

# Attachment and Quality of Life in the African Diaspora

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# Outline

Attachment Relationships

Attachment & the African Diaspora

Method

Results: Descriptive Stats; Subgroup  
Differences; Bivariate Correlations

Discussion

Next Steps





# Attachment Relationships



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# What is Attachment?

Attachment is a psychological model that describes the dynamics of long-term and short-term relationships.

2 main branches:

- **Parent-child attachment**

This is the most researched aspect of attachment relationship which examines the close emotional bond between parents and their children, and serve as a predictor of a child's later social and emotional outcome (Bowlby & Ainsworth).

- **Adult attachment**

This aspect of attachment relationship has been studied on the basis that the same attachment system that gives rise to parent-child bond is responsible for the bonds that develop between adults in social relationships (e.g. with geographic places, divine entities, romantic partners, human close others).

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# Parent-child Attachment

A child is attached to the parent or caregiver for survival value and through the interactions with the caregiver, the working models of attachment are developed. These working models are the mental representations of what the child could expect from future relationships.

The internal working models developed at this stage could inform on whether the child is predisposed to either of these three attachment patterns:

- **Secure attachment** - confidence in the availability of the caregiver
- **Insecure attachment:** often in the form of an anxious or avoidant attachment behavior, signaling the lack of confidence in the availability of the caregiver.
- **Disorganized attachment:** anxious & dismissive

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# Adult Attachment

- Experiences in close relationships (romantic partner, friend, family) (Fraley et al.)
- People-place relationships (Low & Altman, 1992; and others)
- Believer-God relationships (Kirkpatrick et al.)

The idea here is that an adult may be attached to something or someone (object of attachment) to perform a particular function (e.g. felt security) due to their sophisticated cognitive controls over children (e.g. working memory, response inhibition).

**This function of felt security makes the individual to be drawn to both physical and invisible objects of attachment as their:**

- safe haven to turn to in times of danger
- secure base from which to explore the broader environment
- target of proximity seeking behaviour
- model for identity construction (modeling their lives around the values of the object of attachment)



# **Attachment experiences in the African diaspora**



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# Why “attachment” for the African diaspora in Australia?

1. Forced Displacement
2. Migration
3. Implicit Bias
4. Identity



# Forced displacement

## 01

Some members of the African diaspora might have left or fled their home-countries due to conflict, violence, and human rights violations. They could have **lost their primary attachment figures due to these conflicts** and therefore in need of a substitute attachment figure in their lives.



# Migration

## 02

Due to migration, most members of the African diaspora are **geographically separated from their loved ones** and primary caregivers (e.g. mother, father, family) in home-countries, thus in need of an object of attachment to turn to in their new abodes.



# Implicit Bias

03

A new study (i.e. Mapedzahama and Kwansah-Aidoo, 2017) shows that most Australians are bias about black African migrants due to race-based stereotypes. This often makes African migrants to feel alienated from their host community, as they seek for a secure base from which/whom to explore the Australian space - one that will give them a sense of meaning and belonging.





# Identity

04

Some members of the African diaspora model their lives and forge identity around their objects of attachment (e.g. place identity, religious identity).



# Research question

What is the strength of the attachment experiences of the African diaspora in Australia, and to what extent are these experiences related to health-related quality of life (HQoL)?



# Method





# Method: Procedures & Participants

- Cross-sectional survey of a sample of 261 African residents in New South Wales.
- Snowball sampling and recruitment through existing African community (religious and cultural) structures
- Age mean: 36.9 years (SD=11.7).
- Female (54%) (Ref. = Male, 46%)
- Residents under 5 years (30%) (Ref. = over 5 years, 70%)
- Central Africa (0.4%) (Ref. = Eastern Africa, 2.4%; Western Africa, 58.4%; Southern Africa, 38.8%)
- Single (32%) (Ref.= Married, 62%; Widowed/divorced/separated, 6%)
- High school or less (19%) (Ref. = Tertiary education, 81%)



# Method: Measures

- **Experiences in Close Relationships (Fraley et al. 2011): Experiences in Close Relationship Scale (rating scale of 1 - 7)**
  - ◆ Insecure-avoidant attachment ( $\alpha = .77$ ): e.g. “It helps to turn to people in times of need” (reverse-coded)
  - ◆ Insecure-anxious attachment ( $\alpha = .80$ ): e.g. “I often worry that other people do not really care for me,”
  
- **Attachment to Australia as a place ( $\alpha = .81$ ) (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001): Sense of Place Scale; e.g. “I feel relaxed when I’m in Australia” (rating scale of 1 - 5)**
  
- **Attachment to God ( $\alpha = .89$ ) (Sim & Loh, 2003): e.g. “My relationship with God gives me the courage to face new challenges” (rating scale of 1 - 6)**
  
- **Health-related quality of life outcomes (WHOQoL Group, 1998):** psychological health ( $\alpha = .76$ ), physical health ( $\alpha = .77$ ), environmental health ( $\alpha = .79$ ), social relationships ( $\alpha = .71$ ), general QoL ( $\alpha = .63$ ). Rating scale of 1 - 5.





# Results



# Descriptive statistics





## Descriptive Data: Attachment experiences

<b>Descriptors</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>
Attachment avoidance	4.462	1.192	1	7
Attachment anxiety	2.951	1.415	1	7
Place attachment	3.608	0.769	1	5
Attachment to God	5.691	0.455	3	6



## Descriptive Data: HQoL

<b>Descriptors</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>
General QoL	4.864	0.480	3	5
Psychological health	3.717	0.474	2.60	5
Environmental health	3.982	0.571	2.25	5
Physical health	3.774	0.693	1.40	5
Social relationships	4.030	0.773	1	5

**Statistically significant  
socio-demographic differences  
in attachment experiences**

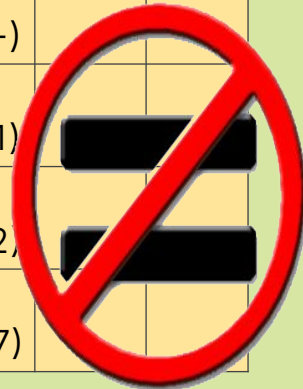
A decorative graphic in the top right corner consisting of several overlapping circles of varying sizes and shades of teal. The largest circle is semi-transparent and contains a smaller, solid teal circle. Other smaller circles are scattered around it, some overlapping each other.

# Subgroup differences: region of origin

## Region of origin and avoidant attachment

- Avoidant behaviour may be linked to the effects of conflict in home countries (Salas-Wright et al., 2014)
- Avoidant behaviour and alienation in personality development may be related to the effects of Apartheid in Southern Africa (Dommissie, 1986).
- Heleniak (2009) has also linked such avoidant outcome to weak sense of community.

	M(SD)	f	p
<b>Region of Origin</b>		4.443	<b>.005</b>
Central Africa	2.75(-----)		
Eastern Africa	4.71(0.91)		
Western Africa	4.28(1.22)		
Southern Africa	4.78(1.07)		





# Subgroup differences: education

## Education background and avoidant attachment

- Educated migrants are more avoidantly attached than those with high school education or less.
- According to the classic modernization theory, this might be due to the exposure to an educational system which makes individuals more likely to be independent, avoidantly attached, and more critical in their thinking

	M(SD)	f	p
<b>Education Background</b>		5.786	<b>.003</b>
High school or less	3.94(1.20)		
Tertiary education	4.58(1.17)		



# Subgroup differences: relationship status

## Relationship status and attachment to God

- This finding says much about the role of spiritual attachment as an meaningful experience in African diaspora communities.

	<b>M(SD)</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>p</b>
<b>Relationship Status</b>		4.904	<b>.008</b>
Single	5.58(0.62)		
Married	5.76(0.33)		
Separated/widowed /divorced	5.58(0.55)		



# **Correlations between attachment experiences and health-related quality of life**



# Attachment and HQoL

NS = Not statistically significant

Variables	Attachment Anxiety		Attachment Avoidance		Place Attachment		Attachment to God	
	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
General QoL	-.048	NS	<b>.137*</b>	<b>.027</b>	<b>.157*</b>	<b>.011</b>	<b>.399**</b>	<b>.000</b>
Psychological Health	-.101	NS	<b>.147*</b>	<b>.018</b>	<b>.278**</b>	<b>.000</b>	<b>.207**</b>	<b>.001</b>
Environmental Health	<b>-.305**</b>	<b>.000</b>	<b>.183**</b>	<b>.003</b>	<b>.281**</b>	<b>.000</b>	<b>.239**</b>	<b>.000</b>
Physical Health	<b>-.267**</b>	<b>.000</b>	<b>.151*</b>	<b>.015</b>	<b>.353**</b>	<b>.000</b>	<b>.165**</b>	<b>.008</b>
Social Relationships	<b>-.183**</b>	<b>.003</b>	.098	NS	<b>.196**</b>	<b>.001</b>	<b>.281**</b>	<b>.000</b>



# Discussion



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# Higher levels of avoidant attachment relate to higher levels of HQoL

Participants had a slightly average avoidant attachment on a 1 to 7 rating scale:  $M=4.5$  ( $SD=1.2$ )

Psychological health, environmental health, and physical health were positively related to avoidant attachment in human relationships

This suggests that avoidantly attached migrants may adopt a self-reliant disposition and independent of others as a coping strategy to remove or reduce the cause of a potential stressor or negative emotions associated with “unreliable” human relationships (e.g., Orlova & Gruzevskis, 2014; Compas et al., 2001; Ayers et al., 1996).

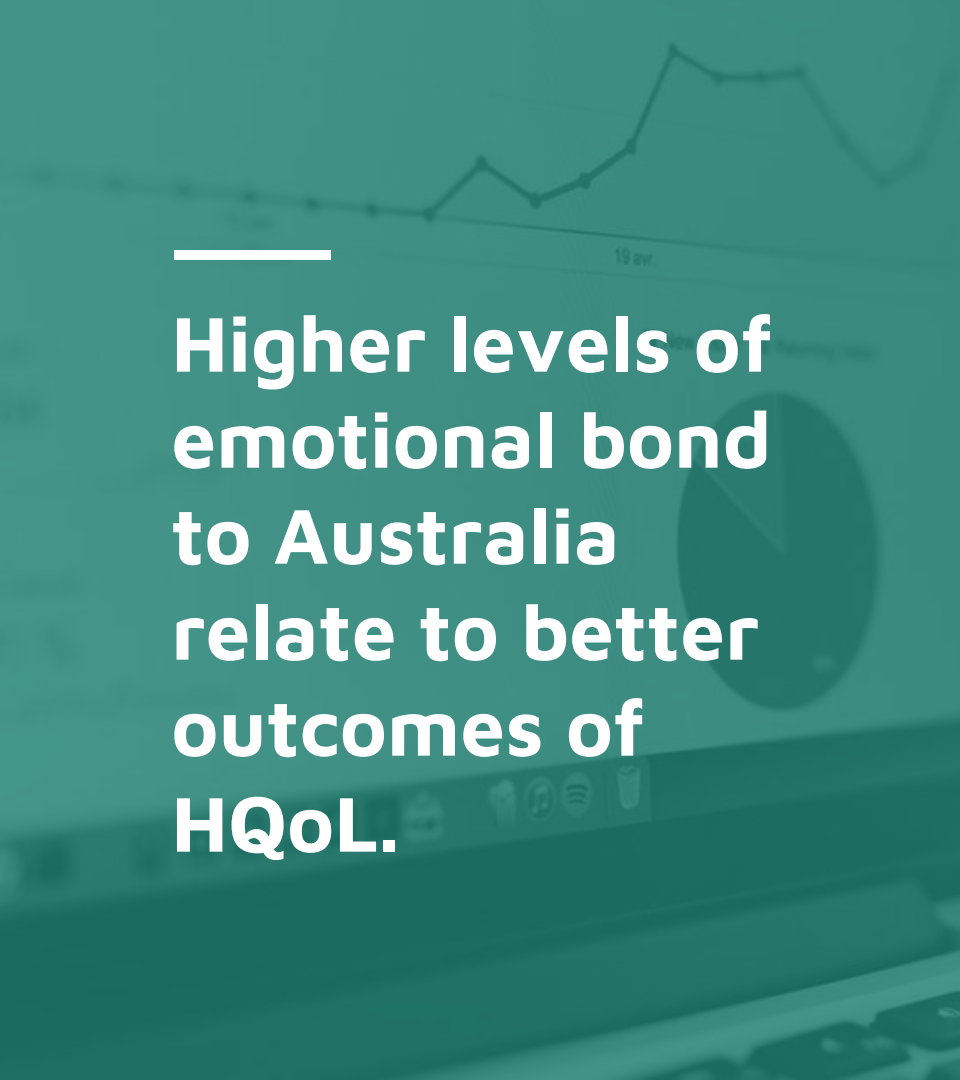
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# Lower levels of attachment anxiety correlate with higher levels of HQoL

Participants had a very low attachment anxiety on a rating scale of 1 to 7:  $M=3.0$  ( $SD=1.4$ )

Attachment anxiety was negatively related to environmental health, physical health, and social relationships.

This results is quite expected since being less anxious would likely enhance overall quality of life (Brenes, 2007).



Higher levels of emotional bond to Australia relate to better outcomes of HQoL.

Participants had an above average attachment to Australia on a 1 to 5 rating scale:  $M=3.6$  ( $SD=0.8$ )

All domains of HQoL were positively related to place attachment.

Gattino et al. (2013) link this relationship to having a sense of community.

Marcheschi et al. (2015) saw this link as the function of building supported housing facilities and providing adequate resources and opportunities for minority groups.

Tartaglia (2013) positions this relationship as a direct effect of perceived social support from family and friends, and through place attachment.

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# Stronger attachment to God correlate with better HQoL

Participants had strong attachment to God on a scale of 1 to 6:  $M=5.7$  ( $SD=0.5$ ).

All domains of HQoL were positively related to attachment to God

The experience of attachment to God among study participants seems to unfold a spiritual coping model for negotiating HQoL at a subjective level (Exline et al. 2014).



# Next Steps





# What next?

- Developing policies and initiatives that will focus on strengthening the attachment experiences of the African diaspora in Australia
- Addressing the socio-cultural inequities that may be prompting the urge to seek attachment with imaginary objects
- Meaningfully engaging the African diaspora community in Australia to better understand why they are forming surrogate attachments.
- Exploring other research possibilities focusing on the African diaspora in Australia.





**Thank you!**



# Questions?

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