

**THE IMPACT OF FEAR OF INTIMACY IN ASSOCIATION BETWEEN
ATTACHMENT STYLES AND RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION AMONG YOUNG
ADULTS**

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates whether young people's relationship happiness and adult attachment types are mediated by their fear of intimacy. Hayes' PROCESS Model 4 was used to analyse data from 200 participants in a cross-sectional study. Research indicates that while fear of intimacy does not moderate this effect, anxious and dependent attachment styles significantly lower relationship pleasure. These findings imply that communication, trust, and emotional control might be more reliable indicators of contentment. The study emphasises that attachment-related behaviours, not intimacy fears, should be the main focus of therapy. Various mediators should be investigated in future studies.

Keywords: Attachment styles, fear of intimacy, relationship satisfaction, romantic relationships, mediation analysis, regression

1. INTRODUCTION

Romantic relationships are crucial in an individual's psychological well-being and overall life satisfaction. These are two significant evaluations we make of our lives and probably heavily influenced by romantic relationships. Various aspects affect the quality of these relationships — including attachment styles, fear of intimacy and trust (Mohan & Mathew, 2024). Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) posits that early interactions with caregiver's code a working model of attachment style that influences adult relationships. Having a secure attachment style makes people more prone to fulfilling and satisfying relationships, while insecure attachment styles (anxious or avoidant) often lead to fear of intimacy and struggle with trusting others, leading to less relationship satisfaction (Parvathy, 2024).

Intimacy anxiety, or the fear of becoming close to someone emotionally or fear of intimacy, is often regarded as a mediator in the adult attachment styles relating to relationship satisfaction. Studies have shown that individuals with avoidant attachment styles are more likely to experience fear of intimacy, which in turn affects their romantic relationships negatively (Arya, 2023). In addition, self-esteem and trust are also mediating factors in these relationships since they affect how people manage intimacy and connection with their partners (Pourmohseni-Kolouri& Afsar, 2024).

Considering the increasing interest in intimate relationships and their psychological foundations, the current research intends to examine the intimacy fear as a mediating variable between adult attachment styles and relationship satisfaction. Research on recent empirical evidence will be made in an attempt to contribute further to the growing field of study on intimacy, attachment, and relational dynamics.

Notwithstanding the voluminous scholarship in attachment theory and relationship satisfaction, there remains a void for further understanding of the mediating role of fear of intimacy within this dynamic. Many people have problems with emotional closeness, and even if their attachment styles make it more probable that they will avoid intimacy, this avoidance is likely to result in dissatisfaction in romantic relationships. The current study seeks to fill this void by exploring the complex relationship existing between attachment styles, fear of intimacy, and satisfaction in relationships.

This study has both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, it adds to the body of knowledge relating to attachment theory and intimacy by demonstrating the mediating role of fear of intimacy within the context of romantic relationships. Practically, this study may be useful in relationship counseling and therapy by elucidating for clients the impact that attachment styles and intimacy fears have on their relationships. Addressing such issues could help individuals along with couples achieve better satisfaction in their relationships and emotional well-being.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The history of the issues related to the habits of adults, the fear of association, and the contentment of the relationship, is a major concern in the psychology of intersubjective relationships. According to Bowlby (1969), attachment theory suggests that early experiences with caregivers have a significant impact on how adults become involved in relationships, which in turn impacts the way they start and maintain love connections. According to one study by Descutner & Thelen (1991), fear of intimacy, as a result of which people tend to shy away from supportive relationships, is the main ingredient in the development of certain disorders together with attachment style and lowers

satisfaction in the relationship between the two. This chapter aims to synthesize different studies on attachment styles, fear of intimacy, and relationship satisfaction that focus mainly on the role of fear of intimacy in romantic relationships as a mediating variable.

The research literature divides attachment styles into secure and insecure groups, according to Hazan and Shaver (1987). People with secure attachment maintain confidence in relationships, emotional balance, and comfortable intimacy practices, which create increased relationship contentment (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Research has discovered that relationship satisfaction experiences negative impacts when people carry either anxious or avoidant insecure attachment styles.

Research from Shaver & Mikulincer (2012) shows that people with anxious attachment show desperate emotional dependence and overwhelming anxiety about being abandoned, thus creating relationship problems. Anxious attachment style belongings demonstrate a pattern of excessive relationship anxiety, and they both seek reassurance and excessively analyze their partners' actions (Mohan & Mathew, 2024). The excessive behaviors developed by these individuals activate conflicts and exhaust emotions that eventually decrease their relationship fulfillment.

People with an avoidant attachment pattern extract themselves emotionally from intimacy while denying their attachment needs, which reduces their relationship fulfillment (Simpson et al., 2015). Studies indicate that avoidant people experience difficulties creating emotional intimacy while they dislike emotional dependence and fear revealing vulnerability, which results in relationship dissatisfaction (Parvathy 2024). Relational problems for avoidantly attached individuals become worse because they face commitment difficulties combined with emotional detachment from relationships (Grey, 2024).

Attachment insecurity creates a strong connection with avoidance in forming intimate relationships. People with anxious attachment face the dual fear of partner abandonment together with the fear of becoming too emotionally close because of rejection risks, whereas avoidant individuals purposefully pull away for their independence (Pourmohseni-Kolouri & Afsar, 2024). Research evidence indicates fear of intimacy functions as the primary cause which prevents insecurely attached people from constructing rewarding intimate connections (Arya, 2023).

Descutner and Thelen (1991) identified fear of intimacy as the inability as well as reluctance for people to interact in deep emotional relationships. This condition leads individuals to resist exposing their emotions while causing them trouble to voice their feelings, while they would rather maintain basic social bonds (Pourmohseni-Kolouri & Afsar, 2024). Repeated studies demonstrate that increased fear of intimacy corresponds to diminished relationship satisfaction results (Mohan & Mathew, 2024).

A variety of events such as past traumatic experiences and unfavorable relational encounters and attachment insecurities may create fear of intimacy (Arya, 2023). People exposed to emotional neglect throughout their early childhood learn avoidance techniques for emotional bonds which persist in their adult relationships, according to Parvathy (2024). Social environments along with cultural traditions regulate how people feel about intimate relationships and share their emotions (Grey, 2024).

Research shows that intimacy-related fears lead people to have fewer satisfying relationships and poor relationships due to communication problems, emotional detachment, along with trust issues (Mohan & Mathew, 2024). Those who fear intimacy strongly will separate themselves from emotional bonds with their partners, which makes both partners dissatisfied (Pourmohseni-

Kolouri& Afsar, 2024). Studies show (Arya 2023) that fear of intimacy produces increased relationship conflicts together with decreased commitment in enduring partnerships.

Relationship research focuses on understanding whether fear of intimacy functions as a mediation factor between adult attachment types and relationship contentment. The psychological block known as "fear of intimacy" exists as a barrier which stops people who carry insecure attachments from developing satisfying romantic relationships (Parvathy, 2024).

2.1 Anxious Attachment → Fear of Intimacy → Relationship Dissatisfaction

Anxious attachment leads people to develop a fear of intimacy because they depend on their partners intensely, according to Mohan and Mathew (2024). People with anxious attachment both want emotional proximity and fear getting turned down, thus creating unstable emotions that lead to relationship dissatisfaction (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2012). Arya (2023) revealed through research that people who identify as anxiously attached experience unsatisfactory relationships when their fear of closeness rises.

2.2 Avoidant Attachment → Fear of Intimacy → Relationship Dissatisfaction

The fear of intimacy as a defensive reaction develops in avoidantly attached individuals when they seek to protect themselves from emotional intimacy (Simpson et al., 2015). People who avoid such deep emotional bonds possess difficulties showing affection; therefore their relationship satisfaction suffers significantly (Grey, 2024). Research demonstrates that when avoidantly attached people fear intimacy more intensely, their relationship satisfaction becomes lower (Parvathy, 2024).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Aim

To investigate how young people's relationship satisfaction and adult attachment types are mediated by their fear of intimacy.

3.2 Objectives

1. To evaluate the connection between young people's fear of intimacy and adult attachment types.
2. To assess the connection between young people's relationship happiness and their fear of intimacy.
3. To explore the direct connection between young adults' relationship satisfaction and adult attachmentstyles.
4. To ascertain if young people's relationship happiness and adult attachment types are mediated by their fear of intimacy.

3.3 Hypotheses

H1: Secure attachment will negatively predict fear of intimacy.

H2: Anxious and avoidant attachment styles will positively predict fear of intimacy

H3: Fear of intimacy will negatively predict relationship satisfaction.

H4: Fear of intimacy will mediate the relationship between attachment styles and relationship satisfaction.

3.4 Sample

3.4.1 Sample Nature:

Young adults currently in romantic relationships

3.4.2 Sample Size and Sampling Technique:

- Estimated sample size: 200 participants.
- Sampling technique: Purposive sampling and snowball sampling

3.4.3. Inclusion Criteria:

- Participants aged 18–30 years.
- Currently in a romantic relationship for a minimum of six months.
- Proficient in English (to understand the survey tools).

3.4.4. Exclusion Criteria:

- Individuals not in a romantic relationship.
- History of diagnosed severe mental illness that may affect relational behaviors.
- Incomplete or inconsistent responses to survey tools.

3.5 Tools Used

1. **Adult Attachment Scale** (Collins, 1996) was developed to assess individual differences in attachment style.
2. **Fear of Intimacy Scale** (David Burns, 1980) was developed to assess level of fear of intimacy among individuals.
3. **Relationship Assessment Scale** (Henderick et al., 1998) was developed to assess how satisfied an individual feels in their intimate relationships.

3.5 Research Design

A **quantitative, cross-sectional study** using self-reported measures to examine the relationships between attachment styles, intimate attitudes, and relationship satisfaction.

4. Results and Discussion

The present study examined the mediating role of fear of intimacy in the relationship between adult attachment styles and relationship satisfaction. The mediation analysis, conducted using Hayes' PROCESS Model 4, assessed whether fear of intimacy explains the relationship between close, dependent, and anxious attachment styles and relationship satisfaction. The findings indicate that while attachment styles, particularly anxious and dependent styles, have significant direct effects on relationship satisfaction, fear of intimacy does not serve as a significant mediator in these relationships.

The results indicate that the close attachment style does not significantly predict relationship satisfaction ($\beta = 0.0833$, $p = 0.4661$) and does not have any indirect effects on satisfaction via fear

of intimacy ($\beta = 0.0060$, BootLLCI = -0.0205, BootULCI = 0.0296). These are not in line with prior studies which postulate that subjects falling under secure attachment (close attachment) are likely to have higher relationship satisfaction because of the positive emotions surrounding them (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). A potential reasoning for the non-significant effect in this study may be due to the existence of other moderating variables, such as the length of the relationship, communication patterns, or even different cultures, which could affect how strong the attachment-satisfaction relationship is (Collins & Feeney, 2004).

On the other hand, it was found that anxious attachment style had a detrimental effect on relationship satisfaction ($\beta = -0.3863$, $p = 0.0001$). Unfortunately, the suggestive mediation by fear of intimacy was not significant ($\beta = -0.0019$, BootLLCI = -0.0309, BootULCI = 0.0164). This supports existing literature, which hypothesizes that individuals with anxious attachment tend to be more emotionally distressed and insecure in romantic relationships, resulting in lower satisfaction (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Anxiously attached individuals show rigid reliance on their partners, pathological fear of abandonment, and hyper-vigilance, which emotionally destabilize the relationship and increase conflict (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2012). Nevertheless, the results from this study propose that the underlying cause of the lower satisfaction is not intimacy avoidance but rather unfounded interpersonal problems, specifically excessive reassurance seeking and poor conflict management skills (Simpson et al., 2015).

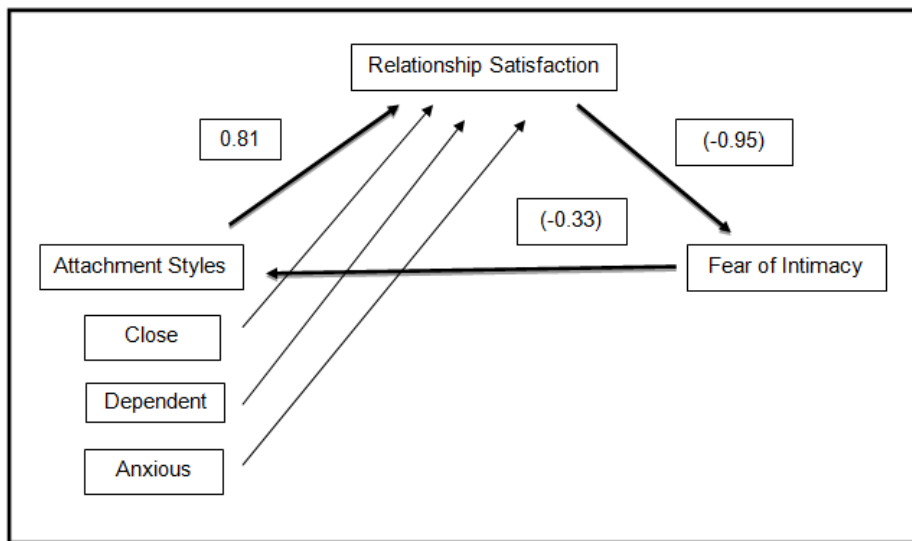


Figure 1: Relationship between attachment styles, relationship satisfaction and fear of intimacy

Dependent attachment style predicted extensively lower relationship satisfaction ($\beta = -0.4992$, $p < 0.001$) but fear of intimacy failed to serve as a mediator in this connection ($\beta = 0.0065$, BootLLCI = -0.0176 , BootULCI = 0.0319). Several existing academic papers show that people with dependent attachment styles become dissatisfied in their relationships because they need excessive emotional security from their romantic partner (Collins & Feeney, 2004). People who depend on others for attachment tend to face challenges with independence, which leads them to behave possessively in relationships, thereby creating relationship dissatisfaction (Feeney, 2008). Similar to the relationship between anxious attachment and intimate relationships, fear of intimacy does not seem to serve as the explanation of this connection. Attachment behaviors characterized as dependent correlate negatively to relationship satisfaction because they produce distrust toward partners and poor conflict resolution and eroded self-esteem (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016).

Initial predictions showed that fear of intimacy failed to establish mediating influence on the connection between attachment styles and relationship satisfaction. The current study results indicate that attachment styles affect satisfaction without requiring fear of intimacy as a mediating factor even though previous research focused on this variable (Dion, 2000). Theiss & Solomon (2006) discovered that people who fear intimacy encounter relationship obstacles at the beginning rather than experiencing problems with relationship contentment after establishment. The study results demonstrated that fear of intimacy did not constitute a significant mediator because relationship satisfaction demonstrates stronger response to trust issues combined with communication ability and emotional control instead of closeness anxieties (Feeney, 2008).

The identified results present vital information for research institutions alongside clinical treatment organizations. Therapeutic interventions for enhancing relationship satisfaction need to target attachment-disorder symptoms since these attachment qualities minimize relationship contentment. Relationship quality stands to benefit most from counseling methods which work to mitigate attachment behaviors that lead people to seek reassurance excessively or experience abandonment fear (Collins & Feeney, 2004). Therapy should assess new possible mechanisms beyond fear of intimacy to improve relationship satisfaction since this factor did not prove significant in the study.

Research should explore alternative factors, namely trust and self-esteem together with communication styles to provide more comprehensive explanations about attachment-satisfaction connections. Studies following relationships over time would show how attachment patterns and relationship happiness develop and evaluate the importance of intimacy fears in younger relationships' development.

Anxious and dependent attachment styles prove to be powerful factors for reducing relationship satisfaction according to the current research. The results failed to validate the proposed mediating effect of fear of intimacy, thus indicating that other interpersonal elements better explain this relationship. This research adds new knowledge to attachment theory studies on romantic partnerships because it shows the importance of investigating the psychological methods which affect relationship satisfaction.

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