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## Attachment style and self-esteem: The mediating role of Type D personality

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### ABSTRACT

Previous research indicates that attachment style, Type D personality and self-esteem may be interrelated. The present study hypothesizes that Type D personality mediates the relationship between attachment and self-esteem. Participants ( $n = 555$ ) filled in questionnaires on Type D personality (DS14), self-esteem (Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale) and attachment (Relationship Questionnaire; RQ). Direct effects and the mediation model were evaluated through multiple logistic regression analyses and Sobel tests. Attachment style and Type D personality were both significantly related to self-esteem. Moreover, attachment style was significantly associated with Type D personality. Sobel tests confirmed that Type D personality partly mediates the relationship between attachment style and self-esteem. This is the first study to date exploring possible mediators affecting the well established link between attachment style and self-esteem.

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### 1. Introduction

Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1973, 1980) has become an important framework for explaining individual differences in adult personality and social interaction (Collins & Read, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). It has been proposed that attachment experiences are important for the shaping of a person's self-image and the internal image of others (Ainsworth, 1989; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Bowlby, 1973; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). The attachment model of Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) couples attachment styles to models of self and others. Securely attached individuals have a positive model of both self and others, fearfully attached individuals have a negative image of both self and others, whereas preoccupied individuals have a positive image of others and a negative image of self. Finally, dismissive individuals have a positive image of self and a negative image of others. Secure and dismissive individuals therefore share a positive image of self, whereas fearfully and preoccupied individuals have a negative image of self in common.

Not surprisingly then, there is a well established relationship between attachment style and self-esteem. Secure and dismissive attachment is consistently related to high self-esteem (Arbona & Power, 2003; Armitage & Harris, 2006; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Brennan & Bosson, 1998; Brennan & Morris, 1997; Bringle & Bagby, 1992; Bylsma, Cozzarelli, & Sumer, 1997; Collins & Read, 1990; Emmanuelle, 2009; Feeney & Noller, 1990; Gomez & McLa-

ren, 2007; Laible, Carlo, & Roesch, 2004; McCormick & Kennedy, 1994; Mikulincer, 1995, 1998; O'Koon, 1997; Ooi, Ang, Fung, Wong, & Cai, 2006; Paterson, Pryor, & Field, 1995; Wearden, Peters, Berry, Barrowdough, & Liversidge, 2008; Wilkinson, 2004) whereas attachment anxiety and avoidance are associated with low self-esteem (Foster, Kernis, & Goldman, 2007; Srivastava & Beer, 2005; Wu, 2009).

Furthermore, of present interest is the possible role of attachment in the development of Type D personality, described as a proneness to both negative affectivity (NA) and social inhibition (SI). The NA component reflects a tendency to experience negative emotions, regardless of situation, whereas the SI component reflects the hesitance to self express and an insecure interaction with others (Denollet, 2005). Type D personality is partly attributable to genetic factors, with a heritability of 52%, where individual differences are determined by additive genes, non additive genes and nonshared environment (Kupper, Denollet, de Geus, Boomsma, & Willemsen, 2007). Concerning the role of the non-shared environment, previous research indicates that attachment experiences may be an influential factor in the development of Type D personality (Van Den Broek, Smolderen, Pedersen, & Denollet, 2010) and negative affectivity (Aron, Aron, & Davies, 2005; Feeney & Ryan, 1994; Wearden, Cook, & Vaughan-Jones, 2003).

Moreover, Type D personality has also been associated with lower self-esteem (Denollet, 1998). This is also evident in findings that Type D personality is associated with an inferior body image (Borkoles, Polman, & Levy, 2010) and a diminished sense of personal accomplishment (Oginska-Bulik, 2006). Furthermore, negative affectivity has been linked to a negative view of self (Watson & Pennebaker, 1989). In sum, previous research has revealed that both attachment style and Type D personality are related to self-

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esteem and moreover, that additional clarification on the origins of Type D personality may be found in attachment theory. The present study evaluates the main hypothesis that Type D personality mediates the association between attachment styles and self-esteem. In order to test this hypothesis, several underlying expectations have to be met and consequently, three subsidiary hypotheses were formulated:

1. Secure and dismissive attachment ratings are positively related to self-esteem, whereas fearful and preoccupied attachment ratings are negatively associated with self-esteem.
2. Secure attachment is negatively and insecure attachment (e.g. fearful, preoccupied, and dismissive) is positively related to the odds of Type D personality classification.
3. Individuals with a Type D personality have significantly lower self-esteem scores than non Type D's.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants

The sample included 555 Dutch participants (275 men, 280 women), between the ages of 16 and 64 ( $M_{\text{age}} = 40.7$ ,  $SD = 12.1$ ) who responded to an announcement on the website of a Dutch radio station to participate in an online survey on emotion, music and well-being (see Table 1). Participation was voluntary and anonymous.

### 2.2. Measures

#### 2.2.1. Attachment style

Attachment style was assessed with the Relationship Questionnaire (RQ; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). The RQ consists of four short descriptions of the four attachment styles that are rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all like me*) to 7 (*very much like me*). The scale also includes a forced choice question. Furthermore, the questionnaire has sufficient psychometric properties.

#### 2.2.2. Type D personality

The DS14 (Denollet, 2005) was used to assess Type D personality. It consists of 14 items, of which 7 measure negative affectivity (NA) and 7 social inhibition (SI). Response alternatives range from

**Table 1**  
Demographic indices.

	Total		Men		Women	
	<i>n</i>	(%)	<i>n</i>	(%)	<i>n</i>	(%)
Age years ( <i>SD</i> )	40.7	(12.1)	42.5	(11.4)	38.9	(12.5)**
<i>Education</i>						
Low	37	(6.6)	23	(8.4)	14	(5.0)
Middle	224	(40.4)	107	(38.9)	117	(41.8)
High	294	(53.0)	145	(52.7)	149	(53.2)
<i>Marital status</i>						
Single	192	(34.6)	92	(33.5)	100	(35.7)
Married	363	(65.4)	183	(66.5)	180	(64.3)
<i>Type D</i>						
No	349	(62.9)	169	(61.5)	180	(64.3)
Yes	206	(37.1)	106	(38.5)	100	(35.7)
<i>Attachment style*</i>						
Secure	274	(49.4)	131	(47.6)	143	(51.1)
Fearful	119	(21.4)	55	(20.0)	64	(22.9)
Preoccupied	41	(7.4)	16	(5.8)	25	(8.9)
Dismissive	121	(21.8)	73	(26.5)	48	(17.1)
Self-esteem <i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	20.9	(5.32)	21.6	(5.09)	20.3	(5.46)**

\*  $\rho < 0.05$ .

\*\*  $\rho < 0.01$ .

0 (*false*) to 4 (*true*), resulting in a total score, range between 0 and 28, for either scale. Participants were classified as Type D only if they scored 10 or higher on both scales. The scale has adequate psychometric properties, with sufficient stability (Martens, Kupper, Pedersen, Aquarius, & Denollet, 2007), internal consistency and factorial validity (Denollet, 2005; Emons, Meijer, & Denollet, 2007). Internal consistency in this sample was also sufficient (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.89$  and  $0.86$  for the SI and NA scale, respectively).

### 2.2.3. Self-esteem

Self esteem was estimated using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965). The RSES consists of 10 items measuring positive and negative feelings towards the self, rated on a scale from 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 3 (*strongly agree*). Even though the RSES is originally designed as a Guttman scale, the Dutch version of the RSES is found to be a one-dimensional scale with high internal consistency and congruent validity (Franck, De Raedt, Barbez, & Rosseel, 2008). In the present sample, an exploratory factor analysis also resulted in a one factor structure, with adequate internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.89$ ). Therefore, the ratings on the 10 items were summed after the recoding of the negatively worded items, resulting in a total global self esteem score ranging from 0 to 30, with higher scores indicating higher self-esteem.

### 2.3. Procedure

The survey was divided into three sections, each taking between 10 and 15 min to complete. Participants were asked whether they wanted to terminate or continue the survey after each section. Only participants who fully completed the first two sections of the survey were included in the sample. The online survey included a few simple open questions that were used to filter out participants that did not answer seriously. Also, information on IP address was used to filter out individuals that participated more than once.

### 2.4. Statistical analysis

Linear and logistic regression analyses were conducted, with sex and age entered in the first step in all analyses, to assess direct associations between the four continuous attachment style ratings, Type D personality (yes/no) and the continuous self-esteem ratings. Complete mediation is considered when the relationship between attachment style and self-esteem is no longer significant when controlled for Type D personality in a regression analysis. Partial mediation is considered when the relationship between attachment style and self-esteem is weakened by including Type D personality in the model, but both attachment style and Type D personality are still associated with self-esteem (Baron & Kenny, 1986). In addition, Sobel tests were conducted (Preacher & Hayes, 2004) to directly test the effect sizes and significance of the mediation effect for each of the attachment styles.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Demographic indices

Sex differences were found for age, self-esteem and attachment style. To further explore these sex differences in attachment style, the continuous ratings were compared. The male participants scored significantly lower on fearful attachment style ( $M_{\text{men}} = 3.09$  vs.  $M_{\text{women}} = 3.38$ ,  $F(1, 553) = 4.036$ ,  $\rho < 0.05$ ) than women. Pearson's correlation coefficients are shown in Table 2.

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