

Attachment in Personality: Contemporary Challenges

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Original Article

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Source: *Clinical Social Work and Health Intervention*
Pages: 28 – 37

Volume: 15
Cited references: 50

Issue: 6

Reviewers:

Gabriela Lezcano
University of California, San Francisco, USA
Daniel West
University of Scranton school of education, USA

Keywords:

Attachment. Trust. Family. Child Development. Digital Technology. Narcissism.

Publisher:

International Society of Applied Preventive Medicine i-gap

CSWHI 2024; 15(6): 28 – 37; DOI: 10.22359/cswhi_15_6_03 © Clinical Social Work and Health Intervention

Abstract:

The contemporary era presents a multitude of challenges that have a significant impact on the relational dimension of the human personality. This paper presents an analysis of selected aspects of relational dynamics, including interpersonal relationships, emotional intelligence, digital interactions, and their impact on an individual's mental health and social functioning. This study employs a multidisciplinary approach to examine the impact of modern technology, globalisation and the accelerated pace of life on traditional patterns of communication and social interaction, and the emergence of new forms of relationships. Emphasis is placed on the place of authenticity, empathy and the problem of creating deep emotional connections in an environment where digital communication and individualism prevail due to the fragmentation of society. The aim is to point to some of the causal contexts that

complicate relational bonding and to propose a framework of possible solutions that promote healthy relationships and personal integrity.

Introduction

The life of man is included in the smoothly progressing reciprocity of all that exists. The human inclination to form positive and close relationships with other individuals, whether in the context of cooperation, friendship, or romantic attachment, is referred to as “affiliation”. We observe differences between people in terms of the degree of importance attached to the establishment of relationships, their causes, and differences in terms of the intensity of motivation and skill manifested in the formation of relationships (1).

Human beings exist within a vast network of concrete relationships and are intrinsically connected to others. It can be argued that humans are not independent beings; rather, their interests are deeply connected to those of others throughout their lives, and their goals are shared with those around them (2). Similarly, Elias posits that the human being is not a mere closed entity comprising disparate compartments and organs. Rather, it is a complex system that shares intrinsic properties with other beings and things within its natural organisation. This organisation is shaped by nature as part of a larger world (3). He is by nature conditioned in such a way that he can and must get into relationships with other people and things. The structure of human relationships is of course highly variable and flexible; man is a social being dependent on the company of other people. According to G. H. Mead (2017), we cannot be ourselves unless we are at the same time members of a community of attitudes which influences the attitudes of all (4).

The notion of attachment reality is, by its very nature, an inherently subjective concept (5). The acquisition of self-consciousness as a human being establishes our status as members of society and defines our sense of self, which is contingent upon our interactions with other selves. It is not possible to delineate an immutable boundary between the self and the self of others, as the self exists and is experienced only insofar as the self of others exists and is experienced. The individual’s concept of the self is contingent upon the

collective self of the group to which they belong (6). The structure of the individual’s “I” reflects the general pattern of behaviour exhibited by the social group to which the individual belongs (7).

The atomisation of contemporary society affects not only the economic and social aspects of human life, but also the psychological ones, in that social bonds are disintegrating, and the coherence of their interrelations is gradually being lost (8). The consequences of such disintegration impact both the intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions of human existence, influencing the potential for external relational bonding (9). However, more significantly, they affect an individual’s internal disposition to create and cultivate relationships with which they consciously enter and of which they are “by definition” a part (10).

The Concept of “Attachment” in Relationships

Attachment within close relationships is a concept reflecting on the emotional bond between individuals, specifically between parent and child (11). Attachment to individuals with whom one has a close relationship carries with it the inherent risk of experiencing pain and distress because of the imperfections and shortcomings inherent in any human relationship. The emotional bond that forms the basis of close relationships is likely to evoke a range of feelings, including positive emotions such as joy, kinship and love, as well as negative emotions such as disappointment, fear, worry and anxiety (12). It is likely that we are most conscious of the attachment projected into a relationship when we experience a sense of loss or when the relationship fails for some reason. In the context of attachment and relationships, Buber’s concept of “I and you” is pertinent, emphasising the significance of profound and genuine connection with others (13). Love is an action that encompasses the entire world, whereas feelings are something that one possesses. Consequently, love occurs as an existentialist process of self-realisation within a specific context (14). To establish and maintain

healthy relationships, it is essential to transition from an “I-It” to an “I-You” perspective and thus bring inner world into it. Furthermore, feelings of unfulfillment and alienation in modern society also arise from the reduction of relationships to the mechanical, objective, or utilitarian (“I-me”) (15). The prevalence of digital technologies and online interactions has been identified as a contributing factor to feelings of loneliness, isolation and emotional distance between individuals (16). The perception of an increase in the quantity of interactions, at the expense of their quality, serves only to exacerbate this phenomenon. Workload and stress experienced by growing variety of people have become an integral part of our daily reality (17). The current crisis in relational bonds and interpersonal relationships in general demands a renewal of “I-Thou” relationships based on empathy, understanding, authentic interaction and mutual respect.

The human need for acceptance and love is a fundamental and enduring aspect of the human experience, persisting throughout the lifespan. Nevertheless, the fulfilment of this need manifests in a multitude of ways (18). The need for acceptance and love is particularly acute in the case of young children. The pivotal role of the early relationships between the child and their primary caregiver, particularly the mother, in the subsequent development of the individual is addressed in the attachment theory, which has become a foundational concept in the field of developmental psychology. The theory was initially proposed by Bowlby and has since been further developed by numerous scholars. The term ‘emotional attachment’ is employed to describe a long-lasting emotional bond, characterised by the need to seek and maintain proximity to a specific individual. This need is especially pronounced in situations that are perceived as stressful. It is an inescapable aspect of child development that the child will inevitably require and actively seek an emotional relationship. The child’s initial relationship, typically with the mother, has a profound impact on their subsequent development and well-being (19). The child’s inclination towards relational bonding represents an instinctual response to the need for protection. A robust and stable bond serves as the

foundation for the child’s fundamental sense of security. In the absence of such a bond, the child will display indications of deprivation (20). The formation of secure relationships during childhood is a crucial factor in the healthy development of the individual. In this context, the concept of existential security is of relevance that encapsulated a spiritual dimension as well (21). Some have proposed that, given the considerable dependence of the human infant, the need for the human being stands out as an essential prerequisite for the development and maintenance of one’s own humanity (22). One of the functions of the emotional bond is protection, and its formation is considered a prerequisite for the survival and healthy development of the individual.

Parents’ attitudes towards their children are seen as a crucial aspect of parenting. It is seen as a reflection of parents’ values, expectations, emotional availability and responses to their children’s needs. Understandably, a positive attitude of acceptance and love for the child can be overwhelmed by a negative attitude that reflects indifference, disinterest, criticism, rejection or neglect of the child. This can lead to emotional problems, low self-esteem and insecure relationship patterns. It is important to note that both attitudes can manifest themselves in different intensities and forms.

A positive parental attitude towards the child is contingent upon the existence of a positive relationship between the child and their parents, as well as identification with them. This, in turn, serves as the foundation for the formation of a positive relationship with other individuals, the surrounding environment, and the world in which the child resides. Such an attitude significantly promotes the child’s self-esteem and emotional stability, while also strengthening their ability to solve problems and resolve conflict situations (23). The life attitudes of parents should be marked by truthfulness and sincerity, and these should also be exercised in relation to children. It is desirable to compare one’s demands on children with the demands on oneself, to compare one’s actions and conduct with one’s words. Every child needs to know consistent rules and boundaries, the transgression of which is linked to the consequences of his or her

actions. We consider the educational tenet proposed by Stur (22) to be a source of inspiration:

1. Respect and honour the child from the very first days, because even then he is already a human being!
2. Adapt the theory of education to the child, not the child to the theory!
3. You must first know what you want to educate for, so you can find out how!
4. Look for and encourage the good in the child above all, don't just stop at repressing the bad!
5. Do not educate yourself less than you educate your child!
6. Raise your child always in cooperation with him, not against him!
7. Do not value the opinion of others more than the good of your child!
8. Before you say no to your child, think about ways to say yes!
9. Give your child all the tenderness and love you have in you, but don't spoil him/her!
10. Don't take parenting so seriously that you forget to enjoy it!

Trust as a Key Element for a Nurturing Relationship

We see trust as a key element in the educational influence of parents. The establishment of trust is a process that necessitates a considerable investment of time and effort, yet it has a profound influence on the child's personality development and the quality of relationships within the family or school setting. The recurrent topic of the crisis of trust in public discourse is indicative of a decline in the population's trust in state institutions on a global scale. A legitimate question is why do we need to trust other people at all? One answer is to point to the fact that we depend on others in many situations because we cannot achieve our own goals or alter the intricate circumstances of our lives (24). It is natural in these processes to accept the risk of betrayal as the price of trust. Today, the understanding of trust as a cooperative predisposition is emphasized, which is both a condition and an expression of our dependence on the world and, at the same time, an optimistic openness to it. It is a particular structural unity of trust and vulnera-

bility, apprehensible through the lens of diverse perspectives and situational contexts (25).

According to Anthony Giddens in his book *The Consequences of Modernity* (1988), trust is based on the expectation that other people or systems will act in a certain way that fosters stability, reliability, and predictability in everyday situations, despite the existence of potential risks (26). Giddens distinguishes between trust and risk, emphasizing that trust is a fundamental aspect of modernity, where social relationships and systems are no longer primarily based on personal acquaintance or traditional structures. Modern trust is often based on *disembodied trust*, which operates through abstract systems such as institutions, technologies or expert networks.

He also distinguishes between trust in interpersonal relationships and trust in broader social and institutional systems. Trust in interpersonal relationships (facework commitments) is rooted in personal contact and relationships. It develops through familiarity, daily interactions, and social norms. For example, trust between friends, family members, or neighbours. Trust in abstract systems (system trust) is critical in modern societies, where many social and economic processes occur through systems that are not directly dependent on personal relationships. Examples include trust in banks, healthcare systems, legal institutions, or technologies. This trust involves "disembedding," meaning we trust systems and their representatives (e.g., a doctor as a representative of the healthcare system) even when we do not have personal relationships with them.

In traditional societies, trust was deeply rooted in familiar environments where people trusted each other based on personal relationships. In modernity, these traditional bonds have weakened, replaced by trust in systems. If the system or individual in which we place trust betrays that trust, it can lead to a profound sense of betrayal and a loss of confidence not only in that system but also in related systems. Modernity brings new global risks, such as climate change or technological threats, which can undermine trust in international institutions and systems.

Modern societies are reflexive, constantly evaluating and reinterpreting their institutions

and practices. However, this reflexivity can weaken trust by fostering scepticism toward authorities and systems. So, we see the trust dilemma here: on the one hand, trust is essential for managing the complexity of modern society; on the other hand, modernity introduces risks that can erode trust (e.g., scandals, institutional failures, or technological disasters). Thence trust is an essential ingredient for the functioning of modern societies and is also a key element in the post-traditional world. It facilitates social integration and collaboration in the context of persistent change and mounting uncertainty.

Given the important role that technology plays in the daily lives of consumers and organisations, trust is also fundamental to the success and sustainability of the technology industry (27). Bowles (2021) asserts that users must have trust in the promises made by technologists that voice assistants will not record anything unless a specific word is spoken, that cameras will not record anything without consent, that private messages will not be read, and so on (28). It can be argued that trust is an important ethical value, and one that is essential for a healthy society. The act of entrusting data to another party implies a certain level of assurance that it will not be disclosed. This trust, therefore, represents a form of vulnerability in the context of security. In any case, the absence of trust, or the failure to implement measures to strengthen it, can act as a potential barrier to the process of digitisation and the successful development of new technologies.

The Impact of Digital Technologies

The increasing role of digital technologies in people's everyday lives is affecting various aspects of interpersonal relationships, including the quality of relational bonding (attachment) in the context of adult partner relationships and parenting. Social media platforms, instant messaging, smartphone apps, and video calls are dramatically altering interpersonal communication and impacting attachment-related psychological processes (29). Relational bonding constitutes a core element of interpersonal relations, described as an emotional connection between two individuals that includes feelings of

security, trust, and closeness. The rise of digital technologies has reshaped how these bonds are established and maintained. Social networking, instant communication, and video chats offer new avenues of interaction that can affect the quality and resilience of relational bonds (30).

The Attachment Theory, as developed by Bowlby (1988), posits that the quality of childhood attachment is a significant predictor of an individual's capacity to form and sustain healthy relationships in adulthood (31). In the context of the digital era, however, the question arises as to the extent to which technology can stimulate, develop, or disrupt these processes (32). Castells' (2009) theory of the network society posits that digital communication alters the dynamics of social ties, emphasising the diversity of contacts while simultaneously reducing the depth of their interactions (33). Another study by Turkle (2011) indicates that the phenomenon of "solo together" is occurring, whereby individuals engage in physical interactions while simultaneously immersed in the digital realm of their mobile applications (34). Consequently, the genuine experience of closeness and understanding in relationships is diminished, yet "closeness" becomes a constrained phenomenon.

Conversely, Mikulincer and Shaver (35) argues that relational bonds can also be fostered through digital tools if these are employed in an efficacious manner. Hampton et al. (2011) highlight that social media facilitates an increase in awareness of others' lives, thereby fostering social bonds, particularly through the sharing of information and emotions (36). This phenomenon is frequently designated as "social super-networking," which engenders fundamentally novel prospects for interpersonal communication. The philosophical question that remains is to what extent this is a dissemination of information and to what extent there is an enhancement of the bond in the sense of relationship as an existential phenomenon that integrates all levels of human existence.

On the one hand, digital technologies facilitate significant contact between individuals despite geographical distance. As demonstrated by Wellman et al. (2001), the use of email and chat have the effect of reinforcing the bonds be-

tween individuals who would otherwise remain outside the boundaries of their traditional social communities (37). During the period of restrictions imposed by the Coronavirus pandemic, digital technologies have been effectively employed in the care of clients in nursing homes and hospital settings. Stafford (2010) posits that long-distance peer relationships are enhanced by the increased ability to communicate via video calls and messages, which can foster feelings of emotional connection (38). This effect is more pronounced in those with a secure attachment, which, in the context of this discussion, refers to past physical interpersonal communication. Social networks provide a platform for sharing emotions and seeking social support. Shaver et al. (2017) posit that technological communication can serve as a complement to physical proximity, thereby promoting relational stability (39). They point out that technological communication can serve as a complement to physical proximity, thereby promoting relational stability. The beneficial impact of digital technologies in fostering relationships that facilitate partner-finding for individuals who otherwise have constrained opportunities for conventional dating has been documented in numerous studies. As reported by Rosenfeld et al. (2019), approximately 39% of new partnerships in the United States in 2017 were formed through online dating sites, which has significantly increased their importance (40).

On the other hand, the use of digital technologies in relationships between people may diminish the quality of intimacy if they supplant in-person contact. The communication that occurs in digital environments has the potential to result in the formation of superficial relationships, as the authentic interaction that occurs in person is reduced to text and visual representation. A study conducted by Kross et al. (2013) indicates that excessive use of Facebook is associated with a reduction in momentary feelings of happiness and long-term life satisfaction (41). One of the causes is the phenomenon of “upward comparison,” whereby users of various apps (e.g., TikTok, Facebook, Instagram) observe an idealized representation of others’ lives, a digitally altered reality, and distorted information

that collectively create a distorted picture of reality. The enhancement of the image of others’ lives through digital means engenders a sense of failure among the recipients, which in turn precipitates a decline in their inner happiness. The narcissistic culture of contemporary society reinforces the internal drives that lead people to compare themselves with others, while their solipsistic tendencies undermine their ability to derive pleasure from the successes and happiness of others.

The pervasive availability of technology can precipitate a phenomenon known as “technostress,” which has been demonstrated to have a deleterious impact on the quality of interpersonal relationships. Some studies have indicated that the pervasive presence of technology in the domestic environment may have the potential to disrupt the emotional intimacy and closeness between partners (42). It is advised that individuals exercise voluntary self-restraint in the use of digital technology during family activities, to maintain attention and deepen emotional connection (43, 44). From a psychological standpoint, it is not feasible to simultaneously attend to multiple activities without compromising one’s capacity for social interaction (45). The current legislative approach to road traffic is already beginning to reflect the findings of these studies.

Digital technologies thus have the potential to be a double-edged sword in relational dynamics (46). While digital technologies can facilitate communication and promote emotional closeness, they also pose certain risks. It is therefore essential to communicate the impact of these risks and to implement strategies to minimise their negative consequences.

Conclusions

Contemporary children and youth are profoundly influenced by modern technologies. Technological progress is an inherent aspect of contemporary society. The ongoing process of automation and the mechanisms of automation have an impact on children in several areas, including education, skill development, physical activity and social interactions. The excessive use of technology by children frequently results in a lack of sufficient attention from parents. The

time spent together with parents is transformed in its significance. The number of available models and role models is diminishing, and those who remain are no longer accessible as sources of guidance and emulation. It is crucial for parents and caregivers to achieve a balance in their children's use of technology, promoting the beneficial aspects of automation while safeguarding them from its potential drawbacks.

Parents bear the primary responsibility for their children's upbringing and the conditions in which they grow up. It is their role to foster motivation in the child and to assist them in pursuing realistic aspirations and objectives. An essential element of trust is open communication, which entails the free and honest exchange of information between all parties involved, enabling the expression of thoughts, feelings, and opinions without fear of negative consequences or judgment. The influence of digital technologies on the formation and maintenance of interpersonal relationships is a multifaceted and intricate phenomenon. Although digital communication offers numerous advantages, it is important to acknowledge the potential drawbacks and to proactively cultivate constructive relational strategies.

We have emphasized in this paper that the relational dimension of human personality is undergoing fundamental changes because of the impact of digitalisation, globalisation and modern lifestyles.

Our findings reveal that:

- The capacity for emotional intelligence is of paramount importance in maintaining the quality of relationships in an environment that is characterised by digital fragmentation.
- The advent of digital communication has facilitated rapid access to social networks, yet this has concomitantly undermined the capacity to cultivate profound and genuine relationships.
- There is an increasing necessity to reinstate empathy and authenticity in interpersonal interactions, as their absence results in feelings of loneliness and the disruption of relationships.
- The potential of social networks and technologies to foster relationships is contingent upon their responsible use and the quality of interactions they facilitate.

Considering the current challenges, it is imperative to reaffirm the importance of values such as empathy, respect, and responsibility in relationships. The functional family serves as the primary platform for individuals to develop their personalities in a healthy and well-rounded manner, while also equipping them with the skills to establish and maintain such a family themselves (47, 48, 49). The secondary platform comprises educational institutions and platforms for non-formal education and leisure activities. These will facilitate education in emotional literacy and awareness-raising about the impact of digitalisation on human relationships (50, 51). This approach can contribute to the creation of a more harmonious society that promotes healthy personal development and lasting interpersonal ties.

Acknowledgement

The paper was supported by Research and Development Agency (APVV-22-0204 Religiosity and Values of Permanent Sustainability), by the EU NextGenerationEU through the Recovery and Resilience Plan for Slovakia under the project: Contemporary worship theology in relation to narcissistic culture, No. 09IXX-03-V04-00654, and by International Scientific Research Project agreement no. ZML 01014/2024 RE.

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