Do you have a phone or a tablet or computer: bring it.

ATTACHMENT THEORY

A Map of Close Relationships

chriSTOPHer Long

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Disclaimer: This is a psychological presentation.
I am a neuroscientist, not a psychologist.
I am an interested party, not a subject matter expert.

BEFORE WE BEGIN

Why, What, How for Today…



Why

Attachment Theory is a powerful tool to understand yourself and how you relate to others.



What

I'll give an introduction to the area, you'll do an anonymous assessment, we'll review, & discuss.



How

Quiz can be completed on any internet enabled device. I also have 5 paper copies: who needs one?

BEFORE WE BEGIN

What else to know...



Optional and private assessment

Skip any section, take a break, or keep everything to yourself. Sharing a score or story is never required.



A vocabulary for self-awareness

These ideas offer language for noticing patterns. They don't diagnose you, grade a relationship, or say who you must be.



A snapshot not a diagnosis

Results describe how you answered today, about one relationship. They can't explain another person or predict the future.

WHERE THE IDEA COMES FROM

From infant survival to adult relationships



John Bowlby

Proposes an inborn attachment system: under threat, children seek closeness to a caregiver.

Mary Ainsworth

Strange Situation study: caregiver responsiveness shapes a child's attachment security.

Hazan & Shaver

Extend the ideas to adult romantic love.

Bartholomew & Horowitz

Crossed 'view of self' with 'view of others' to describe four patterns.

Brennan, Fraley and colleagues

Questionnaires (e.g., ECR-RS) measure two dimensions: anxiety and avoidance.

Fraley and colleagues

Large analyses find attachment varies along continua, not in four boxes.

The questionnaire used today "Experiences in Close Relationships - Relationship Structures (ECR-RS)" comes from this research line.

THE ORIGINAL EXPERIMENT

The “Strange Situation” Experiment (Ainsworth & Bell, 1970)

Testing the “Secure Base” in 12- to 18-month-olds

1 The Playroom

Toddler and caregiver enter an unfamiliar room with toys; a stranger enters shortly after.

2 The Separation

Caregiver leaves the room: leaving the toddler first with the stranger, then completely alone.

3 The Reunion

Caregiver returns to comfort and re-engage the child.

Question: *Which moment reveals the MOST about the child’s attachment bond: and what different reactions would you expect to see?*

WHAT RESEARCHERS SAW

Attachment Outcomes

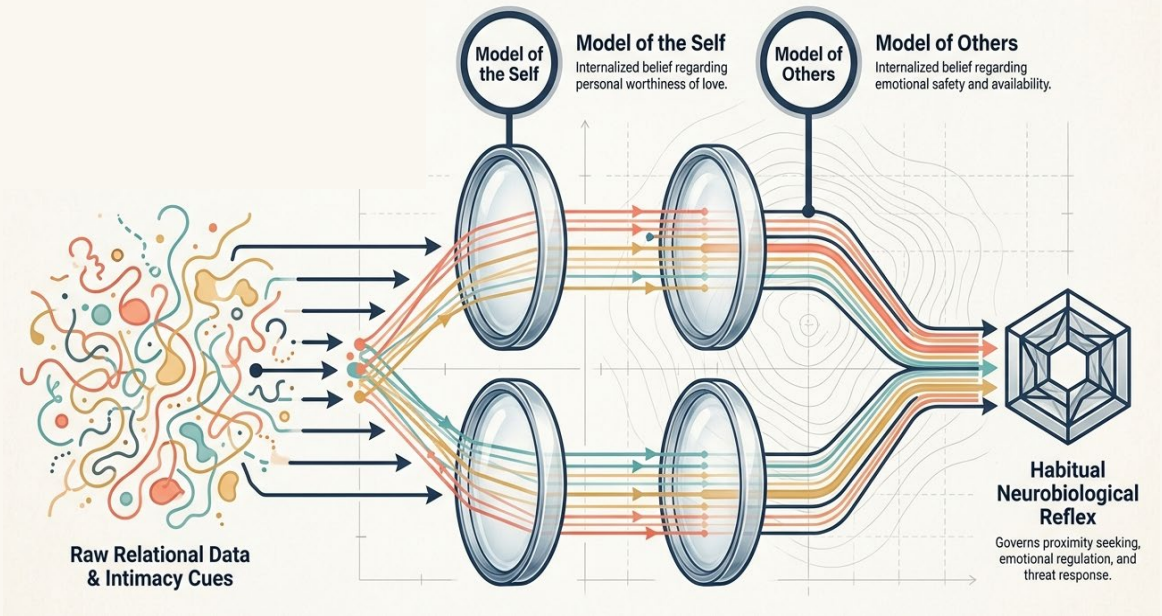
How toddlers react when the caregiver departs and then returns

	Secure *(infant: secure)*	**Anxious** *(infant: ambivalent)*	**Avoidant** *(infant: avoidant)*
INITIALLY	Uses parent as a secure base to explore	Clingy before separation	Explores readily without checking in
SEPARATION	Distressed when left alone	Intensely distressed when parent leaves	Minimal visible distress when left alone
REUNION	**Runs to parent, calms down quickly, and returns to play**	**Seeks contact but resists comfort and stays upset**	**Ignores or turns away from parent (masks internal stress)**

The takeaway: Attachment shows in the reunion, not the separation. It's not how hard a child cries when the parent leaves, but how they reconnect when the parent returns.

HOW EXPERIENCE BECOMES EXPECTATION

Working models: the lenses we look through



Model of self

"Am I worth caring about?"

Model of others

"Will people be there when I need them?"

Expectations shape what we notice and how we respond. Early experience can influence them, but it does not mechanically determine adult relationships; later experiences can reinforce or revise them.

YOUR TURN

Explore your map with the Attachment Quiz

The questionnaire used today “Experiences in Close Relationships - Relationship Structures (ECR-RS)” (Fraley & colleagues).

Self-assessment: about 15 minutes.
Nine questions per section.
6 sections (General, Mother, Father, Partner, Best friend, Other: a pet, sibling, or anyone else).

If someone is no longer alive you can answer about when they were alive, or skip.
And if you don’t have a current partner, use your most recent meaningful relationship or imagine one.

OR SKIP ANY SECTION.

YOUR TURN

Explore your map (next 15 minutes)



Attachment Quiz

Choose “Begin self-assessment.” Do any or all sections; the site scores them. Keep results private if you like. Or share them and we can discuss.

attachmentquiz.stophlong.org

Who needs a paper version? I have 5.

NOW THAT YOU HAVE TAKEN IT

After the quiz



Can save it to your device or email to yourself

For later reflection you can save or email. You can read more and follow the links later. You can permit your data in anonymous pooling.



I'll give a bit more context

I'll show a few more slides for context, the averages from the group, and then let's discuss.



Can keep private or share

Can be thought-provoking.

THE TWO DIMENSIONS

Two Dimensions of the Quiz

ATTACHMENT ANXIETY

"Will you be there for me?"

Worry about whether important people care and will be available. Higher scores mean more of that worry.

ATTACHMENT AVOIDANCE

"How comfortable am I relying on you?"

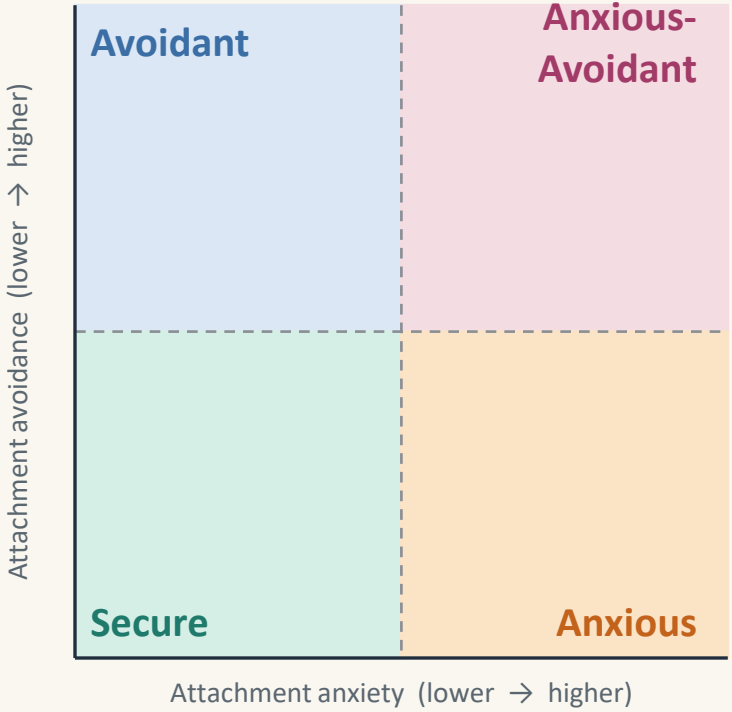
Discomfort with opening up or depending on others. Higher scores mean more of that discomfort.



They vary independently. A person can be higher on one, both, or neither. Could someone want reassurance and also hesitate to accept closeness?

PUTTING THE DIMENSIONS TOGETHER

Four regions on one map



Secure Lower anxiety, lower avoidance
Relative ease with closeness and with relying on others.

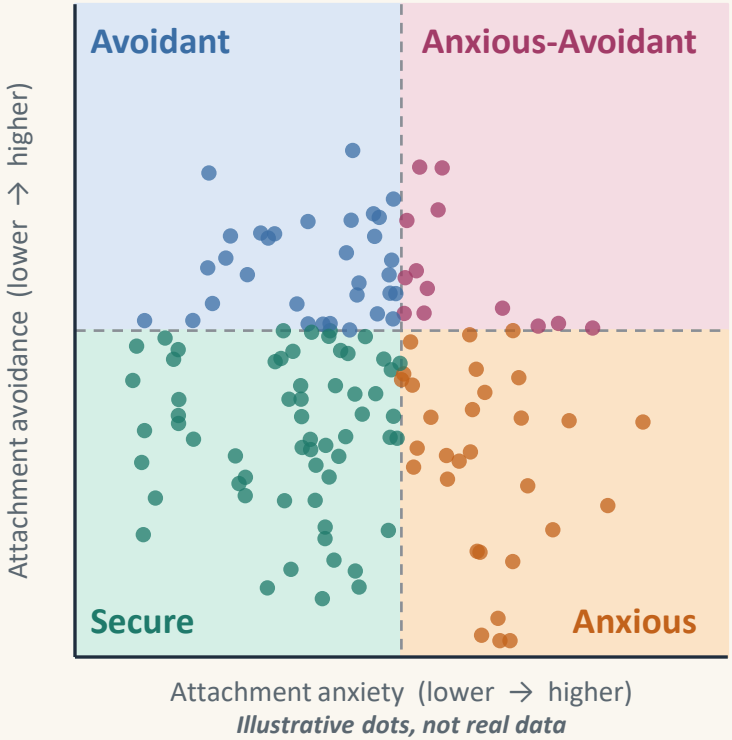
Anxious Higher anxiety, lower avoidance
Closeness matters; availability or reassurance feels uncertain. (also called preoccupied)

Avoidant Lower anxiety, higher avoidance
Independence or emotional distance may feel more comfortable. (also called dismissing, dismissive-avoidant)

Anxious-Avoidant Higher anxiety, higher avoidance
Wanting connection sits alongside discomfort with closeness. (also called fearful-avoidant)

DIMENSIONS, NOT BOXES

Spread across a map, not sorted into types



Illustrative dots, not real data

No natural dividing lines

Large statistical analyses found attachment varies continuously rather than falling into distinct categories.

Position matters more than label

A relationship just over a line has more in common with their neighbor across it than with someone at the far corner.

The midline is a visual guide

The lines at 4 mark the middle of the 1-7 scale. They are not validated cutoffs or diagnostic thresholds.

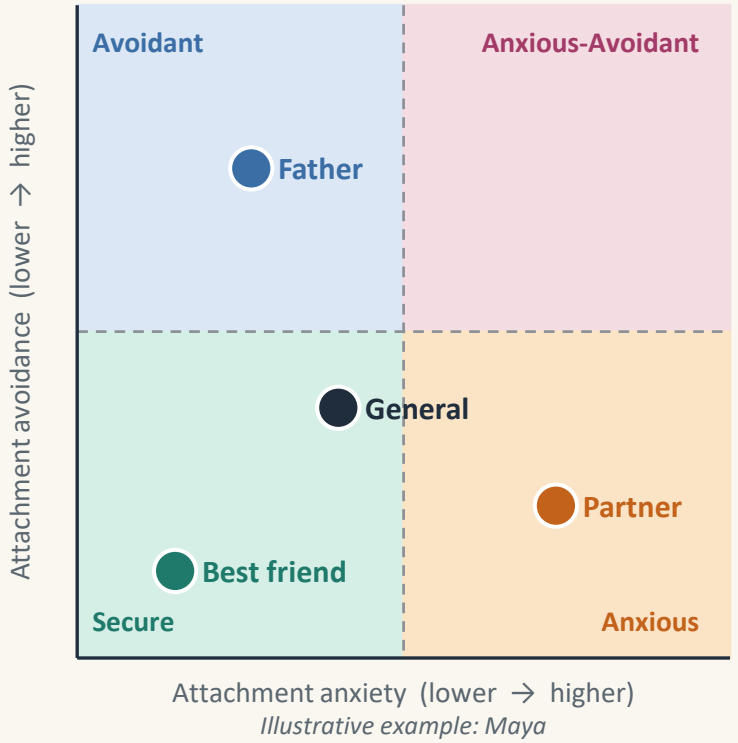
CONTEXT MATTERS

One person, different relationships

Maya finds it easy to ask her best friend for help, but keeps worries to herself around her father.

Each relationship gets its own point.
The ECR-RS asks the same nine statements about General, Mother, Father, Partner, Best friend. I added "Other."

Different points are not a deficit.
Research found a varied profile does not by itself mean a person is unhealthy or fragmented.



Illustrative example: Maya

NOW

Let’s examine the group scores.

NOW

Let’s discuss.

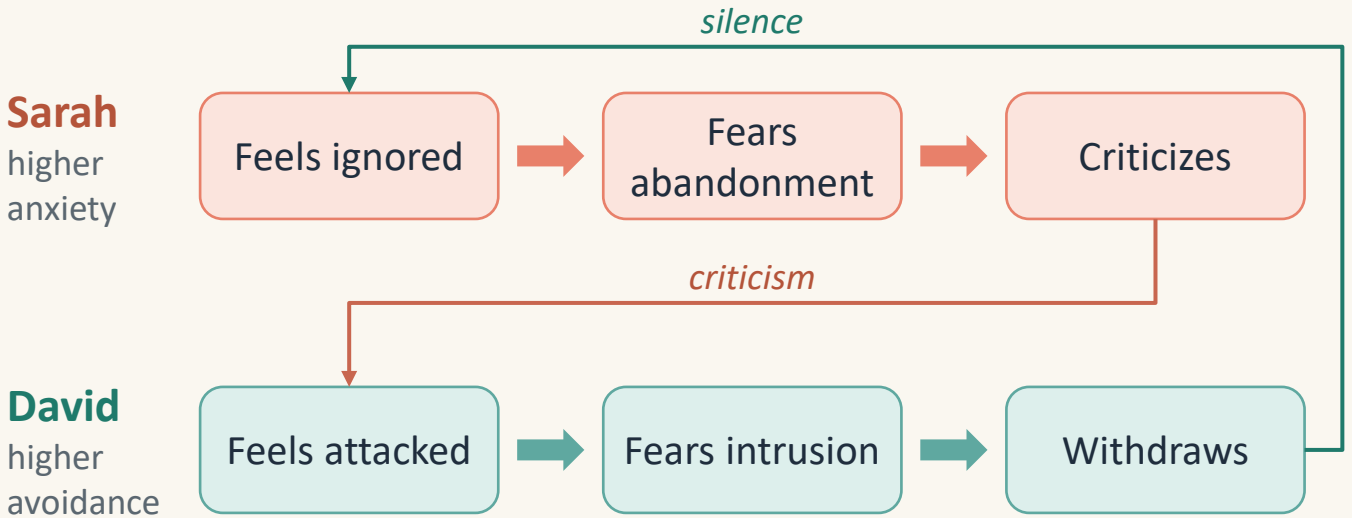
ONE CLASSIC PATTERN IN COUPLES

One turns up, the other turns down

The demand-withdraw loop

Sarah feels ignored by David at a party. On the drive home she criticizes him. David feels attacked and withdraws.

Her pursuit confirms his fear of intrusion. His silence confirms her fear of abandonment.



Each move makes sense from the inside; together they make a loop neither person wants. This is a story, not a prediction: no score tells you how a particular person will act.

EXPLORING SECURE RELATIONSHIPS

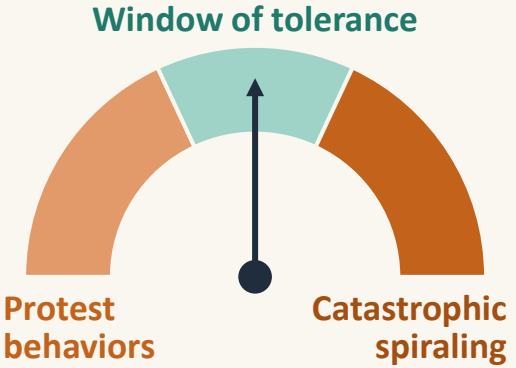
Widening the window

Widen the window of tolerance
Building tolerance for uncertainty (if anxiety is higher) or for closeness (if avoidance is higher).

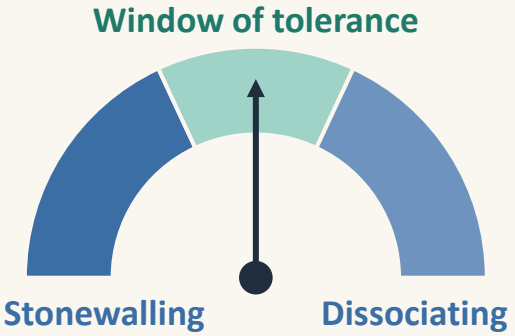
Say the need directly
Replace protest or withdrawal with a plain statement of what you feel and need.

Collect new evidence
Each time openness is met with care, old predictions get updated.

Expanding Tolerance for Uncertainty



Expanding Tolerance for Vulnerability



READING A RESULT WITH CARE

What a score can and can't tell you

A score can suggest

- ✓ How you answered today, about some relationships.
- ✓ Which concern stands out: worry about care, or comfort with relying on someone
- ✓ Differences between relationships worth getting curious about
- ✓ A shared vocabulary for conversation

A score cannot establish

- ✗ Your worth, or the health of a relationship
- ✗ Your childhood, a trauma history, or a cause
- ✗ Another person's motives or feelings
- ✗ What you will do, or what a relationship will become

Ask of any result: Which part fits? Which part doesn't? What's missing?

TODAY AND BEYOND

Now What…

For This Weekend

- Think about how you normally relate to others. Are there reflex responses you can challenge?
- Can you explore other ways of relating?
- If anxious…try assuming people will be there for you.
- If avoidant…try assuming you can be vulnerable with people.
- Notice one moment when you reached out, or held back.

Learning More

- Levine & Heller, *Attached* (2010)
- Sue Johnson, *Hold Me Tight* (2008)
- Gottman & Silver, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* (1999; rev. 2015)
- Siegel & Hartzell, *Parenting from the Inside Out* (2003)
- Lindsay C. Gibson, *Adult Children of Emotionally Immature Parents* (2015)

The end. Thanks!