



A Study on Fear of Intimacy and Attachment Styles among Young Women

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Abstract

Fear of intimacy and attachment style both influence an individual's romantic relationship. Fear of intimacy stems from the atmosphere in our homes, as we look up to our major caregivers, i.e. our parents, during our early stages of development. As we become older, the things that have had the greatest impact on us begin to manifest themselves in our relationships, but we cannot blame our relationship difficulties solely on our parents or early experiences. Our personality, as well as our experiences during infancy, adolescence, and adulthood, all contribute to the development of our attachment style, which affects our relationships and can lead to our fear of intimacy. The purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between fear of intimacy and attachment style among young women. Sample of 35 females aged 18 –

25 years was taken. Standardized scales were used to measure fear of intimacy and attachment style. The results found out that there is a significant correlation between the different style of attachment with each other. Therefore, it can be said that if one has one style of attachment then the effect of other types can be there. Though, there is no significant correlation between attachment style and fear of intimacy, but fear of intimacy is also seen among the young women. Attachment style can affect young women's interpersonal relationships. So, it's important to know about one's style and work on it for a healthy relationship. Fear intimacy can also prevent an individual from having healing relationships therefore it is important to focus on this aspect of one's personality as well so that one can lead an emotionally fulfilling personal life alongside a flourishing mental well-being.

Keywords: *Fear of intimacy, attachment styles, young women.*

Introduction

Fear of intimacy and Attachment styles are concepts which are often associated with romantic relationships, or the way these two affect how a young adult navigate their way around one. Humans are considered as social creatures; they cannot survive alone. They need companionship and comradery to thrive in this world. Henceforth, they need to form different types of bonds and relationships with those around.

Intimacy can be of various types; physical, emotional or experiential. It can also refer to sharing deep feelings with your partner, being open with one another and listening to them without any judgement. Fear of intimacy is when, one is hesitant to reveal their true selves, the things they have gone through and therefore are fearful of taking their relationship forward. It can also indicate certain patterns in a person and how they were treated in their childhood. The

way a person is introduced to the phenomena of love, its workings, its basic principles or the way they were taught to receive it- can determine a lot of crucial aspects of future relationships.

Fear of intimacy can also stem from childhood relationships with one's caregivers and from the way one look at romantic relationships around them. A major contributor is- your parent's relationship with each other, the way they behave, react and communicate in front of the child plays a huge role in strengthening or reinforcing their notion about love. Other than that, the pattern in which the parent behave with their child can also determine future signs of fear of intimacy. They can either be too overbearing and over involved in the child's life or be disinterested and detached from them altogether.

As a result of childhood experiences, one can develop different types of attachment styles later in life. Some of them are secure, avoidant, anxiety and disorganised. If the primary caregiver is attentive towards the child in the infancy, then one is most likely to have a secure attachment style later in life. On the other hand, if there is a confusing state of mind and unclear communication between the two, then one is more likely to have an insecure attachment.

A secure attachment style looks like; having to set boundaries with different people present in one's social life. Being okay with spending time alone, having close meaningful relationships. One will be willing to own up to your weaknesses and work on them with confidence. Some primary emotions of a person with a secure attachment style would be hope, empathy and trust. It stems from a strong bond with your primary caregiver since infancy.

A person who is avoidant of intimacy and relationships would be fearful of forming real connections with people around them. They might feel uncomfortable initiating intimacy as well as responding to it. Some of the qualities of an avoidant attachment would be hyper-independence, maintaining distance from one's partner and choosing short term relationships

over long term. It usually stems from being with a neglectful caregiver in one's childhood, one who doesn't show any sort of attachment to the child, that he or she learns to self-soothe.

Another type is anxious attachment also known as anxious-ambivalent or anxious-preoccupied. In this type people tend to crave emotional intimacy and at the same time worry that the other person doesn't want to be with them. Some common things to notice in this style of attachment can be crave love and closeness, need for constant reassurance and second-guessing your every decision. This kind of attachment comes from inconsistent parenting, that the caregiver is available one out of five times and seems to be distracted the other four. That level of mistrust leads you to question yourself and if your needs can ever be satisfied in other relationships.

Lastly there is Disorganized or Disoriented attachment style. Commonly called as fearful-avoidant attachment style. One believes that they don't deserve love or intimacy in a relationship. This type of attachment can be a result of trauma in childhood, neglect or abuse. It is caused by; presence of a young or unexperienced caregiver in infancy, traumatic experiences, frequent moves, physical and emotional neglect.

Everybody goes through these kinds of shifts from different types of attachment styles and fear of intimacy. The most important giveaway from this is, one's childhood experiences and the role of a caregiver play a huge role in shaping adult behaviour.

Fear of Intimacy

Fear of intimacy is defined as "the inhibited capacity of an individual, because of anxiety to exchange thoughts and feelings of personal significance with another individual who is highly valued" (Descutner & Thelen, 1991).

Fear of intimacy “is the expression of existential views in that to love and to be loved makes life seem precious and death more inevitable (Firestone & Catlett, 2006).

A study done by Rohner et al. (2019) on remembrances of parental rejection in childhood and adult’s fear of intimacy on a sample of 3483 young adults, answered the mother and father versions of Adult Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (short form), Interpersonal Relationship Anxiety Questionnaire (short form), Adult Personality Assessment Questionnaire (short form) and fear of intimacy scale. The result showed that the remembrance of maternal rejection was higher which predicted adulthood fear of intimacy. Results also showcased that both genders independently predicted adult’s maladjustment and their relationship anxiety.

According to a study done by Uttamchandani (2024), on fear of intimacy, perfectionism and rejection sensitivity, on a sample of 200 young adults across India. The scales used were FIS (Fear of Intimacy scale), FMPS (Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale) and A-RSQ (Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire- adult version). The results found that there was a weak positive correlation between rejection sensitivity and fear of intimacy and between perfectionism and fear of intimacy. A significant difference was found between males and females in perfectionism, but no difference in rejection sensitivity and fear of intimacy.

According to a study done by Anand and Sinha (2024) on social anxiety and fear of intimacy, it was seen that there is a positive correlation between the two variables. A sample of 81 young adult males and 119 females was taken. The scales used were: SIAS (Social interaction anxiety scale) and The Fear of Intimacy Scale. The study also pointed out that there is no significant difference in social anxiety and fear of intimacy between males and females.

Attachment Styles

Attachment refers to “a two-dimension, dichotomized model of self and others. These two dimensions are combined to form four prototypes: secure, preoccupied, fearful and dismissing” (Bartholomew and Horowitz, 1991). Attachment also refers “to the emotional and interpersonal patterns that individuals develop based on their early experiences with caregivers” (Sable, 2008).

A research study done by Adamczyk et al. (2012) on the relationship between relational competencies and attachment style, relationship status and gender. A sample of 423 young adults was taken, who were asked to fill out the Questionnaire of Relational Competences in Intimate Relationships, Revised Adult Attachment Scale, Demographic Questionnaire. The results were as follows, all three factors play a role in description of various relational competences and the association between relational competences and attachment style is influenced by circumstances pertaining to relationship status.

A study done by Sagone et al. (2023) on exploring the association between attachment style, psychological well-being and relationship status in young adults and adults. The sample consisted of 393 Italian adults from the age range of 18 to 62. The scales used were; Psychological well-being scale and the Attachment style questionnaire. In relation to single people, it was observed that they experienced discomfort with closeness and relationships as secondary. The ones in stable relationships reported high levels of psychological well-being. Furthermore, in single people psychological well-being was moderately and positively predicted by attachment style.

According to a study done by Monteolivia et al. (2016) on Perceived benefits and costs of romantic relationships for young people, a sample of 1539 university students were asked to fill out a relationship questionnaire by (Bartholomew & Horowith) and one about behavioural

belief. The results showed that people with different attachment styles have varying beliefs about the costs and benefits of romantic relationships and the consequences derived from them. The people who are secure and preoccupied see them as beneficial but the ones who are dismissing perceive them as more consequential due to loss of independence.

Methodology

Purpose

The purpose is to study the relationship between Fear of Intimacy and Attachment Styles in Young Women.

Hypothesis

- It is expected there would be significant relationship between Fear of Intimacy and Attachment Styles among Young Women.

Methods

Sample

A sample of 35 young women in the age of 18-25 years was collected from Chandigarh and Panchkula.

Measures

The following standardised tools were used to measure fear of intimacy and attachment styles among young women.

- ***Fear of Intimacy Scale (FIS)***: The scale as developed by Descutner et al. in 1991 consisted of 35 items in a self-evaluation test and was used to measure a person's level of fear of intimacy. A high score on the scale indicated a high level of fear of intimacy. The items were measured on a five-point Likert Scale ranging from 1 (Not at all characteristics of me) to 5 (Extremely characteristic of me).
- ***Adult Attachment Scale (AAS)***: The scale as developed by Collins in 1996 consisted of 18 items in a self-report questionnaire and was used to measure the attachment style of an adult. The scale had three subscales which measured the constructs of dependence, anxiety and closeness. The items were measured on a five-point Likert Scale ranging from 1 (not at all characteristics of me) to 5 (very characteristic of me).

Procedures

The participants were informed about the purpose of the research and the questionnaires were filled through Google forms; each participant was thanked for their cooperation. Standardised psychological tests were administered on the participants.

Analysis of Results

Results

The responses of the participants were analysed using Pearson's Correlation to see the relationship between Fear of Intimacy and Attachment Styles.

Table 1*N, Mean and Standard deviation*

Descriptives											
		ATTACHMENT SCALE		CLOSE		ANXIETY		DEPEND		FEAR OF INTIMACY	
N		35		35		35		35		35	
Mean		52.5		19.0		17.3		16.2		82.2	
Standard deviation		7.41		4.33		7.42		4.51		22.1	

Table 2*Correlation between fear of intimacy and attachment scale*

	ATTACHMENT SCALE	CLOSE	ANXIETY	DEPEND	FEAR OF INTIMACY
ATTACHMENT SCALE	—				
CLOSE	0.574***	—			
ANXIETY	0.419*	-0.396*	—		
DEPEND	0.402*	0.634***	-0.577***	—	
FEAR OF INTIMACY	0.045	-0.104	0.199	-0.153	—
<i>Note. * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001</i>					

Discussion of Results

The results found out that there is a significant positive correlation between attachment style & close ($r = 0.574$, $p < .001$) as well as anxiety ($r = 0.419$, $p < .05$) and depend ($r = 0.402$, $p < .05$). Close shows significant negative correlation between anxiety ($r = -0.396$, $p < .05$) and significant positive correlation between depend ($r = 0.634$, $p < .001$). Further, the result found out there is significant negative correlation between anxiety and depend ($r = -0.577$, $p < .001$).

No significant correlation was found attachment style and fear of intimacy ($r = 0.045$) and between close and fear of intimacy ($r = -0.104$). Further, no significant correlation was found between anxiety and fear of intimacy ($r = 0.199$) as well as between depend and fear of intimacy ($r = -0.153$).

According to Koolae et al. (2013) a study on fear of intimacy and attachment styles in women who apply for divorce on a sample of 132 women was done. The result found out that women who applies for divorce has high level of fear of intimacy and avoidance and anxiety attachment style. The result suggested need for pre- and re- marital counselling and couple therapy.

A study done by Besharat et al. (2014) on moderating role of attachment style on the relationship of alexithymia and fear of intimacy with marital satisfaction on a sample of 313 males and 375 females was done. The results found out that secure attachment style showed significant positive association with marital satisfaction but insecure attachment styles as well as fear of intimacy and alexithymia showed significant negative association with marital satisfaction.

Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between fear of intimacy and attachment style among young women. Sample of 35 females aged 18 – 25 years was taken. Standardized scales were used to measure fear of intimacy and attachment style. The results found out that there is a significant correlation between the different style of attachment with each other. Therefore, it can be said that if one has one style of attachment then the effect of other types can be there. Though there is no significant correlation between attachment style and fear of intimacy, but fear of intimacy is also seen among the young women. As there is correlation only between attachment style and its types. Therefore, this rejects our hypothesis- which stated that there would be significant relationship between fear of intimacy and attachment styles.

Attachment styles among women can affect their inter-personal relationships overall, and as the study shows the styles correlated with each other as well hence, it is important for an individual to recognise their style and work on it for a healthy and nourishing personal life. Fear intimacy can also prevent an individual from having healing relationships therefore it is important to focus on this aspect of one's personality as well so that one can lead an emotionally fulfilling personal life alongside a flourishing mental well-being.

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