

Research Paper

Attachment Styles and Their Influence on Self Esteem, Loneliness and Relationship Satisfaction among Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

The present study explored how attachment styles influence self-esteem, loneliness, and relationship satisfaction among young adults aged 18 to 34 years. Using data from 150 participants, standardized measures assessed attachment patterns and psychosocial outcomes. Results showed moderate self-esteem and relationship satisfaction, with avoidant attachment being most common. Correlation analyses indicated that avoidant attachment was significantly associated with greater loneliness, while anxious attachment showed a weak but significant link to relationship satisfaction. Regression analyses further revealed that anxious and avoidant attachment styles significantly predicted loneliness and relationship satisfaction but not self-esteem. Overall, the findings point out the role of insecure attachment, especially avoidant attachment, in shaping emotional and relational well-being in young adults, emphasizing implications for counselling and mental health interventions.

Keywords: Attachment styles, self-esteem, loneliness, relationship satisfaction, young adults, avoidant attachment, anxious attachment

Attachment style

Humanness is oriented toward finding connections, meaningful relations, and a place within a social structure. Close relationships influence personality and behavior and the development of emotional well-being from childhood into maturity. Young adulthood, the age of identity development and growing independence, is the stage at which individuals increasingly rely on romantic partners and peers for support (Arnett, 2000). Understanding the factors influencing psychological adjustment at this crucial stage, such as attachment style, self-esteem, loneliness, and relationship satisfaction, is very important in today's socially demanding world.

Attachment theory suggests that early experiences of care influence the development of an internal working model, which later guides relationship development and maintenance throughout life. These models influence emotional regulation, closeness, and expectations in adult bonds. Whereas secure attachment engenders trust and healthy intimacy, anxious attachment involves fear of rejection, and avoidant attachment reflects discomfort with closeness. These patterns, in turn, are thought to play a major role in young adults' emotional well-being and relationship functioning.

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Loneliness

Loneliness is typically defined as the distress that results from a discrepancy between desired and actual social connection, and is commonly heightened during young adulthood due to life transitions such as leaving home, starting college, or joining the workforce. The inability to establish close attachments brings about emotional loneliness, while the lack of broader networks causes social loneliness. Continued loneliness can lead to poorer mental health, diminished self-esteem, and lower satisfaction within relationships. Attachment insecurity is strongly related to loneliness.

Self-esteem

Yet another influential factor in young adulthood is self-esteem, defined as the individual assessment of personal worth. According to Rosenberg (1965), it affects coping, confidence, and relationship behavior. As observed, humanistic, developmental, and sociometer theories have attested that acceptance, competence, and perceived belonging are building blocks of self-esteem. High self-esteem contributes to resilience and good relations, while low self-esteem triggers a greater risk for loneliness, insecurity, and relational disputes. Attachment likewise influences self-esteem, since secure attachment encourages more positive views of oneself.

Relationship Satisfaction

Relationship satisfaction is defined as positive evaluations by individuals regarding their relationships and the degree to which the relationships meet one's emotional and interpersonal needs. Whereas theories of social exchange and interdependence stress rewards, fairness, and mutual dependence, attachment theory emphasizes emotional security. Young adulthood is considered a very important stage in life for the formation of an intimate partnership, and high relationship satisfaction is related to good mental health, low loneliness, and emotional stability.

Attachment, self-esteem, loneliness, and relationship satisfaction are interwoven in a system. Attachment style influences people's ideas about themselves and their social interactions; loneliness often arises when attachment needs are frustrated; self-esteem modulates responses to social acceptance or rejection; and relationship satisfaction incorporates the interactive effects of these factors. Understanding their interaction is essential for explaining young adults' emotional adjustment and guiding mental health interventions aimed at encouraging healthier relationships and overall well-being.

METHODOLOGY

Sample size

Sample size was determined based on the complexity of the analyses, the reliability of the measures, and the diversity of the participants. Larger samples give more precise results and allow the inclusion of demographic factors. The sample size chosen is similar to previous studies of attachment and young adult adjustment to provide meaningful and reliable findings. A minimum of about 73 participants per predictor group was required, so a total target of at least 150 participants was set to allow for dropouts and incomplete data.

Instruments

Four Measures were used in this study:

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1. Attachment Style Questionnaire – Short Form (ASQ-SF) Developed by: Alexander, Feeney, Hohaus and Noller:

The ASQ-SF is a 29-item self-report measure based on Bowlby's Attachment Theory to assess adult attachment across different relationships. It examines secure and insecure tendencies through five dimensions: Confidence, Discomfort with Closeness, Need for Approval, Preoccupation with Relationships, and Relationships as Secondary.

- *Reliability:* The scale demonstrates fair internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.69 to 0.86, reflecting its homogeneity among its subscales.
- *Validity:* The ASQ-SF has strong construct validity and meaningful associations with emotional and relational outcomes. It is suitable for use across family, peer, and romantic contexts.
- *Interpretation:* Scores on each subscale are rated higher for stronger tendencies in that particular dimension of attachment, such as security, avoidance, or anxiety; this would explain how individuals manage intimacy and dependence.
- *Scoring:* Items are rated on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from “completely disagree” to “completely agree.” Subscale scores are summed separately. The higher the total, the stronger the presence of the respective attachment dimension.

2. Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) Developed by: Morris Rosenberg:

The RSES is a 10-item self-report scale developed by Rosenberg (1965) to measure global self-esteem; it reflects overall self-worth, self-respect, and personal value. It is widely used in research and clinical settings.

- *Reliability:* The instrument has demonstrated high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha generally above 0.85, and yields consistent scores over time.
- *Validity:* There is strong construct and criterion validity of the RSES, which correlates with psychological well-being, life satisfaction, and emotional adjustment across diverse populations.
- *Interpretation:* Higher scores indicate positive self-esteem and confidence, while lower scores suggest self-doubt or insecurity.
- *Scoring:* Items are rated using a 4-point Likert format ranging from “Strongly agree” to “Strongly disagree,” with five negatively worded items reverse-scored. Scores are summed to give a total ranging from 10 to 40, with higher scores reflecting higher self-esteem.

3. UCLA Loneliness Scale Developed by: Russell, Peplau, and Ferguson:

The UCLA Loneliness Scale, Version 1, is a widely used self-report measure developed by Russell, Peplau, and Ferguson (1978). It aims to assess subjective feelings of loneliness and disconnection from others. The 20-item scale scores the frequency of the respondent's emotions of lack of companionship, social isolation, and reduced connectedness.

- *Reliability:* The scale is internally consistent; Cronbach's alpha generally is above 0.90. This high reliability indicates that the items consistently capture the core experience of loneliness across different groups, including young adults.
- *Validity:* Strong, as it correlates well with various psychological variables, including self-esteem, emotional well-being, and relationship satisfaction. It also demonstrates its power as a research tool through the fine distinctions it draws between subjective loneliness and objective social isolation.
- *Interpretation:* High scores reflect a state of loneliness, emotional isolation, and possibly perceived lack of meaningful social connections. The responses help in the

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identification of persons who may have incidences of loneliness that are frequently severe or intense.

- *Scoring*: The UCLA Loneliness Scale consists of 20 items rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from “Never” to “Often.” Scores from all items are summed, with higher total scores indicative of greater levels of loneliness.

4. Relationship Assessment Scale Developed by: Hendrick:

The Relationship Assessment Scale, designed by Hendrick in 1988, is a short instrument composed of 7 items intended to measure overall relationship satisfaction. Using a Likert-type format, the instrument examines how the individuals view the happiness, quality, and stability of their romantic relationships.

- *Reliability*: RAS also demonstrates good reliability, with Cronbach's alpha mostly greater than 0.80. This indicates that the items in this questionnaire measure relationship satisfaction consistently across numerous populations, including young adults.
- *Validity*: The scale has shown strong validity, as evidenced by significant associations with the longer, more elaborate measures of relationship quality. Its precision and brevity make it a valuable tool in research concerned with attachment and relational outcomes.
- *Interpretation*: Higher RAS scores reflect more satisfaction, positive feelings about the relationship, and better relational well-being. Lower scores reflect dissatisfaction, concerns, or even strain in the relationship.
- *Scoring*: The RAS consists of seven items rated using a Likert scale. Scores are summed or averaged to produce a total satisfaction score, with higher values reflecting greater relationship satisfaction.

Procedure

The scale was given to each participant individually by following standard instructions. The sample included young adults of 18 to 34 years of both genders selected randomly. The participants were contacted online through Google Forms. A good rapport was built to make them feel comfortable, and they were assured that their answers would be kept confidential. A short introduction about the study and clear instructions were given at the beginning. They were asked to answer honestly, and after collecting all responses, the data were organized for analysis.

RESULTS

Table No. 1 Demographic characteristics of the study sample

VARIABLE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	MEAN $\pm$ SD
AGE (IN YEARS)			
18	18	12%	25.77 $\pm$ 9.44
19	12	7.94%	
20	10	6.62%	
21	7	4.63%	
22	9	5.96%	
23	6	3.97%	
24	11	7.28%	

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25	13	8.6%
26	4	2.64%
27	10	6.62%
28	8	5.29%
29	6	3.97%
30	5	3.31%
31	6	3.97%
32	7	4.63%
33	14	9.27%
34	5	3.31%
GENDER		
MALE	71	47.33%
FEMALE	80	53.33%

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the study sample. The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 34 years, with an average age of 25.77 years (SD = 9.44). The largest age group was 18 years, constituting 12% of the sample, while 9.27% were 33 years old. Most age groups fell between 3% and 8.6% of the sample, reflecting a good distribution across the different age groups in the participant pool. This means that the results obtained from this study can be generalized to a fairly young adult population. The sample consisted of 71 males and 80 females, representing 47.33% and 53.33% of the participants, respectively. The proportion of females was higher than that of males, hence giving a slight majority of women within the sample. Both genders were almost equally represented, which is good for balanced analyses across gender lines. In summary, sociodemographic data indicate that the current study draws on a heterogeneous sample in terms of age and gender, thus increasing the generalization ability of the findings to similar populations of young adults. Demographic diversity like this is highly desired in studies investigating psychosocial constructs to ensure diverse perspectives and minimize potential biases related to an unbalanced sample.

Table No. 2 Descriptive study of attachment styles and their influence on self-esteem, loneliness and relationship satisfaction among young adults

VARIABLES	MEAN	SD
SELF ESTEEM	24.92	2.24
LONELINESS	28.35	11.94
RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION	23.91	5.68
ANXIOUS ATTACHMENT STYLE	25.79	8.01
AVOIDANT ATTACHMENT STYLE	40.09	10.09

Note: N = 151. SD = Standard deviation

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the main study variables. The participants' self-esteem scores had a mean of 24.92 (SD = 2.24), which reflects a low dispersion of this construct across the sample. The mean loneliness score was 28.35 (SD = 11.94), indicating a wider dispersion of responses. Relationship satisfaction presented a mean score of 23.91 and an SD of 5.68, which shows a moderately varied level of satisfaction among respondents.

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The anxious attachment style attained a mean of 25.79 (SD = 8.01), but the avoidant attachment style expressed a higher mean of 40.09 (SD = 10.09), indicating a greater dispersion and prevalence of avoidant behaviors. These values give the basic overview of the sample's psychological profile that will be useful in subsequent analysis.

Table No. 3 Pearson's Product Moment Correlation for the study variable

VARIABLES	ANXIOUS	AVOIDANT
SELF ESTEEM	.066	.044
LONELINESS	.119	.251**
RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION	.207*	.075

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

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

Table 3 gives the correlational analysis between anxious and avoidant attachment styles and the study variables of self-esteem, loneliness, and relationship satisfaction. Several significant associations were obtained. Anxious attachment was not significantly correlated with self-esteem, $r = .066$, or with loneliness, $r = .119$. However, anxious attachment showed a weak but statistically significant positive correlation with relationship satisfaction, $r = .207$, $p < .05$, with higher anxious attachment being modestly associated with increased relationship satisfaction. In contrast, avoidant attachment showed different patterns. Avoidant attachment was negligibly correlated with self-esteem, $r = .044$, and did not significantly relate to relationship satisfaction, $r = .075$. Importantly, however, avoidant attachment was significantly positively correlated with loneliness, $r = .251$, $p < .01$, with individuals with higher avoidant attachment scores reporting increased feelings of loneliness. Overall, these results indicate that anxious attachment may play a minor role in predicting relationship satisfaction, whereas avoidant attachment is more strongly related to increased loneliness. The lack of significant associations between either attachment style and self-esteem is consistent with previous suggestions that attachment may impact interpersonal rather than self-percept variables more strongly. All correlations were subjected to two-tailed significance levels.

Table No. 4 Regression table for loneliness and attachment styles

MODEL	SUM OF SQUARES	DF	MEAN SQUARE	F	Sig.
REGRESSION	1429.200	2	714.600	5.294	.006
RESIDUAL	19979.197	148	134.995		
TOTAL	21408.397	150			

a. Dependent variable: loneliness

b. Predictors: (Constant), avoidant_attachment_style, anxious_attachment_style

Table 4 presents the multiple regression analysis conducted to determine how much avoidant and anxious attachment styles predict participants' loneliness. The overall regression model was significant, $F(2, 148) = 5.29$, $p = .006$, and it was observed that the two attachment styles, combined, accounted significantly for a variation in loneliness scores. Precisely, the

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regression sum of squares was 1429.200, with a mean square value of 714.600 across 2 degrees of freedom. The residual sum of squares was 19979.197, and at 134.995 with 148 degrees of freedom, the mean square was carried forward out of a total sum of squares of 21408.397. Since $p = .006$, it means that, taken as a whole, this model is significant, meaning the predictors involved in this model (avoidant and anxious attachment style) significantly contribute to explaining the difference in loneliness among study participants. This result confirms that attachment styles are important psychological predictors of loneliness in this sample. This finding has been consonant with the suggestion of several earlier researches that insecure attachment style is a risk factor for loneliness. Results have important implications for the psychological mechanisms underlying loneliness, underlining the role of individual differences in attachment style.

Table No. 5 Regression table for self-esteem and attachment styles

MODEL	SUM OF SQUARES	DF	MEAN SQUARE	F	Sig
REGRESSION	3.286	2	1.643	.322	.725
RESIDUAL	754.913	148	5.101		
TOTAL	758.199	150			

a. Dependent variable: Selfesteem

b. Predictors: (Constant), avoidant_attachment_style, anxious_attachment_style

Table 5 shows the Multiple regression analysis testing avoidant and anxious attachment style as predictors of self-esteem among participants. The regression model was not statistically significant, $F(2, 148) = 0.32$, $p = .725$; this indicates that avoidant and anxious attachment styles do not explain a significant proportion of the variance in self-esteem scores in this sample. The sum of squares for regression was 3.286, with a mean square value of 1.643 across 2 degrees of freedom. The residual sum of squares was 754.913, and the mean square for the residual was 5.101 with 148 degrees of freedom. The total sum of squares was 758.199. Since the p-value is well above significance criteria, at $p = .725$, this suggests that neither avoidant nor anxious attachment style significantly predicts the self-esteem of the population studied. The limited variance accounted for by the regression model merely reflects the fact that these attachment styles have no substantial, significant relationship with self-esteem among the participants. This result highlights the hypothesis that, within this particular sample, other factors are more important in influencing self-esteem than attachment style.

Table No. 6 Regression table for relationship satisfaction and attachment styles

MODEL	SUM OF SQUARES	DF	MEAN SQUARE	F	Sig
REGRESSION	240.099	2	120.049	3.859	.023
RESIDUAL	4603.782	148	31.107		
TOTAL	4843.881	150			

a. Dependent variable: relationship_satisfaction

b. Predictors: (Constant), avoidant_attachment_style, anxious_attachment_style

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Table 6 shows the multiple regression analysis done to establish whether avoidant and anxious attachment styles significantly predict relationship satisfaction. The overall regression model was found to be significant, $F(2, 148) = 3.86$, $p = .023$, indicating that taken together, avoidant and anxious attachment styles account for an adequate proportion of variance in relationship satisfaction scores. The regression sum of squares had a value of 240.099, and the mean square had a value of 120.049 over the 2 degrees of freedom. The residual sum of squares was 4603.782, while the residual mean square was 31.107 with 148 degrees of freedom, giving a sum of squares of 4843.881. The p-value of .023 confirms appropriateness of fit of the model, meaning there is a significant relationship between predictors and relationship satisfaction within the sample. This evidences that attachment styles are important in driving relationship satisfaction, backing theoretical and empirical links between insecure attachment and lower satisfaction within interpersonal relationships.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined the influence of attachment styles on self-esteem, loneliness, and relationship satisfaction among young adults. The findings revealed that participants, aged 18–34 years ($M = 25.77$, $SD = 9.44$), represented a balanced and diverse sample with nearly equal gender distribution. Descriptive data showed moderate levels of self-esteem ($M = 24.92$, $SD = 2.24$), higher variability in loneliness ($M = 28.35$, $SD = 11.94$), and moderate relationship satisfaction ($M = 23.91$, $SD = 5.68$). Avoidant attachment ($M = 40.09$, $SD = 10.09$) was more prevalent than anxious attachment ($M = 25.79$, $SD = 8.01$), suggesting a greater tendency for emotional distancing among participants. Correlation analysis indicated that anxious attachment had a weak but significant positive relationship with relationship satisfaction ($r = .207$, $p < .05$), while avoidant attachment showed a significant positive correlation with loneliness ($r = .251$, $p < .01$), highlighting that individuals with avoidant tendencies are more prone to feelings of isolation. Regression analyses further revealed that avoidant and anxious attachment styles significantly predicted loneliness ($F(2,148) = 5.29$, $p = .006$) and relationship satisfaction ($F(2,148) = 3.86$, $p = .023$), but not self-esteem ($F(2,148) = 0.32$, $p = .725$), suggesting that attachment patterns influence interpersonal and emotional well-being more strongly than self-perception. Overall, the findings emphasize that insecure attachment, particularly the avoidant type, contributes to increased loneliness and reduced relationship satisfaction, supporting existing literature that underscores the critical role of attachment in shaping emotional and relational functioning among young adults

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Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interests.

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