). At 3½ years they were found to engage in more affective sharing and were rated higher on a peer competence Q-sort (Waters et al., 1979). In an extensive evaluation of the peer relations of pre-school children previously classified in the Strange Situation, Sroufe (1983a) found that secure children engaged in more mutually fulfilling peer relations than insecure children; they were more popular, less aggressive, more empathic and showed more positive affect in social situations.

Social interaction styles that are unique to avoidant infants have proved difficult to identify (cf. Sroufe, 1983a). However, a few findings are suggestive. Although avoidant children in a pre-school setting were clearly interested in establishing contact with teachers, they actively avoided contact in high-stress situations or when their teachers initiated friendly contact (Sroufe et al., 1983). A similar and more striking pattern was observed with abused toddlers (George & Main, 1979). Toddlers who often spontaneously approached daycare workers were strongly avoidant when caregivers made friendly overtures and were inclined toward unprovoked aggressive outbursts. In another study, avoidant pre-schoolers were likely to be described by teachers as either emotionally distant and withdrawn or overly hostile and aggressive (Sroufe, 1983a). Although the social behavior of avoidant children is often confusing, it does suggest a deep distrust of others and a failure to conform to social norms of reciprocity. This pattern is particularly self-defeating because it not only undermines the friendly approaches of others, it leads to social rejection that confirms the child's distrust. According to Sroufe (1983a), whenever pre-school teachers became so frustrated that they wanted to isolate a child from the class, the object of their irritation had previously been classified as an avoidant infant.

In summary, children who have displayed an avoidant pattern of attachment with their primary caretaker in infancy exhibit a range of maladaptive behaviors up to six years of age. These patterns are relatively stable and may be mediated by internal expectancies or models of social relations. But the purpose of avoidance within the context of the infant–parent relationship is still unclear. In particular, many behavior patterns associated with childhood avoidance

appear to be maladaptive. Can they be understood as originally adaptive responses to difficult conditions, or do they merely reflect a disruption in normal development engendered by inadequate early caregiving? These issues will be explored in the next section as we move from a descriptive to functional analysis of avoidant attachment in childhood.

The meaning of avoidant attachment in children

Although the avoidant child's behavior as observed in the Strange Situation could be interpreted as reflecting a lack of need or desire for contact, there is compelling evidence to the contrary. Despite the fact that avoidant infants show patterns of emotional expressiveness similar to those displayed by a subset of secure infants (Frodi & Thompson, 1985), a number of important differences exist. Unlike securely attached infants, avoidant infants lack expressiveness in the Strange Situation (Grossmann et al., 1986); positive and negative affect are blunted. Main & Weston (1982) report a strong negative correlation between avoidance of the mother in the Strange Situation and emotional expressiveness. Moreover, even when avoidant infants appear distressed, they are far less likely to communicate their distress directly to their mothers or seek out contact (Grossmann et al., 1986).

There is also evidence that the apparently innocuous focus on play and inanimate objects observed in avoidant infants may be a form of displacement behavior. Sroufe & Waters (1977: 8) found that avoidant infants exhibited cardiac acceleration in response to separation, in spite of their overt lack of distress. In addition, unlike secure infants, avoidant infants did not show a deceleration in heart rate during play following the reunion. These results suggest that the behavior of avoidant infants is 'active avoidance rather than precocious social maturity'.

The behavior of avoidant infants outside the Strange Situation also belies the strength of their attachment needs. Despite phenotypically opposite responses to the Strange Situation, avoidant and resistant groups of anxiously attached infants have repeatedly been found to display similar patterns of behavior in naturalistic settings. For instance, both groups display higher levels of separation distress, lack of compliance and problem behavior at home than does the securely attached group (Ainsworth et al., 1978). But the

behavior that best discriminates the avoidant group at home is anger directed toward the mother (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Anger is often expressed indirectly and inappropriately within the home context (Main & Weston, 1982). This finding is striking in light of the observation that avoidant infants show the lowest levels of anger in the Strange Situation. Correspondingly, although avoidance of the mother is negatively correlated with expressions of anger in the Strange Situation, it is highly positively correlated with expressions of anger and hostility toward the mother in the home setting (Main & Weston, 1982).

A parallel pattern is observed in children who have undergone major separations from their primary attachment figure (Bowlby, 1973). Upon reunion, children typically display strong avoidance, including physical avoidance and apparent lack of recognition of the attachment figure. Although avoidant behavior subsides within hours or days, the greater the avoidance upon reunion, the greater the display of anger and dependent behavior toward the mother over the ensuing weeks. As Bowlby (1982b) has argued from an ethological perspective, anger is a protest behavior directed toward increasing proximity with the caregiver. The anger that avoidant children express toward their mothers in less stressful circumstances, presumably in response to their mothers' rejecting or unresponsive treatment, can therefore be taken as further evidence of their lack of indifference.

Observations of avoidant children at later ages confirm their continuing attachment needs. In one study, pre-school children previously classified as avoidant were rated by teachers and observers as highly dependent (Sroufe et al., 1983). In fact, on most measures the avoidant group was found to be at least as dependent as the resistant group. Avoidant children frequently attempted to contact their teachers indirectly, but decreased contact-seeking in stressful conditions or when contact was directly initiated by another. Six-year-olds classified as avoidant in infancy were also found to display considerable emotional vulnerability in response to imagined separations, although they were unable to suggest ways of dealing with the separation situation (Kaplan, 1987).

Avoidance in the Strange Situation is a challenging behavior pattern to explain because it is inconsistent with the expectation that attachment behaviors (seeking and maintaining of contact with the attachment figure) will be activated under conditions of threat. On the contrary, avoidant behavior is defined explicitly as an active

avoidance of contact. Yet, despite evidence that their need for human contact is not extinguished, 20–25 percent of infants in North American society exhibit what Sroufe describes as a 'clearly maladaptive' pattern (1983b: 497).

In two recent papers, Main (1981; Main & Weston, 1982) discusses avoidance as it appears in both human and non-human infants. She suggests that avoidance may serve a 'signal' function in that it prevents the expression of attachment needs which may lead to hostility or withdrawal on the part of the caretaker. A second, 'cut-off' interpretation focuses on the effects of avoidance on the infant's own responses to separation. In response to separation, avoidant infants feel angry toward the caretaker, but the expression of anger decreases proximity, so angry impulses are masked or cut-off and replaced with a detached avoidance. Avoidance thereby prevents the infant from fleeing from or acting aggressively toward a rejecting caretaker. Chronically rejected infants experience particularly strong angry impulses with corresponding high levels of avoidance when the display of anger entails risk. However in less stressful situations, this anger is expressed indirectly. Thus the signal interpretation interprets avoidance as serving to prevent the caretaker from decreasing proximity to the child, and the cut-off interpretation interprets avoidance as serving to prevent the child from decreasing proximity with the caretaker.

The cut-off interpretation foreshadows a more general style of cutting off the expression of unacceptable impulses. Like the signal explanation, it does not see avoidance as undermining the primacy of attachment needs in infants. Consistent with this explanation, avoidant infants communicate less with their mothers when upset (Grossmann et al., 1986), and mothers of avoidant infants withdraw when their infants express negative affect (Escher-Graub & Grossmann, 1983, cited in Grossmann et al., 1986). Through this process, avoidant children internalize the same aversion to strong feelings that is characteristic of their mothers.

An alternative explanation views avoidance as an attempt to maintain behavioral organization and flexibility in the face of an irresolvable approach–avoidance conflict. Threats lead to tendencies to approach the attachment figure, but the attachment figure rejects physical contact. Thus, when attachment needs arise, the object of approach is forbidden and dangerous, leading to withdrawal, anxiety and further activation of the attachment system, in a self-perpetuating positive feedback loop. The only solution is to

shift attention away from the attachment figure altogether, i.e. to practice avoidance.

This interpretation accounts for many contexts in which avoidance arises. Under conditions of high stress when there is no way to gain comfort, infants will shift attention to neutral objects or engage in displacement behaviors to distract themselves from their frustrated attachment needs. In Bowlby's terms, they attempt to 'deactivate' the attachment system. Consistent with this explanation, gaze aversion, a behavior common among avoidant infants in response to their mothers, serves to modulate arousal levels (Sroufe & Waters, 1977). Second, the stereotyped hand movements, freezing, rocking and other odd behaviors which have been observed in strongly avoidant infants can be understood as conflict behaviors resulting from conflicting tendencies (see Main & Weston, 1982 for a review). Finally, the behavior of pathologically avoidant infants was found to break down under stress (Fraiberg, 1982). Fraiberg describes cases of avoidant infants whose personalities seemed 'to disintegrate before our eyes' (Fraiberg, 1982: 624). Infant avoidance may act not only to prevent further conflict with the attachment figure, but to prevent intolerable levels of distress and behavioral disorganization.

Longitudinal research does not yet exist to indicate the later developmental course of avoidant children. However, avoidant strategies may become increasingly anticipatory and habitual, until the expression of negative affect is avoided altogether and close interpersonal relations which could give rise to approach–avoidance conflicts are shunned. Both Ainsworth and Sroufe have postulated that as the capacity for emotional control develops, avoidant children may express their attachment needs less and less directly until a general detachment in interpersonal relations is attained (Sroufe, 1983a; Ainsworth et al., 1978). An intriguing finding that may foreshadow this development is that pre-schoolers rated as avoidant in infancy tended to be over-controlled on Block's Q-sort measure of ego-control, while secure children showed moderate control and resistant children tended to be under-controlled (Arend et al., 1979).

Adult attachment

Until recently, attachment research has focused almost exclusively upon infancy and early childhood. The parent–child relationship

has been seen as the prototypic attachment relationship, if not the *only* relationship in which attachment operates. This focus has resulted in a wealth of information on early attachment, but it has overshadowed the importance of attachment throughout the lifespan. Yet Bowlby (1977, 1980, 1982a) emphasizes that attachment is not limited to childhood. He presumes that childhood attachment underlies 'the later capacity to make affectional bonds', as well as a whole range of adult dysfunctions including 'marital problems and trouble with children as well as . . . neurotic symptoms and personality disorders' (1977: 206).

Ainsworth (1982, 1989) discusses the possibility that parents, peers, siblings and sexual partners may all operate as attachment figures over the course of the lifespan. Shaver & Hazan (1988; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Shaver et al., 1988) and Weiss (1982) focus primarily on love relationships in adulthood. The defining features of infant–mother attachment characterize most love relationships: a desire for closeness to the attachment figure, especially under stress; a sense of security from contact; and distress or protest when threatened with loss or separation (see Weiss, 1982). Bowlby identifies an adult pattern of 'compulsive self-reliance' characterized by an assertion of independence of affectional ties (1980). He posits that, as a result of a history of parental rejection, the attachment systems of compulsively self-reliant adults have become 'deactivated'. These adults are emotionally detached — or, from the point of view of the individual, emotionally self-sufficient — and are not consciously aware of their attachment needs. Unfortunately, this pattern has not been investigated empirically.

Although continuity of attachment-related behaviors has been documented (see Belsky & Pensky, 1988; Bowlby, 1973, 1980; Morris, 1981; Ricks, 1985; and Rutter, 1988 for selective reviews), work has only recently addressed the question of how working models of attachment mediate adult emotional and social adaptation. In a particularly fruitful new line of research, Morris, Main and others have investigated the correspondence between parents' working models of attachment based on descriptions of their own childhood experiences and the quality of their children's attachment (Main et al., 1985; Morris, 1981; Ricks, 1985). Main has developed an Adult Attachment Interview that explores adults' representations of their childhood attachment relations (George et al., 1984; Main & Goldwyn, 1988). It includes questions regarding separations and rejections from parents, and the quality of the

relationship with parents from childhood through to the present. On the basis of the interview, adults are assigned to attachment groups parallel to the three childhood attachment patterns. In fact, the criteria for inclusion in groups were initially derived by comparing the interview transcripts of groups of mothers defined by the attachment classification of their infants.

Those labelled Secure (or free to evaluate attachment) were characterized by ease in recalling childhood experiences, generally positive memories of parental treatment and a valuing of attachment relationships. The Preoccupied or Enmeshed group (corresponding to the childhood ambivalent group) described a mix of closeness with parents and frustrated attempts to gain parental support. Individuals who were classified as Detached or Dismissing of attachment (corresponding to avoidant in childhood) tended to downplay the importance of attachment relationships and the influence of their childhood experiences on present functioning. Their parents were described as cold, disinterested or rejecting, and were especially likely to be remembered as unsupportive in times of stress. These adults also lacked coherence in their childhood accounts, often idealizing their parents in spite of conflicting specific memories.

Main's methodology has proved useful in predicting the quality of mother–child interactions and the security of a child's attachment from a mother's representation of her own childhood experiences (Crowell & Feldman, 1988; Grossmann et al., 1988; Main et al., 1985). The classification system has also been used to predict individual differences in affect regulation and social support among college students (Kobak & Sceery, 1988). Peers rated the Dismissing/Detached group as high on hostility and moderately high on anxiety in comparison with the other two groups. On self-report measures, Dismissing/Detached students displayed levels of subjective distress and social competence equal to the secure group. However, they also rated themselves as lonely and lacking in social support from their families. Kobak & Sceery (1988) interpret the discrepancies between self- and peer-reports of distress as defensive avoidance of acknowledging the experience of negative affect. Hostility in peer relations is interpreted as displacement of anger arising from frustrated attachment needs.

These findings suggest that Main's adult attachment classification predicts individual differences in affect regulation as well as parenting characteristics. However, the quality of peer relations of Dis-

missing/Detached individuals is unclear. Dismissing/Detached college students reported both loneliness, which would not be expected of the truly self-reliant, and high levels of social self-esteem and dating competence. The Adult Attachment Interview is also limited by its focus on representations of childhood experiences as a means of classifying adult attachment. In adulthood, representations of friendships and love relationships would be expected to be at least as important as representations of family relationships in defining a current 'attachment style'. An exclusive focus on child–parent relationships precludes exploring the degree of specificity found in attachment representations. For example, adult models of parent–child attachment are related to quality of childcare — but can these adult models also predict the quality of marital relationships or close friendships? If, as Bowlby claims, an individual's early attachment experiences determine 'the pattern of affectional bonds he [sic] makes during his [sic] life' (1980: 41), a general model of attachment would be expected to operate across social domains.

In contrast to Main's focus on representations of childhood experiences, Hazan & Shaver (1987) have conceptualized romantic love as an attachment process and developed a self-report procedure to differentiate adult attachment styles. Their attachment measure consisted of three brief paragraphs describing adult analogues to the infant attachment styles — secure, ambivalent and avoidant — of which subjects were asked to chose the most self-descriptive. The secure description was characterized by ease of trusting and getting close to others, and the ambivalent description indicated a desire to merge with a partner, coupled with a fear of not being loved sufficiently. The adult version of avoidant attachment ran as follows:

> I am somewhat uncomfortable being close to others; I find it difficult to trust them completely, difficult to allow myself to depend on them. I am nervous when anyone gets too close, and often, love partners want me to be more intimate than I feel comfortable being (p. 515).

In line with the investigators' hypotheses, both groups of insecure adults reported more negative experiences and beliefs about love, a history of shorter romantic relationships and less favorable descriptions of their childhood relationships with parents than did the securely attached adults. As expected, the avoidant subjects were particularly likely to describe their parents as rejecting.

The work of Hazan & Shaver is important because it translates

the childhood attachment paradigm into terms directly relevant to adult relationships. However, the avoidant option describes, at least in part, an active *fear* of closeness rather than a detached approach to relationships. The correlates of this style paint a picture of an individual who distrusts others, but in whom, nonetheless, strong feelings are elicited in attachment relations. Thus, avoidant individuals were similar to ambivalent ones in seeing themselves as having more self-doubts than their secure counterparts and in reporting jealousy and emotional extremes in relationships. These results suggest that a method based on endorsement of an explicit definition of avoidance may be inadequate to identify the defensive self-reliance described by Bowlby (cf. Hazan & Shaver, 1987). This pattern parallels the avoidant pattern in childhood, but it only partially corresponds to the defensive self-reliance described by Bowlby. Although avoidant of close relationships, adults showing this pattern appear to be aware of their unfulfilled attachment needs.

In summary, empirical studies support the utility of studying adult relationships (in particular, parent–child and love relationships) within an attachment perspective. Although both methods of operationalizing adult attachment styles conceptualize adult avoidance along lines suggested by Bowlby, as a deactivation of the attachment system, the results to date are difficult to reconcile with this interpretation. While the two approaches undoubtedly identify overlapping avoidant groups, each may tend to capture a different aspect of adult avoidance: the interview technique appears to primarily identify adults who deny attachment needs, and the self-report method adults who fear intimacy. Since in both cases the rating criteria for the adult attachment groupings were explicitly defined to correspond to child attachment classifications, the groupings may not be ideally suited to understanding variations in adult-attachment relations. In particular, a single avoidant–detached category, although adequate for classifying infant attachment, may obscure different patterns of avoidance in adulthood. Building on this work, a more comprehensive conceptualization of adult avoidance will be suggested. Particular attention will be given to distinguishing between *behavioral* tendencies to avoid close relationships and *subjective* awareness of attachment needs and fears of intimacy.

Toward a definition of adult avoidance

To address these issues, I propose an expanded model of adult attachment that builds upon models of the self and others derived from the literature on childhood attachment. In this analysis, the criteria for judgment of attachment styles will be based upon characteristics of the subjects' current relationships with peers (including friends and romantic partners) along the lines pioneered by Hazan & Shaver. Once established, that classification can then be related empirically to the person's current representations of childhood experiences as well as actual childhood experiences.

Figure 1 systematizes Bowlby's conception of internal working models by organizing different patterns of adult attachment in terms of the intersection of models of the self and other. As discussed earlier, models of the self and other are built interactionally; young children may confound their perceptions of the attachment figure's availability and their own love-worthiness. Models of the self can be dichotomized as either positive (positive self-concept, the self as worthy of love and attention) or negative (negative self-concept, the self as unworthy). Similarly, models of the other can be viewed as either positive (the other as trustworthy, caring, available) or negative (the other as rejecting, uncaring, distant).

Figure 1 shows how each working model of the self in combination with each working model of the other defines an adult attachment style. Each of the four styles represent theoretical ideals, or prototypes. The concept of a prototype has been used to describe 'fuzzy' sets, where members of a category vary in their typicality (Cantor et al., 1980; Rosch, 1978). Because images of the self and of others are derived from numerous heterogeneous experiences over a person's lifetime, no person's actual experiences will uniformly match the prototype of a single cell of Figure 1. Thus, not all individuals are expected to exhibit a single attachment style as has often been implicitly assumed in previous attachment work; rather some may show differing degrees of similarity to two or more prototypes. When a person in the final analysis is described as best matching one of the four cells, this means only that the person's experiences have generally led to outcomes that more closely approximate that cell than the other three cells. Moreover, by rating individuals' degrees of correspondence with each prototype, they can be placed within the space defined by the intersection of self and other models, rather than simply assigned a single label.

FIGURE 1
Styles of adult attachment

MODEL OF OTHER (Avoidance)	MODEL OF SELF (Dependence)	
	Positive (Low)	**Negative** (High)
Positive (Low)	**SECURE** Comfortable with intimacy and autonomy	**PREOCCUPIED** Preoccupied (Main) Ambivalent (Hazan) Overly dependent
Negative (High)	**DISMISSING** Denial of Attachment Dismissing (Main) Counter-dependent	**FEARFUL** Fear of Attachment Avoidant (Hazan) Socially avoidant

For example, an individual who does not correspond at all to the preoccupied or fearful prototypes, but shows aspects of both the secure and dismissing styles would be positive with respect to one dimension (positive self-image), but neutral with respect to the other dimension. This model thereby allows for complexity in describing the attachment styles expected to characterize adults.

Now let us consider each of the four cells more closely. *Secure* attachment is represented in the upper left cell of Figure 1. Warm and responsive parenting is expected to give rise to positive models of both the self and other, resulting in secure and fulfilling adult relationships. This style corresponds to the Secure group as identified in prior research. Secure individuals display high self-esteem and an absence of serious interpersonal problems.

A *preoccupied* attachment style is indicated in the upper right. Children who experience inconsistent and insensitive parenting, especially if accompanied by messages of parental devotion, may conclude that their own unworthiness explains any lack of love on the caregiver's part. The result is a preoccupied overly dependent style characterized by an insatiable desire to gain others' approval and a deep-seated feeling of unworthiness. This pattern corresponds to the Ambivalent and Preoccupied-Enmeshed styles identified in previous research.

The bottom cells represent two forms of adult avoidance presumed to result from a history of rejecting or psychologically unavailable attachment figures. Consistent with the idea that models of the self and other are built interactionally, rejected children would tend to conclude that others are uncaring and unavailable and perhaps, in addition, that they themselves are unlovable. This pattern is indicated in the lower right cell (negative self and negative other model) and will be referred to as *fearful* avoidance. Like avoidant children, these individuals experience frustrated attachment needs. They desire social contact and intimacy, but experience pervasive interpersonal distrust and fear of rejection. The result is subjective distress and disturbed social relations characterized by a hypersensitivity to social approval. To preclude the possibility of rejection, such individuals actively avoid social situations and close relationships in which they perceive themselves as vulnerable to rejection. In the process, they undermine the possibility of establishing satisfying social relations which could serve to modify early attachment representations. The *fearful* style has not been explicitly discussed in previous work in adult attachment, although it may overlap with the avoidant group identified by Hazan & Shaver (1987). Taken to an extreme, this pattern corresponds to the avoidant personality disorder as described in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (American Psychiatric Association, 1987).

The bottom left cell reflects a more complex strategy in which attachment needs are denied or, in Bowlby's terms, the attachment system is deactivated. A way of maintaining a positive self-image in the face of rejection by attachment figures is to distance oneself and develop a model of the self as fully adequate and hence invulnerable to negative feelings which might activate the attachment system. In a sense, this pattern is equivalent to a permanent adoption of the avoidant stance observed in infants during the Strange Situation. Therefore, correlates of infant avoidance such as displacement behaviors (e.g. preoccupation with achievement), blunted affect and perhaps even physiological arousal would be expected. In this case, however, defensive avoidance is successful. Over time, the strategies used to defend against the awareness of attachment needs become so engrained as to operate automatically and largely outside of awareness. Individuals with this style passively avoid close relationships; they place much value on independence and assert that relationships are relatively unimportant. A focus on imper-

sonal aspects of life, such as work or hobbies, is also expected. This style corresponds closely to Main's Detached or Dismissing of Attachment group and will therefore be referred to as *dismissing*.

The two dimensions in Figure 1 can also be conceptualized in terms of social response styles (see labels in parentheses). On the horizontal axis a dependent response style can vary from low (where self-esteem is largely internalized and does not require external validation) to high (where self-esteem requires others' ongoing acceptance). The vertical axis can be understood behaviorally as reflecting the degree of avoidance of close contact with others. Thus, according to Figure 1, dependency and avoidance can vary independently. Both the *dismissing* and *fearful* groups show avoidance of close relationships, but differ in the importance placed upon others' acceptance. This difference is reflected in greater susceptibility to loneliness and depression stemming from interpersonal sources on the part of the *fearful* avoidant group. Similarly, both the *preoccupied* and *fearful* groups are characterized by strong dependency needs, despite striking differences in behavioral approaches to relationships. While the overtly dependent reach out to others in an attempt to fulfill dependency needs, the *fearful* defensively shun closeness to minimize the potential pain of loss or rejection. The two groups share, however, a desire for close involvements, susceptibility to depression stemming from interpersonal sources, fear of rejection and low self-confidence.

More generally, the dimensions of self and other models are conceptually parallel to the higher-order constructs of individuation and connectedness. In attachment terms, secure attachment facilitates both processes by providing a 'secure base' from which to engage in independent exploration (Ainsworth et al., 1978). The two forms of avoidance proposed capture different imbalances in these two fundamental dimensions of human experience. The *dismissing* have attained autonomy and a sense of self-worth at the expense of intimacy, while the *fearful* have difficulties with both autonomy and intimacy.

The question arises as to what developmentally differentiates the two patterns of adult avoidance proposed. In early childhood, models of the self and other are not expected to be well formed and certainly not clearly differentiated. Rather it is continuity in the quality of the family environment that appears to be largely responsible for continuity in attachment-related behaviors. It is only over the course of time that the quality of attachment relations is inte-

grated into stable and self-sustaining internal representations. In fact, Bowlby sees the formative years of models of attachment extending into adolescence (1980). Thus while both patterns of adult avoidance are hypothesized to have their roots in early childhood experiences, there are undoubtedly many other factors that determine adult outcomes.

What kinds of parent–child interactions or other life experiences might account for the differing self-images of *fearful* and *dismissing* adults? While no empirical evidence directly addresses this question, it seems likely that the parents of *fearful* and *dismissing* adults differed in their child-rearing practices in ways that differentially affected their children as they moved into later childhood. For example, the parents of fearfully avoidant adults may have freely expressed negative affect toward and in front of their children, leading to fearfulness and the avoidance of interpersonal conflict on the part of rejected children. In contrast, the parents of those with a *dismissing* style may have discouraged the open expression of negative affect, displaying a pervasive coolness in interactions with their children and deficits in emotional availability and sensitivity. These parents may thereby have communicated to their children that it is unacceptable to experience or express negative feelings, contributing to a defensive negation of feelings that might undermine self-esteem. As children, the *dismissing* may also have been encouraged by parents to value non-social domains such as school or sport achievements more highly than the attainment of intimate relations; therefore, a lack of close relationships may not have been interpreted as reflecting negatively on the self.

Among non-familial factors, peer acceptance, or at least lack of rejection, may be particularly important in facilitating the construction of a positive as opposed to negative self-image. Those with a *fearful* avoidant style may have had more experiences of active rejection by peers, while those showing a *dismissing* style may have maintained superficial but less overtly problematic social relations. In addition, temperamentally inhibited children (Kagan, 1989) may be especially prone to developing a *fearful* style in the face of perceived rejection by parents or peers. In contrast, temperamentally less reactive children who experience rejection may be relatively more successful in cutting off their experience of negative affect, thereby facilitating the achievement of a detached interpersonal stance in later childhood.

In summary, patterns of adult avoidance of intimacy can be

understood in a broad developmental context as more or less successful attempts to regulate negative feelings within close relationships. While the developmental antecedents of the two patterns of avoidance are unclear, their differing combinations of self and other models are expected to be concurrently manifest in distinct patterns of emotional regulation and social interaction.

Emotional regulation

Bowlby argues that 'the psychology and psychopathology of emotion is found to be in large part the psychology and psychopathology of affectional bonds' (1980: 40). Yet little is known of the phenomenological or subjective aspects of emotional experience of avoidant adults. Adults with an active fear of close relations may inhibit the social expression of negative affect in order to avoid alienating others. Nevertheless, a negative self model or view of the self is expected to be accompanied by considerable distress. For example, an association between negative self-schemas and depression has been demonstrated in both clinical and non-clinical populations (e.g. Derry & Kuiper, 1981; Pietromonaco & Markus, 1985). Correspondingly, individuals with this style should report subjective distress associated with their social fears and low self-confidence. And although they avoid close relationships in order to prevent rejection, they are also expected to experience distress *because* of their lack of intimacy with others. Like their childhood counterparts, *fearful* adults are caught in an approach–avoidance conflict: both lack of social intimacy and the prospect of vulnerability in intimate relations are anxiety provoking.

But what of the *dismissing* group that denies interest in close relationships? The *dismissing* hold views of themselves and others that downplay the importance of attachment relationships. By isolating themselves from negative affective experiences, they avoid the anger and anxiety anticipated from activation of the attachment system. A *dismissing* style can thus be interpreted as a defensive process designed to prevent the experience of negative affect and the arousal of attachment behaviors (cf. Cassidy & Kobak, 1988). The literature on defensive emotional styles may therefore shed light on the subjective experiences of *dismissing* individuals.

Weinberger (in press) has recently reviewed evidence for a defensive (repressive) style characterized by a motivated exclusion from conscious awareness of negative affect, despite tendencies to behave and physiologically respond in ways indicative of high

anxiety. He argues that *repressors* successfully employ a range of defensive strategies to avoid threats to their self-conceptions as well-adjusted self-controlled individuals. Similarly, *dismissing* individuals, despite evidence of difficult early attachment experiences, appear to have isolated their affective reactions from their cognitive representations of early events and developed a model of themselves as impervious to future rejection.

As Bowlby (1980) points out, the strongest human emotions, both positive and negative, typically arise within attachment relationships. Thus, a defensive style characterized by an exclusion from awareness of negative affect may be maintained by an avoidance of close relationships. Conversely, defensive exclusion of information and feelings which would be likely to activate attachment needs permits the maintenance of a detached interpersonal stance (cf. Bowlby, 1982a). A defensive emotional style and *dismissing* interpersonal style may thereby mutually support and reinforce one another.

There is evidence that individuals showing a defensive style display aspects of a *dismissing* interpersonal style. The Marlowe–Crowne Social Desirability Scale, commonly used to identify defensiveness, measures a defensive avoidance of thoughts and feelings which may lead to interpersonal conflict. High defensiveness has been associated with a number of deficits in social competence such as lack of empathy and insensitivity to social cues (for a review see Weinberger, in press). Pellegrine (1971) reports that repressors presenting at a university counseling center tended to deny that they experienced interpersonal problems and yet on the basis of an intake interview were judged to 'shy away from deep interpersonal involvement' (p. 335). Dion & Dion (1985a, 1985b) report that in comparison to the less defensive, highly defensive subjects reported falling in love less frequently and expressed more cynical views toward love. Results of an experimental study further suggested that defensive females were less likely to reciprocate intimacy, disliked self-disclosure by others, and appeared particularly uncomfortable with opposite sex peers.

In summary, *fearful* and *dismissing* attachment styles can also be conceptualized in terms of styles of emotional regulation. While the high levels of subjective distress associated with a fear of close attachments should be readily reportable, the defensive emotional style associated with a *dismissing* style is intrinsically more difficult to document. In addition, the problems associated with emotional

defensiveness are not as obvious as those associated with excessive distress. However, the coping literature identifies a number of potential costs of defensively avoiding awareness of threatening stimuli that may also apply to the attachment domain. Such a strategy may result in emotional numbness, intrusions of threatening material, a lack of awareness of the connection between threatening stimuli and psychological or somatic symptoms, and a general breakdown in functioning when broached (Roth & Cohen, 1986; Weinberger, in press). Consistent with the latter suggestion, Bowlby (1980) found that the compulsively self-reliant were at risk for pathological mourning upon death of a spouse. Thus, there are potentially serious emotional concomitants to both styles of avoidant attachment identified.

Interpersonal interaction

In early childhood, stability of interaction patterns in specific attachment relationships mediates continuities in attachment. But in time, attachment experiences are presumed to become internalized in models of the self and other. Correspondingly, the initial work on adult attachment has taken a decidedly cognitive bent (e.g. Bretherton, 1985; Main et al., 1985). But defining adult attachment in terms of working models should not overshadow the fact that individual differences in styles of interpersonal interaction are the fundamental phenomena that attachment theory is designed to explain. In this section, interpersonal mechanisms through which working models are expected to be externalized and maintained will be discussed. In particular, selective affiliation and characteristic interaction patterns will be examined within the context of the marital relationship.

The interactive role of personality dispositions (self-concepts, working models) and interpersonal behaviors has been examined in interpersonal approaches to personality (e.g. Sullivan, 1953; Leary, 1957; Swann, 1983). These approaches recognize that self-conceptions are developed and maintained within social contexts. For instance, Swann (1983) discusses 'self-verification' processes through which people induce others to verify their self-images. Selective affiliation refers to the tendency to seek out social contexts which provide self-confirmatory feedback. This mechanism has been demonstrated in the maintenance of both positive and negative self-conceptions (e.g. Swann & Pelham, 1987), with relationships in which congruent feedback is obtained tending to be more

stable (Swann & Predmore, 1985). Selective affiliation in the form of avoidance of social contacts and the selection of social partners with whom a safe distance can be maintained is expected to be central in maintaining adult patterns of avoidance.

There have been a limited number of investigations of the role of selective affiliation in the attachment domain. Bowlby (1980) observed that the compulsively self-reliant chose not to utilize available sources of social support in times of crisis, presumably because of a hesitancy to trust others and a fear of dependence. Similarly, low-income mothers of avoidant infants were observed to avoid developing supportive relationships (Crittenden, 1985), and Dismissing college students reported low levels of support from their families (Kobak & Sceery, 1988). These findings are consistent with recent developments in the social support literature which focus on how stable individual differences influence the quality of received support (Sarason et al., 1986). However, the voluntary regulation of interpersonal distance in adult friendships and love relationships has not yet been addressed.

The processes which have been most extensively investigated are interpersonal interaction sequences, consistent behavior patterns which characterize social interaction. Evidence suggests that people adopt interaction strategies that elicit self-confirmatory feedback from others (see Swann, 1983 and 1987). Based on the work of Leary (1957), a circumplex model has been developed which provides a heuristic of the universe of interpersonal behaviors (see Wiggins, 1979; Kiesler, 1983). Behavior is conceptualized as falling on the Interpersonal Circle, as jointly defined by two dimensions: control (submission to dominance) and affiliation (friendliness to hostility). The model hypothesizes that behaviors elicit corresponding behaviors on the affiliation dimension (i.e. friendliness begets friendliness) and complementary behaviors on the control dimension (i.e. dominance begets submission). It can be applied to both specific interaction sequences and to general styles of interaction. Maladaptive interaction patterns are characterized by lack of flexibility in shifting around the interpersonal circle in response to situational demands and extreme levels of a particular interpersonal style (Kiesler, 1983).

The circumplex model provides a useful framework for studying the interactive component of avoidance. Deficits in both reciprocity and flexibility characterize avoidant infants. For instance, avoidant infants do not respond to friendly overtures by their mothers in the

Strange Situation and instigate unprovoked aggression toward their mothers at home (e.g. Ainsworth et al., 1978). At later ages, these children exhibit disturbed social relations including unprovoked aggression, lack of responsiveness to friendly overtures and lack of reciprocity in peer relations (e.g. George & Main, 1979; Lieberman, 1977). Although avoidant children are responsive to environmental conditions, they are limited in their social repertoires as indicated by, for example, limited expression of positive affect in social situations (Sroufe, 1983a; Waters et al., 1979).

Consistent with the finding that self-reports of preferred interpersonal distance are positively associated with the hostility dimension (Gifford & O'Connor, 1987), both *fearful* and *dismissing* adults are expected to score on the hostile side of the Interpersonal Circle. Based on their passivity in social relations, actively *fearful* adults are further expected to exhibit an interpersonal style falling into the passive–hostile quadrant of the Interpersonal Circle, a style variously labelled as introverted, aloof or socially avoidant. The principles of reciprocity would predict that such a style would invite dominant–hostile or rejecting responses from others, thereby confirming negative self and other models. In contrast, based on their self-assurance, *dismissing* individuals are expected to score in the dominant–hostile quadrant, exhibiting a controlling and overtly hostile style referred to as competitive or arrogant and calculating. Consistent with this prediction, Kobak & Sceery (1988) report that peers rate Dismissing/Detached college students as high in hostility.

From the perspectives of both attachment theory and interpersonal theory, individual differences in interpersonal styles are expected to be highlighted in relationships with 'significant others' (Bowlby, 1977; Kiesler, 1983). On an intrapsychic level, 'the deeper the relationship and the stronger the emotions aroused the more likely are the earlier and less conscious models to become dominant' (Bowlby, 1977: 209). Enduring love relationships are probably the most important attachment relationships in adult life. The marital relationship is the primary source of social support in adulthood, and extra-marital relations may not readily compensate for unsupportive marriages (see Coyne and DeLongis, 1986). A close supportive relationship with a sexual partner has been found to protect against the impact of adverse life events (e.g. Brown et al., 1975) and may even play a therapeutic role in obviating the effects of difficult early attachment relationships (Brown & Harris, 1978; Quinton et al., 1984; Rutter, 1988). In a sample of adolescent

mothers, high support from sexual partners protected against the tendency for childhood rejection to be passed on in angry and punitive parenting (Crockenberg, 1987).

Indirect evidence supports the hypothesis that insecure childhood attachment constitutes a risk factor for later marital difficulties (Ricks, 1985; Rutter, 1988). However, information is lacking on how distinct insecure patterns differentially affect marital relations. Adult attachment styles are expected to influence the quality of marriage through both partner selection and characteristic interaction strategies. In particular, adults that avoid close attachments may choose partners similar to themselves in order to maintain a safe interpersonal distance. Or they may choose partners who are inherently unavailable for intimacy by dint of such factors as physical distance, competing romantic attachments, substance abuse, or preoccupation with work (cf. Morris, 1981). Alternatively, avoidant individuals may choose dependent or preoccupied partners in order to validate their perceived need to maintain psychological distance — a *preoccupied* partner may in fact desire a pathological level of closeness with romantic partners. The nature of selective affiliation across attachment styles, especially as predictive of marital satisfaction and stability, is clearly a rich area for future study.

Independent of initial partner choice, the distancing expected of both *fearful* and *dismissing* individuals may serve to fuel dependency needs in their partners. In a pattern commonly discussed in the clinical literature (e.g. the 'rejection–intrusion cycle' described by Napier, 1978), increased dependent behavior induces further distancing, leading to a self-perpetuating and mutually frustrating positive feedback loop. In a study utilizing Hazan & Shaver's (1987) self-report attachment styles (Bartholomew, 1987, unpublished), global self-ratings on the avoidant style and highly dependent, ambivalent style were independent, $r = -0.13$, d.f. = 86, n.s. (cf. Levy & Davis, 1988); however, within a given romantic relationship subjects' ratings of avoidance in themselves and ambivalence in their partners were significantly positively correlated ($r = 0.41$, d.f. = 86, $p < 0.001$). At the very least, individuals wary of intimacy may be biased toward perceiving overdependency in romantic partners, and thereby activating self-fulfilling interaction patterns.

Interaction sequences similar to those expected in relationships involving avoidant adults have been documented in the marital interaction literature. Based on a selective literature review, Gottman & Levenson (1988) describe a pattern in which men in unhappy

marriages avoid interpersonal conflict by practising emotional withdrawal. Withdrawal is associated with escalation in negative affect on the part of spouses, leading to a positive feedback loop. This strategy of inhibiting the expression of negative affect — referred to as 'stonewalling' — is accompanied by flat emotional expression and physiological arousal. Stonewalling bears a striking similarity to the avoidant stance observed in infants in the Strange Situation. Methods developed to study behavioral and physiological components of marital interaction are therefore expected to be well suited to the analysis of adult avoidance. Moreover, individual differences in adult attachment styles may shed light on the development of maladaptive marital patterns.

In summary, individuals with a *dismissing* or *fearful* attachment style are expected to choose social environments and partners and to exhibit interactive patterns that confirm their disinterest in or fears of establishing close attachments. The two groups are hypothesized to differ in degrees of social dominance, with the *fearful* avoidant adopting a more passive introverted stance and the *dismissing* a more hostile controlling stance. But it is unclear how individuals exhibiting the two styles may differ in their choices of intimate partners. In both cases, however, avoidance of intimacy pre-empts the possibility of establishing satisfying close relationships that could help update negative models of others that may no longer be appropriate, in turn facilitating further intimacy. Consistent with interpersonal theory, the internal representations and patterns of social interaction of the *fearful* and *dismissing* mutually support and perpetuate one another.

Summary

I have proposed that adult avoidance of intimacy has its roots in early attachment experiences in which emotional vulnerability comes to be associated with parental rejection. Adverse experiences result in negative models of others that are hypothesized to mediate adult avoidance of close relationships. Unlike children, adults differ in their conscious awareness of unfulfilled attachment needs. Two styles of adult avoidance are therefore proposed: a *fearful* style, characterized by a conscious desire for social contact counteracted by fears of the consequences of attachment, and a *dismissing* style, characterized by a defensive denial of the need or

desire for attachment bonds. This distinction is represented by differing models of the self: the *fearful* view themselves as being undeserving of the love and support of others, and the *dismissing* possess a positive self model that minimizes the subjective awareness of distress or social needs that might activate the desire for close attachments. Avoidance of intimacy is thus hypothesized to be a complex phenomenon with a rich developmental history. It is hoped that an attachment perspective will be helpful in guiding empirical studies of this important but neglected topic.

REFERENCES

Ainsworth, M.D.S. (1982) 'Attachment: Retrospect and prospect', in C.M. Parkes & J. Stevenson-Hinde (eds) *The Place of Attachment in Human Behavior*. New York: Basic Books.

Ainsworth, M.D.S. (1989) 'Attachment beyond infancy', *American Psychologist* 44: 709–16.

Ainsworth, M.D.S., Blehar, M.C., Waters, E. & Wall, S. (1978) *Patterns of attachment: A psychological study of the Strange Situation*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

American Psychiatric Association (1987) *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 3rd edn, revised. Washington DC: American Psychiatric Association.

Angyal, A. (1941) *Foundations for a science of personality*. New York: Commonwealth Fund and Harvard University Press.

Arend, R., Gove, F., & Sroufe, L.A. (1979) 'Continuity of individual adaptation from infancy to kindergarten: A predictive study of ego-resiliency and curiosity in preschoolers', *Child Development* 50: 950–9.

Atkinson, R.N., Heyns, R.W. & Veroff, J. (1954) 'The effect of experimental arousal of the affiliation motive on thematic apperception', *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 49: 405–10.

Bakan, D. (1966) *The Duality of Human Existence*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Bartholomew, K. (1987) 'Assessment of adult attachment status within romantic relationships', unpublished raw data. Stanford University.

Belsky, J. & Pensky, E. (1988) 'Developmental history, personality, and family relationships: Toward an emergent family system', in R.A. Hinde & J. Stevenson-Hinde (eds) *Relationships within Families*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Bowlby, J. (1973) *Attachment and loss: Vol. 2 Separation*. New York: Basic.

Bowlby, J. (1977) 'The making and breaking of affectional bonds', *British Journal of Psychiatry* 130: 201–10.

Bowlby, J. (1980) *Attachment and loss: Vol. 3. Loss, sadness and depression*. New York: Basic.

Bowlby, J. (1982a) 'Attachment and loss: Retrospect and prospect', *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 52: 664–78.

Bowlby, J. (1982b) *Attachment and loss: Vol. 1. Attachment* (2d). New York: Basic. (Original work published 1969.)

Bretherton, I. (1985) 'Attachment theory, Retrospect and prospect', in I. Bretherton & E. Waters (eds) *Growing points in attachment theory and research, Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development* 50: 3–38.

Brown, G.W., Bhrolchain, M.N. & Harris, T. (1975) 'Social class and psychiatric disturbance among women in an urban population', *Sociology* 9: 225–54.

Brown, G.W. & Harris, T. (1978) *Social origins of depression.* London: Tavistock.

Cantor, N., Smith, E.E., French, R. deS. & Mezzich, J. (1980) 'Psychiatric diagnosis as prototype categorization', *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 89: 181–93.

Cassidy, J. & Kobak, R. (1988) 'Avoidance and its relation to other defensive processes', in J. Belsky & T. Nezworski (eds) *Clinical Implications of Attachment.* Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Cobb, S. (1976) 'Social support as a moderator of life stress', *Psychosomatic Medicine* 38: 300–14.

Coyne, J.C. & DeLongis, A. (1986) 'Going beyond social support: The role of social relationships in adaptation', *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 54: 454–60.

Crittenden, P.M. (1985) 'Social networks, quality of child rearing, and child development', *Child Development* 56: 1299–1313.

Crockenberg, S. (1987) 'Predictors and correlates of anger toward and punitive control of toddlers by adolescent mothers', *Child Development* 59: 964–75.

Crowell, J.A. & Feldman, S.S. (1988) 'Mothers' internal models of relationships and children's behavioral and developmental status: A study of mother–child interaction', *Child Development* 59: 1273–85.

Derry, P.A. & Kuiper, N.A. (1981) 'Schematic processing and self-reference in clinical depression', *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 49: 286–97.

Dion, K.K. & Dion, K.L. (1985a) 'Individual differences in the experience of love', paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association, Los Angeles, CA.

Dion, K.K. & Dion, K.L. (1985b) 'Personality, gender, and the phenomenology of romantic love', in P.R. Shaver (ed.) *Self, situations and behavior: Review of Personality and Social Psychology, Vol. 6.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Egeland, B. & Farber, E.A. (1984) 'Infant–mother attachment: Factors related to its development and changes over time', *Child Development* 55: 753–71.

Erikson, E.H. (1963) *Childhood and society* (2nd Ed.). New York: Norton.

Fraiberg, S. (1982) 'Pathological defenses in infancy', *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 51: 612–35.

Freedman, J. (1978) *Happy People: What happiness is, who has it, and why.* New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch.

Frodi, A. & Thompson, R. (1985) 'Infants' affective responses in the strange situation: Effects of prematurity and of quality of attachment', *Child Development* 56: 1280–90.

George, C., Kaplan, N. & Main, M. (1984) 'The attachment interview for adults', unpublished manuscript, University of California, Berkeley.

George, C. & Main, M. (1979) 'Social interactions of young abused children: Approach, avoidance, and aggression', *Child Development* 50: 306–18.

Gifford, R. & O'Connor, B. (1987) 'The Interpersonal Circumplex as a behavior map', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 52: 1019–26.

Gilligan, C. (1982) *In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Gottman, J.M. & Levenson, R.W. (1988) 'The social psychophysiology of marriage', in P. Noller & M.A. Fitzpatrick (eds) *Perspective on marital interaction*. Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters Ltd.

Grossmann, K.E., Grossmann, K. & Schwan, A. (1986) 'Capturing the wider view of attachment: a reanalysis of Ainsworth's Strange Situation', in C.E. Izard & P.B. Read (eds) *Measuring emotions in infants and children, Vol. II*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Grossmann, K., Fremmer-Bombik, E., Rudolf, J. & Grossmann, K.E. (1988) 'Maternal attachment representations as related to patterns of infant–mother attachment and maternal care during the first year', in R.A. Hinde & J. Stevenson-Hinde (eds) *Relationships within Families*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Gurian, J.P. & Gurian, J.M. (1983) *The Dependency Tendency: Returning to Each Other in Modern America*. New York: University Press of America.

Hatfield, E. (1984) 'The dangers of intimacy', in V.J. Derlega (ed.) *Communication, intimacy and close relationships*. Hillsdale, NJ: Academic Press.

Hazan, C., & Shaver, P. (1987) 'Conceptualizing romantic love as an attachment process', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 52: 511–24.

Jemmott, J.B. (1987) 'Social motives and susceptibility to disease: Stalking individual differences in health risks', *Journal of Personality* 55: 267–98.

Kagan, J. (1989) 'Temperamental contributions to social behavior', *American Psychologist* 44: 668–74.

Kaplan, N. (1987) 'Internal representations of attachment in six-year-olds', paper presented at the biennial meetings of the Society for Research in Child Development, Baltimore, Maryland.

Kiesler, D.J. (1983) 'The 1982 Interpersonal Circle: A taxonomy for complementarity in human transactions', *Psychological Review* 90: 185–214.

Klinger, E. (1977) *Meaning and void: Inner experience and the incentives in people's lives*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Kobak, R.R. & Sceery, A. (1988) 'Attachment in late adolescence: Working models, affect regulation and representations of self and others', *Child Development* 59: 135–46.

Lamb, M.E., Thompson, R.A., Gardner, W.P., Charnov, E.L., & Estes, D. (1985) 'Security of infantile attachment as assessed in the "Strange Situation": Its study and biological interpretation', in S. Chess & A. Thomas (eds) *Annual Progress in Child Psychiatry and Child Development 1985*. New York: Brunner/Mazel.

Leary, T. (1957) *Interpersonal diagnosis of personality*. New York: Ronald.

Levy, M.B. & Davis, K.E. (1988) 'Lovestyles and attachment styles compared: Their relations to each other and to various relationship characteristics', *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 5: 439–71.

Lieberman, A.F. (1977) 'Preschoolers' competence with a peer: Relations with attachment and peer experience', *Child Development* 48: 1277–87.

Lutwak, N. (1985) 'Fear of intimacy among college women', *Adolescence* 77: 15–20.

Lynch, J.J. (1977) *The broken heart: The medical consequences of loneliness in America*. New York: Basic Books.

McAdams, D.P. (1980) 'A thematic coding system for the intimacy motive', *Journal of Research in Personality* 14: 413–32.

Main, M. (1981) 'Avoidance in the service of attachment: A working paper', in K. Immelman, G. Barlow, M. Main & L. Petrinovitch (eds) *Behavioral Develop-*

ment: The Bielefeld Interdisciplinary Project. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Main, M. & Goldwyn, R. (1988) 'An adult attachment classification system', unpublished manuscript, University of California, Berkeley.

Main, M., Kaplan, N. & Cassidy, J. (1985) 'Security in infancy, childhood, and adulthood: A move to the level of representation', in I. Bretherton & E. Waters (eds) *Growing points in attachment theory and research, Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development* 50: 66–106.

Main, M. & Weston, D.R. (1981) 'The quality of the toddler's relationship to mother and to father: Related to conflict behavior and the readiness to establish new relationships', *Child Development* 52: 932–40.

Main, M. & Weston, D.R. (1982) 'Avoidance of the attachment figure in infancy: Descriptions and interpretations', in C.M. Parkes & J. Stevenson-Hinde (eds) *The place of attachment in human behavior.* London: Tavistock.

Matas, L., Arend, R.A. & Sroufe, L.A. (1978) 'Continuity of adaptation in the second year: The relationship between quality of attachment and later competence', *Child Development* 49: 547–56.

Memmi, A. (1984) *Dependence: A Sketch for a Portrait of the Dependent.* Translated by P.A. Facey. Boston: Beacon Press.

Morris, D. (1981) 'Attachment and intimacy', in G. Stricter (ed.) *Intimacy.* New York: Plenum.

Napier, A.Y (1978) 'The rejection–intrusion pattern: A central family dynamic', *Journal of Marriage and Family Counseling* 4: 5–12.

Orlofsky, J.L., Marcia, J.E. & Lesser, I. (1973) 'Ego identity status and the intimacy versus isolation crisis of young adulthood', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 27: 211–19.

Pellegrine, R.J. (1971) 'Repression-sensitization and perceived severity of presenting problem of four-hundred-and-forty-four counseling center clients', *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 18: 332–6.

Peplau, L.A. & Perlman, D. (1982) *Loneliness: A Sourcebook of current theory, research and therapy.* New York: Wiley-Interscience.

Pietromonaco, P.R. & Markus, H. (1985) 'The nature of negative thoughts in depression', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 48: 799–807.

Quinton, D., Rutter, M., & Liddle, C. (1984) 'Institutional rearing, parenting difficulties, and marital support', *Psychological Medicine* 14: 107–24.

Ricks, M. (1985) 'The social transmission of parental behavior: Attachment across generations', in I. Bretherton & E. Waters (eds) *Growing points in attachment theory and research, Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development* 50: 211–30.

Rosch, E. (1978) 'Principles of categorization', in E. Rosch & B.B. Lloyd (eds) *Cognition and categorization.* Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Roth, S. & Cohen. L.J. (1986) 'Approach, avoidance, and coping with stress', *American Psychologist* 41: 813–19.

Rutter, M. (1988) 'Functions and consequences of relationships: some psychopathological considerations', in R.A. Hinde & J. Stevenson-Hinde (eds) *Relationships within Families.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Sarason, I.G., Sarason, B.R. & Shearin, E.N. (1986) 'Social support as an individual difference variable: Its stability, origins, and relational aspects', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 50: 845–55.

Shaver, P.R. & Hazan, C. (1988) 'A biased overview of the study of love', *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 5: 473–501.

Shaver, P.R., Hazan, C. & Bradshaw, D. (1988) 'Love as attachment: The integration of three behavioral systems', in R.J. Sternberg & M. Barnes (eds) *The Psychology of Love*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Sroufe, L.A. (1983a) 'Infant-caregiver attachment and patterns of adaptation in preschool: The roots of maladaption and competence', in M. Perlmutter (ed.) *Minnesota symposium in child psychology, Vol. 16*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Sroufe, L.A. (1983b) 'Socioemotional development', in J.D. Osofsky (ed.) *Handbook of Infant Development*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Sroufe, L.A. & Waters, E. (1977) 'Heart rate as a convergent measure in clinical and developmental research', *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly* 23: 3–25.

Sroufe, L.A., Fox, N.E. & Pancake, V.R. (1983) 'Attachment and dependency in developmental perspective', *Child Development* 54: 1615–27.

Sullivan, H.S. (1953) *The interpersonal theory of psychiatry*. New York: Norton.

Swann, W.B. (1983) 'Self-verification: Bringing social reality into harmony with the self', in J. Suls and A.G. Greenwald (eds) *Psychological Perspectives on the Self, Vol. 2*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Swann, W.B. (1987) 'Identity negotiation: Where two roads meet', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 53: 1038–51.

Swann, W.B. & Pelham, B.W. (1987) 'To be known or to be adored: Selection of relationship partners and the self', unpublished manuscript, University of Texas, Austin.

Swann, W.B. & Predmore, S.C. (1985) 'Intimates as agents of social support: Sources of consolation or despair?', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 49: 1609–17.

Vaughn, B., Egeland, B., Sroufe, L.A. & Waters, E. (1979) 'Individual differences in infant–mother attachment at twelve and eighteen months: Stability and change in families under stress', *Child Development* 50: 971–5.

Waters, E. (1978) 'The reliability and stability of individual differences in infant–mother attachment', *Child Development* 49: 483–94.

Waters, E., Wippman, J. & Sroufe, L.A. (1979) 'Attachment, positive affect, and competence in the peer group: Two studies in construct validation', *Child Development* 50: 821–9.

Weinberger, D.A. (in press) 'The construct validity of the repressive coping style', in J.L. Singer (ed.) *Repression and dissociation: Defense mechanisms and personality styles*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Weiss, R.S. (1982) 'Attachment in adult life', in C.M. Parkes & J. Stevenson-Hinde (eds), *The place of attachment in human behavior*. London: Tavistock.

Wiggins, J.S. (1979) 'A psychological taxonomy of trait-descriptive terms: The interpersonal domain', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 37: 395–412.