

Blame the parents for my toxic relationship: An Exploration of Attachment and Dyadic Trust within Romantic Relationships

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Background

Attachments are formed during the first years of an infant's life with their most prominent caregiver, typically their mother (1).

Bowlby's (2) seminal research led to the development of attachment styles, which within adulthood have been defined as fearful, dismissing, preoccupied and secure by Bartholomew and Horowitz (3).

Positive Model of Others

Negative Model of Others

Positive Model of Self

Negative Model of Self

Positive Model of Self	Negative Model of Self
Secure Comfortable with intimacy and independence	Preoccupied Desire a relationship to prove they are a good person
Dismissing Disregard intimacy and value the qualities they have themselves	Fearful Scared of intimacy and require constant reassurance

Bartholomew's Prototypes (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991)

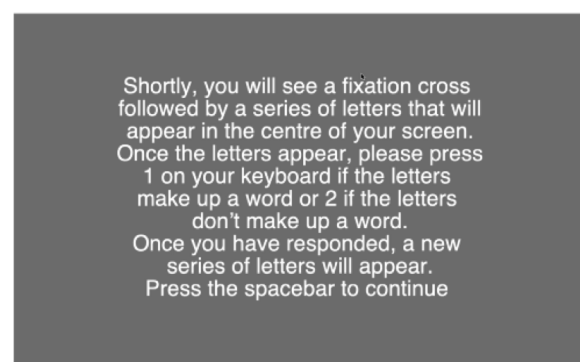
Previous research (4) explored attachment style and dyadic trust. The most influential incorporated a lexical decision task exploring how trust related goals link with attachment styles, using positive trust stimuli.

Current Research

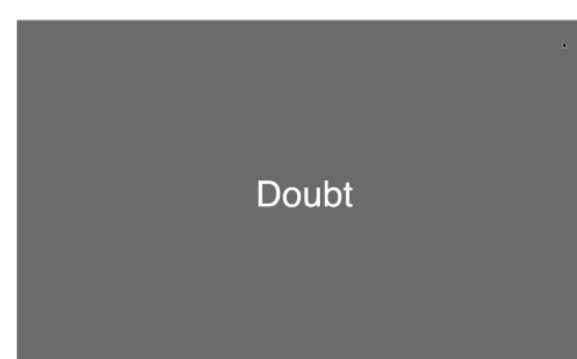
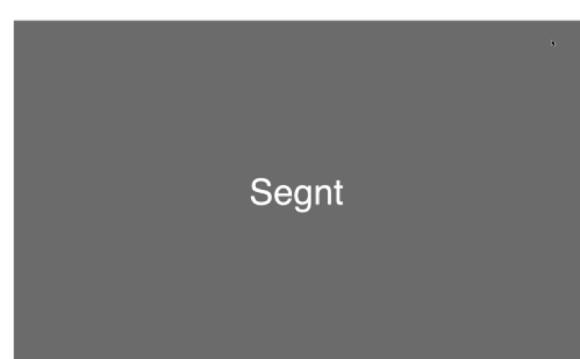
Using a lexical decision task, the current research explored whether those with a secure attachment responded quicker to the 'trust word' than the 'distrust words' and those with an insecure attachment respond quicker to the 'distrust words' than the 'trust words'.

Methods

68 participants aged 18+ who had experienced a romantic relationship where asked to complete a lexical decision task and an attachment assessment



Top left - instructions on how to complete the experiment
Top right - fixation cross

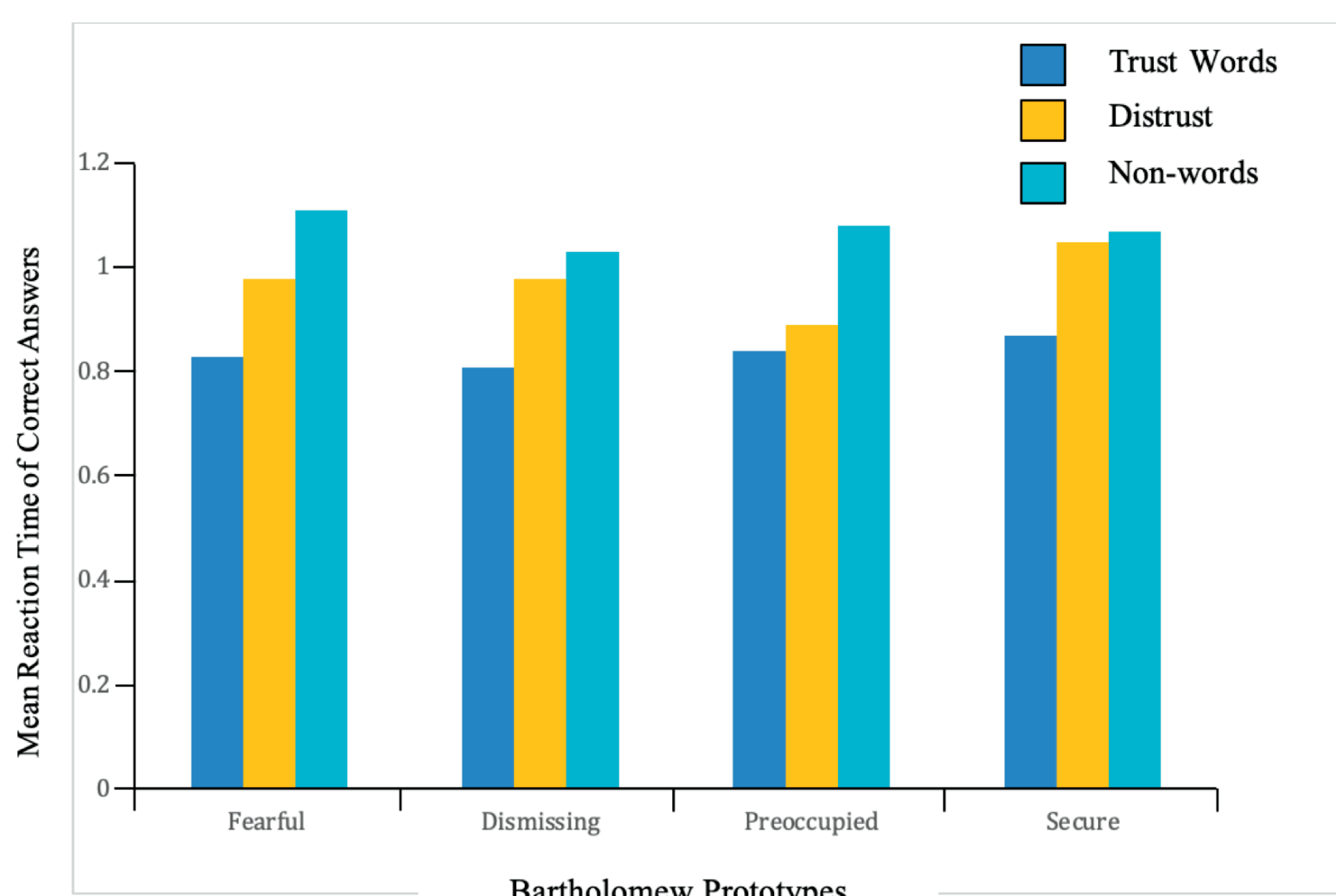


Bottom left - example of 'non-word' lexicon
Bottom right - example of 'distrust word' lexicon

- The lexical decision task measured reaction time and response accuracy to 'trust' (e.g., hope), 'distrust' (e.g., doubt) and 'non-words' (e.g., bigly). The stimuli were shown to the participants until they pressed either a '1' for words or '2' for non-word.
- The attachment assessment asked statements like "I talk things over with my partner", with participants rating (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) (5)

Findings

Participants responded significantly quicker to the 'trust words' in comparison to the 'distrust words' and 'non-words'. This indicates that participants were able to recognise and identify the 'trust words' and 'distrust words' significantly quicker than the 'non-words' regardless of their attachment style



Interaction between Bartholomew prototypes, lexical types, and mean reaction time of correct answers

Conclusions

A lexical decision task is the wrong measure for attachment style and trust

Levels of trust were not quantified through an established measurement. Instead, it was implied through the lexical decision task that response time to stimuli would signify whether the participant had high or low dyadic trust.

Trust levels are not static and could fluctuate in response to events and throughout a relationship (6). Generalising an individual's level of trust by taking a pinpoint measurement of their trust at a single point in time, is not sufficient.

Future research should use a multifaceted approach, as it would allow for the exploration of multiple avenues in which trust, and distrust behaviours could be shown without failing to account for its complexity.

References

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