



Emotional Exile: Unpacking Hyper-Independence, Attachment Avoidance and the role of Internalised Shame in Young Adults

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Abstract: The transition into adulthood often prompts a delicate balancing act among autonomy, intimacy, and personal identity. For many young adults, navigating these developmental challenges can lead to the emergence of hyper-independence, a rigid form of self-reliance that resists not only support but also the vulnerability that comes with genuine connection. This paper delves into the intricate relationship between hyper-independence, attachment avoidance, and internalised shame, with the aim of illuminating the psychological mechanisms that underpin this phenomenon, which is referred to as emotional exile. Utilising a cross-sectional research design, data were meticulously collected from 140 participants who engaged with various measures assessing Hyper-Independence, Experiences in Close Relationships (ECR), and Internalised Shame. Through rigorous correlational and regression analyses, the paper explored the interconnectedness of these variables of interest. The findings reveal a significant correlation between hyper-independence and elevated levels of both attachment avoidance and internalised shame. This suggests that what may initially present as self-sufficiency may, in fact, serve as a defensive posture against deep-seated relational fears and unresolved feelings of self-judgment. This research contributes to the evolving literature on maladaptive autonomy by highlighting the pivotal roles of shame and relational dynamics in shaping the emotional and relational functioning

of young adults. The complex interplay among hyper-independence, attachment avoidance, and internalised shame not only enhances our understanding of these individuals' relational behaviours but also sheds light on their overall well-being, revealing the profound psychological mechanisms that govern their experiences in relationships.

Keywords: *Hyper-Independence, Avoidant Attachment, Internalised Shame, Young Adults*

1. Introduction

Young adulthood is a pivotal phase characterised by the quest for autonomy, the cultivation of intimate relationships, and the solidification of one's personal identity. While the pursuit of independence is often celebrated as a key indicator of maturity, some individuals experience a contrasting phenomenon known as hyper-independence. This inclination manifests as an excessive reliance on oneself, coupled with a marked reluctance to seek support from others. Such behaviour is frequently intertwined with attachment avoidance, a pattern that reveals discomfort with closeness and an aversion to vulnerability.

Furthermore, hyper-independence is often reinforced by deeply ingrained feelings of internalised shame, which can cultivate an environment of relentless self-criticism and emotional withdrawal. This interplay of factors can lead to a form of emotional exile, wherein young adults navigate their lives showcasing a façade of self-sufficiency, all while grappling with significant relational and emotional obstacles beneath the surface.

Delving into the intricate relationships between hyper-independence, attachment avoidance, and internalised shame offers valuable insights into the psychological mechanisms at play. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for comprehending how they influence young adults' relational functioning and overall emotional well-being.

Hyper Independence refers to the phenomenon where an individual refuses to seek help from others at all costs, even when required. This is an extreme, often unhealthy/maladaptive form of self-reliance. This behaviour typically stems from a trauma response rooted in experiences of betrayal, neglect, or overwhelming responsibility in childhood, creating a deep fear of vulnerability and dependence.

Signs of Hyper-Independence:

- a) ***Overcommitting:*** Individuals who exhibit hyper-independence often take on too many work or personal projects, leading to an unmanageable workload that they cannot handle

alone.

- b) ***Refusal to Delegate:*** Those who are hyper-independent frequently struggle to seek assistance when feeling overwhelmed and find it challenging to entrust tasks to others.
- c) ***Guardedness in Relationships:*** Close relationships inherently involve interdependence, but hyper-independent individuals may find it difficult to lower their defences and allow others to connect with them emotionally.
- d) ***Secretiveness:*** People with hyper-independence often tend to keep their thoughts and feelings private, hesitating to share personal information that could be misused.
- e) ***Mistrust of Others:*** This hyper-independence can stem from a fear that others might disappoint them or betray their trust.
- f) ***Limited Close Relationships:*** Due to their difficulty in opening up, hyper-independent individuals often find it challenging to develop and maintain friendships and romantic relationships.
- g) ***Stress or Burnout:*** Their reluctance to delegate or ask for help can result in hyper-independent individuals taking on more than they can manage, ultimately leading to increased stress and even burnout.
- h) ***Dislike of Neediness:*** In addition to avoiding reliance on others, hyper-independent people may resist or resent those who depend on them, viewing it as a form of weakness.

Hyper-Independence as a Trauma Response

Hyper-independence often emerges as a complex psychological response to trauma, manifesting for a variety of reasons. It's crucial to recognise that trauma affects individuals differently, and not everyone processes their experiences in the same way. While some may come to view themselves as inherently incapable of dependence due to past traumas, others may adopt an approach that starkly emphasises self-sufficiency.

Feeling Undeserving of Social Support

For many trauma survivors, the notion of seeking help can provoke profound feelings of unworthiness. These individuals might have internalised messages that frame the act of needing support as a sign of weakness or vulnerability. Thus, they may embrace hyper-independence as a protective strategy, determined to shield themselves from what they perceive to be the shame connected to asking for assistance.

Past Neglect

For some, their traumatic experiences are rooted in a past marked by neglect, where their emotional or physical needs were consistently unmet. In the abyss of such deprivation, hyper-independence can blossom as a survival mechanism. This hard-learned self-reliance translates into a worldview where trust in others is scarce; they come to believe that their ability to navigate challenges alone is far superior to seeking help—a belief deeply intertwined with their past experiences of being let down by those meant to care for them.

Mistrust of Others

The seeds of hyper-independence may also stem from a pronounced reluctance to trust others. Survivors of trauma, particularly those subjected to abuse by caregivers, often find themselves grappling with the terrifying prospect of dependence. The idea of relying on others can ignite memories of past abuse, evoking a sense of danger associated with vulnerability. This history creates barriers that dissuade them from reaching out, even when help is needed.

Coping Mechanism

In many cases, hyper-independence serves as a robust coping strategy, an attempt to carve out a sense of control in a world that has frequently felt chaotic or unpredictable. Traumatic experiences can strip away one's sense of agency, leading survivors to adopt an "I can handle this myself" mentality as a means to reclaim some mastery over their environment.

One useful framework for understanding hyper-independence stems from attachment theory, articulated by Bowlby in 1969 and expanded upon by Ainsworth in 1978. Attachment theory elucidates the emotional bonds formed between infants and their caregivers, highlighting the importance of these connections in establishing security. Individuals with hyper-independence often display traits aligned with avoidant attachment, a style characterised by discomfort with intimacy, the suppression of attachment needs, and a strong emphasis on self-reliance. Such individuals tend to minimise the importance of relationships and retreat from dependency, behaviours that resonate deeply with the instinctual patterns of hyper-independence (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016).

Within young adult populations, the tension between the need for interdependence and hyper-independence can become especially pronounced as individuals navigate the complexities of romantic relationships, academic endeavours, and professional ambitions—domains in which the capacity to connect with others is not merely valuable but often essential.

Types of Attachment Styles

Bowlby's attachment theory, and based on and expanded by Mary Ainsworth and others researchers, culminating in four primary attachment styles:

- a) ***Secure Attachment*** is a comfort with intimacy and autonomy, with trust in your relationships and emotional regulation, and the ability to request and provide support. Typically, this develops when caregivers consistently respond, are available, and emotionally attuned to the child. Secure Attachment involves balanced relationships, the ability to be vulnerable, and interdependence.
- b) ***Avoidant (Dismissive) Attachment*** involves a high value of independence with avoidance of closeness, silently inhibiting emotional needs, and withdrawing emotionally in times of stress. This typically develops with emotionally unavailable caregivers, rejecting or dismissive of the child's requests. Avoidant Attachment often leads to issues with intimacy, minimisation of feelings, possible hyper-independence, and difficulty relying on others.
- c) ***Anxious (Preoccupied) Attachments*** are characterised by an overwhelming desire for closeness, fear of abandonment, higher sensitivity to relationship norms/dynamics, and emotional dependence. Anxiously attached individuals often develop from inconsistent caregiving at times, sometimes attentive and other times neglectful, resulting in uncertainty and vigilance. In adults, Anxious Attachments may look like clinginess, overthinking within relationships, highs and lows of testing the partner's commitment.
- d) ***Disorganised (Fearful-Avoidant)*** involves the mixture of both anxious and avoidant, involving fear of closeness or near beautiful cohesion with fear of rejection, chaotic or unpredictable behaviours to some extent. This is often the result of trauma, abuse, abandonment, or neglect in childhood, where the caregiver is a source of comfort and distress.

Attachment avoidance in emerging adults is a relational style defined by an individual who is uncomfortable with emotional closeness and highly self-reliant. An attachment avoidance style also includes a tendency to minimise or suppress emotional needs in order to maintain a sense of independence and avoid vulnerability, initiatives that often originate from childhood experiences with caregivers who have been either inconsistently available or emotionally unresponsive.

Although individuals with an attachment avoidance style may appear to be independent and self-sufficient, the manner in which they typically engage in relationships can often be

detrimental to developing intimacy and deep relationships; they may emotionally distance themselves from others, have difficulty feeling and expressing feelings, and encounter challenges in interpersonal relationships.

Characteristics

- a) ***Hyper-independence:*** The need to rely on oneself and avoid dependency on others.
- b) ***Emotional distancing:*** People find it difficult to convey thoughts, feelings, and emotions to their partner.
- c) ***Discomfort with closeness:*** May feel vulnerable when feeling emotionally close to someone and may actively avoid anyone emotionally close to them in relationships.
- d) ***Suppression of needs:*** People have a tendency to hide or deny their own emotional needs and vulnerability for the purpose of regulating their emotional effect and feeling emotionally "safe."
- e) ***Patterns of relationships:*** May show unpredictable behaviour, disengage from partners, or be unable to give support during stressful situations.

Possible causes

- a) ***Childhood experiences:*** Develop in early childhood based on caregiver availability, emotionally inconsistent caregivers, or dismissiveness to a child's emotional needs.
- b) ***Learned behaviours:*** Children may discover early on that sharing emotions or vulnerability is neither safe nor effective. Then children may learn to limit or suppress those needs to meet their needs or avoid negative responses without understanding what they are doing.

Consequences for relationships

- a) ***Difficulty with intimacy:*** Emotional closeness is often superseded and disrupted by the same strategies used to keep others from being too close.
- b) ***Strained relationships:*** Wanting emotional intimacy can be directly opposed to using behaviours that keep others at an emotional distance, particularly in romantic relationships or other close relationships.
- c) ***Internal malaise:*** Individuals may appear self-sufficient or independent from others, but can actually experience internal malaise, emptiness, and even some depressive symptoms when unacknowledged emotional needs are not met by themselves or another person. Internalised shame originates from negative external judgments, originating from

environmental circumstances, often early on in life, that manifest as part of the person's self-perception and become beliefs of being unworthy or unlovable. It differs from guilt in that it focuses all negative feelings about worth on the entire self as opposed to specific behaviour or actions. Effects include harsh self-criticism, self-isolation, avoidance of social situations, difficulty accepting praise, and lowered mental health, self-respect, and development

What Internalised Shame Is

- a) ***Self-Criticism:*** Internalised shame is the process of taking someone else's disapproval or disapproval and internalising it as a self-critical voice proclaiming oneself as bad and unworthy.
- b) ***Self-Focus:*** Internalised shame is a self-evaluation of worthlessness and continually appraising the depravity of the whole self as opposed to guilt, which is focused on a single behaviour.
- c) ***Adopting External Judgments:*** The judgments and negative traits of others have been internalised into the belief that the individual is innately inferior in comparison.

Causes of Internalised Shame

- a) ***Recollections of Childhood Experiences:*** Repeated instances of neglect or criticism, along with emotional invalidation throughout childhood, can lead to the belief that a person is unlovable or defective.
- b) ***Societal Stigma:*** Embracing negative societal views about oneself, like weight stigma, can lead to internalised shame.

Symptoms and Behaviours

- a) ***Harsh Inner Critic:*** A continuous voice of self-hatred or negative self-talk.
- b) ***Social Withdrawal:*** A desire to withdraw from other people, avoid social interactions, and fear of judgment.
- c) ***Difficulty with Self-Worth:*** A challenge to accept compliments or praise, with a constant feeling of inadequacy.
- d) ***Paralysis:*** A feeling that one is unable to act freely or with confidence due to believing there is something flawed about oneself.

Impact of Internalised Shame

- a) ***Mental Health:*** It is associated with several mental health issues, like burnout, and illnesses like depression.

- b) **Relationships:** It can undermine self-esteem, disrupt healthy relationships, and possibly be passed down to the next generation.
- c) **Moral Development:** It can undermine elements of self-respect and moral agency, making it difficult to positively assess oneself.

In sum, hyper-independence, attachment avoidance, and internalised shame are not distinct experiences, but woven strands of the same story, strung throughout our early relational experiences and perpetuated into the experience of young adulthood. While hyper-independence can be construed as a source of strength or resilience, the invisibility of the avoidant attachment pattern and unmeasured burden of shame lurk behind it. Young adults who are caught in this dilemma live in a paradox. They identify outwardly as resilient and adaptable, but on the inside, they remain exiled from their own vulnerability and the ability to connect with others. This thesis aims to explore the variables of hyper-independence, attachment avoidance and internalised shame in conjunction with one another, highlighting the cost of a defensive reliance upon self, while demonstrating how avoidance and shame contribute quietly to the performance of independence. This thesis seeks to uncover the possibility of true interdependence for young adults - a life not marked by exile from emotional connection and support, but rather marked by the courage to be seen and supported, and to access the option of connection.

2. Review of Literature

Ginalska et al. (2025) investigated the intricacies between attachment styles, maladaptive schemas and relationship satisfaction in romantic partners. Their findings revealed a compelling link: secure attachment was correlated with fewer early maladaptive schemas (EMS) and greater satisfaction in relationships, while avoidant and ambivalent attachment styles were associated with an increase in EMS and a significant decrease in relationship fulfilment. Particularly intriguing was the discovery that ambivalent attachment brought forth heightened feelings of abandonment, mistrust, and shame, while avoidant attachment was tethered to feelings of emotional deprivation and a general air of pessimism. Additionally, the length of the romantic relationship was found to moderate the impact of avoidant attachment on shame and the seeking of approval, indicating that relational dynamics evolve over time, shaping individuals' emotional landscapes.

Zhang et al. (2025) researched Childhood emotional trauma and social avoidance, and distress in adolescents. Results indicate that Childhood emotional trauma is a significant positive

predictor of social avoidance and distress; psychological resilience mediates the connection between childhood emotional trauma, distinctively predicting social avoidance and distress; and left-behind experience moderates the association between psychological resilience and the associated outcomes of social avoidance and distress.

Snyder et al. (2024) explored the adverse childhood experiences, insecure attachment styles and their effects on emotional regulation hassles. Findings suggested that the relationships between ACEs and insecure (i.e., anxious and avoidant) attachment were explained by dissociation and difficulties in emotion regulation after controlling for mental health treatment. Emotion regulation difficulties were not found to be a significant predictor of avoidant attachment.

Sagone et al. (2023) examined the Association between Attachment Style, Psychological Well-Being, and Relationship Status in Young Adults and Adults. Those with stable close relationships felt higher psychological well-being than singles. Additionally, single individuals reported an attachment style characterized by insecurity about closeness, seeing relationships as secondary, and avoidance compared to those with stable close relationships. Lastly, for single individuals, confidence as an attachment style significantly and positively predicted psychological well-being, while the need for approval significantly and negatively predicted psychological well-being.

Remondi et al. (2023) studied the Insecure Attachment and Psychological Distress and the Role of Dispositional Shame and Shame-Coping Styles. The results of the path analysis revealed a complex interplay between attachment dimensions and psychological outcomes. Specifically, both dimensions of attachment were found to have an indirect relationship with dispositional shame, which subsequently influenced the adoption of an aggressive self-shame coping style. This aggressive approach, in turn, was positively correlated with elevated psychological distress. Additionally, the analysis highlighted that insecurities related to attachment also had an indirect association with dispositional shame, leading to the development of an avoidance shame-coping style. Notably, this avoidance strategy was linked to a decrease in psychological distress, suggesting a nuanced relationship between coping mechanisms and emotional well-being.

Sajjadi et al. (2022) researched the Mindful Self-Compassion intervention among young adults with a history of childhood maltreatment. In light of the findings, it can be concluded that MCS has beneficial effects on depression, anxiety, self-criticism, internal shame, and self-compassion for young adults with childhood maltreatment. Further studies with longer follow-up

periods and larger samples, representing different demographics, would be appropriate to reaffirm these findings.

Sabaß et al. (2022) found that attachment mediates the link between childhood maltreatment and loneliness. Individuals with PDD had greater levels of Childhood Maltreatment, attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, and loneliness compared with the normal population. CM was positively related to loneliness in both groups. Finally, mediation analyses indicated that the relationship between CM and loneliness was mediated through avoidant, but not anxious attachment. The indirect effect of avoidant attachment was present regardless of a diagnosis of PDD.

Park et al. (2023) worked on Childhood attachment insecurity and shame-proneness in adulthood. Findings from multilevel regression analyses indicated that two types of insecure attachment styles related to shame-proneness: anxiety and disorganization. Avoidance was not related. Secure attachment style was negatively related to shame-proneness, but not at statistically significant levels.

D'Rozario et al. (2021) researched upon the effects of parental separation and divorce on adult attachment styles. The findings of this study clearly indicated that individuals with a history of parental separation or divorce were more likely to develop anxious and avoidant attachment styles in adulthood. Specifically, those who experienced their parents' separation during formative years exhibited a heightened tendency towards anxiety in their relationships, often characterized by fear of abandonment and emotional dependence. Conversely, others developed avoidant attachment styles, leading them to maintain emotional distance and a reluctance to engage in deep interpersonal connections. These patterns suggest that early disruptions in familial relationships can have long-lasting effects on one's ability to form secure and healthy relationships in later life.

Sedighimornani et al. (2020) explored the factors contributing to the experience of shame and its management. The findings indicate that negative experiences during parenting significantly contribute to the development of feelings of shame, particularly through the influence of attachment styles formed in childhood. The model presented illustrates the process by which shame can emerge from these early negative interactions, highlighting the pivotal role of attachment in this dynamic. It further explores potential strategies for managing and mitigating shame, suggesting that understanding one's attachment style can be crucial in addressing these feelings effectively.

2.1 Rationale of the Study

- a) **The Significance of Development:** Young adulthood is a transitional period in life where patterns of autonomy and community begin to take form. The study of hyper-independence sheds light on how defensive self-reliance can inhibit intimacy and hinder one's personal evolution and psychological growth.
- b) **Theoretical Gap:** An abundance of literature connects attachment avoidance and shame; however, hyper-independence lacks research attention--this study argues for hyper-independence to be conceptualised within extant psychological paradigms.
- c) **Clinical Relevance:** The identified connection between hyper-independence, avoidance, and shame will be valuable in shaping practices to mitigate relational barriers, impaired help-seeking, and self-care, as it relates to interdependence and healthy relationships.
- d) **Societal Relevance:** In collectivistic societies that demonise vulnerability in all forms and equate it with dependence, this study pushes back against this elusive narrative and motives alike by exposing the unexamined emotional costs associated with hyper-independence.

3. Methodology

3.1 Aim

To study the impact of Hyper-Independence on Attachment Avoidance and Internalised Shame in Young Adults.

3.2 Research Objectives

- a) To investigate the relationship between Hyper-Independence and Attachment Avoidance in Young Adults.
- b) To investigate the relationship between Hyper-Independence and Internalised Shames in Young Adults.

3.3 Hypotheses

1. Hyper-Independence will be positively correlated with Attachment Avoidance among Young Adults
2. Hyper-Independence will be positively correlated with Internalized Shame among Young Adults
3. Attachment Avoidance will be positively correlated with Internalized Shame
4. There will be age and gender differences in Hyper-Independence, attachment avoidance,

or shame levels.

3.4 Sample

The study included 140 young adults between the ages of 18 and 30 years. Participants were recruited using convenience sampling from universities, social media platforms, and community networks.

Eligibility criteria required participants to be within the specified age range and proficient in English to ensure comprehension of the measures. Individuals currently undergoing psychotherapy or reporting a psychiatric diagnosis were excluded to minimize potential confounding factors.

Of the total sample, 70% identified as female and 30% as male, with a small proportion identifying as non-binary or preferring not to disclose gender. In terms of relationship status, the majority were single, while the remainder reported being in a relationship or married. Educational levels varied, with most participants pursuing undergraduate or postgraduate studies. The focus on young adults was intentional, as this developmental period is characterized by increasing autonomy, identity exploration, and the formation of intimate relationships. Examining hyper-independence, attachment avoidance, and internalized shame within this context provides insight into the relational and emotional dynamics that emerge during a critical stage of psychological development.

3.5 Variables

1. Independent Variables
 - a) Attachment Avoidance
 - b) Internalized Shame
2. Dependent Variable: Hyper-Independence

3.6 Tools Details and Description:

Experiences in Close Relationships Scale (ECR)

Attachment patterns were measured using the Experiences in Close Relationships (ECR) scale (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998). The 36-item instrument assesses two dimensions of adult attachment: avoidance and anxiety. Responses were recorded on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). For this study, the avoidance subscale was used to capture discomfort with closeness and reluctance to depend on others. The ECR has demonstrated excellent psychometric properties, with internal consistency estimates typically

ranging from .90 to .94 for avoidance and .91 to .95 for anxiety (Brennan et al., 1998; Sibley & Liu, 2004). Test–retest reliability has been reported at .86 for avoidance and .82 for anxiety over a three-week interval (Wei et al., 2007). Convergent validity has been established through significant correlations with other attachment measures (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). In the present study, the avoidance subscale demonstrated high internal

Internalized Shame Scale (ISS)

Internalized shame was measured using the Internalized Shame Scale (ISS; Cook, 1994), a 30- item self-report questionnaire assessing feelings of self-contempt, inferiority, and inadequacy. Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (*never*) to 4 (*almost always*), with higher scores reflecting greater levels of internalized shame. The ISS has demonstrated strong psychometric properties, with Cronbach’s alpha coefficients typically ranging between .95 and .96 (Cook, 2001). Test–retest reliability has been reported at .84 over six weeks (Rizvi, 2010). Construct validity is supported by significant correlations with depression, low self-esteem, and maladaptive coping, while discriminant validity has been demonstrated through its ability to distinguish shame from guilt (Tangney & Dearing, 2002). In the present study, internal consistency for the ISS was high

3.7 Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected in person from participants through standardized self-report questionnaires. After obtaining informed consent, each participant was provided with a printed questionnaire booklet that included questions related to Hyper-Independence, the Experiences in Close Relationships (ECR) questionnaire, and the Internalized Shame Scale. Participants completed the questionnaires individually in a quiet setting to minimize distractions and ensure privacy. The researcher was present throughout the process to address any queries, provide clarification if needed, and ensure that the instructions were followed correctly. On average, it took participants 10–15 minutes to complete the measures. Once completed, the questionnaires were collected directly by the researcher to maintain confidentiality and reduce the risk of data loss.

4. Results

Table 1: *The Table shows the codes and the themes*

Score Range	Codes	Categories	Themes
0–30 (Low)	Relies on others; seeks support; comfortable with interdependence	Interpersonal trust; shared coping; emotional openness	Relational Openness-trusts connections, values support, less guarded
31–60 (Moderate)	Balanced independence; selective in seeking help; cautious with vulnerability	Ambivalent coping; partial trust; mixed emotional expression	Ambivalent Dependence-torn between self-reliance and desire for closeness
61+ (High)	Strong self-reliance; avoids help; mistrustful of others; suppresses needs	Withdrawal, defensive coping, emotional suppression	Protective Self-Reliance-independence used as a shield against shame, rejection, or disappointment

Hyper-Independence scores are classified into three distinct interpretive bands: Low (0–30), Moderate (31–60), and High (61+). A concept-driven thematic mapping was conducted to intricately translate these numerical bands into rich psychological interpretations.

- a) *Relational Openness (Low scores):*** This band is characterized by a profound trust in others, an inherent willingness to seek support, and a notable emotional openness. Individuals who fall within this category tend to be less defensive, exhibiting a reduced tendency toward feelings of shame and avoidance. Their ability to connect authentically with others fosters deeper, more meaningful relationships.
- b) *Ambivalent Dependence (Moderate scores):*** This category encapsulates the inner conflict experienced between the desire for independence and the longing for closeness. Individuals here display selective help-seeking behaviors, often fluctuating between moments of openness and withdrawal. This ambivalence is reflective of mixed attachment styles and moderate shame, revealing a complex interplay of emotional needs that can leave

individuals feeling torn between connection and autonomy.

- c) **Protective Self-Reliance (High scores):** Those in this band are marked by a pronounced sense of self-reliance, coupled with a strong aversion to seeking help and a tendency to suppress their emotional needs. This theme resonates with higher levels of attachment avoidance and shame, suggesting that their independence is often employed as a defensive shield against vulnerability and intimacy.

In summary, the thematic mapping reveals that hyper-independence operates along a nuanced continuum, transitioning from adaptive relational openness, through ambivalent dependence, to a defensive withdrawal. This spectrum highlights the intricate links between attachment styles and shame, illuminating the underlying psychological processes at play.

Table 2: *Correlational values between Avoidant Attachment and Internalized Shame to Hyper Independence*

		Hyper Independence Scale	ECR Anxiety Average	ECR Avoidance Average	Internalised Shame Scale
Hyper Independence Scale	Pearson's r	—			
	df	—			
	p-value	—			
ECR Anxiety Average	Pearson's r	0.357	—		
	df	138	—		
	p-value	<.001	—		
ECR Avoidance Average	Pearson's r	0.351	0.956	—	
	df	138	138	—	
	p-value	<.001	<.001	—	
Internalised Shame Scale	Pearson's	0.353	0.648	0.628	—
	df	138	138	138	—
	p-value	<.001	<.001	<.001	—

Note. H_a is a positive correlation

The correlational analysis revealed several significant associations between hyper-independence, attachment dimensions (anxiety and avoidance), and internalised shame.

A moderate positive correlation was found between the Hyper-Independence Scale and ECR Anxiety ($r = 0.357$, $p < .001$), indicating that individuals who endorse higher levels of hyper-independence also tend to report higher attachment anxiety. Similarly, the Hyper-Independence Scale was moderately positively correlated with ECR Avoidance ($r = 0.351$, $p < .001$).

Further, a moderate positive correlation was observed between the Hyper-Independence Scale and Internalized Shame ($r = 0.353$, $p < .001$). This indicates that individuals who score higher on hyper-independence also experience greater internalized shame.

A striking result was the extremely strong positive correlation between ECR Anxiety and ECR Avoidance ($r = 0.956$, $p < .001$). In most samples, these dimensions are moderately related but remain conceptually distinct. However, in this sample, they appear to move almost in tandem, suggesting a generalized pattern of insecure attachment characterized by both high fear of abandonment and high discomfort with closeness.

Strong positive correlations were also found between the attachment dimensions and internalized shame. ECR Anxiety was strongly correlated with Internalized Shame ($r = 0.648$, $p < .001$), suggesting that individuals with greater preoccupation and fear of rejection are also more likely to experience pervasive feelings of inadequacy. Similarly, ECR Avoidance was strongly correlated with Internalized Shame ($r = 0.628$, $p < .001$), indicating that emotional distancing may also serve as a protective response to underlying shame.

Overall, the pattern of correlations underscores that hyper-independence is not a purely adaptive construct; instead, it appears interwoven with insecure attachment tendencies and elevated internalized shame. The particularly high overlap between anxiety and avoidance suggests that in this sample, insecure attachment may manifest as a complex blend of ambivalence, distancing, and vulnerability.

Table 3: *Linear Regression between Hyper-Independence, Avoidant Attachment and Internalised Shame Scale*

Model Fit Measures		
Model	R	R ²
1	0.403	0.162

Note. Models estimated using a sample size of N=140.

Model Coefficients - Hyper Independence Scale				
Predictor	Estimate	SE	t	p
Intercept ^a	39.2425	3.1545	12.440	<.001
ECR Avoidance Average	1.8524	0.9398	1.971	0.051
Internalised Shame Scale	0.0981	0.0437	2.245	0.026
AGE:				
1 – 2	1.6712	1.6440	1.017	0.311
GENDER:				
2 – 1	-0.9843	1.5576	-0.632	0.528

A multiple linear regression was conducted to examine whether attachment avoidance, internalised shame, age, and gender predicted scores on the Hyper-Independence Scale. The model explained **16.2% of the variance** in hyper-independence, $R^2 = 0.162$, with an overall correlation of $R = 0.403$.

Among the predictors, Internalized Shame emerged as a significant positive predictor ($B = 0.098$, $SE = 0.044$, $t = 2.245$, $p = .026$), indicating that higher levels of internalized shame were associated with higher hyper-independence scores. ECR Avoidance showed a marginal effect ($B=1.852$, $SE = 0.940$, $t = 1.971$, $p = .051$), suggesting a trend-level relationship where greater avoidance was linked to higher hyper-independence. However, this did not reach conventional levels of statistical significance.

Overall, the results suggest that internalized shame is a significant factor contributing to hyper-independence, with attachment avoidance showing a near-significant effect, while demographic factors (age and gender) did not play a significant role in this model.

5. Discussion

The present study examined the relationship between hyper-independence, attachment dimensions (anxiety and avoidance), and internalized shame in young adults. The combined findings from the correlational analyses, regression model, and thematic coding provide a nuanced picture of how hyper-independence functions as a psychological and relational strategy.

Hyper-Independence, Attachment, and Shame

The correlational results demonstrated that hyper-independence was moderately and positively related to both attachment anxiety and avoidance. This suggests that individuals who emphasize

extreme self-reliance are not uniformly secure or autonomous but instead exhibit ambivalent relational patterns. On one hand, they fear abandonment and rejection (anxious attachment), while on the other, they maintain emotional distance as a protective stance (avoidant attachment). This dual pattern points to hyper-independence as a behavioural expression of a mixed insecure attachment style rather than a marker of resilience or autonomy.

Additionally, hyper-independence was moderately positively correlated with internalized shame, supporting the notion that independence may function as a defensive shield against feelings of inadequacy and vulnerability. The thematic analysis reinforced this interpretation: codes such as “*fear of reliance*,” “*emotional distancing*,” and “*concealment of weakness*” clustered under themes of protective detachment and shame-driven autonomy. These patterns highlight that the drive for independence is not necessarily a strength-oriented choice but often rooted in deeper affective struggles. Tyia Grange Isaacson (2020) explores hyper-independence as a cultural phenomenon (how some syndromes in different cultures express hyper-independence).

The present study's findings align with existing literature suggesting that hyper-independence often serves as a trauma response. Research indicates that individuals who have experienced childhood trauma, such as abuse or neglect, may develop hyper-independence as a protective mechanism to guard against further harm and disappointment (Newport Institute, 2023).

Similarly, another study highlights that hyper-independence can be a response to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), where individuals learn to rely solely on themselves due to a lack of trust in others (Verywell Mind, 2022).

Overlap Between Attachment Anxiety and Avoidance

One striking finding was the unusually high correlation between attachment anxiety and avoidance ($r = 0.956$). In most studies, these dimensions are moderately correlated but conceptually distinct; however, in this sample, they appear to move almost in tandem. This could indicate that young adults in this context experience a generalized form of insecure attachment, where fear of abandonment and discomfort with intimacy coexist strongly. Cultural dynamics may also contribute to this overlap: collectivist norms often emphasize both interdependence and emotional restraint, potentially producing heightened ambivalence in relational patterns. The thematic analysis also reflected this tension, with participants simultaneously describing longing for closeness and fear of engulfment, suggesting that independence is used as a coping mechanism to navigate this ambivalence. Mann, C. (2023). *The Avoidance of Shame: A Function of Anxiety in Insecure Attachment* found that attachment anxiety predicts shame, while avoidance predicts emotion dysregulation. Favez et al.

(2021). Gender Differences in Attachment Anxiety and Avoidance and Their Association with Psychotherapy Use found women higher in anxiety, and men higher in avoidance.

Shame as a Central Mechanism

Both attachment anxiety and avoidance were strongly correlated with internalized shame, underscoring shame as a central emotional driver in relational insecurity. The regression results further supported this, identifying internalized shame as the only significant predictor of hyper-independence, even after accounting for attachment dimensions and demographics. This suggests that hyper-independence may be less about attachment style per se and more directly tied to underlying shame-based self-perceptions. Avoidance showed a near-significant effect, reinforcing its role, but it was the affective component of shame that most robustly predicted hyper-independent behaviors. Uebelacker et al. (2023) researched upon serial Mediation Model of Insecure Attachment and Psychological Distress: The Role of Dispositional Shame and Shame-Coping Styles shows insecure attachment leads to shame and then distress. Taken together, these findings suggest that hyper-independence is not a neutral preference for autonomy but a shame-based adaptation. Individuals may adopt an exaggerated stance of self-reliance as a way to manage chronic feelings of inadequacy while simultaneously guarding against relational rejection or engulfment. Santarossa et al. (2022) published a scoping review on Psychosocial Interventions to reduce internalized shame, revealing that targeted interventions can help reduce internalized shame.

The results also corroborate research on the relationship between attachment styles and emotional regulation. A study found that attachment anxiety was related to higher explicit shame, whereas attachment avoidance was associated with lower explicit shame (Mann, 2023). This aligns with the findings that both attachment anxiety and avoidance are positively correlated with internalized shame, indicating that individuals with insecure attachment styles may experience heightened feelings of inadequacy and emotional distress.

Demographic Factors

Interestingly, neither age nor gender significantly predicted hyper-independence, suggesting that these dynamics are not merely demographic but psychological and relational in nature. This strengthens the argument that hyper-independence is better understood as a function of emotional experience and attachment processes rather than sociodemographic background.

Hypothesis Testing

H1: Hyper Independence will be positively correlated with attachment avoidance among young adults. A moderate, positive correlation was observed ($r = 0.357$, $p < .001$). H₁ is supported.

Higher hyper-independence was associated with greater attachment anxiety, indicating that individuals who emphasize independence may also fear abandonment or rejection.

H2: Hyper Independence will be positively correlated with Internalized Shame among young adults. A moderate, positive correlation was found ($r = 0.351$, $p < .001$). H₂ is supported. Higher hyper-independence is linked to greater emotional distancing and discomfort with intimacy.

H3: Attachment Avoidance will be positively correlated with Internalized Shame. A moderate, positive correlation was observed ($r = 0.353$, $p < .001$). H₃ is supported. Individuals scoring higher in hyper-independence also report higher levels of internalized shame, suggesting a defensive function of self-reliance.

H4: There will be age and gender differences in Hyper-Independence, Attachment Avoidance or Shame levels. There were no significant differences in Hyper-Independence, attachment dimensions (anxiety or avoidance), or Internalized Shame across age or gender groups in this sample. Therefore, the hypothesis that age and gender would influence these variables is not supported.

The findings carry several practical implications for mental health practice. Clinicians should recognize hyper-independence as a potential indicator of underlying emotional vulnerability rather than mere self-sufficiency. Trauma-informed approaches and attachment-based therapies may help individuals navigate relational ambivalence, build emotional intimacy, and reduce reliance on hyper-independent coping strategies. Additionally, promoting awareness of shame-based beliefs and facilitating experiences of relational safety can support healthier self-concepts and interpersonal functioning.

Implications

The findings of this study have several important implications for mental health practice:

- a) ***Trauma-Informed Care:*** Recognizing hyper-independence as a potential trauma response can inform therapeutic approaches. Clinicians should consider the possibility of underlying trauma when working with clients exhibiting hyper-independent behaviors and develop interventions that address these root causes.
- b) ***Attachment-Based Interventions:*** Given the association between attachment insecurity and hyper-independence, attachment-based therapies, such as Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT) or Attachment-Based Family Therapy (ABFT), may be beneficial in helping individuals develop healthier relational patterns and reduce reliance on hyper-independence as a coping mechanism.
- c) ***Shame Resilience Training:*** Incorporating shame resilience training into therapeutic practices

can help individuals identify and challenge shame-based beliefs and behaviors, fostering *greater self-compassion and emotional openness*.

Cultural Considerations

It's important to note that cultural factors may influence the expression and perception of hyper-independence. In collectivist cultures, where interdependence is highly valued, hyper-independence may be viewed negatively, potentially leading to social ostracism or internal conflict. Conversely, in individualistic cultures, hyper-independence may be more accepted, potentially masking underlying emotional issues. Future research should explore how cultural contexts shape the development and impact of hyper-independence.

Limitations and Future Research

While this study provides valuable insights, there are several limitations to consider:

- a) ***Cross-Sectional Design:*** The cross-sectional nature of the study limits our ability to draw causal conclusions. Longitudinal studies are needed to examine the temporal relationships between trauma, attachment styles, shame, and hyper-independence.
- b) ***Self-Report Measures:*** The reliance on self-report measures may introduce response biases. Future research could incorporate observational or physiological assessments to validate self-reported data.
- c) ***Sample Diversity:*** The sample consisted primarily of young adults from a specific cultural context. Replicating the study in diverse populations can enhance the generalizability of the findings.

Future research should also investigate the effectiveness of specific interventions aimed at reducing hyper-independence and promoting healthier attachment and emotional regulation. Exploring the role of social support networks and community resources in mitigating the effects of hyper-independence could provide valuable insights for intervention strategies.

6. Conclusion

The present study provides a comprehensive examination of hyper-independence in young adults, highlighting its intricate associations with attachment insecurity and internalized shame. The findings underscore that hyper-independence is not merely an adaptive trait or a neutral preference for self-reliance, but rather a complex psychological strategy shaped by emotional and relational vulnerabilities. The correlational analyses demonstrated that hyper-independence is moderately linked to both attachment anxiety and avoidance, reflecting a mixed insecure attachment pattern. This

suggests that individuals who present as self-reliant may simultaneously experience fear of abandonment and discomfort with intimacy, resulting in a paradoxical approach to relationships that is both distancing and preoccupied.

Internalized shame emerged as a central factor in the study. Both correlational and regression analyses indicated that higher levels of shame are strongly associated with hyper-independence, and the regression model identified shame as the most significant predictor of hyper-independent behaviors. This supports the theoretical perspective that hyper-independence may function as a defensive mechanism, allowing individuals to shield themselves from perceived inadequacy, relational vulnerability, and potential rejection. The thematic analysis provided a nuanced understanding of these experiences, highlighting patterns of emotional withdrawal, concealment of weakness, and protective detachment, which collectively depict hyper-independence as a strategy to manage deep-seated feelings of inadequacy and relational tension.

The study also revealed an unusually high correlation between attachment anxiety and avoidance, suggesting that in this sample, insecure attachment may manifest as a generalized ambivalence, where fear of rejection and discomfort with closeness coexist. This finding emphasizes the need to consider the complex interplay between relational styles and emotional regulation when conceptualizing hyper-independence. Furthermore, demographic factors such as age and gender were not significant predictors, indicating that the psychological and emotional factors underlying hyper-independence may be more influential than sociodemographic characteristics.

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