

CHAPTER ONE

AN OVERVIEW OF ATTACHMENT THEORY

HEALTHY ATTACHMENT IS A DEEP BOND and an enduring emotional closeness that connects people to one another across space and time.³ As human infants, we are born into this world with an attachment system that wires us to expect connection with others. The creator of attachment theory, John Bowlby, called this innate expectation the *attachment behavioral system* and explained that it is one of several behavioral systems that humans evolved to ensure our survival. As infants, we can't yet meet any of our own needs. So, in order to survive, we have to bond and attach to caretakers who can provide us with food and shelter, as well as meeting our biological and psychological needs for emotional attunement, warm responsiveness and calming physical touch. Popular parenting culture often calls this “skin time,” and it's known to be a crucial part of early childhood development.

When an infant feels fear, distress or discomfort, their attachment system is activated. This prompts them to quickly turn towards their caretakers or use proximity-seeking behaviors such as crying, reaching for, calling out or, later, crawling and following their attachment figure.

All these behaviors are attempts to restore feelings of safety, and in many cases to restore actual safety, too. If the child receives the support, reassurance and comfort they need from their caretaker, their nervous system then returns to a state of calm homeostasis. Infants and children who can't yet fully regulate their own emotional states depend on their caretakers to co-regulate for them. Being close with another human helps children to feel calm. Further, being connected to and soothed by their caretakers over time teaches them how to self-soothe and regulate their own emotional states. As children, we want to know that our attachment figures are nearby and accessible. We need to know that they will provide us with a safe haven to turn to when we need them, which then gives us a secure base from which we can explore our environment. Bowlby called this the *exploratory behavioral system*. When our attachment needs are being met, this system enables us to feel comfortable and free to explore ourselves, others and the world around us.

John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth's research shows that children develop attachment styles that are more secure or more insecure, depending on how well their parents are able to be a connected and responsive safe haven for them. If their caretakers are able to meet most of their needs enough of the time, children usually have a secure attachment. But if they experience their parents as inconsistent, inaccessible, unresponsive or even threatening and dangerous, they adapt by developing more insecure attachment styles. If our attachment figures were absent or scary to us as children, we didn't develop our ability to freely explore and to learn about the world and about our own abilities. When this happens, we develop insecure strategies for engaging with others—we

may become more vigilant and anxious or more avoidant and dismissive.

Mikulincer and Shaver created a model of attachment-system functioning and dynamics,⁴ which I've adapted into a flowchart showing how the different attachment experiences arise. First, if a child experiences a threat—whether perceived or actual, physical or emotional—they will try to find protection by seeking closeness to an attachment figure. If their attachment figure is available and responsive, and meets their needs, the child feels safe and can go back to playing or exploring. But if their attachment figure is unresponsive or inaccessible, and the child is left without a safe haven to turn to, they may adapt by either *deactivating* (turning down) or *hyperactivating* (turning up) their attachment needs.

As children, when we feel afraid, threatened or in need, and seeking closeness with our parents is *not* a viable option because they're not available or because turning towards them doesn't make things better, we learn to rely more on ourselves. We become more self-reliant and we minimize our attachment needs. When we deactivate our attachment system, we suppress our attachment-based longings—not because we don't still want closeness and connection, but in order to adapt and survive. If we experience discomfort or danger and closeness to a parent is still *somewhat* of a viable option, we might learn that we can get their attention by intensifying our attachment cries. If our caretakers did not respond to our initial bids, but ramping up our demands and hyperactivating our attachment system did get their attention in some form, we then learn that this is an effective strategy. Later in this chapter, we'll talk about how these strategies—deactivating, hyperactivating, or

vacillating between the two—relate to the three different insecure attachment styles.

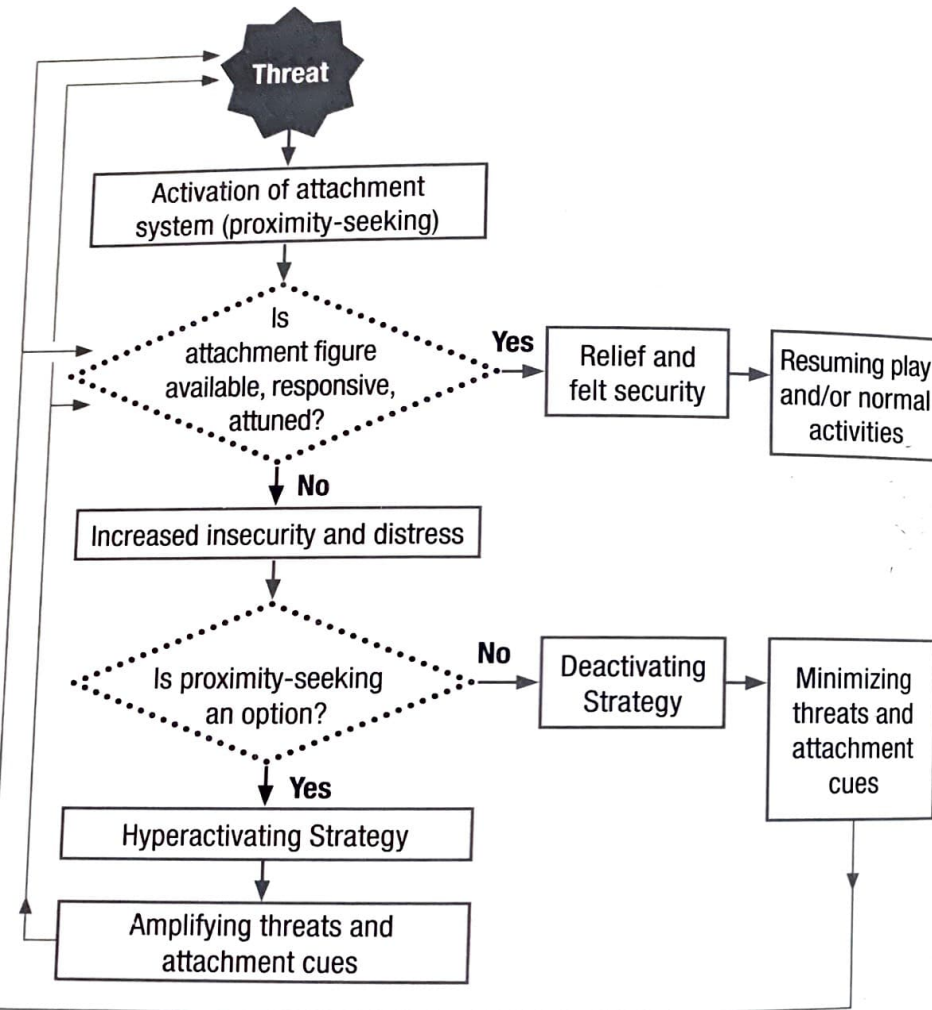


FIGURE 1.1 An adaptation of Mikulincer and Shaver's model of attachment-system activation and functioning in adulthood.⁵

Caregiver behaviors that could lead a child to take on a deactivating attachment strategy include:

- Neglecting or abusing the child.
- Being emotionally cold or rejecting the child.
- Giving the child hostile, angry or threatening responses.
- Discouraging a child's expression of vulnerability.
- Encouraging (whether explicitly or implicitly) the child to be more self-reliant and independent.

Caregiver behaviors that can incite hyperactivating attachment strategies include:

- Being unreliable, unpredictable or intrusive, where interactions are sometimes gratifying and connected, but at other times mis-attuned and disconnected.
- Punishing or criticizing a child for their independence or curiosity.
- Conveying messages that the child is not enough, or is incapable, stupid or failing in some way.
- Taking on a helicopter style of parenting, which might include excessive praise but also excessive control, protectiveness or perfectionism.
- Experiences of abuse or traumas that occur when the child is separated from their primary attachment figure, which can reinforce the notion that it's dangerous to be apart from them.

Both of these strategies can also occur simultaneously, meaning a child may experience both hyperactivation and deactivation, or may vacillate between the two survival strategies. We'll discuss this more in the section about fearful-avoidant attachment.

Secure Attachment: When Attachment Needs Are Met in Childhood

Children who have a secure attachment style have generally experienced a family environment that's mostly warm and supportive. Their parents or caretakers are available, accessible and responsive to their needs, enough of the time. Not necessarily *all* of the time but *enough of the time*, when the child has an attachment need, they reach out to their attachment figure and that attachment figure moves towards them in an emotionally attuned way that calms the child's nervous system.⁶ This in turn teaches the child that allowing themselves to feel their needs and communicating those needs to others is an effective strategy. A caretaker being present, safe, protective, playful, emotionally attuned and responsive is of paramount importance to a child developing a secure attachment style.

Early positive attachment experiences have a huge impact on healthy brain development and emotional regulation.⁷ When the attachment figure is able to emotionally resonate with the child, the child feels supported and learns to regulate their own positive and negative emotional arousal. This helps to lower stress hormones and increase oxytocin (the bonding hormone). By co-regulating with a caretaker, the child learns to understand and process facial and social cues, they learn empathy and they develop an increased ability to cope with stress. When children experience secure interactions with the adults in their lives and function from a secure attachment style, they also tend to have better self-esteem, be more resilient to trauma, have strong social skills, concentrate better, enjoy play and have solid overall emotional health.

CHAPTER ONE AN OVERVIEW

Through these nourishing experiences, a child develops a sense of safety and trust. They take in the messages that the world is a friendly place and that they can ask for what they want because the people in their lives care and are willing to help.

Secure Attachment as an Adult

Early childhood attachment experiences become the blueprint for the kinds of connections we go on to expect and seek in our adult romantic relationships. The interactions we experienced with our caretakers create internal working models of how we see ourselves—both positively and negatively—and set our positive or negative expectations about how attuned and available our partners will be to us in times of need.⁸ People with a secure attachment style experience a healthy sense of self and see themselves and their partners in a positive light. Their interpersonal experiences are deeply informed by their knowledge that they can ask for what they need and people will typically listen and willingly respond. It's empowering to know that our actions are effective. As children, if we reach out with our body and use our voice to get the help or connection we need to mitigate our distress, and if our parents usually meet these attachment bids, we learn that we matter and are worthy of love. This builds the foundation for healthy self-esteem and a sense of competence in the world. As adults, this helps us be more flexible when our partners can't meet our needs. We're better able to weather hearing no, to wait for our needs to be met at a later time or to seek an alternative means of having our attachment needs met without shaking the foundation of our relationship.

Bowlby viewed attachment as relevant “from the cradle to the grave.”⁹ He said that adult romantic relationships function as reciprocal attachment bonds, where each partner serves as an attachment figure for the other. Bowlby conceived of the parent-child attachment relationship as having four essential features: *proximity maintenance*, *separation distress*, *safe haven* and *secure base*. We can see many parallels between the parent-child attachment relationship and the adult-adult attachment relationship. For instance, adults seek physical contact with each other, engage in dreamy eye-gazing, and even use baby talk or cooing sounds to nurture and encourage bonding. We feel separation distress when apart, and we turn towards our romantic partners as a safe haven in times of need. We also see them as a secure base from which to explore the world and our sexuality, and we feel able to share important discoveries with them.¹⁰

Of course, there are differences between the parent-child attachment bond and the adult-adult attachment bond. As adults, even though we seek regular and consistent proximity to our partner, we can tolerate much longer periods of separation from our partners by employing mental representations of them to help give us an understanding of why we are apart (e.g., “I know my partner is at work,” “My partner is away on a trip” or “I have this weekend with my kids and I’ll see my partner in a few days”). As adults, we are also better equipped than children to leverage positive fantasies about our partner; we can imagine what it will feel like when we’re reunited, and we can access a bodily felt sense of their presence, which can offer reassurances of comfort and security when physically apart.

Two additional changes in adult attachment compared to parent-child attachment include mutual caregiving and sexuality.¹¹ As children, caregiving is asymmetrical: a child under secure circumstances receives care from their attachment figures but does not provide it in return. But as adults, caretaking becomes more symmetrical and shared between partners. Sexuality also becomes an integrated part of the attachment and caregiving behavioral systems.

A child with a secure attachment style will likely grow up into an adult who feels worthy of love and seeks to create meaningful, healthy relationships with people who are physically and emotionally available. Securely functioning adults are comfortable with intimacy, closeness, and their need or desire for others. They don’t fear losing their sense of self or being engulfed by the relationship. For securely attached people, “dependency” is not a dirty word, but a fact of life that can be experienced without losing or compromising the self.

Conversely, securely functioning adults are also comfortable with their independence and personal autonomy. They may miss their partners when they’re not together, but inside they feel fundamentally alright with themselves when they’re alone. They also feel minimal fear of abandonment when temporarily separated from their partner. In other words, securely attached people experience *relational object constancy*, which is the ability to trust in and maintain an emotional bond with people even during physical or emotional separation.

Object constancy is a developmental milestone where a child is able to understand that their attachment figure is a separate person. This person can love and be there for them, but they can leave the room and, even if they’re

temporarily out of sight, it doesn't mean they're completely gone. In adulthood, relational object constancy enables us to trust that our connections and bonds with people will endure even if we're apart. People with secure attachment are able to internalize their partners' love, carrying it with them even when they're physically separate, emotionally disconnected or in conflict.

Another important aspect of secure attachment is that, when distressed, a person can both emotionally regulate on their own, and can also co-regulate and receive support from their partners. People functioning from a securely attached style are better able to take care of their own needs as well as ask their partners to help out. In my psychotherapy practice, I've noticed that more securely attached partners are often better able to set healthy boundaries. They truly say no when they mean no and yes when they mean yes. To me, this is the foundation of true consent.

Research has also shown that having a secure attachment style as an adult is correlated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction and balance,¹² higher levels of empathy, respect and forgiveness for partners,¹³ and higher levels of sexual satisfaction when compared to people who are insecurely attached in their relationships.¹⁴ Additionally, having a secure base with a partner can increase *sexploration*, a term coined to describe "the degree to which a person co-constructs a sex-positive, supportive, and safe environment with their partner(s)."¹⁵ If you've been to one of my talks on attachment, you will have heard me say that secure attachment is the new sexy!

Statements that someone with a secure attachment style might make:

- I find it easy to make emotional connections with others.
- I enjoy being close with others.
- I am comfortable depending on others and having others depend on me.
- I don't often worry about being abandoned or about someone getting too close to me.
- If I am in distress I can easily turn to my attachment figure for comfort and support.
- I am aware and accepting of my partners' strengths and shortcomings, and I treat them with love and respect.
- During conflict or disagreement, I am able to take responsibility for my part, apologize when needed, clear up misunderstandings, apply problem-solving strategies and forgive when needed.
- I do well with the transition of going from being by myself to then being together with a partner, and I also do well with the transition of going from being together to then being alone again.

When Attachment Needs Are Not Met

So far, I've described the optimal situations for attachment in childhood and then adulthood—but approximately half the time, this ideal is far from achieved, leading to the three different expressions of insecure attachment: avoidant, anxious and disorganized. In general, with these three different insecure styles, regardless of what specific insecure adaptations a child develops, they will go on to have difficulty with certain relational skills and personal capacities. A person with any of the insecure

styles will usually struggle with regulating their own emotional states in healthy ways. They may deactivate, suppress or deny their emotions, or they may hyperactivate and inflame their emotions, and be easily taken over by emotional states.

We learn how to self-regulate through our connections with our attachment figures. So, if our parents were unable to regulate their own emotions (whether from their current stress levels or their previous unresolved trauma), and therefore couldn't support us in regulating our own emotions, we lost a foundational developmental experience. In the absence of the foundational neuropsychological experience of receiving soothing and emotional regulation from our parents, as adults we then have to learn these difficult developmental tasks on our own. We have to figure out how to identify and articulate our emotional states and then find ways to self-soothe as a healthy response instead of pulling away, shutting down or lashing out in emotional reactivity. We also need to learn how to healthily rely on others and to figure out when it's appropriate to seek support from them to help regulate our emotions.

Children who experienced an insecure attachment environment, regardless of which style they adopted, can internalize the beliefs that to some degree the world is unsafe and people cannot truly be relied on. These children will also struggle with having a sturdy relational object constancy. Since relational object constancy is the ability to trust that your connection and bond with someone will persist beyond an initial separation or conflict, as an adult, having a compromised relational object constancy can make it extremely difficult to get through the disappointments, uncertainties, healthy conflicts, and

natural ebbs and flows that adult romantic relationships inevitably produce. Research also demonstrates that people with insecure attachment styles in adulthood struggle with relationship satisfaction.¹⁶ They find it hard to trust their partners, forgive them and respond intentionally instead of reacting out of habit. They also face challenges when it comes to commitment, whether they tend to commit too soon or not commit at all.

A Caveat to the Attachment Styles

Before you read the next section, which describes the three different insecure styles, there are several important points that I'd like for you to keep in mind.

- Attachment wounds can occur for many reasons, and it is imperative to emphasize that attachment ruptures are not always the fault of one's attachment figures. Attachment theory is not about parent blaming. Disruptions in attachment can occur for various reasons outside of the attachment figures' control: physical or mental illness, hospitalizations, accidents, the needs of other children or family members in the home, death, poverty, housing instability, war and other social factors. I give a more in-depth analysis of the different levels of potential attachment ruptures in Chapter Three.
- Attachment styles are *not* static! If you experienced an insecurely attached childhood you can still go on to have healthy securely attached adult

relationships, experiencing what is called an *earned secure attachment*. Your attachment styles are survival adaptations to your environment and since they were learned, they can also be unlearned. I will touch more on earned secure attachment in Part Three.

- Attachment styles are not rigid identities to take on. These different insecure styles are not how you relate all of the time and they are not the totality of who you are. I often hear people describe themselves as “I *am* an avoidant” or “I *am* anxiously attached,” seeing themselves wholly through this one lens. We can also do this to our partners, labeling them and everything they do as a result of them “being an avoidant” or “being preoccupied,” etc.
- From a narrative therapy perspective, this would be a form of essentializing in which someone takes one part of their identity or experience and sees it as the entirety of who they are. To me, this also exposes the paradox of labels. Labeling ourselves or even receiving a diagnosis can be very helpful. It can give important clarity and definition to the struggles that we have been facing. Whether it be a personality type, a medical condition, a psychiatric diagnosis or an astrology chart, finding ourselves in a certain *type* can be refreshing. We may feel that our experience is no longer mysterious or just limited to us, but is actually understood, well-articulated and even shared with others. For some, reading about a certain attachment style can literally put their entire life and relationship history into context, liberating them from the idea

that they are broken or helplessly doomed to never have relationship success. Instead, they can see themselves as a person who has wisely taken on a certain attachment adaptation and they can feel empowered to change that adaptation and choose a more secure path from which to move forward.

Conversely, labeling or receiving a diagnosis can also confine us into rigid categories that may restrict our sense of self or obscure the fullness of who we are. Labels can easily keep us stuck in the mindset of *this is who I am, and so this is who I will continue to be*. Instead of seeing ourselves as someone who struggles with anxiety, we see ourselves as anxiety itself. Instead of seeing ourselves as someone who is battling depression, we see ourselves as depression itself. So, when reading about attachment styles, please identify with what feels useful, and please be mindful of rigidly identifying yourself or others. We are more than the problems we face.

- You might relate to more than one style. Some people see themselves in two, three or even all four of the styles. You might function from a more secure style most of the time, but then act out a particular insecure style while under stress, or you might experience different attachment styles depending on who you are relating to. Many of us have different attachment styles in relation to each of our parents, for example—we might have felt very secure with one parent, but insecure with another. The styles of our partners also have an impact on our own attachment expression. A partner with a dismissive attachment style might

provoke more anxious/preoccupied behaviors from us, or being with a more anxious partner might polarize us into being more dismissive. Our attachment styles can change from one relationship to the next and they can also change within a specific relationship with the same person.

- Lastly, your attachment style is not an excuse for abuse! I've heard people use their attachment style as an excuse for their actions, blaming their unskilled or even harmful behaviors on the "fact" of them having a certain attachment style. Please don't do this! If you are acting out in harmful ways towards yourself, your partners or anyone you're in contact with, please take your traumas and wounds seriously and seek professional support. Cycles of violence, abuse or neglect can undoubtedly be broken when the right support is in place.

Insecure Attachment Styles

In this section, I will first present the three insecure styles in the typology in which they are commonly presented by other authors. However, some researchers and theorists have moved away from using the traditional four-type attachment typology, proposing instead that attachment plays out over the two dimensions of *attachment anxiety* and *attachment avoidance*. This two-dimensional perspective can be a more precise way of understanding the different expressions of the secure and insecure attachment styles, which I will present after the three insecure styles.

The Avoidant/Dismissive Attachment Style

Avoidant Attachment in Childhood

The avoidant and anxious styles were first observed in children by Mary Ainsworth in 1978 through her Strange Situation Procedure.¹⁷ In these experiments, infants and young children were observed with their primary attachment figure (usually the mother) in a room filled with toys. Each child was at times alone with their parent in the room, then left alone with a stranger while the parent stepped out of the room for several minutes. Of particular interest were how much the child explored the room of toys, how much anxiety the child felt when left alone with the stranger and how the child responded to first being separated and then reunited with their parent. The child's response to separation and reunion became the primary way of assessing secure and insecure attachment.

Children with a secure attachment were observed as comfortable exploring the room of toys while their parents were present, at ease interacting with strangers when parents were present and then expressing healthy attachment distress when their parents left the room, followed by relief and comfort when their parents returned.

The children who were classified with the avoidant attachment pattern were observed as being distant from their caretakers, showing little to no distress upon separation, expressing little interest in the parents upon reunion, and even showing little preference for being with their parents versus the stranger. These children were less likely to explore the room of toys and often preferred to play by themselves. Interestingly, the seemingly unaffected demeanor of these children, who were physically

provoke more anxious/preoccupied behaviors from us, or being with a more anxious partner might polarize us into being more dismissive. Our attachment styles can change from one relationship to the next and they can also change within a specific relationship with the same person.

- Lastly, your attachment style is not an excuse for abuse! I've heard people use their attachment style as an excuse for their actions, blaming their unskilled or even harmful behaviors on the "fact" of them having a certain attachment style. Please don't do this! If you are acting out in harmful ways towards yourself, your partners or anyone you're in contact with, please take your traumas and wounds seriously and seek professional support. Cycles of violence, abuse or neglect can undoubtedly be broken when the right support is in place.

Insecure Attachment Styles

In this section, I will first present the three insecure styles in the typology in which they are commonly presented by other authors. However, some researchers and theorists have moved away from using the traditional four-type attachment typology, proposing instead that attachment plays out over the two dimensions of *attachment anxiety* and *attachment avoidance*. This two-dimensional perspective can be a more precise way of understanding the different expressions of the secure and insecure attachment styles, which I will present after the three insecure styles.

The Avoidant/Dismissive Attachment Style

Avoidant Attachment in Childhood

The avoidant and anxious styles were first observed in children by Mary Ainsworth in 1978 through her Strange Situation Procedure.¹⁷ In these experiments, infants and young children were observed with their primary attachment figure (usually the mother) in a room filled with toys. Each child was at times alone with their parent in the room, then left alone with a stranger while the parent stepped out of the room for several minutes. Of particular interest were how much the child explored the room of toys, how much anxiety the child felt when left alone with the stranger and how the child responded to first being separated and then reunited with their parent. The child's response to separation and reunion became the primary way of assessing secure and insecure attachment.

Children with a secure attachment were observed as comfortable exploring the room of toys while their parents were present, at ease interacting with strangers when parents were present and then expressing healthy attachment distress when their parents left the room, followed by relief and comfort when their parents returned.

The children who were classified with the avoidant attachment pattern were observed as being distant from their caretakers, showing little to no distress upon separation, expressing little interest in the parents upon reunion, and even showing little preference for being with their parents versus the stranger. These children were less likely to explore the room of toys and often preferred to play by themselves. Interestingly, the seemingly unaffected demeanor of these children, who were physically

and emotionally distant from their caretakers, did not reflect their internal state. Even though these children appeared “fine” on the outside, they were actually experiencing internal signs of elevated heart rate and physiological stress.

A child who had parents who were mostly unavailable, neglectful or absent adapted to their attachment environment by taking on a more avoidant style. Parenting that is cold, distant, critical or highly focused on achievement or appearance can create an environment where the child learns that they are better off relying on themselves. When a child does not get enough of the positive attachment responses that they need or they are outright rejected or criticized for having needs, they will adapt by shutting down and deactivating their attachment longings. A child in this scenario learns that, in order to survive, they need to inhibit their attachment bids for proximity or protection in order to prevent the pain and confusion of neglect or rejection. In this situation a child often learns to subsist on emotional crumbs, assuming that the best way to get their needs met by their parent is to act as if they don’t have any. In adulthood, having a deactivated attachment system includes not only minimizing one’s own bids for care and attention, but also having a diminished ability to pick up on and register attachment cues from others.

Some of the different factors that can contribute to a child adopting an avoidant attachment style are:¹⁸

- Isolation through too much time alone or not enough face-to-face time with parents.
- The absence of physical or emotional presence from caretakers.

- Too much emphasis on task-based presence. That is, where caregivers are only present when they are trying to educate or teach something to their child that is practical, academic or skills-based.
- Too little touch and affection, or what Diane Poole Heller calls “skin hunger.”
- Emotional neglect where emotional nourishment is low or absent and parents are unable to effectively read the child’s signals. Such parents might respond in insensitive ways or be completely unresponsive to the child’s emotional states and needs.
- Expressive dissonance, which is when someone’s facial or verbal expressions are mismatched with their emotional states. Someone might be laughing when they are angry or smiling when they are actually upset, which can be confusing to children (or anyone for that matter). Since children are learning how to identify and express their own emotional states through the modeling of the adults around them, a parent with expressive dissonance can create challenges in their child’s ability to understand others’ feelings and to express themselves in ways that are socially appropriate and authentic.
- Disrupted engagement with caretakers due to illnesses or other factors that interfere with either the child or the parent participating in bonding attachment behaviors (see the nested attachment model in Chapter Three).
- Rejection from parents that might be ongoing, subtle or even outright abandonment of the child and parental responsibilities.
- Parents who are overly strict and controlling.

- Parents who might have the best intentions, but have a child who is so different from them that they are unable to understand or connect with that child in attuned ways.

Dismissive Attachment as an Adult

In adulthood, the childhood avoidant style is referred to as dismissive. A person who is functioning from a dismissive style will tend to keep people at arm's length. Usually priding themselves on not needing anyone, people with this style will tend to take on an overly self-reliant outlook, valuing their hyper-independence and often seeing others as weak, needy or too dependent. Although they may present as having high self-esteem, people functioning from a dismissive attachment style often project unwanted traits onto others and inflate their sense of self to cover a relatively negative self-image. People with this attachment style have reported lower levels of relationship satisfaction, trust and commitment,¹⁹ as well as having more negative views about sex and lower levels of sexual satisfaction when married.²⁰

A person with a dismissive attachment style likely didn't get what they needed early in life from their primary caregivers, so they learned to get by and survive by needing little to nothing from others. When someone grows up in a home with minimal or no emotional nourishment, it makes sense that they would deemphasize the value and importance of relationships, and that they find it extremely difficult to be vulnerable and open with others. Oftentimes, their own painful emotions or experiences are placed below the radar of their emotional awareness in order to avoid the discomfort of feeling pain. This in

turn creates a disconnection from their own feelings and needs. Living with a sense of chronic disconnection from themselves, others and the world, they might at times experience the longing to be close, but then feel at a total loss as to how to bridge the gap between their isolation and others, missing opportunities to receive support from their partners or to provide care to their loved ones.

People in this attachment style *do* want relationships. They will enter into relationships, even long-term relationships, but may struggle with their ability to reflect on their own internal experience as well as sensitively respond to the signals of their partners. They usually find it difficult to tolerate emotions related to intimacy, conflict and different forms of emotional intensity. When someone who is functioning in this style either feels vulnerable or perceives vulnerability in their partner, they will distance themselves to avoid discomfort. Signs of potential rejection or criticism from others will also create a quick withdrawal.

People with the dismissive attachment style will also tend to be highly linear and logical, showing many forms of competence and ability in the practical or professional realms of life. This overdevelopment of the logical brain can also create challenges with certain aspects of autobiographical memory—people with a dismissive attachment style might have little memory for childhood experiences, as well as simplistic narratives about their parents and childhood being “just fine.”²¹

In my therapy practice, I often notice that people who are relating from the dismissive style initially describe their parents or current romantic relationships as being great, even ideal, but just a few minutes of deeper questioning into their actual childhood experiences or current

relational patterns reveals that things aren't actually so perfect. This occurs because the deactivation of their attachment system has made it difficult for them to access and consistently stay in touch with their true feelings. For many, contacting and admitting one's actual feelings might be perceived as a threat to their current relationship or to the status quo of their family of origin.

Part of this deactivating and distancing adaptation is the dissociation from lived experience. When someone with a dismissive style starts to work on healing their insecure attachment, they must begin by no longer dismissing and distancing from themselves. This requires that they no longer deny their desires and needs, allowing the longings and wants for connection that have for so long been forbidden. When someone functioning from a dismissive style starts to allow their attachment system to come back online, it can initially be a very tender, raw and even overwhelming process. The skills that come with being able to identify your own feelings are part of a developmental process that takes time. The process of allowing feelings as they arise, learning how to self-soothe and establishing an inner trust that experiencing feelings is safe, cannot be rushed.

For the dismissive style, the journey from insecure to secure attachment is one of returning to the body through bringing feelings and sensations back to life and learning how to be with oneself in this process. Once this is established, the risk of then leaning into others, revealing one's internal world, and dismantling the self-reliant exoskeleton through asking for help and care from others can begin.

Statements that someone with a dismissive attachment style might make:

- My autonomy, independence and self-sufficiency are very important to me.
- I am generally comfortable without close relationships and do well on my own.
- I want to be in relationships and have some closeness with people, but I can only tolerate closeness to a limit and then I need space.
- I prefer not to share my feelings or show a partner how I feel deep down.
- I frequently don't know what I'm feeling or needing and/or I can miss cues from others about what they are feeling or needing.
- I feel uncomfortable relying on partners and having partners depend or rely on me.
- I either struggle with making relationship commitments or if I do commit, I may secretly have one foot out the door (or at least have the back door unlocked).
- I am very sensitive to any signs that my partner is trying to control me or interfere with my freedom in any way (and I don't like the word "sensitive").
- I see myself or others as weak for having needs or wanting comfort, help or reassurance.
- During disagreements or in conflict I tend to withdraw, shut down, shut out or stonewall.
- I do well with the transition from being together with people to then being alone again, but once I've been alone for a while I can be slow to warm up to others or struggle with the transition from being alone to entering back into connection with someone.

The Anxious/Preoccupied Attachment Style

Anxious Attachment in Childhood

In Ainsworth's Strange Situation Procedure, children who were classified as being anxiously attached were reluctant to play with the toys in the room even when their parent was present. They showed signs of distress and clinginess even before their parent left the room and struggled to settle down upon reunion with their caregiver. For these children, the attachment system was hyperactivated, in comparison to the deactivating of the attachment system that the avoidant style employs. Hyperactivating the attachment system ramps up the desire for a caretaker, amplifying the child's attachment bids as a way to capture a parent's attention.

Parents who are loving but inconsistent can encourage the adaptation of the anxious style. Sometimes the parent is here and available, attuned and responsive, but then other times they are emotionally unavailable, misattuned or even intrusive, leaving the child confused and uncertain as to whether their parent is going to comfort them, ignore them, reward them or punish them for the very same behavior. This unpredictability can be very dysregulating for a child who is trying to stabilize a bond with their caregiver so, in an attempt to cope, they then learn that hyperactivating their attachment system through getting louder or needier achieves the attention they need. In this scenario, the child can become dependent on their hyperactivating strategy in order to survive, fearing that if they let their attachment system settle and rest then their needs will never be met. This in turn can lead to a chronically activated attachment system that exaggerates

threats of potential abandonment, which may or may not actually be there.²²

Some factors that can contribute to a child adopting an anxious insecure attachment style are:²³

- Parents who are unable to consistently co-regulate with their child, which leaves the child dependent on others to regulate their emotions, again and again turning outward to make sense of their inner feelings and unable to emotionally regulate on their own.
- Over-involving the child in the parent's state of mind, where the parent's emotions or state of mind is more central to the parent-child interaction than the child's. In this case, the child might be asked (whether explicitly or implicitly) to be responsible for meeting the parent's needs, making the parent feel better or supplying the parent with meaning and purpose. This is often due to a parent's own level of anxiety, stress or unresolved trauma, or their own anxious attachment history. When the state of mind of the parent is the centerpiece of interactions, the child is left to constantly monitor and be concerned about their parent's state of well-being, which can encourage a role reversal in which the child is acting more like the parent in the relationship. As a child, being responsible for a parent's well-being is a misplaced, confusing and overwhelming responsibility.
- Overstimulation. We live in an increasingly stimulating world, with fewer spaces to rest physically and mentally between interactions with people, technology, billboards, ads and the like. Our nervous systems need breaks from such stimulation in order to develop properly, and parents can impede this process when they force constant contact, require

attention or presence from a child that might be beyond their developmental capacity, hover over the child, interject themselves when the child is calmly playing independently or enjoying time with others, or even push physical boundaries through tickling or affection that is unwanted by the child in that particular moment.

- Parents who discourage autonomy. Some parents discourage their child's agency and autonomy through comments or suggestions that insinuate, whether subtly or overtly, that the child is incapable, less than or not enough in some way. Even well-intentioned parents can question their children's actions and decisions in ways that are shaming instead of encouraging. Some parents who are struggling with their own anxiety can easily get overwhelmed by children who want to explore and discourage or overprotect the child in ways that undermine their interests or abilities.

Preoccupied Attachment as an Adult

When used to characterize an adult, anxious attachment is called preoccupied. People with this attachment style demonstrate an intense focus and heightened concern about the level of closeness in their relationships. A defining factor of the preoccupied style is how the person's hyperactivated attachment strategy not only amplifies their attachment bids, but also intensifies their focus on their partners. Because of this, they may end up constantly monitoring their partners' level of availability, interest and responsiveness. The partner of someone with a preoccupied attachment style may then feel like

this constant tracking of relational mis-attunements and mistakes is controlling of them. But for the person with a preoccupied attachment style, this behavior is less an attempt to overtly control their partner than it is a symptom of their attachment system being overly sensitive to even the slightest sign they might be left. From their perspective, they're not trying to control their partner; they're just grasping for a relationship they're afraid is slipping out of their hands.

Hyperfocus on the other can lead to a disconnection or loss of self through over-functioning and over-adapting in the relationship in an attempt to maintain and preserve the connection. Frequently consumed by fears of abandonment, people functioning out of a preoccupied style will easily give up their own needs or sense of self, yielding to the needs or identity of their partner in order to ensure proximity and relationship security. Due to their history of unpredictable and inconsistent love, they can have considerable challenges with trusting that their partners truly love them. They may frequently fall into self-critical and self-doubting loops, questioning if they are truly worthy enough to receive their partner's love. They often have a hard time fully taking in the love they so desperately want, even when it is given. People functioning from this style tend to jump into relationships or bond very quickly with people. Often idealizing their partners, they may confuse anxiety and intensity for being in love, hearing and seeing only what they want to see and missing potential red flags. They may not allow enough time to get to know someone beyond the honeymoon phase in order to assess if this person, and the relationship, are truly a good fit.

A person with a preoccupied style can be uncomfortable, even terrified, of being alone. They often promote

their own dependency on their partners (or they might promote their partners' dependency on them) in a way that discourages doing things separately from each other. Engaging in compulsive caretaking can also become a way to prevent the discomfort of feeling lonely and enhance the perceived security of not being abandoned. Even though people with this style tend to sacrifice themselves for the relationship, the ways in which they are preoccupied and compulsively give care are not necessarily attuned. In such cases, the caregiving is more of a strategy to keep a person close than an actual response to what their partner genuinely needs. If someone with this attachment style perceives even the slightest possibility that their partner is disconnected or disinterested, they can become demanding, possessive or needy for approval, reassurance, connection, contact, and greater emotional or sexual intensity.

From their partner's perspective, the needs of the person with the preoccupied attachment style may seem insatiable. The partner may feel they can never do enough, which can in turn create the very pulling away or even breaking up that the person with the preoccupied style is so desperate to avoid. Compared to people with a more secure attachment style, people with the preoccupied style report increased jealousy and relationship conflict,²⁴ as well as feelings of ambivalence about their sex life, since they are less likely to use consistent contraception and more likely to engage in sex they don't fully want.²⁵

Similar to people with a dismissive attachment adaptation, people with the preoccupied adaptation also have difficulty identifying and describing their own emotions. Initially, this may seem counterintuitive since the preoccupied person is much more emotionally focused,

self-disclosing and heightened in both their emotional experience and expression in comparison to someone with a dismissive style, who typically has less access to their feelings. But it makes sense if you look a little closer. Someone with a preoccupied style has more awareness of both their feelings and their partner's feelings, but they still struggle with differentiating and communicating their feelings and with managing their emotional responses in healthy ways. Also, although they're aware of their partner's feelings, they're not necessarily reading those feelings accurately. People with this attachment style might be very precise in detecting even the slightest change in their partner's mood or state, but they're more likely to assume that the shifts are personal to them and that they are negative, when neither may be true.

Part Three covers ways to heal the different attachment styles, and provides a more in-depth look at self-soothing. It also explains a model called HEARTS, which describes secure functioning in ways that can be applied to healing your own attachment challenges. For now, I'll just say that someone with a preoccupied style must first come back to themselves. I will often guide clients to tune into where their sense of self is. Is it within their own body or out there in someone else's body? If it is with someone else, we can then focus on calling themselves back to establish a sense of inner authority and self-trust.

Statements that someone with a preoccupied attachment style might make:

- I am comfortable with connection and usually crave it more than my partners do.
- I am very attuned to others and can detect subtle shifts in their emotional or mental states.

- I often worry about being abandoned, rejected or not valued enough.
- I tend to overfocus on my partners and underfocus on myself.
- When I am going through something, I tend to reach out and turn towards others to make sense of what I'm experiencing or to make myself feel better.
- I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved or desired by a partner; however, when my partners give me reassurance or show their desire for me, it either doesn't register for me or I have trouble receiving and believing it.
- I tend to commit to relationships and get attached very quickly.
- I get frustrated or hurt if a partner is not available when I need them.
- I get resentful or take it personally when a partner spends time away from me.
- I do well with the transition from being alone to being together with partners, but I struggle when going from being together to being alone again.
- I tend to hold on to resentments and have trouble letting go of old wounds.

The Disorganized/Fearful-Avoidant Attachment Style

Disorganized Attachment in Childhood

The final insecure style was not initially classified in Mary Ainsworth's original studies, but was named later by Main and Solomon.²⁶ Ainsworth observed that a percentage of the children in her Strange Situation Procedure did not

neatly fit into one of the three categories of secure, anxious and avoidant. Some children displayed confusing, even chaotic, behaviors such as running towards their parent then immediately away from them, freezing up, hitting their parent for no apparent reason, rolling or throwing themselves on the floor, and more. Main and Solomon later reassessed these findings, and furthered our understanding of the attachment styles by adding the fourth classification of disorganized.

Children with a disorganized attachment style have an attachment system that seems to be hyperactivated and deactivated at the same time. They don't display a consistent organized attachment strategy in the same way that children with a secure, anxious or avoidant style do. Instead, they seemed to lack a coherent organization of which strategy to employ, often vacillating between the anxious and avoidant insecure attachment styles.

The disorganized attachment style is most commonly associated with trauma and it typically arises when a child experiences their attachment figure as scary, threatening or dangerous. When we are afraid, our attachment system gets activated to seek proximity to and comfort from our attachment figure, but what happens when our attachment figure is the person causing the threat? This puts the child in a paradoxical situation where their caretaker, who is supposed to be the source of their comfort and the solution to their fears, is actually the source of their fear instead. Diane Poole Heller refers to this conflicting experience as having *one foot on the gas and one foot on the brake*. The child's attachment system wants to move towards their attachment figure, while the protective defensive mechanism of flight/fright/freeze/appease

wants to move away from the attachment figure, and the two systems are coactivated.

The predominant factor leading to this style in childhood is having parents who are suffering from their own unresolved trauma or losses. When a parent has a history of unresolved trauma, they are more easily overwhelmed by life's demands and emotionally flooded by their child's emotional states. Unable to regulate their own emotions, parents with their own history of unhealed trauma, neglect or abuse might then act out, lash out or completely tune out in ways that are scary to the child. Whether that parent is being terrifyingly overresponsive or frighteningly underresponsive, the child learns that they're not safe with the very person who's supposed to protect them. Research has shown that approximately 20 to 40 percent of the general population has some degree of a disorganized attachment style, and approximately 80 percent of children who have experienced abuse develop a disorganized attachment style to one or both of their parents.

Additional factors that can lead to a disorganized attachment style include:²⁷

- **Parents who are on an emotional roller-coaster.** Parents who have drastic, unpredictable fluctuations in their moods, actions or mental states can be extremely confusing for the child, leaving them uncertain whether to approach or withdraw. One of my clients described how her stepmother's emotionally erratic behavior was still lingering in her own nervous system decades later. At family holidays, her stepmother would dote on her one minute, showering her with gifts and praise, and then minutes later would erupt in a yelling fury, shaming her for not

paying enough attention to her younger stepbrother. This client recalled how she wasn't the only one who fell into a freeze response when her stepmother had these outbursts; all of the adults in the house did—including her father. They would freeze up, unsure about how to handle the situation. This left her additionally abandoned by the other adults around her, who could have stepped in to mitigate the situation in some way that was responsive and protective for her at a crucial time.

- **Parents who are contradictory in their communication.** Indirect signals or direct expressions that tell the child to come close but then go away, that they are loved but then unworthy of love, or that they should succeed but are a failure can all be perplexing to a child. Similarly, unrealistic expectations, catch-22s, being punished or shamed for not doing something that they were never shown how to do, being asked to solve problems that are unsolvable, or being expected to do tasks beyond their developmental capability can all lead to a level of disorientation where the child is left frozen and unclear whether to move up or down, right or left. They are damned if they do, damned if they don't.
- **Family chaos.** Factors such as illness, financial stress, job insecurity, parents who are imprisoned or handling addictions, and even a culture of overachieving in which every minute of a child's life is scheduled with extracurricular activities can all create a home of chaos. It is difficult to feel safe and secure when the home that we live in and the people we rely on are unstable, unpredictable or even erratic. Well-intentioned parents who push

wants to move away from the attachment figure, and the two systems are coactivated.

The predominant factor leading to this style in childhood is having parents who are suffering from their own unresolved trauma or losses. When a parent has a history of unresolved trauma, they are more easily overwhelmed by life's demands and emotionally flooded by their child's emotional states. Unable to regulate their own emotions, parents with their own history of unhealed trauma, neglect or abuse might then act out, lash out or completely tune out in ways that are scary to the child. Whether that parent is being terrifyingly overresponsive or frighteningly underresponsive, the child learns that they're not safe with the very person who's supposed to protect them. Research has shown that approximately 20 to 40 percent of the general population has some degree of a disorganized attachment style, and approximately 80 percent of children who have experienced abuse develop a disorganized attachment style to one or both of their parents.

Additional factors that can lead to a disorganized attachment style include:²⁷

- Parents who are on an emotional roller-coaster. Parents who have drastic, unpredictable fluctuations in their moods, actions or mental states can be extremely confusing for the child, leaving them uncertain whether to approach or withdraw. One of my clients described how her stepmother's emotionally erratic behavior was still lingering in her own nervous system decades later. At family holidays, her stepmother would dote on her one minute, showering her with gifts and praise, and then minutes later would erupt in a yelling fury, shaming her for not

paying enough attention to her younger stepbrother. This client recalled how she wasn't the only one who fell into a freeze response when her stepmother had these outbursts; all of the adults in the house did—including her father. They would freeze up, unsure about how to handle the situation. This left her additionally abandoned by the other adults around her, who could have stepped in to mitigate the situation in some way that was responsive and protective for her at a crucial time.

- Parents who are contradictory in their communication. Indirect signals or direct expressions that tell the child to come close but then go away, that they are loved but then unworthy of love, or that they should succeed but are a failure can all be perplexing to a child. Similarly, unrealistic expectations, catch-22s, being punished or shamed for not doing something that they were never shown how to do, being asked to solve problems that are unsolvable, or being expected to do tasks beyond their developmental capability can all lead to a level of disorientation where the child is left frozen and unclear whether to move up or down, right or left. They are damned if they do, damned if they don't.
- Family chaos. Factors such as illness, financial stress, job insecurity, parents who are imprisoned or handling addictions, and even a culture of overachieving in which every minute of a child's life is scheduled with extracurricular activities can all create a home of chaos. It is difficult to feel safe and secure when the home that we live in and the people we rely on are unstable, unpredictable or even erratic. Well-intentioned parents who push

their child into more and more enriching activities can cause children to feel destabilized from the lack of rest, downtime and free play time that is needed to feel settled and soothed in the nervous system. In such cases, attachment figures may not be engaging in direct mistreatment of their child, but the surrounding environment or some of the parents' behaviors can create fear and chaos for the child, disrupting their ability to feel safe and secure.

- The child may be a Highly Sensitive Person (HSP) or have a challenging health condition. While disorganized attachment is often associated with parental abuse and neglect, this isn't always the case. Certain traits or experiences specific to the child can also prompt a disorganized experience. Approximately 15 to 20 percent of the population has a nervous system wired to be more sensitive. These people are more attuned to the subtleties of their environment and process that information much more deeply compared to others without this trait.²⁸ While being more observant might be a survival advantage, it can also be overwhelming. Someone who is constantly aware of the subtleties of the environment and of the people around them can quickly experience sensory overload. My clients who consider themselves to be HSPs often report experiencing a certain type of disorganized attachment because the world itself is too much. Due to their increased sensitivity, even normal everyday events can feel too intense, too chaotic or too stimulating, leaving little respite to feel settled, safe and secure. In relationships, HSPs are often unclear as to whether what they are feeling has its origin in themselves or if their partner's feelings

are creating that "one foot on the gas, one foot on the brake" experience in their nervous system. They want to be close to people, but being close can be a sensory assault that is confusing or that dysregulates them for days.

Similarly, I see people with certain illnesses who also suffer with a disorganized attachment, not because of their parental experiences, but because of the world and the body they find themselves in. Imagine what it's like to eat a certain food that may be innocuous for most people, but can spiral you into debilitating physical and mental symptoms for days. Or imagine what it would be like to be invited to a friend's house for their birthday, which should be celebratory, but is actually terrifying to you because you don't know if you are going to be exposed to mold that can set off neurological symptoms that will interfere with your ability to think, walk or talk. Or imagine what it would be like for someone with chemical sensitivities who can't just jump into a taxi, stay in a hotel or even at times walk into a grocery store without experiencing an olfactory punch that can leave them less than functional for days. In such cases, the world itself isn't safe and our bodies are not safe in the world. When autoimmunity is at play, someone will experience a paradoxical situation where the immune system that is supposed to be protecting them is actually harming them and the body that is the vehicle for life is the very thing taking it away.

Fearful-Avoidant Attachment as an Adult

In adulthood, the disorganized attachment style is referred to as fearful-avoidant. People with this style of attachment experience a clashing fear of either being too close or too far away from their partners. People with this insecure attachment style have the characteristics of both the dismissive and preoccupied styles—their desire for closeness and their longing for connection are active, but because they have previous experiences of the ones they loved or depended on hurting them, they tend to feel uncomfortable relying on others or are even paralyzed by the fear that speaking their feelings and needs could be dangerous and make things worse. They might request attention from a partner but then withdraw when connection is offered or, in more extreme manifestations, they might demand attention or affection and then attack or criticize their partner when what they want is given. People with this style are easily overwhelmed by their feelings or subject to what I call *emotional flare-ups*, where their intense emotional states can take over, disrupting their ability to function and, at times, taking others down with them.

Due to their history of trauma, their sense of self and others have been impaired. When trauma occurs, there is a rupture with the foundational relationship a person has with their self. This severed internal relationship with the self needs to be restored so that the person can go on to trust and value themselves, as well as begin to trust others again. When this type of healing has yet to occur, people functioning from the fearful-avoidant attachment style will tend to see themselves as broken and unworthy and will expect that others are untrustworthy or will only

hurt them in the end. In more extreme cases, this attachment style is associated with high relationship turmoil, dissatisfaction and toxicity, self-destructive behaviors, relationship abuse, mental illness and addictions.

Diane Poole Heller makes two important distinctions in regard to this attachment style. The first is that the expression of this style can either look more dismissive and withdrawing or more anxious, clingy and pursuing. Heller refers to these two variations as either being more *disorganized avoidant* or *disorganized anxious*. In my own practice, I make a distinction between the *internal fearful-avoidant* and the *external fearful-avoidant*. In the category of internal fearful-avoidant, we find people who, when under stress or threat, are triggered into higher anxiety and have the internal disorganized experience of wanting connection and wanting to move closer to someone, yet simultaneously feeling an inner pull back, believing the connection to be unsafe. However, such people do not act this dynamic out in ways that are destructive to themselves or others. The experience is more internally disruptive than externally damaging.

Other people express the experience of having one foot on the gas and the other on the brake in a relationship in a much more external and reactive way. These people react externally in ways that are confusing, contradictory or harmful. The distinction between internal and external fearful-avoidant might be a difference in degree or severity within this attachment style, or it might also be two different stages in healing. A person with a fearful-avoidant attachment style who has been engaging in healing work that is moving them towards more secure functioning may initially develop less external reactivity while still experiencing an inner “push/pull” dynamic. The process

of resolving their trauma may have enabled them to now choose differently with how they externally respond.

The second important distinction that Heller makes is that we can have a *chronically* disorganized style that functions as a primary attachment style, or more of a *situational* disorganized style. In the situational kind, someone might be more consistently secure, dismissive or preoccupied in their attachment style, but in certain situations or under the influence of certain triggers, they get activated into a temporary disorganized state. Once the stressor or situation resolves, they then return to their other, more dominant style.

Since people with the fearful-avoidant style experience both attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance, see which of the above statements for the dismissive and preoccupied styles also describe your experience. Some statements that someone with a fearful-avoidant style might make are:

- I often don't feel safe or fully trusting in relationships, even if my partner acts in safe and trustworthy ways.
- I frequently get triggered by things that may seem to come out of nowhere.
- I genuinely want intimacy and closeness but I can experience episodes of fearful overwhelm when intimacy with a partner increases.
- When in conflict, I can vacillate from being overwhelmed or aggressive to being dismissive and numb.
- I can vacillate between different types of chaos or rigidity.
- When in distress I have acted in ways that have been harmful to myself or my partners.

- I often expect that the worst will happen in a relationship, even when things are going well.
- I have elaborate negative fantasies about what will go wrong or how my partner will inevitably hurt me beyond repair, even if things are mostly going well.
- Being in a relationship can cause me to become dysregulated, dissociative or confused.
- There are times when I look fine on the outside, but I am actually a complete tsunami on the inside.
- I frequently experience the conflicting internal drives of wanting to be close and share myself but fearing that closeness or vulnerability will be dangerous or cause the relationship to end.

Parental Interactions	Childhood Attachment Style	Adult Attachment Style
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protective • Emotionally available • Responsive • Attuned 	Secure	Secure 50–60%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unavailable • Unresponsive • Imperceptive or mis-attuned • Rejecting 	Insecure: Avoidant	Dismissive 20–30%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inconsistently responsive, available or attuned • Intrusive • Acting out of their needs for attention or affection over the child's needs 	Insecure: Anxious	Preoccupied 15–20%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frightening • Threatening • Frightened • Disorienting • Alarming 	Insecure: Disorganized	Fearful-Avoidant 20–40%

TABLE 1.1: The types of parental interactions that are related to the different attachment styles in childhood, and how the names of the insecure styles change in adulthood. The percentages of each style are also noted. These percentages do not neatly add up to 100 percent since they are more of a general range, with each study finding slightly different percentages for each style (since people with a fearful-avoidant style might initially test as being one of the other insecure styles). Gender differences have not been found between the different styles.

An important takeaway from this overview of attachment theory is the importance of securely attaching to others who will care for us. This is our first survival strategy because without the loving and attentive presence from others we would die. Accordingly, emotional attunement and connection are wired into us as basic human needs that persist through life. Depending on the environment and circumstance that we were born into and how well our parents were able to meet our attachment needs (some conditions our parents had control of and others they did not) we will either develop a secure attachment style, where we feel safe to be with our caretakers and explore the world beyond them, or we will develop an insecure attachment style. Insecure attachment can take the form of overly pulling into ourselves to avoid and withdraw, overly turning outward to others to grasp and procure, or vacillating between the two. These insecure attachment styles are secondary survival strategies that make sense based on what we went through as a child and will continue to impact how we attach and bond in our adult romantic relationships. Here I invite you to reflect on your own personal attachment history, what style or styles you experienced with your different attachment figures and how this relates to the attachment behaviors you have exhibited in your adult romantic relationships.