Intimacy-Anger and Insecure Attachment as Precursors of Abuse in Intimate Relationships

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One hundred and twenty men referred for treatment for wife assault and forty demographic controls completed self-report questionnaires assessing attachment patterns, anger, jealousy, Borderline Personality Organization, and trauma symptoms. This constellation, with the exception of attachment, has been found to represent a profile related significantly to the frequency of both verbal and physical abuse. In the present study, attachment was found to correlate significantly with these other measures. A measure of secure attachment correlated significantly, but negatively, with the constellation measures. A measure of fearful attachment correlated significantly and positively. A preoccupied attachment pattern correlated with the other measures less strongly than did the fearful measure. A dismissing measure was not correlated with any constellation measures. The role of attachment anger is discussed; it is suggested that fearful attachment could also be described as angry attachment. The concept of intimacy anger is introduced from early studies in attachment and applied to the explanation of assaultiveness in adult relationships.

Bowlby asserted that “attachment behavior is held to characterize human beings from the cradle to the grave” (1977, p. 203). He postulated that confidence in the availability of attachment figures, or lack of it, is built slowly during the years of immaturity—infancy, childhood, and adolescence—and that “whatever expectations are developed during those years tend to persist relatively unchanged throughout the rest of life” (1973, p. 235). These expectations, referred to as internal representations or working models of self and intimate partners, are central components of personality. As he put it, “…when an individual is confident that an attachment figure will be available to him (sic) whenever he desires it, that person will be much less prone to either intense or chronic fear than will an individual who for any reason has no such confidence” (1973, p. 235).

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Bowlby viewed interpersonal anger as arising from frustrated attachment needs and functioning as a form of protest behavior directed at regaining contact with the attachment figure. A fundamental conclusion of attachment research on infants is that anger and rage follow unmet attachment needs and that threats or separations from attachment figures produce powerful emotional responses such as terror, grief, and rage (Bowlby, 1969, 1973). In turn, chronic childhood frustration of attachment needs may lead to adult proneness to react with extreme anger (referred to in this paper as intimacy anger) when relevant attachment cues are present. Thus, attachment theory suggests that an assaultive male's violent outburst may be a form of protest behavior directed at his attachment figure (in this case, a sexual partner) and precipitated by perceived threats of separation or abandonment.

Attachment and Adult Relationships

Although attachment processes have been extensively investigated in parent-child relationships, relatively less attention has been paid to the role of attachment processes in adult relationships. However, following the seminal work of Hazan and Shaver (1987), who conceptualized romantic love as an attachment process, a growing body of research has applied an attachment perspective to the study of adult personal relationships. Hazan and Shaver (1987) developed a self-report measure to differentiate adult analogues of the three infantile attachment patterns described by Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall (1978): secure, ambivalent, and anxious-avoidant. Subsequent research has indicated that: (a) The qualitatively different patterns of attachment identified in childhood are parallel to patterns that characterize adults, (b) enduring sexual or romantic relationships are the most important attachment relationships in adult life (Hazan & Zeifman, 1994), and (c) adult attachment patterns are associated with a range of relationship outcomes including satisfaction, trust, communication, and conflict resolution (Bartholomew, 1993; Hazan & Shaver, 1994; Shaver & Hazan, 1993). Until the present study, however, little application had been made of an attachment perspective to the study of adult pathology.

Building on Hazan and Shaver's (1987) work, Bartholomew developed a 4-category model of adult attachment that defines attachment patterns in terms of the intersection of positive or negative representations of the self and others (Bartholomew, 1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). The self-model dimension indicates the degree to which individuals have internalized a sense of their own self-worth; thus, a negative self-model is associated with excessive anxiety and dependency in close relationships. The other model dimension indicates the degree to which individuals expect significant others to be supportive
and trustworthy and, thus, is associated with the tendency to seek out or avoid intimacy in relationships (Griffin & Bartholomew, in press).

The secure pattern is defined in terms of a positive self-model and positive other model; secure individuals are both confident and comfortable with intimacy in their close relationships. Therefore, this pattern is expected to be negatively associated with emotional reactivity and abuse in intimate relationships. The dismissing attachment pattern is defined in terms of a positive self-model and negative other model. Dismissing individuals maintain a positive self-image by defensively downplaying the importance of attachment needs and maintaining emotional distance in their relationships. Although the frustration of attachment needs associated with this style may give rise to anger (Kobak & Sceery, 1988), the dismissing are not prone to insecurity in close relationships (presumably due to the deactivation of the attachment system) and, therefore, they should not be especially prone to angry protest in intimate relationships.

In contrast, individuals showing the two attachment patterns defined in terms of a negative self-model (the preoccupied and fearful) are chronically anxious about rejection and abandonment in their close relationships. Therefore, these anxious attachment patterns are expected to be associated with high levels of negative affect, including anger, in intimate relationships. Preoccupied individuals (negative self-model and positive other model) actively seek to gain their attachment figure’s approval in order to validate their tenuous sense of self-worth. Their feelings of unworthiness and the strong approach orientation to meeting their needs are expected to be associated with high levels of intimacy anger.

But the fearful attachment pattern (negative self-model and negative other model) may be the most strongly associated with intimacy anger. Fearful individuals “desire social contact and intimacy but experience pervasive interpersonal distrust and fear of rejection” (Bartholomew, 1990). This style manifests itself in hypersensitivity to rejection and active avoidance of close relationships where vulnerability to rejection exists. Although the fearful share anxiety over abandonment with the preoccupied, their avoidance orientation may lead to more chronic frustration of attachment needs than that experienced by the preoccupied. Bartholomew (1990) argues that strong and unresolvable approach/avoidance may underlie the behavior of chronically fearful (anxious-avoidant) people: Perceived threats of abandonment lead to tendencies to approach the attachment figure who rejects physical contact, thus generating withdrawal accompanied by an even stronger need for attachment. A self-perpetuating feedback loop ensues that leads to chronic avoidance, frustration of attachment needs, and anger. Hence, intimacy anger may be central to the fearful attachment style.
In summary, individuals with fearful and preoccupied attachment patterns are prone to the experience of anxiety about abandonment in their intimate relationships and, therefore, these attachment patterns are expected to be positively related to anger, jealousy, and affective instability. Dutton (1994) and Dutton and Starzomski (1993) found that anger, jealousy, and affective instability were all strongly and significantly related to the frequency of verbal and physical abuse in intimate relationships. Hence, a link is also hypothesized between anxious attachment patterns and a propensity for abusiveness—attachment anger and affective instability. We argue that attachment anger (intimacy anger) and affective instability are produced by chronically frustrated attachment needs and are risk factors for increased abusiveness in intimate relationships.

**Wife Assault**

Male violence toward women frequently occurs in the context of intimate relationships (Straus & Gelles, 1990; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980). With the exception of serial killers, almost all cases of males killing females occur in the context of an ongoing intimate relationship (Crawford & Gartner, 1992; Daly & Wilson, 1988), and much male intimate violence occurs in the process of real or perceived relationship dissolution (Crawford & Gartner, 1992; Daly & Wilson, 1988; Dutton & Browning, 1988). Prior research indicates that men who assault their wives have high chronic anger scores (Dutton, 1994) and that their anger is frequently triggered by an attachment change that they perceive as being uncontrollable. Dutton (1988) describes these changes as abandonments and engulfments and has found that these kinds of changes produce the greatest anger reactions in male subjects watching couple-conflict videotapes (Dutton & Browning, 1988). In their study of 551 femicides, Crawford and Gartner (1992) concluded that “the offender’s anger or rage over the actual or impending estrangement from his partner typified 45% of the cases where a motive could be established” (p. 44). In another 15% of cases, the motive was the offender’s suspicions about his partner’s relationship with another man. It appears, in other words, that intimacy or attachment issues generate strong reactions that include anger and violence toward intimate others.

The thesis of the present study is that men who have anxious attachment styles will be more likely to report chronic anger and associated features of wife abuse. In particular, we focus on attachment styles described as fearful (anxious-avoidant) and preoccupied (ambivalent) by Bartholomew (1990). Both styles involve negative self-models and intimacy anxiety, and they are characterized by frustrated attachment needs, subjective distress, and hypersensitivity. Both styles should contain high levels of intimacy anger.
Dutton (1994) has demonstrated a batterer profile of associated abuse features that include a personality characterized by Borderline Personality Organization (BPO), some central features of which are affective instability, anger, and the projection of unacceptable impulses onto the devalued woman object (cf. Gunderson, 1984). Dutton reported high BPO scorers as demonstrating a constellation of measures associated with the frequent use of verbal and physical abuse, including experience of trauma symptoms and greater anger and jealousy than low BPO scorers. The present study will assess the associations of attachment styles to this constellation of characteristics associated with wife assault: anger, jealousy, and chronic experience of trauma symptoms. Finally, this study will assess the relationship of attachment styles to a comprehensive and direct measure of abusiveness in intimate relationships, the Psychological Maltreatment of Women Inventory (Tolman, 1989).

Method

Testing and clinical assessment was done on court-referred and self-referred males interviewed by the Vancouver Assaultive Husbands Project, the Victoria Family Violence Institute, and the Burnaby Family Life Institute. One hundred and twenty men were assessed. A demographically matched control group of 40 union men was also assessed. Furthermore, 43 female partners of the assaultive group and 33 partners of the control group provided data relating to the men’s psychological abusiveness.

Only North American acculturized men were included in the current sample to avoid interpretative problems arising from language difficulties or from different cultural norms. The demographic profile of the assaultive group was as follows: average age was 35 (ranging from 17 to 65), average level of education was grade 12, average income was $34,285 (63% self-identified as blue collar and 37% as white). Men in the treatment groups reported an average assaultiveness in the prior year of 5.87 (SD = 6.22) acts of physical violence against their wives; 56% were still living with the assault victim.

Control group men were contacted through their local union representative and asked to participate in a study on family conflict. This group reported an average age of 35 (ranging from 19 to 45), an average level of education of grade 12, and a modal family income of $35,000; 65% were married, and the mean self-reported score for physical assaultiveness against their partner in the prior year was 1.34 acts of violence (SD = 3.4). These men were selected to provide a demographically matched, relatively nonviolent, noncriminal sample (although, as reported above, they did self-report some violence toward their wives).
We assessed differential patterns of attachment, emotional expression (anger and jealousy), presence of current trauma symptoms, and a style of personality called Borderline Personality Organization for these two groups. Not all men completed all assessments. Hence, in some cases, reported n's are less than the total sample sizes.

Testing and assessment included:

1. Attachment Measures

   *Relationship Styles Questionnaire (RSQ).* The RSQ (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994) is a 30-item self-report measure with items drawn from Hazan and Shaver’s (1987) attachment measure, Bartholomew and Horowitz’s (1991) Relationship Questionnaire, and Collins and Read’s (1990) Adult Attachment Scale. Measures of each of the four attachment patterns (secure, fearful, preoccupied, and dismissing) identified by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) were created by summing four or five items from the corresponding prototypic descriptions. The RSQ attachment scores show convergent validity with interview ratings of the four attachment patterns (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). Note that each subject receives a continuous rating for each attachment pattern.

   *Relationship Questionnaire (RQ).* Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) describe their RQ as an adaptation of the attachment measure developed by Hazan and Shaver (1987). It consists of four short paragraphs describing the four attachment patterns (secure, fearful, preoccupied, and dismissing). Each respondent is asked to make ratings on a 7-point scale of the degree to which they resemble each of the four styles. The RQ attachment ratings show convergent validity with interview ratings (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994) and moderately high stability over 8 months (Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1994). The RQ can either be used to generate a continuous rating for each attachment pattern or an attachment category, defined as the pattern with the highest rating on the 7-point scales.

2. *Borderline Personality Organization (BPO).* The Self-Report Instrument for Borderline Personality Organization (Oldham et al., 1985) is a 30-item instrument derived through factor analysis of a 130-item questionnaire designed by the authors. The three subscales measure: (a) identity diffusion (a poorly integrated sense of self or of significant others), (b) primitive defenses (splitting, idealization, devaluation, omnipotence, denial, projection, and projective identification), and (c) reality testing (external vs. internal origins of perceptions, evaluation of own behavior in terms of social criteria of reality, differentiation of self from nonself, etc.).

Oldham et al. (1985) report on the scale’s intrascale consistency, inter-scale relationships and relationship to BPD differential diagnosis, and the application of the scale to differing theories of BPO and its DSM-IIIIR Axis 2 definition. Cronbach’s alpha for the BPO subscales are identity diffusion, .92;
primitive defenses, .87; and reality testing, .84. In our current sample, we obtained Cronbach’s alphas as follows: identity diffusion, .85; primitive defenses, .87; and reality testing, .80. Dutton (1994) shows the BPO scale to be significantly correlated with frequency and severity of violence in a wife assault sample, and Dutton and Starzomski (1993) demonstrated that men’s self-reports of BPO were strongly and significantly correlated with their wives’ reports of psychological abusiveness.

3. Anger. The Multidimensional Anger Inventory (MAI; Siegel, 1986) is a 38-item self-report scale assessing the following dimensions of anger response: frequency, duration, magnitude, mode of expression, hostile outlook, and range of anger eliciting situations. Siegel reports the results of a factor analysis of this scale and the reliability of its subscales \( \alpha = .51 \) to .83 and the scale as a whole (\( \alpha \) equal to .84 and .89 for two separate samples). The scale was validated by correlation with other conceptually similar anger inventories.

4. Jealousy. The Interpersonal Jealousy Scale (Mathes, Phillips, Skowran, & Dick, 1982; Mathes & Severa, 1981) is a 28-item scale that measures romantic jealousy. Tests of the construct validity of this measure have shown it to be correlated with dependency. The scale has a high internal reliability and a low correlation with social desirability response bias.

5. Trauma symptoms (TSC-33). The Trauma Symptoms Checklist (TSC-33; Briere & Runtz, 1989) is a brief (33-item), reliable instrument showing predictive and construct validity. It has been shown to discriminate female victims of childhood sexual abuse from nonvictimized women. The TSC-33 contains five subscales: dissociation, anxiety, depression, post-sexual abuse trauma-hypothesized, and sleep disturbance. The post-sexual abuse trauma-hypothesized includes those symptoms thought to be most characteristic of sexual abuse experiences, but which may also occur as a result of other types of trauma. Analysis of the internal consistency of the five subscales indicated reasonable reliability with an average subscale alpha of .71 and a total alpha for the TSC-33 of .89 (Briere & Runtz, 1989).

6. Psychological abuse. Tolman’s (1989) Psychological Maltreatment of Women Inventory (PMWI) was used to provide a more comprehensive assessment of abuse, since psychological abuse is more common than physical abuse (Straus et al., 1980). It was completed by the women partners, who reported the men’s abusiveness. The PMWI contains 58 items rated from never (1) to very frequently (5) that cover forms of emotional/verbal abuse and dominance/isolation. Dominance/isolation includes items related to the rigid observance of traditional sex roles, demands for subservience, and isolation from resources. In contrast, emotional/verbal abuse includes withholding emotional resources, verbal attacks, and behavior that degrades women. Factor analyses support the inclusion of the two factors. In the sample considered in this study,
Cronbach's alpha for the dominance/isolation subscale was .82 and, for the emotional/verbal subscale, it was .93.

Procedure

Men entering the Vancouver Assaultive Husbands Program and the Victo-
ria Family Violence Project were administered the above scales either prior to
treatment or during the first 3 weeks of treatment in order to minimize the
effects of treatment on the test results. Their partners were also administered
questionnaires, by mail, at that time. Although participation was voluntary,
cooperation was encouraged by offering, and providing, a subject fee and, for
the men, individual feedback on questionnaire results. The subjects completed
the questionnaires individually and returned them to the experimenter at the
next session (the men only) or by mail.

Control data was obtained by posting signs in two union locals requesting
participation in exchange for a subject fee. The subjects approached their union
representative or Family Violence Lab personnel to obtain a questionnaire
package; upon receipt of the completed questionnaire in the lab, the subject fee
was provided.

Confidentiality was assured. The men and women were asked not to discuss
their respective responses with each other.

Results

RSQ With RQ

According to RQ self-reports, 20% of the sample group of assaultive men
was secure, 20% was fearful, 33% was preoccupied, and 27% was dismissing.
Table 1 shows the correlations of the RSQ and RQ continuous pattern ratings.
The measures demonstrate a moderate positive association ranging from .39
for secure attachment to .65 for preoccupied. Correlations of each attachment
measure with other measures of this study follow similar patterns. To avoid
redundancy, only correlations of the RSQ measure will be reported in the tables
that will follow.

Control Group Versus Assaultive Men

Table 2 demonstrates linear comparisons between the control and treatment
groups. Scores on secure attachment were significantly higher for controls.
Scores on fearful and preoccupied attachment were significantly higher for
treatment group men. The dismissing rating did not differ significantly by
Table 1

Correlations of Two Attachment Measures (Assaultive Men)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>RQ: Secure (20%)</th>
<th>Fearful (20%)</th>
<th>Preoccupied (33%)</th>
<th>Dismissing (27%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RSQ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>-.44</td>
<td>-.003</td>
<td>-.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fearful</td>
<td>-.34</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preoccupied</td>
<td>-.23</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismissing</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>-.22</td>
<td>.45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2

Differences in Assaultive and Control Men on Major Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Control N = 40</th>
<th>Wife assaulter N = 120</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attachment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fearful</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preoccupied</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismissing</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPO</td>
<td>62.9</td>
<td>68.5</td>
<td>.048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>74.9</td>
<td>80.7</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trauma symptoms</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jealousy</td>
<td>-10.2</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

group. Treatment group men also scored significantly higher on BPO total scores, MAI (anger) total scores, jealousy, and TSC-33 (trauma symptoms) total scores. In general, the assaultive group appeared to be less securely attached and less affectively stable than the control group.

Associations of Attachment to Other Measures

In order to assess specific relationships between attachment style and other
Table 3

*Correlations of RSQ With Total Scores on Other Measures for Entire Sample (n = 160)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Secure</th>
<th>Fearful</th>
<th>Preoccupied</th>
<th>Dismissing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BPO</td>
<td>-.35***</td>
<td>.58***</td>
<td>.42***</td>
<td>-.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trauma symptoms</td>
<td>-.28***</td>
<td>.50***</td>
<td>.34***</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>-.36***</td>
<td>.49***</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jealousy</td>
<td>-.16*</td>
<td>.34***</td>
<td>.18*</td>
<td>-.015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal abuse (PMWI):</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domination/isolation</td>
<td>-.30*</td>
<td>.46**</td>
<td>.27*</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional abuse</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>.52***</td>
<td>.26*</td>
<td>-.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

dependent measures, Pearson correlations were run on the combined sample and are demonstrated in Table 3. The strongest associations were demonstrated for scores on fearful attachment. These correlated significantly and positively with scores of the BPO measure (.58), and with anger (.49), trauma symptoms (.50), and jealousy (.34), all associated features of abusiveness (Dutton, 1994). The preoccupied scores generated a similar, if weaker, pattern of associations. Scores for secure attachment, on the other hand, correlated negatively and significantly with BPO (-.35), anger (-.36), trauma symptoms (-.28), and jealousy (-.16). Scores for the dismissing pattern did not tend to correlate significantly with other measures. These same general patterns of association between the RSQ and measures of associated abuse features replicated for all subscales of each measure.

Attachment and Abusiveness

Finally, RSQ attachment patterns were correlated with the psychological abuse measure (PMWI). Fearful attachment correlated strongly and significantly with scores on both the dominance/isolation and emotional abuse factors. The preoccupied rating was also significantly correlated with both abuse scales. The secure rating was negatively correlated with dominance/isolation. Finally, dismissing scores were unrelated to the abuse measure (Table 3).
ANOVA and Tukey procedures were run on the attachment groups (derived from the RQ), comparing them for anger, trauma symptoms, and jealousy (Table 4). For anger, these yielded between-group significance, $F(3, 67) = 9.08, p = .0001$. As can be seen from Table 4, the fearful group differed significantly from the secure and dismissing groups.

An ANOVA and Tukey procedure run on TSC-33 total scores also yielded a significant between-attachment group difference, $F(3, 67) = 4.99, p = .0035$. Again, the fearful group reported the highest scores, which differed significantly from the secure group and the dismissing group. This same pattern recurred for jealousy, $F(3, 67) = 4.89, p = .009$; and BPO, $F(3, 67) = 5.09, p = .003$. For dominance, $F(3, 33) = 5.19, p = .006$, however, a Tukey revealed a significant difference between the secure group and the fearful and preoccupied groups. For emotional abuse, $F(3, 33) = 4.35, p = .034$, a Tukey revealed that the secure and fearful groups were significantly different.

Hence, on BPO, MAI, jealousy, and trauma symptoms, the fearful group reported the highest scores. On all these measures, they differed significantly from the secure and dismissing groups but not from the preoccupied group, which reported scores in a weaker pattern than did the fearful group. On both abuse measures, the fearful group again reported the highest scores but differed only from the secure group on emotional abuse.

Using the above measures of attachment, anger, and BPO, a discriminant function analysis was performed on abuse scores. The one-factor discriminant function correctly discriminated 85.6% of the men into high and low abusiveness on Factor 1 (dominance/isolation) of the PMWI and 87.5% on Factor 2 (emotional/verbal abuse). Predictor variables, in order of the strength of their correlation with the discriminant function, were for dominance/isolation: BPO total score, .79; anger total score, .72; fearful attachment, .61; secure attachment, -.52; preoccupied attachment, .45; and dismissing attachment, .24. This same pattern was reproduced, with minor variation, for emotional/verbal abuse. Used alone, the RSQ correctly classified 78% of the men on dominance/isolation and 80% on emotional/verbal abuse. A multiple regression run on the abuse variables selected fearful attachment as having the strongest association with the dependent measures. Fearful attachment alone accounted for 25% of the variance in dominance/isolation and 30% of the variance in emotional/verbal abuse.

**Composite Attachment Scores**

In order to establish whether general anxiousness and avoidance (apart
Table 4

*Means, Differences for Attachment Groups on Dependent Measures*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Secure ($n = 32$)</th>
<th>Fearful ($n = 32$)</th>
<th>Preoccupied ($n = 54$)</th>
<th>Dismissing ($n = 42$)</th>
<th>Significant difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>71.7 (12.6)</td>
<td>96.4 (13.7)</td>
<td>86.7 (18.0)</td>
<td>83.8 (11.6)</td>
<td>2 vs. 1, 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trauma</td>
<td>15.1 (9.7)</td>
<td>36.9 (11.1)</td>
<td>26.1 (14.9)</td>
<td>18.8 (10.5)</td>
<td>2 vs. 1, 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jealousy</td>
<td>-6.4 (30.6)</td>
<td>33.7 (32.9)</td>
<td>5.7 (39.5)</td>
<td>-2.4 (40.6)</td>
<td>2 vs. 1, 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPO</td>
<td>61.9 (16.0)</td>
<td>84.4 (9.3)</td>
<td>76.5 (14.9)</td>
<td>63.4 (11.7)</td>
<td>2 vs. 1, 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominance</td>
<td>62.2 (14.9)</td>
<td>109.5 (20.1)</td>
<td>106.3 (19.8)</td>
<td>86.0 (17.6)</td>
<td>1 vs. 2, 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional abuse</td>
<td>29.4 (11.6)</td>
<td>43.9 (18.8)</td>
<td>39.8 (17.7)</td>
<td>37.7 (16.9)</td>
<td>1 vs. 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
from their representation as specific attachment styles) were related to our dependent measures, we developed composite attachment scores following a procedure used by Griffin and Bartholomew (in press). Attachment scores for general anxiousness were calculated as: (fearful + preoccupied) - (secure + dismissing) = anxious. Attachment scores for general avoidance were calculated as: (fearful + dismissing) - (secure + preoccupied) = avoidant. These two dimensions are parallel to the anxiety and avoidance scales developed by Simpson, Rholes, and Nelligan (1992) and correspond to those dimensions that have repeatedly been found to underlie individual differences in attachment style (Griffin & Bartholomew, in press; Shaver & Hazan, 1993). The patterns of correlation of these composite attachment scores with other test measures were as follows: High scores on composite anxiousness correlated significantly, $p < .001$, and positively with scores on BPO, .57; anger, .37; trauma symptoms, .56; jealousy, .50; and psychological abuse, .46 with dominance/isolation and .55 with emotional abuse. High composite scores on avoidance correlated significantly, $p < .001$, and positively with these same measures.

Discussion

The present research found evidence that anxious attachment is related to a variety of measures associated with a personality constellation of abusiveness in intimate relationships and with a direct measure of emotional abusiveness. Dutton (1994) found that high scores on BPO, anger, currently experienced trauma symptoms, and jealousy correlated significantly with the frequency of both verbal and physical aggression directed toward women in intimate relationships. Dutton and Starzomski (1993) found that BPO and anger scores accounted for 50% of women’s reports of their husbands’ emotional abuse. In the present study, this constellation was strongly associated with attachment style, especially attachment characterized as fearful, and to a lesser extent, with preoccupied attachment. Scores depicting either style correlated significantly with scores on BPO, anger, trauma symptoms, and jealousy, as well as with the measure of emotional abusiveness. Furthermore, composite attachment scores of general anxiousness and avoidance had strong and significant relationships with BPO, anger, trauma symptoms, and jealousy.

Fearfully attached men experience high degrees of both chronic anxiety (as measured by the TSC-33) and anger (as measured by the MAI). In addition, both trauma scores, in general, and dissociation scores, in particular, were highest for the fearful group. Fearful attachment alone accounted for significant proportions of variance in both emotional abuse criterion factors. Alexander (1992) speculated that fearful adults “would be expected to exhibit the most
severe disorders of affect regulation, including PTSD and dissociation,” $p < .190$. Since anxiety (.42) and anger (.48) are both strongly associated with fearful attachment, one could argue that an emotional template of intimacy anxiety/anger is the central affective feature of the fearful attachment pattern. These correlations are maintained in the control sample (fearful anxiety, .53; fearful anger, .52), suggesting that this emotional template does not only reside within physically abusive men.

A prominent feature of BPO is intimacy anger (Dutton, 1994; Gunderson, 1984). The correlation of fearful attachment to BPO is so strong (.62) that one could argue that BPO is a personality representation of this particular attachment style (Mahler, 1971). Gunderson describes BPOs as experiencing identity diffusion that they attempt (unsuccessfully) to stabilize through their primary relationship. However, their tendency to project unacceptable impulses onto their intimate partner and to “split” attachment objects produces inevitable “dysphoric stalemates” and eventual relationship conflict.

With the fearfully attached man, anger is an aspect of attachment independent of what transpires interpersonally and, when that anger is experienced, it is both blamed and projected onto the attachment object (Dutton, 1994), resulting in chronic anger with the other person. Scores on fearful attachment correlated significantly with the BPO subscale for primitive defenses, which assesses the tendency to split women into ideal and devalued objects and to project angry impulses onto the devalued woman object. This affective template sets the stage for intimate conflict and increases the risk for intimate violence.

Preoccupied men also showed significant correlations with features of an assaultive profile found by Dutton (1994). Parallel to the ambivalence and anger shown by anxious-ambivalent children in the Strange Situation (Ainsworth et al., 1978), assaultive males also demonstrate heightened abandonment anxiety (Dutton & Browning, 1988) and extreme anger at abandonment scenarios that depict uncontrollable changes in intimacy generated by the female. It is our contention that anger accompanies anxious attachment in general.

A Developmental Origin of Intimacy Anger

Although the focus of recent research in attachment has been on anxiety, much of the early focus of Bowlby and Ainsworth was on what could be called attachment anger or attachment rage. Bowlby (1969, 1973) and Ainsworth (Ainsworth et al., 1978) indicated that, when attachment needs are activated for a long time without being satisfied, angry behavior is regularly observed in the
infant. Bowlby reported observations of the reactions of children (age 15 to 30 months) in nurseries who were separated for the first time from their parents. The actions associated with the first phase of the separation cycle, which he called protest, were generated agentically (outward on the world) in order to produce the return of the mother. It is instructive to hear Bowlby's own description of these reactions:

"... (in) the initial phase (Protest), the young child appears acutely distressed at having lost his mother and seeks to recap- ture her by the full exercise of his limited resources. He will often cry loudly, shake his cot, throw himself about, and look eagerly towards any sight or sound which might prove to be his missing mother. All his behavior suggests strong expectation that she will return" (1969, pp. 27-38).

It is only after prolonged failure to have agentic actions lead to a successful recreation of the mother's presence that the subsequent emotions of depression (mourning) and eventual detachment (avoidance) appear.

Avoidant children, the potential developmental precursor to fearful adults, experience a rejecting of the parent and are characterized by avoidance of the caretaker after separation in a controlled laboratory setting (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Some time afterward, however, avoidant children direct considerable anger toward their mothers at home. Main and Weston (1982) also noted unpredictable outbursts of aggression by this group toward their mothers in the home setting. And the greater the avoidance upon reunion with mother, the greater the display of anger and dependent behavior toward her over the ensuing weeks. Main and Weston (1982) suggest that, in response to separation, avoidant infants feel angry with their mother, but the expression of anger in this situation risks decreased proximity, so chronically rejected infants only express anger in circumstances that do not risk decreased proximity from the caregiver.

In contrast, Main and Weston report that an anxious-ambivalent (or preoc- cupied) group became extremely agitated on separation, often crying profusely. This group typically sought contact with their mother when she returned but simultaneously arched away from her angrily and resisted all efforts to be soothed. The implication is that these infants somehow incorporate anger into their terror at being abandoned by the mother. The simultaneous seeking of contact and arching away represents the prototypical physical manifestation of ambivalence. We include this material on infant attachment as a reminder that rage responses may have early origins in parent-child attachment relationships.
Data from other sources support the notion that actual parenting practices shape childhood attachment patterns (Crittenden, 1988; Main & Stadtman, 1981) and that there are intergenerational continuities in parent-child attachment patterns (Fonagy, Steele, & Steele, 1991; Steele & Steele, 1994; Van IJzendoorn, 1992). What we are suggesting is an alternative link to a modeling mechanism for the well-known intergenerational transmission of violence (Straus et al., 1980). That link is anxious attachment patterns that manifest anger, jealousy, anxiety, and abusive behavior in intimate relationships.

Both dominance/isolation and emotional/verbal abuse, as measured by the PMWI, were related significantly to fearful and preoccupied attachment. One could speculate that emotional abuse is a product of attachment rage. The anxiously attached man, unaware that his dysphoria is intimacy produced, attributes it to the real or perceived actions of his partner and retaliates with abusiveness. The dominance/isolation factor can be viewed as an overgeneralized attempt to diminish anxiety about abandonment. The yoked dysphoric modes—anger and anxiety—thus may have a common origin in insecure attachment and operate to generate both abusing and controlling behaviors.

Anger increases the probability of aggression (Konecni, 1975), and assaultive men with high anger scores report a greater frequency of physical assault (Dutton, in press). Men with early attachment problems may be more likely to experience anxiety and anger about intimacy regulation. The arousal, anxiety, and anger these men exhibit in intimate relationships may originate in a felt anxiety about their childhood attachment figures and, all things being equal, increase the probability of aggression toward the intimate partner.

It may appear discomfiting, prima facie, that anxious attachment patterns could be a risk factor for abuse, given that contemporary abuse treatment models focus more on discrete cognitions or controlling behaviors (Dutton & McGregor, 1991; Ganley, 1989; Saunders, 1989). There are two potential treatment applications of the above analysis. First, it appears therapeutically important to separate the dysphoria produced by anxious attachment itself from negative attributions to the attachment figure. Second, understanding attachment anxiety can potentially provide a better understanding of control issues by providing insight into the origins of intimacy fear. What is controlled in intimate relationships is that which is most feared: namely, the degree of intimacy or emotional distance from the attachment-other. Learning to negotiate emotional distance with greater awareness seems to be therapeutically beneficial.

References


Straus (Eds.), *New directions in family violence research* (pp. 163-175). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.


