

Reconceptualizing Adult Attachment Relationships: A Network Perspective

Lachlan McWilliams

University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, SK, Canada

&

Eiko Fried

Leiden University, Leiden, The Netherlands

Acknowledgements



Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en
sciences humaines du Canada

Canada 

Outline

1. Concise overview of attachment theory
2. Concise history attachment assessment
3. Present 2 studies in which attachment related behaviors, beliefs, and feelings are examined from a network perspective

Attachment Theory



Attachment
Behaviors



Attachment Styles
(Secure, Anxious, Avoidant)


Attachment self-reports

Avoidant


I am somewhat uncomfortable being close to others. I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on them. I am nervous when anyone gets too close, and often, others want me to be more intimate than I feel comfortable being.

Evolution of attachment self-report measures

Multi-item
measures of
many
attachment
constructs
(trait-like)



Multi-item
trait-like
measures of
anxiety and
avoidance
(trait-like)



Multi-time
measures of
anxiety and
avoidance in
specific
relationships

Relationship Structures Questionnaire (RSQ)

Factor Structure for Mother Items

Item numbers and wording	Avoidance	Anxiety
1. I usually discuss my problems and concerns with this person.	.91	-.16
2. I talk things over with this person.	.89	-.20
3. It helps to turn to this person in times of need.	.84	-.29
4. I find it easy to depend on this person.	.68	-.42
5. I prefer not to show this person how I feel deep down.	-.62	.25
6. I don't feel comfortable opening up to this person.	-.66	.22
7. I'm afraid that this person may abandon me.	-.18	.81
8. I worry that this person won't care about me as much as I care about him or her.	-.18	.85
9. I often worry that this person doesn't really care for me.	-.32	.79
10. I don't fully trust this person.	-.51	.59

Study 1

Objective 1: Demonstrate the application of network analysis to the study of adult attachment relationships.

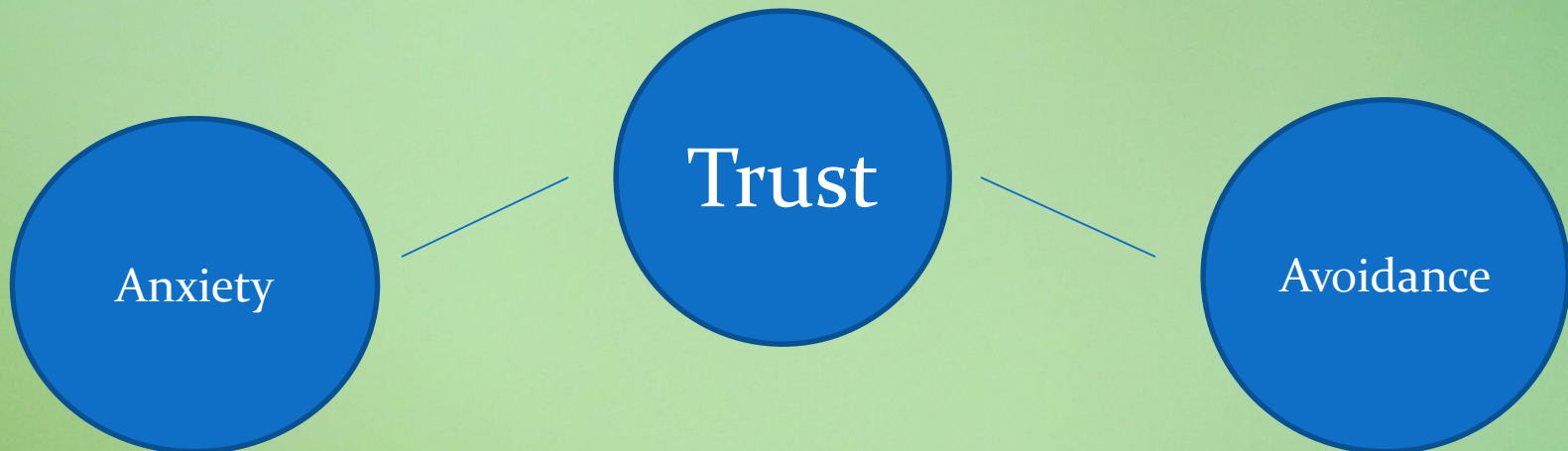
Study 1

Objective 1: Demonstrate the application of network analysis to the study of adult attachment relationships.



Study 1

Objective 2: Use network analysis to study connection between attachment anxiety and avoidance (i.e., bridge item).



Study 1

Objective 3: Evaluate similarity of attachment networks across attachment figures.



Methods

- $N = 310$ (university students)
- Relationship Structures Questionnaire (RSQ)
- Separate analyses for each scale

Methods

Network Inference

qgraph (GLASSO)

Visualized with equalized presentation

Strength centrality = overall degree of association between nodes

Betweenness centrality = reflects shortest path length connecting any two nodes

Methods

Network Accuracy and Stability (Est. with *bootnet*)

Confidence Intervals for edge weights

Stability coefficients for centrality

NetworkComparisonTest (NCT)

Omnibus test of differences network structures

Spearman correlation coefficients of adjacency matrices

Degree of similarity

Figure 1

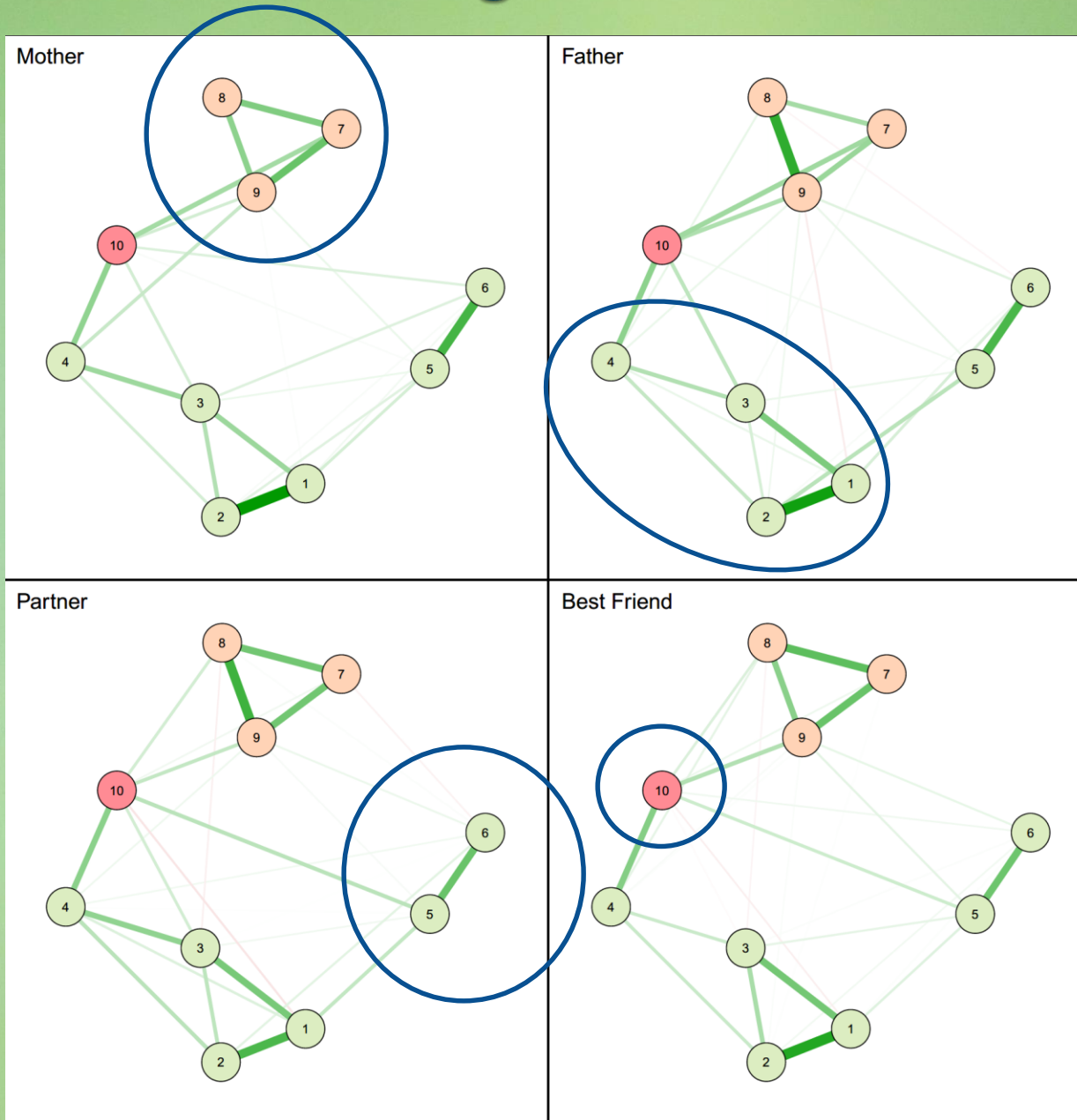


Figure 2: Measures of centrality

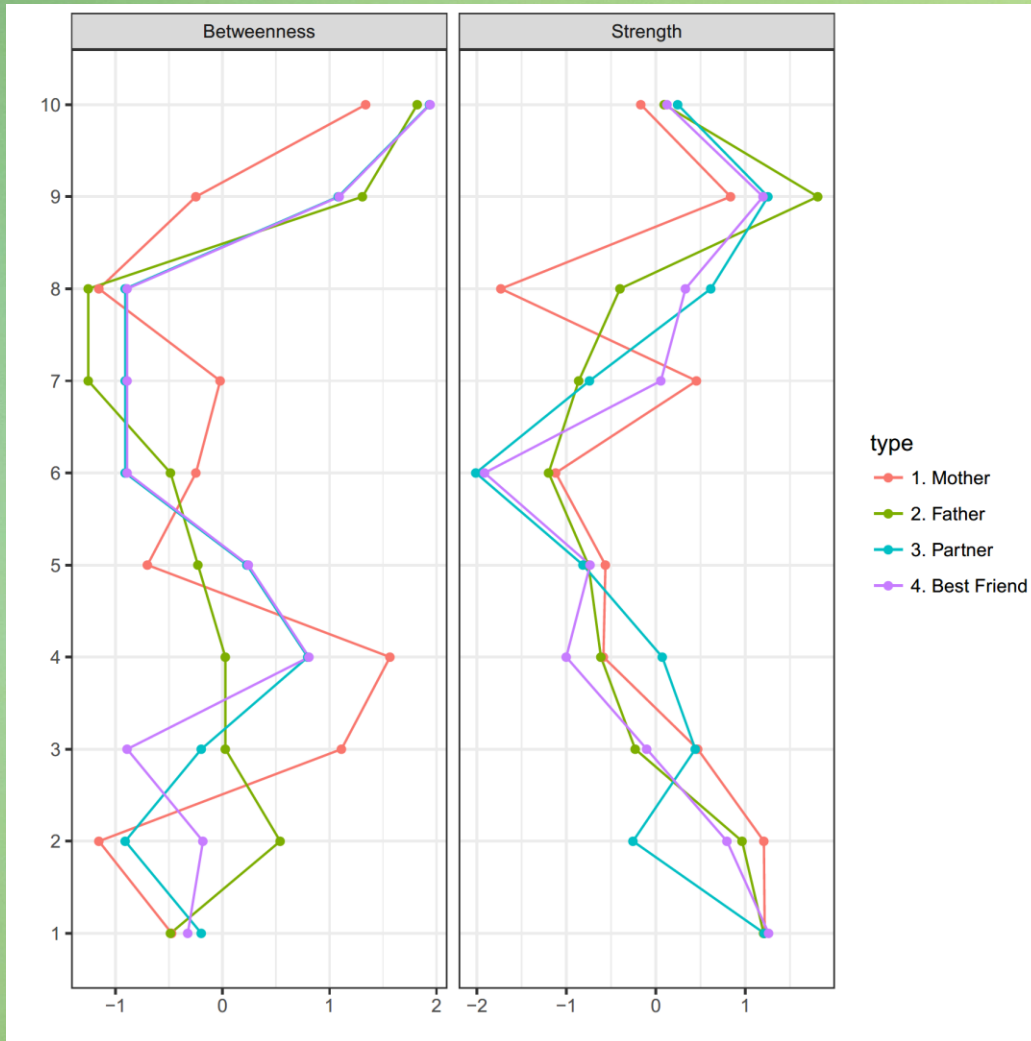


Figure	Stability Coefficient (strength)
Mother	.23
Father	.49
Partner	.46
Best Friend	.49
Minimal standard	.25
Robust standard	.50

P-values for *NCT* ranged from .16 to .59

Correlations between adjacency matrices ranged from .70 to .82

Study 2

Objective 4: Examine replicability of the findings from Study 1 in a more diverse sample.

$N = 3710$

Mean age = 30.1

Majority (58.3%) in U.S

Majority (66.1%) White

Figure 3: Measures of centrality in Study 2

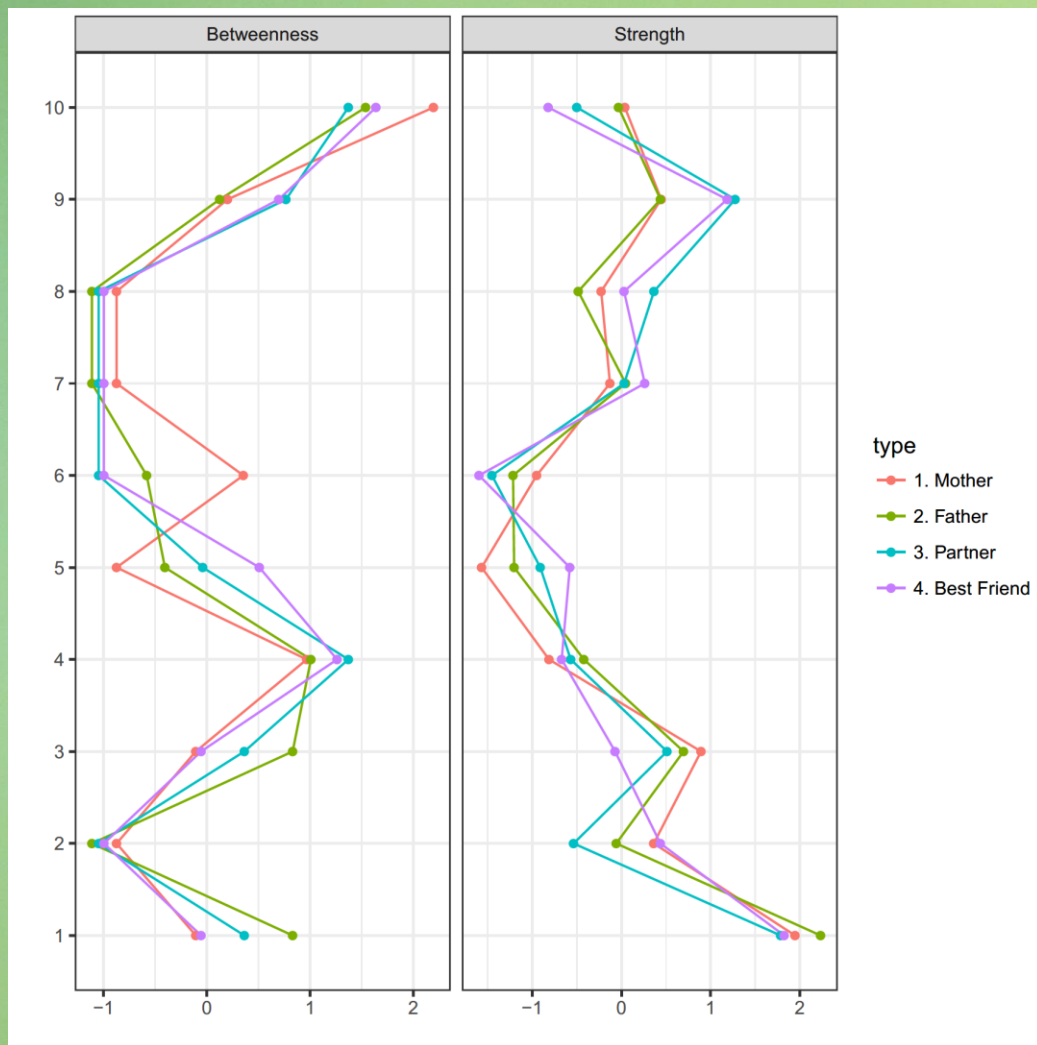


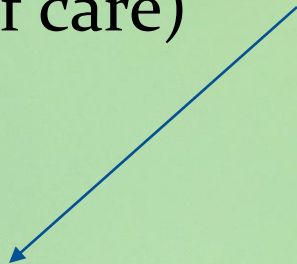
Figure	Strength Stability	Betweenness Stability
Mother	.75	.64
Father	.75	.40
Partner	.75	.46
Best Friend	.75	.52
Minimal standard	.25	.25
Robust standard	.50	.50

P-values for *NCT* indicated four significantly different network comparisons.

Correlations between adjacency matrices ranged from .91 to .98

Objective 1: Demonstrate the application of network analysis to the study of adult attachment relationships.

Item 9: “I often worry that this person doesn’t really care about me.” (i.e., concerns about genuineness or sincerity of care)



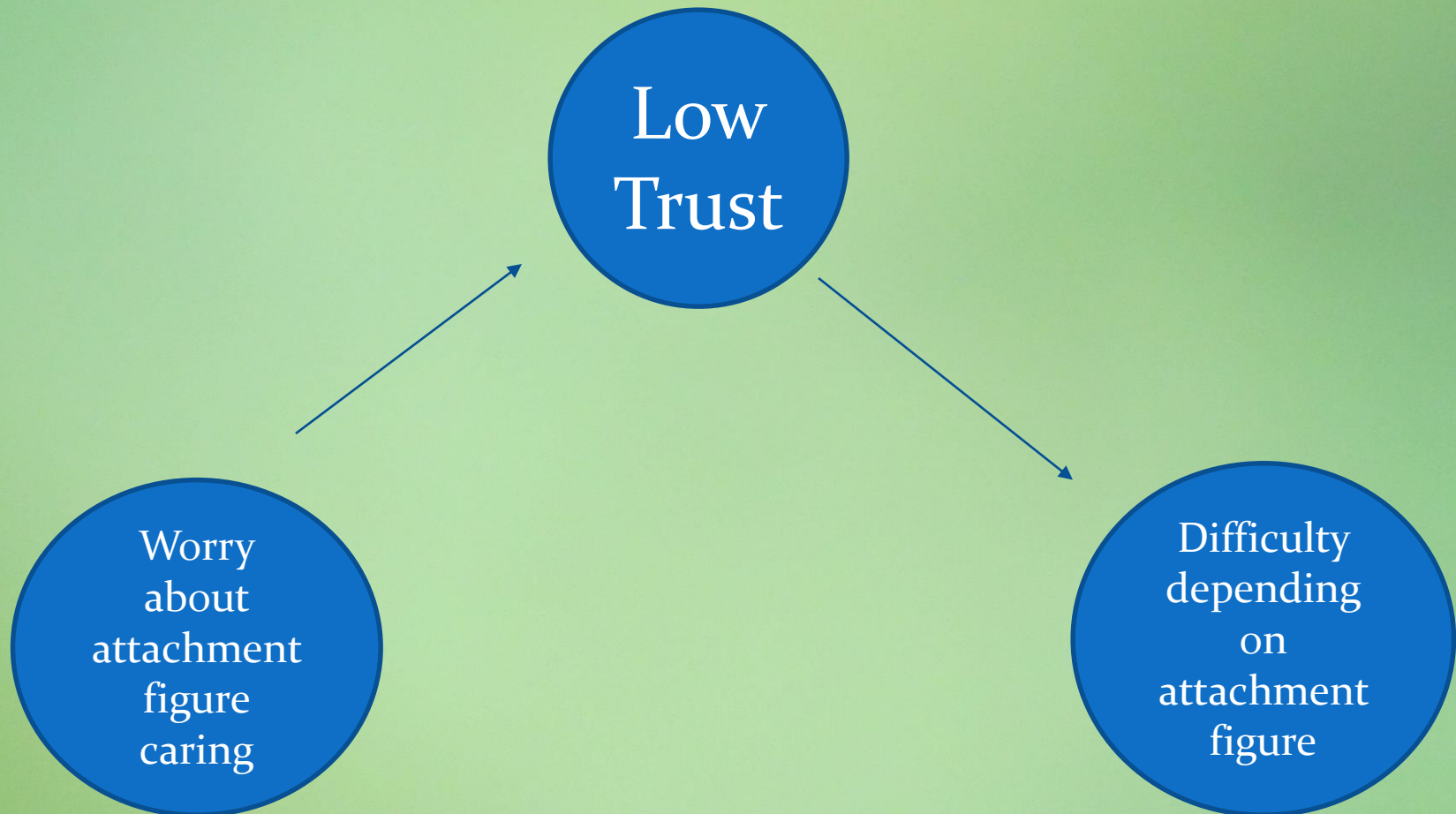
Fear of abandonment



Worry interest being reciprocated

Causal relationships vs. Latent variable model

Objective 2: Use network analysis to study connection between attachment anxiety and avoidance.



Objective 3: Evaluate similarity of attachment networks across attachment figures.



Future directions

1. Are those with high scores on highly central items (thoughts, feelings, behaviors) more likely to experience stable or increasing insecurity?
2. Can targeting highly central items be effective in decreasing insecurity?
3. Can attachment dynamics be observed?
 - a. Study dynamics of attachment relationships in periods of relationship transition
 - b. Experimental manipulations that foster security