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**Attachment as Diathesis:  
An examination of adult attachment as depressive  
vulnerability when individuals are faced  
with negative events**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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## **Abstract**

This thesis tested a diathesis-stress model of attachment on the links between stressful life events and depressed mood. Drawing on diathesis-stress models in the personality domain, I hypothesised that experiencing negative interpersonal events would be associated with lower mood, particularly for individuals high in attachment anxiety, and negative self-relevant events would be associated with lower mood, particularly for those high in attachment avoidance. These predictions were tested a) retrospectively using cross-sectional analyses, b) using a daily diary and hierarchical linear modelling, and c) longitudinally examining effects over a 3-month time period.

Several findings demonstrated the important impact attachment insecurity has on depressed mood but the results differed across method. Cross-sectionally, greater attachment anxiety was associated with greater drops in mood when experiencing more negative interpersonal events as predicted, but on a daily basis anxious individuals exhibited lower mood in response to both interpersonal and self-relevant negative events. In contrast, those high in attachment avoidance experienced a greater deterioration of mood following negative interpersonal (but not self-relevant) events retrospectively and over time, but reported more depressed mood at the daily level regardless of the frequency of interpersonal events.

All effects remained significant when controlling for personality, social support, and pre-existing levels of depression, attesting to the pervasive nature of attachment orientations in accounting for the links between stressful events and depressed mood.

The pattern of findings provide an important contribution to the existing literature focussing on vulnerabilities to depression by highlighting the central role that attachment plays in people's reactions to interpersonal events, above and beyond the primary focus on personality traits. The discussion considers both the research and clinical implications of these important findings.

To Sally {1959-2009}

Your memory lives on within the attachments you secured

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