

Attachment style and relationship satisfaction among early adults

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Abstract

The study investigates the connection between attachment style and relationship satisfaction. Attachment theory suggests that early experiences with caregiver's shape individuals' attachment styles, influencing their behaviors and emotions in adult relationships. The present study focuses on three main attachment styles close attachment, depend attachment and anxious attachment. Measures of attachment styles (RAAS) and relationship satisfaction (RAS) were completed by a sample of (120) participants both genders combined. The statistical techniques used were correlation and one way ANOVA. The results revealed negative correlation between anxious attachment style and relationship satisfaction. Also, there is no difference in attachment style and relationship satisfaction based on gender. And there is no difference in relationship satisfaction based on work status.

Keywords: Attachment style; Relationship satisfaction; Secure attachment; Anxious attachment; Avoidant attachment

1. Introduction

Our closest relationships have a profound impact on our well-being. Attachment theory, developed by John Bowlby, posits that early childhood experiences with caregivers shape how we form and navigate intimate connections in adulthood. These enduring patterns, known as attachment styles, influence how comfortable we are with closeness, our ability to trust others, and how we cope with conflict. To explores the link between attachment styles and relationship satisfaction, examining how our internal models of relationships formed in infancy play out in the complexities of adulthood. Attachment style refers to the characteristic way individuals perceive and respond to intimacy and closeness in relationships, based on their early interactions with caregivers. The concept was first formally defined and explored by John Bowlby (1958), a British psychologist and psychiatrist, in his seminal work on attachment theory.

John Bowlby (1958) defined attachment style as the "lasting psychological connectedness between human beings" that is formed in infancy through interactions with primary caregivers, typically the mother. He emphasized that these early attachment experiences shape internal working models, or mental representations, of oneself and others, which guide individuals' expectations, emotions, and behaviors in future relationships. Mary Ainsworth expanded on Bowlby's work through her "Strange Situation" study in 1978, identifying three main attachment styles: secure, anxious, and avoidant. Ainsworth (1978) observed that securely attached individuals tend to have caregivers who are responsive and nurturing, leading to healthy relationship expectations. In contrast, those with anxious or avoidant attachment styles often had inconsistent or unresponsive caregiving. Bowlby proposed that infants develop one of several attachment styles based on their caregivers' responsiveness and availability.

- **Secure Attachment:** Infants with secure attachment styles typically have caregivers who are consistently responsive to their needs. They learn to trust that their caregivers will be available and supportive, which fosters a sense of security and confidence in exploring their environment.

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- **Anxious Attachment:** Infants with anxious attachment styles experience inconsistent caregiving. They may be unsure of their caregivers' responsiveness and exhibit heightened distress and clinginess in their presence, yet struggle with reassurance.
- **Avoidant Attachment:** Infants with avoidant attachment styles have caregivers who are emotionally distant or unresponsive. They learn to minimize their need for closeness and may appear emotionally detached or independent, suppressing their attachment needs.
- **Disorganized Attachment:** This style, identified later by Mary Main and Judith Solomon, results from traumatic or abusive caregiving experiences. Children with disorganized attachment may exhibit contradictory behaviors, such as approaching and then suddenly withdrawing from their caregivers. Each attachment style influences how individuals approach relationships throughout their lives. These patterns of attachment continue to shape emotional responsiveness, communication styles, conflict resolution strategies, and relationship satisfaction into adulthood. Bowlby's attachment theory has provided a foundational framework for understanding the dynamics of interpersonal relationships and has been extensively researched and expanded upon by subsequent scholars in psychology and developmental science. Recent research continues to explore the attachment styles, including the disorganized attachment style, which combines both anxious and avoidant features and is often associated with unresolved trauma or loss (Main & Solomon, 1990). Understanding attachment styles is crucial for comprehending how early experiences shape adult relational behaviors and for developing therapeutic interventions aimed at improving relationship satisfaction and emotional well-being. These early patterns of attachment extend into adulthood, influencing romantic relationships and other social bonds. Hazan and Shaver (1987) applied attachment theory to adult romantic relationships, identifying similar patterns: secure, anxious-preoccupied, and dismissive-avoidant. Securely attached adults tend to form stable and satisfying relationships, characterized by trust and healthy interdependence. Anxious-preoccupied individuals often experience anxiety and insecurity in relationships, leading to dependency and fear of abandonment. Dismissive-avoidant individuals tend to maintain emotional distance, often prioritizing independence over intimacy. Bartholomew and Horowitz proposed a four-category model of adult attachment, introducing the concept of fearful-avoidant attachment alongside secure, preoccupied, and dismissing-avoidant styles (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). This model provided a more understanding of adult attachment styles, incorporating both self and other dimensions of attachment. Mikulincer and Shaver conducted extensive research on how attachment styles influence emotional regulation, coping mechanisms, and mental health (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Their work highlighted the role of secure attachment in fostering resilience and psychological well-being, while insecure attachment styles were linked to greater vulnerability to stress and mental health issues. Wei et al. (2007) emphasized that attachment anxiety and avoidance negatively affect relationship satisfaction through maladaptive emotional regulation strategies.

Grime et al. (2014) explored how attachment styles influence daily interactions in relationships. They found that secure attachment contributes to more positive daily interactions and overall relationship satisfaction, whereas insecure attachment styles can lead to daily stress and lower satisfaction. Bartholomew (1990) proposed a four-quadrant model that suggests individuals may exhibit characteristics from more than one style depending on the context and their specific experiences. Stemming from unpredictable or inconsistent caregiving, individuals with this style (Brennan et al., 1998) crave intimacy but are often plagued by anxieties about rejection or abandonment. They may exhibit "clingy" behavior, become overly dependent on their partners, and experience frequent jealousy.

Research by Griffin & Bartholomew (1994) suggests a link between anxious attachment and lower relationship satisfaction. Fraley & Shaver, (1998) are uncomfortable with closeness and tend to distance themselves from partners. They prioritize independence and may struggle to express emotions or engage in vulnerable communication. Studies by Simpson et al. (1992) indicate a link between avoidant attachment and difficulty maintaining healthy relationships. Understanding attachment styles gives us a window into how they influence various aspects of relationships like; **Communication:** Secure individuals tend to communicate openly and honestly with their partners. Insecure individuals, on the other hand, may struggle with expressing their needs or struggle to navigate conflict effectively (Wei et al., 2010; Pistole, 1989). **Conflict Resolution:** Secure individuals are better equipped to address conflict constructively and work towards solutions (Feeney & Noller, 1990). Insecure individuals may resort to unhealthy coping mechanisms, such as stonewalling or blame, when faced with conflict (Feeney, 1992). Secure individuals are comfortable expressing a wide range of emotions within their relationships (Mikulincer et al., 2002). Insecure individuals may struggle to express vulnerability or may overexpress emotions in an unhealthy way (Simpson et al., 1996)

Hazan and Shaver (1987) extended attachment theory to adult romantic relationships. They found parallels between infant-caregiver attachment styles and adult romantic attachment patterns. Their seminal study in 1987 concluded that securely attached adults are more likely to experience higher relationship satisfaction, while those with anxious or avoidant attachment styles often encounter challenges in intimacy and trust. These early patterns of attachment extend

into adulthood, influencing romantic relationships and other social bonds. Hazan and Shaver (1987) applied attachment theory to adult romantic relationships, identifying similar patterns: secure, anxious-preoccupied, and dismissive-avoidant. Securely attached adults tend to form stable and satisfying relationships, characterized by trust and healthy interdependence. Anxious-preoccupied individuals often experience anxiety and insecurity in relationships, leading to dependency and fear of abandonment. Dismissive-avoidant individuals tend to maintain emotional distance, often prioritizing independence over intimacy. Relationship satisfaction refers to the subjective evaluation of the overall happiness and contentment within a relationship. It encompasses various dimensions such as emotional connection, communication, intimacy, and conflict resolution. Understanding relationship satisfaction is crucial because it impacts not only individual well-being but also the stability and quality of the relationship itself. This discussion aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the research and theories on relationship satisfaction, tracing its historical development, examining key models and studies, and highlighting contemporary advances in the field. The study of relationship satisfaction has evolved significantly over the years, rooted in foundational psychological theories. John Bowlby's attachment theory (1969) provided a basis for understanding how early childhood experiences with caregivers influence adult romantic relationships. Erik Erikson's stages of psychosocial development (1950) also highlighted the importance of intimate relationships in adult life. Robert Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love (1986) introduced a framework for understanding the components of love intimacy, passion, and commitment that contribute to relationship satisfaction. These early theories set the stage for more focused research on what makes relationships satisfying. Feeney and Noller (1990) identified communication patterns as a critical determinant of relationship satisfaction, noting that secure individuals tend to communicate more effectively. The study of attachment styles and relationship satisfaction is significant due to its implications for mental health, relational stability, and overall well-being. Understanding these dynamics can inform therapeutic practices, enhance relationship counseling, and guide individuals toward healthier relational patterns. For instance, interventions aimed at fostering secure attachment behaviors can improve relationship outcomes, reducing incidences of conflict, and promoting emotional intimacy. Additionally, this research is valuable for developing preventative measures against relational dysfunction and for fostering resilience in interpersonal bonds.

Objective

- To examine the relationship between attachment style and relationship satisfaction among early adults.
- To know difference in attachment style and relationship satisfaction based on gender.
- To know difference in relationship satisfaction based on work status.

Hypotheses

- There will be significant correlation between attachment style and relationship satisfaction among early adults.
- There will be significant difference in attachment style and relationship satisfaction based on gender.
- There will be significant difference in relationship satisfaction based on work status

2. Material and methods

The participants of the study consist of 120 (80 Females and 40 Males). The participants were selected randomly from Karnataka and their age range from 18 to 30. Working adults are 44 and 76 not working participants.

2.1. Instruments

2.1.1. The Revised Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS)

The Revised Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS) by Nancy Collins (1996) is an 18-item self-report questionnaire that evaluates individual differences in adult attachment styles. The RAAS includes three subscales: Close, Depend, and Anxiety. The Close subscale measures comfort with closeness and intimacy; the Depend subscale assesses the ability to depend on others; and the Anxiety subscale evaluates fears of abandonment and rejection. The scale is a refined version of the original Adult Attachment Scale developed by Collins and Read in 1990, aimed at providing a more nuanced assessment of adult attachment behaviors and attitudes. It has high internal consistency reliability, often with Cronbach's alpha coefficients above 0.80, and validity, evidenced by its correlation with established attachment measures.

2.1.2. The Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS)

The Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS), by Susan S. Hendrick in 1988, is a brief, seven-item measure used to assess overall satisfaction in relationships. It is widely used to assess various types of relationships, including those of married, cohabiting, engaged, or dating couples. Each item is rated on a 5-point scale, and the total score ranges from 7 to 35,

with higher scores indicating greater satisfaction. The RAS is appreciated for its brevity and reliability, and it correlates well with other measures of relationship quality, such as love and commitment . It is highly reliable (Cronbach's alpha typically 0.80-0.90) and validity is correlating well with measures of relationship quality and stability indicating its effectiveness in assessing relationship satisfaction.

2.2. Procedure

Traditional data gathering was carried out using Google forms. Research participants were invited at random to participate in the study. The Google form and consent form were emailed to the individuals who accepted the invitation, and they were urged to fill it out as quickly as possible. In order to accommodate participants, the investigator has additionally issued a Google form over WhatsApp. The investigator ceased getting the Google form after that. After manually assigning points, the information was transferred into a spreadsheet for additional statistical examination.

3. Results and discussion

The basic descriptive statistics of the variables under investigation, such as the arithmetic mean, median, mode, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis, were computed and displayed in the table 1

Table 1 Descriptive statistics of the variables under study

	Relationship Satisfaction	close attachment/secure	depend attachment/preoccupied	anxious attachment/dismiss
Mean	22.64	16.95	17.46	16.19
Median	22.00	17.00	18.00	16.50
Mode	21	18	17	18
Std. Deviation	6.051	3.135	2.762	4.698
Skewness	0.197	0.222	0.423	0.265
Kurtosis	0.574	1.573	0.412	0.370

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the variables under study. The arithmetic mean of the variables relationship satisfaction, close attachment, depend attachment, anxious attachment as 22.64,16.95,17.46,16.19 respectively. The median of the variables was 22.00,17.00,18.00,16.50 respectively. The mode of the variables was 21,18,17,18 respectively. The standard deviation of the variables was 6.051,3.135,2.762,4.698 respectively. The value of skewness of variable relationship satisfaction, close attachment, depend attachment, anxious attachment are 197,222,423,265 respectively. The values of kurtosis are -574, 1.573,412,,370 respectively. From the table values, it can be concluded that the collected data was more or less normally distributed and viable for parametric statistical techniques. To find the out the relationship between relationship satisfaction, close attachment style, depend attachment style and anxious attachment style Pearson’s correlation was performed. The results are given in table.

Table 2 Correlation of the variables under study

variables	Relationship satisfaction	close attachment/secure	depend attachment/preoccupied	anxious attachment/dismiss
Relationship satisfaction	-			
close attachment/secure	0.147	-		
depend attachment/preoccupied	0.033	0.262**	-	
anxious attachment/dismiss	0.229*	0.180*	0.306**	-

**p<0.01; *p<0.05

From the table 2 , it can be seen that relationship satisfaction is significantly and negatively correlated with anxious attachment style ($r=-0.229$, $p<0.05$). Secure attachment is positively correlated with preoccupied attachment ($r = .262$, $p < 0.05$), and negatively correlated with dismissive attachment ($r = -.180$, $p < 0.05$). There is negative correlation between preoccupied and dismissive attachment styles ($r = -.306$, $p < 0.05$).

These findings indicate meaningful relationships between attachment styles and relationship satisfaction, underscoring the importance of attachment theory in understanding relational dynamics. The data suggest that promoting secure attachment could enhance relationship satisfaction, while addressing anxious and dismissive attachment tendencies might mitigate relationship challenges. This has practical implications for therapeutic interventions aimed at improving relationship outcomes by fostering secure attachment and reducing maladaptive attachment behaviors. Simpson et al. (1996) investigated how attachment styles influence conflict resolution and relationship satisfaction in romantic relationships. The authors found that individuals with different attachment styles perceive and handle conflicts differently. Securely attached individuals tend to approach conflicts with constructive strategies and a positive outlook, enhancing relationship satisfaction, preoccupied individuals are often anxious and hyper-vigilant about potential threats to the relationship, leading to more conflict and lower satisfaction. Dismissive individuals tend to avoid conflicts altogether, which can lead to unresolved issues and dissatisfaction. According to Brennan et al. (1998), securely attached individuals generally report higher relationship satisfaction and better functioning in relationships. Preoccupied individuals tend to experience anxiety and insecurity, often leading to lower satisfaction. Dismissive individuals, with their tendency to avoid emotional closeness, frequently report lower satisfaction due to a lack of intimacy and unresolved conflicts. Supporting that Feeney et al.(2002) found that securely attached individuals experienced more positive daily interactions and higher overall relationship satisfaction. Preoccupied individuals reported more frequent but often negative interactions, leading to lower satisfaction. Dismissive individuals had fewer interactions and often felt less satisfied due to emotional distance and unaddressed issues.

To examine the gender difference in relationship satisfaction and attachment styles, one way ANOVA was performed.

Table 3 F-value of relationship satisfaction, close attachment style, depend attachment style and anxious attachment style for groups based on gender

Variables	Source of variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F
Relationship satisfaction	Between Groups	68.245	2	34.122	0.931
	Within Groups	4289.347	117	36.661	
	Total	4357.592	119		
close attachment/secure	Between Groups	1.535	2	.768	0.077
	Within Groups	1168.165	117	9.984	
	Total	1169.700	119		
depend attachment/ preoccupied	Between Groups	7.662	2	3.831	0.498
	Within Groups	900.129	117	7.693	
	Total	907.792	119		
anxious attachment/ dismiss	Between Groups	46.946	2	23.473	1.065
	Within Groups	2579.646	117	22.048	
	Total	2626.592	119		

From table 3, it can be seen that for relationship satisfaction, the F-value is 0.931 indicating no significant differences between the groups. Similarly, close attachment/secure has an F-value of 0.077 also showing no significant differences. For dependent attachment/preoccupied, the F-value is 0.498 suggesting no significant group differences. Anxious attachment/dismiss has an F-value of 1.065 indicating no significant differences between groups . The ANOVA results demonstrate that there are no significant gender differences in relationship satisfaction, close attachment (secure), dependent attachment (preoccupied), or anxious attachment (dismissive). This lack of significant differences suggests that the groups being compared are relatively homogenous in terms of these variables.

In contrary to the results of the study, Giudice (2011) found gender differences in attachment styles. According to him, women generally exhibit anxious attachment higher levels, characterized by seeking closeness and reassurance. Men are more likely to show Avoidant Attachment style, preferring emotional distance and independence. These differences affect relationship dynamics, potentially leading to conflicts and misunderstandings.

Mickelson et al. (1997) examined gender differences in attachment-related emotions and their effect on relationships. According to them, men are less expressive and women are more expressive. They concluded that these differences influence how satisfied individuals are in relationships, with potential mismatches in emotional needs causing issues.

To examine the difference in relationship satisfaction based on work status, one way ANOVA was performed

Table 4 F-value of relationship satisfaction and attachment style for groups based on work status

Source of variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F
Between Groups	26.161	1	26.161	0.713
Within Groups	4331.431	118	36.707	
Total	4357.592	119		

From table 4, it can be seen that there is no significant difference in relationship satisfaction based on work status as F value is not significant.

These findings suggest that factors other than work status may be more critical in influencing relationship satisfaction. Future research could focus on other variables, such as personal characteristics, relationship dynamics, or external stressors, to better understand what affects relationship satisfaction. Additionally, considering a larger and more diverse sample could help identify any subtle effects of work status that might not have been detected in this study.

In supporting to the result of the study, Fraley et al. (1997) highlighted that attachment styles influence relationship satisfaction irrespective of work status. Fraley et al. (1997) found that securely attached individuals reported higher relationship satisfaction in both work and non-work contexts. Anxious and avoidant individuals reported lower relationship satisfaction across both contexts. In contrary to the current study, Collins et al. (2004) found difference in relationship satisfaction based on work status. Working securely attached individuals leveraged workplace support networks to manage stress, which positively influenced their personal relationships. Non-working individuals with anxious attachment styles struggled with limited support sources, increasing relationship tensions. Work status influenced the availability and perception of support, with secure attachment facilitating better support dynamics and relationship satisfaction across contexts.

4. Conclusion

Research aimed to explore the relationship between attachment style and relationship satisfaction among early adults. Utilizing the Revised Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS) and the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS), the study involved 120 participants aged 18-30 from Karnataka. The findings indicate a significant negative correlation between anxious attachment style and relationship satisfaction, suggesting that higher levels of anxiety in attachment correlate with lower satisfaction in relationships. Secure attachment styles were found to positively correlate with relationship satisfaction, highlighting the importance of a secure base in fostering healthy, fulfilling relationships. The study revealed no significant differences in attachment styles and relationship satisfaction based on gender or work status. These results suggest that attachment styles have a consistent impact on relationship satisfaction, irrespective of gender and employment status. These findings emphasize the importance of promoting secure attachment behaviors in early adulthood to enhance relationship satisfaction. Therapeutic interventions focusing on reducing attachment anxiety and fostering secure attachment patterns could be beneficial in improving relational outcomes. Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on attachment theory and its implications for relationship satisfaction.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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