

FIGURE 1
Two-Dimensional, Four-Category Model of Adult Attachment (Bartholomew, Henderson & Dutton, 2001), reprinted here with permission.

Attachment Theory and the Couple Relationship

Attachment theory helps us to understand the couple relationship in terms of the attachment styles each partner uses and the interaction between different styles. One very useful model is provided by Bartholomew, Henderson & Dutton (2001). Using Bowlby's analysis of internal working models, they have generated four prototypic attachment patterns in adulthood, underpinned by the two dimensions of 'model of self' and 'model of other' (Fig. 1):

- *Secure attachment* leads to a positive view of self and other. Secure individuals can establish close relationships and use others as support when needed
- *Preoccupied attachment* leads to a positive model of others, but negative model of self, eliciting a demanding and dependent style
- *Fearful attachment* is where others are viewed as uncaring and the self as unlovable. Intimacy is avoided because rejection is expected
- *Dismissing attachment* leads individuals to distance themselves from others to maintain a positive view of self. Compulsive self-reliance and self-control offer protection from rejection

Although these have been described as pure prototypes, most people would have a predominant pattern, but would use multiple strategies.

In healthy couple relationships, each partner is able to move reciprocally between the depended-upon and dependent positions. With insecure attachment styles, individuals are often fixed in one position, unable to ask for support or provide it in a mutually enhancing manner. One of the questions we want to raise has to do with individuals who fall into the preoccupied, fearful, or dismissing categories, and whose attachment strategies are highly entrenched. Can we help them by only attending to the couple relationship in the present, or do we also need to explore past relationships as a way of understanding how the insecurities in the present are fuelled by past anger and anxiety?

As we have argued elsewhere (Grant & Crawley, 2002), each of us has our own unique repertoire of relationship experiences, beginning with our very earliest experiences with our mother and other caregivers. Some of these experiences were what we needed at the time to facilitate our development, while others were disappointing or lacking, or perhaps too overwhelming in terms of the level of excitement or frustration involved. From this repertoire of early life experiences, each of us develops our own unconscious 'agenda for

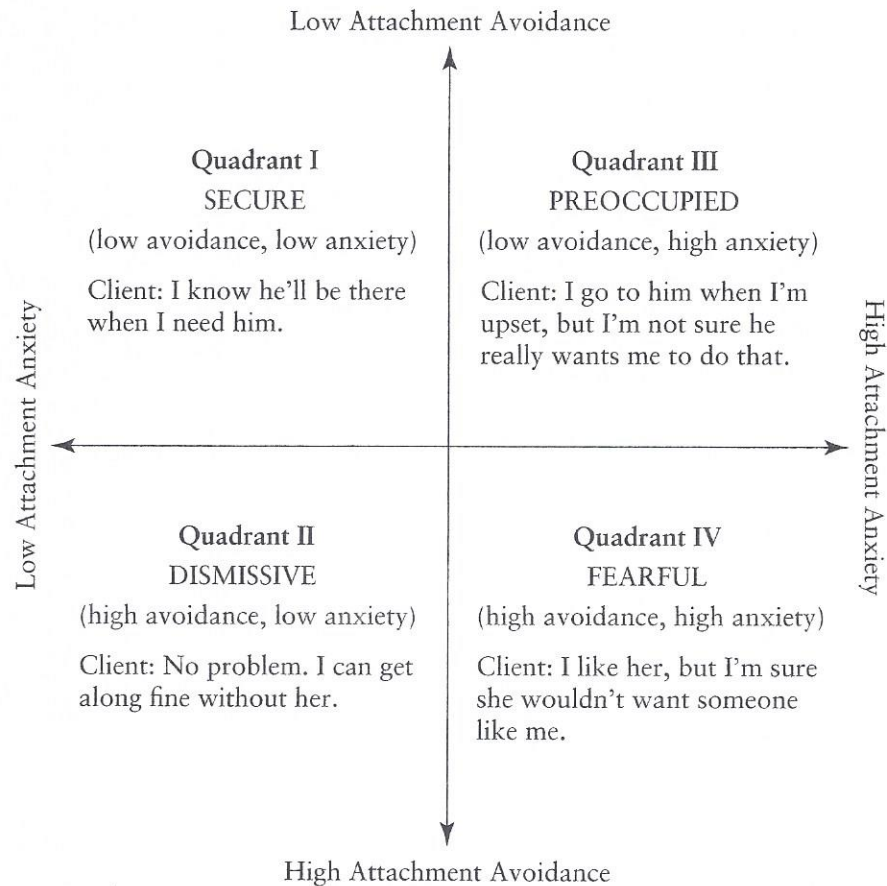


FIGURE 6.1 | ATTACHMENT STYLES IN ADULTHOOD

flexible and capable of dealing with stress. Thus, when Secure adult clients come to therapy, they are less conflicted about having a problem and seeking help, are more able to work collaboratively with the therapist and readily establish a working alliance, enter into their exploration of their conflicts with feeling and depth, and are more capable than the other three subtypes to risk exploring ruptures and negative reactions toward the therapist (Rubino et al., 2000). Thus, in Figure 6.1, the Secure client in Quadrant I is low on avoidance and low on anxiety. That is, when distressed, these clients do not avoid relationships or their emotional needs. Rather they appropriately seek out help or understanding from significant others in healthy, adult ways, and they do this without anxiety or excessive worry about being controlled, abandoned, or other threats that the other subtypes will exhibit. When working with Secure clients, you will hear prototypic sentences like these that capture their felt sense of trust, safety, and security:

- I know that he will be there when I need him.
- I know that she won't hurt my feelings when I get close to her.