

The Perception of Death and the Attachment Style Developed in Couple Relationship

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Abstract

Introduction: This research aims to present, explore and analyze the dynamics and interactions between the attachment style developed by the individual in the couple, death anxiety and separation anxiety. The focus on these three concepts can be justified by the fact that these are important processes that occur during the experiential journey of each individual, processes which significantly influence the quality of the relationship between the partners.

Objectives: Objectives and assumptions underlying the present study support the exploratory and investigative approaches, to identify the attachment styles developed, levels of death anxiety, but also the level of separation anxiety manifested in the erotic partnership in which the participant was a part of at the time of the data collection phase. Besides the exploratory aspects of the research, I inter-linked these concepts to capture the dynamic interaction and specific principles.

Methods: Three instruments were used in the present study: a questionnaire for investigating the attachment style (AAS), a questionnaire for investigating the level of separation anxiety (AS-FI), and a third one for investigating the level of death anxiety (TDAS).

Results: Regarding the specific assumptions, three research hypotheses were confirmed: H1, that there is a statistically significant positive correlation between separation anxiety in couples and ambivalent attachment style ($r = .45, p < .01$), showing that people who have a high level of attachment anxiety have reported a higher tendency to worry about separation than those who have a lower level of this dimension; H2, that there is no statistically significant correlation between separation anxiety in couples and secure attachment style ($r = -.07, p > .01$), as the dynamics of the relationship of those with a secure attachment style makes the separation anxiety appear unlikely; H5, that ambivalent attachment style predicts separation anxiety ($r^2 = .21$). The H3 hypothesis was partially confirmed, with ambivalent attachment style and avoidant attachment style correlating statistically significant with death anxiety ($r = .31, p = .001$, respectively $r = .29, p = .001$), while there is no statistically significant correlation between secure attachment style and death anxiety ($r = -.10, p > .001$), people with a secure attachment style defending themselves against the awareness of death in a different way than those with an ambivalent or avoidant attachment style. The H4 hypothesis has not been confirmed, as death anxiety does not modulate the relationship between secure attachment style and separation anxiety.

Conclusions: Individuals with an ambivalent or avoidant attachment style score higher on the scales that measure death and separation anxiety, while individuals with a secure attachment style register lower values on these scales.

Keywords: attachment style, death anxiety, separation anxiety, erotic partnership

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I. Introduction

The attachment theory was formulated by John Bowlby in 1959 (1969), starting from the studies of evolutionary psychology, especially those of Konrad Lorenz, who showed that a strong connection develops between a chicken and a maternal figure. However, it must be borne in mind that Deush was the first to attribute the fundamental value of the mother-child relationship to attachment, in the 1950s. Each contribution emphasizes that attachment is assigned a central role in the development of the individual, namely: inner, through motivational value, and relational, through the internal representational model (Bowlby, 1969; Cassidy & Shaver, 2008).

According to Snyder, Shapiro & Treleaven (2012), Bowlby's theory (1988) is a psychological one that captures human connection. This theory of attachment, according to the author, branches on three levels: (a) any human being is emotionally connected with another, in intimate relationships; (b) the way in which children are treated by their parents, especially by mothers, as the usual primary attachment figures, has a significant impact on their further development; and (c) such a theory of developmental pathways may lead to an eventual explanation of subsequent tendencies in relationships, on the basis of precisely these early experiences in one's own family. Attachment theory captures intimacy as a basic component of human nature, present in germinal form right from the beginning of childhood.

Four phases of attachment behavior formation were identified by Bowlby (1969), as the following:

(a) orientation of the child to a figure and issuing signals, without having the ability to discriminate;

(b) following the development of the capacity for interpersonal discrimination, the child begins to interact distinctly with each individual;

(c) the concept of preferentiality appears, the small one seeking to maintain proximity to the person who aroused his interest, manifesting through locomotor actions;

(d) eventually, the reciprocity of the relationship is reached, and the child's behavior may even have a persuasive tint.

Mary Ainsworth (1967; Papalia, Olds & Feldman, 2010) elaborated the 'strange situation', meant to evaluate the possible attachment patterns. These were classified according to the following criteria: the affective relationship should be a persistent one and not a transitory one; to involve a person of special

significance compared to the others (Ainsworth, 1989; Cassidy & Shaver, 2008). The actual experiment consisted of a series of separation, respectively retrieval episodes, each of 3 minutes, being watched and recorded the reactions of the child at the leaving of the mother, at the arriving of the stranger, at the leaving of both and the mother's return. According to Mary Ainsworth et al. (1968) the resulting categories of interactions can be classified into four attachment style, namely:

(a) secure attachment style: the child exhibits a moderate level of search for closeness with the mother (although they are upset when their mother leaves, they welcome her positively when she returns and becomes available to them; it is an adaptive form of attachment);

(b) anxious-resistant attachment style: separation from the mother causes the child a strong upset, and when she returns, they are difficult to comfort;

(c) anxious-avoidant attachment style: the child avoids contact with their mother, even runs away from her when she returns and, at the same time, is not very upset while being left with strangers;

(d) disorganized attachment: the child's behaviors are contradictory and inconsistent (the moments of search for closeness alternate with those of avoidance; in general, the child cries when the mother leaves, rolls around, has 'frozen' behaviors) (Schaffer, 2007; Cotigă, 2010; Golu, 2015, p. 86).

In case of adults with a secure attachment style, the following behaviors were noted: availability to enter into authentic and intimate relationships; they feel comfortable to depend on others; they are self-confident; they emphasize personal valorization; availability to self-disclosure; and their couple relationship is based on happiness, trust and friendship (Collins & Freenay, 2004; Stancu, 2011).

Regarding anxious-avoidant attachment style, adults who reject often highlight emotional isolation in childhood, arguing that rejection, neglect, and even the parents' moments of anger have provided them with a tough education, but necessary to reach determination and eliminate the need for another person (Main, 1995; Wallin, 2010).

Adults with ambivalent attachment manifest behaviors such as: the concern if the partner appreciates, loves or values him/her; strong demands for intimacy; insecurity; the investment of a large amount of energy in the relationship; high expectations in relation to the partner; and, at the same time, they tend to disregard and devalue, be jealous and get inconsistently involved in the relationship (Pines, 2011).

Antonucci, Taurisano, Coppola and Cassibba (2018) discuss the neurobiological substrate of emotion processing and its connection with the manifest attachment style. According to the authors, security of attachment, as well as sensitivity regarding the attachment elements of another person are closely linked to the ability to read, recognize and regulate emotions. One important fact is the individual's ability to respond in a sensitive way to the needs of the children, which means distinguishing the valence of emotions (positive or negative), identifying the children's facial expressions, correlating them with the emotions felt and, at the same time, recognizing the signs of infantile emotional distress. This ability to process emotions leads to the building of attachment relationships, representing even their key, as it facilitates communication between two human beings, by reflecting emotions and dispositions under the intrinsic aspect of personal facial expression (Bowlby, 1973; Antonucci et al., 2018).

This complex network was identified by MacLean (1952) as the 'limbic system', composed anatomically of structures of the limbic lobe of the brain and subcortical regions, a system meant to support the processing of emotions. Starting from the model proposed by MacLean, the conceptualization of the limbic system was developed, proposing its extension in the mesencephalic and diencephalic regions, at the same time appearing closely related to the amygdala, hypothalamus, hippocampus and the parahippocampal gyrus (Nieuwenhuys, 1996; Antonucci et al., 2018).

For the present research, the couple's relationship is conceptualized as: a love relationship between two people with social and erotic implications, of at least six months, which implies or not changing the marital status, and which is specific to both young people and adults, the respondents to the questionnaires being between the ages of 20 and 60 years.

The couple relationship is defined as "a bipolar structure, of biopsychosocial type, based on mutual interdeterminism (the partners are satisfied, stimulated, developed and realized as biological, affective and social individuals, one through the other)" (Mitrofan, 2009, p. 14; Godeanu, 2015). "Erotic couples, while retaining the nostalgia for a definitive affective and social solidarity, are reoriented in the spirit of maintaining a quasi-permanent availability, of a personal autonomy, considered important for the authenticity of the couple's life" (Mitrofan & Ciupercă, 2009, p. 78).

Interested in the way people choose their life partner, Godeanu (2015) identified a series of

manifested attitudes and behaviors, types of connections between predecessors and descendants that replicate family dynamics, with the help of which the author has strengthened and made possible the development of a transgenerational typology, based on six types of couple relationships: "the reparation-relationship couple typology (they tend towards an ideal relationship and consider avoiding the maladaptive behaviors of their predecessors), the container couple typology (based on Bion's container-content model (1970), involves availability, acceptance, a desire for knowledge and interconnection), the symptom evolution couple typology (the partners entail and manifest circular-pathogenic reactions with maladaptive potential), the confusional-cryptophoric couple typology (they enter into a new relationship without knowing the reasons that brought them into this state and without assuming separation from the previous partner), the phantasmagoric-imaginary couple typology (it considers the consummation of an imaginary relationship, without the existence of real physical contact between the two partners) and the utilitarian couple typology (it involves the investment of one of the partners by the other with the role of an instrument)" (Godeanu, 2011, p. 70-73).

Frale and Shaver (2000) claim that romantic love, as it is commonly conceived, implies the interaction between attachment, care and sex. Even though romantic love is partly an attachment phenomenon, it involves additional behavioral systems, care and sex, which are empirically connected with attachment, both of them remaining theoretically separable.

Starting from the attachment theory, conceived initially for infants, Hazan and Shaver (1987) explored its possibility of providing a valuable perspective on adult romantic love. The authors suggested that romantic love is a process of attachment (which involves a process of becoming attached) lived to a lesser or greater extent different from other people, with the emphasis being placed on their attachment history. According to the authors' hypotheses, the results showed that partners with secure attachment style reported the most important experiences of love as being especially happy, based on friendship and trust. They also stressed the possibility of accepting and supporting the partner despite his/her flaws. Moreover, their relationships tended to withstand a longer period of time: 10.02 years, on average, compared to 4.86 years for subjects with anxious/ ambivalent attachment style and 5.97 years for subjects with avoidant attachment style. The average age of the participants was 36 years.

Regarding the divorce rate, the partners with secure attachment style registered a percentage of 6%, compared with 10% in the anxious/ ambivalent group and 12% in the case of the avoidant group. Partners with avoidant attachment style were characterized by fear of intimacy, emotional polarities, extreme sexual attraction and jealousy. They failed to reach a high value on the dimensions regarding positive love experiences. Subjects with anxious/ ambivalent attachment style also reported varying emotional states, sexual attraction and jealousy, but were noted through the involvement of obsession, desire for reciprocity and union in experiencing love (Hazan & Shaver, 1987, p. 512-515).

According to Golu (2015), anxiety is a dominant affective phenomenon in early childhood, which derives from the inability of the child facing the external stimuli and the stringency of their own needs. Separation anxiety is a fairly common phenomenon, which occurs around 7 months, and is defined as the fear of the child not being separated from parents, associated with anxiety towards strangers (Golu, 2015, p. 83). Among the effects of an unresolved separation anxiety, strong feelings of fear, anger and sadness can be identified, which can appear in adulthood as aggression, rebellion and relationship difficulties (Bowlby, 2011).

Within the analysis of couple dynamics, events such as loss, abandonment and bereavement play a very important role. These events generate roles that are found in many addiction-focused trap scenarios. Thus, in adulthood, loss and separation represent two events in a couple's life that place those who endure these in a dramatic existential difficulty. Accepting reality, in the absence of the partner, implies accepting the loss of the loved one, going through a very critical period, enduring an intense mental work. Most of the time, the loss of the life partner involves the installation of an ambivalence in the future romantic relationships (Godeanu, 2015, p. 254-255).

According to Jung (2004), individuation is a process of "forming and customing of an individual, especially developing the psychological individual as a distinct being from collective psychology. Individuation is a differentiation process with the intention of developing the personality" (p. 473).

Consequently, the individuation takes place in relation to the culture of time. Once the individual has attained a sufficiently good degree of adaptation, the process of individuation would allow him to question collective norms and values, favoring another orientation in life. The dissolution of the person, of the social mask he/she wears to be acceptable to others and

to themselves, but also to come into contact with the unconscious contents, especially with the personal Shadow, were considered by Jung the first steps of the process (Tricarico, 2016, p. 461).

"Whatever is said, death really hurts. It hurts all the time; it is always with us, lurking somewhere in the interior, fluttering slightly, barely heard, somewhere under the membrane of the conscious. Hidden and disguised, flowing in a variety of symptoms, it is the source of many of our worries, tensions and conflicts" (Yalom, 2011, p. 15).

According to Bourassa, Knowles, Sbarra and O'Connor (2016), couple partnerships influence each other's psychological functioning and quality of life. To explore whether this interdependence persists after a person becomes a widower, the authors tested whether the characteristics of deceased spouses were associated with the later quality of life of widowed partners, using couples extracted from a multinational sample of older adults. Independent subsamples were evaluated before and after the death of a spouse. The results suggest that the interdependence of quality of life continues even after the death of the partner. The authors found that the presence of a partner with a higher quality of life before death could allow a better understanding of his death from surviving spouses. The significance of death given by the surviving spouse alleviates the association of risk factors for distress and complication of death in the case of people who are emotionally lost, injured, and may make the loss of an attachment figure less threatening.

Mikulincer and Florian (2000) found that people who have a secure attachment style defend themselves against the awareness of death in a different way than those who have an anxious or avoidant attachment style. Only people with secure attachment style have reacted to death with an increased desire for romantic intimacy. Although the desire for intimacy can have a wide variety of meanings, the threatening context in which this response was observed favors the functional sense of intimacy offered by Bowlby (1988), namely: the search for closeness to another significant person, who can provide comfort in times of need. In this way, a greater desire for intimacy could be a defensive strategy that could dispel the concerns of the death of secure persons and could render useless other means of defense from the world (Bowlby, 1988, p. 270-271).

II. Methods

2.1. Instruments and procedure

Three instruments were used in the present research: a questionnaire for investigating the

attachment style (AAS), a questionnaire for investigating the level of separation anxiety (AS-FI), and a third one for investigating the level of death anxiety (TDAS).

The Attachment Style Questionnaire was adapted by Radu (2014) on the Romanian population based on the operations of each attachment style described by Mary Ainsworth, the questionnaire comprising 27 items, with 9 items on each scale. Thus, for the secure attachment style ($\alpha = 0.64$) the items were: 5, 8, 13, 19, 21, 25, 28, 29 and 30, for the avoidant attachment style ($\alpha = 0.75$) the items were: 6, 7, 10, 12, 14, 17, 20, 23 and 27, and for the ambivalent attachment style ($\alpha = 0.71$) as items were: 4, 9, 11, 15, 16, 18, 22, 24, 26.

The AS-FI questionnaire was adapted by Radu (2014) to measure separation anxiety related to the relationship in which the individual was engaged at the time of testing and the fear of individuation. It contains 20 items out of which 10 items on the 'separation anxiety' scale ($\alpha = 0.71$), items: 2, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12, 15, 16, 18, 24 and 10 items on the scale 'fear of individuation' ($\alpha = 0.76$), items: 3, 4, 8, 10, 14, 17, 21, 22, 23, 25.

The Death Anxiety Questionnaire was built by Sarıkaya and Baloğlu (2016), following to be translated into Romanian and verified on the Romanian population using an item analysis. Thus, the instrument comprises 20 items, of which 10 on the 'death ambiguity' scale ($\alpha = 0.94$), items: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, other 7 items on the 'death exposure' scale ($\alpha = 0.93$), items: 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, and the last 3 items on the 'death agony' scale ($\alpha = 0.90$), items: 18, 19, 20. According to the standards in force, all statistical indices comply with the fidelity threshold, but a shortened version of the instrument should be considered.

2.2. Subjects

The sample consisted of 184 persons, aged between 20 and 60 years. The 20-40-year-old segment was composed of 130 participants, and the 41-60-year-old group of 54 participants. In terms of gender, the sample consisted of 157 women and 27 men. At the testing time 86 of the participants were in a marital relationship, officialized and civilly recognized.

The diversity of the sample lies in the fact that the people who participated in this research do not come from the same social or socio-economic environment. Thus, an efficient randomization was attempted to ensure the validity of the measurements.

2.3. Specific hypotheses

H1: We assume that a high level of separation

anxiety is positively correlated with the development of the ambivalent attachment style.

H2: We assume that separation anxiety does not correlate with the development of the secure attachment style.

H3: We assume that death anxiety correlates specifically with each attachment style.

H4: Anxiety of death moderates the relationship between the secure attachment style and the anxiety of separation.

H5: The ambivalent attachment style predicts separation anxiety.

III. Results

Following the processing of the data using the SPSS statistical program, version 25, and Jamovi, version 0.9.6.9, descriptive and inferential statistical procedures were undertaken, which will be presented for each variable separately.

Regarding age, gender and marital status, the sample investigated is distributed as follows: 27 men (14.7%) and 157 women (85.4%), between the ages of 20 and 60 years. Of the participants, 130 (70.7%) were between 20 and 40 years old, and the remaining 54 (29.3%) were between 41 and 60 years old. 98 (53%) of the participants were in a non-formalized romantic relationship at the time of completing the questionnaire, while 86 (46.7%) were married.

Table of data normalization

| | AAS_AS | AAS_AE | AAS_AA | PM_TOTAL | ASFI_TOTAL |
|---------------------|--------|--------|--------|----------|------------|
| N | 184 | 184 | 184 | 184 | 184 |
| Missing | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Mean | 35.4 | 26.5 | 26.3 | 50.4 | 54.9 |
| Median | 35.0 | 26.0 | 26.0 | 48.0 | 55.5 |
| Standard deviation | 4.71 | 5.84 | 5.84 | 20.3 | 9.25 |
| Minimum | 21 | 13 | 9 | 20 | 32 |
| Maximum | 45 | 42 | 42 | 100 | 77 |
| Skewness | -.41 | .07 | .22 | .35 | -.14 |
| Std. error skewness | .17 | .17 | .17 | .17 | .17 |
| Kurtosis | .29 | -.68 | .06 | -.75 | -.39 |
| Std. error kurtosis | .35 | .35 | .35 | .35 | .35 |
| Shapiro-Wilk p | .01 | .03 | .15 | <.001 | .09 |

Attachment style analysis revealed the following statistical data: participants who developed a secure attachment style (AAS_AS): $m = 35.4$ and $SD = 4.71$, those who developed an avoidant attachment style (AAS_AE): $m = 26.5$ and $SD = 5.84$, and participants who developed an ambivalent attachment style (AAS_AA): $m = 26.3$ and $SD = 5.84$.

Exploring the levels of separation anxiety (ASFI_TOTAL) in relation to the erotic partnership in

which the individual was involved at the time of the discussion, the following emerged: $m = 54.9$ and $SD = 9.25$.

Regarding the anxiety of death (PM_TOTAL) the data that resulted from the analysis are the following: $m = 50.4$ and $SD = 48.0$.

To verify the specific hypothesis H1: *We assume that a high level of separation anxiety correlates positively with the development of an ambivalent attachment style*, the Pearson linear correlation coefficient (r), which evaluates the association between two quantitative variables, was calculated. The scores obtained by the subjects on the *separation anxiety* and *ambivalent attachment style* scales were correlated.

The result presented in the table below allows rejecting the null hypothesis and confirming the research hypothesis (H1), according to which there is a positive and statistically significant correlation between the *separation anxiety* in the couple and the *ambivalent attachment style* ($r = .45$, $p < .01$).

| Correlation Matrix | | | | |
|--------------------|----------------|--------|------------|-----|
| | | AAS_AA | ASFI_TOTAL | |
| AAS_AA | Pearson's r | — | .45 | *** |
| | p-value | — | < .001 | |
| | Spearman's rho | — | .46 | *** |
| | p-value | — | < .001 | |
| ASFI_TOTAL | Pearson's r | | — | |
| | p-value | | — | |
| | Spearman's rho | | — | |
| | p-value | | — | |

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

To verify the specific hypothesis H2: *We assume that separation anxiety does not correlate with the development of a secure attachment style*, the Pearson linear correlation coefficient (r) was calculated, which evaluates the association between two quantitative variables. The scores obtained by the subjects on the *separation anxiety* and *secure attachment style* scales were correlated.

The result presented in the table below confirms the research hypothesis (H2), according to which there is no statistically significant correlation between the *separation anxiety* in the couple and the *secure attachment style* ($r = -.07$, $p > .01$).

| Correlation Matrix | | | |
|--------------------|----------------|--------|------------|
| | | AAS_AS | ASFI_TOTAL |
| AAS_AS | Pearson's r | — | -.07 |
| | p-value | — | .30 |
| | Spearman's rho | — | -.06 |
| | p-value | — | .35 |
| ASFI_TOTAL | Pearson's r | | — |
| | p-value | | — |
| | Spearman's rho | | — |
| | p-value | | — |

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

To verify the specific hypothesis H3: *We assume that the death anxiety correlates specifically with the attachment style*, the Pearson linear correlation coefficient (r), which evaluates the association between two quantitative variables, was calculated. The scores obtained by the subjects on the *death anxiety* and *secure attachment style*, *avoidant attachment style*, and, respectively, *ambivalent attachment style* scores were correlated.

The result presented in the table below allows partial confirmation of the research hypothesis (H3), according to which there is a statistically significant correlation between death anxiety and attachment style specifically.

| Correlation Matrix | | | | | |
|--------------------|----------------|--------|----------|----------|----------|
| | | AAS_AA | AAS_AS | AAS_AE | PM_TOTAL |
| AAS_AA | Pearson's r | — | -.37 *** | .59 *** | .31 *** |
| | p-value | — | < .001 | < .001 | < .001 |
| | Spearman's rho | — | -.31 *** | .59 *** | .32 *** |
| | p-value | — | < .001 | < .001 | < .001 |
| AAS_AS | Pearson's r | | — | -.40 *** | -.10 |
| | p-value | | — | < .001 | .16 |
| | Spearman's rho | | — | -.39 *** | -.09 |
| | p-value | | — | < .001 | .17 |
| AAS_AE | Pearson's r | | | — | .29 *** |
| | p-value | | | — | < .001 |
| | Spearman's rho | | | — | .29 *** |
| | p-value | | | — | < .001 |
| PM_TOTAL | Pearson's r | | | | — |
| | p-value | | | | — |
| | Spearman's rho | | | | — |
| | p-value | | | | — |

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Regarding *ambivalent attachment style* and *avoidant attachment style*, these were found to correlate statistically with death anxiety ($r = .31$, $p = .001$, respectively $r = .29$, $p = .001$).

Regarding the relationship between *secure attachment style* and *death anxiety*, the results show there is no statistically significant correlation between these two ($r = -.10, p > .001$).

To verify the specific hypothesis H4: *Death anxiety moderates the relationship between the secure attachment style and separation anxiety*, the effects of the independent variable (secure attachment style) and moderator (death anxiety) were calculated, as well as their interaction on the dependent variable (separation anxiety), respectively the effect of the independent variable on the dependent one at different levels of the mediator.

The results shown in the *Moderation Estimates* table indicate that *secure attachment style* does not have a significant effect on *separation anxiety* ($\beta = -.102; Z = -.758, p > .05; 95\% \text{ CI: } -.379 - .152$). *Anxiety of death*, in turn, has a significant effect on *separation anxiety* ($\beta = 0.121; Z = 3.430, p = .001; 95\% \text{ CI: } -.0503 - .18847$). Regarding the effect of the interaction between *secure attachment style* and *death anxiety* on the dependent variable, this is not statistically significant ($\beta = -.003; Z = -.553, p > .05; 95\% \text{ CI: } -.016 - .008$).

Moderation Estimates

| | Estimate | SE | 95% Confidence Interval | | Z | p |
|-------------------|----------|-----|-------------------------|-------|------|-------|
| | | | Lower | Upper | | |
| AAS_AS | -.10 | .13 | -.379 | .152 | -.75 | .44 |
| PM_TOTAL | .12 | .03 | .050 | .188 | 3.43 | <.001 |
| AAS_AS * PM_TOTAL | -.00 | .00 | -.016 | .008 | -.55 | .58 |

The *Simple Slope Estimates* table shows the effect of *secure attachment style* on *separation anxiety* at different levels of *death anxiety*. At low levels of *death anxiety* (scores above a standard deviation below average), *secure attachment style* does not have a significant effect on *separation anxiety* ($\beta = -.029; Z = -.146, p > .05; 95\% \text{ CI: } -.426 - .362$). At the average level of *death anxiety* (scores between -1SD and 1SD), *secure attachment style* also does not have a significant effect on *separation anxiety* ($\beta = -.102; Z = -.757, p > .05; 95\% \text{ CI: } -.376 - .154$). For participants who have high scores on *death anxiety*, the relationship between *secure attachment style* and *separation anxiety* is again not statistically significant ($\beta = -.175; Z = -1.027, p > .05; 95\% \text{ CI: } -.544 - .132$).

Thus, it can be observed that the relationship between the *secure attachment style* and *separation anxiety* does not change, no matter what values the *death anxiety* might take.

Simple Slope Estimates

| | Estimate | SE | 95% Confidence Interval | | Z | P |
|-------------|----------|-----|-------------------------|-------|------|-----|
| | | | Lower | Upper | | |
| Average | -.10 | .13 | -.376 | .154 | -.75 | .44 |
| Low (-1SD) | -.02 | .20 | -.426 | .362 | -.14 | .88 |
| High (+1SD) | -.17 | .17 | -.544 | .132 | -.02 | .30 |

Note. Shows the effect of the predictor (AAS_AS) on the dependent variable (ASFI_TOTAL) at different levels of the moderator (PM_TOTAL)

To verify the specific hypothesis H5: *The ambivalent attachment style predicts separation anxiety*, simple linear regression analysis was used.

The results shown in the *Model Fit Measures* table indicate that 21% of *separation anxiety* is predicted by the *ambivalent attachment style*. According to $p < .001$, the *ambivalent attachment style* statistically significantly influences *separation anxiety*.

Model Fit Measures

| Model | R | R ² | Adjusted R ² | Overall Model Test | | | |
|-------|-----|----------------|-------------------------|--------------------|-----|-----|-------|
| | | | | F | df1 | df2 | p |
| 1 | .45 | .21 | .20 | 41.2 | 1 | 182 | <.001 |

IV. Discussions

By analyzing the answers of the participants in the study we can integrate the statistical, descriptive and inferential results, in a specific psychological context that will provide a wider meaning and image on the constructs measured by using the procedures to test the research hypotheses.

By the specific hypothesis (H1), which has been confirmed, it is claimed that there is a statistically significant positive correlation between the separation anxiety in the couple and the ambivalent attachment style. The correlation analysis studies the extent to which the variation of the values of one variable is related to the variation of the values of the other variable. In other words, the linear correlation coefficient indicates to what extent the changes of one variable are related to the changes of the other variable and vice versa. From a psychological point of view, the relationship found emphasizes that people who have a high level of attachment anxiety have reported a higher tendency to worry about separation than those who have a lower level of this dimension (Mikulincer, Florian, Birnbaum, Malishkevich, 2002). Thus, separation anxiety is associated with behaviors specific to adults with ambivalent attachment style, such as: they want a steady and intimate relationship, in which to maintain the stability of the couple, they need frequent

confirmations from the partner that the relationship works, and, at the same time, they become dependent, jealous and emotionally unstable, merging with the partner. Calculating the coefficient of determination of this correlation, we obtain $r^2 = 0.210$. The psychological significance of this coefficient is given by the premise that 21% of the variation of the separation anxiety variable is determined by the variation of the ambivalent attachment style variable.

By the specific hypothesis (H2), which has been confirmed, it is claimed that there is no statistically significant correlation between separation anxiety and the development of secure attachment style. The psychological implications of this hypothesis come as a complement to the existing relations between separation anxiety in the couple and the attachment style present to the individual. Thus, the behavioral and attitudinal arguments underlying this confirmation are closely related to the characteristics of secure attachment style, namely: maintaining a balance between the intimacy of the couple and their own independence, trust in the partner, being inclined to enter into an authentic relationship and face all the difficulties that arise, expressing their needs easily. At the same time, they see the couple also as a friendship in which they can rely on each other, making their life full of happiness and meaning, things that make fears become adaptive. In other words, the dynamics of the relationship of those with a secure attachment style makes the separation anxiety appear unlikely, the latter assuming the involvement of a strong fear, having as a ghost object the separation of an attachment figure (Bowlby, 2011), aspects that in the case of this type of relationship are not present.

The specific hypothesis (H3) has been partially confirmed, resulting that there is a statistically significant association between death anxiety and ambivalent, respectively avoidant attachment style, but not also the secure one, has the following psychological meanings: subjects with an ambivalent attachment style have a stronger fear of death than subjects with a secure attachment style, both at the conscious and subconscious levels and, at the same time, they are more likely to fear the loss of social identity with death (Mikulincer et al, 1990). As for people with secure attachment style, they develop other defense mechanisms, based on an intimate relationship that allows them to adopt adaptive behaviors towards death anxiety. The coefficients of determination indicate that 10% of the variation of the *anxiety of death* variable is determined by the variation of the *ambivalent*

attachment style variable, and 9% by the variation of the *avoidant attachment style* variable.

The specific hypothesis (H4) has not been confirmed, meaning that the *death anxiety* variable does not moderate the relationship between *secure attachment style* and *separation anxiety*. Moderation analysis tests the extent to which the effect of an independent variable on a dependent variable varies, in one form or another, depending on a third variable, called 'moderator'. Based on the results highlighted above, *secure attachment style* does not have a significant effect on *separation anxiety* while *death anxiety* has a significant effect on *separation anxiety*. Moreover, *secure attachment style* does not have a statistically significant effect on *separation anxiety* regardless of the values of *death anxiety*. A possible explanation for the fact that the present hypothesis is not confirmed is the lack of significant relationships between the secure attachment style and the moderating variable, respectively dependent variable, relationships explored also in the previous hypotheses.

The specific hypothesis (H5), which has been confirmed, was tested by means of a regression analysis. The regression analysis aims to predict the scores of one variable according to the values of another variable. The independent variable is called 'predictor' and the dependent variable 'criterion'. In this case, the predictor is the *ambivalent attachment style*, and the criterion is *separation anxiety*. Thus, the results show that the *ambivalent attachment style* variable predicts 21% of the *separation anxiety* variable. Interestingly, the exactly percentage of common variability found between the two variables in the specific hypothesis (H1) is also the one predicted by the ambivalent attachment style.

Another perspective that comes to support the results obtained is related to the age of the participants. The group of those between the ages of 20 and 40 years old was much larger than the group of those between the ages of 40 and 60 years old. According to Russac, Gatliff, Reece & Spottswood (2007) death anxiety peaks both among men and women in their 20s, a significant decline in death concern being expected to occur with age. Thus, it is justified to record high scores on Death Anxiety scale as it happened. Furthermore, the authors argue that women exhibit an unexpected secondary spike in death anxiety during their early 50s, being about to stabilize at a uniformly low level at the age of 60 years old for both men and women.

There are several ideas that can explain this phenomenon: "people become less anxious because (a) death does not threaten as many of our values, and/ or

(b) there is a continued developmental process through which we 'come to terms' with mortality" (Kastenbaum, 2000, p. 122); decreased death anxiety might result from denial initiated by the impending reality of death (Munnichs, 1966) or "from an unreadiness evoked by an inability to prepare adequately for such an unpleasant reality" (Russac et al., 2007, p. 557); it may also result from a poor quality of life (increasing the attraction of death) (Neimeyer, 1988).

Regarding the increased level of death anxiety of young people, the arguments revolve around the idea of reproductive status, "both men and women reaching the height of their reproductive capabilities at precisely the time when death anxiety is at its zenith" (Russac et al., 2007), raising concerns about what children would do in their absence and so on.

V. Conclusions

The present research fulfilled its objectives of presenting, exploring and analyzing the dynamics and interactions between the attachment style developed by the individual, the anxiety of death and the anxiety of separation.

Through the specific hypotheses, association relations, moderation as well as inferential prediction between separation anxiety, death anxiety and the attachment style developed by the individual were realized. According to the obtained results, there are statistically significant relations between the anxious attachment styles and the separation anxiety, respectively the death anxiety, thing that cannot be said in the case of the secure attachment style. All of these come as a support, as well as an extension, of the results of previous research carried out on similar topics.

The findings of this study contribute to a deeper understanding of the clients suffering from death anxiety and separation anxiety, both of which can be explained by the attachment style. The results are particularly important to comprehend the need to develop specialized psychotherapeutic interventions on this type of problem, considering the implications of each studied variable and how they influence each other.

Thus, the psychotherapist can work in the therapy sessions on the transformation of the attachment styles, which will allow a better knowledge and communication within the couple relationship. Subsequently, this will lead to an increase intimacy between the two partners, the needs, desires, expectations and emotions of each partner becoming much more clearly shared. This authentic contact being created between the two of them, a significant decrease

in death anxiety and separation anxiety will be noticed, because they learn to properly anchor their needs in relation to the other. Finally, all these things will make evolution possible, in the sense of partners' emotional maturity in the couple relationship.

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