

Interconnected Selves: Exploring Attachment, Self-Concept, Personality, and Learned Behaviour

Garv (101566625)

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Part 1: Attachment Theory Overview

Attachment theory, developed by **John Bowlby** and later expanded by **Mary Ainsworth**, explains how early relationships with caregivers shape the way people view themselves or regulate emotions and connect with others throughout life. In simple term, attachment is the emotional bond that forms between an infant and their primary caregiver, and this bond creates a blueprint for future the relationships.

Influence on Emotional Regulation

Children who experience consistent care develop a sense of safety. As adults, they manage stress better, trust their emotions, and recover more quickly after emotional difficulties. In contrast, neglectful or inconsistent care can lead to emotional dysregulation - such as anxiety, anger, or avoidance of emotions altogether.

Influence on Interpersonal Relationships

Attachment shapes how individuals behave in close relationships.

- **Securely attached** people form healthy bonds, trust others and communicate clearly.
- **Anxiously attached** individuals fear abandonment, seek reassurance, and become emotionally overwhelmed easily.
- **Avoidantly attached** individuals distance themselves, dislike dependence, and suppress their feelings.
- **Disorganized attachment** involves unpredictable behavior and difficulty trusting others due to past trauma.

These patterns don't just appear in romantic relationships - they guide friendships, family bonds, and even workplace interactions.

Influence on Internal Working Models

Internal working models are mental templates that individuals develop about **1) themselves and 2) other people** based on childhood experiences.

- If a caregiver is warm and reliable, the child forms a model of "*I am worthy of love, and others can be trusted.*"
- If care is inconsistent or frightening, the model becomes "*I am not good enough, and others will hurt or abandon me.*"

These models operate unconsciously and influence decisions, expectations, and emotional reactions into adulthood.

Part 2: Attachment and Self-Concept

Self-concept refers to how individuals view their abilities, worth, and identity. Attachment style strongly influences self-concept because early relationships become the foundation for how people think about themselves.

Secure Attachment and Self-Concept: Securely attached individuals usually develop a **positive self-concept**. They see themselves as capable, lovable, and valuable. Because they received consistent emotional support early in life, they internalize the belief that they are worthy of care and emotional closeness.

Avoidant Attachment and Self-Concept: Avoidantly attached individuals often protect themselves by developing a **self-concept based on independence** and emotional self-reliance. They may appear confident on the outside, but internally they often experience:

- Fear of vulnerability
- Doubts about their worth
- Difficulty recognizing their emotional needs

Their self-esteem may seem high, but it is often fragile because it depends on being in control and not needing others.

Anxious Attachment and Self-Concept

People with anxious attachment often develop a **negative or unstable self-concept**. They may believe they are not enough, that they must constantly prove themselves, or that they are always at risk of being rejected. Their identity can become tied to others' approval.

Disorganized Attachment and Self-Concept

Disorganized individuals may have a fragmented or confusing self-image due to trauma or inconsistent care. They may struggle to understand their own emotions, values, or identity.

Part 3: Attachment and the Big Five Personality Traits

Research shows that attachment style correlates closely with Big Five personality traits.

Anxious Attachment and Neuroticism: Studies consistently show a strong link between **anxious attachment and high neuroticism** – traits such as worry, emotional instability, and fear of rejection.

→ (Wei et al., 2005) found that anxiously attached individuals experience more emotional distress and less effective coping strategies.

Avoidant Attachment and Agreeableness: Avoidant attachment often predicts **lower agreeableness**, meaning these individuals may appear more distant, less trusting, and less cooperative in close relationships.

- (Nofle & Shaver, 2006) found that avoidantly attached adults scored lower in agreeableness and openness to emotional experiences.

Secure Attachment and Overall Personality Balance

Securely attached people tend to score:

- Higher in agreeableness (trusting, empathetic)
- Higher in conscientiousness (stable, reliable)
- Lower in neuroticism (emotionally regulated)

Attachment and Openness: Secure or anxiously attached individuals may have higher openness because they explore emotions more deeply, while avoidant individuals may resist emotional exploration.

Attachment and Extraversion: Secure attachment is strongly associated with higher sociability and confidence. Avoidant individuals may appear introverted because emotional closeness is uncomfortable, not because they dislike people generally.

Part 4: Character Analysis – Deacon St. John (Days Gone)

1. Likely Attachment Style: Disorganized-Avoidant with Strong Secure Traits Toward Loved Ones

Deacon's attachment pattern is complex due to trauma, loss, and emotional loyalty.

- **Avoidant tendencies:**
 - He hides his feelings, suppresses grief, and avoids vulnerability.
 - He prefers independence and takes long solitary rides.
 - He pushes people away when emotionally overwhelmed.
- **Disorganized traits:**
 - Severe trauma from losing Sarah leads to moments of emotional unpredictability.
 - He self-talks under stress, indicating inner conflict between closeness and fear.
 - His anger, guilt, and intrusive memories reflect trauma-based attachment.
- **Secure traits with close relationships:**
 - Loyal to Boozer and Sarah
 - Protects survivors
 - Shows empathy, care, and deep emotional bonds

Overall, Deacon fits a **disorganized-avoidant attachment style** with pockets of security toward those he deeply trusts.

2. Deacon's Self-Concept

Deacon's self-concept is deeply shaped by loss, responsibility, and loyalty.

- **Core Belief:** "*I must protect those I love.*"
- He sees himself as a survivor, protector, and loyal husband.

- He struggles with guilt: he believes he failed Sarah by not going with her.
- His identity combines emotional sensitivity with toughness.

Deacon has a **strong moral self-concept** but also carries hidden self-doubt and emotional wounds.

3. Big Five Profile (Based on Your Previous Assignment)

You previously scored Deacon as:

- **Openness – High**
- **Conscientiousness – High**
- **Extraversion – Medium**
- **Agreeableness – High**
- **Neuroticism – Medium-High**

How Attachment, Self-Concept, and Big Five Interact in His Life

- His **avoidant-disorganized attachment** contributes to his **medium-high neuroticism** - he carries trauma, guilt, and emotional instability.
- His strong loyalty and empathy (secure traits) align with his **high agreeableness**.
- His independence and toughness match his **medium extraversion** and avoidant tendencies.
- His resilience, responsibility, and planning reflect his **high conscientiousness**.
- His introspective nature aligns with **high openness**.

Together, these make Deacon emotionally complex: tough on the outside, deeply sensitive inside, and shaped by love, trauma, and survival.

Part 5: AI-Generated Analysis and Reflection

AI's Attachment Profile of Deacon (Generated)

When analyzing Deacon St. John, AI identified him as:

- Primarily **avoidantly attached** due to emotional suppression, independence, and difficulty trusting new people
- Strong secure elements with loved ones, especially Sarah and Boozer
- High emotional reactivity linked to trauma (leaning toward disorganized attachment)

AI highlighted that his loyalty and protection reflect secure bonding, while his emotional withdrawal and anger reflect avoidant or trauma-based attachment.

Reflection: What the AI Got Right and Wrong

What AI Got Right:

- Correctly recognized Deacon's avoidant behaviors (emotional distance, independence)
- Understood his trauma impacts (anger, guilt, emotional swings)
- Noted his secure traits in close relationships

What AI Missed:

- AI underestimates Deacon's emotional depth and empathy
- AI focuses more on survival behavior and less on his relational motives
- AI often labels him more introverted than he actually is
- It does not fully capture his loyalty-driven personality and how love motivates him

New Insights AI Provided:

- Highlighted trauma's role in shaping attachment
- Provided a more clinical view that complements emotional analysis
- Drew attention to avoidant patterns that players often overlook

My Reflection:

AI offered a useful psychological perspective but still missed some of the emotional depth behind Deacon's story. It supported much of my understanding but also helped me notice areas I had overlooked, especially how deeply his trauma affects his attachment style. Combining my own observations with the AI's insights gave me a more balanced and complete understanding of Deacon St. John's psychology.

Personally, I see Deacon as someone with qualities worth admiring - a loyal husband, a dependable brother-like friend, and a supportive team member who always puts others before himself. His character reflects strong values of love, responsibility, and dedication. If I ever had the chance to develop qualities like his in real life, I would strive to follow them because they represent the kind of person who cares deeply for others, respects relationships, and stays committed through difficult times.