

## ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS, ATTACHMENT STYLES, AND EXPERIENCES OF CHILDHOOD

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**Abstract:** The aim of the present study was to investigate the relations between adult attachment styles in romantic relationships with the memories of the experiences with parents during childhood in a sample of university students. The sample comprised 822 university students, 392 males and 430 females, aged 18-27 years. The Experiences in Close Relationships Inventory (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998) was used in order to assess participants' attachment style in romantic relationships. Participants' memories of experiences with parents and partner were assessed with Hazan and Shaver's (1987) Adjective Checklist. Chi-square tests indicated that the majority of females had an anxious/ambivalent attachment style in their romantic relationship, while the majority of males had an avoidant/dismissing or avoidant/fearful attachment style. Participants' descriptions of their mother, father and parental relationship were associated with their attachment style. As far as their current romantic relationships were concerned, participants who had a secure or an anxious/ambivalent attachment style, unlike participants with avoidant/fearful style of attachment, tended to have a long-standing romantic relationship and used positive adjectives to describe their partners. Finally, females, compared to males, used more positive adjectives to describe their partner.

**Key words:** Attachment styles, Memories of experiences of childhood, Romantic relationships.

Bowlby's (1969) theory of attachment portrays the "mother"-infant relationship as the root of both intra- and interpersonal functioning in later childhood and adulthood. Bowlby suggested that, as a result of early attachment experiences, the child accumulates knowledge and develops a set of expectations, known as "internal working models", about one's self, significant others and, later on, the social world. These working models

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regulate the attachment behavioural system and are resistant, though not impervious, to change. Bowlby maintained that attachment behaviours «characterize human beings from the cradle to the grave» (Bowlby, 1979, p. 129) and that «while attachment behaviour is at its most obvious in early childhood, it can be observed throughout the life cycle, especially in emergencies» (Bowlby, 1989, p. 238). He maintained that working models regulate attachment-related processes and personality dynamics throughout the life course (Bowlby, 1988). Internal working models, which can be conceptualized as by-products of repeated attachment-related experiences, consist of accumulated knowledge about one's self, attachment figures and attachment relationships and they function outside of awareness.

The purpose of the present article is to investigate possible connections between childhood attachment histories, as reflected in childhood memories of parents, and adult attachment styles in a Greek sample. We begin with theory related to childhood memories and adult attachment in adulthood. We then turn to romantic relationships, their quality and their relations to adult attachment and present the findings of the empirical study. Finally, we discuss methodological and measurement issues in adult attachment research.

### *Attachment styles in adulthood*

Bowlby's theory dealt primarily with attachment formed between infants and their mothers; however, attachment principles are also relevant to adults' close relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Although Bowlby (1969) and Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall (1978) had discussed the role of attachment in adult romantic relationships, neither of them actually attempted to assess individual differences in attachment styles in adulthood. Two seem to be the most influential research approaches, as far as adult attachment is concerned; the first was developed by Main, Kaplan, and Cassidy (1985) and the second by Hazan and Shaver (1987). In Main's studies, adults with infant children were interviewed about their own childhood relationships with their parents, and the interviews were analysed in order to see which features, if any, were related to the interviewees' infant children's attachment behaviour. Hazan and Shaver's (1987) approach, on the other hand, is based on a self-report measure of adult romantic relationships. The purpose of this approach was to see whether attachment theory in general, and the three patterns of attachment organization identified by Ainsworth

et al. (1978), in particular, help explain personality differences in the experience of romantic love in adulthood. The first approach focuses on parenting and emphasizes recollections of childhood experiences in order to assess adult attachment styles, whereas in the second, adult attachment is viewed in terms of romantic relationships in adulthood.

### *Childhood experiences and attachment styles in adulthood*

Main and her colleagues (Main et al., 1985; Main & Solomon, 1990) used the Adult Attachment Interview, a clinical instrument that explores adults' representations of childhood attachment relations, and found that secure adults maintain a balanced and realistic (seeming) view of early relationships, value attachment relationships and view attachment-related experiences as influential to their development. Avoidant/dismissing adults, on the other hand, devalue the importance of attachment relationships; they have difficulty in recalling specific events, and usually describe an early history of rejection. Preoccupied adults have little difficulty talking about attachment-related feelings; they describe early relationships with parents as over-involved or as guilt-inducing, and they have a tendency towards incoherence in their descriptions.

In an attempt to retrospectively assess the attachment histories of college-aged and older adults, i.e., their childhood relationships with parents, Hazan and Shaver (1987) used a 39-item adjective checklist. Findings indicated that there were differences as far the adjectives adults used for their parents according to attachment style. Secure individuals, compared to insecure ones, reported warmer relationships with both parents and a warmer inter-parental relationship. Moreover, secure adults were more likely to recall their childhood relationships with their parents as being affectionate, caring, accepting, responsive, confident, and respectful. Adults who were insecure were more likely to recall their childhood relationships with their parents as rejecting, cold; anxious/ambivalent adults described their fathers as having been "unfair", i.e., inconsistent. Hazan and Shaver (1987) also reported gender differences in the description of parents; women, compared to men, were more likely to describe their father as loving, affectionate and understanding and their mother as critical and demanding. On the other hand, men tended to describe their mother as loving, affectionate and understanding and their father as critical and demanding (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

In the same direction, studies conducted by Feeney and Noller (1990) and Diehl, Elnick, and Bourbeau (1998) showed that securely attached individuals reported relatively positive perceptions of their early family relationships. It is also reported that anxious-ambivalent individuals were less likely than avoidant individuals to see their father as supportive, and they reported a lack of independence and a desire for deep commitment in relationships.

In a recent study, Levy, Blatt, and Shaver (1998) investigated relationships between attachment styles and the content and structure of mental representations of parents. Findings of the study indicated that parental representations of securely attached participants were more positive in content, as they described their parents as benevolent and non punitive, more conceptually complex, as they provided longer descriptions of their parents and with greater differentiation. The descriptions of dismissing participants for their parents were less differentiated and were characterized by more punitiveness and malevolence and the same applied to fearful participants. Representations of anxious-ambivalent participants were quite ambivalent, as they described their parents as both punitive and benevolent. Gender differences also occurred since women, compared to men, used longer descriptions for both their parents and anxious-ambivalent men represented their mothers as more ambivalent than secure and avoidant men did, whereas avoidant women represented their mothers as more ambivalent than secure and anxious-ambivalent women did.

Findings of the above mentioned studies indicate that members of the three adult attachment groups recalled childhood relationships with parents in ways that are predictable from the literature on infant-mother attachment. This suggests that systematic differences in the quality of early attachment relationships influence personality, attachment styles and close relationships in adulthood.

### *Romantic love and attachment styles in adulthood*

In a number of studies conducted in the 1980s (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Shaver & Hazan, 1988; Shaver, Hazan, & Bradshaw, 1988), Hazan, Shaver, and their colleagues attempted to explain the individual differences in romantic relationships and conceptualized romantic love as an attachment process that involves an interplay between attachment, caregiving, and sexual/reproductive behavioural systems. Shaver and Hazan (1988) identified

parallels between the feelings, dynamics and behaviour associated with attachment between infant and mother, on the one hand, and those associated with the experience of romantic love in adulthood, on the other. Infant attachments involve "proximity maintenance" and "separation protest", seeking proximity to the attachment figure and resisting separation, "secure base", using the attachment figure as a base to explore the environment, and "safe haven", turning to the attachment figure for comfort in times of threat. These features of infant-mother attachment apply to most committed romantic relationships, that is, the person derives comfort and security from the partner, wants to be with the partner, especially in times of distress, and protests when the partner threatens to become unavailable.

Hazan and Shaver (1988) argued that the three styles of attachment identified by Ainsworth et al. (1978) correspond to three distinct styles of love in adulthood. They developed a forced-choice, self-report measure of adult attachment, which consisted of three paragraphs written to capture the main features typifying the three attachment styles. Participants were asked to choose the paragraph most descriptive of their feelings in close relationships. Hazan and Shaver (1987) obtained similar percentages of the three groups (56% secure, 25% avoidant, and 19% anxious/ambivalent) to those obtained in studies of infant-mother attachment (Ainsworth et al., 1978). They also found that secure adults viewed themselves as likeable, appreciated and easy to get to know, and other people as generally well-intentioned and good-hearted. Their love experiences were most often characterized as friendly, happy and trusting. Moreover, secure participants' romantic relationships lasted longer (10 years) compared to romantic relationships of anxious (4.9 years) or avoidant adults (6 years), and were less likely to report having been divorced (6% of secure vs. 10% of anxious and 12% of avoidant individuals). On the other hand, insecure adults, that is, avoidant and anxious/ambivalent, were less likely to view themselves as likeable, self-confident or appreciated, and others as well-intentioned. Avoidant adults tended to associate relationships with fear of closeness, while anxious/ambivalent adults associate relationships with jealousy, extreme emotions, and strong desires for reciprocation.

Hazan and Shaver's approach of romantic love as an attachment process was quite influential and later studies provided substantial empirical evidence to support and expand this theory. Levy and Davis (1988) compared attachment and love-style approaches to romantic relationships. Findings of their study indicated that secure attachment tended to be associated with positive relationship characteristics, whereas avoidant attachment was related

to relationships characterized by less satisfaction and lower levels of intimacy. Finally, anxious-ambivalent attachment style was negatively linked to positive relationship characteristics.

Simpson (1990) used a questionnaire based on Hazan and Shaver (1987) attachment vignettes and revealed that the three attachment styles were strongly associated with different patterns of emotional experience within relationships. More specifically, secure individuals tended to have relationship patterns characterized by greater commitment and higher levels of interdependence, trust, investment and satisfaction. On the other hand, participants categorized as insecure tended to have relationships defined by the opposite set of features and reported less commitment to the current partner and less trust and satisfaction.

Feeney and Noller (1990) also found links between romantic relationships and attachment types. In their study, avoidant participants, compared to secure ones, were more likely to report never to have been in love and not being in love at the time of the study. Moreover, secure participants had romantic relationships that lasted longer compared to anxious-ambivalent participants and were less likely than insecure individuals to experience divorce. The link between relationship stability and duration, on the one hand, and attachment styles, on the other, is also established in other cross-sectional studies (Hill, Young, & Nord, 1994; Kirkpatrick & Hazan, 1994).

However, other studies have adopted more critical approaches to Hazan and Shaver's theory. Fraley and Shaver (2000), in an attempt to revisit the theory of adult attachment as it was formulated by Hazan and Shaver (1987), argued that the theory suffers from a number of limitations and that there are still remaining issues that need to be clarified more thoroughly. They claimed that "the theory contained an implicit assumption that all romantic relationships are attachment relationships, and it therefore failed to provide a way of separating attachment from nonattachment relationships. It also failed to provide a clear account on the evolution and function of attachment in romantic relationships" (Fraley & Shaver, 2000, p. 138). Fraley and Shaver suggested that issues such as individual differences in adult attachment behavior should be investigated in more detail in future studies.

Nevertheless, the major criticism leveled at the Hazan and Shaver approach was related to the three-category model they had proposed, since subsequent research evidence (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994; Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1994) suggested that avoidant individuals differed in the degree to which they exhibited anxious as well as

avoidant qualities. In an expansion of Hazan and Shaver's theory (1987), Bartholomew (1990) maintained that models of self can be dichotomized as positive (the self is seen as worthy of love and attention) or negative (the self is seen as unworthy). In addition, models of others can be positive (the others are seen as available and caring) or negative (the others are seen as unreliable or rejecting). Bartholomew and colleagues proposed that working models of the self and others jointly define four attachment styles, the three already described by Hazan and Shaver but with two avoidant styles, "dismissing" and "fearful". Dismissing individuals emphasize achievement and self-reliance, maintaining a sense of self-worth at the expense of intimacy. Fearful individuals desire intimacy but distrust others; thus, they avoid close involvements that may lead to loss or rejection.

Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991), based on Hazan and Shaver's (1988) questionnaire, developed the Relationship Questionnaire, containing four descriptions of relationships, namely secure, anxious/ambivalent (preoccupied), avoidant/fearful and avoidant /dismissing, from which the individual has to choose the best description for him/her. In their study, findings indicated that 57% of the participants were classified as secure, 18% as dismissing, 10% as preoccupied and 15% as fearful, percentages similar to those reported by Hazan and Shaver (1987). Gender differences were also detected in this study, since men were more likely, compared to women, to be classified as dismissing, whereas women were more likely to be preoccupied. It should be mentioned here that indications for gender differences in attachment styles are also evident in other relevant studies that employed the four-category model. Brennan, Shaver, and Tobey (1991) found that men classified themselves as dismissing and preoccupied more often than women, and women were more likely to classify themselves as secure or fearful. In the Levy et al. (1998) study women, compared to men, were more likely to be fearful, where, as men, compared to women, were more likely to be secure. It may be that the four-category model may be more sensitive to gender differences compared to the three-category model (Feeney & Noller, 1996).

The basic two-dimension, four-category model proposed by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) was further supported by recent research evidence (for example, Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998; Feeney, Noller, & Hanrahan, 1994; Fraley, Davis, & Shaver, 1998) in studies conducted in Western countries. However, a question arises as to whether the phenomenon of adult attachment is a universal feature or whether differences in important respects can be observed across cultures.

### ***Methodological issues concerning adult attachment***

In the mid 1990s a number of scholars argued that the typologies proposed by Hazan and Shaver (1987) was not a valid measure of adult attachment and that a self-report measure should be used instead. Subsequently, a "«types versus dimensions» debate" (Fraley & Shaver, 2000, p.142) began (Collins & Read, 1990; Fraley & Waller, 1998; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994).

In an important recent development, Brennan et al. (1998) attempted to identify the optimal dimensions system for organizing individual differences in romantic attachment and combined most of the extant self-report attachment measures into a single questionnaire. They factor-analyzed the 323 items of the 60 attachment scales and created a 36-item inventory. Their analyses revealed that individual differences in romantic attachment can be organized within a two-dimensional space (Avoidance-Anxiety), similar to the dimensions proposed by Bartholomew's theoretical model (1990). These two dimensions can either be used to describe an individuals' approach to romantic relationships, or, alternatively, to classify individuals into one of the four attachment types.

### ***Aims - Hypotheses***

The aim of the present study was to investigate the relations between the memories of young adults' childhood experiences with their parents with reference to their attachment styles in adulthood. Adult attachment styles have not been investigated in a Greek sample in the past, so this is a first attempt to examine attachment styles in young adults in Greece. An investigation of whether participants' attachment styles are related to the presence of a current romantic relationship and descriptions of partner is also an aim of the study.

In accordance with the research objectives, the study examined the following hypotheses: (a) Males and females will be differentiated as far as their attachment style is concerned. (b) Types of attachment in adulthood will be related to memories of childhood experiences with parents. Based on relevant research findings, secure participants are expected to refer to their mothers and their fathers as dependable, responsive and caring; avoidant (avoidant/fearful & avoidant/dismissing) participants will refer to their mothers/fathers as generally cold and rejecting; and anxious/ambivalent (preoccupied) participants will mention a mixture of positive and



negative experiences with their mothers. (c) Young adults with a current romantic relationship, compared to young adults without a current romantic relationship, will be differentiated as far as their attachment styles are concerned. (d) The duration of the romantic relationship and participants' descriptions of their partners will be differentiated as far as their attachment styles are concerned. More specifically, it is expected that secure participants would be involved in romantic relationships that last for a longer period as compared to anxious/ambivalent or avoidant (fearful and dismissing) ones. Moreover, secure participants will describe their partners more positively compared to anxious/ambivalent or avoidant (fearful and dismissing) ones.

## METHOD

### *Participants*

The participants of the present study were 822 university students. Four hundred and thirty (52.3 %) were females, with an age range between 18 and 27 years ( $M = 20.83$  years,  $SD = 1.80$ ) and 392 (47.7%) were males, with an age range between 18 and 27 years ( $M = 21.02$  years,  $SD = 1.91$ ). The mean age of the whole sample was 20.92 years ( $SD = 1.85$ ). Originally, questionnaires were administered to a total sample of 900 students. Forty (4.4%) students refused to answer the questionnaires; participation rate was 95.6%. Of the remaining sample, 8 (0.9%) participants stated that they had a homosexual relationship and were excluded from the analysis, while 30 (3.3%) questionnaires were excluded due to missing values.

Four hundred and seven (49.5%) participants had a current heterosexual romantic relationship (192 men and 215 women) lasting from one month to 90 months ( $M = 20.7$  months,  $SD = 19.9$ ). The remaining four hundred and fifteen (50.5%) participants (200 men and 215 women) did not report having a romantic relationship at the time of the study.

### *Measures*

All questionnaires were translated into Greek and then back to English for a cross check by two bilingual translators.

*Adult attachment style.* Participants' attachment style in romantic rela-

tionships was assessed with the Experiences in Close Relationships inventory (ECR; Brennan et al., 1998). The ECR inventory conceptualizes behaviors, such as sharing privacy (thoughts, feelings, problems, concerns) in a romantic relationship and liking dependence on a romantic partner. It is a 36-item self-report attachment measure that assesses close relationships on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). There are two major dimensions: (a) *Anxiety* (18 items), which indicates an intense preoccupation over affective relations, as well as fear of being rejected and abandoned due to frequent demands for affection and involvement of the partner. (b) *Avoidance* (18 items), which is linked to difficulties and discomfort involved in approaching and emotionally trusting the partner, as well as discomfort with closeness and depending on others.

Following Brennan et al. (1998), participants are categorized into one of the four attachment styles, based on computations using classification coefficients (Fisher's linear discriminant functions) published with the instrument, according to their scores on the two dimensions of the measure. These two dimensions can be used as axes on which individuals' scores can be plotted. The resulting four quadrants correspond to the four styles of attachment. Individuals with secure attachment style have low scores on avoidance and anxiety subscale, and individuals with a preoccupied attachment style have a high score on anxiety and a low score on avoidance. Individuals with dismissing attachment style correspond to a high score on avoidance and a low score on anxiety, while individuals with fearful attachment style have high scores on both avoidance and anxiety.

To assess construct validity of the Experiences in Close Relationship inventory a principal components analysis (Varimax rotation) was performed. The analysis resulted in two factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 that explained 37.32 % of the total variance and agreed with the subscales of the original inventory (Brennan et al., 1998). The first factor extracted was labeled "Avoidance". It consisted of 18 items and explained 19.64% of the total variance. The second factor was labeled "Anxiety". It consisted of 18 items and explained 17.68% of total variance. After rotation, an item was included only if it had a factor loading at or above .40 and did not load highly on more than one factor (Comrey & Lee, 1992). All items of the inventory met these criteria. Table 1 presents the loadings of the 36 items of the ECR on the two factors. Table 1 also displays the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients of the two subscales. The two subscales were found to be internally consistent within the present sample: Avoidance,  $\alpha = .89$  and

Table 1. Factor analysis of the Experiences in Close Relationship (ECR) (N = 822)

Item	Varimax rotation	
	Factor 1	Factor 2
9 I don't feel comfortable opening up to romantic partners.	.69	
13 I am nervous when partners get too close to me.	.69	
27 I usually discuss my problems and concerns with my partner. (R)	.68	
25 I tell my partner just about everything. (R)	.68	
17 I try to avoid getting too close to my partner.	.67	
5 Just when my partner starts to get close to me I find myself pulling away.	.62	
11 I want to get close to my partner, but I keep pulling back.	.62	
7 I get uncomfortable when a romantic partner wants to be very close.	.60	
33 It helps to turn to my romantic partner in times of need. (R)	.60	
31 I don't mind asking romantic partners for comfort, advice, or help. (R)	.59	
35 I turn to my partner for many things, including comfort and reassurance. (R)	.57	
15 I feel comfortable sharing my private thoughts and feelings with my partner. (R)	.57	
29 I feel comfortable depending on romantic partners. (R)	.56	
1 I prefer not to show a partner how I feel deep down.	.55	
23 I prefer not to be too close to romantic partners.	.52	
21 I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on romantic partners.	.52	
3 I am very comfortable being close to romantic partners. (R)	.52	
19 I find it relatively easy to get close to my partner. (R)	.46	
2 I worry about being abandoned.		.73
14 I worry about being alone.		.69
4 I worry a lot about my relationships.		.68
6 I worry that romantic partners won't care about me as much as I care about them.		.66
18 I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by my partner.		.62
22 I do not often worry about being abandoned. (R)		.60
30 I get frustrated when my partner is not around as much as I would like.		.60
20 Sometimes I feel that I force my partners to show more feeling, more commitment.		.58
32 I get frustrated if romantic partners are not available when I need them.	.56	
12 I often want to merge completely with romantic partners, and this sometimes scares them away.	.55	
10 I often wish that my partner's feelings for me were as strong as my feelings for him/her.	.54	
34 When romantic partners disapprove of me, I feel really bad about myself.	.52	
28 When I'm not involved in a relationship, I feel somewhat anxious and insecure.	.52	
24 If I can't get my partner to show interest in me, I get upset or angry.	.50	
36 I resent it when my partner spends time away from me.	.47	
16 My desire to be very close sometimes scares people away.	.44	
26 I find that my partner(s) don't want to get as close as I would like.	.40	

Note. A parenthesized R following an item indicates that the item is reverse-scored. Only loadings  $\geq .40$  are presented.

Anxiety,  $\alpha = .89$ . Cronbach's alphas reported by Brennan et al. (1998) were  $\alpha = .94$  for the avoidance dimension and  $\alpha = .91$  for the anxiety dimension. Correlation between the two subscales in the present sample was  $r = -.04$ .

**Memories of childhood experiences.** The participants were asked to describe their parental experiences from their childhood using the Hazan and Shaver's (1987) Adjective Checklist. The instrument is divided into three parts: the first involves the description of the participant's mother, the second the description of the participant's father, and the third the overall description of the participant's relationship with parents.

Each participant was asked to describe how each parent had generally behaved toward him/her during childhood by indicating the adjectives that best described their mother and father. Participants were free to use as many adjectives as they felt. The adjective checklist used for the description of mother and father included the following 39 adjectives: Loving, demanding, caring, sympathetic, overprotective, affectionate, strict, unresponsive, disinterested, critical, respectful, understanding, rejecting, abusive, attentive, intrusive, accepting, happy, weak, confident, unpredictable, insecure, selfish, responsible, respected, troubled, sad/ depressed, strong, nervous, fair, warm, flexible, unfair, likeable, immature, cold, hostile, funny, inconsistent (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

Participants were also asked to describe their parents' relationship with each other during childhood, using the following adjective checklist: Affectionate, distant, violent, caring, happy, troubled, unhappy, supportive, argumentative, comfortable, strained, and good-humored (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

**Romantic relationship.** For the purposes of the present study, participants who were currently involved in a romantic relationship were also asked to describe their partner using the same Adjective Checklist as for the parents.

**Demographic information.** Information was collected on participants' gender, age, existence of a romantic relationship (homosexual or heterosexual), duration of the relationship, frequency of dating, and if they lived together.

### **Procedure**

The questionnaires were anonymous and were administered individually to participants of various Schools and Departments of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. The order of questionnaires was counterbalanced. Participation in the study was voluntary and no incentives were given to the participants. Each participant needed approximately 40 minutes to complete the questionnaires.

*Table 2. Frequencies and percentages of attachment style as a function of gender*

Attachment style	Males	Females	Total
	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)
Secure	51 (13.0)	65 (15.1)	116 (14.1)
Anxious/Ambivalent	134 (34.2)	199 (46.3)	333 (40.5)
Avoidant/Fearful	163 (41.6)	142 (33.0)	305 (37.1)
Avoidant/Dismissing	44 (11.2)	24 (5.6)	68 (8.3)
Total	392	430	822

*Note.*  $\chi^2(3, N = 822) = 19.99, p < .001$ .

## RESULTS

### *Attachment style*

***Frequencies of the four attachment styles.*** The analysis of responses to the ECR inventory showed that 116 (14.1%) of the participants had a secure style of attachment, 333 (40.5%) were found to have an anxious/ambivalent attachment style, 305 (37.1%) had an avoidant/fearful style of attachment and 68 (8.3%) had an avoidant/dismissing attachment style (see Table 2).

***Gender and attachment style.*** Table 2 outlines the breakdown of attachment style in romantic relationships according to gender. Almost half of the females (46.3%) were found to have an anxious/ambivalent (preoccupied) attachment style, while the majority of males (41.6%) were found to have an avoidant/fearful attachment style in their romantic relationships. Chi-square tests and adjusted standardized residuals were used in order to examine gender differences. Results showed that there was a statistically significant association between attachment style and gender,  $\chi^2(3, N = 822) = 19.99, p < .001$ . Males, compared to females, were more likely to have an avoidant/dismissing ( $z = 2.9$ ) or an avoidant/fearful attachment style ( $z = 2.5$ ) in their romantic relationships. Females, on the contrary, were more likely to have an anxious/ambivalent (preoccupied) attachment style ( $z = 3.5$ ) in their relationships. It is, however, interesting to note, that only 13% of the males and 15.1% of the females had a secure style of attachment.

### *Attachment style and young adults' memories of childhood*

Chi-square tests and the method of adjusted standardized residuals were used in order to examine the association between participants' attachment styles and the adjectives they used to describe their parents and the parental relationship.

Table 3. Attachment style and adjectives used for mother (N = 822)

Adjectives	Secure		Avoidant/ Fearful		Anxious/ Ambivalent		Avoidant/ Dismissing		$\chi^2(3, N = 818)$	p
	%	z	%	z	%	z	%	z		
Loving	84.2	1.3	76.3	-1.8	83.4	<b>2.3</b>	67.6	-2.6	12.49	.006
Demanding	28.9	-1.5	33.9	-0.7	39.2	1.9	33.8	-0.3	4.51	.212
Caring	86.8	1.1	79.9	-1.9	85.2	1.3	80.9	-0.5	4.63	.201
Sympathetic	61.4	<b>2.3</b>	43.8	-3.5	56.9	<b>2.5</b>	44.1	-1.3	17.19	.001*
Overprotective	32.5	-1.1	36.5	-0.3	39.5	1.1	36.8	-0.1	1.89	.596
Affectionate	84.2	<b>2.2</b>	69.7	-3.3	78.9	1.5	77.9	0.4	12.49	.006
Strict	28.1	0.4	22.4	-2.1	29.2	1.4	30.9	0.8	4.71	.194
Unresponsive	1.8	-0.1	2.3	0.8	1.5	-0.6	1.5	-0.2	0.62	.891
Disinterested	1.8	1.4	0.0	-1.9	0.6	-0.4	2.9	2.2	8.51	.037
Critical	13.2	-0.3	14.1	0.1	14.8	0.5	11.8	-0.6	0.51	.917
Respectful	58.8	3.2	41.4	-1.5	44.0	-0.4	41.2	-0.6	10.83	.013
Understanding	78.9	<b>2.8</b>	63.2	-2.1	68.7	0.5	64.7	-0.6	9.89	.020
Rejecting	0.0	-1.5	0.7	-1.6	2.4	1.6	4.4	1.9	8.42	.038
Abusive	1.8	-0.3	1.6	-0.8	2.4	0.3	4.4	1.9	2.15	.541
Attentive	63.2	3.1	44.1	-2.4	51.5	0.9	42.6	-1.2	13.89	.003
Intrusive	26.3	-0.2	26.0	-0.5	29.2	1.2	20.6	-1.2	2.43	.488
Accepting	62.3	<b>2.2</b>	48.4	-1.9	53.3	0.3	52.9	0.0	6.55	.088
Happy	65.8	<b>2.4</b>	50.3	-2.3	55.1	-0.2	63.2	1.3	9.85	.020
Weak	5.3	-1.5	10.9	1.5	9.0	0.1	5.9	-0.9	4.05	.256
Confident	49.1	1.4	41.8	-0.7	44.0	0.3	36.8	-1.1	3.11	.375
Unpredictable	17.5	1.6	9.9	-2.0	15.1	1.6	7.4	-1.4	7.95	.047
Insecure	12.3	-1.5	18.1	0.4	17.2	-0.1	23.5	1.4	3.98	.264
Selfish	12.3	-0.1	9.9	-1.8	14.5	1.3	16.2	0.9	3.90	.272
Responsible	82.5	0.3	78.0	-2.0	84.6	1.9	80.9	-0.1	4.79	.188
Respected	67.5	<b>2.9</b>	49.7	-2.3	55.7	0.4	52.9	-0.3	10.91	.012
Troubled	26.3	0.5	22.0	-1.3	26.8	1.2	22.1	-0.5	2.37	.500
Sad, depressed	4.4	-1.9	10.5	0.9	10.8	1.3	4.4	-1.4	6.68	.083
Strong	65.8	<b>2.9</b>	45.4	-3.4	54.5	0.6	60.3	1.2	16.30	.001*
Nervous	22.8	-2.1	33.6	1.1	33.4	1.1	25.0	-1.2	6.50	.090
Fair	65.8	<b>2.6</b>	50.7	-1.8	56.0	0.7	47.1	-1.3	9.50	.023
Warm	73.7	<b>2.6</b>	54.3	-3.8	66.6	1.9	63.2	0.1	17.24	.001*
Flexible	28.1	<b>2.0</b>	19.7	-0.7	20.2	-0.5	19.1	-0.4	4.00	.261
Unfair	0.9	-0.7	2.3	1.3	1.2	-0.7	1.5	-0.1	1.68	.642
Likeable	82.5	1.8	70.7	-2.6	79.5	2.1	69.1	-1.3	11.18	.011
Immature	0.0	-1.4	1.6	0.3	1.5	0.1	2.9	1.1	2.79	.425
Cold	0.0	-1.4	2.0	0.9	1.8	0.7	0.0	-1.1	3.52	.319
Hostile	0.9	0.2	0.7	-0.2	0.3	-1.2	2.9	2.2	5.46	.141
Funny	43.0	1.9	30.3	-2.2	36.1	0.6	36.8	0.3	6.48	.091
Inconsistent	2.6	0.0	3.9	1.7	1.5	-1.7	2.9	0.1	3.63	.304

Note. \* $p \leq .001$ ;  $z > 1.96$  are printed in bold.

To avoid Type I errors Bonferroni correction was used with level of statistical significance  $p = .05/39 = .001$  in the case of parents and  $p = .05/12 = .004$  in the case of parental relationship. Table 3 presents the attachment style and the ad-

Table 4. Attachment style and adjectives used for father (N = 822)

Adjectives	Secure		Avoidant/ Fearful		Anxious/ Ambivalent		Avoidant/ Dismissing		$\chi^2(3, N = 812)$	p
	%	z	%	z	%	z	%	z		
Loving	50.0	<b>2.2</b>	38.7	-0.9	41.2	0.2	32.4	-1.5	6.59	.086
Demanding	41.2	-1.3	48.0	0.5	49.1	1.0	41.2	-1.0	3.15	.369
Caring	64.0	<b>2.4</b>	46.0	-3.3	56.1	1.2	55.9	0.4	12.89	.005
Sympathetic	43.9	1.9	29.7	-2.9	40.0	1.9	32.4	-0.7	10.95	.012
Overprotective	29.8	1.1	22.3	-1.7	28.2	1.3	22.1	-0.7	4.33	.228
Affectionate	55.3	<b>2.0</b>	36.3	-4.6	53.3	3.1	47.1	0.0	22.14	.000*
Strict	46.5	-0.2	45.3	-0.9	49.4	1.0	47.1	0.0	1.08	.783
Unresponsive	2.6	-0.6	3.7	0.0	4.2	0.7	2.9	-0.3	0.75	.861
Disinterested	4.4	-1.5	11.3	<b>2.8</b>	5.8	-1.9	8.8	0.3	8.98	.030
Critical	21.9	0.9	17.3	-0.8	18.2	-0.4	23.5	1.0	2.23	.526
Respectful	57.0	0.9	50.0	-1.3	55.2	1.0	50.0	-0.5	2.68	.444
Understanding	58.8	0.7	53.0	-1.2	57.9	1.0	52.9	-0.5	2.17	.539
Rejecting	3.5	-1.2	6.3	0.3	5.8	-0.3	10.3	1.5	3.55	.314
Abusive	3.5	-0.7	5.0	0.2	4.5	-0.3	7.4	1.0	1.46	.692
Attentive	52.6	<b>2.9</b>	33.3	-3.1	43.0	1.3	38.2	-0.4	14.39	.002
Intrusive	21.9	-0.5	25.7	1.0	23.3	-0.2	20.6	-0.6	1.22	.747
Accepting	39.5	-0.2	42.0	0.8	38.5	-0.8	41.2	0.2	0.86	.835
Happy	46.0	1.1	39.7	-0.8	42.7	0.6	35.3	-1.1	2.62	.454
Weak	3.5	0.1	5.0	1.8	2.7	-0.9	0.0	-1.6	5.05	.169
Confident	67.3	<b>3.0</b>	48.0	-2.8	55.8	0.7	54.4	0.0	12.74	.005
Unpredictable	24.7	-0.1	28.5	0.3	27.3	-0.3	29.4	0.3	0.20	.977
Insecure	11.5	0.6	9.6	-0.2	10.9	0.8	2.9	-2.0	4.45	.217
Selfish	31.9	-0.7	33.4	-0.6	36.7	1.0	35.3	0.1	1.19	.756
Responsible	76.1	0.2	73.8	-0.7	76.7	0.8	73.5	-0.3	0.83	.842
Respected	68.1	1.6	57.9	-1.4	61.8	0.3	60.3	-0.1	3.71	.294
Troubled	25.7	0.0	23.5	-1.0	27.0	0.7	27.9	0.5	1.21	.750
Sad, depressed	4.4	0.3	2.3	-1.8	4.8	1.1	5.9	0.9	3.57	.312
Strong	70.8	1.1	60.9	-2.4	68.2	1.1	70.6	0.8	5.96	.113
Nervous	30.1	-1.1	36.4	0.9	33.6	-0.5	38.2	0.7	1.99	.574
Fair	66.4	1.9	56.3	-0.9	57.0	-0.6	60.3	0.3	3.88	.275
Warm	45.1	<b>2.2</b>	30.5	-2.4	37.6	0.9	35.3	-0.1	8.49	.037
Flexible	27.4	<b>2.9</b>	14.2	-2.0	17.6	-0.1	17.6	0.0	9.83	.020
Unfair	2.7	-1.1	6.3	1.5	4.5	-0.3	2.9	-0.7	3.17	.366
Likeable	67.3	1.7	53.0	-3.2	65.8	<b>2.8</b>	51.5	-1.5	15.30	.002
Immature	7.1	0.2	7.6	0.9	6.4	-0.3	2.9	-1.3	2.04	.564
Cold	7.1	0.4	7.0	0.7	4.5	-1.6	8.8	1.0	2.82	.420
Hostile	0.9	-0.9	3.0	1.6	1.2	-1.3	2.9	0.6	3.60	.308
Funny	54.9	2.3	40.7	-1.8	46.4	0.7	39.7	-0.9	7.69	.053
Inconsistent	8.0	0.2	8.9	1.2	7.0	-0.5	2.9	-1.5	3.11	.375

Note. \* $p \leq .001$ ;  $z > 1.96$  are printed in bold.

jectives for *mother*. Participants with secure attachment style described their *mother* as sympathetic, strong and warm. Those with an anxious/ambivalent (preoccupied) attachment style described their *mother* as sympathetic. The as-

Table 5. Attachment style and adjectives used for parental relationship (N = 822)

Adjectives	Secure		Avoidant/ Fearful		Anxious/ Ambivalent		Avoidant/ Dismissing		$\chi^2(3, N = 808)$	p
	%	z	%	z	%	z	%	z		
Affectionate	53.1	1.7	39.9	-2.7	50.9	2.3	36.8	-1.6	12.36	.006
Happy	61.9	1.5	49.8	-2.5	58.6	1.4	55.9	0.1	7.08	.069
Argumentative	4.4	-1.4	8.6	0.7	8.6	0.7	5.9	-0.6	2.72	.438
Distant	8.0	0.1	10.0	1.8	5.8	-1.7	7.4	-0.1	3.75	.290
Troubled	9.7	-1.3	14.3	0.5	13.5	0.0	16.2	0.7	1.95	.583
Comfortable	60.2	1.9	47.2	-2.2	54.9	1.3	47.1	-0.9	7.60	.055
Violent	2.7	0.8	1.7	-0.1	0.9	-1.5	4.4	1.8	4.70	.195
Unhappy	6.2	1.7	2.7	-1.0	2.8	-0.9	5.9	1.1	4.77	.189
Strained	24.8	-0.3	27.6	0.7	26.4	0.1	20.6	-1.1	1.53	.676
Caring	54.0	0.9	43.2	-3.1	56.7	<b>3.0</b>	44.1	-1.1	13.16	.004*
Supportive	61.9	<b>2.4</b>	48.2	-1.5	50.9	-0.3	52.9	0.2	6.37	.095
Good-humored	40.7	0.7	33.6	-1.9	39.9	1.0	42.6	0.8	3.99	.263

Note. \* $p \leq .001$ ;  $z > 1.96$  are printed in bold.

sociation between attachment styles and the adjectives used to describe parents and the parental relationship was not statistically significant in any other case.

Table 4 presents participants' attachment style and the adjectives they used to describe their *father*. Participants with secure or anxious/ambivalent (preoccupied) attachment style tended to describe their *father* as affectionate. No other statistically significant associations were found between attachment styles and adjectives used for paternal descriptions.

Table 5 presents participants' attachment style and the adjectives used to describe *parental relationship*. Participants with anxious/ambivalent (preoccupied) attachment style tended to describe their parents' relationship as caring. None of the adjectives that described parental relationship was statistically significant for any other attachment type.

**Indexes of positive and negative adjectives.** To investigate whether the adjectives participants used overall to describe their parents had a positive or a negative trend two separate indexes were formed, one for the positive and one for the negative adjectives. A two-way ANOVA was employed to investigate the effect of attachment style and gender on the two adjective indexes.

Table 6 presents the means and standard deviations of positive and negative adjectives the participants used to describe their mother, father and parental relationship as a function of attachment style. A two-way ANOVA (Gender x Attachment style) was employed to assess the impact of gender and attachment style on the index of adjectives participants used to describe their parents and parental relationship.



*Table 6. Means (and SD) of the positive and negative adjectives index for mother and father (N = 822) as a function of attachment style*

Attachment style	N	Males	Females	Total
Positive adjectives index				
For mother				
Secure	114	11.66 (4.24)	12.34 (3.53)	12.04 (3.85)
Anxious/Ambivalent	332	10.07 (4.30)	11.19 (3.96)	10.74 (4.13)
Avoidant/Fearful	304	8.91 (3.94)	10.37 (4.06)	9.59 (4.06)
Avoidant/Dismissing	68	9.32 (4.33)	11.29 (4.53)	10.01 (4.47)
Total	818	9.71 (4.23)	11.10 (4.00)	10.43 (4.17)
For father				
Secure	113	9.14 (4.63)	10.88 (4.37)	10.12 (4.54)
Anxious/Ambivalent	330	8.17 (4.45)	9.82 (4.59)	9.15 (4.60)
Avoidant/Fearful	300	7.69 (4.22)	8.52 (4.60)	8.07 (4.41)
Avoidant/Dismissing	68	7.80 (4.79)	9.83 (4.76)	8.51 (4.85)
Total	811	8.05 (4.43)	9.55 (4.63)	8.83 (4.59)
For parental relationship				
Secure	113	3.22 (1.94)	3.39 (2.02)	3.32 (1.98)
Anxious/Ambivalent	326	3.01 (1.81)	3.19 (1.93)	3.12 (1.88)
Avoidant/Fearful	301	2.60 (1.86)	2.64 (1.86)	2.62 (1.86)
Avoidant/Dismissing	68	2.77 (2.01)	2.83 (1.90)	2.79 (1.96)
Total	808	2.84 (1.88)	3.01 (1.93)	2.93 (1.91)
Negative adjectives index				
For mother				
Secure	114	2.22 (1.89)	2.52 (1.99)	2.39 (1.94)
Anxious/Ambivalent	332	2.46 (2.14)	3.23 (2.38)	2.92 (2.31)
Avoidant/Fearful	304	2.36 (1.97)	2.91 (2.07)	2.62 (2.03)
Avoidant/Dismissing	68	2.64 (2.78)	2.58 (2.04)	2.62 (2.53)
Total	818	2.41 (2.12)	2.98 (2.21)	2.71 (2.19)
For father				
Secure	113	9.14 (4.63)	10.88 (4.37)	10.12 (4.54)
Anxious/Ambivalent	330	8.17 (4.45)	9.82 (4.59)	9.15 (4.60)
Avoidant/Fearful	300	7.69 (4.22)	8.52 (4.60)	8.07 (4.41)
Avoidant/Dismissing	68	7.80 (4.79)	9.83 (4.76)	8.51 (4.85)
Total	811	8.05 (4.43)	9.55 (4.63)	8.83 (4.59)
For parental relationship				
Secure	113	0.49 (0.94)	0.61 (1.16)	0.56 (1.07)
Anxious/Ambivalent	326	0.40 (0.72)	0.70 (1.04)	0.58 (0.93)
Avoidant/Fearful	301	0.54 (0.95)	0.78 (1.06)	0.65 (1.01)
Avoidant/Dismissing	68	0.52 (0.88)	0.71 (1.16)	0.59 (0.98)
Total	808	0.48 (0.86)	0.71 (1.07)	0.60 (0.98)

*Positive adjectives for mother.* A statistically significant main effect of gender,  $F(1, 810) = 13.26, p < .001$ , was found on the index of positive adjectives participants used to describe their mother. Females,  $M = 11.10$ , compared to males,  $M = 9.71$ , used more positive adjectives to describe their mother. There was a main effect of participants' attachment style,  $F(3,$

810) = 9.75,  $p < .001$ . Securely attached participants used more positive adjectives in their descriptions of their mother,  $M = 12.04$ , compared to anxious/ambivalent (preoccupied),  $M = 10.74$ , avoidant/dismissing,  $M = 10.01$ , or the avoidant/fearful participants,  $M = 9.59$  (pairwise comparisons,  $p < .001$ ). The gender by attachment style interaction was not found statistically significant,  $F(3, 810) = 0.44, p = .72$ .

*Negative adjectives for mother.* No statistically significant main effect was found for either gender,  $F(1, 810) = 4.18, p = .04$ , attachment style,  $F(3, 810) = 1.44, p = .23$ , or the interaction of gender by attachment style,  $F(3, 810) = 0.82, p = .48$ , on the index of negative adjectives participants used in the description of their mother.

*Positive adjectives for father.* A statistically significant effect of gender was found on the index of positive adjectives the participants used to describe their father,  $F(1, 803) = 15.25, p < .001$ . Females ( $M = 9.55$ ), compared to males ( $M = 8.05$ ), tended to use more positive adjectives in the description of their father. A statistically significant effect of attachment style on the index of positive adjectives participants used was also found,  $F(1, 803) = 5.24, p = .001$ . Participants with secure attachment style ( $M = 10.12$ ), compared to participants with avoidant/fearful attachment style ( $M = 8.07$ ), used more positive adjectives (pairwise comparisons,  $p = .001$ ). The interaction of gender with attachment style was not statistically significant,  $F(1, 803) = 0.64, p = .59$ .

*Negative adjectives for father.* No statistically significant main effect was found for either gender,  $F(1, 803) = 0.31, p = .58$ , attachment style,  $F(3, 803) = 0.27, p = .84$ , or the interaction of gender by attachment style,  $F(3, 803) = 1.54, p = .20$ , on the index of the negative adjectives the participants used in the description of their fathers.

*Positive / Negative adjectives for the parental relationship.* As regards the index of the positive adjectives used for parental relationship, the two-way ANOVA showed no significant differences between genders,  $F(1, 800) = 0.43, p = .51$ . A statistically significant effect of attachment style was found on the index of positive adjectives,  $F(3, 800) = 5.08, p < .01$ . Secure participants ( $M = 3.31$ ) and anxious/ambivalent participants ( $M = 3.10$ ), compared to fearful ones ( $M = 2.62$ ), used more positive adjectives in their descriptions for the parental relationship (pairwise comparisons  $p < .01$ ). The interaction of gender by attachment style was not statistically significant,  $F(3, 800) = 0.09, p = .96$ .

As regards the index of the negative adjectives participants used to de-

**Table 7. Frequencies and percentages of having a romantic relationship as a function of attachment style**

Attachment style	N	With relationship	Without relationship
		f (%)	f (%)
Secure	116	75 (18.4)	41 (9.9)
Anxious/Ambivalent	333	178 (43.7)	155 (37.3)
Avoidant/Fearful	305	119 (29.2)	186 (44.8)
Avoidant/Dismissing	68	35 (8.6)	33 (8.0)
Total	822	407	415

Note.  $\chi^2(3, N = 822) = 26.26, p < .001$ .

scribe the parental relationship, the two-way ANOVA yielded statistically significant differences between genders,  $F(1, 800) = 5.89, p = .01$ . Females ( $M = 3.01$ ), compared to males ( $M = 2.90$ ), used more negative adjectives to describe parental relationship. The main effect of attachment style was not statistically significant on the negative adjectives,  $F(1, 800) = 0.75, p = .52$ . The same regards the interaction of gender by attachment style,  $F(3, 800) = 0.26, p = .86$ .

### **Attachment style and romantic relationships**

**Attachment style and existence of a current romantic relationship.** Table 7 presents attachment style and the presence of a romantic relationship. The  $\chi^2$  analysis showed statistically significant associations between attachment style and the existence or not of a romantic relationship,  $\chi^2(3, N = 822) = 26.26, p < .001$ . Participants who had a romantic relationship were found to have a secure ( $z = 3.5$ ) or an anxious/ambivalent (preoccupied) ( $z = 1.9$ ) attachment style. Those who did not have a romantic relationship had, mainly, an avoidant/fearful style of attachment ( $z = 4.6$ ).

Chi-square test and the method of adjusted standardized residuals were used in order to examine the association between the existence of a romantic relationship and gender. Results indicated that there was no statistically significant association between the existence of a romantic relationship and gender,  $\chi^2(1, N = 822) = .09, p = .77$ .

### **Attachment style and current romantic relationship**

Of the 815 participants of our sample, 407 (49.5%) had currently a heterosexual romantic relationship (192 men and 215 women) lasting from one month to seven years and five months. On this group of our sample separate analyses were performed in order to investigate possible links between

**Table 8. Means (and SD) of the duration (in months) of the romantic relationship (N = 407) as a function of attachment style**

Attachment style	N	Males	Females	Total
Secure	66	19.16 (16.18)	28.32 (20.46)	24.85 (19.35)
Anxious/Ambivalent	160	15.57 (17.14)	25.35 (20.80)	22.18 (20.16)
Avoidant/Fearful	101	16.51 (18.57)	15.48 (20.07)	16.10 (19.08)
Avoidant/Dismissing	32	19.57 (19.83)	20.36 (22.44)	19.84 (20.40)
Total	359	17.03 (17.82)	23.71 (21.00)	20.75 (19.91)

relationship stability, descriptions of partner, and attachment style.

**Attachment style and duration of romantic relationship.** Table 8 presents the means and standard deviations of the duration (in months) of romantic relationship as a function of attachment style. The mean duration of the romantic relationship for males was 17.03 months ( $SD = 17.82$ ) and for females 23.71 months ( $SD = 21.00$ ). The difference was statistically significant,  $F(1, 357) = 10.24, p = .001$ . One-way ANOVA of the duration of the romantic relationship by attachment style yielded a statistically significant main effect of attachment style,  $F(3, 351) = 3.19, p = .03$ . Secure participants ( $M = 24.84$ ), compared to fearful ones ( $M = 16.09$ ), had romantic relationships that lasted longer.

**Attachment style and descriptions of partner.** Chi-square tests and the method of adjusted standardized residuals were used in order to examine the association between the attachment style participants with a current romantic relationship and the adjectives they used to describe their partner. To avoid Type I errors Bonferroni correction was used with level of statistical significance  $p = .05/39 = .001$ . Table 9 presents the attachment style and the adjectives for the romantic partner. Participants with an anxious/ambivalent (preoccupied) attachment style described their romantic partner as confident while those with an avoidant/dismissing attachment style described him/her as sad/depressed. None of the adjectives that described the partner was statistically significant for any other attachment type.

**Index of positive and negative adjectives for partner.** To investigate whether the adjectives participants used overall to describe their partner had a positive or a negative trend two separate indexes were formed, one for the positive and one for the negative adjectives. Table 10 presents the means and standard deviations of positive and negative adjectives the participants with a current romantic relationship used to describe their partner as a function of attachment style. A two-way ANOVA (Gender x At-

## Attachment styles

Table 9. Attachment style and adjectives used for romantic partner (N = 407)

Adjectives	Secure		Avoidant/ Fearful		Anxious/ Ambivalent		Avoidant/ Dismissing		$\chi^2(3, N = 405)$	p
	%	z	%	z	%	z	%	z		
Loving	93.3	0.6	89.0	-1.2	93.8	1.4	85.7	-1.3	4.02	.259
Demanding	38.7	0.7	28.0	-2.0	38.4	1.2	37.1	0.2	3.96	.266
Caring	73.3	0.9	65.3	-1.1	72.9	1.4	54.3	-2.0	6.23	.101
Sympathetic	57.3	1.7	43.2	-1.4	50.8	0.8	37.1	-1.4	5.85	.119
Overprotective	25.3	1.3	15.3	-1.5	22.0	0.9	14.3	-0.9	4.17	.244
Affectionate	72.0	1.9	53.4	-2.4	67.2	1.7	48.6	-1.8	11.65	.009
Strict	10.7	-0.6	6.8	-2.3	16.4	<b>2.0</b>	17.1	0.8	6.85	.077
Unresponsive	4.0	-0.2	4.2	-0.1	4.5	0.1	5.7	0.4	0.18	.980
Disinterested	2.7	-1.0	5.9	0.6	5.1	0.1	5.7	0.2	1.13	.771
Critical	14.7	0.2	14.4	0.2	13.0	-0.4	14.3	0.1	0.19	.980
Respectful	66.7	1.7	53.4	-1.2	59.3	0.5	48.6	-1.2	4.75	.191
Understanding	73.3	1.5	62.7	-0.9	67.2	0.4	57.1	-1.2	3.71	.294
Rejecting	2.7	-0.2	1.7	-1.0	2.8	-0.1	8.6	<b>2.0</b>	4.52	.210
Abusive	1.3	-0.9	5.1	1.6	1.1	-1.9	8.6	<b>2.0</b>	8.44	.038
Attentive	64.0	<b>2.0</b>	40.7	-3.4	57.6	1.4	57.1	0.4	12.52	.006
Intrusive	22.7	1.3	14.4	-1.1	17.5	0.0	17.1	-0.1	2.17	.538
Accepting	50.7	-0.3	46.6	-1.5	55.4	1.1	60.0	0.9	3.11	.375
Happy	72.0	0.0	73.7	0.5	71.2	-0.4	71.4	-0.1	0.24	.971
Weak	8.0	-0.8	18.6	<b>3.4</b>	6.2	-2.5	11.4	0.2	12.19	.007
Confident	60.0	1.6	39.0	-3.3	59.9	<b>2.9</b>	34.3	-2.1	18.71	.000*
Unpredictable	38.7	0.7	30.5	-1.2	35.6	0.2	40.0	0.6	1.90	.594
Insecure	29.3	-0.9	39.0	1.5	31.1	-0.9	37.1	0.5	2.85	.416
Selfish	37.3	-0.9	41.5	-0.2	47.5	1.9	28.6	-1.7	5.42	.143
Responsible	69.3	<b>2.2</b>	48.3	-2.5	61.0	1.1	51.4	-0.8	9.79	.020
Respected	44.0	0.8	33.9	-1.6	41.2	0.4	45.7	0.7	2.92	.404
Troubled	13.3	-1.8	19.5	-0.5	24.9	1.7	22.9	0.3	4.48	.214
Sad, depressed	4.0	-1.0	10.2	1.8	2.8	-2.7	20.0	<b>3.3</b>	17.38	.001*
Strong	46.7	0.7	31.4	-3.0	50.3	<b>2.6</b>	37.1	-0.7	11.26	.010
Nervous	29.3	-0.2	25.4	-1.3	36.7	<b>2.6</b>	14.3	-2.1	11.26	.028
Fair	46.7	1.9	24.6	-3.3	41.8	1.8	34.3	-0.4	12.68	.005
Warm	65.3	0.1	59.3	-1.4	68.9	1.6	60.0	-0.6	3.23	.357
Flexible	30.7	1.7	20.3	-0.9	23.2	0.0	17.1	-0.9	3.61	.307
Unfair	4.0	-0.3	5.9	0.8	3.4	-1.1	8.6	1.1	2.34	.506
Likeable	74.7	0.4	65.3	-2.1	78.0	<b>2.1</b>	65.7	-1.0	6.76	.080
Immature	10.7	-1.1	15.3	0.2	16.9	1.1	11.4	-0.6	2.00	.573
Cold	4.0	0.3	2.5	-0.6	2.3	-1.2	11.4	<b>2.7</b>	7.79	.051
Hostile	1.3	0.1	0.8	-0.5	0.6	-1.1	5.7	<b>2.5</b>	6.56	.087
Funny	69.3	1.2	60.2	-0.9	63.3	-0.1	62.9	-0.1	1.68	.643
Inconsistent	5.3	-1.8	10.2	-0.4	13.6	1.4	14.3	0.6	4.07	.254

Note. \* $p \leq .001$ ;  $z > 1.96$  are printed in bold.

tachment style) was employed to assess the impact of gender and attachment style on the index of adjectives participants with romantic relationships used to describe their partners.

**Table 10. Means (and SD) of the positive and negative adjectives index for partner (N = 407) as a function of attachment style**

Attachment style	N	Males	Females	Total
<b>Positive adjectives index</b>				
Secure	75	9.52 (4.50)	12.55 (3.57)	11.29 (4.23)
Anxious/Ambivalent	177	9.48 (3.66)	11.57 (3.80)	10.84 (3.87)
Avoidant/Fearful	118	8.36 (4.04)	10.34 (3.38)	9.10 (3.91)
Avoidant/Dismissing	35	8.04 (4.88)	12.00 (4.92)	9.29 (5.17)
Total	405	8.87 (4.13)	11.54 (3.77)	10.28 (4.16)
<b>Negative adjectives index</b>				
Secure	75	3.42 (2.91)	2.77 (2.68)	3.04 (2.78)
Anxious/Ambivalent	177	3.37 (2.34)	3.45 (2.58)	3.42 (2.49)
Avoidant/Fearful	118	3.38 (3.01)	2.77 (2.17)	3.15(2.74)
Avoidant/Dismissing	35	3.67 (3.85)	3.27 (4.67)	3.54 (4.06)
Total	405	3.42 (2.90)	3.16 (2.67)	3.28 (2.78)

*Positive adjectives for partner.* Two-way ANOVAs (Gender x Attachment style) were executed on the index of positive adjectives participants with romantic relationships used to describe their partners. The gender main effect was statistically significant in the index of positive adjectives participants with a romantic relationship used to describe their partner,  $F(1, 397) = 32.00, p < .001$ . Females ( $M = 11.54$ ), compared to males ( $M = 8.87$ ), used more positive adjectives for their partner. Attachment style effect was also statistically significant,  $F(3, 397) = 3.19, p = .02$ . Participants with secure attachment style ( $M = 11.29$ ), compared to fearful ones ( $M = 9.10$ ), used more positive adjectives, in the descriptions of their partners (pairwise comparisons,  $p = .03$ ). The interaction of attachment style by gender was not statistically significant,  $F(3, 397) = .75, p = .52$ .

*Negative adjectives for partner.* No statistically significant effect was found for either gender,  $F(1, 397) = 1.27, p = .26$ , attachment style,  $F(3, 397) = .46, p = .71$ , or the interaction of gender by attachment style,  $F(3, 397) = 0.46, p = .71$ , as far as the negative adjectives participants with a romantic relationship used to describe their partner.

## DISCUSSION

The aim of the present study was to investigate the relations between adult attachment styles, memories of young adults' childhood experiences with their parents and their current romantic relationships in a sample of Greek university students.

### ***Adult attachment style and childhood memories***

Our study indicated that the majority of our sample (40.5%) had an anxious/ambivalent attachment style. Furthermore, 37.1% were found to have an avoidant/fearful style of attachment and 8.3% had an avoidant/dismissing attachment style. It is interesting to note that the percentage of secure participants based on the ECR inventory was surprisingly low, 14.1%; only 13% of males and 15% of females had a secure attachment style, a finding that is in accordance with results reported by other studies with young adults (Allen & Baucom, 2004; Vanman & Hwang, 2003). However, this finding contradicts findings of studies with community samples (Brennan et al., 1998). It seems that students, compared to older adults, are less likely to be securely attached in their relationships. This finding can be possibly attributed to the fact that they have recently left their parental home and may not be ready yet to make a serious emotional commitment to a romantic partner. It is interesting to note that in a study by Duemmler and Kobak (2001) it was found that attachment security increased with the length of time in the dating relationship and predicted relationship stability following graduation. Moreover, attachment styles, assessed as a measure of personality, also predicted relationship stability with both males' and females' security increasing the relationship stability one year after graduation.

The fact that the proportion of secure participants, in the present study, was found to be very low might be explained by cultural reasons as well. Unfortunately, in Greece there is no epidemiological study carried out examining attachment styles, so that we could compare with the results of our study. Obviously, the topic deserves further investigation with different methodology –possibly with interviews– in a representative sample in order to find out whether this finding is representative of the student population only or also of other groups in Greece.

***Attachment style and gender.*** We hypothesized that there might be gender differences in attachment style. The results of our study supported our hypothesis since the majority of males were found to have an avoidant/fearful attachment style, while the majority of females had an anxious/ambivalent style of attachment. The above mentioned finding corresponds to findings reported by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991). We also found that men tended to classify themselves as avoidant/fearful, an element contrary to the extant findings (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Brennan et al., 1991). Again, further investigation is needed in order to explore whether this

reflects a group-specific effect or a broader cultural trend in Greece or not.

***Attachment style and memories of experiences of childhood.*** According to our hypotheses, attachment styles in adulthood would be related to memories young adults had of their parents. More specifically, participants would use different adjectives in their descriptions of their parents according to their attachment styles. The results of the present study supported this hypothesis. Participants with secure attachment style, compared to fearful ones, used more positive adjectives in their descriptions of their mother, father and parental relationship. Specifically, they described their mother as sympathetic, strong and warm and their father as affectionate. Participants with an anxious/ambivalent (preoccupied) attachment style also used positive adjectives in their descriptions and described their mother as sympathetic, their father as affectionate, and the parental relationship as caring. These findings are in line with Hazan and Shaver's (1987) suggestion that secure individuals, compared to insecure ones, report warmer relationships with both parents and between their parents. Several studies reveal an overlap between security in the parental and romantic domains, showing that adults who were secure in their romantic relationships were more likely to recall their childhood relationships with their parents as being affectionate, caring, and accepting (Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Levy et al., 1998). Diehl et al. (1998) mentioned that adults with a secure attachment style describe their family of origin and their current family more positively. In a recent study by Stanojevic (2004) it was shown that the relationship with the mother was significant for the prediction of partner secure attachment. However, it remains unknown how past attachment experiences with both parents influence romantic relationships in adulthood. This is another topic which requires further investigation.

***Attachment style and current romantic relationship.*** We hypothesized that young adults with a current romantic relationship, compared to young adults without a current romantic relationship, will be differentiated as far as their attachment styles are concerned. The results of the present study supported this hypothesis and indicated that avoidant/fearful participants were less likely to have a romantic relationship compared to secure and anxious/ambivalent ones. Previous research evidence suggests that the group of adults who are willing to get close to others and feel secure in their romantic relationship is the secure ones. On the other hand, adults belonging to avoidant styles do not completely trust others and tend to protect themselves against romantic disappointment by avoiding close relationships and main-



taining a sense of independence (Heaven, Da Silva, Carey & Holen, 2004). In an attempt to explain the above mentioned finding we can say that secure individuals have higher self-worth, are less sensitive to rejection, value others more highly, and are more comfortable depending on others than non secure individuals. Consequently it is easier for them to form and maintain romantic relationships (Brennan et al., 1998; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). Research evidence (Heaven et al., 2004) suggests that attachment styles are related to personality dimensions; however, it was beyond the aim of the present study to examine this topic. In a further study, though, this factor should be seriously taken into account.

***Attachment style and duration of a romantic relationship.*** As far as the duration of the romantic relationship is concerned, we hypothesized that secure participants would be involved in romantic relationships that last for a longer period as compared to anxious/ambivalent or avoidant (fearful and dismissing) ones. As predicted, results indicated that secure adults had a current romantic relationship that lasted longer. This finding is similar to evidence from a recent Spanish study (Monteoliva & Garcia-Martinez, 2005), which showed that the secure and preoccupied students had more long-lasting relationships than did both avoidant (fearful and dismissing). Simpson, Ickes, and Grich (1999) also suggested that anxious/ambivalent adults experienced greater instability in their relationships and their relationships were more likely to have ended by the 4-month follow-up. In general, research evidence suggests that people with secure attachment styles tend to experience less conflict, more satisfaction, greater stability, and longer duration in their romantic relationships (Belsky, 1999; Feeney & Noller, 1990; Kirkpatrick & Hazan, 1994). According to Vanman and Hwang (2003), secure individuals, compared to fearful ones, show more commitment to their romantic partner and, consequently, their romantic relationships last longer. Research evidence suggests that adult partners need time to test each other as attachment figures that are capable of providing safety and support (Duemmler & Kobak, 2001). As relationships proceed, attachment security possibly increases; thus longer relationships might reflect greater attachment security.

***Current romantic relationship, attachment style, and descriptions of partner.*** Concerning descriptions of the romantic partner, in accordance with our research hypotheses, participants with secure attachment style, compared to fearful ones, were found to use more positive adjectives in their descriptions. Moreover, participants with an anxious/ambivalent attachment style de-

scribed their partner as confident, while avoidant/dismissing participants described him/her as sad/ depressed. This finding is in accordance with previous research findings (Duemmler & Kobak, 2001; Simpson, 1990) that showed that people who manifest a secure attachment style have more frequent occurrences of positive emotion and less frequent occurrences of negative emotion in their relationships. On the other hand, research indicates that preoccupied individuals tend to have a positive view of others, idealizing about their romantic relationships (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Kunce & Shaver, 1994).

Gender differences were also observed. Females, compared to males, used more positive adjectives in their descriptions of their romantic partners and had romantic relationships that lasted longer. It seems that females more actively seek stable romantic relationships. Females define the self within a context of relationships to others, i.e., in terms of their ability to construct and maintain relationships (Jordan & Surrey, 1986). They generally undertake roles in which they are subordinate to and dependent upon males (Jordan & Surrey, 1986). Alonso-Arbiol, Shaver, and Yarnoz (2002) found that emotional dependency was moderately correlated with femininity. They also found a significant correlation between emotional dependency and anxiety. There appear to be interesting differences between males and females in the correlates of attachment and how elements of past experience are relevant for each gender (Crowell & Treboux, 1995).

### *Conclusion*

The present study, in accordance with previous research, supports the view that early relationships with parents are associated with the way people form romantic relationships. Females tended to have an anxious/ ambivalent (preoccupied) attachment style, whereas males had an avoidant/ fearful style of attachment. Students with a secure style of attachment used generally more positive adjectives to describe their parents. Regarding romantic relationships, students with a secure attachment style, compared to those with insecure, had a current long lasting romantic relationship and used more positive adjectives to describe their partner.

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