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Doctoral Dissertation Summary

The Effect of Adult Attachment Orientations on Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Processes: Testing Security Schema Activation

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Introduction

Attachment research is growing into the studies that investigate early attachment's (i.e., child-caregiver) effect on beliefs about the self, others, and the world as well as the guidance of these beliefs within interpersonal relationships. Even though Bowlby's (1969) work on attachment mainly focused on the infant-caregiver relationship (see Bowlby, 1973, 1987; Ainsworth et al., 1978), over the last two decades the dynamics of attachment through adulthood has been gaining attention (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). Bowlby, himself, also believed that attachment-related experiences have implications for social and emotional functioning across the lifespan. In other words, these experiences shape attachment-related experiences shape interpersonal functioning across the life course. Building on his ideas, Hazan and Shaver (1987) argued adult romantic relationships to be a function of attachment behavioral system that develops the emotional bond between infant and their caregivers.

Attachment orientations have been studied as a strong individual difference in adulthood that result in variety in everyday functioning (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Indeed, several alignments on the attachment dimensions (that orient around anxiety and avoidance) are associated with the way people think, feel, and behave in close relationships throughout life (for a review, see Gillath et al., 2016). In this sense, attachment theory might be regarded as one of the useful frameworks to understand identity formation, self, affect regulation, cognitive appraisals, relational processes, attitudes as well as behaviors. What is more, working on attachment orientations are important because it is noted that only when relief is attained, and a sense of attachment security is restored can the individual deploy attention and energy to other behavioral systems and engage in non-attachment activities including sex, exploring, caregiving (Bowlby 1969/1982).

As addressed above, acquiring a sense of attachment security seems deeply connected with effective daily functioning. In this sense enhancement of attachment security via priming might be useful for improving psychological functioning and enhancing the quality of life through altering sense of security for the better. Activation of the attachment security schemas (i.e., mental representations) through exposing individuals to explicit or implicit attachment related cues to make them feel more secure is thought to work by making attachment security related cues more

readily accessible and available for mental processes, thus affecting individuals' emotions, cognitions, and behavior (Gillath et al., 2022; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2020).

Within the present dissertation we examined the associations between attachment orientations and intra (e.g., self-concept clarity, resilience, coping, empathy) as well as interpersonal processes (e.g., sexism, intimate partner violence), mainly focusing on appraisals of the self, others, and relationships, through four studies. Instead of handling individuals as belonging to different attachment categories, we followed the two-dimensional model (attachment anxiety dimension and attachment avoidance dimension) suggested by Fraley and colleagues (2015) (based on the work of Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991)), as they stated, "...If people actually vary continuously in attachment organization, but researchers assign people to categories, then potentially important information about the way people differ from one another is lost" (p. 355). It was expected that the findings of all the four studies might help us to understand the dynamics that lead to variety within affect, cognition, and behaviors in terms of everyday context. What is more, the present dissertation attempted to broaden our knowledge on the possible empowerment effect of the activation of attachment security schemas specifically within romantic relationship context. The aims of the four studies included within the dissertation are as follows:

Study 1. Investigating the associations between attachment orientations and resilience through coping mechanisms (i.e., emotional focused coping and problem focused coping) during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Study 2. Expanding existing SCC literature by providing a model for the examination of the relationship between (a) attachment orientations (i.e., attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance) and SCC; (b) SCC and aspects of empathy (i.e., empathic concern and personal distress); and (c) attachment orientations and aspects of empathy through SCC.

Study 3. Expanding the existing relationship dynamics literature by providing a model for the examination of the association between (a) attachment orientations (i.e., attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance), BS, and NTB; (b) NTB and preference for a partner endorsing BS attitudes through attachment anxiety levels; (c) attachment security schema activation and appeal of such partner through NTB.

Study 4. Building on existing IPV research by proposing and providing a model for the association between (a) attachment orientations and WSR to keep an abusive relationship; (b) evoking attachment security schema and WSR with regards to persistence within the abusive relationship.

1. Attachment anxiety and resilience: The mediating role of coping

Although previous research provides evidence for the link between attachment and resilience, less is known about the mechanism underlying this association. Building on the indirect evidence mentioned above, we believe that the association between different coping strategies and attachment orientations may provide an insight into why individuals high in a specific attachment orientation are more likely to demonstrate resilience than others. Our goal was to explore the role played by coping strategies in the relationship between attachment orientations and resilience, since resilience is also explained as “a stress-resistant attitude, related to the appraisal of oneself as able to cope with stressors” (Karreman & Vingerhoets, 2012, p. 821) and IWMs- that include cognitive appraisals of self- along with secondary strategies connected to attachment orientations, impact coping strategies for stressors. Indeed, the assessment of stressful situations and one's own competences to cope with them is affected by the level of an individual's self-assessment (e.g., IWMs) and habits of reacting to difficulties (e.g., secondary attachment strategies, coping strategies) are among personality determinants of resistance to stress (Huber, 2010 as cited in Pudlo- Komorowska, 2016). In this sense, it may be that attachment influences resilience because it is associated with variance in engaged coping strategies, and coping strategies may in turn shape resilience when faced with distressing stimulus.

Because of the limited number of studies that have associated coping strategies with attachment orientations and resilience (e.g., Craparo et al., 2018; Guo, 2019), as well as evidence suggesting a relationship between the different attachment orientations and resilience (see Rasmussen et al., 2019), we hypothesized that attachment security would be correlated with greater resilience and reliance on the problem-focused coping strategy.

We tested two mediation models corresponding to the attachment dimensions assessed by the ECR-R (i.e., anxiety and avoidance). We found that individuals high in attachment anxiety tend to use emotion-based coping strategies more, compared to the problem-focused ones and as a result, they indicate less resilience (see Figure 1).

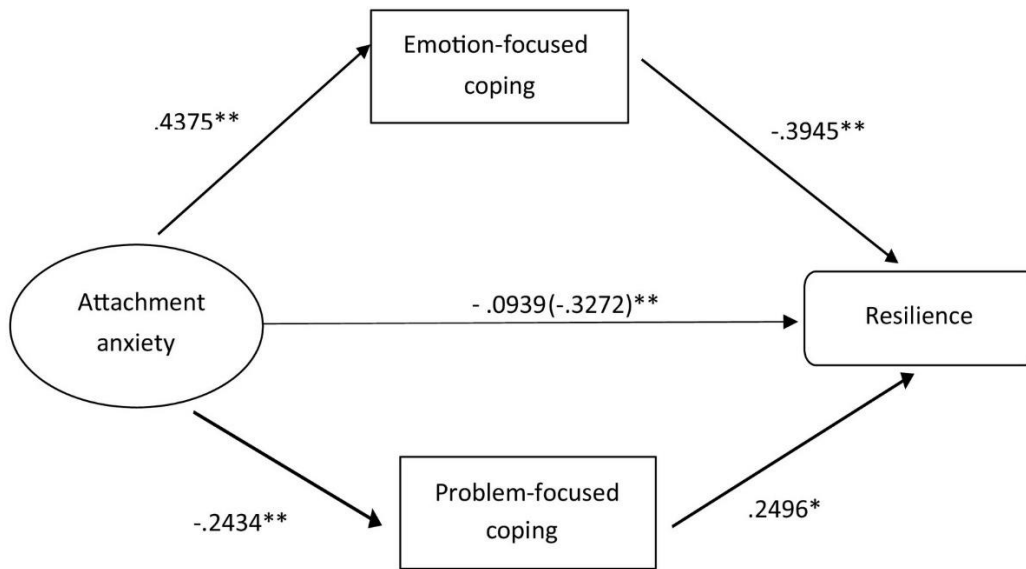


Figure 1. Attachment anxiety, coping, and resilience association

On the other hand, although attachment avoidance did not have a direct significant effect on resilience, it had an indirect significant effect on resilience through problem-focused coping; focusing on the problem less resulted in heightened resilience levels among individuals high in attachment avoidance (see Figure 2).

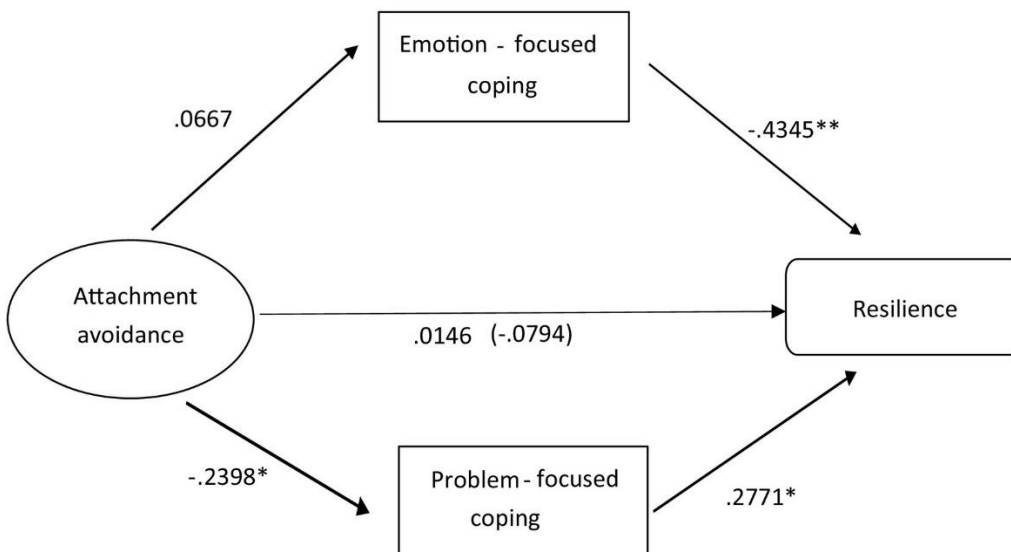


Figure 2. Attachment avoidance, coping, and resilience association

Our findings align with the existing literature; when distressed, individuals high in attachment avoidance tend to divert their attention away from perceived threats, which also serves

for emotional dissociation— a learned defense mechanism to manage stress within the self— in order to conceal the feelings of insecurity whereas individuals high in attachment anxiety tend to fixate on the threat and exaggerate feelings of helplessness with the hope of gaining proximity from their attachment figures (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

2. The association between attachment orientations and empathy: The mediation effect of self-concept clarity

Since the self–other distinction is mentioned by many researchers as a key aspect of empathy (e.g., Bird & Viding, 2014; Lamm et al., 2016), further research is needed to understand the psychological factors that can facilitate this distinction. Carl Rogers (1959) called attention to the importance of recognizing self and other as different entities in order to be able to empathize with others, which justifies the importance of investigating SCC. Krol and Bartz (2021) described the potential impact of this recognition as follows: “a strong sense of self should allow one to share the experience of another in distress, while maintaining an awareness of whose feelings belong to whom and, in this way, facilitate empathic concern and, ultimately, helping the person in need” (p. 3). In other words, a strong, stable, and clear sense of self may allow individuals to empathize with others in distress, while leading to a conscious awareness of and distinction between their own and others' emotions.

Individuals with high attachment anxiety or avoidance may struggle to form a clear, coherent, and stable sense of self. Attachment avoidance is characterized by the deactivation of attachment needs and is manifested in excessive self-reliance and fear of forming close relationships (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2012). Given that individuals with high attachment avoidance are reluctant to become interdependent with close others, they may miss out on benefiting from others as a basis for a clear self-concept. Moreover, attachment avoidance has been characterized by reduced trust in others, including the feedback received from them (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

Negative IWMs of the self-lead individuals who are high in attachment anxiety to seek external self-validation and to see close relationships as the main source of their self-esteem (Mikulincer et al., 2005) rather than basing their self-esteem on internal standards of competence and value (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). While these individuals have a greater desire than their counterparts with lower attachment anxiety to integrate or merge with close others, they report a

big discrepancy between their desired and perceived self–other integration (Slotter et al., 2010). As a result, these individuals seek to reduce this discrepancy by altering their self-concepts in an attempt to integrate more fully with close others (e.g., Mikulincer and Shaver, 2005, Mikulincer and Shaver, 2007). In exchange for maintaining closeness with significant others (through merging with close others), individuals who are high in attachment anxiety are thought to have a less stable self-concept and experience greater self-concept confusion, especially following separation (Slotter et al., 2010).

Although earlier research had demonstrated significant links between attachment and self-concept clarity; attachment and empathy; and self-concept clarity and empathy respectively, there had been no studies examining these associations in conjunction with one another. Therefore, two studies explored whether individual differences in self-concept clarity would mediate the relationship between attachment orientation (i.e., attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance) and empathy (i.e., empathic concern and personal distress). In Study 1, the association between attachment orientation and self-concept clarity was examined among 602 Hungarian university students. In Study 2, the relationship between attachment and empathy was investigated through self-concept clarity among 1000 Hungarian adults.

First, we ran a model in which we checked SCC as the mediator between attachment anxiety and empathic concern. The results indicated that both the total effect, $B_{total} = 0.054$, $SE = 0.016$, $\beta_{total} = 0.105$, 95 % CI (0.022, 0.086), and the direct effect, $B_{direct} = 0.098$, $SE = 0.018$, $\beta_{direct} = 0.191$, 95 % CI (0.061, 0.135) of attachment anxiety on empathic concern were significant. Overall, SCC partially mediated the relationship between attachment anxiety and empathic concern ($\beta_{IE} = -0.085$, 95 % CI [-0.125, -0.048]). The overall model explained 9 % of empathic concern, $R^2 = -0.091$, $F(5,935) = 18.94$, $p < .001$ (see Figure 3).

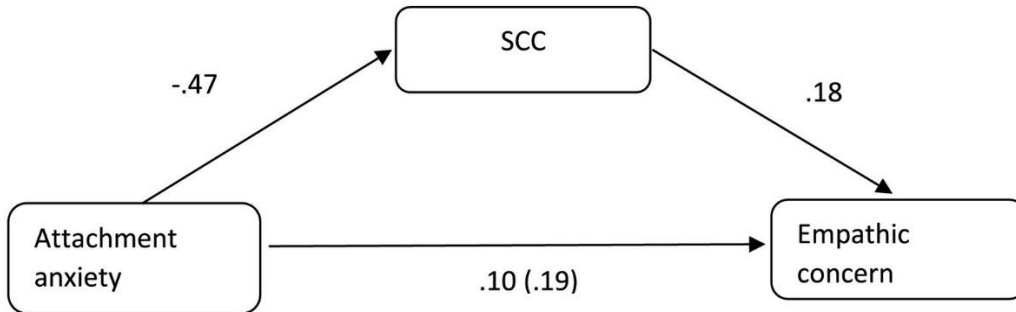


Figure 3. Mediation model for attachment anxiety predicts empathic concern through SCC.

We ran a model in which we checked SCC as the mediator between attachment anxiety and personal distress. The results indicate that both the total effect ($\beta_{\text{total}} = 0.508$, $SE = 0.0196$, 95 % CI [0.318, 0.395]) and the direct effect ($\beta_{\text{direct}} = 0.429$, $SE = 0.022$, 95 % CI [0.257, 0.345]) of attachment anxiety on personal distress were significant. Overall, SCC partially mediated the relationship between attachment anxiety and empathic concern ($\beta_{\text{IE}} = 0.079$, 95 % CI [0.048, 0.111]). The overall model explained 28 % of personal distress, $R^2 = 0.277$, $F(5,994) = 76.34$, $p < .001$ (see Figure 4)

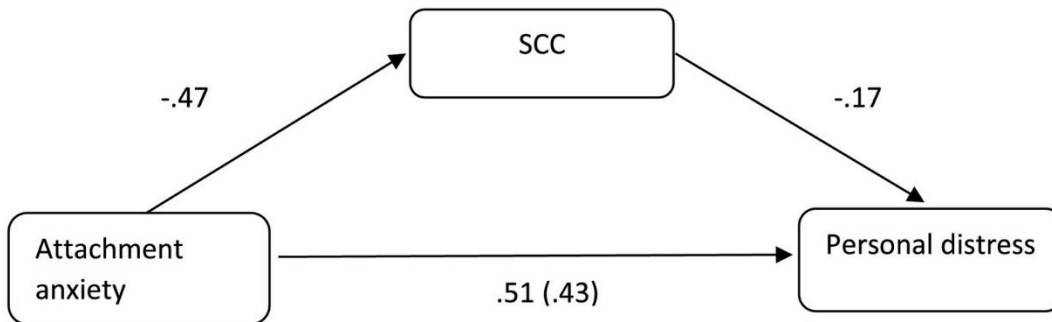


Figure 4. Mediation model for attachment anxiety predicts personal distress through SCC.

The findings from both samples revealed that attachment avoidance and anxiety were negatively related to self-concept clarity. Individuals with greater self-concept clarity showed greater empathic concern and lower personal distress. Attachment avoidance was associated with lower empathic concern, whereas there was no significant association with personal distress. These individuals may automatically disengage from the distressing stimuli (e.g., perceptions of others' discomfort) before engaging the self, in an attempt to block or inhibit any emotional state that is incongruent with the goal of keeping their attachment needs deactivated (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016).

Attachment anxiety was positively related to empathic concern and personal distress. Self-concept clarity partially mediated associations with attachment anxiety and aspects of empathy. In their study, Krol and Bartz (2021) reported that greater self–other merging may be one of the mechanisms underlying the empathic difficulties experienced by individuals with low SCC. Our findings contribute to this work by showing that a clear and coherent sense of self has an additional effect in the case of attachment anxiety—prompted by the tendency toward excessive self–other merging (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016)—when empathizing with others.

3. Attachment security schemas to attenuate the appeal of benevolent sexism: The effect of the need to belong and relationship security

Due to the emphasis placed on men's obligation to cherish, protect, and provide for their female partners, benevolent sexism (BS) is thought to play a pivotal role in sustaining gender inequality, since its romantic overtones mask the way in which these attitudes can interfere with women's independence, ambition, and competence (Glick & Fiske, 1996). In the context of attachment theory and the need to belong (NTB), the two present studies examined why some women tend to find BS appealing despite the costs. Baumeister and Leary (1995) proposed that “human beings have a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships” (p. 497). Although NTB is a fundamental motivation, the strength of that motivation differs among individuals (Leary et al., 2006). Furthermore, within the belongingness orientation model, Lavigne et al. (2011) describe two distinct orientations in terms of the different drives behind fulfilling NTB. According to this approach, individuals either genuinely have an interest in others and perceive a connection with others as the basis for interpersonal and individual development (i.e., growth orientation) or they desire the closeness of others due to constant worry over social acceptance (i.e., deficit-reduction orientation). Individuals strongly motivated by the latter orientation are assumed to need great reassurance, seek acceptance to feel secure, and experience high levels of fear of rejection.

Social experiences during the early years of life have the potential to shape individuals' ability to satisfy their fundamental psychological needs, including NTB (McClelland, 1985). Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) postulates internal working models (IWMs) of the self, as well as of others, which are built through continuous infant–caregiver relationship patterns and develop into a specific set of expectations, attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors in terms of bonding with

others later in life (Bartholomew, 1990; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). For example, individuals who experienced inconsistent care from their caregivers (i.e., individuals with high attachment anxiety) tend to have a greater fear of rejection as well as greater concerns regarding acceptance compared to counterparts whose caregivers provided consistent affection (Bowlby, 1969; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Since the relationship patterns these individuals experienced throughout their developmental years lacked continuity of care, affection, and trust, unlike those experienced by counterparts high in attachment security, their NTB has never been fully satisfied, thus elevated levels of NTB, the enhanced pursuit of its satisfaction, and the fear of losing acquired relationships may be ongoing (see also Lavigne et al., 2011).

In addition, such individuals have an intense need for relationship security—for example, men who endorse benevolent sexist attitudes, which promise investment in the relationship as well as the partner, seem to strongly appeal to women with high attachment anxiety (Cross & Overall, 2018). Following this research path, we assumed that attachment orientation might play a significant role in terms of the strength of NTB as well as partner preferences. In Study 1, we discussed and tested the assumption that men's BS might be appealing to women who have high levels of attachment anxiety due to increased NTB. Study 2 took the form of an experimental study in which the activation of attachment security schema was tested for its effect on reducing NTB as well as on preference for a partner with benevolent sexist attitudes.

We found that an individual's NTB seems to be important in terms of their tendency to prefer a partner who holds more benevolent sexist attitudes if they have a greater fear of abandonment. The association of NTB with ideal partner BS was significant and positive among individuals with high attachment anxiety ($B = 0.32$, $B SE = 0.10$, 95 % CI = [0.12, 0.53], $p = .001$) and individuals with moderate attachment anxiety ($B = 0.18$, $B SE = 0.08$, 95 % CI = [0.01, 0.34], $p = .028$). By contrast, the association was not statistically significant among those with low attachment anxiety ($B = 0.03$, $B SE = 0.10$, 95 % CI = [-0.17, 0.24], $p = .74$) (see Figure 5). These findings align with the literature that suggests individuals who are high in attachment anxiety have an inordinate need to belong, to fit in, or to feel accepted (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Baumeister & Leary, 1995) and they are more likely to prefer their potential partner to hold benevolent sexist attitudes than were their counterparts with a more secure attachment orientation (see also Cross & Overall, 2018).

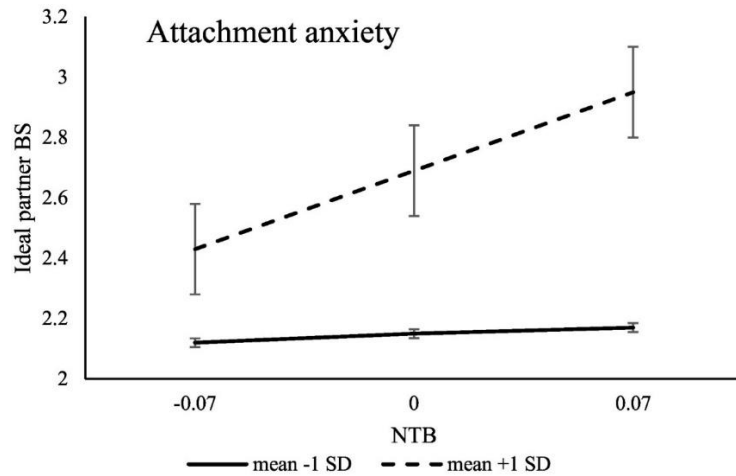


Figure 5. Moderation analyses for attachment anxiety.

We also found that priming attachment security (compared to a neutral prime) leads to decreased levels of NTB, which in turn reduces the preference for a future partner that holds benevolently sexist attitudes toward women (see Figure 6). Our results were in line with the assumption of the “broaden and build” cycle of attachment security (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2020). Furthermore, these results suggest that felt security attenuates both preoccupation with the need for relationship security and fear of abandonment and reduces the need for acceptance/approval, which in turn also reduces the importance attributed to permanent devotion and investment as preferred values in potential partners.

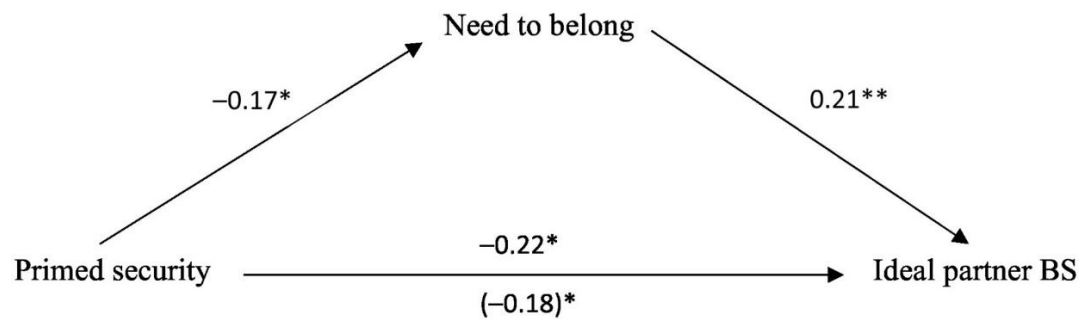


Figure 6. Standardized coefficients demonstrating the mediating effect of NTB on the relationship between security prime and ideal partner BS.

Notes: The direct effect is presented within brackets; ** $p < .001$, * $p < .05$.

4. The role of anxious attachment in the continuation of abusive relationships: The potential for strengthening a secure attachment schema as a tool of empowerment

Despite the extensive body of research on attachment and IPV perpetration, comparatively few studies have been carried out on victimization and attachment. Higher levels of attachment anxiety have been linked to recurrent IPV victimization among women, as it leaves women with a wide range of relational vulnerabilities (Velotti et al., 2018). As attachment anxiety predisposes women to fear separation and abandonment, women high in attachment anxiety have difficulty leaving abusive relationships (Velotti et al., 2018). Doumas et al. (2008) stated that individuals high in attachment anxiety tend to tolerate violence as a tool to provide proximity—that is, negative treatment might seem more endurable by individuals high in attachment anxiety over perceived emotional distance, separation threats, or actual disengagement.

Furthermore, IPV may function as a tool of affirmation/validation for individuals with high attachment anxiety in terms of their perception of the self and of others. In their study on IPV, childhood maltreatment, attachment styles, and depressive symptoms among women, Smagur et al. (2018) reported that women interpret IPV in a way that is congruent with their negative working models of the self, and that IPV maintains working models that result from childhood maltreatment. From a different perspective, anxiously attached individuals' predominant IWM of the self as unworthy or undeserving of love may “justify” the abuse directed at them (Henderson et al., 2005). As Sandberg et al. (2016) stated, for individuals high in attachment anxiety, a caring and loving relationship might seem unattainable. In some cases, staying with an abusive partner might involve traumatic reenactment of unresolved attachment experiences (Pearlman & Courtois, 2005). Considering these patterns, we expect a tendency to stay in the relationship for individuals with greater attachment anxiety but not for attachment avoidance. Indeed, it has been hypothesized that high levels of attachment anxiety among victims of IPV may make it more difficult to leave an abusive relationship (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016; Park, 2016).

Participants were asked to read about an IPV incident involving a fictional friend and they were informed about their friends' decision of leaving the partner. Finally, they were provided with willingness to stay in relationship questionnaire. The last questionnaire required answers as if the participants were the victimized close friend. In Study 1, we therefore examined whether individuals with attachment difficulties are at increased risk for experiencing IPV by investigating

the association between attachment orientations and keeping an abusive relationship. Building on the conclusion drawn by Park (2016) that having skills to maintain secure and supportive relationships would make women less likely to remain in an abusive relationship, in our second study we investigated whether making individuals' feelings of being valued, cared for, loved, and secure in a relationship more explicit might support this recommendation. We assessed willingness to stay in an abusive relationship across two different priming conditions (security vs. neutral).

Attachment anxiety positively and significantly predicted WSR, whereas attachment avoidance did not. Attachment anxiety presented the strongest predictive value for WSR. That is, individuals high in attachment anxiety had the strongest tendency to imagine themselves staying in the relationship. Negative views of self, a fixation on separation anxiety, and the excessive need for relationship security that comes with attachment anxiety seem to interfere with IPV perception and tend to result in the imagined continuation of the abusive relationship. On the other hand, IPV may work as a tool for maintaining contact, which is preferred over detachment/break-up that represents a strong threat of separation among individuals with high attachment anxiety (see Velotti et al., 2018). The null finding regarding attachment avoidance and imagined willingness to keep the relationship is complementary with regards to IWMs individuals with high levels of attachment avoidance have. These individuals have a negative view for others as well as repressed relationship needs. Thus, because avoidant individuals show excessive self-reliance and a tendency to withdraw from relationships under relationship stress (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2012), the WSR items might be irrelevant for them.

Participants in the secure priming condition reported lower levels of willingness to stay in the relationship significantly compared to participants in the neutral condition ($t(229) = -2.02, p = .045$; see Fig. 7). We also found that attachment anxiety but not attachment avoidance significantly moderated the association between attachment security priming and WSR (see Figure 8). Conforming and building on indirectly relevant findings (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2015; Park, 2016), we found that imagining a secure and supportive relationship lead women to imagine rejecting an abusive relationship. Our findings were in line with earlier research that reported victims' attachment anxiety as a risk factor for IPV (see Velotti et al., 2018, for a review).

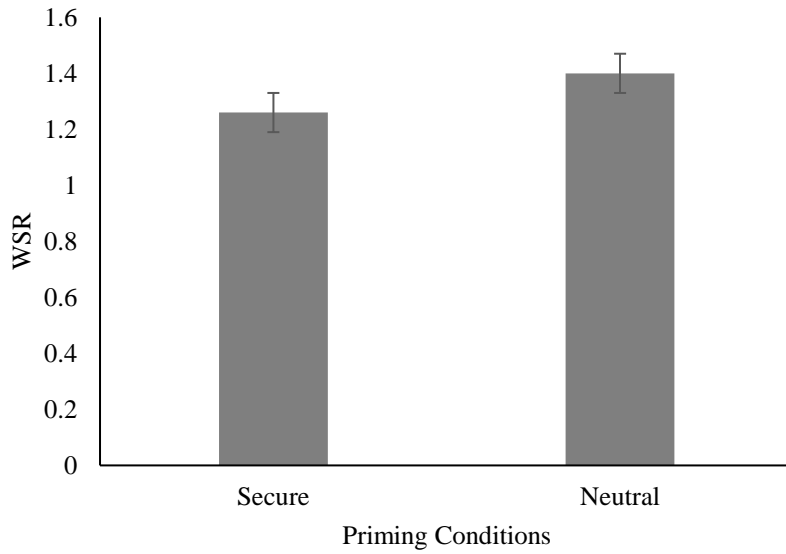


Figure 7. The WSR levels for priming conditions.

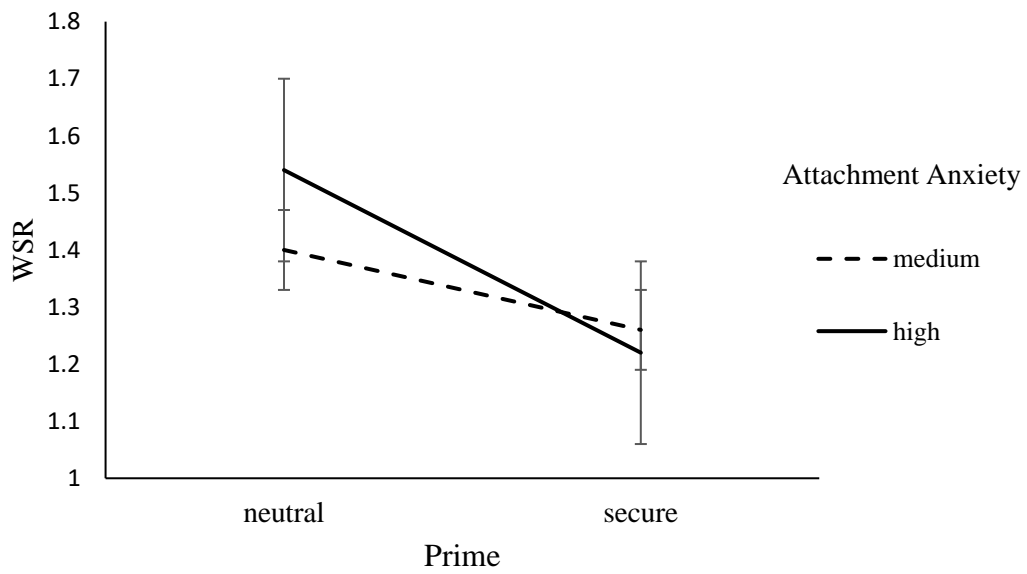


Figure 8. Effect of attachment anxiety (± 1 SD) on WSR for neutral and secure conditions.

General discussion

Throughout the four studies covered within the present dissertation, we were able to demonstrate the disruptive effect of IWMs related to attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance on various intrapersonal as well as interpersonal processes. Following these findings and the relevant literature, we believe it is important to provide trainings to develop insights about attachment orientations and their functions among several contexts (e.g., daily life, intergroup engagements, romantic relationships).

In Study 1, we worked on the factors (i.e., emotion-focused coping vs. problem-focused coping) that contribute to the connection between resilience and attachment. In line with the assumption that the early attachment experiences of insecure individuals interfere with the development of inner resources needed for coping successfully with stressors (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2019), the results of the study demonstrate the important role of attachment in the facilitation of coping strategies and resilience. In a broader sense, our findings suggest that attachment anxiety is a risk factor that negatively impacts well-being by predisposing individuals to show both poor resilience traits and ineffective coping strategies in the face of distress. Attachment anxiety is characterized by employing hyperactivation strategies, in order to attract the attention of the attachment figure and be soothed when faced with threats. Hyperactivation strategies include the exaggeration of threats, overdependence on the attachment figure, and hypervigilance to threat when faced with distressing situations (Mikulincer & Florian, 1998; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Although the use of hyperactivation and emotion-focused strategies (e.g., self-blame, self-criticism, rumination, focus on negative emotions, and feelings of helplessness) by individuals high in attachment anxiety is to some extent effective in maintaining the attention of the attachment figure, these strategies may serve to intensify anxiety, which has been found to interfere with the development of resilience traits (Cantazaro & Wei, 2010; Pascuzzo et al., 2015).

In Study 2, the strongest relationship regarding attachment anxiety was with personal distress and it was partially mediated by SCC. Basing on the “theory of mind” we believed that this finding might be due to the excessive motivation among individuals high in attachment anxiety to merge with others in their attempt to find closeness, which may predispose them to being unable to differentiate between their own and others' distress, while making them more vulnerable to

personal distress. In their study, Krol and Bartz (2021) reported that greater self–other merging may be one of the mechanisms underlying the emphatic difficulties experienced by individuals with low SCC. Our findings contribute to this work by showing that a clear and coherent sense of self has an additional effect in the case of attachment anxiety—prompted by the tendency toward excessive self–other merging (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016)—when empathizing with others.

The two studies within Study 3 illustrated that a greater need for relationship security and belongingness orient women high in attachment anxiety to prefer partners who hold BS attitudes, as these attitudes are appraised as signaling the partner's reliability, investment, permanency, and devotion. The relationship between NTB and ideal partner BS was strongest in the case of higher levels of attachment anxiety. These findings complement the core feature of attachment anxiety that is reflected as a desire for closeness and a worry of being rejected by or separated from significant others (Bifulco & Thomas, 2012). By adding an experimental paradigm in the second part of Study 3, we showed that activating attachment security schemas enhances felt security and attenuates NTB, which in turn reduces the preference for potential partners who endorse BS attitudes.

In Study 4 we aimed to contribute to the development of a theory on the role of victim-related psychological mechanisms in explaining vulnerability to IPV victimization as a result of remaining in an abusive relationship. Our finding is in line with earlier research that reported victims' attachment anxiety as a risk factor for IPV (see Velotti et al., 2018, for a review). Velotti et al. (2018) also mentioned in their review that the reason for women high in attachment anxiety to prefer staying in an abusive relationship might be the unbearable experience of anxiety that stems from the loss of the partner. We found that visualizing a secure and supportive relationship lead women to imagine rejecting an abusive relationship. This finding suggested that activating secure schemas have a potential to alleviate the need to continue relationship driven by fear of separation and abandonment (Rouleau et al., 2019; Schneider & Brimhall, 2014). More specifically, felt security through security priming seems to attenuate hyperactivation strategies, including remaining in a dysfunctional relationship, to cope with unpleasant experiences or threats. This is also in line with research that presents induced secure schemas as guiding information processing, feelings, and behavior in orientation-congruent ways, as well as having positive outcomes in the short term (Carnelley et al., 2018; Mikulincer and Shaver, 2015).

Building on the work of Corvo et al. (2018), Study 4 has contributed to the newly developed concept of including attachment security priming in IPV interventions to obtain better treatment results, and our second study demonstrated its potential effectiveness. In different contexts, “earned secures” have been shown to perform nearly as well as “continuous secures” (Mota & Matos, 2015), suggesting that attachment security inducement is a possible method for improving coping strategies and fostering resilience.

Conclusions

Despite the need for further research, the studies included here strongly suggest that attachment orientations as displays of IWMs are strong factors that predispose individuals to perceive, feel and act in certain ways. What is more, we showed that inducing sense of security through attachment security priming might attenuate the detrimental choices (e.g., tendency to be with benevolently sexist partner or not leaving an abusive partner) individuals with greater attachment anxiety make because of their heightened attachment related needs. In a broader sense, we were able to illustrate the positive psychological effects of the activation of mental representations related to attachment security and the possibility to alter an individual’s felt security, at least temporarily.

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