



# Preschooler Attachment and Adolescent Psychological Flexibility

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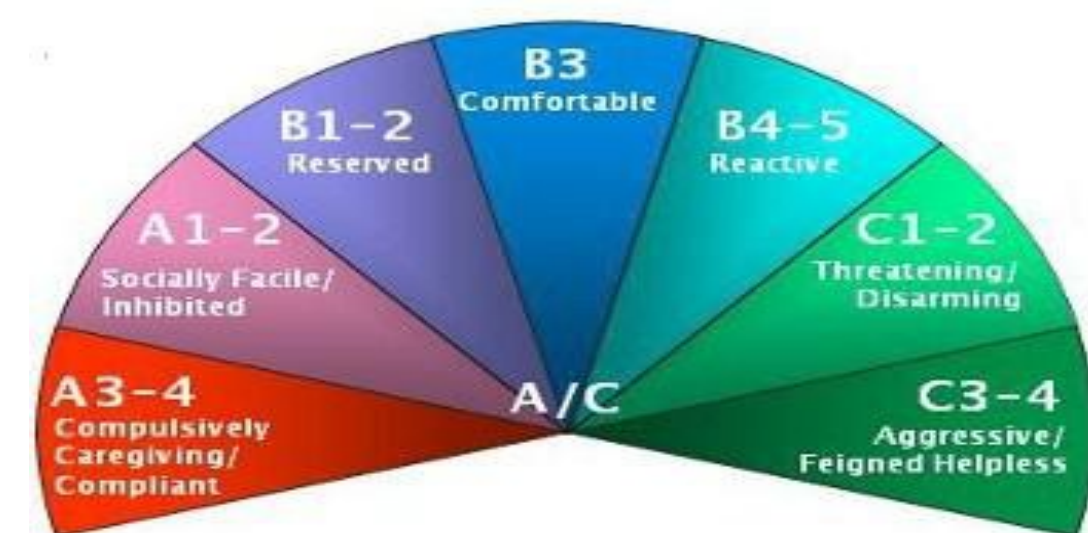
## Introduction

### Psychological Flexibility

- Psychological Flexibility is identified as a fundamental aspect of psychological health by Kashdan (2010).
- Broadly, it refers to being open, aware, and actively engaged (Hayes & Monestes, 2016).
- Increasing Psychological Flexibility is a chief aim of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy.

### Preschool Attachment Strategies

- Attachment is the quality of the parent-child bond (Bowlby, 1969).
- Through this relationship, the child learns the rules and processes of regulating and communicating emotions. Attachment theory suggests the following:
  1. **Secure:** Caregivers are sensitive to child emotional cues and children tend to express emotions openly.
  2. **Avoidant:** Caregivers ignore or reject child cues of anger or vulnerability; thus, children tend to suppress such emotions.
  3. **Ambivalent:** Caregivers attend differentially to helpless or angry emotions, so children will tend to exaggerate such displays (Berlin & Cassidy, 2004; Brumariu, 2015).
- Using the Dynamic Maturational Model of Attachment, an expanded version of Ainsworth's categories attuned to development past infancy, we can categorize strategies as:
  - **Low Risk**=> B (or secure), and A1-2 through C 1-2
  - **High Risk**=> A 3-4 and C 3-4
    - The further from B (or secure) in the model, the higher the risk (Crittenden, 2008/2015).



## Hypothesis

We predict that individuals with higher-risk preschool attachment strategies will show decreased psychological flexibility as adolescents.

## Participants

This study is part of a longitudinal project that began when children were in preschool.

### Subjects

- Participants were recruited from preschools serving predominantly Caucasian, low-income families.
- The sample in the 1st and 4th wave of data collection included 21 children (50% females).
- Child participants were mean age of 4.5 years at time 1 and 16.5 years at time 4

## Methods

### Procedures

#### Strange Situation (SSP):

- A procedure intended to reveal patterns of child attachment. The SSP used during time 1 is a 25-minute standardized series of reunions and separations (Ainsworth, Blehar, & Waters, 1978). Key to determining attachment strategy is how/if the child utilizes the parent as a secure base in this mildly stressful environment.
- Eight subjects assessed to utilize low risk, Ainsworth attachment strategies:
  - B = 5, C1-2 = 2, A1-2 = 2
- Majority of our subjects (n=11) utilize high risk, DMM attachment strategies:
  - A3-4 = 8, A/C, Dp, or IO = 5.

### Self-Report Measures

- **Avoidance and Fusion Questionnaire for Youth (AFQY:** Greco, Lambert, & Baer, 2008)
  - The AFQ-Y has 17 items answered on a 5-point Likert scale. Lower scores indicate greater psychological flexibility. Internal consistency with our sample was .85.
- **Social Desirability Scale – 17 (SDS-17:** Stöber, 1999, 2001)
  - This 17-item T/F questionnaire measures willingness to admit imperfections. The higher the score, the more defensiveness is indicated. Internal consistency for our study was .82

## Results

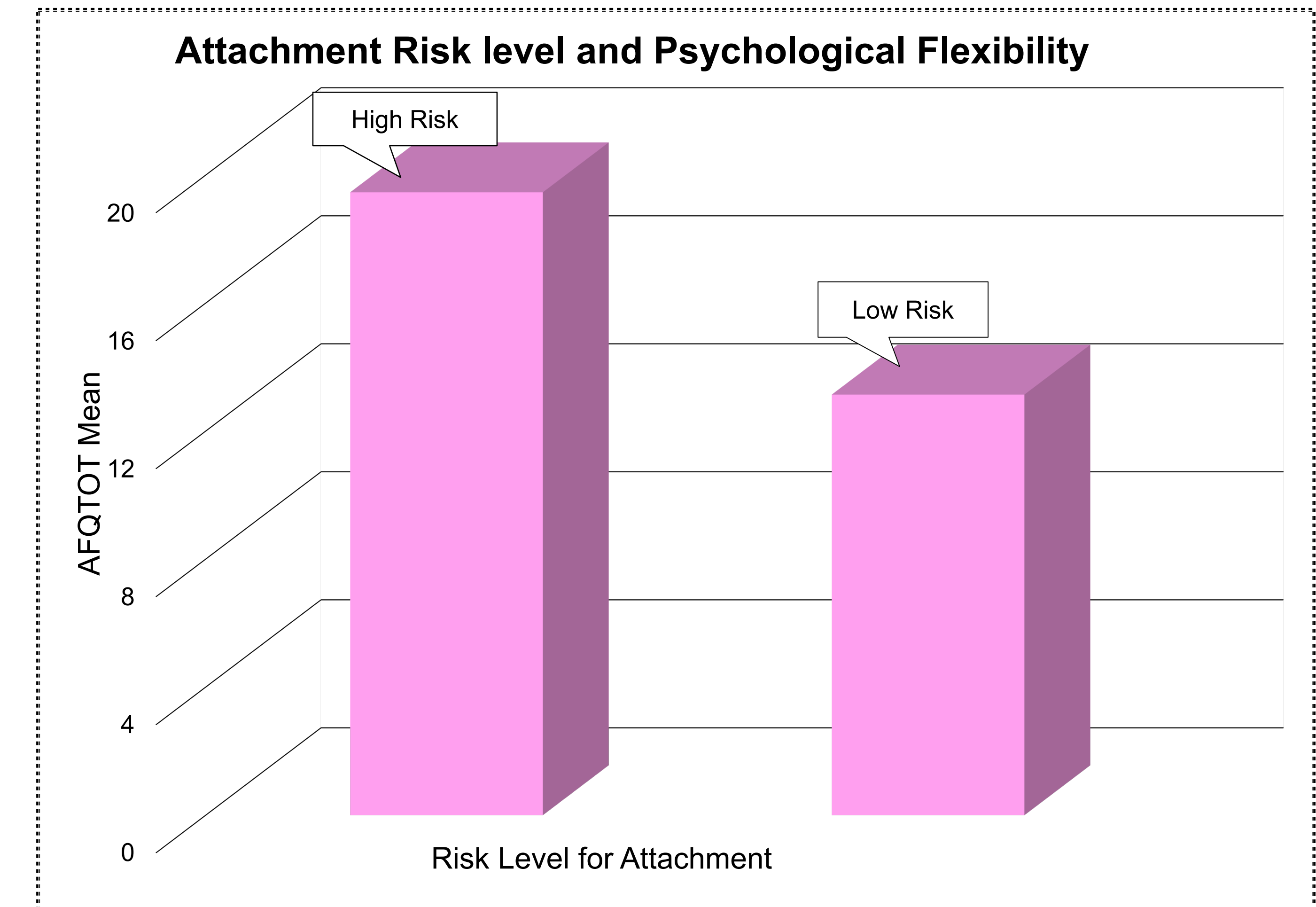
### Test of Significance

	High Risk Attachment	Low Risk Attachment
Mean	19.46	13.13
Standard Deviation	11.27	7.20
N	13	8

An ANCOVA was conducted to examine the association between the AFQY totals and preschooler attachment risk, with the SDS-17 as a covariate.

- The association between preschooler attachment risk and psychological flexibility approached significance [F(1,21) = 3.913, p=.063,  $\eta^2$  = .179].

## Results



### EFFECT SIZE

Coden D: 0.636

CI 95%: (-.275, 1.531)

- The effect size is between preschooler attachment risk and the AFQY totals without the covariate, SDS-17.
- There is medium to large meaningful relationship between the variables in our sample.

## Discussion

### Explanation

- This is the first study that examines the relationship between preschooler attachment and psychological flexibility.
- The results were not statistically significant.
- Given the impact of sample size on statistical power, effect size provides an alternative method of examining these associations.

### Limitations

- The insignificant results of Time 1 and 4 data may stem from the small sample.
- Preliminary analyses suggest the relationships between variables may be complex.

### Future Directions

- We will be examining the relationship of the AFQY with measures of adolescent adjustment.