

Ainsworth and her colleagues (1978) identified three types of relationships between infants and their caregivers. Infants with a **secure attachment style** typically have caregivers who are responsive to their needs and who show positive emotions when interacting with them. These infants trust their caregivers, are not worried about abandonment, and come to view themselves as worthy and well liked. Infants with an **avoidant attachment style** typically have caregivers who are aloof and distant, rebuffing attempts to establish intimacy. These infants desire to be close to their caregiver but learn to suppress this need, as if they know that such attempts will be rejected. Infants with an **anxious/ambivalent attachment style** typically have caregivers who are inconsistent and overbearing in their affection. These infants are unusually anxious because they can never predict when and how their caregivers will respond to their needs.

The key assumption of attachment theory is that the particular attachment style we learn in infancy becomes our working model or schema (as we discussed in Chapter 3) for what relationships are like. These early relationship schemas typically stay with us throughout life and generalize to adult relationships with other people (Fraley & Shaver, 2000; Hartup & Laursen, 1999; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003, 2007; Mikulincer et al., 2009). Thus, people who as children had a secure relationship with their parents or caregivers are better able to develop mature, lasting relationships as adults; people who had avoidant relationships with their parents are less able to trust others and find it difficult to develop close, intimate relationships; and people who had anxious/ambivalent relationships with their parents want to become close to their adult partners but often worry that their partners will not return their affections (Collins & Feeney, 2000, 2004a; Rholes, Simpson & Friedman, 2006; Simpson et al., 2007). This has been borne out in numerous studies that measure adults' attachment styles with questionnaires and then correlate the styles with the quality of their romantic relationships (though, as we note below, it is *not* the case that attachment style is destiny—people who had less-happy relationships with their parents are *not* doomed to perpetually unhappy adult relationships).

For example, researchers asked adults to choose one of the three statements shown in Table 10.3, according to how they typically feel in romantic relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Each statement was designed to capture one of the three kinds of attachment styles we described. The researchers also asked people questions about their current relationships. The results of this study were consistent with an attachment theory perspective (Feeney, Noller, & Roberts, 2000; Feeney, Cassidy, & Ramos-Marcuse, 2008; Hazan & Shaver, 1994a, 1994b; Simpson & Rholes, 1994).

Other researchers have reported similar findings: Securely attached individuals have the most enduring romantic relationships of the three attachment types. They experience the highest level of commitment to relationships as well as the highest level of satisfaction with their relationships. The anxious/ambivalently attached individuals have the most short-lived romantic relationships. They enter into relationships the most quickly, often before they know their partner well. For example, a study conducted at a marriage license bureau found that anxious men acquired marriage licenses after a shorter courtship than did either secure or avoidant men (Senchak & Leonard, 1992). They are also the most upset and angriest of the three types when their love is not reciprocated. The third category, avoidant individuals, are the least likely to enter into a relationship and the most likely to report never having been in love. They maintain their emotional distance and have the lowest level of commitment to their relationships of the three types (Campbell et al., 2005; Feeney & Noller, 1990; Keelan, Dion, & Dion, 1994).

Secure Attachment Style

An attachment style characterized by trust, a lack of concern with being abandoned, and the view that one is worthy and well liked

Avoidant Attachment Style

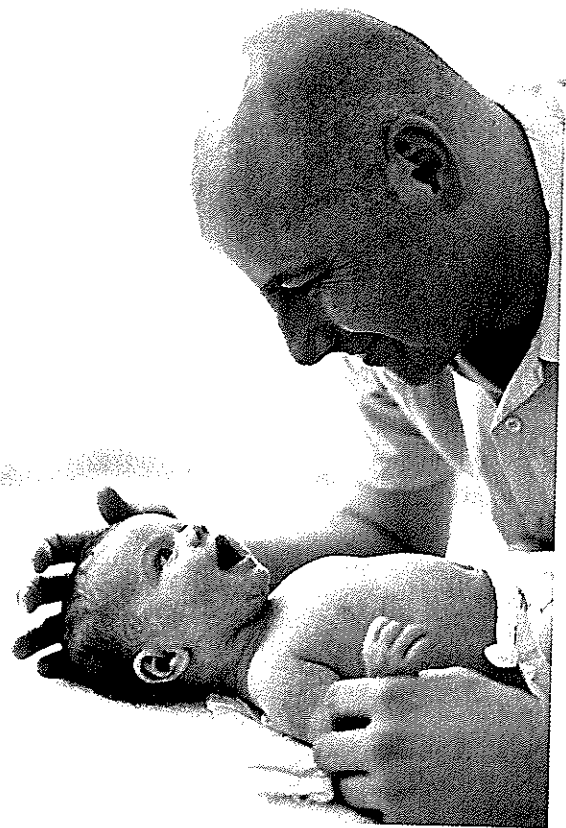
An attachment style characterized by a suppression of attachment needs because attempts to be intimate have been rebuffed; people with this style find it difficult to develop intimate relationships

Anxious/Ambivalent Attachment Style

An attachment style characterized by a concern that others will not reciprocate one's desire for intimacy, resulting in higher-than-average levels of anxiety

In my very own self, I am part of my family.

—D. H. LAWRENCE



Attachment theory predicts that the attachment style we learn as infants and young children stays with us throughout life and generalizes to all of our relationships with other people.