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A Study on Paula Hawkins's Into the Water-With Special Reference to Attachment Theory

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Abstract

Attachment theory is the shared work of John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth; both were influenced by Freud (Bowlby, 1969/1982, p. 12; Ainsworth et al., 1978, p. 5). Bowlby developed his model of attachment theory while working as a psychiatrist in a child guidance clinic in London in the 1930s. He shared the psychoanalytic view that early experiences in childhood have an important influence on development and behavior later in life. The theory posits that a secure emotional and physical attachment to a primary caregiver during early childhood is vital for healthy psychological development. While it does not serve as a comprehensive theory of all relationships, it specifically examines how individuals respond to emotional distress, separation from loved ones, or perceived threats within close connections. It focuses on the four different attachment styles that are secure, avoidant, anxious/ambivalent, and disorganized. These styles change with time and experience. This paper explores attachment disorders as portrayed through the characters in the novel *Into the Water*. Such behavioral disorders impact an individual's ability to develop and sustain healthy relationships. This paper analyzes the problems faced by some characters in the novel who don't seem to have a peaceful relationship with others due to some aggressive behaviors in their childhood. This study focuses on the attachment issues between the characters that were caused by some bad childhood experiences, and how to avoid such problems in life.

Keywords

Attachment, styles of attachment theory, insecure attachment, emotional availability.

Attachment theory focuses on the connections and bonds between people, encompassing those between a parent and child, as well as between romantic partners. It's a psychological illustration of the emotional bonds and connections between them. These earthly bonds may continue to influence attachments throughout life. British psychologist John Bowlby was the first attachment philosopher who described attachment as a "lasting cerebral connectedness between mortal beings" (Bowlby, 1969/1982, p. 45). He was interested in knowing the anxiety and torture that children face when they're separated from their primary caretakers (Holmes, 2014, p. 33). Some of the former behavioral propositions suggested that attachment was a learned gesture. The child's life isn't only influenced by their parents but also by their siblings, close mates, schoolteachers, and others with whom they interact on a day-to-day basis.

The attachment proposition argues that a strong emotional and physical bond with one primary caregiver during our early periods of life is critical to our development. However, they also feel safe to explore the world if the bond between the people is strong and securely attached. It gives a feeling of insecure attachment and makes it scary to explore the world if the attachment is weak. People who are securely attached are said to have higher trust, can connect to others, and

as a result are more successful in life. Insecurely attached people tend to distrust others, warrant social expertise, and have problems forming connections (Gibson, 2020, p. 55). There are four attachment styles: secure attachment, anxious attachment, avoidant attachment, and fearful-avoidant (disorganized). Let's get into a detailed explanation of each attachment style.

Firstly, a secure attachment style is the ability to secure and love relationships with people. A person with this quality will trust others and be friendly with them. They are not afraid of intimacy but like to socialize with others. Secure attachment is considered the perfect one for relationships. Securely attached children often show signs of distress when separated from their caregivers, but they warmly welcome them back when they return. Parents of securely attached children interact more with their children. Adults tend to have faith and good relationships, seek out social support, and share their emotions with other people. These people tend to have good self-esteem (Gibson, 2020, p. 62).

To understand the secure attachment style better, let's look at the character named Katie. She was a fifteen-year-old girl who lived in a small town called Beckford. Katie is a kind-hearted girl and spreads positivity wherever she goes. These qualities of Katie were inherited from her parents when she was a child. Parents play a vital role in shaping the personality of their child and act as a mirror of reflection in their child's life. Parents are the guides for developing a better future for their children. When Katie was a child, her parents were attentive, nurturing, sensitive, and loving. They always stand by Katie no matter what happens to her. They were responsive to her needs, and she learned that she could rely on her parents whenever she needed. Katie learns and grows up by watching Louise and Alec and how they lead their lives. Katie's attachment style also extends to her friendships. She fosters deep and meaningful connections with her friends. She's supportive and reliable, always there to lend a listening ear or a helping hand. Katie's secure attachment style enables her to form and maintain healthy relationships. She has a positive self-image and feels worthy of love and care. A secure attachment style enables her to navigate relationships with confidence, emotional openness, and trust in others.

The second type of attachment is anxious attachment. It is a type of insecure attachment.

People with an anxious attachment have a feeling of doubt about their relationships and always try to seek attention from others. Children who form ambivalent attachments often display confusion and insecurity when interacting with strangers. These children feel distressed when they get away from their parents or caregivers. They always worry about their parents, whether they love them or not, and become disturbed. Patrick serves as a clear example of someone with an anxious attachment style. As the father of Sean

Townsend-the detective assigned to investigate Nel's death-his behavior reflects the insecurity and emotional intensity typical of this attachment type.

Patrick was a kind of nutcase and never respected women. He was an unstable person and was uncertain about his wife, Lauren. There is a possibility that his parents, friends, or those close to him shaped his character. He strongly doubts that his wife was cheating on him with another man. In reality, Lauren was a good and loyal woman, and she never had an illegal relationship with anyone. Patrick's parents may be inconsistent and unpredictable, or his parents may not have been attentive and dismissive. Maybe this way of inconsistent parenting is the reason for the fear of abandonment for Patrick (Bowlby, 1969/1982, p. 74). This causes him to seek reassurance and validation within his romantic relationship with Lauren. He tends to worry about the status and security of his relationships, often overanalyzing situations and seeking excessive reassurance from his partner. Patrick has a strong desire for closeness and intimacy, but he also fears rejection and tends to be overly sensitive to any sign of distance or disinterest. He struggles with trusting Lauren's intention and always feels the need to test her commitment. As a result of Patrick's ambiguity about Lauren, he killed her by pushing her into the water. Individuals with an anxious attachment style often hold a poor self-image while viewing others in a more favorable light. These individuals often develop this style due to inconsistent caregiving (Cassidy & Shaver, 2016).

The third style of attachment is avoidant attachment. It is a type of insecure attachment where people have trouble connecting or trusting others in relationships. These kinds of people disassociate themselves from society and are emotionally unavailable (Holmes, 2014, p. 41). They wanted to be independent and were unwilling to share their thoughts or feelings with others.

A great example of this type of attachment style is a character named Jules. At the beginning of the novel, Jules describes her traumatized childhood experiences with every minute detail when she revisits Beckford on the death of her sister, Nel. This was the place that Jules never wanted to come back to. The only reason why Jules hates this place so much is because of her sister, Nel. From a young age, Jules shared most of her time with Nel, their bond growing stronger each day. Her parents were emotionally unavailable sometimes; they didn't provide comfort or support and were dismissive of her emotional needs. Jules was afraid of Nel, and she had an awful childhood experience with her. Nel's dominance over Jules significantly disrupted and negatively impacted Jules's life. Nel threatens her by criticizing her looks and for being sensitive. She couldn't forget what had happened to her when she was eight years old and can remember each incident perfectly. Jules never shared her misery with others. In time, Jules came to value being self-sufficient, driven by a growing need to break free and rely only on her strength. After her mother passed away, she fled the town. She eventually ran out of patience and left Beckford to look after her mental health. She prioritizes her independence and personal space. Jules experiences her emotional challenges and prefers to deal with them herself. After she leaves, Nel tries to contact her, but she refuses to answer her calls. Jules believes that relying on others will only lead to disappointment and a loss of freedom. Jules has no close friends, and she doesn't socialize much with people. In the avoidant attachment style, people have a negative view of themselves as well as others.

The last attachment style was fearful avoidant. It is the combination of anxious and avoidant attachment styles. People of this type desperately long for affection, and at the same time, they want to avoid it at all costs. They unwillingly develop romantic relationships, and also, they feel terrible to be loved by others. These individuals seem to be inconsistent and fluctuate between the extremes of avoidance and anxiousness (Gibson, 2020, p. 83).

The suitable character for this type of attachment style is Lena, who was fifteen years old and the daughter of Danielle Abbott. She shared a close bond with Katie Whittaker. On the other hand, she has difficulty trusting her friends and moves between a stance of being overly reliant on them and then distancing herself. One day, she heard news that her mom had died in a swimming pool. Lena does not

believe that her mother committed suicide. A few months before, Lena's best friend also died in that pool. She was very upset because these two are the most important people in her life. She longed for love and care, but at the same time, she wanted to be alone. Jules, her aunt, returned to Beckford to look after her. However, Lena resents her because she always ignores Nel's attempts to communicate. This made a bad impression of her aunt Jules. Jules makes efforts to create a healthy relationship with her niece, Lena, and finds a way to compensate for her past complaints. Individuals with a disorganized attachment style often experience conflicting feelings about themselves and others, leading to unpredictable and unstable relationships.

People's behavior with fellow human beings is affected by how attachments develop to them in the early stages of their lives. Attachment styles developed in adulthood are seldom like those displayed in childhood. Adults who were securely attached as children have a higher probability of developing emotional strength and good self-esteem and can develop better social skills. Conversely, those with insecure attachment styles may struggle to form healthy connections, often repeating patterns of avoidance or anxiety in their relationships. Understanding these dynamics can be crucial for personal growth and fostering more meaningful interactions. The three insecure attachment styles have their core wounds and negative expectations, which developed from things that did or did not happen to someone when they were younger. Hopefully, these can be reprogrammed over time because the brain is neuroplastic; with awareness and interceding, they can be changed.

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