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Research Paper

# Sexual Attitudes and Emotional Closeness Among Men: The Role of Hook-up Culture and Attachment

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Casual sexual encounters, often described under the label of hook-up culture, are a visible feature of emerging adulthood, including in Indian metropolitan settings. Recent research indicates that casual sex is neither uniformly harmful nor uniformly benign, and that its correlates depend on attitudes, motives and relational dispositions. Little is known about how the two dimensions of adult attachment, anxiety and avoidance, relate to the separate dimensions of sexual attitudes in young men, or whether men who report fewer or more casual encounters differ on these variables. **Objectives:** To examine the associations between attachment-related anxiety and avoidance and four dimensions of sexual attitudes (permissiveness, birth control, communion and instrumentality) among young men, and to compare men reporting fewer than three with those reporting more than three casual sexual encounters on these variables. **Methods:** A quantitative, cross-sectional correlational design was used. Seventy-six men aged 18–27 years, each reporting at least one past romantic relationship and at least one casual sexual encounter, completed an online survey comprising the Brief Sexual Attitudes Scale (BSAS) and the Experiences in Close Relationships–Short Form (ECR-S). Data were analysed with descriptive statistics, the Shapiro–Wilk test, Cronbach's alpha, Spearman's rank-order correlation and the Mann–Whitney U test in IBM SPSS Statistics version 21. **Results:** Attachment avoidance was negatively correlated with permissiveness ($\rho = -.256$, $p = .025$) and instrumentality ($\rho = -.281$, $p = .014$), and positively correlated with birth control attitudes ($\rho = .337$, $p = .003$). Attachment anxiety was negatively correlated with communion ($\rho = -.297$, $p = .009$). Permissiveness ($\rho = .479$, $p < .001$) and communion ($\rho = .333$, $p = .003$) were positively correlated with instrumentality. Men reporting fewer than three encounters ($n = 50$) had higher permissiveness mean ranks than men reporting more than three ($n = 26$; $U = 414.50$, $p = .010$). The groups did not differ significantly in attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, birth control, communion or instrumentality. **Conclusion:** Attachment anxiety and avoidance relate to different dimensions of sexual attitudes, and permissive attitudes did not map straightforwardly onto reported frequency of casual sex. Encounter frequency should not be treated as an index of attachment orientation. Because emotional intimacy was not measured directly, conclusions

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about emotional closeness are not possible; longitudinal studies with direct intimacy measures and larger, more diverse Indian samples are recommended.

***Keywords:*** *Sexual Attitudes, Hook-Up Culture, Casual Sexual Encounters, Attachment Anxiety, Attachment Avoidance, Young Adult Men, India*

Sexual attitudes are the beliefs, values and evaluative orientations that people hold about sexual behaviour, sexual relationships and sexual intimacy. They are shaped by cultural standards, family and peer environments, relationship histories and individual dispositions, and they are increasingly understood as multidimensional rather than as a single liberal–conservative continuum. A person may, for example, accept sex outside committed relationships while also valuing emotional connection in sex, or may hold responsible views about contraception regardless of how permissive he is in other respects.

Casual sexual encounters, commonly discussed under the label of "hook-up culture", refer to sexual activity between partners who are not in a committed romantic relationship and who do not necessarily expect one to follow. Research published over the past decade has moved away from asking simply whether casual sex is good or bad. A systematic review of 71 quantitative studies found that people generally evaluated their casual sexual experiences more positively than negatively, yet such experiences were associated with short-term declines in emotional health in most studies that tracked change within a year, and outcomes varied with individual characteristics such as permissiveness of attitudes (Wesche et al., 2021). Qualitative and survey work likewise shows that hook-ups carry both perceived rewards and costs (Anders et al., 2020) and are embedded in social norms about how "casual" one is expected to be (Wade, 2021). At the same time, population data from the United States indicate that the popular image of a uniformly "hook-up generation" is overstated, since sexual inactivity in young adulthood has become more common in recent cohorts (Twenge et al., 2017).

In India, research on casual sex among young adults remains limited, but available studies suggest that hook-up behaviour is present among emerging adults in metropolitan cities, including Bengaluru, and that it is reported more often by men (Kohli et al., 2022). Survey evidence also indicates that attitudes towards premarital sex in India are gradually becoming more permissive while remaining far from uniform (Majumdar, 2018), and cross-cultural comparisons show that Indian young adults tend to endorse more pro-romantic and less liberal sexual attitudes than their American peers (Kanth et al., 2023). Indian young men therefore negotiate casual sexual experiences in a context where traditional expectations, romantic ideals and newer, more permissive norms coexist.

Attachment theory offers a useful framework for understanding why individuals approach intimacy and sexuality differently. In adulthood, attachment is usually described along two dimensions: attachment-related anxiety, reflecting fear of rejection or abandonment and a strong need for reassurance, and attachment-related avoidance, reflecting discomfort with closeness, dependence and vulnerability. Contemporary research suggests that these orientations are only partly rooted in early caregiving and remain open to change through later relationship experiences (Fraley & Roisman, 2019), and that they are linked to sexual motives, sexual satisfaction and partner choice (Gewirtz-Meydan & Finzi-Dottan, 2018; Yu et al., 2022).

Despite this growing literature, three gaps remain. First, many studies of attachment and casual sex have focused on hook-up behaviour or global sociosexuality rather than on separate dimensions of sexual attitudes. Second, much of this evidence comes from Western, frequently female or mixed-gender college samples (e.g., Schneider & Katz, 2017), so less is known about young men specifically. Third, Indian evidence that links attachment dimensions with specific sexual-attitude dimensions appears scarce. The present study addresses these gaps by examining the associations between attachment anxiety and avoidance and four sexual-attitude dimensions (permissiveness, birth control, communion and instrumentality) among young men aged 18–27 years in India, and by comparing men who reported fewer than three with those who reported more than three casual sexual encounters. Emotional intimacy itself was not measured; the study therefore speaks to attachment dimensions and attitudes towards the relational aspects of sex, not to emotional closeness directly.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### *Dimensions of Sexual Attitudes*

Sexual attitudes in the present study are conceptualised through the four dimensions of the Brief Sexual Attitudes Scale (BSAS; see Measures). Permissiveness refers to the acceptance of sexual relations outside committed relationships; it indicates openness to casual sex but does not by itself signal an absence of emotional attachment. Birth control concerns attitudes towards contraception and shared responsibility for preventing pregnancy, and is separable from permissiveness because acceptance of casual sex need not correspond to views about contraception. Communion reflects the idealisation of sex as an expression of closeness, affection and bonding, whereas instrumentality reflects a more self-focused orientation in which physical pleasure is central. Communion is an attitude towards the relational meaning of sex, not a measure of emotional intimacy in a relationship.

Recent psychometric work supports the use of the BSAS with men outside the United States. A confirmatory factor analysis among Filipino men provided reliability and validity evidence for the scale (De Guzman et al., 2024), which is relevant because the present sample is also male and non-Western. Studies of young adults further show that more liberal sexual attitudes are associated with more reported sexual behaviour; among Indian college students, those with liberal sexual attitudes reported more physical and online sexual behaviours (Brar et al., 2018). Such findings concern attitudes and behaviour in general, however, and do not establish that each attitude dimension maps onto the frequency of casual sex in the same way.

### *Casual Sexual Encounters and Hook-up Culture in Emerging Adulthood*

Emerging adulthood is a period of identity exploration in which romantic and sexual experiences are frequently tried out before long-term commitments are made. Hook-ups occur within this developmental and social context. Wade's (2021) analysis of 101 first-person accounts of college students described an emotional imperative to remain casual, enacted, for instance, by hooking up while intoxicated, avoiding tenderness and avoiding "repeat" hook-ups; breaking these rules was also a primary route into romantic relationships. Large-sample survey data similarly show that many students see hook-ups as a possible pathway to a relationship, and that post-hook-up reactions, such as satisfaction and emotional responses, explain much of the variance in interest in a subsequent hook-up or relationship with the same partner (Kettrey & Johnson, 2021).

Motives are central to understanding the consequences of casual sex. College students describe the rewards of hooking up as fun, sexual satisfaction, status and the possibility of a relationship, and its costs as regret, ambiguity, sexual risk and loss of respect (Anders et al., 2020). Motives for hooking up show both similarities and differences across gender and partner type (Weitbrecht & Whitton, 2020), and autonomous motives have been found to be more strongly associated with casual sexual behaviour than non-autonomous motives in both men and women (Townsend et al., 2020). Digital platforms add a further layer: emerging adults report several distinct motives for using dating applications, which vary by age and gender (Sumter et al., 2017), and higher sociosexuality and lower sexual disgust sensitivity predicted using Tinder for casual sex, with somewhat different models for men and women (Sevi et al., 2018).

With respect to wellbeing, the evidence is mixed. In a multisite college sample, unprotected sex and a larger number of hook-up partners were associated with more negative hook-up experiences, which in turn were associated with psychological distress in both men and women (Napper et al., 2016). Wesche et al. (2021) concluded that emotional outcomes differ across people and situations, with worse outcomes among women and among individuals holding less permissive attitudes towards casual sex. A small study of college students also reported a negative association between hook-up involvement and self-esteem (Chaube & Vijayan, 2023), although its sample size limits generalisation. Taken together, these studies suggest that the number of encounters alone is a limited indicator of how casual sex is experienced.

### *Adult Attachment and Sexuality*

Adult attachment orientations shape how people regulate closeness and distance in intimate relationships, and the sexual and attachment systems are understood to interact. Longitudinal evidence suggests that adult attachment styles are only weakly and inconsistently predicted by early caregiving and remain responsive to later relational experiences (Fraley & Roisman, 2019). From an evolutionary life-history perspective, attachment anxiety and avoidance have been proposed to calibrate different reproductive strategies, emotional expression and cognitive schemas, especially in harsh or unpredictable environments (Szepsenwol & Simpson, 2019).

Empirical studies link attachment insecurity with sexual motives and outcomes. In a dyadic study of 128 couples, sexual motives mediated associations between attachment orientation and men's sexual satisfaction, sexual intimacy and orgasmic responsivity (Gewirtz-Meydan & Finzi-Dottan, 2018). In newly dating couples followed over eight months, men's displays of sexual desire predicted declines in their own and their partners' relationship-specific attachment insecurities, and women's displays of intimacy predicted declines in their partners' insecurities (Mizrahi et al., 2016), suggesting that sexual processes and attachment security may influence each other over time.

Attachment has also been examined in relation to casual sex. Among heterosexual college women, proximity-seeking and self-reliance were both associated with the number of hook-up partners: intimacy motives explained a positive link for proximity-seeking, whereas enhancement motives explained a negative link for self-reliance, leading the authors to argue that casual sex does not necessarily reflect insecurity or dysfunction (Schneider & Katz, 2017). In a three-wave study of Chinese college students, intimacy and coping motives mediated the association between anxious attachment and the number of hook-up partners,

with the coping pathway significant among women (Yu et al., 2022). Studies grounded in life-history and developmental frameworks have examined insecure attachment in relation to unrestricted sociosexuality (Chen, 2017), and one cross-sectional study reported that parental rejection predicted insecure attachment, which in turn predicted more unrestricted sociosexuality and, through it, lower sex guilt (Hackathorn & Malm, 2022). Sociosexuality and hook-up frequency are, however, distinct from the attitude dimensions measured by the BSAS, so these findings cannot be transferred directly to permissiveness, communion or instrumentality.

### *Men, Gender and Casual Sex*

Men are often assumed to be more permissive and less emotionally invested in casual sex, but recent findings complicate this picture. Men reported more frequent hook-ups than women, yet the total number of negative hook-up effects did not differ by gender, and negative impacts were associated with distress for both men and women (Napper et al., 2016). Motives for hooking up overlap substantially across genders (Weitbrecht & Whitton, 2020), and in couples, men's attachment-related sexual motives were linked to their own sexual intimacy and satisfaction (Gewirtz-Meydan & Finzi-Dottan, 2018). Indian survey data show that overall hook-up behaviour was higher among males (Kohli et al., 2022), and fathering, rather than mothering, was more strongly associated with sons' sexual behaviours among Indian college students (Brar et al., 2018). These findings justify a focused examination of how attachment relates to sexual attitudes in men, without presuming that men's casual sex is emotionally neutral.

### *The Indian Context*

Indian research on sexual attitudes and casual sex has grown but remains comparatively thin. Analysis of World Values Survey data showed that premarital sex in India is becoming more common but is not widespread, and that attitudes vary with religiosity, marital status, political orientation, social class and education (Majumdar, 2018). A cross-national study of 883 unmarried young adults found that Indian participants endorsed less liberal sexual attitudes and more pro-romantic attitudes than American participants, with associations between attitudes, experiences and wellbeing differing across the two cultures (Kanth et al., 2023). Survey evidence from Bengaluru, Mumbai, Delhi and Kolkata indicates that hook-up behaviour is present among emerging adults and is most frequent among those living independently (Kohli et al., 2022). To the authors' knowledge, verified Indian studies that examine attachment anxiety and avoidance alongside the BSAS dimensions in young men are not available, which the present study seeks to begin addressing.

### *Synthesis and Research Gap*

The literature reviewed suggests that (a) sexual attitudes are multidimensional; (b) casual sex is experienced in diverse ways that depend on motives, norms and attitudes rather than on frequency alone; (c) attachment anxiety and avoidance relate to sexual motives and outcomes through partly different pathways; and (d) evidence from young Indian men is limited. Because attachment anxiety centres on fear of rejection and the need for reassurance, it may relate most closely to the relational dimension of sexual attitudes (communion); because avoidance centres on discomfort with closeness, it may relate to attitudes towards uncommitted and self-focused sex (permissiveness, instrumentality) and to sexual responsibility (birth control). The direction of these links is not settled by previous research, particularly for BSAS subscales in men. The present study therefore tested these

associations, together with differences between encounter-frequency groups, using non-directional null hypotheses.

### *Rationale, Objectives and Hypotheses*

#### *Rationale*

By examining each dimension of sexual attitudes separately in relation to each attachment dimension, the study may reveal patterns that would be obscured if sexual attitudes or attachment were treated as single constructs. Focusing on young men in India adds evidence from a population and cultural context that is under-represented in the literature on attachment and casual sex.

#### *Objectives*

1. To assess the levels of permissiveness, birth control, communion and instrumentality among participants.
2. To assess attachment-related anxiety and avoidance among participants.
3. To examine the relationships between the dimensions of sexual attitudes and the dimensions of attachment.
4. To examine differences in sexual attitudes and attachment between participants reporting fewer than three and more than three casual sexual encounters.

#### *Hypotheses*

In view of the inconsistent prior evidence, the hypotheses were stated in null form and tested two-tailed.

- H1: There will be no statistically significant association between attachment-related anxiety and avoidance and the dimensions of sexual attitudes (permissiveness, birth control, communion and instrumentality).
- H2: There will be no statistically significant difference in sexual-attitude dimensions between participants reporting fewer than three and more than three casual sexual encounters.
- H3: There will be no statistically significant difference in attachment-related anxiety and avoidance between the two casual-encounter-frequency groups.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Research Design*

A quantitative, cross-sectional correlational design with a comparative component was used. The four dimensions of sexual attitudes and the two dimensions of adult attachment were measured without manipulating any variable, and the two encounter-frequency groups were compared on all six variables. The design permits the examination of associations and group differences but not causal inference.

### *Participants*

The sample comprised 76 men aged 18–27 years, recruited through universities, student communities and social media. This age range was chosen because emerging adulthood is a period of identity exploration and of developing intimate relationships. All participants reported at least one romantic relationship and at least one casual sexual encounter involving penetrative sex.

For the comparative analysis, participants were divided into two groups according to the reported number of casual sexual encounters: fewer than three ($n$ = 50) and more than three ($n$ = 26). No participant reported exactly three casual sexual encounters; therefore, the two groups exhaust the sample ($N$ = 76).

### *Inclusion criteria*

- Self-identified male gender
- Age between 18 and 27 years
- At least one past romantic (dating) relationship
- At least one casual sexual encounter involving penetrative sex
- Informed consent to participate

### *Exclusion criteria*

Individuals outside the specified age range, those not identifying as male, and those who had never had a romantic relationship or any casual sexual encounter were excluded.

### *Measures*

- **Brief Sexual Attitudes Scale (BSAS).** The 23-item BSAS (Hendrick et al., 2006) assesses four dimensions: permissiveness (10 items; acceptance of casual sex and sexual relations without commitment), birth control (3 items; attitudes towards contraception and responsibility for preventing pregnancy), communion (5 items; the link between sexual experience, emotional closeness and relational significance) and instrumentality (5 items; a focus on physical gratification). Subscale scores were computed as item means. Communion concerns the relational meaning attributed to sex and is not by itself a direct indicator of emotional intimacy. In the present sample, Cronbach's α was .774 for permissiveness, .624 for birth control, .722 for communion and .762 for instrumentality (Table 3).
- **Experiences in Close Relationships–Short Form (ECR-S).** The 12-item ECR-S (Wei et al., 2007) measures attachment-related anxiety (6 items; fear of rejection and abandonment) and attachment-related avoidance (6 items; discomfort with closeness and dependence). Higher scores indicate greater anxiety or avoidance. In the present sample, Cronbach's α was .751 for anxiety and .647 for avoidance (Table 3).

### *Procedure*

Data were collected through an online survey. Participants first read a description of the purpose of the research, the procedures and their rights as participants, and provided electronic informed consent. They then completed a brief demographic questionnaire, followed by the BSAS and the ECR-S. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, no personally identifying information was collected, and participants could withdraw at any time without penalty.

### *Ethical Considerations*

The study protocol was approved by the Ethics Committee of Jain University. Electronic informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and participants could withdraw at any time without penalty.

### *Statistical Analysis*

Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 21. Means and standard deviations were computed for the BSAS and ECR-S subscales. Normality was assessed with the

Shapiro–Wilk test, and internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha. Because birth control scores departed significantly from normality and questionnaire scores are ordinal and bounded, associations among the six variables were examined using Spearman's rank-order correlation, and the two encounter-frequency groups were compared using the Mann–Whitney U test. Statistical significance was set at $p < .05$ (two-tailed).

## RESULTS

Data from all 76 participants were analysed. Results are presented in the order of the study objectives.

### *Descriptive Statistics*

***Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables***

| Variable | N | M | SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| **ECR-S Avoidance** | 76 | 3.01 | 0.88 |
| **ECR-S Anxiety** | 76 | 4.20 | 1.10 |
| **BSAS Permissiveness** | 76 | 2.82 | 0.61 |
| **BSAS Birth Control** | 76 | 1.99 | 0.63 |
| **BSAS Communion** | 76 | 2.14 | 0.67 |
| **BSAS Instrumentality** | 76 | 2.85 | 0.85 |

*Note.* *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation; BSAS = Brief Sexual Attitudes Scale; ECR-S = Experiences in Close Relationships–Short Form.

Attachment anxiety had the highest mean among the six variables ($M = 4.20$, $SD = 1.10$), followed by attachment avoidance ($M = 3.01$, $SD = 0.88$). Among the sexual-attitude dimensions, instrumentality ($M = 2.85$, $SD = 0.85$) and permissiveness ($M = 2.82$, $SD = 0.61$) had relatively higher means, and birth control had the lowest ($M = 1.99$, $SD = 0.63$). These values address Objectives 1 and 2 descriptively.

### *Assessment of Normality*

***Table 2 Shapiro–Wilk Tests of Normality***

| Variable | W | p |
|---|---|---|
| **ECR-S Avoidance** | .986 | .586 |
| **ECR-S Anxiety** | .979 | .231 |
| **BSAS Permissiveness** | .985 | .539 |
| **BSAS Birth Control** | .937 | .001 |
| **BSAS Communion** | .975 | .132 |
| **BSAS Instrumentality** | .989 | .733 |

*Note.* *W* = Shapiro–Wilk statistic. A significant result indicates a departure from normality.

Attachment avoidance, attachment anxiety, permissiveness, communion and instrumentality did not deviate significantly from normality ($ps > .05$), whereas birth control scores did, $W = .937$, $p = .001$. In view of this result and the ordinal, bounded nature of the scores, non-parametric tests were used.

### *Reliability Analysis*

***Table 3 Internal Consistency of the Study Measures***

| Scale dimension | Number of items | Cronbach's α |
|---|---|---|
| **BSAS Permissiveness** | 10 | .774 |
| **BSAS Birth Control** | 3 | .624 |
| **BSAS Communion** | 5 | .722 |
| **BSAS Instrumentality** | 5 | .762 |
| **ECR-S Avoidance** | 6 | .647 |
| **ECR-S Anxiety** | 6 | .751 |

*Note.* BSAS = Brief Sexual Attitudes Scale; ECR-S = Experiences in Close Relationships–Short Form.

Permissiveness, communion, instrumentality and attachment anxiety showed acceptable internal consistency, whereas birth control and attachment avoidance had lower coefficients; findings involving these two subscales should be interpreted cautiously.

### *Correlations Between Attachment and Sexual-Attitude Dimensions (H1)*

***Table 4 Spearman Correlations Among Attachment Dimensions and Sexual-Attitude Dimensions***

| Variable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1. ECR-S Avoidance** | — | | | | | |
| **2. ECR-S Anxiety** | .209 | — | | | | |
| **3. BSAS Permissiveness** | −.256* | .045 | — | | | |
| **4. BSAS Birth Control** | .337** | −.068 | −.020 | — | | |
| **5. BSAS Communion** | −.042 | −.297** | .171 | −.036 | — | |
| **6. BSAS Instrumentality** | −.281* | −.180 | .479** | −.166 | .333** | — |

*Note. N* = 76. Values are Spearman's rho (ρ). *p < .05. p < .01 (two-tailed)*

**Attachment avoidance.** Avoidance was negatively correlated with permissiveness, $\rho = -.256$, $p = .025$, and with instrumentality, $\rho = -.281$, $p = .014$, and positively correlated with birth control attitudes, $\rho = .337$, $p = .003$. Its correlations with communion, $\rho = -.042$, $p = .720$, and with attachment anxiety, $\rho = .209$, $p = .069$, were not significant.

**Attachment anxiety.** Anxiety was negatively correlated with communion, $\rho = -.297$, $p = .009$. Its correlations with permissiveness, $\rho = .045$, $p = .698$; birth control, $\rho = -.068$, $p = .561$; and instrumentality, $\rho = -.180$, $p = .119$, were not significant.

**Sexual-attitude dimensions.** Permissiveness, $\rho = .479$, $p < .001$, and communion, $\rho = .333$, $p = .003$, were positively correlated with instrumentality. The correlations between permissiveness and birth control, $\rho = -.020$, $p = .862$; permissiveness and communion, $\rho = .171$, $p = .140$; birth control and communion, $\rho = -.036$, $p = .755$; and birth control and instrumentality, $\rho = -.166$, $p = .152$, were not significant. Thus, four of the eight attachment–attitude correlations relevant to H1 were significant, with effect sizes in the small-to-moderate range.

### *Comparison of Casual-Encounter Frequency Groups (H2 and H3)*

*Table 5 Mann–Whitney U Tests Comparing Attachment and Sexual-Attitude Scores Across Encounter-Frequency Groups*

| Variable | Group 1 mean rank | Group 2 mean rank | U | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **ECR-S Avoidance** | 37.62 | 40.19 | 606.00 | .633 |
| **ECR-S Anxiety** | 38.52 | 38.46 | 649.00 | .996 |
| **BSAS Permissiveness** | 43.21 | 29.44 | 414.50 | .010 |
| **BSAS Birth Control** | 41.05 | 33.60 | 522.50 | .157 |
| **BSAS Communion** | 40.32 | 35.00 | 559.00 | .319 |
| **BSAS Instrumentality** | 38.19 | 39.10 | 634.50 | .869 |

*Note.* Group 1 = fewer than three encounters ($n$ = 50); Group 2 = more than three encounters ($n$ = 26). $U$ = Mann–Whitney U statistic. Tests are two-tailed.

**Sexual attitudes (H2).** A significant difference was found for permissiveness, $U = 414.50$, $p = .010$: participants reporting fewer than three encounters had a higher mean rank (43.21) than those reporting more than three (29.44). Differences in birth control, $U = 522.50$, $p = .157$ (41.05 vs. 33.60); communion, $U = 559.00$, $p = .319$ (40.32 vs. 35.00); and instrumentality, $U = 634.50$, $p = .869$ (38.19 vs. 39.10) were not significant.

**Attachment (H3).** The groups did not differ significantly in attachment avoidance, $U = 606.00$, $p = .633$ (mean ranks 37.62 vs. 40.19), or attachment anxiety, $U = 649.00$, $p = .996$ (38.52 vs. 38.46).

### *Summary of Hypothesis Testing*

H1 was partially rejected: attachment avoidance was significantly associated with permissiveness, birth control and instrumentality, and attachment anxiety with communion, while the remaining attachment–attitude associations were not significant. H2 was partially rejected: the groups differed significantly in permissiveness but not in birth control, communion or instrumentality. H3 was retained: the groups did not differ significantly in attachment anxiety or avoidance.

## DISCUSSION

This study examined how attachment-related anxiety and avoidance relate to four dimensions of sexual attitudes among 76 young men, and whether men reporting fewer or more casual sexual encounters differ on these variables. Three broad patterns emerged. First, the two attachment dimensions related to different attitude dimensions: avoidance to permissiveness, birth control and instrumentality, and anxiety to communion. Second, permissiveness was higher among men reporting fewer encounters. Third, attachment anxiety and avoidance did not distinguish the encounter-frequency groups. Each pattern is discussed below in relation to recent literature, with the caveat that the design is cross-sectional and the effects are modest.

### *Attachment Avoidance and Sexual Attitudes*

Avoidance was negatively correlated with permissiveness ($\rho = -.256$) and instrumentality ($\rho = -.281$). A common expectation is that men who are uncomfortable with emotional closeness would favour uncommitted, pleasure-focused sex. The present data do not support that expectation for attitudes. Related evidence is mixed: studies framed in life-history and developmental terms have linked insecure attachment with more unrestricted sociosexuality

(Chen, 2017; Hackathorn & Malm, 2022), whereas among college women, self-reliance, an orientation conceptually close to avoidance, was negatively related to hook-up behaviour through lower enhancement motives (Schneider & Katz, 2017). The present finding is more consistent with the latter pattern, and one possible interpretation is that avoidance in this sample reflected a general reluctance to engage with sexual and relational matters rather than a preference for casual sex. This interpretation was not tested here and should be regarded as a hypothesis for future work. It is also important to note that sociosexuality and hook-up frequency differ conceptually from BSAS permissiveness, so direct comparisons are limited.

Avoidance was positively correlated with birth control attitudes ($\rho$ = .337). The substantive meaning of this association depends on the scoring direction of the birth control items, which should be confirmed, and the subscale's internal consistency was low ($\alpha$ = .624). The association concerns attitudes and should not be read as evidence of contraceptive behaviour.

### *Attachment Anxiety and Communion*

Attachment anxiety was negatively correlated with communion ($\rho$ = −.297): more anxious men endorsed the idea of sex as an expression of closeness and bonding to a lesser degree. Because anxious individuals typically seek closeness and reassurance, one might have expected a positive association. Recent work suggests that the motives of anxious individuals in sexual contexts are complex: in Chinese college students, both intimacy and coping motives mediated the link between anxious attachment and the number of hook-up partners (Yu et al., 2022), and in couples, attachment-related sexual motives were linked to men's sexual intimacy and satisfaction (Gewirtz-Meydan & Finzi-Dottan, 2018). Longitudinal dyadic evidence further indicates that sexual desire and intimacy displays can reduce relationship-specific insecurity over time (Mizrahi et al., 2016). It is possible that for anxious men, sex is associated with worry or with coping rather than with a secure sense of connection, which could lower endorsement of communal statements; however, motives were not measured here.

Communion is an attitude dimension and not a measure of emotional intimacy. The finding therefore does not show that more anxious men are less emotionally close to their partners. Anxiety was not significantly related to permissiveness, birth control or instrumentality, suggesting that, in this sample, anxiety was linked specifically to the relational meaning of sex rather than to attitudes about commitment or pleasure.

### *Relationships Among Sexual-Attitude Dimensions*

Permissiveness ($\rho$ = .479) and communion ($\rho$ = .333) were both positively correlated with instrumentality, whereas permissiveness and communion were not significantly related. Communal and instrumental orientations therefore did not compete in this sample; men could value both closeness and physical pleasure in sex. This pattern supports a multidimensional view of sexual attitudes and is consistent with evidence that people report a mixture of relational and sexual rewards from casual sex (Anders et al., 2020) and that hook-ups can serve as a route into relationships (Kettrey & Johnson, 2021; Wade, 2021).

### *Encounter Frequency and Permissiveness*

The finding that men reporting fewer than three encounters had higher permissiveness ranks (43.21) than men reporting more than three (29.44) was unexpected. The result should be

interpreted cautiously. First, it rests on a small comparison group ($n$ = 26) and a single significant difference among six comparisons. Second, the direction of BSAS scoring used in the analysis should be verified, because a reversal would change the interpretation. Third, attitudes and behaviour are different constructs.

Several explanations are possible, none of which can be tested with the present data. Men with more casual experiences may have encountered some of the costs described in recent research, such as regret, ambiguity or negative emotional reactions (Anders et al., 2020; Napper et al., 2016), which might temper their endorsement of permissive statements. Alternatively, men with fewer encounters may hold more permissive views in principle while having had fewer opportunities, a possibility consistent with evidence that actual sexual activity among young adults is often lower than popular accounts of hook-up culture imply (Twenge et al., 2017). Social norms that require sexual casualness (Wade, 2021) and the wider Indian context, in which attitudes towards premarital sex are changing but remain mixed (Kanth et al., 2023; Majumdar, 2018), may also create gaps between attitudes and behaviour. These remain conjectures; the study did not assess motives, opportunities, relationship status or the emotional consequences of encounters.

### *Encounter Frequency and Attachment*

The two groups did not differ in attachment anxiety ($p$ = .996) or avoidance ($p$ = .633), and they did not differ in communion, birth control or instrumentality. This is consistent with recent evidence that the links between attachment and casual sex operate largely through motives (Schneider & Katz, 2017; Yu et al., 2022) and that the consequences of casual sex vary across people and situations (Wesche et al., 2021). The number of encounters alone therefore appears to be a weak indicator of attachment orientation. The non-significant results do not show that no differences exist in the wider population; the small second group and the broad categories limited statistical power and sensitivity.

### *Theoretical Implications*

- First, the findings support treating attachment anxiety and avoidance as distinct dimensions with different correlates: avoidance related to attitudes about commitment, pleasure and contraception, whereas anxiety related to the relational meaning of sex.
- Second, sexual attitudes are multifaceted; communal and instrumental orientations co-occurred rather than opposed each other.
- Third, attitudes and behaviour should be distinguished: permissive attitudes did not correspond to more frequent casual sex, and encounter frequency did not correspond to attachment orientation.

Finally, emotional intimacy is related to, but distinct from, attachment security and communion, and should be measured directly in future work.

### *Practical Implications*

- **Counselling.** Counsellors working with young men may find it useful to explore attachment concerns alongside beliefs about the meaning of sex, since anxiety and avoidance were associated with different attitude dimensions. These associations are modest and should not be used diagnostically.
- **Sexual-health education.** Programmes for young adults, including in Indian colleges, could address permissiveness, contraception, communion and

instrumentality as separate topics and include skills for sexual decision-making, an approach also suggested by recent reviews of casual sex outcomes (Wesche et al., 2021). Encounter frequency should not be used as a proxy for attitudes or risk.

- **Assessment.** Separate measures of attachment, sexual attitudes, sexual behaviour, motives and emotional intimacy would allow more accurate conclusions than inferring one construct from another.

### *Limitations*

- **Sample size and composition.** The sample of 76 men aged 18–27 years, recruited through universities, student communities and social media, may not represent men of other ages, educational levels, regions or relationship situations. Only men were studied, so gender comparisons are not possible.
- **Generalisability to India.** Verified Indian evidence on attachment and sexual attitudes is limited, so the present findings could be compared mainly with Western and East Asian studies. Regional, religious and class differences within India (Majumdar, 2018) were not examined.
- **Cross-sectional design.** Variables were measured at a single time point, so causal and temporal conclusions cannot be drawn.
- **Self-report.** Responses may have been influenced by social desirability or discomfort in reporting sexual attitudes and experiences.
- **No direct measure of emotional intimacy.** Neither the ECR-S nor the BSAS communion subscale measures emotional intimacy; conclusions about emotional closeness are not possible.
- **Internal consistency.** Alpha was relatively low for birth control ($\alpha$ = .624) and attachment avoidance ($\alpha$ = .647), which may attenuate or destabilise associations involving these subscales.
- **Encounter-frequency categories.** The broad categories (fewer than three vs. more than three) and the unequal group sizes (50 vs. 26) limited sensitivity and statistical power.
- **Unmeasured variables.** Motives for casual sex, relationship status, alcohol use, peer norms and dating-app use, all identified as relevant in recent research, were not assessed.

### *Future Directions*

1. Include direct measures of emotional intimacy and of sexual motives.
2. Recruit larger and more diverse Indian samples, including women and men from different regions, educational backgrounds and relationship situations, to allow gender and cultural comparisons.
3. Record the exact number of casual sexual encounters and analyse it as a continuous variable, or pre-specify group cut-offs.
4. Use longitudinal designs to examine how attachment, sexual attitudes and casual sexual experiences change over time.
5. Examine contextual factors such as peer norms, dating-app use, alcohol use and post-encounter emotional reactions.
6. Replicate the findings independently, and examine the psychometric properties of the BSAS and ECR-S in Indian male samples.

## CONCLUSION

Among 76 young men, attachment avoidance was associated with lower permissiveness and instrumentality and with higher birth control scores, and attachment anxiety was associated with lower communion. Permissiveness and communion each co-varied positively with instrumentality. Men reporting fewer casual encounters had higher permissiveness ranks, and attachment orientation did not distinguish the encounter-frequency groups. Associations between attachment and sexual attitudes therefore depend on the specific dimensions considered, and the number of casual encounters should not be treated as an index of attachment orientation or emotional intimacy. The cross-sectional design, modest sample, reliance on self-report and absence of a direct measure of emotional intimacy limit the conclusions that can be drawn.

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