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The Development and Long-Term Influences of Attachments As Seen Through Attachment Theory: The Influence of Attachment on Homosexual Males

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Introduction

Research on the differences between heterosexual and homosexual males has been conducted in numerous fields of study (Hassan & Rahman, 2007; Collaer, Reimers, & Manning, 2007; Lippa, 2008). Results of such research have found differences between the two groups, although, findings imply that these differences have some developmental component and are not a result of differing sexual orientations (Collaer, Reimers, & Manning, 2007).

The findings of said research also imply potential for the study of differences between heterosexual and homosexual males in other areas of interest, such as attachment and its development. Although attachments are formed at infancy, the influences from the manner in which these attachments are developed on a person's behavior and attachments beyond infancy have been observed (Bowlby, 1978). Thus, the study of differences in the influence and manifestation of attachments between males who differ on sexual orientation would shed light on useful information that would help in improving our understanding of homosexual males in the context of attachments and their influence over behavior and further attachment development.

Attachment

The Study of Attachment

We observe attachments between people in our everyday lives which are usually experienced in a visual or physical representation of some behavior. These behaviors differ depending on the relationship representing the attachment (Doyle, Lawford, & Markiewicz,

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2009). Still, it is difficult to know from visible attachment behavior, such as affectionate physical contact or nurturing tendencies, what factors go into the development of these attachments and the resulting behaviors.

The development of attachments in humans has long been a matter of interest as it helps better understand what internal and environmental variables interact in producing the formation of bonds between humans. Most of the research on how humans develop attachments has focused on the first couple of years of infancy as these years have been found to foster developmental milestones in humans (Bowlby, 1980; Bowlby, 2007; Simpson & Rholes, 2010). The study of attachments has shed light on which variables interact in the development of attachments and which behaviors should be expected considering these interactions. It has also resulted in observations that link the development of attachments in infancy to different personality variables as well as internal working models for future attachments (Bowlby, 1978; Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Ammaniti, Van Ijzendoorn, Speranza, & Tambelli, 2000; Brandell, 2010; Imamoğlu & Imamoğlu, 2010; Shoemaker & Furman, 2009).

Research on attachment, however, has produced theories in the literature which are not in complete agreement with regards to what drives the development of attachments. The disagreement on the nature behind the development of attachments primarily revolves around the needs of the infant in the early stages of development. This is due to theories placing differing levels of importance on certain needs observed in infants (Bowlby, 1978; Bowlby, 1980; Brandell, 2010).

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Theories on the Development of Attachment

As Bowlby (1980) recalls, there were four main theories prior to 1958 that attempted to explain the attachments, how they come to be and how they result in attachment behaviors. He explains and terms them as:

- Secondary Drive Theory: Posits that a child has certain physiological needs, such as nourishment. These needs are fulfilled by a primary human figure and the child is left satisfied.   Attachments to said figure, usually the mother or a primary caregiver, are explained by the child's eventual knowledge that this figure will satisfy its physciological needs.

- Primary Object Sucking: Posits that a child, by nature, is inclined to objects that it can fixate on orally. This is done by sucking on said object, a trait that makes the chil partial to the breast, specifically the nipple. The child's partiality to the nipple lies in its oral value to the child as it sucks on it. Eventually, the child realizes that there is a figure present while the oral fixation is being satisfied, usually the caregiver providing the breast. Attachment to said figure is attributed to this realization as the child recognizes this figure as satisfying its oral fixation.

- Primary Object Clinging: Posits that a child is inherently in need of physical contact with another human. Attachments are explained by the primary

figure's continued physical contact with the child satisfying the child's

phsycial needs.

- Primary Return-to-Womb Craving: Posits that a child's birth results in the

  child's resentment of the birth desire to go back to the womb. The child's

  desire to re-enter the womb results in constant desire to be close to the mother,

  explaining attachment to mother figures. (p. 178)

These example the different needs emphasized in different theories of developing attachments.

The Primary Return-to-Womb Craving theory depicts attachment as a result of an emotional

desire which cannot be truly fulfilled, and so there is an attachment formed with the figure from

whose womb the baby came. Primary Object Sucking theory depicts attachment as a result of a

physical desire for stimulation of the mouth, resulting in the need of a specific type of object to

suck on provided by a figure who, by association with the object, then becomes the attachment

figure. Similarly focusing on a specific type of stimulation, Primary Object Clinging theory

focuses on a physical need where the need is thought to go beyond that of a physical connection

for physiological (feeding) purposes and is thought of as a primary need of its own. In such a

case, the attachment figure would be the person which provided for this physical need. The

Secondary Drive theory depicts attachments as a result of primary, or instinctual, needs and the

satisfaction of these needs. This theory attributes attachments to needs known to be primary as

they are essential to living, the need to feed for example. It is satisfaction from these basic needs

that results in the attachment to a figure.

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It is this Secondary Drive theory that, as Bowlby (1980) acknowledges, is "the most widely and strongly held" theory of the four (p. 178). This is due to its approach in explaining the nature of attachments as a natural process in the rearing and caring of a child (Brandell, 2010). That is to say, the forming of attachments is described as resulting from actions that a primary figure the child is exposed to, usually the caregiver, would perform naturally in raising a child. Much psychoanalytic research as far back as Freud has used the assumptions made in the Secondary Drive theory of attachment in the analysis of how certain psychological or emotional disorders come to be and what can be done to treat them (Bowlby, 1978; Bowlby, 1980; Brandell, 2010).

The four prominent theories Bowlby (1980) mentions are examples of different views expressed prior to his own theory on attachment. Although there is some overlap between Bowlby's Attachment Theory and its predecessors, his theory differs from prior theories, particularly the Second Drive theory, in that it uses the activation of four behavioral systems, one of which regulates attachment and attachment behaviors, to help understand overall human behavior. The theory focuses on attachment since the behavioral system of attachment is believed to regulate the other three (Simpson & Rholes, 2010). Although Bowlby's theory holds many facets and implications, only the aspects of the theory that detail by which means attachments are developed and strengthened as well as implications of the attachment styles that result from the development of attachments will be discussed.

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Attachment Theory

In Bowlby's (1980) theory, "attachment is presented as a system of behavior having its own form of internal organization and serving its own function" (p. 230). This means that there is a specific behavioral system responsible specifically for activation of behaviors related to attachment. The behaviors activated by the behavioral system are either not goal-corrected or goal-corrected, the latter meaning that the infant has applied a goal to its behavior focused on interacting with the primary attachment figure to attain close proximity. Although most behaviors do not start off as goal-corrected, with time the infant learns the outcome of a certain behavior and acts accordingly for that outcome, making the behavior a goal-corrected one. Attachment results from these attachment behaviors, and is strengthened when these behaviors become goal-corrected (Bowlby, 1978; Bowlby , 1980; Bowlby, 2007; Brandell, 2010).

Ethological Approach

A key component in the formulation of his theory is the ethological approach that Bowlby takes on understanding the development of attachment and the activation of attachment behaviors in humans (Bowlby, 1978; Bowlby, 1980; Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). He relates the manner in which human attachments develop through infancy to the manner in which birds, as well as some non-human mammals are believed to, "imprint". Imprinting is described by Bowlby (1980) as such:

Whatever processes may be at work in leading the filial attachment behavior of a young bird or mammal to become directed preferentially and stably towards one (or more) discriminated figure(s). By extension, it may also be used to refer to processes that lead other forms of behavior to be directed preferentially towards particular objects, for example maternal behavior towards particular young, and sexual behavior towards particular mate(s). (p. 167)

Bowlby sees key similarities between this phenomena and what is known about the development of attachment behaviors in humans. He draws this parrallel by describing the development of attachment behaviors through eight statements similar to eight statements that describe imprinting in birds (Bowlby, 1980). His descriptions essentially state that:

1. Overall responses from infants are due to many and almost any stimuli at first but, after a few months, are elicited by specific figures the infant has had constant access to.

2. Marked biases regarding the response to certain stimuli more frequently than others have been observed.

3. The strength of an infant's attachment to a figure is positively correlated with the amount of social interaction experienced between the two.

4. It is suggested that exposure learning may take part in the development of attachment as seen with face discrimination after periods of staring and listening.

5. Most infants develop attachments to a preferred attachment figure within their first year, a year which could also encompass a time at which attachment behavior develops with more ease.

6. Sensitive phases are not likely before the infant is six weeks of age.

7. Fear responses towards strangers are more explicit and intense after about eight months, making it more difficult for the infant to develop new attachments to other figures.

8. After a strong attachment is formed, the infant will tend to prefer the attachment figure over all other figures. This preference persists even when the infant and attachment figure are separated. (p. 222-223)

The parallel drawn to imprinting helps to summarize what is commonly seen throughout the development of attachment behaviors while the infant builds its attachments. It also helps to illustrate the different stages at which an infant's behaviors shift from not having a goal to being goal-corrected. Behaviors begin to become goal oriented after the infant begins to distinguish the primary attachment figure. Acknowledgement of the attachment figure allows the infant to focus its attachment behaviors specifically on this figure. The goal of these behaviors is to increase proximity with the attachment figure, the drive behind the strengthening of the attachment.

Five Patterns of Behaviors That Mediate Attachment

Bowlby's (1980) theory emphasizes the role of five behavior patterns, that infants are either born with or gain with time, in contributing to the development of attachment. Sucking, clinging, following, crying and smiling are seen as behaviors that mediate the development of attachments and each of these is found to do so in different ways (Bowlby, 1978; Bowlby, 1980). When these behaviors become goal-corrected, attachment to the attachment figure strengthens. Explanations on how each of these attachment behaviors mediates the development of attachments and how these behaviors become goal-corrected for attachment-based interactions are as follows:

Sucking. The act of sucking is discussed apart from it's usual nourishing function. Sucking is described as an instinctual behavior that is acted upon by the infant and usually coincides with being fed. It is the combination of the instinctual behavior and the attachment figure's behavior in providing for that instinct that Bowlby finds to mediate attachment between the two (Bowlby, 1978; Bowlby, 1980). He explains that once sucking becomes a goal-corrected behavior, the infant begins to suck on objects, a pacifier for example, in alarming situations. This is due to the desire for proximity to the attachment figure to which an attachment has been made through sucking (Bowlby, 1978; Bowlby, 1980).

Clinging. Clinging is another behavior that infants are able to perform since birth. It is described that during infancy, there exist situations which involve instinctive clinging, sitting

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off-balance on the attachment figure for example (Bowlby, 1978; Bowlby, 1980). This behavior

mediates attachment as the clinging to the attachment figure provides a basis for a physical

security through proximity to the figure. Though it is initially a natural reflex with no initial

designated goal, clinging behavior becomes goal-corrected when the organization of clinging

behavior becomes more sophisticated, at which time the infant does not cling out of reflex but

instead clings onto the attachment figure for security and proximity (Bowlby, 1978; Bowlby,

1980).

Following. Behaviors that involve following the attachment figure by the infant are not

instinctual like sucking or clinging. Since infants are not born with the ability to move around

freely, following behaviors are not seen until the infant is able to roam freely (Bowlby, 1978;

Bowlby, 1980). Once movement is gained, the infant has some control over its proximity to the

attachment figure. The following behavior, though at first not goal-corrected, changes in this

aspect once the infant realizes that by following the attachment figure, the distance between the

two is shortened, providing for the attachment between the two.

Crying. An infant's crying is another attachment behavior that does not have an

attachment related goal at birth. Initially, crying serves as the infant's natural response to certain

discomforts such as hunger or pain (Bowlby, 1978; Bowlby, 1980). This response is usually

attended to by a figure to stop the infant's crying which results in the forming of an attachment.

After an attachment is formed, the crying becomes goal-corrected and becomes a means for the

child to call for the attachment figure's attention, leading to the increase in proximity to the

figure, instead of being just a natural response.

Smiling. Similar to crying, smiling is an attachment behavior every human is naturally

born with. The general function of smiling is to show that one takes pleasure in one's current

state and this is what the infant informs the attachment figure of by smiling (Bowlby, 1978;

Bowlby, 1980). While smiling does not demand any behavior from the attachment figure, it is

common that the figure would in turn smile back at the infant, ultimately resulting in an

attachment mediated by reciprocated expressions of happiness. This behavior becomes goal-

corrected for attachment after the infant is able to recognize the reciprocation of the smile from

the attachment figure, at which time the infant uses this behavior to elicit the attachment figure's

reciprocation and ultimately decrease the distance between the two (Bowlby, 1978; Bowlby,

1980).

Bowlby (1980) describes the attachment behaviors in terms of how the infant uses these

behaviors on instinct, eliciting responses from the attachment figure. The result of the

interactions brought forth by the attachment behaviors is the formation of attachment between

the infant and the attachment figure. Once the infant is able to direct these behaviors towards a

goal, in this case being close to the attachment figure, the attachment between the two is

reinforced and strengthened. The formation and strengthening of these attachments have been

found to hold implications for future attachments and development (Bowlby, 1980; Bowlby,

1988; Holtzen, Kenny, & Mahalik, 1995; Ammaniti, Van Ijzendoorn, Speranza, & Tambelli,

2000; Wight, Williamson, Henderson, 2006; Doyle, Lawford, & Markiewicz, 2009; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2010).

Internal Working Models and Attachment Patterns

As Bowlby (1988) states:

"The second area to which attachment theory pays special attention to is the role of a child's parents in determining how [it] develops. There is today impressive and mounting evidence that the pattern of attachment that an individual develops during the years of immaturity – infancy, childhood, and adolescence – is profoundly influenced by the way [their] parents (or other parental figures) treat [them]." (p. 123-124)

Through the process of forming attachments with a primary attachment figure, the infant takes the paired attachment process and internalizes these interactions to form internal working models for social interactions (Bowlby, 1988; Ammaniti, Van Ijzendoorn, Speranza, & Tambelli, 2000; Shoemaker & Furman, 2009). These "mental representations" provide the infant with an internalized depiction of its formed attachments with the attachment figure.   The resulting internal working models have been proposed to influence the development of attachments throughout a person's life by shaping that person's future behaviors when forming close attachments with figures other than the primary attachment figure (Bowlby, 1988; Shoemaker & Furman, 2009).

Three attachment patterns. Research on the long-term influences from internal working models of attachment have resulted in three observable patterns of attachment (Bowlby, 1988; Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Doyle, Lawford, & Markiewicz, 2009; Shoemaker & Furman, 2009). These patterns detail how an individual behaves with regards to the world outside of the primary attachment figure. Bowlby (1988) provides a description of the three patterns, as well as which actions the parent took while forming attachments that resulted in the observed pattern of attachment:

- Secure Attachment: Individuals with the pattern of secure attachment are sure that their primary attachment figure will provide support to them if the need should arise. They also take to exploring their environment. This pattern results from the attachment figure being accessible to the individual as well as providing affectionate responses to uncomfortable siuations for the individual during infancy.

- Anxious Resistant Attachment: Individuals with the pattern of anxious resistant attachment are not sure if their primary attachment figure will provide for them if the need should arise. They are prone to separation anxiety and do not take to exploring their environment. This pattern results from the attachment figure being only partially accessible to the individual as well as constant lack of proximity between the two.

- Anxious Avoidant Attachment: Individuals with the pattern of anxious

  avoidant attachment does not believe that their primary attachment figure will

  provide support to them if the need should arise and actually expect rejection

  should the need arise. They tend to stear away from forming further

  attachments as a means to live life without emotional attachments to others.

  This pattern results when the individual is turned away numerous times while

  using attachment behaviors to elicit a secure response from the attachment

  figure. (p. 124-125)

The patterns of attachment observed in an individual reveal which attachment-related

interactions were satisfied between the individual and the primary attachment figure (Bowlby,

1978). More importantly, these patterns help to explain certain behaviors in the context of the

attachments formed during infancy. Of the three patterns, only one seems to be a desired

outcome of attachment development.

Since individuals with secure attachment patterns have well-formed attachments to their

primary attachment figures, they feel secure being separate from the attachment figure (Bowlby,

1988). Being at a distance from the attachment figure does not elicit attachment behaviors in

these individuals because through the process of developing their attachment, they've learned

that the primary attachment figure will respond to their attachment behaviors should they be

activated. At ease with distance from the attachment figure, a secure individual is able separate

from the attachment figure and explore the outter environment (Bowlby, 1988; Doyle, Lawford,

& Markiewicz, 2009). Therfore, those with secure attachment patterns tend to be more open to

ideas of exploration due to the security they know the attachment figure will provide should they need it. This seems to be the desired outcome with regards to how the development of attachments influences future attachment and attachment-related behaviors.

The problematic patterns of attachment would then fall to anxious resistant and anxious avoidant attachment patterns. Individuals with these patterns of attachment interacted with primary attachment figures who did not provide constant support for them while the development of their attachments was taking place (Bowlby, 1988; Doyle, Lawford, & Markiewicz, 2009). This explains the resulting behavior towards attachments seen in these patterns. An anxious resistant individual was only partially supported by the primary attachment figure, but the need for full support results in a lingering need to have this fulfilled. This promotes the clinginess exhibited by these individuals in that they are constantly looking for this unfulfilled support, as well as the anxiety felt by separation due to fear of losing the little support offered (Doyle, Lawford, & Markiewicz, 2009). Similarly, anxious avoidant individuals attempt to interact with an attachment figure that provided little, if any, response to attachment behaviors durng infancy. Due to not having adequate attachment-related interactions, these individuals do not seek comfort in others and avoid forming attachments as they see little value in these (Doyle, Lawford, & Markiewicz, 2009).

Research suggests that these attachment styles carry on through a person's life, influencing attachment-related behaviors towards non-familial attachment figures (Bowlby, 1978; Bowlby, 1988; Doyle, Lawford, & Markiewicz, 2009; Shoemaker & Furman, 2009; Simpson & Rholes, 2010). Thus, attachments formed at infancy are in some way manifested at later ages.

Homosexual Males

Differences Found in Heterosexual Males

As was initially mentioned, research on the differences between heterosexual and homosexual males spans across various fields of study. These include the study of cognitive and personality differences, as well differences in hormone levels both prenatally and post birth (Hassan & Rahman, 2007; Collaer, Reimers, & Manning, 2007; Lippa, 2008). For example, studies that examined performance on cognitive tasks that generally favor males found that homosexual males, on average, do not perform as well as heterosexual males while still outperforming females (Collaer, Reimers, & Manning, 2007).

Observed differences between heterosexual and homosexual males have been postulated to occur due to variables that influence developmental differences between sexes (Lippa, Collaer, & Peters, 2010). Developmental differences within the brain have been explained by prenatal and post birth hormone level differences naturally found in each sex (Collaer, Reimers, & Manning, 2007). That is, there are explanations for the differences that fit males due to male-typical hormones as well as explanations that fit females due to female-typical hormones. Therfore, if heterosexual and homosexual male differences are to follow suit, these differences cannot be attributed to their sexual orientation but rather have been shown to be a result of different physical developments in male and female brains in infants, both before and after birth, as well as social biases.

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The development of attachments differs from sex differences in that attachment theory applies in the same way to everybody (Bowlby, 1980). The process by which attachment and attachment styles come about is constant across individuals with a resulting pattern of secure attachment being the ideal norm. Therefore, differences in attachment will have to be examined by how homosexual males manifest their attachment styles through behavior towards attachment figures. The literature on attachment in homosexual males seems to focus on peer and parental attachments which are found to be influenced by disclosure of sexual orientation since disclosure of sexual orientation has been linked to strength of attachment (Holtzen, Kenny, & Mahalik, 1995).

Peer and Parental attachments and Disclosure

Among the first non-familial attachments a person forms is an attachment to a peer (Shoemaker & Furman, 2009). The development of attachment to peers follows a similar order to that of interacting with a primary attachment figure. That is, in the process of becoming attached to peers, a person will find one primary attachment figure among the peers to whom, like with the familial attachment figure, the person will turn to when in need of support (Diamond & Dube, 2002; Doyle, Lawford, & Markiewicz, 2009). It is also with this peer attachment figure that the strongest peer attachment will be held with.

Due to the social stigma associated with homosexuality, it is understood that under certain circumstances it can be difficult for homosexuals to readily seek out strong attachments to peers for fear of rejcetion, alienation and in some cases loss (Diamond & Lucas, 2004;

Fingerhut & Peplau, 2006). Interestingly enough though, attachments to peers have been found to be held in high regard in young homosexual males (Diamond & Dube, 2002; Diamond & Lucas, 2004). This seems counter-intuitive at first, considering there are many ways in which the development of attachment to peers can go wrong, especially if once the homosexual male is "out" (Diamond & Lucas, 2004).

The social stigma placed on homosexuality can lead to a peer rejecting the initial formation of a peer relation with a homosexual as well as an already attached peer terminating the peer relation with the homosexual after disclosure. The latter could be due to to different variables including religion, discomfort or embarassment at being seen with a homosexual and misinterpretation of proximity in the forming of peer attachments as a sexual advance (Diamond & Lucas, 2004). Even still, there is a high value placed on peer attachments and this could be due to shortcomings in parental support. This is not to say that these shortcomings are due to inadequate attachment development, rather these parental shortcomings emerge from a lack of understanding their homosexual son (Cramer & Roach, 1988). The parental shortcomings produce a need of understanding and freedom, at which time the homosexual son resorts to attachment behavior seeks this comfort and understanding in the next prominent attachment figure, namely a peer. This could also explain findings that peer attachments between homosexual males and their best friends were stronger than the attachments observed in their heterosexual counterparts and their best friend (Diamond & Dube, 2002). Since disclosure of sexual orientation is a marker of the utmost trust, strong attachments must be formed before disclosure occurs (Miller & Boon, 2000). A best friend is the strongest form of peer attachment and so it follows that disclosure of sexual orientation to a peer would require an existing

attachment that is strong or at least the willingness from both individuals to strengthen the

attachment they hold. Either way, the resulting attachment would be in accordance with

Diamond and Dube's (2002) findings about homosexual male's attachments to their best friends.

When it comes to parents, however, disclosure of sexual orientation does not always

strengthen the existing attachments (Holtzen, Kenny, & Mahalik, 1995). Parental support for

homosexuals is key in completing the formation of their identity (Goldfried & Goldfried, 2001;

Savin-Williams R. , 2003). Even so, it is difficult for homosexual males to go after that support

for numerous reasons. Studies show that reasons behind not disclosing sexual preference are

fear-related (Cramer & Roach, 1988; Miller & Boon, 2000; Goldfried & Goldfried, 2001) even

though other research has found that, aside from initial negative reactions, parent support

increased shortly after (Cramer & Roach, 1988).

Research on perceived acceptance has found that homsexual males withhold their sexual

orientation from parents and family for fear of rejction, both discrete and extreme, and that, on

average, they hold similar perceptions of how accepting family members will be (Cramer &

Roach, 1988). Specifically, it is generally perceived that mothers will be most accepting,

followed by siblings and lastly the father (Cramer & Roach, 1988; Miller & Boon, 2000). In

light of attachment styles, it would seem that homosexual males' fears of rejection from parental

attachment figures are rooted in not being confident that these attachment figures will support

him. These reservations regarding the attachment figure's support sounds very much like one of

the problematic patterns of attachment which, as was mentioned, would not be the ideal norm or

desired outcome of attachment development. This brings into question whether an ideal

attachment style would influence disclosure and the answer is yes. Ideal attachment patterns, or

secure attachment, has been found to be positively associated with "coming out" to parental attachment figures (Holtzen, Kenny, & Mahalik, 1995).

It would seem then that attachments play an important role in homosexual male's lives. While attachments can be sought and made stronger through disclosure of sexual orientation, a marker of trust and attachment, secure attachments can mediate the disclosure process. Thus, it seems that the way attachments are used by homosexual males differs somewhat from heterosexual males and these differences revolve around the disclosure process which heterosexual males do not go through.

Conclusions & Future Directions

The development of attachments in light attachment theory generates an understanding of attachment beyond its emotional connotation and presents it as a drive for behavior. Formations of attachment patterns is an observed phenomena which helps illustrate why some people exert certain behaviors and how those behaviors came to be. This has been found to be applicable in subsections of the general population, such as homosexual males, in different ways. Regardless of the differences regarding manifestations of attachments in behavior, the way that these attachments develop remains quite similar.

Future study on attachment in homosexual males should focus on aspects life separate from disclosure in order to identify other attachment driven behaviors. There should also be a focus on other subsections of the general population who's behavior could also hold some roots in attachment. Cross-cultural and minority studies are highly encouraged as certain aspects of

attachment theory regarding the attachment figure and the figures responses to attachment behavior are no similar across the board (O'Donnell, Agronick, San Doval, Duran, Myint-U, & Stueve, 2002; Yalcinkaya, Rapoza, & Malley-Morrison, 2010; Imamoğlu & Imamoğlu, 2010).

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