

**EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ADULT
ATTACHMENT
STYLE AND PERCEIVED PARTNER
RESPONSIVENESS
IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP**

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Abstract

The current study explores the complex relationship between adult attachment styles and perceived partner responsiveness in the context of romantic relationships. Rooted within the framework of attachment theory, this study specifically examines how two core dimensions of adult attachment—attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance—are related to an individual's perception of their romantic partner's emotional responsiveness. A total of 60 participants were selected through convenience sampling and were currently involved in romantic relationships. Data were collected via online self-report questionnaires, including the Experiences in Close Relationships - Short Form (ECR-S) to measure attachment anxiety and avoidance, and the Perceived Partner Responsiveness Scale (Short Version) to assess partners' perceptions of their partner's understanding, validity, and emotional support. Both scales were selected due to their strong psychometric properties and relevance to romantic attachment and intimacy processes. Statistical analyses were conducted using Microsoft Excel, where descriptive statistics were calculated, followed by Pearson correlation analysis

to examine the relationship between attachment variables and perceived partner responsiveness. Results revealed a moderate negative relationship between attachment anxiety and perceived partner responsiveness, indicating that those who are more anxious in relationships perceive their partners as less emotionally responsive. A weak negative relationship was also observed between attachment avoidance and perceived partner responsiveness, suggesting that those who are uncomfortable with emotional intimacy may experience difficulty recognizing emotional support from their partners.

Keywords: Adult Attachment, Perceived Partner Responsiveness, Attachment Anxiety, Attachment Avoidance.

Introduction

Love is one of the deepest emotions known to man. There are many forms of love, but many find its expression in a romantic relationship with a suitable partner (or partners). For these individuals, romantic relationships are one of the most meaningful aspects of life and a source of deep fulfillment.

A romantic relationship is a voluntary connection between two individuals, emotionally and physically connected bonds, characterized by feelings of love, attraction, and often, intimacy. It involves to share attraction commitment, trust, infatuation, and a deep emotional connection with each other.

A romantic relationship is defined as mutual, ongoing and voluntary interactions between two partners that is characterized by specific expressions of affection and intimacy (Collins, et al., 2009).

Romantic relationships are among the most transformative experiences in a person's life, especially during adolescence — this stage is important because of search for identity, emotional fulfillment, and interpersonal connection. Young adults navigate the complexities of love and intimacy due to both digital communication and changing social values which is increasingly shaped in world. These relationships, whether fleeting or long-term, often leave a lasting emotional imprint. They shape how individuals perceive themselves, their partners, and the broader concept of love and attachment.

Yet, while some relationships provide warmth, mutual understanding, and growth, others are marred by insecurity, misunderstanding, and unmet emotional needs.

Understanding why people experience relationships so differently—why one partner may feel loved and secure, while the other feels anxious or distant—requires exploration of the psychological underpinnings that govern emotional behaviours. One of the most powerful and empirically supported frameworks in this context is attachment theory, which explains how early emotional bonds shape our adult relationships. In parallel, another important construct is perceived partner responsiveness, which refers to how well individuals feel understood, cared for, and validated by their romantic partners.

The aim of this study is to explore these two key psychological variables—adult attachment style and perceived partner responsiveness—and how they interact to shape relationship dynamics. Focusing on young adults in romantic relationships, particularly within the culturally rich and evolving landscape of India, the current study provides insights into how internal mental models and self-concepts jointly influence relationship satisfaction and emotional security.

Attachment theory was first developed by John Bowlby (1969/1982), a British psychoanalyst who proposed that humans have an innate need to form close emotional bonds with others. Although his work began with an emphasis on infant-caregiver relationships, later research by Hazan and Shaver (1987) extended attachment theory to adult romantic relationships. They argued that the same behavioural mechanisms that guide children's relationships with caregivers—such as seeking closeness, expressing grief, and seeking comfort—are also evident in romantic relationships.

According to contemporary models of attachment, adult attachment is measured on two dimensions:

Attachment anxiety: This refers to the extent to which a person fears abandonment, craves closeness, and is excessively concerned about the availability of their partner.

Attachment avoidance: This dimension reflects discomfort with intimacy, dependence, and emotional closeness.

These dimensions combine to create four general attachment styles: secure (low anxiety, low avoidance), anxious-preoccupied (high anxiety, low avoidance), dismissive-avoidant (low anxiety, high avoidance), and fearful-avoidant (high anxiety, high avoidance). People with secure attachments trust their partners and feel confident in their relationships. In contrast, those with insecure attachments often struggle with miscommunication, unmet emotional needs, and dissatisfaction.

Perceived Partner Responsiveness (PPR) is a psychological construct that measures the extent to which an individual believes that their romantic partner is understanding, caring, and valid. According to Reiss and colleagues (2004), PPR is important and crucial for increasing intimacy and satisfaction in intimate relationships. When individuals feel that their partners genuinely care about them and respond to their emotion, they are more likely to experience emotional closeness, trust, and overall relationship satisfaction.

However, perceptions are not always objective. An individual's attachment style can determine how they interpret their partner's behaviours and view. For example, someone high in attachment anxiety may perceive their partner as inattentive or distant, even if the partner is generally supportive. Similarly, someone high in attachment avoidance may reject or minimize expressions of affection and support, viewing them as intrusive or unnecessary.

Multiple studies have confirmed that attachment style plays a crucial role in how individuals perceive and experience their romantic relationships. Mikulincer and Shaver (2007) emphasize that insecurely attached individuals are often less accurate in interpreting their partner's behaviours. Those with high attachment anxiety tend to exaggerate problems and interpret ambiguous actions as signs of rejection. In contrast, avoidantly attached individuals often withdraw emotionally, making them less likely to acknowledge or seek emotional support.

Collins and Feeney (2004) conducted an experimental study in which individuals watched videos of their partners providing support during stressful tasks. They found that those with high attachment avoidance perceived their partner's supportive behaviours as unnecessary or even uncomfortable. In contrast, individuals with high attachment anxiety often doubted the sincerity of the support, viewing it as inadequate.

Brennan, Clark, and Shaver (1998) developed the Experiences in Close Relationships (ECR) scale, which helped researchers more precisely measure attachment-related anxiety and avoidance. This scale and its revised versions (ECR-R, ECR-S) have been widely used in psychological research to study romantic attachment. These instruments provide consistent evidence that individuals with secure attachments are more likely to perceive their partners as emotionally responsive.

In India, romantic relationships among young adults are often influenced by a mix of traditional cultural values and modern perspectives. On the one hand, personal preferences and emotional connection are increasingly emphasized; on the other hand, family approval, gender roles, and social expectations regarding marriage continue to influence relationship experiences (Dhawan & Lutz, 2020).

Many young adults in India experience stress while balancing romantic relationships with family expectations. These stresses can affect attachment behaviours. For example, attachment anxiety may increase in places where romantic partners cannot openly express commitment due to family constraints. Similarly, attachment avoidance may become a coping strategy in conservative environments that discourage emotional vulnerability.

Moreover, social pressures can influence how responsiveness is perceived. In a culture where overt emotional expression is often restrained, small gestures of care can be deeply meaningful – or go unnoticed, depending on one's attachment orientation. Therefore, it is necessary to carefully consider both psychological and cultural aspects to understand how Indian young adults perceive their partner's responsiveness.

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by two complementary frameworks:

- Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1982; Fraley & Shaver, 2000): This theory explains how internal working models formed in early relationships influence adult emotional regulation, relationship expectations, and behaviours.
- Process Model of Interpersonal Intimacy (Reiss & Shaver, 1988): This model suggests that intimacy develops when one partner expresses thoughts and feelings and perceives that the other partner responds in a way that conveys understanding, validation, and care.

Together, these frameworks suggest that individuals with insecure attachment styles may bias or misinterpret their partner's attempts to connect emotionally. As a result, these individuals may report lower levels of perceived partner responsiveness, even when their partners are objectively supportive.

Aim of the Study

While there has been extensive research on attachment theory in Western countries, relatively few studies have explored how attachment style influences perceptions of partner responsiveness in the Indian population. This gap is important, as cultural norms significantly shape relationship behaviours and expectations. Furthermore, most existing research currently uses large-scale surveys rather than focusing on young adults involved in romantic relationships, particularly in the Indian context.

This study fills this gap by exploring how attachment anxiety and avoidance in romantic relationships among young Indian adults aged 18 to 30 years are related to perceived partner responsiveness. These findings may contribute to culturally sensitive relationship counseling and interventions aimed at improving emotional communication between romantic partners.

Review of literature

Research conducted by Bowlby (1969/1982) laid the

foundation for attachment theory, emphasizing how early bonds with caregivers create internal working models that shape relationship expectations across the lifespan. These models influence the way individuals experience intimacy, security, and trust in romantic relationships.

Hazan and Shaver (1987) extended this theory to adult romantic relationships. Their research found that adult romantic love is functionally similar to infant-caregiver bonds. Adult attachment was categorized into secure, anxious, and avoidant styles, based on behaviours such as seeking intimacy, responding to separation, and using the partner as a secure base.

Fraley and Shaver (2000) further refined adult attachment research by conceptualizing attachment along two core dimensions: anxiety (fear of abandonment and excessive desire for closeness) and avoidance (discomfort with closeness and emotional dependence). These dimensions provide a more nuanced and continuous measure of adult attachment patterns.

The Experiences of Close Relationships (ECR) scale was introduced in a study conducted by Brennan, Clark, and Shaver (1998), which became the gold standard for assessing adult attachment. Their work transformed attachment anxiety and avoidance into measurable constructs, allowing researchers to examine how these adaptations influence perceptions and behaviours in relationships.

The ECR was later refined into shorter forms (e.g., ECR-R, ECR-S), which maintained high reliability and validity. These instruments have enabled extensive cross-cultural research on attachment and have made it possible to correlate attachment styles with other psychological constructs such as emotional regulation and partner responsiveness.

Reiss and Shaver (1988) introduced the interpersonal intimacy process model, proposing that intimacy is created when one partner expresses feelings and the other responds with understanding and care. Perceived partner responsiveness (PPR) refers to the perception that one's partner is emotionally connected, valid, and supportive (Reiss, Clark, & Holmes, 2004).

Meisel and Gable (2009) found that PPR is important not only during times of emotional distress but also during times of shared positive experiences. Their research highlighted that partners who respond supportively to both successes and failures increase relationship satisfaction and intimacy.

A study conducted by Mikulincer and Shaver (2007) found that attachment insecurity (both anxiety and avoidance) influences how individuals interpret partner behaviours. Anxiously attached individuals may misinterpret neutral actions as rejection, while avoidantly attached individuals may underestimate or ignore supportive gestures.

Collins and Feeney (2004) supported this with experimental results that avoidant individuals perceive their partners as objectively supportive but less supportive. Anxious individuals, despite actively seeking intimacy, are often dissatisfied due to increased emotional demands and fear of abandonment.

Grime et al. (2015) conducted a longitudinal study that showed that securely attached individuals report stable and positive perceptions of their partner's responsiveness during times of stress. In contrast, anxious individuals experience fluctuating perceptions, often influenced more by internalized insecurities than by the partner's actual behaviours.

Hudson, Lucas, and Donelan (2020) also reported that anxiously attached individuals showed high variability in their daily assessments of partner responsiveness, whereas avoidant individuals consistently underestimated their partner's emotional availability.

In the Indian context, attachment behaviours are influenced by strong family and social norms. Dhawan and Lutz (2020) explored romantic love in India and noted that the tension between modern relationship norms and traditional values often exacerbates emotional stress. Anxiously attached individuals may struggle even more when family support for romantic relationships is lacking.

Raval, Martini, and Raval (2017) examined the intergenerational transmission of attachment in Indian families. Their study

found that attachment security or insecurity developed in childhood continues to shape emotional expectations and perceptions of relationships in adulthood.

Furthermore, cultural norms often reinforce avoidant behaviours, especially among men, who may have been socialized to suppress emotional expression. This cultural reinforcement complicates the accurate perception of emotional support and contributes to a decrease in perceived partner responsiveness.

A study by Shaver and Mikulincer (2012) explored how attachment style influences emotional regulation strategies. They found that insecurely attached individuals—both anxious and avoidant—struggle with effective emotional regulation. This difficulty results in misunderstanding a partner's cues and a reduced ability to engage in emotionally responsive interactions.

Gillath, Shaver, Baek, & Chun (2008) examined neural responses related to attachment activation and found that anxiously attached individuals display heightened emotional reactivity when experiencing a lack of support from their romantic partners, reinforcing their tendency to interpret emotional cues negatively.

As a result, attachment style serves not only as a predictor but also as a mediator of emotional intimacy. Misinterpreting a partner's behaviours, avoiding emotional contact, or being overly dependent—all stem from attachment-driven regulatory patterns, which make emotional communication more difficult and stressful.

Etcheverry, Le, Wu, & Wei (2013) found that avoidantly attached individuals are more likely to devalue their partners after experiencing relationship threats. This behavior serves as a self-protective strategy but reduces emotional closeness and perceived support.

Kane, McCall, Collins, & Blascovich (2012) used experimental methods to show that anxious individuals display heightened physiological arousal and stress when their partner is unavailable, even temporarily, linking this to lower perceived reactivity.

Dewitte, De Houwer, & Buysse (2008) found that adult attachment styles influence attentional biases toward emotional faces, which can distort how individuals interpret their partner's mood and responsiveness in real time.

Knobloch & Solomon (2003) found that individuals with attachment insecurity experience greater relationship uncertainty, which affects their ability to accurately assess their partner's behavior.

Brumbaugh & Fraley (2006) studied consistency and change in adult attachment styles and concluded that stressful relationship experiences can reinforce poor perceptions of support, especially in anxious and avoidant individuals.

Rodrigues, Lopes, & Kumashiro (2017) emphasized that responsiveness is context-sensitive. They found that anxiously attached individuals are more affected by small changes in their partner's behavior, making them more reactive and more likely to experience neglect.

Lemay & Clark (2008) reported that anxiously attached individuals often put more effort into monitoring their partner's behavior, leading to emotional exhaustion and lower satisfaction with perceived support, even when their partners were caring.

Overall & Simpson (2015) found that responsiveness to romantic partners was more effective in reducing stress among securely attached individuals. In contrast, anxious and avoidant individuals showed limited benefit, suggesting a perceptual filter formed by attachment orientation.

Joel, Gordon, Impet, McDonald, & Keltner (2013) highlighted that anxious individuals may experience emotional ambivalence—they desire intimacy but feel unworthy of it—which makes them hypercritical or suspicious of their partner's responses.

Hadden, Smith, & Webster (2014) showed that insecurely attached individuals are less likely to recognize emotional availability during partner relinquishment, such as compromise or forgiveness.

Tani, Pascuzzi, and Raffagnoni (2015) conducted a cross-cultural comparison and found that attachment styles predicted emotional dissonance similarly in both Italian and Indian samples, highlighting the cross-cultural relevance of the theory.

Pistole (1993) found that avoidant individuals actively block emotional messages from their partners, often dismissing support as “unnecessary,” which contributes to emotional detachment.

McClure and Lydon (2014) revealed that anxious individuals catastrophize a partner’s absence, interpreting even temporary unavailability as rejection, resulting in reduced emotional responsiveness.

Shallcross, Howland, Bemis, Simpson, and Frazier (2011) found that individuals with insecure attachment react poorly to a partner’s disclosures and are less likely to reciprocate emotional openness, resulting in reduced perceived mutual support.

Debrot, Cook, Perez, and Horn (2012) showed that physical affection initially improves perceived support among secure individuals. Insecurely attached participants are more likely to feel emotionally detached despite physical closeness.

Borelli, David, Crowley, and Mays (2011) studied co-regulation in couples and found that securely attached dyads manage stress more effectively, while avoidant partners are less emotionally present, which reduces perceived support.

Morris, Webb, and Fletcher (2020) emphasized that partner responsiveness depends not only on behavior but also on perceptions and interpretations—areas where attachment style plays an important role.

Shaver and Mikulincer (2009) developed the concept of “attachment security priming”, finding that increasing a person’s sense of security increases their ability to perceive responsiveness from others, even in previously misperceived situations.

Methodology

This section outlines the detailed research methodology adopted for the current study that explored the relationship between adult attachment styles and perceived partner responsiveness in romantic relationships. Every stage of the study – from conception and design to data analysis – was conducted with the utmost adherence to ethical principles and academic rigor. The methodology is organized under several key areas, providing a transparent and human-centered view of the research process.

Research Design

This study utilized a quantitative, cross-sectional, and correlational research design. Quantitative research methods are highly effective for quantitatively measuring psychological constructs and analyzing relationships using statistical tools. This design was particularly well-suited to exploring the strength and direction of the association between adult attachment styles (anxiety and avoidance) and perceived partner responsiveness.

Being cross-sectional, the study collected data at one point in time, providing a real-time snapshot of participants' relational and emotional experiences. The correlational nature of the study allowed the researcher to examine the natural associations between variables without manipulating any factors, making it theoretically appropriate for a non-clinical population. The overall structure of the design ensured the necessary expertise, feasibility, and scientific reliability for a postgraduate-level study.

Objectives and Hypotheses

The main objective of this study was to examine how adult attachment styles are related to how individuals perceive emotional responsiveness from their romantic partners. Drawing from psychological theories of attachment and intimacy, this study aimed to provide insight into the psychological basis of romantic relationships among young adults.

Objectives:

- To assess attachment anxiety and avoidance using a psychometrically valid scale.
- To measure perceived partner responsiveness using a structured and validated scale.
- To examine the correlation between attachment style and perceived emotional support in romantic relationships.

Hypotheses:

- H1: There is a negative relationship between attachment anxiety and perceived partner responsiveness.
- H2: There is a negative relationship between attachment avoidance and perceived partner responsiveness.

Participants

The sample consisted of 60 participants, all of whom were young adults aged 18 to 30 years and were currently in a romantic relationship. Participants were recruited through digital means, specifically social media platforms, educational WhatsApp groups, and online peer networks.

Inclusion Criteria:

- Aged 18 to 30 years
- Currently in a romantic relationship
- Able to understand English (as the instruments were in English)
- Informed consent provided

Exclusion criteria:

- Individuals not in a current relationship
- Participants with incomplete information or inconsistencies in responses
- Self-reported history of serious mental disorders that may affect the perception of relationships

- The sampling method used was non-probability convenience sampling, chosen for its feasibility in an academic setting and its suitability for exploratory psychological research.

Tools Used

Two standardized and widely used self-report instruments were used to measure the variable of interest: the Experiences of Close Relationships - Short Form (ECR-S) and the Perceived Partner Responsiveness Scale (PPRS). These instruments were selected based on their theoretical basis, reliability, validity, ease of use, and relevance to the study variable.

Experiences in Close Relationships Scale - Short Form (ECR-S)

The Experiences in Close Relationships Scale - Short Form (ECR-S) is a 12-item self-report measure

designed to assess adults' attachment patterns in romantic relationships, representing a more concise version of the original 36-item ECR (Wei et al., 2007). Built on contemporary attachment theory,

the ECR-S assesses how individuals think, feel, and behave in romantic relationships, focusing specifically on attachment-related anxiety and avoidance dimensions.

The ECR-S measures a two-dimensional framework of adult romantic attachment:

- Anxiety - assessing fear of rejection and abandonment, need for approval, and distress over the relationship
- Avoidance - measuring discomfort with intimacy, dependence, and intimate self-disclosure

For clinicians, the ECR-S offers several distinct advantages. Its concise format makes it ideal for routine clinical assessments, providing robust insights into relationship functioning and taking only a few minutes to complete. This measure helps clinicians quickly identify attachment-related difficulties at the root of relationship conflict, as well as larger attachment themes that may be affecting interpersonal style or the

therapeutic alliance.

The ECR-S is particularly useful in the context of couples therapy and relationship counseling. It helps clinicians understand each partner's attachment style, anticipate relationship dynamics, and tailor interventions accordingly. For example, identifying high attachment anxiety in one partner and high avoidance in the other can help explain patterns of pursuit-withdrawal and inform specific therapeutic strategies. The importance of this measure on current romantic relationships makes it particularly relevant for addressing current relationship difficulties and developing targeted treatment plans. In addition to assessing current relationship patterns, the ECR-R can be used retrospectively where a respondent recalls how they felt during a previous romantic attachment and responds accordingly.

Scoring and Interpretation

The ECR-S scores are composed of two main attachment dimensions, Attachment Avoidance and Attachment Anxiety. The scoring system reflects the distinct patterns of attachment in close relationships:

- Attachment Avoidance (items 1,3,5,7,9,11; score range: 6 to 36): High scores indicate intense discomfort with intimacy and dependence in relationships, which manifests as emotional distance, excessive self-reliance, and a reluctance to share personal feelings or rely on others. Individuals high in Avoidance tend to maintain strict emotional boundaries and may use defensive strategies to protect themselves from perceived relationship threats.
- Attachment Anxiety (Items 2,4,6,8,10,12; Score Range: 6 to 36): High scores reflect intense fear about the stability of the relationship and the availability of the partner, which manifests as hypervigilance to relationship cues, excessive need for reassurance, and difficulty maintaining emotional balance when partners are unavailable. Individuals with high anxiety tend to seek excessive closeness and validation from relationship partners.

Contours of the Contemporary Mind

Each score is converted to a percentage based on normative data and is assigned based on the range of descriptive (low, average, high) percentages:

Low: 25th percentile or below

Average: 26th to 74th percentile

High: 75th percentile or above

Percentages are calculated based on an undergraduate sample, with 50 percent representing the typical pattern of responses. The normative sample was undergraduate students.

The explanatory text includes an initial attachment pattern analysis. This pattern analysis is based on a specific combination of scores on both dimensions descriptors (low, average, high). These patterns range from secure styles (e.g., "secure style") to various insecure styles (e.g., "avoidant style", "dismissive style", "preoccupied style"). Each style provides specific insights into the organization of attachment and the dynamics of relationships, as well as associated therapeutic implications and approaches. The interpretation considers the interaction between the avoidant and anxious dimensions to provide a comprehensive understanding of the individual's attachment style and its implications for relationships and therapeutic work. The specificity of the overall attachment pattern allows for highly tailored therapeutic recommendations and insight into potential treatment challenges and opportunities

Brennan et al. (1998) derived the ECR-S from the 36-item ECR. Wei et al. (2007) demonstrated the strong psychometric properties of the ECR-S through six validation studies. The scale showed satisfactory internal consistency across studies with coefficient alphas ranging from .77 to .86 for the anxiety subscale and from .78 to .88 for the avoidance subscale. Test-retest reliability was strong over a 1-month period, with coefficients of .80 and .83 for the anxiety and avoidance subscales, respectively. Factor structure analysis confirmed two relatively orthogonal dimensions (anxiety and avoidance) that provided a good fit to the data after removing response sets, with CFI values ranging from .95 to .97 across studies.

Consistent with the predictions of attachment theory, the construct validity of the ECR-S was supported by the positive association of attachment anxiety with emotional reactivity and the positive association of attachment avoidance with emotional cutoff (Wei et al. 2007). Convergent validity was established by correlation analysis using several tests (Wei et al. 2007): excessive reassurance seeking was significantly associated with attachment anxiety but not with attachment avoidance. Frustration was significantly associated with both attachment anxiety and avoidance.

Normative data from college students collected by Wei et al. (2007) were synthesized to generate means and standard deviations for scores and subscales. The initial sample consisted of 851 undergraduate students at a large public university. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 45 years.

($M = 20.36$ years, $SD = 2.04$).

Anxiety subscale (6 items; $M = 21.73$, $SD = 7.04$)

Avoidance subscale (6 items; $M = 16.28$, $SD = 6.97$)

NovoPsych assigned descriptors for each attachment score that were determined by percentages. The selected percentage ranges were consistent with those of previous attachment researchers (e.g., Kaitz et al., 2004; Mayseless & Scher, 2000; Rain et al., 2016):

‘High’ score: 75th percentile or higher

‘Low’ score: 25th percentile or lower

‘Average’ score: 26th-74th percentile

The NovoPsych version of the ECR-S uses a sophisticated pattern analysis system that examines the interaction between avoidant and anxious attachment dimensions. These attachment patterns were developed by three PhD-level psychologists with extensive clinical experience (Hegarty, D., Smith, C., Buchanan, B., 2024). The analysis produces attachment pattern interpretations based on specific combinations of scores across the dimensions. The patterns focus on the fundamental interactions between anxious and avoidant attachment dimensions, classifying individuals into broad attachment styles. For example:

Secure style (both avoidance and anxiety below the 75th percentile)

Avoidant-avoidant style (high avoidance, high anxiety: both above the 75th percentile)

Avoidant-avoidant style (high avoidance, low anxiety)

Anxious-avoidant style (low avoidance, high anxiety)

This two-level pattern analysis system, supported by empirical attachment research (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Brennan et al., 1998), provides both the specificity needed for clinical intervention and the broad taxonomic framework useful for research and general understanding of attachment organization.

Perceived Partner Responsiveness Scale (PPRS)

The PPRS was developed by Reis, Clark, and Holmes (2004) and is based on the Interpersonal Process Model of Intimacy (Reis & Shaver, 1988). It measures the extent to which individuals perceive their romantic partners to be understanding, valid, and emotionally responsive. Description

The PPRS is a measure of people's perceptions of their relationship partners' responsiveness to themselves. This 12-item measure includes two closely related constructs, originally based on the interpersonal process model of intimacy proposed by Reiss and Shaver (1988): understanding (the extent to which the other person "believes things are right about oneself") and validation (the extent to which the other person believes that he or she appreciates and values oneself). This measure is intended to assess the responsiveness of a specific target to the respondent and is typically used for romantic partners. It can be easily adapted to refer to other types of relationships, such as friends, family, and acquaintances. The scale explicitly asks about global perceptions of a partner's responsiveness; such perceptions will not necessarily correspond to the partner's attitudes, intentions, or perceptions or to objectively coded behavior.

Developments

The 18-item PPRS was first introduced by Harry Reiss and

Cheryl Carmichael (2006) in an unpublished study of married couples' experiences of intimacy and support. Since then, some of the item wording has undergone minor changes. Subsequently, a 12-item version of the measure has been developed (Reiss, Maniachi, Caprarillo, Eastwick, & Finkel, 2011), which has generally produced similar reliability and demonstrated adequate validity compared to the longer version. A three-item version has also emerged, which is more suitable for protocols that demand brevity, such as empirical sampling and daily diary studies (Gable, Gosnell, Meisel, & Strachman, 2012).

Reliability

The internal consistency of both the 12-item and 18-item PPRSs is high, ranging from 91 to 98 in most published and unpublished samples (e.g. Birnbaum & Reis, 2006; Reis et al., 2011; Reis, Maniachi, & Rogge, 2014).

Validity

A close, exploratory factor analysis using principal axis extraction using data from an Internet-based sample of over 2000 individuals who were asked to complete the PPRS supported a unidimensional construct solution, in which all items load highly on a single factor. This solution has emerged. Consistently (with the same factor loadings) across different types of relationships (e.g., with a romantic partner, close friends, and family members). In the Internet-based sample and several other samples, there was mildly suggestive evidence of a two-factor solution related to understanding and validity, but even in this setting, the two factors were significantly related, 94. This likely reflects the fact that understanding and validity tend to co-occur in close relationships.

Several studies have demonstrated convergent validity through correlations with other scales designed to measure responsiveness, including relationship satisfaction ($r=.82$), trust ($r=.67$), empathy (51), and emotional support ($r=.49$). Other findings that contribute to the validity of the measure include an experimental study in which PPRS scores increased as first-year college students became better acquainted with

each other (Reis et al., 2011). In another study, PPRS scores were significantly related to reports of a partner's daily empathetic behavior. ($r=.33$), suggesting that givers and receivers agree on behavioral manifestations of responsiveness (Reis et al., 2014). Another unpublished study found significant agreement ($r=.33$) between ratings of responsiveness given by relationship partners and independent coders in laboratory conversations (Rasbult, Kumashiro, & Reis, 2011).

Availability

The romantic partner version of the PPRS is shown at the end of this profile. Other versions can be created by changing the wording of the relationship of interest (e.g., best friend, parent, or work supervisor). The scale is freely available to researchers, with appropriate citations.

Core dimensions measured:

- Understanding: The perception that the partner truly listens to and understands the emotional experience.
- Validation: The feeling of acceptance and validation of the partner's thoughts and emotions.
- Caring: The feeling of warmth, empathy, and emotional support from the partner.
- Structure and Format: The short version of the PPRS consists of 12 items.
- Each item is rated on a 9-point Likert scale from 1 (not at all true) to 9 (very true).

Sample items:

"My partner listens to me attentively."

Scoring and Interpretation

The total PPRS score is calculated by summing the scores on the 12 items, resulting in a score range from 12 to 108.

Higher scores indicate greater perceived emotional responsiveness from the partner.

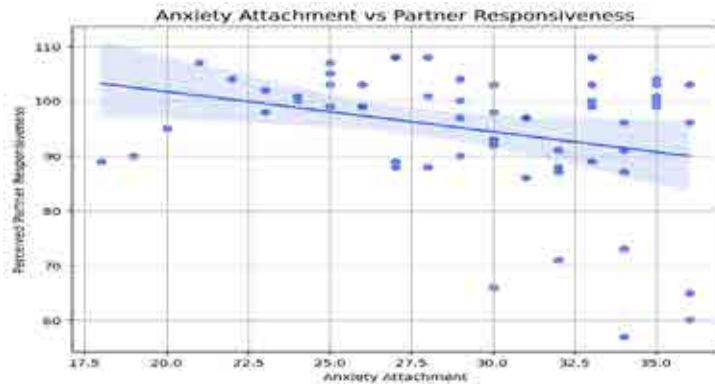
Psychological Properties

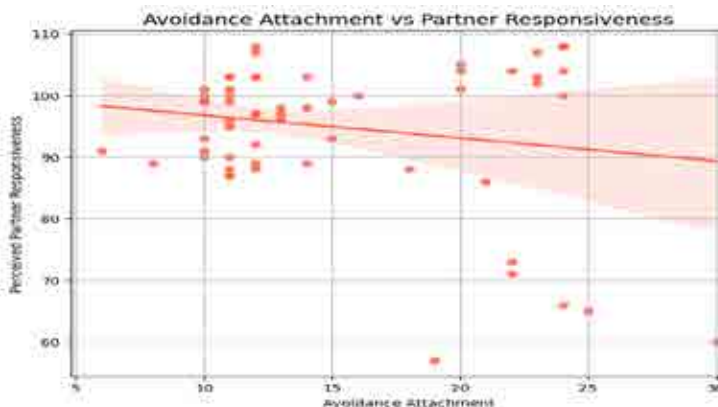
- The PPRS shows high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha typically ranging from 0.86 to 0.90.
- The construct validity of this scale is strong and is significantly related to measures of relationship satisfaction, intimacy, and attachment security.

Applicability

- The PPRS is particularly useful in romantic relationship research due to its strong theoretical basis and psychological relevance.
- It is acceptable in both Western and non-Western cultural contexts.

Both instruments were administered in digital format via Google Forms. Their selection was based on their relevance to the construct being studied, strong psychometric support, and ease of completion for participants. Together, the ECR-S and PPRS provided a comprehensive measure of both internal attachment styles and interpersonal perceptions of emotional support.





Discussion

The purpose of this research was to explore the relationship between adult attachment styles and perceived partner responsiveness (PPR) in romantic relationships among young adults. The study focused specifically on two dimensions of attachment: avoidance and anxiety. These were measured using the Experiences in Close Relationships – Short Form (ECR-S), while perceived partner responsiveness was assessed using the Perceived Partner Responsiveness Scale (PPRS – Short Version). The final sample comprised 60 participants aged between 18 and 30 years. Data were analyzed using Microsoft Excel, and Pearson’s correlation coefficients were calculated to assess the relationship between the attachment dimensions and perceived partner responsiveness. This chapter discusses the findings in light of existing literature, theoretical frameworks, and cultural contexts, while also reflecting on the implications and limitations of the study.

Attachment Avoidance and Perceived Partner Responsiveness

One of the main objectives of this study was to examine whether a significant relationship exists between attachment avoidance and perceived partner responsiveness. The findings revealed a **negative correlation ($r = -0.18$)**, suggesting that individuals who exhibit higher levels of attachment avoidance

tend to perceive their partners as less emotionally responsive. Although the strength of this correlation is weak, the direction of the relationship is consistent with existing theoretical and empirical literature.

Attachment theory, originally developed by Bowlby (1969), posits that individuals with avoidant attachment patterns typically value independence, are uncomfortable with closeness, and tend to withdraw emotionally in relationships. Consequently, they are less likely to seek out or respond positively to emotional support from partners. As a result, even when a partner is genuinely caring or attentive, the avoidant individual may downplay or disregard such behaviours, leading to a reduced perception of responsiveness.

This pattern has been observed across various studies. For instance, Mikulincer and Shaver (2007) found that avoidantly attached individuals often suppress their attachment needs and distance themselves during emotional interactions, which leads to misinterpretations of partner behaviours. Similarly, Fraley and Shaver (2000) noted that such individuals tend to devalue emotional intimacy and may interpret partner support as intrusive or unnecessary.

In the present study, the weak correlation may be attributed to a number of contextual and individual factors. One possibility is that the participants, despite scoring higher on avoidance, may still be in relationships where partners offer consistent and visible emotional support. This could soften the negative impact of avoidant tendencies, resulting in a relatively small effect size. Another explanation might be the influence of social desirability bias, where participants underreport their avoidant behaviours or overreport their perceptions of partner support.

Cultural factors may also play a role. In collectivist societies such as India, where family values and interdependence are emphasized, even avoidant individuals might conform to relational norms that value emotional closeness. Hence, despite internal discomfort, they may still acknowledge their partner's supportiveness, albeit with some ambivalence. Such cultural balancing could dilute the strength of the observed negative relationship.

Overall, the findings support the theoretical proposition that avoidance in adult attachment is associated with reduced perception of partner responsiveness, albeit weakly in this sample.

Attachment Anxiety and Perceived Partner Responsiveness

The second major focus of this study was to investigate the relationship between attachment anxiety and perceived partner responsiveness. The results showed a **moderate negative correlation ($r = -0.51$)**, indicating that individuals with higher attachment anxiety tend to perceive their partners as less emotionally responsive.

This result aligns strongly with theoretical expectations. Attachment anxiety is characterized by a heightened sensitivity to signs of rejection, an excessive need for reassurance, and a tendency to overinterpret ambiguous behaviours as negative. Individuals high in attachment anxiety are often preoccupied with doubts about their partner's commitment and love, which distorts their ability to accurately perceive emotional support.

Previous research has consistently found this pattern. Collins and Feeney (2000) reported that anxious individuals are prone to perceive even supportive actions as insufficient or conditional. Their hypervigilance toward relational cues often results in the misinterpretation of neutral or even positive behaviours as signs of detachment or neglect. Mikulincer et al. (2003) also emphasized that anxious individuals frequently seek reassurance but may remain dissatisfied even when partners attempt to meet those needs.

In the current study, the moderate strength of the correlation indicates a meaningful inverse relationship. This suggests that as anxiety increases, individuals' capacity to recognize or believe in their partner's emotional support decreases significantly. This has critical implications for relationship satisfaction and emotional well-being. High levels of perceived unresponsiveness can reinforce the anxious individual's fear of abandonment, creating a cycle of insecurity and dissatisfaction.

It is important to consider the relational context when interpreting these results. While attachment anxiety is an internal trait, perceived partner responsiveness is inherently relational. If an anxious individual is in a relationship where the partner is inconsistent, emotionally distant, or dismissive, the effects of anxiety may be magnified. Conversely, even in supportive relationships, the anxious person may feel persistently unsure due to their internal cognitive and emotional biases.

Cultural norms may again play a role. In Indian settings, emotional expression within romantic relationships is evolving, particularly among urban youth. Traditional expectations may conflict with the emotional needs of anxious individuals, resulting in a mismatch that exacerbates their perception of low responsiveness.

These findings reinforce the idea that attachment anxiety is a significant risk factor for relational dissatisfaction and underscores the importance of emotional communication and reassurance in romantic dynamics.

Implications

The findings of this study provide several theoretical, clinical, and sociocultural implications, particularly in understanding how adult attachment styles—specifically attachment anxiety and avoidance—shape perceptions of emotional support in romantic relationships among young people.

Theoretical Implications

This study reinforces the basic concepts of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988; Hazan & Shaver, 1987), affirming that adult attachment styles act as psychological filters through which individuals perceive their romantic partner's behavior. The observed negative relationships—specifically the moderating relationship between attachment anxiety and perceived partner responsiveness (PPR)—highlight the role of internal working models in distorting interpersonal perceptions (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). It also validates the application of the attachment framework beyond childhood, providing theoretical support for models that emphasize perception-driven intimacy (Reiss & Shaver, 1988).

Additionally, the results of this study support the interpersonal process model of intimacy, which states that intimacy increases when individuals perceive their partners as responsive (Lorenzo et al., 1998). Anxiously attached individuals may disrupt this process due to their hypervigilance and emotional disorganization, while avoidant individuals may inhibit intimacy by suppressing or rejecting emotional cues.

Clinical and Counseling Implications

The results are highly relevant to relationship counselors and psychologists, as they reinforce the importance of assessing and addressing attachment insecurity in romantic partnerships. Individuals with high attachment anxiety may misinterpret their partner's support due to an internalized fear of abandonment or rejection (Collins & Feeney, 2000). On the other hand, avoidant individuals may be less likely to seek or acknowledge emotional intimacy, which can create a communication gap.

Therapists can use these insights to develop interventions. For example:

Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT) can help partners explore unmet attachment needs and improve emotional connection (Johnson, 2004).

Cognitive-behavioral techniques can help reframe negative interpretations and build trust in anxious individuals.

Attachment security priming can be incorporated to change insecure attachment patterns over time (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2009).

Educational and Preventive Effects

For young adults, who are often in the process of forming long-term romantic relationships, early education on attachment styles and emotional communication can encourage healthy patterns of intimacy. Relationship education programs in universities and counseling centers can:

- Promote awareness of how past experiences shape current attachment patterns.

- Teach emotional regulation and communication strategies.
- Encourage recognition of supportive behaviors from partners.
- Incorporating such training into college counseling services or premarital counseling may serve as a preventative strategy to reduce relationship dissatisfaction.

Cultural and Social Implications

This study also contributes to the growing understanding of romantic dynamics within the Indian cultural context, where emotional expression is often shaped by traditional norms, family structures, and gender roles (Dhawan & Lutz, 2020). Individuals with insecure attachments may experience greater conflict between personal emotional needs and cultural expectations, especially when navigating romantic relationships in conservative environments.

In this cultural environment, perceived partner responsiveness may be interpreted differently, with small gestures taking on significant meaning or going unnoticed depending on one's attachment orientation. These findings emphasize the need for culturally sensitive counseling that considers how attachment processes emerge in collectivistic societies like India (Raval et al., 2017).

Digital and Modern Relationship Context

The collection of data through online platforms reflects a larger trend – digital intimacy and communication are central to modern relationships. In this context, perceived responsiveness can be mediated through text, video calls or social media. Attachment-related biases can not only affect face-to-face interactions, but also how individuals perceive responsiveness in digital spaces (Finney & Collins, 2015). This opens up new avenues for exploring how attachment styles operate in technology-mediated or long-distance relationships.

Limitations

Despite its contributions, the study is not without limitations.

These issues should be taken into account when interpreting the results and planning future research:

Small sample size:

The study was limited to 60 participants, which limits the generalizability of the results. A larger and more diverse sample would provide greater statistical power and improve the robustness of the conclusions.

Cross-sectional design:

The use of a cross-sectional design provides only a snapshot in time and does not allow for causal inferences. Future studies using longitudinal designs could better examine how attachment styles and perceived responsiveness evolve over time.

Self-report bias:

Reliance on self-reported data introduces the potential for social desirability bias, especially in the Indian context where disclosing relationship dissatisfaction or emotional struggles may be culturally discouraged.

Uncontrolled variables:

The study did not control for important contextual variables such as relationship duration, cohabitation status, family involvement, or past relationship trauma. These factors can significantly influence both attachment behavior and perceptions of responsiveness.

Limited to non-clinical sample:

All participants were from the general population, and the results may not generalize to individuals with clinically significant attachment disorders, history of abuse, or mental health conditions that affect relationship functioning.

Language and Cultural Nuances

Although participants were required to understand English, the cultural and emotional subtleties included in the PPR

Suggestions for Future Research

While the current study provides valuable insight into the relationship between adult attachment styles and perceived partner responsiveness, several areas remain open for future research:

Larger and more diverse samples

Future research should include a larger and more demographically diverse population to increase the generalizability of findings across different ages, cultures, and relationship contexts.

Longitudinal design

A longitudinal approach will help explore how attachment styles and perceived partner responsiveness develop over time and across different stages of romantic relationships.

Dyadic research model

Collecting data from both partners in a relationship will provide a more complete picture of mutual perceptions, attachment dynamics, and emotional responsiveness.

Qualitative exploration

Incorporating qualitative methods such as interviews or open-ended responses can provide deeper insights into how individuals perceive and interpret emotional support based on their attachment orientation.

Cultural Comparisons

Future research may benefit from cross-cultural studies to understand how attachment and emotional reactivity vary in societies with different relationship norms and communication styles.

Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the relationship between adult attachment styles—specifically attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance—and perceived partner responsiveness (PPR) in romantic relationships among young adults. Guided by attachment theory, the research explored whether

individuals with higher levels of insecure attachment perceive their partners as less emotionally responsive. Using validated psychometric tools – the Experiences in Close Relationships – Short Form (ECR-S) and the Perceived Partner Responsiveness Scale (PPRS)—and a sample of 60 participants, the study uncovered insightful patterns that both affirm theoretical expectations and prompt further inquiry.

The results revealed two key findings. First, a moderate negative correlation was found between attachment anxiety and PPR, suggesting that individuals who are more anxious in relationships tend to perceive their partners as less emotionally supportive and validating. This finding is consistent with existing literature, which suggests that anxious individuals often misinterpret or discount their partner's positive behaviours due to fears of abandonment and heightened emotional sensitivity. Second, a weak negative correlation was observed between attachment avoidance and PPR, indicating that individuals who are emotionally distant or uncomfortable with intimacy also tend to perceive lower responsiveness from their partners, although to a lesser extent.

Together, these results underscore the impact of internal attachment orientations on interpersonal perceptions. Even when partners are supportive, individuals with insecure attachment may struggle to recognize or accept that support. This has direct implications for relationship satisfaction, conflict resolution, and emotional intimacy. An anxious or avoidant attachment style can subtly distort how individuals perceive their romantic experiences, often leading to dissatisfaction or miscommunication.

From a theoretical standpoint, the findings validate core principles of attachment theory, especially in the context of adult romantic relationships. The observed patterns reflect the idea that early relational experiences shape internal working models, which in turn influence emotional expectations and interpretations in later life. Attachment styles are not merely static traits but active psychological filters that color how people see and respond to love and support.

In practical terms, this research holds value for counselors, therapists, and individuals in romantic partnerships. For clinicians, understanding a client's attachment style may offer clues about recurring relational struggles, fears, or communication patterns. Interventions aimed at building emotional awareness, self-regulation, and communication skills can empower individuals to move toward more secure attachments. For couples, this study highlights the importance of understanding how internal insecurities may influence perceptions and behaviours within the relationship.

The study also adds to the growing body of psychological research emerging from the Indian context. As romantic relationships evolve in Indian society—shaped by both traditional family values and modern individualistic ideals—understanding emotional dynamics becomes increasingly important. Findings like these contribute to culturally relevant relationship counseling and emotional wellness strategies tailored for young adults in transitional societies.

However, it is essential to acknowledge the limitations. The relatively small sample size and cross-sectional design limit the generalizability and causality of findings. Additionally, self-report tools, while efficient, are subject to social desirability bias and may not capture the full complexity of emotional experiences. Future studies could benefit from larger, more diverse samples and mixed-method approaches that include qualitative insights.

In conclusion, this study provides meaningful evidence that adult attachment styles—particularly anxiety and avoidance—are related to how individuals perceive their romantic partner's responsiveness. These insights not only affirm established psychological theories but also point toward real-world applications in relationship support, therapy, and emotional growth. As romantic relationships remain central to human well-being, understanding the internal mechanisms that influence them is essential for fostering healthier emotional lives.

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