

The Interplay of Attachment and Personality in Shaping Emotional Dependence and Autonomy: Implications for Contemporary Counseling Practice

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Abstract. Background: Attachment patterns and personality traits are becoming more widely acknowledged as being the determinants of the ways individuals cope with emotions, their relations with others, and how they will react to therapy. However such factors are frequently studied individually and it is, therefore, more difficult to determine how they co-exist in clinical practice. The review is dedicated to the interaction between the two systems and its importance in the problem of supporting emotional autonomy in adults. Approach: The literature published in 2020-25 was reviewed in the areas of counseling psychology, emotion science, and psychotherapy research. The comparison of the findings was done in terms of experimental work, clinical samples and qualitative reports. The overlap of attachment-based needs, personality-driven tendencies, and therapeutic processes was considered in a particular way. Findings: Insecure attachment, regardless of the studies, had been associated with heightened emotional responsiveness, dependence on others, or automatic emotional avoidance. Such patterns were more significant in combination with other personality characteristics particularly, high emotional sensitivity or low interpersonal flexibility. It was also revealed that instilling in clients the aspect of an attachment history alongside dispositional tendencies resulted in the greatest benefit outcomes. The experiential techniques aided clients to have access to deep emotions, cognitive techniques enabled them to achieve changes in beliefs that they had held for a long time and the relational work provided the stability that they required to revise their old relational expectations. Collectively, these results point to the possibility of enhancing emotional autonomy through an integrated approach and help to take on the functions of a healthier, more robust, and resilient functioning.

Keywords: Attachment theory, Personality trait, Consulting

1. Introduction

The examination of the attachment styles and personality traits is becoming a critical consideration in modern research in counseling studies and practice. Both systems of the possible reasons of developmental history, and stable tendencies of dispositions, developed together influence the way the adults establish relationships, emotionally regulate, and solve interpersonal problems. These

dimensions are thus very important to comprehend the mechanisms of emotional dependence and emotional autonomy formation, reaction to therapeutic intervention, and the reason why some emotional or relational patterns may be maintained through adulthood.

Attachment orientations also play a role in determining how people strive to get close, how they deal with vulnerability and how they interpret relational cues. Personality traits provide more broad behavioral pattern, feelings sensitivity and coping styles [1]. Taken collectively, these dimensions contribute to understanding the reason why certain people engage in chronic reassurance seeking, avoid emotional involvement, hyper-emotional responsiveness or ability to tolerate distress. The integration of the two points of view also explains how counseling produces emotional stability and relational development.

Since the research in the fields of psychology, counseling, and psychotherapy has grown exponentially in recent years, there is a high time to integrate evidence on the interplay between attachment and personality to affect the functioning of the emotion. The purpose of the current review is to synthesize the evidence that has been published in studies starting in 2020 and through 2025 that involve the study of the interplay between attachment patterns and personality characteristics and their influence on emotional regulation, engagement with therapy, and counseling outcomes. Using the neuroscience, clinical psychology, and psychotherapy as the background, the review aims at a better understanding of emotional autonomy in the adult counseling contexts, address the main clinical implications, and suggest the future directions of study.

2. Theoretical foundations

It is based on two broad theoretical traditions that provide a reflection on emotional functioning in adulthood in a comprehensive manner. These are the attachment theory and the Big Five personality model both developed by Bowlby. The two jointly describe how childhood experiences in relationships and long-term traits of being provide explanations to the lifetime pattern and interpersonal behavior patterns of emotion.

Attachment theory is a theory that was developed by John Bowlby, and it states that early interactions with caregivers create internal working models. These psychological frameworks influence the anticipation concerning the self-esteem and safety of emotions as well as the presence of others. Internal working models define the way people control emotions and seek support as well as participate in a relationship. There are many different attachment orientations that adults tend to exhibit, but among them are secure attachment, anxious-insecure attachment, and avoidant one. Safe attachment allows adaptable emotional management and contentedness about helplessness. Anxious attachment is more likely to be characterized by emotional hyperactivation, concern that one will be rejected and that he or she depends on external reassurance. Avoidant attachment is one that suppresses emotions, dislikes being close to others, and highly emphasizes on self-dependence. The theory of attachment thus examines how emotional needs and interpersonal coping mechanisms come to be.

The second model is the big five model of personality which distinguishes between five general personality dimensions namely; openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism. These characteristics are comparatively constant throughout adulthood and influence the way people react to stress, to outlet their emotions as well as deal with others. Emotional volatility and sensitivity to perceived threat is linked to high neuroticism. Agreeableness is high which helps in empathy, warmth and cooperation. Attachment tendencies are also mediated by personality traits which either enhance or moderate the effects. As an example, a neurotic anxious

person will have a high emotional reactivity and an avoidant person with high conscientiousness will be seen to have been controlled but unaffected by emotion.

By combining attachment theory and personality psychology, one can have a more comprehensive vision of emotional functioning than can be attained by using either theory. Attachment describes use of attachment to understand why people have some kind of emotional predispositions and personality describes how these predispositions are manifested in different situations. They both shed light on that which, in turn, leads to emotional dependence, withdrawal and autonomy, and the varying reactions of clients to therapies. This composite theoretical foundation will be used in subsequent parts of the review, where it will be established how these interacting dimensions affect the counseling processes and results.

2.1. Attachment theory

Attachment theory holds that early relationship experiences shape the way people view themselves, others, and communicate emotionally. These patterns can run through a person's entire life. Adult attachment is usually described as secure, anxious or avoidant. Secure attachment supports flexible emotional regulation and consistent expectations of relationships. Anxious attachment is characterized by intense emotional responses and a reliance on comfort from others. Avoidant attachment is characterized by suppressed emotions and discomfort with intimate relationships. Recent studies have shown that these attachment orientations are closely related to emotional regulation and therapeutic responses [2]. Attachment needs influence how clients establish therapeutic relationships and also how people benefit from corrective emotional experiences. Acquired secure attachment has become an important part of adult psychotherapy [3]. It reflects a shift from an insecure pattern to a more stable and trusting one.

2.2. Personality traits

A personality psychology also provides another perspective on the nature of emotional propensities. Studies on normal-range factors and maladaptive areas of personality demonstrate that neuroticism, antagonism, and emotional instability are some of the traits that forecast the manner in which people perceive stressors, that is, how they react to jealousy and sustain relational security [4]. Pathological personality features of negative affectivity and disinhibition are significantly interconnected with insecure attachment in clinical samples and may indicate that early breakdowns of attachment and dispositional vulnerability often contribute mutually to one another [5]. In addition, personality cannot be considered separate of the regulation of emotion, but rather that it interacts with attachment history to form interpersonal sensitivity, self-protection strategies, and therapist involvement.

2.3. Emotion-focused therapy

In the analyzed literature, emotion-focused therapy (EFT) stands out as one of the most important models of interventions. EFT presupposes that emotional processing plays a key role in psychological change and lays importance on experiential or experiential approaches, corrective emotional experiences and reformation of maladaptive emotional schemes [6]. Since insecure attachment is closely related to dysregulated emotional responses, EFT is often applied to assist clients who struggle with the problem of insecure attachment. Recent findings in both qualitative

and quantitative research indicate that EFT would enhance emotions, relational distress, and provide growth in difficult interpersonal environments [7].

3. Attachment and emotional dynamics of counseling

Recent studies indicate a growing body of research that attachment orientations are essential factors in the role of determining emotional dexterity, interpersonal conduct, and the degree of responsiveness of adults in therapeutic intercession. Insecure attachment is repeatedly identified across neuroscience, clinical psychology, and psychotherapy research as one of the most effective predictors of emotional dysregulation due in part to increased amygdala activity, decreased prefrontal regulatory abilities, and disordered connections within brain systems aimed at threat detection and affect regulation. As an example, their review identified a synthesis of data indicating that anxious and avoidant attachment is strongly identified with increased emotional reactivity, reassurance seeking, and being unable to regulate emotional instability independently without external support, and not temporary interpersonal responses, which explain their continuity in relationships and their ability to be modified through specific therapeutic efforts to alter [8]. However the major limitation in their research is that most of the studies they used were based on self-report measures of attachment which might lack the unconscious bit of the attachment mechanism.

On top of an overall affective regulation disposition, the attachment needs play a critical role in influencing client outcome with the psychotherapy. According to Jacobsen et al., clients who had a higher attachment need were the most likely beneficiaries of therapeutic relationship where clients experienced definite emotional safety and regular responsiveness [2]. As clients slowly came to know more of relational attainment as reliable, what were once insecure expectations might be re-intrusted, now in more secure modes of relating that eventually aided the gains of emotional autonomy. The findings that they made indicate that clinicians should detect the presence of attachment-based vulnerabilities through multimethod assessment techniques, such as clinician-rated interviews like the Adult Attachment Interview, behavioral-coded emotional reactions, and structured questionnaires, to plan interventions and make a precise assessment of the relational injuries incurred by clients.

Attachment is also an overlap with the residual impact of interpersonal trauma. Lee et al. studied young adults who were experiencing childhood interpersonal trauma and found that individuals with insecure attachment had worse social anxiety and more punitive and maladaptive patterns of emotion regulation [9]. Since trauma commonly strengthens the habit of emotional dependence or emotional distancing, the arguments suggested by the authors were that emotion-focused therapy (EFT) would best fit this particular population. The experiential nature of EFT allows the client to take a renewed experience in accessing the underlying emotional memories, unresolved relationship trauma, and provides the client with more adaptive coping mechanisms. Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that the sample that was used in the study by Lee et al. was mainly composed of university students, which reduces the extrapolability of the results to larger populations or clinical populations with more serious trauma histories.

The therapeutic change procedure of people with insecure attachment is also revealed by qualitative research. In a meta-analysis of clients receiving EFT, Marren et al. demystified that anxious and avoidant clients over an extended time tended to become increasingly relational vulnerability receptive with minimal emotional awareness, when therapy provided clear empathic presence [9]. Clients have reported being more capable of experiencing primary emotions of sadness, fear or tenderness compared to defaulting to secondary emotions of anger or withdrawal

and, therefore, being able to tackle interpersonal situations with clearer and more genuine intentions. These personal experiences are significant milestones towards increased emotional independence.

The experiences of the therapists also explain how the problem of attachment presents itself in therapy. Research by Stiegler et al., which interviewed clinicians providing EFT, mentions issues like the fear of abandonment in the clients, the absence of ability to engage in emotional communication, or reluctance to display distress [4]. Therapists highlighted that to work successfully with insecurely attached individuals, it is necessary to pace them, that is, gradually increase or decrease the emotional exposure, and perform for experiential work, the shorter but more focused exercises, provide regular validation, and demonstrate to them the regularity of the relational stability, so that they do not feel overwhelmed and can switch to a withdrawn position. Their testimonies emphasize the fact that psychotherapy should be a corrective emotional space, as the clients can internalize new relational experiences that were not similar to their previous attachment histories.

In addition to the clinical scenario, the patterns of maladaptive emotional responding in everyday life are also predicted by attachment orientations, such as, anxious people may become over-reactive in response to lateness in a text message, think that someone has rejected them in a relationship, or become jealous at minor conflicts, and avoidant adults may disengage on an argument, refuse related emotionally-charged discussions, or run away to solitary activities to reduce vulnerability. Richter et al. demonstrated that anxious attachment correlates with greater levels of jealousy and relational threats sensitivity, whereas avoidant attachment correlates with emotional distancing and suppression [5]. This result highlights the fact that emotional reliance and avoidance witnessed in the therapy settings are expressions of the extended relationship processes, which transpire in daily life.

Attachment also is the interaction of the personality traits; this renders emotional functioning intricate. According to Radetzki et al., insecure attachment is often comorbid with pathological personality areas including negative affectivity in psychiatric samples, which may indicate that attachment insecurity can enhance dispositional vulnerabilities [6]. In line with the same concept, Messina et al. indicated that various attachment orientations are associated with various interpersonal emotion-regulation strategies [10]. As an example, anxious people tend to find external appeasement, whereas avoidant ones tend to use self-protecting withdrawal. These converging results indicate that emotional dependence and distancing are patterns, which are jointly determined by relational histories and personality dispositions and that these patterns must be actively deconstructed during therapy by the use of emotion activation, corrective relational experience and the restructuring of attachment-related beliefs.

Against these background, it seems that EFT can be especially helpful in changing attachment related emotional patterns. According to Timulak and Keogh, the change in emotions exists when clients choose and re-form the fundamental emotional experiences in a protective, sensitive therapeutic relatedness [7]. This is consistent with clinical research findings that insecure individuals gain in instances where the therapy process focuses on embedding emotional availability, articulation, and remedial relational events. In line with that, Kiadarbandsari et al. discovered that EFT-based couple therapy made relational functioning of partners with insecure attachment significantly better by showing that by creating a secure emotional disposition, dependence on or withdrawal can be minimized and more normal relational work patterns may be established [8].

On the whole, the examined studies prove that emotional dependence, regulatory constructions as well as therapeutic change are profoundly influenced by attachment orientations. Hyperactivation, reassurance seeking, and distress intolerance behavior are characteristic of anxiously attached

individuals, whereas avoidantly attached adults are dependent on suppression, emotional distancing and greater self-protectiveness. Coupled with therapeutic interventions like EFT, clients can slowly become more emotionally autonomous, i.e. with the ability to self-soothe, tolerate ambiguities, have emotional boundaries and control their effectiveness without excessive dependency on others, change their maladaptive relational expectations, and become less resilient in interpersonal situations. These results reiterate further to argue that attachment is a core determinant of emotional functioning that should not be marginalized in studies and counseling practice.

4. Emotional autonomy and personality traits of counseling

Messina et al. also show the interaction of the effect of personality traits and attachment orientations to form the regulation of interpersonal emotions [10]. As they find out, anxiously attached individuals tend to depend on other people emotionally, whereas avoidantly attached individuals tend to approach distancing and suppression. Emotional regulation is further complicated when the personality traits that include low agreeableness or high neuroticism are introduced to these inclinations. An illustrative case would be a highly neurotic client with anxious attachment who will fluctuate in between reassurance seeking and emotional bombardment, and fail to reach the stable relational rhythm upon which therapeutic progress can be planned and executed. Despite the fact that the insights that Messina et al. provide are brilliant and beneficial. The qualitative method of the study does not allow studying more comprehensive causal routes among the characteristics and emotional consequences.

Overall, these studies demonstrate that emotional autonomy is created in response to constituent personality dispositions that play an interaction with attachment-based expectations. More deliberate pacing and more structured relational containment during therapy are typically beneficial to clients who are emotionally volatile or distrustful enough to be relational. Conversely, more open-minded or emotionally pliant clients might be in better condition to be involved in deeper experiential work. The awareness of the limitations of the current studies also adds to the necessity of counseling strategies that are based on the consideration of both dispositional, relational, and contextual factors. Taking into consideration the experience of the research of personalities and attachment, therapists may assist the clients more efficiently in building a stable sense of self-regulation, emotional demarcations, and a more dependable sense of internal autonomy.

5. Integrative discussion and therapeutic implication

The conducted review studies noted that the success of counseling is related to the combination of awareness of the specifics of attachment relationships with familiarity with the characteristics of personalities. The two systems in contrast work in collaboration to determine the way the clients perceive relationships, emotionally react, and engage in a therapy. Ambivalent attachment seems to be a fundamental reason of emotional regulation problems (it is reported many times) and personality features determine the magnitude of the experience and expression of the problems. Applying the two areas at the beginning of the therapy enables clinicians to create treatments that better reflect the emotional needs and developmental backgrounds of clients.

It is important to note that emotion regulation interventions are particularly critical when the neuroticism, avoidance or anxiousness tendencies of people increases emotional reactivity or withdrawal. Jacobsen et al. establish the positive change in clients with a high level of attachment needs that can be achieved through emotional safety, responsiveness, and attainment in therapy [2]. The combination of these findings with the results by Messina et al. of interpersonal regulation

styles implies that therapy should conform to the pattern of coping habits of clients [10]. Avoidant clients need to have slow, emotionally factual exposure to the inside world and anxious clients normally need grounded and scheduled containment in order to create emotional independence.

The rectifying role of the therapeutic relationship is central in that it provides reliable indicators of relationship that is used to replace previous experiences of insecurity. The reliability of the therapist is one of the main mechanisms of the reconstruction of the relational expectations in people who have personality characteristics that increase fear of rejection, mistrust or emotional volatility. Stable tuning and proper pacing will enable clients to internalize any new forms of relationships that can be used to maintain psychological security and emotional autonomy.

Coherent combine of experiential, cognitive, and relational modalities also contribute to improving the therapeutic gains. The experiential emotion-oriented therapy procedures assist patients in connecting with their primary emotions related to attachment injuries as presented by Marren et al. [9]. Cognitive strategies contribute to reorganizing beliefs which are determined by dispositional orientations like pessimism, rigidity, self-criticism. Relational interventions provide the clients with sufficient stability to maintain permanent change. Since personality factors drive the sensitivities to defensiveness, pacing, as well as engagement, the therapists should respond to such factors by adjusting approaches on a case to case basis to ensure the emotional safety and depth of the therapeutic process.

All in all, the cumulative evidence shows that counseling reinforced identity development and emotional autonomy because it assists the clients to resolve how personality traits intersect with their attachment histories. This combined awareness will contribute to more adaptive self-regulation, a more articulated relationship boundary, and resiliency with regards to interpersonal encounters. Counselors can help people change their emotions more profoundly and maintain a more long-lasting psychological well-being by paying equal attention to both dispositional and attachment-based factors.

6. Conclusion

This review highlights the major findings about the role of attachment orientations and personality traits in influencing the workings of the emotional functioning and counseling effectiveness. Throughout the studies reviewed, there are a couple of patterns that remain similar. Emotional control, relational insecurity, and vulnerability have a close relationship with attachment insecurity that may result in increased vulnerability during therapy. It is personality that determines how fierce, expressive and lasting such emotional challenges are. A combined conception of these dimensions is thus critical towards enhancing emotional independence in the counseling situations.

The facts indicate that treating the therapeutic process foster optimal interventions when the clinicians simultaneously focus on the attachment history and dispositional tendencies of the individuals. The primary aspects of the maladaptive emotional pattern change are secure therapeutic relationships, trustworthy emotional attainment, and interventions, which are personalized according to the regulatory styles of clients. The three methods, experiential, cognitive and relationships interventions are all effective change promoting approaches since they assist clients in accessing fundamental feelings, overturning habitual beliefs and constructing more secure patterns of relationships. These results emphasize the essence of developing the counseling intervention that incorporates the experiential, cognitive, and relational approaches and aligns them with the attachment-based and dispositional characteristics of an individual client.

The limitations in the current research are also found in the review. Most studies have based on self-report measures which may be not fully accurate in measuring implicit emotional processes.

Other articles take samples limiting demographic diversity or come to cross-sectional study designs, which limit the causality interpretation. Longitudinal and multi-method research designs should be employed in future studies to study the changing nature of attachment and personality over time, different situations, and to answer questions about how these aspects react to changes in a therapeutic process. Further studies that are based on a variety of cultural mindsets are also required, as cultural norms determine the expression of emotions, expectations of relationships, and help-seeking patterns.

In general, the synthetical evidence can prove that healthy emotional autonomy in counseling is most effective with an extensive focus on attachment and personality. Understanding the intersection of these dimensions, clinicians can assist their clients to get a better formed self-regulation, defining relations, and resilience in interpersonal situations. By treating dispositional inclinations and attachment related patterns simultaneously, counseling might result in a greater emotional transformation and longer lasting psychological health.

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