

The Role of Attachment Styles in Adult Relationships

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Registration No. 241MSCD00263 | Academic Year 2024–2026

Abstract: *This study explored attachment-related responses and self-reported relationship experiences among adults. A quantitative, cross-sectional survey was conducted using an online questionnaire; the supplied response file contained 57 records. The questionnaire included demographic questions, 12 attachment-related statements, six relationship-experience statements, and an optional open-ended question about healthy relationships. Descriptive statistics were calculated. For exploratory analysis, four items concerning fear of rejection and reassurance were averaged into an anxiety-related index, and four items concerning emotional disclosure, closeness, and independence were averaged into an avoidance-related index. These researcher-created indices are not validated psychological scales. Spearman rank correlations were used to examine associations with relationship-experience ratings. The six-item relationship-experience composite had a mean of 3.65 on a 1–5 scale. The anxiety-related index was positively associated with the composite ($p = .315$, $p = .017$), as was the avoidance-related index ($p = .430$, $p = .001$), contrary to the initially anticipated negative direction. Since the items were not validated, no reverse-scoring was applied, and the sample was a convenience sample with uneven demographic representation, these findings must be interpreted cautiously. They do not establish causation or justify classifying individuals by attachment style.*

Keywords: attachment; adult relationships; attachment anxiety; attachment avoidance; emotional intimacy; relationship experiences

Research Highlights

- The study summarises 57 online survey responses from adults.
- Relationship-experience item means ranged from 3.63 to 3.67 on a five-point scale.
- Two exploratory item indices showed positive, not negative, associations with the relationship-experience composite.
- Non-validated items and convenience sampling limit interpretation and generalisability.

1. Introduction

Close relationships can provide emotional support, belonging, intimacy, and a sense of well-being. Adults differ in how they approach closeness, communicate needs, seek reassurance, and respond to conflict. Attachment theory provides a framework for examining these differences by considering expectations about the availability of others and the self's worthiness of care.

Bowlby's attachment theory emphasised attachment bonds and internal working models: expectations about whether important others will be available and whether support can be sought when needed. Ainsworth and colleagues' research on infant-caregiver relationships provided an influential foundation for later attachment research. Hazan and Shaver (1987) extended attachment concepts to adult romantic relationships, while Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) proposed a four-category model of adult attachment. Later research commonly examined adult attachment dimensionally, particularly through anxiety about rejection and avoidance of emotional closeness (Brennan et al., 1998).

Attachment-related tendencies may be relevant to trust, emotional disclosure, intimacy, communication, and responses to relationship stress. However, they do not determine relationship outcomes on their own. Partner

behaviour, personal history, social context, and current circumstances also matter. The same person may behave differently across relationships and situations, and attachment should not be treated as a fixed label.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The present project examines how respondents answer statements about closeness, reassurance, emotional disclosure, independence, and fear of abandonment, alongside questions about their relationship experiences. A central concern is whether the responses grouped as anxiety-related and avoidance-related tendencies are associated with participants' ratings of satisfaction, emotional support, conflict resolution, well-being, communication, and feeling understood.

1.2 Objectives

- To describe attachment-related responses reported by adult participants.
- To summarise self-reported relationship satisfaction, emotional support, conflict resolution, well-being, communication, and feeling understood.
- To explore associations between researcher-created anxiety-related and avoidance-related indices and relationship-experience ratings.
- To summarise participants' descriptions of a healthy relationship where these responses are available for analysis.

1.3 Research questions

The study asks: What patterns appear in the respondents' attachment-related ratings? How do participants rate their relationship experiences? Are the two exploratory item indices associated with the relationship-experience

composite? The analysis is exploratory because the questionnaire was not established as a validated instrument.

1.4 Significance and Scope

The project offers a small, context-specific description of survey responses and illustrates the importance of careful measurement in psychological research. It is not intended to diagnose respondents, classify them into attachment categories, or represent the adult population as a whole.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Attachment theory

Bowlby (1982/1969) proposed that attachment relationships support protection and emotional regulation and that repeated interactions contribute to internal working models of the self and others. These models may shape expectations in later relationships, although early experiences do not permanently determine adult functioning. Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall (1978) studied infant attachment using the Strange Situation procedure and described patterns in infant-caregiver relationships. Those categories were developed for a particular developmental context and should not be directly applied to adults without appropriate adult measures.

2.2 Attachment in romantic relationships

Hazan and Shaver (1987) conceptualised romantic love as an attachment process and helped establish adult romantic relationships as a field for attachment research. Their work encouraged researchers to consider differences in security, anxiety, avoidance, and intimacy. Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) proposed four adult attachment patterns—secure, preoccupied, dismissing, and fearful—based on representations of the self and others. These models offer conceptual tools, but categories should not be assigned from an informal questionnaire.

2.3 Anxiety and avoidance dimensions

Brennan, Clark, and Shaver (1998) reviewed self-report measurement of adult attachment and highlighted anxiety and avoidance as central dimensions. Attachment anxiety generally concerns fear of rejection or abandonment and a heightened need for reassurance. Attachment avoidance generally concerns discomfort with dependence, vulnerability, or emotional closeness. These dimensions are commonly measured with established instruments and defined scoring rules, rather than by selecting a few statements without psychometric evaluation.

2.4 Attachment and relationship quality

Research has examined associations between attachment, working models, emotion regulation, intimacy, and relationship quality. Collins and Read (1990) studied adult attachment, working models, and relationship quality in dating couples. Simpson (1990) investigated the influence of attachment styles on romantic relationships, while Feeney and Noller (1990) considered attachment style as a predictor

of adult romantic relationships. Mikulincer and Shaver (2007) synthesised evidence on adult attachment processes, including emotion regulation and close relationships.

2.5 Rationale for the present study

The literature provides a theoretical basis for studying attachment-related responses, but the current project uses a researcher-created questionnaire rather than a validated measure. Therefore, its findings should be treated as preliminary descriptive evidence. The project's value lies in summarising this sample and identifying measurement and sampling improvements for future work.

3. Method

3.1 Research design

A quantitative, cross-sectional survey design was used. Data were collected through an online questionnaire and measured at one time point. The design allows description of the responses and exploration of associations but cannot establish temporal order or causation.

3.2 Participants and sampling

The supplied response PDF contained 57 records. Participants were recruited through an accessible peer/friend network using convenience sampling. The sample included several age groups and relationship statuses, but women and participants aged 21–30 years formed the majority. Because selection was not random, the sample may differ from the broader adult population.

3.3 Instrument

The questionnaire included demographic questions; 12 attachment-related statements about closeness, trust, reassurance, emotional disclosure, abandonment, and independence; six relationship-experience statements; and an optional open-ended question about the meaning of a healthy relationship. Rating responses ranged from 1 to 5. The response file did not establish that the items formed a validated scale or that the response anchors had been psychometrically tested.

3.4 Data preparation and variables

The response PDF was reviewed and its 57 records were organised for analysis. Frequencies and percentages were calculated for demographic variables. Means and standard deviations were calculated for rating items. For exploratory analysis, the anxiety-related index was calculated as the mean of items A2, A4, A6, and A10, which concern worry about love, leaving, reassurance, and abandonment. The avoidance-related index was calculated as the mean of A5, A7, A9, and A12, which concern showing deep feelings, closeness, opening up, and independence. The relationship-experience composite was the mean of items R1–R6.

3.5 Statistical Analysis

Spearman rank correlations were used to examine associations between the two exploratory indices and the six relationship-experience items/composite. This non-parametric measure was selected for exploratory analysis of ordinal ratings and small item groupings. A two-tailed $p < .05$ threshold was used as a conventional reference point. Multiple exploratory comparisons were conducted, so the p -values should not be treated as confirmatory evidence.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Participation in psychological surveys should be voluntary and based on informed consent. Respondents should be able to skip questions, and direct identifiers should be excluded from the analysis dataset. Data should be stored securely and reported in aggregate. The questionnaire scores in this project should not be used to diagnose or label participants.

4. Results

4.1 Participant Characteristics

The sample comprised 57 respondents. Participants aged 26–30 years were the largest group (27; 47.4%), followed by those aged 21–25 years (19; 33.3%). Five participants were aged 31–40 years (8.8%), four were above 40 years (7.0%), and two were aged 18–20 years (3.5%).

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents

Variable	Category	n	%
Age	18–20 years	2	3.5
Age	21–25 years	19	33.3
Age	26–30 years	27	47.4
Age	31–40 years	5	8.8
Age	Above 40 years	4	7.0
Gender	Woman	47	82.5
Gender	Man	9	15.8
Gender	Prefer not to say	1	1.8

Forty-seven respondents identified as women (82.5%), nine as men (15.8%), and one preferred not to say (1.8%). With respect to current relationship status, 26 respondents were married (45.6%), 16 were dating or in a relationship (28.1%), and 13 were single (22.8%). One respondent selected separated/divorced and one selected other/prefer not to say (1.8% each).

4.2 Relationship History

Forty-three respondents (75.4%) reported having had a romantic relationship, ten (17.5%) reported no such experience, and four (7.0%) preferred not to say. The duration of the current or most recent relationship varied, with 21 respondents reporting more than three years and 12 reporting one to three years. Some selected “not applicable” or preferred not to say. This variation matters because partner-focused questions may not apply equally to respondents with different relationship histories.

4.3 Attachment-related Item Responses

The questionnaire included statements about getting close to a partner, depending on a partner, trusting a partner, worrying about love or abandonment, needing reassurance, feeling nervous when a partner gets too close, opening up emotionally, communicating needs, and preferring independence. These items cover conceptually relevant topics, but their inclusion alone does not demonstrate that they form reliable anxiety or avoidance scales.

4.4 Descriptive Statistics

The six relationship-experience items had mean ratings between 3.63 and 3.67 on a five-point scale. The items concerned satisfaction with the relationship, emotional support, healthy conflict resolution, relationship-related well-being, talking things over with a partner, and feeling understood. The six-item composite mean was 3.65 (SD = 1.29). The composite is used here only as a descriptive summary; it has not been validated as a single measure of relationship quality.

Table 2: Summary of exploratory indices and relationship-experience composite

Measure	N	Mean	SD	Range
Anxiety-related exploratory index	57	3.37	1.05	1–5
Avoidance-related exploratory index	57	3.27	1.01	1–5
Relationship-experience composite	57	3.65	1.29	1–5

The anxiety-related index had a mean of 3.37 (SD = 1.05), while the avoidance-related index had a mean of 3.27 (SD = 1.01). These researcher-created indices are not standardised scores, do not have established norms, and should not be used to assign attachment categories. No reverse-scoring was applied because the questionnaire did not provide a validated scoring key.

4.5 Correlation analyses

The anxiety-related index was positively associated with the relationship-experience composite (Spearman $\rho = .315$, $p = .017$). The avoidance-related index also showed a positive association with the composite ($\rho = .430$, $p = .001$). These directions were contrary to the negative associations anticipated in the initial hypotheses. A positive coefficient means higher index values tended to occur alongside higher ratings in this dataset; it does not establish that anxiety or avoidance improves relationships.

Table 3: Correlations with the relationship-experience composite

Exploratory index	Spearman ρ	p-value	Observed direction
Anxiety-related	0.315	0.017	Positive
Avoidance-related	0.430	0.001	Positive

The anxiety-related index was associated with satisfaction ($\rho = .339$, $p = .010$), emotional support ($\rho = .404$, $p = .002$), relationship-related well-being ($\rho = .354$, $p = .007$), talking things over ($\rho = .303$, $p = .022$), and feeling understood ($\rho = .267$, $p = .045$), but not significantly with healthy conflict resolution ($\rho = .198$, $p = .139$). The avoidance-related index showed positive correlations with all six relationship-

experience items, with coefficients ranging from .331 to .437 and reported p-values from .001 to .012.

5. Discussion

This study explored attachment-related responses and self-reported relationship experiences among 57 survey respondents. Relationship-experience item means were slightly above the midpoint of the five-point response scale. The anxiety-related and avoidance-related exploratory indices were positively associated with the relationship-experience composite, contrary to the initially anticipated negative direction.

5.1 Interpretation

The mean ratings suggest that respondents, on average, selected moderately positive responses to the six relationship-experience statements. However, these items have not been validated as a unified measure of relationship quality, and respondents had different relationship circumstances. The composite should therefore be treated as a descriptive summary rather than a definitive assessment of relationship satisfaction.

The positive correlations do not show that attachment anxiety or avoidance improves relationships. The selected items may not cleanly represent the intended constructs, and the indices were not tested for factor structure, reliability, convergent validity, or discriminant validity. Without a validated scoring procedure, these indices cannot be equated with established attachment measures.

5.2 Limitations

The sample was small, demographically uneven, and recruited through convenience sampling. The questionnaire was researcher-created and not shown to be validated; the study was cross-sectional and self-reported, so it cannot establish causation. Multiple exploratory correlations increase the possibility of chance findings. Some respondents reported no romantic relationship experience, which may affect how partner-focused items were understood. Open-ended responses were not subjected to formal qualitative coding.

6. Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies should use an authorised, validated adult attachment measure, such as the Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R), following its use conditions and scoring instructions. Any researcher-developed items should be piloted, reviewed by subject experts, and evaluated for reliability and validity before composite scores are interpreted.

Researchers should define the target population and relationship eligibility criteria in advance, recruit a larger and more diverse sample, and include suitable “not applicable” options for partner-specific questions. Hypotheses, scoring rules, and statistical tests should be pre-specified; item distributions should be checked before combining items, and effect sizes and confidence intervals

should accompany p-values. If open-ended responses are central, a systematic qualitative coding procedure should be used.

7. Conclusion

This study described attachment-related statements and relationship experiences among 57 survey respondents. The six relationship-experience items had means between 3.63 and 3.67, with a composite mean of 3.65. The researcher-created anxiety-related and avoidance-related indices showed positive associations with the composite, contrary to the predicted negative direction. Because the questionnaire was not validated, the sample was recruited through convenience sampling, and respondents differed in relationship history, these findings should be treated as preliminary. The results do not establish causation and do not justify assigning participants to attachment-style categories. The main lesson is methodological: future work should use validated measures, clear eligibility criteria, transparent scoring, and a larger, more diverse sample.

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Editorial note

This concise manuscript was prepared from the supplied project report and its reported 57 survey records. Before

submission, confirm all calculations against the original dataset, verify references and questionnaire scoring, and follow the university's formatting and authorship requirements.