**The influence of attachment styles on the acceptability of
psychological abuse**

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Abstract

This research provides insight into how attachment styles influence the acceptability of psychological abuse. Research shows that people with an insecure attachment style (anxious-ambivalent, avoidant and disorganized attachment style) both experience and perform psychological abuse more often in a relationship and are more likely to find psychologically abusive behaviour acceptable. The main hypothesis is that people accept psychological abuse more when it fits their attachment style, while considering both the role as performer as well as receiver of psychological abuse. Eight scenarios were made which consisted of psychological abusive behaviour which are associated with specific types of attachment of which participants had to rate the acceptability, to test whether it is true that specific forms of abuse are considered more or less acceptable based on attachment style. The four scenarios each had an performer and receiver scenario of the behaviour. Acceptability was the dependent variable, attachment styles the predictor variable, experienced abuse in the past the covariate and attitude towards violence the alternative dependent variable. The questionnaire included an attachment style, experienced abuse and attitude towards violence questionnaire and scenarios. Results show that roles did not matter in case of acceptability of the behaviour. If people experienced abuse in their past, they were more likely to have an insecure attachment style. The insecure attachment styles positively increase together. The acceptability of the individual scenarios did not differ depending on attachment style of the participants. Behaviours were considered abusive regardless of attachment style. Only experienced abuse influenced the acceptability of psychological abuse. This research tells us that the proposed link between attachment styles and specific forms of abuse may not transfer over to differing levels of acceptability. For future research, a qualitative study through interviewing can be done to allow researchers to map the reasons for acceptability.

Introduction

Psychological abuse

Intimate relationships are important in life. They provide social support and contribute to the development of an individual on emotional, personal and social level (Reis & Shaver, 1988). However, deficits in intimate relationships can cause psychological disturbances (Evans & Wertheim, 1998). Both interpersonal problems and relationship problems are often the consequence of the attachment style a person has (Bookwala & Zdaniuk, 1998). Attachment styles are expectations people develop about relationships with others. Attachment styles influence intimate relationships and can be the cause of relationship problems (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991).

Research shows that people with an insecure attachment style (anxious-ambivalent, avoidant and disorganized attachment style) both experience and perform psychological abuse more often in a relationship than people with a secure attachment style (Muller et al., 2000). Therefore, they are more likely to find psychological abusive behaviour acceptable (Malley-Morrison et al., 2000). Psychological abuse causes problems within a relationship and a person's life. Psychological abuse can cause mental, physical and functional problems (Sackett & Saunders, 1999). Although all types of abuse are a problem, women frequently report that psychological abuse is more damaging than physical or sexual abuse (Follingstad, 2009). Therefore, there is evidence that suggests that psychological abuse is the worst and most common form of abuse according to women (Stark, 2009). This research focusses on psychological abuse and attachment styles.

Researchers do not have consensus on the definition of psychological abuse. Psychological abuse includes many different behaviours. Psychological abuse includes threats of abuse, seeking control over someone through force, intimidation or assault, verbal abuse, denial, underestimating, degrading, not appreciating, nicknaming, authority and over-suppression, ridiculing of traits, criticizing behaviour, intimidation, dependency and overprotecting, destruction of property, engendering fear, socially isolating the partner, denying their emotional responsiveness humiliation, ignoring, jealous control, flaunting other sexual partners and taking or withholding belongings (Kara et al., 2004; Doherty & Berglund, 2008). For this research, psychological abuse is defined as "behaviour that involves the regular and deliberate use of a range of words and non-physical actions used with the purpose to manipulate, hurt, weaken or frighten a person mentally and emotionally; and/or distort, confuse or influence a person's thoughts and actions within their everyday lives, changing their sense of self and harming their wellbeing" (SafeLives, n.d.).

Psychological abuse causes fear, symptoms of distress, suicidal feelings, difficulty in daily activities, decrease of self-esteem and removes social support (Yoshihama, 2009). People who have been abused (in any form) as children are often more aggressive, mentally delayed and have cognitive deficits in their adult life (Arcaya & Gerber, 1990). Psychological abuse thus has many consequences, and also contributes to people's internal working models, which also represents their experience with psychological abuse (Muller et al., 2000).

Working models

Attachment styles develop through working models. People develop working models, which are representations of someone's history about themselves and their relationships with others (Bowlby, 1973; Baldwin, 1992). Working models are mental structures of how an event is supposed to go according to someone's past experiences. Thus, past experiences influences for example how people think about a relationship (Bowlby, 1973).

There are two working models: a self-model and a relationship model. The self-model contains perceptions of one's competence, worth and lovability (Lopez et al., 1998). The relationship model contains expectations towards the trustworthiness, goodness and dependability of each of their relationship with others, while the self-model contains perceptions of an individual's own worth and lovability (Lopez et al., 1998). These working models are developed in childhood and serve as a template for intimate relationships in adulthood. Working models determine how people seek intimacy or avoid relationships and whether they engage in a relationship at all. If people have experience with trustworthy, understanding and kind people, they will view relationships and others as more positive. On the other hand, relationships with people who are not trustworthy, unresponsive and reject them, will lead to a negative view of others (Bretherton, 1990). This will also determine the person's model of the self. They will feel either worthy or unworthy of love with regard to relationships but also their own competence and worthiness apart from others (Bowlby, 1977). For example when people are rejected, they might feel not worthy of love, since people do not want them.

Working models thus affect the type of intimate relationships people have and how they see relationships (Bretherton, 1990; Kobak & Hazan, 1991). People develop representations of the world, including representations of relationships. That is a working model. It enlarges the chance to survive due to the representations of what can happen to them (Delius et al., 2008). For example, when people have been psychologically abused multiple times in the past, they learn not to trust others easily in order to prevent getting hurt again. Students who experienced abuse were more likely to use insults and abuse in their relationships (Styron & Janoff-Bulman, 1997). This is because they have a working model that abuse is acceptable and belongs to a

relationship since they have received it as well. Working models thus determine someone's general behaviour in relationships and their attachment style.

Attachment styles

Attachment styles are a consequence of the working model people have. Not only do individuals need food, security and other needs to survive, they also need affection, love and acceptance (Schaffer & Emerson, 1964). Attachment is the base of love and affection. Therefore, attachment can contribute to people fulfilling these needs (Schaffer & Emerson, 1964). Bowlby developed the attachment style theory. He defined attachment as a "lasting psychological connectedness between human beings" (Bowlby, 1982). While this definition refers to the attachment between specific people, people also develop an attachment style which reflects their general approach to relationships based on their past experiences of forming attachments. Attachment styles greatly influence how people behave in relationships within their lives. It starts at birth and develops throughout childhood (Muller et al., 2000). Often, the attachment forms in childhood and is stable over a lifetime. However, it can change due to experiences in their life (Belsky & Nezworski, 1988). For example when someone has neglecting parents, they might have an insecure attachment style, but when in adulthood they have loving and caring people around them, their attachment style might become more secure. This can also work the other way around. Bad experiences can decrease a secure attachment style. According to Bartholomew (1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991), there are four attachment styles: secure, anxious-ambivalent, avoidant and disorganized.

People with a secure attachment style have usually had positive experiences within past relationships. They typically have a positive view of themselves and others and are generally comfortable within a relationship. Mostly, they are able to be intimate with others and express their emotions openly to them. Relationships are based on emotional closeness and honesty and individuals are able to rely on each other. This attachment style develops when people receive consistency, warmth, support and safety from their caregivers (Grabill & Kerns, 2000).

People with an anxious-ambivalent (also called fearful) attachment style have a positive view of others but a negative view of themselves. They desire an intimate relationship and seek a positive view of the self through their relationships with others. Being alone or being without a partner gives them anxiety. These individuals highly value their relationships but are often anxious that their partner will leave them or is not as invested as they are. A strong fear of abandonment is present in these individuals. They are assured when their partner gives them attention, is responsive and cares for them. The fear of attachment to others expresses itself in seeking approval and support from their partner. The absence of support can cause the

individual to be clingy and demanding, seeking attention from their partner and desperate for love. They often see their partner as better than them. People with an anxious-ambivalent attachment style seek approval of others to fill their own sense of self-worth. People with this attachment style are often jealous or anxious when they are away from their partner and may use psychological abusive behaviours such as controlling behaviour, guilt or other manipulative tactics to keep their partner close. The theory is that as an infant, this attachment style develops when they receive inconsistent responses or neglect from their caregiver. This attachment style can develop through inconsistencies in behaviour from a friend or partner (Grabill & Kerns, 2000). Inconsistent in this case is for example that one day a mother can be extraordinary kind while the next day she ignores the child completely.

People with an avoidant (also called preoccupied) attachment style have a positive view of themselves but a negative view of others. They want more autonomy and less intimacy in a relationship. They are strong, independent and generally avoid emotional closeness. They do not want to depend on others or have others depend on them. Often, people perceive them as 'lone wolves'. The fear of attachment to others expresses itself in avoiding an intimate relationship. Psychologically abusive behaviour of this attachment style includes being secretive, ignoring the feelings of the partner, not giving support, being independent and not share emotions or feelings. This attachment style may develop when someone does not get the support from their caregivers that they need. They may be ignored as a child by their caregivers (Bowlby, 1977).

People with an disorganized (also called dismissing) attachment style have both a negative view on themselves and of others. These individuals often want a relationship, but their fear of rejection holds them back in intimacy in a relationship. Fear of intimate relationships in this case expresses itself in showing ambiguous and unstable behaviour within a relationship. They want intimacy and closeness but distrust others and do not want to depend on their partner. Their fear of getting hurt causes them to avoid emotional attachment (Grabill & Kerns, 2000). People with an disorganized attachment style have problems with regulating and controlling their emotions, can show psychologically abusive behaviours such as hostility and aggressive behaviour and can have a more coercive style in their interactions. The disorganized attachment style is believed to be developed due to abuse or childhood trauma. When a caregiver is inconsistent and unpredictable, the child cannot depend on their caregiver and fears their own safety. This is how a disorganized attachment style can develop (Benoit, 2004). The disorganized attachment style has a combination of the anxious-ambivalent and avoidant attachment style and can therefore have some similarity.

These attachment styles are often stable over time and they determine the characteristics of a relationships the person has within their life (Bartholomew & Shaver, 1998; Bowlby 1980). The disorganized, avoidant and anxious-ambivalent attachment styles are together grouped as insecure attachment. Insecure attachment can lead to emotional distress, interpersonal problems and substance abuse. People who experience abuse are more likely to have an insecure attachment style than people who did not experience abuse (Muller et al., 2000). Next to that, people with an insecure attachment style are less likely to be in a supportive relationship (Borhani, 2013). Adults with an insecure attachment were seen as more distressed, experience more negative emotions, were more violent, anxious and hostile according to their peers (Kobak & Sceery, 1988; Simpson, 1990). Malley-Morrison et al., (2000) shows that insecure attachment styles are positively correlated with psychological abuse as both abuser and victim. Therefore, it appears logical to think that they will be negatively associated with judgments of those behaviours (Malley-Morrison et al., 2000). Thus, it is to be expected that they experience more psychological abuse and accept it more. Research connects attachment styles with emotional abuse, sexual offending and partner abuse (Dutton et al., 1994). People who experienced abuse have more difficulties with relationships in their adult life (McCarthy & Taylor, 1999).

Research shows that people with an insecure attachment style are also be more likely to be victims of abuse because of their attachment styles (Malley-Morrison et al., 2000; Muller et al., 2000). People with an insecure attachment style perceive psychological abuse as less abusive than people with the secure attachment style (Salehi, 2020). Children who experienced abuse, often develop a denial coping strategy. That is because they were at an age in which they were unable to defend themselves yet. The denial strategy is then available to defend against the physical and emotional pain from being abused by their caretaker. It then became a characteristic style of the child reacting to the stress they experienced. Research shows that children who have a lot of stress in their childhood, often make use of the immature defense of the denial strategy when they become adults (Cramer and Block, 1998). This denial strategy can prevent the person from recognizing abusive behaviour (Cramer & Kelly, 2010). Therefore, people who experienced abuse in the past might accept abuse more than people who did not experience abuse.

The anxious-ambivalent attachment style was described as the angry attachment style (Dutton et al., 1994). The anxious-ambivalent attachment style is associated with a higher level of psychological aggression and anger within an intimate relationship. For this reason, they might perceive psychological abuse as more typical for a relationship as receiver and performer

of abuse (Malley-Morrison et al., 2000). One study shows that the anxious-ambivalent attachment style correlates positively with psychological abuse, while the other attachment styles were not significantly correlated with psychological abuse. The anxious-ambivalent attachment style displays hypersensitivity to rejection (Dutton et al. 1994). This could be due to a defense mechanism. Thus, the more fear people have in relationships, the more reluctant they are to perceive aggression as abusive. People with an avoidant attachment style seek their attachment figures' approval as well in order to confirm their sense of self-worth. Their own feelings of unworthiness are correlated with a high level of intimacy anger (Dutton et al. 1994) which causes them to judge aggressive behaviours as more typical of intimate relationships (Malley-Morrison et al., 2000). The failure of recognizing abuse can contribute to justifying the abusive behaviour because they do not see it as abuse. Abuse might be seen in their working model as part of a relationship and that it how it is supposed to go in a relationship. If they do not see it as abuse, they will probably think the behaviour is acceptable and therefore justify the behaviour.

Current study

A working model forms people's attachment style which determines expectations, how they behave in relationships and their perception of relationships (Bowlby, 1980). It is therefore expected that these perceptions and the attachment style influence how people perceive and justify psychological abuse. Research shows that insecure attachment significantly contributed to the perception of abuse in a way that they accept psychological abuse more (Salehi et al., 2020). People might show behaviour which is typical for the attachment style they have. Therefore, it is expected that because of their working models, people should view behaviours that fit their attachment style as more acceptable. In this study, the focus will be on psychological abuse.

The subject of this study is whether there is a correlation between the attachment style and the acceptability of psychological abuse, expecting the specific form of abuse to matter. As for acceptability, this study focusses on both the receiver as well as the performer when looking at psychological abuse. Thus, people will have to imagine they are both the performer as well as receiver of psychological abusive behaviour in a romantic relationship to see whether there is a difference in victim or performer in case of acceptability. Participants have to rate how acceptable the behaviour is based on the explanations given for the behaviour which are based on each attachment style. The main hypothesis will be that people accept psychological abuse more when the behaviour of psychological abuse as both the performer and receiver fits their attachment style. Thereby, specific types of behaviour lead to the formation of attachment styles

via the development of working models. Therefore, it is expected that specific forms of abuse are considered more acceptable based upon attachment style. Thus, psychological abusive behaviours which are typical for an attachment style, will be considered more acceptable when people have that certain attachment style. For example for anxious-ambivalent attachment style, specific forms of abuse are manipulating, dependency and isolating the partner. A positive association between specific attachment styles and acceptability only for behaviours typical for the matching attachment style is expected. For example, there is a positive relationship expected with the anxious-ambivalent attachment styles and the acceptability of the scenario describing anxious-ambivalent typical behaviours, but not between anxious ambivalent attachment styles and behaviours of other attachment styles.

Method

Design

This study is a quantitative study examining how attachment style influences the acceptance of psychologically abusive behaviour from the perspective of both the receiver and performer of those behaviours. This experiment has a 2 (Role: Receiver, Performer) x 4 (Attachment styles: Secure, Anxious-ambivalent, Avoidant, Disorganized) within-subjects design. The attachment styles were continuous rather than categorical predictor variables. Thus, the relationship between attachment style and level of acceptance of the behaviour will be tested, with the covariate being past experiences of abuse and the alternative dependent variable being a positive attitude towards violence.

Participants

There were a total of 159 participants included in the study. A power analysis was performed to specify how many participants were needed in the study. This was done choosing a linear multiple regression as statistical test. This was because the researcher was primarily interested in the predictive power of the attachment style corresponding to the scenario. Using a power level of 0.80, a significance level of .05 and an partial R^2 effect size of 0.06 and seven predictors (four attachment styles, the role and two covariates), the sample size determined that 133 participants were needed. An effect size of 0.06 was used since this is the smallest effect size of interest. The participants were collected by the researcher who asked the participants to fill in the questionnaire through convenience sampling via social media and SONA from the University of Twente. This website was used as a recruitment tool where participants get study credits for participating in research. Fifty-one percent of the participants were from SONA.

The inclusion criteria was that participants had to be eighteen years or older. Four participants were excluded because they did not give consent, one did not complete the questionnaire and one participant was under eighteen. Based on these criteria, 159 participants remained out of the 165 original participants. Participants had an age between 18 and 62 years old ($M = 26.6$, $SD = 9.58$). Twenty-eight percent were male, and 69.4% were female. Sixty-one percent of the participants were Dutch, 30.6% were German. The rest had another nationality (6.9%). Eighty-one percent was heterosexual, 3.8% were homosexual and 10.6% were bisexual. From all the participants, 45% had experience with either inter-partner or parental abuse.

Materials

At the beginning, demographic questions were asked to provide age, gender, sexuality and nationality. For the whole questionnaire, see appendix A.

Positive attitude towards violence questionnaire

The subscale abuse of the Intimate Partner Abuse Attitude Scales (IPVAS; Smith et al., 2005) was used as a questionnaire to measure the alternate outcome variable positive attitude towards violence because it predicts whether people commit abuse and how acceptable they perceive psychological abuse to be. This variable is used to test for an effect of attachment style on the acceptability of abuse without designating specific abusive behaviours. Previous studies suggest that this variable has an influence on the acceptability of psychological abuse (Juarros-Basterretxea et al., 2019). These eleven items assessed the attitude towards intimate partners as both the performer and receiver of the behaviours (e.g., "During a heated argument, it is okay for me to say something to hurt my partner on purpose" or "It is okay for me to blame my partner when I do bad things") which were based on the Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A high score on the scale indicates a higher positive attitude and acceptance towards violence. Since it is one scale, no distinction is made for performer or receiver. The subscale abuse has a Cronbach's alpha of .62.

Attachment style questionnaire

To measure the attachment styles, the Relationship Scales Questionnaire (RSQ; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994) was used. The scale consists of eighteen items to measure how participants scored on each attachment style (e.g. for avoidant "I am comfortable without close emotional relationships" or for secure: "I am comfortable depending on other people" or for anxious-ambivalent: "I find it difficult to depend on other people" or for disorganized: "It is very important to me to feel independent"). The answer options are based on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Not at all like me) to 5 (Very much like me). The secure and disorganized

attachment styles consists of five items and the anxious-ambivalent and avoidant attachment styles consists of four items. The scores for each attachment style were based on the mean of the items indicating each attachment style. Thus, people get a score on each attachment style. The secure items have an Cronbach's alpha of 0.34. The anxious-ambivalent items have an Cronbach's alpha of 0.73. The avoidant items have an Cronbach's alpha of 0.19. The disorganized items have an Cronbach's alpha of 0.52.

Scenarios

The researcher made eight scenarios which measure acceptability of psychological abusive behaviour based on each of the four attachment styles. There are eight scenarios, two for every attachment style whereby one was the receiver and one was the performer of the behaviour described in the scenarios. Hereby, it was about behaviour participants performed or received from a partner within a romantic relationship. The scenarios were based on the literature of the attachment styles in the introduction. In the scenarios, abusive behaviour was described which is empirically shown to be associated with each attachment type. For example the anxious-ambivalent attachment style, may use controlling behaviour, guilt or other manipulative tactics to keep their partner close. Thus, behaviour for this scenario included being dependent, not allowing the partner to go anywhere, checking their phone and making them feel guilty for leaving. For the secure attachment it is known that they are loving, supporting and emotionally open to others, thus, behaviour in this scenario included support, being emotionally open, taking feelings into account and being able to express needs and feelings. For the avoidant scenario it is known that they are independent, distant and close themselves of emotionally. Thus, behaviour in this scenario included being secretive, ignoring the feelings of the partner, not giving support, being independent and not share emotions or feelings. For the dismissing scenario it was known that people show ambiguous and unpredictable behaviour. Thus, behaviour in this scenario included showing a lack of trust and unpredictability with showing emotions.

The scenarios do not include gender so people would not be excluded and everyone would be able to imagine the relationships regardless of their own gender identity or sexuality. Each scenario included a question asking about the acceptability of the psychological abuse in that scenario through a continuous scale from 1 (Worst behaviour possible) to 100 (Kindest behaviour possible). It consisted of one question per scenario. The question was formed as "Imagine yourself as if you have done/received this to/from your partner, what do you think of this behaviour?". The scenarios were placed in a random order and included a screen in between

the scenarios where participants had to click "Next" to go to the next scenario. This was done to prevent participants from giving the same answers on the scenarios.

Experienced abuse in the past questionnaire

To measure experienced abuse, the "E-HITS" (Extended - Hurt, Insult, Threaten, Scream) screening instrument is used (Chan et al., 2010). This questionnaire measures psychological aggression, physical assault and sexual coercion in intimate partner abuse. Instructions for participants were to think about the relationship with their parents, legal guardian or a romantic relationship with a partner and think about whether they have ever performed these behaviours towards them. For this study, the questionnaire was adjusted to measure experienced abuse in general, not necessarily from a partner. Thus, "your partner" has been removed from the questions, as well as "in the past 12 months". This is done since this study wants to know about whether they experienced abuse ever in a their lifetime, not necessarily within a certain timeframe. After the five questions about experienced abuse, it was asked whether this behaviour is either performed by parents or intimate partners or both. It consisted of five questions (e.g. "Has someone ever physically hurt you?"). The questions were answered by a five point Likert scale with options "Never", "Rarely", "Sometimes", "Often", or "Frequently". It has an acceptable Cronbach's alpha of .78.

Procedure

First, participants read information about the research. This information stated that the study is about finding out how people perceive behaviours in relationships. Next to that, a warning was given because the questionnaire included the subject psychological, physical and sexual abuse which could trigger participants and make them feel uncomfortable. Since it is a sensitive subject, a website and a phone number were provided in the information which participants could call in case they needed to talk to someone. The website and phone number were from "Slachtofferhulp Nederland", which is a professional organization regarding emotional, legal and practical support in the Netherlands regarding abuse. The attachment styles were not mentioned to prevent people from filling in socially desirable answers or to influence participants beforehand. Thus, only necessary information was given. Then, informed consent was asked.

After the information and consent, participants provided demographic information (age, gender, sexuality and nationality). Next, they had to complete questions about experienced psychological abuse. Thereafter, they had to complete the questionnaire about attitudes towards abuse. After that, they completed the attachment style questionnaire. These variables were

measured before the scenarios to make sure the manipulation did not affect scores on the covariates. Then, they had to read the scenarios and answer the questions about the acceptability of the behaviour in the scenarios. Lastly, they were fully debriefed and the information on where to go for help for inter-partner abuse was given again to the participants.

Data-analysis

The statistical programme IBM SPSS Statistics 26 was used to analyse the data from the questionnaire. A repeated-measures ANOVA was performed to analyse the difference between the roles and the influence of experienced abuse and attachment styles on the acceptability per scenario. Four models were run, with the dependent variable being the acceptability of performer and receiver of each scenario. In all four repeated measures ANOVAS, the attachment styles and experienced abuse were inserted as covariates. Hereby, the difference between the perceiver and performer of abuse were analysed, as well as the influence of the attachment styles and experienced abuse. Next to that, a linear regression was performed to see what the influence of attachment styles were on experienced abuse and attitude towards violence. Correlations were also analysed to see the relationship between the covariates.

<center>**Results**</center>

Descriptive statistics

The means and standard deviations of the attachment styles, positive attitude towards violence and acceptability for performer and receiver scales are presented in Table 1. Some of the variables were skewed and did not have a normal distribution. The secure performer and receiver acceptability were skewed to the left, while the attitude towards violence and anxious-ambivalent performer and receiver acceptability were skewed to the right. Therefore, a natural logarithmic transformation was executed to meet the assumptions of the general linear models that would be run for the analyses. This was done for the variables positive attitude towards violence, secure performer acceptability, secure receiver acceptability, anxious-ambivalent performer acceptability and the anxious-ambivalent receiver acceptability. These logged variables are used in the repeated measures ANOVAS and linear regression analyses. In Table 1 however, the variables without the logarithmic transformation are presented.

The results of the experienced abuse in the past questionnaire showed that 52% of the participants experienced physical abuse at least once. For insults, 85% of the participants experienced this type of abuse. Forty-three percent has been threatened as a form of psychological abuse. Ninety-one percent of the participants has been screamed at at least once

in their life. Twenty-nine percent experienced sexual abuse at least once in their life. Twenty percent of the people who experienced at least one form of abuse, thought of their parents as the performer of abuse, 13% experienced it from a partner and 45% from both their partner as well as their parents or legal guardian.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics for attachment styles, positive attitude towards violence, experienced abuse in the past and acceptability per attachment style scenario (N = 159).

	M	*SD*	Median	Lower quartile	Upper quartile
Secure attachment style*	2.91	.64	3.00	2.40	3.40
Anxious-ambivalent attachment style*	2.97	.84	3.00	2.25	3.75
Avoidant attachment style*	2.82	.59	2.75	2.50	3.25
Disorganized attachment style*	3.26	.59	3.40	2.80	3.80
Attitude towards violence scale*	1.40	.37	1.36	1.09	1.63
Experienced abuse*	2.10	.73	2.00	1.40	2.60
Performer acceptability**	37.53	8.93	36.75	31.00	42.25
Receiver acceptability**	38.78	9.06	37.25	33.25	42.75

Note.
*. Answer scale from 1 to 5.
**. Answer scale from 1 to 100

Correlations

In Table 2, the correlations between the continuous variables are presented. The significant correlations are highlighted in the table. The secure attachment style has an significant negative relationship with anxious-ambivalent, avoidant and dismissing attachment style. Thus, when people score high on the secure attachment style, they will score low on the insecure attachment styles.

The anxious-ambivalent attachment style has an statistically significant positive linear relationship with the avoidant attachment style and the disorganized attachment style. Thus, the variables tend to increase together.

Attitude towards violence has an statistically significant positive relationship with the avoidant attachment style. Thus, the higher people score on a positive attitude towards violence,

the higher they score on the avoidant attachment style. This is the only attachment style which has an positive relationship with attitude towards violence.

Experienced abuse in the past has an statistically significant positive linear relationship with the anxious-ambivalent and avoidant attachment style. Thus, the higher the score on experienced abuse in the past, the higher the score on the anxious-ambivalent and avoidant attachment style. Besides, experienced abuse has an significant negative relationship with the secure attachment style. Thus, when people score high on experienced abuse, they score low on the secure attachment style.

Table 2

Pearson correlations between the covariates attachment styles, attitude towards violence and experienced abuse in the past.

Variable	Secure	Anxious-ambivalent	Avoidant	Disorganized	Attitude
Secure					
Anxious-ambivalent	**-.510**				
Avoidant	**-.333**	**.461**			
Disorganized	**-.318**	**.483**	**.410**		
Attitude	-.027	.101	**.226**	.078	
Experienced Abuse	-.*168*	**.283**	*.178*	.052	-.065

Note. Significant levels at 0.01 are highlighted in bold. Significant levels at 0.05 are highlighted in italic.

Main effect of role

A repeated measures ANOVA was done to determine the acceptability of each individual scenario (secure, anxious-ambivalent, avoidant and disorganized) for the performer and receiver and how much people accepted the psychological abusive behaviour in the scenarios based on their own attachment styles and experienced abuse. Thereby, the effect of role (receiver or performer) on the acceptability of psychological abuse was analysed. All predictor variables can interact together with the role variables. The role variables cannot interact together, since they are theoretically separate constructs and they should not influence each other. For these tests, the logged variables were used. Which variables were logged, are mentioned in the descriptive statistics section. The test was repeated four times, once for each scenario. The scenarios described specific abusive behaviours typical for the attachment styles people have. These results are described below in Table 3 and 4.

The result of the repeated-measures ANOVA for the role on the secure scenario was not significant ($F(1, 153) = 1.16$ $p = .281$, $\eta_p^2 = .008$). Therefore, it can be concluded that there is no significant difference between the performer ($M = 4.49$, $SD = 0.15$) and receiver role ($M = 4.52$, $SD = 0.13$) for the acceptability of the secure attachment style scenario (see results in Table 3 and 4).

For the role on the anxious-ambivalent attachment style, the result of the a repeated-measures ANOVA showed that there is no significant difference between the performer ($M = 2.31$, $SD = 1.06$) or receiver ($M = 2.43$, $SD = 1.06$) role for the acceptability of the anxious-ambivalent attachment style scenario ($F(1, 119) = 1.02$ $p = .314$, $\eta_p^2 = .009$).

For role on the avoidant attachment style, the result of the repeated-measures ANOVA was not significant ($F(1, 153) = 1.25$, $p = .264$, $\eta_p^2 = .008$). Thus, there is no significant difference between the performer ($M = 23.09$, $SD = 19.95$) or receiver ($M = 22.86$, $SD = 18.65$) role for the acceptability of the avoidant attachment style scenario.

The same analysis was executed for the disorganized attachment style. The result of the repeated-measures ANOVA was not significant ($F(1, 153) = 0.05$, $p = .823$, $\eta_p^2 = <.001$), so it can be concluded that there is no significant difference between the performer ($M = 23.72$, $SD = 15.97$) or receiver ($M = 24.55$, $SD = 16.12$) role for the acceptability of the disorganized attachment style scenario.

These analyses show that there are no differences in perceived acceptability depending on whether participants performed or received the behaviour.

Attachment styles

There were no interaction effects of the attachment styles on the acceptability of psychological abuse. Table 3 and 4 show that attachment styles had no relationship with acceptability of the described behaviours regardless of the role.

Experienced abuse

The covariate experienced abuse had some interaction effects on the acceptability of psychological abuse. Experienced abuse in the past did have a significant negative effect on the receiver role of the anxious-ambivalent scenario ($B = -.37$, $t(119) = -2.77$, $p = .006$, $SE = 0.13$). Specifically, if participants scored high on experienced abuse, they were less likely to accept psychological abuse on the anxious-ambivalent scenario as receiver. For the performer role this was not significant ($B = -.10$, $t(119) = -.73$, $p = .467$, $SE = 0.13$).

Experienced abuse in the past had a significant negative effect on both the performer ($B = -4.75$, $t(153) = -2.66$, $p = .008$, $SE = 1.78$) and receiver role ($B = -5.56$, $t(153) = -3.08$, $p = .002$, $SE = 1.80$) of the disorganized scenario. Thus, when people experienced abuse in the past, they were less likely to accept psychological abuse in the disorganized attachment scenario. However, the effect is stronger for the receiver than for the performer role. These significant effects are shown in Table 3 and 4.

Table 3

Outcome of repeated measures test for the effect of role (receiver or performer) on the acceptability of psychological abuse from the scenarios while taking the scores of the attachment styles and experienced abuse into account.

Scenarios	Secure				Anxious-ambivalent				Avoidant				Disorganized			
Predictors	*F*	*p*	*df*	*Partial eta squared*	*F*	*p*	*df*	*Partial eta squared*	*F*	*p*	*df*	*Partial eta squared*	*F*	*p*	*df*	*Partial eta squared*
Role	1.16	.281	1, 153	.008	1.02	.314	1, 119	.009	1.25	.264	1, 153	.008	0.05	.823	1, 153	<.001
Role*Anxious-Ambivalent	0.04	.836	1, 153	<.001	0.09	.761	1, 119	.001	0.20	.648	1, 153	.001	0.02	.869	1, 153	<.001
Role*Avoidant	3.04	.083	1, 153	.020	0.20	.649	1, 119	.001	0.81	.367	1, 153	.005	0.91	.340	1, 153	.006
Role*Disorganized	0.005	.944	1, 153	<.001	0.09	.758	1, 119	.001	0.82	.365	1, 153	.005	0.14	.706	1, 153	.001
Role*Secure	0.03	.862	1, 153	<.001	0.50	.481	1, 119	.004	1.39	.239	1, 153	.009	0.22	.638	1, 153	.001
Role*Experienced abuse	0.14	.704	1, 153	.001	**7.88**	**.006**	**1, 119**	**.062**	0.76	.383	1, 153	.005	0.26	.609	1, 153	.002

Note. Significant results less than .05 are highlighted in bold.

Table 4

Results of test of between subjects effects of the repeated measures ANOVA.

Scenarios	Secure				Anxious-ambivalent				Avoidant				Disorganized			
Predictors	*df*	*F*	*p*	Partial Eta Squared	*df*	*F*	*p*	Partial Eta Squared	*df*	*F*	*p*	Partial Eta Squared	*df*	*F*	*p*	Partial Eta Squared
Anxious-ambivalent	1	1.67	.198	.011	1	2.85	.094	.023	1	0.001	.982	<.001	1	2.26	.134	.015
Avoidant	1	0.001	.978	<.001	1	1.65	.200	.014	1	2.42	.122	.016	1	0.94	.333	.006
Disorganized	1	0.34	.556	.002	1	0.13	.719	.001	1	0.87	.350	.006	1	1.82	.178	.012
Secure	1	0.10	.743	.001	1	0.06	.806	.001	1	0.12	.721	.001	1	0.003	.956	<.001
Experienced abuse	1	0.61	.433	.004	1	3.47	.065	.028	1	1.68	.196	.011	**1**	**10.29**	**.002**	**.063**

Note. Significant results less than .05 are highlighted in bold.

Attachment styles on positive attitude towards violence

A linear regression was performed to see the relationship between the attachment styles and attitude towards violence. This was also done for the attachment styles on past experienced abuse. These analyses are explorative analyses in addition to the main analyses. As can be seen in Table 3, there is a significant positive relationship of the avoidant attachment style on the attitude towards violence (β = .24, $t(158)$ = 2.62, p = .010). Thus, the higher people score on the avoidant attachment style, the more they have an positive attitude towards violence.

Table 5

Outcome of the linear regression analysis with the attachment styles on positive attitude towards violence.

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	*SE*	*β*	*t*	*p*
Secure	.039	.055	.065	.712	.478
Anxious-ambivalent	.013	.046	.028	.276	.783
Avoidant	.155	.059	.243	2.626	**.010**
Disorganized	-.011	.059	-.017	-.182	.855

Note. Significant results less than .05 are highlighted in bold.

Attachment styles on experienced abuse

The linear regression was repeated for the relationship between attachment styles and past experience of abuse. As can be seen in Table 6, there is a significant positive relationship between the anxious-ambivalent attachment style and past experience of abuse (β = .28, $t(158)$ = 2.88, p = .004). Thus, the higher people score on the anxious-ambivalent attachment style, the more they experienced abuse in the past.

Table 6

Outcome of the linear regression analysis with the attachment styles on experienced abuse in the past.

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	*SE*	*β*	*t*	*p*
Secure	-.039	.104	-.034	-.375	.708
Anxious-ambivalent	.249	.086	.289	2.886	**.004**
Avoidant	.107	.111	.087	.961	.338
Disorganized	-.165	.112	-.134	-1.481	.141

Note. Significant results less than .05 are highlighted in bold.

Discussion

This research was about whether attachment styles had an influence on the acceptability of psychological abuse, taking different roles as performer and receiver into account. This research is important to help better understand the theoretical links between past experiences of abuse, attachment style and the acceptability of psychological abuse. The hypothesis was that people accept psychological abuse more when the behaviour of psychological abuse as both the performer and receiver fits their attachment style. No significant findings were found to support this hypothesis. Attachment styles had no effect on the acceptability of psychological abuse. Besides, there was no difference in the acceptability of the receiver or performer role of psychological abuse. Thus, it did not matter regarding acceptability of behaviour in the scenarios if someone did that behaviour towards them, or that person did it to someone else. Further findings show that if people experienced abuse in their past, they were more likely to have insecure attachment styles (anxious-ambivalent and avoidant) and less likely to have an secure attachment style. The insecure attachment styles (anxious-ambivalent, avoidant and disorganized) were all positively correlated. Thus, people who had aspects of one were likely to show aspects of the other insecure attachment styles as well. Other findings show that when people experienced abuse in the past, they were less likely to accept psychological abuse in both the receiver and performer role of the disorganized attachment scenario. Next to that, participants who scored high on experienced abuse, were less likely to accept psychological abuse on the anxious-ambivalent scenario as receiver. People with an avoidant attachment style had an higher positive attitude towards violence.

Attachment styles and acceptance of abuse

It is known that people who experienced abuse often have insecure attachment styles and that if people have an insecure attachment style, they often also score high on the other insecure attachment styles (Malley-Morrison et al., 2000; Muller et al., 2000). This research also shows that the insecure attachment styles correlate together and that when people experienced abuse, they score higher on the anxious-ambivalent and avoidant attachment style. However, something can be said about the distinction between the insecure types. Bartholomew (1993), the maker of the attachment style questionnaire, points out that the patterns within the different attachment styles do not correspond completely but conceptually overlap with each other. Thus, the insecure attachment styles conceptually overlap, which might explain why the forms of abuse did not seem to matter here. The correlations in the current research support that the insecure attachment styles are related but are still distinct constructs, since the correlations are not overly high but also not weak either. The insecure attachment styles are similar, since they all act out of fear. However, there are important differences. The anxious-ambivalent style seeks emotional intimacy, the avoidant style avoids emotional intimacy and wants to be independent, while the disorganized seeks both independency and emotional intimacy to others (Bartholomew, 1993). The subscales of the four attachment styles in the attachment style questionnaire each had an low Cronbach's alpha, which might indicate that the questionnaire has a poor interrelatedness between the items. Thus, it might be the case that any correlation between the insecure attachment styles is due to the questionnaire, which might not be valid or reliable or distinct the insecure attachment styles enough (Malley-Morrison et al., 2000).

It was expected from the outcome of other studies that attachment style had an effect on the acceptability of psychological abuse (Malley-Morrison et al., 2000; Salehi et al., 2020). In the current study, attachment styles had no effect on the acceptability of psychological abuse, which was unexpected. However, the study of Malley-Morrison et al., (2000), uses a different questionnaire and measures peoples' attitudes pertaining both the abusiveness and typicality of a range of behaviours directed towards elderly. Therefore, it can lead to the different results since it measures acceptability of behaviour differently. The current study measures different psychological abusive behaviours typical for each attachment style, while Malley-Morrison et al., (2000) measures psychological abuse, psychological neglect, physical abuse, physical neglect and material abuse. This might explain the different outcomes. Salehi et al., (2020) did a similar study on the perceptions of elder abuse which showed that people with an secure and avoidant attachment style perceived abuse as less acceptable. Again, that result was not found in the current study. This can be due to the fact that they have different measures and measure

all types of elderly abuse, not necessarily the acceptability of psychological abuse based on behaviour in attachment styles. Besides, these studies measured attachment styles differently. In their studies, they used attachment styles questionnaire of which you could only have one attachment style and not score on the others. The current study takes the scores on all the different attachment styles into account. In the RSQ, which is used in the current study to measure attachment styles, the attachment styles are designed as a continuous measure. Attachment styles are not meant to be used as a categorical measurement. They are continuous variables on which you can score high or low on all of the styles (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). Therefore, it might have caused different results since in the current study, participants do not have a single attachment style, but rather score high or low on all of them. In the other studies, they only have one style (Malley-Morrison et al., 2000; Salehi et al., 2020). This might explain why attachment styles in the current study have no influence on the acceptability of psychological behaviour, while the other studies show the opposite.

Jang et al., (2010) found that people with an avoidant attachment style were be more likely to leave their relationship than people with an secure or anxious-ambivalent attachment style. This finding is in contradiction with the findings that insecure attachment is associated with higher tolerance for abuse (Karakurt et al., 2019). The research of Kostadinova (2022) also shows no relationship with the avoidant attachment style and acceptability of abusive behaviour. Thus, researches all differ in the relationship between attachment styles and acceptability of behaviour. Most of these studies seem to be measuring acceptability in general, while the current study considers the specific form of abuse to matter. A different measuring tool or sample could be a possible explanation for the different results on all the researches. The different measures to measure acceptability and the attachment styles might cause the different results, since some scales might be more valid an reliable than others (Bolarinwa, 2015). Another possible explanation is that the acceptance of psychological abuse is not correctly measured since participants might not answer truthfully and give social desirable answers or find it hard to imagine themselves into that situation (Nederhof, 1985). Next to that, self-report measures are not always reliable (Chan, 2010). This can all be the cause of the different results.

There might be other factors which explain why the attachment style might not be the key factor in determining how acceptable different types of psychological abuse are perceived. For example, social economic status, being abused as a kid, high anger and personality are factors which contribute to people performing and accepting psychological abuse (Schumacher et al., 2001). Another research shows that people with an high commitment to their partner, accepted abusive behaviour from their partner more than individuals with moderate levels of

commitment. In this research, all the scenarios were hypothetical and participants might have had a hard time imagining themselves into this situation and therefore were not committed (Mills & Malley-Morrison, 1998). Thus, all these factors can contribute to acceptability of psychological abusive behaviour and therefore not only attachment styles could be the key factor.

The current study shows that experienced abuse influences the acceptability of the disorganized and the anxious-ambivalent scenario. Thus, it might be the case that experienced abuse is actually more critical for the acceptability than attachment styles. Many researchers suggest that experienced abuse lead to more acceptability of psychologically abusive behaviours (Cramer & Kelly, 2010; Malley-Morrison et al., 2000; Muller et al., 2000; Styron & Janoff-Bulman, 1997). However, this study shows that it makes people find psychologically abusive behaviours less acceptable, especially when being the receiver of the behaviour. The assumption of the working models theory is that abuse changes peoples working models to make abusive behaviours seem more acceptable (Styron & Janoff-Bulman, 1997). However, the current study shows the opposite. People who experienced abuse made psychological abusive behaviour less acceptable. This shows that a person who has experienced trauma and suffering might still make a good life for themselves and might have been taught to deal with experienced abuse in an appropriate way (Geddes, 2005). Therefore, the working model theory and therefore the attachment theory might not always be so crucial and relevant as has been declared (Slater, 2007).

Results also show that people with an avoidant attachment style had an higher positive attitude towards violence. According to the research of Cramer & Kelly (2010), people who experienced abuse more often had an avoidant attachment style. The theory in the introduction shows that people with an insecure attachment style perceive psychological abuse as less abusive than people with the secure attachment style (Salehi, 2020; Malley-Morrison et al., 2000; Dutton et al., 1994). It makes sense according to that theory that people with an higher positive attitude towards violence accept abuse more than people who do not have an positive attitude towards violence. However, the current research does not show that people with an insecure attachment style accept psychological abuse less. Thus, there is no clear explanation from the current research as to why the avoidant attachment style had an higher positive attitude towards violence yet according to the other studies, it was an expected result (Cramer & Kelly, 2010).

Limitations

Results might also differ due to the population. The studies of Malley-Morrison et al., (2000) and Salehi et al., (2020) both had students as participants, however, from a different culture. Malley-Morrison et al., (2000) shows in their study that some cultures perceive abusive behaviour as less abusive than others. This study had mostly Dutch and German participants, which were similar cultures to each other and to most of the studies on attachment styles. Other cultures thus might show different acceptability towards psychological violence, as Malley-Morrison et al., (2000) research shows. Social norms can cause people to accept psychological abuse more and therefore differ per culture. For example, a study of Antai (2011), shows that the social norms in Nigeria causes people to accept abuse more. In Western cultures, abuse is seen as less acceptable (Malley-Morrison et al., 2000). This study mostly had people with a Western culture, which might explain why people rate the abusive behaviour less regardless of their attachment style. To avoid this limitation, people of all cultures should be included. There is critique on the attachment theory that is applies mostly to Western cultures (Doherty et al., 1994). However, since most participants had an Western culture, attachment theory should apply to them. Thus, this adds to the theory that attachment style might actually not influence the acceptance, but other factors like experience of abuse do.

Next to that, since the current study had mostly psychology students as participants, they might perceive psychological abuse as less acceptable in any case since they have more knowledge about the subject (Madu, 2003). As psychology students, it could have been the case that they were exposed to knowledge of psychological abuse before filling in the questionnaire and therefore, they were already influenced (Druckman & Kam, 2011). Thus, they might say all these behaviours were not acceptable since they are abusive. Having mostly psychology students as participants limits the external validity of the findings (Patino & Ferreira, 2018). More research needs to be done to confirm the outcomes on this research.

The questionnaire was mostly distributed in the Netherlands. However, the questionnaire was in English only. Since most participants were Dutch or German, it might be the case that some questions were misunderstood and therefore are not filled in correctly. People who do not speak English were therefore ruled out.

At least 51% of the participants had an high educational background. This can influence the results since people with an lower educational level have up to 1.5 times more chance of getting involved in psychological abuse in relationships (Audi et al., 2008). Therefore, there could be different outcomes, because the current study shows that people who experienced abuse have a higher chance of insecure attachment styles. According to Audi et al., (2008),

people with an high educational background might have less experience with psychological abuse. Results can be different since they might perceive psychological abuse different than the population of the current research, which mostly consisted of people with an high educational background.

Since no evidence was found to support the theory that attachment styles influences the perceptions of the different abusive behaviours, it could have been the case that the scenarios did not fully capture the behaviour of the different attachment styles or acceptability. This raises the question how well the literature can show that there is a clear difference in the abusive behaviours people show depending on attachment style. Although the different kinds of psychologically abusive behaviours which are said to be typical per attachment style are derived from literature, it does not mean that people always show this behaviour when they have an certain attachment style. Previous studies used existing questionnaires which measured judgements of psychological abuse (Malley-Morrison et al., 2000; Salehi et al., 2020). This could be an explanation to the different results, since they used existing valid instruments.

Future research

For future research, it might be useful to execute this research in multiple different countries, since there is research that shows that cultures matter in case of acceptability of the behaviour (Malley-Morrison et al., 2000; Salehi et al., 2020). Therefore, it could give insight into the cultural differences of attachment styles and acceptability of psychological abuse.

Besides that, it might be useful to ask people about their family situation when growing up to get information about how people got their attachment style. A qualitative approach would better allow researchers to map the reasons for acceptability based on people's own experiences. This can be in the form of a think aloud study in combination with an interview. It could be useful to do a think aloud study to see why participants rate acceptability the way they do, so the different kinds of considerations participants make when rating acceptability can be identified. Thus questions can be asked about why they perceive certain behaviour to be acceptable or not. Thereby, an interview can be performed to get insight into people's family background, potential experienced abuse and their attachment style. This way, we can get into more depth about why they see some behaviour as acceptable and receive an explanation for the results from this research (Faltermaier, 1997).

For the attachment styles, interviews can be done to discover which experiences lead to an insecure attachment style and to make a distinction within the insecure attachment styles and what experiences and which behaviour lead to each insecure attachment style. Since there is

critique on the distinction between the insecure attachment styles, it might be useful to research what the difference is between the insecure styles (Bartholomew, 1993).

Conclusion

To conclude, this research suggests that roles (performer or receiver) do not matter when it comes to acceptability of abuse. Thus, it did not matter regarding acceptability of behaviour whether someone does behaviour to you, or you do it to someone else. Attachment styles did not have an influence on the acceptability of psychological abuse. Behaviours were considered abusive regardless of the attachment style. Only experienced abuse influenced the acceptability of psychological abuse. Experienced abuse was associated with reduced, not increased acceptability of psychological abuse. These findings are important because it can help regarding attachment style or psychological abuse issues in research and in practice. This research can be used to help better understand the theoretical links between past experiences of abuse, attachment style and the acceptability of psychological abuse.

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Appendix A. Questionnaire

Information sheet participants:

The goal of this research is to examine how people think about behaviours in intimate relationships. The questionnaire will take about 15 minutes to fill in. First, some questions will be asked about yourself and about relationships. Then, you get different scenarios in which you have to fill in your opinions about different behaviours.

Some of the behaviours you will rate might be considered abusive, and we will also ask you questions about any past experiences of abuse you might have experienced as a child or adult and about psychological, physical and sexual abuse. Because of this, we recommend you complete this study at a place and time when you feel safe. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from participation anytime during the questionnaire without consequences or having to give an explanation. If you need help or want to talk about the subject of inter partner abuse, you can go to www.verbreekdestilte.nl or call 0900 9999 001.

This questionnaire will be completely anonymous. The researcher is cannot see who filled it in. The data will be stored without identifying details and only deidentified information will be shared with anyone outside the research team. Anonymous data might be made available to the research community in line with the principles of open science, for example via the open science framework (https://osf.io/). Your answers are confidential. Therefore, please answer these questions honestly. Anonymised data will be stored for at least 10 years in lines with the data retention policies for scientific research.

The results of the questionnaire will be used to write a thesis. It may form the basis of academic publications or presentations at academic conferences. Any presentations of results will only present aggregated data and never data from individual participants. This means you cannot be identified from any presentations of the research.

This study is being done by Tamara Kuik from the Faculty of Behavioural, Management and Social Sciences at the University of Twente as part of an MSc thesis. The supervisor of this thesis is Dr. Steven Watson. If you have any notes or questions, feel free to send me an e-mail: Tamara Kuik t.kuik@student.utwente.nl For information about ethics, please contact: ethicscommittee-cis@utwente.nl.

Considering all of the information provided above, do you give consent to participate in this study?

○   ○
Yes   No

Demographics:

1. How old are you?
2. What is your gender?
   - o   Male
   - o   Female
   - o   Non-binary
   - o   Other
   - o   Prefer not to say
3. What is your nationality?
   - o   Dutch
   - o   German
   - o   Other
4. What is your sexuality?
   - o   Heterosexual
   - o   Homosexual
   - o   Bisexual
   - o   Other
   - o   Prefer not to say

Experienced abuse past questionnaire:

This can be a sensitive question but think about the relationship with your parents, legal guardian or a romantic relationship with a partner. Think about whether they have ever performed these behaviours toward you.

This question is anonymous and cannot be traced back to you. Please answer this question honestly, but you may decline to answer if you wish.

When answering this question, please given an answer based on any individual who has ever performed these behaviours toward you. For example, if most of your romantic partners have never performed one of these behaviours, but one partner performed that behaviour frequently, then please answer "frequently" for that item.

1. Has someone ever physically hurt you?

1. Never   2. Rarely   3. Sometimes   4. Often   5. Frequently

2. Has someone ever insulted you?

1. Never   2. Rarely   3. Sometimes   4. Often   5. Frequently

3. Has someone ever threatened to harm you?

1. Never   2. Rarely   3. Sometimes   4. Often   5. Frequently

4. Has someone ever screamed or cursed at you?

1. Never   2. Rarely   3. Sometimes   4. Often   5. Frequently

5. Has someone ever forced you to have sexual activities?

1. Never   2. Rarely   3. Sometimes   4. Often   5. Frequently

For the questions above, did you think of your parents/guardian, a partner within a relationship or both?

　　　○　　　　　　○　　　○　　　　　　○
Parents/guardian   Partner   Both   Not applicable

Positive attitude towards violence

A22– Threatening a partner is okay as long as I don't hurt him or her.

A12– During a heated argument, it is okay for me to bring up something from my partner's past to hurt him or her.

A11– As long as my partner doesn't hurt me, "threats" are excused.

A28– During a heated argument, it is okay for me to say something to hurt my partner on purpose.

A15– I think it helps our relationship for me to make my partner jealous.

A8– My partner is egotistical, so I think it's okay to "put down" my partner's looks.

A7– I don't mind my partner doing something just to make me jealous.

A16– It is no big deal if my partner insults me in front of others.

A 5– It is okay for me to blame my partner when I do bad things.

A27– It is okay for me to accept blame for my partner doing bad things.

A6– It is not acceptable for my partner to bring up something from the past to hurt me.

Questionnaire attachment style:

1. I find it difficult to depend on other people.
2. It is very important to me to feel independent.
3. I find it easy to get emotionally close to others.
4. I worry that I will be hurt if I allows myself to become too close to others.
5. I am comfortable without close emotional relationships.
6. I want to be completely emotionally intimate with others.
7. I worry about being alone.
8. I am comfortable depending on other people.
9. I find it difficult to trust others completely.
10. I am comfortable having other people depend on me.
11. I worry that others don't value me as much as I value them.
12. It is very important to me to feel self-sufficient.
13. I prefer not to have other people depend on me.
14. I am somewhat uncomfortable being close to others.
15. I find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like.
16. I prefer not to depend on others.
17. I worry about having others not accept me.

Scenarios

1: Secure (performer):

Imagine yourself in the following scenario that takes part within a romantic relationship. You support your partner when you feel they are stressed or unhappy. You are emotionally open to your partner and try to take their feelings into account. You are comfortable with expressing your needs and feelings.
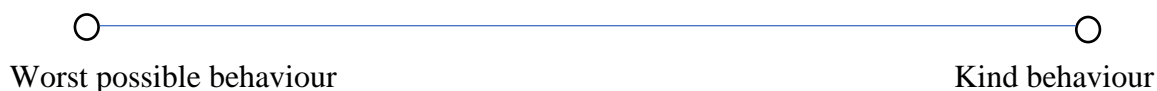
Imagine you have done this behaviour toward someone. How would you rate performing this behaviour within a relationship?

Worst possible behaviour   Kind behaviour
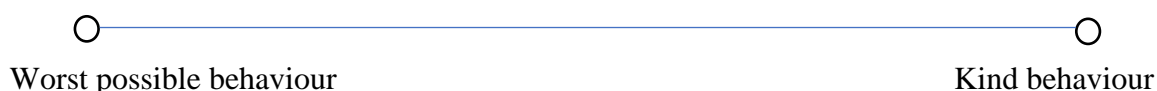
2: Disorganized (Receiver):

Imagine yourself in the following scenario that takes place within a romantic relationship. Often, it is hard to predict what kind of mood your partner will be in. One day your partner will be sweet and supportive and the next they start an argument that seems to be based on minor things and ignore you. Your partner sometimes says that they do not trust you. They can be unpredictable in how they express their emotions.

Imagine you have received this behaviour from someone. How would you rate receiving this behaviour within a relationship?

O—————————————————————————O
Worst possible behaviour   Kind behaviour

3: Anxious-ambivalent (performer):

Imagine yourself in the following scenario that takes place within a romantic relationship. Lately, you are very dependent on your partner. You do not allow your partner to go to his friends or family and want your partner to stay at home with you. You always want to check the phone of your partner. You tell your partner that they should tell you what their plans are and make sure you agree that what they want to do is appropriate. When your partner says something about it, you make them feel guilty for leaving you alone.

Imagine you have done this behaviour toward someone. How would you rate performing this behaviour within a relationship?

O—————————————————————————O
Worst possible behaviour   Kind behaviour

4: Avoidant (performer):

Imagine yourself in the following scenario that takes place within a romantic relationship. You are often secretive to your partner, for example you do not tell them were you are going and with whom. You ignore your partner's feelings. Therefore, you do not always give support to your partner. You like to be independent and therefore do not talk about your emotions with your partner and like to have plenty of time alone.

Imagine you have done this behaviour toward someone. How would you rate performing this behaviour within a relationship?

○──○
Worst possible behaviour   Kind behaviour

5: Secure (Receiver):

Imagine yourself in the following scenario that takes part within a romantic relationship. Your partner support you when you feel stressed or unhappy. Your partner is emotionally open to you and tries to take your feelings into account. Your partner is comfortable with expressing their needs and feelings.

Imagine you have received this behaviour from someone. How would you rate receiving this behaviour within a relationship?

○──○
Worst possible behaviour   Kind behaviour

6: Avoidant (Receiver):

Imagine yourself in the following scenario that takes place within a romantic relationship. Your partner is often secretive towards you, for example they do not tell you were they are going and with whom. Your partner ignores your feelings. Therefore, your partner does not always give support to you. Your partner likes to be independent and therefore does not talk about their emotions with your and likes to have plenty of time alone.

Imagine you have received this behaviour from someone. How would you rate receiving this behaviour within a relationship?

○──○
Worst possible behaviour   Kind behaviour

7: Disorganized (performer):

Imagine yourself in the following scenario that takes place within a romantic relationship. Often, for your partner it is hard to predict what kind of mood you will be in. One day you will be sweet and supportive and the next you start an argument that seems to be based on minor things and then you ignore them. You sometimes say to your partner that you do not trust them. You can be unpredictable in how you express your emotions.

Imagine you have done this behaviour toward someone. How would you rate performing this behaviour within a relationship?

○──○

Worst possible behaviour   Kind behaviour

8: Anxious-ambivalent (Receiver):

Imagine yourself in the following scenario that takes place within a romantic relationship. Lately, your partner is very dependent on you. Your partner does not allow you to go to your friends or family and they want you to stay at home with them. Your partner wants to check your phone. Your partner tells you that you should tell them what your plans are and make sure they agree that what you want to do is appropriate. When your say something about it, your partner makes you feel guilty for leaving them.

Imagine you have received this behaviour from someone. How would you rate receiving this behaviour within a relationship?

○──○

Worst possible behaviour   Kind behaviour

Debriefing

Thank you for participating in this study. In the beginning, it was mentioned that the goal of this research is to find out how people think about psychological abuse in relationships. This research does look at how people view psychological abuse in relationships while taking their attachment style into account. An attachment style is a specific pattern of behaviour in and around relationships. A person's attachment style is shaped and developed in early childhood in response to their relationships with their earliest caregivers. Thus, there are questions included which measure your attachment style and experiences in relationships. In this study we are interested in how people's past experiences influence how acceptable they find different relationship behaviours and whether the type of behaviour they find acceptable is affected by their attachment style. To prevent that people are already influenced beforehand and therefore giving different answers, this information was not shared at the start.

If you need help or want to talk about physical, psychological and sexual abuse, you can go to www.verbreekdestilte.nl or call 0900 9999 001. They can provide emotional, legal and practical support.

Thank you again for filling in the questionnaire!

After reading the text above, we would like to confirm that you still consent to take part in this study. If you do consent you can select "Yes, I confirm participation" below.

If you wish to withdraw please click "I wish to withdraw from this study"

○   ○

Yes   No