

Exploring the Influence of Attachment Styles on Close Relationship Memories

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Introduction

Attachment is defined by Bowlby (1969) as "lasting psychological connectedness between human beings". Most commonly conceptualised within infant-caregiver and adult romantic relationships, literature has since begun to constitute adult friendships as attachments. Further, internal working models of attachment are a critical component of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1973). Composed of the model of others and the model of self, the representations guide thought processes and behavior (Collins & Allard, 2004). Attachment dimensions or styles, attachment-related anxiety (model of self) and attachment-related avoidance (model of others) are used to measure the differences in these models across individuals. Empirical studies have suggested that attachment, more specifically these working models, are implicated in autobiographical memory processing (Fivush, 2011; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2018). Thus, all things considered, the current study aimed to explore the implications of attachment outside of the typical romantic relationship context on memory processes.

Research Question

How are beginning and end memories in relation to friendship, romantic relationship, and life transition memories rated in terms of positivity, significance, influence?

Hypotheses

- 1 If an individual scores high in attachment avoidance, then memories will be recalled as less positive, significant, and influential
- 2 If an individual scores high in attachment anxiety, then memories will be recalled as highly significant, influential and moderately negative

Method

102 participants, ages of 18-35 years old (M= 23.74, SD=4.96).

2x3 Within Subjects
Factorial Design

IV1: Time point (beginning, end) & Category (friend, romantic, life transition) memory factors
IV2: Attachment-related Anxiety & Avoidance
DV: Positivity, Significance, Influence Scores



1 Revised Adult Attachment Scale - Close Relationships Version (Collins, 1996)

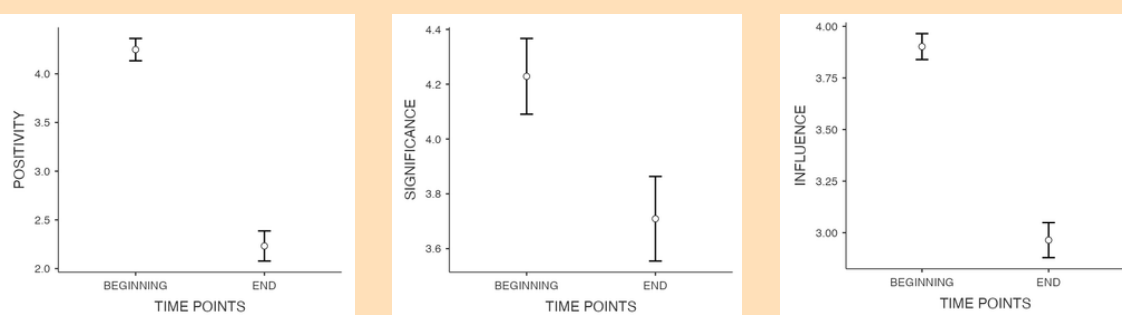
- 2 **Q1.** Describe a time where the beginning of a friendship occurred
Q2. Describe a time where the end of a friendship occurred
Q3. Describe a time where the beginning of a romantic relationship occurred
Q4. Describe a time where the end of a romantic relationship occurred
Q5. Please recall a time where you may have gone through a life transition in which something began?
Q6. Please recall a time where you may have gone through a life transition in which something ended?

3 Memory Scores - Likert Scales

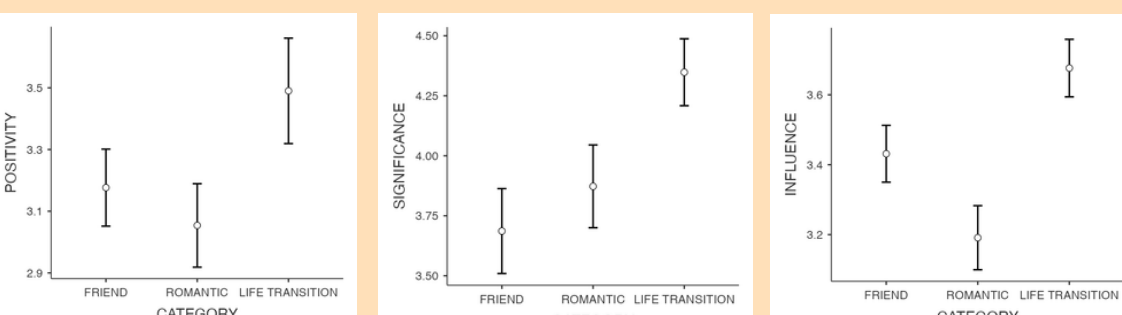
Positivity:
0. Very negative 1. Somewhat negative 2. Neither negative nor positive 3. Somewhat positive 4. Very Positive
Significance:
0. Very insignificant 1. Somewhat insignificant 2. Neither insignificant nor significant 3. Somewhat significant 4. Very significant
Influence:
0. Very negative influence 1. Somewhat of a negative influence 2. Neither negative nor positive influence 3. Somewhat a positive influence 4. Very positive influence



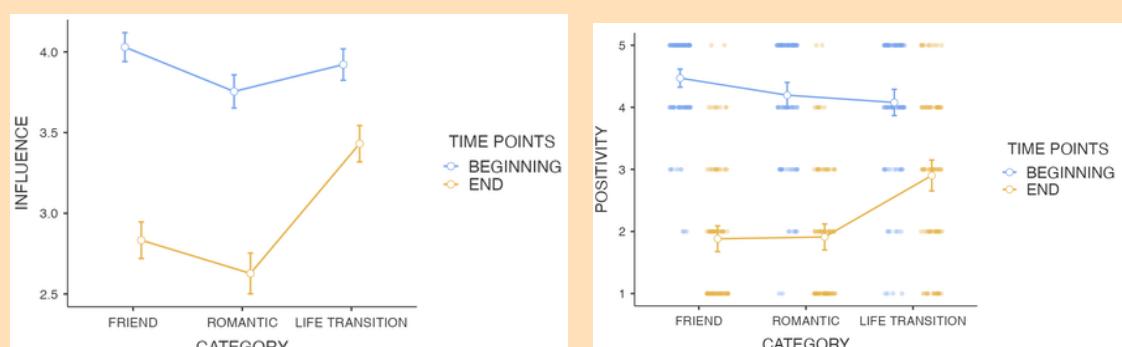
Time Point



Category



Time point x Category



Correlational Analysis

Correlations between Attachment Dimensions and Group Significance Scores

Variable	bg.sig	ed.sig	fr.sig	rm.sig	lt.sig
Anxious	-0.11	0.18	0.00	0.04	0.08
Avoidant	-0.28**	0.12	-0.19*	-0.01	0.05

Note. Column headings are the shortened forms of each group name. * indicates $p < .05$, ** indicates $p < .01$, *** indicates $p < .001$

Correlations between Attachment Dimensions and Group Influence Scores

Variable	beg.infl	end.infl	fr.infl	rm.infl	lt.infl
Anxious	-0.07	-0.07	-0.09	-0.23*	0.16
Avoidant	-0.22*	-0.12	-0.18	-0.35***	0.14

Note. Column headings are the shortened forms of each group name. * indicates $p < .05$, ** indicates $p < .01$, *** indicates $p < .001$

Correlations between Attachment Dimensions and Group Influence Scores - Continued

Variable	beg.fr.infl	beg.rm.infl	beg.lt.infl	end.fr.infl	end.rm.infl	end.lt.infl
Anxious	-0.08	-0.19	0.14	-0.06	-0.18	0.11
Avoidant	-0.23*	-0.33***	0.14	-0.08	-0.25*	0.08

Note. Column headings are the shortened forms of each group name. * indicates $p < .05$, ** indicates $p < .01$, *** indicates $p < .001$

Results

Positivity
- significant main effect (time point)
- significant main effect (category)
- 12 significant interaction effects (time point x category)
Significance
- significant main effect (time point)
- significant main effect (category)
- no significant interaction effect
Influence
- significant main effect (time point)
- significant main effect (category)
- 10 significant interaction effects (time point x category)

8 negative correlations found between attachment dimensions (avoidance, anxiety) & memory scores

Discussion

To summarize, high scores in attachment **Avoidance** were related to lower beginning significance, friend significance, beginning influence, romantic influence, beginning friend influence, beginning & end romantic influence scores. High scores in attachment **Anxiety** were however associated with lower influence scores for romantic relationship memories. The findings are consistent with prior literary observations (Fralely et al., 2000; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2018). However, the study has practical implications for relationship specific attachment styles as an explanation for the variations of correlations between close relationship memories and attachment dimensions (Gillath, Karantzas, & Selcuk, 2017).