

## COUPLE-YOUTH ATTACHMENT AND DEMAND WITHDRAW COMMUNICATION PATTERN IN THE RELATIONSHIP

FATAHYAH YAHYA, NUR FATIHAH MATT YUSOFF, ABD HAKIM MOHAD  
& AHMAD TARMIZI TALIB

### ABSTRACT

*An attachment relationship refers to a tie of affection that bonds someone with an attachment figure, principally the primary caregiver. Attachment styles and the quality relationships are determined partly as the result of mental images of both the self and others. Individuals who sensed that they were being rejected as children may develop insecure attachment relationships with significant people in their later life. In contrast, individuals who had positive experiences of relationships may develop a sense of security that allows them to seek such relationships in the future. This study aimed to explore the influence of couple-youth attachment on relationship quality related to demand and withdraw communication pattern in the relationship. A correlational research design was used to address the research objective. One hundred and fifty three (153) youth participants were employed. Two established questionnaires were used: Experience in Close Relationship and Communication Pattern Questionnaire. The results showed that youth couples with highly avoidance in attachment reported greater conflict demand and withdraw communication in the relationship.*

**Keywords:** Attachment, Attachment Styles, Demand and Withdraw Communication, Marital Conflict, Marital Quality

### ABSTRAK

*Hubungan pertautan adalah merujuk tautan kasih sayang yang berupaya merapat hubungan seseorang dengan individu yang dijalin, terutama ibubapa atau penjaga. Gaya pertautan dan perhubungan yang berkualiti ditentukan oleh hasil imej diri dan orang lain. Individu yang merasakan bahawa mereka tidak dihiraukan ketika kanak-kanak boleh mengakibatkan mereka memiliki gaya pertautan tidak selamat. Sebaliknya, individu yang mempunyai pengalaman positif boleh membentuk gaya pertautan yang selamat. Kajian ini bertujuan melihat pengaruh pertautan belia dewasa terhadap kualiti hubungan yang berkaitan dengan corak komunikasi desakan dan menarik diri di dalam hubungan. Reka bentuk penyelidikan korelasi telah digunakan untuk menjawab objektif penyelidikan. Satu ratus lima puluh tiga (153) responden di kalangan belia dewasa telah menyertai kajian ini. Dua soal selidik telah digunakan: Experience in Close Relationship, dan Communication Pattern Questionnaire. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa pasangan belia yang memiliki gaya jalinan menolak yang tinggi akan mempengaruhi corak komunikasi mendesak dan menarik diri di dalam perhubungan.*

**Kata Kunci:** *Pertautan, Gaya Pertautan, Gaya Komunikasi Desakan dan Menarik Diri, Konflik Perkahwinan, Kualiti Perkahwinan*

## INTRODUCTION

John Bowlby (1969, p. 194) describes attachment as a 'lasting psychological connectedness between human beings'. It is a theory that emerged from his observations of children and their caregivers at times when the child exhibits 'distressful behaviour' in a 'strange situation', particularly when the child is separated from its caregiver. The relationship model can be considered as either 'secure' or 'insecure'. Bowlby held that the early bonds that children form with their caregivers continue to have a great impact that continues through life. Shaver and Hazan (1989) were the first to apply the Bowlby's Attachment Theory to the question of romantic attachment. Later, Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) detailed adult attachment styles and attachment relationships with a two-dimensional model, namely the mental model of self (a person's positive or negative view about themselves), and the corresponding mental model of others. This was based on underlying views held by the subjects, both about themselves and about others.

The attachment system is activated particularly in response to stress, such as whilst the child is frightened or in pain. The experience of love and care from the primary caregiver emboldens the child to be more playful and sociable during its early childhood. This represents a secure attachment prototype (Ainsworth, 1967). As a corollary, where a primary caregiver is absent, or otherwise deprives the child of love and adequate care, they may experience anxiety. This insecurity can take the form of anxious or avoidant attachment. In anxious attachment, the child is pre-occupied about the presence of the primary caregiver. This pre-occupation can be manifested by the child visually checking, calling, or moving to re-establish contact, as well as manifesting clinging-type behaviour. In contrast, avoidant attachment is characterised by the child using defensive strategies and, despite wanting and needing the caregiver's attention, seeking to avoid them.

The most important couple interaction pattern considered by researchers in the past decade is the demand/withdraw pattern (Bradbury, Fincham & Beach, 2000). Typically the woman demands change and emotional closeness and the man avoid or disengage from this process. The man's level of withdrawal is positively related to the woman's level of demand (Gottman & Lavenson, 2000; Heavey, Christensen & Malamuth, 1995; Klinetob & Smith, 1996). This pattern is negatively related to couple satisfaction at early, middle, and later stages of relationships (Belsky & John, 1994; Carstensen, Gottman & Levenson, 1995; Cohan & Bradbury, 1997; Gottman, Coan, Carrere & Swanson, 1998), and eventually leads to failed marriages (Gottman, 1991, 1994; Pasch & Bradbury, 1998). Therefore, the purpose of this research is to provide an alternative way of viewing the couple relationship that is embedded in Attachment Theory. It is believed that the framework provided by Attachment Theory is potentially useful for understanding a uniqueness in which

couples function in terms of their interpersonal relationships.

## OBJECTIVE

This study aimed to explore the influence of couple-youth attachment on the conflict in the relationship. In particular, the study aimed to find out the relationship between attachment and conflict related to demand and withdraw communication pattern in the couple-youth relationship.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Research Design*

A correlational design was used in this research to identify the relationship between the attachment and the conflict demand and withdraw pattern in the couple-youth relationship.

### *Participants*

One hundred and fifty three (153) participants were recruited from the Luton area, United Kingdom. The minimum age of the participants was 23 years, and the maximum was 52 years. The majority of participants were female (57.5%), while 42.5% were male. In terms of ethnicity and citizenship, 44.4% were White and 55.6% were Non-White; 54.9% were British and 45.1% were of Non-British nationality. Participants possessed a variety of educational backgrounds: 17.0% had postgraduate qualifications, 30.1% had undergraduate qualifications, 23.5% had reached A Level education, 14.4% had reached GCSE level, and 15.0% had no qualifications.

### *Measures*

#### *Experience in Close Relationship (Brennan & Shaver, 1998)*

The 36 items of ECR (Brennan & Shaver, 1998) has designed to measure attachment-related avoidance (ECR-AVOIDANCE) and anxiety (ECR-ANXIETY). Four types of attachment style may also be assessed based on these two attachment dimensions. In this study, the alpha value of the 18-item Avoidance scale is .782 while for the 18-item Anxiety scale is .906.

#### *Communication Pattern Questionnaire (Christensen & Sullaway, 1984)*

The Communication Patterns Questionnaire (CPQ; Christensen & Sullaway, 1984; is a 35-item questionnaire consists of six subscales: Constructive Communication (CPQ-CC); Total Amount of Demand-Withdraw Communication (CPQ-TDWDC); Man Demand / Woman Withdraw Communication (CPQ-MDWDC); Woman Demand / Man Withdraw Communication (CPQ-MDWDC); Roles in Demand-Withdraw Communication (CPQ-RDWDC); and Mutual Avoidance and Withholding (CPQ-MAW). In the present study, Cronbach's coefficient alpha is .600.

### Data Analysis

The results of the questionnaire study presented frequencies and descriptive statistics for the demographic variables. The correlation was used to explore the relationships between the attachment and the demand withdraw communication pattern in the relationship.

## RESULT

The result showed that ECR-AVOIDANCE demonstrated positive correlation with two of the Conflict Variables: CPQ-TDWC ( $r=-.17$ ,  $p= .033$ ), and CPQ-MDWWDC ( $r=-.18$ ,  $p= .019$ ).

Scale (N=153)*	CPQ-TDWC	CPQ-MDWWDC
ECR-AVOIDANCE	.17*	.18*

\* =  $p < 0.01$ , \*\* =  $p < 0.05$

## DISCUSSIONS

Attachment was found to be correlated with the interpersonal problems in the couple-youth relationship. In particular, Attachment Avoidance was found to be correlated with the Conflict Total Demand and Withdraw Communication, and the Conflict Man Demand and Woman Withdraw Communication. In other words, in the condition of highly avoidable in an attachment, participants in this study were found to be also higher in the demand and withdraw communication in the relationship. On the other hand, in the condition of low avoidance in attachment, participants in this study were found to be also low in the demand and withdraw communication in the relationship.

Previous research supported the relationship between attachment and couple conflict and conflict management (Corcoran & Mallinckrodt, 2000; Creasey, Kershaw, Boston, 1999; Creasey & Hesson-McInnis, 2001; Levy & Davis, 1988; Pistole, 1989). In the present research, it seems that one partner was demanding and the other withdrew, perhaps as a defensive response to the pressure posed on the couple in the relationship. During that interactive pattern, the person seeking some type of change is labelled as the 'demander', as in order to achieve change; they must rely on their partner's cooperation. Therefore, demanders are likely to use pressure, criticism, complaint and demand in order to achieve the results that they want. The other partner is labelled as the 'withdrawer' as their response to the partner's demands is to increase emotional distance.

From an attachment perspective, the repeated rejection from attachment figures during infancy can contribute in a belief in avoidant individuals that achieving psychological closeness with attachment figures is futile. Instead of seeking support from their attachment figures during reunion, these babies continue to direct

their attention to toys. Turning away from the attachment figures during stressful situations is a way of managing the fear of losing the attachment figure. In an adult conflict resolution situation, the avoidance behaviour is transformed into a pattern of blocking, in which the avoidant individual avoids discussing any stressful issues. Due to their resignation, their belief that their partner will not be psychologically available to meet their needs – they tend to be cut off from their emotions during conflict (Simpson et al., 1996). Attachment theory holds that attachment avoidance is closely related to withdrawing (Pistole & Arricale, 2003; Simpson, Rholes, & Phillips, 1996). According to Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991), highly avoidant individuals have a greater tendency than non-avoidant individuals elude intimacy, show discomfort with emotional closeness and seek a high level of self-sufficiency. Avoidant individuals tend to find ways, physically or emotionally, of disengaging themselves from the confines of a relationship (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991).

### IMPLICATIONS

It is proposed that this research can make a contribution towards relevant intervention programs to facilitate support couples-youth by emphasizing the importance of the attachment to enhance relationship satisfaction in couples-youth as an implication of their couples' relationship satisfaction. With the understanding about the nature of the attachment theory, and its relation to the interpersonal communication in the relationship, it is very useful to deal with the spouse for better satisfaction in the relationship by identifying their attachment styles. It can be done during the counselling sessions. The avoidance individuals should be made to feel that it is important that they open up themselves so that the therapist should help them remove the worries in side themselves. Not only that, the partner also should be made to understand that if avoidant partners do not open up it is because they worry about rejection a bit , not because they do not care. This is very important in order to improve interpersonal communication and strengthen the relationship bonding.

### REFERENCES

- Ainsworth, M.D.S. 1967. *Infancy in Uganda: Infant Care and the Growth of Love*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Bartholomew, K., & Horowitz, L. M. 1991. Attachment styles among young adults: A test of a four-category model. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 61, 226-244.
- Belsky, J., & John, K. 1994. *The Transition to Parenthood: How a First Child Changes a Marriage: Why Some Couples Grow Closer and Others Apart*. New York, NY: Delacorte Press.
- Bowlby, J. 1969. Attachment, 2nd edition, *Attachment and Loss* (Vol. 1): New York: Basic Books.

- Bradbury, T. N., Fincham, F. D., & Beach, S. R. H. 2000. Research on the nature and determinants of marital satisfaction: A decade in review. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 62, 964-980.
- Brennan, K. A., & Shaver, P. R. 1998. Attachment styles and personality disorders: Their connections to each other and to parental divorce, parental death, and perceptions of parental care giving. *Journal of Personality*, 66(5), 835-878.
- Carstensen, L.L., Gottman, J.M., and Levenson, R.W. 1995. Emotional behaviour in long-term marriage. *Psychology & Aging*, Vol. 10(1), 140-149.
- Christensen, A. & Sullaway, M. 1984. Communications Patterns Questionnaire. Unpublished Manuscript, University of California, Los Angeles.
- Cohan, C. L. & Bradbury, T. N. 1997. Negative life events, marital interaction, and the longitudinal course of newlywed marriage. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 73, 114-128.
- Corcoran, K., & Mallinckrodt, B. 2000. Adult attachment, self-efficacy, perspective taking, and conflict resolution. *Journal of Counselling & Development*, 78, 473-483.
- Creasey, G., Kershaw, K., & Boston, A. 1999. Conflict management with friends and romantic partners: The role of attachment and negative mood regulation expectations. *The Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 28 (5), 523-543.
- Creasey, G., & Hesson-McInnis, M. 2001. Affective responses, cognitive appraisals, and conflict tactics in late adolescent romantic relationships: Associations with attachment orientations. *Journal of Counselling Psychology*, 48, 85-96.
- Gottman, J.M. 1991. Predicting the longitudinal course of marriages. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 17(1), 3-7.
- Gottman, J.M. 1994. Nonlinear differential equation models of marital interaction. In S. Johnson and L. Greenberg (Eds.). *The heart of the matter: Perspectives on emotion in marital therapy*, 256-293.
- Gottman, J., Coan, J., Carrere, S., & Swanson, C. 1998. Predicting marital happiness and stability from newlywed interactions. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 60, 5-22.
- Gottman, J.M. & Levenson, R.W. 2000. The timing of divorce: Predicting when a couple will divorce over a 14-year period. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 62, 737-745

- Hazan, C., & Shaver, P. R. 1994. Attachment as an organizational framework for research on close relationships. *Psychological Inquiry*, 5, 1-22.
- Heavey, C. L., Christensen, A., & Malamuth, N. M. 1995. The longitudinal impact of demand and withdrawal during marital conflict. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 63, 797-801.
- Klinetob, N. A., & Smith, D. A. 1996. Demand-withdraw communication in marital interaction: Tests of inter spousal contingency and gender role hypotheses. *Journal of Marriage & Family*, 58(4), 945-957.
- Levy, M. B., & Davis, K. E. 1988. Love styles and attachment styles compared: Their relations to each other and to various relationship characteristics. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 5, 439 - 471 .
- Pasch, L. A., & Bradbury, T. N. 1998. Social support, conflict and the development of marital dysfunction. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 66, 219-230.
- Pistole, M. 1989. Attachment in adult romantic relationship: Style of conflict resolution and relationship satisfaction. *Journal of Social Personal Relationships*, 6: 505-510.
- Pistole, M., & Arricale, F. 2003. Understanding attachment: Beliefs about conflict. *Journal of Counselling and Development*, 81, 318-328.
- Shaver, P., & Hazan, C. 1989. Being lonely, falling in love: Perspectives from attachment theory. In M. Hojat & R. Crandall (Eds.). *Loneliness: theory, research and applications*, 105-124.
- Simpson, J. A., Rholes, W. S., & Phillips, D. 1996. Conflict in close relationships: An attachment perspective. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 71, 899-914.

***Authors Profile:***

***Fatahyah Yahya, PhD.***

*Senior Lecturer*

*Department of Counselling*

*Faculty of Cognitive Science and Human Development*

*University of Malaysia Sarawak*

*[yfatahyah@fcs.unimas.my](mailto:yfatahyah@fcs.unimas.my)*

***Nur Fatimah Mat Yusoff****Lecturer**Department of Cognitive Science**Faculty of Cognitive Science and Human Development**University of Malaysia Sarawak**[mynfatimah@fcs.unimas.my](mailto:mynfatimah@fcs.unimas.my)****Abd Hakim Mohad, PhD.****Senior Lecturer**Centre for the Promotion of Knowledge & Language Learning**University of Malaysia Sabah**[abdhakim@ums.edu.my](mailto:abdhakim@ums.edu.my)****Ahmad Tarmizi Talib, PhD****Professor Madya**Faculty of Human Ecology**University of Putra Malaysia**[tarmizi@upm.edu.my](mailto:tarmizi@upm.edu.my)*