Attachment profiles differentially influence quality of life, coping strategies, and health behaviours of breast cancer survivors

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Bartholomew's 4-category Model of Attachment
Bartholomew (1990)

The quality of attachment relationships can vary among:
- spouse/romantic partner
- family
- friends

Typically: social support buffers the impact of stressful life events. However, the perceived quality of support varies among individuals and may not always be beneficial.

The quality of attachment relationships can vary among:
- spouse/romantic partner
- family
- friends

Quality of Life

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attachment Profile</th>
<th>QOL (FACT-B)</th>
<th>Spouse</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Friends</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>Functional</td>
<td>Physical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security (≥, ≥)</td>
<td>.50***</td>
<td>.36***</td>
<td>.23**</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismissing (≤, ≤)</td>
<td>-.47***</td>
<td>-.43***</td>
<td>-.48***</td>
<td>-.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fearful (≤, ≥)</td>
<td>-.53***</td>
<td>-.47***</td>
<td>-.51***</td>
<td>-.18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Demographic Information:
- 236 women -- 52.2 +/- 9.6 yrs old (range 27 - 72 years)
- 95% Caucasian
- 76% Married
- 75% Post secondary education
- 59% Work part or full time
- 46% Family income > $75,000

Breast Cancer Related Demographics:
- 56% were diagnosed within the last 5 years
- Distribution of cancer stages:
  - Stage 1 (39%) Stage 2 (40%) Stage 3 (21%)

Support Group Knowledge & Attendance:
- Of those who knew of support groups (87%):
  - 73% attended at least once
  - 26% still attend on a regular basis

Attachment Categories among possible relationships:
- Spouse/Romantic Partner
  - 36% secure, 20% dismissing, 26% fearful, 18% preoccupied
- Family
  - 32% secure, 23% dismissing, 23% fearful, 22% preoccupied
- Friends
  - 31% secure, 19% dismissing, 24% fearful, 26% preoccupied
**Emotional well-being** in breast cancer survivors with secure and fearful attachment styles

![Bar charts showing emotional well-being for Secure and Fearful attachment styles across Spouse, Family, and Friends.](image)

**Physical well-being** in breast cancer survivors with secure and fearful attachment styles

![Bar charts showing physical well-being for Secure and Fearful attachment styles across Spouse, Family, and Friends.](image)

**Coping Repertoires**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attachment Style</th>
<th>Spouse</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Friends</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>.24**</td>
<td>.28***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>.22**</td>
<td>.27***</td>
<td>.39***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dismissing Problem</td>
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<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.20*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>-.22*</td>
<td>-.29***</td>
<td>-.36***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fearful Problem</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.20*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>-.16*</td>
<td>-.20*</td>
<td>-.38***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Problem-based coping: active, planning, suppress, restraint, instrumental  
Emotion-based coping: emotion, growth, acceptance, religion

**Problem-based coping** in breast cancer survivors with secure and fearful attachment styles

![Bar charts showing problem-based coping for Secure and Fearful attachment styles across Spouse, Family, and Friends.](image)

**Emotion-based coping** in breast cancer survivors with secure and fearful attachment styles

![Bar charts showing emotion-based coping for Secure and Fearful attachment styles across Spouse, Family, and Friends.](image)

**Health Behaviours**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attachment Profile</th>
<th>Health Behaviour</th>
<th>Spouse</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Friends</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Promotion</td>
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<td>-.29***</td>
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<td></td>
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Emotion-based coping: emotion, growth, acceptance, religion  
Problem-based coping: active, planning, suppress, restraint, instrumental
Conclusions

Attachment styles and stage of breast cancer interact to differentially influence coping strategies, QOL, and health promotion behaviours.

Overall, security in all relationships is related to higher QOL ratings, but this effect is dependent on cancer stage as well as the dimension of QOL being measured.

Coping behaviours in women with stage 3 breast cancer (regardless of attachment style), tended to show no predictable coping pattern among support groups.

Health Promotion behaviours are higher in women who report secure relationships with their family and friends.

Acknowledgements

- Dr. Elaine Scharfe, PhD — co-investigator
- Amie Kroes, BA
- Robyn Ptiman, MA
- Canadian Breast Cancer Research Alliance

The greatest mistake in the treatment of diseases is that there are physicians for the body and physicians for the soul, although the two cannot be separated. ~ Plato