Personality and Individual Differences 59 (2014) 21–26

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Personality and Individual Differences

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/paid

# The effects of adult romantic attachment anxiety and avoidance on facets of compliance

Kim E. Drake *

*Institute for Practice, Interdisciplinary Research and Enterprise, University of West London, United Kingdom*

ARTICLE INFO

*Article history:*
Received 16 August 2013
Received in revised form 23 October 2013
Accepted 25 October 2013
Available online 19 November 2013

*Keywords:*
Gudjonsson compliance scale
Difficulty with pressure
Eagerness to please
Attachment anxiety
Attachment avoidance
Negative life events

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to investigate the extent to which attachment anxiety and avoidance best explain the variation in scores on compliance factors 1 (difficulty with pressure) and 2 (eagerness to please and meet expectations), across males and females. 143 female and 100 male participants completed the Gudjonsson compliance scale, the relationship scale questionnaire and the life events questionnaire (to account for participants' experience of negative life events, when estimating the effect of attachment on the compliance factors). Multivariate regression modelling showed that: (i) in both males and females, attachment avoidance alone explained a significant proportion of the variance in factor 1 scores; (ii) in females, both attachment avoidance and anxiety levels accounted for the variance in factor 2 scores (the effect of attachment anxiety emerged in the negative direction); and (iii) neither attachment anxiety nor attachment avoidance levels explained a significant amount of the variance in male factor 2 scores. This study suggests three possible mechanisms explaining the negative effect of attachment anxiety on factor 2 scores in females; one of which implying that eagerness to please tendencies may not always be a sign of psychological vulnerability, but could also reflect pro-social cooperation.



## 1. Introduction

Compliance is one of the serious psychological vulnerabilities that can lead to problems during police questioning, and is defined as a tendency towards consciously deciding to carry out behaviours or accept suggestions or statements for some perceived instrumental gain (which individuals privately do not accept; see Gudjonsson, 1989, 2013). Trait compliance comprises three distinct underlying dimensions, with (i) difficulty with pressure and (ii) eagerness to please being the two most prominent (see Gudjonsson, 1989). Compliant individuals, despite all achieving a high total compliance score, may nonetheless score differently on these lower-order facets of compliance – the variance in which may also be best explained by different predictors, considering these dimensions are distinct. On an applied level, it could well be the case that highly compliant individuals may require different management strategies (during police interview, for example), depending on which underlying dimension (difficulty with pressure or eagerness to please) features most strongly within their compliance profile. It is therefore important to investigate pathways to and predictors of compliance on a local (facet) level, to ensure vital individual differences are not overlooked.

Research evidence shows that attachment patterns (albeit parent–child, romantic or companionate) can explain individual differences in compliant behaviour (see Drake, Sheffield, & Shingler, 2011; Gudjonsson, Sigurdsson, Lydsdottir, & Olafsdottir, 2008; Lickenbrock, Braungart-Rieker, Ekas, Zentall, & Planalp, in press). Attachment behaviour is mainly concerned with the maintenance of emotional, psychological and physical closeness with a significant other person. Attachment anxiety is related to emotion oriented coping and the regulation of affective processes, whilst attachment avoidance governs degree of detachment and suspiciousness (Bowlby, 1988; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). Gudjonsson et al. (2008), using a sample of 377 pregnant women, showed that compliance was significantly related to both attachment anxiety and avoidance. However, despite the link between compliance and attachment avoidance, what emerged most strongly was the association between attachment anxiety (especially fearful avoidant attachment – this attachment pattern combining high attachment anxiety and avoidance) and compliance. This study suggested that a fear of abandonment may precipitate feelings of low self-esteem and tendencies towards negative affect, increasing the likelihood of compliant behaviour. Drake et al. (2011) subsequently, using a student sample (males and females), also uncovered a significant association between attachment anxiety and compliance, but differences emerged: (a) preoccupied anxious attachment patterns (high attachment anxiety only) seemed to predict compliance most strongly and not fearful avoidant

* Address: INSPIRE, University of West London, St Mary's Road, London W5 5RF, United Kingdom.
*E-mail address:* kim.drake@uwl.ac.uk

0191-8869/$ - see front matter © 2013 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.
http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2013.10.024

patterns; attachment avoidance seemed not to have a significant effect on compliance (as in Gudjonsson et al., 2008) and (b) the effect of attachment anxiety on compliance was in the negative direction. The study questioned the role of attachment avoidance, and also showed that attachment anxiety need not always lead to compliant behaviour.

A reason for the discrepant findings could be down to differences in lower-level compliance facet scores across the two samples, and the fact that different attachment dimensions may best explain the variance in those distinct compliance facets. Trait compliance can be deconstructed into three distinct dimensions (two of which are most prominent – factor 1: difficulty with pressure and factor 2: eagerness to please and meet expectations, with the third being a smaller and more spurious factor, making it less clear which aspect of compliance factor 3 may be tapping into; Gudjonsson, 1989). Attachment anxiety is associated with a greater susceptibility to stress and threat anticipation within social interactions and relationships, owing to a hyper-activated attachment system; these tendencies precipitate a fear of abandonment, and may occasion a greater difficulty coping with pressure – such traits may also manifest as an eagerness to please and meet (others') expectations. Attachment avoidance, on the other hand, is born out of a deactivated attachment system, giving rise to a desire to remain emotionally detached and a discomfort with conflict – as such, attachment avoidance levels may also explain a significant proportion of the variance in eagerness to please and meet expectation scores (compliance factor 2) (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). The research question being investigated is the extent to which attachment anxiety and avoidance best explain the variation in compliance factors 1 and 2, which may help to further understand attachment effects on compliance.

Developmental studies also show that the experience of negative events can increase the likelihood of insecure attachment patterns developing within children (Lickenbrock et al., in press). The Drake et al. (2011) research showed that the experience of negative life events correlated with attachment anxiety. Therefore, in this study, the reported experience of negative life events (NLE) will also be included, such that the effects of attachment anxiety and avoidance can be estimated, once the effect of NLE is taken into account. Given that research also shows that women tend to be particularly susceptible to external influence (Gudjonsson et al., 2008; Impett & Peplau, 2002), gender differences in the effect of attachment anxiety and avoidance on the facets of compliance will also be investigated.

It is predicted that attachment anxiety (compared with attachment avoidance scores) may explain the greatest amount of the variance in difficulty with pressure (compliance factor 1). A second prediction is that both attachment anxiety levels and attachment avoidance may explain the variance in factor 2 scores – tapping into an eagerness to please. A third prediction is that these effects, especially the effect of attachment anxiety, may be stronger in females than males.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants

A total of 243 participants took part in the study: 143 females and 100 males, all of which were staff and students at a University within the United Kingdom. The mean age of the sample was 31.98 years (standard deviation: 13.34).

### 2.2. Instruments the Gudjonsson compliance scale (GCS) (Gudjonsson, 1989)

The GCS is a 20-item, true/false, instrument measuring the extent to which individuals tend to comply with others' requests. Scores range from 0 to 20. Scale validity is well documented, with Cronbach's alpha in the current study equal to .80. Three factors can be extracted (though the two most prominent factors were focused on in this study, owing to the spurious nature of the third factor): factor 1 comprising 10 items, reflecting difficulties in coping with pressure; factor 2 comprising 5 items, reflecting eagerness to please and to do what is expected; and factor 3 comprising 5 items, with modest loadings, reflecting an obscure factor (see Gudjonsson, 1989 for item descriptions).

### 2.3. The relationship scales questionnaire (RSQ) (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994)

The RSQ contains 30 items. For each item on the RSQ, participants have to rate on a five point Likert scale the extent to which each statement best describes their behaviour in close relationships. The RSQ shows high internal reliability (in this study, $\alpha = .83$) as well as high test–retest reliability (at two weeks: $r = .83$, $p < .001$; at four months: $r = .78$, $p < .001$).

### 2.4. Life events questionnaire (LEQ) (Norbeck, 1984)

The LEQ lists 82 events in total. Participants were required to endorse whether or not they have experienced an event and, if they have, to rate the extent to which those events had an effect on their lives at the time. The ratings went from 0 ("no effect") to 3 ("large effect"). The LEQ has good test–retest reliability ($\alpha = 0.81$ in this study).

### 2.5. Procedure

Participants completed a battery of questionnaires (using Survey Monkey) consisting of the GCS, the RSQ and the LEQ. Meyerson and Tryon (2003) demonstrated in a study into the psychometric equivalency of web-based research that computer and uncontrollable administration of questionnaires does not seem to adversely affect the quality of results. Data collection via the Web is beneficial for a number of reasons: (1) it is reliable, (2) valid, (4) cost effective, and (5) efficient.

### 2.6. Data analysis

Multivariate regression models were fitted on both the male and female respondent data, using a forced-entry method and the Robust Maximum Likelihood (MLR) estimator to calculate parameter estimates, using MPlus software (Muthén & Muthén, 2006; Schafer & Graham, 2002). Multivariate modelling approaches offer distinct advantages over using separate regression models, in cases where the dependent variables may be correlated (see Flouri, Tzavidis, & Kallis, 2010).

The dependent variables included were: (i) GCS factor 1 (difficulty with pressure) and (ii) GCS factor 2 (eagerness to please). To create the dependent variable constructs, scores on the items within the GCS that loaded $\geqslant .400$ onto each of these two factors were summed: (i) factor 1 comprised items: 1–5, 8, 9, 11, 14 and 15; (ii) factor 2 comprised items: 6, 7, 10, 12 and 16 (see Gudjonsson, 1989 for item descriptions).

The predictors were levels of attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance. Research fitting various models of attachment to the Relationship Scale Questionnaire data showed that only Simpson, Ickes and Grich's (1999) operationalization of attachment anxiety and avoidance yielded an acceptable fit to the data; as such, two attachment dimensions were created from the RSQ scores: (i) attachment anxiety: created by summing items: 10, 12, 13, 15, 20, 24, 29 and 30; and (ii) attachment avoidance: created by summing items: 11, 18, 21, 23 and 25 (see Kurdek, 2002 for item