

How avoidant Attachment Contributes to Pursuer Distancer Dynamics Across Relationships

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Abstract

Interpersonal relationships are a significant contributor to our development of psychological functioning and mental health throughout life. A large body of research has demonstrated that the quality of interactional experiences plays a role in the regulation of affect, coping strategies, and overall psychological adjustment. While supportive interactions are considered a protective factor for psychological health, the presence of maladaptive styles of relating contribute to unhappiness and dissatisfaction, and later psychological problems. This article will draw predominantly on attachment theory to explore the role of early caregiver, infant interactions in the creation of internal working models that underlie adult interactional styles, with a focus on avoidant attachment behaviors. Dissociative intrapersonal and interpersonal strategies, avoidant attachment models, are marked by emotional detachment, lack of trust, and reliance on deactivating behaviors to avoid intimacy, a common precursor to dysfunctional interaction patterns like the pursuer, distancer interaction. This interaction pattern, common to romantic, work, family, and friend relationships, entails one partner pursue emotional connection and intimacy, while the other partner distances himself or herself to attain independence and autonomy. Here, the concepts of mind reading, antipathy, mutual escalation, and chronic relationship distress will be examined through a biopsychosocial lens. This review provides data on the interactional mechanisms underlying maladaptive patterns, and anchors in theory, thus benefiting therapeutic pre, empting of unhealthy interactional patterns.

