**BAR-ILAN UNIVERSITY**

# The Role of Attachment Exploration: Connections among Secure Attachment and Marcia's Identity Dimensions of Exploration and Commitment

Rivki Haliva-Glav

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master's
Degree in the School of Education, Bar-Ilan University

Ramat Gan, Israel                                               2017

# Abstract

The term "exploration" is a fundamental term, common to both John Bowlby's Attachment Theory and James Marcia's Ego Identity Theory, as expressed in his Paradigm of Identity Statuses. In spite of this common exploratory element, various studies have shown that the connection between these two theories is not as expected. The findings of these studies showed weak correlations between identity statuses and attachment. In addition, a significant positive correlation was not found between identity exploration and secure attachment. In light of these findings, this study offers a model which explains the connections between the various theories, by directly measuring the exploration variable, as it is expressed in each theory.

This study seeks to examine the connection between aspects of identity (exploration and commitment) and different attachment styles (secure and unsecure), by means of direct measurement of the explorational attachment system, as well as the dimensions of identity exploration and identity commitment.

Until now, studies which examined the connection between attachment and identity, did not directly measure the explorational attachment system. Therefore, the reason for weak correlations between attachment styles and Marcia's identity statuses stems from the fact that the exploration system was not measured directly. This study will also measure identity exploration and identity commitment. This direct manner of measurement of identity parameters will allow a clearer and more accurate examination of the correlation between them and attachment styles and attachment exploration. Consequently, the hypotheses of the study are as follows: 1) The influence of attachment styles versus attachment exploration will be larger when identity commitment is predicted. 2) In contrast, the relative influence of attachment exploration will be larger in comparison with attachment styles, when the identity exploration is predicted.

Additional hypotheses in this study relate to various connections between attachment exploration and attachment and identity: 3) A negative correlation will be found between attachment variables (anxiety and avoidance) and attachment exploration. 4) A positive

correlation will be found between attachment exploration and identity exploration. 5) Differences will be found between identity statuses for different levels of attachment exploration; the average attachment exploration of statuses that are characterized by high identity exploration (identity achievement and moratorium) will be statistically higher than the average statuses characterized by low identity exploration (foreclosure and diffused identity).

There were 190 subjects in the study, ranging in ages from 15 to 35, the majority of whom (105 participants) were students. All the participants filled in the study questionnaires online, in response to an email sent to them, with online forms to be completed. The participants answered four questionnaires: 1. Attachment Exploration Questionnaire, a self-report questionnaire developed by Green & Campbell (2000), designed to test the level of exploration of a individual, with reference to a variety of explorative activities. The questionnaire was translated to Hebrew for the first time, for the purposes of this study. 2. Ego Identity Process Questionnaire (EIPQ), a self-report questionnaire which examines dimensions of exploration and commitment, through which different identity statuses can be categorized, according to James Marcia's Ego Identity Theory (Balistereri, Busch-Rossnagel & Geisinger, 1995) 3. Experiences in Close Relationships Questionnaire (ECR), a self-report questionnaire reporting individual experiences in times of distress. The questionnaire distinguishes between two basic dimensions of attachment among adults: anxiety and avoidance – the anxiety dimension reflects dependence on others for the purpose of constructing a positive model of self; the avoidance dimension reflects the degree of avoidance of intimacy (approach-avoidance) as a result of past experiences and fear of rejection (Brennan, Clark & Shaver, 1998) 4. Questionnaire of demographic information, designed to examine the background of the participants, including gender, age, marital status, etc., in order to describe the subject population and investigate possible correlations between some of the background variables and the study variables.

The results of the study reveal a complex picture of connections between identity and attachment. The findings partially support the hypotheses; the correlations and the results of the hierarchical regression are weak to moderate. With respect to the unique contribution of attachment exploration as a predictor of the connection between attachment

and identity, the findings of the study support, in a partial manner, the general direction of the hypotheses which mentioned a distinct unique contribution of the variables of attachment and attachment exploration as predictors of identity variables: attachment exploration had a stronger influence in predicting identity exploration; in contrast, avoidance had a stronger influence in predicting identity commitment, but the percentage of variance accounted for by the variables was low to medium. At the same time, the results of the regression analysis raised the level of unique contribution of attachment exploration to a significant level, in a different way: Anxiety and attachment exploration had a significant positive influence in predicting identity exploration, with attachment exploration having a greater effect than anxiety. Avoidance had a stronger influence than attachment exploration, in predicting identity attachment. In both cases, the correction was negative, an increase in avoidance and exploration predicted a decrease in commitment.

In addition to these major findings, additional findings partially supported the hypotheses: Concerning the relationship between attachment exploration and attachment variables, a marginal negative correlation was found between attachment exploration and avoidance, in accordance with the study hypotheses. However, in contrast to the study hypotheses, a significant positive correlation was found between attachment exploration and anxiety.

Concerning the relationship between attachment exploration and identity variables, a significant positive correlation was found between attachment exploration and identity exploration, in accordance with the study hypotheses. In addition, a marginal negative correlation was found between attachment exploration and commitment, although somewhat less strong. Finally, the study findings supported the hypothesis that identity statuses that are characterized by high identity exploration (identity achievement and moratorium) will be associated with higher levels of attachment exploration, in comparison with identity statuses that have lower identity exploration.

The findings of this study have theoretical and practical implications in the fields of consultation and treatment. In the area of research, the results of the study advance further research attempts to clarify difficult questions and construct models for concrete examination of relationships that were examined here. In addition, this study provides a primary basis for expanding the term attachment exploration and investigating it by means

of the questionnaire developed by Green and Campbell.   In the consultation-treatment area, the results of the study emphasize the need for building an intervention and support program for strengthening identity, not only in teenage years, but also in older individuals, who are in the period of higher education, beginning careers and finding mates.  This is especially true in light of the correlation between anxiety and the various dimensions of exploration.