

Hyperconnected or Disconnected? An Analysis of Attachment of Smartphones and Their Use in Family Households of College Students During the Digital Era

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Abstract:

Connection is necessary for survival in all species as it binds us together, making us stronger and secure. Attachment continues to be researched by psychologists around the country as one of the major areas of study, such as with inanimate objects. Cellphones have gradually emerged as one of the primary forms of technological devices used for connection, facilitation, entertainment and education. To measure the feelings people have towards technology, this study seeks to explore to what extent various family households use technological media and where limitations may or may not exist. With a focus on cellphones in particular, this research looks at how one may be attached to one's mobile device in a variety of ways. In a two-part questionnaire, participants answer a 7-item survey on media use in their household in general, and an 18-item technology attachment scale. A total of 81 people were surveyed from The College of Wooster ages 18-22 (M=20). Data was collected via Qualtrics and analyzed using ANOVA procedures. Results indicate that no effect of attachment style on attachment to cellphones. Future research should use different attachment scales to focus on differences across various ages and potential changes in attachment over time through cellphone use.

Key Points/Background:

There are more mobile subscriptions than the total world population. A study found that 79% of smartphone owners have their phones on them all day apart from two hours (Konok et al, 2016). Often observed in infants and toddlers, inanimate objects take on a new meaning for the child such as a security blanket, a pacifier, or a teddy bear (Niemyjska, 2017). In many ways, the role that stuffed animals, cuddly toys, or blankets play is often found during stressful, vulnerable or unfamiliar situations to the child where the child may be sick, sleepy, or upset. These objects become anxiety reducing attachments. In fact, higher attachment anxiety was shown to be a predictor of a higher number of features that link to an attachment towards their mobile phone. In other words, those who had anxious attachment styles with other people, tended to have a stronger attachment with their phone in the sense that proximity was important (Konok et al, 2016). In many ways technological devices have weaved themselves into personal and professional lifestyles and the use of applications and social media platforms has even shifted relationships.

Charts & Figures:

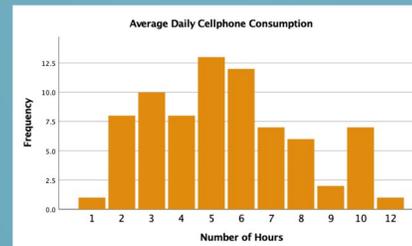


Figure 1: Average daily cellphone consumption for participants in hours

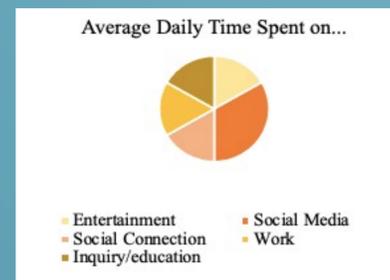


Figure 2: Average daily time spent on various cellphone activities

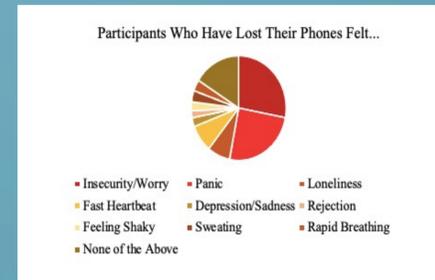


Figure 3: Totals for feelings felt by participants who have lost their phone before

Method:

Participants were recruited through SONA systems accessed through The College of Wooster student's login portal (N=75, 26=male, 40=female, 5=non-binary, 4=transgender, M=19 years-of-age). Participants consented to providing anonymous demographic information, background technology use data (see charts & figures above), filling out a Revised Adult Attachment Scale (Collins & Read, 1990), and filling out an Adapted Mobile Phone Attachment Scale. Device ownership was diverse and high with N=49 participants owning multiple laptops/computers and N=45 participants having one or more televisions at home.

Results:

It was predicted that one's attachment style would influence cell phone attachment. All measures were analyzed using a one-way ANOVA procedure with two groups. For the usefulness measure and attachment style, no effect was found, $F(1,73) = .46, p=.5$ (See Table 1 for descriptive statistics). For the addiction measure and attachment style, no effect was found, $F(1,73) = 1.2, p=.28$ (See Table 2 for descriptive statistics). Further, no effect was found for the continuous use measure and attachment style, $F(1,73) = .38, p=.54$ (See Table 3 for descriptive statistics). Finally, no effect was found for the anxious use measure and attachment style, $F(1,73) = .14, p=.70$ (See Table 4 for descriptive statistics).

Tables:

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Cellphone Usefulness by Attachment Style

Style	N	Mean	S.D.	S.E.
Secure	61	23.11	6.43	.82
Insecure	14	21.86	5.53	1.48
Total	75	22.88	6.25	.72

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Cellphone Addiction by Attachment Style

Style	N	Mean	S.D.	S.E.
Secure	61	12.07	4.37	.56
Insecure	14	10.71	3.12	.84
Total	75	11.81	4.18	.49

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics for Cellphone Continuous by Attachment Style

Style	N	Mean	S.D.	S.E.
Secure	61	14.41	3.71	.48
Insecure	14	13.71	4.21	1.13
Total	75	14.28	3.79	.44

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics for Cellphone Anxiety by Attachment Style

Style	N	Mean	S.D.	S.E.
Secure	61	15.11	5.78	.74
Insecure	14	14.50	4.09	1.09
Total	75	15.00	5.48	.63

Discussion:

Technology use results show that there is indeed a widespread of digital technology in several households. Based on my findings it is evident that technological media is consumed in large amounts, through a variety of devices, by all participants. Although statistical significance was not reached and the data should be reproduced, participants show diversity in forms of media and type of use. In addition, the AAS can be scored in multiple ways which produces sub-scores to attachment processes. Through ways such as Close-Depend-Anxiety, or Secure-Ambivalent-Avoidant scoring, the measure produces several results (Collins, 1996; Collins & Read, 1990). Future studies should consider other forms of attachment measures for adults. Similarly, the Mobile Phone Attachment Scale should be revised for its reliability on more samples. Increased spread and advancement of technology, especially smartphones leaves questions on benefits versus consequences of early, high and type of exposure.