

Child and Adult Attachment Contributions to Relationship Quality and Support

Haven Foley, Jenessa Steele, PhD, Michaela Clark, PhD

Department of Psychology, Radford University

Discussion

It was hypothesized that adult attachment scores would predict significant variance in both relationship satisfaction and perceived social support. It was found that adult attachment accounted for approximately 58% of the variance in relationship satisfaction and 13.4 % of the variance in perceived social support, so the findings of this study fully supported this hypothesis. These findings were consistent with previous literature which found that adult attachment could have a positive or negative effect on relationship satisfaction depending on the attachment style (Vollmann et al., 2019). These findings were also consistent with a previous study by Lane et al. (2017) which found adult attachment style to be a predictor of well-being in adulthood. This could be attributed to the fact that attachment style directly affects how individuals approach relationships, and relationships are a large aspect of social support.

Hypothesis two proposed that after accounting for the adult attachment piece, childhood attachment scores would add significant unique variance to relationship satisfaction and perceived social support quality. The results of this study only offered partial support for this hypothesis. It was found that while childhood attachment accounted for approximately 24% of the variance to perceived social support, it did not add any significant variance to relationship satisfaction. These findings were inconsistent with previous literature which found that childhood attachment was a predictor of later relationships (Simpson et al., 2007).

Given that previous literature has been limited to examining the role of caregivers or romantic partners in attachment (Fraley et al., 2013), we decided to examine differences between relationship types. It was hypothesized that there would be differences between who was chosen as an adult attachment figure and the scores for relationship satisfaction and social support. The findings of this study did not support this hypothesis. No differences were found between the

nature of the attachment figure (mother, friend, romantic partner) and the associated scores on social support and relationship satisfaction. These findings were inconsistent with previous literature that found differences between the type of relationship and relationship satisfaction (Pfund et al., 2021).

It should be noted that there were a few limitations within this study. The first one being the sample size. This study consisted of 64 participants who were mostly female and ages 18-20, which was not a good representation of the population. It should also be noted that the RAS was worded for a more current relationship, so it is believed that participants were answering the relationship satisfaction questions solely for the adult attachment figure. This did not allow for an accurate representation of satisfaction with the childhood attachment figure. The last limitation was that this was a cross-sectional study, so it was not able to measure any changes in relationship satisfaction and social support over time.

This study added valuable information regarding the role of childhood attachment in social support as an adult as well as the nature of the relationship and its impact on relationship satisfaction and social support. However, future research on the subject could be improved to strengthen findings. Future studies should seek a broader range of participants to yield more generalizable results. Researchers should also strive to find a way to accurately gauge relationship satisfaction with a childhood attachment figure. It may prove beneficial to conduct a longitudinal study, if possible, to better understand satisfaction with childhood attachment and examine changes over time.

References

- Fraley, R. C., Roisman, G. I., Booth-LaForce, C., Owen, M. T., & Holland, A. S. (2013). Interpersonal and genetic origins of adult attachment styles: A longitudinal study from infancy to early adulthood. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 104*(5), 817–838
- Lane, J. A., Leibert, T. W., & Goka, D. E. (2017). The impact of life transition on emerging adult attachment, social support, and well-being: A multiple-group comparison. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 95*(4), 378–388. <https://doi-org.radford.idm.oclc.org/10.1002/jcad.12153>
- Pfund, G. N., Bono, T. J., & Hill, P. L. (2022). Purpose as a predictor of satisfaction across relationship domains during the first semester of university. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 39*(3), 570-591. <https://doi-org.radford.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/02654075211042613>
- Simpson, J. A., Collins, W. A., Tran, S., & Haydon, K. C. (2007). Attachment and the experience and expression of emotions in romantic relationships: A developmental perspective. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 92*(2), 355–367
- Vollmann, M., Sprang, S., & van den Brink, F. (2019). Adult attachment and relationship satisfaction: The mediating role of gratitude toward the partner. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 36*(11–12), 3875–3886. <https://doi-org.radford.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/0265407519841712>