

## Attachment Style and Adjustment to Divorce

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Divorce is becoming increasingly widespread in Europe. In this study, I present an analysis of the role played by attachment style (secure, dismissing, preoccupied and fearful, plus the dimensions of anxiety and avoidance) in the adaptation to divorce. Participants comprised divorced parents ( $N = 40$ ) from a medium-sized city in the Basque Country. The results reveal a lower proportion of people with secure attachment in the sample group of divorcees. Attachment style and dependence (emotional and instrumental) are closely related. I have also found associations between measures that showed a poor adjustment to divorce and the preoccupied and fearful attachment styles. Adjustment is related to a dismissing attachment style and to the avoidance dimension. Multiple regression analysis confirmed that secure attachment and the avoidance dimension predict adjustment to divorce and positive affectivity while preoccupied attachment and the anxiety dimension predicted negative affectivity. Implications for research and interventions with divorcees are discussed.

*Keywords:* adjustment to divorce, attachment style, dependence, positive affectivity, negative affectivity, preoccupation with the ex-spouse.

El divorcio es un fenómeno cada vez más frecuente en Europa. En este estudio, se presenta un análisis del papel jugado por el estilo de apego (seguro, desvalorizador, preocupado y temeroso, más las dos dimensiones de ansiedad y evitación) en la adaptación al divorcio. La muestra está compuesta por progenitores divorciados ( $N = 40$ ) procedentes de una ciudad de tamaño medio del País Vasco. Los resultados revelan una proporción más baja de personas con un apego seguro en la muestra de progenitores divorciados. El estilo de apego y la dependencia (emocional e instrumental) están estrechamente relacionados. Se encontraron también asociaciones entre medidas que muestran un pobre ajuste al divorcio y los estilos de apego preocupado y temeroso. El ajuste se relaciona con un estilo de apego desvalorizador y la dimensión evitación. Los análisis de regresión múltiple confirman que el apego seguro y la dimensión evitación predicen el ajuste al divorcio y la afectividad positiva, mientras que el estilo de apego preocupado y la dimensión ansiedad predicen la afectividad negativa de los progenitores participantes. Para finalizar, discutimos las implicaciones que estos datos tienen para la investigación y la intervención con progenitores divorciados.

*Palabras clave:* ajuste al divorcio, estilo de apego, dependencia, afectividad positiva, afectividad negativa, preocupación por la ex pareja.

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The rate of divorce is increasing rapidly in Europe. Spain's increase rate over the last decade for the number divorces and separations is 59%, the third highest rate in the EU after Portugal (89%) and Italy (62%), according to the Eurostat Yearbook (2006-07).

Divorce is usually considered either a process of stress (Amato, 2000) or a process of bereavement (Weiss, 1975). Both these views, which are not mutually exclusive, have important implications for research and interventions with divorcees. In this study we focus on adaptation to divorce, considered as a process of bereavement, from the perspective of the Attachment Theory, and we analyze the emotional regulation strategies used by people with different attachment styles to adapt to the situation of divorce.

### *Attachment Theory and relationships: attachment styles in adults*

Attachment Theory is a theory of relationships (Bowlby, 1988). The basic principle underlying this theory is that the relationship enjoyed by infants with their mother (or main attachment figure) during the first years of life conditions their experience of subsequent relationships, laying the groundwork for a particular relational style and emotional regulation style, which in turn influences both how they perceive others and how they relate to them during (in principle) the whole of their life.

Hazan and Shaver (1987) were the first to conceptualize romantic relationships within the framework of a process of attachment. They *translated* the attachment models found by Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters and Wall (1978) in children to the dynamics of romantic relationships between adults and created an instrument that assessed people in accordance with the way in which they related to their partner. To do so, they described the characteristics of each of the models found by Ainsworth et al. (1978) in their research (secure, avoidant and anxious-ambivalent) and asked the participants in their study to choose the model that best described the way they felt about and behaved with their partner. In this way, they demonstrated empirically that the same classification system that is used for the evaluation of attachment in infancy can be successfully used for the evaluation of adult attachment (Hazan and Shaver, 1987).

Subsequently, other authors (Bartholomew, 1990; Bartholomew and Horowitz, 1991) have proposed a different way of categorizing attachment models in adults. According to a line of thinking expressed by Bowlby, (1979) attachment models reflect the idea that we have of both ourselves and others. Thus, this author distinguishes four relational prototypes, based on a positive or negative idea of oneself, and a positive or negative idea of others. Secure subjects, who have a positive image of both themselves and others, feel

comfortable with the two main dimensions of attachment, i.e. *intimacy* and *autonomy*. Preoccupied subjects, on the other hand, have a negative image of themselves and a positive one of others. This model would correspond with Ainsworth et al. (1978)'s "ambivalent" classification. Preoccupied subjects tend to demonstrate dependence and preoccupation in their affective relationships (Alonso-Arbiol, Shaver and Yáñez, 2002). Those with a dismissing attachment style (which correspond to the "avoidant" in the classification of Ainsworth et al., 1978), have a positive image of themselves and a negative one of others. They tend to avoid intimacy and deactivate the attachment system as a means of defense, with the aim of maintaining their invulnerable and self-sufficient image. Finally, there are those individuals classified as Fearful, who have a negative image of both themselves and others. Said individuals limit their interpersonal relationships because they are afraid of rejection and the subsequent suffering that this may cause. Both dismissing and fearful individuals tend to avoid intimacy and deactivate their attachment systems, but they do so for different reasons and in different ways (Bartholomew, 1990). Both, each in their own way, share an unsatisfied desire to become involved affectively with others, as well as a susceptibility to depression caused by non gratifying interpersonal relationships, fear of rejection and low self-confidence.

Various authors (Feeney & Noller, 1996; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994) have found an association between the duration and satisfaction of relationships and attachment style, with the relationships of secure people being the most long-lasting and satisfying. Furthermore, due to their relational style, which includes fear of abandonment, the preoccupied persons experience greater distress as a result of the breakup (Simpson, 1990) and have a greater tendency to become involved again in new relationships.

### *Divorce and loss*

Confidence in the accessibility of the attachment figure when he or she is needed, which protects against the intense, chronic fear often felt in response to said figure's inaccessibility is built during the development years (infancy, childhood and adolescence) and tends to persist with very few changes throughout an individual's whole life, reflecting fairly faithfully said individual's real experiences. The aim of the attachment system is a feeling of security. This feeling of security is the result of the assessment and evaluation carried out by each individual of a series of internal and external factors (including mood, health or illness, context and specific situations), that may or may not result in the activation of the attachment system. Once activated, security is related to the indications of accessibility of the attachment figure, while insecurity is

related to the indications of threats or difficulties in this accessibility (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991).

During childhood, adolescence and adulthood difficulties may arise in relation to the attachment figure (parent or partner) that may undermine an individual's confidence in their accessibility: threats of abandonment or loss of the attachment figure produce the greatest distress, both during childhood and at subsequent points of the life cycle. In adults, fear and pain at the loss of a partner is mixed with defensive anger. This emotional cocktail can be observed both in the interaction of couples that feel that the other person is inaccessible or does not respond to their needs (Simpson, Rholes, Oriña & Grich, 2002), and in the dynamics of separated or divorced couples, and is a frequent element of therapy sessions (Todorski, 1995).

Weiss (1975) found striking similarities between adults immersed in a process of divorce and children separated from their parents, such as those studied by Bowlby (1980a). It is known that emotional reactions play an important role in the dynamics of individuals (Izard, 2002), with ones such as fear, anger and sadness being especially relevant in the area focused on here. When children perceive difficulties regarding access to their attachment figure, fear takes control over other activities and activates the attachment system, deploying behaviors which normally serve to reestablish access to the attachment figure. Fear also serves as a communication signal aimed at the attachment figure him or herself, alerting him/her to the child's stress and provoking responses designed to comfort them. Anger is a child's response to a perception of their attachment figures as constantly unavailable. The role of anger is therefore, on the one hand, to motivate the child to overcome the obstacles preventing their being with their attachment figure, and on the other, to communicate their reproach to the attachment figure, with the aim of preventing inaccessibility in the future. Sadness occurs when the individual internalizes the loss of an attachment figure, accepting the evidence that said figure is not accessible and that any effort expended in an attempt to reestablish contact with them is doomed to failure. The behavioral counterpart of sadness is abandonment, which gives individuals time to accept these unwanted changes and to review active models (Bowlby, 1980b).

Weiss (1975) also found these emotions in people immersed in a process of marital breakup. Those immersed in a process of divorce often feel a paralyzing fear and an intense rage towards the figure they feel is abandoning them (corresponding to the initial protest phase). These emotions are followed by sadness and an enormous sense of loneliness, which correspond to the final phase of despair, in which the world is perceived as empty, desolate and dead.

Weiss (1976) used the term "separation distress" to refer to the feelings experienced by many separated people with regard to their ex-spouse. The manifestation of these

feelings, which are very similar to bereavement reactions, include recurrent thoughts and images of the ex-spouse, attempts to initiate contact with him/her or find out about him/her, and the aforementioned feelings of emptiness, loneliness and panic when they realize that this figure is now inaccessible.

Based on the classic statement made by Bowlby (1979), that the attachment system remains active in people *from the cradle to the grave*, over the last twenty years, numerous research studies have been carried out on different aspects of interpersonal relationships and the prototypical way in which individuals position themselves in relation to others in accordance with their attachment style (for example, Simpson, 1990). Working with a sample of married people, Banse (2004) found a relationship between security of attachment and marital satisfaction: for both husbands and wives, the score obtained for secure attachment correlated positively with marital satisfaction, while the scores obtained for fearful, preoccupied and dismissing attachment, correlated negatively with it.

Different aspects of the reactions to the loss that follows separation or divorce have also been analyzed from this perspective (Bakermans-Kranenburg & Van IJzendoorn, 1997; Brown, Felton, Whiteman & Manela, 1980; Davis, Shaver & Vernon, 2003; Finzi, Cohen & Ram, 2000; Pistole, 1996; Sbarra & Emery, 2005). Although the majority of researchers associate security of attachment with adequate effective recovery from loss (Bowlby, 1980b; Wayment & Vierthaler, 2002), recently, some authors (Feeney and Noller, 1996; Fraley & Bonanno, 2004; Fraley & Shaver, 1999) have found that some attachment styles that are considered defensive (specifically the avoidant-dismissing ones) work well in relation to bereavement and loss.

### *The present study*

Spain's increase rate over the last decade for the number of divorces and separations is 59%, in a country where divorce was inexistent before 1981, with a small parenthesis in the Second Republic, in 1932, before the devastating civil war of 1936. To our knowledge, this study is one of the few existing studies that analyze in a local (Spanish) population the adaptation to divorce of parents (see also Yáñez-Yaben, Guerra, Plazaola, Biurrun & Comino, 2008), and the only one that highlights the relation between attachment style and adjustment to divorce in a sample of divorced persons.

Based on a review of the studies published on this theme, we proposed the following hypotheses for our research project:

- H1. Various authors (Feeney & Noller, 1996; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994) have found an association between the duration and satisfaction of relationships and attachment style. We therefore expect to find a lower proportion of secure attachment in our sample of divorcees.

Furthermore, we expect that preoccupied and fearfully attached persons will experience greater distress than secure and dismissing persons as a result of the breakup.

- H2: Relationships will be found between dependence and attachment style. Previous research has shown that dependence, both instrumental and emotional, correlates with attachment style (Alonso-Arbiol et al., 2002). In this study, we expect to find similar patterns of association between dependence and attachment among divorcees. That is to say that a high level of instrumental and emotional dependence will be correlated with preoccupied attachment and the anxiety dimension.
- H3: Attachment style (secure and dismissing attachment) and the corresponding dimension of avoidance will predict a better adjustment to divorce and positive affect.
- H4: Attachment style (preoccupied and fearful attachment) and the corresponding dimension of anxiety will predict preoccupation with the ex spouse and negative affect.

## Method

### Participants

Participants comprised 40 divorcees, 18 men and 22 women. 21 belonged to an association of separated parents and 19 were contacted through an FMP (Family Meeting Point), where parents pick up or drop off their children by court order in the case of conflictive divorces. The age of participants ranged from 22 to 68 ( $M = 45.5$ ,  $SD = 10.1$ ), they had between one and three children ( $M = 1.7$ ), had been married for a mean of 13.2 years ( $SD = 7.7$ ) and had been separated or divorced for between three months and 18 years ( $M = 5.4$ ,  $SD = 5.1$ ). 30% had received a secondary education only, 45% had mid-level studies and 25% had university degrees. 35% now live with another person following their divorce and 65% live alone. Participation in the study was voluntary. Participants completed a battery of tests containing the self-reports described below.

### Measures

#### *Demographic factors, initiative and attitudes to divorce*

A series of questions were asked regarding the length of time for which they had been married and divorced, number of children, income level, attitudes to divorce and whether or not they took the initiative in the divorce proceedings.

#### *Attachment Style*

We used a Spanish version (Yáñez-Yaben, 2008) of the RQ, Relationship Questionnaire, (Bartholomew and Horowitz, 1991). This instrument assesses, on a

seven-point scale, the degree to which respondents see themselves reflected in the prototypes of four attachment styles: secure, preoccupied, fearful and dismissing. It also offers the possibility of obtaining two dimensions: anxiety and avoidance, which underlie the self-report instruments which assess attachment in adults (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994).

#### *Adjustment to divorce and preoccupation with the ex-spouse*

It was assessed with eight questions (Kitson, 1982; Spanish version Yáñez-Yaben, 2004) to which participants respond on a three-point scale. Four of them reflect habitual concerns following a divorce, such as, for example, whether the divorce was a good (or bad) idea ( $\alpha .77$ ) and the other four reflect preoccupation with the ex-spouse ( $\alpha .78$ ), that is commonly used as an index of poor adjustment to divorce: behaviors such as thinking about the ex-spouse a lot, wondering what he/she is doing, etc., reflect a poor adaptation to divorce.

#### *Psychological well-being*

As a measure of psychological well-being we used the Bradburn's Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PNA, Warr, Barter & Brown-Bridge, 1983; Spanish translation Vergara, Yáñez & Páez, 1988). This instrument, composed of 18 items, rates the respondent's emotional state (positive: feelings of joy, interest, contentment, or negative; feelings of sadness, fear, and restlessness) on a scale of 1 to 4 (1 = totally disagree, 4 = totally agree). Negative affect is related to interpersonal problems, neuroticism and anxiety. Positive affect is related to social contacts and extraversion (Warr, et al., 1983). In the Spanish adaptation, alphas ranged from .76 for the positive affect to .71 for the negative affect (Vergara, Yáñez & Páez, 1989).

#### *Dependence*

Dependence was assessed using the IDI (Interpersonal Dependency Inventory; Hirschfeld et al, 1977). This scale distinguishes between Emotional Dependence (ER) and Instrumental Dependence (LS) and consists of 16 questions in the ER subscale and 13 questions in the LS subscale, which respondents answer on a four-point scale. In the Spanish adaptation of the IDI, alphas ranged from .73 for Instrumental Dependence to .84 for the Emotional Dependence (Alonso-Arbiol, Shaver & Yáñez, 2002).

## Results

### *Descriptive Statistics*

#### *Relationship style measures*

*Type of Attachment.* Participants were identified as categorically secure (secure vs. not secure) if the maximum score of the four items that assessed attachment was in the

item that reflected security or if the maximum score of the four items reflected a tie between one secure item and one insecure one (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). Otherwise, they were classified as insecure. In our sample, 21 people (52.5%) were classified as secure and 18 (45%) as insecure (the data corresponding to one person were lost).

*Continuous measures and dimensions of attachment.* In this study, we used continuous and dimensional measures of attachment, rather than the categorical ones described in the previous section. The mean values found for each attachment style were as follows: secure 4.70 ( $SD = 2.02$ ), dismissing 4.35 ( $SD = 1.79$ ), preoccupied 3.83 ( $SD = 2.08$ ), and fearful 3.35 ( $SD = 1.96$ ). The mean for the dimensional measure of anxiety was 7.17 ( $SD = 3.60$ ) and the mean for avoidance was 9.05 ( $SD = 3.24$ ).

#### *Initiative in the divorce*

13 participants (32 %) said that it was their ex-spouse who took the initiative in filing for divorce, 5 (12%) said that both partners took the initiative and 22 (55%) said that they themselves took the initiative.

#### *Adjustment to divorce*

The mean obtained in the scale of adjustment to divorce was 9.42 ( $SD = 1.82$ ), and the mean for preoccupation with the ex-spouse was 4.82 ( $SD = 1.17$ ). The mean obtained for positive affectivity was 22.52 ( $SD = 5.70$ ) and the mean for negative affectivity was 16.70 ( $SD = 5.95$ ).

Associations between Demographic variables, Dependence, Initiative, Adjustment, and Attachment Style

As a preliminary analysis, we assessed the influence of gender in the adjustment, dependence and attachment measures. The Pearson *chi-square* did not prove significant in any of the tests carried out, and as a result, we conducted the analysis jointly for men and women.

The correlations among the variables used in this study are reflected in table 1.

I have found no significant associations between demographic variables and measures of adjustment or preoccupation with the ex-spouse. Instrumental dependence correlated with preoccupied attachment and the anxiety dimension. Emotional dependence is closely correlated with preoccupied and fearful attachment and with the anxiety dimension. These data reinforce the

Table 1

*Correlations between demographic variables, dependency, initiative, preoccupation, adjustment and attachment measures*

<i>N</i> = 40	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Secure attach.	1													
2. Dismissing att.	.44*	1												
3. Preoccupied att.	-.20	-.15	1											
4. Fearful att.	-.10	-.04	.58**	1										
5. Anxiety	-.17	-.11	.89**	.88**	1									
6. Avoidance	.87**	.83**	-.21	-.09	-.17	1								
7. Years married	.04	.03	.01	.33*	.19	.04	1							
8. Number of childr.	.32*	.20	.05	.18	.13	.30	.51**	1						
9. Instrument. Dep.	-.27	-.13	.48**	.21	.40*	-.30	.13	.08	1					
10. Emotional Dep.	-.16	-.23	.66**	.54**	.68**	-.17	-.04	-.04	.62**	1				
11. Initiative in div.	-.05	.01	.05	-.04	.00	.02	-.20	.19	-.01	-.05	1			
12. Preocup. Ex	.03	.30	.44*	.22	.30	.18	.15	.15	.21	.24	.16	1		
13. Adjustment	.44**	.34*	.08	.04	.02	.47**	-.06	.23	-.16	-.14	.26	.13	1	
14. Positive Affect.	.47**	.24	-.28	-.17	-.26	.43**	-.27	.01	-.39*	-.19	.11	-.18	.35*	1
15. Negative Affect.	-.18	-.30	.51**	.30	.46**	-.28	.04	-.25	.20	.37*	-.14	.07	-.27	-.20

Note. \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$

relational patterns between attachment and dependence found in previous research (Alonso-Arbiol et al., 2002).

Adjustment correlated with secure and dismissing attachment, the avoidance dimension and positive affectivity. This confirms both the hypothesis that associates security of attachment with a good adjustment to loss, and that which defends the *good working* of dismissing attachment styles.

Preoccupation with the ex-spouse was found to be associated with a preoccupied attachment style, and fearful attachment style to the length of marriage.

Note that there are not significant correlations between initiative in filing for divorce and measures of adjustment, dependence, or attachment style.

#### *Adjustment to Divorce, Attachment Style and Dependence*

The final step in this study was to determine, using a linear regression analysis (Berry, 1993) the role played by attachment style and dependence in predicting adjustment to divorce (positive and negative affectivity and self-perceived adjustment). We performed hierarchical regressions analysis by the method *stepwise* using the SPSS 16 program.

In the first of these analyses, the objective was to determine the role played by attachment style (secure, dismissing, preoccupied and fearful) and dependence (instrumental and emotional) in adjustment to divorce. These data are shown in table 2.

The corrected  $R^2$  for the analysis of these variables with self-perceived adjustment as the dependent variable was .176 ( $F(1, 39) = 9.34, p = .004$ ). The only variable that entered into the equation was secure attachment. Given their low partial correlation value, which failed to increase significantly the value of the coefficient of determination, the remaining variables were not included in the equation. When I introduced the same variables into the regression, but using the dimensional attachment style measure (anxiety and avoidance) instead of the continuous measure, the corrected  $R^2$  for the analysis of these variables with self-perceived adjustment as the dependent variable was .195 ( $F(1, 39) = 10.45, p = .003$ ). The beta coefficients for avoidance were statistically significant (.46,  $p = .003$ ), although this was not true for anxiety. This means that the avoidance dimension and the secure attachment style explained part of the self-perceived adjustment (19.5% and 17.6% of the variance, respectively).

The analysis of the attachment and dependence variables with positive affectivity gave an corrected  $R^2 = .205$  ( $F(1, 39) = 11.08, p = .002$ ). The beta coefficients for security were statistically significant (.47,  $p = .002$ ), not for the other attachment styles or for dependence. When we repeated the regression using the dimensional attachment style measure, the corrected  $R^2$  for the analysis of these variables with positive affectivity was .163 ( $F(1, 39) = 8.61, p = .006$ ). The beta coefficients for avoidance were statistically significant (.43,  $p = .006$ ).

Table 2

*Regression analysis of variables predicting adjustment to divorce and positive affectivity*

Variable	B	SE B	$\beta$
Predicting adjustment with attachment style ( $N = 40$ ) <sup>a</sup>			
Step 1			
Secure Attachment Style	.40	.13	.44***
Predicting adjustment with attachment dimensions ( $N = 40$ ) <sup>b</sup>			
Step 1			
Avoidance	.26	.08	.46***
Predicting positive affectivity with attachment style ( $N = 40$ ) <sup>c</sup>			
Step 1			
Secure Attachment Style	1.34	.40	.47***
Predicting positive affectivity with attachment dimensions ( $N = 40$ ) <sup>d</sup>			
Step 1			
Avoidance	.76	.26	.43**

Note. <sup>a</sup> corrected  $R^2 = .176$ ; <sup>b</sup> corrected  $R^2 = .195$ ; <sup>c</sup> corrected  $R^2 = .205$  <sup>d</sup> corrected  $R^2 = .163$

\*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .005$ .

This means that, at least in the present sample, secure attachment and the avoidance dimension explain part of the adjustment to divorce, both from the point of view of participants' own perspective (self-perceived adjustment) and from that of positive affectivity. According to these data, dependence (instrumental or emotional) does not seem to play a relevant role in adaptation to divorce.

In the regression analysis of the continuous variables of attachment and dependence with preoccupation for the ex-spouse as the dependent variable, no variable was found to have a significance level. Similar results were obtained regarding the dimensional measures of attachment and dependence. Regarding negative affectivity and continuous measures of attachment and dependence, one single variable, i.e. the preoccupied attachment style (beta coefficients of .51,  $p = .001$ ) explained 24.2% of the variance (corrected  $R^2 = .242$  ( $F(1, 39) = 13.48$ ,  $p = .001$ )). When the regression was carried out using dimensional measures of attachment and dependence as independent variables, anxiety about relationships (corrected  $R^2 = .190$  ( $F(1, 39) = 10.16$ ,  $p = .003$ )) was the only variable with significant beta coefficients (.46,  $p = .003$ ). These data are reflected in table 3.

In short, as we supposed, attachment styles, specifically the avoidance dimension and the secure attachment style, are powerful predictors when assessing adaptation to divorce and positive affectivity. The other side of the coin, i.e. negative affectivity is explained by the preoccupied attachment style and anxiety about relationships.

## Discussion

The objective of this study was to analyze the adaptation to divorce as a process of bereavement from the perspective of attachment theory. On the one hand, we tested the association between attachment measures, dependence, initiative in filing for divorce and adjustment; and on the other, we analyzed the role played by the aforementioned variables in adjustment to divorce.

In our sample, 21 people (52.5%) were classified as secure and 18 (45%) as insecure. The percentage of secure people is lower than both the 72% found in Germany (Banse 2004) in a population of married couples, and the 61.4% found in a representative sample of married or cohabiting couples in the USA (Mickelson, Kessler, & Shaver, 1997). This confirms that in our sample of divorced people, the secure attachment type is underrepresented.

The association found between fearful attachment and a longer duration of the marriage was unexpected. Previous studies (Bartholomew, 1990; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994) affirm that avoidant-fearful people organize their behavior defensively, in order to minimize the suffering caused by being rejected by others, an occurrence they fear due to their negative idea of themselves and their positive idea of others. They therefore try to reduce their emotional involvement with others, perhaps in an attempt to control the emotional dependence with which this attachment style is associated, and which is reflected in our data. Remaining in a marriage that, in the end, proved unsuccessful (hence the divorce), is a good example of this way of acting.

The preoccupied attachment style is associated with instrumental and emotional dependence, preoccupation with the ex-spouse and negative affectivity (or lack of positive affectivity). It is not surprising that in the regression analysis, negative affectivity is explained by the preoccupied attachment style. Previous studies have demonstrated that people with a preoccupied attachment style are those who encounter the most difficulties when adapting to a situation of divorce or loss (Davis et al., 2003; Fraley & Bonanno, 2004).

The strategy employed by avoidant-dismissing persons, on the other hand, is centered on self-sufficiency and independence. They avoid opening up to others and depending on them (although according to our data, this association is only significant for instrumental dependence, note that the correlation with emotional dependence, despite not being significant, is nevertheless negative); but this is because, at a conscious level, they see little use in forging emotional ties with others or depending on

Table 3  
Regression analysis of variables predicting negative affectivity

Variable	B	SE B	$\beta$
Predicting negative affectivity with attachment style ( $N = 40$ ) <sup>a</sup>			
Step 1			
Preoccupied Attachment Style	1.46	.40	.51***
Predicting negative affectivity with attachment dimensions ( $N = 40$ ) <sup>b</sup>			
Step 1			
Anxiety	.76	.24	.46***

Note. <sup>a</sup> corrected  $R^2 = .242$ ; <sup>b</sup> corrected  $R^2 = .190$

\*\*\* $p < .005$

others, not because they are afraid of being hurt. In fact, and according to our data, the dismissing attachment style correlates with self-perceived adjustment to divorce.

Griffin and Bartholomew (1994) believe that there are two underlying dimensions to the attachment prototypes: attachment-related anxiety and avoidance. The first dimension refers to the degree to which people are alert to issues related to attachment and relationships. A high degree of anxiety is, for example, related to concern that the attachment figure may not be available when needed, while a less anxious person feels relatively secure about issues related to attachment. In our study, the dimension of anxiety is related to dependence (both instrumental and emotional), preoccupation with the ex-spouse and negative affectivity, and was found to play a key role in a poor adaptation to divorce through negative affectivity. In this sense, our data coincide with those of Davis, Shaver & Vernon (2003).

The second dimension, avoidance, refers to individual differences in the tendency to use avoidant strategies (as opposed to contact-seeking strategies) in order to regulate interpersonal relationships. People at the highest end of this scale tend to withdraw their interest in personal relationships, while those at the lower end feel comfortable opening up to others and using them as a secure base. Our data associate this dimension negatively with instrumental dependence (although not statistically significant, probably due to the size of the sample), as well as with a good level of self-perceived adjustment to divorce. It is also associated with positive affectivity (and inversely, with negative affectivity). Furthermore, we found that this dimension plays an important role in adaptation to divorce (both as regards self-perceived adjustment and positive affectivity).

Our data regarding adaptation to loss in divorced people therefore coincide with those found by Fraley, Davis, & Shaver (1998), Fraley & Shaver (1999) and Fraley & Bonanno (2004), who argue that avoidant strategies of emotional regulation may be as effective as proximity-seeking strategies when regulating bereavement processes and the discomfort caused by interpersonal relationships.

#### *Implications for intervention and research and limitations of this study*

The findings of this study demonstrate the relations between attachment style and adjustment to divorce. This is coherent with previous studies that establish the influence of attachment style in emotional regulation, in the response to stressful situations like divorce, and its relations with coping and mental health (Davis et al., 2003; Vareschi & Bursik, 2005), and has powerful implications for therapeutic and preventive interventions with divorced or separated parents. According to them, individual

differences in attachment style impact affect regulation, information processing, and communication in close relationships. Therapeutic or preventive interventions with divorced or separated parents should bear in mind these differences that strongly affect the emotional and behavioral processes involved in separation and divorce. Persons with a preoccupied attachment style are those who encounter the most difficulties when adapting to a situation of divorce or loss. But because of the features of their relational style, and their tendency to hyperactivate their attachment system in case of stress or danger, they are alert to issues related to attachment and relationships, and they value and appreciate an eventual therapist's help. On the other hand, the dismissing attachment style is associated with better adjustment to divorce, low levels of dependency and positive affectivity. Avoidant-dismissing persons tend to deactivate their attachment system when distressed or needy; centered on self-sufficiency and independence, they feel uncomfortable opening up to others. They will not seek help, and if they do, they may 'dismiss' what therapy has to offer.

The results and implications of this study may have been very different if analyzed in a divorce-sample without children. When divorce occurs and there are children, an ex-spouse is a co-parent for life. In this context, parental attachment style seems to influence not only parental adaptation to divorce but also family ties after divorce, which in turn, have long-term implications for children (Sobolewski & Amato, 2007). In fact, over the last years, several methods of intervention with divorced parents have been developed, with the objective of reducing the experience of negative emotions, like anger, grief, guilt, revenge and vulnerability, common in loss processes, which bolster interparental conflict and undermine the possibility of responsible coparenting (Bernstein, 2007). Some of them are based on attachment-theory and research (Beckerman & Sarracco, 2002), and take into consideration contributions like the one discussed here and other clinical implications of attachment theory, like the idea of the therapist as a secure base and the nature of therapeutic change (Yárnoz, Plazaola & Etxeberria, 2008); the effects on infant attachment to mother and to father of the increasingly common practice of overnight visitation (Kelly, 2007) and the connection of attachment with other constructs that are supposed to facilitate the adaptation to divorce, as forgiveness (Yárnoz-Yaben, 2009).

There are also some implications for research. For instance, how can the parental alliance following divorce be tailored having in mind the characteristics and resources of a given family, parental attachment and adjustment capacity included? We are also in need for an instrument to evaluate and help us to understand the psychological impact of divorce in a family group from the perspective of attachment theory, especially in the divorce court contest.



We are well aware of several limitations of our study. First, because of the cross-sectional design of this study, we are unable to draw any conclusions with regard to possible causal relationships between the variables we used. Second, ours is a convenience and small sample, and it is not representative of the general population from which it was drawn. Third, self-report measures have been used to evaluate all the constructs in this study. Particularly in the case of the attachment evaluation, it would have been useful to include other measures of the same construct, as for example, interview measures of adult attachment style. Further research will address those issues.

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