



Young people's romantic attachment styles and their associations with well-being

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This research, based on attachment theory, examined the relationships between romantic attachment styles, romantic attitudes and well-being among 461 tertiary students, aged 17–21 years. Those with secure romantic attachment styles were less stressed, less lonely and more satisfied academically than those with clingy or casual/fickle styles, independent of current relationship status.

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Introduction

This research concerns the relationships between young people's romantic attachment styles, and their sense of well-being as assessed in several key domains. It is based on the theory of attachment which suggests that adult (or adolescent) romantic attachment styles parallel, in significant ways, childhood attachment styles, and that these styles are, in turn, important determinants of quality of life at any age.

Romantic love relationships can be conceptualized from the point of view of attachment theory, which suggests that infants form various kinds of attachment bonds with their carers, and the quality of these bonds affects adult relationships (Waters and Sroufe, 1983; Bartholomew and Horowitz, 1991). Ainsworth *et al.* (1978) describe these infant bonds as secure, anxious/resistant, avoidant, or disorganized/disoriented. On the basis of these categorizations, Hatfield and Rapson (1995) use attachment theory to group types of people with respect to romantic love. They proposed that people's romantic attachment styles depend on how comfortable they are with closeness and/or independence, and how eager they are to be involved in a romantic relationship. These characteristics are viewed as arising at least in part from childhood experiences with the primary care-giver. Hatfield and Rapson categorize those interested in romantic (love) relationships into four groups: Secure (comfortable with closeness and independence); Clingy (comfortable with closeness but not independence), Skittish (fearful of too much closeness, secure about independence); and Fickle (uncomfortable with both closeness and independence). Those expressing relative indifference to romantic relationships were classified as either Casual (interested only if relationships are virtually problem free) or Uninterested (not at all interested).

Hazan and Shaver (1987) in their attempt to map childhood attachment styles to adult romantic attachment (or "love") styles argued that discomfort with closeness (the "Skittish" style, as described by Hatfield and Rapson above) would be experienced by those who had been avoidantly attached. Discomfort with independence and the desire to "merge" with another (the "Clingy" style) would be the adult version of anxious/ambivalent (later

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renamed anxious/resistant) attachment. Secure adult romantic relationships, characterized by trust, comfort with closeness but without the desire to merge identity with another person, would be predicted by secure childhood attachment. The Hazan and Shaver (1987) studies of undergraduates and individuals responding to a newspaper "love quiz", using a measure of attachment style based on childhood experiences, and a measure of adult romantic attachment style based on the participants' experiences with romantic relationships, showed evidence for these predicted relationships. These researchers did not consider the disorganized/disoriented (childhood) attachment style which arises, according to Berk (1997), from a range of types of inadequate parenting, such as neglect or abuse, in which the child's attempts to attach are met with mixed and confusing signals. It would not be unreasonable to predict that this style would relate to an adult romantic attachment style characterized by either lack of interest in relationships except at a superficial level (Casual or Uninterested), or the "Fickle" style postulated by Hatfield and Rapson (1995). In this latter style, individuals play an approach-avoidance "game" with romantic love, because they are not really sure what they want, and have problems in trusting either their partner or their own emotional responsiveness. There is, in fact, some evidence from longitudinal studies supporting these links between childhood and adolescent/adult attachment styles (e.g. McCarthy, 1999; McCarthy and Taylor, 1999).

Hatfield and Rapson are careful to suggest that adult romantic attachment styles are multidetermined, with only one of their determinants being childhood attachment, albeit a very important one. Another important determinant is developmental period. Specifically, the adolescent and young adult stages postulated by Erikson (1968) as involving first the development of identity, then the development of intimacy, also potentially shape adult romantic attachment style. Thus, young people who were securely attached as infants may temporarily demonstrate less than secure attachment styles, as they work through issues of their own self-definition. The idea of pseudo-intimacy, proposed by Orlofsky (1993) was that young people who claim they are experiencing (or ready for) close intimate relationships before they have developed an adequate sense of self, are in fact not experiencing intimacy as the true mutuality of mature adults. This may or may not develop at a later stage when/if the sense of personal identity becomes stronger (and is not "foreclosed" through cutting off exploratory possibilities by prematurely committing to an exclusive relationship).

On the basis of attachment theory, however, it is likely that developmental transitions such as the ones described above will be less stressful for the securely attached. It is also likely that in late adolescence/early youth, young people who were securely attached as children will express more mature adult romantic attachment styles (even if they are not currently in relationships) than the less securely attached. This is because of the "internal working models" of relationships that are postulated as derived from early care-giving experiences of availability, support, and consistency (or lack of these). These internal working models or sets of expectations provide a representation or guide for future relationships (Bowlby, 1980; Bretherton, 1992), and are proposed to be relatively stable throughout life. For this reason, Hatfield and Rapson view romantic attachment styles as also likely to be highly stable throughout adult life, even if they undergo some variation and development during adolescence. In support of these ideas about stability, Collins and Sroufe (1999) present evidence from a longitudinal study which showed that early attachment was associated with skills in social relationships in primary and secondary school. Adolescents who were securely attached as infants were more likely to have strong friendship groups, be dating, and have closer and more sustained relationships with their dating partners than those from the other

attachment style groups. Several other studies have shown a link between infant attachment and social skills at a later age, usually middle childhood (e.g. Lewis *et al.*, 1984; Lewis and Feiring, 1989; Cohn, 1990).

Childhood attachment styles as echoed in adult romantic attachment styles may, through their association with quality relationships, relate to a range of outcomes reflecting adjustment and well-being (i.e. not just social skills). One way of conceptualizing adjustment is to view it as consisting of two domains, namely the internal psychological (emotional and affective) domain and the external sociocultural (behavioural) domain (Searle and Ward, 1990). The internal psychological domain is often measured in terms of social and emotional well-being, mental health and/or levels of psychological distress or experienced stress. The external sociocultural domain is often measured in terms of the ability to deal with everyday life such as school, family, and work. For tertiary students, coping with everyday life events and experiences, social relationships and study/achievement are the hallmarks of good adjustment. In this study, we will assess satisfactory adjustment/well-being in these domains through perceived stress (a measure of coping with life experience), loneliness (a measure of satisfaction with social relationships) and academic satisfaction (a measure of belief that university is a positive experience in terms of learning and achievement).

Limited evidence exists regarding attachment styles and adolescent/adult adjustment outcomes over and above social well-being. Mikulincer and Florian (1998) reported that people with secure attachment coped better with various stressful situations compared to those with other attachment styles. Roche *et al.* (1999) also found that attachment styles could predict psychological adjustment in the sense that secure attachment was negatively related to depression and anxiety arousal. A meta-analysis of studies that assessed the relationship between attachment style measured at adolescence and adjustment/adaptive behaviour revealed a modest but significant correlation between these variables. Self-esteem, social competence, identity and emotional adjustment, all showed positive relationships with attachment (Rice, 1990). Most studies to date have measured adult/adolescent attachment style through asking the individual to answer questions recalling their parenting. As yet, the link between existing romantic attachment style and psychological adjustment in its broader sense has been little studied. One possibility is that the link is direct, as has been shown in childhood for early attachment style. Another possibility is that more secure adult romantic attachment styles facilitate higher levels of social support, which, in turn, has been shown to relate to adjustment variables like well-being (Ward and Kennedy, 1992) and academic achievement (Leung, 2001). Yet another pathway whereby romantic attachment style and well-being might relate is via the emotions generated in romantic relationships. Less mature/secure romantic attachment styles may lead to greater problems in current relationships which, in turn, lead to higher levels of negative affect. For example, Kaczmarek and Backlund (1991) argue that the severity of the loss felt when adolescent romantic relationships come to an end is often not recognized. Full-blown grief reactions may ensue involving stages such as denial, anger, and depression.

In the current research, we aimed to explore the relationships between romantic attachment style and several measures of well-being relevant to the older adolescent age group. We hypothesized that those with secure romantic attachment styles would be more adjusted on a range of measures—more satisfied with their academic progress and their friendships/relationships (less lonely), and less likely to be experiencing stress in daily living than those with less mature romantic attachment styles. In addition, we expected that the

secure romantic attachment style group would express a positive and balanced attitude to romance, being less “needy” of romantic accoutrements to relationships than the Clingy group, but more positively attuned than those in romantic attachment style groups where closeness was feared or not desired. These adjustment/well-being outcomes were expected to be independent of both gender and current romantic relationship status. This is because attachment theory postulates that the security resides within the individual, who is able to “trust” that the world is a positive place and that secure relationships will be forthcoming, even if currently they are not available. Insecurely attached individuals either obsessively need to be in a current relationship or cannot tolerate relationships that threaten to become truly intimate.

Method

Participants

There were 461 tertiary student participants in the sample (146 males; 315 females). The age range of the total sample was 17–21 years, with a mean age of 18.90 (S.D. = 1.14). On average, males were slightly (and statistically significantly) older than females (males: $m = 19.29$; females: $m = 18.72$; $t(459) = 5.06$, $p < 0.001$). Most students were in their first ($n = 326$; 71.0%), second ($n = 65$; 14.2%) or third ($n = 62$; 13.4%) year of study, and were from six universities in Melbourne, Australia. Reflecting the multicultural nature of Melbourne, participants came from a wide spectrum of cultural/ethnic groups. Three hundred and fifty four (76.8%) of the participants were born in Australia, and the rest were born in another country, with 34 different countries represented. About half of those born in Australia had one or both parents born in another country. All participants spoke English fluently.

Materials

The materials consisted of a questionnaire with the following sections:

(a) The revised UCLA loneliness scale (Russell *et al.*, 1980) was used as the measure of loneliness because of its strong internal consistency, reliability and validity (Paloutzian and Janigian, 1989; Shaver and Brennan, 1991). This scale consists of 20 statements measuring the feelings of loneliness and satisfaction with social relationships. Participants rated the items on a 4-point scale, ranging from 1 = never through to 4 = often. Half the items are reverse scored. After appropriate reversals, all items are summed to produce a measure for which high scores are associated with higher levels of perceived loneliness. The score range is 20–80. The reliability (Cronbach alpha) for the present study was 0.90.

(b) The Love Schemas Scale (Singelis *et al.*, 1995) is a six-item self-report measure in which respondents are asked to rate to what extent each of six schemas represent their own feelings and experiences. Ratings are made on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = never true of me to 5 = always true of me. The scale is based, in part, on the adult attachment scale of Shaver and Hazan (1993), and incorporates self-assessment of one’s perceived desires with respect to independence, closeness, and interest in romantic relationships. It is designed to assess degree of acceptance of each of the romantic attachment styles postulated by Hatfield and Rapson (1995): these are Secure, Clingy, Skittish and Fickle. For those relatively uninterested in romantic relationships, the categories are Casual and Uninterested.

Since each romantic attachment style is assessed through a one-item measure, it is not possible to calculate internal reliability for the scales. Singelis *et al.* (1995) found meaningful relationships between the romantic attachment styles and measures of companionate and passionate love among 200 adult male and female college students.

(c) The Love Ways Inventory (Hecht *et al.*, 1994), which consists of 17 items which measure beliefs about different aspects of romantic love, including intuitive love, companionate love, secure love, traditional romantic love and committed love. In this study, participants were asked to consider the Love Ways statements with respect to an ideal love relationship. They rated the degree to which they thought the items described an ideal love relationship on a 7-point scale, ranging from 1 = does not describe through to 7 = describes very well. Scores were summed across all items, producing a measure for which high scores can be viewed as representing positive or approving attitudes toward romantic love. The score range is 17–119. Hecht *et al.* (1994) found that the scale had good internal reliability and that it correlated meaningfully with the Sternberg (1997) Love Scales and the Marital/Relationship Quality Index (Norton, 1983). The Cronbach alpha reliability of the scale in this study was 0.92.

(d) *Academic satisfaction*: This 5-point scale was made up of seven items which dealt with satisfaction with university life, and was based on the work of Andersen (1982), Moss (1989), Wold (1995), Olweus (1989) and Sam and Berry (1995). The scores were summed with a high score indicating high academic satisfaction, that is, a strong belief that one enjoyed and was achieving well in tertiary studies. A low score indicates poor perceived academic performance, truancy, lack of interest in further education, and concentration difficulties at university. Fan (1999) found the scale to show moderate reliability and construct validity among cross-cultural samples of university-based adolescents. The Cronbach alpha reliability of the scale in this study was 0.71.

(e) *Stress*: The Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen *et al.*, 1983) consists of 14 items measuring the degree to which situations in one's life are perceived as stressful. Participants rate the frequency of perceived stress in response to these situations on a 5-point scale (0 = never, 5 = very often). Seven of these items are positively worded and they are reverse scored. The ratings of the 14 items (with appropriate reversals) are summed to form a total stress score. The authors of this scale found it to have adequate internal reliability, test-retest reliability, concurrent validity, and predictive validity when used with undergraduate and clinical populations. The Cronbach alpha reliability of the scale in this study was 0.82.

Procedure

The participants were recruited through universities, through short presentations in large lecture classes, in which young people were invited to complete the questionnaire, or approaches to groups of young people in university meeting places such as the cafeteria, where the study was briefly explained and voluntary participation sought. Participants either completed the questionnaire "on the spot", for example during class time or in the cafeteria, then return it in a sealed envelope to the research assistant (about 30% of the sample, for which the response rate was 100% for those who volunteered), or completed it in their own time with return via a post-paid mail back envelope (for which the response rate was approximately 50%).

Results

Cluster groupings based on romantic attachment style

As explained previously, data on participants' romantic attachment styles were collected as ratings on six items, each tapping one of the styles. It is possible to treat these ratings as six scores, which in turn can be related to the outcome variables through correlations or some variant of correlational analysis, such as regression. Such an approach does not take into account any potential overlap between the romantic attachment styles, treating them as independent. Hatfield and Rapson (1995) use this score-based approach in their analysis, and talk about participants' endorsement of various schemas or romantic attachment styles, as opposed to categorizing individuals into one style or another. A simple categorizing approach, whereby individuals are grouped into the six romantic attachment style categories on the basis of high scores on one style and low scores on all the others may be desirable in theory but does not take into account the correlations between ratings on the styles. Our data indicated that there were significant negative correlations between endorsement of the Secure romantic attachment style and endorsement of the styles of Skittish, Fickle, and Uninterested romantic attachment. In addition, Skittish, Fickle, Casual and Uninterested were all significantly positively correlated. Finally, Clingy was positively correlated with Fickle. These correlations are shown in Table 1.

A more sophisticated form of categorizing individuals, which takes account of the correlations between romantic attachment styles, is cluster analysis. Cairns *et al.* (1998) recommend this type of approach as important for developmental research, because of the need to consider the range of developmental outcomes associated with different types of person/environment complexes. In this study, cluster analysis of romantic attachment styles was conducted with the aim of relating the emergent clusters to adjustment outcomes. Respondents' scores on the six attachment style measures were subjected to *K*-means cluster analysis in order to ascertain the major groupings of young people on these variables. This is considered as the method of choice when (as in the current exercise), a non-hierarchical method for grouping individuals into a specific number of categories (that is, fewer than six to reduce the data complexity) is required (Borgen and Barnett, 1987). A three-cluster solution was selected as the most efficient and theoretically meaningful grouping. The two-cluster solution was assessed as not discriminating enough, producing only a "secure" and an "insecure" cluster, and the four- and five-cluster solutions contained groups which appeared to be highly overlapping, that is, could not be readily discriminated theoretically. The three-cluster solution produced a group who scored high on the Secure attachment style and low on the other five styles (labelled Secure cluster), a group who scored high on the Clingy attachment style, moderate on the Secure style, and low on the other styles (labelled Clingy cluster), and a group who scored high on Skittish, Fickle and Casual styles, lower on Clingy and Uninterested, and moderate on Secure (labelled Casual cluster). The number of participants in each group was 172, 122, and 157, respectively.

Romantic attachment cluster by sex, age and current relationship status

Females were more likely to be in the Secure cluster than males (41% females *vs.* 31% males). Males were more likely to be in the Casual cluster than females (42% males; 32% females). Males and females were equally likely to be in the Clingy cluster (27% males; 27% females). The different distribution of males and females into the Secure and Casual clusters approached but did not reach statistical significance (chi-square (2) = 5.50, $p = 0.06$).

Table 1 *Correlations between romantic attachment styles, romantic attitudes, loneliness, stress and academic satisfaction*

	Clingy	Skittish	Fickle	Casual	Uninterested	Romantic attitudes	Academic satisfaction	Stress	Lonely
Secure style	0.04	-0.24**	-0.22**	-0.11	-0.17	0.22	0.17**	-0.21**	-0.31**
Clingy style		0.12*	0.26**	-0.06	-0.01	0.29**	-0.16**	0.22**	0.31**
Skittish style			0.34**	0.33**	0.39**	-0.21**	-0.21**	0.10	0.32**
Fickle style				0.34**	0.26**	-0.10	-0.26**	0.28**	0.32**
Casual style					0.45**	-0.38**	-0.05	-0.14*	0.06
Uninterested style						-0.32**	-0.10	-0.01	-0.21**
Romantic attitudes							0.06	0.06	-0.09
Academic satisfaction								-0.41**	-0.37**
Stress									0.39**

* $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.001$.

Of the 202 individuals not in a relationship (46% of the sample), 28% were in the Secure cluster, 22% in the Clingy cluster and 49% in the Casual cluster. Of the 236 currently in a relationship, 48% were in the Secure cluster, 31% Clingy and 21% Casual. The differential distribution of cluster across relationship status was significant (chi-square (2) = 38.04, $p < 0.001$). Being in a relationship was associated with the Secure cluster and not being in a relationship was associated with the Casual cluster. Secure, Clingy and Casual males and females were equally likely to be in (or not in) a relationship.

Age was unrelated to cluster group, with each cluster having an identical mean age (18.9 years). In addition, age was uncorrelated with endorsement of any of the six romantic attachment style ratings. This lack of relationship between age and romantic attachment style was equally evident for male and female data analysed separately. Thus, despite the age differences between the male and female samples, age was not included in further analyses because of its non-association with romantic attachment style or with the style clusters.

Romantic attachment cluster and attitudes to romance

A 2 (sex) \times 3 (cluster) \times 2 (relationship status: in vs. not in a relationship) analysis of variance was conducted on romantic attitudes. Table 2 shows the means associated with this analysis. There were significant sex differences ($F(1, 420) = 10.69$, $p < 0.001$), with females showing stronger romantic attitudes than males. Significant relationship status differences

Table 2 Mean scores on romantic attitudes and well-being measures by sex, attachment cluster and relationship status

	Males	Females	Not in a relationship	In a relationship	All
<i>Romantic attitudes</i>					
Secure	84.9	89.5			88.3 ^{a,b}
Clingy	91.4	94.1			93.3 ^b
Casual	71.6	83.4			79.0
Total attitudes	81.2	88.8 ¹	81.4	90.9 ²	86.5
<i>Academic satisfaction</i>					
Secure	26.4	25.8			25.9 ^{a,b}
Clingy	24.8	21.8			23.5
Casual	22.6	24.0			23.7
Total academic	24.5	24.4	24.7	24.2 ²	24.4
<i>Stress</i>					
Secure	22.8	27.6			26.4 ^{a,b}
Clingy	26.6	31.4			29.9
Casual	26.6	28.8			28.0
Total stress	25.4	28.9 ¹	27.4	28.2	27.8
<i>Loneliness</i>					
Secure	36.1	34.4			34.2 ^{a,b}
Clingy	39.7	39.6			39.6
Casual	43.1	37.2			39.3
Total loneliness	39.9	36.3 ¹	39.4	35.7 ²	37.4

Notes: ¹Significantly different from males; ²significantly different from "not in a relationship" group; ^asignificantly different from Clingy; ^bsignificantly different from Casual.

($F(1, 420) = 10.83, p < 0.001$) indicated that those currently in a relationship were more romantic than those who were not in a relationship. The significant between-cluster effect ($F(2, 420) = 21.00, p < 0.001$) was subjected to the Tukey LSD *post hoc* tests, which indicated that the Clingy cluster was significantly more romantic than the Secure cluster, who were in turn more romantic than the Casual cluster. The sex by cluster interaction ($F(2, 420) = 3.63, p < 0.05$) indicated that sex differences were stronger for the Casual cluster, with Casual females more romantic than Casual males. No other interactions were significant.

Romantic attachment cluster and measures of well-being

Well-being was assessed through young people's academic satisfaction, their level of perceived stress and their experience of loneliness. These three measures were significantly and moderately correlated. See Table 1.

A 2 (sex) \times 3 (cluster) \times 2 (relationship status) multi-variate analyses of variance (MANOVA) was conducted with the well-being measures as dependent variables. The overall MANOVA was significant ($F(3, 409) = 9646.4, p < 0.001$), as were all three main effects (sex: $F(3, 409) = 15.06, p < 0.001$; cluster: ($F(6, 820) = 7.76, p < 0.001$); relationship status: ($F(3, 409) = 6.62, p < 0.001$). The only significant interaction was sex by cluster ($F(6, 820) = 2.44, p < 0.05$).

The mean values associated with these analyses are shown in Table 2. Univariate ANOVA results for loneliness, stress and academic satisfaction are discussed in turn. Note that when there was a main effect of cluster, Tukey LSD *post hoc* tests were used to show where the significant differences occurred between clusters.

Males were significantly more lonely than females ($F(1, 411) = 6.42, p < 0.05$) particularly those males in the Casual cluster (as shown by the significant sex by cluster interaction on loneliness; ($F(2, 411) = 4.28, p < 0.05$). Overall, those in the secure cluster were significantly less lonely than those in the other two clusters ($F(2, 411) = 12.54, p < 0.001$). Not surprisingly, loneliness was associated with relationship status ($F(1, 411) = 5.82, p < 0.05$), with those currently in a romantic relationship being less lonely than "singles".

Stress scores were higher in females than males ($F(1, 411) = 20.58, p < 0.001$), and the Secure cluster was significantly less stressed than the other two clusters ($F(2, 411) = 7.12, p < 0.001$). There was no sex by cluster interaction for this variable, nor was stress significantly associated with relationship status.

Academic satisfaction showed no significant sex effect but there was a cluster effect ($F(2, 411) = 16.45, p < 0.001$) and a sex by cluster interaction ($F(2, 411) = 5.00, p < 0.001$). For both sexes, the Secure cluster was more academically satisfied, with Casuals being the least satisfied among males and the Clingy cluster the least satisfied among females. Those not in a relationship showed a small but significantly higher level of academic satisfaction than those in a relationship ($F(1, 411) = 7.51, p < 0.01$).

Discussion

Among this sample of young people, romantic attachment style was strongly related to both romantic attitudes and the three measures of adjustment/well-being. Those in the secure romantic attachment cluster styles were more likely to be satisfied with their

academic progress, less stressed and less lonely than their Clingy and Casual counterparts. The associations between measures of well-being and romantic attachment style were slightly different for girls and boys in the Clingy and Casual groups, with Clingy girls somewhat less satisfied academically than Clingy boys, and Casual boys more lonely, less romantic in their attitudes, and less academically satisfied than Casual girls. These differences were small, however, in relation to the overriding benefits that seemed to accrue to those with a secure romantic attachment cluster, regardless of sex or whether they were currently actually in a romantic relationship. Indeed, while being in a romantic relationship at this age was associated with benefits in terms of lower levels of loneliness, it was also associated with costs, in the sense of less academic satisfaction. These findings may be a reflection of the struggle among many young people in the early years of university/college life to balance competing demands of study and romantic relationships. But what was evident was that a secure romantic attachment style was pervasive in its associations with well-being. Secure young people, whether in or out of a relationship, were coping best with academic, social and daily stress demands of university life.

As discussed in the Introduction, the link between romantic attachment style and well-being may occur through: (a) a link between romantic attachment style and some more basic adjustment variable associated with childhood attachment; or (b) the ability of those with a secure style to marshal social support; or (c) a link between the secure romantic attachment styles and relatively problem-free relationships. Most likely, all three mechanisms are in place. It is also possible that adequate social support and problem-free relationships both arise from, and assist in consolidating, secure attachment styles, so that cause and effect become difficult to disentangle among these relationships. In addition, the three measures of well-being also interrelate, which could suggest that they are all related to a common "cause", and/or that success in one life domain improves chances of success in others, through mechanisms such as self-concept enhancement.

Romantic attachment style also related as expected to romantic attitudes, and indeed, attitudes to romance could be construed as part of romantic style. The secure romantic attachment cluster took a moderate position in their attitudes to romance, in between the stronger endorsements of the Clingy cluster and the weaker endorsement of the Casual cluster. Those with secure romantic attachment styles may be better able to see romance "in perspective", as part of a more balanced approach to life. Their needs for reassurance through romantic gestures may be less than that required by the Clingy attachment style type. On the other hand, they may be more ready to accept the level of intimacy implied by romantic behaviour than those who clustered in the "Casual" typology—basically individuals who had Skittish, Fickle or Casual love styles, suggesting problems with closeness.

Although it might have been expected that in this developmental stage of late adolescence/youth, there might have been an association between age and romantic attachment styles, with less secure styles being more common among the younger participants, this was not the case. This suggests that by late adolescence, romantic attachment styles are more enduring than developing traits—an expectation which would certainly be in line with attachment theory, which predicts the relative stability of attachment (and therefore love/relationship) styles throughout life. It may be premature to draw this conclusion, however, in a sample with a relatively narrow age range, and which has been tested only once, that is, has not been followed up longitudinally to assess the possibilities of romantic attachment style change. In addition, as there is no *a priori* reason to

imagine that males, in general, would be less securely attached than females, the high percentage of young men in the Casual group is suggestive of developmental change. Biologically, young men reach puberty on average 2 years later than young women, and their social and intimacy development may similarly lag behind. But the speculation that many of these "Casual" young men are really "Secure" young men moving through a developmental transition is not particularly supported by the well-being data. The Casual cluster was associated with lower well-being for young men than it was for young women, which does not suggest an underlying security on the part of the males. Social factors, such as certain masculine stereotypes that eschew intimacy, may provide a more viable explanation for this intriguing gender difference.

In summary, this study shows a strong association between adolescent/youth romantic attachment styles and well-being outcomes, including not only social outcomes such as loneliness, but stress levels and academic satisfaction. These results are consistent with attachment theory. They are less consistent with a developmental model of social relationships which suggests that more experimental and/or casual approaches to relationships are conducive to development. However, it is important that we distinguish here between romantic attachment style (a basic approach to romantic relationships) and current relationship status, which was not strongly associated with adjustment. Presumably, young people may move through several "trial" relationships, or periods where they are not romantically involved, without jeopardizing long-term well-being (and perhaps even enhancing it). Although in these circumstances, loneliness may be experienced in comparison with peers who currently have romantic partners, the overall effects on well-being appear to be far less pervasive for those with a secure attachment style.

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