

## HUMAN TEMPERAMENT AND ATTACHMENT STYLES: A CRITICAL INTERROGATION

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### **Abstract**

*This study "Human Temperament and Attachment Styles: A Critical Interrogation" leaned on John Bowlby's (1950) theory of attachment to investigate the development of attachment patterns and temperament in infants and how early infant interpersonal experiences affect adult life relationships in terms of romantic adult relationship, adult faith and relationship with God. It found that although influences of early infant's attachments and temperaments styles on adult relationships continue across generations, one's personal and environmental factors such as relational experiences do bring about positive change in individual attachment styles. It concluded that whereas human temperament and attachment styles play significant role in adult life, their stability and fluidity in an adult life is occasioned by personal, environmental and societal factors.*

**Keywords:** Emotion, human, life, styles, temperament.

### **Introduction**

Every human being is born with innate biological predispositions which determine differences in individual response to stimuli from his or her environment with regards to emotion, activity and attention. These individual differences of response to environment referred as temperamental traits are shaped by both experience and development and influence affect and behaviour. Temperamental differences and traits such as high sensitivity which entails being easily overpowered by sensory stimuli from the environment do impact aspects of human development such as cognition, attachment style and long-term social adjustment. A study by Maria, de Las M. et al. (2013) which assesses the relationship between dimensions of temperament and attachment with predisposition/protective factors to substance addiction among 642 adolescents aged 13 to 19 years, found a positive correlation between risk to addiction temperamental trait of "Novelty seeking" with attachment style of "self-sufficiency and parental resentment." This study concluded that whereas temperamental traits of "Novelty seeking" and "family concern" were risk factors towards addiction to substance, security attachment was a protective factor.

Based on research carried out on how human temperament and attachment style persist into adulthood across lifespan, evidence suggests that attachment and temperament style of a person affect how they relate to others in workplace, married life or with God. The objective of this study is to interrogate the concepts of human temperament and attachment styles; to critically examine development and influence of human temperament and attachment styles in adulthood; married life and relationship with God.

## **Conceptual Clarification**

### **Human Temperament**

Temperament is viewed as an aspect of an individual's general make-up that is often characterised by dispositions toward particular patterns of emotional reactions, mood shifts and levels of sensitivity resulting from stimulation (Author, R. 1985). Buttler (2010) conceives temperament as the biographical characteristics of action or emotion of an individual's temperament that is determined by behavioural learning or emotional tendencies. In addition, Papalia, D. E (2012) sees temperament as a dimension of personality and a person's fundamental manner of perceiving and responding to life events. This characteristic is believed to be inborn and arguably persists through one's life, though it could be adjusted by parenting environment. Papalia, D. (2012, p.68) reports that siblings whether twin or non-twin tend to be of similar temperament according to an observational study of 7-year-old siblings (50 pairs of adoptive siblings and 50 pairs of siblings by birth) there was observable significant influences on temperamental characteristics of activity sociability and emotionality. For this research paper, temperament is conceived as a person's characteristic respond and reaction to any life's event whether in adult romantic relationship or relationship with God as enhancing or diminishing one's wellbeing.

### **Attachment Styles**

Papalia D. E (2013) defines attachment as a "reciprocal, enduring, emotional tie between an infant and a caregiver, each of whom contributes to the quality of relationship. For this work, attachment styles refer to individual capacity or lack of it to form an emotional and enduring secure relationship with significant other including God.

### **Theoretical Background**

John Bowlby's (1950) theory of attachment holds that early infant relationship which caregivers given during the first five years of life is significant to an individual's socialization. The internal working model of attachment connotes a

child's early memories/experiences of consistency in care or lack of it as it shapes individual's future attachment behaviours in adulthood (Faley & Shaver, 2000). According Bowlby (1950), studies on how mother monkeys formed initial bonds with their infants, got him convinced of the significance of mother-baby bond in human beings, and cautioned against separating mother and baby without providing adequate substitute (p.172). Bowlby (1950) proposed the theory that when infants are separated from their mothers or primary caregiver, the infant suffered negative consequences such as its being unable to function in a stable manner as human being. Bowlby developed the concept of "monotropy" the mother-child relationship which he maintained was responsible for child's ability to form a "secure attachment." This notion of development of secure attachment in infancy was later elaborated on by Erik Erikson (1950) in his theory of stages of human development. He propounded that in the first stage of human development secure attachment in infant enabled it to develop basic sense of trust in life and mistrust if reverse was the case.

## **Literature Review and Discussion**

### **Development of Temperament and Styles from infancy stage of life**

Many scholars have speculated on origin of temperament in infants. According to Maria A. G and Michael K. (2018) the study of human temperament has a long tradition. Different approaches and perspectives agree on biological basis of temperament. From psycho-analytic perspective, Sigmund Freud (1953) holds that temperament differences lies in "excitability of nervous system and libidal energies inherent in an infant" (Butler, 2010). Behavioural approach attributes temperamental differences in infants to early conditioning and learned experiences of infant's environment of development. Biology and genetics are yet other approaches to understanding temperamental differences in infants (Butler, 2010). Butler (2010) argued for multiple influences on development of temperaments styles in infants; environmental context, nature of familial relationships, cultural values and beliefs, age, gender, nutritional status and structure and function of the nervous system.

Another approach to development of human temperament is the psycho-biological model, according to which "temperament represents constitutionally based individual differences in emotional and motor reactivity, as well as self-regulation, demonstrating consistency across situations and relative stability over time" (Maria, A. & Michael K.. 2018). According to this approach, there are unique aspects of human temperament which originates from underlying brain functions and how these influence developmental pathways. This model argues that there is intrinsic connection between temperament and biology. Accordingly,

temperamental traits and differences of individual are found in the very makeup of the human person. These positions, notwithstanding, some scholars advocate multidimensional understanding of origin and direction of human temperaments. Temperamental differences in the individual are as a result of the interaction of nature and nurture and many other variables such as experience of romantic relationship and personal connection with the Divine or God.

### **Types of Temperament in Infants**

Very early on in an infant's life, it exhibits certain behaviours that seems to make him or her different from other siblings. Some infants may be stubborn, others happy and still others reserved. Infants at this stage show a pattern in emotional responses that continues all throughout a child's development. Since these characteristics displayed by infants seem to continue beyond childhood, biologists were keen to establish how many different temperaments there are.

### **Three Components of Temperament in Infants**

- *Emotionality*: This "refers to a child's emotional reaction to environmental stimuli" Some refer to this type as "The difficult child." (Bee, 1989). This type of child reacts negatively to stimuli; tends to cry frequently, is more fearful, and slow to adapt to new experience.
- *Sociability*: Pertains to a child's inclination to enjoy interacting and being with others. A child that shows such response is described as "The easy child." The child is positive and quick to adapt to new experiences (Bee, 1989).
- *Activity*: This refers to a child's level of energy. The child is slow to warm up, has low activity level, is somewhat negative and displays low intensity of mood.

### **Attachment Theory: A Critical Consideration**

Bowlby (1950) posits that children come into the world biologically pre-programmed to form attachments with others/caregiver because this helps them to survive. Attachments are instinctive and will be activated by any condition that seems to threaten the achievement of proximity such as separation, fear and insecurity. Bee (1989) refers to attachment behaviours as "all those behaviours that allow a child or adult to achieve and maintain proximity to someone else to whom he or she is attached" (P.402). In infants, attachment behaviours towards caregiver include smiling, making eye contact, calling out to the other person across the room, touching and crying.

Bowlby's (1950) theory of attachment has its critics. Some critiques have taken issues with the fact that Bowlby developed his theory of attachment of human infants from his observation of baby-mother attachment behaviour among geese and their goslings. Based on his study, Bowlby claimed that human infants seek comfort from those who are immediately available to them to meet their emotional needs. Bowlby (1950) concluded that the mother should exercise the role because the infant is innately drawn to her. Additionally, Bowlby's (1950) theory emerged from his observations with young boys who had separation anxiety and showed psychotic symptoms.

Looking at Bowlby's theory of attachment from 21<sup>st</sup> century perspective, it is absurd that the study of the development of human infants should be guided by animal studies and sick children admitted to psychiatry clinic. Above all, the theory fails to take into account the diverse child-care/bonding environment of many infants in Non-Euro-American contexts. Many infants in some African societies are cared for by multiple attachment figures and not by single attachment subject like mother as is the case in some European and American societies.

### **Process of Formation of Attachment**

Bee, H. (1989) opines that the process of attachment formation in an infant begins with a child exhibiting attachment behaviours towards a caregiver, and then grows into full attachment around 6 to 7 months. Scholars believe that attachment process in an infant goes through a number of phases: Phase 1 - Initial pre-attachment. This begins around first 3 months when infant exhibits a range of attachment behaviours referred to as "proximity-promoting"; crying, smiling to bring caregiver or any person round it closer. At this time the child doesn't show any preference to any particular person. Phase 2 - This phase is referred to as "Attachment in the making." Around the third month a child's attachment behaviours are more discriminating. The infant smiles primarily at the caregiver and often may cry when a stranger reaches to it. At this stage, attachment is not yet full blown as the child may still display proximity behaviours towards persons other than primary caregiver (Bee, H. 1989). Phase 3 - Full-blown attachment. Between 6 to 7 months, a child begins to direct its attachment behaviours towards a specific caregiver; it becomes attached to someone. In what is called "proximity-seeking," a child makes gestures towards caregiver and uses her as "safe base" to explore its environment. When this happens, it shows that a child is fully attached (Bee, 1989). Phase 4 - Multiple attachments - Once a child has established attachment with primary caregiver, it expands attachment to many others who are in contact with him, including siblings, grandparents,

house-help. A child is able to use these people as well for exploring its environment (Bee, 1989).

### **Styles of Infant's Early Attachment**

Mary Ainsworth's (1967) strange situation's experiment was a laboratory-based technique to assess attachment styles between infant and adult in this case the mother. Ainsworth (1967) use infants between 10 to 24 months old in this experiment with experiment conducted in Uganda, Central Africa. Papalia (2103) describes the strange situation experiment thus:

The strange situation consists of a sequence of episodes and takes less than an hour. During that time, the mother twice leaves the baby in an unfamiliar room, the first time with a stranger. The second time she leaves the baby alone and the stranger comes back before the mother does. The mother encourages the baby to explore and play and gives comfort if the baby seems to need it. Of particular concern is the baby's response each time the mother returns (p.172).

Based on Ainsworth's (1967) and colleagues' observations, they found three main styles of attachment: Secure attachment and two styles of anxious or insecure attachments; avoidant and ambivalent or resistant in the babies. In secure attachment, baby is flexible and resilient in the face of stress; he or she is easily comforted when caregiver returns. According Bret I. Simmons, Janaki Gooty, Debra I. Nelson and Laura M. Little (2009) "Secure attachments are characterized by internal regulatory mechanisms that allow individuals to be flexible and constructive in their inter-personal relationship." Similarly, Bowlby (1950) had conceived secure attachment as individual ability to bond well securely in interactions with others while possessing capacity for free actions as context demands.

Insecure attachment is divided into two: Avoidant and ambivalent. A baby with avoidant attachment is unaffected by caregiver leaving or returning and shows little emotion; whilst a baby with ambivalent attachment is generally anxious, upset at caregiver leaving and after return it continues to cry or scream. Studies show that children with insecure attachment suffer from social and psychological impairment which affects their capacity for relationships with others. Synder, Shapiro and Treleaven, (2012) refer to such impairment in children as "attachment disorder; "Children with insecure attachments have a greater likelihood for physical health morbidities and impaired social, psychological, and neurobiological functioning" (p.78).

### **Temperaments and Attachment Patterns: Any Correlation?**

Though genetics play significant role in determining differences in temperamental styles in infants, environmental factors contribute to infant's attachment pattern. A key environmental factor in the formation of attachment pattern in an infant is the care environment. A child with difficult temperament that grows up with a responsive care giver could still develop secure attachment style. On the other hand, a child with positive temperament that grows up in an inconsistent and unstable care environment is not necessarily guaranteed developing attachment security. While an infant temperament may positively or negatively affect attachment, a good match between parent's or care-giver and infant's temperament may promote attachment security, and a mis-match may hinder it. It is, therefore, fair to say that combination of good parenting and care environment could moderate negative tendencies in an infant's temperamental style.

### **Influence of Security/Insecurity Attachment and Temperament Styles on Adult Life**

Up to this point, this paper has discussed development of attachment patterns, and temperament in infants. Following section want to examine how these early infant interpersonal experiences continue in, and affect adult life/relationship; romantic adult relationship, and adult faith relationship with God.

### **Adult Relationship with God**

Individual relationship and perception of God reflects early childhood attachment and temperament styles experiences. Attachment here refers to how "people learn to experience and respond to separation and distress in the context of core, close relationship very early on in their lives" (Mockinbird, 2016). An individual relationship and perception of God is most challenged in time of crisis or when things go wrong in life. In a time of distress, a person's perception of God as an attachment figure tend to reflect two dimensions of human attachment: Anxiety about abandonment and avoidance of intimacy. In time of lost or distress, securely attached individual seem to easily turn to God to restore a lost sense of security.

These individuals feel very connected to God in experience of ups and downs of life. Moreover persons with security attachment find their closeness to God during time of crisis as comforting and are likely to perceive God as accessible. Conversely, adults with anxious-preoccupied attachment tendencies are likely to perceive God in this time as distant. They may question God's love for them and

feel abandoned by him. Individual with anxious temperaments in time of crisis may even doubt God's love for them.

What is God like? How an individual sees God tend to reflect early relational knowledge. Most adults believe that God is love, however there seems to be a difference between 'doctrinal' and 'experiential' knowledge of God. Experiential or heart knowledge of God of an individual is shaped by early childhood relational experience. Adults with avoidant-dismissive temperament and attachment perceive God as generally remote and inaccessible. People with these styles would find it difficult to display or accept affection from God. Secure attachment relationship to God seems to have positive impact on mental wellbeing of a person (Refahi et al, 2015). Teachers with attachment security towards God evaluated events in their lives in more positive and relaxed manner. They hoped for good things to come their way, and sought meaning in unpleasant experiences in life. Still other people who perceived God as near and warm towards them said they were able to use their relationship God as a kind of 'stress buffer' in times of lean resources and burdens (Refahi, et al, 2015).

Another study conducted by Bradshaw (et al, 2009) showed that parishioners with secure attachment relationship with God, over and above mere Church attendance, experienced healthier mental health in terms of their ability to forgive readily and free their mind of unpleasant experiences. These studies seem to suggest that an individual adult relationship style with God has some consequences on one's self-perception and wellbeing.

### **Adult Romantic Relationship**

Secure/insecure attachment styles in adults are known to inform human relationships at school, at home, with spouse, with God, and in the work place. Fraley (2000) found that the emotional and behavioural dynamics of infant-caregiver relationships and adult romantic relationships reflect attachment behavioural pattern. It seems how an adult views love and romantic relationship with a partner reflects early childhood attachment styles (Barba, & Philip, 2012). The strength and quality of an individual romantic life is largely influenced by quality of one's attachment pattern or style (Firestone, 2013). Individual with secure attachment style are optimistic and confident in a romantic relationship. They are able to resolve inter-personal conflicts in a relationship (Barba & Philip, 2012). Anxious-ambivalent individuals show a lot of anxiety about their romantic relationship. They nurse fears around partner's proximity and likelihood of abandonment by a partner.

Securely attached individual or insecurely attached individuals tend to respond quite differently to conflict in romantic relationship. A securely attached person approach failure of partner more positively and is ready to resolve disagreement. Anxiously attached individual is inclined to be pessimistic and seeks to blame partner for conflict situation in relationship. An adult with anxious avoidant attachment style and low on temperament sociability is likely to avoid intimacy and closeness with a partner especially when experiencing stress in the relationship.

In addition, Fraley (2000) observed characteristics of attachment patterns among adults and how those influence spousal relationship. The anxious avoidant individual is generally uncomfortable to get close to partner and finds it difficult to rely on the partner or to be relied upon. The secure adult finds it relatively easy to get close to partner and to rely on them as well as letting them depend on him or her. He feels very secure in the relationship without fear of being abandoned. The anxious ambivalent is reluctant to get close to partner and worry why others are slow to get close to him/her.

Besides aforementioned characteristics of attachment patterns among adults, individual's personality trait is crucial in dynamics adult romantic relationship. Research to examine how early attachment patterns towards primary caregivers are related to adult personality traits, shows that persons with early security attachment scored better on personality traits such as openness, agreeableness and extraversion ( Young, E. S., Simpson, et al, 2017). These individuals possessed better emotional control, with greater attention flexibility. They show greater capacity for cooperation and are willing to reciprocate in relationship. Conversely, individual who were more insecurely attached scored lower on personality traits of openness, agreeableness and extraversion. They tended to be short-term in their goal orientation and prone to stress. Some of the implications of these findings are that securely attached individual with more friendly temperament and personality traits may fare better in romantic relationships than their insecurely attached counterpart with less stable personality and temperamental traits.

Finally, influence of early infant's attachments and temperaments styles on adult relationships continues across generations (Raby et al, 2008). Attachments and temperament styles enjoy stability, and each generation of parents through early parent-child relationship passes on to next generation a fairly stable patterns of attachment and temperaments of preceding generation. There is what is understood to be an "intergenerational' transmission of attachments and temperament patterns in adult romantic and family life" (Raby et al, 2008).

Fortunately, the cycle of insecure attachment can be broken. Research has indicated that human person is not condemned to early-childhood attachment style. An individual can transit from insecurity attachment to security attachment. Studies have shown that previously insecurely attached parents have raised their own children with secure attachment. This change has been attributed to changes in maternal and family circumstance. In addition, one's personal and environmental factors such as relational experiences do bring about positive change in individual attachment style (Catherine Cozzarelli, Joseph A. Karafaf, Nancy I. Collin, Michael J. Tagler, 2003).

### **Summary/conclusion**

The objective of this research paper was to interrogate the concepts of human temperament and attachment styles; to critically examine development and influence of human temperament and attachment styles in adult life; married life and relationship with God. The paper has defined attachments and temperaments, and how they are related. The theory of attachment has influenced most discussions on the question of influence of early childhood attachment patterns on adult life. However, John Bowlby (1950) attachment theory and Mary Ainsworth (1967) findings from "Strange-situation" experiment that discovered the different attachment styles in infant are not without their limitations.

The theory of attachment and patterns in infant has come out from a worldview that accords significance to the individual. The "strange-situation" experiment did not take into account the more collective, flexible and dynamic care-giving environment where a child security or insecurity was not solely the responsibility of one care-giver. Many children in rural African communities are likely to grow up with multiple care givers; uncles, aunts, neighbours etc. Secondly, to judge how well a child copes with separation is not very applicable to certain societies where infant-mother-separation is uncommon (Babra & Philip, 2012).

Another element that the paper pointed out was the influence of cultural differences on attachment styles formation, distributions and functions. In some societies, where children grow up under very strict and punitive parental style, children tend to develop a more avoidant attachment style as a way of adapting to the circumstance. Other societies that are more communal and collectivist in nature are likely to see children with more anxious attachment style resulting from dependence on the community to meet psycho-social needs. All these environmental factors would influence what kind of attachments patterns would be prevalent among certain groups of people and how these patterns are adapted within such cultural contexts. Such attachment styles may not necessarily reflect model of "strange-situation" experiment which emphasised "separation, distress

and re-union” of an infant with care-giver, but simply as cultural adaption and function.

The influence of attachment patterns and temperament on adult life is the interplay between nature and nurture. Whilst attachment styles of an individual is mainly the result of environmental factors of early child care context, individual temperament styles are occasioned by genes. Temperaments and attachment styles in an adult life do change and get mitigated as the individual continue to interact with his or her environment. For example, an adult who was insecurely attached and with a difficult temperament as a child could through a loving relationship with a spouse develop attachment security. Similarly, history is replete with stories of hardened criminals with insecure attachment backgrounds, who through coming to know God have used their relationship with God to lead very happy family life. The research paper concludes that whereas human temperament and attachment styles play significant role in adult life, their stability and fluidity in an adult life is occasioned by personal, environmental and societal factors. Human beings are not slaves to their temperament and attachment styles, each person has the capacity to grow from attachment insecurity to security attachment or retrogress from attachment security to attachment insecurity.

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