

Attachment Styles and their Impact on Dependency and Rejection Sensitivity in Interpersonal Relationships of Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

The present study evaluated the link between attachment styles and rejection sensitivity and dependency. A total of 80 samples were collected among the age group 18-25 including both men and women. Correlational study was conducted using IBM SPSS statistics. Results reveal that there is positive significant correlation between dependency and attachment styles (anxious and avoidant) at the same time negative correlation was found to exist between secure attachment style and dependency. The correlation between rejection sensitivity and anxiety attachment style was found to be significantly positive. The study propagates that insecure attachment pattern individuals being more prone to rejection and seeking dependency in relationships and signifies the importance on working to understand and change your attachment pattern for better interpersonal relations.

Keywords: Attachment Styles, Dependency and Rejection Sensitivity, Interpersonal Relationships, Young Adults

Humans from evolutionary perspective are instinctual beings, like every other animal human also rely on their instinct. Apart from instinct in any specie which is inevitable cause of nature there are also behavior-controlled systems present to enhance the survival of the species. The species come together and live and such through these mechanism from goal-directed behaviors which are essential for their survival (Bowlby, 1969). This mechanism is somewhere like the attachment style patterns which human develop because of parenting or early childhood relationships. As every living thing is a product of its environment it is inept to the nature of its surroundings. The dangers present in and around our world do take as a part of the instinctual behavior in humans but are managed and groomed with the help of goal-directed attachment behaviors. Rejection is a very crucial part of attachment and there are very few studies which have considered the impact of rejection on our attachment patterns. This study brings forth the account of rejection sensitivity that stems from the attachment styles we form in our early childhood and aims to classify a link towards them so that we can understand the fear and anxiety a human faces from rejection and how it impacts their desire to attach and connect with others.

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Attachment styles

The research by Bowlby, Ainsworth, and others (1978) led to the emergence of patterns in behavior which was observable from early childhood. They were further classified into: -

- Secure Attachment style- When the child is comfortable with the primary caregiver is perceived to be available and responsive.
- Anxious Attachment Style- This type of attachment makes the child perceives the caregiver to be unavailable, dismissive, and unresponsive.
- Ambivalent Attachment Style- In this type of attachment the child feels the caregiver is inconsistently responsive.

Following Bowlby's lead it is assumed that in adulthood also there is activation of a threat response system. The threats can either be attachment related or attachment unrelated just so as it happens in childhood (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2017). "Such activation automatically heightens access to attachment-related mental contents and action tendencies (e.g., images and thoughts of one's attachment figure and strategies for contacting or gaining proximity to him or her), which in turn increases the likelihood of seeking contact with an attachment figure" (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2017 p 45).

Dependency

As there are attachment issues in adulthood it also becomes a problem in the area where young adults are forming new relationships and connections. Insecure attachment even though it is fearful and anxious where people refrain from getting attached at the same time it also leads people to become emotionally dependent in a relationship. People tend to seek the approval of others to regulate their own self-esteem which is very hazardous to their health. This dependency is also known as sociotropy. Sociotropy consists of traits related to excessive interpersonal dependency and a strong need for affiliation and support from others. Whereas autonomy includes excessive achievement expectations and a strong need for independence (Bagby & others, 2001).

Interpersonally dependent or sociotropic individuals have a strong need for care and approval from others and they often act in ways to please others. They depend on the love and attention for others for the maintenance of their self-esteem and are also at the risk for developing depression when faced with treats in the interpersonal domain. On the other side of the dimension, there are autonomous or self-critical individuals who have a high need for independence and they are very goal oriented. They experience feelings of doubt, self-criticism, and guilt at not living upto expectations or obligations. They are sensitive to personal failure and lack of control over goal attainment. These traits are not mutually exclusive and may co-exist to different degrees in the same individual.

Rejection Sensitivity

All of the insecure attachment and the tendency to be emotionally dependent in relationships is related to the rejection sensitivity of the individual which marks to be a very important criteria of this study.

Every human needs acceptance and do not want to face rejection, this is a basic human motive. Some people tend to be sensitive to rejection in the sense that they anxiously expect, readily perceive and overreact to rejection (Downey & Feldman, 1996). Rejection comes in various forms in our daily life from being ignored or avoided by others, being excluded from a group activity, being overlooked or not being responded to in a conversation, each of such

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experiences has the potential to cause hurt or unhappiness in the recipient (Watson & Nesdale, 2012).

This study aims to understand and elaborate the link between these three mechanisms of human behavior which makes them susceptible to disorders like Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) and can clarify the core issue regarding interpersonal problems young adults are facing.

METHODOLOGY

Aim

To investigate the relationship between attachment styles and its impact on dependency and rejection sensitivity in interpersonal relationships of young adults.

Objective

- To understand the relationship between rejection sensitivity and attachment styles.
- To understand the relationship between dependency and attachment styles.
- To understand the relationship between rejection sensitivity and dependency.

Hypothesis

- There will be significant correlation between anxiety attachment style and dependency in interpersonal relationships.
- There will be significant correlation between anxiety attachment style and rejection sensitivity in interpersonal relationships.
- There will be significant correlation between avoidant attachment style and rejection sensitivity in interpersonal relationships.
- There will be significant correlation between avoidant attachment style and dependency in interpersonal relationships.
- There will be significant correlation between secure attachment style and rejection sensitivity in interpersonal relationships.
- There will be significant correlation between secure attachment style and dependency in interpersonal relationships.
- There will be significant correlation between dependency and rejection sensitivity in interpersonal relationships.

Sample and its selection

The sample size for this research is 80. The age ranged from 18 to 25 years. A total of 80 individuals participated in the study situated across India. Random sampling was carried out. Random sampling refers to when the researcher selects a random subset of people from a population.

Description of tools

The Adult Attachment Scale by Nancy Collins- It is an 18 item scale, using a five point Likert scale to measure each item ranging from 1 (not at all characteristic) to 5 (very characteristic). These 18 items measure one of the three constructs: dependency, anxiety and closeness.

The Spann-Fischer Co-dependency Scale by Fischer, JL and Spann, L and Crawford, D- It is a 16-item self-report instrument that has been proposed as a measure of co-dependency. The scale is based upon a definition of co-dependency as "a dysfunctional pattern of relating to

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others with an extreme focus outside of oneself, lack of expression of feelings, and personal meaning derived from relationships with others."

The Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire by Downey and Feldman- It is a 18 item scale, each item consisting of a situation with two questions. It uses Likert scale to measure from 1 (not at all characteristic) to 6 (very characteristic).

Procedure

Firstly, a topic was chosen for this research according to the researcher's interest area, going through the previous work and researches of the same to understand the topic more. Finding the scales for the variables that had been chosen and selecting and filtering the population and thus the sample. Followed by making a questionnaire including all the three scales and carrying out offline data collection of samples including taking proper consent first. Running statistical tests including correlation and independent sample t test and analysing the results for the same through SPSS and concluding if the hypothesis was true or not.

Statistical analysis

Analysis and data processing is done using Microsoft excel program and SPSS. Pearson's Correlation was used to examine the relationship between three variables.

RESULTS & ANALYSIS

Three variables were selected to examine their relationship and to compare their means in order to note the range of the scores obtained for the chosen variables for attachment styles, dependency and rejection sensitivity.

Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Secure Attachment	3.0979	.52818	80
Rejection Sensitivity	10.9207	2.96114	80
Anxiety Attachment	3.0562500000000000	.972889814996421	80
Avoidance Attachment	2.8744	.63261	80
Dependency	60.1750	12.66489	80

For attachment styles, three variables were chosen anxiety attachment score, avoidance attachment score and secure attachment score. Anxiety attachment score had a mean of (n=80) 3.0562 and Standard deviation (SD) of 0.97289. For Avoidance attachment score the mean was (n=80) 2.8744 and Standard deviation (SD) was 0.63261. For Secure attachment score the mean was (n=80) 3.0979 and Standard deviation (SD) was 0.52818.

For co-dependency the scores were obtained and it had a mean of (n=80) 60.1750 and a Standard deviation (SD) of 12.66489.

For rejection sensitivity the scores were obtained as instructed by the manual and it had a mean of (n=80) 10.9207, the Standard deviation was recorded at (SD) 2.96114.

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Correlation Table

		Secure Attachment	Rejection Sensitivity	Anxiety Attachment	Avoidance Attachment	Dependency
Secure Attachment	Pearson Correlation	1	-.022	-.450**	-.474**	-.283*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.847	<.001	<.001	.011
	N	80	80	80	80	80
Rejection Sensitivity	Pearson Correlation	-.022	1	.274*	.163	.107
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.847		.014	.149	.343
	N	80	80	80	80	80
Anxiety Attachment	Pearson Correlation	-.450**	.274*	1	.589**	.631**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	.014		<.001	<.001
	N	80	80	80	80	80
Avoidance Attachment	Pearson Correlation	-.474**	.163	.589**	1	.518**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	.149	<.001		<.001
	N	80	80	80	80	80
Dependency	Pearson Correlation	-.283*	.107	.631**	.518**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.011	.343	<.001	<.001	
	N	80	80	80	80	80

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Correlational analysis was conducted and it was found that:

1. Anxiety attachment style is significantly correlated with both Rejection sensitivity and dependency with correlation coefficient 0.274 and 0.631 respectively
2. Avoidant attachment style is significantly correlated with dependency with correlation coefficient 0.518.
3. Secure attachment style is significantly correlated with dependency with correlation coefficient -0.283.
4. Avoidant attachment style is not significantly correlated with Rejection sensitivity as correlation coefficient is 0.163.
5. Secure attachment style is not significantly correlated with rejection sensitivity as the correlation coefficient is -0.022.
6. Rejection sensitivity and Dependency are not significantly correlated as the correlation coefficient is 0.107.

It shows rejection sensitivity is positively correlated with anxiety attachment style but not with other styles of attachment (secure & avoidant). Anxiety attachment style is also positively correlated with dependency. Avoidant attachment style is positively correlated with dependency but not so with rejection sensitivity and secure attachment style is negatively correlated with dependency but not so with rejection sensitivity. Dependency and rejection sensitivity are also not significantly correlated.

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DISCUSSION

The results reveal that indeed rejection sensitivity is significantly correlated to anxiety attachment style, but it does not show any significant correlation to avoidant and secure attachment styles. On the other hand, dependency shows significant positive correlation to both avoidant and anxiety styles of attachment, but it shows negative correlation to secure style of attachment. At the end rejection sensitivity and dependency do not show any significant relationship of correlation between them.

Hence, hypothesis 1 which states that anxiety attachment style and dependency has a significant relationship is accepted. Hypothesis 2 which states that anxiety attachment style and rejection sensitivity has a significant relationship was also accepted. Hypothesis 3 & 4 regarding avoidant attachment style having a significant relationship with dependency and rejection sensitivity were accepted and rejected respectively. And the hypothesis 5 & 6 regarding secure attachment style were also accepted and rejected respectively. This solidifies the further proof that attachment style is indeed linked with rejection sensitivity and dependency. Once an individual during their early childhood forms an insecure attachment pattern with their primary caregiver it results in greater tendency to perceive rejection in their adulthood as well as a greater tendency to seek dependency in their relationships. Whilst if the individual secures a safe attachment in their early childhood then it the tendency to perceive rejection and be overpowered by it is less as well as they tend to show less tendency to depend on their partners in interpersonal relationships.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the results show that indeed there is a relationship between attachment styles and dependency and rejection sensitivity. Insecure attachment style from childhood brings about aversion to threat which dismantles the sensitivity to rejection in an individual as well as makes them more prone to be dependent in their interpersonal relationships.

Future implications

The study's results highlights that it's important to work on the attachment style of an individual and identify how an insecure attachment style is giving rise to anxiety and problems in interpersonal relationships. It proposes that time and effort need to be put in for those with an insecure attachment styles to improve their interpersonal relationships. With this the individual shall become less sensitive to rejection and as that decreases they would not feel overwhelmed in their interpersonal relationships. Individuals would also not seek approval for love or needs from others and can be autonomous regardless of others demands or wishes. The individuals can improve their interpersonal skills and can also learn to negotiate and handle difficult situations that they found earlier to be. This can be extremely fruitful for someone suffering from Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) as they can form meaningful relationships and get out of the pattern of feeling stuck as poor interpersonal skills pose and could be vital in their recovery.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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