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Attachment and Adult Romantic Relationships: An Interview With M. Carole Pistole

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Dr. M. Carole Pistole is an associate professor in the Department of Educational Studies at Purdue University. She is regarded as a leading researcher in adult attachment theory. In addition to chapters and editorials, she has published more than 25 refereed journal articles. Dr. Pistole's adult attachment theory work incorporates two complementary bonding systems: attachment and caregiving. The knowledge gained from Dr. Pistole's testing of theory has increased confidence in the basic tenets of attachment theory and contributed to understanding how people can better conduct or, when necessary, end their central emotional relationships. Her work includes theory development, particularly with regard to counseling practice. She has incorporated theoretical and measurement developments into her work, as reflected in using the four-category model of attachment and a multi-item attachment measure that permits more sophisticated statistical analyses. For more information on attachment and Dr. Pistole's research efforts, readers are encouraged to visit her Web site at <http://www.edst.purdue.edu/pistole/>. The following interview was conducted in August 2003 via conference call.

Keywords: attachment; bonding; caregiving; John Bowlby; couples

FUNDAMENTALS OF ATTACHMENT

Sheperis: For our readers, the first thing that we want to do is find a way to explain attachment to family counselors.

Pistole: I'm going to have to explain it from my own perspective and interests, which are romantic relationships. I explain attachment theory, initially at least, the same way to everyone. And then for professionals, I try to fill it out the way I write about it in my articles and so this is where things may get complex and I may get lost. When I talk about attachment, first of all, I start trying to explain the principles of attachment. Usually I say it's the bonding that romantic partners feel in those really important romantic relationships, not the casual ones, but the really important ones. It is the bonding

that people feel for one another or the bonding that children feel toward their parents. It is the bonding that results in a sense of felt security. The bonding for the parent to the child is a caregiving bond because normally adults don't gain a sense of felt security from the child's presence. More specifically, I guess attachment is the tendency toward proximity to a particular attachment figure that results in a sense of felt security.

On the other hand, there is also an attachment system and the attachment system is this goal-corrected objective. Let's take the case of children: If I am a child and I get too far separated (there is a range of comfort with separation) or if there's an unexpected separation from the parent, then that results in separation anxiety. At the occurrence of separation anxiety is when attachment behaviors kick in, and that's when the attachment system becomes primary over the exploration system. So when the attachment system is active, exploration, competency, mastery, or learning behaviors are not particularly efficient and effective. It's as if they've shut down and will not become particularly effective again until the attachment issue has been resolved and the person has regained the sense of security and of proximity. With little-bitty children or infants, proximity needs to be physical. As we get older, we may need to hear the voice of an attachment figure or a picture of the person might do with adults, for instance.

Also, the piece I'm interested in is the individual differences in attachment. Bowlby's (1969) concept of the working model is: (a) the beliefs about the self, lovability, or worthiness of care; (b) beliefs about the other person, being the kind of person who will be accessible when needed; and (c) rules and strategies that regulate attention to attachment information, regulate attachment behavior, and regulate attachment-related emotion. Now, I see this as a cognitive-affective schema.

Some people talk about it as cognitive, but I read psychodynamic literature; and at this point (I may change my mind later of course), I think those early senses of good and bad are organized emotionally in a sensory-motor (if you want to talk cognitively) kind of schema. I think that schema is probably driven affectively with adults, probably at an almost unexamined, almost unconscious kind of level.

Sheperis: So based on what you were saying, attachment covers the life span. Is the present organizational structure or the historical data more important to you?

Pistole: Well, that would be client specific because for the most part, what Bowlby (1969) said and what I tend to believe is that this organization develops in early infancy based on real life interaction (real life interaction as perceived of course by the infant/young child) and that gets organized and across time becomes more a property of the person. I internalize the schema by which I view the world, and I act in ways that continue to maintain that same schema; and so it becomes sort of an automatic behavior. I don't think it's until something happens (like maybe a breakup or a death of someone really important) that we start looking at the way that schema is driving our own interactions or relationships. So I tend to think that the current schema, if it's been unexamined, is very similar to the early schema, particularly with persons who have insecure attachment relationships. I think it can be changed, but I think we have to examine it to change it. I also think, like Bowlby says, that we have multiple attachment relationships to people, like mother or father, and that the quality of these relationships is specific to those early relationships. So I may have one organization with mother, and I may have a different organization with father. So perhaps I am preoccupied in my attachment with mother (remember in those early ages it's based on reality), so she's probably inconsistent in her responsiveness to me. With father, on the other hand, I can be securely attached in that relationship. He can provide more consistent accessibility, and I can build a different kind of relationship with him. Typically, in our later important relationships, the major central romantic relationships, it's the central caregiving relationship (which is usually the relationship with mother) that forms the prototype for the attachment organization with a romantic partner. There's a hierarchy in these different attachments with that central caregiving or central romantic relationship for adults typically being the highest or the primary. There's not much data on that, but when you are thinking about counseling, it's important to keep it in mind because the relationship with the therapist might in fact be that primary relationship or it might be a different one, and the therapist needs to know in order to work the interventions.

Sheperis: Do you think that there are different ways that attachment organization would show up with regard to

a romantic relationship versus a friendship relationship?

Pistole: In most people, the romantic relationship is the primary attachment model. The people that are really centrally important to us also are attachment relationships, although it's unlikely that they will be the primary model that our romantic relationships usually pull. I think that it can be qualitatively different than the romantic relationship.

Sheperis: So, for example, if you are securely attached to your father but also have some disorganized attachment based on mom, then some of that disorganized stuff may not get activated until a romantic relationship occurs.

Pistole: Exactly, that's what I think. That's my theory. Then that prototypical organization with father may be what you see with the friend.

Sheperis: Now is this how you started thinking about attachment or was it different when you first started getting into this field?

Pistole: I didn't understand it as well when I started because I remember finishing my dissertation and going, "Oh gosh, now I get this theory." And also when I started, I had to develop my literature review for my dissertation out of childhood literature because the only adult research out there was Hazan and Shaver's 1987 article, and it had not yet been published. I had a paper in which they had presented their newspaper survey. So I think across time, one of the things I have changed is that I think I see the theory as more complex than I used to. I attend more to the caregiving aspect than I used to, and I know people have done research and find that attachment applies to our affiliative social worldview. I see it as really central to our important emotional relationships. I don't see it as a social worldview, though people are finding data to suggest that's true. I'm not yet convinced that is what it amounts to. I may have to become convinced. . . . But, you know, in counseling, you don't see the social worldview; you see the central relationships, the best friend, the parents, the romantic partners, that kind of thing.

DEVELOPMENTAL INFLUENCES

Sheperis: You know most people have some kind of impetus that brings them to study a certain topic. Is there anything about your background or family that contributed to your interest in attachment?

Pistole: When I present on this theory, I tend to start with how I got interested in the first place. I was in my doctoral program, and I was a returning kind of student, one of those who lived life for a while and then came back to school. I was in a practicum course and was seeing college counseling center clients who were just so upset about their relationships. They were asking, "What does this behavior mean?" and not being satisfied by simply understanding the behavior. I was in a counseling psychology program but I took some social

psychology courses. I used to go to the social psychology colloquiums, so I knew those folks and knew their research. I needed a dissertation topic because the one I was going to use fell through. I called my friend, Anita Barbee, who was in social psychology and she said, "Look, there is this new paper I just got." The paper was Hazan and Shaver's presentation on their newspaper survey on attachment theory. I read about it and thought, "Oh my gosh." I mean it just really, really appealed to me. Now at this same point in time, I was also single. I got divorced in my program and knew a lot of single people with the same issues as my clients. When their relationships weren't going well, the rest of life didn't seem important, and they couldn't understand what was going on. This just clicked for me, and it has stayed clicked for me in both those instances.

I don't have anything in my head that says why this would have hit for me based on early family background. I know later family background when my granddaughter was born. She would scream every time her mother left the room. I knew attachment theory so I'm watching these interactions, and I'm thinking that my daughter-in-law is being very consistent, she's setting firm boundaries, she's reminding the child "I'll be right back," and she's telling her "I came back." I thought, if I had known this when I was raising my children, how would I have raised them differently? You know, down the road several years later, what I'm looking at behaviorally looks like a secure attachment with regard to my granddaughter.

Sheperis: Well, I have a 3-year-old and a 1-year-old so . . . I can relate to what you're saying.

Pistole: I think that we need to educate parents with this theory because we don't get much training on how to parent. When you don't know what a behavioral cue is telling you, it's very hard to respond appropriately. My take on attachment theory and these individual differences is very much like Bowlby's. I stay very much with what is normative development rather than psychopathology.

Sheperis: Do you think that there is a correlation between your divorce and your interest in attachment style?

Pistole: Oh, it's possible because suddenly I had no attachment, no central romantic attachment and I'd been married for 20 years. I had good experiences with self-help kinds of groups, organizations that help provide singles with a place where they can go talk to people who are experiencing the things they are. It produces another type of structure in their life, which is not necessarily therapeutically oriented.

Sheperis: As I look at my various research interests, I could always pick out those events that have kind of sparked that interest for me, and I just wondered if there was a little life moment that brought you to say, "Oh, this is something that is poignant for me."

Pistole: Yeah, and I think I do know bunches of people who have the same sort of experience, and I think it's

also why I'm interested in how can we separate from our relationships without feeling like we're dying. I don't know that it's possible to do that because Bowlby talks about attachment as being biologically based, physiologically based. There are some theories of love that say the same thing. If it's biologically based, it's going to be hard to get out of, but I do think that there are ways we can find to help people do that.

TRAINING

Sheperis: Do you think that students are learning attachment as a central issue in training courses for family counseling or in family therapy programs?

Pistole: I don't know. To be honest, I don't always teach it in my courses, even when I teach family. Though I think it's probably hard to take a course from me and not know something about it. If I talk about love, then I bring it up and teach at least a superficial view of it. I know that there are people coming out of family programs that are doing attachment research and writing on attachment, so maybe people are starting to put it in their coursework. I think one of the counseling theories books has attachment as a psychodynamic theory, and so that should help people begin to get a sense of it. I think it's useful when working with relationships.

ASSESSMENT

Hope: How do you think family counselors should go about assessing a preoccupied attachment or various styles of attachment?

Pistole: I think you have to know the theory. If you know the theory, I think you can hear it. You can use client statements to document it if you want to document it. I also think there is another way to go after it. There are some quick and simple measurements of attachment. At this point in time, I prefer that four-category model by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991). It is simple and quick and easy to give to a client. There are others that have three dimensions, which don't hit for me, but a lot of people like them. Brennan, Clark, and Shaver (1998) have the Experience in Close Relationships, which is a multi-item instrument out of which you derive dimensions. If you derive dimensions, you can derive a prototype out of that. Now these are quick and simple to do, and people will say that if it is too simple and too easy, you don't get it accurately or psychometrically sound. I was surprised to hear Phil Shaver say at a presentation a year ago at APA (American Psychological Association) that they've got some data that these do in fact work and are reliable and valid. The combination of hearing what your client has to say and doing an "assessment" of the organization with something that's paper and pencil allow you to ask, "Do these jive?" It at least gives you a starting point. It's not like an MMPI at all, but if what I'm hearing from my client is confusing to me, then using one or both of these measures might

help me get a better sense of what's going on with the client.

ADDRESSING ATTACHMENT-RELATED PROBLEMS

Hope: What does it look like for you to work on changing someone's attachment organization?

Pistole: I think that what you have to do is you have to look at those elements of the working model. This is why I like the prototypes more than I like the dimensions. The dimensions seem to be better for data; but, you know, people are both on the avoidance dimension and the anxiety dimension at the same time. They're not on one or the other; they're on both simultaneously. So if you start looking at that simultaneously, then what you are essentially doing is looking at a prototype. I think that what you have to do is access the beliefs about the self's lovability, beliefs about the other person, and the rules and strategies that they are using to regulate attachment information and are using to interpret the other person's behavior. You've got to help people with an insecure organization discover that they are either hyper-activating the attachment system or hypo-activating it, and I think the therapist has to find those places. Then I think you can help the person talk about it, and you can help the person see where they [*sic*] are misperceiving their partner's behavior. For example, if the partner is saying, "I want to be available to you and right now I can't, but I can tomorrow." This, in fact, is consistent accessibility rather than a rejection. Sometimes also what you have to do to help someone get it is to go back to, "When did you feel rejected by mother?" Then if it sounds like it's rejecting, "Can you see the difference between what your partner is saying and what you're mother was saying?" I also think you have to use the therapeutic relationship because you've got it in the here and now. A counselor can use the therapeutic relationship to contrast or you can use it to reinforce, for example: "Do you remember when you thought I was rejecting you and you brought that in? I'm so glad you did and we were able to talk about that." I think you've got to get all three of those pieces. You've got to help the person understand that they [*sic*] are lovable; the mother's rejection or the partner's rejection is not really a statement about the lovability of the self, even though it does feel that way.

Sheperis: How would that be similar or different from object relations?

Pistole: Attachment theory *is* an object relations theory. [It is an object relationships theory that is (a) focused on emotionally important relationships, (b) comprised of both the attachment and caregiving bonds/systems, (c) relevant to those relationships across the life span, and (d) embedded with links to development, the exploratory system (i.e., mastery and competence), and the sexual system.] As I read Bowlby (1969), attachment theory with its individual differences in emotional

organization of relationship interaction (e.g., secure and insecure attachment) is descriptive of relatively normal development. Bowlby did, however, consider experiences that may compromise development; and the theory does recognize and pertain to psychopathology as well. Nonetheless, I find the theory most useful in counseling when my college counseling center clients' central issues are distress in their relationships, often in conjunction with concerns related to competence (i.e., the exploratory system). Were I working with a client with an underlying borderline personality structure, like someone diagnosed with narcissistic or borderline personality disorder, then I might use attachment theory to address *some* of the relationship elements. Although I believe that attachment theory resonates with these two diagnoses, I suspect a different object relations theory would be more useful for conceptualizing the personality structure. The therapeutic work will be broader than a focus on relatively normative relationship elements, because the personality organization will not be so well developed; that is, it will be more impaired or more primitive (e.g., in preferred defense mechanisms). Although others may, I do not view attachment theory as relevant to therapeutic goals such as modifying grandiosity and entitlement, developing an observing ego, learning to modulate intense emotional reactivity, understanding that other people are separate from the self rather than being a two-dimensional function in the client's life, developing stronger reality testing, modifying the reliance on primary defenses, internalizing an ambivalently held object in order to mitigate the polarized all-good and all-bad self and object representations with their accompanying mood swings. Nonetheless, to reiterate, attachment theory is an object relations theory which uses intuitive experience near language to address important emotional relationships in a way that develops greater competence, including in-relationship functioning and self-esteem. It has well-defined leverage points for change (i.e., the elements of the working model) and seems to be necessary and sufficient for relationship therapy with reasonably "intact" or "normative" persons who are experiencing relationship difficulties. It also is formulated in such a way that it lends itself to quantitative research methodology.

Sheperis: A lot the things that we've been talking about have been technical with regard to theory. How do you explain this to a client so they [*sic*] understand it?

Pistole: The same way. I infuse the working model in interventions without ever really explaining the working model. I talk about how sensitive the person is to rejection or separation. As a therapist saying, "Don't you think your partner is just trying to discuss something with you that is hard for him? He's afraid he's going to lose his job and he doesn't know what that means and that might mean he has to move. And what you heard is 'I'm going to leave you,' and what he's really saying is 'I need to talk with you.'" That's talking

about the hyper-activation of the attachment system and the preoccupation with it—misinterpretation of cues and being overly sensitive to the partner's separation. I do talk about the bonding and that sense of felt security, and usually I use the word "bonding," and it seems to work. If I need to, I go back to explain it as how parents feel toward their children. I usually don't have any trouble explaining the concept—people catch it.

Sheperis: It sounds like part of the treatment is focused on the communication process as the avenue for attachment organization emerging from the individual.

Pistole: It certainly could be, but I don't normally think of it in those terms. That sounds to me like a good way to go after it. I don't know of anyone else writing about it in those terms either. Part of it is the communication and part of the communication is read through nonverbal kinds of cues. . . . Communication sounds like a great way to explain it. That's what you do specifically—you talk about how that's communicated whether that's your framework or theory or not.

Sheperis: Working with college students, you certainly get the gamut of various types of relationships. Since you don't use it with all of your clients, what tells you there's an attachment problem when they come in?

Pistole: I'm not sure I have a perfect answer to this question. I guess the preoccupation, though it may be the clients' insistent focus on their relationships and their distress over what is happening in their relationships.

Sheperis: Does that kind of guide you to go into exploring the attachment organization?

Pistole: Yes, and the clients who say they are having distress in their romantic, their family, and their professional lives, whatever that is, an advisor, a boss or in two areas but not the third. For example, I've had clients where the romantic relationship is just fine but the family relationship is distressful to them and an advising relationship is distressful to them. People who come in and say, "I'm not dating, why aren't I dating?" or "I'm too shy." Those have also turned out to be attachment issues.

Sheperis: How does "I'm not dating" turn into an attachment issue?

Pistole: I go after expectations of the family and cultural expectations, but often the person is avoidant of relationships in general or avoidant of important romantic relationships. You can hear that when they talk about family or when you talk about the kinds of experiences they've had in previous relationships. "Well, this guy called me, but he's not good enough for me," or "This is wrong with him or this is wrong with him." As a counselor, you can pursue that as maybe her standards are too high, but I tend to explore it as being avoidant of important romantic relationships in general and dismissive of their importance. I have also had clients say, "I'm 21 or 22 and graduating, and gee, it's time for it, and I'm the only one who isn't getting married or involved, and so now I think there's a problem."

Sheperis: So it seems that attachment pretty much presents itself in the session based on the type of issue the client's bringing. If the client brings something up with relationships in general, then that gives you the impetus to explore the attachment-based issues.

Pistole: Yes, and in saying that, the client who is disturbed over grades may not have an attachment issue.

Sheperis: Now you mentioned earlier in our discussion about the different . . . I was going to say styles and I know you don't like that word. In my reading, I have seen different people identify different numbers of and different nomenclature for styles. Can you talk about some of the research related to this and how you view the various styles?

Pistole: I started out with the three-category model: secure, anxious/ambivalent, and avoidant. Those categories hit for me and actually it hit for my dissertation committee as well.

Sheperis: Which is important, right?

Pistole: Yes, it sure was, but at the same time I had a couple of students who kept saying, "I don't fit any of these categories; this one's close, and this one's close, but I'm more a mixture of the two than any of the three." When the Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) four-category model came out, those same students said, "Here I am." That has convinced me to use that fourth category and now I typically talk about secure, preoccupied. I picked preoccupied up off the Adult Attachment Interview, but I like it better because I think it is descriptive of what happens; people are preoccupied with their attachment relationship. I like preoccupied better than the terminology anxious/ambivalent or ambivalent/anxious. Avoidant/fearful and avoidant/dismissing are the others, and you *see* the differences. For the dismissing person, it's like relationships are just not important, but the fearful person really is afraid of relationships because you hear them speak about being afraid of rejection. For example, a fearful person may say, "You know, if I go up to this woman and say this to her, she is likely to reject me" or "we've been dating 6 weeks and I don't know . . . I'm afraid to talk to her about taking it deeper because I'm not sure she'll agree and I don't want to get rejected"; and so the person may distance themselves from the relationship. I like that nomenclature; those are the ones that make sense to me and that I see in people. I think that probably some of this is a person's own personality. For instance, my own personality may drive me to utilize one set of nomenclature rather than another. I read about the dimensions and when I do research, I collect data for both the dimensions and the prototypes. I give two attachment measures; and if I'm writing up data, the truth of the matter is I have better success in publications when using the dimensions. I can see avoidance and I can see anxiety about abandonment, but that's just not where I think about it. To be honest, though, I wouldn't shut down anyone's research on any of these because I think across time,

I've learned a lot from the data, regardless of methodology.

Sheperis: The research doesn't always transfer to practice.

Pistole: Well, a lot of the people who are doing research aren't doing it to transfer to practice. On the other hand, I think most people in the counseling field who are doing research are interested in it transferring to practice, depending on the level of your analysis and your therapy. The truth of the matter is I'm not talking about being finished in a certain number of sessions, maybe planting some seeds in a limited time, but not being finished.

Sheperis: So you see this as a more long-term approach?

Pistole: Sure, because I think you have to access some childhood stuff. Actually, it also tends to fit within some psychodynamic theories about short-term therapy. The truth of the matter is that, with some clients, sometimes it'd be 2 weeks between sessions even when we were both on campus. Actually, I've not worked in a situation where I've had a time limit of 6 sessions or 10 sessions or 12 sessions. I think I would continue to use this model if I did, I would just talk more about the future. I do try to intervene if people can be aware of their process because then they have access to changing it. I would do the same thing in time limited.

PREVENTION

Sheperis: In your 1993 article in the *Journal of Mental Health Counseling* (Pistole, 1993), you posited that future research should investigate preventative programs derived from attachment theory. What would a preventative program look like?

Pistole: I would start with people who are interested in the romantic relationships. In a first session, have people take an instrument or two and talk about their own prototype. So essentially you would start with where each person is and look at the pieces that go with that and how they see their own relationships. Then ask what happens when you are getting into a relationship and what happens when you leave a relationship. Are there differences? I didn't have it designed, I just wrote it up to design it.

Sheperis: It sounds like something that may be good as a premarital counseling technique to help individuals recognize their styles.

Pistole: I think that we do very little to educate people on relationships, and I think this model will lend itself to educating people about relationships. If a person is talking about romantic relationships in particular, I think a therapist has to include the caregiving piece. You have to help people understand when the issue is an attachment issue, so they can respond out of caregiving. I think it would benefit people to understand their own attachment and caregiving organization and understand their partner's attachment and caregiving organization.

Sheperis: That sets a stage for a more healthy relationship.

Pistole: I think that it would also help people to say, "Look, you're responding to what we're talking about and I'm upset because we're having conflict. I need to know you still love me." If you can make that kind of statement, then the partner can say, "I'm only mad, of course I still love you."

Sheperis: So it may be important for a person to start the argument with, "I love you, but I'm angry about this," when you know your partner needs that particular reassurance.

Pistole: I also think it would help people to be alert to and more accurate about tending to attachment cues. Now that's a general theoretical kind of statement that doesn't include too much of what are people's different attachment organizations. Though if I know my partner is preoccupied with attachment, then if I can keep that in mind, it can help me not get upset about the frequency of contact that my partner needs.

NONTRADITIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Hope: What do you think are some of the things that counselors should be aware of in working with nontraditional relationships with regard to attachment?

Pistole: That attachment is the primary issue probably and that attachment in adult relationships means that partners need to stay emotionally connected, but that doesn't necessarily have to translate to physical proximity.

Sheperis: Does that mean you think that it's feasible for long-distance relationships to be successful?

Pistole: We know they're successful. I talk about this in classrooms and people say, "What percentage of them break up? Don't they break up more than marriages do?" And it's like, "Excuse me, the divorce rate is still close to 50%—what do you mean?"

Sheperis: What is it about attachment style or what particular styles would make long-distance relationships successful? Are there styles that would be more fitting than others?

Pistole: I don't know, I'm trying to find out. I'm trying to do two research projects, and I'm trying to get a search engine to pick up my research Web site right now. I've been trying for over 6 months. I've been trying for a year and a half to collect enough of this data. I'm getting really frustrated because I can't get it picked up by a search engine, although everybody else in the world seems to be able to, and I can't find the expertise to help me get it out there, and I want the data to help answer this question. One of the issues with something like a long-distance relationship is that you have a cycle of reunion and separation and that's a pattern in a long-distance relationship. The couple has to develop routines and patterns for how they stay connected to satisfy this emotional proximity issue. I think in today's world those things are probably easier. You can use e-mail, for instance, but with e-mail you don't hear the voice. I think there are times where a person really needs to hear

your partner's voice. I think it might be important for a person to have pictures of the partner around. I think that people have to come to terms with the excitement at the reunion and then the feeling blue and feeling sad over the separations. You asked about styles. My guess is that people who have secure attachment organizations can handle this effectively because they are comfortable being alone when it's appropriate and they're comfortable being close to the partner when that's situationally feasible. I'm wondering if someone who is dismissing in their attachment organization also finds it fairly easy, because I am guessing that they don't need to feel that sense of closeness as frequently. I think it would be more difficult for someone who is preoccupied with their relationship simply because of the level of contact that's going to be needed. I wonder if they need more physical contact than, say, someone who is dismissing or secure. I think in terms of a fearful attachment, this person might get more involved in thinking, "What if my partner sees someone, gets interested in someone, has an affair?" What I am trying to do is frame that fear of intimacy and fear of rejection piece that people carry.

Sheperis: So those folks (fearful/avoidant) just may not be able to do a long-distance relationship?

Pistole: I think in this country people still tend to carry emotionally that we should all be hooked up in relationships, even though it is not true. People think that it should be kind of like the nuclear family relationship, and I just don't think that fits many people's lives anymore, certainly not as many people as it used to fit. And I'm not positive, though I know there's pathology out there. I'm not making a statement like that, but I'm not positive that multiple romantic relationships are not a sign of something reasonably healthy or positive. I'm saying it as a double negative. This could be positive instead of negative, and we assume it's negative. We assume you cannot be married or you cannot have a real relationship if you live in Los Angeles and your partner's in New York. Well, I think you can, but it counters our assumptions of what important relationships really are. Part of the reason long-distance relationships can work is the technology we live with now makes things possible. People used to have to write letters during wars, for instance, when they were separated for periods of time. It took days and days to travel somewhere. Now we live much longer and much healthier lives in general, and people spend fewer years in that nuclear family structure, if they spend any time in that organization at all. There has to be some healthy way to live other than the nuclear family, and there has to be some other way to optimize people's lives for people who have really rewarding careers. Academia is just a prime example where individuals can have really rewarding careers at two different places in the country. If you're an academic, you've got control over your schedule. A person might work really hard for two work weeks and through the weekend, then take 3 days and fly

somewhere in a city that you both love and have real quality relationship time. In academics, of course, you've also got breaks and summer. I don't know how much time people who live in the same household really spend together in terms of quality time or interaction.

Sheperis: As you were talking about long-distance relationships, some of the things like video phones and computer cameras could enable people to have live interaction with your [*sic*] partner every day.

Pistole: That's right, but it takes some money. I watch *Friends* (Kauffman & Crane, 1994), and one of the actresses, Jennifer Aniston, she married Brad Pitt and they have that setup and when they are separated, that's what they use. Of course, they have plenty of money to do that and everyone doesn't have that kind of money.

Sheperis: Even with a basic digital camera on top of your computer, which is about \$20, you can get some video interaction with your partner.

Pistole: People in lower socioeconomic groups don't have as much access to technology, but people in middle- to higher-, even middle-income families can prioritize that and they can have some access to it. Phone calls can get expensive, but in today's world, you can get calling plans that include all the long distance you want, which people with working-class kinds of jobs can afford. Data wise, we don't know enough about this yet.

MULTICULTURAL ISSUES

Sheperis: Have you seen any implications for various multicultural populations?

Pistole: Bowlby (1969) proposed this theory as universal, and my interpretation of Bowlby is that he meant the bonding or the attachment bond is universal across cultures and the formation of a working model is universal. I don't think he meant which prototype would be normative for the culture, because secure is more normative in our culture, at least in the three-category model. I don't think Bowlby meant that it would be normative in all cultures because different cultures have different values, and that's going to influence the working model and how people raise their children. I have data, particularly in child development literature, on cross-cultural differences in attachment. What's been interesting to me, the data I have seen, on romantic relationships with regard to multicultural differences, is that if the sample is drawn within the United States, there are no differences based on ethnic background.

Sheperis: Well, attachment certainly is a worldwide theory. There are several people writing on attachment from different countries, especially on children from Third World countries with regard to adoption and foster care.

Pistole: I think part of what would be interesting multiculturally is, How much closeness do I need? How do I get that? Strategies are different in different cultures, but I would suspect there would be a bond and

there would be a working model. I think it needs to be explored and wouldn't it be fascinating if the universality piece was supported because that's part of what we're always working toward. In what ways do people use their specific culture, and is there anything universal that connects us all?

Sheperis: It would be interesting to find that out, wouldn't it?

Pistole: I do think people have to listen carefully when they are working with someone who is from a different country or out of a different ethnic background and clarify some of those expectations like, Is the female college student, for instance, expected to stay closer to the family rather than necessarily form a romantic attachment at that point in time?

Sheperis: I am sure that working in college counseling centers that you've seen a lot of cross-cultural relationships with people who are involved with someone from a different culture. Have there been any implications there with regard to attachment?

Pistole: You remind me of a client I had from a Latina background. Actually, you know, I wish I could remember the details of this client because her father was from one country and her mother was from another, and there seemed to be differences in expectations even between those two cultures, and she frequently dated guys who were from the dominant Caucasian culture. The way it comes up for me is different expectations about the meaning of closeness. That didn't seem to me to be like preoccupied or avoidant; it seemed to me to be different expectations about what it means to be close.

Sheperis: It wasn't necessarily that it activated the attachment system for her; it was more about the rules of the family governing the interaction. Is there anything that we haven't covered that you think we need to hear from you to really facilitate the readers' understanding?

Pistole: I think this theory has relevance to pre-K through 12 teaching. There is some work in that field. I think young children attach to their teachers, and I think that framework could be useful to teachers. Of course, young children also have attachment to parents, and so at some point, the literature would have to deal with how the attachment to parent and teacher works. But if the teacher recognizes the attachment of the child, then the teacher becomes a secure base in guiding mastery and learning. If the child then experiences separation from the teacher or is having attachment issues, kind of from the home or distress related to home life, there are secure bases for the child to turn to. This theory might be useful to teachers in terms of intervening, helping them find a structure so that they have a sense of what's going on and so they have a sense of what to do. In high school, I suspect it is like what is written about in the college relationship, a mentoring kind of relationship for learning and career guidance.

Sheperis: Well, that makes a lot of sense. I had not thought about that in terms of teachers.

FUTURE RESEARCH EFFORTS

Pistole: We're trying to develop a caregiving scale for counseling, and if we can get that developed, then we can do counseling process and outcome research on attachment from an attachment theory perspective.

Sheperis: Where are you at in the development of your instrument?

Pistole: We've got a set of items, and we actually want to reduce them, but we want to reduce them based on data. We are trying to get people in training programs to fill out the instrument and then the next step, when we see what that looks like, is to revise it and send it to the therapists and get them to fill it out and do a validity study on it and try to come up with an instrument then that can be used. I think that this is the direction that attachment theory needs to go. I think that clients are attached to the therapist at least most of the time, and I think that we experience caregiving bonds through our clients.

Sheperis: Well, with that in mind, what do you think happens with community counseling agencies where there's a high turnover of therapists? You know, sometimes people are there 6 months and so then they terminate with their clients or transfer to another counselor.

Pistole: Well, I hadn't thought it through that far actually, but I think it would be useful to address the attachment and separation issues. I think they probably get addressed through things we do in termination, but I think it would be important to do it specifically because anger can be separation anxiety. That's just replicating another attachment separation, and we all have attachment separation. It would be good for somebody to write on that and give us some base examples.

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