

# Attachment and Risk Taking: Are They Interrelated?

Ümit Morsünbül

**Abstract**—Attachment theory focuses on the bond that develops between child and caretaker and the consequences that this bond has on the child's future relationships. Adolescents attempt to define their identity by experiencing various risky behaviors. The first aim of the study was whether risk taking behavior differs according to attachment styles. The second was to examine risk taking behavior differences according to gender. The third aim of this study was to examine attachment X gender interaction effect for risk taking behavior. And final was to investigate attachment styles differences according to gender. Data were collected from 218 participants (114 female and 104 male) who are university students. The results of this study showed that attachment styles differentiated by risk taking behavior and males had higher risk taking score than females. It was also found out that there was significant attachment X gender interaction effect for risk taking behavior. And finally, the results showed that attachment styles differentiated according to gender.

**Keywords**—Attachment style, risk taking

## I. INTRODUCTION

ATTACHMENT theory was developed by Bowlby to explain the process by which a bond develops between a child and his/her caretaker and the functions that this bond serves. Bowlby defined attachment as strong emotional bonds that people develop against important person for them. The tendency and requirement of emotional bond establishment represent attachment system which necessary to people continue their life. Attachment theory focuses on the bond that develops between child and caretaker and the consequences that this bond has on the child's future relationships [1]. Bowlby pointed out that experiences between caretaker and child form child's internal working model. Bowlby identifies two key features of these working models of attachment: (a) whether or not the attachment figure is judged to be the sort of person who in general responds to call for support and protection; and (b) whether or not the self is judged to be the sort of person towards whom anyone, and the attachment figure in particular, is likely to respond in helpful way. The first concerns the child's image of other and the second concerns the child's image of the self [1, 2, 3]. Internal working models are

consolidated permanently from childhood to adolescence. The end of adolescence is seen as period that internal working models are permanent and more resistant to change. According to Bowlby, adolescences and adults use internal working model in relationships with people who important for them [1].

Bartholomew defined four attachment styles by using internal working model. These are secure, preoccupied, dismissing and fearful attachment styles. According to this model, the secure individuals have positive self and positive others model, the preoccupied individuals have negative self and positive others model, the dismissing individuals have positive self and negative others model and finally the fearful individuals have negative self and others model. Secure individual is characterized by a valuing of intimate friendships, the capacity to maintain close relationships without losing personal autonomy, and a coherence and thoughtfulness in discussing relationships and related issues. Dismissing individual is characterized by a downplaying of the importance of close relationships, restricted emotionality an emphasis on independence and self reliance, and lack of clarity or credibility in discussing relationships. Preoccupied individual is characterized by an over involvement in close relationships, a dependence on other people's acceptance for a sense of personal well-being, a tendency to idealize other people, and incoherence and exaggerated emotionality in discussing relationships. Fearful individual is characterized by an avoidance of close relationships because of fear of rejection, a sense of personal insecurity, and distrust others [2, 3].

According to Erikson the most important and basic developmental task in adolescence is construction of identity. In the process of identity construction, adolescents make a lot of attempts related to life area [4]. Some adolescents arrive at a clear and integrated identity, others end up in a state of identity confusion. In this process, adolescents show a lot of risk taking behaviors.

The concept of risk taking was described different ways by different authors. Psychologist have shown great interest in question of risk and risk-taking. Underpinning much of this approach lies a number of claims and beliefs about how risk can be identified and understood [5]. According to Jack risk taking is a part of normal transitional behavior during adolescence [6]. In adolescence risk-taking fulfils a basic developmental psychological

Ümit Morsünbül is with the Institute of Educational Sciences, Ankara University, Cebeci, 06320, Ankara, Turkey, [E-mail: morsunbulumit@gmail.com].

need related to gaining autonomy. Taking risk is a means of distancing themselves from parents and others and forming their own identities. This arises from the basic human need of having mastery and individuality. Pursuing new risky activities and practices can therefore have positive and negative outcomes [5]. Trimpop, argues that risk taking is any consciously or non-consciously controlled behavior with a perceived uncertainty about its outcome, and/or about its possible benefits or costs for the physical, economic or psycho-social well-being of oneself or others [7]. Consequently, current literature differentiate risk taking behavior as normative risk taking behavior (healthy exploratory activity) and non-normative risk taking behaviors (dangerous and high risk exploratory). In this study risk taking behavior was taken in hand as non-normative risk taking behavior.

Risk taking on the stage of adolescence is explained by different viewpoints. Attachment view point has lead to great strides in understanding the development of social behavior, psychopathology and risk taking behavior in adolescence. According to attachment viewpoint one's attachment style affects person's coping styles and risk taking behaviors in various situations [8]. Adolescence period is seen as dramatic changes stage, and this period is not same for all adolescents. For adolescent who has secure attachment, these paths appear fairly straight, smooth and easily traversed; for adolescent who has not secure attachment these paths are twist, detours and difficult [9]. The secure individuals think that their lives are under their control. They are strong against stress and when they have a problem they communicate with their family and friends. Unsecure individuals have poor coping strategies, when they have problem they either regret it or show risk behavior [2, 5].

In the light of these knowledge, the purpose of this study is to answer the following questions:

1. Does risk taking behavior differ according to attachment styles?
2. Does risk taking behavior differ according to gender?
3. Does risk taking behavior differ according to attachmentXgender interaction effect?
4. Does attachment styles differ according to gender?

## II. METHOD

### A. Participants and Procedure

Data were collected from 218 participants who are university students at Mersin University in Turkey. Of this participants, 114 participants were female and 104 were males. Their age range from 17 to 22, and mean age was 20,15 (SD=1.41).

Data gathering took place during lesson time and participants filled out the questionnaire nearly within 40 minutes. Participation was voluntary and confidentiality.

### B. Measures

#### Attachment styles

To determine attachment styles RSQ (Relationship Scale Questionnaire) were administered. It was developed by Griffin and Bartholomew and adapted to Turkish by Sümer and Güngör [10, 11]. RSQ consists of 18 items which show 4 attachment styles. Secure and dismissing attachment subscales contain 5 items and preoccupied and fearful attachment subscales contain 4 items. Participants rated each item on a 7- point scale ranging from "not at all like me" to "very like me". The Cronbach's alpha for each attachment styles ranged from .47 to .61. Internal consistency for the attachment styles were relatively low. It result from each attachment style category combines two orthogonal dimensions: self model and others model. Although RSQ has low internal consistency its construct validity is high [10, 11, 12].

#### Risk taking Behavior

To determine risk taking behavior (ARTQ) The Adolescent Risk-Taking Questionnaire were administered. It was developed by Gullone, et al. and adapted Turkish by Esen [13, 14]. ARTQ consists of 26 items. ARTQ include 3 subscales; risk taking related to social position (15 items), risk taking related to traffic (6 items) and risk taking related to substance using 5 items). Participants rated each item on a 5- point scale ranging from "not at all like me" to "very much like me" The Cronbach's alpha for each subscale ranged from .62 to .84. ARTQ gives only one score. If one's score is high it shows high risk taking behavior; if one's score low it shows low risk taking behavior [14].

## III. RESULTS

In order to analysis the data Two-Way ANOVA and t test were conducted. Means and standard deviations which adolescents took from ARTQ according to attachment styles and gender were shown in Table 1. Two-Way ANOVA were conducted to determine whether the means which adolescent took from ARTQ differentiate by attachment styles and gender. These results were shown in Table 2. The results of Two-Way ANOVA revealed that adolescents' risk taking means significantly differentiate by attachment styles [F (3-210)= 81,86,  $p<.01$ ] and gender [F (1-210)= 12,11,  $p<.01$ ]. According to attachment styles fearful ( $\bar{X}=92.22$ ) and preoccupied ( $\bar{X}=73.17$ ) attachment styles have higher risk taking scores than secure ( $\bar{X}=50.74$ ) and dismissing ( $\bar{X}=54.39$ ) attachment styles. According to gender, females ( $\bar{X}=61.35$ ) have lower risk taking scores than males ( $\bar{X}=65.96$ ).

TABLE I  
 MEANS AND STANDART DEVIATIONS WHICH ADOLESCENTS  
 TOOK FROM ARTQ ACCORDING TO ATTACHMENT STYLES AND  
 GENDER

Attachment	Gender	N	M	Df
Secure	Female	20	44.29	15.58
	Male	28	57.19	12.63
	Total	48	50.74	15.86
Fearful	Female	32	90.62	10.85
	Male	12	93.83	16.94
	Total	44	92.22	12.67
Preoccupied	Female	14	72.18	18.91
	Male	22	74.14	16.68
	Total	36	73.17	17.34
Dismissing	Female	48	46.50	10.78
	Male	42	62.28	16.54
	Total	90	54.39	15.14
Total	Female	114	61.35	24.25
	Male	104	65.96	19.28
	Total	208	63.65	22.09

There is also significant attachmentXgender interaction effect for risk taking behavior [ $F_{(3-5210)} = 3.35, p < .05$ ]. In order to determine source of the differences attachment x gender interaction Scheffe test were conducted. Scheffe test showed that there are significant differences between secure females and fearful females, between secure females and fearful males, between secure females and preoccupied females, between secure females and preoccupied males; significant differences between secure males and fearful females, between secure males and fearful males, between secure males and dismissing females; significant differences between fearful females and preoccupied males, between fearful females and dismissing females, between fearful females and dismissing males; significant differences between preoccupied females and dismissing females, between preoccupied females and dismissing males; significant differences between preoccupied males and dismissing females, between preoccupied males and dismissing males. And finally, there are significant differences between fearful males and preoccupied males, between fearful males and dismissing females, between fearful males and dismissing males. [Secure females ( $\bar{X} = 44.29$ ), secure males ( $\bar{X} = 57.19$ ), fearful females

TABLE II  
 RESULTS OF TWO-WAY ANOVA

Source	SS	df	MS	F	P
Attachment	50196.28	3	16732.09	81.86	.000*
Gender	2476.10	1	2476.10	12.11	.001*
Attachment * Gender	2188.765	3	729.588	3.35	.015**
Error	42921	210	204.384		
Total	105953	217			

\*  $p < .01$  \*\*  $p < .05$

( $\bar{X} = 90.62$ ), fearful males ( $\bar{X} = 93.83$ ), preoccupied females ( $\bar{X} = 72.18$ ), preoccupied males ( $\bar{X} = 74.14$ ), dismissing females ( $\bar{X} = 46.50$ ), dismissing males ( $\bar{X} = 62.28$ )].

T test was conducted to determine if there were any significant differences between females and males by attachment styles. Results were shown in Table 3.

There is significant difference between males ( $\bar{X} = 4.16$ ) and females ( $\bar{X} = 3.85$ ) in secure attachment dimension ( $p < .05$ ). In fearful attachment dimension females ( $\bar{X} = 4.39$ ) got higher scores than males ( $\bar{X} = 3.81$ ) ( $p < .01$ ). In preoccupied attachment dimension males ( $\bar{X} = 4.07$ ) got higher scores than females ( $\bar{X} = 3.69$ ) ( $p < .01$ ). And finally dismissing attachment dimension there is not significant difference between males and females.

#### IV. DISCUSSION

The present study investigated whether risk taking behavior differentiates by attachment styles. The result of this study showed that attachment styles differentiated by risk taking behavior. These results consistent with previous studies [15, 16, 17]. According to the results of this study individuals who have positive self model showed lower risk taking behavior than individuals who have negative self model. That is, individual who have fearful or preoccupied attachment showed higher risk taking behavior than individual who have dismissing or secure attachment style. However, dismissing adolescents showed higher risk taking behavior than secure adolescents and fearful adolescents showed higher risk taking behavior than preoccupied adolescents. The secure adolescents view self and others positively, are comfortable with close relationships, and feels in control of his or her life. The dismissing adolescents view self positive but others negative, are uncomfortable with closeness and intimacy. They have poor coping strategies and show higher risk

taking behavior than secure adolescents. The preoccupied adolescents have negative self and positive others model, are dependent, lack self confidence, conform to other's wishes. The fearful adolescents have negative self and others model, avoid relationships because of fear rejection, are introverted and lacks self confidence. Since fearful adolescents have both negative self and others model, they show higher risk taking behavior than preoccupied adolescents. Similar findings were found in others studies.

TABLE III  
 MEANS, STANDART DEVIATIONS, AND RESULTS OF  
 INDEPENDENT T-TEST

	Gender	N	M	SD	T	P
Secure	Female	114	3.85	.95	2.35	.019*
	Male	104	4.16	1.003		
Fearful	Female	114	4.39	1.38	3.46	.001**
	Male	104	3.81	1.03		
Preoccupied	Female	114	3.69	.99	2.61	.009**
	Male	104	4.07	1.14		
Dismissing	Female	114	4.71	1.12	.65	.51
	Male	104	4.62	.95		

\*  $P < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$

Cooper, Colins and Shaver investigated attachment style differences in psychological symptomatology, self-concept, and risky or problem behaviors in a community sample of Black and White adolescents, 13 to 19 years old. Overall, secure adolescents were the best-adjusted group, though not necessarily the least likely to engage in risky behaviors. Anxious (preoccupied) adolescents were the worst-adjusted group, reporting the poorest self-concepts and the highest levels of symptomatology and risk behaviors. In contrast, avoidant (dismissing) adolescents reported generally high levels of symptomatology and poor self-concepts but similar levels of risk behaviors to those found among secures [15].

Turner at. al. examined the relationships among sociodemographic characteristics, family process, and the initiation of health risk behaviors in early adolescence. Results showed that students who received autonomy support from parents were less likely to initiate sexual intercourse. Students who were emotionally detached from their parents were more likely to fight and use substances. Those who were emotionally detached tended to come from families with low levels of cohesion and

acceptance [16]. Consequently, it can be said that positive self model decreases level of risk taking behavior but negative self model increases level of risk taking behavior.

The second aim of this study was investigation of risk taking behavior differences according to gender. According to the results of this study there are significant gender differences in risk taking behavior. Results related to gender and risk taking, revealed that males show higher risk taking behavior than females. This result was consistent with previous studies [18, 19]. When we look studies related to risk taking and gender, similar results can be seen. Studies of gender differences in harmful risk taking and antisocial behavior suggest that male and female adolescents respond differently to situational stressors. This situation related to gender role. Girls may have different ways of externalizing their response to stress and anxiety in terms of antisocial and risk behavior. When we look societies, especially collectivist societies, girls prefer indoor activities but boys prefer outdoor activities. Outdoor activities include more risk than indoor activities. Therefore, generally, males may show higher risk taking behavior than females[20]. The socialization environment may determine gender differences according to risk taking behavior. In cultures characterized by broad socialization, individualism and independence are promoted, and there is relatively less restrictiveness on the various dimensions of socialization. This leads to higher rates of risk taking. Cultures characterized by narrow socialization individuals consider obedience and conformity to the standards and expectations of the community to be paramount and punish physically or socially any deviation from the norm. This leads to lower rates of risk taking [18]. In the cultures characterized by narrow socialization, traditional gender roles are prevalence. Thus girls attend more indoor activities than outdoor activities. Turkish society show more narrow socialization than broad socialization. In Turkey, traditional gender roles are prevalence. Thus girls make lower attempts related to life area as compared with boys on adolescence. In traditional Turkish culture, boys are supported to be more independent and free, unlike girls are supported to be dependent[21]. Consequently, girls show lower risk taking behavior than boys.

The third aim of this study was to examine attachment X gender interaction effect for risk taking behavior. The results showed that there was significant attachment X gender interaction effect for risk taking behavior. According to these results attachment and gender change adolescent's risk taking level together. According to result of attachment X gender interaction which was very important fearful females had higher risk taking behavior level than secure, dismissing and preoccupied males.

The fourth aim of this study was investigation of attachment styles differences according to gender. In this

study gender differences were found in attachment styles except from dismissing attachment style. Gender differences were found previous studies [1, 22, 23]. Brennan, Shaver and Tobey found differences in dismissing and fearful attachment styles. In dismissing dimension more males than females were dismissing and in fearful dimension more females than males were fearful [23]. Morsünbül also found similar results in fearful dimension [22].

Consequently, the study showed that, when adolescents faced with risk taking behavior, their preferences may depend on attachment style. When specialists try to decrease rates of risk behavior among adolescent, they should consider whether modification can be made in attachment styles.

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Ümit Morsünbül is Ph.D student [Educational Psychology], at Ankara University, Institute of Educational Sciences. He received B.S. in Psychology, Ankara University in 2001. He completed his master education between years 2002-2005. His Ph.D. began 2005 and continues now, both at Ankara University Institute of Educational Sciences and his master thesis were about identity status and attachment styles. His academic interest areas are identity development, attachment, self construal and risk taking.