

Research Paper

Interrelationship Tendencies: Exploring Attachment Styles and Friendship Quality in Boys and Girls

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ABSTRACT

The following study claims to understand the nuances of attachment style, friendship quality and their relational differences in boys and girls. The potential relation between how our attachment styles actually shape the peer relationships that we make later in life in boys and girls have been explored in the study. The significant difference between boys and girls in the context of friendship quality and attachment styles have also been explored. The sample size of 148 people, between the age of 22 to 36, were taken out of which females and males were of the equal number. The scales used in the study were Cambridge Friendship Questionnaire and Adult Attachment Scale. Correlation and T-test were conducted on the variables. The study showed a significant difference between boys and girls in their friendship quality ($t(146) = -3.928, p < .001$). The differences in the attachment style subscales were also significant for Anxiety ($t(146) = 5.233, p < .001$) but not so significant for Close ($t(146) = .741, p = .460$) and Depend ($t(146) = -1.431, p = .154$). The relationships between attachment styles and friendship quality were significant at all three subscale levels for females but for males only the Anxiety subscale and friendship quality did not have a significant correlation ($r(72) = .117, p = .322$). The results reflected the validity and reliability of the theoretical frameworks. Literature reviews helped in forming the numerous implications of the results and the possible scope of further studies.

Keywords: Attachment style, Friendship quality, Internal working model, Alliance, Gender

The study, inspired by certain difficulties faced by the author in current clinical practice, focuses on attachment styles and friendship quality in boys and girls. The boundary issues brought up by the client in the clinical practice became a major cornerstone in the genesis of this curiosity of exploring earlier attachment styles of the individuals in the context of present relationships. Understanding the nuances of both actually helped in integrating the past and the present, ultimately increasing hope and optimism for a holistic future.

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Received: May 15, 2024; Revision Received: May 21, 2024; Accepted: May 25, 2024

Attachment Styles and Friendship Quality

The conceptualisation of attachment styles as given by Bowlby were majorly focused on understanding the importance of the bond between the infant and the primary caregiver. Observation and years of research led to the conclusion that the bond is evolutionary in nature and gives the infant the highest chances of survival. At this stage when the infant is completely dependent on the primary caregiver, the responses of the attachment figure to the needs of the child forms the foundation of the psycho-socio-behavioural system based on which the child will form future relationships. Bowlby however did not put emphasis on the difference between males and females and thus generalised the ways of forming attachments. The internal working model that Bowlby proposed were systems that govern the emotional reactions and expectations that one has from the relationship. He identified two systems - model of others and model of self - each including the perceptions that one has about others and self respectively (Bowlby, 2007). Years of research eventually led to a four category two-dimensional model of attachment (Bartholomew & Griffin, 1994) where four attachment styles were identified - secure (positive model of self and others), preoccupied (negative model of self and positive model of others), fearful (negative model of self and others) and dismissing (negative model of self and positive model of others).

Further research on the concept by Ainsworth resulted in three types of proximity seeking behaviour of the child - secure, avoidant and ambivalent. Based on the work, Hazan and Shaver (1987), conceptualised a “style” or a “type” based approach that postulated that the attachment style of the child towards the caregiver sets the foundation of romantic relationships also. Collins and Read devised a self-report questionnaire categorising three attachment styles, namely “Close”, “Depend” and “Anxiety”. These subscales have been proven to be highly consistent with the styles proposed by Ainsworth.

Friendship quality refers to the intimate bonds that we have created over time with our peers. It can be expressed in terms of two or more people having a cordial relationship with each other and a comfortable environment for the true expression of the self that is ultimately resulting in growth and development of both the parties. Friendship has been defined as an intended and custom of a shared association. It acts as the primary function in individual day-to-day life (Demir et al., 2007). It is a relationship where both the parties involved give their support and care to each other and facilitate the individual’s growth and development by stimulating one’s psycho-social systems. There have been studies that show that people crave those as their friend who can help them fulfil their need for expression of facilitating their socio-sentimental objectives for one another (Hays, 1984).

Friendships have always been seen as a very important source of happiness, well-being, physical health and longevity. There have been numerous scales over the years which have explored the dimension of friendship along different parameters like reliable alliance, stimulating companionship, emotional security, intimacy, self validation and help.

Attachment styles, being such a foundational part of our very first orientation to the external world based on the evolutionary needs of our survival, it becomes quite interesting to note how our relationships shape up in the future. It is true that our attachment styles do offer a basis for the encoding, adjustment, memorisation and orientation of the relationships that we establish in the future. Thus our attachment styles should have a significant relationship with the friendship quality. Secure attachment styles should have a high level of friendship quality since people with secure attachment styles are more trusting of others and thus they would be more welcoming to new experiences in the context of friendship also. Likewise, Dependent

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and Anxious subscales of attachment would also tend to have a low relationship with friendship quality since these attachment styles include personalities that are suspicious of others, fearful, and avoidant of the feelings of pain due to any potential loss or rejection in a relationship. Thus being high on different attributes of friendship like self-disclosure, reliable alliance, emotional security, etc, is unlikely.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This study examined attachment organisation as a modulator of the relationship between the delinquent behaviour of the teenagers and the quality of their present friendships. A moderately at-risk group of seventy-one adolescents from a variety of ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds provided the data. Strong and encouraging friendships were associated with lower levels of delinquency, according to the results, but only when adolescents' attachment organisation reflected an orientation toward heightened attention to attachment relationships (via preoccupation or via a clear lack of dismissal of attachment). This was the only situation in which the AAI's assessment of attachment organisation had a moderating effect. These findings imply that attachment organisation is crucial in defining the circumstances in which social connection characteristics are most likely to be connected to significant psychosocial consequences. (Mcelhaney, K. B., Immele, A., Smith, F. D., & Allen, J. P., 2006)

The study aims to explore how the individual attachment styles can influence the communication patterns of the individuals and their friendship quality. It was found that secure attachment styles usually have a higher friendship quality and they also communicate better, whereas the anxious and avoidant attachment styles tend to self-disclose less and thus have lower friendship quality. (Lim et al., 2021)

The study undertaken here aimed to study the gender differences in the friendship quality and gossip tendency with a sample of 167 females and 69 males. It was found that friendship quality was positively correlated with the gossip tendency in males but in females this was not present. The study reflected a greater individuation in male friendships compared to female friendships. The study highlighted that friendship has always been more communal in females and more agentic in males. This can be largely due to the roles that males and females take on in society. Women's friendships are seen to be more holistic in the sense that they are more involved in group activities. Men's friendships on the other hand are very circumscribed, they have specific work-related friends, sports friends, etc. (Watson, 2012)

In a sample of 40 women who are considered to be at risk of relationship issues, this study investigates the association between attachment type and friendships and romantic relationships. Researchers also looked into the relationship between depression and self-esteem metrics and attachment type. Compared to women with insecure attachment styles (avoidant and ambivalent), secure attachment style users rated the domain of adult love relationships higher, while avoidant attachment style users reported more difficulties in their relationships. Living with a deviant partner was also associated with an insecure attachment style. Adult attachment style was found to be substantially correlated with ratings of self-esteem and functioning in the adult friendship domain, but not with ratings of mood at the time of the assessment. Specifically, compared to secure participants, anxious-ambivalent attachment style participants exhibited higher levels of poor self-esteem. In the area of adult friendships, secure individuals scored higher than insecure participants, and a somewhat significant correlation was also discovered between challenges in this area and an anxious-ambivalent attachment style. Furthermore, 8% of the women had attachment styles that were

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characterised by significant degrees of avoidance and ambivalence. Compared to the women who supported a single dominant attachment style, this group was found to have more persistent issues in their close relationships. (McCarthy., 2011)

In this study, friendships and attachment are combined and compared in online and offline settings. There is currently little study to inform our understanding of how friendship and attachment traits are demonstrated in online environments, despite the fact that we know a great deal about the significance of attachments and friendships for healthy development. In order to evaluate attachment type, friendships (both online and offline), interactions with friends, and friendship quality, participants filled out surveys. There was no difference in the degree to which people looked for online buddies based on their attachment type. The quality of friendship varied according to attachment style; however, distinctions between attachment styles for other aspects of friendship emerged only when context (online versus offline) was taken into account concurrently (Vanessa M. Buote, Eileen Wood, Michael Pratt, 2009)

In this study, representations of friendship and peer relationships—as measured through interviews with a sample of forty-three adolescents—were compared to representations of attachment, as measured by the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI). The idea of friendship, integration into a peer group, and emotion control within close friendships were all found to be substantially correlated with secure attachment representations in interview-based studies. The quality and notion of friendship were linked to the attachment experiences, integration, and coherency that were reported during the AAI. The findings demonstrate the strong correlations between friendship networks and attachment representations throughout adolescence. Using an interview method or a questionnaire approach produced different relationships between attachment representations and peer interactions. (Zimmermann, 2004)

METHODOLOGY

Sample

A total of 148 participants took part in the study whose responses were gathered through the circulation of an online survey form consisting of two scales - Cambridge Friendship Questionnaire and Adult Attachment Scale-Close Relationship. The inclusion criteria for the participants were that they would have to be between the age 22 and 36 and identified as cisgenders (their gender identity is same as their sex assigned at birth). All the participants were from Noida (Delhi-NCR) and South Delhi.

Psychometric Measurements: Adult Attachment Scale (AAS) by Collins and Read developed in 1990 was used to measure the attachment styles of the participants. Cambridge Friendship Questionnaire designed by Simon Baron and Wheelwright was used to measure the friendship quality.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics was used to describe and summarise the data in order to understand the centrality and the measure of variability. Inferential statistics was applied to derive conclusions about the population. Correlational study was used to understand the relation between the different attachment style subscales with friendship quality in both boys and girls. Independent sample T-Test was used to check whether there is a significant difference between the attachment styles and friendship quality between boys and girls.

Hypothesis:

- **H₁** - There will be a significant relationship between attachment style and friendship quality in males and females.
- **H₂** - There will be a significant difference between the attachment styles of males and females
- **H₃** - There will be a significant difference between the friendship quality of males and females.

RESULTS

Inferential Statistics Details -

1. Correlational Study -

To explore the relationship between the attachment style subscales and friendship quality in males and females Pearson-Correlation was used after finding that the data was normally distributed. The significance level was 0.05 level and 0.01 level.

Table 1. Correlation between Attachment Style subscales and Friendship Quality in Boys and Girls

Variable		Friendship Quality					
		Male N = 74			Female N = 74		
Attachment Style	Subscales	r	Sig. (2-tailed)	Result	r	Sig. (2-tailed)	Result
	Close	.710	<.001	S	.624	<.001	S
	Depend	.880	<.001	S	.965	<.001	S
	Anxiety	.117	.322	NS	-.981	<.001	S

a. In males -

- i. The Close attachment style subscale was seen to have a significant positive correlation with friendship quality - $r_{(72)} = .071, p < .001$.
- ii. The Depend attachment style subscale was seen to have a significant positive correlation with friendship quality - $r_{(72)} = .880, p < .001$.
- iii. The Anxiety attachment style subscale was seen to have a very low positive correlation with friendship quality, but it was not significant - $r_{(72)} = .117, p = .322$.

b. In females -

- i. The Close attachment style subscale was seen to have a significant positive correlation with friendship quality - $r_{(72)} = .624, p < .001$.
- ii. The Depend attachment style subscale was seen to have a significant high positive correlation with friendship quality - $r_{(72)} = .965, p < .001$.
- iii. The Anxiety attachment style subscale was seen to have a significant high negative correlation with friendship quality - $r_{(72)} = -.981, p < .001$.

2. Independent Sample T-Test-

The differences between males and females in attachment style subscales were evaluated with an independent sample t-test, displayed in Table 2. The results showed the following –

Table 2. T-test between males and females across study variables

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	t value	Sig. (2 tailed)	Result
Friendship Quality					
Males	73.51	26.570	-3.928	<.001	S
_Females	58.08	20.882			
Close					
Males	19.28	2.350	.741	.460	NS
_Females	19.66	3.710			
Depend					
Males	19.46	1.698	-1.431	.154	NS
_Females	18.74	3.955			
Anxiety					
Males	17.08	4.468	5.233	<.001	S
_Females	21.26	5.211			

- a. There was no significant difference between males and females in the subscale of Close attachment style; $t_{(146)} = .741$, $p = .460$.
- b. There was no significant difference between males and females in the subscale of Depend attachment style; $t_{(146)} = -1.431$, $p = .154$.
- c. There was a significant difference between males and females in the subscale of Anxiety attachment style; $t_{(146)} = 5.233$, $p < .001$.
- d. There was a significant difference between males and females in their friendship quality; $t_{(146)} = -3.928$, $p < .001$.

DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

The findings of the study have been quite congruent theoretically. The review of the literature has been replicated by the study efficiently. In proving the three hypotheses, a lot of general conclusions about the populations have been drawn that have been observed to be quite relevant across cultures and time periods.

Hypothesis 1 - There will be significant relationship between the attachment style and friendship quality in males and females.

This has been successfully proved by the study as can be seen in the previous section. The subscales of depend and close have produced a significant correlation with friendship quality in males and females. The anxiety subscale has produced a very low positive correlation but does not show any significance. Females have shown a high significant negative correlation ($r_{(72)} = -.981$, $p < .001$). The results imply that men with an attachment style where they are worried about being rejected and abandoned, “anxiety”, their friendship quality might not be affected at all. This implies that even if they might face discomfort in their friendship, they might not want to indulge in any sort of confrontation. They might be more anxious to preserve their friendships rather than to correct offensive behaviour. Hence, this shows high suppression in males, thus implying the low positive insignificant correlation. However, in the case of the females, the high significant correlation strongly implies that women are more confrontational than men. The sensitivity to things and their willingness to confront the discomfort in friendships might actually result in the fragility of the friendships.

Hypothesis 2 - There will be a significant difference between the attachment styles of males

and females.

The study resulted in a significant difference in the anxiety subscale of attachment style in males and females. The t value was 5.233 at the df of 146 and $p < .001$. It is quite reflective of the evolutionary perspective of human mating and reproductive strategies. It has been well documented that romantic attachment has been regarded as the component of human reproductive strategies and mating. In harsher ecological climates, males tend to be more avoidant or less anxious of the relationships because it becomes a strategy for low commitment due to preference for casual sexual relations. Relationship exclusivity is often in favour of males who can benefit more from having sex with multiple partners. On the other hand, females tend to become more anxious about relationships because it becomes a strategy for maximising investment from their partners. (Giudice, 2019). Research has also found that differences in anxiety peak in young adulthood, which is also included in the sample. The finding is also reflective of the fact that sex differences mostly concern insecurely attached people (Giudice, 2019). This is clearly shown with the non-significant difference between males and females in for Close and Depend subscales (Sechi & Vismara, 2023). Considering the mean population of both the genders are young adults, and working, sample mean age of females to be 26 yrs and the mean age for males to be 28 yrs, it can be well assumed that in the Indian context, females who have been fulfilling a particular gender role, who are expected to be emotionally mature, who are heavily discriminated against in a patriarchal society, they tend to be severely anxious about the responsibilities and societal expectations that they need to fulfil in their different social roles. This is the age by which the two major focuses come into the picture, career establishment for the males and marriage for females. Speculations can be made that in the case of the females the anxiety can be higher since they majorly get married to partners who they haven't decided for themselves, arranged marriage. Thus the direction of the difference in order to understand whether the females show a higher anxiety attachment than males is surely a scope for future research where we understand that the attachment styles are shaped by the gender socialisation, roles and expectations put onto the group.

Hypothesis 3 - There will be a significant difference between the friendship quality of males and females.

According to the results, there was a significant difference in the quality of friendship between males and females ($t = -3.928$, $df = 146$, $p < .001$). This finding is consistent with previous research showing that women are more likely to have intimate, sympathetic, and supporting friendships. They are more prone to be gregarious, like social interaction purely for its own sake, and have a more sentimental approach to friendships (Cohen & Wheelwright, 2003). According to reports, girls are more likely than boys to engage in more group debate and revelation, as well as to display greater emotional care and intimacy in friendships (Shekhawat & Sharma, 2021). It should be mentioned that men tend to respond quite instrumentally, relating primarily to behaviour with a purpose in their connections. However, women tend to be more emotion-focused due to their expressive behavioural response orientation. They give off the impression of being incredibly selfless, sympathetic, and passionate about their friendships. (Fox et al., 1985) The conversational component of friendship—gossip—is another intriguing literary work that references the variations in friendships. Because of its inherent qualities of self-disclosure, mutual trust, and information gatekeeping, gossip may be an extremely intense activity between two people. Therefore, the type of gossip that women engage in may differ greatly from that of men. (Watson, 2012) Divergences may also arise in defining the concept of "friendship." The self-report questionnaire's nature means that the respondents' subjective bias has been carefully taken

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into account. It is impossible to assess the differences in the nature of friendships between boys and girls when considering questions like 34 and 35 because the answers to them are highly subjective. Because the questions are subjective, it has also been noted that 64.9% of male respondents chose to answer "political affairs," with 35.1% choosing to answer "hobbies and interests." The bulk of the men (46%) are between the ages of 27 and 31, which is the normal age range for the working population in India. As a result, men tend to be more interested in goal-oriented subjects like politics that are connected to a remote external environment. However, in the case of females, the following responses have been received: 16.2% for "family and friends," 4.1% for "personal matters," and 79.7% for "political affairs." It does seem to suggest that when it comes to friendship concerns, women are more holistic than men. (Watson, 2012)

CONCLUSION, LIMITATION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The study has successfully proved the three presented hypothesis -

1. **H₁** - There is a significant relationship between attachment style and friendship quality in males and females.
2. **H₂** - There is a significant difference between the attachment styles of males and females
3. **H₃** - There is a significant difference between the friendship quality of males and females.

In proving these three hypotheses, some of the implications that came to surface were truly insightful. It was evident that the gender differences have varying implications in friendship quality and attachment styles, as supported by the analysis as well as the review of past literatures.

Limitation and further scope of research could be in the following areas -

1. The moderating effect of gender on attachment style and friendship quality can be evaluated.
2. Friendship here has only focused on "close friends" in general. It did not mention same-gender friends or cross-gender friends. Specificity of the data can be obtained even further by focusing on either of the friend-type groups in both the genders.
3. The current research has only focused on the degree and direction of relationship that one variable has with another (friendship quality and attachment style). Further research should focus on the degree of effect or influence of one variable onto the other. It should focus on how much does each of the subscales of attachment style (Close, Depend, Anxiety) influence friendship quality individually in males and girls.
4. The study was conducted using only one scale of each variable, Adult Attachment Scale - Revised Version for attachment style, and Cambridge Friendship Questionnaire for friendship quality. The scales have robust validity and reliability. However, the different dimensions of friendship have not been explored and have been viewed as a holistic concept in this study. Study of different dimensions like closeness, companionship, conflict resolution, etc. should be explored further.
5. The study has explored the variables of friendship quality and attachment style in cis-genders. Moving beyond the gender binary should be the focus on further studies.
6. The sample size - The size of the sample is relatively small and thus may not sufficiently give results which can be subjected to generalizability.
7. Measurement tools - The measurement tools that have been used are largely self-report measures that can be very subjective in nature. Specially in the case of

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friendship quality, certain items like 34 and 35 can certainly have a more objective set of responses.

8. Cross-cultural differences - The study has only been undertaken in the Indian context. Hence it can have a heavy culture bias. Even in the Indian context, it represents a certain urban, educated, middle to upper socio-economic population. The results obtained through this sample may not be replicable in the context of the whole country. However, more research needs to be undertaken that would be inclusive of the larger mainstream Indian context.
9. Moderating and mediating factors - Identification of moderating factors that could influence attachment style and friendship quality in males and females haven't been explored in this study. Factors such as personality traits, coping strategies, communication styles, etc. may play a significant role in shaping attachments and friendships. The moderating role of gender between a particular attachment style and friendship quality is also left to be explored in future studies.
10. The predictive aspect of gender, attachment styles and friendship quality has not been explored in this study. With the help of regression analysis, there is scope for further exploration of how a particular attachment style helps predict the friendship quality in males and females.
11. In the current digital age, the impact of social media and virtual interaction on attachment styles and friendship quality should also be explored.

Lastly, further research should be undertaken on the scope of generalizability of the results with various tools pertaining to attachment styles and friendship quality in order to get a holistic and comprehensive understanding of the test variables.

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Acknowledgment

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Bagchi, S. & Singh, S. (2024). Interrelationship Tendencies: Exploring Attachment Styles and Friendship Quality in Boys and Girls. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 12(2), 2301-2310. DIP:18.01.198.20241202, DOI:10.25215/1202.198