How Does a Woman's Attachment Style Influence Posttraumatic Growth Following Betrayal?

A Literature Review

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Abstract

This literature review will look at how attachment style influences a woman’s ability to not only survive the trauma of relational betrayal but also go on to heal and grow as a result. Attachment theory, posttraumatic growth and relational betrayal will be defined highlighting the possible connections between them. The question will be discussed -- Does the woman with a secure attachment style experience greater posttraumatic growth than a woman with ambivalent, avoidant or disorganized styles? This review suggests that secure attachment style does promote posttraumatic growth.
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How Does a Woman’s Attachment Style Influence Posttraumatic Growth Following Betrayal?

Why do some clients who experience the trauma of relational betrayal seem to recover and even thrive while others who encounter equal or lesser trauma struggle to recover and end up living with long-term impairment as a result? What help and support does a person need to heal, grow, learn and recover from the trauma? Are there factors from early life experience which predispose people to experience either success or failure in recovery? The purpose of this review is to look at individual attachment styles and decide what the literature says about their influence on posttraumatic growth. Relational betrayal is the form of trauma that will be addressed in this review.

Relational betrayal refers to violations of expectations of emotional and physical exclusivity in relationships (Whisman & Wagers, 2005). This review will focus on the trauma of relational betrayal as it occurs for a female when her husband is unfaithful to her either emotionally or sexually. This betrayal includes use of pornography – either in print or on the internet, sexual affairs, emotional affairs, internet chat connections with other women, and involvement with prostitution. Researchers have established that there are two main categories of infidelity – sexual and emotional. Engaging in sexual intercourse defines sexual infidelity, while falling in love with someone other than a spouse defines emotional infidelity (Whitty & Quigley, 2008). These two categories might be an oversimplification of infidelity considering the huge influence of the internet and cyber technology. Are some women better equipped than others to handle this trauma in their marriage based on their core beliefs about themselves and others? Are some more likely to experience healing and growth because of these basic beliefs? Are some women better equipped to reach out to find the support they need in their time of crisis? This review will seek answers to these questions.
Relational betrayal is commonly discussed using terms like infidelity, sexual addiction, sexual compulsivity, and acting out. While many acts of infidelity occur without sexual addiction, addiction/compulsivity is a major factor in sexual betrayal. Research shows that married heterosexual people make up the majority of those who struggle with sexual addiction and compulsivity. Also, “marriages in which a sexual addiction or sexual compulsivity exist are commonly pervaded with diminished intimacy, anxiety, secrecy, mistrust, isolation, relationship dysfunction, sexual dysfunction, and decreased temporal security due to the risk of job loss or related debts (Manning & Watson, 2008 p.233). The behaviors themselves are described as troublesome, problematic, driven and out of control by the spouse and tend to continue even though they create negative consequences. Anxiety, depression, anger, rage, obsessive thoughts and compulsive checking behaviors, difficulty concentrating, increased isolation and hyper-vigilance are common symptoms experienced by the spouse of a sexual addict. The acting out behaviors clearly destroy trust for the spouse of the addict. It is also suggested that the husband’s denial of betrayal prior to the actual discovery adds to the level of trauma that the wife experiences (Steffens & Rennie, 2006). This short summary of relational betrayal reveals the potential trauma that is possible within relationship and leaves a lingering question about how a spouse begins to recover and ideally how they can go on to experience growth.

Posttraumatic growth simply stated, is the possibility of positive life changes resulting from trauma or life crisis. The concept of PTG has existed for a very long time in various religions and philosophies with the concept that personal suffering has the potential to increase wisdom and satisfaction because of a connection with a higher power (Shaw, Joseph, & Linley, 2005). The Bible which is foundational to Judeo-Christian faith clearly teaches this concept when it states, “…we rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces
perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us…”
(Romans 5:3-5 NIV). Caplan, Frankl, Maslow and Yalom are just a few influential social scientists in the twentieth century who have also believed in the potential for positive change resulting from adversity. Tedeschi and Calhoun (2008) coined the term posttraumatic growth instead of recovery because it more accurately explains the concept of positive change and also avoids negative connotations of trauma as in a disordered state of being. Instead of merely returning to the pre-trauma state, posttraumatic growth highlights the possibility of experiencing positive change that goes far beyond the initial condition before the trauma (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2008).

Attachment theory had its beginning early in the twentieth century. John Bowlby lived from 1907-1990 and is considered to be an influential early figure on the issue of attachment. In his work he sought to explain the early bond that occurs between children and their parents or other primary caregivers by looking at existing theories and combining them into a new and better understood theory (Van Der Horst, Van Der Veer, & Van Ijzendoorn, 2007). The process of bonding with primary caregivers in children up to two or three years of age is proving to be influential in creating core beliefs and is being shown to shape future adult behavior. Contemporary authors on the subject have identified four types of attachment styles along with factors in early childhood and parenting styles that lead to the development of each type. One type is secure while the remaining three types – avoidant, ambivalent and disorganized are considered insecure in varying degrees (Clinton & Sibcy, 2002). Each type will be described and discussed in later sections of this review.
The Research Question

Are women who have a secure attachment style more likely to experience posttraumatic growth following relational betrayal than women who have ambivalent, avoidant, or disorganized attachment styles? This review will seek to answer the question of whether attachment style has an influence on the healing and positive change that can happen for the wife when she has been emotionally or sexually betrayed by her husband. It will define the four types of attachment styles, posttraumatic growth, and relational betrayal and use these definitions within the context of the review.

Merit of the Study

The answer to why some people who experience trauma manage to survive and grow is an important one. An informed understanding of the dynamic at work in cases such as this could equip future therapists to help their clients in new ways as they understand the individual attachment style at work. There is very little information on treatment protocols that can be used effectively in recovery from compulsive pornography use. As pornography use explodes with technology and culture, negative effects are being observed in close relationships. There is a lack of literature relating to the recovery work that couples must do to see their relationships heal, survive and thrive (Zitzman & Butler, 2005). As society addresses the growing issue of infidelity related to pornography, some researchers are hopeful that an understanding of a client’s specific attachment style will help therapists implement appropriate methods of treatment based on attachment style (Shorey & Snyder, 2006).

Research focusing on the women who are married to sexually compulsive men is lacking. Awareness of this problem is relatively new and further research is needed. There is also a pressing need to develop effective and helpful resources for these women. Focus of existing
research has been on recovery for the couple, so additional research is needed to develop empirical evidence to strengthen the understanding and help that could be available to the individual betrayed spouse. Increased understanding of their attachment styles and the early life experiences that caused them to develop might begin to increase understanding of issues and support for recovery and subsequent posttraumatic growth (Manning & Watson, 2008).

In the same way, literature on the subject of posttraumatic growth is still relatively sparse. Posttraumatic growth literature mentions many different types of trauma but fails to specifically mention relational betrayal (Sheikh, 2008). For the purpose of this review, it will be necessary to make some connections between traumas specifically mentioned in the literature and relational betrayal. In other words, the literature clearly demonstrates the potential for posttraumatic growth in trauma – relational betrayal is trauma – therefore literature on posttraumatic growth can be applied to the trauma of relational betrayal.

When considering the differences between male and female reactions to infidelity, older studies have concluded that men are more distressed by sexual betrayal while women are more distressed by emotional betrayal. However, newer studies are showing that reactions to infidelity are more dependent on a person’s attachment style and outlook on life than on their gender even though more information is needed before making definitive conclusions (Treger & Sprecher, 2011). Determining therapy methods based on attachment styles has been recommended in some of the literature, while other studies conclude that the evidence is not sufficient to make the statement that attachment style should dictate the mode of therapy (Diener & Monroe, 2011). This review does not address which types of therapy are recommended for a particular attachment style. Rather, it seeks to answer the question of which attachment style is most equipped to experience posttraumatic growth.
Assumptions and Limitations

When considering attachment styles, posttraumatic growth and relational betrayal, there are a number of related topics which this review will not address. These topics are posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), shame, forgiveness and depression. While PTSD likely co-occurs in many cases of posttraumatic growth, the topic is too broad to include in this review. Similarly, while shame is a common response to trauma, it will also not be a topic for this review (Platt & Freyd, 2012). The importance of forgiveness in relationships has been identified and studied. While forgiveness is certainly related to the rebuilding of trust following infidelity (Gordon, Highes, Tomcik, Dixon, & Litzinger, 2009), this review will not go into detail about this relationship. Another study (Schultz, Tallman, & Altmaier, 2010) found that religion and spirituality are strongly related to growth and forgiveness after a trauma like relational betrayal. While trust rebuilding and spirituality will be mentioned, these factors are not the focus of this review. In the same way, depression often accompanies trauma (Cano & O'Leary, 2000). This review will discuss traumatic life events without talking about depression in detail.

The study of attachment theory has developed along two separate lines of research – attachment relationships beginning in infancy and early childhood up to age two or three, and attachment dynamics of adult romantic relationships (Dinero, Conger, Shaver, Widaman, & Larsen-Rife, 2011). This review will focus on attachments established in infancy and early childhood.

Relational Betrayal

What is Relational Betrayal?

Betrayal in marriage is defined as the “violation by a partner of an implicit or explicit relationship-relevant norm” (Finkle, Rusbult, Kumashiro, & Hannon, 2002). In marriages it also
often includes “broken promises, engaging in extramarital relationships, and deception” (Chan, 2009). For the purposes of this review, relational betrayal includes emotional affairs, sexual infidelity, sexual addiction, and internet infidelity. It is also important to note that there is disagreement among married couples on what specific behaviors constitute infidelity (Hertlein, Wetchler, & Piercy, 2005). For the purpose of this review, betrayal will include the behaviors mentioned above.

**How Does Relational Betrayal Affect Relationships?**

When trying to understand the impact on the victim it is important to consider to what extent she was deceived and also to what extent the betrayal was intentional. Lying and deception are almost always present and result in a foundational break in the trust level of the relationship (Chan, 2009). To what extent the betrayal act is perceived as personal is also important. In the case of sexual addiction and marital infidelity the betrayal is intensely personal (Steffens & Rennie, 2006). Research is showing that the damage can be minimized if the betrayed wife can come to understand the addictive power that is at work motivating the behavior. Disclosure of betrayal invokes many things for the betrayed spouse including fear, anger, embarrassment, shame, loss of trust, loss of identity, and a need to check up on behaviors and play detective. It often takes a toll on physical health as well creating stress, agitation, exhaustion, and other illnesses like headaches and chronic pain (Hertlein, Wetchler, & Piercy, 2005).

**Relational betrayal and online behaviors.** Four ways in which cyberspace betrayal is different from offline betrayal are identified in another study. These are suddenness of exposure, a sense of violation of private areas of the home, permanence of the record, and its addictive quality. Of great concern is the 24/7 nature and availability of the internet, increasing the
addictive and obsessive potential of internet pornography and chat rooms. Because this activity is artificial and fueled by fantasy and imagination, the possibilities for arousal and gratification are limitless. People can be whatever they want to be unconstrained by reality; and it is easy to see how real life relationships have a hard time competing. People who engage in online infidelity have been shown to think of the activity as creating sexual excitement for themselves while, at the same time, staying faithful to their real life partner. This line of reasoning is faulty and makes no sense to the partner when infidelity is discovered. Cybersex is cultivating two parallel realities where an individual comes to believe he/she can have online and offline relationships simultaneously without causing any problems (Gerson, 2011).

Compulsive use of pornography and accessibility to internet relationships has created an increase in relational betrayal (Zitzman & Butler, 2005; Hertlein & Piercy, 2008). The internet is particularly insidious when being used for the purpose of finding extramarital partners because of what is known as the “Triple A” engine – accessibility from many locations, affordability, and anonymity. Where it used to be necessary to visit a strip club or an adult bookstore to purchase pornography, now it is available with the click of a mouse in the privacy of the home. A person can create whatever persona he/she desires to create with relative ease and secrecy. This study also verified the fact that sexual contact is not necessary for the behavior to be viewed as betrayal by the marriage partner. Emotional connections are believed to be equally or even more harmful than physical acts in the context of committed relationships (Hertlein & Piercy, 2008).

**Perceptions altered in relational betrayal.** Observation of this client population shows, almost unanimously, that the discovery or disclosure of the betrayal is a traumatic event which is remembered in detail for years to come. The betrayed wife’s perceptions are altered in three important areas: her relationship with her partner, her view of her own worth and desirability,
and her view of the character of her partner. In questioning her relationship, she often comes to notice many signs of secrecy and withdrawal that she had previously missed causing her to realize the deterioration in the relationship. As she struggles with her view of herself, she often questions her worth as a person because he went outside the relationship and chose something or someone else. In a third area, her view of her partner, she comes to question his character and personal worth as well. In this disillusionment she wonders how the person she thought she knew could actually have done these things. This questioning process also involves introspective questioning as the betrayed spouse examines the reality of all she has believed to be true about the relationship and her ability to correctly determine truth and place trust in her spouse (Bergner & Bridges, 2002).

**Specific effects of relational betrayal.** Bergner & Bridges (2002) identify six important factors concerning the relationship that are immediately affected in conjunction with discovery of betrayal. First, whether the betrayal involves a sexual affair or pornography use, contact with other women destroys the exclusivity of the relationship. Second, sexual desire is affected. This often has occurred over time as the husband has lost interest in sex with his wife because of his acting out and/or the wife comes to realize that she is merely a sexual object being used to fuel the addiction. Hertlein & Piercy (2008) agree that people who are obtaining sexual or relational gratification online are less interested in their real life partners. Third, there is a loss of intimacy as the wife realizes she has lost the person she thought was her best friend. Fourth, the wife loses the security of feeling that her husband cares about her and her wellbeing. Fifth, there is a loss of feeling understood – that he understands how his actions have affected her. Finally, there is a realization for the wife that she has been living a lie in her marriage. What she thought was true is actually very different from reality. While deception is undeniable and the hurt is deeply felt,
the woman usually needs help to see that not all of her reality has been a lie. There is a conflicting reality as the same relationship that has involved betrayal and pain has also often produced positive things like children and satisfying family life. The confusion of trying to reconcile conflicting realities such as these is a significant part of the trauma (Bergner & Bridges, 2002).

A woman’s view of herself also undergoes a change following discovery of betrayal. Most women find themselves questioning everything about what they previously thought about their worth and value. Three themes often emerge from this process of questioning. First, because of her partner’s preference for pornography or other women, the betrayed wife feels sexually undesirable – that she could never measure up to the images or people in her husband’s fantasy world. Second, there can be a feeling of worthlessness as she questions where she failed as a wife. A third and final theme that often arises is a new belief that she is weak or stupid, either because she did not see it coming or because she is choosing to stay and work on the relationship (Bergner & Bridges, 2002).

Making Sense of Relational Betrayal - Implications

Victim's attempts to explain relational betrayal. Six common themes emerge as the victim of betrayal struggles to come up with explanations and reasons for the behavior. Involved in all of these themes is a need to examine all or nothing thinking. The question must be answered whether some things about life can be true in the presence of glaring deception and lack of truth. Where thinking has previously been very black and white, there are now many confusing shades of gray. First, the betrayed wife struggles to decide whether or not her husband is actually a sexual degenerate of some kind? As his history reveals progressively “sicker” activities, she must find a satisfying explanation for his behaviors. Second, she often comes to
view him as a liar who is untrustworthy and deceitful – maybe someone she will never be able to trust ever again. This process often involves a deep questioning of everything previously viewed as true and one’s ability to accurately discern deception from another person. Third, maybe he is just an unloving person who is unable to care for anything or anyone other than his own pleasure. Fourth, the betrayed wife often comes to view her spouse as a failure in his role as husband and father. Fifth, there can be great confusion as she struggles with whether he is inherently bad or actually sick. When she can view him as sick, she also might have a greater willingness to stay and be a part of the recovery process. Finally, she must struggle with deciding whether he is repentant or unrepentant, which also affects her willingness to stay. As might be expected, the husband’s remorse and willingness to change and get help has been shown to lessen her desire to leave the relationship. The opposite is also true. If the husband is unrepentant, the woman in this case is more likely to leave the relationship (Bergner & Bridges, 2002).

A follow-up study by these same authors explored whether women in general have a negative view of their partner’s use of pornography. While many women did not have strongly negative feelings about their partner’s pornography use, approximately one-third of women had extremely negative feelings similar to the women in Bergner and Bridges previous study (Bridges, Bergner, & Hesson-McInnis, 2003). Two other important variables were revealed. Married women who considered themselves to be highly committed to their relationship showed high amounts of distress over their husband’s use of pornography. Also, women whose husbands had the highest levels of pornography use and frequency showed equally high amounts of distress. These variables led the authors to conclude that the amount of distress is closely related to the perceived threat or damage caused by pornography to the marriage relationship. Women
who are deeply invested in their relationship and have a lot to lose because of pornography use are highly distressed by it (Bridges et al., 2003).

**Restoring trust in relational betrayal.** Research has proven that betrayal damages the relationship and trust between the husband and wife, and that this trust is not easily repaired. Four factors have been shown to be important in this process of restoring trust – apology, restitution, repentance, and renegotiation of values. While trust rebuilding begins with *apology*, this alone is not enough to rebuild trust. Because trust has been broken words are now cheap. *Restitution* infers actions that will demonstrate the remorse and desire to be trustworthy in the future. The husband’s *repentance* is similar to the apology but is more ongoing and attempts to demonstrate to the betrayed wife his desire to become a trustworthy person moving forward. The *renegotiation of values* happens when the restoration process is well established and allows the couple to agree on important priorities and actions for their relationship in the future (Chan, 2009).

**Posttraumatic Growth**

**What is Posttraumatic Growth?**

Starting in the middle of the 20th century, researchers began to broaden their focus from psychological disorders and illnesses to include the study of healthy individuals. This trend has continued to the present day and has led to the identification and study of posttraumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). As researchers have worked to name the concept of posttraumatic growth, many other terms were considered – adversarial growth, stress-related growth, thriving, perceived benefits, positive adjustment and positive adaptation (Linley & Joseph, 2005), change in the aftermath of loss (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2008) positive psychological change, stress-related growth, discovery of meaning, and transformational coping (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).
Tedeschi and Calhoun (2008) also make the point that the terms recovery and posttraumatic growth are two very different things. Recovery hints at a need to get over an illness or addiction, while posttraumatic growth describes a process of emerging from adversity as a stronger and more capable person.

Posttraumatic growth is defined as a “positive psychological change experienced as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life circumstances” (Sheikh, 2008). This positive change is not merely a return to the previous normal but indicates an improvement in functioning that is significant (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). While trauma has long been viewed as a cause of negative life change, in recent years the focus has begun to shift to look at how traumatic events can sometimes actually bring about greater personal growth (Shaw, Joseph, & Linley, 2005). Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) are careful to point out that the experience of negative events is highly distressing and does not guarantee growth. They go on to explain the conditions in which growth can occur in stressful events (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). These researchers have developed a measurement tool called the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI) which has proven effective in measuring growth in specific areas (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). They more recently developed a short version of this helpful tool called the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory – Short Form (PTGI-SF) (Cann et al., 2010). These researchers measured growth along the five domains of posttraumatic growth explained later on in this review.

When examining posttraumatic growth, it is important to have a clear definition of trauma in this context. “A trauma is an event that profoundly challenges an individual’s fundamental schemas, beliefs, goals, as well as the ability to manage emotional distress, and profoundly affects that individual’s life narrative.” (Sheikh, 2008 p87). This definition will be relevant in later discussion of posttraumatic growth. There is no doubt that this definition applies
to a woman who discovers her husband’s relational betrayal and feels her world come crashing down.

**Four phases of posttraumatic growth.**

*Managing distressing emotions.* Managing distressing emotions is necessary because of the traumatic event and is the beginning of the process of posttraumatic growth. The wife who discovers relational betrayal finds herself in shock and asks how this could have happened to her (Sheikh, 2008). She must learn how to express her full range of feelings related to the trauma. Working to comprehend the losses involved in her situation, she begins doing grief work. The distressing emotions do not subside quickly and usually continue into the next stages of the process of dealing with posttraumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

*Support and disclosure.* Support and disclosure mark the beginning of the second phase of posttraumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). The pain resulting from the betrayal remains high during this second phase of growth (Triplett, Tedeschi, Cann, Calhoun, & Reeve, 2012). Supportive relationships and counseling have been shown to be important for the client in this stage of posttraumatic growth (Sheikh, 2008). The distress remains as the shock begins to diminish. Supportive relationships and counseling will allow the person to move towards deliberate and constructive thoughts to try to make sense of the new reality (Triplett et al., 2012). As mentioned earlier, there is usually significant confusion as the woman wrestles with conflicting realities while trying to decide what is true. Disclosure to safe people helps the betrayed woman begin to tell her new story, allowing her to make new meanings for herself in the process (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). While professional support is usually necessary, the therapist does not create the growth (Sheikh, 2008). Just as Adlerian theory views the person as
expert of their own life, similarly the betrayed woman is responsible for and in charge of her own growth rather than the therapist (Sheikh, 2008).

**Cognitive processing.** The third phase of posttraumatic growth is cognitive processing involving either obsessive rumination or intentional thoughtful processing of the distressing reality (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). This is an intentional active process in which the traumatized person is thinking and working through her experience for the purpose of solving the problem. She is focused on making sense of problems instead of passively dwelling on the obstacles that stand in the way of solutions (Stockton, Hunt, & Joseph, 2011). It is important to make the point that not all intrusive thoughts are negative when they encourage scrutiny of the situation and bring about new meanings.

Greater levels of these intrusive thoughts have been shown to lead to higher levels of posttraumatic growth (Stockton, Hunt, & Joseph, 2011) when the woman can use them to make sense of her life. The woman must wrestle with the damage the trauma has created to her core beliefs (Triplett, Tedeschi, Cann, Calhoun, & Reeve, 2012). In the process of posttraumatic growth, these recurrent thoughts lead the woman to problem solving, making sense of her trauma, and eventually coming up with a new reality (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). The growth happens not as a result of the trauma but from the focus and struggle to make meaning from the trauma (Stockton et al., 2011). This reflection is believed to improve the outcome, provide perspective and allow the trauma to begin to bring change. When this rumination and reflection are combined with positive social support in the form of friends or counselors, posttraumatic growth is shown to occur (Sheikh, 2008).

**Emergence of a new narrative and wisdom.** The eventual result of the woman’s struggle to make meaning from the betrayal is the emergence of a new narrative and wisdom. Life’s
perspective changes and allows her to view reality in a new way, better managing the unknowns that are a normal part of life. The hypothesis here proposes that a woman who comes into the trauma with the confidence and skills of a secure attachment style is better able to establish this new perspective. Before the trauma occurs she possesses a belief that she is loveable, capable and able to achieve the health that she desires. In the midst of the pain of betrayal, these secure beliefs about herself give her valuable perspective. She quite likely will come to view her life with a before and after mentality (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004) – the way things were before the trauma of betrayal and how her reality changed after the betrayal. Her beliefs about herself remain constant despite the traumatic occurrences in her life.

**Results of Posttraumatic Growth**

**Five domains of posttraumatic growth.** Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) identified five areas or domains where growth can be observed and also created a framework for measuring each. The domains are – a greater appreciation for life accompanied by a change of priorities, closer and more meaningful relationships with other people, a perception of increased strength, an ability to identify new possibilities, and spiritual or existential growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2008).

**Greater appreciation for life.** In the midst of significant pain, a new outlook often develops bringing increased awareness of smaller positive things in life that were once taken for granted. This increased appreciation often enriches life and brings a change in priorities that highlight small things that were not lost in the trauma (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

**Closer and more meaningful relationships with other people.** There is often “a greater sense of compassion and connectedness to other human beings, perhaps especially to others who undergo similar losses, and an experience of greater intimacy with some friends and family**
members” (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2008 p.33). At the same time, there might be a distancing from some relationships that are not equipped to withstand the trauma – in many ways the person in trauma finds out who their true friends really are (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

**A perception of increased strength.** While the experience of significant life trauma highlights the fact that we, as humans, are all vulnerable to suffering, it is possible to gain a new concept of personal strength upon realizing the trauma has not prevailed. There is often a new confidence gained that allows a person to feel assured of success in weathering future problems (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2008). Situations that might have once been viewed as impossible can change perspective and seem less daunting because of the growth that results from the trauma of betrayal (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

**An ability to identify new possibilities.** This area of posttraumatic growth highlights the possibility that the traumatic event often causes a reevaluation of a person’s life direction and calling and might lead to a new career path or area of interest. This could lead to new volunteer work, a different job or further schooling in order to pursue a new career. Original ways of thinking before the relational betrayal are often rigid and narrow when compared with the new ability to process and reason that results from posttraumatic growth. As part of the new possibilities there is an increased ability to think outside the box and see many options in any given situation (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

**Spiritual or existential growth.** The struggle to understand the meaning or reasons for the loss or trauma can be an intensely spiritual journey. While the pain might persist, “it does so alongside deeper and more satisfying understandings of the individuals place and purpose in the world” (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2008 p.35). Concepts that were always present in the woman’s
mind are reevaluated and applied in a new way and can become deeply ingrained beliefs as a result of trauma (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2008).

Shaw, Joseph, and Linley (2005) note two important points from a survey of America in the early days following the 9/11 terrorist attacks. First, beliefs that are spiritual or religious can be helpful to people who are recovering from trauma. Second, they show evidence that new spiritual beliefs can develop as a result of the life trauma. Religious beliefs can provide a framework to bring meaning and rebuild shattered assumptions. Threatening events can actually be perceived as less of a threat in conjunction with a belief in a power greater than human existence. At the same time, this confidence in a higher power is no guarantee. Some become disillusioned with a God who allows bad things to happen (Shaw, Joseph, & Linley, 2005).

The research shows that spirituality can be a key factor in survival and recovery (posttraumatic growth) as a victim places confidence in a God who is bigger than the current problem. When a problem seems out of control, it can be comforting to realize there is help available in the form of a higher power. Individuals who profess a strong commitment to spiritual goals are also more likely to report recovery and new meaning after trauma. Also, while there might be anger in the short term, those with strong religious beliefs report an increased sense of peace and deepening of faith after trauma (Shaw, Joseph, & Linley, 2005).

**Ramifications of Posttraumatic Growth**

When considering ramifications of posttraumatic growth, this author notices a number of things when working with this population in a therapeutic setting. As posttraumatic growth creates a greater appreciation for life, there is often a visible return of personal worth and sense of dignity. Once a woman has taken the time and energy to discover what is really true about the
betrayal and her relationship, she realizes her own value, worth and desirability. This new sense of personal worth might be experienced as a part of a restored relationship or as a newly single person who knows she will not remain a victim in an unsafe relationship. As posttraumatic growth leads to more meaningful relationships with people, the partners’ relationships often experience varying degrees of healing and even transformation. Exclusivity of the sexual and emotional relationship can be re-established; and there is often a different type of trust that develops. Instead of blindly trusting her spouse, a woman now realizes her inability to control what he chooses, and learns how to clearly express what she will tolerate. Along with that comes a sense of peace as she trusts herself to be able to face the future. Instead of feeling weak and stupid as she once did when she realized the betrayal she now perceives herself as having increased strength to manage whatever she needs to manage. She realizes she has options and strength to take care of herself should that become necessary in the future.

Because posttraumatic growth brings a person to a better place than where she was before she experienced the trauma, in this new place she realizes many possibilities that were not previously apparent. There is often a new belief in the ability to care for oneself, security, and an ability to trust oneself. In the last domain of spiritual or existential growth, the literature showed that many people experienced either new relationships with God or a higher power, or came to experience a new spirituality they did not have previously.

When considering ramifications of posttraumatic growth in an Adlerian context, the assumptive world that is frequently discussed in posttraumatic growth literature seems to closely correlate with the concept of private logic within Adlerian theory (Griffith & Powers, 1987). Private logic is defined as “a person’s unique valuation of self, others, and the world, and what life requires of him or her” (Griffith & Powers, 1987, p.81). It is common sense – what each
person believes to be true about the world. When this assumptive world/private logic is challenged as in relational betrayal, it creates a need to reevaluate everything that was previously believed to be true. This process of reevaluation and struggling with making new sense of reality is where the posttraumatic growth takes place – not in the betrayal itself (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

The process of posttraumatic growth is not driven by a therapist. The reevaluation and cognitive struggle with previously held assumptions and beliefs must be worked on by the client (Sheikh, 2008). Adlerian theory also holds this belief – that the therapist is a guide and the client is responsible for doing the work and making his or her own discoveries.

One study attempted to explain the differences between actual posttraumatic growth and perceived or self-reported posttraumatic growth. Participants who reported higher levels of satisfaction and lower levels of distress following the trauma were also more likely to be accurate in their perception of posttraumatic growth (Gunty et al., 2011). Their perceived level of growth was similar to their test score on the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI). This finding might prove to be interesting when considering personality traits of securely vs. insecurely attached individuals in the following section and would provide opportunity for further study.

**Attachment Styles**

John Bowlby is a well-known name in the field of attachment theory. In his early work, he did a study of forty-four thieves and discovered that they all had a common experience – disrupted childhoods. He became convinced through this study that early emotional development was an important factor that needed to be better understood (Van Der Horst, Van Der Veer, & Van Ijzendoorn, 2007). This early experience shaped his future work as he sought to understand
what happens early in the life of a child that has such power to shape adult life. As he studied infancy and early childhood, “Bowlby discarded Freud’s image of a clingy dependent infant, focused on drive reduction, and replaced it with a view of infants as much more competent, inherently motivated to exploration and mastery, and skilled at using one or a few primary attachment figures as a secure base from which to explore” (Waters & Waters, 2006, p.185). He saw the infant’s early experience – this secure base – as significant and referred to this experience as a working model (Waters & Waters, 2006). Thus, “working model” can refer to either the secure or the insecure base that is formed from early life experience.

The theories of John Bowlby and Alfred Adler are derived from the psychodynamic perspective and have basic similarities (Peluso, Peluso, Buckner, Kern, & Curlette, 2009). Bowlby defined attachments as “close, intensely emotional relationships that form between infants and one or two close, caretaking individuals. These attachments can be either secure or insecure, based on the quality of the interaction between adult(s) and the child.” (Peluso et al., 2009 p394). On the other hand, “Adlerians believe that lifestyle is a set of self-governing strategies for maneuvering through life that evolve early in childhood and remain stable throughout the life span. Those strategies are developed by individuals to adapt best to the family and social environments into which they were born.” (Peluso et al., 2009, p.395). The two clear similarities between these theories are the biological origins involved and the important relationships of the child with key adults in his or her life. According to these authors a person with a secure attachment style might have an Adlerian lifestyle characterized by optimism, confidence, good coping skills, good organization skills and a positive sense of the world around them… not dependent on feedback from others to determine self-worth.
What is an Attachment Style?

In his work on attachment theory, John Bowlby (2007) identified a questioning and seeking behavior seen in children as early as six months of age that showed their repeated attempts to decide whether their caregiver was in close enough proximity for them to feel safe and secure. This concept, named the proximity principle, was the foundation of attachment theory (Clinton & Sibcy, 2002). An infant creates a working model of relationship based on personal experience and responsiveness of caregivers that leads to the formation of attachment style (Shorey & Snyder, 2006). As the young child works to feel a sense of security he unknowingly begins to develop very important core beliefs about himself and the world around him which fall into two categories – questions about self and questions about others. Questions about self ask “Am I worthy of being loved?” and “Am I competent to get the love I need?” Questions about others ask “Are others reliable and trustworthy to respond to me when I need them?” and “Are others accessible and willing to respond to me when I need them?” The answers to these questions are believed to create attachment styles and expectations about future relationships (Clinton & Sibcy, 2002). Bowlby’s theory of attachment style has been proven by empirical research proving that styles established in infancy remain into adulthood. In the adult population slightly over half of people (56%) have a secure attachment style while 44% have one of the three insecure attachment styles (Shorey & Snyder, 2006).

As various researchers have studied and assigned names to each attachment style there has been a lack of continuity in terminology. The Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) was developed as a semi structured interview from childhood narratives and led to the naming of four attachment styles – secure, dismissing, preoccupied, and disorganized (Shorey & Snyder, 2006). Clinton and Sibcy (2002) use the terms secure, avoidant, ambivalent and disorganized in their
writing. In an attempt to clarify different terminology researchers came to see attachment theory in terms of models of self and models of others. The following diagram demonstrates and seeks to clarify the terminology as it relates to images of self and others.

<table>
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<td>Ambivalent</td>
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This focus on either positive or negative models of self and others alleviates the confusion caused by the different terminology. What matters most despite differing terminology is the fact that each style “guides perceptions, thoughts, and behavior in theoretically consistent ways across measurement models” (Shorey & Snyder, 2006). In this review the terms secure, avoidant, ambivalent and disorganized will be used.

**Secure attachment style.** “Secure attachment results from a history of successfully seeking and receiving support from one or more attachment figures” (Mikulincer, Shaver, Sapir-Lavid, & Avihou-Kanza, 2009 p616). Adults who have a secure attachment style have been able throughout their lives to answer yes to the above questions about their worth and ability to obtain love and safety. They feel worthy and capable of getting the love they need, trusting of other people, and confident that people will be there for them to care for them. These secure people were blessed with caregivers in their infant and toddler years with whom they felt safe and secure. These adults feel free to experience all emotions, are confident in who they are, know how to negotiate conflict, possess a basic trust in people, and have courage to face the demands of life without becoming overwhelmed because they know they can ask for help. A secure attachment style does not promise an absence of problems, but does suggest resilience in the
midst of the problems of life that helps the secure person remain sure of their worth and value (Clinton & Sibcy, 2002).

The parenting style that is most prevalent among those who develop a secure attachment style is democratic. There is a family belief that all people in the family have power, are worthy and should be included. In the same way, all members of the family are allowed and encouraged to have and express feelings, thoughts and needs as they occur. Parents support their children without smothering them and encourage self exploration and exploration of the world (Clinton & Sibcy, 2002).

**Insecure attachment styles.** In the following three insecure styles of attachment something has prevented the child from successfully meeting the instinctual goal of finding and maintaining security from their caregiver. While some parents mean well and end up falling short, others subject children to blatant abuse and neglect. The following descriptions of each of the insecure attachment styles will explain likely causes of the insecurity. It is also important to remember that the attachment styles can and do present themselves at varying levels of intensity and are sometimes seen in combinations (Shorey & Snyder, 2006).

**Avoidant attachment style.** Adults who possess the avoidant style are not able to answer yes to all of the basic questions concerning personal worth and availability of support from parents. While they feel worthy of love and capable of getting the love they need, they do not perceive others to be willing to offer that love and support. Their early experience has led them to believe that people are unreliable, untrustworthy and/or unwilling to provide for them the love they need (Clinton & Sibcy, 2002). There is a difficulty with emotional intimacy and self-disclosure because the idea of being vulnerable to another person is too scary. Because of this lack of trust in other people, the person who is avoidant is often also uncomfortable with non-
sexual touch because they feel threatened by it. Avoidant children commonly refuse to acknowledge their distress – either consciously or unconsciously – putting in place a method of coping that goes with them into adulthood (Shorey & Snyder, 2006).

The parenting style that is most commonly experienced among those who develop the avoidant style is inconsistent. The caregivers are sometimes responsive and sometimes distant or aloof. In one instance the parent might be overprotective or controlling, while at another time they might give the child the cold shoulder. The child develops a fear of abandonment because the attention from the caregiver is so unpredictable. This parent unintentionally fosters a feeling of incompetence as the child is not allowed the opportunity to explore his/her environment within the safety of the parent’s reliable and predictable support (Clinton & Sibcy, 2002).

**Ambivalent attachment style.** The ambivalent attachment style is also referred to as preoccupied. Adults with ambivalent attachment style do not feel worthy or capable of asking for love without being clingy or angry. The ambivalent person believes that other people are capable of meeting his needs but might not actually meet them due to his own flaws. Because the ambivalent person believes himself to be worthless, that condition of worthlessness will likely cause trustworthy and reliable people to abandon him (Clinton & Sibcy, 2002). The young child struggles with fear that his parents might abandon him. A strong need to please people develops as a result of this fear of abandonment. There is a fear of intimacy. While he feels worthy of love, other people have not been there for him in his early years so he has learned to take care of his own needs and not expect to give or receive much either. The anxious-ambivalent child learns to become hyper-vigilant for signs of threat or rejection (Shorey & Snyder, 2006).

The parenting style that is most prevalent among those who develop the avoidant attachment is a rejection of the child. While it is rarely intentional on the parent’s part, they
experience difficulty expressing sensitivity to the child’s needs and are often too busy and
distracted. This parent views the child’s expression of needs as manipulative, and the child ends
up struggling with emotional connection and sensitivity to others in his life. This child becomes
fiercely independent, reliable, capable, competent and perfectionistic (Clinton & Sibcy, 2002).

**Disorganized attachment style.** The disorganized attachment style is also referred to as
fearful. The person with a disorganized attachment style answers no to all of the questions about
himself and others. He feels unworthy, unlovable, incompetent to get love; and views other
people as untrustworthy and unreliable. This person tends to isolate and withdraw in some
circumstances and to become clingy and dependent at other times. A mixture of the other two
insecure attachment styles is displayed. Pessimism is a common character trait. During
childhood, this person never got to have a place where he could feel safe and secure. The home
environment might have been abusive creating fear and anxiety. For this person there is a great
deal of distress in relationships (Clinton & Sibcy, 2002).

The parenting style that is most prevalent among people who develop the disorganized
attachment style is characterized by abuse and/or neglect. For whatever reason, these parents are
unable to be available to their child. Examples of this type of parenting include severe marital
conflict, addictive behaviors and psychological, emotional, physical and sexual abuse. The adult
with a disorganized attachment style has a negative view of himself and of others. He is
comfortable with the chaotic environment in which he grew up and might experience
dissociation, addiction and hopelessness (Clinton & Sibcy, 2002).

A condition called “splitting” is frequently observed in these extreme cases. The child
manages to maintain a positive parental image by unconsciously pushing away the negative
experiences. This splitting or dissociation is a valuable survival tactic for the young child but can cause many problems and maladaptive behaviors later in life.

Splitting thus allows children to believe, even in the face of disconfirming evidence, that their parents will value and protect them. If rebuffed, such children then internally attribute the rejecting parental behaviors to their having been bad children as opposed to the less desirable view that their parents simply do not care. This example illustrates how children’s insecure attachment styles represent their best attempts to get their security needs met when primary caregivers behave in aversive and unfulfilling ways. The price exacted for this perceived security is high, however, because these early childhood working models are likely to become maladaptive in the context of later adolescent and adult relationships that pertain to friendships or romance. (Shorey & Snyder, 2006 p3)

**Trends in Attachment Theory**

Over the past fifty years, the trend in attachment theory research has highlighted the importance of creating strong family bonds to meet the emotional and social needs of children. Every child needs a primary attachment figure, a caregiver with whom he can have a strong and long lasting emotional bond. Grandparents, nannies and close relatives often become secondary attachment figures for a child by spending time and providing support and love. Research shows that children have improved mental health and increased resilience if they have three or more secondary attachment figures involved in their lives. Well known risk factors that work against healthy secure attachment include poverty, family breakdown, substance abuse, violence, parental depression, and lack of parenting skills (Bowlby, 2007). The attachment style a child develops in early childhood has been shown to remain constant into adulthood including adult romantic attachment relationships (Leveridge, Stoltenberg, & Beesley, 2005) (Shorey & Snyder,
ATTACHMENTS AND POSTTRAUMATIC GROWTH

2006). While styles remain constant, they can be changed with intentional effort and professional help (Clinton & Sibcy, 2002).

The explosion in technology over the last 20 years has allowed neuroscientists to view images of the brain and learn how a child’s early emotional attachments influence healthy brain development. It has been discovered that hormones produced in conjunction with positive and negative emotions actually affect the structure of a baby’s developing brain. These hormones are especially influential in the first two years of life while the brain is doubling in size. Before 30 months of age, toddlers develop the emotional and intuitive skills necessary for showing empathy and consideration in future adult relationships (Bowlby, 2007).

Individuals with secure attachment style are being shown to possess a more positive view of their family of origin, a positive view of current family climate, higher sociability, and higher self-acceptance and empathy than those with insecure style. Secure attachment also results in lower scores for immature defense style. The individual with insecure attachment style shows the exact opposite of these traits exhibiting more negative views of family of origin and current family and shows less empathy and self-acceptance (Diehl, Elnick, Bourbeau, & Labouvie-Vief, 1998). Securely attached adults have also been proven to possess higher self-esteem, be more socially outgoing, and report less loneliness than insecure types. Similarly, this group perceives their family as emotionally close, adaptable and satisfying (Pfaller, Kiselica, & Gerstein, 1998). The securely attached person is less likely to experience depression, anxiety, and social isolation than the insecure person. There is also more open expression of conflict in households with securely attached individuals (Leveridge, Stoltenberg, & Beesley, 2005). Similarly, securely attached people have been shown to be more extroverted and less neurotic. Pfaller, Kiselica, and Gerstein (1998) report higher levels of family cohesion, adaptability and satisfaction among
securely attached individuals in relation to their families. Shorey and Snyder (2006) even make
the case that personality disorders can be viewed as disorders of attachment.

Although it is not yet well-studied, there is growing evidence of a phenomenon called
secure-base script which is a mental schema or model thought to be present in securely attached
individuals. This script has three characteristics: a) in a time of distress or crisis, this person can
ask for help from a relationship partner; b) the partner will be available and supportive when
called upon for help; c) relief and comfort will be the result of proximity to this partner. While
these authors do not specifically discuss relational betrayal, they do mention distress, which is
certainly present in cases of relational betrayal, leading to the assumption that secure-base script
could be helpful in cases of relational betrayal (Mikulincer, Shaver, Sapir-Lavid, & Avihou-
Kanza, 2009).

Another notable trend in attachment theory research is the growing evidence that a
person’s style remains basically constant from infancy to adulthood without doing intentional
work to change it. The research is showing that insecure attachment style can change over time if
the right help is available. These researchers have shown that in 50-77% of individual cases,
attachment style remains constant into adulthood. While it is common to have characteristics of
multiple styles, one attachment style is usually dominant (Shorey & Snyder, 2006).

Implications in Attachment Theory

There is clearly a need for further study to examine the connections between attachment
style and posttraumatic growth. Therefore, no direct answer to the thesis question is found in the
literature. This literature review has clearly demonstrated that relational betrayal is a traumatic
event that is damaging to the committed couples’ relationship. This review has also demonstrated
that posttraumatic growth does occur in cases of trauma and has explained the factors that lead to
this growth. The strengths of the securely attached individual have been clearly defined along with the deficits that accompany insecure attachment. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that the woman with secure attachment has a better chance to experience posttraumatic growth after relational betrayal than the woman with insecure attachment. The remainder of this review will provide evidence for this conclusion.

**Greater appreciation for life in secure attachment.** The securely attached person is more likely to reach out and ask for help than the insecurely attached person. In this help seeking behavior, the secure person can examine her inner reality which has been shown to have a direct impact on actual life events and her sense of security and well-being (Shorey & Snyder, 2006). While strong attachments in early life provide security, Bowlby (2007) found that disrupted attachment during a child’s preverbal stage often creates an ongoing state of anxiety throughout the remainder of life that is difficult to understand. While anxiety interferes with a sense of appreciation and enjoyment, absence of such anxiety allows for greater enjoyment and appreciation of life.

The person with secure attachment has been shown to possess secure-base script which also increases appreciation and enjoyment of life. The secure-base script, as described earlier in this review, is an internal system of thinking made up of three parts: first, an obstacle is encountered that causes distress and help is sought from a person in close relationship; second, the close person is available and supportive; and third, relief and comfort are the result of proximity with this person. The person with secure attachment has internalized this process through years of repeated experience with this cycle – a phenomenon which these authors call the broaden-and-build cycle. This “story” in the head of a securely attached woman who encounters relational betrayal will allow the woman to rely on the security and positive outcomes...
of past experiences rather than on psychological defenses. She can be distressed with her current situation and still draw strength from an inner confidence in past support systems that were reliable and comforting in earlier times of distress and trouble. Relying on psychological defenses often leads to distortion, rigidity, and conflict rather than peace and confidence. The woman with secure attachment has had a lifetime of “broaden-and-build” experiences in which people in close relationship with her have proved themselves to be reliable and comforting. These experiences have strengthened her secure-base script making her better equipped to face the devastation of relational betrayal. The secure woman can use her energy to focus on constructive alternatives rather than becoming overwhelmed by the trauma. She is acutely aware of the pain of betrayal but knows she is not alone. She knows how to reach out and get the help she needs (Mikulincer, Shaver, Sapir-Lavid, & Avihou-Kanza, 2009).

While betrayal introduces an insecure script, this woman’s secure script is firmly established, allowing her to rest in that security while navigating the difficult time. The woman with insecure attachment who encounters relational betrayal has her insecure script reinforced by the betrayal – she already believes that others are unreliable and untrustworthy, and questions her own worthiness and value. She is faced with the challenge of recovering from the trauma and rewriting her insecure script at the same time. With much hard work, she can surround herself with people who will begin to show her that they are trustworthy and reliable. But in this time of intense pain, she is also faced with the challenge of changing her internal view of her own lovability and worthiness, making the task of recovery more daunting. It is easy to see why the woman with insecure attachment style is less likely to experience posttraumatic growth. The secure-base script gives the secure woman a solid foundation upon which to deal with the trauma of betrayal – she starts out with a measure of security not possessed by the insecurely attached
woman in the same situation. Secure-base script helps the secure woman come to a greater appreciation for life by providing a strong base upon which to build.

**Closer and more meaningful relationships with people in secure attachment.** “Secure individuals generally make realistic appraisals of their relationships and relationship partners; they are more likely to notice supportive, caring behavior and are quicker to understand and forgive partners who fail, under certain circumstances, and deviate from their normally considerate, supportive behavior” (Mikulincer, Shaver, Sapir-Lavid, & Avihou-Kanza, 2009 p.631). The secure-base script mentioned earlier allows the securely attached woman to correctly deduce when she can count on support, express needs and get close to others. This confidence tends to promote harmony, satisfaction and security in relationships (Mikulincer et al., 2009).

Secure attachment style has been shown to be a predictor of emotional intelligence indicating that the secure person is better at managing emotions and regulating behaviors. Emotional intelligence is defined by these researchers as an ability to appropriately express emotions, understand how others feel, remain flexible in problem solving, and express optimism and happiness. Also identified are five dimensions of emotional intelligence which enhance relationships with others: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, empathy, and social skills. While all of these dimensions can be applied to relationships, the last two – empathy and social skills – are especially important in relationships with others. These indicate that the securely attached person possesses skills necessary for successful relationships with others (Hamarta, Deniz, & Saltali, 2009). In the case of relational betrayal, all five of the dimensions of emotional intelligence could be especially helpful in promoting healing and growth following betrayal.
Shorey and Snyder (2006) identify a high correlation between insecure attachment style and a condition called alexithymia. This condition is characterized by three things: difficulty identifying feelings, difficulty describing feelings, and an externally-oriented way of thinking. These characteristics have obvious ramifications when considering closer and more meaningful relationships, suggesting that the insecurely attached person will struggle more with relationships because she is less able to access feelings and understand emotions. When trying to recover from relational betrayal, these deficits of alexithymia seem to be in contradiction to posttraumatic growth potential. Just as the insecure child learns to be hyper vigilant for signs of threat and rejection, the insecure adult brings these methods of coping into adult relationships, creating many problems. Also, as the insecure child learns to suppress their distress – even if it is unconsciously – the insecure adult may be poor at recognizing her own distress and at expressing feelings (Shorey & Snyder, 2006).

Research has shown that securely attached persons “can better cope with negative emotions in social interactions when compared with insecure persons”. They also experience greater positive emotion in these interactions (Hamarta, Deniz, & Saltali, 2009). Putting this into the context of the woman recovering from relational betrayal, it seems logical to conclude that this ability to better cope with the negative and have the ability to see some positives would be beneficial in the growth and recovery process following betrayal. It seems safe to conclude that a securely attached woman might be better able to experience a closer and more meaningful marriage relationship with her husband or move on with greater confidence to make good decisions in other future relationships.

Researchers in another study proved that those with secure attachment style are “more comfortable depending on others and find it easy to get close to others” (Pfaller, Kiselica, &
Gerstein, 1998, p.353) These researchers studied cohesion, adaptability and satisfaction as it relates to family of origin and found that all three factors are significantly higher among securely attached individuals. This group of secure individuals views their family relationships as emotionally close, adaptable and satisfying (Pfaller, Kiselica, & Gerstein, 1998). Similarly, Diehl, Elnick, Bourbeau, and Labouvie-Vief (1998) correlated the secure attachment style with positive image of family, higher self-confidence and psychological well-being, and higher social function in the world. Zitzman and Butler (2005) also draw a connection between secure attachment within the marriage relationship and feelings of well-being both personally and for the relationship. It seems safe to conclude that these secure traits would result in other relationships being perceived as closer and more meaningful. When trust has been violated, as in the case of relational betrayal, the woman with this emotionally close and satisfying history will be more likely to maintain a positive opinion of human kind, recover, learn and grow stronger as a person. She will experience posttraumatic growth.

**Perception of increased strength in secure attachment.** When reviewing post treatment scores in global assessment of functioning (GAF) as found in the DSM-IV TR, Shorey and Snyder (2006) found that individuals with secure attachment scored highest, indicating that this group has great potential to improve their functioning following therapy – to improve upon their own perception of personal strength – which is one component of posttraumatic growth. They show a higher GAF score following therapy. Additionally, the securely attached person exhibits significantly less psychopathology compared to insecurely attached persons, suggesting a much greater potential for personal growth and increased strength. In contrast, individuals with insecure attachment styles had more traumatic personal relationships, depression and masochistic attitudes believing that they must suffer in order to be loved (Shorey & Snyder, 2006). It seems
likely that the masochistic individual who believes she must suffer and endure hardship will be less likely to seek help and experience this type of growth.

The securely attached person has been shown to possess greater intrapersonal and interpersonal skills over the insecurely attached person. These skills have proven to indicate more self-confidence, higher self-esteem, and greater adaptability in coping with problems (Hamarta, Deniz, & Saltali, 2009). This self-confidence is important to the woman who has discovered betrayal in her relationship. Instead of feeling totally defeated, she has a greater confidence to face the challenges of relational betrayal than the woman who has insecure attachment. She is also more determined and less unsure when facing her problems. She is better able to look at her problems without desperation and find satisfying solutions. In contrast, the insecure avoidant person experiences defensiveness, somatic complaints, isolation, disengagement with family and conflict avoidance (Leveridge, Stoltenberg, & Beesley, 2005).

**Ability to identify new possibilities in secure attachment.** Shorey and Snyder (2006) found that compared to securely attached persons, those with dismissing insecure attachment styles are less likely to seek psychotherapy and also far less likely to benefit from it if they do. This would decrease the likelihood of developing and identifying new possibilities for the insecurely attached person and would suggest that the securely attached person is more able to identify these new possibilities.

The securely attached person is able to deal with challenges directly considering all of the factors involved. She sees the problem realistically and does not lose sight of positive aspects also involved. Psychotherapy enhances this self-understanding and is an important part of the growth process. “This is accomplished by illuminating how clients’ internal worlds (working models), as opposed to external forces, are what shape the present quality of their interpersonal
relationships. Thus, a connection can be made between how changing inner reality can have a direct impact on the outer world and increase one's sense of security and well-being” (Shorey & Snyder, 2006, p.13). As the working model of the securely attached woman is utilized and strengthened in therapy, the ability to identify new possibilities seems a likely result.

Attachment literature shows a clear connection in four out of the five domains of posttraumatic growth. The working models created in life as early as infancy and toddlerhood have been proven to have an ongoing influence on adult decisions. Adlerians call this phenomenon the lifestyle, while researchers on attachment styles use the working model to explain secure and insecure attachments. While there is need for future study to prove the connection between secure attachment and posttraumatic growth empirically, it is more than reasonable to conclude this connection. The woman who has a secure attachment style has a higher level of emotional intimacy, has a secure base upon which to manage life problems, is more likely to seek help in times of crisis, experiences more growth when engaged in therapy, and has been shown to experience greater success in overcoming trauma.
References


