

# The Attachment Relationship with Emotional Intelligence and Well-Being

Doinița E. Nanu\*<sup>iii</sup>

\* Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Psychology Department,  
University of Bucharest, Bucharest, Romania

## Abstract

**Introduction:** In personality development, attachment experiences are critical for human emotional and cognitive development. Interactions with attachment figures are important for the shaping of individuals' self-image and social world, which are internalized in an internal working model (Bowlby, 1969/1982), based on affective and cognitive representations of self, others, and relationships, which affect individuals' close relationships and emotion regulation throughout their lifespan. Attachment theory has become, also, one of the most influential perspectives through we understand the emotional regulation.

**Onjectives:** This study examines the relations between self-reported adult attachment orientation, self-esteem, emotional intelligence development and well-being. This study show the correlations between the types of adult attachment, emotional intelligence and self-esteem, and how these dimensions determine the adoption of emotion regulation strategies, attachment theory becoming one of the most influential perspectives through we understand the emotional regulation and social interaction as adult.

**Methods:** 75 romanian adults were evaluated with Adult Attachment Scale (Collins & Read, 1990), Global Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965), Emotional Intelligence Test (adapted M. Roco by Bar-On, 1997) and Self-report Well-Being Questionnaire (Nanu, 2014). The results show the secure attachment is significative positive correlation with self-esteem, emotional intelligence and well-being.

**Results:** Results reveal correlations between the types of adult attachment, self-esteem level, emotional intelligence development and subjective well-being. Results confirm conclusions of the other studies: Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) - link between attachment, self-esteem and sociability, Wayne, Cozzarelli & Nebi (2010) or Xu Li & Xue Zheng, (2014) – explore emotional intelligence and self-esteem as mediators of the relationship between adult attachment orientations and subjective well-being.

**Conclusions:** We hope that the results of this study will garner sufficient interest among attachment researchers and practitioners, to generate further investigations to the function of attachment involved in well-being.

**Keywords:** attachment theory, well-being, self-esteem, sociability

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<sup>iii</sup> Corresponding author: Doinița E. Nanu, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, University of Bucharest, Panduri 90, District 5, Bucharest, Romania. Tel.: 0771.541.977

## **I. Introduction**

Attachment theory introduced by Bowlby (1969) argues the attachment is a basic human need, innate, consisting of a system evolving behaviors to help babies to keep the caregivers close to them and offer necessary protection for survival. The theory's fundamental premise is that the motivation to achieve proximity is biologically based and arose through the process of natural selection (Cassidy, 1999). A central tenet of the idea of the attachment relationship is that the caregiver serves as a "secure base" from which the infant explores his/her environment (Ainsworth, 1963). The exploratory behavioral system operates in dynamic equilibrium with the fear behavioral system, which in turn triggers the attachment behavioral system. As interactions with caregivers proceed, infants develop stable beliefs and expectations about the caregiver's responsiveness and accessibility and about themselves as worthy or unworthy of love. This behavioral system (crying, climbing, etc) arises from the child's needs and is activated whenever the child feels a threat or danger. This behaviors restore a sense of comfort and safety when starts feelings of distress. If these needs are not adequately met, the child may adopt secondary attachment strategies.

So, attachment theory is one of the most important conceptual frameworks for social interactions with attachment figures, and also, for understanding the process of emotional regulation (Bartholomew and Horowitz, 1991; Bartolomeu & Shaver, 1998; Brennan et al., 1991; Simpson, 1990; Collins & Read, 1990; Mikulincer, 1995; Brennan & Morris, 1997; Mikulincer et al., 2003 Luca, Maio, Carnelley, 2004).

Recent research has shown that individual differences in adult attachment type are described more precisely in terms of two independent continuous dimensions: anxiety and avoidance (Brennan, Clark, and Shaver, 1998; Fraley & Waller, 1998). These dimensions determine adoption of emotion regulation strategies, that are manifested in two major forms: attachment system hyperactivation and deactivation of the attachment system. According to Mikulincer and Shaver (2007), attachment anxiety and avoidance are both characterized by the failure of proximity seeking to relieve distress, and the consequent adoption of secondary attachment strategies. Attachment styles include cognitive, affective and behavioral changes which may suppress or block the generation activation and expression of emotions. Attachment strategies guide the assessment of emotion regulation and configure personal feelings and actionable trends.

## **Secure attachment, internal working model (self-esteem) and emotional strategy**

Secure attachment in childhood occurs when a caregiver is responsive to the needs of the child. This allows the child to explore the environment safe, and it develops confidence in its ability to interact with autonomous world, to face challenges, and regulate their own emotions (Mikulincer, Shaver, & Pereg, 2003; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2004). This safe working model are based on increased self-esteem, which is not only positive (I am worthy of being loved), but also represents a resource (if things go wrong I can rely on others). According to Decy and Ryan (1995) is development a true self-esteem and is immune to fluctuations of the number of achievements or failures (independent personal achievements) unlike the contingent self-esteem, who depends fulfillment of certain conditions. Thus, we expect an adult with secure attachment possess high self-esteem and stable, which can not be influenced internally by external inputs such as feedback, affection and appreciation of others. Research shows link between secure attachment and positive self-esteem (Collins & Read, 1990; Mikulincer, 1995; Brennan & Morris, 1997; Luke, Maio, and Carnelley, 2004), and the stability of self-esteem (Foster, Kernis and Goldman, 2007) and self-concept clarity (Alfasi, Gramzow, Carnelley, Ruscher, and Gurung, 2011). Moreover, adults with secure attachment reported relatively non-contingent self-esteem (Brandt & Vonk, 2005; Park, Crocker, and Mickelson, 2004), which do not fluctuate more in response to daily feedback. The evidence supports the idea that secure attachment involves a positive self-concept and stable self-esteem. (To be worthy, loved, must be just myself). People with secure attachment seeking support, ask for help and focuses on finding solutions.

## **Anxious attachment, internal working model (self-esteem) and emotional strategy**

Anxious attachment develop in an environment that constantly maintaining proximity to a caregiver is inconsistent and obstruct child exploration and develop an efficacy sense of self-esteem (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2004). These persons need proximity (privacy) and approval of others, as a primary source of positive feelings and values and they feel a chronic fear of rejection if they are not enough close or appreciated as person. The adults with anxious attachment have high level of anxiety and low self-esteem (I don't deserve to be loved and I can not cope without rely on others). The self-esteem level is unstable, because it's conditioned and characterized by hypersensitivity to nearby and approval signals.

Accepting others' approval, self-esteem is temporarily positively amplified, but decreases again when assessments are declining or are perceived repeatedly rejecting signals. The person with anxious attachment as coping mechanism deepens on negative emotions, focuses on emotions, being overwhelmed.

#### **Avoidant attachment, internal working model (self-esteem) and emotional strategy**

Avoidant attachment occurs in an environment where distancing and self-confidence are prioritized to protect from rejection experience. The lack of a truly secure base determined independent exploration, but focusing on personal effectiveness (Brennan & Morris, 1997; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2004), feelings of worth are decoupled from interpersonal approval and can not be adjusted internally.

*Avoidance* is a strategy caused by the suppression of pain, stress, by the frustration. The caregiver is distant, cold, or reject the child. *Inhibition* is a strategy driven by fear, anxiety, anger, sadness, shame, guilt. These emotions are associated as threats and vulnerabilities. The child adopt repression as avoidant attachment mechanisms coping, distancing of stressors, or passive resignation strategies, leading to a decreased effect of therapeutic interventions.

The avoidant adults attachment have not necessarily low self-esteem, but is contingent. Some studies have linked avoidance attachment with poor integration of the itself concept, low clarity and poor capacity for self-understanding, self-reporting information suggesting that positive self-esteem is defensive. (Mikulincer, 1995; Davila & Cobb, 2003; Kim, 2005). Mikulincer (1998) found the avoiding people reporting a positive self-image, more increased as the threat of self-esteem growing and reduce when decrease the threat of self-esteem, self-confidence directly involving the self higher self.

Bartholomew & Shaver (1998), Shapiro & Levendosky (1999) demonstrated the stability of attachment styles over time. Children internalize information from interactions with parents, who expected their relations in adulthood (Muller, Sicoli & Lemieux, 2000). It is known that there are 4 types of attachment (Crittenden & Ainsworth, 1989) and parental attachment type is transmitted transgenerational children. confirmed. Hazan and Shaver's (1987) showing that individuals' experiences in their current romantic relationships as well as their recollections of parental relationships are consistent with their reported attachment style (see Belsky & Cassidy, 1994; Shaver & Hazen, 1993; Rothbard & Shaver, 1994. It is also, generally accepted, that the family is a highly influential context for children's

development, providing a developmental environment with great importance for children. There, the parental influence processes and the quality of parent-child relationships are increasingly important, but, it is important to note that attachment patterns are not the same: one person will not necessarily show the same levels of anxiety and avoidance, along the time or in different relationships. Several longitudinal studies suggest that internal working models tend towards stability from childhood to adulthood, and adjusted in response to life experiences (Fraleay, 2002 Waters, Merrick, Treboux, Crowell, and Albersheim, 2000).

*Global self-esteem* is conceptualized as an individual's positive or negative attitude toward the self as a totality. This attitude has an important influence on individual behavior and mental health (Rosenberg, 1965). Often, self-esteem is seen as a personality trait, stable and enduring. Self-esteem involve a variety of beliefs about the self, such as the appraisal of one's own appearance, beliefs, emotions and behaviors. Pelham and Swann (1989) suggested that "developmentally early affect" about the self (i.e., pride or shame) may precede and continue to exist independently of more cognitively complex judgments about the self (i.e., about competence). It has been proposed that attachment experiences are important for the shaping of individuals' self-image and ultimately influence their ability to regulate emotion (e.g., Bowlby, 1973). Likewise, in the past few decades researchers have stressed the importance of self-esteem influencing happiness and view self-esteem as one of the strongest predictor variables of well-being (e.g. Diener & Diener, 1995).

*Emotional Intelligence* is a theoretical construct that represents "ability at perceiving, assimilating, understanding, and managing emotions" to better guide one's mind and behaviour - Salovey and Mayer (1990). The theory of emotional intelligence views emotion as an evolved signal system, where each emotion denotes a particular relationship within oneself or with the outside world (Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 2004). According to Salovey and Mayer, emotional intelligence (EI) consists of three categories of adaptive abilities: appraisal and expression of emotion, regulation of emotion and utilization of emotion in solving problems. Researchers have long proposed that adult attachment orientations exert considerable influence over EI (Kim, 2005).

All emotional intelligence models, proposed by Salovey and Mayer (1990, 2000, 2004), Reuven Bar-On (1992, 1997), Goleman (1995, 1998), Higgs and Dulewicz (1999), Petrides and Furnham (2003) include self-awareness and interpersonal aspect -

interpersonal relationships, sociability. An association between attachment and emotional intelligence is suggested in the literature and research on the socialization of emotions, a broad rubric that addresses what the child is learning about emotions and emotional relationships through interactions with others, predominantly caregivers.

*Well-being* is defined as individuals' evaluations of their lives, according to dimensions including life satisfaction, pleasant affect, and infrequent unpleasant affect (Diener, 1994). Mental well-being, as a part of the concept, is defined as a mental health. The international and national health service agencies and World Health Organization (WHO) (2007, 2010) defines mental health no longer as the state of being free from mental illness (WHO, 1948) but as that which enable the individual to live her life to its fullest (Keyes & Annas, 2009), to actualize one's growth potential (Vitterso, 2004) and to experience happiness and satisfaction along the way (Kaneman, Diener, & Schwartz, 1999, Keyes, 2002; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Seligman, 2002). Now, mental well-being is understood as an integral process in its own right, independent of mental illness (Bradburn, 1969; Jahoda, 1958; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Well-being is more than happiness (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Singer, 1989) it involves the concept of growth towards optimal development (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Waterman, 1993), flourishing (Keyes & Haidt, 2002; Keyes & Annas, 2009) and resilience in difficult times (Block J. H. & Block J., 1980; Carver, 1998; Hefferson & Boniwell, 2011).

Researchers have shown that attachment theory is a valid framework for understanding individual variations in happiness (Mikulincer, Shaver, & Pereg, 2003) and provided empirical evidence to support the idea that good quality family relationships may contribute to a sense of well-being. For example, secure attachment has been found to be positively correlated with well-being (Abubakar et al., 2013), whereas attachment anxiety and avoidance have been demonstrated to be negatively correlated with life satisfaction and well-being (Lavy & Littman-Ovadia, 2011).

### **Objectives**

This study examines the relations between self-reported adult attachment orientation, self-esteem, emotional intelligence development and well-being. This study shows the correlations between the types of adult attachment, emotional intelligence and self-esteem, and how these dimensions determine the adoption of emotion regulation strategies, attachment theory becoming one of the most influential perspectives through we understand the emotional

regulation and social interaction as adult. The results give us valuable guidance on how to implement psychological interventions aimed at enhancing attachment-anxious or attachment-avoidant individuals' well-being.

### **Hypotheses**

We assume:

H1: Secure attachment correlates positively with self-esteem, emotional intelligence and well-being.

H2: Avoidance attachment correlates with self-esteem, but is no significant correlation with emotional intelligence and well-being.

H3: Anxious/ambivalent attachment correlates negatively with self-esteem, emotional intelligence and well-being.

## **II. Methods**

*Population:* Examines Romanian adults (N=75) between 28 and 55 years (32 male and 43 female), which are parents. To respect the rules of professional conduct, the written consent of each participant has been demanded. The results are confidential and transversely design used in the present study. Sample selection was done randomly, between parents of Herastrau Primary School, from Bucharest.

### **Measures**

Adults were individually assessed with three psychological tests that measure: adult attachment type - Adult Attachment Scale – AAS (Collins, 1990); level of self-esteem - Global Self-Esteem Scale – (Rosenberg, 1965); emotional intelligence - Emotional Intelligence Test - (adapted M. Roco in 1996 by Bar-On and D. Goleman) and Self-report Well-Being Questionnaire (Nanu, 2014).

For the purposes of this study, adult attachment types variables were operationalized by the Close, Dependent and Anxiety scores in secure attachment (high on the close and depend dimensions, and low on the anxiety dimension), anxious-ambivalent attachment (high score on the close and depend dimensions and high on the anxiety dimension, and avoidance attachment (low on the close, depend and low anxiety on dimensions). The questionnaire was composed of 18 items, six items characteristic for each scale. The answer to each item were given based on a Likert scale, where 1 means strong disagreement, 2 means disagreement, 3 is partial agreement, 4 is agreement and 5 represents total agreement. Regarding the internal consistency of high values of Alpha Cronbach coefficients were obtained for all three types: secure attachment = .759 ; avoidance attachment = .721; anxious/ambivalent attachment = .746.

**Procedure**

To Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) the respondents were instructed to choose the best variant that examines in a four point Likert scale, from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Coefficient alpha for the scale was .82.

To measure emotional intelligence - Emotional Intelligence Test (adapted M. Roco in 1996 by Bar-On and D. Goleman) the respondents were instructed to choose the best option that suits them from four possibilities. Alpha Cronbach coefficients was .76.

In Self-report Well-Being Questionnaire (Nanu, 2014) the respondents were instructed to choose the best option that suits them from 7 variants.

The statistical analysis of the variables included in this part of research led to the confirmation

of the general hypothesis.. Condition of normality distribution of variables was checked by Kolmogorov-Smirnov test.

To check if there is a significant correlation between attachment type, self-esteem and global score of emotional intelligence was calculated Pearson correlation coefficient  $r$  and for emotional intelligence and well-being level were used nonparametric correlations (Spearman's Correlation).

**III. Results**

In the present study were used parametric statistical tests, variables are scale and data distribution is normal for attachment and self-esteem. Independent samples  $t$  tests of gender differences revealed that nonsignificant differences between women and men.

**Table 1. One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test**

		Secure Attachment	Anxious Attachment	Avoidance Attachment	Self-esteem	Emotional Intelligence
N		75	75	75	75	75
Normal Parameters <sup>a,b</sup>	Mean	19.24	14.95	14.85	30.76	95.27
	Std. Deviation	2.650	2.945	2.832	5.093	22.941
	Absolute	.133	.133	.094	.112	.195
Most Extreme Differences	Positive	.069	.133	.070	.062	.136
	Negative	-.133	-.107	-.094	-.112	-.195
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		1.151	1.150	.814	.966	1.689
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		<b>.142</b>	<b>.142</b>	<b>.522</b>	<b>.309</b>	<b>.007</b>

Using SPSS Bivariate – Correlate – Analysis procedure the studies show that adult attachment is linked with self-esteem and emotional intelligence. We performed a correlational analysis and the results are presented (table 2).

According to the results obtained there is a significant positive correlation between *secure attachment* and self-esteem  $r(73) = .451, p = .000 < .01$ , and the coefficient of determination  $R^2 = .20$  and also, a positive correlation between secure attachment and emotional intelligence  $r(73) = .336, p = .003 < .05, R^2 = .11$ . We can say that 20% of the variance secure attachment variable is explained by the self-esteem variable and 11% of the variance secure attachment variable is explained by the emotional intelligence variable.

In terms of *avoidant attachment* results revealed a negative correlation between avoidance attachment and Self-esteem  $r(73) = -.239, p = .039 < .05$  and  $R^2 = .05$  and no significant correlation with emotional intelligence  $r(73) = .111, p = .344 > .05$ . We can say 5% of the variance avoidance attachment variable is explained by the self-esteem variable and it

is independent to emotional intelligence variable.

*Anxious/ attachment* correlates significant negatively with self-esteem,  $r(73) = -.410, p = .00 < .01, R^2 = .16$  and also, negative correlation between anxious attachment and emotional intelligence  $r(73) = -.230, p = .047 < .05, R^2 = .05$ . We can say 16% of the variance anxious/ambivalent attachment variable is explained by the self-esteem variable and 5% of the variance avoidance attachment variable is explained by the emotional intelligence variable.

Using SPSS Bivariate – Corelate – Analysis procedure the studies show that adult attachment is linked with of self-esteem, emotional intelligence and well-being level. We performed a nonparametric correlational analysis and the results are presented (see table 3).

The statistical analysis of the variables included in the second part of research led to the confirmation the specific hypothesis:

Secure attachment correlates positively with well-being.

Spearman's Correlation revealed:

- positive correlation between secure

attachment and: satisfaction from children ( $\rho = .351$ ,  $p=.002, <.01$ ); life satisfaction ( $\rho = .331$ ,  $p = .004, <.01$ ); work satisfaction ( $\rho =.293$ ,  $p = .011, <.05$ ); self-perception on professional competence ( $\rho = .275$ ,  $p= .017, <.01$ ).

Avoidance attachment is no significant correlation with well-being.

Spearman's Correlation revealed:

- no correlation between avoidance attachment and: satisfaction from children ( $\rho = -.045$ ,  $p = .704$

$>.05$ ); life satisfaction ( $\rho = -.051$ ,  $p= .666 >.05$ ); work satisfaction ( $\rho = .056$ ,  $p = .631 >.05$ ); self-perception on professional competence ( $\rho = .066$ ,  $p = .571 >.05$ ).

Anxious attachment negatively correlate with well-being.

Spearman's Correlation revealed:

- negative correlation between anxious attachment and: work satisfaction ( $\rho = -.257$ ,  $p = .026 <.05$ ); life satisfaction ( $\rho = -.262$ ,  $p = .024 <.05$ ); salary rangers ( $\rho = -.236$ ,  $p = .042 <.05$ .)

**Table 2. Correlations between adult attachment types and self-esteem and emotional intelligence**

		Secure Attachment	Anxious Attachment	Avoidance Attachment
Self-esteem	Pearson Correlation	<b>.451**</b>	<b>-.410**</b>	<b>-.239*</b>
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.039
	N	75	75	75
Emotional Intelligence	Pearson Correlation	<b>.336**</b>	<b>-.230*</b>	<b>.111</b>
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	.047	.344
	N	75	75	75

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**Table 3. Correlations between adult attachment types and well-being, also with self-esteem and emotional intelligence level**

			Secure Attachment	Anxious Attachment	Avoidance Attachment
		Correlation Coefficient	<b>.437**</b>	<b>-.295*</b>	<b>-.272*</b>
Spearman's rho	Self-esteem level	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.010	.018
		N	75	75	75
	Emotional Intelligence level	Correlation Coefficient	<b>.389**</b>	<b>-.216</b>	<b>.008</b>
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.063	.943
	Work satisfaction	N	75	75	75
		Correlation Coefficient	<b>.293*</b>	<b>-.257*</b>	<b>.056</b>
	Satisfaction from children	Sig. (2-tailed)	.011	.026	.631
		N	75	75	75
	Life satisfaction	Correlation Coefficient	<b>.351**</b>	<b>-.085</b>	<b>-.045</b>
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.468	.704
	Job level	N	75	75	75
		Correlation Coefficient	<b>.331**</b>	<b>-.262*</b>	<b>-.051</b>
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	.024	.666
		N	75	75	75
		Correlation Coefficient	<b>-.078</b>	<b>.087</b>	<b>.130</b>
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.503	.459	.266
		N	75	75	75

Salary ranges	Correlation Coefficient	<b>.137</b>	<b>.236</b>	<b>-.171</b>
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.242	.042	.142
	N	75	75	75
Self-perception on professional competence	Correlation Coefficient	<b>.275**</b>	<b>-.111</b>	<b>.066</b>
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.017	.342	.571
	N	75	75	75

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

#### IV. Discussion

Attachment avoidant not correlated with emotional intelligence and well-being, and anxious attachment were negatively correlated with emotional intelligence and well-being. According to Mikulincer and Shaver (2007) anxiety and avoidance attachment are both characterized by the failure of proximity seeking to relieve distress, and the consequent adoption of secondary attachment strategies.

Attachment-anxious individuals have a fear of rejection, and tend to intensify negative emotional states and exaggerate the threatening aspects of an event, whereas attachment avoidant individuals have compulsive self-reliance tendencies, and preference for emotional distance from others. Mikulincer and Shaver detail the progression, with self-report measures of attachment style, from categorical measures to continuous scales that, in the main, reveal two underlying attachment dimensions, most often characterized in terms of anxiety (about relationships) and avoidance (e.g. discomfort with closeness).

Also, results showed relation between adult attachment type and global self-esteem, that secure and avoidant participants reported higher global self-esteem. This confirms the other studies results Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991), the mechanisms by which attachment styles are thought to develop and change are clearly related to processes involved in the formation of the self-concept and self-esteem (Cassidy, 1988,1990). The unique overlap between attachment styles and self-esteem (independent of the effects of competence ratings) represent a diffuse sense of worth or value as a person that is independent of specific successes, failures, or beliefs about abilities and competence. Attachment experiences may give rise to this overall sense of pride or shame in the self.

This interpretation is consistent with a model of the self-concept outlined briefly by Pelham and Swan (1989). The results reflect that attachment avoidance is a more negative and emotionally

defensive mechanism than is attachment anxiety. Consequently, these different attachment strategies may influence individuals' levels of emotional intelligence and ultimately reflect the different mechanisms underlying the happiness of attachment-anxious and attachment-avoidant individuals. In addition, Xu Li, Xue Zheng, (2014) found that the level of EI had significant influence on well-being through the mediating role of self-esteem.

Limitations of the study are offered by reduced sample and is done on adult parents from urban environment, so results can not be generalized to entire population. We intend in the future to restore the study of adolescents and unmarried adults.

#### V. Conclusions

In short, we can say the results confirm the theory and this research give us valuable guidance on how to implement psychological interventions aimed at enhancing attachment-anxious or attachment-avoidant individuals' well-being. Specifically, helping attachment insecure individuals elevate their emotion regulation and self-esteem abilities may provide a path to enhance their mental health status and happiness. We hope that the results of this study will garner sufficient interest among attachment researchers and practitioners, to generate further investigations to the function of attachment involved in well-being. Also, it would be interesting to study the relationship between the type of attachment and the type of self-esteem, real self-esteem (defined by Rogers unconditional self-esteem) and contingent self-esteem.

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