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QUALITY OF CLOSE RELATIONSHIP FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF ATTACHMENT THEORY

Jakość bliskiego związku z perspektywy teorii przywiązania

ABSTRACT

Studies into the problems of attachment in the period of adulthood and the impact of the type of attachment on close interpersonal relationships is of great importance as the complex nature of functioning of close partner relationships has not been fully understood yet. Exploration of the meaning of attachment in adulthood and its impact on close relations can prove helpful in understanding and solving some problems in family functioning (Plopa, 2003). It is also important to take into account the styles of partners attachment in psychological consultations as making the partners aware of their strategy of attachment and its consequences for the quality of relationship and its functioning can enhance the effectiveness of therapy. Results of recent studies into the functioning of partners representing a certain style of attachment are expected to be useful for development of a diagnostic technique for identification of disturbances in the partners' relations and for increasing the social awareness of problems in marriage and cohabitation.

To sum up, contemporary studies within the theory of attachment significantly enrich the knowledge in the field and make empirical grounds for development of new therapeutic methods (Józefik, Iniewicz, 2008).

Key words: adulthood, close relations, attachment

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STRESZCZENIE

Podjęcie badań z zakresu przywiązania w dorosłości i jego wpływu na funkcjonowanie jednostek w bliskich związkach interpersonalnych jest istotne, gdyż problem rozumienia osobistych relacji partnerskich pozostaje nadal nierozwiązany, przynajmniej częściowo. Eksploracja znaczenia przywiązania w okresie dorosłości i jego oddziaływania na bliski związek, może okazać się użyteczna i pomocna w zrozumieniu i rozwiązywaniu niektórych problemów występujących w życiu i funkcjonowaniu rodziny (Plopa, 2003). Zasadne także wydaje się uwzględnienie stylów przywiązania partnerów w poradnictwie psychologicznym. Uświadomienie partnerom ich strategii przywiązania, jak i wynikających z tego konsekwencji dla jakości związku i ich wzajemnego funkcjonowania może podnieść efektywność terapii. Ponadto, coraz to nowsze badania dotyczące funkcjonowania partnerów o określonym stylu przywiązania, mogą przyczynić się do skonstruowania metody dotyczącej diagnozowania zaburzeń relacji między partnerami a także do zwiększenia świadomości społeczeństwa w zakresie postrzegania małżeństwa i kohabitacji, a tym samym rozwiązać niektóre mity z nim związane.

Podsumowując, współczesne badania prowadzone w ramach teorii przywiązania znacznie wzbogacają wiedzę psychologiczną w tym zakresie i stanowią empiryczne podstawy do opracowania nowych metod terapeutycznych (Józefik, Iniewicz, 2008).

Słowa kluczowe: dorosłość, bliskie relacje, przywiązanie

INTRODUCTION:

John Bowlby, the author of attachment theory, defined attachment as a social and emotional bond which, once established, tends to persist in people's lives from birth until death. The tendency to form attachment is a fundamental element of human nature, allowing individuals to establish close bonds and interpersonal relations (Bowlby, 2007; Józefik, Iniewicz, 2008).

In early life, children become attached to the primary caregiver, usually the mother. The attachment, formed early in childhood, does not disappear in adult life but operates as an external model defining the nature of close interpersonal relations at later stages of human development. Consequently, attachment established in early life is a precondition for creating emotional bonds later in life, and a factor determining their further development.

Bowlby claimed that humans display a tendency for replicating the same patterns of attachment in romantic relationships with their partners in adulthood as those developed early in life, when they were children under the care of parents/guardians. The thesis has inspired many contemporary psychologists to attempt to verify it empirically. A number of research centres worldwide, including Bydgoszcz in Poland, have been conducting extensive research in this field. Even if it were to be assumed that the current stage of advancement of the research apparatus available to development psychologists

makes it possible to verify the validity of Bowlby's claims, it has not as yet been confirmed definitely that early childhood attachment pervades one's entire adult life. However, even despite the lack of definite empirical evidence some attachment researchers believe that the style of attachment specific to an adult human being reflects the pattern of the early bond formed with a caregiver. They also recognize the importance of early emotional attachment for building specific types of relationships with other people (Baron, Byrne, 2000; Carver, Shier, 2000; Rostowski, 2003).

Early research into differences in attachment patterns was carried out by Mary Ainsworth, who was inspired by Bowlby's theory. Ainsworth's method of assessing models of childhood attachment, called the Strange Situation Procedure, makes it possible to distinguish three styles of attachment: secure, anxious-ambivalent insecure and anxious-avoidant insecure. Criteria distinguishing the three patterns included: quality of relations, mother's availability and responsiveness to needs communicated by the child (Plopa, 2005; Holmes, 2007; Stawicka, 2008).

Attachment was also studied by Cindy Hazan and Philip Shaver. They used the main tenets of Bowlby's attachment theory as a basis for exploring and explaining the nature and aetiology of love. They described the emotion experienced by romantic partners as an attachment-based process involving similar aspects as the emotional bond connecting infants and caregivers (Plopa, 2003). The researchers noted that the emotional and behavioural dynamics of the infant-caregiver relationship is determined by the same biological system. They stress that, just like children, who feel anxiety and seek support from their caregivers when their close relationship with the main figure of attachment is under risk (e.g. during disease, separation, etc.), adults need their romantic partners, for example when they are afraid of something, or when they are sick. In such challenging situations, they look for the support and protection of their nearest (Plopa, 2003). Hazan and Shaver also claim that children's interactions with the object of attachment contribute to the development of internal operating models that represent these interactions. Among other goals, the models make it possible to construct a system of beliefs about oneself and the surrounding world. They also determine the way in which an individual tries to achieve closeness with others (Czub, 2005, 2005a). Hazan and Shaver, the authors of the concept of romantic love, also point to similarities between attachment patterns formulated by Mary Ainsworth and styles of attachment observed in adults which, they argue, can be divided into three main types: secure, anxious-ambivalent and avoidant. Individuals whose attachment pattern is secure regard their relationship as happy, full of mutual trust and reciprocally rewarding. They accept their partner's conduct

aimed at achieving a higher degree of mutual closeness. They feel loved and appreciated in an intimate relationship. They are convinced that their partner is a dependable, sensitive and trustworthy person. Consequently, they are more lenient in their assessment of partner behaviour. Securely attached partners are able to support themselves in difficult moments of life. Their relationship is hence stable, full of intimacy and warmth (Rostowski, 2003; Wojciszke, 2004; Wojciechowska, 2005; Plopa, Kaźmierczak, 2006). People whose attachment type is defined as anxious-ambivalent tend to believe that their partner is not prepared to become engaged in close relations, which makes them nervous and increases their crave for intimacy. They are frequently anxious about the durability of their relationship and afraid of losing their partner. People who form anxious-ambivalent relationships often worry that their relation might not be sufficiently attractive to their partner who might, as a result, be tempted to seek alternative relations. Individuals demonstrating an avoidant approach to attachment do not believe in true romantic love. Emotional intimacy and the feeling of interdependence irritate them. As a result, they are not comfortable in close relations and never fully trust their partner. People who are prone to the avoidant type of attachment are fearful of intimacy, which is why they try to maintain a "safe distance" in their relations with a partner. They find it difficult to be close to another person and, consequently, they are apprehensive about commitment (Plopa, 2003; Carver, Scheier, 2000; Noller, Feeney, 1998, 2006; Rostowski, 2003; Rostowska, 2006).

As mentioned above, studies into attachment conducted by Bowlby, Ainsworth, Shaver, Hazan and Bradshaw have stimulated a high degree of interest among psychologists and pedagogues, encouraging other researchers to take up their own investigation focused on the impact of attachment styles on various aspects of people's adult life (Noller, Feeney, 2006; Kuczyńska, 1998). They have also inspired the authors of this article to embark on a deeper empirical exploration of the topic with a special focus on intimate relationships in our cultural sphere.

At the current stage of research it is assumed that the type of attachment formed early in childhood plays a major role in adult life (Wojciszke, 2005). It is an important predictor of the nature of romantic relations established in adulthood, largely determining the quality of close interpersonal relationships. It is a precondition for creating emotional bonds with other people and satisfies a number of basic mental, social and biological needs. The needs can be satisfied to a certain degree in interactions with close people. Partners' typical attachment styles, by contributing to the establishment and stabilization of more or less rewarding relations, define the quality of partners' life together and chart the future course of their relationship.

PROBLEM UNDER STUDY

The problem investigated by the authors concerned the importance of attachment bonds between young adults in intimate relationships.

The main study objectives were to gain insights into the meaning of attachment for partner relations and to find out how partners function in a couple depending on their individual attachment patterns. Another important aspect was to establish whether factors such as relationship status, relationship duration or number of partners' previous relationships have any influence on the quality of each couple's relations and if so, what the impact consists of. Also, an attempt was made to identify correlations between attachment patterns demonstrated by relationship partners and factors enumerated above.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES:

Based on literature dealing with the topic and earlier studies into the impact of different attachment styles on adult life, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1: *Attachment style is of major importance for partner relations. More positive relations are expected between partners with a secure attachment style than people with insecure attachment patterns.*

H2: *The status of partners' relationship is of major importance for their mutual relations. Married couples are expected to build more positive relations than engaged couples or cohabiting partners.*

H3: *The status of relationship established by partners is associated with their attachment style, with the secure attachment pattern being more common among married couples than among couples engaged to be married or cohabiting partners.*

H4: *The number of partners' previous relationships is correlated with the quality of their mutual relations: the fewer past relationships they had, the more positive relations they create.*

H5: *The number of partners' previous relationships correlates with their attachment styles in that the fewer past relationships they had, the greater the likelihood that they demonstrate the secure attachment style rather than insecure attachment patterns.*

RESEARCH TOOLS:

The study was based on the following research tools: *Attachment Styles Questionnaire* (ASQ) by Plopa, *Intimacy-Passion-Commitment Questionnaire* (IPC) by Acker and Davis, and *Partnership Questionnaire* (PFB) by Hahlweg.

Mieczysław Plopa's *Attachment Styles Questionnaire* (ASQ) was applied to investigate which style of attachment was predominant among young adults. The structure of the questionnaire is based on Hazan and Shaver's idea discussed above. ASQ comprises a total of 24 statements to which study subjects provide responses by circling a number in a seven-point scale to mark the extent to which they agree or disagree with different statements. The Questionnaire consists of three sub-scales corresponding to different attachment styles: secure, anxious-ambivalent and avoidant. Raw results recorded in each scale range from 8 to 56 points which are then converted into stens. Stens 1-2 represent very low score; stens 3-4 – low score; stens 5-6 – average score; stens 7-8 – high score and stens 9-10 – very high score.

The reliability of the questionnaire's measures was: for the secure attachment style: 0.91; for the anxious-ambivalent style: 0.78; for the avoidant style: 0.80. Reliability of the questionnaire was assessed with three methods: investigation of internal test structure, evaluation of intergroup differences and criterion validity (Brzeziński, 1997; Plopa, 2005). The questionnaire proved to be a tool meeting the criteria of theoretical validity.

The nature of relations between partners of a couple was determined using the *Intimacy-Passion-Commitment Questionnaire* (IPC) and the *Partnership Questionnaire* (PQ). The *Intimacy-Passion-Commitment Questionnaire* (IPC) helps investigate the main indicators of partner relations constituting love, i.e. intimacy, passion and commitment. The IPC questionnaire used in the study was complemented by indicators of satisfaction with one's relationship. The satisfaction measurement scale was developed for our studies specifically. The tool consists of 43 questions to which study subjects are asked to reply by choosing one of the following options: 5 – *I definitely agree*, 4 – *I agree*, 3 – *Difficult to say*, 2 – *I don't agree*, 1 – *I definitely don't agree*. The number to be scored in each of the scales ranges from 12 points (the minimum score) to 60 points (the maximum score). The total score obtained in Scale I (intimacy) indicates the degree of partners' mutual closeness in the relationship, the strength of support they give each other and the willingness to share experiences and goods. The total score recorded in Scale P (Passion) represents the strength of passion between partners, the force of emotions felt towards the partner and the desire to become united with them (Sternberg, 1986; Wojciszke, 2005). The total score obtained in Scale C (commitment) is an indicator of the degree

of partners' commitment to their relationship and their determination to maintain the relationship despite perceived obstacles and difficulties (Sternberg, 1986; Wojciszke, 2005). The minimum score that could be gained in Scale S (satisfaction with the relationship) was 7 points, the maximum – 35. The number of points scored by study subjects in the scale reflects the level of satisfaction and the sense of fulfillment derived from being in the present relationship. The reliability of the Questionnaire, defined by Cronbach's alpha (α), is: For the *intimacy* scale: 0.78; for the *passion* scale: 0.76 and for the *commitment* scale: 0.79 (Grabowska, 2007).

Another tool used in the study was Kurt Hahlweg's *Partnership Questionnaire (PFB)* developed for the assessment of interpersonal communication and its dimensions. Hahlweg's PFB questionnaire was employed in the study by the consent and courtesy of Prof. Iwona Janicka. The tool is composed of three scales:

1. Scale of behaviour during arguments (A) assessing the way partners behave in conflict situations;
2. Scale of intimacy/delicacy (I) referring to partners' behaviour in specific situations, including verbal and non-verbal indicators of their mutual feelings;
3. Scale of mutual communication (MC) describing activities that are specific to each of the partners in terms of their communication patterns inside the relationship.

Overall, the Questionnaire consists of 31 questions, one of which is designed to determine the measure of happiness derived from being in the present relationship. Each of the scales listed above consists of 10 questions. The maximum number that can be scored by a study subject is in the range of $< 0; 30 >$. All in all, study subjects could score from 0 to 90 points in the Questionnaire (excluding the assessment of happiness). The reliability of the Questionnaire is: 0.93 – for the argumentative behaviour scale, 0.91 – for the intimacy scale, 0.88 – for the mutual communication scale and 0.95 – for the total of the three scales. The reliability of the method was checked by retesting. Reliability coefficients were also found to be favourable both for the tool as a whole and for constituent scales. They reached the following levels: 0.68 – for the argumentative behaviour scale, 0.74 – for the intimacy scale, 0.83 – for the mutual communication scale and 0.85 – for the total of the three scales (Janicka, 2006).

STUDY GROUP:

The study group comprised people in close romantic relationships. It included a total of 120 individuals (60 women and 60 men) living in different types (forms) of relationship. Three relationship types were represented: married couples (20 in total), couples engaged to be married (20 in total) and cohabiting couples (20 in total). All the study subjects were in their early adulthood (aged between 20 and 30 years). The most numerous sub-group comprised secondary education graduates. Eleven study couples had children together.

COURSE OF THE STUDY:

The sample of study subjects was selected purposely from the population. The basic criterion of selection was being in a close partner relationship. Three relationship types were distinguished: matrimony, engagement and cohabitation. The matrimony group included both couples who took their marriage vows in the Church and people who got married in the registry office, thus entering into a legally sanctioned relationship. The engagement group comprised persons engaged to be married. According to the definitions put forth by Trost and Chechliński, Wiersma and Elliot, cohabiting individuals were assumed to be people who lived together without sanctioning their relationship formally (Kwak, 2005; Trost, 1977; Janicka, 2006). The second criterion of sample selection was age: between 20 and 30 years old.

The study proper was preceded by individual interviews held with all study subjects who were assured of full anonymity and solely scientific nature of the experiment. After giving consent to participation in the study, the subjects were asked to fill in a set of questionnaires. People who returned incompletely filled questionnaires were excluded from the qualitative and quantitative assessment.

STUDY RESULTS:

Statistical analyses also indicate that relationship status has an impact on partner relations. Table 1³ below lists the results of Fisher's test for different partner relations and the significance level (p) calculated for each of them and

³ Statistically significant results are presented in bold print.

presents mean values recorded for partner relations in different relationship types.

Table 1. Mean values obtained for relationship status and partner relations and results of Fisher's test regarding the status of relationship between partners and their relations

Variable	Mean values obtained for relationship status and partner relations			Single factor analysis of variance – Fisher's test, N = 120	
	Engagement (1) N = 40	Matrimony (2) N = 40	Cohabitation (3) N = 40	F	Significance level p
Intimacy	55.83	57.50	54.10	7.16	p < 0.001
Passion	51.98	53.92	50.70	3.67	p < 0.028
Commitment	51.88	56.13	50.13	14.94	p < 0.001
Satisfaction	30.40	31.90	29.15	6.64	p < 0.002
Behaviour during arguments	7.75	4.50	9.28	8.95	p < 0.001
Intimacy in communication	25.55	25.60	24.05	1.79	p = 0.172
Mutual communication	22.67	23.08	21.82	0.70	p = 0.499
Satisfaction/happiness	4.50	4.63	4.17	4.94	p < 0.009

Fisher's test provided evidence that relationship status was of significant importance for partners' mutual relations, with the exception of intimacy in communication ($F = 1.79$; $p = 0.172$) and mutual communication ($F = 0.70$; $p = 0.499$). Post-hoc analysis and Duncan's test were then performed in order to explore the constellation of other dimensions of interpersonal relations, i.e. intimacy ($F = 7.16$; $p < 0.001$), passion ($F = 3.67$; $p < 0.028$), commitment ($F = 14.94$; $p < 0.001$), satisfaction ($F = 6.64$; $p < 0.002$), argumentative behaviour ($F = 8.95$; $p < 0.001$) and the feeling of happiness with being together and satisfaction with mutual relations ($F = 4.97$; $p = 0.009$) in different relationship types. In the light of results of statistical analysis it emerged that married couples build more positive relationships than couples that are engaged to be married and cohabiting partners. Relations between spouses have more intimacy, passion, commitment, satisfaction and happiness with mutual relations and the lowest level of conflict situations in comparison to the other relationship types under analysis.

ANOVA results (Table 2) show that the three relationship types distinguished for the purpose of the study (matrimony, engagement, cohabitation) differ significantly in terms of degree of secure attachment ($F = 7.17$; $p = 0.001$).

Table 2. Results of Fisher's test regarding the status of relationship between partners and their attachment style

Attachment style/ relationship status	Engagement	Matrimony	Cohabitation	Single factor analysis of variance – Fisher's test, N = 120	
				F	Significan- ce level p
Secure	9.48	9.63	8.78	7.17	p < 0.001
Anxious-ambivalent	4.23	3.18	3.75	2.39	p = .096
Avoidant	1.23	1.35	1.58	1.45	p = .240

Statistical analysis by Pearson's r correlation coefficient revealed that the style of attachment had a bearing on partner relations. Results of the study are listed in Table 3.

Table 3. Correlation between attachment styles and partner relations.

Pearson's r (correlation coefficient) (N = 120)				
Variable	Intimacy	Passion	Commitment	Satisfaction
Secure	0.62	0.60	0.60	0.56
	p < 0.001	p < 0.001	p < 0.001	p < 0.001
Anxious-ambivalent	-0.41	-0.28	-0.16	-0.50
	p < 0.001	p < 0.002	p = 0.072	p < 0.001
Avoidant	-0.41	-0.46	-0.41	-0.41
	p < .001	p < .001	p < 0.001	p < 0.001

Variable	Behaviour during arguments	Intimacy in communica- tion	Mutual communication	Satisfaction/ happiness
Secure	-0.49	0.46	0.33	0.54
	p < 0.001	p < 0.001	p < 0.001	p < 0.001
Anxious-ambivalent	0.43	-0.34	-0.36	-0.47
	p < 0.001	p < 0.001	p < 0.001	p < 0.001
Avoidant	0.32	-0.35	-0.22	-0.49
	p < 0.001	p < 0.001	p < 0.011	p < 0.001

The secure attachment style displays a moderately positive correlation with intimacy ($r = 0.62$; $p < 0.001$), passion ($r = 0.60$; $p < 0.001$), commitment ($r = 0.60$; $p < 0.001$), satisfaction ($r = 0.56$; $p < 0.001$), intimacy in communication ($r = 0.46$; $p < 0.001$) and satisfaction with the relations ($r = 0.54$; $p < 0.001$). Also, the secure attachment style has a weak positive correlation with mutual communication ($r = 0.33$; $p < 0.001$) and a moderate negative correlation with behaviour during arguments ($r = 0.49$; $p < 0.001$). This means that the more secure the attachment between the partners, the greater value they place on intimacy, passion and commitment, and – consequently – the more satisfied and happy they are with being together. Also, they rate the value of mutual communication more highly and note a lower level of conflict behaviours.

The second attachment style under study, anxious-ambivalent, demonstrates a moderately negative correlation with intimacy ($r = 0.41$; $p < 0.001$), satisfaction ($r = 0.50$; $p < 0.001$) and satisfaction with their relations ($r = 0.47$; $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, it has a moderate positive correlation with behaviour during arguments ($r = 0.43$; $p < 0.001$). A weak negative correlation exists for passion ($r = 0.28$; $p < 0.002$), intimacy in communication ($r = 0.34$; $p < 0.001$) and mutual communication ($r = 0.36$; $p < 0.001$). This means that the greater the degree of anxious-ambivalent attachment between partners, the less intimacy, satisfaction and happiness with their relations. Also, the quality of their mutual and intimate communication is lower and they experience more conflict situations. Statistical analysis shows that the anxious-ambivalent attachment style has no significant impact on commitment ($r = 0.16$; $p = 0.072$).

The avoidant attachment style displays a moderately negative correlation with intimacy ($r = 0.41$; $p < 0.001$), passion ($r = 0.46$; $p < 0.001$), commitment ($r = 0.41$; $p < 0.001$), satisfaction ($r = 0.41$; $p < 0.001$) and happiness with their relations ($r = 0.49$; $p < 0.001$). It also has a weak negative correlation with intimacy in communication ($r = 0.35$; $p < 0.001$) and mutual communication ($r = 0.23$; $p < 0.011$), as well as a positive correlation with behaviour during arguments ($r = 0.32$; $p < 0.001$). This means that the greater the degree of avoidant attachment between partners, the less intimacy and passion they experience, the weaker their commitment to the relationship and the less satisfied and less happy they are with their mutual relations. Their mutual communication is also compromised. As the avoidant type of attachment becomes more pronounced, more conflict situations emerge.

The results show that there is a significant association between the partners' attachment style and their mutual relations in the relationship. More positive relations are created by partners with a well-developed secure attachment style, while less favourable interactions are evident in the case of partners demonstrating insecure attachment styles.

Statistical analysis based on Duncan's test (Table 4) shows that the degree of secure attachment style is significantly different for engagement and cohabitation ($p < 0.004$), and for matrimony and cohabitation ($p < 0.001$). Secure attachment style is more common among married couples than engaged couples and cohabiting partners. For anxious-ambivalent attachment ($F = 2.39$; $p = 0.096$) and avoidant attachment ($F = 1.45$; $p = 0.240$) there were no significant differences between married couples, engaged couples and cohabiting couples.

Table 4. Degree of secure attachment style in various relationship types

Duncan's test; variable: SECURE ATTACHMENT STYLE Approximate probabilities for post-hoc tests, N = 120			
Relationship status	{1} 9.48	{2} 9.63	{3} 8.78
1. Engagement		$p = 0.533$	$p < 0.004$
2. Matrimony	$p = 0.53$		$p < 0.001$
3. Cohabitation	< 0.004	$p < 0.001$	

Quantitative analysis also shows that secure attachment is the strongest in married couples.

Results of Pearson's correlation (r) analysis (Table 5) of all couples regardless of their relationship status demonstrate that number of partners' previous relationships is a significant factor affecting the sense of intimacy felt in the relationship ($r = 0.24$; $p < 0.009$), as well as passion ($r = 0.19$; $p < 0.043$) and commitment ($r = 0.30$; $p < 0.001$), i.e. constituents of love. The correlation between the number of past relationships and these relations is weak and negative. The more past relationships partners had, the lower their intimacy, passion and commitment.

Table 5. Correlations between the number of partners' previous relationships and their mutual relations

Pearson's r (correlation coefficient) (N = 120)				
Variable	Intimacy	Passion	Commitment	Satisfaction
Number of past relationships	-0.24	-0.19	-0.30	-0.18
	$p < 0.009$	$p < 0.043$	$p < 0.001$	$p = 0.055$
Variable	Behaviour during arguments	Intimacy in communication	Mutual communication	Satisfaction/happiness
Number of past relationships	0.06	-0.01	-0.12	-0.05
	$p = 0.495$	$p = 0.926$	$p = 0.206$	$p = 0.551$

Results also indicate that the number of partners' relationships displays a weak negative correlation with the secure attachment pattern ($r = 0.26$; $p < 0.004$) (Table 6).

Table 6. Number of past relationships and partners' attachment styles

Pearson's r (correlation coefficient) (N = 120)			
Variable	Secure	Anxious-ambivalent	Avoidant
Number of past relationships	-0.26	-0.09	0.07
	$p < 0.004$	$p = 0.356$	$p = 0.473$

The more relationships partners had in the past, the less secure their attachment style is. The number of past relationships does not correlate with the anxious-ambivalent ($r = 0.09$; $p = 0.356$) or avoidant ($r = 0.07$; $p = 0.473$) style of attachment.

DISCUSSION:

The analyses above show that the attachment style has a bearing on partner relations. The more attached partners are to each other, the more positive mutual relations they build. Consequently, they create a relationship that is full of intimacy, passion and commitment. Partners who are securely attached, have intimate and mutual communication, as well as low escalation of behaviour during an argument. Partners with insecure attachment styles form less positive relations. The higher the level of anxious-ambivalent attachment between the partners, the less intimacy and passion they experience in their relationship. As a result, the partners are less satisfied and less happy with being together. Also, they evaluate their mutual communication as less intimate. In addition, they are more prone to conflict behaviours.

However, no significant association has been identified in the study between the pattern of attachment and mutual commitment in partners with the anxious-ambivalent attachment style. In the group of partners with the avoidant attachment pattern, the higher the intensity of the avoidant attitude, the lower the degree of intimacy and passion experienced by the partners, and thus the lower level of commitment to the relationship, satisfaction and happiness with being together. Mutual communication is also decreased, which causes an escalation of argumentative behaviour.

The correlations discussed above corroborate results of previous research into the influence of attachment style on the quality of human relationships.

They demonstrate that attachment styles are associated with particular ways in which individuals function in close interpersonal relations, and with the quality of the relations (Kuczyńska, 1998; Noller, Feeney, 2006). The research proves that relationships created by securely attached individuals are stable, full of warmth and love and, therefore, they are a source of satisfaction and happiness. The most prominent features of relations formed by people with the anxious-ambivalent style of attachment include jealousy, conflict proneness, low satisfaction and happiness. As a result, partners they do not believe strongly enough in the permanence of their relationship. Therefore, if tensions and disagreements grow, the partners fail to make sufficient effort to protect and sustain their relationship. In turn, relationships created by individuals with the avoidant attachment pattern are full of strain and lacking in intimacy. Avoidant partners do not have a strong need for closeness and affection. The claims presented above have been confirmed in the authors' study reported in this article.

Results of the study indicate that the relationship status has a major bearing on the partners' mutual relations – with the exception of aspects of interpersonal communication. Spouses have more positive relations with higher levels of intimacy, passion and commitment. They also give their husband or wife greater satisfaction and happiness. What is more, they demonstrate a markedly lower level of conflict behaviour in comparison with other forms of close relationships (i.e. engagement and cohabitation). The correlations identified in the current study are consistent with findings made by other scholars investigating how relationship status affects partners' satisfaction and quality of their mutual relations (Celmer, 1985; Braun-Gałkowska, 1992; Plopa, 2005). In comparison to unmarried couples, married couples are more likely to have more rewarding relations due to better communication, greater commitment and lower level of conflict behaviour (Brown, Booth, 1996, after: Janicka, 2006). The observation points to the advantage of positive psychological bonds existing between spouses over bonds between partners who are engaged to be married or unmarried cohabitants. This proves the thesis advocated by some researchers that the institution of marriage gives partners a stronger feeling of security and stability, and a greater opportunity to satisfy their mutual expectations and needs, as compared to other forms of relationship (Braun-Gałkowska, 1992; Matuszewska, 2003; Kwak, 2005). The marriage ritual moves people into new social roles and endows them with a sense of responsibility and mutual belonging. Marriage means an indissoluble union between the spouses, as well as validating and legalizing the satisfaction of one of human basic biological need, i.e. sexual activity. The partners' declaration to be together "in good times and in bad" significantly increases the quality and durability of their relationship (Kwak, 2005; Janicka, 2006; Slany, 2008). The fact of entering into matrimony strengthens the couple's

conviction that they will stay together despite problems, passing disagreements, etc. Marriage rests on solid sociocultural foundations additionally supported by the legal system (Goldstein, Kenney, 2001). This makes the life of married people easier and spares them at least some of the problems faced by unmarried couples (i.e. having an illegitimate child, isolation in the community, difficulties with obtaining a bank loan, etc.). In contrast to unmarried partners, spouses are more oriented towards cooperation, interdependence and exchange of services (Tyszka, 2002). Greater trust, closeness and stability, which are associated with marriage, help married partners cope with everyday problems more efficiently than people in other types of relationships. Against this background, the positive bond between married partners is both the aim of marriage and a basis that makes it a stable union (Ryś, 1999). The above, however, does not apply to cohabitating partners. A major factor adversely affecting their relationship is the fact that there are no clear-cut rules and cultural norms governing their life together. The ambiguous nature of cohabitation may give rise to a number of limitations, difficulties and troubles decreasing the quality of their relations (e.g. lack of creditworthiness stemming from the absence of a legally regulated relationship, problems faced by illegitimate children at school, low social approval of legally unsanctioned relationships, etc.). Sometimes the cohabiting partners' individual needs rise in importance at the expense of the couple's joint needs, as cohabitants seek to be independent and satisfy their desire for personal freedom more than married partners. Differences in ways of functioning, plans and expectations for the achievement of basic needs of each individual result in clashes that throw the relations between partners off balance (Janicka, 2006).

Results of our studies conform to the reports presented above claiming that the status of intimate relationship has a differentiating function for relations between the man and woman creating the relationship. Most importantly, the study confirms that more positive relations are built by married partners, as opposed to engaged or cohabiting partners.

Some dimensions of the partners' communication are unaffected by relationship status, though. It may be the case that other factors – such as the partners' values, personal identity structures or character traits, individual experiences, current events or the economic status – are more important for determining the quality of mutual intimate communication than the form of the relationship. The claim that partners tend to develop their specific and reciprocally satisfying style of mutual communication and understanding in any type of relationship cannot be ruled out at the current stage of study. Moreover, the lack of differences in intimate and mutual communication between various relationship types may be a consequence of the fact that the majority of study couples had only been in their relationship for a period ranging from one to three

years. As a rule, the quality of communication, and the level of communication intimacy in particular, are higher in the initial period of any relationship because, in addition to being more fascinated with each other, partners are conscious that they have entered into the relationship freely and willingly, which entails mutual commitment. This tendency may result in the absence of major differences in the investigated aspects of communication between men and women creating close relationships, which were found to differ only to a limited extent.

The studies also showed that relationship status has a significant correlation with the secure attachment style which is more common among married people than among couples who are engaged to be married or cohabiting. People who are attached securely tend to establish more stable, intimate and warmer relations with other people. A relationship that gives them a sense of stability is, at the same time, a major source of satisfaction and security, which means the partners are keen to protect it. Matrimony performs all these functions: it assumes permanence and stability, and gives the spouses a feeling of security (Rostowski, 1987; Kotlarska-Michalska, 1997).

There are, nonetheless, no sufficient grounds for rejecting the presumption that individuals with a more prominent secure attachment style, due to previous experiences, perceive their partner differently than people with strong insecure attachment styles: as a person providing them with positive experiences and a source of multi-faceted support. Consequently, they have more trust in their partner and are not afraid to choose the person for creating a relationship regarded in our culture as a long-term bond, or even a union for life.

Based on Erikson's concepts, the sense of security gained at the beginning of life can be considered an early predictor of pro-developmental resolution of successive development dilemmas, as well as the problem specific to early adulthood, namely: intimacy vs. social isolation. Cultural and legal norms encourage couples to formalize their relationship and give it the marriage status in order to guarantee effective management of another dilemma relating to generativity. These social regulations also aim at ensuring conditions that are conducive to procreation and the upbringing of offspring.

Cohabiting and engaged couples always allow for a certain degree of uncertainty about the development of their relationship in the course of time, which prevents them from being completely stable and long-lasting. Consequently, marriage is preferred by people with the secure attachment style who need and expect stability.

There are no significant differences between insecurely attached individuals who are in other forms of relationships, though this tendency may follow from the fact that they expect different things from their relationship, which effectively produces similar consequences. This means that people with the

anxious-ambivalent pattern of attachment (who do not believe in permanence of any emotional relationship) and with the avoidant style of attachment (who reject excessive closeness and intimacy) do not plan relationship stabilization and, in some cases, are even afraid of it.

Studies also show that the number of partners' previous relationships has an adverse effect on intimacy, passion and commitment, i.e. the constituents of love. The more relationships partners had in the past, the lower their intimacy, passion and commitment to the present relationship was. Lower intimacy, passion and commitment, i.e. love felt by partners who had a few shorter or longer relationships in the past, may stem from their uncertainty and fear of disappointment with yet another failed relationship and apprehension about making another mistake. It cannot be ruled out that such partners have developed the conviction that commitment, sacrifice and complete openness with another person are not worth their while since they have already failed so many times. This makes them withdrawn, unenthusiastic and wary of committing themselves again. Partners can transfer fears and negative experiences from their past into the present relationship, which results in a different quality of relations.

The major role played by love in people's lives undoubtedly stems from the fact that it represents one of the basic human social needs. The exceptional status of love is reinforced by the cult of romantic love happening only once in a lifetime which is so commonly found in the media, films and literature (Wojciszke, 2005). Believing in the socially accepted myth and seeking to satisfy the basic human need to love and be loved, partners often try as hard as their can to find love. Discouraged by repeated disappointments and unpleasant experiences, they invest less and less intimacy, passion and commitment into their future relationships.

Studies have also proven that the number of partners' previous relationships has a special correlation with the secure attachment style: the more relationships partners had in the past, the weaker their security of attachment is. It is also worthwhile to consider another causal explanation whereby a high number of previous relationships is, in fact, a consequence of low security of attachment characterizing the individual concerned.

Meanwhile, people with a distinctly secure attachment style seem convinced of the durability of their relationship and the permanence of love which, though changing never falters. The conviction serves as a foundation for building a stable and close relationship (Wojciszke, 2004; Wojciechowska, 2005; Płopa, Kaźmierczak, 2006).

As stressed above, secure attachment style is weaker in partners who have had experience in past relationships. An explanation for this association has been sought in attachment theory and research into maternal deprivation

which claim that frequent changes of caregivers in young children's life make it more difficult for them to become securely attached and, in extreme cases, even impossible feel any attachment to anyone throughout their life (Bowlby, 2007).

The fact that there is no evident correlation between the number of partners' previous relationships and the anxious-ambivalent and avoidant attachment styles may be caused by low intensity of the identified attachment pattern (applicable to 78 and 117 study subjects, respectively). Consequently, it is difficult to interpret those relationships due to the small number of people with highly pronounced insecure attachment styles.

Results of our research presented in the article provide insights into the understanding of the influence of attachment styles on the psychosocial development of people in close relationships created in early adulthood.

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