

Attachment styles: Dating a Dismissive Avoidant

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There is a wealth of information to transmute on each attachment style. Attachment styles are so very intricate and nuance to each and every individual suffering with one, as well as those that end up on the receiving end.

Looking back I believe I dated someone with a dismissive avoidant (DA) attachment style, so writing this has unexpectedly been quite an emotional journey. No matter how much you heal from something your nervous system still remembers.

Thankfully now I am a different person to who I was before, which pains me to write about some of the things I was naive to. I by no means will say that I was perfect in this relationship. I know all too well I had my own problems that lay burden to me at the time. Looking back, I am confident that at the very least I had traits that resembled a fearful avoidant attachment style when entering this relationship. This by no means will have made this relationship and my DA's attachment style any better. It was a relationship that brought out the worst in me. Nevertheless, I do incessantly believe this was an encounter that was meant to happen. As it didn't happen to me it happened for me.

There is always some advantage of being able to write from experience. However one must not get lost in being too subjective but remain objective, which is what I intend to do. I hope with writing this people may be able to relate, understand and be a little more educated on this ever so intricate subject of the dismissive avoidant attachment style .

Drop Dead Fred



Remember when Carrie Fisher who played Janie shouted out ‘Thank you drop dead Fred’? Because what at first seemed like such a disastrous incident when Drop Dead Fred sank the boat she lived on actually turned out to be a huge benefit and did her a massive favour. Well my DA was my very own Drop Dead Fred. Without him I would not be the woman I am today. It was a relationship that made me hit rock bottom. However, it was the best thing anyone could have ever done for me. I saw who I was and I realised I had to shape up. I was a walk over and extremely naive when it came to love, relationships, friends, you name it. I was in a sea of piranhas and for far too long I had been letting people take chunks out of me. Well not anymore.

So without further ado I will commence my blog. An attempt to tell you all there is to know about the dismissive attachment style and also a little of what it was like dating a DA from my own experience.

Our most susceptible years

Every experience we have endured in life has moulded our personality and being in some sort of way. After all that is to a large extent how we become who we are. However, it's said that the first seven years of a child's life are the most impressionable and it is what helps define our biological systems and psychological makeup (Sansone 2021). This age is what literally shapes our persona, interaction styles and beliefs about ourselves and others. It is also where we undoubtedly are supposed to be tended to and cared for the most.

‘Give me a child until he is seven and I will show you the
man’

Aristotle

What causes attachment issues?

There are various reasons and catalysts that cause attachment styles.

Mother or father leaving them at an early age.

The death of a parent(s)

Divorce

Adoption

Interpersonal adult relationships

Many people refer to these attachment styles as those suffering with abandonment issues.

Dismissive attachment causes

DA attachment style can be caused from any of the above. However, what can really catapult someone into suffering with this particular attachment style is based around what happens in childhood. For instance a caregiver severely neglecting a child's needs (Resnick 2023). This means the caregiver lacks emotional responsibility for the child. This looks like such things as the caregiver ignoring a child when they cry or having a low tolerance to negative emotions. In other instances DA attachment styles can be created when the caregiver rewards the child for suppressing their emotions. (Envision wellness 2014). This cause of attachment style can be down to caregivers possessing a lack of empathy or on the other hand lacking knowledge on how to care for their child. The caregiver therefore repeatedly fails to meet the child's needs and this causes them to fend for themselves. A paper by Coffman and Swank (2022) shows that households with substance abuse stand a high chance of an insecure attachment style

developing (such as DA) as it can expose children to traumatic events, unstable dynamics and poor family functioning.

What affect does it have on a child?

When a child is overlooked they can spend a considerable amount of time on their own with their own feelings and problems. To be overlooked is to be disregarded and not to feel seen. This creates complex trauma and it has a profound effect on their self worth. This lack of self worth can cause a child to stop sharing their feelings. At such a young age a child that has not been seen has also had their perceived understanding of how to deal with their emotions withheld from them. Instead they deal with their emotions by suppressing them . This means they teach themselves to self soothe by shutting down emotionally (Kehohan 2023).

Throughout transitioning into adulthood they associate emotions with vulnerability, weakness or a burden to others. They feel this is where they give people the opportunity to reject them and hurt them. So ensuring their interpersonal dealings are accompanied by being emotionally checked out, they ensure they are protected from this ever happening again.

If no one has shown us love, are we capable of giving it?

Being overlooked and unloved can cause a child to grow into an

emotionally void person. When a child receives no love, no compassion and no empathy it has a profound affect on their perception of themselves. They internalise that they are a bad person or that they must be defective in some sort of way.

McFann (2023) talks about when affection and love have been scarce in a persons life it literally moulds their nervous system into handling emotions in a particular way. She highlights that when they start to experience someone showing them love their nervous system has difficulty processing it. This indeed will then effect how someone shows and gives love to another person. This however, doesn't mean DA's don't desire love. As humans we innately crave and want emotional connections. DA's have spent their childhood missing out on this type of connection and so they know all too well about the desire and may even fantasise about it. Unfortunately they just don't know how to transmute it due to the negative associations and beliefs it is filtered through (Gibson 2023). The best way to answer this question is that they can only give what they have got. In other words what they are capable of giving.

The dismissive avoidant in a relationship

Love and relationships are not a priority in a DA's life. Their main priority is themselves and their independence. This means in many cases a relationship with a DA can start quite slowly (Gibson 2022). The DA will

ensure they limit the amount of time they spend with the other person or may blow hot and cold because they like to exercise a sense of control over the relationship (Reyes 2016). This is to protect themselves from any emotional bonding and it stalls the relationship from maturing. However, this is not always the case because suffering with a DA attachment style is such a wide spread spectrum. As MacWilliam (2022) points out relationships can instead start passionately but also fizzle out just as quickly.

When I first met my DA we saw each other on our days off. He was tattoo artist working in a shop in Scarborough that he co-owned with his twin brother. On our days off or any spare moments we had we would always be with each other. I can't say there were no red flags because there were. I just couldn't place if it was me being overreactive or actually pin pointing a sever problem. Of course the latter was right but as usual at the time I decided to go against my better judgement. As much as we both saw each other there was one core element missing in all of our interactions. Any acts of emotions were completely void. I look back now and remember saying, 'where are you?' At points where we should have been connecting he was physically there but it was as if he had checked out behind the scenes. There was a feeling of something being deeply unattainable in him.

Emotional interaction consisted of me making the first moves. Where hugs should have innately been given I would have to ask for them. Eye contact was an issue, especially when it came to trying to communicate emotionally. He couldn't look me in my eyes, it was all too much for him.

He would seem agitated and fidgety. Nonetheless, this does not make a DA a bad person, rather this is the only way they have learnt to navigate through life in order to protect themselves. However, when someone is unaware a person has this attachment style there is always something in the air you can't put your finger on. A type of stone walling happens when the appropriate times for emotion should be encountered. This is because DA's are not just avoiding emotional connection but they generally feel uncomfortable with it too (Toat 2022).

The first time I was invited over to my DA's we spent the whole day and night together. However, I remember sat talking to him all day and thinking maybe I had read the signs wrong. This is because throughout the full time I was there it felt like I was his friend. There was no emotional contact when interacting or having conversation. I actually started to get a little self conscious thinking that I was looking a little disheveled. However, we would then be physically intimate and no sooner had we done that I would go back to experiencing being friend zoned.

Freedom and Independence

A DA's freedom and independence is their priority and they are very much use to doing everything on their own. This is something my DA repeatedly said to me. I can't help looking back at this and feeling a deep sadness that came with such a comment. Nevertheless, I failed to click on to what was really being communicated.

What I also found quite perplexing at the time and I often look back at it now and think - 'Sol , this was such a big red flag', was the way we actually got into a labelled relationship. DA's can avoid putting a label on their relationships for as long as possible. Responsibility for another person is not something a DA wants (envision wellness 2014). It blurs the lines of ensuring emotional distancing and infringes on their independence.

Eventually at his twin brothers wedding that we were attending in Italy together I had to eventually ask my DA if we were together. It comes to a point in any relationship where you would like to know where you stand. Also the unemotional availability I was experiencing was creating a lot of confusion. When I asked if we were together, he replied by saying, 'well what do you think?', this wasn't sarcastic either. However, it was a guarded answer that allowed him to fold and save face if I said we wasn't. When I did say that I thought we were, he said, 'well of course, you should know that'. This strange answer then made me feel as if I was in the wrong for even asking. It was a bizarre conversation. Such an anticlimax. Like a really shitty proposal.

Narcissist vs The DA

Firstly some DA's can be narcissists (Hall n.d). However, its quite easy to think of all DA's as narcissists because they appear and come across emotionally cold. However, a DA has a behavioural problem that causes them to interact and attach to others insecurely. Many DA's portray a high self esteem. You can't help but think they come across very ego driven

when it comes to prioritising and talking about themselves. However, according to Brady (2022) this self assuredness they dress themselves in is a protective barrier to hide their fragile ego and low self worth. These traits also make them seem cold and aloof a lot of the time. Nevertheless all of this is a way of protecting themselves the only way they know how.

A narcissist on the other hand has a personality disorder. A narcissist has a lack of feelings, remorse or empathy (Brady 2022). They are cold people but do their best to disguise this until their mask drops. Narcissists use their emotional distancing as a way of punishing someone and as an attempt to manipulate a relationship for their own gains.

Do DA's cheat?

Its not uncommon for DA's to cheat and there are number of reasons behind this. The obvious I feel is that cheating allows them to further disconnect from the relationship. Cheating can be a habitual pattern that takes place in their relationship in order to sabotage and stall emotional bonding on their part (William n.d). A DA goes into a relationship with a very disempowered mindset and belief system about themselves and relationships (Gibson 2021). They are so accustomed to not having their needs met and not being able to communicate their needs. This then can make them think there is no longevity in the relationship and so helps justify cheating.

DA's can be extremely sensitive to criticism because it makes them feel inferior. (Gibson 2021). In essence it resurfaces feelings of not being good enough. If the DA experiences constant criticism and someone else shows them positive attention this can be a cause for them to cheat. Positive attention centres around validation which creates a false sense of worth for a period of time as it is dependant on an outside source. Even without criticism a DA may cheat when they feel validated and seen by another person. The attention of being desired self soothes their inner wounds.

Im quite sure my DA was cheating from the beginning of our relationship. At his twin brothers wedding in Italy he left me alone. He disappeared for a full day and night and then had some amazing, heart felt excuse as to what happened. I do believe this was a habitual pattern in his relationships due to how he spoke about encounters and relationships in his past that overlapped. Unfortunately, I connected the dots a little too late, however would it have made a difference? Who knows? Disappearing and going off to do whatever one wants reinstalls a sense of independence and freedom that they may have thought they were losing by being in a relationship. Its not uncommon to find a DA has a whole other life either. Some can turn out to be married and have families (Hall n.d). Their emotional distancing allows them to keep all of that from you.

DA's and possible addictions

Its also not uncommon for dismissive to have addictions to such things like porn because there is no emotional tie (Namaste centre for healing 2014).

Drug abuse is also found to be something a DA can suffer with. This combats feelings of loneliness and lacking in their life. However, Hall (n.d) says that by being immersed in something else is another way of sabotaging and blocking intimacy.

Physical contact

Being involved with a DA can be extremely challenging and often very hurtful. As time goes on they become even more reserved with their space (Hall n.d). They may start choosing not to sit next to you when your out or refrain from holding hands. There were times where I use to grab my DA's hand but then after a while even that became awkward to do. I could tell that when we were holding hands it felt very uneasy and it was a horrible thing to feel. In some cases a DA may not even be aware that this is taking place. However, in other cases I don't feel this is the case. I feel my DA knew exactly what he was doing towards the end. He had made reference to his lifestyle and actions on a number of occasions and was very much aware of how he conducted himself at times. Therefore, the distancing was not subconscious but part of a process of cementing detachment. I was a very touchy feely person and his actions I believe were intentional. He was creating distance to cease any emotional availability I was seeking in him.

Sexual contact

I am very much adamant that my DA knew exactly what he was doing with his emotional distancing in the bedroom also. When with a DA people can experience them start to refrain from the most intimate parts, such as foreplay. The DA that was once very much involved in that aspect holds back. I do believe this is because at the beginning a DA can mirror what a narcissist does when they love bomb except with physical contact. For instance at first a DA can be really into the physical side of the relationship and this is because attaining sex drives their ego (Attachment Project 2020). But then they pull back in order to start sabotaging the relationship. This happened to me and it's not a nice experience for anyone to go through. Bringing the issue up however just fell on deaf ears. McAllister (2018) states that a perpetual deniability happens if you call them out. I found my DA answering in such ways as 'really, do you think so?'

In some cases a DA can completely stop having sex with their partner and this form of rejection for anyone is extremely painful to go through. However, little did I know I was in phase two of what I like to call the 'shake up stage'.

The shakeup

The shake up stage is where the DA's behaviour suddenly changes, such as intimacy, routines, the time they spend with you, they may get busier, have new hobbies or start to work more (Hall n.d). Problems even start to arise out of nowhere and the relationship starts to become an uphill battle. I can

sincerely say I have earned my stripes in the shake up stage, as much as I had no clue at the time I was in it.

The shake up stage firstly started for me when it suddenly became difficult to see him. Out of nowhere came longer working hours, family responsibilities and out of the blue tattoo appointments that he suddenly couldn't turn down. There was the new culinary school that he suddenly decided to start.....because now he suddenly wanted to be a chef! That really threw me! Nevertheless my intuition was telling me something was very off.

This sudden shake up though enabled him to start creating distance. From then on out my DA started living two separate lives. It became harder and harder to secure any time together. This kept me in a state of anxiety. I was constantly fighting for his time and then extremely anxious incase plans fell through. This was severely unhealthy. However, I had entered a perpetual toxic cycle that I wasn't going to win. I was trying so hard to get to how things first were, yet having no idea that it was never going to happen.

The shake up stage was toxic and draining. Not everyone may experience such a drawn out shake up stage but mine was extremely lengthy. As much as he wanted to release me he kept bread crumbing me and making plans for the future and then completely going cold. My mental state was a mess because I was trying to get to the bottom of what was causing this. However, I was so out of the loop and detached from his actual life all I was left with was my imagination. Nevertheless, I continued

to chase which in turn validates a DA. It gives them a sense of self worth but rather it is a boost to their self esteem when someone persists and fights for the relationship. While one is full of anxiety the other is having their ego stroked. Its a horrible dynamic but one your blind to.

Catch and release

A relationship with a DA is very much catch and release style because as soon as they feel vulnerable they let you go and finish the relationship (Namaste centre for healing 2014). This is what the shakeup stage is all about so they can inevitably transition into releasing their partner. This is a habitual method, a blue print so to speak that they follow. As much as a DA uses this blue print in order to protect themselves from being emotionally vulnerable it can also be a little colder than that. A DA is an expert at being numb and an expert at following a pattern of how they release their partner without a second thought of looking back. They have become so accustomed to physically checking out at a certain point or rather time stamp in relationships it becomes unsympathetically second nature to them. The honey moon phase that they experienced in their own way is now over. This release allows them to return back to their old independent life or look for another relationship that holds the newness the last one inevitably ended up lacking. This is because new relationships are less suffocating and don't demand as much emotional dependance as older ones start to inevitably produce.

As much as DA's don't want emotional connections they are far from shy when it comes to dating. When my DA told me about his dating history it was very reflective of what a narcissist did. He always had another interest lined up for when he made his exit in the relationship. Again this should have been a huge red flag. However, as they say love is blind.

My DA said something very indicative of a DA I just didn't realise it at the time. He said, 'I chose this life for myself'. This couldn't be more true. DA's chose this life style consciously or subconsciously because its what they have become experts in doing to avoid vulnerability. My DA's road map of his love life was filled with numerous encounters and short lived relationships. There was no substance to his past life, no signs of something maturing or any intricate detail of how he truly felt for someone. There was no love language used to explain any of his relationships or encounters.

Do you chase a DA

When a DA breaks up with you the worst thing you can do is chase them. DA's do not want to be chased or at least initially if they have released you. It's all for good reason in their mind. DA's finish a relationship when they feel it is taking on new heights of emotion in order to protect themselves. They may also feel like they are being suffocated and crave their freedom back (Nguyen 2022). They actually experience a sense of relief when breaking up with their partner. However, as it is such a wide spread spectrum there are DA's that do try and get back together after a breakup

or actually feel bad for hurting the other person (Akiteg n.d). Moreover, some DA's can reach out but just to see if you still want them and nothing else. Again, this centres around acquiring validation.

Dismissing a DA

Finishing with a DA can literally feel like you have fell into the pits of hell. There is nothing more brutal than a DA's wrath. I have personal experience of being on the receiving end when I broke up with my DA. What I have come to learn from my experience is that taking the initiative to do this can throw a DA completely out of alignment. In the middle of the long drawn out shake up stage I soon began to realise something deceiving was going on behind the scenes that I wasn't privy to. This was when I decided to end the relationship. This breakup turned out to be like no other I had ever experienced. I have had a lot of experience with narcissists and let me tell you they were looking like a walk in the park.

Their wrath can look like a narcissists

Hall (n.d) shows there are a lot of similarities between DA's and narcissist. Even though not all DA's are narcissists, she states that DA's are in fact prone to narcissism or can be found to have some of their traits. My DA told me that he was going to ruin my life after the breakup and like a dog with a bone he didn't let go until he turned my world upside down. My DA resorted to a smear campaign to blacken my name, my identity and to

isolate me. If anyone has read into narcissists and their tactics this is one of their moves. However, it worked. He did indeed manage to turn my friends against me. Disclosing secrets about myself I had confided in him along with his own personal twist. I noticed nearly every friend pull back and join in the spiteful game of Chinese whispers. These actions taken by my DA were extremely vengeful. However, do I think my DA was a narcissist? What I do think is that at the very least he did possess a lot of narcissistic traits, especially when he felt out of control in a situation.

Let me explain why?

Firstly you have to understand that it is not just narcissist that can go on smear campaigns. Anyone has the capability of doing so. Everyone, reacts when they are shocked, scared and angered and some people are more reactive than others.

Dumping a narcissist wouldn't trigger deep feelings of the trauma they endured in the past. Instead they would perceive it more as a threat to their ego and identity and this is where their rage comes from. The act of finishing with my DA triggered him to feel past emotions of feeling rejected and being defective. Emotions that had been under control and compartmentalised for such a long time. Thus this means a lot of DA's will not be equipped in handling these sudden surfaced emotions. This then can cause DA's to act irrationally. Their nervous system will feel under attack and a sense of vulnerability is felt; something in which they have mastered at avoiding for such a long time. Now ceasing to be in control of

their emotions they want to act anything but vulnerable and so instead lash out with anger.

Shame

Shame is a very private concept that is not shared easily with others. When a child suffers with abuse, they can develop the concept that they are defective which creates this feeling of shame. Consequently this induces a lot of self blame and negative internal dialogue. There is a type of humiliation that derives from the shame DA's experience. This can have an astounding effect on how someone reacts when feelings of shame surface. It can cause a person to act out from their most emotional aggressive side.

Hiding shame

DA's hide shame by acting very self assured, having a heightened ego as well as being extremely self efficient. Striving for success and achievement is a psychological self soothing tool to mitigate the feelings of shame and to reassure themselves they are not a bad person (Gibson 2022). This heightened ego is in reality a mask that protects anyone catching a glimpse of how they really feel about themselves.

A symptom of shame is being highly sensitive to what others think about you. When breaking up with my DA the one thing he couldn't let go of was how humiliated he felt by me finishing the relationship. The act of

what he perceived as me humiliating him was a stressor. This is because he perceived this as a danger of being exposed to the world as being unworthy. In reaction to this, the smear campaign was him trying to humiliate me just as I did him.

Final Words and possibilities to recovery

When writing this it made me understand that every person that had touched upon the DA avoidant style had a lot of the time something a little extra to add or different to say. However, the difference of opinions or perspective does not make one more right than the other. I do believe some DA's can be a lot more cold hearted than others. Some are narcissists and some simply at times take on those traits. I feel it depends on genetics, how wounded a person is and the type of trauma they endured which is why we acquire all these slightly different perspectives on the DA attachment style.

Relationships are an interpersonal dynamic and just as much as DA's can be held accountable for their actions so can the person staying with them. I persisted to stay with my DA even when there were feelings of uncertainty, anxiety, heart ache and feeling second best. This was down to deep rooted issues that centred around my own feelings of low self worth. Nevertheless, these relationships we immerse ourselves in have every potential at making us wiser and more knowledgable. We must not allow

the instances of heartbreak to completely destroy us or devalue us. In order to become wiser, rather than point the finger we must look within and ask why did we attract this dynamic and why did we put up with it? Progress is always made by looking within. We may not be able to control other people's actions but we can control our own through our capacity to work on ourselves.

In every instance having a DA attachment style is very much curable if worked upon. However, like everything in life that depends on the person and if they are willing and wanting to change and face their demons head on. For some this is a hard experience and depending on how much DA's operate out of their fake mask and elevated ego it can be a tough place to transition from. It is the armour one has constructed in order to hide their deepest secrets and protect themselves, so not every one will be willing to let that drop.

We have the capacity to carry so much venom within us from situations in the past that did not serve us correctly. This venom we carry, the resentment and the anger, shame and apathy is all poison which deeply affects how we treat others and what we believe about ourselves. There is a level of forgiveness and understanding one has to come to in order to dilute this venom so emotions are not filtered through it.

DA attachment issues are rooted in survival instinct; not committing or being emotionally involved is the way to conduct their lives in order to survive. Strong feelings and emotions offered to them is like a foreign object entering their body; all the body wants to do is remove it. In order

to overcome the traumatised nervous system Dr P. A Levine came up with Somatic therapy that helps with this trauma response. For instance, in the case of a DA, they are exposed to and allowed to sit with emotions they never got to experience growing up. In essence this is constantly feeding the nervous system small amounts of unfamiliar emotions in order to build up its tolerance.

Nevertheless we must use discernment when it comes to the person and the attachment style. This is very important for people on the receiving end of a DA attachment style or any other. Discovering and labelling the attachment style allows for reasons why people do the things they do and indeed is very much valid. But we must be aware that the rule can not become the excuse. I am a big believer in nature verses nurture and sometimes nature can play a bigger part than nurture when it comes to our actions. Sometimes the act of cheating is innately in someone. Cheating on someone does not have to be directly linked to the attachment style and thus be an excuse of why your partner does it. Just as not being able to control an urge does not have to always be labelled as an addiction. Rather for some it is down to choice. We humans are all capable of making choices and living with the consequences and some are more apt than others. As my nanna use to say, sometimes you just get a rotten egg. Therefore we can all take the road to healing and we can all understand the journey but we do not have to want to be the better person.

You can lead a horse to water but you can't make it drink

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